



Finding work

A job searching and employment preparation
workbook for autistic people




Until everyone understands

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The National Autistic Society is grateful for the time and insight given by the autistic people who have contributed their perspectives to ensure we provide a true representation of the needs of autistic jobseekers.

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Introduction

Our research shows that only 15% of autistic adults (including Asperger syndrome) are in full-time employment. This compares with around 31% for all disabled people and 57% for non-disabled people of working age in Great Britain.¹ In 2009, research from the National Audit Office highlighted the need for those providing employment services to have a better understanding of autism.

At The National Autistic Society (NAS) we believe the UK has an 'undiscovered workforce' of motivated, talented autistic people who are not in employment because of barriers within recruitment processes. Rather than assessing someone's ability to do a job, traditional recruitment processes assess how effectively a person can communicate their abilities. The recruitment process includes many potential challenges for autistic people, such as unwritten rules, hypothetical questions, group activities and panel interviews.

"I would love a job that took my skills and harnessed them, because of who I am and what I am, rather than in spite of it."

About this workbook

Our employment experts have produced this workbook to provide clear guidance and strategies that will help autistic people to find a job. Every autistic person is an individual, so not all of these resources will be useful for everyone. We have provided a comprehensive set of resources, so that you can use the worksheets and resources that you feel are right for you. You can use these resources to take a structured approach to finding a job.

We have included quotes with the perspectives of autistic people throughout the book, to provide examples and experiences of other autistic job seekers.

"I have learnt how to work independently and to try and solve problems myself and only to ask questions when I am really unsure. I gained in confidence and self-esteem and learned lots of new skills. I also go out socially more now because I have the confidence. I go to various clubs such as the snooker club and I have made new friends."

How to use this workbook

To have the best experience of this workbook, you'll need to view it using Adobe Reader software, which you can download for free.

Versions of Adobe Reader are available for a range of operating systems and devices, including for desktop or laptops, and mobile devices. However we recommend viewing the book on a desktop or laptop computer. You can download it at <https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader>.

¹ Employment rates for all disabled and non-disabled people are taken from Labour Force Survey Quarter 2, 2011.

Autism terminology

There is a lot of debate about how to define and talk about autism. Terms used to describe autism include:

- > autism spectrum disorder
- > autism spectrum condition
- > Asperger syndrome
- > classic autism
- > Kanner autism.

All of these terms refer to aspects of what is known as 'the autism spectrum'. The spectrum is vast and captures a huge range of experiences and ways of being.

Many people prefer to use the term 'autistic person' because they feel that this language is a positive affirmation of autism as a difference in neurology, way of being and sense of personal identity. Some of the quotes in this workbook use this term.

Facts and figures on autism and employment:

- > only 15% of people diagnosed with autism are in full-time employment
- > 79% of autistic people who receive out-of-work benefits want to work
- > 26% of autistic graduates are unemployed, compared to 11% of disabled graduates and 8% of non-disabled graduates.



Understanding autism

Aim

To increase your understanding of autism and the support you may need in the workplace.

Objectives

To understand:

- > what autism is and how to describe it
- > possible areas of need in the workplace
- > your skills and strengths
- > why it would be helpful to tell an employer about autism
- > how to tell an employer about your autism, including your strengths and areas of need
- > your employment rights and what 'reasonable adjustments' mean.

"Being autistic is something I bring to a role. It's a different perspective. It's a different way of working. It's a commitment to working through any challenge."

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What is autism?

"It's a part of who I am. It's a part of my identity. Just like my gender, my race and my sexuality."

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability. It is a spectrum condition and is sometimes referred to as an autism spectrum disorder, or an ASD. The word 'spectrum' is used because while all autistic people share three main areas of difficulty, the condition affects people in very different ways. Some are able to live relatively independent lives, while others will require a lifetime of specialist support.

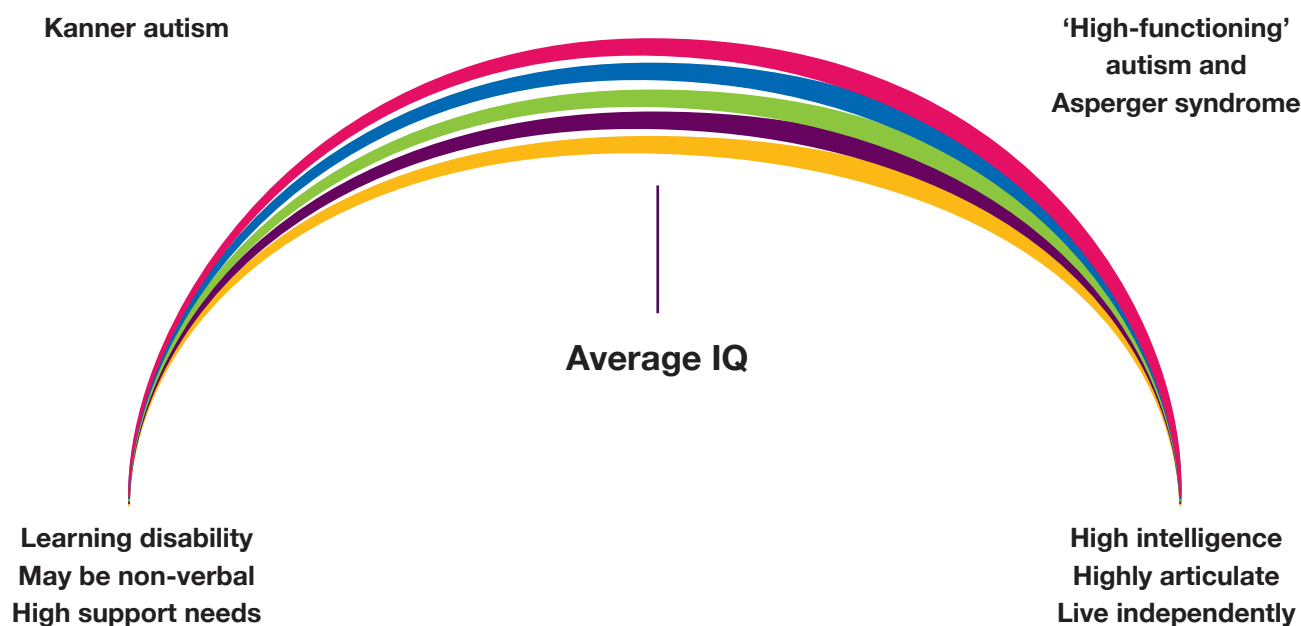
Autism was first formally identified in the early 1940s. Asperger syndrome was formally identified in the UK in the early 1980s following a paper written by Hans Asperger in the 1940s.

Ways of describing autism

Autism is often referred to in different ways, including:

- **ASD:** autism spectrum disorder
- **ASC:** autism spectrum condition
- **classic autism:** individuals will often have high support needs for life and may be non-verbal and have associated learning disabilities
- **Kanner autism:** another name for classic autism, named after Leo Kanner – the first scientist to clearly define autism
- **Asperger syndrome or AS:** a form of autism that is linked to people with average or above average intelligence
- **'high-functioning' autism:** often used interchangeably with Asperger syndrome to describe individuals with average or above average intelligence, but who had a language delay as a child. This term can be unhelpful as many autistic people experience difficulties with functioning day to day, regardless of how intelligent or seemingly 'able' they are.

The autism spectrum



Facts about autism

- There are around 700,000 people in the UK with an autism spectrum disorder.
- The condition appears to be more common in males than females; the reason for this is unknown.
- The exact cause is still being investigated. Research suggests a combination of factors – genetic and environmental – may account for changes in brain development.
- Autism is not caused by a person's upbringing, or social circumstances, and is not the fault of the individual with the condition.
- Autism is a 'hidden disability'.

Common difficulties associated with autism

The characteristics of autism vary from one person to another but are generally divided into three main groups. These are:

- **social communication:** this relates to the ability to interpret others, or express oneself, through the use of both verbal and non-verbal language
- **social interaction:** this relates to recognising or understanding other people's emotions, feelings and thoughts as well as being able to express one's own. These skills are important for interacting with others in a social context
- **flexibility of thought:** this relates to the ability to understand and predict other people's behaviour, make sense of abstract ideas and imagine situations which have not been directly experienced before.

The following section gives examples of some of the difficulties that may be experienced by autistic people in these three areas.

Social communication

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication includes eye contact, tone of voice, body language, gestures and facial expressions. Some studies have shown that around 80% of communication is non-verbal. Many autistic people describe having great difficulty with identifying and interpreting non-verbal communication. This can make it very hard to understand the message someone is trying to communicate, if you use non-verbal hints and do not state things clearly and directly.



"I really don't like it when people communicate with me in hints or non-verbal means. They, sort of, say things without saying them. I find it impossible to relate to. It's very, very stressful when you are constantly trying to guess what's going on in other people's heads. I suppose it's like spending your entire life in the Mastermind chair."

Literal interpretation of language

The language used in daily conversation often contains a number of metaphors, similes and ambiguous phrases, such as 'take a seat' or 'let's touch base later'. Some autistic people can interpret language literally and find it difficult to infer meaning from ambiguous or unclear phrases. This can make it hard to follow conversations, or understand instructions, if phrases of this type are used.



"If someone were to say, 'Can you give me a hand?' I'd be thinking 'How? What do you mean? What am I supposed to do?'"

Difficulty with small talk and banter

In the workplace, small talk is often used to develop relationships with colleagues or as a starting point before going on to discuss more specific topics. Some autistic people have difficulty joining in with small talk. This may be for a number of reasons.

Some people describe small talk as a difficult concept to understand, because they can't see a reason to discuss things that they aren't particularly interested in, such as the weather or the commute into the office. Others say that they would like to make small talk, but can't find the right things to say and worry they will be judged or misinterpreted.

It can be tempting to skip small talk and instead talk about a topic of interest or ask for information straight away. However, people can interpret a lack of small talk as being rude or disinterested. Being interpreted in this way may limit the development of professional or social relationships.



Workplace banter often heavily relies on sarcasm. Sarcasm can be difficult to interpret as it can be hard to identify whether someone is being serious or not. A tendency to interpret language literally, along with difficulty in interpreting facial expressions and body language, can make it particularly difficult for some autistic people to identify when someone is being sarcastic.

Tone of voice

The way that something is said can often add meaning to what you are saying; this is referred to as your tone of voice. Some autistic people can have difficulty with monitoring or changing their tone of voice, which may lead to difficulties in social situations or in professional settings, such as job interviews. For example, someone who speaks with a monotone voice may be perceived as being disinterested or bored, even if this is not how they are actually feeling.

Formal language

Daily conversations can be quite informal, using slang terms or incomplete sentences instead of formal language. Some autistic people do not adapt their use of language in this way. This may cause them to stand out in social situations.

"People used to say, 'Oh you speak posh' and I was trying my best to conform but they kept teasing me because I didn't conform well enough into their gang."

Social interaction

Reciprocal conversation

The rules of conversation are complex and often unspoken. Autistic people can find it difficult to work out what these rules are, and may need to put a lot of effort and focus into following them. Some people describe having to think hard about every moment of their conversation, trying to figure out:

- › how to start a conversation
- › when it is appropriate to join in the conversation
- › when to stop talking
- › whether their comment is appropriate or right
- › whether they understand the conversation fully.

Conversation can become a complicated and stressful process, and some people may find it easier to avoid conversations altogether.

Eye contact

Eye contact is a social convention that holds a lot of meaning to many people. This is because looking towards another person's eyes makes them feel they are being listened to and understood. Some autistic people may not follow the conventional rules of eye contact – they might make too little eye contact or it might be too intense. For some people this can be a sensory issue, as they may find the

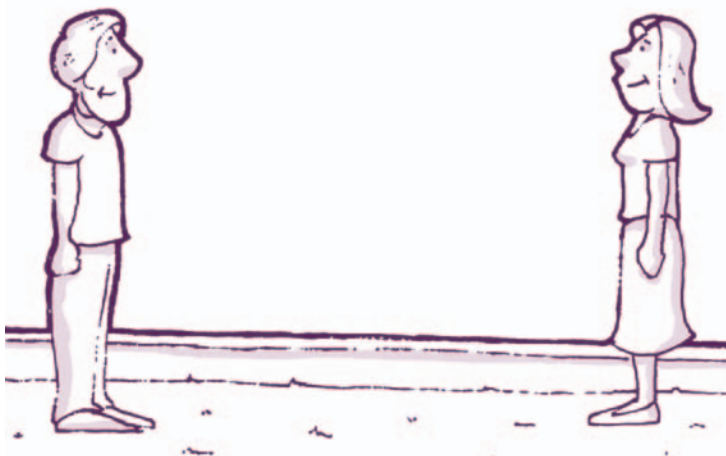
intensity of eye contact makes them feel uncomfortable. For others, it might be too difficult to consciously follow the rules of eye contact while also trying to engage in conversation.



"When it comes to eye contact I'm really not very good at it. People think 'Oh, she's not focused. She's distracted.' Actually, I can be really focused if I don't have to worry about eye contact."

Physical boundaries

The rules of physical boundaries between people in the workplace change depending on factors such as the closeness of your relationship, the size of the room and the context of your interaction. It can be difficult for an autistic person to navigate these complex rules and work out how close or far away to stand from other people.



Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and respond to another person's feelings. The first step in showing empathy is often to work out how someone is feeling from the non-verbal cues that they give. Difficulty with identifying non-verbal cues can make it hard for some autistic people to work out how someone is feeling. Some people describe how they need to see a very clear indication of a person's feelings to pick up on them and act appropriately. They might, for example, need to be told in words that a person is upset, or see a physical sign such as tears. If there

is no clear indication of how someone is feeling, an autistic person may misinterpret their actions or may appear to have a lack of empathy.

Flexibility of thought

Change

Many autistic people describe experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety around change. This can be environmental changes, such as changes to the layout of an office; relationship changes, such as a new colleague or new manager joining a team; or situational changes, such as facing a situation that has not been experienced before. Some people describe having a strong need for routine and structure in all aspects of their life, because they find it so difficult to cope with change.

Change can be particularly difficult to cope with if it is unexpected, unexplained or occurs at the last minute. Being given advance notice can help people to prepare for and cope with change.

Hypothetical thinking

Making predictions about future outcomes or consequences can often require hypothetical thinking; imagining situations that have not been directly experienced. Some autistic people can find it very difficult to think hypothetically, particularly about social situations.

Hypothetical thinking can be important in the workplace. For example, predicting the consequences of different tasks not being completed by a deadline can help you to prioritise your work. Many interview questions also require candidates to think hypothetically. For example, a common interview question is 'What problems do you think you might face in this role?'



Single focus

There are often strong demands on people to do more than one thing at a time. For example, during a meeting at work you may be required to follow the discussion, make eye contact with others, take notes and think of questions or contributions to make.

Many autistic people describe having 'single focus' attention, which can make it very hard to focus on multiple things at once. This affects people in different ways. For example, some people find that they are very easily distracted from their work by noises from the surrounding environment and find it difficult to regain their focus after being interrupted. Some people find it very hard to multi-task – switching from one task to another when the first is not complete

Single focus can also lead to difficulty with following instructions which involve a number of steps. For example, if given three instructions in one go, an autistic person may only focus on the first task and may not complete the others.

Further characteristics

In addition to the three groups described above, there are further characteristics which are often associated with autism. These are described below.



Anxiety and other mental health problems

Research shows that 65% of autistic people experience some form of mental health problem, such as anxiety, at some point in their lifetime. It is important to remember that mental health problems are not part of autism, and people should receive appropriate support and treatment if they experience these problems.

There are some very effective treatments for mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. It is very important that the person providing treatment is knowledgeable about the needs of autistic people.

Sensory sensitivity

We have seven senses:

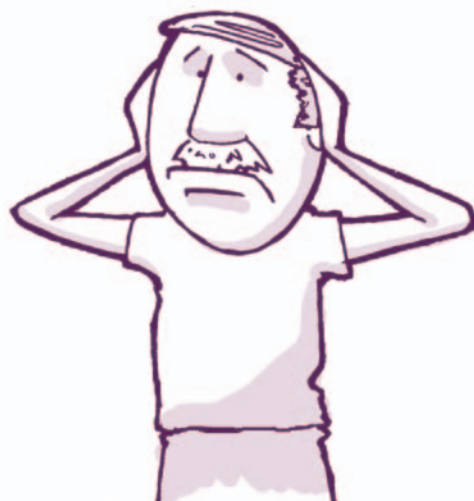
- > sight
- > sound
- > touch
- > taste
- > smell
- > balance ('vestibular')
- > body awareness ('proprioception').

Autistic people can be over- or under-sensitive in any or all of the seven senses. You may hear this referred to as being 'hypersensitive' or 'hyposensitive'.

Sensory sensitivity can have a significant impact on a person's actions and ability to concentrate. For example:

- > if a person is over-sensitive to sound, they may find it very difficult to filter out noises from the surrounding environment. This can make it hard to focus on what somebody is saying if they are in a room with a lot of background noise
- > if a person is under-sensitive to light, they may require very bright lighting to be able to read or concentrate on their work. Working in an office with low levels of light may lead to ongoing problems with concentration, which may be misinterpreted as being lazy or unmotivated.

"I am sensitive to both sound and light. Loud sounds and unexpected sounds make me cringe. My ears hurt and I can't concentrate. I've never liked bright lights. I wear my sunglasses all the time. At home, I have settings on my computer to make the screen dimmer and green coloured. Otherwise it's a strain and I find it hard to concentrate for a long time."



Special interests

Some autistic people have a special interest. Their special interest could be a general topic such as music and films, or something more specific such as the London Underground or Apple products.

People often have an excellent knowledge of their specialist topic which can be useful when looking for appropriate job roles. However, not all special interests are appropriate for discussion in the workplace. It is important to think about this before starting work.

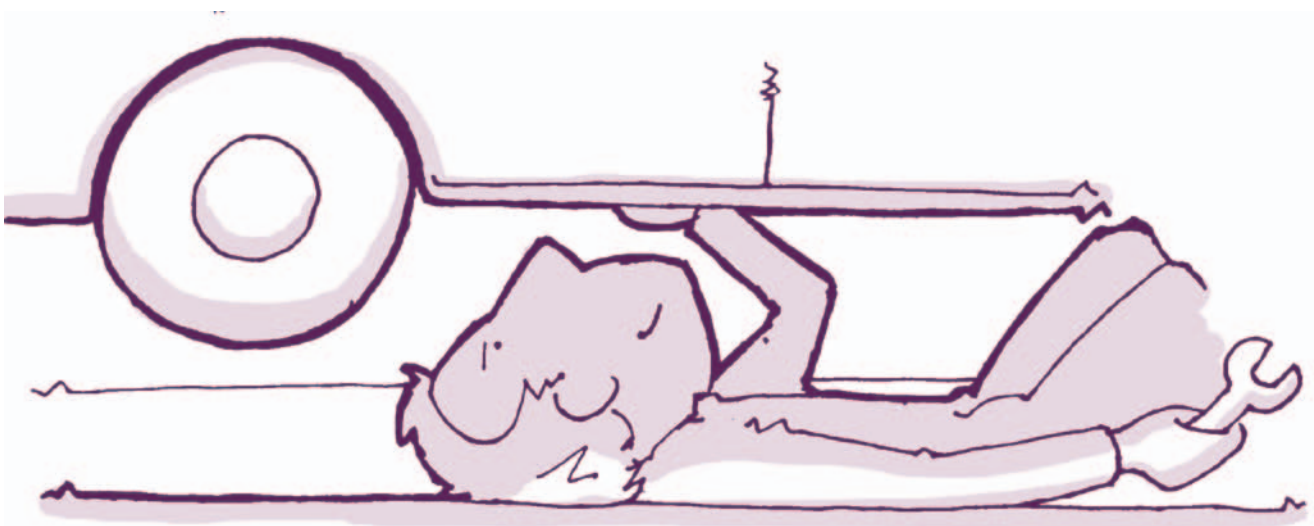
Executive function

'Executive function' refers to the mental processes involved in skills such as planning, organising, sustained attention and multi-tasking. Some autistic people have difficulty with these regulatory processes and may need support and guidance to develop skills in these areas.

Perfectionism

Some autistic people can be perfectionists, spending a lot of time working on one particular task to make sure it is completed to a high standard. This can be an excellent skill when there is enough time to work on a task, but it can make it difficult to meet deadlines. An important skill to develop in the workplace is the ability to identify when something is 'good enough' and to accept that it is not realistic to expect everything to be perfect.

"I have these very focused interests and they are not as varied as other people's. I compare it to light bulbs versus lasers. A light bulb will shine its light everywhere and shine all over everything, whereas a laser only concentrates its light on a very small point, but it will be a very intense point. Sometimes, I wish I could just suddenly open myself to all these other things. But it's very difficult. I just make the most of focusing my energy on what I know and what I like."



Strengths associated with autism

There are a lot of strengths associated with autism which can be very attractive to an employer. Not everyone will have all of the strengths listed in this section, but you may find that some of them relate to you, or you may have other strengths which are not listed.

Problem-solving skills and attention to detail

Autistic people often have strong attention to detail and tend to prefer logical and structured approaches to their work. This combination of skills can mean that they are very good at identifying areas for improvement. They may enjoy problem-solving and can bring new and innovative ideas to their job.



High levels of concentration

Autistic people often find focusing on detailed work rewarding. They may work persistently and without being distracted, ensuring that their work is consistent and accurate.

Reliability and loyalty

Autistic people can be very conscientious and committed to their work, and often display good punctuality, honesty and integrity. Employers tell us that their autistic employees tend to be absent from work less often than other employees.

If someone has a strong preference for routine, once settled into their job they will often be an extremely loyal employee.

Technical ability and specialist interests

Autistic people may develop highly specialist interests and skills which can be very valuable in the workplace; they may become very knowledgeable and skilful in their area of work.



Resourcefulness

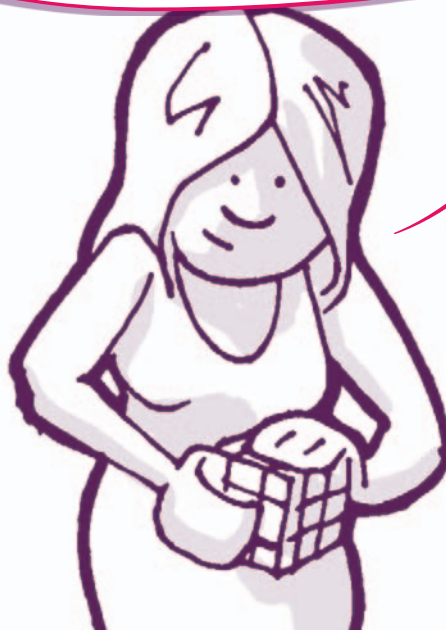
Autistic people may have often had to find ways to overcome challenges in their lives, and so can be very hard-working and resourceful.

Personal perspectives on strengths

"Just because we lack certain skills doesn't mean we lack others. Some of our skills are enhanced. For example, we may lack social skills but when it comes to working and focusing we can do extremely well. You can count on that."



"There are two reasons why I think I'm so reliable. One is that people with autism tend to have strong focus. The other is that my autism has taught me to be dedicated. We have to get through the challenges we face in life one way or another. I have learned to work hard and not give up. Being autistic is something I bring to a role. It's a different perspective. It's a different way of working. It's a commitment to working through any challenge."





"I do things that people don't expect people with autism to do. I've been complimented on my presentation skills. I did really well when I did some telesales work. My boss was really impressed with me. I would just sit down and get on with making 200 phone calls a day. Most of the other workers wouldn't meet those targets. They'd sit down and mess around. Whereas I met the targets every day."

"The biggest strength I can bring to the workplace is my attention to detail. I'm always trying to check and double check for mistakes. I want to make sure a job or task gets completed properly. To make sure my manager and customers are happy. I am also always punctual. I like to think of myself as being reliable and that people could trust me to do a good job for them."



"People say I'm very quick at learning things. For example, I recently went on an advanced Microsoft Word course and I finished all the sheets really quickly. I ended up getting 100% on all the tests."

Myths vs reality

"Not all autistic people are like 'Rain Man' or the character from 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time'. They may not all hate being touched or might not all hate talking to strangers. There are lots of stereotypical images of people with autism but we are actually a lot more varied than the media would have you think."

Myth	Reality
Autism (including Asperger syndrome) is a rare condition.	Autism is no longer seen as a rare condition and is thought to affect around 700,000 people in the UK today.
Autism is a new phenomenon.	The first detailed description of a child we now know had autism was written in 1799 by Jean Itard in his account of the 'Wild Boy of Aveyron'.
Autism is the result of emotional deprivation or emotional stress.	Autism is a complex developmental disability. It is not caused by a person's upbringing or social circumstances. Research suggests a combination of factors – genetic and environmental – may account for changes in brain development.
Autism is due to parental rejection or cold, unemotional parents.	Autism has nothing whatsoever to do with the way parents bring up their children.
An autistic person cannot be educated.	Autistic people can have strong academic abilities and the number of autistic students in higher education is increasing each year. With the right support, autistic people of all abilities can be helped to reach their full potential.
Autistic people wish to avoid social contact.	Autistic people are often keen to make friends but, due to some of the characteristics associated with their disability, can find this difficult.
Autistic people look different from other people.	Autism is an invisible disability – you can't tell if a person is autistic by looking at them.
Autism is a childhood condition.	Autism is a lifelong developmental disability. Autistic children grow up to be autistic adults.

Useful info: a different way of thinking

Many people describe autism as a different way of thinking.

Here is an analogy describing the differences between PCs (people who aren't autistic) and iMacs (autistic people).

On the surface, these machines look very similar and both are capable of carrying out similar tasks. However, each uses a very different operating system, which means they go about completing the same tasks in different ways.

Of the two machines, the PC is most common and so there is a far greater range of software available for it. While it is possible to run some PC software on the iMac, the iMac will be much slower at running the software.

In the same way, the majority of people in the world are not autistic and so their way of thinking and doing things dominates daily life.

Autistic people constantly have to interact with people who think differently. This is why, like the iMac trying to run PC software, autistic people can often find social interaction tiring, stressful and confusing.

However, in the same way that the iMac actually outperforms the PC in certain areas, autistic people are often able to outperform other people in terms of:

- > accuracy and attention to detail
- > concentration on routines and procedures
- > memory for facts and figures
- > a logical approach to tasks
- > reliability.



iMac



PC

Activity: all about me

Read each of the text boxes below and choose the ones which apply to you.

Average or above average intelligence
(eg Asperger syndrome)

Perfectionist

Sensory difficulties

Unwritten rules
may not be obvious

Punctual

Anxiety and
depression

Honest

Find change
difficult

Love of routine

Non-verbal communication
may be missed

Autism and Asperger syndrome

Eye contact may be
different

Body language may be
hard to understand

Good memory for
facts and figures

Reliable

Attention to detail

Difficulty understanding
social rules

Special
interests

A hidden disability

Can find it hard to maintain and
form relationships

Activity: common difficulties

Write examples of difficulties you've had under each of the titles below.

Communication

Flexibility of thought

Social interaction



Example answers: common difficulties

Communication

- Finding it hard to understand facial expressions, gestures and body language.
- Not being able to express my thoughts and feelings to others.
- Not knowing how to make small talk and socialise.

Flexibility of thought

- Feeling anxious about change and preferring routine.
- Finding it hard to predict what someone will do next.
- Difficulty with multi-tasking.

Social interaction

- Finding it hard to start or join in a conversation.
- Not making eye contact in an appropriate way.
- Finding it hard to understand people's thoughts, feelings and intentions.



Activity: online research

There's lots of helpful information about autism and Asperger syndrome available on the internet. The table below lists four autism websites. Visit each website and write a short review. At the end of the table, add a review of any other interesting autism websites you come across or that you already know of. There is also 'mis-information' on the internet about autism. You should check that information is confirmed by research from a reputable source.

Websites	Your review
www.autism.org.uk	
www.autistica.org.uk	
www.scottishautism.org	
www.researchautism.net	

Activity: identifying sensory needs

Things in the environment I don't like:

(Click on the words below which describe things you don't like.)

Bright lights

Strong tastes

Lots of background noise

Heat

Strong smells

Cold

Loud noises

Clothing such as long
shirt sleeves

Touch, such as people
brushing past me or
shaking hands

Darkness

Write down some of your own:

Useful info: tips for coping with sensory issues in the workplace

- > A screen across your desk could help block out visual distractions.
- > Wear ear plugs or play soft music through headphones to block out background noise.
- > Some people find that noise-cancelling headphones are effective for blocking out background noise.
- > Place photos or pictures on your desk to help you find it easily.
- > Communicate by email if you find this easier than by telephone or in person.
- > If your manager gives you instructions:
 - > ask your manager to move with you to a quiet area so you can concentrate
 - > repeat back what you have heard and check it is correct
 - > if the instructions are long, write them down step-by-step – you may ask your manager to check that you have everything written down.



"I asked if I could sit at a desk on the edge or in the corner. They did this for me and also allowed me to listen to my music whilst I was working. These small changes made a real difference to me. Music really helps me concentrate. It helps me to work and I don't hear background noise. I did really well in the job after that. I was the fastest worker on the team."





Activity: my strengths

There are many different strengths and skills associated with autistic people. Write down three examples of different strengths commonly found in autistic people. Example answers can be found on page 28.

Now think about your own strengths and skills. Write down three skills you have that you think will be useful in the workplace.

There are many successful people, from the present and from the past, who have been described as having characteristics of autism. Can you think of two successful people who have been described in this way?



Example answers: my strengths

There are many different strengths and skills associated with autistic people. Write down three examples of different strengths commonly found in autistic people.

1. good memory
2. excellent focus
3. creativity

Now think about your own strengths and skills. Write down three skills you have that you think will be useful in the workplace.

1. high intelligence
2. organised
3. methodical approach to work

There are many successful people, from the present and from the past, who have been described as having characteristics of autism. Can you think of two successful people who have been described in this way?

1. Albert Einstein – it is speculated that Einstein may have been on the autism spectrum due to his intense focus and his difficulty in social interaction.
2. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – it is speculated that Mozart was on the autism spectrum due to his hypersensitive hearing and difficulty with communication.

Useful info: explaining your autism to others

There are a number of situations in which it will be useful to be able to explain what autism is and how it affects you, such as at a job interview or when starting a new work placement.

If employers have an understanding of your disability it is more likely that they will make specific adjustments to support you in demonstrating your full potential. This could include taking the time to explain things clearly or understanding that predictability is important to you. They may also be less likely to jump to the wrong conclusion if you accidentally overlook a 'social rule'.

What should I say?

To answer this, think about what the other person needs to know. They would probably need to know:

- > your strengths
- > the difficulties you might have
- > what things make it easier for you to cope with difficult situations

It is important to be positive and the information that you give should not only be about difficulties. Try to mention your strengths. Below are some examples of workplace skills that you may feel are personal strengths and you can think about others that you may have, too:

- > good timekeeping
- > attention to detail
- > honesty
- > dependability.

"When I was doing one of my first jobs my boss thought I was a bit rude and stand-offish and I didn't really do what she said. But when I told her I had Asperger's and explained some of the support I needed it really helped. She moved me to an office which was quieter and where I could concentrate properly. I did really well after that."

Useful info: should I tell an employer about my autism?

Legally you do not have to disclose to an employer that you have autism, so whether you tell them or not is up to you. At The National Autistic Society we recommend that you tell your employer for three main reasons.

1. Equality legislation gives employers the duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to the recruitment process and in the workplace. This means your employer should think about your needs and put in place strategies to support you in achieving your full potential.
2. If reasonable adjustments are put in place, you are likely to be more successful at work and will probably find work less stressful.
3. If colleagues know about your autism they are likely to be more understanding, which will help you to build better relationships.

If you decide to tell an employer, you can do so at any stage of the recruitment process, or at any time once you are employed. We recommend that you disclose before an interview takes place, so that the interviewers can make any necessary adjustments to the process, such as avoiding hypothetical questions.

"When I did disclose, it worked really well. I applied for summer work in an office and told them I had Asperger's before my interview. They asked me if I needed any adjustments and they were really helpful in the interview. I got the job and they re-employed me the next summer because I was so quick and accurate."





Activity: reasons for and against telling an employer

Fill in the table below with the reasons why you think it might and might not be helpful to tell your employer about your autism.

Reasons why it might be helpful to tell your employer	Reasons why it might not be helpful to tell your employer

Useful info: Lucy's story about telling an employer

Lucy, 23, has Asperger syndrome. She has recently become employed as a database administrator for a software company. Lucy has a science degree and some previous experience of working in offices during her summer holidays.

Lucy had been applying for full-time jobs for quite some time. She would often be invited to interviews, but she would not be offered the job. Lucy's employment adviser encouraged her to ask for feedback for the jobs she had been unsuccessful with. One interviewer explained that Lucy had sometimes not answered questions properly and another explained that Lucy seemed disinterested and distant.

