

Interview Guide for Autism & Anxiety

Rob Oates, MSc BSc

A step-by-step method to decode any job spec, answer questions with confidence, and get hired for what you can do, not how well you perform socially

August 23, 2025

How to Use This Guide

Get Started:

In a hurry? → Jump to Quick Start (page 4) for a 4-minute setup

Want the full system? → Read sections 2-6 (about 30 minutes total)

Need examples and extras? → Check the appendices

This guide is free to use.

For updates and more info visit <https://files.autisminterviewguide.com>[°]

Contents

How to Use This Guide	2
1. Quick Start - Your Foundation (3-4 Minute Read)	4
2. (CORE) Why Structure Wins (4 Minute Read)	6
2.1. The Bad	6
2.2. The Good (Structured Interviews)	7
2.3. The Interview Reality:	7
2.4. Our Best Strategy	7
3. (CORE) The CAR Method (2-3 Minute Read)	8
3.1. Is STAR really the STAR or is it a FLOP for us (Four Lengthy Overwhelming Parts)?	8
3.2. Context, Action, Result (STAR optimised for the ND / Anxious)	8
4. (CORE) Decode Any Job Spec in 5 Minutes (3-4 Minute Read)	10
4.1. Action Phrases	10
4.2. Simplify and Group	11
4.3. Fears	11
4.4. Generate 3 Stories to Prevent their Fears	11
5. Job Spec Decoding Worked Example (2 Minute Read)	12
6. (CORE) From Job Spec Themes to CAR Stories (7 Minute Read)	14
6.1. CAR Story 1	14
6.2. CAR Story 2	15
6.3. CAR Story 3	16
6.4. Bonus CAR Story: Learning From a (Small) Mistake	16
7. Neurodivergent Gotchas:	18
8. Conclusion: You've Got This!	19
Appendix A. Bonus Worked Example: Operations Role:	
Appendix B. Question / Answer Bank: What They Really Want to Hear (With Examples) . . .	
Appendix C: Should you Disclose your Autism?:	
Appendix D: Practice Guide	
Appendix E. Worksheets and Cue Cards	
References	

1. Quick Start - Your Foundation (3-4 Minute Read)

If interviews feel overwhelming or like you're making it up as you go along, you're not alone. The good news is that you don't need to wing it. I'm going to give you a simple structure and a few prepared stories so your brain can focus on presenting your best self, rather than juggling twenty different things at once.

The only tool you need: **C.A.R.** and the job spec. This is your reliable framework for every story you tell:

Context: Set the scene in one sentence: what was happening and what needed to be done.

Action: The specific steps you took, usually two to three things, using clear action words.

Result: One sentence stating what improved or changed because of your actions (ideally with a number or clear outcome).

Learning (optional): what you now do differently. *Only* add this if you've practiced it and it flows naturally.

1.1. Job Description Scan

Read through the job posting and highlight the action words / phrases: things like deliver; fix; improve; prioritize; communicate; document. Now group these into 2–3 main themes using your own words. For *example*:

- **Deliver** (getting useful work done that actually works in practice)
- **Fix/Reliability** (taking ownership of problems and keeping things running smoothly)
- **Communicate** (keeping everyone on the same page with clear updates)

You've just made a pretty good guess at what they'll be scoring you on. Don't worry about being perfect, close enough is absolutely fine.

If you are really short on time, or very overwhelmed, skip analyzing the job description. Instead, use the above example themes and add a fourth:

- **Ownership of Mistake** (Making a *small* mistake, and this is what I learned from it).

It's definitely better to do the job spec analysis, to match their actual criteria, but even this quick structure is better than no structured prep.

1.2. What are They Terrified Of?

Based on these groupings, consider the question "What are they terrified of in a new hire?"

This lets you get into the headspace of your potential employer. What would a *terrible* hire be, based on these themes? Keep that in the background as context.

1.3. Create 3-4 Short CAR Stories

Prepare one **CAR** story from your experience for **each theme** (plus one about a *small* mistake you learned from), 3-4 in total. Keep each story to 60–90 seconds when you speak it out loud. Structure them like this:

I delivered when...”

- **Context:** “At (workplace/project), we needed to (goal)...”
- **Action:** “I (did this), (then this), and (finally this)...”
- **Result:** “I reduced complaints by half / met the tight deadline / ... increased conversions by 15%.

add **Learning** only if you’ve practiced it and it feels natural)

Don’t have the exact numbers for the result? That’s completely fine. Use clear outcomes instead, e.g. “fewer support tickets,” “the handover went much more smoothly.

1.4. Answering During the Interview

1. Name what competency you’re demonstrating so the panel knows what box to tick: e.g. “*This shows delivery and stakeholder management*”
2. Start with your **Context** (one line), then explain your **Action** (2–3 steps), then give your **Result**
4. Give yourself permission to pause: “*Let me take a few seconds to choose the best example*”
5. Stop when your CAR story is complete. Longer answers don’t automatically score higher

If your mind goes blank: say the Result first (“The outcome was...”), then fill in the rest. If you’re allowed notes: keep your cue visible: Context → Action → Result (≤90s).

1.5. Practice

A gentle 10-minute practice session (any quiet evening):

1. Choose either your 2–3 job-specific themes
2. Say two of your stories out loud, 90 seconds each, starting with the Result
3. Jot down one small thing you’ll adjust next time

The four CORE sections (2,3,4,6) walk you through this method step by step. Section 5 contains a worked Job Spec decoding example. For evidence, please see the Appendices A-D, and for worksheets and cue cards Appendix E

2. (CORE) Why Structure Wins (4 Minute Read).

TLDR: Unstructured interviews lean heavily on first impressions and body language, which usually puts autistic and anxious people at a disadvantage, and the science says they aren't very reliable anyway. Structured interviews, on the other hand, are fairer and more accurate, because everyone is asked the same questions and scored against the same criteria. This format actually plays to our strengths: fewer moving parts, less mental juggling, and more chance to show clear evidence of what we can do.

Many interviews sit somewhere in between, but you can still make them work for you. Treat every question as if it were structured, use the simple **CAR** (Context–Action–Result) approach, see section 3, and you'll be giving the panel exactly what they need to score you fairly.

I remember back in school hearing how essential the first impression and a “good handshake” was in interviews. My doubt about the predictive power of a perfect Goldilocks grip for an IT role received the response “Rob. It's just the way it is”.

They were (partially) right. Surface factors do shift interview evaluations when the format is **unstructured**, even the goldilocks handshake! (*Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985; DeGroot & Motowidlo, 1999; Forsythe, 1990; Stewart, Dustin, Barrick, & Darnold, 2008*). Additionally, neurotypical people typically get “bonus points” for their non verbal communication, whereas autistic people don't (*Norris, Prosser, Remington, Crane & Maras, 2024*).

2.1. The Bad

Unstructured interviews are, as it turns out, not so great for the employer either. Not only do they give more space for the interviewer to assess us based on non verbal communication (*Huffcutt and Arthur, 1994*), but decades of high quality meta-analytic evidence has consistently shown unstructured interviews have consistently lower predictive validity for job performance than objective and structured methods (*Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994, McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998, Barrick, Swider, & Stewart, 2010; Highhouse, 2008*). *Morgeson, & Campion (2014)* even go so far as to say..

“We suggest that rapport building should be eliminated, minimized, or standardized due to the propensity of interviewers to form biased opinions based on this part of the interview”. *Morgeson, & Campion(2014)*

Yes. Finally. Someone said it.

2.2. The Good (Structured Interviews)

Where unstructured interviews are the noise, structured interviews are the signal. They use the same questions and anchored scoring criteria for every candidate, so decisions rest on evidence from your answers, and less on surface and non verbal cues. The increased predictive validity of structured formats is obviously good for employers. It's also good for us.

