

How do I get there?

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Introduction



In Blocks 1 and 2 you've carried out some activities that should have increased your self-awareness, and you have been guided to explore opportunities. You've probably put a lot of time into analysing your life and career, and you should have considered your strengths, skills and experience, and researched the occupational areas that interest you. This block is designed to help you to take decisions and develop a plan detailing how to put them into action. The advice, guidance and activities below will help you to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different decisions, find sources of help and plan for action.

Here's a video to introduce this block, followed by an activity designed to get you to consider whether your SWOT analysis needs updating.

Video content is not available in this format.

Activity 1

Allow about 15 minutes

There are a couple of reasons why you may want to take another look at your SWOT results. It may be some time since you completed the SWOT analysis at the end of Block 2, and lots of things may have changed. For example, you may have addressed some of your weaknesses, or some of the threats might have disappeared. If anything has changed, amend your SWOT results to reflect the current position.

However, even if you have recently completed your SWOT analysis and it's still fresh in your mind, just take a few minutes to review it before you start Block 3. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Is there anything in the results that I'd like to change?
- What are my priorities in terms of addressing weaknesses and dealing with threats?
- What are my priorities in terms of building on my strengths and seizing opportunities?

Once you are happy with your SWOT and have noted down any priorities, you have a sound basis on which to move forward.

Learning Outcomes

By completing this block and the associated quiz, you will:

- identify your goals and action that you can take next to reach them.

1 Making decisions

Obviously you have to be realistic about what is possible, because life imposes restrictions on us all, but many people don't achieve all that they're capable of because they're not clear about what they want to do and how to make decisions. It's important to aim for what you want, while being aware of what's actually achievable. One way to consider the range of options is to look at your goals alongside your personal restrictions and resources.

Managing your situation

Whenever you're in a situation you're not happy with, you have four basic options. It can be useful to think about the short, medium and long term when you consider them.

For example, you may be clear that you want to change jobs in the long term, but in the short term you might be able to 'change yourself' to make things easier, while embarking on some training that will provide you with a relevant qualification in the medium term.

- **Work for change:** try to change the situation to make it closer to what you want it to be. If you've tried to do this and have been unsuccessful, you're left with the other three options.
- **Change yourself:** examine your own attitudes, behaviour, ambitions, skills, lifestyle and so on, and consider how your situation might improve if you changed any of those.
- **Live with it:** this means much more than 'putting up with it'. You need a strategy to minimise the aspects of the situation that you don't like and maximise those you do. For example, you might put more energy into activities outside your job if you're dissatisfied at work, change the way you work so that it reduces your contact with troublesome elements, or spend more time doing the things you enjoy and cutting down those you don't.
- **Leave:** find a constructive way to move on or out of the situation, job, relationship or problem.

Activity 2

Allow about 15 minutes

Consider the four options listed above. Note down how each of them may help you to move on from your current undesirable situation in the short, medium and long term.

Provide your answer...

You've now completed Section 1 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

2 Goals, restrictions and resources

Whatever your decision about the four options listed on the previous page, you need a goal and a plan to get to where you want to go. We are now going to look at your goals and then examine the restrictions and resources that may affect how you reach them.

2.1 Goals



What is a goal?

- Goals are what you want to get out of life.
- You may use other words to describe your goals, such as 'results', 'outcomes', 'aims' or 'ambitions'.
- Whether short or long term, goals should be realistic but challenging.
- Remember that your goals may change over time.

Activity 3

Allow about 15 minutes

What are your goals? You may not have identified them fully yet, but note them down in the space below in as much detail as you can – you can add to them later as you define them more clearly.

Provide your answer...

2.2 Restrictions and resources

We're all affected by our own restrictions and resources. Sometimes the same thing can be both a restriction and a resource. If you're buying a house on a mortgage, it's both a liability and an asset; a friend or relative might need support but might also be a source of support to you.

Activity 4

Allow about 20 minutes

What are your restrictions and resources?

Think about your resources – the things, people and attitudes that could help you. Then think about your restrictions – the things you need to take into account, or that may be problems.

Go to [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and note them down. An example is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Resources	Restrictions
Money	Responsibilities
Financial resources	
Equipment, tools, premises	I haven't got ...
I have ...	
People, family, contacts	Who needs my help or support?
Who can help me?	
Health	Bad points
Good points	
Beliefs, outlooks	Negatives
Positives	

Comment

Consider your answers in the table you filled in.

- How will they affect the kind of opportunities open to you?
- Are there other things you need to consider? For example, do you need to work near your home?
- Could you move to a new area?
- Could you work from home?
- Have you caring responsibilities, or do you need care yourself?

2.3 Balancing helpful resources against restrictions

Now look again at the restrictions and resources you listed in Activity 4. You probably noted some factors that would help you to move in the direction that you want to take and others that you need to find a way round. You now need to consider each of your goals in terms of all the resources that could be helpful or restrictions that might hinder you. The next activity will help with this.

Activity 5

Allow about 30 minutes

Look first at the example in Table 2. It was produced by someone who wanted to apply for a promotion. Each restriction is set against a helping resource, giving a balanced picture of the situation.

Table 2

Resources	Restrictions
Line manager's support	Colleagues' reactions
Personal ambition/determined	Limited mobility
Prepared to take responsibility	Little experience of managing people
Project management experience	No experience of managing budgets

Now return to the template and balance the resources and restrictions for the goal(s) you listed for Activity 3. Which of the goals are the most important? Highlight them.

What actions would help you to make the most of the resources you listed? And what would help you to reduce the effects of the restrictions?

You've listed the actions you can take towards your goals. You should now bring actions and resources together, listing the resources that can help you to carry out each step. Look at the example in Table 3, where 'no experience of managing budgets' was listed as a problem.

Table 3

Actions	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend course on finance for non-managers at work Attend outside course in the evenings Find out about the budget process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal training courses Local college has course Line manager's support Family support

Now do this for each of the actions you listed in [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#).

Comment

You should now have a clear picture of what you really want and what ideas you want to develop. You should also be clear about the main helping forces and problems you need to deal with.

You've now completed Section 2 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

3 Forming a plan of action

The next stage is to bring everything together into a detailed plan of action. This means you will need to:

- set out your goals (in the long, medium and short term)
- decide which actions you need to take
- identify your restrictions and resources
- work out a realistic timescale to achieve each step.

If you monitor your progress by checking your plan from time to time, you can identify what you have achieved and then revise your targets if necessary. And of course if you change your mind about your end goal, then you can go back to your original plan to make necessary adjustments.

When drawing up your action plan you should consider:

- what you need to do
- how you are going to take action
- what resources that could help you (e.g. finance, information, friends)
- when you will achieve your targets
- how you will know when you have achieved your goal.

One way to deal with this is to break each activity down into small steps and keep it manageable. Action plans need to be SMART (**s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**chievable, **r**ealistic, **t**ime-based). Using a structure like this helps you to break big tasks down into smaller, more manageable ones so that you stay in control and have the confidence that you can manage them.