When Lucy was offered an interview for the database administrator role, she decided to disclose her disability. She felt that, if she explained the characteristics of her Asperger syndrome, the interviewer may be more understanding and may not interpret her behaviours in a negative way. Lucy wrote a disclosure statement with her employment adviser and sent it to the interviewer before her interview.

Lucy's interview went very well. She said it was her favourite interview she had done so far. The interviewers were friendly and asked very clear questions. They told Lucy when she had provided enough information and they also reworded some questions which Lucy had not understood at first.

Lucy was offered the job and is now working full-time as a database administrator. Her employers have ensured that she has a desk in the quietest part of the office and she has already received a lot of praise for her efficient and accurate work.



Lucy's disclosure statement

I have Asperger syndrome, a form of autism, which affects the way that I communicate and interact with others. The main effect this has on me is that I have difficulty with understanding some non-verbal body language and making eye contact.

In the interview, I may not look the interviewer in the eye as much as I should, but this does not mean that I am not focusing on what they are saying. I can also find it hard to judge how much information to give. It would be helpful if the interviewer could ask clear questions and let me know when I have said enough.

My Asperger syndrome also brings many strengths, my attention to detail makes me very efficient and accurate in my work. I am also very passionate and hard-working.

I have attached some factsheets about autism for your information.

Yours sincerely,



Lucy



Activity: how I explain my autism to others

It is important to be prepared to explain your autism to others and how it affects you. It will be helpful to have both a written and verbal explanation, which you can use in different situations. For example at an interview or in an application form. Example answers can be found on pages 35-7.

Complete the following statements, describing your needs, strengths and adjustments:

I have a disability which affects the way that I communicate and interact with others. This means that I have strengths in certain areas. These are

This also means that I have difficulty with

There are some simple adjustments which would be helpful in an interview. These are

In the workplace there are some simple adjustments that would be helpful. These are



Example answers: how I explain my autism to others

It is important to be prepared to explain your autism to others and how it affects you. It will be helpful to have both a written and verbal explanation, which you can use in different situations. For example at an interview or in an application form.



Complete the following statements, describing your needs, strengths and adjustments:

I have a disability which affects the way that I communicate and interact with others.

This means that I have strengths in these areas:

- Being very focused on an activity that I enjoy. This can lead to significant productivity if the activity is related to my work.
- Detailed factual knowledge and an excellent memory.
- Problem-solving skills: I prefer logical and structured approaches to my work and often think in a very visual way. I enjoy problem-solving and can bring new ideas and take fresh approaches to my job.
- High levels of concentration: I find focusing on detailed work rewarding and can work persistently and without being distracted, paying great attention to detail and being able to identify errors.
- Reliability and loyalty: I am capable of being very conscientious and committed to my work, often with good levels of punctuality, honesty and integrity.
- Technical ability: I have developed highly specialist interests and skills in...
- Resourceful: I have had to find ways to overcome challenges and so can be resourceful.
- Above average intelligence.
- Good verbal skills.



This means I also have difficulty with...

- Empathy, or knowing what other people are thinking and feeling.
- Understanding people's actions. I may find them unpredictable and confusing.
- Non-verbal communication, so my eye contact and body language might be different to other candidates and may not reflect how I feel about the job (I might not be able to demonstrate enthusiasm). I also might not pick up on non-verbal gestures/facial expressions/hints.
- Unwritten rules which guide behaviour, such as knowing which chair to sit on in a group, training, or interview situation, or not knowing when to end a conversation with a colleague.



- Ambiguous or hypothetical questions on application forms or in interviews, as I often interpret language in a literal way.
- Judging how much information to give, especially if questions are open.
- Finding the appropriate level of formality.
- Joining in banter or making small talk.
- Communication – I may sometimes use unusual language or speak with a monotone voice.
- Over-focusing on a single topic or interest and talking about it at length.
- Starting or sustaining reciprocal conversation.
- Understanding ‘physical boundaries’.
- Dealing with change or taking on new ideas.
- New or unfamiliar situations and people.
- Predicting what will happen next in a new situation.
- Sensory sensitivities (smells, sounds, light, touch, etc) – hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity.
- Planning and organisation.
- Multi-tasking because of single focus attention. For example, not being able to stop one activity to start another.
- Perfectionism – I may feel increased stress when something does not go to plan.



There are some simple adjustments which would be helpful in an interview.

These are...

- Providing me with clear information about what will be expected at the interview and what I should bring along with me.
- Ask specific questions if possible. For example, if you say ‘Describe your work history for the last five years’, rather than ‘Tell me about yourself’, it will help me to be clear on what information you want.
- Be aware that my eye contact or body language may not be the same as other candidates and may not be a reflection of how I feel about the job.
- Avoid asking me hypothetical questions. Instead, ask me for examples from the previous work I have done. I will demonstrate my skills better this way.
- Asking me supplementary questions and giving me prompts. This will help to make sure you get the information you need.
- If I am talking too much, let me know – I may find it hard to judge how much information you need.
- Be aware that I may interpret language quite literally. If you ask specific and direct questions I will be less likely to misinterpret what I am asked.



**In the workplace there are some simple adjustments that would be helpful.
These are...**

- Provide me with a thorough induction, including an introduction to my colleagues and a timetable for the first week.
- Assign a mentor or buddy in advance where possible. This means I will know who to speak to should I have any problems.
- Give clear, concise and specific instructions.
- Structure the working environment: I find timetables and guidance on how long a task should take very helpful.
- Be aware that I have sensory hypersensitivity. Allow me to make suggestions for changes to my work space which will help me to focus on my work.
- Make sure that staff in the team understand autism and how it can impact on someone at work.



Useful info: equality legislation and reasonable adjustments

Equality legislation aims to protect disabled people and prevent disability discrimination. It provides legal rights in the following areas:

- > employment
- > education
- > access to goods, services and facilities including larger private clubs and land-based transport services
- > buying and renting land or property.



According to legislation, a person has a disability if:

- > they have a physical or mental impairment
- > the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities.

Autism is classified as a disability under equality legislation.

Individual rights

According to equality legislation, it is unlawful for employers to discriminate against disabled people. This includes discrimination in:

- > application forms and interviews
- > aptitude or proficiency tests
- > job offers, including terms of employment and pay
- > promotion, transfer and training opportunities
- > work-related benefits such as access to recreation or refreshment facilities
- > dismissal or redundancy
- > discipline and grievances.



Reasonable adjustments

Employers must make reasonable changes to applications, interviews and work so that disabled people are not disadvantaged compared to non-disabled people. These are known as 'reasonable adjustments'.

The need to make reasonable adjustments can apply to working arrangements such as:

- > adjusting a person's working hours
- > providing an adapted piece of equipment to help the person do the job
- > providing written instructions for tasks
- > arranging for the person to receive regular support in the workplace from a specialist mentor or job coach (workplace support).



Useful info: how workplace support can help

For many autistic people, there are aspects to employment which can be challenging and stressful. Workplace support from a mentor who has a good understanding of autism can be of great benefit in overcoming some of the difficulties associated with the workplace. Autistic people can be very bright and articulate and have many skills to offer employers, so why may they need support?

Autism affects social and communication skills and it can also make it difficult to cope with change and see situations from different perspectives. Without support, all of these areas could make employment difficult and stressful for an autistic person.

With support, an autistic person will be in a much better position to reach their full potential in their role and should find it much more enjoyable and less stressful. Here are some examples of the types of support and advice which can be provided during workplace support sessions.

Social and communication skills

- Discuss appropriate topics of conversation.
- Discuss appropriate body language.
- Practise conversation skills, one-to-one and as part of a group.
- Practise listening skills.
- Develop skills in showing empathy and understanding towards others.
- Talk through the 'unwritten' social rules of the workplace, such as offering to make cups of tea for colleagues.



Coping with change

- Ensure expectations are clear and realistic.
- Prepare for any changes which may occur and talk through the reasons why.
- Develop effective strategies for managing anxiety and minimising the impact of change.

Seeing situations from different perspectives

- Discuss different options for dealing with a particular work situation.
- Talk through the possible outcomes of each of those options.
- Make an informed choice about the best way forward, having considered all of the options and possible consequences.

Useful info: how a workplace assessment can help

A workplace assessment is a way of identifying what adjustments and working strategies would be useful for you in your specific role.

An employment consultant visits your workplace and meets with you, your manager and any other relevant staff members to discuss your role, your strengths, current working practice and any difficulties.

After the visit the consultant writes a comprehensive assessment report outlining how your employer can improve their working practice. This includes practical tips, advice and strategies for you and your employer. The report also includes recommendations for reasonable adjustments that will enable you to succeed in your role.

How awareness training for your manager and colleagues can help

Your managers and colleagues will:

- > be more empathetic towards you
- > understand you better
- > be less likely to get upset or offended if you break an 'unwritten rule'
- > be less likely to misinterpret your non-verbal communication
- > be more understanding of difference
- > be more accepting of adjustments and adaptations.

"Awareness training has helped those around me to better understand why I behave or react in the way that I do in certain situations, and it has helped my managers to play more to my strengths."





Activity: reasonable adjustments that would help me

The recruitment process

There are many adjustments that can be made to the recruitment process. From the examples that have been given, or others that you may be able to think of, choose three reasonable adjustments which you think would be helpful to you during the recruitment process and give a brief explanation why. Page 122 provides further information on adjustments to the interview process.

In the workplace

There are many adjustments that can be made when you are in employment. From the information provided on page 38, or other examples that you may be able to think of, choose three reasonable adjustments which you think would be helpful to you when you are in employment and give a brief explanation why.



Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Identified your own specific areas of difficulty relating to autism	
Identified three strengths	
Identified any sensory issues	
Filled out a disclosure template	
Identified three examples of reasonable adjustments that would be useful during the recruitment process	
Identified three examples of reasonable adjustments that would be useful in employment	

Choosing a suitable role

Aim

To enable you to identify suitable roles.

Objectives

You will identify:

- > your strengths and what roles they would be useful in
- > two roles you would like to apply for
- > your transferable skills
- > what qualifications and experience are needed for a role
- > achievable short-term steps to achieve a long-term career goal.

Content

1. Difficulties with choosing a suitable role
2. Activity: identifying positives and challenges
3. Activity: focusing on the positives
4. Activity: previous experience and personal qualities
5. Useful info: transferable skills
6. Activity: my transferable skills
7. Activity: things to consider when choosing a job
8. Useful info: investigating whether a role is suitable
9. Activity: reading job profiles
10. Activity: stepping stones
11. Activity: career journeys
12. Useful info: things to remember when applying for jobs
13. Useful info: learning about roles
14. Outcomes checklist

"We need to think of our strengths as exactly the same things as what make us different. The desire to focus on a task, complete it accurately and not be distracted is the same as not joining in with office gossip and wasting time, which might seem antisocial. But you have to look at it the other way round. It's simply a matter of looking differently at what is there."



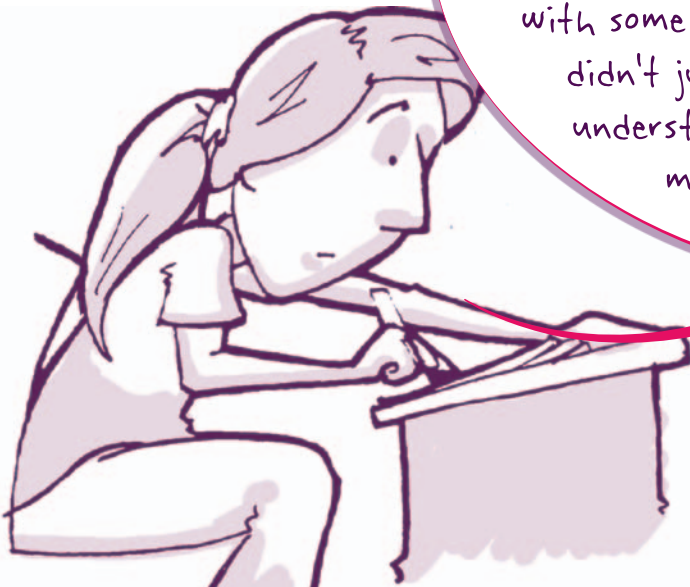
Difficulties with choosing a suitable role

These quotes illustrate some of the challenges that autistic people face when choosing a suitable role.

"I'm not very good at 'thinking outside the box' when I search for jobs. My job centre wanted me to come up with three job titles. I didn't know at all. My employment adviser helped me to look at websites which gave advice on careers linked to my degree. Then we looked at examples of job descriptions. I found this really helpful. I just didn't know anything about what types of jobs were out there and I didn't know how to find out."



"I found my growing up experience so very overwhelming. I didn't get to know myself properly. I didn't understand the expectations of the world of work and I didn't know myself. I just knew what it meant to be very stressed. I didn't know my own strengths and weaknesses. I could have done with some support much earlier on, by people who didn't just write me off. Who could help me understand what my strengths were, how I might fit into a world of work."



"I needed help because I only wanted to find jobs near to me and I only wanted to do one specific job. That meant I didn't find any jobs to apply for. I needed to be told that it's better to have experience of any job than no experience at all."



"I used to just look at one website. I wasn't finding any jobs and was feeling really hopeless. I now go on many different job searching websites. I didn't know about most of these sites until I was given a list by my employment adviser."



I have also learned to search for organisations in the area of work I am interested in. Sometimes they put jobs up on their websites and don't advertise them anywhere else. I didn't know you could do this before."



Activity: identifying positives and challenges

Positives

Things I am good at include:

(Circle the words that apply to you and add your own words at the bottom)

Following a routine or
procedure

Remembering things
such as dates

Learning facts

Music

Maths

Being honest

Attention to detail

Concentrating on one
activity

Proofreading

Using the internet

Being on time

Art

Fixing things

Other things I am good at are:

Activity: identifying positives and challenges

Challenges

Things I have trouble with are:

(Circle the words that apply to you and add your own words at the bottom)

Facial expressions

Common phrases such as
'it's raining cats and dogs'

Tone of voice

Taking turns in
conversations

Jokes

Talking to new people

Sarcasm

Personal space

Body language

Telling people how I feel

Loud noises

Bright lights or colours

Listening to other people

Other things I find challenging are:

Activity: focusing on the positives

"To work out my strengths, I thought about what I felt comfortable with. What I had experience with. What feels natural to me. What I am good at. That helped me to start choosing jobs to apply for."

It is important to recognise your own strengths and to have a clear idea of how they can be used in a job. Write down your strengths, then think about which jobs they would be suitable for and why. An example is given in the first row.

Positive characteristic	Suitable jobs	How this characteristic helps
Reliable	All jobs	Builds trust, employer can rely on you

Activity: previous experience and personal qualities

1. In previous roles (work experience, voluntary work and paid employment), think about what you liked or disliked about working in that type of environment.

Complete the table below. Firstly, describe the type of environment you worked in and then put a tick in either the 'liked' or 'disliked' column.



	Description of environment	Liked	Disliked
Type of workplace <i>eg office, factory or shop</i>			
Location of workplace <i>eg nearest train station</i>			
Amount of travel involved <i>eg time taken to get to work</i>			
Number of colleagues <i>eg working on your own, in a small team or in a large busy office</i>			
Contact with the public <i>eg none or dealt with customers, in person/over the phone/ by email</i>			
Noise levels <i>eg quiet or noisy workplace</i>			
Facilities <i>eg café or canteen, toilets</i>			
Your location in the workplace <i>eg position of desk or work station</i>			

Using this table, and your other experience, write down what type of environment you would like to work in

2. From your previous experience (work experience, voluntary work and paid employment), what tasks were you best at and which did you find most difficult?

Tasks I was best at:

Tasks I found more difficult:

3. Which types of jobs would you like to apply for?

Considering the types of environment you like and the tasks you are good at, think of the types of jobs you would like to apply for.

Job 1.

Job 2.

4. Write down the types of tasks you think would be involved in each of these jobs.

Job 1

1.

2.

3.

Job 2

1.


2.

3.

5. Do you have any experience of doing these tasks or similar ones?

If you have, write down details of this experience below.

Tasks	Dates	Role and employer



Tasks	Dates	Role and employer

6. As well as qualifications and/or experience, certain jobs require specific personal qualities. For example, it would be important that anyone applying to be a teacher was patient and confident speaking in front of a group. Think about the two jobs you are interested in. What personal qualities do you feel it would be important to have for each role?

Write your answer here.

Job 1.

Job 2.

7. Can you think of a time when you were able to demonstrate the personal qualities you've identified for the roles you're interested in, either in your previous work experience or in a situation outside of work?

Describe the situation here.

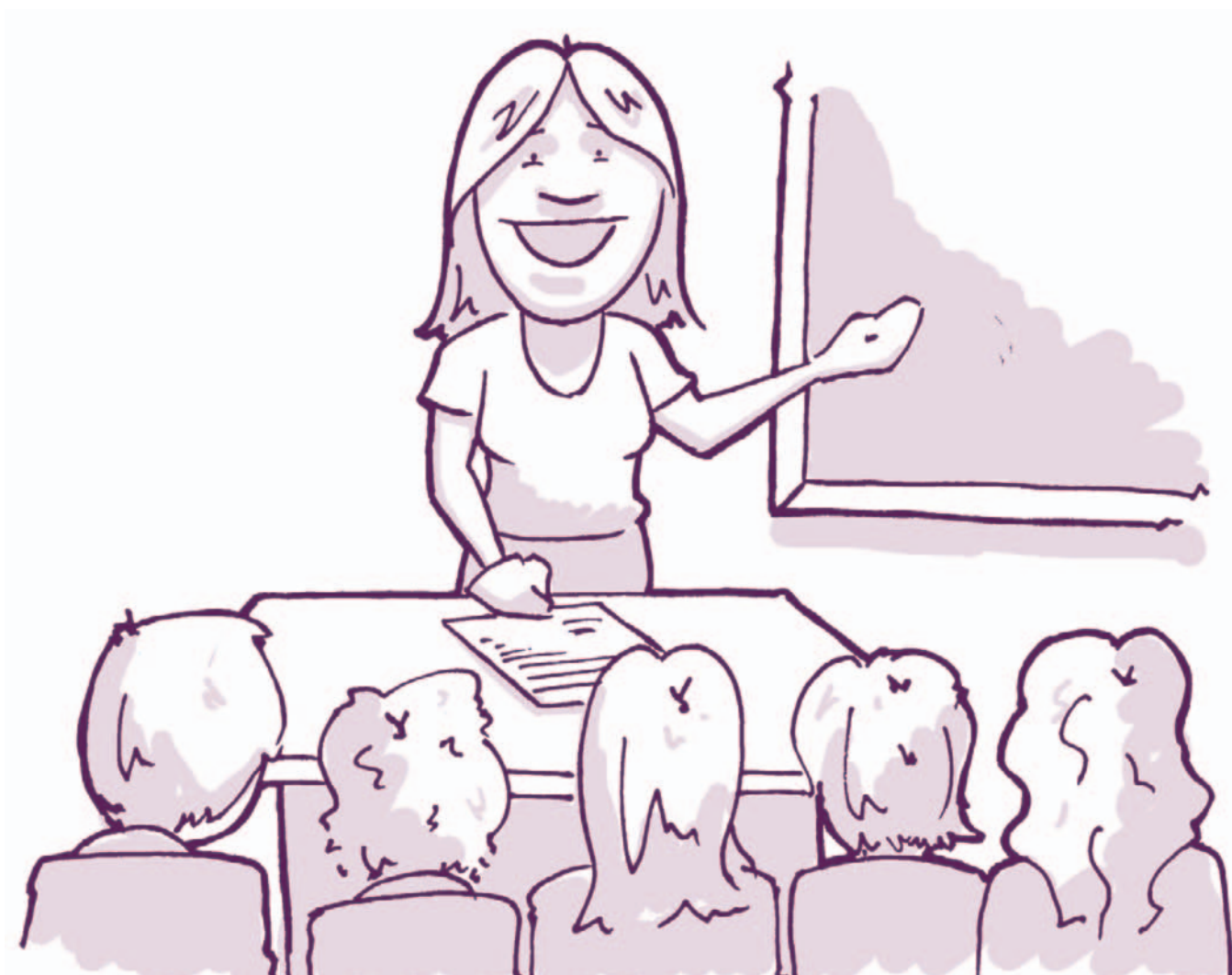
Summary

This activity has looked at the following:

- › the type of environment you would like to work in
- › your skills and strengths
- › tasks you do and don't enjoy
- › the type of jobs you are interested in
- › your understanding of the types of tasks involved in those jobs
- › your previous experience of those types of tasks
- › personal qualities required for those types of jobs.

The key points to consider are:

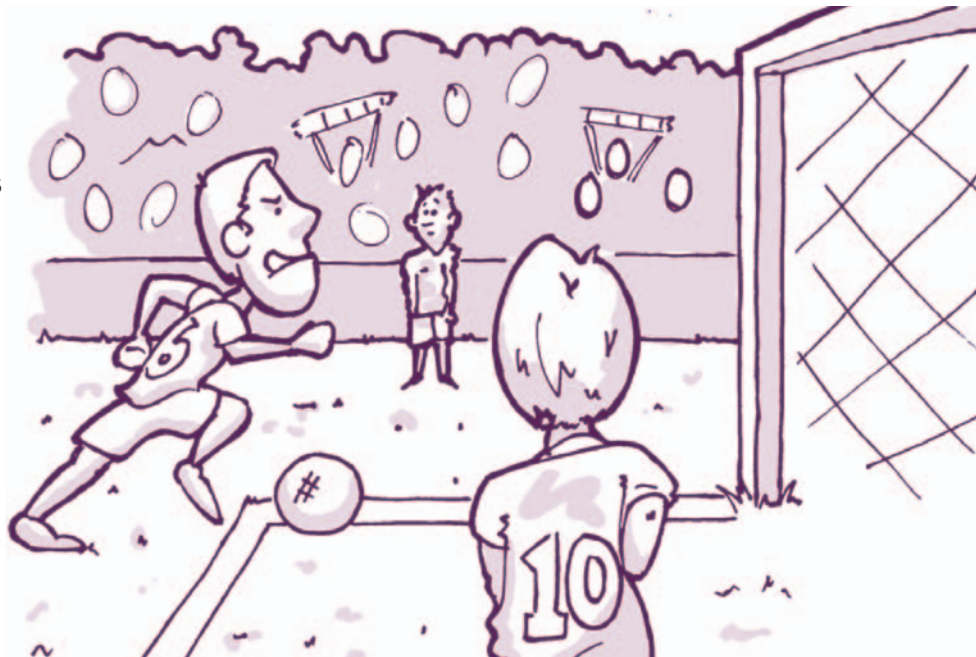
- › Do I have the practical skills and personal qualities to do this type of work?
- › Will I feel comfortable in this type of working environment?



Useful info: transferable skills

Transferable skills are those you can use in many different types of jobs. You might have gained these skills in different situations such as:

- › your home life
- › college or school projects
- › previous jobs
- › voluntary work
- › sport or group activities
- › interests and hobbies
- › job shadowing or work experience.

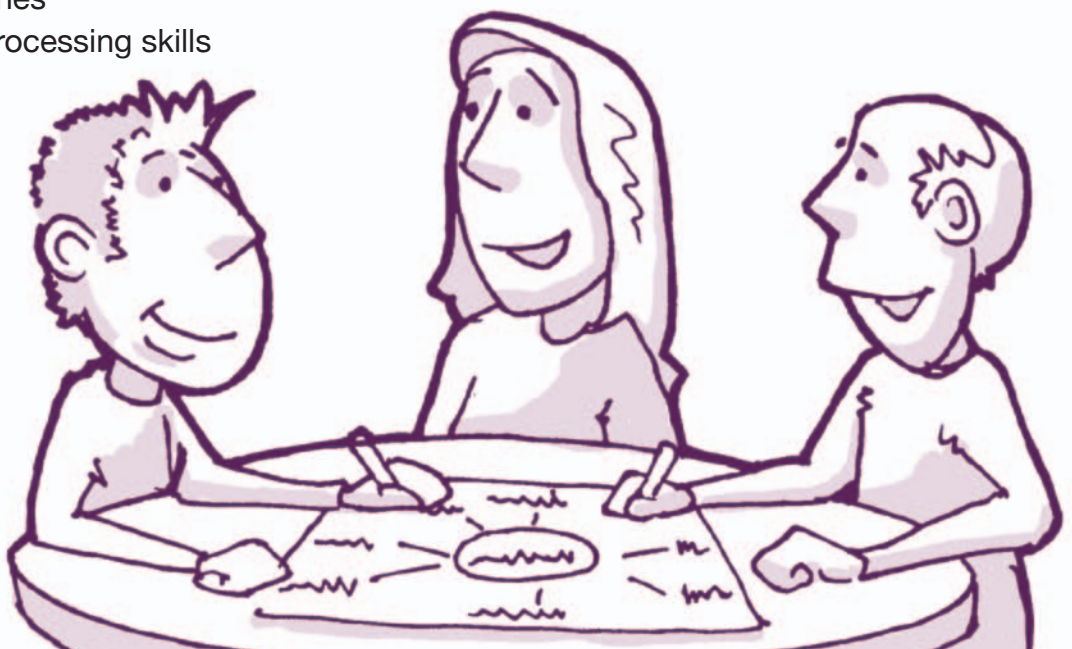


You can use these skills in a new job, even if you have no previous experience of doing that particular job. Transferable skills are useful even if you are changing careers or starting employment for the first time.

Examples of transferable skills

These are some examples of transferable skills you may have:

- › attention to detail
- › organisation skills
- › communication skills
- › working as a team
- › IT skills
- › meeting deadlines
- › data input or processing skills
- › research skills.



Activity: my transferable skills

When you are thinking about which roles are suitable for you, think about your transferable skills.

Think about examples of when you have used your transferable skills. Remember you can use examples from any of the situations described on the transferable skills page.



Example:

Planning and organisation skills: organising a trip to the Peak District with a friend.

Now write down examples of when you've used these skills:

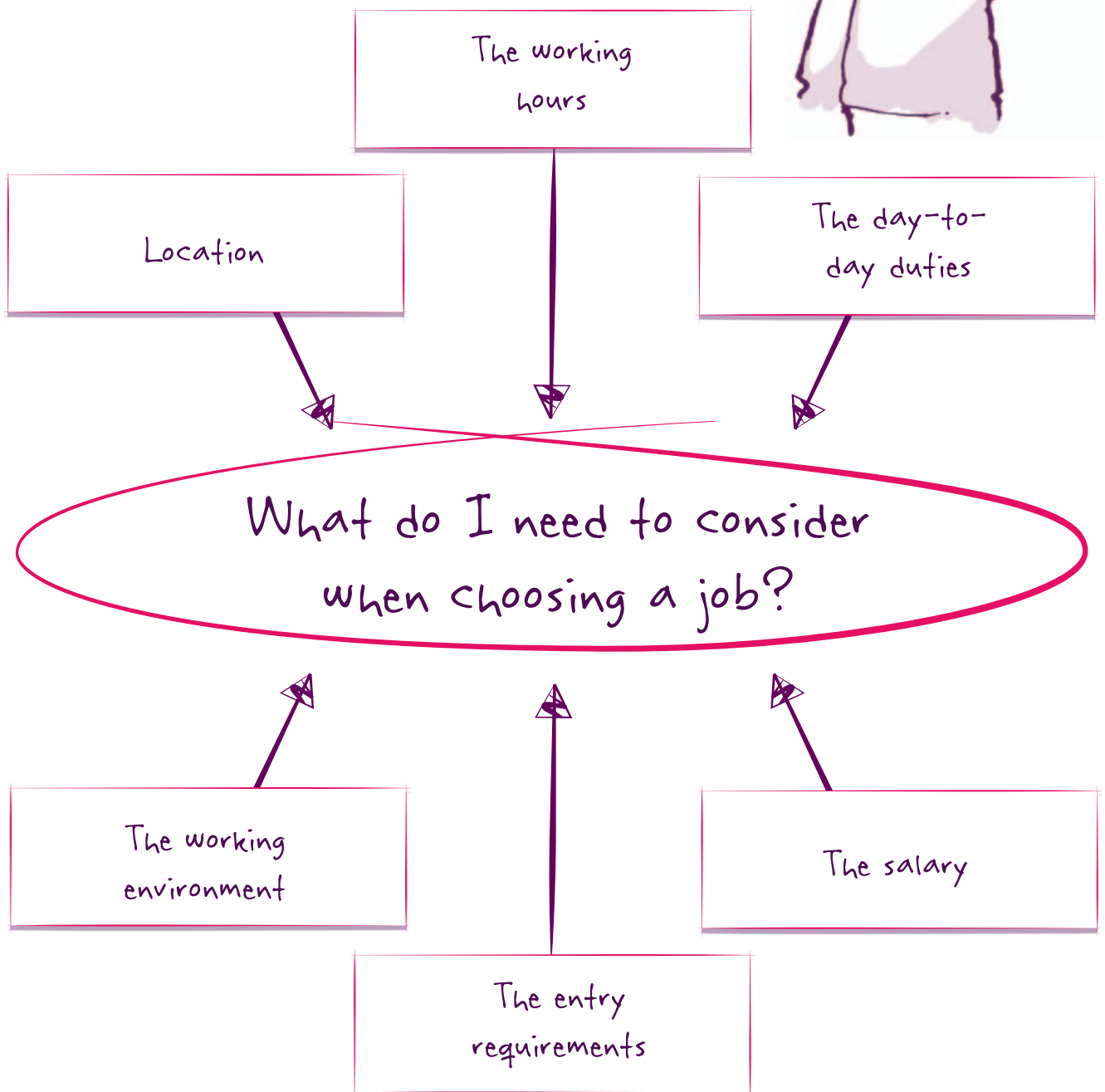
Attention to detail:

Inputting data:

Meeting deadlines:

Things to consider when choosing a job

Answers could include:

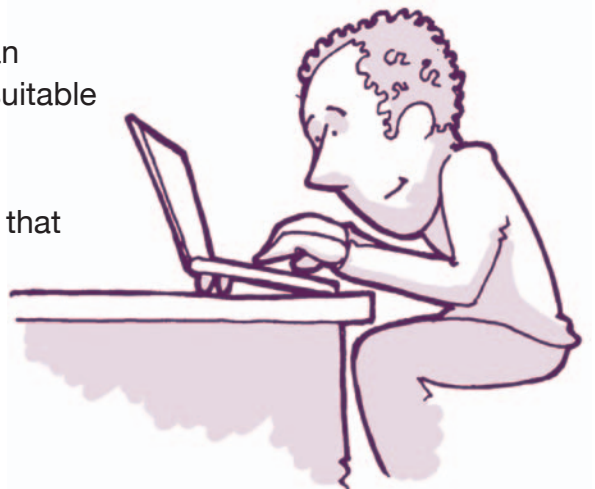


Useful info: investigating whether a role is suitable

If you see a job that you might be interested in, you can follow these steps to investigate whether it would be suitable for you.

1. Research the job online. There are many websites that provide job profiles, including:

- > <http://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>
- > www.prospects.ac.uk.

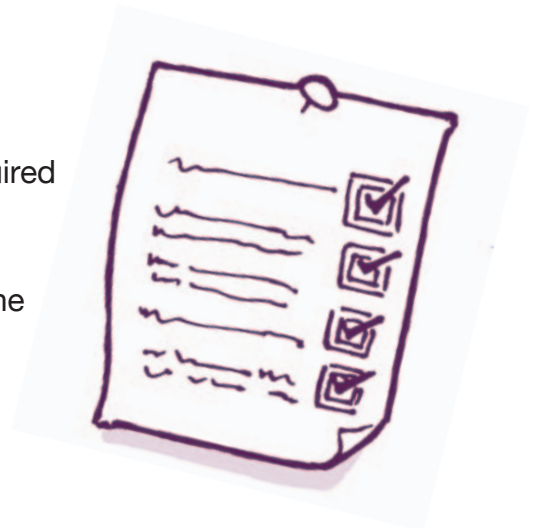


2. Look at what tasks are involved.

Think about:

- > whether you would like to do these tasks
- > if there are any you would find difficult
- > whether you think you have the skills and experience required to learn the tasks you have not done before.

If the role is suitable for you then you would enjoy most of the tasks and think you would be able to do them.



3. Look at the entry requirements.

Ask yourself:

- > whether you have the required level of qualifications or experience
- > if you need to work towards these before applying for the role.

It could be that the role is a long-term goal for you, and you need to take other steps before you can achieve the goal.

4. Look at the skills required. Think about whether the required skills match your own skills and strengths. You will be most successful in a job that plays to your strengths.

5. Explore related roles. If you have followed all of these steps and the role doesn't seem suitable for you, look at the 'related roles' to see if they are more suitable.



Activity: reading job profiles

Here are some examples of job profiles for an ecologist and an electrician. For each profile, we have highlighted the questions you should be thinking about to decide whether the job would be suitable.