Structure naturally helps autistic, ADHD and anxious brains (if you, like me, have 2 or more of those, congratulations on unlocking interview hard mode). Many autistic / ADHD people show tighter working memory capacity (the mental notepad that holds the question, plan and clock) and anxiety shrinks capacity even further in the moment (*Habib, Harris, Pollick, & Melville, 2019; Alderson, Kasper, Hudec, & Patros, 2013; Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, & Calvo, 2007*).

Since structure means fewer moving parts, that means less mental juggling. It therefore follows there will therefore be less demand on working memory, which means a much easier time for us under pressure and much better answers. It also makes preparation easier, as you will see.

2.3. The Interview Reality:

Many interviews are mixed according to large scale surveys. LinkedIn's Global Recruiting Trends report shows structured interviews used "frequently/always" by 74% of talent professionals (LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2018). There is of course "structured", and there is *well* structured. Another survey places structured interviewing at 38 to 42%, with a smaller slice using fully unstructured formats (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2022). This evidence, though not the most robust, implies many employers do use structured elements, and in practice it often ends up semi-structured.

2.4. Our Best Strategy

Given the factors that structured interviews have in our favour, I would argue our best strategy is:

1. To become *really good* at answering structured questions.
2. Wherever possible, make the interview behave as if It's structured. Answer every prompt as if it were structured so they have to score it.

3. (CORE) The CAR Method (2-3 Minute Read)

TLDR: STAR (Situation Task Action Result) is the popular interview method, but it often feels clunky and overloaded, especially if working memory is tight under stress. You don't need four steps to tell a clear story. CAR (Context Action Result) is simpler and works just as well, giving you structure without the extra mental juggling.

When looking at a job description, don't panic at the long wish list. Most of it boils down to 2–3 real themes (for example: make things, fix things, communicate clearly). If you prepare one CAR story for each theme, plus a story for a small mistake you learned from, you'll be covering most of what interviewers actually care about while keeping the process manageable.

3.1. Is STAR really the STAR or is it a FLOP for us (Four Lengthy Overwhelming Parts)?

You may have encountered STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result), the universally acclaimed method for answering and preparing for structured interview questions. It's the "firm handshake" of answer structures, loved by employment professionals everywhere, but has anyone actually thought about whether it works?

Interestingly there are no peer-reviewed trials showing STAR beats other simple structures; the benefit comes from being structured and mapping to the rubric.

What we have is evidence delivering structured, storytelling answers beat unstructured (*Bangerter, Corvalan, & Cavin, 2014*) and that training candidates to target job criteria improves performance (*Oostrom, Born, Serlie, & Van der Molen, 2015*). But that structure doesn't need to be exactly STAR.

My personal (autistic) experience with STAR, "Situation" and "Task" cover the same ground. Which means you're saying "Here's the context, and here's the context repeated again, but with slightly different words". My lower working memory bandwidth (especially when anxious) isn't stretching to 4 things, so using both S and the T isn't helpful.

It's cognitive overload wearing a "helpful structure" disguise. Enter CAR.

3.2. Context, Action, Result (STAR optimised for the ND / Anxious)

Think of CAR as STAR's no nonsense sibling. Instead of four moving parts, you get 3. A 25% reduction in mental overhead under pressure isn't to be sniffed at (of course, if you are comfortable with STAR, use STAR).

Context: What was happening? What needed doing? (combining STAR's redundant S and T)

Action: What did you do? (The meat of your answer)

Result: What happened because of your actions?

Your working memory can focus more on telling a coherent story instead of wondering whether you've adequately separated your "situation" from your "task". It still hits all the evidence markers structured interviews are looking for.

If, and *only if* you are practised with CAR, add an L on the end (learning, what you learned from the situation). That's a better answer (if everything goes right), but it risks us getting into overloaded territory. I will leave including that to your discretion.

4. (CORE) Decode Any Job Spec in 5 Minutes (3-4 Minute Read)

TLDR: Job descriptions often look like walls of buzzwords that feel overwhelming. The truth is, most boil down to just 2–3 real priorities. By spotting the action words, grouping them into simple themes, and asking “what would they fear if they hired the wrong person?”, you uncover what they really care about.

From there, you only need a handful of CAR stories that show you can deliver, fix problems, and communicate clearly. Instead of juggling twenty vague criteria, you’re preparing for the core concerns that panels actually score.

Simple steps:

1. Highlight the action words in the job ad.
2. Group them into 2–3 plain-language themes
3. Ask yourself: what are they most afraid of if they hire wrong?
4. Prepare one CAR story for each theme (plus one small mistake you learned from).

Read the examples in chapter 5 if you need a hint!

The job description is the best representation of the criteria they are assessing us on available to us.

Most are usually initially tight criteria that end up being a confused soup of buzzwords, performance indicators, mixed messages and vague, wispy dreams.

Reading this stuff is where I genuinely enter panic territory. My working memory taps out somewhere around demand seventeen. Standard interview advice is to deliver targeted answers to “match the criteria in the spec” during interview pressure. All of it. Somehow. *What?*

Overwhelm.

But here’s the thing: usually they are scared of 2-3 specific things. Once you identify their fears, you identify their needs, and you can position yourself to be that need.

We are decoding the obfuscated job spec into a simple criteria, which we can then use to prepare our CAR answers. The process... (examples follow, so don’t worry too much now!)

4.1. Action Phrases

Highlight the action phrases only. Ignore the company description, entirely, the salary, the wispy dreams. Highlight action phrases only. What do they want you to do? Don’t be precious

about perfection here, just grab the words / phrases that jump out as actions, no need to get them all (trust me it will come together).

4.2. Simplify and Group

Simplify and group the action phrases into 2 or 3 groups. Ah pattern matching.. good. Often things falls into “make stuff,” “fix stuff,” or “communicate about stuff.” groups. Rephrase in whatever plain language makes sense to your brain.

4.3. Fears

Ask “What are they terrified will happen if they hire wrong?” This cuts through all the corporate bs. Are they scared of missed deadlines? System failures? Angry customers? Communication breakdowns? The action words will tell you.

4.4. Generate 3 Stories to Prevent their Fears

Research shows that breaking complex information into smaller chunks reduces cognitive load and improves decision-making accuracy (*Sweller, 1988*). This method essentially does cognitive chunking for you. We give them what they are looking for (the core of it), but instead of holding 20+ requirements in working memory, you’re dealing with 3 core themes.

Why?

Structured interviews usually score a small set of core competencies, often around 4–6. For example, the UK Civil Service guidance advises less than 4 assessed behaviours (*U.S. Office of Personnel Management [OPM], 2008; OPM, n.d.; Civil Service, 2020*), so we don’t have to meet every small wish list in the job spec, just hit the big ones. The simplification of STAR to CAR is based on the possibility of autistic working memory difficulties (*Habib, Harris, Pollick, & Melville, 2019; Alderson, Kasper, Hudec, & Patros, 2013, Norris & Maras, 2022*).

Distilling things down to “what are they afraid of if they hire wrong?” is essentially the critical incident lens often used in job analysis (It’s a cornerstone of job analysis). Identify high-impact successes/failures and speak to those (Flanagan, 1954, Latham, Saari, Pursell, & Campion, 1980).

5. Job Spec Decoding Worked Example (2 Minute Read)

Backend Software Engineer, London/Hybrid, £45-55k

About us:

HealthTech platform processing millions of records daily with complex data pipelines.