Having a back-up plan

You should always try to have a back-up plan, so keep an eye on progress and adapt your plan if necessary. If you don't manage to meet your goals, it may be that your first plan wasn't good enough. You may need to improve it or change it completely. If, after doing that, you still find that you're unable to reach your goal, you might have to reconsider it. Ask yourself, 'Is it realistic?' If it isn't, you'll have to revise it.

Activity 6

Allow about 30 minutes

To achieve what you want, it might be necessary to go through several stages. You might need to gain experience or qualifications, gather information, or get access to a particular resource.

You may have to cope with setbacks and frustrations, but you're setting out on a potentially exciting journey, taking the first steps towards a new life. Set aside time at regular intervals to review your goals and see how you are progressing.

Look at the example in Table 4 and then fill in [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#).

Table 4

My long-term goal	Short and medium-term goals	Actions required	Constraints	Resources – who or what can help me	Target date
Retail management	Secure intermediate-level apprenticeship in retail environment	May need to improve my GCSE Maths grade for an intermediate apprenticeship	Have to wait for an opportunity to resit the Maths GCSE	Teachers and family	Next August
	Secure full-time job with further training and/or prospects at the (successful) end of the intermediate apprenticeship	Need to explore opportunities in the local area Will need to get practice at my application and interview techniques	Reliant on public transport, which limits employment opportunities		

You've now completed Section 3 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

4 Getting the job

4.1 What do employers look for when recruiting?

In its 2011 report *Building for Growth*, The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) identified seven core employability skills that most employers value:

1. Self-management:
 - readiness to accept responsibility
 - flexibility
 - resilience
 - self-starting
 - appropriate assertiveness
 - time management
 - readiness to improve own performance based on feedback/reflective learning.
2. Team working:
 - respecting others
 - cooperating
 - negotiating and persuading
 - contributing to discussions
 - an awareness of interdependence with others.
3. Problem solving:
 - analysing facts and situations
 - creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions.
4. Communication and literacy
 - producing clear, structured written work
 - oral literacy
 - listening and questioning.
5. Numeracy
 - manipulating numbers
 - general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts.
6. Application of information technology:
 - basic IT skills
 - familiarity with commonly used IT programmes.
7. Business and customer awareness:
 - understanding the key drivers for business success
 - innovating
 - taking calculated risks
 - providing customer satisfaction
 - building customer loyalty.

According to the report, four out of five employers value these skills. Underpinning them all is a positive attitude and enthusiasm. We have categorised them into four broad areas:

1. self-reliance skills
2. people skills
3. general employment skills
4. specialist skills.

Table 5 shows the skills that employers want and how they can be developed.

Table 5

Type of skill	Examples of how the skills can be developed through interests, work and education
Self-reliance skills	
Self-awareness: purposeful, focused, self-belief, realistic, assessing your own performance	Study: carrying out self-directed projects Roles within work
Pro-active: resourceful, drive, self-reliant	Involvement in community groups or charities
Willingness to learn: inquisitive, motivated, enthusiastic	Roles within the home: planning, coordinating others
Self-promotion: positive, persistent, ambitious, accepting responsibility	
Networking: initiator, relationship-builder, resourceful	
Problem solving: how you approach problems, finding and implementing solutions	
Planning action: decision-maker, planner, able to prioritise, identifying areas for improvement	
People skills	
Team working: supportive, organised, coordinator, deliverer, reliability, adaptability	Caring responsibilities Work responsibilities in a team
Interpersonal skills: listener, adviser, cooperative, assertive	Fund-raising for charity
Oral communication: communicator, presenter, influencer	Voluntary work Member of orchestra or drama group
Leadership: motivator, energetic, visionary	Sport
Customer orientation: friendly, caring, diplomatic, respect	Guide/Scout leader
Foreign language: specific language skills	Travel
General employment skills	
Problem solving: practical, logical, results orientated	Roles within the home: budgeting
Flexibility: versatile, willing, multi-skilled	Roles within work: use of IT, work experience
	Project work through study

Business acumen: entrepreneurial, competitive, risk taker, customer service	Membership of local clubs, committees and societies
IT/computer literacy: office skills, keyboard skills, software packages	Self-employment
Numeracy: accurate, quick thinker, methodical, dealing with data	
Commitment: dedicated, trustworthy, conscientious	
Specialist skills	
Specific occupational skills: specialist relevant knowledge, e.g. languages, IT	Study
Technical skills: journalism, engineering, accounting, sales	European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)
	Language skills
	Web design skills: use of programming or coding languages
	Using social media tools
	First aid at work qualification
	NVQ qualification

The requirements that an employer sets out in a job advertisement are likely to be much more specific, but it's worth bearing in mind that candidates who apply for jobs are also expected to demonstrate at least some of these skills.

4.2 Matching vacancies

You've seen a vacancy advertised that you'd like to apply for. Now you want to make sure you have a 'match'. So, before finding out more about the position, analyse the information you already have. Even a brief advertisement can reveal a great deal of useful information if you read between the lines. Look at the advertisement and analyse it under these headings:

- Style and language:** what's the general style of the advertisement? Is it formal, low-key, flamboyant or attention-seeking? What does this tell you about the organisation?

What vocabulary is used to describe the organisation? How does the organisation see itself and what image does it want to project? Do you feel comfortable with its choice of words? Will your personality fit the organisation? Are your values similar?
- Brief job description:** does the work genuinely interest you? Does it match your needs? What are the key tasks? What skills are needed? Can you produce evidence of your ability to deal successfully with each task? How will you demonstrate your potential for coping with tasks you haven't handled before? Is there anything that seems unclear?
- Qualifications:** are qualifications preferred or essential? For example, do you need a driving licence or other specified qualification?
- Experience:** is experience preferred or essential? Will you be ruled out? What experience can you offer from any aspect of your life that demonstrates close or transferable skills?

- **Qualities:** note the language used to describe the ideal applicant. Analyse each noun and adjective for its implications. For example, 'committed self-starter' could imply that there'll be little supervision, but may also mean that no training is provided. You may have to motivate yourself with little support or encouragement, or even in the face of resistance. Find out what this will mean in practice, and be honest about whether your personality and needs match what the employer wants.
- **Location and geographical mobility:** how far would you travel each day? Would you consider moving house? If you need to travel around, how much of a problem would this be for you?
- **Prospects:** what opportunities are there for advancement in this job? The employer may be looking for evidence of your willingness and ability to progress. If the opportunities seem limited, it's important to see how you can use it to develop your skills and experience.
- **Salary:** usually a good guide to the level of qualifications and experience required, but you have to be aware of the going rate for that occupation. What are you looking for, especially if there isn't a specified salary?
- **Named contact:** is a name given to contact for further information? It's a good idea to follow up such offers, but be prepared when you do, as the contact will form an impression of you from the very beginning. Rehearse your introduction and be prepared for the question, 'What would you like to know about us?' Be ready to highlight your suitability for the post.

4.3 Matching the requirements

Once you've analysed your advertisement, decide if it interests you, and then request further details, such as the job description and person specification. You need to try to match yourself to the requirements of the job to judge whether or not you want to apply for it.

