



EMPLOYABILITY ESCAPE ROOM

Crack the code and unlock your potential



EMPLOYABILITY ESCAPE ROOM

Getting into employment isn't always as easy as ABC.

It's more like a set of clues to solve, or a series of puzzles to figure out. The language of interviews is a code. And often, the game can feel stacked against you.

In this guide, we'll take the employability code and help you to crack it one piece at a time so you can unlock opportunities and keep opening new doors.

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THE EMPLOYMENT PUZZLE

Talking about success with work can be too black and white sometimes. No matter who you are, what strengths you have or what challenges you're facing, the goal is the same: get into education, training or employment.

Don't get us wrong – that's a good goal to have. But it focus so squarely on a single moment in time that lots of important progress is left out.

Imagine your employment journey like an escape room. You know what you're trying to achieve, and you need to work with what's available and figure out the clues to make it happen.

When it comes to work, your dream job – the goal – is a set of puzzles away. Every riddle you solve or code you crack is worth noticing and celebrating because it moves you further towards finally opening the door.

Talent Thresholds: marking milestones

The Talent Thresholds are a new way to look at and track your journey to employment and give yourself credit where it's due.

There are 14 thresholds, or 'abilities'. Each one is either an employment skill (Employabilities) or life attribute (Lifeabilities) that hiring managers in every sector look for when recruiting. Improving at each will help to unlock new possibilities within the employability escape room.

Over the next two sections, we'll look at the four Lifeabilities and nine Employabilities in more depth – and set you a challenge for each one.

First, a chance to reflect.



Your escape room toolkit

When you step into an escape room, you have to solve the clues with what you have to hand. So, what's in your escape room toolkit? Take some time to reflect using the prompts below.

Self-reflection: what's in your toolkit?

What am I good at doing? Eg, playing football, listening, looking after plants.

What do I like doing?

What would I like to get better at?

What are my values? Eg, honesty, kindness, authenticity.

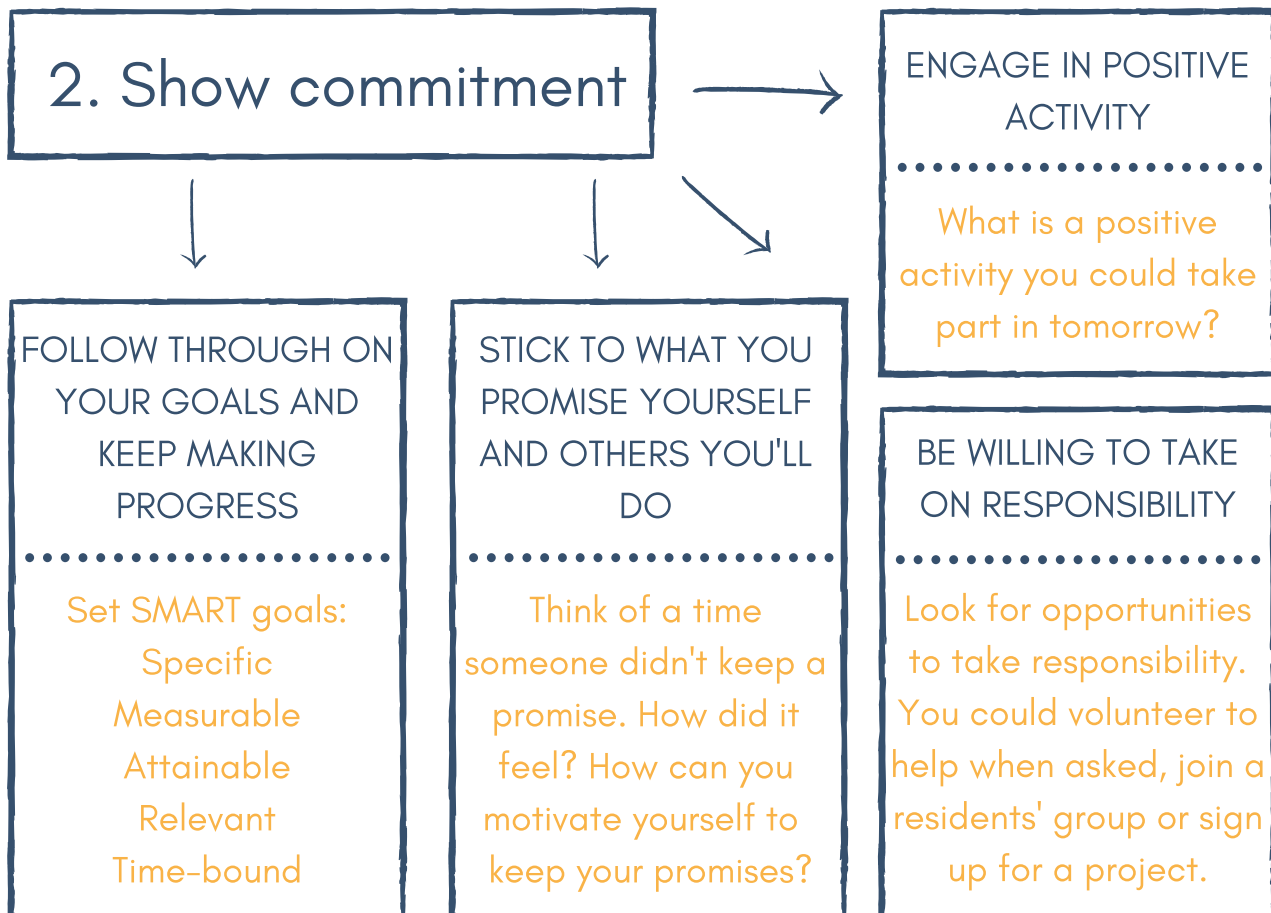
Who can help me?

