

Interview Skills Manual



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The purpose of a job interview is for an employer to assess four main things and decide if you are the right person for the job:

1. Your ability to think, analyze, critique and reflect on your skills, experiences and knowledge.
2. Your potential and capacity to perform the duties of the job.
3. Common sense and maturity.
4. Your 'fit' to the role, the team, and the culture of the organization.

Sell yourself in an interview! For each interview that you attend you will be competing against others. The interviewer is often spoilt for choice and when they come down to picking the winning candidate they will not only look at your qualifications, but also your social fit, experience (life and work), personal qualities and the way you can handle yourself talking to a complete stranger. Hopefully this program will put you in the best position to impress your interviewer.

Part 1: Job Interviews

Preparing yourself

Job Interview Structure

All job interviews are going to be different from the last. For example, some will have one person interviewing you over coffee or in an office. Other job interviews may be in front of a panel of multiple people. Some may get you to undertake a written or practical assessment, like write an essay, test your touch typing etc.

1. Pre-engagement
2. Engagement
3. Skills, Experience & Knowledge
4. Behavioral / Situational Based Questions
5. Conclusion

1. **Pre-engagement:** This is the activity that unfolds when you have been successful with the resume stage. This includes all the liaising with the administration, HR or management staff who will organize the interview. Also it is about your capacity to research the company and understand the job description and specification.

POINTS TO REMEMBER: You are being assessed from this point onwards. Be nice to all people you talk to. Do not assume that administration staff do not have influence over the decision. Be attentive to your language, vocal tones and mannerisms. You must research the company. Jump online and check out their website which will give you a great idea about what they do, who they are, organizational structure and networks. **If you do not do this, you will be ill-prepared and may look unprofessional.**

2. **Engagement:** This is the part of the interview where you will be talking generally about yourself. They will ask numerous questions about who you are, why you want to work in the role, what your skills are or what are your reasons for your application.

POINTS TO REMEMBER: This is the part of the interview where they are judging your social fit and your EQ skills. You must give plenty of examples in your answers and where possible back up your answers with evidence. It is okay to be friendly, funny and quirky.

It is all about EQ

EQ refers to your emotional intelligence which is easily described by your ability, capacity and skill to express, analyze, perceive and manage your socio-emotional self. In an interview, it is important to show through your EQ how well you would fit in with the other staff members. EQ is just as important as your qualifications and skills; because if you are not a happy, social, bubbly, friendly or good natured person you will struggle to find a job. In an interview particularly in the pre-engagement and engagement phase, it is important to show your EQ by providing information about yourself (other than your work experience, qualifications & skills) and by engaging in small talk. You are hoping to work with these people so it is important to be talkative and social, they will not hire you if you are introverted or too manic (find the happy 'social' medium).

It is okay to talk positively about your social life, hobbies and interests, but not too much. It will show that you are a relaxed human being with a life beyond the realm of work. **Remember, you are being assessed, but assessment goes beyond qualifications.**

In a nutshell: EQ = maturity. If you need to grow-up, do so fast. There is no room in a job for immaturity.

3. **Skills, Experience & Knowledge:** This is the first of two formal inputs that are required of you in the interview. You are required to talk about your current skill base, the experience that you have and the knowledge. You will be asked questions relating to these areas and they can be framed numerous ways including;
 - A. 'What are your top three skills that you will bring to this position?'
 - B. 'What is your current knowledge of MS Office software?'
 - C. 'What experience do you have as customer-service operator?'

Always be prepared with evidence-based examples. You want to prove what you have done and move away from hollow-statements with no meaning. So to answer the following questions you could say;

- A. I believe that you are looking for someone with developed and quality administrative skills. I have had well defined and developed skills in maintaining a general office environment, I have formidable financial skills such as processing end of month accruals, creating reports on outstanding purchases and monitoring petty cash. Furthermore, I have strong clerical skills such as diary management, working email, record keeping, creating salary payments, filing and organizing work for the manager and using office equipment.

- B. At school we have a strong policy towards developing our computer literacy. In years 8 – 10 we have to do two semesters of information processing in which we have gained basic knowledge in MS Office software such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher and Outlook. In my first year of SACE I undertook a VET course in Information Processing in which I fine-tuned and mastered in Word, PowerPoint and Publisher. In the process I gained certificate III in Information Processing which has developed a specific and in-depth knowledge of these software packages.