The job description and person specification are usually set out under headings such as 'Experience', 'Qualifications' and 'Personal qualities'. They should specify what the employer is looking for, so you need to consider how you can show that you meet the requirements.

Look at the example in Table 6, where the vacancy is for a fund-raiser for Scottish Wildlife Preservation Society. Here the key experience requirements are listed, and the second column shows how a candidate would provide evidence of having the necessary experience. This is a useful way of approaching any job advert, as it helps you to focus on the important aspects as you complete your application form or prepare a CV.

Table 6

Key experience requirements	My evidence
Numeracy	Drew up budget bids or plans within agreed guidelines and procedures for submission to internal and external bodies. Responsible for assessing potential expenditure in terms of value for money and taking appropriate action to ensure this is achieved.
Keyboard skills	Self-taught packages in order to produce a dissertation for my degree.

	Worked in Windows-based environment for numerous holiday jobs.
Marketing knowledge	Temporary job (with full induction and training) over two summer holidays as a market research interviewer. Marketing module completed as part of my degree studies (12 months) identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.
Ability to work on own	As a part-time student I have worked within a 32-week study calendar and managed a weekly workload of reading, assignments, tutorials and revision alongside a part-time job and voluntary work. I have worked unsupervised as a treasurer for a local Residents Association for two years and have always met deadlines for reports.
Interest in wildlife	I have organised several meetings between the RSPB and the local branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England to look at the decline of the blue tit in Cheshire and preventive measures. I am a regional fund-raiser for BTCV and the PDSA. I work alternate Sundays at the local animal hospital as a volunteer. I am an avid reader and subscriber of <i>The Warbler</i> , and make regular contributions to this national magazine.
Presentation skills	I have used PowerPoint to present information on the decline of local bird populations to a community group and to councillors.

Activity 7

Allow about 30 minutes

Begin by looking at an advert or job description for a position that interests you. (If you don't have a specific one in mind, you could look in a national or local newspaper, or on a website such as jobs.co.uk.)

Whichever way you choose, ask yourself:

- Does the work genuinely interest me?
- Does it match my personality, values, interests and needs?
- What are the key job requirements?
- What skills are required to perform them?
- Can I produce evidence of these skills?

Using Table 6 as a guide, open [the template for this activity in the resource pack](#) and note down the key characteristics and requirements of your selected vacancy. Try to produce evidence of your suitability against each point.

4.4 What employers want

Many employers are moving towards a competency-based style of assessment for evaluating candidates. This requires the candidate to adopt a particular approach if they are going to be successful. There are definite techniques that can be employed to greatly increase the chances of passing this stage. The first hurdle may be a difficult one, because many employers' questionnaires are specifically designed to fail a certain percentage of applicants.

Competencies are the criteria that employers set for each job. They show what you 'can do'. Stating this is not enough – employers want you to demonstrate your competencies through evidence. Some job descriptions don't mention competencies at all, and talk instead about skills. Many employers use the terms 'skills' and 'competencies' interchangeably, so don't worry too much about this. The basis of competency-based assessment is that if you can demonstrate you did something in the past then you can do it in the future.

As noted, in Block 2, a good technique to use when answering questions on application forms or at interview is **STAR**:

- **Situation:** What was the situation and when did it take place?
- **Task:** What task was it, and what was the objective?
- **Action:** What action did you take to achieve this?
- **Results:** What happened as a result of your action?

When considering which example from your experience to select when answering a particular question, it might be helpful to use the **RAPPAS** technique as a guide:

- **Relevant:** Ensure your answer is describing the skill being asked for.
- **Action:** Make sure you include something that you actually did, as opposed to what you learned, or what you might do in a hypothetical situation.
- **Personal:** It is most important to state what you did, as opposed to saying what other people did or what happened.
- **Positive:** The answer will read better if the situation has a positive outcome.
- **Appropriate:** The example needs to be something you can talk comfortably about if asked for more detail.
- **Specific:** If the question asks for an example, then only one should be described, not a composite of several.

You've now completed Section 4 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

5 Application forms



Application forms come in all shapes and sizes. Some are designed for recruiting people for a particular function or training scheme. Most are intended for a wide variety of posts in the organisation (e.g. an NHS Trust). Most large organisations now make their forms available online, which can save you time and postage.

Whatever format they come in, the principles for completing application forms are very similar. If you're asked to submit an application form, don't send a CV instead. Often – but not always – you're told that you may also enclose a CV. If you do, it shouldn't just repeat what's on your form. Use it effectively to include or to emphasise information that you think is relevant and isn't asked for on the form.

Keep the following points in mind when it comes to completing an application form:

- The purpose of a completed application form, like a CV or a letter, is to get an interview.
- Your aim is to convince the employer that you're worth interviewing – that you appear to be a suitable candidate for the job, and the kind of person that the organisation wants to employ.
- The only information that the selectors will have about you is what you've given them in your written application. Emphasise the positive and leave it to them to spot the negative. Convince them that they need to see you.
- Remember that presentation can be as important as content.
- Many larger employers ask you to complete an online application.

When completing online forms you may find that some of your experiences do not fit neatly into the categories provided. We suggest you contact the employer for advice on how to approach this.

If you haven't looked at employers' application forms for some time, you may be surprised at the probing nature of some of the questions that they ask, and not only for senior jobs. You'll come to some sample questions later in this section.

Bear in mind that employers often receive a large number of forms. This means that on an initial read-through they may spend as little as two minutes looking at your form – so it is crucial that you sell yourself effectively.

5.1 Before you start your application form



- Find out as much as you can about the vacancy and the organisation. Ask the organisation for more details (for example, a detailed job description and person specification) and, if possible, visit a careers service or large library to look for other information. You can also research online, as most organisations will have comprehensive information on their websites.
- Read through the whole form before you fill in any of the sections.
- Make a photocopy of the blank form (or print it from the screen) and use it for your rough draft.
- Comply with instructions such as using black ink or block capitals. You must keep to the prescribed format, because many large employers now optically scan applications to enter them into their recruitment databases.
- Usually, the space allowed for each question indicates its relative importance.

5.2 Filling in your form

Here are some hints and tips for completing an application form:

- Complete all sections of the form. If a question doesn't apply to you, write 'N/A' or 'Not applicable' to show that you haven't overlooked it.
- If there isn't enough space for factual information (e.g. 'give names, addresses and dates of all previous employers'), attach a separate sheet, unless you're told that you must not attach any other papers.
- If there isn't enough space for general interest information (e.g. 'What have been the significant factors in your life to date?'), prioritise and keep it within the space allowed.
- Be sure to answer all the elements of each question (e.g. 'What are your spare time activities, what do you contribute and what do you get out of them?').

