



Skillmax Resource Guide

PREPARE FOR THE JOB INTERVIEW



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Welcome to Unit 6

Unit 6 focuses on preparing for a job interview. You will learn about different types of interviews and will read advice from various people about how to perform in the interview situation. You will also consider cross cultural aspects of the job interview.

Assessment

There is one formal assessment in Unit 6.

You will prepare for a job interview (Activity 7, Activity 11 and Activity 12). Your teacher will use the criteria listed in Learning Outcome F1 to assess your preparation. These activities will prepare you to participate in a mock interview in Unit 7.

Learning outcome: CSWE IV (E) F1

Prepare for a job interview

Assessment criteria	Conditions and method of assessment
<p>1.1 Select a job advertisement relevant to own qualifications, experience and aspirations</p> <p>1.2 Research target organisation, eg size, staff, products, employment opportunities</p> <p>1.3 Predict questions likely to be asked</p> <p>1.4 Prepare responses to likely questions</p> <p>1.5 Prepare questions to ask at interview</p>	<p>Selected context is authentic.</p> <p>Sample tasks</p> <p>Learners select advertisements from, eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • online and print newspapers and journals • employment agency bulletin boards <p>Learners undertake a range of interview preparation activities, eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparing a file on the organisation • preparing a file on likely questions and responses • compiling a list of questions

Understanding the selection process

The selection decision is an important one, for both you and the employer. For employers, hiring the right person is important, because the cost of getting the wrong person is huge (as is the benefit of hiring the right person into the right job). Of course, for a job to be called *the right one*, it also has to be right for you!

There are various elements of the selection process which you need to consider. Understanding the process will enable you to plan for the interview and other parts of the process, and to sell and market yourself more effectively. Knowledge of what is involved in the process will also increase your confidence and also your performance across the range of selection processes you may be involved in.

Activity 1

Discuss these questions in a small group and then share the points of your discussion with the class.

1. What is the purpose of the selection committee or hiring manager?
2. What is the purpose of a psychological or aptitude test?
3. What are the responsibilities of the committee or panel members?
4. What is the purpose of checking with 2 or 3 referees?
5. What other checks on applicants might be made?

Activity 2

Number these steps for filling an advertised position in the correct chronological order.

- ☐ Interviews held
- ☐ Feedback given to unsuccessful applicants (only some companies do this)
- ☐ Short-listing
- ☐ Applications
- ☐ Selection panel formed
- ☐ Applicants notified of result
- ☐ Referees' reports obtained
- ☐ Applicants invited to an interview
- ☐ Material sent to applicants
- ☐ Selection questions prepared
- ☐ Vacancy advertised in the press
- ☐ Invitation to a second round of interviews

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

The interview is essentially an exchange of information. Interviewers ask questions to assess whether you would be a suitable employee.

KEY MESSAGES TO SEND TO EMPLOYERS AND RECRUITERS

On the surface, some job interviews seem to be informal, friendly chats but don't be fooled. Even when you feel very comfortable in an interview, it is important to keep in mind the reason you are there – to sell and market yourself to the interviewer and convince them beyond reasonable doubt you are the right person for the job. While some job interviews may be relaxed and quite unstructured, many are very structured. They follow rules and progress through a series of stages. Each interview question has a purpose related to the job application and all your responses are evaluated. Your task is to understand the intention behind the questions and to respond appropriately.

PREPARING FOR A JOB INTERVIEW

After researching, networking and telephoning recruiters and employers, you are now preparing for the interview. You will be assessed by an employer or recruitment agency in order to determine your suitability for the job. They will decide if your skills, qualifications and work history closely meet the requirements of the job. In addition they need to see if your personal attributes will *fit* their workplace and team. As discussed in Module 1 the *culture fit* is an important consideration for both the employer and prospective employee.

Activity 3

Discuss in groups the following questions concerning interviews in Australia.

1. What is the purpose of the interview?
2. How long does an interview usually take?
3. How many people will usually interview you?
4. How many interviews do you usually have for one job?
5. What are the main stages of an interview?
6. What does the interviewer want to find out? Is this the same in your country?
7. What are some of the mistakes job hunters make during the job interview?

Report back to the class on your group discussion.

The culture of the interview

The interview is shaped by the culture in which it has evolved.
Different cultures value different interview behaviours.