Job 1 - Ecologist

Hours: 37-40 per week

Starting salary: £20,000 + per year

The work

As an ecologist you would normally specialise in a particular type of habitat, for example marine or coastal areas, or study a specific animal or plant species. Depending on your particular job, your tasks could include:

- carrying out fieldwork - surveying and recording information on plants, animals and environmental conditions
- researching the impact of human activity (like housing and intensive agriculture) on the environment and on climate change
- building computer models to predict the effects of development or climate change
- testing samples to investigate issues like the effects of air pollution on growth.

You may also assess planning proposals and make recommendations on sustainable land use for local authorities, government departments and companies. This could be, for example, nature reserves or waste management schemes.

- **Would you like to do these tasks?**
- **Are there any you would find difficult?**
- **Do you have the skills and experience required to learn the tasks?**



Hours and environment

For office-based work, such as computer modelling and laboratory work, you would be based at one site and work between 37 and 40 hours a week, Monday to Friday. You may have to travel to visit other sites or go to meetings. Most ecologists carry out both field-based and office- or laboratory-based activities. Research and fieldwork could involve longer and irregular working times, including evenings and weekends. You may need to work anywhere in the country, and possibly overseas, for several weeks at a time.

- **Have you worked in a laboratory or office or carried out fieldwork before?**
- **Would you feel comfortable working in each of these environments?**
- **How do you feel about evening and weekend work?**
- **How would you feel about travelling to different locations?**



Income

Starting salaries can be between £20,000 and £27,000 a year. With experience, this can rise to between £35,000 and £40,000 a year. Figures are intended as a guideline only.

- **How does this compare with what you need?**
- **What is the minimum income that you are looking for?**

Entry requirements

You would normally need a degree or postgraduate qualification in a subject such as ecology, botany, zoology, biology, environmental science or geography.

Ecology courses include fieldwork and work experience options. However, it may improve your employment prospects if you do some further work in your own time, for example volunteering for a conservation charity.

- **Do you have a relevant degree or postgraduate qualification?**
- **Have you done any volunteering work in conservation?**
- **Is this something you can start to do to increase your chances of employment?**

Skills and knowledge

To become an ecologist, you will need to have:

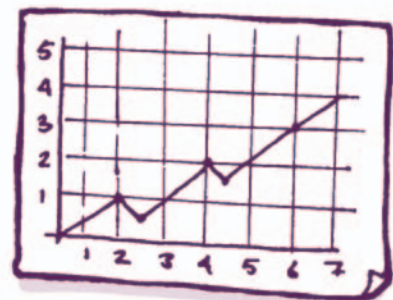
- a methodical approach to work
- the ability to gather and interpret data
- a knowledge of environmental policies and legislation
- an impartial approach
- good presentation and report writing skills
- project management skills
- good IT skills.

- **Do you have these skills?**
- **Are you comfortable working with lots of data?**
- **When have you demonstrated these skills?**

Related careers

- Arboriculturist.
- Botanist.
- Countryside officer.
- Recycling officer.

- **Do these similar jobs appeal to you?**
- **Do you know what's involved in them?**
- **Would they be better suited to your skills?**
- **Would you find them more enjoyable?**



Job 2 - Electrician

Starting salary

£17,000 + per year

Work

Electricians work on a very wide range of projects, from bringing power to homes to taking part in major engineering projects. Their tasks can range from transporting data along fibre optic cables to programming computer-controlled 'intelligent' buildings and factories.

As an electrician, you would install, inspect and test equipment, make sure that electrotechnical systems work, and find and fix faults.



- > **Have you done these tasks before?**
- > **Are there any you would find difficult?**
- > **Would you like to do them?**
- > **Do you enjoy practical work and fixing faults?**



Hours and environment

You would normally work a basic 37-hour week, Monday to Friday, with the possibility of overtime. You may work shifts, or you may be on call where 24-hour cover is provided. You would travel locally between jobs, and some contracts may involve overnight stays away from home. A driving licence may be needed for some work. Depending on your exact role, you may have to work in cramped spaces to reach electrical cabling and equipment, and you may sometimes work at heights on scaffolding, for example on a construction site.

- > **Would you be prepared to do shift work?**
- > **How would you feel about travelling to different locations?**
- > **Have you got a driving licence?**
- > **How would you feel about working in a cramped space, or high up?**

Income

First year apprentices may start on around £8,000 a year. Newly-qualified electricians may earn between £17,000 and £20,000 a year. With experience, this can rise to between £23,000 and £30,000.

- > **How does this compare with what you need?**
- > **What is the minimum income that you are looking for?**

Entry requirements

To qualify as an electrician, you need an industry-recognised level 3 qualification, such as:

- Level 3 Diploma in Electrotechnical Services (Electrical Maintenance)
- Level 3 Diploma in Installing Electrotechnical Systems and Equipment (Buildings, Structures and the Environment).

These qualifications are normally completed while you are working. A common route into this work is to do an apprenticeship. This would combine learning on the job with study at a college or training centre. It normally takes two to four years to become fully qualified this way.

- **Do you know what an apprenticeship would involve?**
- **Do you meet the entry requirements for an apprenticeship?**
- **How would you feel about working and studying at the same time?**

Skills and knowledge

To be an electrician, you should have:

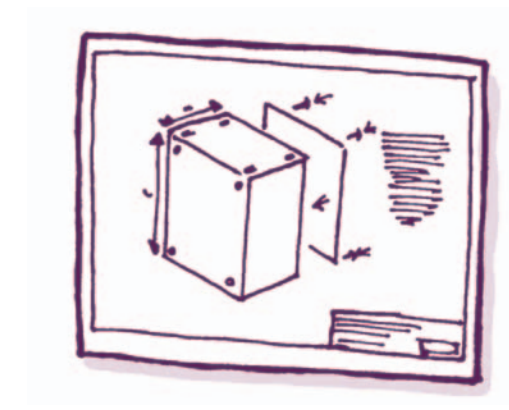
- good practical skills
- an ability to follow technical drawings, building plans and wiring diagrams
- an ability to work carefully, methodically and safely
- an ability to measure accurately
- a head for heights and willingness to work in all sorts of weather
- a willingness to work in confined spaces
- good written and verbal communication skills
- an ability to work in a team as well as on your own initiative
- a flexible approach
- good problem-solving skills
- good analytical and evaluation skills.

- **Do you have these skills?**
- **Are you good at solving problems?**
- **When have you demonstrated these skills?**

Related careers

- Domestic appliance service engineer.
- Electrical engineering technician.
- Industrial electrician.
- Kitchen and bathroom fitter.

- **Do these similar jobs appeal to you?**
- **Do you know what's involved in them?**
- **Would they be better suited to your skills?**
- **Would you find them more enjoyable?**



Activity: stepping stones

You will need to take a number of steps to get to your career goal or 'ideal job'. This is sometimes called taking a 'stepping stones' approach to get where you want to be. For example, you might need to complete paid or voluntary work experience before gaining a place on a postgraduate librarianship course.



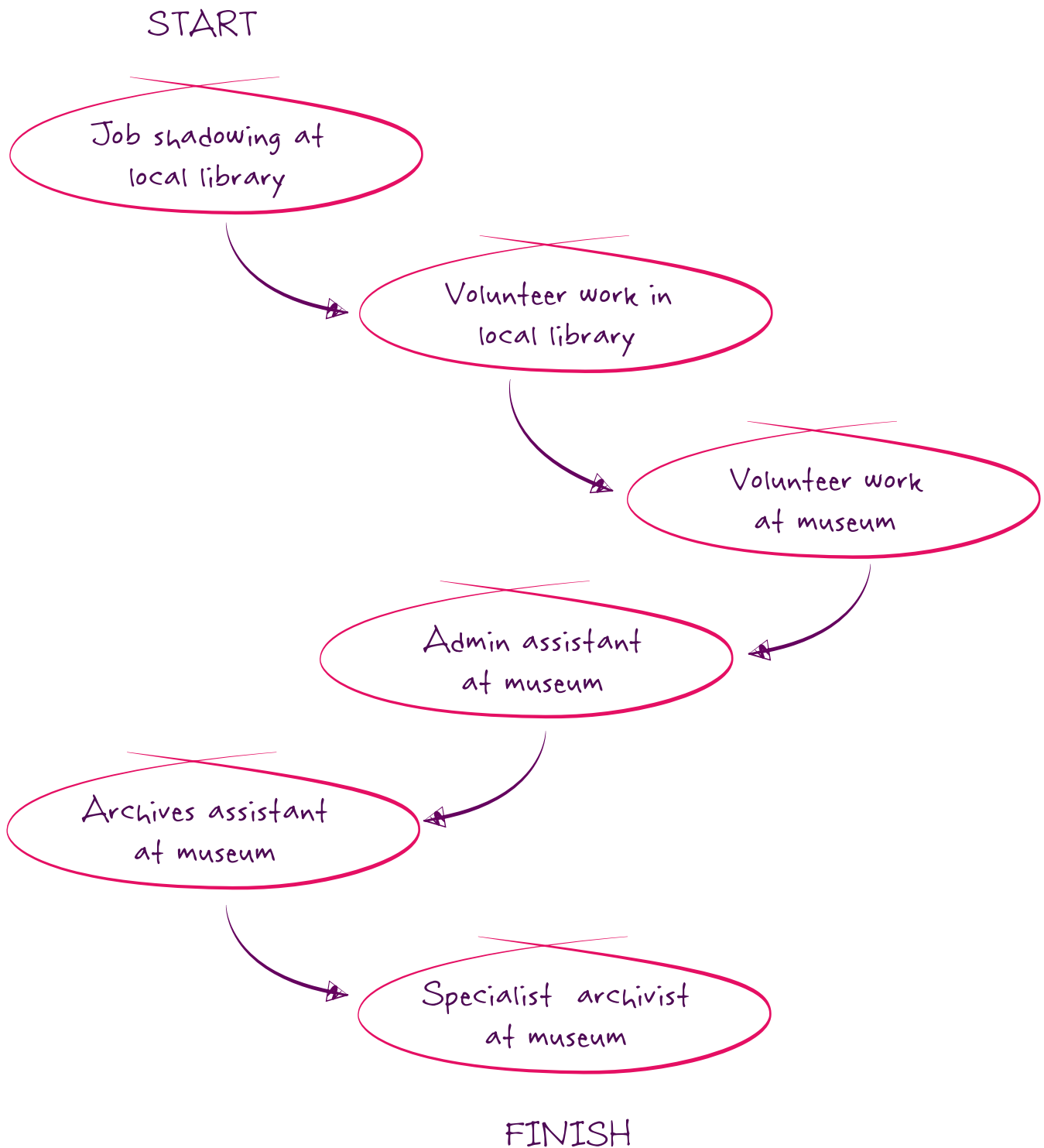
In the table below, the left-hand column shows possible stepping stones. In the top row, add the roles you're interested in. Then tick the stepping stones that could lead to your chosen role or area of work. We've completed one example for you. You might need to do internet research to find out what stepping stones would be useful for your chosen career.

You can add any more stepping stones you think of to the end of the list.

Role I'm interested in	Software developer			
Enter sector at a lower level.	✓			
Complete work experience placement or voluntary work.	✓			
Find role in another department of an organisation then move across to preferred department.				
Take on a short work project in the organisation, in a related department, which may lead to more work.	✓			
Complete academic study eg a degree.	✓			
Full-time vocational training.				
Part-time vocational training while working in a different field				
Other stepping stones:	Complete online course in Visual Basic			

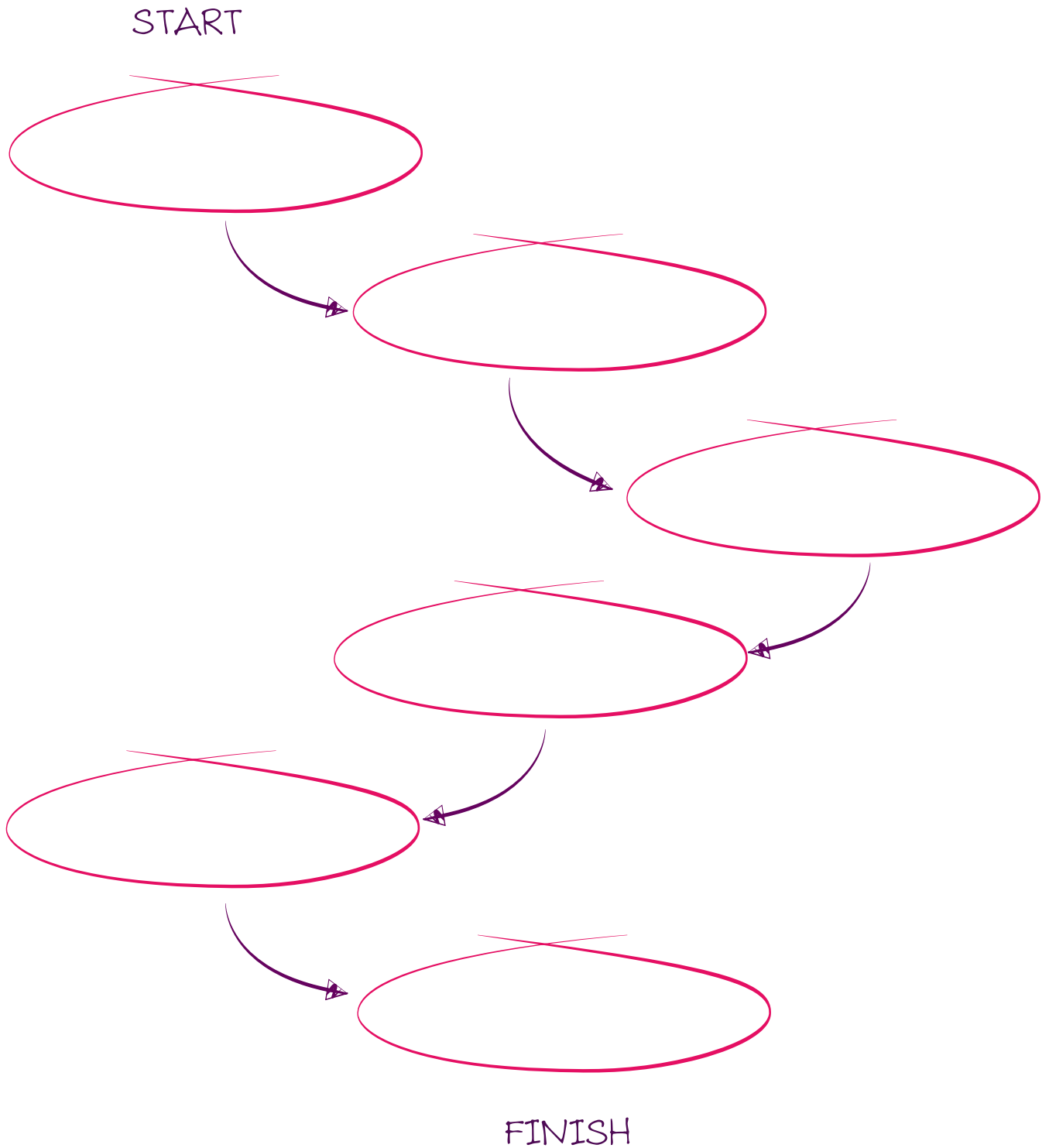
Activity: career journeys

This is an example of a career path with stepping stones towards a position as a specialist archivist at a museum.



My career journey

Fill out the steps you could take on the path towards your chosen career.



Useful info: things to remember when applying for jobs

1. Be realistic

- Apply for jobs that meet your skills and experience.
- When looking through the job descriptions read the 'person specification' carefully and see if you match each requirement.
- It is vital that you match all of the essential criteria in the person specification. The employer will only shortlist candidates if they match all of the essential criteria.

2. Keep your options open

- We all have an ideal job in our mind – a dream job we know we would be perfect for. However, it is sometimes hard to find this kind of job as it can be very rare to find a job that suits all of our requirements.
- It is important to keep your options open for a variety of roles that would suit your skills and experience.



3. Consider how far you would be willing to travel

- Be realistic about how far you are willing to travel. This includes taking into consideration how long you would like to spend commuting in rush hour and the cost of travel.
- Sometimes when we are eagerly looking for work, we are open to giving any job a go, even if it means a two-hour commute each way. However, travelling this distance could make you feel tired and stressed by the time you arrive at work and might lead to a decrease in your productivity.
- Before you apply for a job, look at your local travel planning website (for example, in London it would be www.tfl.gov.uk) and see how long the journey might take you, and then decide if you would be willing to make that journey.



4. What hours you would like to work

- Before you start applying for jobs, it is important to think about how many hours you would like to work (whether full-time or part-time).
- Take into consideration your commitments outside of work, how tired you tend to get when working and doing strenuous activities, and your ability to deal with new situations.
- If any of these factors are an issue for you, you may want to consider working part-time to start with and moving into full-time work when you are ready.



5. What type of organisation you would like to work in

- There are a number of industry sectors to choose from, including:
 - public sector, such as local councils or government departments
 - third sector, such as charities and not-for-profit organisations
 - private sector, such as local businesses.
- Think about the size of different organisations, as this will influence how many people you will be working with, the layout of the office and organisational structure.
- The type of organisation and the working environment can play a crucial role in determining whether you will enjoy your job. Take the time to consider these factors and work out what will be the most suitable working environment for you.

Work experience

The world of work can be daunting. Knowing which role, which sector and which company to apply for can be difficult. How can you know what the right job is and what environment would suit you without working in them all and finding out?

Work experience and voluntary work are a great way to identify what your preferences are. You can find out what type of organisation you prefer, what tasks you enjoy and what working environment suits you.



Stay positive!

The search for employment can be long and unpredictable. Everyone experiences setbacks and rejections when applying for jobs. It's easy to feel disheartened when we are not successful in applications or interviews. It is important not to take this personally and remember that you only need one successful application and interview to secure a job. Keep applying and try different tactics to make sure you keep your employment options open.

Useful info: learning about roles

Now you have identified roles you would like to work in, identify people who work in similar roles or sectors.

See if you can meet with them, or email them, to find out more about their work. You can find out really useful information from people who are working in your preferred sectors. This can help you decide whether this is a role you would like to work in, and is an opportunity to get some tips on how to increase your chances of employment.

Questions to ask

Details of your role

1. What does a 'typical day' involve?
2. What skills are important in your role?
3. What do you like about your role?
4. What do you find difficult?
5. Does your role involve communicating with others? What methods of communication do you use most?
6. Do you work as part of a team? How is your team work structured?
7. What training and support did you receive when you started your role?
8. What experience and qualifications did you have before you started your role?

Job searching

1. For how long had you been searching for a job before you started your current position?
2. Which websites did you use to search for jobs?
3. How many interviews did you have before you started your current position?
4. Do you have any job-searching strategies or tips?

Work experience, voluntary work and internships

1. Did you do any work experience, voluntary work or internships?
2. Were these useful?
3. What were the benefits of having this experience?





Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Identified strengths and transferable skills	
Identified preferred tasks	
Identified two suitable roles	
Contacted people in each of these roles for information	
Identified possible stepping stones to get into chosen roles	

Applying for roles

Aim

To enable you to apply for vacancies effectively.

Objectives

You will be able to:

- > write an effective CV
- > write a cover letter
- > apply for a job using a CV and cover letter
- > write a speculative letter
- > make a speculative application
- > complete an application form
- > write a supporting statement.

"My big tips for other autistic people would be: try to write what you are good at and not what you are not good at. Focus on your skills and emphasise them. Don't worry if they ask for excellent communication skills, it's worth applying if you feel that you can do all other parts of the job really well."

Content

1. Difficulties with applying for roles
2. Useful info: writing a CV
3. Useful info: example of a good CV
4. Useful info: sending your CV by email
5. Activity: CV checklist
6. Activity: what information should appear on a CV?
7. Activity: spot the mistakes on this CV
8. Useful info: cover letters
9. Useful info: how to write a cover letter
10. Activity: cover letter checklist
11. Useful info: speculative applications
12. Useful info: application forms
13. Useful info: what to expect on application forms
14. Useful info: competency-based questions
15. Activity: competency-based questions
16. Useful info: supporting statements
17. Useful info: writing a supporting statement
18. Activity: supporting statements
19. Useful info: 'Dos and don'ts' for your application form
20. Activity: application form checklist
21. Outcomes checklist



Difficulties with applying for roles

These quotes illustrate some of the challenges that autistic people face when applying for jobs.

"I worry about people judging me based on what I write. I know that I'm no good at imagining what the employer will think. So, it gets very confusing and I get quite stuck."



"I'm just not very good at writing things in that fancy way. I've done three temporary jobs in warehouses and on my old CV I wrote the same tasks for each one. Things like 'assembled boxes, put deliveries in boxes, put letters in envelopes and put stamps on the envelope'. I needed help to make things sound better. There are better words for saying the tasks you do."



"I wrote a lot on my last CV. Loads and loads of details. You're supposed to have no more than two pages. Mine was a lot more than that."



"My employment adviser helped me by proofreading my CV. Helping me to present my experiences and skills properly. Helping me to write about things in a positive way and to only include the most relevant information."



"I'm never sure what to say when I get to the equal opportunities bit of application forms. I know it says equal opportunities but I worry that they will be secretly judging me."

"I find that the boxes on application forms are sometimes too big in one place and too small in another place. I have learned that the size of the box is a hint about how much you should say. This has helped, but I often don't know what I am required to say."



"I don't really like vague questions or open questions, but application forms are full of them. I'm not sure what they want me to talk about and how much detail to go into. I don't know how to approach the question they have asked."

Useful info: writing a CV

"The hardest thing for me was thinking about what I had done in my life, knowing what my skills were and knowing what to include."

CV stands for curriculum vitae, which is Latin for 'story of life'. It is a document that gives potential employers an outline of your previous work experience and the skills and qualifications that you have to offer.

Why you need a CV

A professional-looking and up-to-date CV is a vital tool in your job search. There are two ways you can use your CV:

- > you can send it to an employer in response to a job advert which asks for CVs to be submitted instead of application forms
- > you can send it to employers you'd like to work for even if they haven't requested it (this is called sending a CV out 'speculatively') in case they are looking for someone with your skills either now or in the future.



What to include


Your CV should include:

- > your name
- > your contact details
- > your education history
- > your employment history, including voluntary work and work experience.

Tips for designing your CV

- > Keep your CV short and to the point. A one-page CV is fine for anyone who has less than three years' work experience in total. Two pages is the maximum length for people with more work history to cover.
- > Type your CV on a computer using a simple, easy-to-read font such as Arial size 12. Avoid using borders or 'clip art' pictures, as these will be distracting to an employer and look unprofessional.
- > Make sure each paragraph is no more than seven lines long. If you have a longer paragraph, split it into smaller paragraphs or make a list using bullet points.



- 
-
- › Your education and work history should start with the most recent information first. It's not necessary to include exact dates – the month and the year is enough. Remember to include voluntary and unpaid work.
 - › Be honest but positive – emphasise your strengths and abilities, and describe your experiences in a positive way.
 - › Ask someone else to read it and check for any spelling errors.
 - › When you send your CV to an employer you should always include a cover letter (which is sometimes called a covering letter) with it.

Things to avoid

When writing your CV:

- › don't include your age, date of birth, gender or marital status
- › don't disclose your disability on your CV
- › don't list more than four hobbies or interests
- › don't include a photo
- › don't mention any sort of failure.



"When you write a CV or cover letter you are supposed to downplay your flaws and focus on your positive sides. I don't do this very well! But I'm getting better."

Useful info: example of a good CV

Curriculum vitae – Mary Spence

Address: 2 Cutlery Avenue, Barking, Essex, IG11 9DS

Telephone number: 07788 *****

Email: maryspence@hotmail.com

Profile

I am a motivated and reliable graduate, with previous office experience. I enjoy completing tasks independently and working as part of a team. I am seeking a varied and challenging role in an office environment, preferably in fundraising within the charity sector.

Experience

Mar 2010 – Present National Lung Foundation (NLF)

Trust and Major Gifts Fundraising Intern

- Researched and created reports for funders.
- Ensured statistical information was kept updated for the use of the Trust and Major Gifts Team.
- Used resources (eg LexisNexis, *Who's Who*, online and print media) to research existing and potential high value donors.
- Responsible for various administrative tasks as required.

Sep 2009 - Jan 2010 Loan and Go

Loan Adviser

- Took inbound and made outbound calls to people who were interested in loans.
- Used discretion and sales skills to encourage customers to take up loans.
- Delivered a high level of customer service.
- Accurately filled in loan applications.

Education

2006 - 2009 University of Lincoln

BSc Hons Recreation Management

2005 - 2006 Sherwood Forest College

AVCE Leisure and Recreation

2000 - 2005 Integrated College

7 GCSEs including C Maths, C English, B Science

IT skills

Excel (intermediate), Word (intermediate), Raiser's Edge, PowerPoint, SPSS

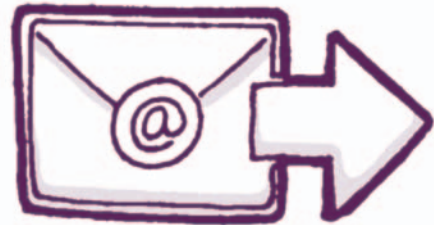
References

References available on request

Useful info: sending your CV by email

Here are our tips for sending your CV to a potential employer by email:

Use your cover letter as the body text of your email, or include it as an attachment to the email.



Send your CV as an attachment to the email.

Send your CV as a PDF (portable document format) or as a Microsoft Word document.

It can be helpful to email your CV and cover letter to yourself before you send it to the employer, so that you can check that the formatting looks good (sometimes line lengths can be changed by your email software).

Activity: CV checklist

Use this list to check that your CV includes the right information and is presented professionally. You should be able to answer yes to all of the questions.

Spelling and grammar

- ☐ Have you used a spell checker?
- ☐ Have you used capital letters correctly? (*Eg, the first line of an address would be written as 10 Beech Road.*)

Layout

- ☐ Is your CV one or two pages of A4?
- ☐ Is it easy and clear to read with the most important information on the first page?
- ☐ Is everything neatly aligned?
- ☐ Is all the information about a particular topic together in one place on the CV?
Eg education and qualifications should be covered in a single 'Education' section rather than in separate 'Education' and 'Qualifications' sections.
- ☐ Is there a clear structure with appropriate headings and organised sections (*eg 'Education', 'Work experience'*) with at least a line gap between sections?
- ☐ Only if you've included lists – have you used bullet points for each list and do they use proper bullets (circles or squares) rather than asterisks (*) or dashes (-)?
- ☐ Have you used a simple font and used no more than two different fonts?
- ☐ Have you made headings (*eg 'Education', 'Interests'*) stand out by using a larger font size, bold or underlining?

Personal details

- ☐ Have you put your name at the top in a large font size (*eg 18 points*) so the recruiter can easily find your CV and know who it is from?
- ☐ Have you included your email address? This is the most common way that recruiters will contact you.
- ☐ Is your email address professional? (*It should include your name and not a nickname such as turtle_mcspoon@gmail.com.*)

Work experience and skills

- ☐ Have you described key tasks, responsibilities and skills gained from work experience *eg customer service skills?*

Have you mentioned any skills you have in:

- ☐ languages *eg good conversational French, basic Spanish?*
- ☐ computing *eg good working knowledge of MS Access and Excel, plus basic web design skills*
- ☐ driving *eg full current clean driving licence.*

Activity: what information should appear on a CV?

1. Circle the items you think you should include on a CV. Example answers can be found on page 77.

Age

Criminal convictions

Education

Volunteer work

Previous jobs

Date of birth

Hobbies

Height

Gender

References

Weight

Reasons for leaving each job

2. Can you think of five key skills you have that would impress an employer? Write them down here.

Example: hard-working

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....



Answers: what information should appear on a CV?

Age

Criminal convictions

Education

Volunteer work

Previous jobs

Date of birth

Hobbies

Height

Gender

References

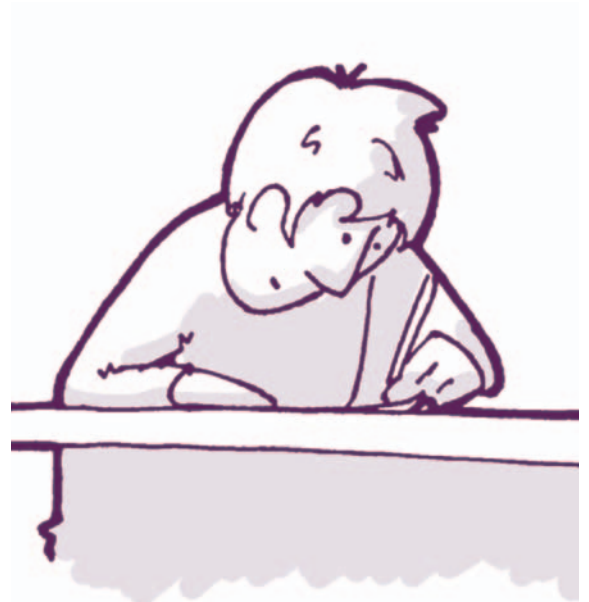
Weight

Reasons for leaving each job

2. Can you think of five key skills you have that would impress an employer? Write them down here.

Examples (there are no right or wrong answers):

1. Conscientious
2. Motivated
3. Confident
4. Good attention to detail
5. Hard-working



Activity: spot the mistakes on this CV

There are several reasons why this CV would not impress a potential employer.
Can you spot them?

Steven 'Stevie' Wilson

Personal details

Address: 23 North Street, St. Leonard's, East Kilbride G74 2FC

Tel: 01355 299 ***

Mobile: 0778 876 ****

E-mail: i_hate_cops@hotmail.com

Employment history

Oct 2009 - Dec 2010

Delivery Driver, Curry King, East Kilbride

Duties; Delivery of meals in the East Kilbride area.

Left as I did not enjoy dealing with public.

Aug 2012 - Oct 2012

Kitchen Porter, The Riviera Restaurant, East Kilbride

Duties; Food preparation and dishwasher.

Left to find a job nearer my house.

Jan 2011 - May 2012

General Assistant, Sainsbury's, East Kilbride

Duties; Unloading deliveries.

Left due to personal difficulties with supervisor.

Education and qualifications

Aug 1992 - Jun 1997

Claremont High School, East Kilbride.

Achieved some standard grades and one higher.

Hobbies and interests

In my spare time I mostly like to watch television at home or go to the pub.



Answers: spot the mistakes on this CV

On this version of the CV, we've highlighted the mistakes you might have spotted.

Steven 'Stevie' Wilson

Nicknames are too informal to use on a CV.

Personal details

Address: 23 North Street, St. Leonard's, East Kilbride G74 2FC

Tel: 01355 299 ***

Mobile: 0778 876 ****

E-mail: i_hate_cops@hotmail.com

The email address does not include the person's name and could offend some people.

Employment history

Oct 2009 - Dec 2010

Delivery Driver, Curry King, East Kilbride

Duties; Delivery of meals in the East Kilbride area.

Left as I did not enjoy dealing with public.

Your most recent employment should appear first.

Aug 2012 - Oct 2012

Kitchen Porter, The Riviera Restaurant, East Kilbride

Duties; Food preparation and dishwasher.

Left to find a job nearer my house.

Jan 2011 - May 2012

General Assistant, Sainsbury's, East Kilbride

Duties; Unloading deliveries.

Left due to personal difficulties with supervisor.

The explanations given in this section may be true but do not sound very positive.

Education and qualifications

Aug 1992 - Jun 1997

Claremont High School, East Kilbride.

Specify the number of qualifications you have, for example six standard grades.

Achieved some standard grades and one higher.

Hobbies and interests

In my spare time I mostly like to watch television at home or go to the pub.

Try to add hobbies and interests that sound more active, for example being a member of a local group or sports team. If your hobbies and interests are not relevant to the role, you do not need to include this section in your CV.



Useful info: cover letters

When you send a CV to a potential employer, you must also send a cover letter (sometimes called a covering letter) with it. The cover letter is an essential part of your application and it helps to highlight the relevant details of your CV.

Why you need a cover letter

The key purpose of a cover letter is to:

- introduce yourself
- highlight your strengths
- explain your background and level of expertise
- provide specific information that matches your skills to the job requirements.

In addition you can:

- show the value you would bring to the employer
- confirm your enthusiasm and suitability for the job
- cover any gaps in your CV
- provide additional, relevant information.

If you do not send a cover letter with your CV the employer may decide that you:

- can't complete a task
- aren't able to express yourself in writing
- don't know how to present yourself properly
- can't write letters.



"I realise now that I didn't write cover letters very well at all before. I would just attach my CV and write one or two sentences to say that I wanted the job. I didn't know about looking at the person specification and job description and needing to sell yourself. I was invited to lots more interviews once I started doing this."

Useful info: how to write a cover letter

Follow these tips for writing an effective cover letter. Make sure you write a different cover letter for each role – don't send identical letters to different employers.

Dear Sir/Madam

First paragraph

- › State the job you're applying for.
- › Say where you found out about the job (*eg advert in The Guardian newspaper*) – this is because organisations like to know which of their advertising sources are working well.
- › Explain why you're interested in the role.
- › Say why you would like to work for the company or organisation.