What you'll do

- Design, build and maintain REST APIs using Python/Node.js.
- *Improve system reliability* and performance, focusing on latency optimisation and error rate reduction.
- Prioritise and deliver features in small increments working closely with product and design teams.
- Own incident response through on-call rotation, write detailed post-mortems and implement preventive measures.
- Collaborate with data engineering and frontend teams while communicating technical concepts clearly to non-engineering stakeholders.
- Raise code quality through comprehensive testing, thorough code reviews, technical documentation, and observability improvements.

What you'll bring

- 2+ years backend development experience
- Strong SQL skills, experience with message queues
- Git workflows
- CI/CD pipelines.
- Evidence of problem-solving abilities and successful project delivery.
- Comfortable making technical trade-offs, security-conscious, privacy-aware

5.1. Step 1: Action

: Highlight only the action phrases:

Design , build , maintain , improve reliability , optimise , prioritise , deliver , own incidents , collaborate , communicate technical concepts , raise quality , problem-solve, write detailed, problem solving, successful project delivery

5.2. Step 2: Groupings

: Separate these words into their logical best fit groups (2 or 3):

1. Design , build , deliver , successful project delivery = *We need someone to make stuff that works and actually deliver it*
2. Maintain , improve , optimise , own incidents , problem solving = *We need someone to keep stuff working. If it breaks and It's your responsibility, own it, and fix it*
3. Collaborate , communicate clearly , write detailed = *We need someone who communicates clearly, and works fluidly with people without causing confusion*

5.3. Step 3: Fears

From these 3 groupings we can figure out what they are terrified of.

“We’re terrified of hiring someone who builds things that break, doesn’t deliver on time, can’t fix them when they do break, and can’t explain what’s happening to the stakeholders who are panicking about downtime.”

6. (CORE) From Job Spec Themes to CAR Stories (7 Minute Read)

TLDR: This chapter builds directly on the last one. You’ve already spotted the main themes in the job spec; now you’re turning them into stories the panel can score. The examples here show how to flesh out a story using CAR (Context Action Result).

If you already have your own examples, that’s even better, just shape them into the CAR format: set the scene briefly, describe what you did, and show the result. Keep each story short and focused, about 60–90 seconds when spoken aloud. Adding a small mistake and learning story is a bonus, because it proves you can grow from setbacks and covers a few additional possible questions.

Simple steps:

1. Take your 2–3 themes from the previous section (or your own job spec).
2. Match each theme to one story from your own experience.
3. Use CAR to structure each story: Context → Action → Result.
4. Add one short “mistake and what I learned” story.

These stories will become the backbone for answering almost any interview question.

Using the previous example, let’s go ahead and flesh out your specific CAR stories, and use them afterwards to populate a bunch of sample interview questions:

1. “I delivered a system/feature, prioritising what I needed to that worked reliably in production”
2. “I diagnosed and fixed a critical system problem under pressure, with ownership of process / problems”
3. “I communicated a technical crisis to non-technical stakeholders clearly and calmly”

6.1. CAR Story 1

Theme 1 : *“We need someone to make stuff that works and actually deliver it”*

...

Summary line (say this first if bandwidth permits): *“This shows I can ship reliably and improve what matters.”*

Context: We had a slow, clunky orders page that people used daily. Load times were terrible, users were dropping off before completing purchases, and the business was losing conver-

sions. The page was trying to load everything at once, including data that users didn't actually need immediately.

Action: I broke the work into two manageable releases instead of trying to fix everything at once. First release simplified the initial data request. I only fetched what was essential for the page to render. Second release deferred the non critical information to load after the main page was already usable. I added some basic tests to make sure the loading states worked properly, and wrote a short technical note explaining the approach so other developers could apply the same pattern elsewhere.

Result: Average load time dropped from about 3.2 seconds to 1.4 seconds, and conversions increased by roughly 15% over the following month. The business team was happy, users stopped complaining, and the pattern got adopted for other heavy pages.

When to use: “biggest impact,” “tight deadline,” “how you prioritise,” “tell me about yourself” questions.

6.2. CAR Story 2

Theme 2: *“We need someone to keep stuff working. If it breaks and It's your responsibility, own it, and fix it”*

...

Summary line (say this first if possible): *“This shows I can prioritise under pressure and take ownership of problems.”*

Context: One Tuesday afternoon, our error monitoring started lighting up red. Users couldn't complete checkout, a very critical problem for an e-commerce platform. The timing was particularly bad because it was during a busy period, and support was getting flooded with complaints. Action

I immediately prioritised this over my current feature work and paused our planned release to avoid making things worse. Checked recent deployments first, I found that a database query optimisation deployed that morning was causing timeouts under load. Rolled back that specific change to get users working again. Then I dug into why the optimisation had backfired, realised it hadn't been tested with realistic data volumes, and rewrote it with proper connection pooling. I also updated our incident playbook with a “check recent DB changes first” step so the next person dealing with similar issues would have a clearer starting point.

Result: Service was restored within about 25 minutes, support tickets dropped back to normal levels the same day, and we haven't seen that specific failure pattern since. The improved incident playbook has helped the team resolve two other database related issues faster.

When to use: “problem you solved,” “working under pressure,” “dealing with failure/weakness,” “taking ownership.” questions.

6.3. CAR Story 3

Theme 3: *“We need someone who communicates clearly, and works fluidly with people without causing confusion”*

...

Summary line (say this first if bandwidth permits): *“This shows I can explain trade-offs clearly and work collaboratively across teams.”*

Context: We needed to improve our user authentication system because security vulnerabilities were piling up, but the product team was worried about disrupting a major marketing campaign they’d planned for the following month. There was tension because both priorities felt urgent and important.

Action: Instead of arguing about which was more important, I proposed a phased approach that would address both concerns. I wrote a single explanation in plain language, no technical jargon, explaining the security risks, the options we had, and why a two-phase rollout made sense. Phase one would fix the most critical vulnerabilities without touching the user experience. Phase two would implement the bigger UX improvements after their campaign. I also set up a brief weekly check in to keep everyone aligned on progress and any emerging issues.

Result: The security holes got patched without affecting their marketing timeline, and the campaign launched successfully. We completed the full authentication improvements two weeks later. The product team gave positive feedback about how clear the communication was, and we’ve used the same phased approach for other complex projects since.

When to use: “teamwork,” “conflict/disagreement,” “influencing,” “communicating to non-technical people,” “managing competing priorities” questions.

The beauty is that these core themes show up everywhere, whether it’s e-commerce, health-care, finance, or any other sector, employers are usually worried about the same fundamental things: delivery, reliability, and communication.

A Bonus Story, that always comes in super handy for certain questions..

6.4. Bonus CAR Story: Learning From a (Small) Mistake

“I learned from a deployment that went sideways”

Summary line (say this first if bandwidth permits): *“This shows I can learn from mistakes and implement safeguards to prevent repeats.”*

Context: We needed to update a Python library to get a security patch. It seemed straightforward, just bump the version number and deploy. The library had been stable for months, so I didn’t expect any issues.

Action: I updated the dependency without properly checking the changelog for breaking changes. When the API started throwing 500 errors on certain endpoints, I quickly identified

the library update as the cause. I had to choose between rolling back (which would reintroduce the security vulnerability) or patching the breaking changes under pressure. I chose to patch it fast, fixed the method calls that had changed, tested the critical paths, and got it deployed within about 45 minutes.

Result: Service was restored and the security patch stayed in place. Support tickets spiked briefly but dropped back to normal once the fix was live. No data was lost, but we did have some frustrated users during that window.

Learning: Now I always read changelogs properly before updating any dependency, especially for major version bumps. I also set up a simple staging environment that mirrors production data volume so I can catch these issues before they hit users. I added “dependency update checklist” to our deployment docs so the whole team benefits from the lesson.