- Don't cram sections with too much text – it makes them difficult to read. A clear layout can help, so consider using bullet points, underlined topic headings, etc., to clarify your points. Being able to write succinctly is evidence of your written communication skills.
- When answering extended (multi-part) or difficult questions, think of:
 - what you're going to say (understanding the purpose of the question)
 - who you're saying it to (someone who doesn't know you but will make decisions about your future)
 - how you're going to say it (presenting an accurate picture of yourself)
 - why you're saying it (showing that you have the qualities, interests and skills the employer is looking for).
- Make your points relevant, interesting and personal (say 'I', not 'we'). Give evidence and be specific (e.g. 'I worked as a volunteer classroom assistant for three years' rather than 'I love children'). The skills you've developed in one context may well be transferable to another and employers will look for evidence that you recognise them, e.g. dealing with members of the public, working under pressure, handling money, working odd hours.
- Use positive language.
- Leave no unexplained gaps in your employment record. If you've been unemployed say so, but mention any part-time or voluntary work you did during that period.
- Tailor your responses to the post you're applying for. If you're applying for a job related to a course that you've completed, give fuller details of your course than you would if it's not particularly relevant.
- Use the 'any other information' section to draw attention to activities and qualities not covered elsewhere on the form.
- Be convincing, positive and honest. Inaccuracy in one section can raise doubts about other areas of the form.
- Get your referees' agreement before giving their names, and keep them well briefed so that they can write supportive references.

It's also important to focus on what you can do rather than anything you can't. When writing an application you are advised to focus on the positives, selling your skills and abilities. You must be truthful, but are expected to omit any deficiencies, e.g. you should never state that you 'don't have relevant experience'. It is up to the prospective employer to deduce that from the information.

Activity 8

Allow about 15 minutes

These are genuine questions from application forms used by large companies:

1. On the first page of this application you stated a preference for a particular job. Explain why we should select you ahead of other candidates.
2. Outline any activities you have planned and organised. Tell us what you did and how you achieved results.
3. Write a short piece about yourself. Include such details as your achievements and responsibilities; the people, events or experiences that have influenced you; your ambitions and aspirations.

What should you include in your answers? Note down your thoughts before reading the comments.

Provide your answer...

Comment

1. Show that you understand what the job involves and what you have to offer. Go for key points and give evidence from your record.
2. Remember to cover 'planned', 'organised', 'what you did' and 'results'.
3. This section will tell them more about you as an individual than any other part of the form. You should be able to justify each word you have included. You'll need to spend a lot of time writing drafts and fine-tuning your response.

5.3 When you've completed the form

It is good practice to do the following before submitting your form:

- Check it thoroughly for spelling and grammatical errors; ideally, get someone else to check it rather than relying on a spell checker. Make sure you've been consistent in style (e.g. in your use of personal pronouns).
- Look over the presentation. If possible, ask someone else to look over your application before you send it to make sure it makes sense and comes across positively.
- Make a note of the job you've applied for, the name and address of the person you sent the form to, and the date you sent it.
- If you're asked to post the application form, use an envelope of a suitable size (such as an A4 envelope with cardboard reinforcement.) so that the form isn't folded. Always send it by first class post. If you are completing an online application, you will usually receive an email when it has been received.
- Make a copy of your completed form so that you can reread it before the interview. It'll also take some of the tedium out of tackling other forms. You can often use the same material, with a little editing, for several applications.
- You'll rarely find the perfect application form that exactly suits your background and experience. You'll need to adapt your answers to the questions you find.

You've now completed Section 5 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

6 The curriculum vitae



Like an application form, a curriculum vitae (CV) is primarily intended to make the recruiter think it worthwhile interviewing you. The advantage of a CV is that you get to decide what information to include and highlight, and what to leave out or minimise. In addition, your CV doesn't need to conform to any particular format, so you have more control over the impression it will create. You can tailor the style, content and design to show off your strengths and present you in the most positive light.

The importance of tailoring your CV

It's most important that you keep in mind that one 'all-purpose' CV will not be much use to you. This is only likely to work if you always apply for the same job in several very similar organisations. It is often more effective if you adapt your CV to suit the particular organisation or job you're applying for – something that's easy enough to do if it's word-processed.

Employers expect you to show that you're responding to their own advertisements, not sending out a batch of identical CVs to a list of companies. You may in fact be doing just that, but it must look as though you're targeting the individual company, and you can reinforce this impression by tailoring the covering letter.

What style of CV?

The general style of the CV should depend on the sector or organisation that it's addressed to. For example, applications to marketing organisations or to the publishing industry can be successful if the style and layout suggest a flair for lively prose or graphic design. To use the same approach for a financial institution or a local authority, say, might have an adverse effect. Bear this in mind when you design your own CV.

6.1 Preparing your CV

How you organise and present information about yourself and your activities, will send key messages about your suitability as a potential employee. Be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time on creating and reworking an effective document. You want to make sure that you present yourself positively and accurately. So when it comes to preparing your CV, you need to ask yourself a few key questions:

- What's the area of work I'm after?
- Which employers or organisations am I approaching?

- What messages do I want to send about myself, my strengths and qualities?
- What experiences shall I emphasise?
- How can I match the style of my CV to the type of organisation(s) I'm sending it to, as well as the work I want?

6.2 What to include (and not include) in your CV

Your CV is uniquely yours in style, content and layout – but you may find the following 'do's' and 'don'ts' helpful. CVs usually contain:

- personal data
- employment experience
- education
- training
- interests and activities
- additional skills
- career aims and personal profile (optional)
- references.

Personal data

Give the name you want to be known by if you're called for interview or appointed. However, you don't need to give initials or middle names; they're unnecessary at this stage and may confuse matters. Put your name in the centre in a larger, bold font instead of giving the document the title 'Curriculum vitae' – it should be quite obvious what it is. Be sure to give a full postal address with a postcode, since invitations to interview are often sent at short notice and speedy delivery is in your interest. Include an email address, but make sure this reflects the image you want to project. Including the address 'pinkfluffybunny@hotmail.com' will not promote a professional impression to recruiters. If you include a link to your social media profile, such as your Twitter account, again, make sure this is professional.

It's important to give a telephone number where you can be reached or where a message can be left. Include your mobile number if you have one. If you're employed and prospective employers can contact you during office hours, give your number and say that it's a work number so that the caller will be discreet. Always give the full area code, number and extension so that you can be reached as easily as possible.

There's no need to include such details as your date of birth, nationality, gender, marital status or the number of children you have. These are irrelevant on a CV, where your aim is to get yourself invited for interview. You can discuss them at the interview if appropriate, when you have more opportunity to negotiate any difficulties.

Employment experience

Your aim here is to stress your achievements at work. Include the nature and place of your employer's business if it isn't obvious from the name, but don't give the address or the

name of your manager at this stage. For more recent jobs – during the last ten years, say – give more detail about particular responsibilities, projects, assignments and results achieved. Avoid jargon, unless you're sure that the reader will understand it.

There are different opinions about whether you set your experience out in forward or reverse date order. So much depends on the nature and relevance of your previous employment to the job you're applying for. But everyone agrees that the most relevant job should appear at the top of the list, so that the reader is encouraged to read on.

