

Interview Skills

A workbook for carers





Introduction

This workbook has been created to help you, as a carer, prepare for a job interview.

Many carers have diverse employment experience and history. It may have been some years since you last had a job interview, or you may be seeking to enter a new field or career with different processes and requirements. Whatever your circumstance, you may find it useful to refresh some common employment concepts.

Carers Victoria has prepared this workbook as a guide to assist you in preparing for job interviews, whether they are on the phone, online or in person. Following the activities in this workbook will provide good preparation and help you to feel confident in a job interview.

Interview Skills and Preparation

Following a job application, the employer may invite you to a job interview. The job interview can be part of a process and include more than one interaction. The first step often involves what is known as a 'phone screening'. It is not a formal interview; its purpose is to determine if you have the minimum requirements for the position. However, employers will already be forming an impression and pre-selecting preferred candidates based on their answers.

To prepare for a phone screening interview, here are a few things to consider:

- › Think about the phone screening interview in advance when you have time to prepare for it.
- › Have a professional sounding voice mail message in preparation for any calls you miss.
- › When you answer the phone speak clearly, stating your name e.g., "Hello, Karen Evans speaking."
- › Keep a pen and paper handy and take notes about relevant details.
- › Listen carefully for the interviewer's name and write it down so that you remember it.
- › Listen for the role title.
- › Have the position description open in front of you while on the call, if possible.
- › Ask any questions that would be useful for you.
- › Clarify next steps.

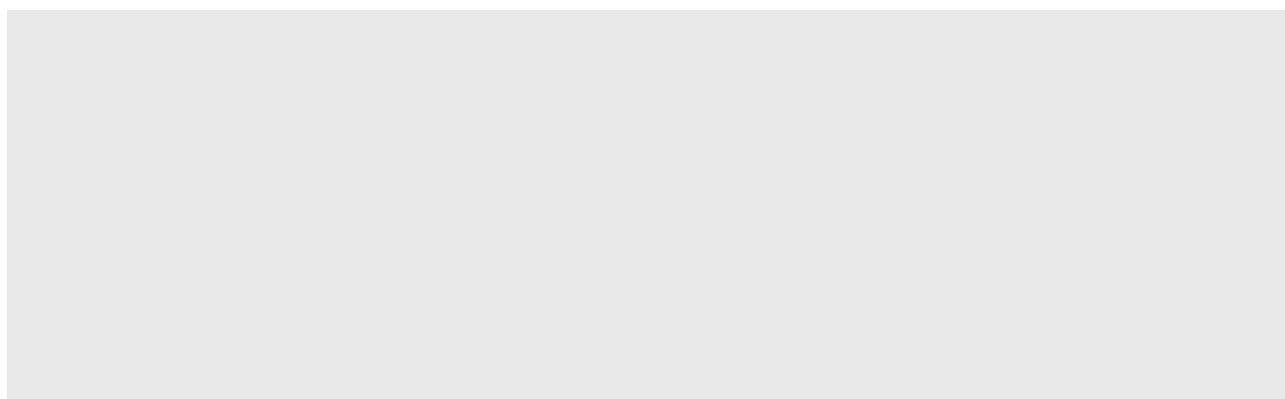
Workbook Activity

Common pre-screening interview questions

In preparation for a screening call write down clear and concise answers to these practice questions. This will help you if you are asked similar questions in the call.

Why did you apply for this role?

(This is asking about your motivation and skills/experience/attributes that make you suitable for the role, your "elevator pitch".)



When are you available to start?

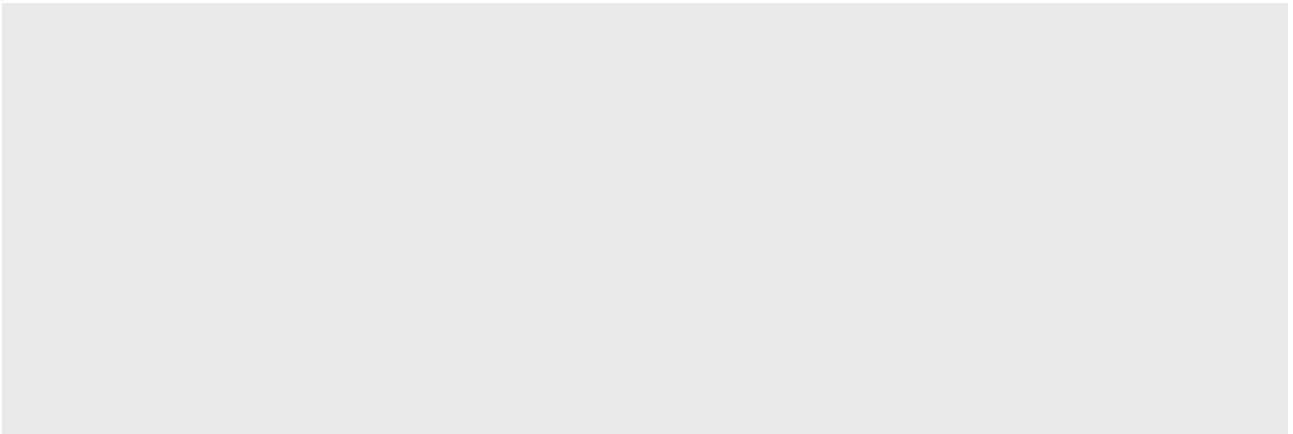
What do you think it takes to succeed in this role?