- C. I have had a number of experiences working with customers and people. At school I volunteer in the canteen each Thursday during lunch. I work with the canteen staff preparing lunches, serving customers, handling money and cleaning up. I also assist my netball coach with the junior players. Although not a normal customer-service environment I have developed the required customer service skills and attitudes needed for this role including; an attitude of helpfulness, being able to follow instructions, talk with people from different ages and instruct and teach others. Finally as part of my community-development work at school I have worked as a mentor in a child-care center. Throughout term 3 in 2007 I worked at ABC Norwood in a volunteer capacity assisting the staff with play-time, food preparation and serving, art classes and outdoor activities. Here I learnt a lot of skills including working within a high-demand and highly-responsible environment.

It is important that you read the job description, do your homework and prepare answers so you can confidently talk about your competencies. Your competencies are your skills, experience and knowledge relevant to the job. The following is a table of competencies that may be relevant for you to talk about in a job interview. You do not want to simply state you have great communication skills - back it up with some demonstration of evidence. Use the list on the next page to identify the your personal competencies.

Competencies

Communication	Teamwork	Problem Solving	Technology
Speaking clearly and directly	Working with people or different ages, gender, race, religion	Developing creative, new and interesting solutions	Using the internet
Active listening	Sharing responsibilities	Resolving conflict or concerns	Touch typing; what is your words per minute?
Written communication	Appreciating different points of view	Ability to think outside the square	MS Office software knowledge
Speaking another language	Training others	Prioritizing issues	Other software applications; Photoshop i.e.
Liaising or consulting with other people	Sport teams or group examples	Balance the needs of all those concerned	Using different equipment such as telephone, fax machine, digital camera i.e.
Negotiating (such as assignment due dates with teachers).		Being able to define the problem and solutions	Willing to learn about new I.T developments
Writing reviews, articles, essays or speeches			I.T, Information Processing knowledge or experience

Administrative	Analytical	Leadership	Interpersonal
General office duties	Researching assignments	Roles at school: Sports Captain, SRC rep i.e.	Ability to: liaise, negotiate, lead, think innovatively, resolve conflict, listen, build rapport, support others, take initiative, demonstrate politeness, give feedback, mediate and cooperate with other people, groups or teams.
Maintaining office equipment and environment	Critical thinking	Community development or volunteer participation	
Customer service experience	Reviewing cause and effect of your actions	Group work assignments	
Financial duties	Evaluating your work and performance	Leading or supervising others	
Diary management	Creating and identifying networks or relationships	Coaching or teaching others	
Filing and organizing work,	Good science or maths knowledge	Caring for others: child care, aged care, siblings or animals	

- 4. Behavioural / Situational Based Questions:** This part of the interview will require you to reflect on past work, study or life experience. These questions are interested in how you have managed specific behaviors in the past. This is the part of the interview in which you are asked questions relating to hypothetical situations. They are looking to see how you would act in certain situations and how well you would apply your skills, attributes and qualities in such a position.

POINTS TO REMEMBER: STAR: Answer these types of questions by describing the **S**ituation or **T**ask, following this up with the **A**ction you rendered and finally commenting on the **R**esults of these actions.

- 5. Conclusion:** This part of the interview is for you to ask questions and for you to sum up the interview. This is the most overlooked component of an interview by an interviewee (you). Remember this is your chance to interview your future employer and find out whether this job is right for you. It is important to ask the right questions and there is a fine art to appearing engaged. More so, the conclusion gets you to sum up what you have said and to allow you to give your ending power statement. Such statements could be, *'I am the right person for this job because I meet all the required & desired skills, knowledge & experience. I would like to stress that my experience in (primary experience) and skills in (top three skills) will support me in this position'.* **Follow up by thanking the interviewer** for their time. They have been given this task on top of their normal work. Politeness always impresses.

POINTS TO REMEMBER: Ask – Ask – Ask – Ask questions!!!

CLICHÉ 101: First impressions are lasting impressions.

As humans we judge other people, and in an interview 'judging' is one of the very few social interactions in which this form of behavior is encouraged. The first 30 seconds of an interview from when you enter a room to when you speak are the most crucial. There is a guide to being successful within these crucial 30 seconds; **SSS&B**. SSS&B equates to Smile, Shake, Sit & Breathe.

Walk into the room smiling (which means leaving any personal baggage at the door), shake the hands of the interviewer or panel of interviewers, sit down in the chair provided when it has been offered (do not do this prematurely) and take a deep breath before you start to speak.

Interviewing for a job over the phone and email.