Some possible sequences are as follows:

- Put your present or most recent job at the top of the list, with appropriate detail; then the rest of the employment history in backward or forward date order.
- Start with the most relevant work experience, even if it's not the most recent, then work backwards or forwards in time.
- Divide your experience under the sub-headings 'Related' and 'Other'. This allows you to highlight the experience that the employer is likely to be most interested in and play down other, less important, jobs.
- If you had a series of short-lived jobs and you want to abbreviate the list, you could say something like 'In 2010–2015 I worked in various temporary positions in the catering industry'.

However you present your employment experience, make sure it's clear and that the way you present starting and leaving dates is consistent. Don't leave any unexplained gaps. For example, if you've had time out of paid work to bring up a family, state this.

Education

How far back should you go? School or young college-leavers should be quite explicit about their education since age 11, but it's more appropriate for more mature applicants to include a brief summary of their education, including exams passed. There's no need to include the full address of each school or college – condense the information to dates, names and towns. Present your qualifications in the way that makes the most of them:

- If the job requires a degree or diploma, it's best to start with that, enabling the employer to see at once that you meet the requirement.
- If you have no higher-level educational qualifications, you could list secondary school educational history in date order – that can be easier to digest than starting with the most recent and working backwards. Use the same order you used for your employment experience. If you've worked your way up from the bottom and lack formal qualifications altogether, you could expand your work achievements and contract the education section.
- If you're offering professional qualifications, it might be worth specifying not only the qualification (with the S/NVQ level, if appropriate) and the awarding institution, but also how you obtained it, e.g. full-time course or day release. For a technical post or one that requires special knowledge, consider giving additional information to show that you have the relevant work experience, knowledge or training.
- Be specific about what you studied, highlighting in a covering letter or skill section the personal qualities and skills involved in completing your studies. You might find descriptions for the courses that you have studied very useful: pick out the skills that the course aimed to develop, which are often listed as learning outcomes. Learning

outcomes can assist you in mapping out the skills and achievements that you gained during study. They can also help you identify the subject-specific knowledge and transferable skills you have acquired during each course. Of course, some jobs do require subject-specific knowledge (e.g. being a teacher), while others place more emphasis on transferable skills. Some look for a mixture of both. By studying, whatever the subjects are, you will find that you will have developed a range of both subject knowledge and transferable skills that many employers will value. It is up to you to identify them from your own experience so that you can present this on a CV.

- If your qualifications were awarded overseas, mention the UK equivalent so that the employer knows what level you've reached.

Training

Don't give an exhaustive list of all the training courses and seminars you've attended. Include useful information about training and development courses of a week or more, or training in relevant specialist skills.

Interests and activities

This section has various uses. It can show that you have a well-rounded life and don't live for work alone; that you're a sociable person who gets on with others; or that you keep yourself fit. Your hobbies may have given you opportunities to tackle roles and develop skills that you haven't had scope for at work – perhaps you've helped out a school, run a computer club or done voluntary work that demonstrates organisational and management skills. An unusual hobby such as skydiving or family history research can be worth mentioning, even though it has no obvious relevance to the job. It gives your CV an interesting feature and makes it memorable.

Additional skills

The diversity of individual careers sometimes makes extra sections desirable: you can make up your own sub-headings. Include details you think a prospective employer really ought to know: if you have a driving licence, or additional skills such as foreign languages (if possible, give an indication of your level of competence), first aid training, and so on. It is also important to outline your level of IT and keyboard skills, including software you are familiar with, e.g. Word and Excel.

Career aims and personal profile

Including career aims and a skill profile can be particularly effective if you're seeking a career change, you have an unconventional work record or you're applying for a job for which the competition is particularly keen.

References

You'll usually need two referees, one from your present or last employer. Give their names, addresses and telephone numbers, and their status or relationship to you (e.g. line manager, course tutor). If you don't want your employer approached at this stage, say so in your CV or covering letter. You might prefer to omit referees on the CV and put 'available on request'.

6.3 Presentation of your CV

To produce an effective CV, pay attention to its appearance as well as its content.

- Make it easy to read and follow. Yours will be one of many that the employer has to read. Use an 'easy-to-read' font and size, such as Arial 11 point.
- Be consistent in how you present the information (e.g. date order) and in your layout. Have headings in the same style (capital letters, bold, underlining). Use bullet points to make reading quicker.
- Two sides of A4 is usually the right length.
- Don't cram the page, or clutter it up with unnecessary punctuation. Space makes text easier to read and more attractive.
- Put the most important information on the first page and as near the top as possible. The employer may not bother to read on if there's nothing of interest to begin with.
- The space you give to each section should reflect its importance. Concentrate on the aspects that are most important for the employer to know.
- Avoid long, complicated sentences. Don't use jargon and abbreviations that the reader may be unfamiliar with. Write the words out in full the first time you use them and put the abbreviation in brackets; after that you can use it on its own.
- Seek other people's views on your draft and proofread the final version carefully.
- If you need to send a paper CV, it should be produced to a high standard, word-processed and printed or copied on good-quality white or cream paper. Make sure the copies are sharp and clear. If you need to demonstrate an interest in design (e.g. for some media jobs), more elaborate graphics and perhaps coloured paper might be appropriate.
- Make sure that your CV arrives looking like a quality document. Don't fold it. Use an A4 envelope with cardboard reinforcement.
- If you send your CV by email, follow it up by sending a hard copy straight away, if required.
- Keep a copy of your CV in a safe place. You'll need it again to adapt for other employers.

6.4 Examples of different types of CV

There's no right or wrong way to write a CV. The right one is the one that works for you in your situation and succeeds in getting you interviews. Here we will just provide some guidelines on good practice and offer some examples of possible formats:

- chronological
- functional
- targeted.

We will also show some examples of targeted CVs for specific purposes. Most people tend to prefer one style over the others, but whichever format you choose, it should be flexible enough to allow modification to match the job you're seeking.

For most jobs you need to make a decision about the kind of CV to use, as most employers will not specify. However, some job areas have expectations that a particular format is used. When researching jobs, look at what the expectations might be. It is important that you find out if there is a preferred format for the type of job that you are applying for by doing further research into the job and if necessary seeking advice from a careers adviser (or the professional body, if there is one). For instance, some professions, such as the legal profession, prefer CVs in a chronological format. When you have work experience that is directly relevant, it is useful to highlight this in a separate section as it draws attention to it.

The chronological CV

You are probably most familiar with a chronological CV. This lists jobs by date, beginning with the most recent, showing the name of each employer, where you worked, the period you were employed, your job title(s), responsibilities and key achievements.

The advantages of a chronological CV are that it:

- can be very easy to produce
- has for many years been recognised as a standard approach to CVs
- allows prospective employers to see very quickly how an individual has progressed and increased responsibility.

However, the disadvantages to a chronological CV are that any gaps in your employment stand out.

As a result, if you've changed jobs frequently, it can suggest instability and will require explanation, particularly if you've changed profession or career direction. In addition, with a chronological CV, it isn't always easy to spot key achievements or skills that might get 'buried' under different job titles.