Top tips for self-reflection:

1. **Find a quiet space** where you won't be interrupted.
2. **Be honest.** Sometimes this might feel uncomfortable, but it doesn't do you any favours to fib to yourself.
3. **Know what's important to you.** Not to anyone else - just you.
4. **Be kind to yourself.** It's okay to have setbacks and make mistakes.

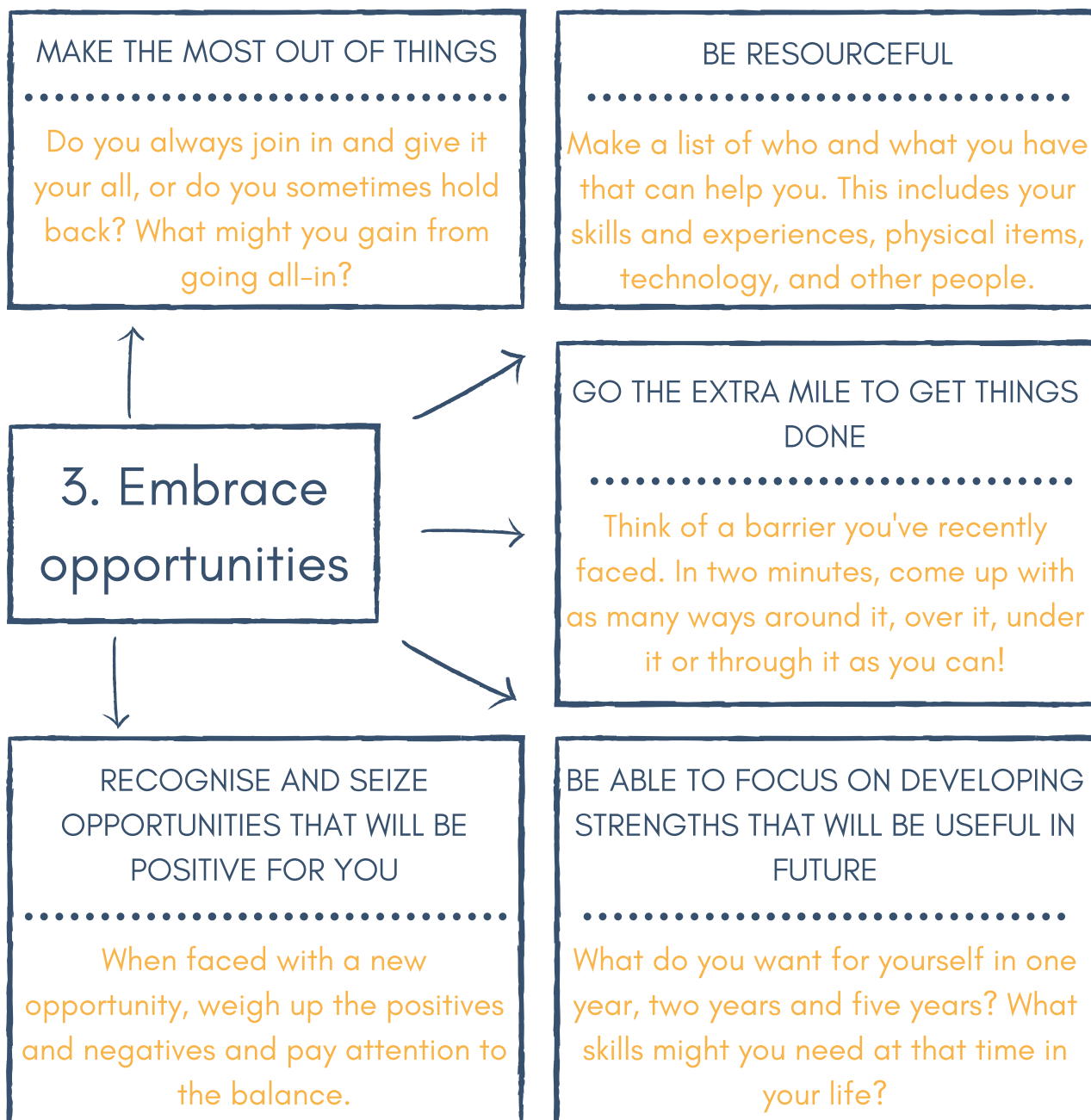
LIFEABILITIES

These are the four Lifeability milestones, each with a challenge for you to try.



The Lifeabilities are life skills that, when you work on them, will help you to become more resilient in your work life and in your personal life too.

Each one will be easier some days and harder others. When you're tired, it's raining and you've found a hole in your shoe, you might find it harder to go the extra mile for someone. When the sun is shining and you've found a forgotten fiver in your pocket, it might be easier. It's up to you to positively challenge yourself and see what you can achieve, even when the world seems like it's against you.



4. Promote yourself to others

SHARE BOTH YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN A POSITIVE WAY

.....

Focus on your weaknesses. What have you learned because of them? What have you done to work on improving them?

TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED AND LEARNED FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES

.....

What is a time in your life you've learned a lot from? What strengths does it show? How could you talk about this in a professional setting?

KNOW HOW TO EMPHASISE WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT

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Pick a story about a time something went wrong and you helped to fix it. What strengths did you show? Tell the story and make sure to mention each of those elements.

KNOW WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO GET NOTICED IN A POSITIVE WAY

.....

What do you consider to be good qualities in other people? What do they do that shows it?

It might feel strange to talk about your personal life in a job interview, but it's a good way to show employers what you're made of - especially if you don't have much on your CV yet. If you're someone who has experienced difficult times, you're likely to have valuable skills that employers are looking for.

