



INTERVIEWS UNLOCKED

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO HELP YOU FEEL
CONFIDENT AND PREPARED FOR
INTERVIEWS

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Welcome!

INTERVIEWS UNLOCKED

If you are an ambitious young job seeker wondering how to prepare well and stand out in interviews... you're in the right place.



Maybe you're:

- Getting interviews but not progressing to the next stage
- Unsure what interviewers actually want
- Feeling nervous, overthinking or second-guessing yourself
- Not sure how to talk about your strengths
- Worried you don't have enough experience to sell your skills

This guide is designed to help you get clear on:

- The interview question almost every employer asks first
- The simple framework that makes your stories sound structured and confident
- The mistakes that cause strong candidates to miss out
- How to turn school, sport or part-time jobs into strong interview examples
- The questions you should always ask at the end of an interview

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Early warm up questions

- How was your journey here?
- How is your time at sixth form/university/gap year going?
- What have you most enjoyed studying?

Tip: These questions might feel casual, but they shape first impressions. Don't be afraid to smile, show a bit of personality and build rapport.

Now on to the first critical question!

- Tell me about yourself.

This is one of the most important questions in any interview

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Can you structure your thoughts clearly?
- Do you understand what's relevant to this role?
- Are you confident...but not arrogant?

Quick Reality Check – Avoid answers like:

“Well... I live in...”

“Let me talk you through my entire CV.”

“I'm not really sure where to start...”

How to Answer - approx 1 minute answer:

Present → Relevant skills → Why this role

- **Who you are:** Introduce yourself confidently and say what stage you are at now E.g. recent graduate who studied {xx} degree at {xx} university, now working part-time in {xx} while I apply for Graduate schemes.
- **Relevant skills:** Share 3 skills that are relevant for the role using what you have done in the last few years
- **Why this role** (topline level)

Your Motivation & Career Direction

- Why do you want to work here?
- Why do you want to pursue a career in this sector?
- How much do you know about us? What research have you done on us?
- What other career options are you considering at the moment?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Have you thought seriously about your future?
- Are you genuinely interested in this role or just applying everywhere?
- Will you stay committed?

Quick Reality Check – Avoid answers like:

“It just looks like a great company.”

“I’m applying for lots of different things.”

“I don’t really know much about the company yet.”

How to answer the question about why you want this role:

You need to be very convincing, otherwise it can be difficult to progress to the next stage.

Your interests → Your strengths → What you learned from researching the company

Example:

“I’m interested in this sector because X. I believe my strengths in X and X would allow me to contribute well in this role. What stood out when researching your company was X, particularly X.”

Most employers use competency questions to assess potential, not experience. Think about examples from school/Uni, part-time work, volunteering or hobbies.

- Give me an example of a time when you solved a difficult problem.
- Tell me about a time when you took initiative without being asked.
- Tell me about a time when you've had to make an unpopular decision?
- Describe a time when you had a difference of opinion with someone and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time when you led or organised something.
- Tell me about a time when you've either failed or made a mistake. How did you handle it and what did you learn?
- Give me an example of a time where you've had to persuade someone to do something.
- Describe a time when you had to manage your own workload or priorities.
- Tell me about a time when you've received criticism or difficult feedback – how did you handle it?

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Do you have evidence of your skills?
- Do you take responsibility for outcomes?
- Can you reflect and learn from experience?

Quick Reality Check – Avoid answers like:

"I'm good at teamwork."

"We worked together and everything went well."

"I can't think of an example."

How to Answer These Types of Questions - Use CARL structure to articulate your story clearly:

CONTEXT - what the situation was

ACTIONS - what you did

RESULTS - what happened as a result (include numbers if possible)

LEARNING - what you learned from the experience

Preparing Your Best Stories



Below is an example showing how I would recommend you prepare your best stories and examples so you can flex them live in the interview, depending on what questions come up.

Here's a 2 minute YouTube video I've create to explain the CARL technique in more detail [CLICK HERE](#) with examples.