The functional CV

A functional CV focuses attention on your skills and achievements, presented according to the function or responsibilities you've undertaken rather than according to individual jobs. This CV shows that you're conscious of the demands of the prospective employer and of what you have to offer. Its advantages are that:

- it can highlight your skills rather than job changes
- if your current or most recent experience isn't related to the position you're applying for, it allows you to place more emphasis on relevant strengths and experience from earlier periods
- you can group different achievements together to match the job that you are applying for.

The disadvantages are that it takes more thought to prepare a functional CV and you have to ensure that it is clear and relevant to the chosen job without looking as though you might be hiding something.

The targeted CV

A targeted CV is even more closely matched to the needs of a particular employer, with the skills required and the evidence of them clearly laid out at the beginning, followed by the details, dates and so on. It combines elements from both the chronological and the functional CV. Most candidates for managerial posts use this format. The advantages are that:

- it focuses straight away on your strengths
- it is more likely to catch the reader's interest
- you can adapt it to suit the job you're after without sacrificing quality
- you can lead the reader in the direction you want to go – your skills and achievements.

The disadvantages are that, like the functional CV, this one isn't easy to prepare. It has to change to match each job, with all the time, effort and skill that implies.

You've now completed Section 6 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

7 The covering letter

Your covering letter is your opportunity to market yourself. It introduces your application and draws attention to the main factors that make you suitable for the job. It will usually be read first, so make sure that the reader will want to find out more about you.

It should enhance your application, not repeat what's on the application form or CV.

Always include a covering letter unless the employer specifically tells you not to.

Application forms often allow you reasonable scope to sell yourself and may need only a brief covering letter. A CV will usually require more of an introduction.

Applying for a job in a vacancy list or answering an advertisement

Mention the job title (including any reference number) and say where and when you saw the vacancy. Highlight your strongest selling points, such as a relevant degree, appropriate qualification and related experience. Stress how you think the organisation can benefit from employing you. Add some other detail to reinforce your suitability, without duplicating what's on the application form.

Applying speculatively

In a speculative approach, you have to present your case in a letter, usually accompanied by your CV. State clearly what kind of work you're seeking, your qualifications and what you have to offer. You're trying to find out whether there are any vacancies, or whether vacancies will arise in the near future. At the same time you must leave the impression that you're someone it's useful for the employer to know about.

If there's a vacancy, this will – if done well – translate into being someone the employer ought to see. So make clear who you are, where you are and what you're studying, then highlight the relevant points in the CV such as work experience, interests and activities. Say why you want to work for that particular organisation, and when you would be able to start. Do not waste your time, or an organisation's, by submitting speculative applications if they are specifically prohibited.

Drafting your letter

- Type or word-process your letter (although, very occasionally, an employer will ask for a handwritten letter).
- If you are posting your application, use plain A4 paper of good quality.
- Keep it brief – usually not more than one side of A4.
- Put your name, address, telephone number and date at the top right-hand corner and, on the left-hand side, the name, job title and organisation of the person you're writing to.
- Address your letter to an individual person by name and job title. Switchboard staff can be very helpful in supplying this information if it isn't otherwise available.

- When writing to a named individual, end 'Yours sincerely'. If you do have to resort to 'Dear Sir or Madam', end 'Yours faithfully'.
- Although you should be business-like, steer clear of stilted expressions like 'I beg to remain'.
- Make sure your spelling and grammar are correct, and that you've expressed yourself clearly.
- Ask someone else to read it – don't rely on your computer's spelling check, especially as it may be based on US spelling.
- Print your name clearly below your signature.
- You can use your covering letter to give additional information such as reasons for an unusual change in career, or to highlight aspects of your CV that you feel are particularly important.
- If there are any special circumstances not covered in the application form or CV, such as a disability and how you overcome potential difficulties, mention them in the letter.
- Keep a copy of your letter. If you haven't received an acknowledgement within two or three weeks, send a brief follow-up letter or telephone to make sure that it's been received.

You've now completed Section 7 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

8 The interview



Interviews remain the most common method of filling vacancies. There are several types of interview that you may be asked to attend:

- **Face-to-face:** this is the most common, and can be in the form of a one-to-one meeting or there may be a sequence of interviews, each with a different member of staff.
- **Telephone:** these are as formal as face-to-face interviews, so you need to be well prepared.
- **Panel:** you will meet several interviewers in one interview. It is important to maintain eye contact with the person speaking to you. Try not to be put off by panel members making notes as you speak.
- **Competency-based:** interviewers ask you questions relating to the skills and competencies needed for the job. You therefore need to know what they are, and have prepared some examples from your experiences to demonstrate them.

8.1 Interview tips

Here are some initial tips for interviews:

- Interviewers want you to do yourself justice. They're hoping that you'll be an excellent candidate and that the interview time and effort will be well spent.
- Interviewers may also be inexperienced or nervous. It's up to you to help them out and make them feel comfortable.
- When faced with a panel of interviewers, you should address the majority of your response to the interviewer who has asked you a question, while ensuring that you still have some eye contact with the rest of the panel.
- Show acceptance of the interviewer as a person. Remember that interviewers want to be liked and hope to be supported in their day-to-day work and career by your appointment. They'll be asking themselves 'Could we get on?' and 'Would this person be supportive?'

- Balance the initiative-taking. The ideal interview should flow like a conversation, reaching greater depths as the rapport develops between the two parties. Neither should psychologically dominate the discussion, although as the candidate you should do most of the talking, in effect determining the content, while the interviewer sets the format.
- A few seconds' silence in an interview can seem an eternity. Don't be panicked into responding too quickly, perhaps in an illogical way. Fill a thinking gap with comments such as 'That's an interesting question – I need a moment or two to think about it.'
- Always try to be positive in what you say and never be critical of a previous employer.
- Guard against being too open.
- When asked whether you have any questions, it can be useful to ask about future business plans. If the interview has already covered that, use the opportunity to add relevant information about yourself that you haven't had an adequate opportunity to express.

From the vast amount of research into interviews as a selection method, some important insights for candidates emerge. For example:

- Some interviewers make up their minds about candidates within the first four minutes of an interview, and aren't easily swayed by factual information thereafter. First impressions count: initial answers are critical.
- Interviewers are more likely to be swayed by negative information or behaviour on the part of the candidate than positive. Interviews tend to exclude rather than to include.
- Interviewers may be poor at assessing the personality characteristics of individual candidates with any validity, but they make very consistent judgements and assessments between candidates. This suggests that a good interview performance is likely to impress.
- A candidate's body language in an interview (for example, not maintaining eye contact) can be more important in determining its outcome than experience or qualifications.
- Interviewers' judgements about a candidate are always made in relation to judgements about earlier candidates, so the sequence of interviews assumes an importance of its own. If you're given a choice, go first. You can set a standard against which the others will be judged.

8.2 Interviewers

Below we list the four main types of interviewers you may come across. Don't let your own stereotyping of the interviewer affect your interview technique. Remember that when managers interview they're playing a role to a set of social rules, and may not be entirely their usual selves. Their perspectives may differ according to their job function:

- **Human resource/recruitment managers:** well-trained and experienced, often astute and very sensitive. Acting as internal screener; judgement valued by others. Likely to concentrate on personality and organisational 'fit'. May have a fund of knowledge about company cultures.