Second and third paragraphs

- › Summarise your strengths and how they might be an advantage to the company or organisation.
- › Give examples of when you've demonstrated each of the competencies, skills or criteria required for the job – use examples from your previous work experience and education.

Last paragraph

- › Summarise why you would like to do the role.
- › Mention when you are available to start work and be as flexible as possible

Greeting and sign-off

- › If you don't know the name of the person you are writing to, it's best to use the formal 'Dear Sir or Madam' and to sign off 'Yours faithfully'.
- › If the person has already emailed you, reply back in the same style. For example:
 - › if they signed their email 'David', start yours with 'Dear David'
 - › if they signed their email 'Ms Jones', start yours with 'Dear Ms Jones'
 - › if they started their email to you informally with 'Hi Claire', then you can reply in the same informal way, such as 'Hi David'
 - › if they ended their email with 'Best wishes' or 'Kind regards', you can do the same.

Yours faithfully,



Final checks

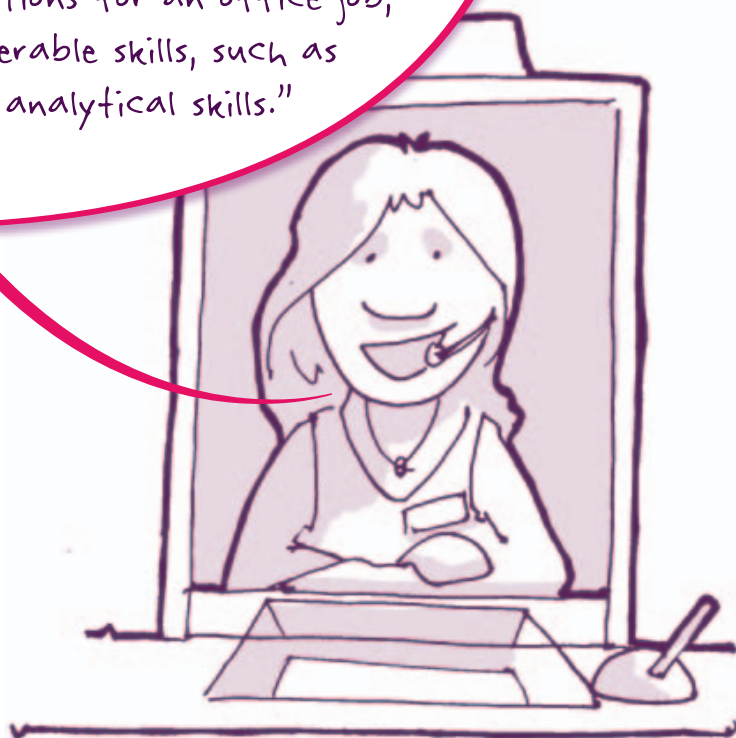
- › Run a spell check and proofread the letter (or ask someone else to proofread it for you) – remember that a computer won't pick up mistakes such as 'form' instead of 'from', or 'manger' instead of 'manager'.

Activity: cover letter checklist

After you've written your cover letter, check that you've done all of the following:

- ☐ made the letter specific for the company and role
- ☐ explained why you are a good candidate for the role
- ☐ described how you meet the essential criteria required for the role
- ☐ related your skills to the job
- ☐ been positive about your skills, achievements and experience
- ☐ kept it clear, concise and to the point
- ☐ used a spell checker and checked the spelling and grammar yourself (or asked someone to do this for you).

"I say what I have done in the past that is relevant to the role I am applying for and I use different skills for different cover letters. For example, if I am writing a cover letter for a job in a scientific organisation, I put an emphasis on the scientific work I have done at university and in voluntary work. Whereas, if I am applying for more of an office job, I describe my previous office experience. I would also mention my qualifications for an office job, to show I have transferable skills, such as numerical skills and analytical skills."



Useful info: speculative applications

If there is an employer you'd like to work for but they're not advertising a job that's suitable for you, you can send a 'speculative' application to them.



A speculative application can be successful if:

- the employer has a suitable role available that they haven't yet advertised
- the employer will be recruiting for a suitable role in the next six months
- the employer is looking for people with your skills/experience and can create a role for you.

Making a speculative application

To make a speculative application to an employer, you need to send them your CV along with a speculative cover letter.

To maximise your chances of getting a positive response, you will need to send out a large number of speculative letters to different companies or organisations that you'd like to work for. The letters can't all be the same – they need to be made specific to each employer.

Speculative letters are a good opportunity to demonstrate that you want to work for a particular employer. When you are applying speculatively you will not be competing with a high volume of other applicants, like you would when a job vacancy is advertised openly.



Here is an example of a speculative cover letter.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am seeking the opportunity to apply my skills and experience in a position at Ecology Welfare Ltd. I am keen to undertake any role in administration or data analysis, where my organisational and analytical skills can be used to contribute to your organisation's outstanding work. I have attached my CV for your consideration.

I have over 18 months' experience in administration and data analysis. I am currently working as an Administrative Assistant at Bird and Fairy Ltd where I am responsible for data entry using Excel and an internal database. I also carry out desk-based internet research and other administrative tasks. In this role I have been commended on my strong organisational and prioritisation skills. I have strong IT skills including Word, Excel, Publisher and Access.

I am committed, organised and very methodical in my approach to work. I am passionate about the natural environment and ecology and I am keen to use my skills and experience to contribute to an organisation that makes a difference in the environmental sector.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my application. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,



Jay Amadi

Useful info: application forms

An employer will usually ask you to send either an application form or a CV and cover letter to apply for a job. Application forms can vary a great deal in length and the amount of information they ask for. There are three key points all employers will look out for to help them decide whether you are suitable for the role.

1. Spelling and grammar

Your spelling and grammar is a quick and easy indicator to an employer of your ability, attention to detail and the effort you have put into completing your form. It is important to make sure that there are no mistakes. A good way to do this is to type your answers on a Word document first and use 'spell check' to check your spelling and grammar. You can then copy your answers onto the application form. Asking another person to proofread your application form will be another way to check for mistakes.



2. Competencies

The key purpose of your application form is to demonstrate to an employer that you have the competencies required to do the job well. An acronym commonly used to describe the core competencies employers are looking for is **SAKE**, which stands for:

- > **S**kills
- > **A**bilities
- > **K**nowledge
- > **E**xperience.



(See page 93 for tips on how to demonstrate that you have specific competencies.)



3. Effort and interest

The employer will be looking for evidence that you are motivated and interested in their role and company. Make sure you research the organisation, the department you will be working in and the specifics of your role before completing the form. You can then refer to this information in your supporting statement.



Useful info: what to expect on application forms

While the size and appearance of application forms varies greatly, most of them are in fact very similar and have very predictable sections. You can expect to find the following sections on most application forms.

Job applied for

This is sometimes already completed. If it is not then you will have to fill this in.

Personal details

This will be a section at the start of the form. The information that will need to be completed includes name, address, phone number and email.

Qualifications and training

This section will ask for information on the educational institutions you have attended and the qualifications you have gained (or are currently completing).

Employment history

The form may ask for your employment history for a specific period of time, such as the last five years, or for all of your employment to date.

Supporting statement

This is the section of the application form where you must demonstrate to the employer that you have the competencies required for the role. The section may be given a different name, such as 'Personal statement', 'Relevant experience', 'Additional information' or 'Your own qualities'. To identify the section, look for instructions telling you to write about how your skills and experience qualify you for the role (look out for the other terms from the SAKE acronym, too).

Competency questions/skills profile

Some applications will have a section with a number of questions (typically three to five questions) asking you to demonstrate that you have each of the competencies required for the role. For example, '*Describe a time when you worked as part of a team to complete a task.*'

References

It is best to give references from people relevant to the role wherever possible. For example, if you are applying for a role in an office, provide a reference who has supervised you in an office environment or when you have used similar skills to those used in office work. You must not provide family members as references. Always make sure that you have gained permission from the referee before you put their details on the form.

Equal opportunities and monitoring

An equal opportunities section plays no part in the selection process but is included so that employers can measure the diversity of job applicants and the success rate of their applications. Some people worry that if they fill in this section and include information about their disability they won't get the job. This is not the case. These sections are optional, though, so if you prefer not to complete this section then you do not have to.



Useful info: competency-based questions

"I don't really like vague questions or open questions, but application forms are full of them. I'm not sure what they want me to talk about and how much detail to go into. I don't know how to approach the question they have asked."

Sometimes employers ask specific questions to see if you can demonstrate the **S**kills, **A**bilities, **K**nowledge and **E**xperience required for the role. These are called 'competency-based questions'.

To answer these questions, you must provide evidence, in the form of specific examples from your previous experience, to demonstrate you have the competencies required.

Here are some examples of the competencies employers may be looking for (remember, the competencies required will be different for different roles):

- > planning and organising
- > team work
- > decision-making
- > numeracy
- > coping with pressure/challenges
- > problem solving.

The '**STAR** approach'

When answering competency-based questions, it is not enough to just say that you have the skill/ability the employer is looking for; you need to provide evidence of specific occasions when you have demonstrated this skill. Your evidence can be examples from your previous employment, or from voluntary work, summer work, education, extracurricular activities or even personal experience.

Your answer should include one or two sentences explaining each of the following **STAR** headings.

- > **S**ituation (Where, when, with whom?)
- > **T**ask (Describe the task or objective you hoped to achieve.)
- > **A**ction (Describe what you did; focus on your role and input.)
- > **R**esult (What did you achieve/what conclusion did you reach/what skills did you develop/what did you learn from the experience?)



The focus of each of the sentences should be on you – even if the situation involved working with others, the employer wants to know what your role was in achieving the result.



When to use the **STAR** approach

The key parts of the recruitment process in which you should use the **STAR** approach are:

- Answering 'competency questions' on your application form
Some application forms will include a section with questions about specific competencies. The questions might begin, 'Give an example of...' or, 'Describe a time when you...' For example, to find out about your ability to cope with pressure/challenges, you may be asked:

*'Describe a time when you have risen to a challenge. How did you approach it?
How successful were you?'*

- Writing your supporting statement
Not all application forms will ask you direct questions about specific competencies. However, in the 'Supporting statement' section you will often be asked to demonstrate how your skills and experience qualify you for the role. This requires you to:
 - look for the essential competencies referred to in the person specification
 - give evidence that you possess each of these competencies.

So you must generate your own competency-based questions, based on the person specification, and use your supporting statement to answer them.

- Answering questions in your interview
You may also be asked competency-based questions in an interview. It is a good idea to look for the competencies referred to in the person specification and to prepare some answers, using the **STAR** approach, beforehand.

Remember to be positive about your experiences. It is OK to use examples of times when you did not achieve your objective. You can say what you learned from the experience and what you would do differently next time.

Activity: competency-based questions

Answer this competency-based question:
“Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a task.”



Here's an example answer to help you:

Situation	I volunteer as a sales assistant in my local charity shop.
Task	The shop was under new management and the manager was concerned that we were not selling any women's clothes. I suggested that we could reorganise the women's clothes in order of size so that the customers would be able to find clothes more easily.
Action	I took all of the women's clothes down from the shelves and put dividers on these shelves (10, 12, 14 etc). I then put the clothes back in the right place according to their size.
Result	Because I worked in a methodical way, it only took one hour to put the clothes in size order. As a result of this, the shop looked tidier and we increased the number of women's clothes we were selling each week.

Write your answer using your own experience here:

Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	



Useful info: supporting statements

Most application forms will include a long section that asks you to explain why you feel you are suitable for the advertised role. For example, a form may ask:

‘Please use the space below to describe how your skills, knowledge and experience relate to the requirements of the role and for any other information you consider relevant to your application.’

We will refer to this section as the ‘supporting statement’, however other names may also be used (see ‘Useful info: what to expect on application forms’).

People often find the supporting statement section difficult because they're not sure about what they should write and because it can take some time to come up with a good answer. However, this is often the most important section on the application form and it is worth taking time to make sure that it is well written.

What a supporting statement is for

Your supporting statement needs to clearly demonstrate how you meet the essential criteria listed in the person specification. The employer will use this section to decide if you meet the criteria and if they should ask you to interview.

The supporting statement is the main way you can make yourself stand out from the other applicants. In addition to demonstrating that you meet the essential criteria for the role, you can show the employer that you possess important qualities, such as:

- clarity of thought
- the ability to write clearly and persuasively
- enthusiasm and commitment (by showing that you have researched the organisation and the work it is involved in).

Useful info: writing a supporting statement

Writing a supporting statement

To start with, make sure you read the instructions for the supporting statement (if they are given) so you know exactly what to include. If you have not been given any specific guidelines for the supporting statement, we suggest using the template below.

Introduce yourself

Give a brief summary of who you are, why you are interested in the role and why you would like to work for this specific organisation. For example, show that you are passionate about the job and the company, or have a personal interest in the area that the job or company focuses on. It is important to give a strong, positive impression of yourself right from the start.

Demonstrate how you meet the required competencies

Read the person specification and job description that are provided with the application form and explain, with examples, how you meet each point. Your examples should show where, when and how you successfully demonstrated the competencies required (the '**STAR**' approach'). Examples provide evidence that you can actually meet the employer's needs.

See the step-by-step guide below for further information on writing this part of your supporting statement.

Provide additional relevant information


If you have any additional skills, attributes or experiences which you feel will demonstrate that you are a good candidate for the role, you can mention them briefly here.

End on a positive

Your closing sentence should emphasise your enthusiasm and ability to do a good job.

Step-by-step guide to demonstrating that you meet the competencies for a role

1. Read through all of the information provided in the job description and person specification (or, if these are not included, the information may be in the job advert itself).
2. Make a list of the essential competencies (**S**kills, **A**bilities, **K**nowledge and **E**xperience) required for the role. If a person specification is provided, this should have the information you need.



3. Write six to eight headings for paragraphs to demonstrate that you have these competencies. To do this, you may be able to group together some of the essential competencies under a single heading. For example, the essential competencies:

- > *'Ability to deliver high quality work to tight deadlines'*
- > *'Strong skills in organisation, prioritisation and planning'*
- > *'Experience of producing timely progress reports'*

may be grouped under the heading of 'Time management skills'.

4. Use the '**STAR** approach' to write a paragraph under each heading, providing specific examples of how you meet the competency.

5. Bring the information together and edit what you have written to ensure that you are not repeating yourself. You can choose to remove the headings at this point, or keep them in.

6. Add your introduction to the start and the additional relevant information to the end. Remember to finish with a positive statement.

Further tips for writing an effective supporting statement

- > Be concise: the length of your supporting statement should be between half a side of A4 (minimum) and two sides of A4 (maximum). It may take several drafts to achieve this.
- > Be specific: you need to tailor your supporting statement for each new application according to the nature of the job.
- > Be positive and avoid negative comments:
 - > start and finish your statement positively. For example, at the end you could say something like: *'I am confident that my experience equips me well for this position. I have a strong commitment and I know that I would be an invaluable member of the team.'*
 - > use positive statements about yourself throughout. For example, say *'I successfully organised...'* rather than *'My supervisor helped me to organise...'*
 - > if you do not feel that you can demonstrate one of the competencies required, cover this in a positive way. Rather than saying *'I do not have experience of using Raiser's Edge software'* you can say *'I am highly skilled in the use of database software through my work as a database administrator for Martin's Accounts. I am a fast learner and always strive to ensure my knowledge and skills are up to date. Due to my extensive experience navigating a variety of different databases, I am confident in my ability to learn Raiser's Edge quickly and efficiently with minimal support.'*
- > Proofread your statement: use spell check to check your spelling and grammar. Then ask someone you trust to read through your statement to check that it is clear, positive and easy to read.

Activity: supporting statements

A supporting statement is a statement you write about yourself which demonstrates all your relevant skills and experiences positively. It must relate to the person specification or the job description.

Look at the job description and the two supporting statements below. Which of the two supporting statements is a good example for this role? Example answers can be found on page 97.

Job description

Administration Assistant, Bird and Fairy Ltd

Essential skills:

- > computer literate
- > strong accuracy skills.

Desirable skills:

- > data inputting experience
- > Maths GCSE.

Example supporting statement A

I am interested in applying for the job as an Administration Assistant because I enjoy working with computers. I have good Microsoft Word and Excel skills and I have GCSEs in Maths and IT which I think will help with the data entry part of the job. I am very organised with an eye for detail so I would always complete filing accurately. I have previous administration experience in my role at Moxon-Doxons. I am enthusiastic and reliable which I think are essential traits to be a good admin assistant and I am keen to start work. I would be a positive addition to the admin team.

Example supporting statement B

I am applying for the role of Administration Assistant because I want to find paid work. I am not bad at using the computer and often play computer games in my spare time. I live quite close to the office, so it would be a convenient place to work for me, which means I know the local area and am more likely to get to work on time. One of my cousins works as an admin assistant and they said it would be a good job for me to do.

Answers: supporting statements

Job description

Administration Assistant, Bird and Fairy Ltd

Essential skills:

- > computer literate
- > strong accuracy skills.

Desirable skills:

- > data inputting experience
- > Maths GCSE.

Example supporting statement A

I am interested in applying for the job as an Administration Assistant because I enjoy working with computers. I have good Microsoft Word and Excel skills and I have GCSEs in Maths and IT which I think will help with the data entry part of the job. I am very organised with an eye for detail so I would always complete filing accurately. I have previous administration experience in my role at Moxon-Doxons. I am enthusiastic and reliable which I think are essential traits to be a good admin assistant and I am keen to start work. I would be a positive addition to the admin team.

Example A is a good supporting statement because:

- > it demonstrates that the jobseeker has the essential skills
- > it demonstrates that the jobseeker has the desirable skills
- > it gives the employer confidence that the jobseeker can do the role as it describes their similar experience in a previous role
- > it highlights the jobseeker's strengths
- > the jobseeker comes across as positive and motivated.

Example supporting statement B

I am applying for the role of Administration Assistant because I want to find paid work. I am not bad at using the computer and often play computer games in my spare time. I live quite close to the office, so it would be a convenient place to work for me, which means I know the local area and am more likely to get to work on time. One of my cousins works as an admin assistant and they said it would be a good job for me to do.

Example B is not a good supporting statement because:

- > it doesn't demonstrate that the jobseeker has essential or desirable skills
- > it doesn't sell the strengths of the jobseeker
- > it gives information that is irrelevant to the employer.



Useful info: Dos and don'ts for your application form

Do

- When filling out the education and employment history sections, put them in date order starting with the most recent information first.
- Stay within any word limits that are given. Some application forms give maximum word limits for specific sections.
- Ask someone to check over your application form, and proofread it before you send it off.
- Check the day and time of the closing date and make sure you send your application form before this day and time.
- Always keep a copy of any application forms that you have completed. They will be useful if you are asked to attend an interview and they will also help you complete other application forms in the future.
- Usually you will fill out the application form on a computer or online. If you are given a paper application form fill it out using block capitals in black ink.

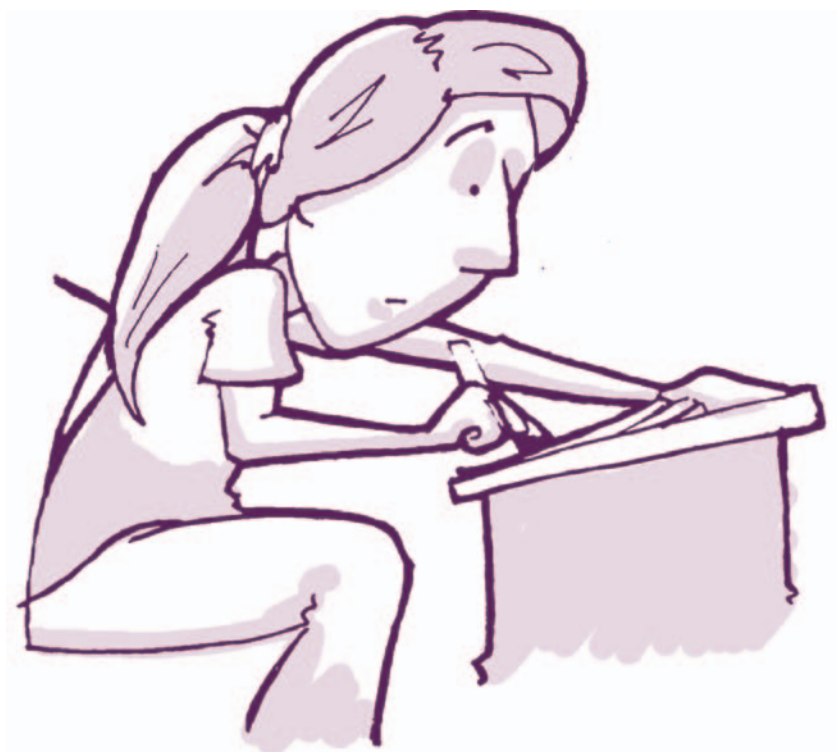
Don't

- Do not assume that the space provided on an application form is all that you have available to complete your answers. You can continue a section on a separate sheet of paper and attach it to your application form, if this is necessary.
- When application forms ask you to give dates of events (eg dates of employment or education), you do not have to be completely specific. Unless the application form says otherwise, it is sufficient to give the month and the year. The day and date is not usually necessary.
- Do not be discouraged if the form includes sections where you do not have much information to give. Many application forms are designed to be used by a variety of people and not everyone will be able to complete all of the sections or fill up all of the space provided. For example, if you have recently left school, you won't be able to write much in the 'Employment history' section. If you need to leave something blank, simply write 'N/A' which is short for 'not applicable'.

Activity: application form checklist

When you're completing an application form, remember to:

- ☐ read the form through before you start to complete it
- ☐ list your jobs and education starting with the most recent first
- ☐ be positive about your previous experience
- ☐ 'sell' your skills and experience in the supporting statement
- ☐ use the '**STAR**' approach to answer skills/competency questions
- ☐ stay within any word limits that are given
- ☐ ask someone to proofread your application before you send it off
- ☐ keep a copy for your own records.





Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Created a CV	
Created a template cover letter	
Applied for a role using a CV and cover letter	
Created a speculative letter	
Sent a speculative application	
Created a supporting statement	
Applied for a role using an application form	

Interviews

Aim

To prepare you for attending an interview.

Objectives

You will be able to:

- > prepare effectively for an interview
- > understand the importance of non-verbal communication in an interview
- > interpret interview questions
- > talk about your skills and strengths
- > prepare answers to common interview questions
- > identify appropriate interview adjustments.

"I have done mock interviews with employment advisers, those have been very helpful. They helped me think about what I would be asked at an interview and I also learned how to say things in a positive way. I'm a bit too honest about my flaws rather than my positive sides."

Content

1. Useful info: different types of interviews
2. Useful info: communication skills for interviews
3. Activity: preparing for interviews
4. Activity: answering interview questions
5. Useful info: emphasising your strengths
6. Activity: being positive
7. Activity: asking questions at the end of an interview
8. Useful info: essential interview tips
9. Activity: practice interview
10. Activity: interpreting interview questions
11. Useful info: reasonable adjustments at interviews
12. Activity: reasonable adjustments that would help me in an interview
13. Outcomes checklist



Useful info: different types of interviews

"Interviews make me particularly anxious. I worry about not speaking clearly, mixing up my words and saying the wrong thing. I wonder what the interviewer will be like and worry that I'll get asked some unusual questions. I also worry about unexpected pre-interview things like maths tests."

Most interviews take place in a quiet office with just you and one or two people from the company. But interviews can be in different formats or settings. Here are some descriptions of interviews or things you may be asked to do.

Panel interviews

This is where more than two people interview you. They usually sit behind a desk and you sit in front of them.



Informal interviews

This is more of an easy-going chat, usually between just you and one other person.

Skills test

You may be asked to do one or more tests to prove you have the skills for the job. For example, if you are applying for an administrative job, you may be asked to complete a data input test.

Aptitude test

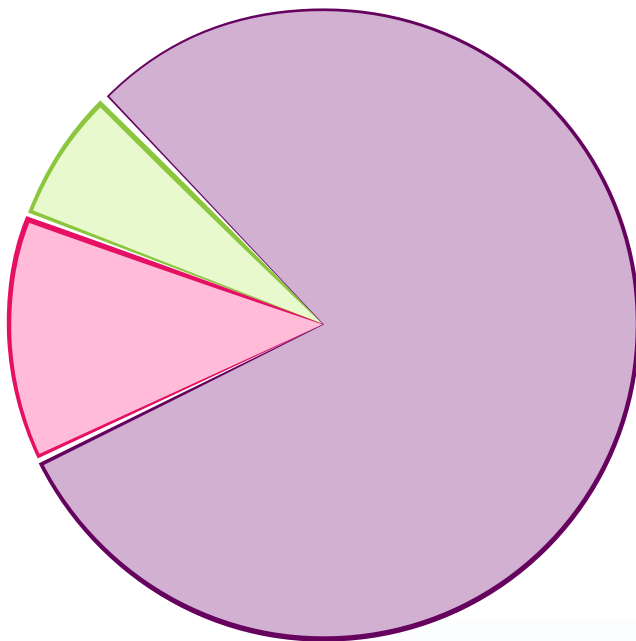
If you are applying for a job which involves training you may be asked to do aptitude tests. They help you and the employer find out how well you may be able to do some parts of the job. For example, if you are applying for a job on an assembly line, they might ask you to put some pieces together or to use a screwdriver.



Useful info: communication skills for interviews

We don't only use words to communicate to each other. In fact, the actual words we use only make up a small percentage of how we communicate.

When you meet someone during an interview, it only takes a few seconds for them to form an initial impression of you. The pie chart shows how what you say, your tone of voice and your body language all contribute to this initial impression.



80% body language
eg gestures, posture,
hand signals

13% tone of voice

7% message content



Body language

Here are our tips for making a good impression through body language.

Eye contact: eye contact conveys listening, interest and honesty. You should look at the interviewer during conversation, but without staring. If you find eye contact difficult, try focusing on the interviewer's forehead. This should feel less intense for you but to the interviewer you will still look like you're making eye contact. Alternatively try looking at the interviewer occasionally, when something particularly important is said.

Facial expression: smiling naturally and frequently shows that you are relaxed, confident and friendly. It also shows that you have a good connection with the interviewer. The most important time to smile is as you enter the interview.

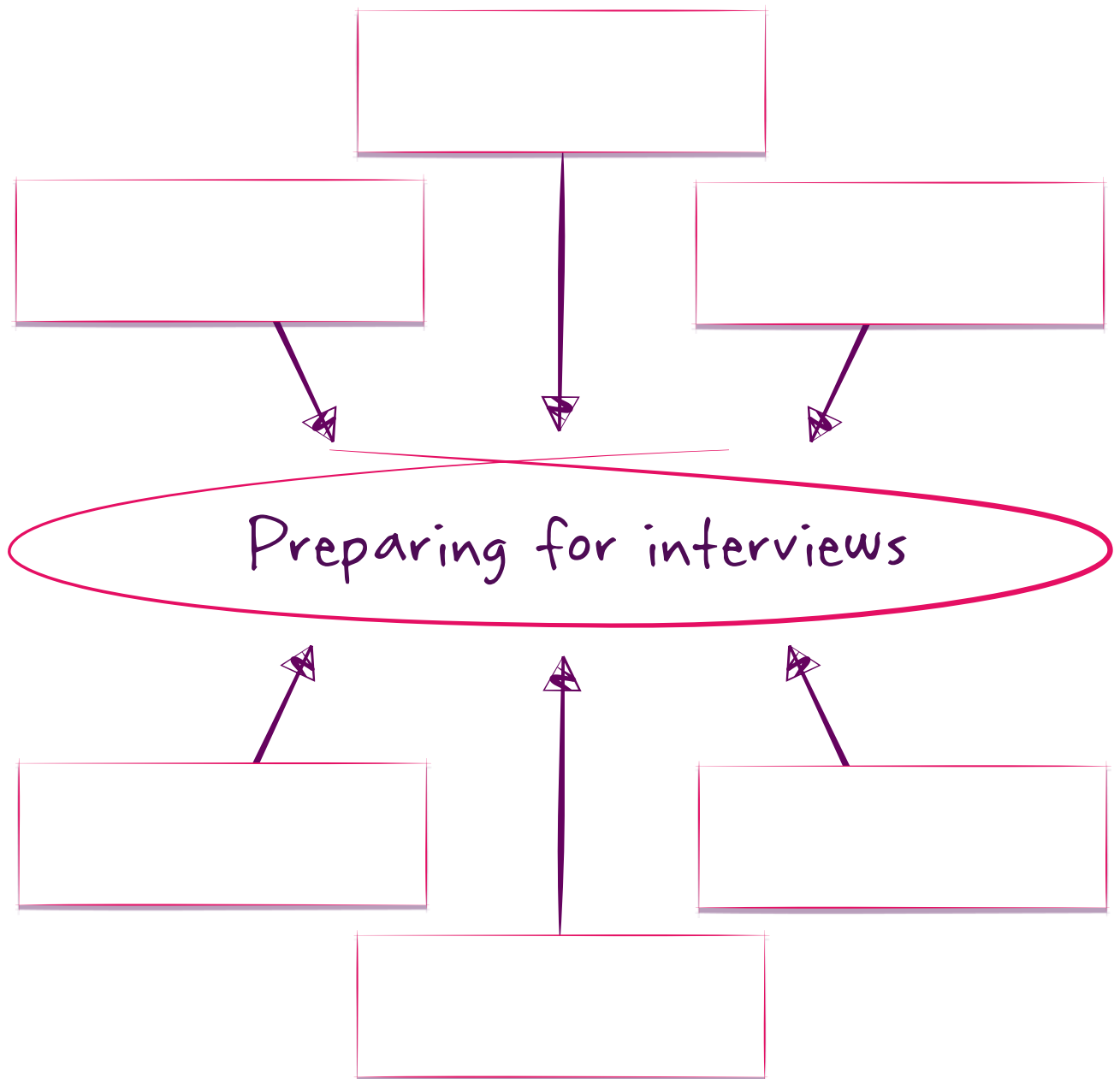


Gestures: too much hand movement can detract from the verbal message. Try to find the right balance – it is natural to have some hand movement, but it is also fine to keep your hands clasped in front of you.

Posture: sit up straight and sit well back in the chair, avoiding sitting on the edge of the seat or slouching. You may like to lean slightly forward when listening or replying to show your interest. Keep your hands relaxed on your lap or on the arm of the chair and avoid fiddling with pens, clothing or hair. Keeping your hands clasped together in your lap reduces the impulse to fidget or fiddle. Tucking your legs under the chair can reduce the impulse to move your legs or tap your feet, which could be irritating for the interviewer.

Activity: preparing for interviews

Fill in the spaces below with your ideas about how you can prepare well for an interview. Example answers can be found on pages 106-7.



Example answers: preparing for interviews

Two days before the interview

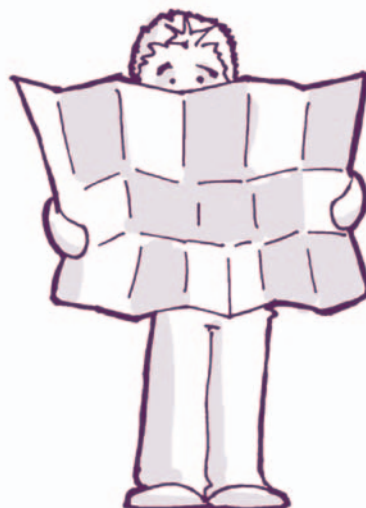
- > Check you have suitable clothes and your hair can be styled in a presentable way.
- > Write down a list of your best skills
eg always on time, keen to work, smart appearance.



- > Research the company on the internet to find out more about who you could be working for.
- > Think of some questions you could ask at the end of the interview *eg When could I start? Are there opportunities for training?*
- > Contact your employment adviser if you need further help.

One day before the interview

- > Plan your journey to the interview using your local transport website (for example in London it is **www.tfl.gov.uk**). Make sure you allow enough time to be at the interview ten minutes before it starts.
- > Wash and iron smart clothes such as a shirt and trousers.
- > Make sure you have a smart bag to bring – do not take a plastic bag to the interview.



- > Clean your shoes with a damp cloth.
- > Make sure your shoes match your outfit *eg grey shoes with brown trousers don't really match.*

The night before the interview

- > Go to bed early.
- > Set your alarm to allow plenty of time to get showered, dressed and have breakfast in the morning.
- > Pack everything you need in your smart bag:
 - > you should take your interview letter with you as this will have important information on it and you might also want to take a plan of your journey
 - > bring a notepad for recording any instructions you are given
 - > make sure you write down the names of the people who will be interviewing you.



The morning of the interview

- > Have a shower or a bath, wash your hair and remember to put on deodorant.
- > Have breakfast.
- > Leave your house at a time that will get you to the interview ten minutes before it starts.



Activity: answering interview questions

Below are some examples of the types of questions that could be asked at an interview. Read the questions and then practise answering them, using the tips provided. At least one or two of these questions is likely to come up in your next interview.