When to use: “tell me about a mistake,” “how do you handle failure,” “describe a time you had to learn quickly under pressure.”

7. Neurodivergent Gotchas:

Following on from your previous story work. You've already mapped themes and shaped your CAR answers; now we're adding a few gentle guardrails so panels can score you without you burning extra bandwidth. Think of these as constraints that make speaking easier under pressure.

If you have a style that works, keep it. These nudges are optional; use what helps and ignore the rest. The aim is short, clear, on-rubric answers that don't drain you.

Simple steps:

1. Consider naming the competency first. "This shows delivery/stakeholder management." It points the panel at the right box.
2. Use one CAR per question (60–90s) and stop. One clear example beats a pile of half-examples.
3. If you blank, lead with the Result, then backfill Context and Action. It jump-starts recall.
4. Make it easy on working memory. Ask for a brief pause; it's fine to use estimates ("20%", "from 50 to 30"); a tiny cue card is allowed where permitted.
5. Keep context to one line; spend time on Action + Result. That's where the points are.
6. Re-use strong stories. Clarity beats charm; once you've answered the competency, stop.

8. Conclusion: You've Got This!

You now have something that most candidates don't:

A system that works with your brain. While others are trying to decode confused job specs and win on social charm, you have a logical method: extract the action words, identify their fears / needs, prepare 3-4 targeted CAR stories. Simple evidence creating structure.

Stories that actually answer what they're asking. The CAR examples should directly address the competencies employers care about (usually delivery, problem solving, and communication). When they ask about teamwork or handling pressure, you're not scrambling to invent something on the spot. You're selecting the right story and adapting it to their specific angle. You have prepared this, you just have to say it and score the points.

Potentially some control over the format. You know how to request accommodations that improve your performance (while actually helping them too!). Written questions and thinking time aren't special treatment, they're tools that help you demonstrate your actual capabilities rather than your ability to perform under artificial anxiety inducing situations. The research is absolutely clear: structured interviews with concrete evidence produce better hiring decisions than impressionistic chats about "culture fit" and handshake quality. When you (carefully, if appropriate) push for structure, clarity, and evidence-based evaluation, you are doing everyone a favour!

Autism isn't something to "overcome" or mask in interviews (though it may be necessary sometimes, because, people gonna people). Your systematic thinking, attention to detail, and preference for clear communication are exactly what good employers need (even if they haven't all quite yet got the memo).

The companies worth working for will recognise this. The ones that don't aren't worth your time anyway.

Your straightforward next steps:

1. Analyse one job spec using the action words method
2. Prepare your 3-4 CAR stories with concrete results
3. Practice retrieval (don't just re-read your notes, see Appendix D)
4. Consider requesting written questions when they invite you to interview (see Appendix C for a discussion on disclosure)

You don't need to be socially fluent, confident, or neurotypical to succeed in interviews. You need to be prepared, systematic, and clear about what you've accomplished.

That's something you can *absolutely* do.

Version v1 · 23-09-2025 · © Rob Oates.

Licence: CC BY-NC 4.0 - free for non-commercial sharing with credit.

More resources & updates: <https://files.autisminterviewguide.com>^o

Contact: hello@autisminterviewguide.com

Appendix A. Bonus Worked Example: Operations Role:

Operations Coordinator (E-commerce Fulfilment), London (3 days on-site). £32–38k

About us

We're a growing e-commerce brand, shipping thousands of orders each week from our London hub.

Role purpose

Keep orders flowing: right items, on time, with minimal waste. What you'll do

- Plan and coordinate daily picking and packing to ensure on-time despatch.
- Reduce errors by improving accuracy and returns handling.
- Own stock accuracy through regular counts and checks.
- Improve processes by updating SOPs and removing bottlenecks.
- Coordinate carriers: monitor scans, chase exceptions, and keep deliveries on track.
- Support communication: make sure customer service has timely tracking updates.
- Maintain health & safety standards, logging issues and briefing the team.

What you'll bring

- 1–3 years in warehousing, operations, or retail back-office.
- Comfortable with spreadsheets, scanners, and basic systems.
- Clear written notes and calm, concise updates to colleagues.

Nice to have

- Experience with Royal Mail/DHL.
- Familiarity with lean/5S basics.

Step 1: Action Phrases

Highlight only the action phrases:

keep flowing , on time , ensure , update , logging issues , plan , coordinate , reduce errors , coordinate , monitor , chase , keep on track , own accuracy , maintain , improve , remove bottlenecks , support communication , timely tracking updates , briefing the team , calm , calm concise updates

Step 2: Grouping Actions Phrases

Separate these words into their logical best fit groups (2 or 3):

1. keep flowing , on time , ensure , update , log issues , plan , coordinate , reduce errors , coordinate , monitor , chase , keep on track , own accuracy , maintain = *Keep our business running without errors, do it responsibly with good logging.*
2. improve , remove bottlenecks = *Make improvements to keep our business running without errors*
3. support communication , timely tracking updates , briefing the team , calm , calm concise updates = *Communicate in a timely, understandable, calm way to keep everyone's anxiety down*

Step 3: Fears

From these 3 groupings we can figure out what they are terrified of.

"We are terrified we will hire a disorganised person who isn't able to handle our inefficient process which often goes wrong. Someone who can fix it would be amazing. Things are held together here with duct tape, and we have some sensitive stakeholders who cant handle glitches. Be calm, so they don't flip out."

Step 4: Your example stories

Generate your 3 stories that provide what they are looking for, and show you aren't what they fear.

1. "I kept a complex, problematic process running smoothly despite constant issues"
2. "I identified problems in a difficult system and implemented improvements that stuck and made things easier"
3. "I communicated well during crises, keeping stakeholders informed but calm"

And find 3 examples from your history that meet these criterion.

You've just turned a really overwhelming spec into three concrete things you can weave into your sample answers.

Appendix B. Question / Answer Bank: What They Really Want to Hear (With Examples)

Ideally keep each answer about a minute (or less).

“Tell me about yourself” / “Walk me through your CV” What they actually want: A 60 second professional summary that proves you’re competent and relevant to this role. Nothing else.

- *Use:* Story 1 (short version)
- *Structure:* Past Present Future opener + short story 1 CAR
- *Full answer:* “I’m currently a backend engineer focusing on performance and reliability. Previously worked on [brief context]. Now I’m looking to do more systems work like what you’re building here. For example, [Story 1, CAR]: That improvement, taking a critical orders page from 3.2 seconds to 1.4 seconds by breaking the work into two releases and optimising data loading, which increased conversions by 15%. That’s the kind of measurable impact I’d want to bring here.”

“Why this company/role?” What they actually want: Evidence you’ve thought about this job specifically, not just sending out generic applications.

- *Use:* Story 1 or 3
- *Structure:* One genuine connection + evidence of relevant capability, short story, 1 brief CAR
- *Full answer:* “I’m interested in healthcare tech because reliable systems directly impact patient care, that matters to me. I’ve delivered measurable improvements like [Story 1 brief]: taking a slow orders page from 3.2s to 1.4s through phased delivery, which matches your focus on reliability and incremental improvement. The challenge of maintaining performance at your scale is exactly the type of systems problem I want to tackle and where I thrive.”

“What are your strengths?” What they actually want: *One* key strength with concrete evidence. Not a shopping list of unsupported ones!

- *Use:* Story 1 (delivery) or Story 3 (communication)
- *Structure:* Name the strength + immediate evidence (story 1 / 3 CAR)
- *Full answer:* “My main strength is shipping things that actually work in production. For example, [Story 1]: I took a problematic orders page that was losing conversions, broke the fix into two manageable releases, and improved load time from 3.2s to 1.4s. The 15% conversion increase showed it solved the real problem, not just the technical metrics.”