(This is asking for your understanding of the role so far and what you will bring to the role, enabling you to succeed with your contribution to the given business problems.)

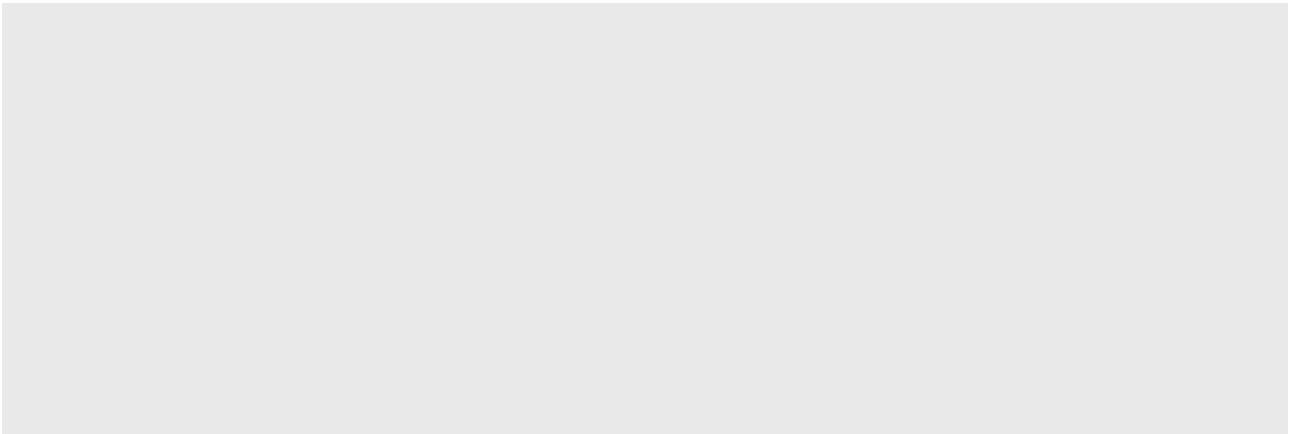
What are your salary expectations?

(This question is checking for a match in expectations. Best to give a range based on your market research. If you are unsure about market rates – you can say so.)

When are you available for an interview?



Remember to ask the caller about interview details if not already provided to you - address, phone, interview style, interviewer names and roles.



Key Tips for Presenting in an Interview

A successful interview depends on many factors, but preparation is a key element in your control. The best interviews are those that “look and feel” effortless because the candidate is well prepared.

Here are some tips to help you prepare for a successful interview:

- › Plan what you are going to wear ahead of the interview and make sure you feel good in it.
- › Make sure you have switched off any distractions (your phone or anything else you may have on you).
- › For an in-person interview, a brief introduction and handshake is the traditional way of building rapport. Take the time to make eye contact, smile and listen carefully to introductions.
- › Building rapport in a video interview is different from the traditional ways of communication – make suitable eye contact with the camera.
- › Be in the present moment, listen to questions and be responsive. Take your time to think about your answer before responding, rather than saying the first thing that pops into your mind.
- › If you are nervous, take a deep breath before commencing what you have to say and don't be afraid to collect your thoughts before speaking. You can even make notes about your answer before responding.
- › Pause if you need to think – you could take a sip of water to allow you to do this without feeling awkward about a few moments of silence.
- › Appear as confident and professional as possible, without being arrogant or too sure of yourself. Be conscious of your body language, tone of voice, speaking pace and practice active listening.
- › Ask clarifying questions, when you don't understand or are missing information.

Standard Questions

Below are some common formal interview questions, to help you prepare for an interview:

- › Why did you apply for this role?
- › Why are you interested in the position?
- › Tell me about yourself.
- › How do your skills and experience suit the job?