Activity 4

Read the statements below. Which are true about the interview process in your country? Which ones do you think are true about Australia? Compare your answers with people from different countries.

	Australia	Country of Origin
1. The purpose of an interview is simply to meet the applicant and see if they will fit in. Decisions about who gets the job are made on the basis of formal qualifications and references.	T/F	T/F
2. Applicants must sell themselves to the interview panel.	T/F	T/F
3. To be successful an applicant must demonstrate knowledge about the organisation and enthusiasm for the job.	T/F	T/F
4. What other people say about an applicant's abilities is more important than what the applicant says about themselves.	T/F	T/F
5. The ability to talk about a job reflects the ability to do the job.	T/F	T/F
6. The interview is an opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of your skills and experience in the position.	T/F	T/F
7. Humility and respect for those in senior positions are valued qualities in an applicant.	T/F	T/F
8. Family background is a good indicator of how well the applicant will fit into the workplace and perform the job.	T/F	T/F
9. The interview tests the general knowledge of the applicant.	T/F	T/F
10. Previous behaviour is the best indicator of an applicant's capacity to perform the job.	T/F	T/F
11. Academic qualifications are the best indicators of an applicant's capacity to perform the job.	T/F	T/F
12. The successful applicant needs to demonstrate long-term commitment and loyalty to the job.	T/F	T/F

The 10 most popular types of interviews

Employment interviews can take different forms. Some of these are outlined below.

1. THE TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

- the interviewer will screen your answers to determine that your answers are consistent with information on your résumé and cover letter
- the interview may last between 10 and 45 minutes

2. THE ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW

- the applicant is interviewed by one person
- the interview is conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone

3. THE BEHAVIOURAL AND COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW

- the interviewer asks a structured series of questions about real situations the applicant has experienced in the past
- the questions are linked to competencies and position descriptions
- the interviewer is essentially looking for evidence of specific behaviours the applicant has demonstrated in the past, as a way to predict how they might behave in similar situations in the future
- the questions asked in a behavioural interview will have been written about specific selection criteria or competencies
- an example of a behavioural question is: *Tell me about a time when you have managed a complaint from a customer?* Be prepared for further probing questions: *How would you deal with that situation differently?*

4. THE PANEL INTERVIEW

- three or four people interview the applicant
- each panel member represents a different focus area
- each panel member takes turns and asks different questions

5. THE GROUP INTERVIEW

- a number of applicants are seen by the company
- there is often a presentation of information about the company
- applicants are then interviewed and observed for body language as well as interpersonal and communication skills

6. THE SITUATIONAL INTERVIEW

- the interviewer asks questions about hypothetical situations
- applicants are asked how they would deal with the situation
- the situational interview asks what you would do in a hypothetical situation (whereas the behavioural interview asks what you have done in a real situation in the past)
- an example of a situational question is: *What would you do if a customer complained to you about the level of service they had received?*

7. THE SIMULATION INTERVIEW

- applicants perform role-plays or respond to case studies at the interview
- interviewers determine your skill in areas such as time management, decision making and communication skills

8. THE STRESS INTERVIEW

- the stress interview is used by some companies or individual hiring managers to gauge how you will handle stress
- the interviewer is assessing how well you will handle stress on the job
- questions are tough and designed to test your resilience to different work pressures

9. THE VIDEOCONFERENCE INTERVIEW

- this type of interview is becoming increasingly popular
- be prepared and aware of how to best use the equipment – the panel convener will seek confirmation from you that you are alone for the duration of the interview
- know how long the interview will last
- look directly into the camera-talk to the camera as if you were in a face-to-face interview and maintain eye contact

10. THE UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

- the interviewer asks broad and general questions (which are often not prepared prior to the interview)

What is the purpose of the interview?

The interview is essentially about selling yourself to the employer. If you make a good sale you are more likely to be offered the job. The most important opportunity to sell yourself comes with questions such as: *Tell me about yourself.*

Activity 5

- a Find an advertisement for a job you would like to apply for, and answer the question: *Tell me about yourself.* Remember to sell yourself in the context of the job you are applying for. For example, instead of saying you are good at problem solving, you could say: *I am very good at solving complex problems, which would certainly be of benefit when dealing with the more difficult customer complaints.*
- b When you have written your response to this question, re-read what you have written and underline each of your selling points.
- c Now circle where you have interpreted what that point will mean in the context of the job you are applying for.
- d If you have mentioned any selling points and not mentioned what that means in the context of the job, go back and do that now.