“What’s your biggest weakness/development area?” What they actually want: Proof you can learn from mistakes and improve your work. They’re testing self-awareness and growth mindset.

- *Use:* Story 4 (deployment failure, CAR)
- *Structure:* Weakness + what you learned + how you prevent it now

- *Full answer:* “I used to be too casual about dependency updates and treated them as low-risk when they can actually break things in subtle ways. [Story 4]: I once updated a Python library without checking the changelog properly, which caused errors on certain endpoints. Had to patch it under pressure while users were affected. Now I always read changelogs thoroughly and test library updates in a staging environment that mirrors production data volume. I’ve also added a dependency update checklist to our team docs.”

“Tell me about your biggest impact/achievement” What they actually want: Evidence you can deliver meaningful results, not just complete tasks.

- *Use:* Story 1
- *Structure:* Impact-first, then how you achieved it (Story 1 CAR)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 1 Result-first]: I improved a critical orders page from 3.2 seconds to 1.4 seconds, which increased conversions by 15%, that translated to meaningful revenue impact. The key was breaking a complex performance problem into two manageable releases: first optimising the initial data load, then deferring non essential information. I added tests and documentation so the pattern could be reused across other high traffic pages.”

“Describe a problem you solved” What they actually want: Your problem solving process under real conditions, not just the solution.

- *Use:* Story 2
- *Structure:* Problem severity (C) + your diagnostic approach (A) + resolution (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 2]: During a busy Tuesday afternoon, our checkout system started failing, users couldn’t complete purchases and support was getting flooded. I immediately paused our planned release to avoid making things worse, then traced the issue to a database optimisation deployed that morning. Rolled back that change first to restore service within 25 minutes, then properly fixed the underlying query with connection pooling. Also updated our incident playbook so the next person would know to check recent DB changes first.”

“How do you handle working under pressure/tight deadlines?” What they actually want: Evidence you can prioritise effectively and deliver quality work when things get stressful.

- *Use:* Story 2 or Story 1
- *Structure:* High-pressure situation (C) + how you stayed organised (A) + successful outcome (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 2]: When our checkout system failed during peak hours, I had to balance speed with not making things worse. I prioritised getting users working again first - rolled back the problematic change within 25 minutes. Then properly diagnosed and fixed the root cause. The key was having a clear triage process: restore service first, understand the problem second, implement the proper fix third. That systematic approach keeps me calm under pressure.”

“Tell me about a time you worked in a team/collaborated” What they actually want: Evidence you can work with others without being difficult or going rogue (ignore social skills).

- *Use:* Story 3

- *Structure:* Team challenge (C) + how you facilitated (A) + successful outcome for everyone (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 3]: We had competing priorities.. security vulnerabilities that needed fixing versus a marketing campaign that couldn’t be delayed. Instead of letting it become an argument, I wrote a single explanation in plain language showing how we could address both concerns with a phased approach. Set up weekly check ins to keep everyone aligned. The result was we fixed the critical security issues without affecting their campaign timeline, and completed the full improvements two weeks later.”

“How do you communicate with non-technical people?” What they actually want: Proof you won’t confuse, frustrate, or alienate non-technical colleagues with jargon and complexity.

- *Use:* Story 3
- *Structure:* Communication challenge (C) + your approach (A) + positive outcome (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 3]: I needed to explain why we couldn’t implement both security fixes and new features before a major marketing campaign. I wrote a single page explanation with no technical jargon showing the trade offs and proposing a phased approach. I set up brief weekly check ins to keep everyone aligned. The result was both teams got what they needed: critical security patches deployed without affecting the campaign timeline.”

“How do you deal with ambiguity or incomplete information?” What they actually want: Evidence you can make progress when requirements are vague, not just when everything is perfectly specified.

- *Use:* Story 1 or 3
- *Structure:* Unclear situation (C) + how you created clarity (A) + successful delivery (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 1]: We knew the orders page was ‘too slow’ but nobody had defined what ‘fast enough’ actually meant. I set success criteria upfront, target load time under 2 seconds, measure conversion impact over 30 days. Then delivered the smallest safe improvement first: optimised initial data loading. Defined ‘done’ as measurable user benefit, not just technical metrics. Result was 3.2s to 1.4s load time and 15% conversion increase.”

“How do you approach prioritisation?” What they actually want: Your decision-making framework when everything feels urgent and important.

- *Use:* Story 2 or 1
- *Structure:* Competing priorities (C) + your framework (A) + successful outcome (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 2]: When our checkout system failed during peak hours, I had multiple urgent things competing for attention... restore service, understand root cause, prevent recurrence, communicate with stakeholders. My approach: impact first, risk second, effort third. Restored service immediately with a rollback, then properly diagnosed and fixed the underlying issue. I posted a quick update so everyone knew status and timeline.”

“Give me an example of leadership without a title” What they actually want: Proof you can drive results and influence others without formal authority.

- *Use:* Story 3
- *Structure:* Situation needing direction (C) + how you stepped up (A) + team success (R)

- *Full answer:* “[Story 3]: When security and marketing priorities clashed, nobody wanted to make the call on what came first. I stepped up and proposed a solution that worked for both teams, phased delivery that addressed critical security issues without derailing the campaign. Wrote the proposal in language both sides could understand, facilitated agreement, and coordinated delivery. Result was both objectives met on time.”

“How do you handle difficult customers or user feedback?” What they actually want: Evidence you care about user experience and can turn complaints into improvements.

- *Use:* Story 1 or 3
- *Structure:* User problem (C) + how you responded (A) + measurable improvement (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 1]: Users were complaining constantly about our orders page being slow and causing abandoned purchases. Instead of making excuses, I treated it as valuable feedback about a real business problem. I prioritised fixing the core user pain.. load times, through a two phase approach. Result was 3.2s to 1.4s load time and 15% more completed orders. I fed the improvement back to support within two days so they could update customers who’d complained.”

“Tell me about a process you improved” What they actually want: Evidence you can spot inefficiencies and implement lasting improvements, not just fix immediate problems.

- *Use:* Story 1 (documentation pattern) or Story 2 (incident playbook)
- *Structure:* Inefficient process (C) + your improvement (A) + lasting impact (R)
- *Full answer:* “[Story 2]: Our incident response was ad hoc. People wasted time figuring out basic diagnostic steps during emergencies. After resolving a critical checkout failure, I updated our incident playbook with a clear ‘check recent DB changes first’ step and basic triage process. Result was the next two database incidents got resolved 40% faster because the team had a systematic starting point instead of random troubleshooting.”

“What matters to you at work?” / “How do you fit our culture?” What they actually want: Your work values aligned with evidence of how you operate, nothing more.

- *Use:* Story 3 or 1 (pick what feels authentic)
- *Structure:* One genuine value + concrete evidence of living it (CAR)
- *Full answer:* “What matters most to me is clear, measurable progress that actually helps users. [Story 1]: When tackling our slow orders page, I focused on metrics that mattered to real people, load time and conversion rates, not just technical benchmarks. I broke the work into phases so we could measure impact and course correct. That systematic, user focused approach is how I prefer to work.”

“What questions do you have for us?” (Not a CAR, use to signal engagement and cultural fit) What they actually want: Evidence you’ve thought seriously about the role and care about doing it well.

- *Structure:* Two substantive questions that show engagement
- Sample questions:
 - “What does success in this role look like after 6 months?” (shows you want to deliver)
 - “Are there any concerns about my background for this role?” (gives you chance to address doubts)

Why these? The first shows you're results focused, the second gives you the possibility to make up some extra points that might have been missed!