1. Can you please tell us about your most recent role?

Tip: use four or five sentences to summarise your tasks in your previous role and what parts of the role you enjoyed the most.

2. Why did you apply for this position?

Tip: be positive and explain why you're interested in the type of work involved and also why you want to work for this particular company.



3. What skills do you think are needed to do this type of work?

Tip: tell the employer which skills are required and also give examples of situations where you have used those skills.

4. At times you may be given several things to do at once, how would you decide on the best order for completing the tasks?

Tip: try to give an example of a situation where you have had to prioritise tasks. Describe how you decided what to do first.

5. Good teamwork is essential to the success of the company. Can you give an example of your teamworking skills?

Tip: the employer is asking this as they need to be confident that you will make an effort to fit in and help colleagues when required. Think back to your previous experiences (for example at school, college, work experience, voluntary work or in your personal life) and choose an example of a time when you worked well with other people in order to achieve something. Structure your answer using the STAR method which means describing the situation, task, action and result.

6. Do you have any questions for us?

Tip: it's always best to have at least one question for the employer, so you seem prepared.

Useful info: emphasising your strengths

"I'm not very good at selling myself. I worry that I will say things that are not completely true. I really don't like lying."

Try to think of a job interview like an advertisement on television. The difference is that you are the product and the employer is the viewer. You will have around half an hour to convince the employer that he should buy your services. To convince the employer to 'make the purchase' you will have to emphasise all the strengths or positive qualities you have to offer.



Answering questions about weaknesses

The employer might ask you to talk about any weakness or negative points you have. If so, it is important that after mentioning your area of weakness you are able to show its positive side.

For example:

"I am a perfectionist and I sometimes check my work four or five times before submitting it. However, this means the work I produce is accurate."

If you structure your answer in this way, the employer is likely to respect your honesty and at the same time admire your determination.



Activity: being positive

1. In the table below, write down as many of your positive qualities as you can think of and also one negative quality.

Positive qualities/strengths

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Negative quality/weakness

1.

2. Now write down how you could turn the negative into a positive.

3. Below are a number of questions that you could be asked at an interview, along with some examples of negative responses. Read each one and then write how you could respond in a positive way.

Interview question 1: Have you got experience of using Microsoft Excel?

Example negative response: Not really. I used it at college but I can't remember much about it.

Your positive response:



Interview question 2: Your finishing time will be 6.30pm

Example negative response: Oh no! That's no good to me. I need to be back home by 6pm, otherwise I'll miss the six o'clock news.

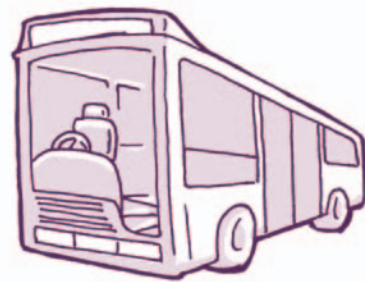
Your positive response:



Interview question 3: You may be required to work on bank holidays. Would this be OK?

Example negative response: No, it wouldn't be OK actually, as I might not be able to get a bus home.

Your positive response:



Interview question 4: We would like you to start at the beginning of next month, is this suitable?

Example negative response: No, I'm going away for a weekend with my girlfriend at the start of next month.

Your positive response:



Activity: asking questions at the end of an interview

Why is it important to ask questions at the end of an interview?

At the end of the interview the interviewer will ask if you have any questions you would like to ask. It is important to have some questions prepared so that you can find out the information you need to know. You can use these questions as a way of 'selling yourself' and showing your positive attributes.



Example question to ask an interviewer: What training and development opportunities will there be?

Why: the question shows that you are keen to learn and develop.

Now write down three questions that you would like to ask an interviewer about a job.

1.

2.

3.

Useful info: essential interview tips

For every interview, make sure that you:

Prepare well – find out information about the company and read over the job description.

Don't be late – make sure you know how to get to the interview and, if you can, carry out a trial run journey the day before the interview. Arrive at reception ten to 15 minutes before the interview is due to begin, to give you time to compose yourself.

First impressions count – when you walk into an interview room smile and make eye contact with the interview panel. Don't offer a handshake until the employer offers one and wait to sit down until you are asked to do so.

Be friendly and cheerful throughout the interview – remember to smile and try to make eye contact with the panel, especially when someone is asking you a question. If you find eye contact difficult it can be helpful to focus on the interviewers forehead or the bridge of their nose.

Provide examples – back up your answers with examples from your previous experience, to demonstrate your skills and strengths.

Take your time – listen carefully to each question and allow yourself time to think about your response.

Be positive – don't make negative comments about yourself or previous employers.

Do your research – prepare questions to ask at the end and take a notepad with you if you think you'll need some help to remember the questions you want to ask. If the employer has already answered your question during the course of the interview then a good response would be, 'I was going to ask about...but you have already covered that. I don't have any other questions.'

Last impressions count – end the interview positively, for example by saying, 'It was good to meet you all. Thank you for your time.'



Activity: practice interview

"We have filmed some mock interviews which was helpful for me too. I could look at my body language on the video afterwards. I also learned that I am very negative when I answer questions. I'm working out ways to say things which are more positive."

Here are some common interview questions that you can practise answering. It is useful to get a friend or family member to ask you the questions as if you were in a real interview. Remember to think about your non-verbal communication as well as what you say.

- 1. Can you tell us about what you were doing in your most recent role?**
- 2. What is it that attracts you to this type of work?**
- 3. What skills do you think would be required for this type of job?**
- 4. Can you give examples of times when you have shown that you have these skills?**
- 5. This job will involve both working on your own at times and working as part of a team. Please give us an example of a time when you achieved something as part of a team.**
- 6. What are your key strengths?**
- 7. Do you have any questions for us?**

Try filming the interview and watching it back – this will help you to see how you come across in an interview.



Feedback for practice interview

During your practice interview, your interviewer will write down their comments on this form and use it to give you feedback at the end. If you are filming the interview, you can use this checklist to assess your own performance when you watch it back.

Areas to consider	Comments
Handshake	
Posture	
Eye contact	
Smiling at appropriate times	
Length of answers	
Emphasising strengths	
Prepared questions at the end of interview	
Any other positive points	



Main areas to work on for next interview

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Activity: interpreting interview questions

Interview questions can sometimes be asked in an unclear or unspecific way, or ask you what you would do in a hypothetical situation.

Here are some example interview questions with inappropriate answers. Write a new version of each question to make it clearer and more specific. Then write your answer to the question. Example answers can be found on pages 120-1.

1. Tell me about yourself.

Example answer: I was born on 12 March 1986, it was a Sunday. My favourite colour is blue. My mum is 56 years old and my dad is 58. I went to Elm Court Nursery and then I went to school in Peckham. I like going to the cinema, I always get nachos and cheese but I don't like them with jalapenos.

Clearer version of question:

Your answer:

2. How did you find your last job?

Example answer: I found it online.

Clearer version of question:

Your answer:

3. This role involves working in a team. Will that be OK with you?

Example answer: I don't know because I haven't met the people on the team yet.

Clearer version of question:

Your answer:

4. How would your friends describe you?

Example answer: I don't know. I have never asked them to describe me.

Clearer version of question:

Your answer:



Example answers: interpreting interview questions

Interview questions can sometimes be asked in an unclear or unspecific way, or ask you what you would do in a hypothetical situation.

Here are some example interview questions with inappropriate answers.

1. Tell me about yourself.

Example answer: I was born on 12 March 1986, it was a Sunday. My favourite colour is blue. My mum is 56 years old and my dad is 58. I went to Elm Court Nursery and then I went to school in Peckham. I like going to the cinema, I always get nachos and cheese but I don't like them with jalapenos.

Clearer version of question:

Could you tell me what interests you about this job and give a brief description of any relevant roles or experience you have had? You should use four to five sentences

Your answer:

I am really interested in politics and international development. I have been working as a fundraising assistant at 'Help the Countries'. I am really motivated by seeing the difference that the organisation makes to people. I am interested in this role, as I believe your organisation has a substantial impact on the lives of people across the world.

2. How did you find your last job?

Example answer: I found it online.

Clearer version of question:

Did you like your most recent job? Could you also describe what you did in your most recent role in two to four sentences? Could you describe what you liked about your most recent role in two to four sentences?

Your answer:

I enjoyed my last role. I worked as a fundraising assistant at 'Help the Countries'. My role involved working in a team sending out information to supporters, and maintaining the supporter database. I enjoyed the database work as I have a good eye for detail and strong numerical skills. I also enjoyed working for an organisation that makes a difference to the lives of people across the world.

3. This role involves working in a team. How do you think you will cope with this?

Example answer: I don't know because I haven't met the people on the team yet.

Clearer version of question:

Are you able to cope with working in a team? Can you describe a time when you have worked well in a team before?

Your answer:

I cope well with working as part of a team. In my last role I worked in a group to send out information about water poverty. My role was collating a list of addresses from different databases. I finished my task early, so was able to help another member of the group to put information in envelopes. We worked well together as a team and sent out information to over 200 people.

4. How would your friends describe you?

Example answer: I don't know. I have never asked them to describe me.

Clearer version of question:

Have your friends or relatives said that you have any positive personal qualities? What did they say? What are your positive personal qualities?

Your answer:

In my last role I got on well with my colleague Jaimal. He said that I was very polite, reliable and hard-working. He said that he enjoyed working with me. I am very patient and I think that helps me to get on with other people.



Useful info: reasonable adjustments at interviews

"I've been to interviews where I haven't disclosed that I am autistic. I got feedback like, 'We didn't get a sense of who you really are as a person. You didn't smile at us.'"

If you tell the employer that you have autism or Asperger syndrome, reasonable adjustments can be made to the interview process. You will need to tell the employer which reasonable adjustments you need. We explain more about reasonable adjustments and how to tell an employer you have autism or Asperger syndrome in the 'Understanding autism' section of this workbook.

Adjustments before the interview

Here are some things that you could ask an employer to do before your interview.

- Provide clear information on what will be expected at the interview, how long the interview will take, what needs to be brought along and how to get to the interview.
- Describe any tasks that you will have to do and the types of questions that may be asked.

Adjustments during the interview

You could ask the people interviewing you to make the following adjustments.

- Ask clear and specific questions such as, 'Describe your work history for the last three years', rather than, 'Tell me about yourself.'
- Ask questions based on past experience, relating specifically to skills needed for the job applied for, such as, 'In your last job, did you do any filing or data input? What processes or procedures did you use to do this effectively?'
- Avoid hypothetical ('What if?') questions such as, 'How do you think you'll cope with working if there are lots of interruptions?'
A better question would be, 'Think back to your last job. Can you tell us how you coped with your work when people interrupted you?'
- Prompt you and ask additional questions to get all the information they need.
- Tell you clearly if an answer is too long.
A polite but direct way of the interviewer doing this would be to say, 'Thank you, you've told us enough about that now and I'd like to ask you another question.'
- To be aware that your body language and eye contact may be different from other candidates and they should not interpret this as a lack of interest in the job.

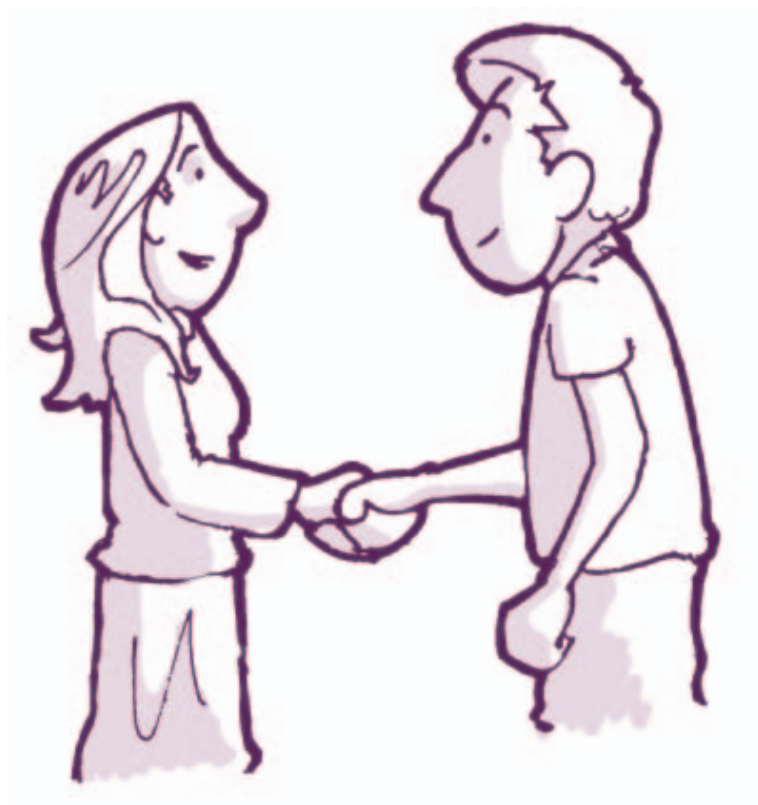


Other reasonable adjustments

If you feel it would help you, you could ask for a support worker to attend the interview with you, to act as a facilitator or 'translator'. They could help with:

- rephrasing unclear questions
- giving context to a question
- prompting to give more information.

You could suggest to an employer that a work trial or placement evaluation would be a more suitable method than an interview to assess whether you have the skills to do the role. Some employers have found that a two-way placement evaluation – a period of work experience – is a better way of assessing individuals' talents than a formal interview.





Activity: reasonable adjustments that would help me in an interview

Write down two things that you might find difficult at an interview.

1.

2.

Now write down what reasonable adjustments could help you during the interview process.
You can use the information on page 38 to help you with this.

1.

2.

3.

4.



Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Prepared answers for common interview questions	
Identified four key skills or strengths	
Prepared examples of when these skills have been demonstrated	
Prepared questions to ask at the end of an interview	
Completed a mock interview	
Identified what reasonable adjustments would be helpful in interviews	

Finding work experience

Aim

To provide you with the skills and tools to find a work experience placement

Objectives

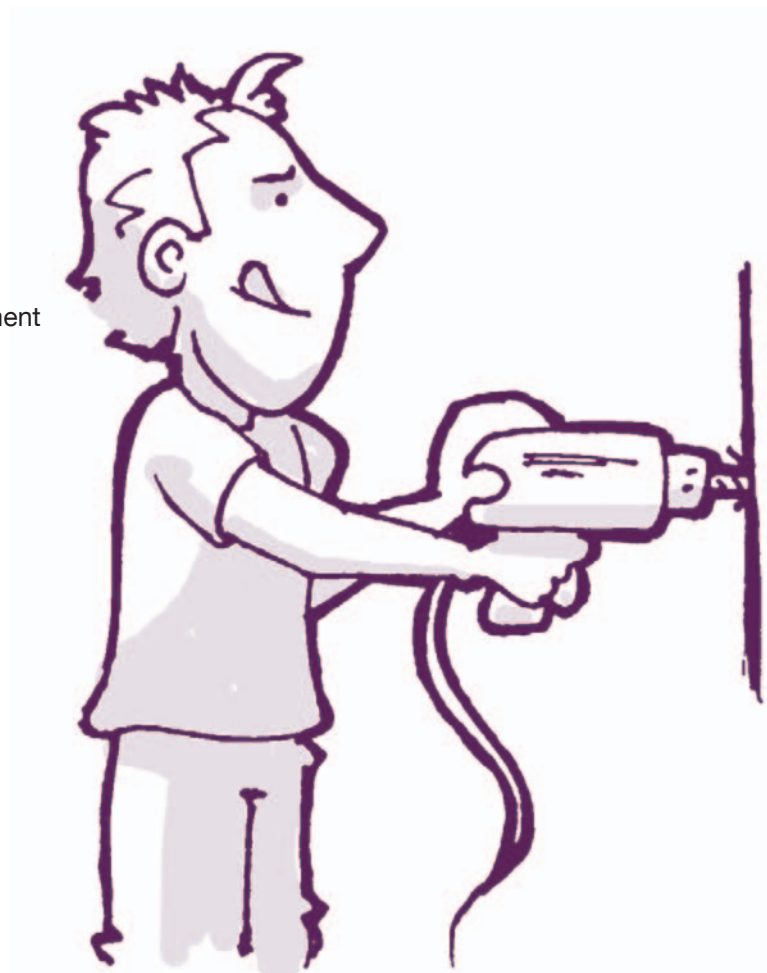
You will be able to:

- > understand the importance and benefits of work experience
- > understand the different types of work experience
- > identify and secure a suitable work experience placement
- > accurately record skills whilst on your work experience placement.

"Volunteering has made interviews a lot easier. I have examples for different skills that I didn't have before. I feel more confident about being asked questions in the interview. I'm better at talking to unfamiliar people and I have more to say."

Content

1. Useful info: why work experience is useful
2. Useful info: Cos's work experience story
3. Activity: how work experience would help me
4. Useful info: different types of work experience
5. Activity: ways to find work experience
6. Useful info: useful websites
7. Useful info: applying for work experience placements
8. Activity: work experience 'wish list'
9. Resource: work experience applications spreadsheet
10. Resource: example speculative letter
11. Activity: work experience expectations
12. Activity: work experience interview practice
13. Resource: template work experience placement agreement
14. Resource: template work experience placement health and safety checklist
15. Resource: work experience contact information for first day
16. Resource: work experience weekly review
17. Resource: work experience skills log
18. Resource: work experience feedback form
19. Useful info: tips for a successful work experience placement
20. Resource: thank you letter
21. Outcomes checklist



Useful info: why work experience is useful

Why is work experience and voluntary work useful?

When a job is advertised there will usually be a number of candidates applying for the same role and everyone might have the required qualifications.

Completing work experience or voluntary work can help you to stand out from other applicants. If you have previous experience of working, whether paid or unpaid, this will demonstrate to the employer that you have transferable skills which you can use in your role with their organisation.



Are voluntary placements and work experience ‘free work’?

You may be uncomfortable or unhappy with the idea of completing work experience. You might, for example, think that work experience and voluntary work is essentially working for someone for free. However, as a jobseeker there are many benefits to be gained from doing work experience and voluntary work.



Benefits of work experience and voluntary work

1. Employers look favourably on people who have completed work experience or voluntary work as it shows dedication and a strong work ethic.
2. You can gain experience and skills which could help you to meet the essential criteria for a job role.
3. You will have more experience and skills to include on your CV.
4. It provides an opportunity for you to get used to working in a new environment.
5. The things you learn about workplace expectations and 'unwritten rules' will prepare you for paid work.
6. It could help you to build your confidence and feel more positive about your ability to do a good job.
7. You will practise your communication skills which will help you in interviews.
8. You will be able to try some new tasks or jobs which you haven't tried before.
9. Because you are not getting paid, you may be able to choose the hours that you work.
10. By trying new tasks, you will find out the things you enjoy and the things you are good at. This will help you to decide on roles to apply for in the future.

"My work experience gave me an understanding of what a working day might be like and what tasks I would be expected to do in paid work. I learned new skills too. I spoke to some people on the telephone, that's something I was really scared of."



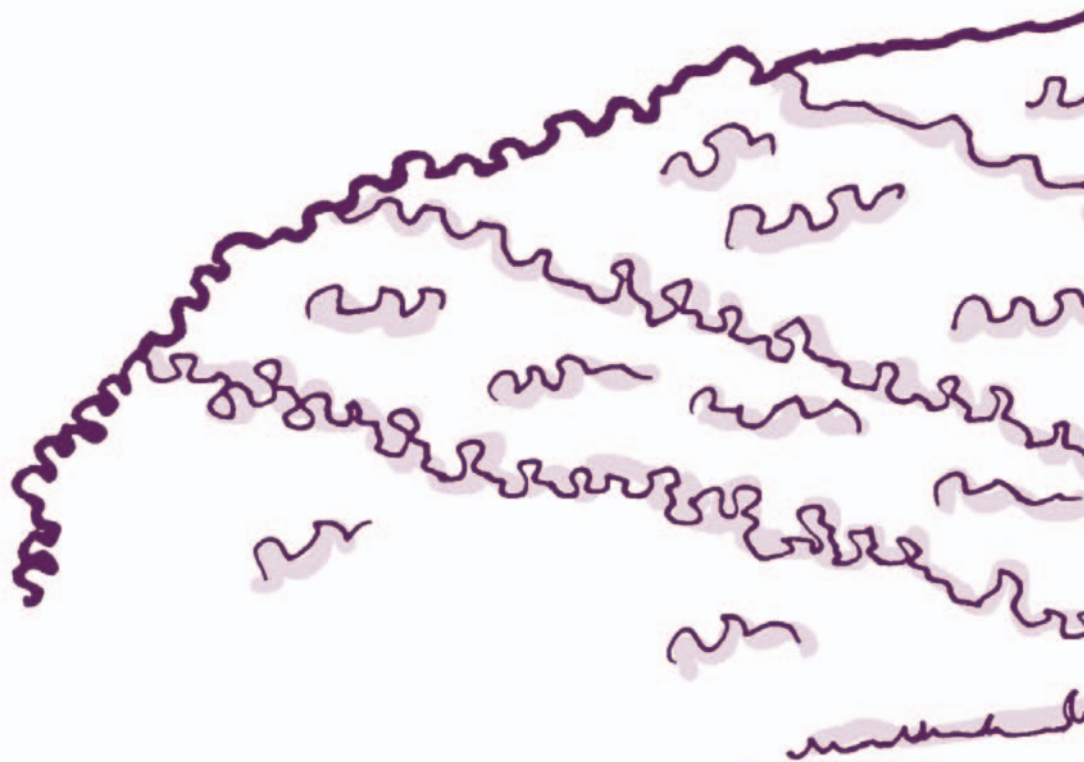
Useful info: Cos's work experience story

Cos, 19, is autistic. He had been applying for jobs for a long time but had not been successful with any of his applications, so he was given a place on a work preparation course. Cos did not have a very good experience at school and college – he was bullied and found it difficult to focus in class. This meant that he left school with few qualifications and he also had no work experience to include on his CV.

Cos's experiences at school had left him very nervous about speaking to people. It took Cos three attempts to enter the office for his work preparation course as he was very anxious and kept running away.

Cos has an interest in plant and insect habitats so he decided to look for voluntary work in gardening or conservation. He searched for garden centres, conservation sites, local charities and public gardens and his employment adviser contacted the companies to ask about voluntary opportunities.

Cos was offered a six-week voluntary placement as a gardener's assistant with a local charity. He helped the head gardener to look after the grounds for three care homes.



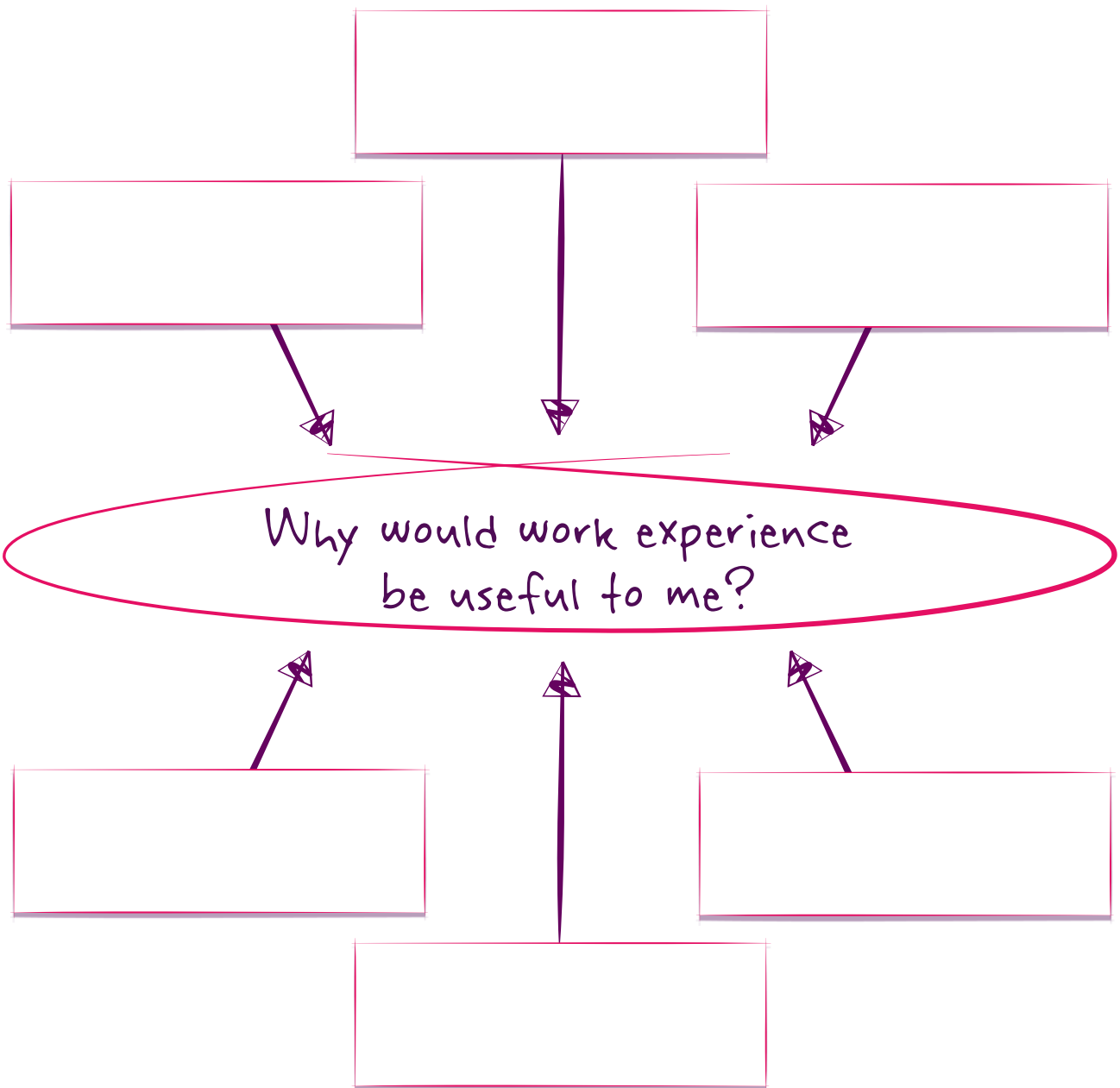
Cos's confidence grew during his placement. He discovered that he was very good at caring for plants and maintaining lawns. At first, he found it hard to talk to the head gardener but, by the end of his placement, he was able to ask questions and even make jokes sometimes. Once Cos's placement finished, he continued to volunteer for one day a week until he found a paid job.

Cos is now employed as a gardener for a country hotel. He loves his job and says that he 'would never have been given a permanent job if I hadn't done my volunteering job first' Cos's voluntary work helped him to build his skills and knowledge of gardening. It also helped him to become more comfortable with speaking to new people, which was really important for when he went to interviews. Cos received an excellent reference from the head gardener from his voluntary placement and this also helped him to secure his permanent job.



Activity: how work experience would help me

Write down your ideas about how work experience would be useful to you.



Useful info: different types of work experience

Work experience placements

How long: can be different lengths of time, as agreed with the company.

What it may involve: shadowing employees in the role you are interested in, completing tasks and duties under supervision, working on a specific project.

Salary: usually unpaid.

Usual way to apply: search for companies of interest and send a CV and speculative letter.



Internships

How long: the placement length can vary, but is most often between three and six months, as decided by the company.

What it may involve: a structured placement is set up which may allow you to try out different roles and departments in the company. Internships are usually offered by large companies.

Salary: minimal, or travel expenses only.

Usual way to apply: companies often advertise internships directly on their website and may also advertise on specialist recruitment websites. The application process can involve a number of stages, such as an application form, interview and skills tests.



Voluntary work

How long: any length of time.

What it may involve: completing a range of tasks and duties as a volunteer. Often this involves working for a charitable organisation. There may be other volunteers who work in the same role.

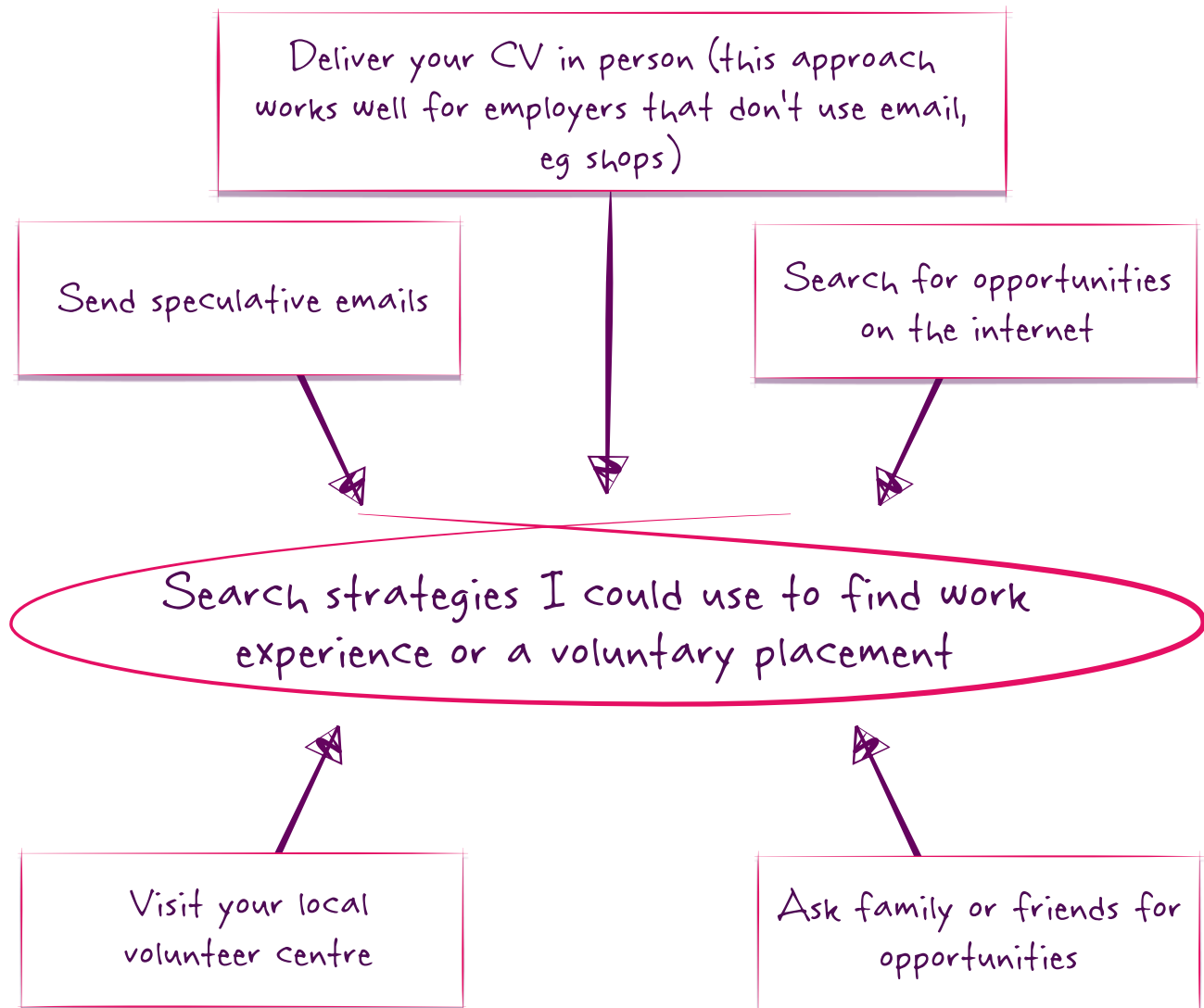
Salary: unpaid.

Usual way to apply: search on volunteering websites and charity websites or contact local charities directly. There may also be a volunteer centre in your local area. You may need to complete an application form and a health and safety form.



Ways to find work experience

Here are some ideas for how you can look for work.



Useful info: useful websites

Here are some useful websites that could help you to find work experience or voluntary jobs.

Voluntary work

- > www.do-it.org.uk
- > www.charitypeople.co.uk
- > www.volunteering.org.uk/component/gpb/supported-volunteering
- > www.nhm.ac.uk/take-part/volunteer
- > www.nms.ac.uk/support_us/volunteers_programme/volunteering.aspx
- > www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/Volunteer

Internships

- > www.get.hobsons.co.uk/index.jsp
- > www.milkround.com/s4/jobseekers
- > www.transitiontradition.com
- > www.thebigchoice.com
- > www.totaljobs.com/jobseeking/summer.html
- > www.reed.co.uk/graduate
- > www.thegraduate.co.uk
- > www.just4graduates.net
- > www.targetjobs.co.uk/work-experience



Useful info: applying for work experience placements

"We searched for weeks using Google, job search websites, local news websites, volunteer websites. I sent my CV and letters to lots of different companies. I ended up getting three different work experience places. They took ages to reply though. I don't like it when things take a long time, I'm impatient with things like that. But I'm getting more used to it now. They are probably busy with lots of things. If you keep trying and try to be patient you will hear back from some places."

Follow these steps when applying for work experience placements



1) Complete a work experience 'wish list'.