Sometimes we have to apply for a Job over a phone and/or email. There are some basic rules to follow when communicating through these means.



Phone

Considering that 85% of our communication is non-verbal, a phone call limits a lot of our body language. This means that on a phone call you will have to pay close attention to your verbal and listening qualities. The following are some rules of engagement:

- Smile (it makes your voice sound more confident and friendly)
- Ring from a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Turn down any loud music, do not sit in front of the television, and be relaxed.
- Be prepared. Have your resume, notes, diary and any other relevant forms in close proximity.
- Speak clearly and not too fast. Talk into the mouthpiece of the telephone so you can be heard.
- Rehearse your introduction (it will boost your confidence and make you sound successful).
- Establish and use the other person's name early in the telephone conversation. Face to face, you can engage by relying on body language; but over the phone using their name is the most effective way to build up a bond.
- Attending skills, like in a conversation when someone else is speaking, use your 'umms', 'argggghhs', 'okays' and 'yes statements'. Being silent on the phone is not a good thing, because you may sound like you are not listening or attending well to the conversation.
- Be funny and yourself. Do not play a character, play you. Do not be dull and boring, be funny, positive and uplifting. You do not need to be a comedian to succeed but use your skills of small talk to get to know the interviewer.
- At the end of the calls, thank the interviewer for their time. Just like any interview, finish off with a power statement such as *'I am really excited about what we discussed today and I am looking forward to hearing from you in the near future'*. (Jo Walsh, 2007 *Catapult: A School Leavers Guide*).

Email

It is not rare these days to be interviewed via an email. Employers often will get you to send in some information about yourself, answer a few questions, conduct a test, send in a resume or communicate with you using the world wide web. You must be prepared for this.

When communicating through email there are some basic rules to attend to;

- As much as possible address the email formally like a letter.
- Always check punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, context and spelling.
- Insert a signature to the email. This can be a name signature of your name, or it can be an information signature for example:

Name Signature is :



Info Signature is:

John Smith

P (08) 8888 8888

E jsmith@email.com

A 1 Street, Suburb, Adelaide, SA

- Make sure that you check your emails regularly for updates.
- A tip before emailing for a job: Make sure your email address is tasteful and not offensive. The best advice is to have an email address that contains your name.

Some say the “IT Savvy / Internet / MySpace Generation” lack the ability to converse face to face. Thus it is important to sharpen your face to face skills before an interview and then to prove this statement wrong during the engagement part of the interview.

RESEARCH TOOL KIT

What is the company called? _____

What did the company used to be called? (If applicable): _____

Who is the director / CEO / Boss? _____

What is the name of the receptionist / admin officer? _____

What is their mission statement? _____

List their three main operations

1.

2.

3.

What three things do you want to know more about from their website?

1.

2.

3.

What is the most interesting aspect of the company?

What is the role you have applied for? _____

What department and/or team will you be working within? _____

List the three key duties for the role you interviewing for:

1.

2.

3.

Part 2: Job Interviews

Non Verbal Communication

Remember: 85% of our communication is non-verbal.

Did you know that only 15% of our communication is verbal and the rest is made up by listening, gestures, eye contact, posture, facial expressions, body language and our physical appearance? Thus it is important in an interview environment to pay close attention to these things.

SOLAR

An Easy Recipe.

TIP: It is perfectly acceptable to take notes in an interview. Make sure that you ask for permission first.

Smile: Make sure during all phases of the interview that you smile! Social Psychology suggests that when we smile we make other people feel comfortable and is one of the quickest ways to build a friendly bond with a stranger.

Open Body Language: Body language sends out very clear messages about how you are feeling and about your current mood. Furthermore it is about your posture (the way you sit, where your hands lay and facial gestures). In an interview setting it is important that you do not close up by: folding your arms, slouching in the chair, averted gaze, tilting of the head, scratching unnecessarily, frowning, crossing your legs etc. These types of postures and gestures send out negative messages.

One of the key facial expressions is eye contact. We communicate engagement through our eyes so if you are averting your gaze or being distracted, you are automatically telling the interviewer that you are not engaged.

Listening: It is so important to listen as it is one of the crucial elements of non-verbal communication. Now, listening may seem like a simple behavior but listening is much more than hearing what is being said.

Do you ever find yourself mindlessly saying “uh huh” when one of these folks is trying to tell you something only to have to say just after “I’m sorry what did you say?” Have you been in a

conversation with one of them and you are not really listening completely to what they have to say because you are too busy formulating your response?