- **Head of a group or department:** a technical expert with wider managerial experience. Will talk shop, problems and solutions within a broader organisational framework. May have standard questions, pick bits from CV. Concerned about your professional competence and the rapport between you.
- **Line manager or decision-maker:** trying to assess your style of working. Concerned about your motivation, achievements and personal ambition. Considering how you'll fit with the rest of the team. May have to 'sell' you to more senior colleagues. Serious but relaxed; may try to 'sell' the job.
- **Managing director or company founder:** may digress into lengthy company history. Concerned about cultural fit; may look for shared vision. May be looking for someone who'll question or act as an agent of change. Will seek views from all those who've come into contact with you.

You could read all the books ever written on how to do well at interview and still not be good at it. Practice is essential. Even experience as an interviewer doesn't make for a flawless performance, for insight often leads to heightened anxiety. How you project yourself through your social and communication skills will determine your success whenever you speak with potential employers.

Find out all you can about interviewing techniques and be ready to cope with them:

- Read about the process.
- Think about the interview and plan for it. Try to foresee questions or situations and work out possible answers.
- Practise by role-playing with a partner, careers adviser or colleague, or use audio or video recordings. How you sound will be crucial.
- Practise speaking on the phone to a friend and ask what impression you're making. Practise some answers into a voice recorder and listen critically to yourself.
- Ask for comments from a partner, network contacts or interviewers who have rejected you.
- Learn from observing others – take the role of interviewer with a partner.
- Reflect on your experience. Evaluate your performance and incorporate the learning into your next interview.

8.3 Before your interview

Here are some things to think about in the run-up to your interview:

- Research the job and employer thoroughly beforehand. If you can, find out something about the people interviewing you.
- Review your CV or reread your application form.
- Think about why you have been invited for interview? What are your unique selling points? Questions are likely to focus on:
 - your achievements
 - your motives for applying
 - your likely contribution.
- Prepare by organising your material in advance.

- Collect as many concrete examples of things you've done that clearly demonstrate your skills, as you can. Read the tough questions in [Section 8.8](#) and practise some answers out loud.
- Think about what skills may be important to perform well in the job.
- Think about times in the past when you have demonstrated the required abilities, e.g. successful projects; successful interactions with other people; convincing a difficult audience; analysing a large amount of information, etc. Don't just think about job-related examples – you may have excellent evidence from your study, hobbies or other activities.
- What are your weak spots and what do you feel uncomfortable talking about?
- Why would you not employ yourself? Produce convincing counter-arguments.
- Practise your answers in the weak areas. Ask a careers adviser or a friend or colleague to help you. Do it out loud, record it and listen to it again.
- Plan travel and arrival times, and if possible do a dummy run.
- Decide what to wear. Show that you know the interview 'rules' by wearing smart clothes, polishing your shoes and so on. Conservative dress is more likely to pay off than flamboyance. Try the whole outfit some days before, so that if it doesn't feel right you've got time to change your plans. Dress appropriately for the culture. If you're very unsure about this, look at company literature or their website to get an idea of how people dress. If there's no suitable literature, you could telephone and ask the person on the switchboard or the secretary of the person interviewing you.
- Prepare some questions that you would like to ask. Having questions prepared can show, for example, your interest and keenness to develop within the organisation, e.g. 'How is performance and development assessed?' or 'How is the job likely to develop over the next two years?'

8.4 On the day

Things to remember:

- Don't smoke before you go into the interview.
- Don't be overburdened with bags, papers or umbrellas.
- Arrive in good time and allow yourself time to relax.
- If you are delayed, telephone.
- Remember the need for a poised, confident first impression.
- Listen carefully and attentively to the questions; ask for repetition or clarification if you don't understand a question.
- Remember to take a copy of your application with you.
- Don't forget to turn off your mobile phone.

How you sound

- Sound as if you have confidence in yourself.
- Speak clearly. Don't drop your voice towards the end of sentences and don't mumble or speak too fast.

- Use plain language that doesn't confuse the interviewer, or go off at a tangent. Avoid jargon or clichés.
- Speak concisely, be specific, and judge when you've said enough. Watch the interviewer's behaviour, which will give you clues to whether you are answering the questions and timing your replies appropriately. If in doubt, ask 'Would you like me to go on?'
- Show through your answers that you've done your research into the company and tailored your answers specifically to them.
- Don't just tell them what you think they want to hear.
- Make sure you answer the question that is being asked.
- Convey the right amount of enthusiasm, warmth, friendliness and sincerity. Smile!
- Avoid negative statements.

Body language

- Walk and sit with good posture.
- Shake hands firmly and briefly. Some people need to practise this.
- Use your natural gestures – there's no need to look frozen.
- Avoid fidgeting and keep your hands away from your mouth.
- Don't fold your arms.
- Maintain good eye contact with the person you're speaking to.

8.5 Answering questions

Whatever the nature of the job, the interviewer will be focusing on three related groups of characteristics: your personal, professional and achievement profile. It's your task to provide evidence in your answers that demonstrates these characteristics.

- Personal profile:
 - intellectual ability
 - communication skills
 - listening skills
 - confidence
 - job motivation
 - energy and drive
 - endurance
 - development
 - financial motivation.
- Professional profile:
 - knowledge
 - reliability
 - integrity
 - commitment.

- Achievement profile:
 - effectiveness
 - efficiency
 - economy.

You also need to be prepared to adapt your responses to the different kinds of question:

- Specific questions invite factual replies, often with a technical content, e.g. 'What problems did you encounter in the early planning stage of the building extension?'
- Open questions can be used by skilled interviewers to encourage expansive replies incorporating both facts and attitudes or feelings, e.g. 'Tell me about the three years you spent studying for your NVQ.'
- Hypothetical questions test a candidate's speed and quality of thought, e.g. 'What if the policy changed to carrying more freight by rail?' In reply, be methodical, state the assumptions that you're making, and say where you'd need more information, e.g. 'Would this just be in the UK or the whole of Europe?' There is usually no right or wrong answer – the interviewer is looking for logical, clear thinking.
- Competency-based questions look for you to talk about your skills, qualities and competencies relating to the job. The basic idea of a competency-based question is that if you can demonstrate that you did something in the past, you can do it in the future. These questions would normally ask for an example of a situation in which you have shown that skill, and how you would deal effectively with it. Questions often begin 'Can you tell us a time when ...'.
- Technical questions ask you to demonstrate your knowledge of specialist language. These often feature in engineering, scientific and IT interviews.

8.6 After your interview

- Think about the questions and your answers. Did you do yourself justice? Did you allow negative information or negative expressions of feelings to creep in?
- Send the employer an informal thank-you note soon afterwards. This reinforces recollections of you. Even if you're unsuccessful this time, there may be other positions coming up.
- If you're rejected, write a letter asking for some constructive feedback by telephone, at the employer's convenience.