Story	Bullet points (CARL format)	3 Skills/ Character Traits
Refereeing	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wanted to earn money and love football – so asked for the referee qualification for my 15th birthday and quickly qualified. <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I started refereeing & at first the abuse was tough. Over time, I got more resilient, more confident at making quick decisions, got better at explaining my decisions quickly and moving on, not taking it personally. Used humour to diffuse tension when appropriate. Learned to flex my refereeing style depending on age group. <p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully progressed from refereeing U14s to U18s; last 4 years I have refereed over 125+ games and 20+ one day tournaments; consistently get strong feedback and booked solid through-out the season. <p>Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The experience has taught me the importance of sticking with something even when things are tough as it gets easier. 	<p>Resilience</p> <p>Decision Making</p> <p>Communicating effectively with lots of different people</p>

Preparing Your Best Stories



Now write down your strongest examples.

- Remember that one experience can often demonstrate several different skills, so you may be able to use the same situation to answer more than one interview question about different skills.

Story	Bullet points (CARL format)	3 Skills/ Traits
	Context: Actions: Results: Learning:	
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	Context: Actions: Results: Learning:	
	Context: Actions: Results: Learning:	

Your Approach to Success & Organisation

- What have you done that you're really proud of?
- Tell me about a goal you set for yourself and how you achieved it.
- Talk me through how you normally plan and manage your time.
- How do you cope when juggling several projects and deadlines at the same time?
- Give me an example where you've had to deal with change.

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Are you reliable?
- Can you manage deadlines?
- Will you cope with real workplace pressure?

Quick Reality Check – Avoid answers like:

“I just get on with things.”

“I try to remember everything in my head.”

“I usually leave things until the last minute.”

How most candidates get this wrong:

They underestimate how much employers value basic organisation and being reliable.

How to answer:

Using CARL structure, explain:

- how you prioritise tasks
- how you manage deadlines
- the result of your approach

This Role & Your Decision



- Is there anything about this role that you are particularly excited about? Or nervous about?
- What parts of this role appeal to you, and which aspects are less appealing?
- What would you do if you were given some work to do but didn't know how to progress it?
- Would you have any reservations about taking this role?
- What other roles are you applying for? How does this role compare to others you are applying for?
- Are you willing to relocate for this role?

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Do you understand what the job actually involves?
- Are you genuinely motivated to do this work day-to-day?
- Will you stay committed if the role becomes challenging?

Quick Reality Check – Avoid answers like:

“Everything about the role sounds perfect.”

“I'm not really sure what the job involves.”

Giving vague answers like “it just sounds interesting”

How to answer:

Interest → Awareness → Willingness to learn

Example:

“What excites me most about this role is X. I understand that Y may be challenging at first, but I'm keen to develop those skills.”

- Highlight the aspects that genuinely interest and motivate you
- Acknowledge that some parts of the role may be challenging or new
- Emphasise your willingness to learn and develop in those areas

What kind of person are you?

These questions help employers assess your self-awareness, emotional maturity and how you work with others.

- What are your strengths?
- What is your biggest weakness?
- How would you describe your personality?
- How would your friends (or family/work colleagues/previous manager) describe you?
- What personal characteristics do you have which will make you successful in this position?
- What kind of people do you work best with?

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Self-awareness
- Emotional maturity
- Coachability and growth mindset

Quick Reality Check – Avoid answers like:

“My biggest weakness is that I’m a perfectionist.”

“I don’t really have any weaknesses.”

Choosing a weakness that is critical to the job.

How to Answer The Weakness Question:

Choose a genuine weakness that you have already started working on.

Explain:

- what the weakness is
- what you are doing to improve it
- how you are developing over time

Unusual questions

- If you were an animal/superhero/Disney character/kitchen appliance, which one would you be and why?

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Can you think on your feet?
- Can you deal with the unexpected?
- Do you have a sense of humour?

Quick Reality Check – Avoid:

“I have absolutely no idea.”

“That’s a strange question.”

Overthinking it for several minutes.

How to Answer:

- **Smile** a little when answering these questions - it’s an opportunity to let your personality shine.
- Think of 3 character traits you have that are relevant for the role and then connect to the question.
- If you can’t think of a superhero/Disney character on the spot - just share the 3 traits anyway!

Example answer:

“I’d say an ant. Ants are hardworking, organised and great team players, which reflects how I approach group projects and work responsibilities.”

And finally... the most common question at the end is:

- Do you have any questions for us?

INSIDER INSIGHT - What they're really assessing:

- Curiosity, preparation and genuine interest

Quick Reality Check – Avoid:

“No, I think you’ve covered everything.”

“How many holidays do I get?” You can deal with all those details if you get offered the job.