2) Decide how far you are willing to travel.

Consider travelling up to an hour as this may be how far you have to travel when you have paid work. You can use maps or journey planners on the internet to find out how long a journey will take you.



3) Decide when you would like to start your work experience.

It is very difficult to get work experience in December because of the Christmas break.



4) Decide how long you'd like your work experience placement to last, whether you want it to be part-time or full-time and how many days a week.

Telling the employer these requirements can help them decide whether they can offer the placement to you.



5) Write a speculative letter asking for work experience.

6) Identify at least 30 companies or organisations you would like to apply for work experience at.

7) Create a spreadsheet with details of the 30 companies or organisations:

- > the name of the company or organisation
- > a contact name
- > address
- > email address
- > phone number.



8) Send a speculative letter to each of the 30 companies or organisations.

Make sure you adapt the letter for each one.



9) Two weeks after sending your letters, follow up with a phone call or an email.

You could ask for the opportunity to meet with the employer so they can get to know you and you can get to know them.



Activity: work experience 'wish list'

Answer these questions to come up with your work experience 'wish list'. Remember that this is just a temporary work experience placement and not a permanent job.



1. Where (location) would you like to work?



2. What skills would you like to develop or build on during the placement?



3. What duties would you be willing to do on the placement?

4. Is there anything that you would not like to do on the placement?



5. Based on your answers to the questions above, can you think of some types of company or organisation which you would like to gain work experience with?



Resource: work experience applications spreadsheet

This is an example of how you might set up a spreadsheet to record your work experience applications.

Organisation	Contact	Phone	Email	Date emailed	Follow up	Response

Resource: example speculative letter

Sarah Aldwych
7 The Drive
Bexley
Kent DA5 1TY

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to enquire whether you would be able to offer a short unpaid work placement. I am interested in gaining some work experience as a customer service assistant or stock assistant to prepare for a future career within the retail industry.

I'm a likeable, hard-working and organised person. I have experience working in a charity shop and would like to gain supermarket experience as this is where I hope to work in the future.

Ideally I am seeking an eight-week placement for up to two days per week. The hours and days can be discussed and are flexible to your needs and what you are able to offer. I feel I could make a valuable contribution to Martin and Fryer Ltd and would work well in a retail environment.

I have attached a copy of my CV for your consideration. I will be available to speak with you by phone or email at your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,



Sarah Aldwych

These questions will help you to prepare for a work experience placement.

1. What do you hope to achieve from your work experience placement?
2. Can you think of any potential difficulties?
3. What aspects of the placement are you most looking forward to?
4. What areas do you feel you would need support with?

Activity: work experience interview practice

It will be helpful to practise your answers to these questions before you go to an interview or meeting about a potential work experience placement.



1. Tell us a bit about yourself.

2. Why do you want to do work experience?

3. Why are you interested in gaining experience in this industry?

4. What tasks would you like to do?



5. Have you had experience of this type of work before?

6. What relevant skills do you have?



7. What experience do you have with computers?

8. What do you do to make sure your work is accurate?



9. What is important when working as part of a team?



10. Can you tell us a bit about your disability and any adjustments you might need in the workplace?

11. What hours and days would you like to work on your placement with us?



12. Is there anything you want to ask us?



Resource: template work experience placement agreement

Before the work experience starts it is helpful to get a workplace agreement set up with the employer.

Work placement agreement

Your name
Placement job title
Start date of placement
Days and hours of attendance
Host company/department
Host company/department address
Supervisor telephone number (inc extension)
Supervisor email address

Placement objectives (skills for you to develop and the outcomes you hope to achieve):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

This is to confirm the details for the agreed work placement:

Your signature Date:.....

Supervisor signature

Supervisor name (print)..... Date:.....

Resource: template work experience health and safety checklist

Work placement health and safety checklist

Name of person completing placement:

Host company:

Main contact at work experience placement:

Main contact telephone number:

Dates of placement:

Hours of attendance:

Part A	Yes	No
Information on job and environment		
1. Will employee be required to operate any machinery? If yes, is machine fitted with guards?		
2. Will employee require either: a: protective clothing or b: safety equipment? If so, when will this be issued and who by?		
3. Will the employee be required to undertake lifting? If so, when will this occur and who will provide training?		
4. Are there any overhead dangers due to the use of scaffolding, ladders, mechanical movements or other environmental factors?		
5. Are there any areas that are restricted due to particular dangers eg electrical appliances, hazardous materials etc?		
6. Will the employee come into contact with any areas where there is moving mechanical equipment/vehicles eg forklifts? If yes, please specify		
7. Are there any special ventilation arrangements required due to fumes/dust?		
8. Within the client's working environment, is there any use of chemical substances, compressed air/gas or flammable liquid/gas? If yes, please specify		

Part A	Yes	No
9. Does the organisation have a policy on visual display unit (VDU) work eg maximum length of time before a break? If yes, please describe		
10. Will any other training necessary for health and safety be required for the job? If yes, please specify		

Part B	Yes	No
Information to be checked with employer before placement starts		
A. First aid kit Location		
B. Accident book Location		
C. Current employer's liability insurance Location		
D. Current public liability insurance Location		
E. Current fire certificate Location		
F. Toilet/washing facilities Location		
G. Locker facilities Location		
H. Canteen/eating facilities Location		
I. Named person responsible for health and safety, first aid, fire precautions. (State if more than one) Contact details:		

Resource: work experience contact information for first day

Work experience contact information for first day:

Company:

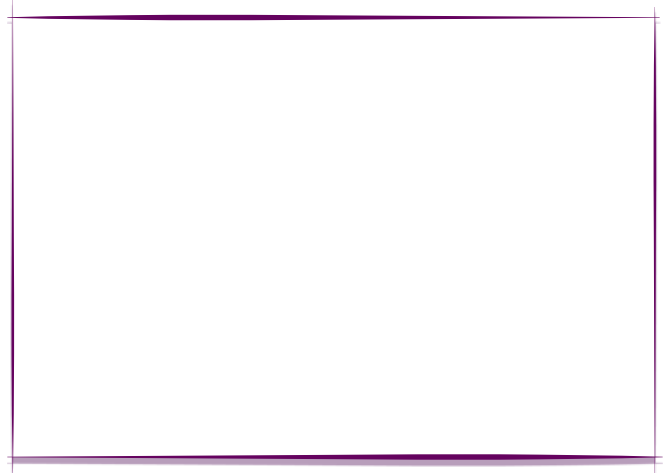
Contact name:

Phone number:

Address:

.....

Directions and map of how to get there:



Days of work and times:

Dress code:

Lunch/break arrangements:



Resource: work experience weekly review

Complete this form at the end of each week on a work experience placement.

Name:

Name of host company:

Work experience job title:

Start date of placement:

Week number:

What have you learnt this week?

What are you enjoying about the placement?

Is there anything you are finding difficult or not enjoying?

What tasks would you like to do next week?

Resource: work experience skills log

Use this form to keep a record of the different skills you've developed during your work experience.



Communication skills

Using equipment



Problem-solving

Organisational skills



Attendance and presentation skills



Working in a team





Resource: work experience feedback form

Work experience placement client feedback

Client name:

Name of organisation:

What I learnt during the placement:

What I was good at on placement/what my strengths were:

What I found difficult on placement/what I need to improve before my next role:

What I enjoyed most about the placement:

What I enjoyed least about the placement:

Useful info: tips for a successful work experience placement

Making a good impression

Be on time

- › Make sure you know how to get to your work experience placement before you start.
- › Find out what time you need to get the train or bus in order to arrive on time.



Appearance

- › If you are working in an office you will normally be required to dress smartly for work.
- › Speak to a friend or family member about what you will be expected to wear if you are unsure whether you should dress smartly (trousers and shirt) or more casually (jeans and t-shirt).
- › The clothes that you wear for your work experience should always be clean and ironed.
- › Leave yourself enough time in the morning to get showered as well as shave and wash hair if necessary.

Lunch

- › If you are going to be having lunch at work, find out what the options are.
- › Some workplaces have a canteen, in which case you may want to take money to eat there.
- › Alternatively, there may be sandwich shops nearby where you can buy lunch.
- › If you are planning to buy your lunch remember to organise your money either the night before or in the morning before you leave your home.
- › There may be a staff room or canteen where you can eat a packed lunch.
- › If you are making your own lunch, you will need to make sure you have left time in the morning to do this, or make it the night before and keep it in the fridge overnight to take with you the next day.



Ask questions

- › If you have been asked to do a task but aren't sure how to do it, always ask.
- › Remember:
 - › nobody is expected to know everything straight away; as with anything new, it takes time to settle in
 - › work experience is an opportunity to develop skills and the best way for you to do this is to ask when you need assistance.



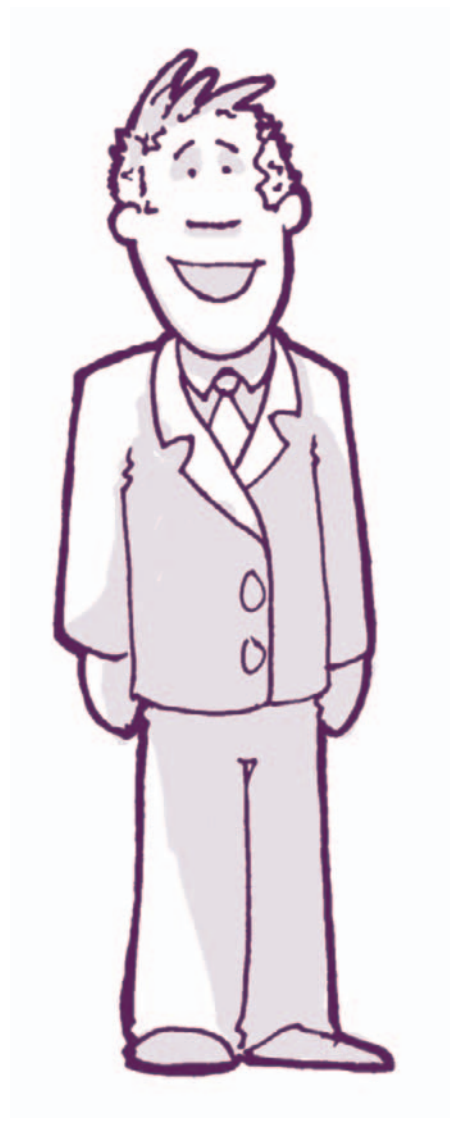
Enthusiasm and motivation

- › Employers and work experience providers will always be impressed by motivation and enthusiasm.
- › This applies whether you already have lots of skills for the job and are using work experience to fine tune them, or if you are learning new skills.
- › If you want to get the most out of your work experience placement, show that you are interested in what you are doing.
- › If you complete your work before the end of your work experience session, ask whether there is anything else you can help with – if you sit there doing nothing people will think that you are not interested in the work and that you are not motivated.



References

- › If you take all the above into consideration (arrive on time each day, dress appropriately, take care of your personal appearance, and show a keen interest in what you are doing), not only will you learn a great deal from your work experience providers, but they may also be prepared to write a reference for you in the future.
- › Having someone who is able to vouch for your reliability and ability is invaluable when trying to gain paid employment.



Resource: thank you letter

Benjamin Hudson
22 Golden Lane
Brundall
Norfolk NR13 8EH

Dear Christine,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to gain work experience at Draper and Jones Ltd. I really enjoyed my time working with the Finance team and have made a few friends who I hope to stay in contact with.

I found that I really enjoyed working for Draper and Jones Ltd and I would be interested in any suitable positions which may come up in the future.

The placement has greatly boosted my confidence and has confirmed that I would like to pursue a career in finance. Thank you for your support, training and guidance.

Yours sincerely,



Benjamin Hudson



Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Identified industry for work experience placement	
Identified suitable type of work experience	
Contacted 30 employers to apply for work experience	
Followed up all first contacts after two weeks	
Visited employer for work experience placement interview	
Completed work experience placement agreement	
Completed a work experience placement	
Recorded skills gained on placement	

Communication and social skills

Aim

To increase your understanding of communication and social interaction in the workplace.

Objectives

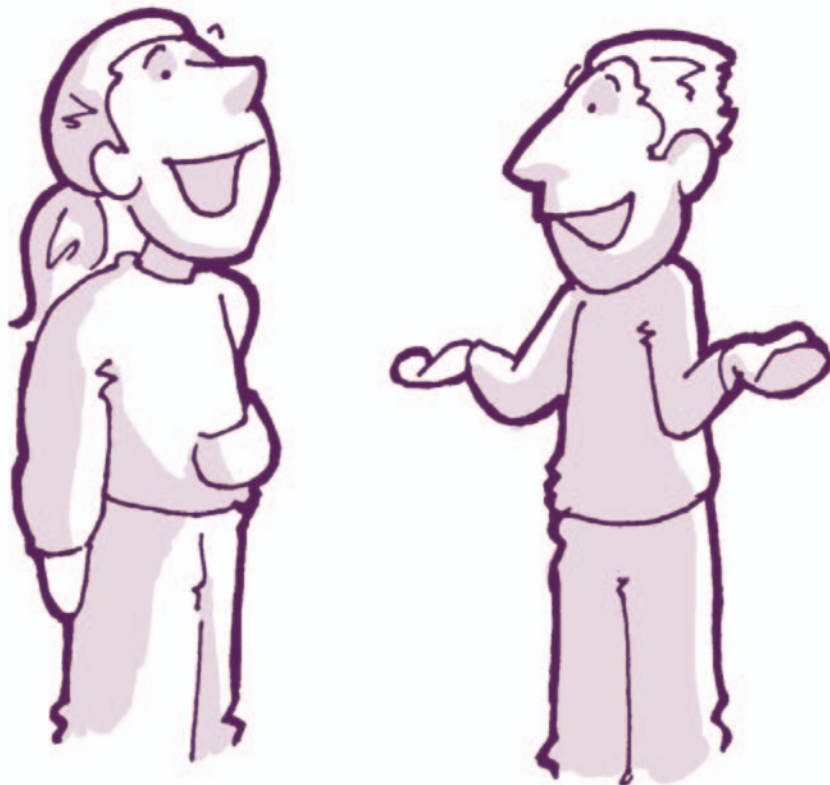
You will:

- > understand the different types of communication in the workplace
- > understand what social skills may be expected in the workplace
- > feel more confident in interacting with colleagues
- > be more prepared about what to expect when entering a workplace
- > understand appropriate and inappropriate conversations in the workplace.

"I would prefer it if people didn't rely too much on body language because sometimes I can't read it. I need to be told things in words. I can read verbal cues better than body language cues."

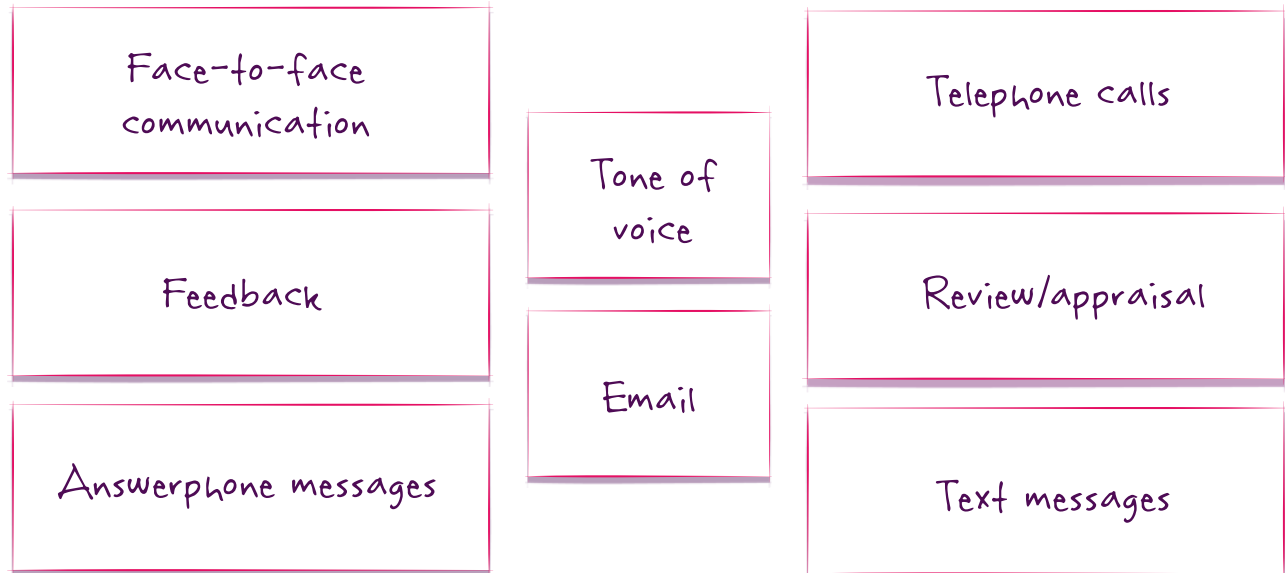
Content

1. Activity: types of communication in the workplace
2. Useful info: types of communication in the workplace
3. Activity: verbal and non-verbal communication
4. Useful info: word emphasis
5. Activity: confident communication
6. Useful info: body language
7. Activity: interpreting body language
8. Activity: listening
9. Activity: conversation topics in the workplace
10. Useful info: small talk
11. Activity: small talk journey
12. Activity: what are good social skills?
13. Activity: why are social skills important?
14. Activity: making friends at work
15. Activity: levels of conversation
16. Activity: starting and finishing conversations
17. Useful info: personal space
18. Activity: personal space
19. Activity: having lunch with colleagues
20. Outcomes checklist

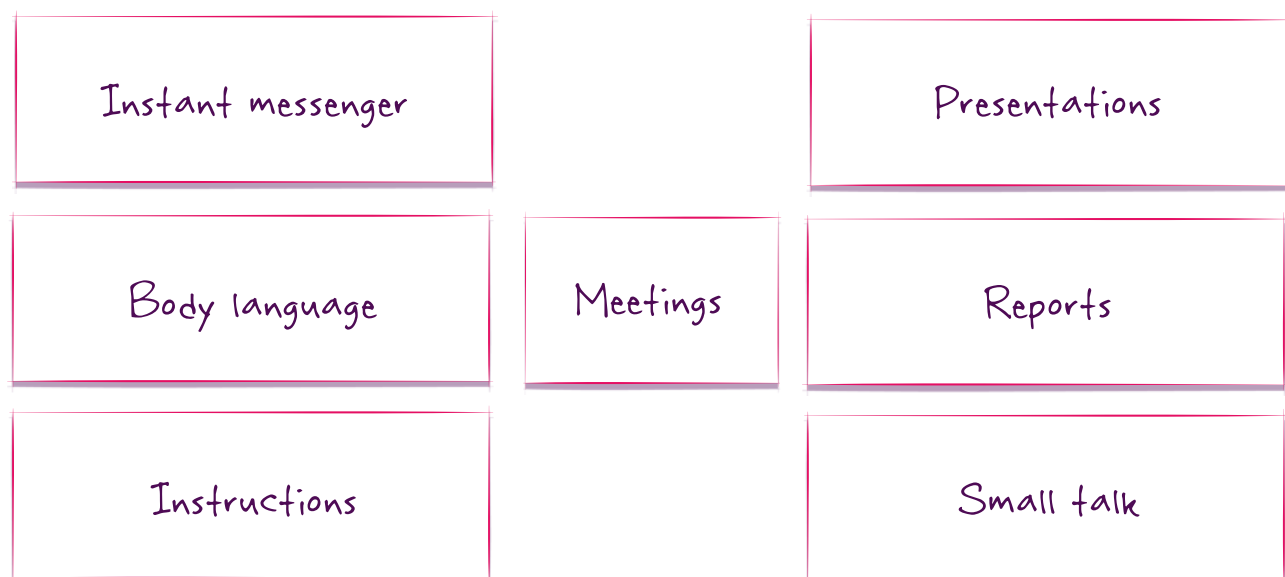


Useful info: types of communication in the workplace

People communicate in many different ways in different types of workplaces. Types of communication include:



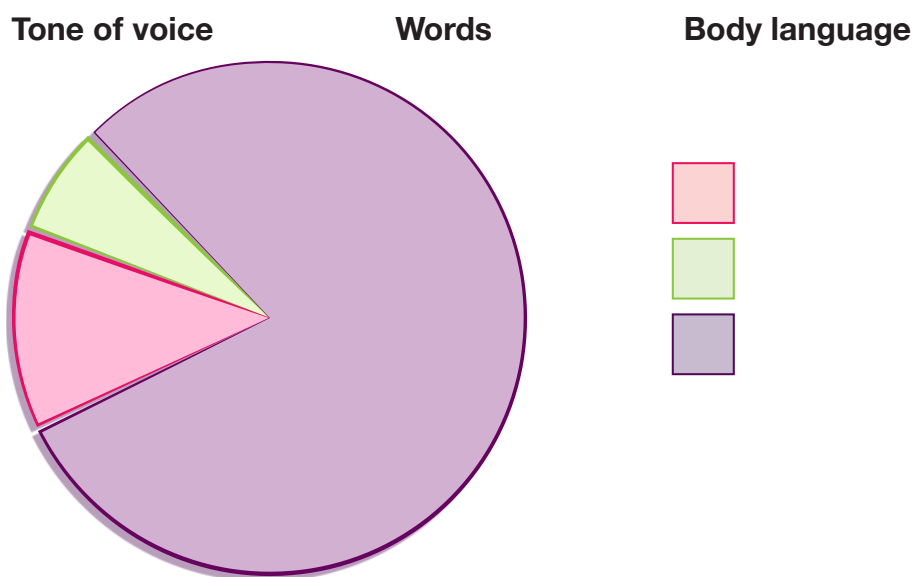
Types of communication in the workplace



Activity: verbal and non-verbal communication

1. How much do we convey through verbal and non-verbal communication?

Complete the pie chart key with the following options. Example answers can be found on page 159.



2. What is body language?

Write down four examples of body language:

1.
2.
3.
4.



Answers: verbal and non-verbal communication

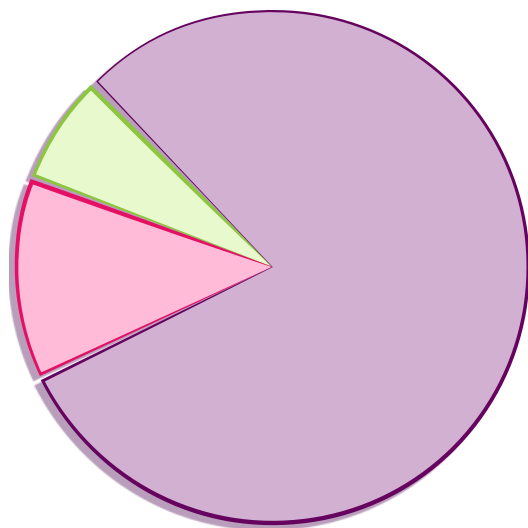
1. How much do we convey through verbal and non-verbal communication?

Complete the pie chart key with the following options:

Tone of voice

Words

Body language



Tone of voice



Words



Body language

2. What is body language?

Write down four examples of body language:

Examples:

1. How we position our bodies
2. Hand gestures
3. Facial expressions
4. Eye contact.



Useful info: word emphasis

"I'm very bad at interpreting body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. I'm more someone who understands words. If someone speaks to me loudly, I will just think they are being bossy. I don't think of other reasons like they are upset or overenthusiastic or there is something more subtle going on."

People sometimes emphasise particular words in a sentence so that they can imply a specific meaning. Sometimes, the words emphasised in a sentence can significantly change how it is interpreted.

Example

In the example, the same sentence is shown six times, with a different word emphasised in each one. The meaning of the sentence changes depending on which word is emphasised.

Emphasis of sentence	Meaning interpreted as
I didn't say she stole my money	but someone said it
I didn't say she stole my money	I definitely didn't say it
I didn't say she stole my money	but I implied it
I didn't say she stole my money	but someone stole it
I didn't say she stole my money	but I might have said she borrowed it
I didn't say she stole my money	she stole someone else's
I didn't say she stole my money	she stole something else

Activity: confident communication

Confidence can have a big impact on our ability to communicate. When we don't feel confident it is likely that we will not communicate clearly.

Try to think of previous situations where you have felt confident communicating and situations where you have not (they do not have to be work related). Example answers can be found on page 162.

Situations where **I have** felt confident communicating

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



Situations where **I have not** felt confident communicating

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



Strategies for confident communication

Write down any confidence-building strategies that you have used or that you know of

Example answers: confident communication

Confidence can have a big impact on our ability to communicate. When we don't feel confident it is likely that we will not communicate clearly.

Try to think of previous situations where you have felt confident communicating and situations where you have not (they do not have to be work related):

Situations where **I have** felt confident communicating

1. With relatives.
2. With friends I know well.
3. 1:1 situations.
4. In a quiet place.
5. When I feel prepared.



Situations where **I have not** felt confident communicating

1. At interviews.
2. Meeting new people.
3. In large groups.
4. At meetings.
5. In crowded and noisy places.



Strategies for confident communication

Write down any confidence-building strategies that you have used or that you know of:

- > preparing in advance
- > undertaking work experience
- > practising interview techniques/mock interviews
- > attending supported social events
- > thinking of suitable topics of conversation
- > asking for help and advice (from a trusted friend or mentor).

Useful info: body language

Even without speaking we are constantly communicating with others through our body language. It is by far the most important factor in communicating and it often forms the basis of first impressions.

Whether we want to impress employers at job interviews, interact effectively with colleagues or build strong social relationships, it is important to be aware of body language. It is important not only to consider what other people's body language is telling you, but also how your own body language might be interpreted by others.

"I keep thinking, am I misinterpreting people? Are people misinterpreting me? It gets really confusing. Sometimes I do wonder if people are misinterpreting me because my body language isn't conforming to what my words are saying."



Activity: interpreting body language

In the table below, the left-hand column gives various examples of body language. Take turns to act out the body language described and use the right-hand column to note down your interpretation of the body language displayed. The first one has been done for you. Example answers can be found on page 165.

Body language	Interpretation
Walking into room smiling with an upright posture.	This person looks friendly and confident.
Walking into room with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched, looking down.	
Sitting upright, typing and intensely focusing on the computer screen.	
Slouching in chair, swivelling, fiddling with a pen.	
Looking down with hands shielding eyes, reading a document.	
Pinching bridge of nose, eyes closed.	
Tapping or drumming fingers and fidgeting.	
Using eye contact, nodding and saying 'yes' and 'uhmm'.	

Example answers: interpreting body language

Body language	Interpretation
Walking into room smiling with an upright posture.	This person looks friendly and confident.
Walking into room with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched and looking down.	This person looks unconfident, nervous, unfriendly or lazy.
Sitting upright, typing and intensely focused on the computer screen.	This person looks hard-working, busy, focused and may not want to be distracted.
Slouching in chair, swivelling, fiddling with a pen.	This person looks too relaxed for the workplace, tired, lazy, bored or disinterested.
Looking down with hands shielding eyes, reading a document.	This person looks focused, possibly busy and stressed and may not want to be distracted.
Pinching bridge of nose, eyes closed.	This person looks stressed, tired or may have a headache.
Tapping or drumming fingers and fidgeting.	This person looks impatient, nervous, angry or unconfident.
Using eye contact, nodding and saying 'yes' and 'uhmm'.	This person looks focused, is listening intently and seems interested in the subject.

Activity: listening

Listening is an important aspect of communication.

Write down the different ways in which you can tell that someone is listening. Example answers can be found on page 167.

1.

2.

3.



4.

5.

Example answers: listening

Listening is an important aspect of communication.

Write down the different ways in which you can tell that someone is listening:

- > nodding
- > smiling
- > eye contact/looking at their face
- > asking questions
- > not interrupting or changing the subject
- > leaning towards the speaker
- > saying 'mmm', 'OK', 'right', 'yeah' etc.



Activity: conversation topics in the workplace

"I make a conscious effort to think about what I can say about my weekend before I go into work on Monday. I plan it all out. I'm sure most people don't have to plan what to say in those types of conversations. But, I prefer to do it and be prepared."

Sometimes it is difficult to know what you can talk about with your manager and colleagues, even if you get on well.

Think about whether the topics in the table below are appropriate for the workplace and why – write down your answers in the space provided. We've completed the first one for you

Although some of these topics are appropriate for the workplace, remember that conversations that aren't about work should be kept brief or only take place during breaks.

Topic	Is it appropriate?	Reason
Weather	Yes	Not controversial and can be a good small talk topic and conversation initiator.
Politics		
TV		
Disabilities		
Immigration		
Personal relationships		
Holidays		
Salary		
Your review meeting		
Violence		
Sports		

Answers: conversation topics in the workplace

Topic	Is it appropriate?	Reason
Weather	Yes	Not controversial and can be a good small talk topic and conversation initiator.
Politics	No	People can feel very strongly about it and may have very different opinions. It may be OK to talk about politics in general, for example about the progress of an election, but not voting preferences.
TV	Yes	Not a controversial subject unless discussing a show about another controversial topic.
Disabilities	Yes and no	Your disability is not something to be embarrassed about, but it is not appropriate to talk to everyone about it.
Immigration	No	People can feel very strongly about it and may have very different opinions.
Personal relationships	No	Many people prefer to keep personal relationships private and asking questions or telling colleagues personal information may be perceived as rude or nosey. However, if a colleague says something like, 'My son is ill at the moment' it may be appropriate to ask a question about this next time, for example, 'Is your son feeling better?'
Holidays	Yes	Not controversial and can be a good small talk topic and conversation initiator.
Salary	No	This can cause tension in the workplace and it is also against many organisations' rules of conduct outlined in employment contracts.
Your review meeting	No	This is private between you and your manager and should not be discussed with colleagues.
Violence	No	People may have strong opinions and may have personal experience that could cause them to feel upset.
Sports	Yes	Not controversial and can be a good small talk topic and conversation initiator.

Useful info: small talk

"If someone makes small talk with me, I have learned to nod and show signs that I'm doing active listening."

What is small talk?

Small talk is a short, casual conversation, usually about fairly impersonal, everyday topics, such as:

- > the weather
- > hobbies and interests
- > weekend/holiday plans
- > news headlines/current affairs.



Why do people make small talk?

Small talk may appear to be boring or without purpose. However, it actually plays a very important part in social interaction. Here are some of the reasons why it is important to try to use small talk:

- > it is a great way to start a conversation
- > it helps to maintain social relationships
- > it shows that you are being friendly
- > it is a polite and safe way of talking to someone you don't know very well
- > it can lead into other conversations.



A typical small talk conversation at work

John: 'Hi Sarah, How are you?'

Sarah: 'I'm fine – bit of a struggle on the trains this morning.'

John: 'I know – there are so many delays and strikes on at the moment.'

Sarah: 'Oh well – let's hope it gets better soon.'

John: 'Yeah. Anyway, what did you get up to at the weekend then? Anything good?'



Sarah: 'Yeah – I went to a party on Saturday night and last night we went to the cinema.'

John: 'Oh yeah – what did you see?'

Sarah: 'James Bond.'

John: 'Any good?'

Sarah: 'Yeah, it was alright. How was your weekend?'

John: 'Pretty quiet really – just spent time with the family.'