It's okay to talk about hard things in an interview instead of only focusing on happy times.

Challenges like homelessness and living on a low income show skills like resilience, the ability to adapt to change, and problem-solving. Learning how to talk about it positively could help to give you an edge on the competition, as they may not have developed those skills yet.

Turning disadvantage into advantage

The next two challenges will give you a chance to practise spotting positives and finding ways to talk about your experiences with employers. They're based on the six experiences below:

Homelessness

Living on a low income

Living in a communal setting

Family conflict

Facing stereotypes

Being underestimated

Challenge 1

Pick an experience that feels the least personal to you. List as many challenges as you can think of that come with this experience, then list the strengths that overcoming that challenge shows. For example:

Living in a communal setting

Challenge: both wanting the bathroom at the same time

Strength: being able to compromise, patience, awareness of others' needs.

Challenge 2

Choose an experience you have been through. What were the challenges? What strengths did you need to use? What skills did you develop? How might you talk about that with a potential employer?

EMPLOYABILITIES

The Employabilities are nine skills that recruiters from every kind of job look for when they're interviewing. They're based on the CBI's Core Employability Skills, Guy Claxton's book *Building Learning Power*, and The Foyer Federation's theory of Advantaged Thinking.

Whether you want to be a taxi driver, a nurse, a personal trainer, a plumber or anything else, getting to grips with these nine skills is the first step towards unlocking the escape room door. Each one is a milestone that moves you closer to cracking the code.

Employability skill checker

These are the nine Employabilities. Each one is broken down into a set of skill statements you can assess yourself against to check your progress in each one.

How to

Find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted for 15–20 minutes. This is a self-reflection exercise, so take a look at the tips on page 2 for some guidance.