Asking questions that are clearly answered on the job ad or website.

How to answer:

Prepare 2–3 thoughtful questions that show interest in the role and organisation.

Examples:

- “What does success look like in this role?”
- “What do people enjoy most about working here?”
- “What are the most important skills for someone starting in this position?”
- “I saw this {xx} initiative on your website - can you tell me more about that?”

Feeling nervous about interviews?

That's completely normal.

Even experienced professionals feel nervous before interviews.

The key difference is **preparation**.

The more examples you prepare and practise talking through them, the more confident you'll feel.

Confidence doesn't come first. Preparation creates confidence.



Here are four other tips to help calm your nerves:

1. Take slow, deep breaths before the interview

Deep breathing helps calm your nervous system and allows your brain to think more clearly.

2. Remember the interviewers want you to succeed

They're not there to "catch you out" — they want to find someone who can do the job well and join their team.

3. Pause before answering

It's completely fine to take a few seconds to think about your answer. A short pause often leads to a clearer and more structured response.

4. Speak slightly slower than you normally would

When people feel nervous they often start speaking very quickly. This can make answers sound rushed or less clear.

Many students tell me they feel far more confident after practising answers out loud with someone else.

WHY MANY GREAT STUDENTS STRUGGLE WITH INTERVIEWS

Many of the young people I work with are bright, capable and hardworking. They often get good grades and often secure interviews for very competitive opportunities.

Yet despite this, many still struggle to convert interviews into offers. And this can be frustrating - for both students and their parents.

3 Common Challenges

1. Students don't recognise their own strengths
They believe they have 'no experience' but in reality they often have plenty of examples from school, uni, part-time work, sport or projects - they just don't know how to talk about them in a way that motivates employers.
2. They don't know what interviewers are assessing
3. Confidence drops under pressure and after the inevitable rejections. Even well-prepared students can struggle. That's completely normal - but remember that interview skills can be learned and improve with preparation, practice and feedback.

This is exactly the kind of support I provide through my coaching.

Together we work on:

- identifying strong real-life examples
- structuring clear interview answers
- practising questions in a realistic interview environment
- building confidence through feedback and preparation

The goal is simple:

To help young people walk into interviews **feeling prepared, confident and able to show their true potential.**

MEET THE COACH

I'm an experienced and qualified Career & Confidence Coach - helping young people launch their careers. My mission is to equip them with the practical tools and strategies to find a career path that plays to their strengths – as quickly and easily as possible.



I typically help students who:

- Want to secure competitive apprenticeships or graduate roles
- Get interviews but struggle to convert them into offers
- Feel nervous in interviews
- Don't know how to talk about their limited experience

If you've read this guide and thought "this sounds harder than I expected", you're not alone. Interviewing is a skill that can be learned, and many young people benefit from some additional guidance as they prepare for this important stage.

Many parents decide to bring in outside support at this stage. **Often it's simply easier for a young person to hear advice from someone other than mum or dad.** After all, most teenagers learn to drive with an instructor - not their parents.

If your son or daughter has interviews coming up and you'd like them to feel properly prepared, feel free to book a free 20-minute call with me to talk through their situation.



You can also write me an email: fiona@careersuccess.org.uk
Or follow me on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#) for regular updates and practical, modern advice on how to launch your career in a competitive job market.

Testimonials



Fiona's coaching sessions were incredibly helpful and full of actionable insights on my CV, interview technique and job search strategy. She provided such a supportive environment and massively improved my confidence with job interviews.

Jess

I asked Fiona to help one of my daughters to improve her success rate in the virtual and in-person interviews and assessments for the rare-as-hens-teeth graduate training scheme opportunities she was already getting selected for. Fiona had great empathy for my daughter's situation, helping her to significantly improve confidence in her next interviews through elements of self-reflection, practice and more thorough preparation.

Jason

After graduating I was unsure of what direction to follow with my career. Fiona helped me to understand what skills I enjoyed using and gain self confidence in my abilities and aptitudes. I would highly recommend Fiona to any graduate that feels in a similar position.

Ella

After just a few sessions I feel much more confident in approaching an otherwise daunting job search, and more certain in my capability to complete competitive applications. Putting in place an action plan between sessions provided a structure that kept me on track.

Simon

More reviews can be found on my
LinkedIn Profile: [Click here](#)