Activity 6

Read the article: *Preparation is still the key to success.* List the pitfalls of the interview identified by David Walsh, a director of the software house Synthesis, who is widely experienced in interviewing IT candidates. Then summarise his tips for success.

Preparation is still the key to success

JOHN SAMSON in London learns how to turn an interview "ordeal" into the chance to shine and impress

WHEN you look for a job, you must endure, at least once, the ordeal of the interview.

For jobs in information technology, interviews are particularly stressful; as well as having your personality scrutinised, you will probably face some tricky technical questions.

How can you stop worrying about the pressure and give yourself the edge that converts an interview to a job offer?

Mr David Walsh, a director of the software house Synthesis, has long experience of interviewing IT candidates.

He says preparation is the key to success.

"If you have taken the trouble to find out as much as you can about the company and the position you're going for, you will shine compared with the general run of applicants."

Mr Walsh says it's also worthwhile being aware of the pitfalls that lie in wait for the unsuspecting interviewee.

"One area where candidates often let themselves down is that they don't listen carefully enough to the questions," he says.

"Maybe they get too stressed or preoccupied.

"But being interviewed is as much about listening as it is about talking."

Experienced IT specialists may be able to rely in part on their specific specialist skills.

But they must be aware that even technical questions may not be completely straightforward.

"Often there's more to a question than meets the eye," Mr Walsh says.

"A good candidate is responsive to the nuances.

"Remember, the interviewer has an agenda and a point of view inside their own organisation.

"The candidate who seems to fit most comfortably into that scenario is the one who will be offered the job.

"The interviewer is looking for someone who can be trusted to protect their point of view and carry out their policy."

Regardless of someone's IT qualifications or technical background, being trustworthy is probably the most valuable quality for a candidate to project.

Nothing is more off-putting to an interviewer than the feeling that the wool is being pulled over their eyes.

"Technical competence is one of the hardest things to judge in an interview," Mr Walsh says.

"On the other hand, it's usually easy to tell when someone is getting out of their depth and pretending to expertise they don't actually have.

"This creates a terrible impression.

"If you don't know something, it's better to say so — then, at least, you get some points for honesty."

The difficulties in assessing knowledge and expertise in the many specialisations of information technology are notorious. Like many other companies, Synthesis resorts to written tests, some of which it has devised itself, to measure knowledge of certain computer languages.

Mr Walsh explains: "Tests will tell you something about a person's ability, but on technical knowledge we also have to rely to some degree on references."

This is a well-known problem to anyone looking for a new job. It can be awkward to put down your present boss as a referee because you may not wish them to know you are planning to leave. Apart from anything else, it's embarrassing if you don't get the new job you're after.

"You don't have to put your present boss down as a referee," Mr Walsh says. "But you should put down somebody who can validate the claims you make on your CV. It might be the boss in your previous job or it could be a colleague, not necessarily senior to you, in your current position. The interview will be easier for you, if your

technical experience is beyond dispute."

What people fear most in an interview is awkward or tricky questions. One of the old favourites in the computer industry used to be — if I took you down to the machine room, could you point out the compiler?

Mr Walsh adds: "We've all heard the classics, like asking someone what their password is — and if they tell you, they're obviously not too hot on security. But that kind of thing is really a joke. In reality a professional interviewer will often ask a two-stage question. They might, for instance, ask someone if they'd be comfortable in a support role. If they want the job, they'll probably say yes. And the interviewer might then follow-up by asking them what they understand a support role to entail."

The hour or so which an interview lasts may seem like an eternity to the long-suffering interviewee but eventually even the roughest one comes to an end. At this point there is a little bit of role-reversal. The interviewer will thank you for attending and will then probably ask if you have any questions. It is usually a good idea to ask one or two just to underline your interest in the job.

That's where Mr Walsh has one final tip.

"The interview is a selling process and so should always end with a close. Not everyone will agree but I think it's a good idea to ask the interviewer outright at the end what are your chances of getting the job.

"Apart from anything else, it shows that you are keen and it certainly can't hurt.