For each of the 'I' statements below, think about how often you do each one when you have the opportunity. If it's something you rarely get the chance to do (for example, serve customers), think of other ways you might show a similar skill, like showing a visitor around the Foyer, greeting a guest or doing a favour for someone.

Give each 'I' statement a number between 1–5 as follows:

1 = I never do this, 2 = I rarely do this, 3 = I do this half the time, 4 = I often do this, 5 = I always do this

We recommend you photocopy this exercise and reflect every month or two to keep track of (and celebrate!) your progress.

1. Self-management

- I accept responsibility
- I am flexible
- I show resilience
- I am assertive when needed
- I manage my time effectively
- I improve through feedback and learning
- I get on with things by myself

2. Team working

- I respect and get along with others
- I can negotiate and persuade people to get things done
- I contribute to discussions in a group
- I am aware of the importance of team members
- I support and trust others

3. Business and customer awareness

- I can understand a business' purpose
- I understand what businesses do to be successful

- I can serve customers
- I can understand an organisation's values and identity
- I can provide customer satisfaction and build customer loyalty

4. Problem-solving

- I can analyse detail and instructions
- I respond positively to challenges
- I use creative thinking
- I try out different approaches
- I am focused on finding solutions

5. Communication and literacy

- I can produce accurate written work
- I write with good spelling
- I speak with clear language
- I question and listen to others
- I understand the different communication needs of social media, email, business letters etc.

6. Numeracy

I understand the use of numbers

I can produce accurate calculations

I can work out costs, measurements and weights

I can understand figures in a budget

7. Information technology

I have basic IT skills

I am familiar and confident with computers

I can use word processing, spreadsheets, data bases and file management systems

I can use email and calendar tools

I can use search engines

I understand the appropriate application of social media

8. Positive attitude

I take a can-do approach

I'm ready and willing to take part in and contribute to activities

I am open to new ideas

I have the drive and energy to get things done

I am quick to bounce back when things go wrong

9. Entrepreneurship

I can offer a creative approach

I'm comfortable in taking positive risks

I can spot new opportunities

I focus on potential rather than the problem

I am open to collaborating with and learning from others

I can negotiate a good deal

Questions for reflection

- Which Employabilities are you strongest at?
- Which Employabilities do you need to work on the most?
- How might you make the most of them?
- How could you work on them in the next day, week and month?
- Which of the Employabilities have you progressed in since last time?

SETTING GREAT GOALS

If you set goals and go after them with all the determination you can muster, your gifts will take you places that will amaze you.

– Les Brown

Goal-setting is a good way to stay focused on achieving what you want out of life. Choosing a point in the distance to aim for makes the pathway there a bit clearer, helping you explore which skills and talents you'll need to grow or learn to unlock your full potential.

There are two main types of goals: short-term and long-term.

Long-term goals are those that will take longer to achieve, whether it's six months, a year, or 10 years. Some examples of long-term goals are:

1. Getting into college
2. Gaining a specific qualification
3. Getting a job in a certain field
4. Owning your own business



Short-term goals are the things you need to do to make the long-term goals happen. They should be things you can do relatively quickly, and you might have a few to work on at the same time. Here are some examples for short-term goals that match to the long-term goals above:

1. Complete and send college application form before the deadline
2. Attend all classes this month
3. Go to a networking event in the field I want to work in
4. Find out how to write a business plan

SMARTen up your goals

Write down one thing you want to achieve in the long-term here:

Now that you have your long-term achievement in mind, it's time to make it even more motivating with the SMART toolkit. This framework helps you to get the most out of your goal-setting and to stay on track for success.

SMART is an acronym and each letter stands for something that's important when you're choosing your goals.



- ✓ **Specific**
- ✓ **Measurable**
- ✓ **Attainable**
- ✓ **Realistic**
- ✓ **Time-based**

SPECIFIC

You're much more likely to accomplish a specific goal than a general one. Make the goal you wrote above specific by answering these six 'W' questions:

- **Who** is involved?
- **What** do I want to accomplish?
- **Where** will I do this?
- **When** will I do this? Establish a timeframe.
- **Which** strengths, things and people will I need? Which constraints do I need to consider?
- **Why** is this my goal? What's the benefit or purpose?

A general goal might be 'figure out what job I want'. A more specific version of that might be 'make an appointment with a career counsellor and read about the kinds of jobs my skills match with online'.