Alternative questions that panels respond well to:

About the role/team:

- "What's the biggest technical challenge the team is facing right now?" (shows engagement with real problems)
- "How does this role contribute to the wider team goals?" (shows you think systemically)

About the work environment:

- "How do you typically handle incident response - is there an on-call rotation?" (shows you understand operational reality)
- "What's your approach to code reviews and technical decisions?" (shows you care about quality)
- "How do you balance new feature work with technical debt?" (shows you understand trade-offs)

About growth/learning:

- "What opportunities are there to work with different parts of the tech stack?" (shows curiosity)
- "How do you support professional development?" (shows you want to improve)

Meta-questions (good for structured interviews):

- "What would make someone really successful in your team culture?" (tests cultural fit from your perspective)

Pro tip: Pick 2-3 questions that genuinely interest you.

Appendix C: Should you Disclose your Autism?:

TLDR: Telling an employer you're autistic can sometimes unlock very helpful adjustments, like written questions or extra thinking time. These changes reduce pressure and help you show what you can really do. Disclosure can also act as a "culture test": if they resist even basic adjustments, that tells you something important.

The risk is bias. Some studies show disclosure improves interviewer perceptions, but others show it can reduce callbacks or lead to misjudgements. Because the evidence is mixed, the safest approach is gradual: ask for small, functional adjustments first, then decide if fuller disclosure feels right.

Simple steps:

Check the signals: does the employer look "safe" (clear adjustments policy, Disability Confident, inclusive language)?

1. If safe consider a full disclosure once invited for interview.
2. If unsure → request functional adjustments first (written questions, pause to think).
3. If unsafe → mask and stick to CAR answers; use the interview to assess them.
4. Remember: the law requires "reasonable adjustments", but not every employer lives up to it.

Benefits

Disclosure can unlock **incredibly** helpful ND reasonable adjustments, such as questions in writing and in advance (a huge structure / organisation boost, reduction of uncertainty and resulting anxiety drop) or at least written questions during the interview (which can help many of us with comprehension under pressure). These *reasonable adjustments* nudges panels closer to their scoring guide, and can act as a culture test (it's good to remember you are also assessing them!). If a basic, lawful adjustment meets resistance, that is useful information about fit.

Some studies show the opposite: when raters know a candidate is autistic, they may interpret behaviour more accurately and give higher ratings (*Flower, Dickens & Hedley, 2021; Norris, Prosser, Remington, Crane, 2023*), though *Flower, Dickens & Hedley (2021)* were cautious about their results. This has similarly been seen outside of interviews, with *Sasson & Morrison (2019)* showing that first impressions of adults with autism improve with diagnostic disclosure and increased autism knowledge. It is important to note however, that these kinds of perceptions

and shifts have more to do with the NT's biases and perceptions of autism than anything else (Morrison, DeBrabander, Faso, & Sasson, 2019).

Risks

Whilst disclosure can unlock adjustments, it also carries bias risk. Field experiments find that applications disclosing disability, including autism receive fewer callbacks than otherwise equivalent applications (Ameri *et al.*, 2018;). Some qualitative (lower statistical quality) research revealed that autistic adults themselves report that disclosure can help but they feel hiding autistic traits is necessary (Romualdez *et al.*, 2021; Davies *et al.*, 2023). Norris, Prosser, Remington, Crane & Maras (2024) showed that whilst allistic candidates received a ratings "boost" when seen on video compared to just their transcript, autistic candidates did not, indicating their non verbal communication was not seen as an asset.

Disclosure Isn't Easy (Context Matters)

So here we have this really tricky double edged sword of disclosure. If we get less biased interviewers, in an organisation that doesn't just pretend to be inclusive, disclosure not only helps via reasonable adjustments and helping interview prep, it may help to mitigate misjudgments and misperceptions about autistic communication. On the other hand, when there is stigma, and negative views about autism, disclosure might worsen the outcome.

A Balanced (Cautious) Approach to Disclosure

I recommend, based on this uncertainty, a tiered, cautious decision tree, once you have the interview confirmation.

IF the employer looks safe **THEN** full diagnostic upfront full disclosure (unlocks all the benefits)

ELSE IF there is uncertainty about the employer **THEN** consider a "functional first" disclosure (this tests the employer and aims for adjustments with minimal bias risk)

ELSE mask, answer everything in CAR format, use the interview process to assess *them* should you decide to take the interview.

It's not you, it's them. *How safe does this employer look for ND adjustments?*

Ways to Tell a Disclosure Safe Employer

- Disability Confident Employer (UK)
- Clear adjustments policy in the spec
- The job ad explicitly invites adjustments
- The company has an existing ND employee network

- There are past blogs / info on the website about adjustments
- An interview guidance page offers written questions, extra time, or offers multiple access modes (quiet room, camera off, breaks).

Ways to Tell a Disclosure Unsafe Employer

- No mention of adjustments anywhere
- Refusal to share even question topics
- Hard “culture fit” language.
- Non structured interviews.

The Functional First Disclosure

Here you send a functional request at invite stage, without mentioning a diagnosis. Some example requests might be:

Dear [Name],

Thank you for the interview invitation for the [Role Title] position on [date/time].

To help me give precise, relevant examples against your criteria, could you share the interview questions in writing beforehand, or display each question in writing during the interview? I'd also appreciate a brief pause (around 5–10 seconds) before I start each answer so I can structure a concise response. This will help you get the clearest evidence for your evaluation.

If sharing full questions in advance isn't possible, a short list of the main competency areas would be very helpful.

Kind regards,

[Your name]

[Phone]

[Link if useful]

If they decline the full questions in advance:

Hi [First name] (or mirror their style)

Thanks for letting me know. Displaying each question in writing during the interview and allowing a brief 5–10 second pause before I answer would still help me give

you the clearest, most relevant examples against your criteria. If possible, a short list of the competency areas you'll cover would also be appreciated.

Kind regards,

[Your name]

Final option (diagnostic disclosure):

Hi [First name] (or mirror their style)

I should mention I'm autistic. I give the most accurate, relevant answers when I can see each question in writing and take a brief pause before responding. Could we use that format? It will help you get clearer evidence for your evaluation.

Kind regards,

[Your name]

We are using a gradual escalation, which means **we don't need to disclose any more than the absolute minimum**, keeping the bias risk as low as possible. We also maintain a performance framing, and keep things totally reasonable.

What are "Reasonable Adjustments"

Reasonable adjustments are changes an employer in the UK ("reasonable accommodations" in the US) must make to the workplace or hiring process to ensure a disabled person is not at a substantial disadvantage.

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees and job applicants. The principle is to remove barriers so that a disabled person has the same access to opportunities as someone who is not disabled.

Common examples include:

- Providing interview questions in advance.
- Allowing an interview to be conducted in writing or via text chat.
- Providing noise-cancelling headphones in an open-plan office.
- Modifying working hours or allowing for remote work.
- Adjusting lighting to reduce sensory overload.

However, just because it's legally required, it doesn't mean all employers are going to play by the rules. The bias is real, so it really does depend on the specific situation, and more importantly, the specific employer.

Appendix D: Practice Guide

TLDR:

Once you have your stories, practice recalling them out loud, rather than just re-reading notes. Short practice sessions spread across different days work better than marathon cramming. Start easy, then gradually add mild challenges like timers or background noise so the real interview feels manageable by comparison. Keep a simple cue card handy (see the cue cards appendix), and decide in advance what you'll do if you blank out.

The goal isn't perfection, just clear enough delivery to tick their scoring boxes.