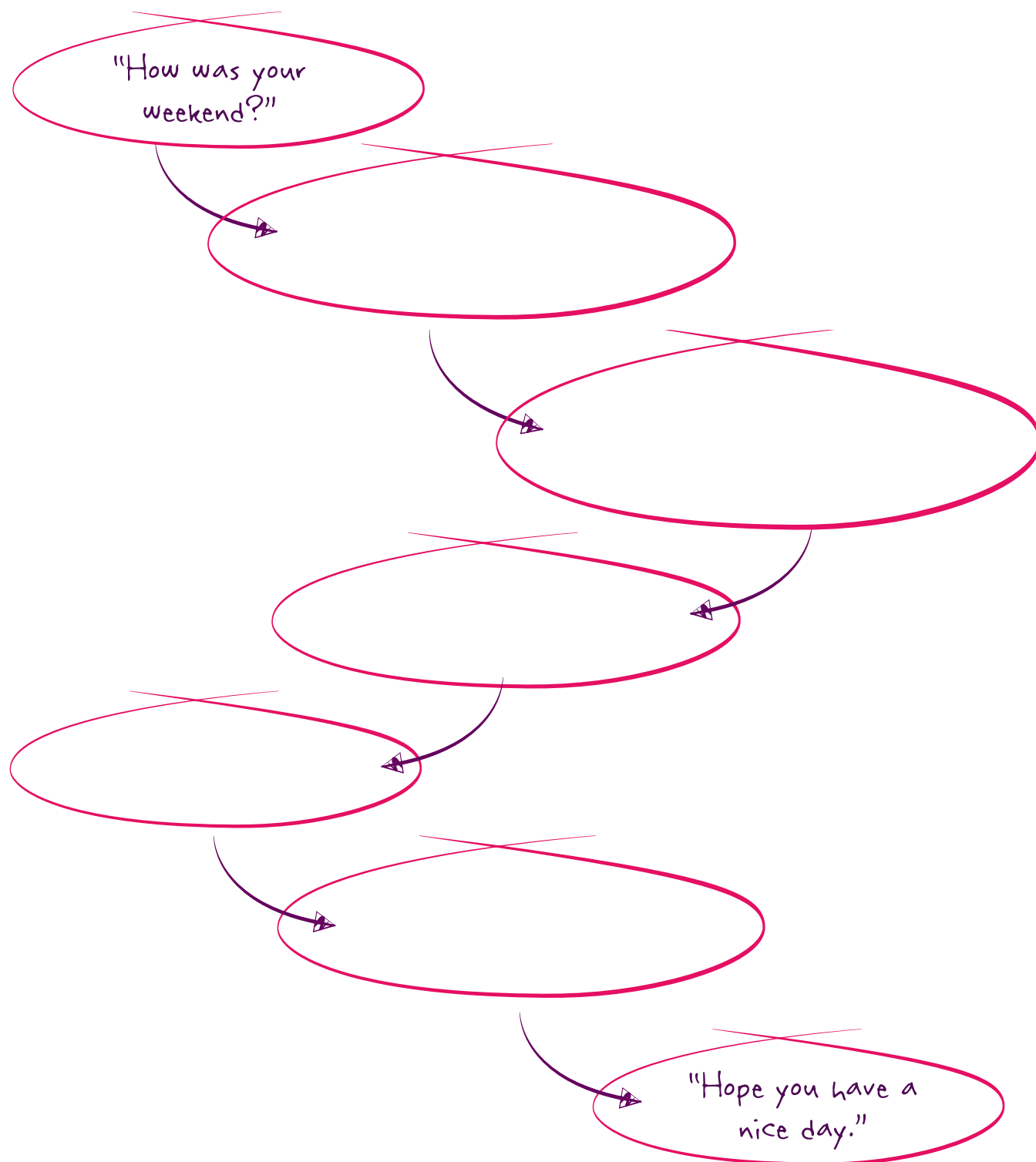
Sarah: 'Sounds nice. Anyway John, I'd better get on with some of my work so I'll see you later.'

John: 'Alright Sarah – talk to you later.'

Activity: small talk journey

START

"How was your weekend?"



FINISH

Example answers: small talk journey

START

"How was your weekend?"

"My weekend was lovely thank you, nice and quiet. How was yours?"

"It was good thank you. I visited family on Sunday which was lovely."

"That sounds nice. Have you got a busy week?"

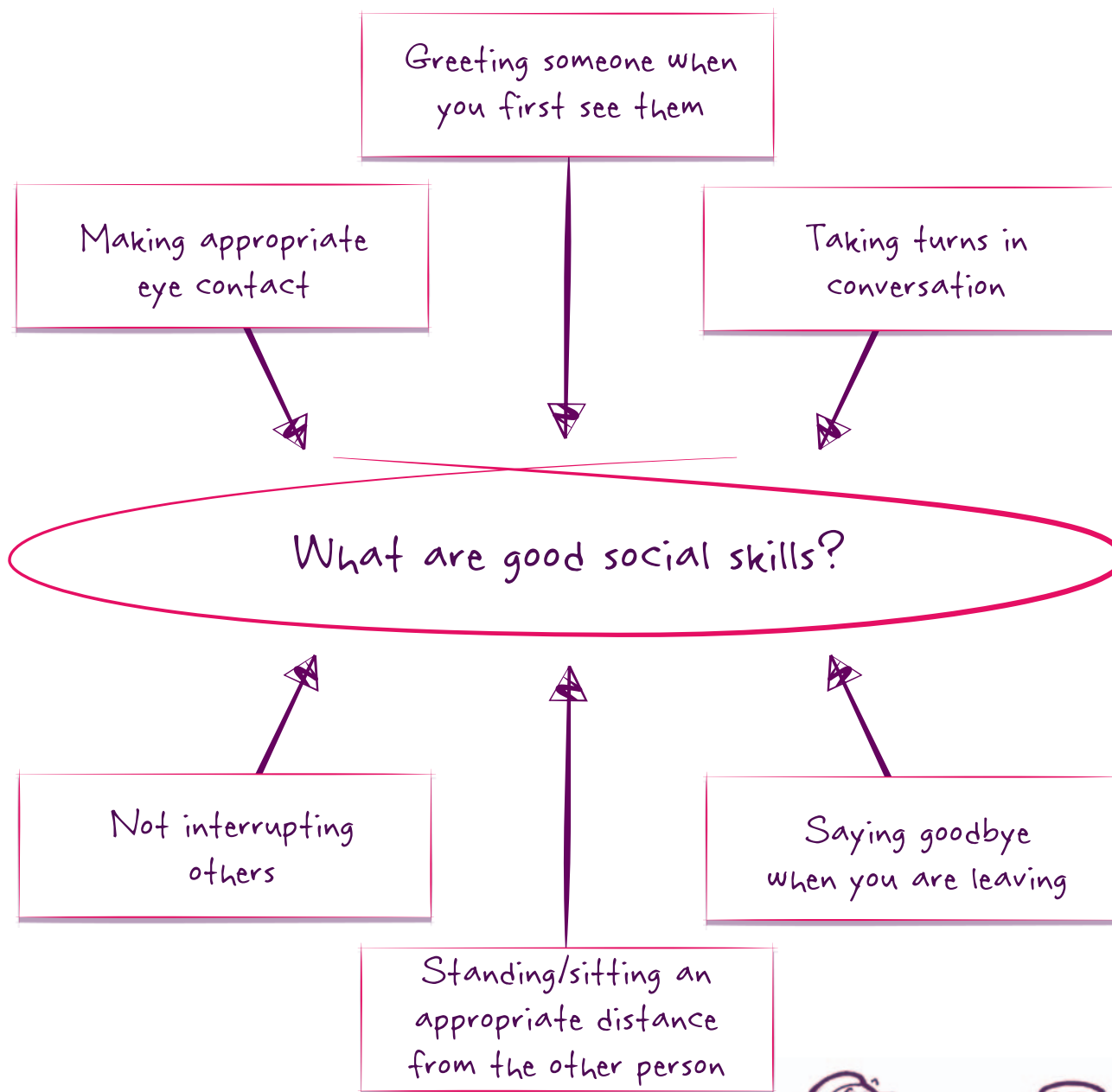
"It's not too bad this week"

"Oh that's good. Well, hope you have a nice day."

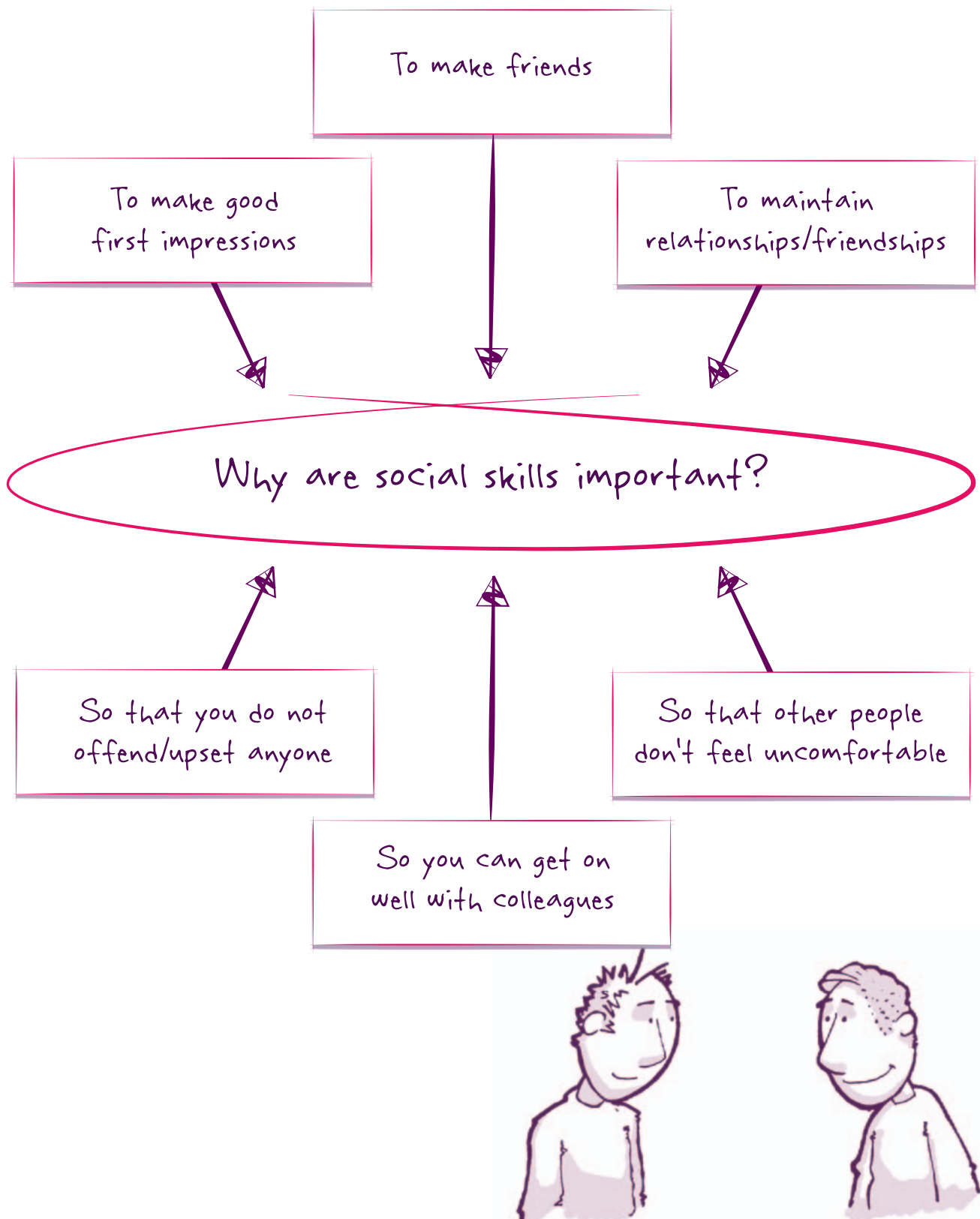
"Hope you have a nice day."

FINISH

Activity: What are good social skills?



Example answers: why are social skills important?



Activity: making friends at work

1. When you meet a colleague for the first time, what do you think you should avoid doing?
2. If you think you get on really well with a colleague and would like to get to know them better, what would be the appropriate thing to do next?
3. What do you think you should do in order to maintain a friendship with a colleague at work?
4. Friendships between colleagues are different from personal friendships and there are boundaries that you need to respect. What topics should you avoid discussing with colleagues even if they are also your friend?



Example answers: making friends at work

1. When you meet a colleague for the first time, what do you think you should avoid doing?

- Asking questions that are too personal.
- Being overly familiar eg touching or being in their personal space.
- Dominating conversations/only talking about yourself.
- Not listening.
- Being rude.
- Saying nothing.

2. If you think you get on really well with a colleague and would like to get to know them better, what would be the appropriate thing to do next?

- Ask if they want to swap numbers or ask if they want your phone number rather than asking for theirs.
- Ask to swap email addresses or connect on social networking sites.
- Ask if they want to have lunch tomorrow or next week.
- Arrange an activity based on similar interests.
- Invite them to another social event.

3. What do you think you should do in order to maintain a friendship with a colleague at work?

- Make conversation at break times.
- Try to find common interests and don't talk about the same topic all the time.
- Listen and ask appropriate questions.
- Attend work social events.
- Return calls and emails.
- Be reliable – don't be late or always cancel meetings.
- Remember important dates eg their birthday.

4. Friendships between colleagues are different from personal friendships and there are boundaries that you need to respect. What topics should you avoid discussing with colleagues even if they are also your friend?

- Salaries.
- Complaining about your work, colleagues or management.
- Asking for details of personal relationships.
- Discussing details of your own personal relationships.
- Gossiping about colleagues.

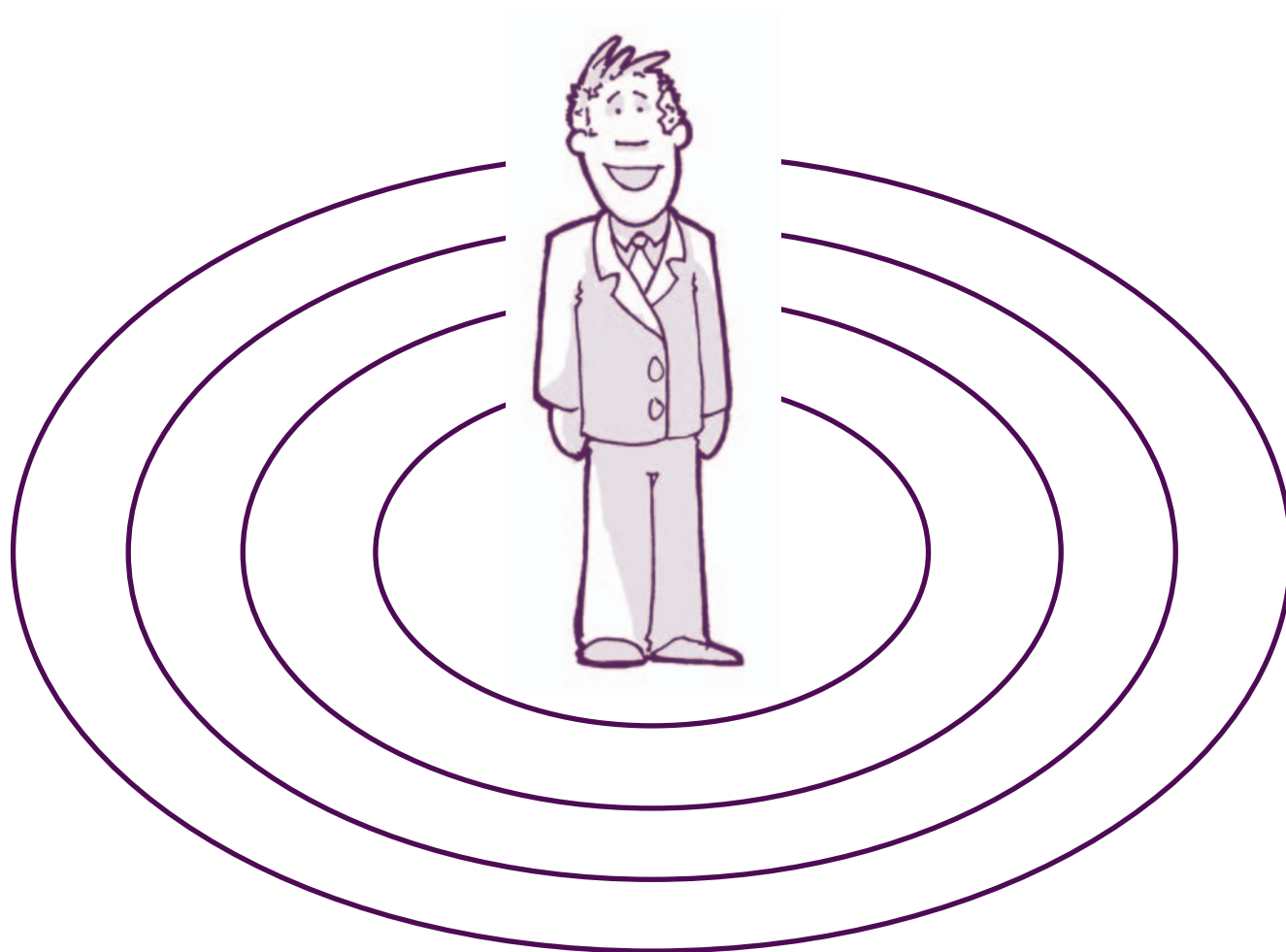


Activity: levels of conversation

The way we communicate and the topics of conversation we pick depend on the situation and the people involved.

Look at the diagram below. Think of yourself as being the person in the middle. Each circle represents how close you might be to different people. As a general rule, the further away from the middle someone is, the less personal information you might want to give them, and the more 'formal' the conversation might be.

Think of the people you currently come into contact with and people you might come into contact with in the future and write them in the relevant circle.



Activity: starting and finishing conversations

Read through this scenario and think about how Sam could start and finish talking to his colleagues. Examples can be found on page 180.

Sam is on his way to work and is due to start in ten minutes. He sees a few colleagues from his department chatting in the cafeteria near his office and one of his colleagues recognises him and signals him to come over. As Sam walks over to the group, he hears them talking about the new computer system, complaining that it is too difficult to use. Sam finds it very easy to use.

As he approaches, they all say hi. There is a pause in the conversation.



What could Sam say to get involved in the conversation?

After five minutes of chatting, Sam looks at his watch and realises he is due to start work in five minutes. He always likes to be at his desk at least five minutes before he starts work.

What could Sam say to excuse himself from the conversation?

Example answers: starting and finishing conversations

Read through this scenario and think about how Sam could start and finish talking to his colleagues.

Sam is on his way to work and is due to start in ten minutes. He sees a few colleagues from his department chatting in the cafeteria near his office and one of his colleagues recognises him and signals him to come over. As Sam walks over to the group, he hears them talking about the new computer system, complaining that it is too difficult to use. Sam finds it very easy to use. As he approaches, they all say hi. There is a pause in the conversation.



What could Sam say to get involved in the conversation?

- > Ask if they are talking about the new system.
- > Ask how they are finding it.
- > Explain that he doesn't find it too difficult – it is best that Sam does not say that he finds it really easy as this may offend his colleagues.
- > Maybe tell his colleagues that he also found it hard at first but is used to it now.
- > Offer to help them.
- > Change the subject, eg ask if they are going to an upcoming social event or if they saw a TV show or film recently.

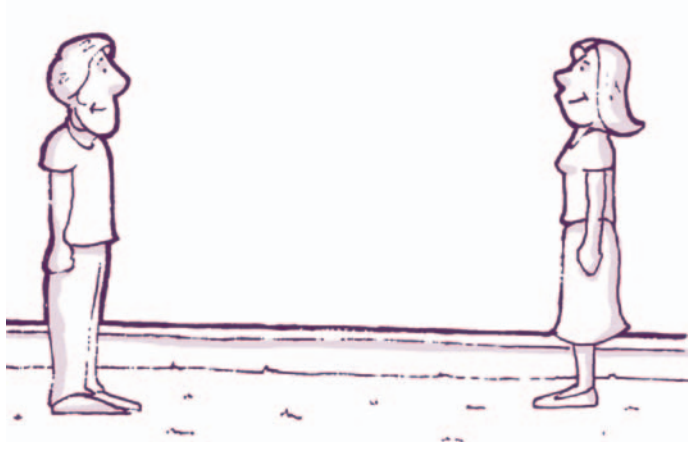


After five minutes of chatting, Sam looks at his watch and realises he is due to start work in five minutes. He always likes to be at his desk at least five minutes before he starts work.

What could Sam say to excuse himself from the conversation?

- > It was nice talking to you, see you later.
- > I'd better get going, got loads to do today!
- > Sorry, but I've got to get going – maybe we can have lunch together?
- > I'm really busy today, let's talk another time.
- > Right, I'm off to my desk but let's catch up soon.
- > I start work in five minutes – I better get going! Speak to you soon.

Useful info: personal space

Leaving an acceptable distance between people is part of body language. The appropriate amount of 'personal space' depends on the situation and people involved.

Formal	Strangers, shop assistants...	Personal space: more than an arm's length 
Social	Friends and colleagues...	Personal space: about an arm's length 
Intimate	Close friends...	Personal space: close/touching 

Activity: personal space

Decide if each statement is 'true' or 'false' and explain why.

Statement	True or false	Reason
You should keep a distance of about an arm's length when talking to colleagues at work.		
It is OK to sit or stand very close to a stranger on a train.		
You should sit on the other side of the cafeteria to your colleagues.		
It is OK to put your arm around your partner.		
It is OK to hug a colleague at work if they are upset.		
You should stand very close to the person interviewing you.		
It is OK to shake a stranger's hand if you are being introduced by a friend.		
It is OK to put your arm around a friend at a party.		

Answers: personal space

It is important to remember that rules for personal space are complex and can change depending on each person and situation. These are general rules.

Decide if each statement is 'true' or 'false' and explain why.

Statement	True or false	Reason
You should keep a distance of about an arm's length when talking to colleagues at work.	True	They may feel uncomfortable if you invade their personal space.
It is OK to sit or stand very close to a stranger on a train.	True	If it is very busy and crowded.
	False	If it is not busy and crowded it may make people feel uncomfortable.
You should sit on the other side of the cafeteria to your colleagues.	False	Your colleagues may think you are being rude and don't like them.
It is OK to put your arm around your partner.	True	Partners are people you know intimately so it is OK to be close and touch them.
It is OK to hug a colleague at work if they are upset.	False	It may be misunderstood by the colleague and make them feel uncomfortable.
You should stand very close to the person interviewing you.	False	It may make them feel uncomfortable and give a bad first impression.
It is OK to shake a stranger's hand if you are being introduced by a friend.	True	Shaking hands is a common and very polite way of introducing yourself.
It is OK to put your arm around a friend at a party.	True	If you know them quite well and they are happy for you to do so.

Activity: having lunch with colleagues

Your colleagues decide to have lunch together in the cafeteria and ask you to join them.

1. Why is it important to have lunch with your colleagues?
2. Do you find situations like this difficult? What difficulties do you experience?
3. What strategies might help you to cope with the situation?



Answers: having lunch with colleagues

Your colleagues decide to have lunch together in the cafeteria and ask you to join them.

1. Why is it important to have lunch with your colleagues?

- To build good social and working relationships.
- To make work a more pleasurable experience.
- Making friends builds confidence.
- It makes people think you are friendly and approachable.
- To form new friendships.
- To develop conversation skills.
- To learn about other people's interests.

2. Do you find situations like this difficult? What difficulties do you experience?

- I'm not sure what to talk about.
- I feel self-conscious eating in front of other people.
- I find it difficult to get involved in the conversation.
- People sometimes get offended by what I say.

3. What strategies might help you to cope with the situation?

- Try not to interrupt when others are talking.
- Look out for gaps in the conversation when it is OK to talk.
- Prepare a range of topics you could talk about, for instance, sports events, TV programmes, books, films or holidays.
- Avoid very philosophical or controversial topics and try not to talk about one topic for too long.
- To start off a conversation that the whole group might be able to join in with you could say something like, 'Did anyone see that film on TV last night' or, 'What did you get up to on the weekend?'





Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Identified types of non-verbal communication	
Practised listening skills	
Identified 'safe' workplace topics of conversation	
Written examples of starting and finishing conversations	
Identified appropriate physical boundaries in the workplace	

Managing anxiety

Aim

To make sure you can understand and manage anxiety.

Objectives

You will:

- > understand what anxiety is and how to recognise its symptoms
- > learn more about negative thinking and how it can impact on work performance
- > develop strategies you can use to manage anxiety and negative thinking
- > learn to reduce anxiety levels at work and feel more confident in the workplace.

"Lots of things have made me feel anxious when I've been searching for jobs. Not finding suitable work, finding a job that sounds right for me but then seeing that I don't have one or two of the skills needed, applying for jobs but not getting replies or getting emails saying 'you were not chosen for an interview!'."

Content

1. Useful info: understanding anxiety
2. Activity: what causes anxiety?
3. Useful info: anxiety and work
4. Useful info: the fight or flight response
5. Useful info: symptoms of anxiety and stress
6. Activity: symptoms of anxiety and stress
7. Activity: what makes me anxious?
8. Useful info: ways of dealing with anxiety
9. Activity: ways of dealing with anxiety
10. Useful info: factors that anxiety may be based on
11. Activity: coping with change
12. Useful info: negative thinking
13. Activity: overcoming negative thinking
14. Useful info: anxiety management – better breathing
15. Activity: practising relaxation breathing
16. Activity: anxiety management – muscle relaxation
17. Outcomes checklist



Useful info: understanding anxiety

Everyone experiences anxiety. It is the most basic of all emotions.

To be able to cope with anxiety, you first need to understand why it occurs and what the symptoms are.

Although anxiety can feel unpleasant it is not harmful, in the short term, and can actually be very helpful.



Short-term anxiety, in response to an immediate situation, is called the 'fight or flight' response. This is because its effects were originally designed to help early people fight or flee from dangerous situations.

Nowadays, we tend to live much more sedate lifestyles and don't need to worry about being chased by a predatory animal or having to fight with rivals. However, we often have to face our own modern-day challenges, such as:

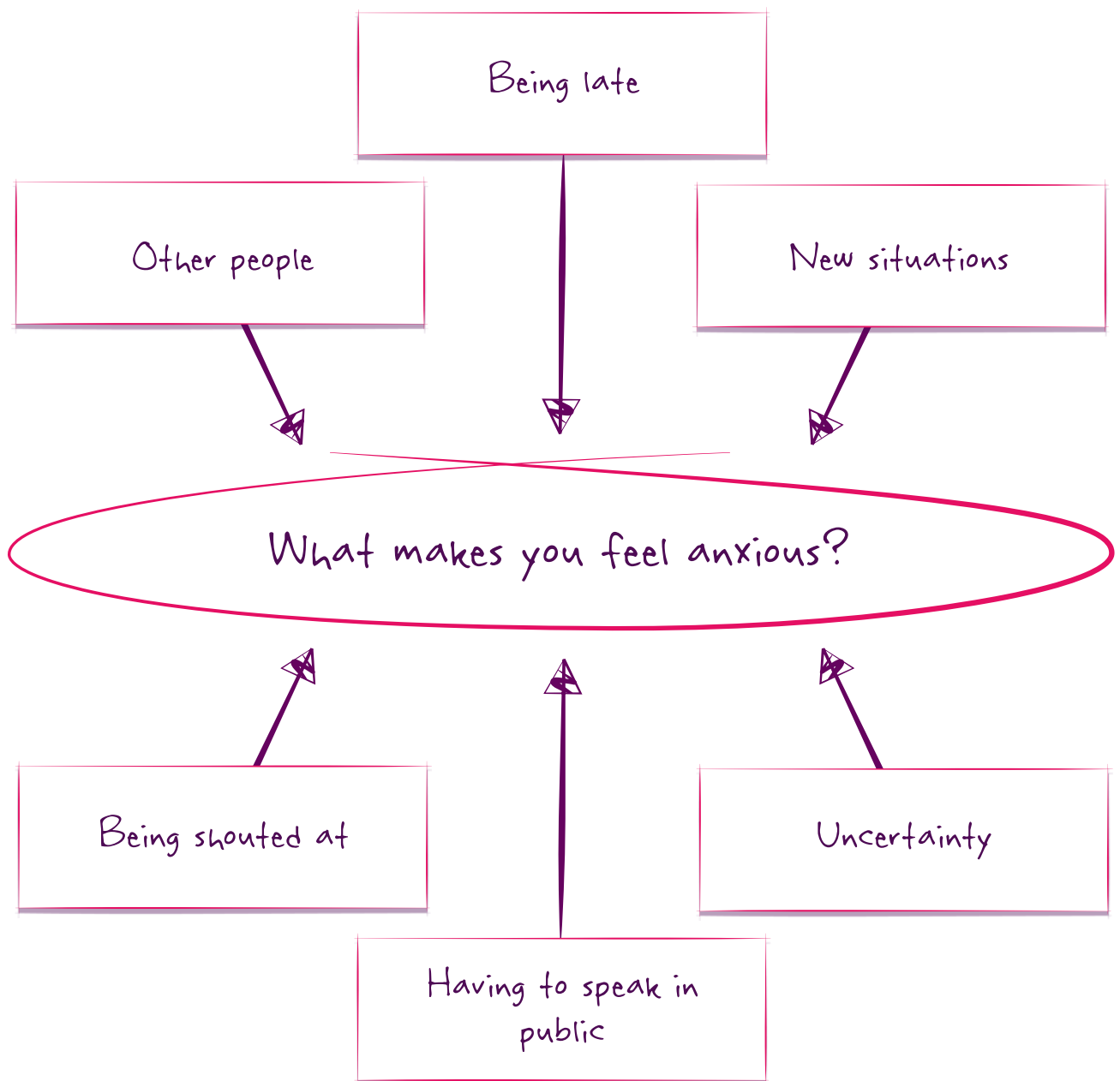
- > speaking in public
- > sitting our driving test
- > attending a job interview
- > going on a rollercoaster.

These types of challenges can also activate the fight or flight response. (See the page 191)



Activity: what causes anxiety?

Read each of the text boxes below and choose the ones which apply to you.



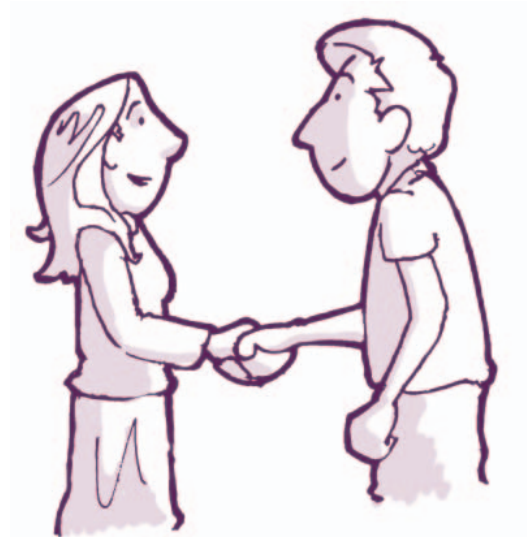
Useful info: anxiety and work

When looking for and starting a new job, a number of factors may cause anxiety. These factors will be different for everyone. The levels of anxiety that people experience will also vary.

If you can identify the factors that cause anxiety, you can then learn to anticipate them and reduce the anxiety you experience.

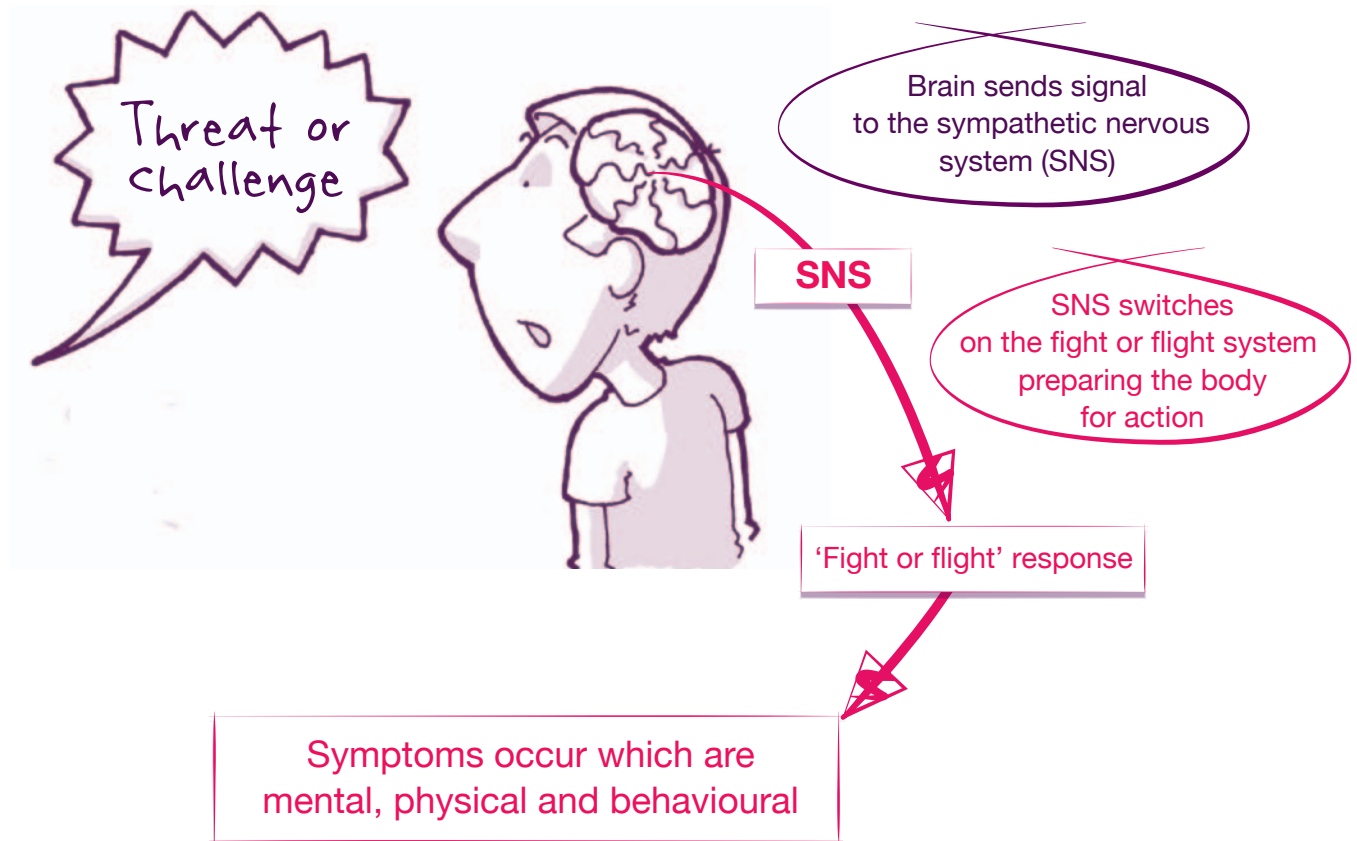
Factors that cause anxiety may include:

- answering questions at an interview
- meeting new people
- having to sit with people at lunch
- remembering people's names
- the sensory environment at work
- instructions not being clear
- getting lost on your way to work
- knowing where the toilets are
- speaking on the telephone
- being asked out to social events for work.