The above four questions are different versions of the same question – again, like in the screening interview, they are asking for your motivations, skills, experience and attributes relating to the role.

- › What do you know about us?



An opportunity to demonstrate what you know about the role context (the company/organisation and the position you are applying for).

Examples of other standard questions:

- › Why did you leave your last position?
- › What is your greatest strength/weakness?
- › Where do you see yourself in the future?
- › Why should we hire you?
- › What are your salary expectations?
- › What else would you like to share with us about yourself?

How to Answer Standard Questions Well

Some standard questions are perceived as more difficult than others by interviewees, so let's go over these in more detail:

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESS?

This question is sometimes confusing to interviewees. The purpose of the question is to explore your attitude towards self-reflection, a key work skill. When you are faced with a challenge or problem you cannot resolve, what strategies and thinking processes do you use? How do you overcome such dilemmas? The question allows you to demonstrate, that although you don't have all the skills or answers in the world (yes, you are human!) – you know how to grow from them and overcome setbacks.

An example answer for someone who is applying for a job helping people look for work:

"I tend to empathise a lot with people who are finding it hard to get a job. I used to tell clients not to worry; that I'd fix everything for them."

"Since studying career counselling, I have learnt that is a disempowering approach. Now I teach people tools and give my clients feedback on what to change resulting in them learning the skills for themselves. These days, I rarely do everything for someone, if I do there will be a reason behind it."

Be honest, succinct, and clear in how you answer but also show how you learn through experience. Some interview questions will ask you to share examples, this may include:

- › **WHERE** you used the skill before
- › **WHAT** actions you took
- › **HOW** you overcame a problem to achieve a positive result.

Here are some examples:

- › Tell me about a time you solved a problem which affected customer satisfaction.
- › Have you ever had to resolve conflict in the workplace?
- › Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative.
 - What was the issue?
 - What did you do?

Workbook Activity

You may find it helpful to spend a few moments considering how you can provide examples of the skills and experience demonstrated in your application.

It can take some practice to communicate these clearly and to the point so that you are answering the question effectively.

The STAR Method

What is the STAR method? How can it help you to succeed in interviews?

The STAR method is a simple way to structure your interview answers when you are asked to talk about “work stories” – examples of something that happened and how you behaved and resolved a problem at that particular time. The type of questions asking you to use this method to structure your answers, are called “behavioural questions”. They are asking what you did, and how you did it. They are giving the interviewer an idea of how you would typically respond to a challenge or problem encountered at work.

Situation. Task. Action. Result.

- › **Situation:** provide context to your answer
- › **Task:** elaborate on the challenge and your role
- › **Action:** explain how you handled the situation
- › **Result:** what you achieved and learnt in the process

Examples using the star response approach

- › **Situation:** Provide background information.
“Our customers complained.”
- › **Task:** Describe problems and challenges.
“We faced supply chain shortage.”
- › **Action:** Explain what you did and how.
“I increased our orders and asked our supplier to put us on a regular monthly supply.”
- › **Result:** State benefits, savings, rewards, recognition.
“We received a 10% bulk discount and knew exactly when our orders would arrive, resulting in no shortages and happy customers.”

Can you describe a mistake you made and how you reacted to it?

- › **Situation:** Yes, I once switched the packing labels of two packages I sent to customers.
- › **Task:** I had to correct the problem without angering the clients.
- › **Action:** I called them both up and provided them with shipping labels with the correct addresses while offering each of them a small gift certificate to use on a future order.
- › **Result:** The customers not only helped me fix my mistake, but they were both satisfied and will return and shop with us again.



Questions for the Employer

An interview is a two-way conversation and a process of getting to know the organisation and the employer. It is also an opportunity for you to ask questions.

Some examples to help prompt your thinking are:

- › Can you please tell me a bit more about the team/your work culture?
- › Will I be based in one location or at several sites?
- › Who are your target customers?
- › What is the company culture like?
- › Is the company planning on expanding in the future?
- › Why do you enjoy working for (employer name)?