Once you've got your stories, the key is practising so you can recall them under pressure, not perfectly, just clearly enough to tick the boxes. Research shows that practising recall (actually saying the answers) works far better than re-reading notes. Short, spaced out sessions are easier on the brain and build stronger memory.

You can gradually make practice a little harder, with a timer, mild background noise, or by pausing before you answer so the real interview feels easier. Keep a simple cue card handy, and plan in advance how you'll handle blanking or rushing. Optional extras like expressive writing can also calm nerves on the day. Go at your own pace: even slow, gentle practice builds real confidence.

Simple steps:

1. Practise recalling them out loud, not just re-reading.
2. Spread short sessions across days (10–15 minutes each).
3. Mix question types and rotate through your stories.
4. Add mild challenges later (timer, noise, pauses).
5. Keep a cue card visible; plan a rescue line if you blank.
6. If anxiety spikes, try a short expressive writing dump before the interview.

So you've got your 2-4 CAR stories mapped to the job requirements, and have read through the sample questions. Now you need to get from "*I know what I want to say*" to "*I can say it coherently under pressure enough to score*". Remember, you don't need to be super slick or fluid (especially if you have disclosed, see the later extra "To Disclose or Not to Disclose" section about that!), you just need to check the boxes to score!

Let's use methods that actually work according to research, especially for ND / anxious brains operating under interview stress.

Practicing recall beats re-reading your notes

Give yourself random prompts by writing sample questions on cards (see the printable cue cards included). Try to deliver 60-75 second CAR answers without looking at *anything*. This (the testing effect) builds much stronger recall than just reading notes (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).

Space it out over time (and start gently if you need to)

Two or three 10 to 15 minute practice sessions spread across different days tends to beat one long session. Spacing gives your brain time to consolidate the memories properly (Cepeda *et al.*, 2006). This is particularly helpful for autistic brains, which often need more processing time to move information into long-term storage. Chip away at it over time, slowly and gently.

Mix up the question types

Every session, try to rotate between different prompts. Mixing different questions builds more flexible recall than practising the same story repeatedly (Rohrer & Taylor, 2007).

Generate first, then check

Try to answer before looking at your notes, then compare against the simple 3 point checklist: Context? Action? Result? This “generation effect” strengthens memory formation more effectively than just reading your prepared answers (Slamecka & Graf, 1978).

Make practice slightly harder than the real thing

After you are in a really good spot with the above (and only then), consider ramping up the difficulty. Use a timer / practice with mild background noise / or add a 5-10 second pause before you start speaking. Try to find ways to answer in more difficult situations where there is more anxiety (e.g. mock interviews, or when It’s noisy, or you are distracted).

Build up slowly, but feel free to get creative. Jump in a cold shower and answer a question (or don’t hah!). This “desirable difficulty” strengthens the neural pathways needed when interview anxiety kicks in (Bjork, 1994). Think of it like lifting heavier weights over time.

Externalise your working memory during the interview

Keep a simple cue card: “Result, Action, Context ($\leq 75s$)” visible during the interview (if you have disclosed), and / or are allowed notes. Visual-verbal prompting boosts recall specificity for autistic adults (Norris, Crane, & Maras, 2020).

Pre-script your rescue plans

Decide in advance what you’ll do if things go wrong: “*If I blank completely, then I say ‘Let me take a few seconds to think about a good example.’ ‘If I’m rushing, then I pause and start with the result first ‘The result was...’*” These intentions reduce panic when your brain hits a wall (Gollwitzer, 1999).

Optional Anxiety Trick

For on the day interview nerves, try 8-10 minutes of expressive writing before the interview, just dump all your worries onto paper. Research shows this can reduce performance anxiety by getting the stress out of your working memory (Ramirez & Beilock, 2011).

And if this prep pace is overwhelming, go even slower. **Take your time.** The prep will help you will all your interviews, and get quicker each time, so there isn't any big rush (it's going to end up being similar stuff each time).

Appendix E. Worksheets and Cue Cards

Job Spec Analysis Worksheet

Write the Action Phrases from the Job Spec:

Themes Worksheet(from job spec)

Group the above action phrases into 3 themes.

What are they worried about if they hire the wrong person?:

Theme 1:

Theme 2:

Theme 3:

CAR Story 1 Worksheet - Match Theme 1 (Example from your Experience)

Theme:

Context:

Action:

Result:

CAR Story 2 Worksheet - Match Theme 2 (from your experience)

Theme:

Context:

Action:

Result:

CAR Story 3 Worksheet - Match Theme 3 (from your experience)

Theme:

Context:

Action:

Result:

CAR Bonus Story 4 Worksheet - A time when you learned from a (small) mistake

Context:

Action:

Result:

CAR Scaffold Reminder (say it in 60–90s)

Context → Action → Result (≤90s).

Context: one sentence on situation + goal.

Action: 2–3 strong verbs on what **you** did.

Result: one line on what improved (number or clear outcome).

*If flustered, say the **Result** first, then backfill.*

Q1 : Tell me about yourself.

What this tests: relevance to the role; ability to summarise.

How to answer: One minute: present → past → future, then one short example.

Start with the **Context**, then **Action**, then **Result**.

Keep it specific to this job, nothing else.

Q2 : Why do you want this role and our company?

What this tests: motivation; fit with the work and values.

How to answer: Name one honest reason, then a short example that proves it. Start with the **Context**, then **Action**, then **Result**.

Avoid generic praise; link to something they actually do.

Q3 : Tell me about your biggest impact or achievement.

What this tests: ability to deliver; prioritisation.

How to answer: **Context**, then **Action**, then **Result**.

Keep to 60–90 seconds; no laundry list.

Q4 : Describe a time something went wrong and you fixed it.

What this tests: problem-solving; ownership; calm under pressure.

How to answer: **Context** (what failed, when), then **Actions** in order: stabilise → diagnose → fix → prevent. Then the **Result**.

Bonus: End with the safeguard you added to stop it recurring.

Q5 : Describe a time you explained something complex to non-technical people.

What this tests: stakeholder communication; clarity; empathy.

How to answer: **Context** (who/what/why), then **Actions**: plain language → phased plan → short check-ins. Then **Result** (both sides met their goals).

Q6 : Describe a small mistake you made and what you learned.

What this tests: honesty; reflection; improved practice.

How to answer: Pick a contained issue with a clear fix.

Context (what happened), **Actions** (what you did), **Result** (recovered quickly),
Learning (the new rule),

Keep blame neutral; focus on what changed afterwards.

Q7 : Describe a time you had competing deadlines. How did you prioritise?

What this tests: judgement; planning; delivery under constraint.

How to answer: **Context** first then 2–3 **Actions** that show the trade-offs you made,
then **Result** (deadline met / risk avoided).

Mention one thing you deliberately de-scoped or delayed.

Q8 : Describe a time you worked under pressure or a very tight deadline.

What this tests: calm execution; risk control.

How to answer: **Context** (why it was pressured), then **Actions:** pause to plan →
triage steps → communication then **Result** (met deadline / stabilised service).

Finish with one prevention you added afterwards.

Q9 : Describe a time you worked with unclear or changing requirements.

What this tests: creating clarity; iterative delivery.

How to answer: Define success up front (what “good” looks like).

Context, then **Actions**: smallest safe step → measure → adjust, then **Results**

Avoid jargon; state how users or colleagues benefited.

Q10 : Describe a time you helped a team succeed.

What this tests: collaboration; reliability; role clarity.

How to answer: **Context** (the team/task), then your **Actions** that enabled others (coordination, documentation, unblocking) then Team **Results** (what improved for the group)..

Keep it concrete and specific; name the handover or habit you set.

Q11 : Describe a time you received difficult feedback. What did you do next?