These things are quite common and indicate that thinking too much or not enough is a crucial part of the listening behavior. In an interview it is important to have a clear head. It is much simpler than you think. So before an interview consciously tell yourself to focus on the interview and leave any personal issues at the door.

Additionally, a good listener will listen until the end of someone speaking which means no interrupting. Allowing the person to completely finish their thought before you begin to form a response is also crucial to good listening.

Attend: Attend refers to attending skills and attending skills refer to your ability to pay attention during a conversation. So how do you attend? You attend by focusing physically (by posture) and cognitively (by thoughts) towards the interviewer. You also attend by looking at the interviewer. You attend by using following communication skills. Following communication skills refer to head nodding to show you understand something, by reacting positively to what has been said by smiling or speaking, and also about asking for clarification. If you are confused with a question, statement or comment; politely ask for clarification.

Relax: The final non-verbal communication you must pay attention to appearing physically nervous. You will be nervous, but SO WHAT?! We are all nervous and so is the interviewer! You need to be relaxed and to do this you must be aware of your coping mechanisms. For some of us, in order to relax we need to turn up 20 minutes before an interview. Whatever your coping mechanism which facilitates your relaxation, be aware of it before an interview and participate in it!

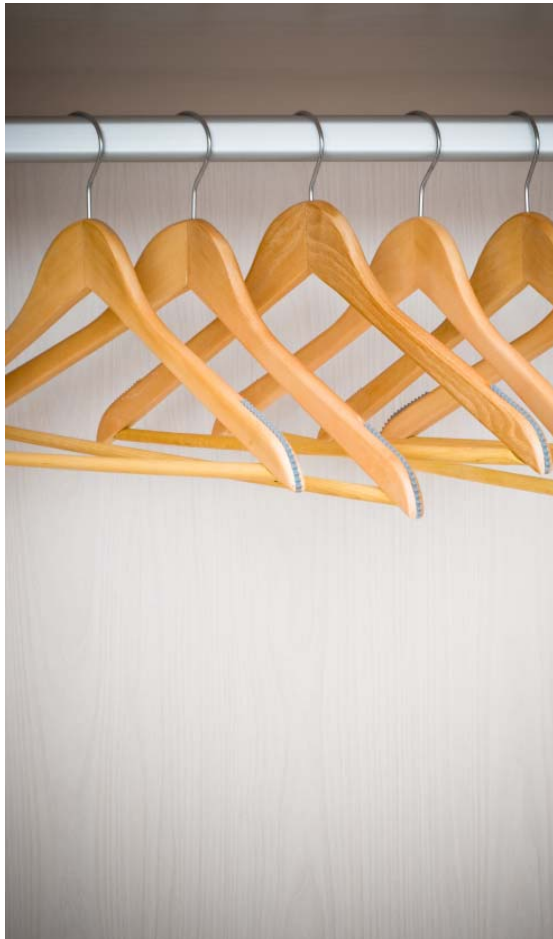
Posture gives us clues about how we are feeling so if you are feeling distracted, anxious, nervous, aggressive, guilty, happy, comfortable, confident, tired, annoyed, bored or assertive – it will show in your posture. So when you are feeling confident, comfortable, annoyed or anxious go to a mirror and become familiar with your facial expressions, gestures and body language. This way you will be aware of how these feelings come across and you can have more control of them in an interview situation.

Dress!!

There is one simple rule when dressing for an interview: Dress to impress – but do not overdo it! It is important to look smart, neat and well groomed. Remember you are not going to a mate's place or a wedding – use your common sense and make sure clothes, faces and bodies are clean.

If you are unsure of what to wear; visit the place of work and look at what they are wearing and mirror that. Just remember not everyone has the same idea about fashion as you and people can get offended or judge inappropriately at certain outfits. So, for one hour of your life dress conservatively because you do not want to lose a job based solely on your appearance.

TIPS



- Dress to impress: neat casual always does the trick.
- Be clean!
- Leave the fashion statements at home.
- Jewellery should be kept to a minimum. No one is impressed by how much bling you bring.
- Perfume / Aftershave (less is more)
- Hair must be neat and clean. Facial hair on men should be shaved off or groomed appropriately.
- If you have piercings and tattoos, cover up where possible.
- School Uniform – NO, NO, NO!
- Ipods or MP3 player cords should not dangle from your ears, clothes or bags. You are not a machine!
- Men should wear closed in shoes (no thongs), women can wear a nice pair of shoes or heels. Men should avoid shorts, jeans, cargo pants and cords. Go with business attire, tie – optional. Do up the top bottom however, no matter how masculine your hair on the chest may be! Women should avoid shorts, jeans, mini skirts, cargo pants, cords; wear a dress that goes beneath the knees. Alternatively a nice business outfit with minimal accessories.