MEASURABLE

How will you measure your progress towards achieving your goal? Decide what your criteria will be so you can see your forward movement.

To assess whether your goal is measurable, ask yourself questions like:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

ATTAINABLE

When you identify a goal that's important to you, you can start to figure out ways to make it happen. Look out for opportunities, explore your connections to find good links, and start planning the steps you need to take to create a path to achievement.

What are the attitudes, abilities, skills and financial capacities you need to attain your long-term goal? Set these as short-term goals.

REALISTIC

For a goal to be realistic, it should be something you're both **able** and **willing** to work towards. If it doesn't make you feel motivated, question whether it's realistic for you. Often, very ambitious goals are more likely to succeed than seemingly 'easy' ones because the energy you have for aiming high is greater.

A good way to test it is to write down what conditions would have to exist for you to achieve your goal. Do these exist, or are they likely to? For example, 'to work at X company, I would need to wake up at 5am every day'.



TIME-BASED

A goal should be linked to a timeframe, otherwise there's no sense of urgency.

If you want to qualify as a plumber, when do you want to do it by? 'Someday' won't work. If you anchor it to a timeframe, it'll set your mind into motion figuring out your short-term goals and getting to work on them.



Here's an example of a SMART goal:



Make your goal SMART

How to

Start with the long-term achievement you wrote down on page 11. Using the SMART toolkit, challenge yourself to make your goal specific, measurable and time-based, and reflect on whether it's realistic for you. Include your first short-term goals for making it attainable too. Write your SMART goal here:



THE COMMUNICATION CODE

A job interview isn't much like normal conversation at all. They take place in unnatural settings with a power balance that can feel a bit skewwhiff. The purpose of the questions might not always be obvious from the wording, and all the while your body language is being observed too. Phew.

The language of interviews is more like a code to crack, and that code might be different between industries and job roles. However, there are some similarities. Once you crack the code, you can craft your answers to show off your strengths, talents and experiences in the best possible way.

Public speaking

How do you feel about public speaking? What does it make you think of? Maybe giving a presentation, reciting a story or poem, or giving a speech to a big crowd. Being interviewed is a kind of public speaking too – and the same skills apply. Whether you're one of the 73% of people who feel nervous about public speaking or you're cool and collected in front of a crowd, these tips will help you make the most of those important moments.

THE FIVE Ss

The five Ss are things to keep in mind to show confidence and clarity when you have the opportunity to speak in public. They are:



1. Smile. Smiling helps you look friendly and confident, and boosts your mood. A natural-looking smile (no grinning!) when you shake hands makes a great first impression.

2. See. Maintain eye contact with your interviewer when they ask you questions and when you answer to create a sense of connection. Remember to blink!

3. Slow. When you're excited or nervous, it's easy for your speech to speed up. Taking a deep breath before you answer a question relaxes you, gives you a moment to consider your answer, and helps you to regulate your speed.

4. Show strengths. Try to keep your answers focused on your strengths as much as possible. Pick examples that highlight the skills you want to show. By drawing attention to your strengths regularly and naturally, your interviewer will come away with a clear sense of your best side.

5. Structure. Think about the clearest way to structure your answer. If you're telling a story, it might be in order of the events. If you're sharing your strengths, you might give each one by one with an explanation. A clear, simple structure makes it easy for the people listening to follow what you're saying.

Public speaking challenge

Choose a topic from the list below and speak out loud about it for one minute. Give yourself five minutes to prepare. Stand in front of a mirror and notice your smile and eye contact while you speak.

- A time you solved a problem
- A time you had a conflict
- A time you made a mistake
- A time you helped someone
- A time you taught someone something
- A time someone taught you something

How did it feel to speak for a minute about something? What did you notice about the five Ss? What went well? What could you improve on? Did you manage to get across all the strengths you wanted to in that time?

The STAR technique

Structuring an answer can be easier said than done - especially when you're on the spot in an interview situation. The STAR technique is a simple, easy-to-follow structure that'll keep your answers focused and clear. It's especially useful for questions like the ones above, which ask you to tell a story.

SITUATION

Start by outlining the situation. Keep it nice and concise rather than crammed with loads of detail. What does the interviewer need to know?

Avoid lots of background information and keep emotions out of it as much as possible. In the example on the right, the employer doesn't need to know what the colleagues were arguing about, the words used or who was right. That simple statement is enough.