What this tests: resilience; openness; behaviour change.

How to answer: Briefly state the feedback (no drama).

Context (when/where), **Actions** (what you changed and how you tracked it) then **Result** (improvement achieved), .

Mention one safeguard or habit you adopted.

Q12 : Describe a time you led without having a formal title.

What this tests: initiative; influence; coordination.

How to answer: **Context** (gap or need), then **Actions:** setting direction, aligning people, removing blockers, then **Result** (what changed because you stepped up)..

End with the team outcome and one lesson you kept using.

References

- Alderson, R. M., Kasper, L. J., Hudec, K. L., & Patros, C. H. (2013). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and working memory in adults: a meta-analytic review. *Neuropsychology*, 27(3), 287–302. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032371>°
- Ameri, M., Schur, L., Adya, M., Bentley, S., McKay, P., & Kruse, D. (2018). The disability employment puzzle: A field experiment on employer hiring behavior. *ILR Review*, 71(2), 329–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793917717474>°
- Barrick, M. R., Swider, B. W., & Stewart, G. L. (2010). Initial impressions in the interview: Relationships with applicant personality and a meta-analysis of structured–unstructured interview score validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(1), 1–15. [<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019918>°]
- Bjork, R. A. (1994). Memory and metamemory considerations in the training of human beings. In J. Metcalfe & A. P. Shimamura (Eds.), *Metacognition: Knowing about knowing* (pp. 185–205). The MIT Press
- Cepeda, N. J., Pashler, H., Vul, E., Wixted, J. T., & Rohrer, D. (2006). Distributed practice in verbal recall tasks: A review and quantitative synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(3), 354–380. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.132.3.354>°
- Civil Service. (2020). Success profiles – SEO/HEO collection [PDF]. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f746b19e90e0740c86c7614/Success_Profile-SEO_HEO_Collection_v0e.pdf°
- Davies, J., Heasman, B., Livesey, A., Walker, A., Pellicano, E., & Remington, A. (2023). Access to employment: A comparison of autistic, neurodivergent and neurotypical adults’ experiences of hiring processes in the United Kingdom. *Autism*, 27(6), 1746–1763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221145377>°
- DeGroot, T., & Motowidlo, S. J. (1999). Why visual and vocal interview cues can affect interviewers’ judgments and predict job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(6), 986–993. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.6.986>°
- Eysenck, M. W., Derakshan, N., Santos, R., & Calvo, M. G. (2007). Anxiety and cognitive performance: attentional control theory. *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)*, 7(2), 336–353. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.7.2.336>°
- Flower, R. L., Dickens, L. M., & Hedley, D. (2021). Barriers to Employment: Raters’ Perceptions of Male Autistic and Non-Autistic Candidates During a Simulated Job Interview and the Impact of Diagnostic Disclosure. *Autism in adulthood : challenges and management*, 3(4), 300–309. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0075>°
- Forsythe, S. M. (1990). Effect of applicant’s clothing on interviewer’s decision to hire. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 20(19, Pt 1), 1579–1595. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1990.tb01494.x>°

- Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51(4), 327–358. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0061470>
- Gifford, R., Ng, C. F., & Wilkinson, M. (1985). Nonverbal cues in the employment interview: Links between applicant qualities and interviewer judgments. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 70(4), 729–736. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.70.4.729>
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54(7), 493–503. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.7.493>
- Habib, A., Harris, L., Pollick, F., & Melville, C. (2019). A meta-analysis of working memory in individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *PLOS ONE*, 14(4), e0216198. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0216198>
- Highhouse, S. (2008). Stubborn reliance on intuition and subjectivity in employee selection. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 1(3), 333–342. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2008.00058.x>
- Huffcutt, A. I., & Arthur, W. (1994). Hunter and Hunter (1984) revisited: Interview validity for entry-level jobs. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(2), 184–190. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.79.2.184>
- Krogh, C., & Breedgaard, T. (2022). Unequal? A field experiment of recruitment practices towards wheelchair users in Denmark. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 24(1), 266–276. <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.944>
- Latham, G. P., Saari, L. M., Pursell, E. D., & Campion, M. A. (1980). The situational interview. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65(4), 422–427. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.65.4.422>
- LinkedIn. (2018). Global recruiting trends 2018. <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/recruiting-tips/global-recruiting-trends-2018>
- Macan, T. (2009). The employment interview: A review of current studies and directions for future research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 19(3), 203–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.03.006>
- Norris, J. E., Crane, L., & Maras, K. (2020). Interviewing autistic adults: Adaptations to support recall in police, employment, and healthcare interviews. *Autism*, 24(6), 1506–1520. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320909174>
- McDaniel, M. A., Whetzel, D. L., Schmidt, F. L., & Maurer, S. D. (1994). The validity of employment interviews: A comprehensive review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(4), 599–616. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.79.4.599>
- Morrison, K. E., DeBrabander, K. M., Faso, D. J., & Sasson, N. J. (2019). Variability in first impressions of autistic adults made by neurotypical raters is driven more by characteristics of the rater than by characteristics of autistic adults. *Autism*, 23(7), 1817–1829. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318824104>

- Norris, J. E., & Maras, K. (2022). Supporting autistic adults' episodic memory recall in interviews: The role of executive functions, theory of mind, and language abilities. *Autism*, 26(2), 513–524. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211030772>^o
- Norris, J. E., Prosser, R., Remington, A., Crane, L., & Maras, K. (2024). Perceptions of autistic and non-autistic adults in employment interviews: The role of impression management. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 112, 102333. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2024.102333>^o
- Norris, J. E., Prosser, R., Remington, A., Crane, L., & Maras, K. (2024). Disclosing an autism diagnosis improves ratings of candidate performance in employment interviews. *Autism*, 28(4), 1045–1050. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231203739>^o
- Ramirez, G., & Beilock, S. L. (2011). Writing about testing worries boosts exam performance in the classroom. *Science*, 331(6014), 211–213. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1199427>^o
- Roediger, H. L., & Karpicke, J. D. (2006). Test-enhanced learning: Taking memory tests improves long-term retention. *Psychological Science*, 17(3), 249–255. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01693.x>^o
- Rohrer, D., & Taylor, K. (2007). The shuffling of mathematics problems improves learning. *Instructional Science*, 35(6), 481–498. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-007-9015-8>^o
- Romualdez, A. M., Walker, Z., & Remington, A. (2021). Autistic adults' experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace: Decision-making and factors associated with outcomes. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 6, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969415211022955>^o
- Sasson, N. J., & Morrison, K. E. (2019). First impressions of adults with autism improve with diagnostic disclosure and increased autism knowledge of peers. *Autism*, 23(1), 50–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361317729526>^o
- Schmidt, F. L., & Hunter, J. E. (1998). The validity and utility of selection methods in personnel psychology: Practical and theoretical implications of 85 years of research findings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(2), 262–274. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.124.2.262>^o
- Slamecka, N. J., & Graf, P. (1978). The generation effect: Delineation of a phenomenon. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, 4(6), 592–604. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-7393.4.6.592>^o
- Society for Human Resource Management. (2022). Talent access report—Org size: Large. SHRM Research Institute. <https://www.shrm.org/content/dam/en/shrm/research/benchmarking/Talent%20Access%20Report-ORG%20SIZE-LARGE.pdf>^o
- Stewart, G. L., Dustin, S. L., Barrick, M. R., & Darnold, T. C. (2008). Exploring the handshake in employment interviews. *The Journal of applied psychology*, 93(5), 1139–1146. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.5.1139>^o
- U.S. Office of Personnel Management. (2008). Structured interviews: A practical guide. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/structured-interviews/guide.pdf>^o