Part 3: Job Interviews

Questions: Q & A

NOTE: A Job interview is not ONE-WAY! You need to ask questions too. It is important for you to ask questions in a job interview because you need to know if this is the right place for you. The following is a list of great questions to ask a future employer in any interview setting.

1 TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF!

This question is directed at finding out about you as a person, as well as about your job skills and experience. The employer needs to know if you have the skills and qualifications to do the job.

Be familiar with your resume when preparing for this question. Try to include a balance of information, including information about your experience and skills as well as information which provide a picture about you as an individual. Remember this is your part to show your EQ skills.

Remember you could often translate your life experiences as well as past formal education you have gained that is related to the job you are applying for. Always link the two, pointing out how well you will be able to do the job.

Things you can mention are:

- **Your INTERESTS AND EXPERIENCES related to the job**
Emphasise hobbies that may be job-related, such as drawing, building gadgets, designing your own clothes or websites for friends, fixing cars, playing computer games, making home videos etc. You can also include non-job-related interests, such as sporting teams you are involved with, as this shows that you are a team player.
- **Your PAST WORK EXPERIENCE and EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**
You can mention different jobs that you have had that are related to the position you are applying for. Mention skills that you learned and apply them to the position you are seeking.
- **Your EDUCATION AND TRAINING related to the job**
Mention subjects that you studied at school (*if they are related to the job you are applying for*).
Mention what you were taught and how it paved the way for the career that you want.
- **Your INTEREST IN WANTING TO WORK IN THIS FIELD**
You can talk about what makes you apply for the job because of whatever it is that attracts you to it.
- **DO NOT mention money.** Mention things like working in a team, being around people working outdoors –
- whatever it is that the position you are applying for entails.

2 HAVE YOU EVER DONE THIS KIND OF WORK BEFORE?

NEVER SAY 'NO' to this type of question, as no two jobs are exactly the same. You would not have applied for this position if you had not had some experience or some reason for thinking you would be able to handle the job.

Tell the interviewer:

- Your past life experiences related to the job.
- Your education and training related to the job.
- Any volunteer or unpaid work experience or your daily life related to the job.
- You are a quick learner and willing to learn (*give examples of this*).

For example, the interviewer might ask if you have worked as a bookkeeper and, even if you have not, you could mention facts such as:

- You kept some books as part of your previous job as a sale assistant.
- You maintain an exact book of records of your family expenses.
- You have completed a bookkeeping course in high school, you are good with figures.
- You are sure you could learn the necessary details quickly.

3 WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO THIS PARTICULAR JOB?

In other words:

- Will you be satisfied with your job?
- Will you want to stay?
- What makes you apply for the position?

Reassure the interviewer with **positive comments about the company** such as:

- Say that you like this kind of work and feel you can do a good job.
- Explain what makes you choose the job but **DO NOT mention money** as your primary motivation.
- Explain what attracts you to this position.

4 WHAT CAUSED YOU TO LEAVE YOUR LAST JOB?

(Be prepared for this question as they may ask you)

That is: Were there any difficulties? People leave jobs for many reasons and only mention those that are favourable to you and make you look good.

Some of the **COMMON REASONS FOR LEAVING A JOB:**

- The company had a cut-back or a layoff.
- It was a seasonal job.
- It was a temporary job.
- It was only part-time.
- It was only a good job while you were at school.
- Excessive travel time from home.
- For improved opportunities and a more challenging job.
- Family moved or changed jobs.

OTHER CONTRIBUTING FACTORS may have been that you **wanted to go into a different line of work** for which **you were well qualified** and **more interested** or maybe you could say that **you saw an opportunity for advancement in the job you are applying for**. **AVOID SAYING YOU WERE FIRED!** However, whatever reason you give, point out that the job for which you are being interviewed does not have the same problem that led you to leaving your last job. **For example**, *'it's not as far to travel'* or *'the hours suit you much better'*, etc.

EMPHASISE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF YOUR LAST JOB, as this will make you sound like a loyal and appreciative employee.