Ending the Interview Well

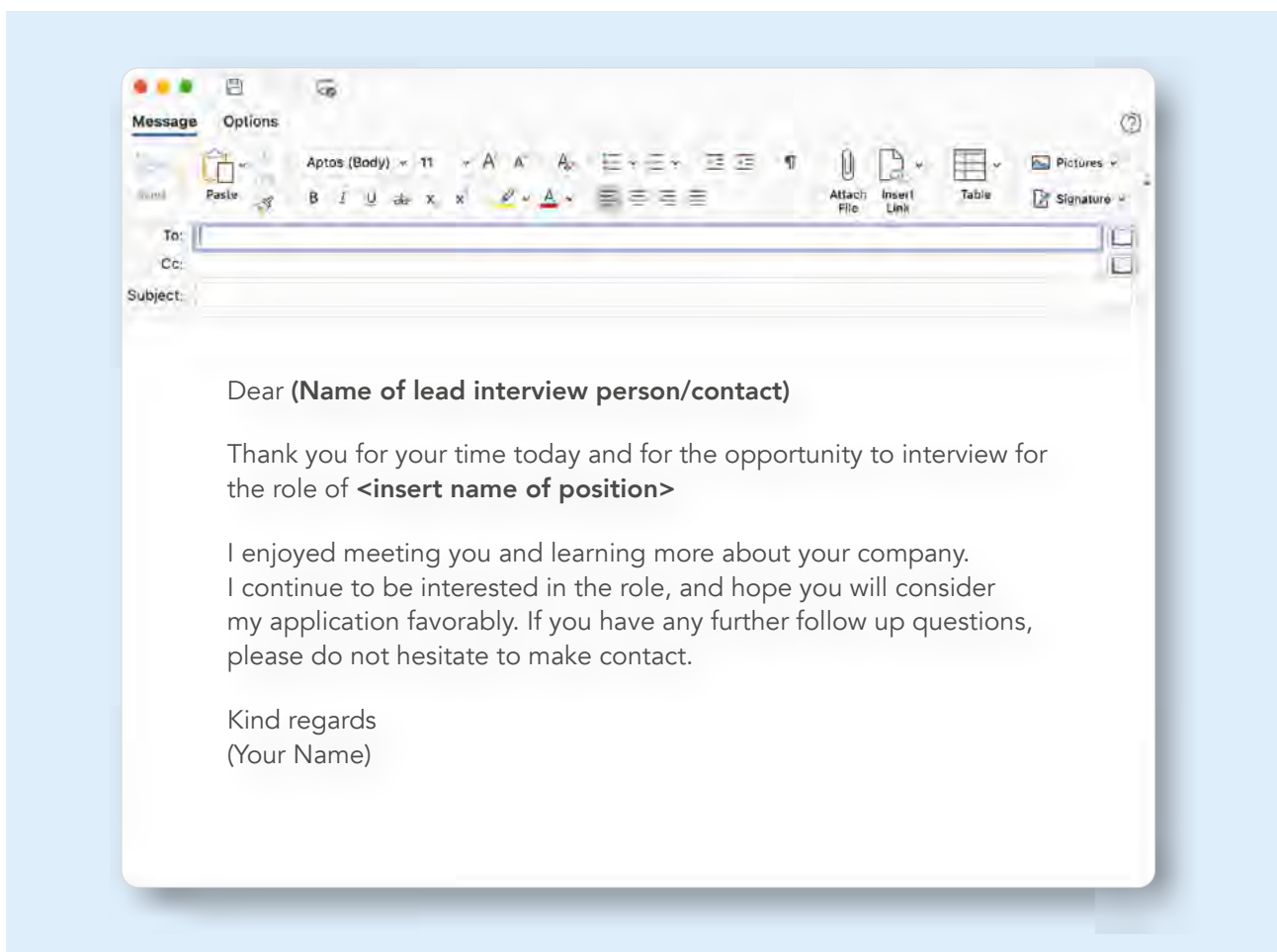
Towards the end of the interview, the employer may brief you on details about the remainder of the recruitment process, such as when they will let people know about the outcome.

They may check if you have the right licenses and pre-employment checks and ask for references.

Typically, a face-to-face interview will conclude with a shaking of hands and walking you out the door. Make sure to remain polite and professional and don't try to predict an outcome. Thank the interview panel for their time and remain professional until you've left the premises, or before you make any calls or debrief.

It is always a good idea to send a professional follow up email on the same day or the day after.

Here is an example:



Concluding Comments and Tips

Interviews typically have a predictable structure and content; you are well-positioned to succeed in interviews when you are well prepared. This workbook outlines the practices and structure of a job interview, and whilst there are many possible variations, this will serve as a good guide and foundation for preparedness.

Practice makes perfect, and practising answers (with friends, family, colleagues etc.) will help you become familiar with the process and assist you with handling your nerves during an interview. We also recommend practising being interviewed by unrelated persons, such as an employment mentor. We have created a list of supporting programs and organisations for this purpose which can be found on the Carers Victoria website.

We wish you the best of luck and success!

Notes

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



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Carers Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the continuing connection to land and waters. Sovereignty was never ceded.