TASK

What was the specific task you had to achieve? The more concise your answer, the better. Think about what the business needed from you in this situation. In the example, your goal might have been to make sure your colleagues stayed friends, but for the business, resolving the conflict is the most important thing.

ACTION

What action or actions did you take? Think specifically about what you as an individual did, including key elements of your thought process if that's relevant. Stick to the most important things and don't get too stuck into the details.



RESULT

What was the end result of this? Again, keep it as focused on the needs of the business as possible. Make sure the example you choose has a positive end result!

It's okay if you don't have work experience. Examples from your personal life can be just as effective. Think about hobbies, relationships with family and friends, sports, and any challenges you've overcome. See pages 5-6 for a reminder of how to do this.

STAR technique example

Situation: Two colleagues were having a disagreement which led to raised voices.

Task: My task was to calm the situation and resolve the conflict.

Action: I separated the two colleagues and gave them time to cool off. I reminded them of their behavioural obligations and mediated a conversation.

Result: The conflict was resolved and the two colleagues were able to work side by side.

Interview question cheat sheet

Interview questions tend to follow a kind of code. The employer will ask you things in a certain way because they want to see how you think. They're not trying to trip you up, but they are testing you to see if you'll be a good fit for their team, if you can solve problems, and if you can keep your cool in a high-pressure situation.

Different sectors will ask about different things, but some questions tend to pop up regularly. These are a few you'll hear time and again, and a clue about how to answer them:



"Tell us a bit about yourself."

They've already seen your CV. This is about *you*. Why did you choose certain subjects at college? What did you enjoy about your work experience placement? Why did you decide to volunteer for this charity specifically? It's a chance to show what your values are.

"What are your three greatest strengths?"

It's not often you're asked to brag about yourself, so take the opportunity to put your best foot forward! Reflect on this ahead of time and pick the ones that are most relevant to the role. Be prepared to go into more detail for each one.

"What are your weaknesses?"

With this question, employers are trying to find out three things:

1. Where will you need most support when you start?
2. Are you self-reflective?
3. Are you open to learning?

People don't want to hire someone who thinks they're perfect. Being able to identify a genuine weakness is a positive thing. Just remember to include how you're improving it and how you ensure it doesn't negatively impact your work.

"What interested you in this job?"

If the true answer is 'the money' or 'I just want any job', it's best to keep that to yourself. Think back to your strengths. How can you align them with this? For example, if it's a retail position, you might say "I wanted a role that would build on my strengths in customer service, numeracy and communication."

Top tips for a great interview



A FEW DAYS BEFORE

- 1. Re-read the job description.** Note down the skills they're looking for and think of some examples you can give for each.
- 2. Plan answers to commonly asked questions.** There are some on the previous page, and you can search Google for more.
- 3. Research the company.** You'll appear passionate if you can talk knowledgeably about the business, which makes a good first impression.
- 4. Be clear about the strengths you want to show.** Use the reflection exercise on page 2 and keep these in the front of your mind.

ON THE DAY

- 1. Dress smartly and comfortably.** A shirt/blouse and smart jacket or jumper will make a good impression. Whatever you wear, be comfortable. If you're not, your mind will be on your clothes rather than the questions.
- 2. Pack what you need.** Print and bring a copy of your CV or the application form, any legal documents you might need to show you have the right to work, and a pen and paper. Bring your portfolio if it's appropriate for the job.
- 3. Aim to arrive 15 minutes early.** This leaves time for the bus to be late, for a loo trip when you arrive, and to get used to the interview surroundings.

IN THE INTERVIEW

- 1. Ask for a glass of water.** Your mouth will dry up from talking. Plus, if you need an extra moment to think about an answer, taking a sip can fill the time.
- 2. Smile.** It makes you look warm, friendly and likeable, and it gives your mood a boost too - even if it's not a real smile!
- 3. Be yourself.** As well as wanting to see how you'd fare as an employee, they want to know what you're like. Let your personality shine.
- 4. Ask questions at the end.** Usually you'll be given time to do this. Try to have something ready to ask, as it makes you look keen and interested. Just be sure not to ask anything that's already answered in the job description. A few ideas for good questions are:
 - What does the role look like day-to-day?
 - What are the most important skills you look for in an employee?
 - What do you like the most about working here?
 - What are the opportunities for professional development?



The Foyer Federation, 2020