"If the interviewer has one or two doubts about your suitability, it will draw these into the open and give you a chance to counter them. Also, even if you don't get this job, it would be nice to know where you fell down. It could make all the difference at your next interview."

The Times

This article was reprinted in *The Australian* in July 2000 from *The Times*. It is reproduced here by kind permission of John Samson.

Activity 7

Select 2 current job advertisements (refer to the Resource section of this Guide for online job board websites). Select advertisements that meet your skills, qualifications, experience and personal attributes. Compile and report to the class the following:

1. Source of advertisement and date advertised.

2. Name of position advertised.

3. Underline the essential and preferred selection criteria (*if relevant*).

4. Align your résumé to the selection criteria.

5. Write the name of the company and location if known.

6. Research the company profile.

What culturally diverse aspects of the interview should I think about?

If your experience has been in another country, even an English speaking country, you need to consider what cross-cultural misunderstandings may arise during the interview.

Cultural practices can hinder migrant applicants in job interviews. Natasha Wallace reports.

Does avoiding someone's eyes in an interview really mean you're lying about your qualifications? Or if you're softly spoken, do you really lack confidence?

The Australian population is among the world's most diverse, yet "intercultural interviewing" – considering a person's ethnic and cultural background and being aware of your own assumptions when assessing individuals, for a job – is a concept barely known here. This isn't a question of racism or a debate about equal opportunity employment it's a far more subtle, unintentional prejudice. But it exists, and it can inadvertently cut a migrant out of the job market. In an increasingly pressured workplace, where managers are expected to make quick decisions, first impressions too often count most. Many jobseekers have experienced what it feels like to know an interview is over before it has even begun.

Abeselom Nega, the regional manager for Australian Multicultural Employment Services (AMES), says people often miss out on jobs because the interviewer doesn't understand the candidate's ethnic and cultural background.

Assumptions about dress, body language and verbal skills may lead an employer to focus too heavily on style instead of content, he says. AMES, part of the Federal Government's Job Network program, helps place people from different cultural backgrounds into employment and runs seminars on conducting intercultural interviews.

"[Recruiters] need to avoid making judgments based on body language and greetings," says Nega. "Second, they need to avoid making judgments on the tone of the voice and perhaps they need to ask more specific questions to get better answers." According to a Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs report released last year, only 51 per

cent of jobseeking migrants had found employment within six months of arriving here although that was an improvement on previous years.

David Reynolds, manager HR practices at TMP Worldwide, says Australian companies generally do not understand the concept of intercultural interviewing, which has been widely adopted in the US. Many psychological screening tools used in recruiting are appropriate only for people from an Anglo-Saxon background.

Nega says that given Australia's large Asian population, recruiters should have a strong understanding of the body language of that culture.

"There is a high degree of politeness, perhaps respect, but that could be misunderstood by the interviewer quite easily. They won't look you in the eye, they will be slow in their response, they'll have a soft voice."

"When they don't look [the interviewer] in the eye", he says, "there's an assumption that the candidate is not telling the truth, is not honest about past experiences and perhaps about credentials and the skills and abilities they bring with them to the job."

The assertiveness of Middle Eastern jobseekers "may be perceived as arrogant even if they're the most polite and hospitable people." As well, Nega says, some indigenous Australians believe self – promotion is unattractive and tackle issues communally so a one-on-one interview may seem odd.

Eastern Europeans, particularly those over 45 who have grown up under a communist government, may be modest or find it difficult to question authority. Jessie Wong, the managing director of Multicultural Marketing and Management (MMM), says that what an interviewer considers the norm, such as reading from left to right, might be a completely new experience for the interviewee. MMM

recruits people from ethnic backgrounds for companies wishing to promote a product in a particular market. Wong says when interviewing candidates from non-English speaking backgrounds, recruiters should speak slowly and clearly and use simple vocabulary. A Melbourne University survey released this month found one Sydney resident in three speaks a language other than English at home, making it Australia's most multi lingual city.

If companies do not consider this, says Reynolds, they will miss out on a greater talent pool and deprive themselves of the competitive advantage that comes with having a culturally diverse workplace.