8.7 Telephone interviews

An increasing number of companies are using the telephone in the first stage of the interviewing process. They do this in several ways:

- **Fully automated:** you receive a letter giving a freephone telephone number to ring. You hear a list of statements and press a number on the telephone keypad to indicate your response.
- **Structured:** a mutually convenient time is fixed in advance for the interview. You're taken through a series of questions that are recorded and analysed by trained

interviewers. The questions are designed to establish whether or not you have the required skills for the job.

- **Screening:** you're questioned on various aspects of your CV or application form to decide whether you'll be invited to a personal interview.
- **A sales exercise:** you're given an opportunity to sell a product over the phone. This technique is used for recruiting sales, marketing or telesales staff.

The advice that follows about face-to-face interviews applies just as much to telephone interviews, but some things are especially important:

- Try to arrange the interview for a time and place where you won't be interrupted.
- Keep your application and any other prepared notes with you.
- Consider how you might come across over the telephone, using the following questions:
 - Do you speak loudly enough?
 - Is your voice clear or do you have a tendency to mumble?
 - Do you sound confident and interested, or monotonous or tentative?
- Don't forget to smile when you're talking on the telephone, as you would when talking to someone face-to-face. The smile won't be seen but it can be heard.
- Standing up while talking on the telephone can make you sound more confident.
- Some candidates dress in the clothes that they would wear to an interview to put themselves in the right frame of mind.

8.8 Tough questions

Everyone has a different understanding about what a tough question is. Here are some tips to help you through them, followed by some examples and how to approach them.

In general:

- If you feel yourself under pressure, you'll tend not to listen so acutely. Ask for the question to be repeated, take time and keep to the point. When you've answered, stop and leave it at that.
- Try to show that you understand why the interviewers have asked you the question. If you can show that you know what they're getting at, you're halfway to giving an appropriate answer.
- In response to embarrassing – rather than simply tough – questions, keep your answer simple and short.
- Always put a positive spin on your answers to difficult questions. If you lack a particular skill, try to emphasise how quickly you learn and can develop this.

Examples of tough questions and how to answer them

- **How much are you worth?** Try to delay answering this until you know the responsibilities and scope of the job, and the typical salary ranges. Mention your

previous salary and any financial commitments that lead you to raise or lower your expectations. Negotiations like this might seem strange to you if your only experience is of fixed salary scales.

- **What are your strengths?** You'll have become aware of these through your self-analysis. Draw on examples from the three profiles – personal, professional and achievement – discussed in [Section 8.5](#) to produce a rounded picture. Include any particular characteristics that you feel relate to the job.
- **Tell me about yourself.** Cover relevant aspects of your life, e.g. early years (if appropriate), education, work experience, significant events.
- **Having worked for one company for so long, what difficulties do you expect in adapting to our culture?** Make it clear that you understand the importance of the concept of culture by mentioning the internal diversity of companies and organisations you've had contact with. Describe how you've adapted to different sub-cultures you've encountered.

Activity 9

Allow about 30 minutes

Here are some more examples of interviewers' questions to think through yourself.

- Why did you decide to study with ...?
- The classic three-part question: What kind of people do you like to work with? What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with? How have you worked successfully with this difficult type of person?
- What are your short-, medium- and long-term goals?
- Why have you decided to change careers?
- What are the main challenges facing (e.g. the Health Service, education, this company ...) today?
- Do you feel well equipped to meet those challenges?
- None of your experience is at managerial level. How would you cope with the transition?
- How long would you expect to stay here?
- How would you describe yourself?
- In your present/last job, what do/did you like most/least? Why? What was your greatest success? What has been your biggest failure?
- What do you see as the most difficult aspect of (e.g. this job, being a manager ...)?
- How do you react to criticism?

Note down your responses in the space below.

Provide your answer...

You've now completed Section 8 - well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your

learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

9 What to do if you are not successful

If you are not getting selected for interviews, you can take various steps to improve your chances:

- Review your CV or application form. Were they tailored to the specific job? Do they promote you in the best way?
- Ask others to give you feedback on your applications. Talk to a careers adviser or friends/colleagues.
- Think about whether you are applying for appropriate vacancies. Do you have the skills and experience they are asking for?
- Look at your job-hunting strategy. Are you only applying speculatively? Do you need to think about which sectors or employers you are applying to?

If you are getting interviews but are not getting any further, you should do the following:

- Ask for feedback from the employer to find out where you fell short on this occasion. This should provide invaluable advice to help you succeed next time.
- Review your interview technique. Did you do enough research beforehand? Were you prepared for the questions? Ask yourself what you could have done better.
- Talk to a careers adviser who can help you with your preparation.

Handling rejection

If you have done all of the above, having asked for feedback to make sure that you have interviewed well, the next thing to remember, if you are rejected, is to try not to take it personally. It is not a criticism of you; it is simply that in this instance you have been unsuccessful. It doesn't mean that they thought you couldn't do the job.

That may mean that someone with more relevant experience has got the job, or that there was a strongly favoured internal candidate. If you were invited to interview it means that, on paper, the recruiters believed you could do the job. Interviewing is expensive, so employers won't waste time interviewing someone they feel is not qualified for the role in question.

It can help to make notes as soon as you come out of an interview. You could make a list of what did and didn't go well, and suggestions of how you might improve. Once you relax after an interview, you may not remember as much detail. You can also compare your notes to any feedback you get by asking, 'How could I strengthen any future application?' Try to treat the whole experience as something you can learn from.

Remember, it took J.K. Rowling a year to find a publisher for her first Harry Potter book and some of the publishing houses made what was, with hindsight, an enormous mistake. It is important to try to stay positive and focused, and persevere with your job search.

You've now completed Section 9 – well done! We hope that you have found your study useful and are motivated to carry on with the course. Remember, if you pass the quiz at the end of each block you will be able to download a badge as evidence of your learning. If you collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your completion of the whole course.

What you have learned in this block

- In Block 3 you've learned about making decisions, setting goals and action planning, which are all parts of the career planning process.
- You have also been given some practical advice on how to get the job you want, including advice and guidance on examining vacancies, completing applications forms, and writing CVs and covering letters, as well as tips for good interview techniques.
- Finally, you've been given some sound advice on how to handle rejection.

Block 3 quiz

Well done, you have now reached the end of Block 3 of *Planning a better future*, and it is time to attempt the assessment questions. This is designed to be a fun activity to help consolidate your learning.

There are only five questions, and if you get at least four correct answers you will be able to download your badge for the 'How do I get there?' block (plus you get more than one try!).

- I would like to try the [Block 3 quiz](#) to get my badge.

I've finished this block. What next?

You can now choose to move on to [one of the other blocks](#) so you can continue collecting your badges.

If you feel that you've now got what you need from the course and don't wish to attempt the quiz or continue collecting your badges, please visit the [Taking my learning further](#) section. There you can reflect on what you have learned and find suggestions of further learning opportunities.

We would love to know what you thought of the course and how you plan to use what you have learned. Your feedback is anonymous and will help us to improve our offer.

- Take our [Open University end-of-course survey](#).

References

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