If the employer asks *'What caused you to be unemployed for so long?'* or *'What caused you to be unemployed since... ?'*, it is important to answer in a positive way. **Briefly explain your circumstances** and then go on to **talk about your strengths** and **the reason why you want the job**. The idea is **NOT to dwell on** information that the interviewer may find **negative**, but to **move the discussion on to your positive points and the reasons why you are well suited to the job**.

5 WHAT MAKES YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE THE RIGHT APPLICANT FOR THE JOB?

Quickly list the SKILLS and ATTRIBUTES you have that will make you a valuable employee.

You may have mentioned some of them before. However, this is like a summary for the interviewer who does not want to think for himself or herself. You could **list your skills and attributes** such as, *'I'm efficient'; 'I don't have to be supervised'; 'I'm not a clock watcher'; 'I'm dependable'; 'I'm fast and accurate'; 'I have a passion for...'* *'I'm interested in this field of work'* etc.

6 WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST STRENGTHS?

This question is similar to:

'What makes you the better choice for the job instead of someone else?' Mention your skills, reliability, experience, enthusiasm, efficiency, ability to get along with others etc.

If asked, *'What is your single greatest strength?'* Mention your personal reliability. Also add that you have several other major strengths and mention them.

7 WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESSES?

DO NOT describe any possible weaknesses when asked this question. Turn the question around and answer in a positive way.

An EXAMPLE you could use is that:

You put pressure on yourself to get things right the first time – you are a perfectionist and like things to be done right.

An interviewer will look at this and think that it could work in their benefit if you are a keen worker who does not like to waste time and wants to get things right the first time.

8 DESCRIBE A DIFFICULT PROBLEM OR SITUATION YOU HAD TO DEAL WITH.

This question is asking you

- *Are you are a problem solver?*
- *Do you keep calm in stressful situations and think logically?*

If you can not think of a problem to discuss, or if you have not worked before, you could say something along the lines of:

'A problem doesn't readily come to mind at the moment, but I make it a practice to stand back and examine the problem and gather as much information as possible. I consult with my co-workers, if appropriate, and work out a series of solutions and prioritise them.'

If PLAN 'A' does not work then I go to PLAN 'B'.

9 DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS TO ASK ME?

It is important that you ask the interviewer questions. Ideally, you will have **at least two questions** that you can ask the interviewer. By asking questions, you are showing the interviewer that you are keen and wanting this job. It shows that you are motivated and that you are interested.

Possible questions you can ask are:

- What makes this position available?
- Is there training provided?
- What are the promotional opportunities?
- Is a uniform provided?
- If successful in gaining this position, when would I be expected to start?
- Will I be working by myself or with other people?
- Who am I responsible to?

Jo Walsh, (2008 Catapult)

REHEARSE with a friend, parent, or spouse. Make sure you know how to answer the engagement questions well. When they say 'tell me about yourself' have something clever, engaging, interesting and relevant to say. If you do not know yourself and cannot answer this question – you have already failed the interview.

TIPS

- Speak clearly.
- Do not whisper or mumble.
- Watch out for ‘umms’, ‘arghhhs’, ‘so’, ‘you know what I mean’, ‘er’.
- Think about your answer prior to speaking. It is appropriate to say, ‘can I just have a minute to construct my answer’. An over prepared or rushed answer may seem fake or be off-putting.
- There is no time for false modesty, you must sell yourself. You are being given a chance to convince and persuade the interviewer that you are better than all the other applicants. Be prepared to give full answers and talk without constantly being pumped for answers.
- Confidence = success.
- Always frame answers in the positive.
- It is okay to be friendly but always remain formal and controlled.
- Turn off the mobile phone. We love being connected to our mates in this global-technological age but we need to remember that a ringing phone is a nuisance and is RUDE! You will live without it for 30 minutes



CLICHÉ 102: “I do not have any skills!”

Firstly, we all have to start somewhere and at some point in our lives. Your teachers, parents, the prime minister and celebrities all started off their careers wondering the same thing. I would like to stress that YOU already have employability skills because it does not take working in paid employment to create them. All of you have developed some employability skills from communication to teamwork from technology to enterprise within many aspects of your life such as;

- At School or Home
- In the sport you play
- Hobbies and Interests
- Social Networks (friends, family, community, church)
- Using daily equipment (computer, lawn mower, mobile phone)
- Life Development – you are learning new skills particularly interpersonal and technological skills as you age and interact within different environments.

Do not believe that you have no skills because you do; and employers appreciate that you are still developing and growing. So think about the interactions you currently enjoy in life and identify the skills you already have.