"They are not allowing themselves to mirror the society with which they're doing business." He concedes TMP does not have an intercultural interviewing training program for recruiters, and says he will look into developing one. Australia's largest recruiter, Adecco, also lacks such a program, says its director of talent and management, Sue Greig. "It's probably not commercially viable that we do that," she says.

The company's consultants dealt daily with many cultural backgrounds. Appropriate interpretation of "some subtle cultural messages" could cause problems, "which is not to say that we therefore ignore them".

The Sydney Morning Herald
October 2002. Reproduced with permission from Natasha Wallace

Intercultural interviewing

- Be aware of your own assumptions and judge others accordingly
- Don't place undue emphasis on body language or tone of voice
- Learn about the candidate's ethnic background and culture
- Avoid using jargon and metaphors
- Speak slowly, clearly and in simple language

Activity 8

- a Based on the article on the previous page, list some aspects of job interviews where potential employers may slip into false assumptions.
- b In a mixed cultural group, discuss ways in which these false cultural assumptions might be overcome.
- c Discuss the positives of a culturally diverse workplace identified in the article.

Activity 9

- a Discuss in groups the following areas where there may be cultural differences between your country of origin and Australia.

- Dress
- Relationships between management and workers
- How employees address management
- Lifelong learning
- Coping with change/change management
- Cultivation and maintenance of relationships between supervisors and peers
- Self promotion – not by boasting, but by actions that show you are a good employee
- Socialising, by means of the company social club/sporting events

The worst mistake at a job interview is to forget to use appropriate behaviour. Unfortunately inappropriate job-interview behaviour is becoming more common and many hiring managers admit it's getting worse. A survey that was conducted recently focused on interview etiquette, with results showing that many jobseekers insist they do show up on time for interviews and are well prepared. However hiring managers beg to differ; they say they've seen a plethora of bad behaviour in interviews.

Activity 10

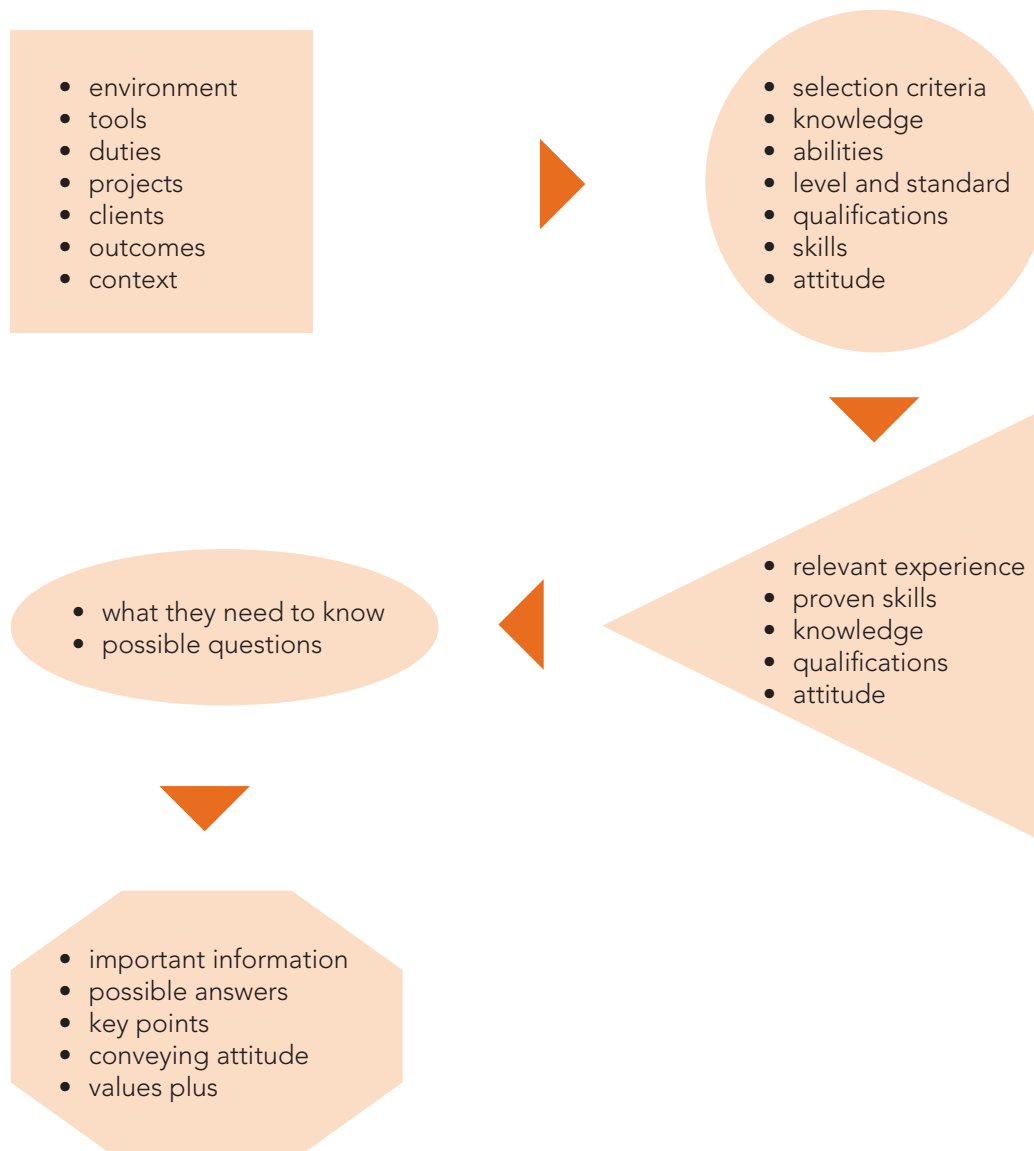
Discuss the characters below and what you think is appropriate or not appropriate behaviour at an interview.



Activity 11

- a Think about the aspects of the interview you need to prepare for.
b Label each box below with one of these headings.

Headings: The job in depth
 You
 The selectors
 The requirements
 Your answers



Activity 12

Consider all the aspects of the interview you need to prepare for:

1. Select 10 questions below and practise the responses.
2. Prepare 8 questions to ask at the end of the interview.
3. Provide feedback to your class partner to improve their interview performance.
4. Self assess your own interview performance.
5. Record your comments and any areas you need to improve.
6. File the information into your Career Portfolio.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1) Tell me about yourself. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) How long have you been in Australia and what have you been doing? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) Why did you apply for this position? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) Have you applied for many jobs before? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5) How do you like living in Australia? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6) Why did you leave your last job? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7) What do you think you can bring to the role? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8) Tell me about your previous jobs and responsibilities. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9) What are your strengths? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10) What are your weaknesses? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11) How would your employer describe you? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12) Explain what being a team player means to you. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13) Describe a time that you had to meet a strict deadline. How did you achieve that?
What was the outcome of the situation? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14) Describe the style of management that you like to work with. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15) Do you prefer to work on your own or in a team? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16) Tell me about a project that you managed and how you implemented the project.
Did you experience any problems and if so how did you overcome them?
Did you achieve your objectives? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17) I am interviewing a lot of applicants for this role, tell me why I should employ you? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18) You do not have any local experience do you? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19) Your qualifications are not the same as those required in Australia –
how will you be able to do the job? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20) How do you cope with pressure and deadlines? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21) What do you know about our company? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22) How do you think you will adapt to the Australian workplace culture? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23) This job is of a lower level to your previous job – how will you cope with that? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24) Are you seeking a long-term job? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25) This position is a contract role – do you consider that to be a problem? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26) Are you prepared to undertake further study and training?
If so, how will you be able to combine that with working full time? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 27) If you were successful, when can you start in this position? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Questions to ask at the end of the interview

Example: When do you anticipate the position to commence? Example: Is there an induction period for this position?	
1.	5.
2.	6.
3.	7.
4.	8.

Discuss the Dos and Don'ts List in the table below.
Can you add to the list?

Do:	Don't:
1. show positive body language	1. arrive with other people accompanying you
2. be polite, interested and alert	2. get distracted or show negative body language
3. be punctual – know transport, location	3. be late
4. bring a copy of your résumé, other relevant documentation, referees' details with you	4. arrive unprepared with no documentation
5. know the name of the interviewer and job title	5. arrive without the name of the person interviewing you
6. be neatly and professionally dressed including correct footwear	6. dress inappropriately
7. practise questions and answers prior to the interview	7. ask direct questions relating to salary
8. review job criteria and your résumé/ application	8. give negative comments about your former employer or colleagues
9.	9.
10.	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.