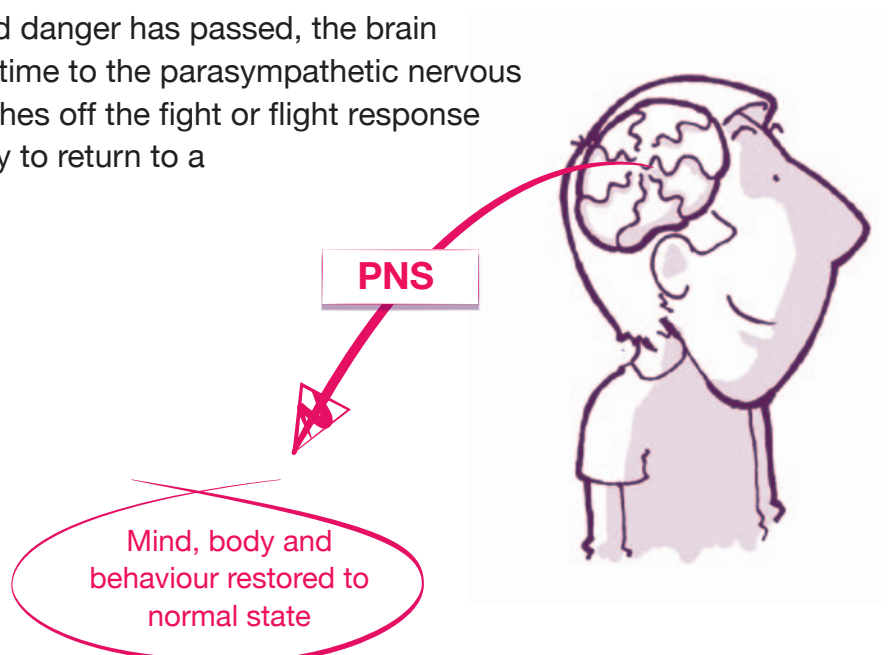
Useful info: the fight or flight response

When the fight or flight response is activated, we experience changes to our mental and physical states and to our behaviour. Although these changes are designed to help us react to and cope with a perceived threat, they would be damaging to our health if sustained over a long period.



Therefore, when the perceived danger has passed, the brain sends another message, this time to the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The PNS switches off the fight or flight response and allows our mind and body to return to a normal state.

If you start worrying about the changes that occur during the fight or flight response, your anxiety will only increase and become unhelpful. By remembering and repeating to yourself that these changes are natural, you will stay in control.



Useful info: symptoms of anxiety and stress

"If something raises my anxiety levels, I cannot concentrate on my work, I make mistakes and I can't pay attention to detail as much. I might slow down because of this."

Psychological

Some of the symptoms may be:

- > difficulty concentrating
- > memory problems
- > panic attacks
- > unrealistic and/or excessive fear and worry
- > irritability or impatience.

Physical

Some of the symptoms may be:

- > heart beating faster
- > faster breathing
- > increased sweating
- > dry mouth
- > muscles may become tense which could cause aches and pains.

Behavioural

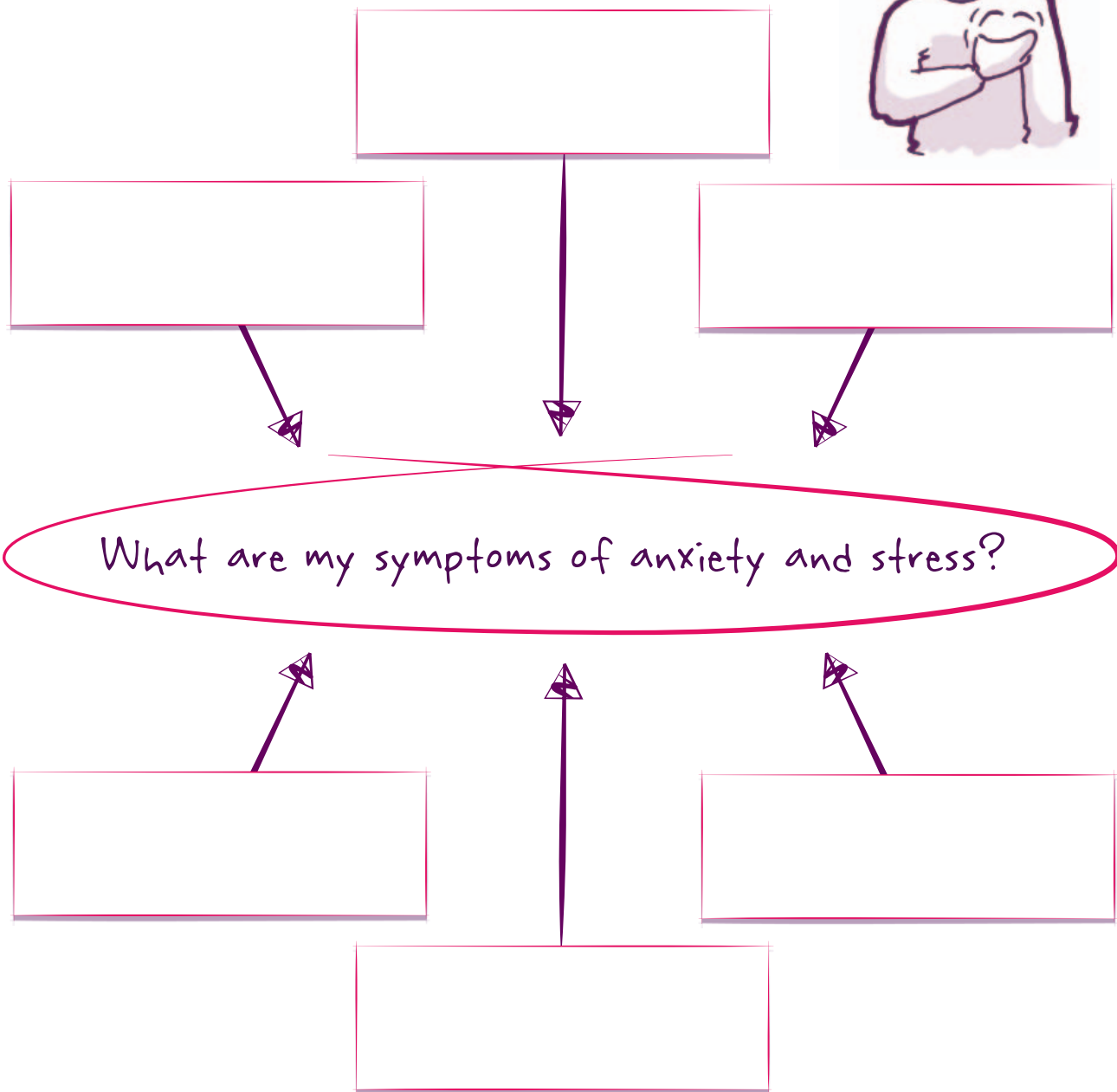
Some of the symptoms may be:

- > restlessness – can't keep still
- > irritability – being snappy towards others
- > problems with sleeping
- > increased smoking or alcohol intake
- > avoiding certain situations.



Activity: symptoms of anxiety and stress

What are my symptoms of anxiety and stress?



Activity: what makes me anxious?

"I worry that I will be put in a workplace that triggers my anxiety and the worst parts of my Asperger syndrome, such as socialising, changes of routine, lots of distractions, being forced to work with people I don't know and not getting on with people I work with."

Lots of different things can make people anxious, and not everyone will feel anxious about the same things. As we have explored, anxiety can have a great impact on your physical and mental states, and your behaviour, and can affect you in the workplace.

In the space below, write down two to four things that make you feel particularly anxious, and which might affect your performance at work.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Useful info: ways of dealing with anxiety

"I find listening to my iPod helps to block out distracting noises, and the music helps me work to a constant rhythm."

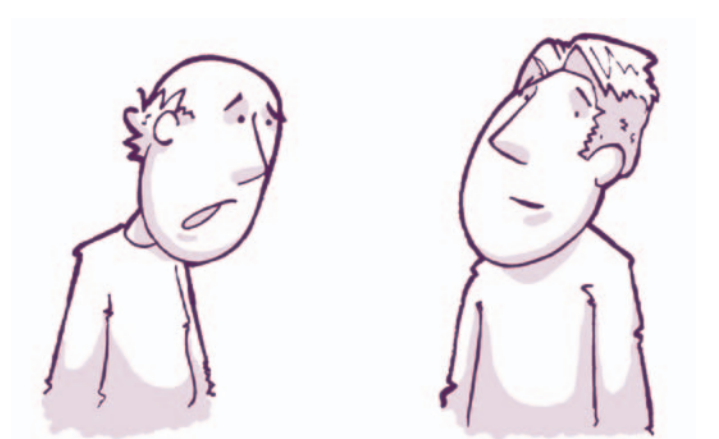
There are a number of ways to deal with anxiety and reduce its impact in the workplace.

One of the best ways to deal with anxiety is to tell an appropriate person about any worries, as soon as possible. We talk about this in more detail on the next page.

There are also a number of strategies you can use to try to tackle anxiety.

The strategies are:

- overcome negative thoughts – trying to think more positively
- keep things in perspective – look at the 'bigger picture'
- better breathing – breathing techniques can help you to relax
- muscle relaxation – relieves tension in muscles
- exercise and healthy living – a good diet, plenty of sleep and exercise
- relaxation, such as listening to music – find time to relax
- take time out – have regular breaks from work tasks
- seek support – counselling or other medical assistance via your GP.





Activity: ways of dealing with anxiety

There are a number of ways to deal with anxiety and reduce its impact on your physical and mental health.

Communicate

One of the best ways to deal with anxiety is to tell an appropriate person about any worries, as soon as possible.

By sharing your worries, not only will you reduce the burden of trying to cope with them on your own, you are also likely to receive some helpful advice.

Try and think of four people you could talk to if you are anxious. Write their names below.

1.
2.
3.
4.

Think about the strategies listed on the previous page. List four of these that **you** can use to try and tackle anxiety. You could also suggest your own strategies.

Finally, identify four things that make you feel happy or relaxed: for example, hobbies, listening to music, films. These things can help when you are feeling anxious.

1.
2.
3.
4.

Useful info: factors that anxiety may be based on

Change

Change can cause anxiety for many people. Starting a new job can cause a lot of anxiety because it means a new daily routine, being in a new environment, completing new tasks, and communicating with a new set of people.

We live in a world where change happens all the time, so being able to cope with that change is important, otherwise, we could spend our whole life in a state of panic. If we recognise that change is inevitable and learn strategies to help us cope, we can face change when it happens and deal with it successfully.

Irrational beliefs

Anxiety can sometimes be caused by trying to live up to unrealistic beliefs. Some examples of these are:

- > I must be loved, or at least liked and approved of by everyone
- > I must never make mistakes
- > it is dreadful, nearly the end of the world, when things are not as I would like them to be
- > my happiness is caused by factors out of my control so there is little I can do about it.

Distorted thinking styles

These are some descriptions of unhelpful thinking styles which can cause anxiety:

- > filtering – focusing on and magnifying the negatives and forgetting about the positives
- > catastrophising – expecting the worst, expecting not to cope, convincing ourselves that we cannot cope
- > blaming – holding ourselves or other people responsible for the pain and unhappiness we are feeling.



Answers: coping with change

Read each of the text boxes below and choose the ones which apply to you.



Make a transition plan

Ask for extra support
around the time of the
change

Ask for information
about changes in advance

How can I cope with change?

Remember situations in
the past where change has
led to a positive outcome

Accept that it may take
time to adjust to the
change

Break the change into
chunks and deal with
one part at a time



Useful info: negative thinking

It can be very easy at times to think negatively about ourselves, or about situations we find ourselves in. Negative thinking is not helpful, and will tend to make us feel even more anxious.

To help yourself overcome negative thoughts, remember the following three steps.

Recognise

Recognise that you are thinking negatively.

Rationalise

Negative thoughts are not only unhelpful but also unlikely to be accurate. Try to put them into perspective.

Replace

Replace unhelpful and unrealistic thoughts with more helpful and realistic thoughts.

Here is an example of how someone might replace their negative thoughts with more realistic ones:

John has just failed his driving test. He cannot stop thinking about this and he can't concentrate at work.

Recognise

John is thinking very negatively about failing his test.

"I can't even pass my driving test. I am completely useless and am no good at anything."

Rationalise

Just because John has failed his driving test, it doesn't mean that he is useless at everything. In fact he has many other strengths. Lots of people fail their driving test first time. John can always try again and learn from the experience.

Replace

John can now replace his negative thoughts with something more positive.

"Oh well, I failed this time, but I can try again. It doesn't mean that I am not good at other things."



Activity: overcoming negative thinking

Individual exercise

Identify something that you tend to think very negatively about. Write this in the box below.

Negative thought:

Now, using the Recognise, Rationalise and Replace model, consider how you might be able to think differently. Write your more realistic thought in the box below.

Realistic thought:

Useful info: anxiety management – better breathing

How can better breathing help reduce anxiety?

Your brain needs you to breathe well so that it has a constant supply of clean, oxygen-rich blood. This helps with clear thinking. Your muscles need oxygen to function properly, and your digestive system needs oxygen to manage the food you eat and get rid of waste products.

By changing your breathing pattern you can alter your state of mind. When you become skilled at being aware of your breathing, and altering it, this could make you more confident about managing anxiety.



You can check your breathing by following these simple steps:

- rest one hand on your upper chest and the other over your navel area
- see which hand rises first when you inhale
- if the upper hand rises first you are using upper-chest breathing. If the lower hand rises first you are breathing with your diaphragm. If both move at the same time you are using a mix of both.



People who are anxious tend to breathe in their upper lungs (upper-chest breathing) with shallow, rapid breath. This makes their chest expand.

Activity: practising relaxation breathing

Relaxation breathing can help to reduce your anxiety in the workplace.

Try to practise relaxation breathing a few times each day. By practising in this way, you will be familiar and comfortable with the process when you need to use it in a real situation.

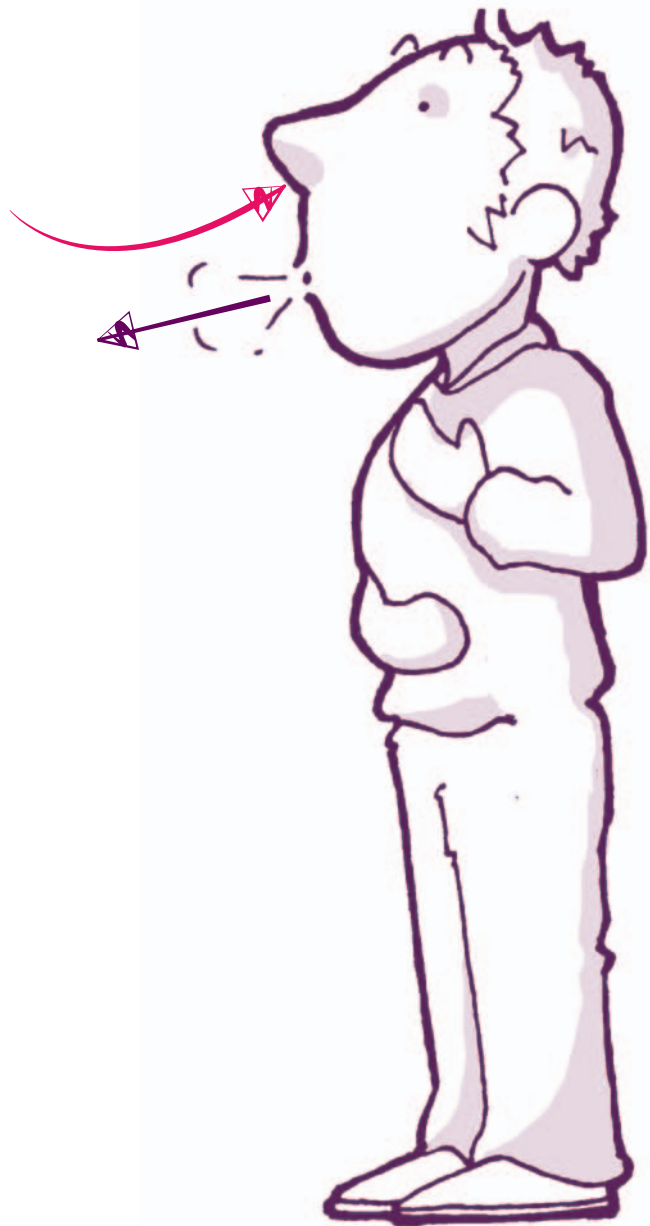
Follow the steps below to practise your breathing.

1. Take a long, slow breath in through your nose, filling your lower lungs. To help you with this you can try putting one hand on your stomach and one on your chest. As you inhale gently, your lower hand should rise first while your upper hand stays still.

2. You should inhale to a count of four.

3. Hold your breath, again for a count of four.

4. Exhale slowly, again to a count of four.



Activity: anxiety management – muscle relaxation

Muscle relaxation is another good way to release tension and create a greater sense of calm. It is best carried out in a quiet area where you will not be disturbed. Like all relaxation methods it is most effective if practised regularly.

1.

Begin by choosing a comfortable chair and loosening any tight clothing.

2.

Starting with your feet, tighten the muscles in your toes and hold these muscles tense for five seconds. On the count of five, release this tension.

3.

This process will give you a sense of release and make each muscle feel relaxed. Gradually make your way up the body, repeating the same process with:

- > legs > back and shoulders
- > arms > neck > face.

4.

Then try to further tighten the same muscles again for another five seconds. Once again, on the count of five, release this tension

5.

Finally, breathe deeply for a few minutes and let your muscles go limp as you do so.

6.

If at any point during this exercise you feel a muscle cramp, move on to the next part of the body.



Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Identified your own symptoms of anxiety	
Identified ways to deal with anxiety	
Identified ways to prepare for and deal with change	
Understood and implemented the anxiety management techniques	

Preparing for the workplace

Aim

To enable you to identify and prepare for the changes employment will bring.

Objectives

You will:

- > understand that employment will bring changes
- > identify what these changes will be
- > identify appropriate workplace behaviours
- > learn skills for working as part of a team.

Content

1. Activity: why do we work?
2. Activity: changes that employment may bring
3. Activity: preparing for change
4. Activity: first day behaviour
5. Useful info: policies that influence the work environment
6. Activity: workplace expectations
7. Useful info: talking and listening skills
8. Useful info: teamwork
9. Activity: workplace guidelines
10. Activity: teamworking skills
11. Activity: preparing for work quiz
12. Activity: common workplace scenarios
13. Outcomes checklist

"An aspect of work which was a key difficulty for me was that there was very little structure. There was uncertainty from day to day about what was going to happen. I struggled to deal with that at first."



Why do we work?

There are many reasons people work. The reasons vary from person to person.

It is important that you identify the reasons why you want to work. You can then match these up to roles that you are applying for. For example if you are motivated by making a difference to others, you should focus on applying for roles where you can achieve this.

Read each of the text boxes below and choose the ones which apply to you.

To earn money

Strong interest in
the industry

To increase
confidence

To make a
difference to others

A sense of
achievement

To contribute to
the community

Why do we work?

A sense of purpose

To support family

To build routine

Self-identity

To meet new people
and socialise

Self-confidence

Activity: Changes that employment may bring

Starting a new job will inevitably bring changes to your life. Some of these changes may be obvious but others may not. It is helpful to plan and prepare for all possible changes.

Read each of the text boxes below and choose the ones which apply to you.

Change in income/money

Change in benefits
entitlement

Becoming involved in new
social activities

Change to your
sleeping pattern

Having to travel in
rush-hour traffic

Changes that employment may bring

Meeting and talking
to new people

Having to wear
work clothes

Learning new skills

Less time to spend on
special interests



Activity: preparing for change

"I try to change my sleep patterns beforehand, so I am used to the early starting hours. I make a routine of dressing up and making myself up to look smart rather than casual. I check where I will work and how to get there, checking bus and train timetables if needs be."

In order to be well prepared for the changes involved in starting a new job, it will be helpful to find out how your work day will be structured, including what time you start work, are allowed breaks and lunchtime, and what time you will finish work. This will help you to practice a new routine and adjust your mealtimes, and sleep patterns.

Complete the activity below. The first one has been done for you. Ask a friend or family member to help if it is difficult. There are also some clues in the quotation box at the top of this page.

How can you prepare?

1. Example – build routines by getting up at the time you will need to get up when you start work, and going to bed earlier.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

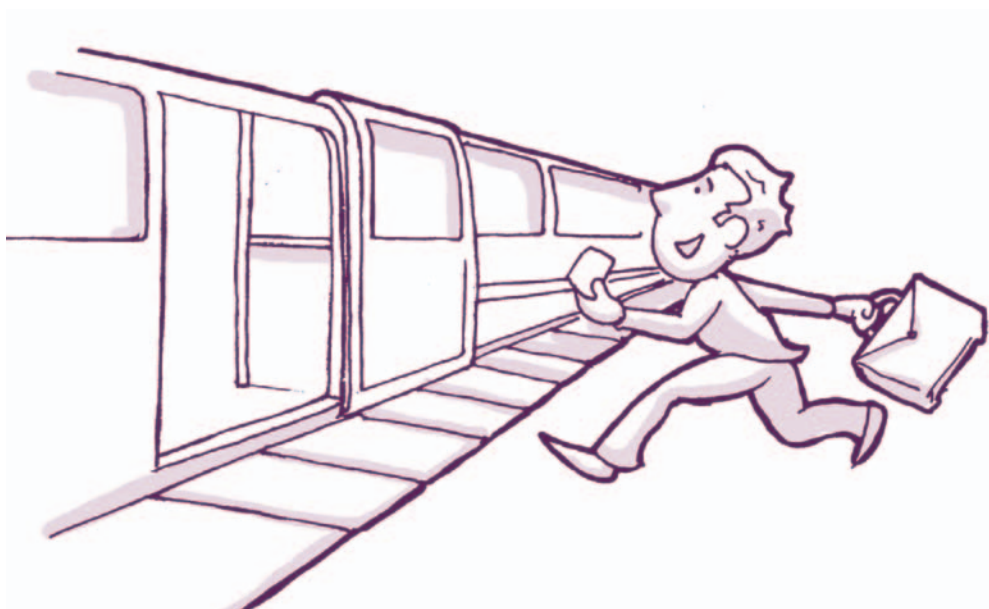
8.

Activity: first day behaviour

What can you do on your first day to create a good impression? What would you do to appear professional?



What could you do on your first day that wouldn't create a good impression? What would appear unprofessional?



Example answers: first day behaviour

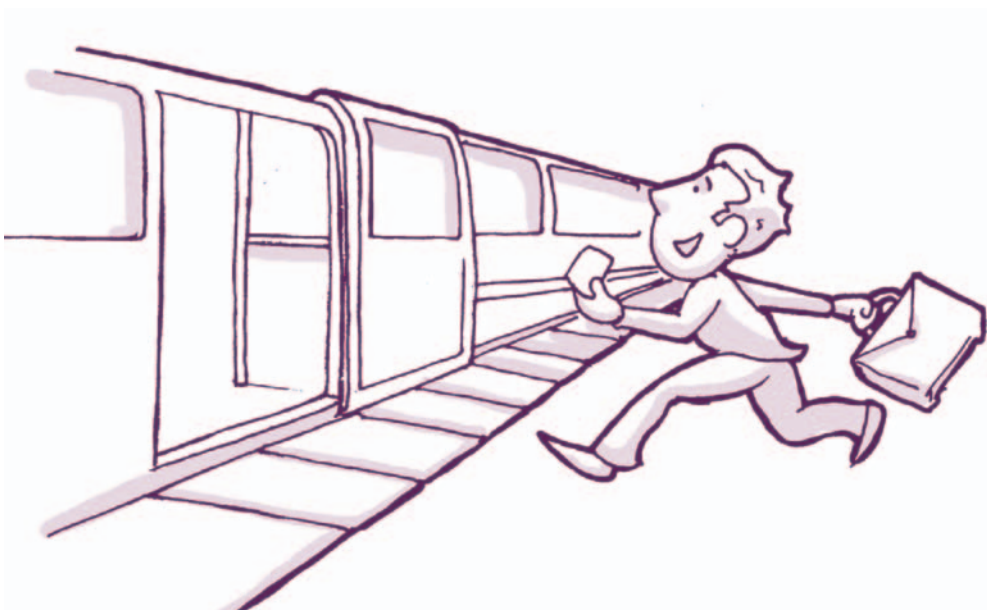
What can you do on your first day to create a good impression? What would you do to appear professional?

- Arrive at your workplace 15 minutes before you are due to start.
- Remember your manager's name.
- Wear appropriate clothing.
- Take with you anything you might need.
- When you are introduced to new people, smile, shake their hand and introduce yourself.
- Make sure you get back to work on time after your lunch break.
- Take notes when you are being given instructions for new tasks.
- Take care of your appearance and personal hygiene (ie shower, have your hair cut, shave).



What could you do on your first day that wouldn't create a good impression? What would appear unprofessional?

- Arrive at work late (even five minutes late).
- Dress too casually, or wear inappropriate clothing.
- Get back late from your lunch break.
- Ignore or make no attempt to speak with your team or colleagues.
- Forget necessary items (contract, security pass, travelcard).
- Go for lunch or leave at the end of the day without letting anyone know you are going.

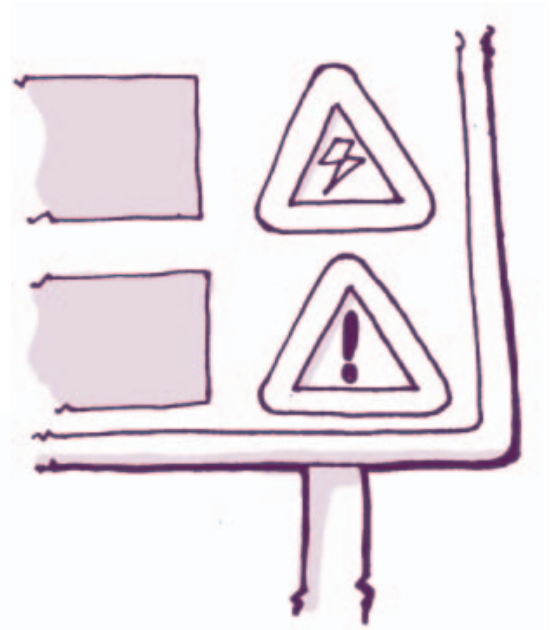


Useful info: policies that influence the work environment

Here are some examples of policies that can influence the work environment. You will be expected to follow some or all of these when you are in work, depending on your employer. It is good to be aware of them.

Do you know what the following policies relate to? You may be able to either search on the internet or ask family or friends to clarify anything you are unsure about.

- > Clear desk policy.
- > Equal opportunities.
- > Data protection.
- > Diversity.
- > Health and safety (including fire).
- > Internet and email use.
- > Anti-bullying and harassment.



Activity: workplace expectations

There are certain things that are expected of employees in all workplaces. In addition, you may find that the area of work that you are interested in has more specific rules and expectations. With this in mind, answer the following questions for the roles you are interested in applying for. Examples can be found on page 213.

What will be expected of me in the workplace?

What can I expect from the workplace?



Example answers: workplace expectations

There are certain things that are expected of employees in all workplaces. In addition you may find that the area of work that you are interested in has more specific rules and expectations. With this in mind, answer the following questions for the roles you are interested in applying for.

What will be expected of me in the workplace?

- Turn up on time.
- Be polite and courteous.
- Adhere to the organisation's policies and procedures.
- Complete work to a professional standard.
- Complete work within the deadlines.
- Dress smartly and appropriately.
- Keep social talk to a minimum during working hours.
- Do not use the internet for personal use during working hours.

What can I expect from the workplace?

- To be paid on time.
- To meet regularly with manager/supervisor.
- To receive instructions and guidance from my manager.
- To receive constructive criticism and feedback from my manager.
- To have an allocated number of holiday days.
- To have reasonable adjustments made, if needed.
- To be given specific break times including a lunch break.

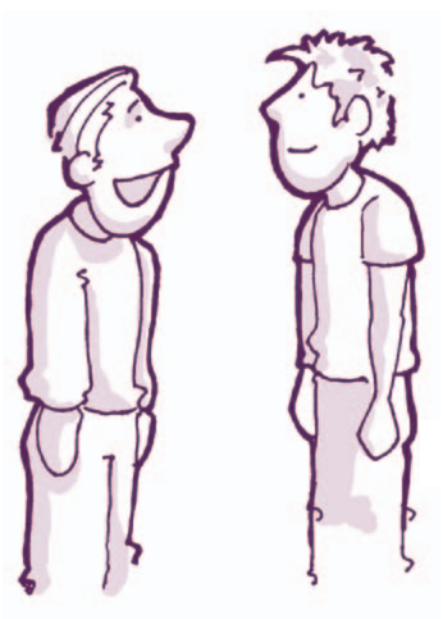


Useful info: talking and listening skills

Throughout your working day you will be asked to do tasks by your line manager as well as your colleagues. You may also have to ask colleagues to complete a task.

When communicating about tasks, it is important that information is clear and that it is understood. If you are following instructions, make sure that you pay attention and understand all the steps you need to take. This will reduce confusion, anxiety and the number of mistakes made, and make sure the team works more effectively.

Here are some tips to help you when you are giving or receiving information.



Stop what you are doing

It is important to stop what you are doing as this will let you concentrate on what is being said to you.



Body language

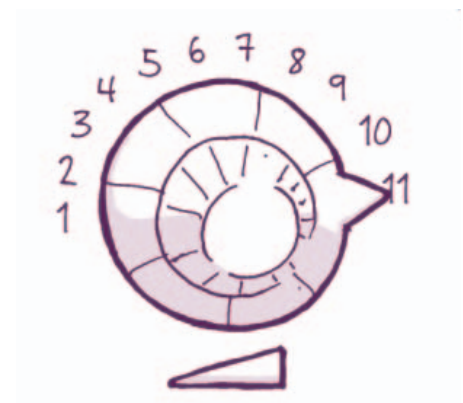
Your body language lets other people know that you are listening to them.

You can show you are listening by turning your body to face the person who is speaking to you, nodding and making eye contact. Making eye contact may help you understand what you are being asked to do, if you find it easier to notice non-verbal gestures. You may also be less distracted by other things.

If you find it difficult to make eye contact, try to look towards the person's forehead or nose. This will also signal that you are paying attention.

Volume

If the person speaking to you talks quietly, or there is a lot of background noise and you haven't heard what they are saying, you can ask them to repeat themselves. If you ask politely, no-one should get offended. Try saying, 'I'm sorry I didn't quite catch that', 'Would you please repeat that?' or 'Could you speak a bit louder as the office is quite noisy today?'



Clarifying what has been requested of you

You can make sure that you have understood information and instructions by saying:

"So, you would like me to... [state your understanding of the instructions]"



If I said to you:

"Can you file away the new customer's paperwork in the blue filing cabinet, under J for James, please?"

You could make sure you have understood by saying:

"OK, so you want me to put the paperwork into the blue filing cabinet under the letter J."

(You do not need to do this all the time, only when instructions are unclear.)

It might help to carry a notepad so that you can make notes.

Checklists can also be useful: write out the steps in the task to make sure you follow instructions accurately. You could write out instructions in bullet points then show them to the person who gave you the instructions. They can check that you have included everything.

Remember...

If you don't understand a request it is better to ask for it to be explained again, rather than attempting to do a task that you do not understand properly.

Useful info: teamwork

Good relationships are essential in the workplace. People who are able to work as part of a team are always valued by employers and appreciated by colleagues. People like this are often referred to as good 'team players'. It is your responsibility to establish and maintain good working relationships with your colleagues and managers.

The following guidelines should help you to understand what makes a good 'team player'.



1. Be prepared to help colleagues with tasks when you are asked to do so

If the task is something you are not trained to do, or would find difficult, then it is OK to say you won't be able to help. However, tell your colleague why you cannot help. If you just said 'I can't help' they might think you are being unhelpful. It would be better to say 'I'm sorry, I can't help because [give reason]'.

2. Asking for help

When you are asking your colleagues for help, remember to be polite and thank them afterwards.

3. Make allowances for colleagues having 'off days'

There will be times when your colleagues may make mistakes they wouldn't usually make or are short-tempered. Everyone has days like this.



4. Show colleagues that you are listening

Remember to make eye contact, nod, and use verbal indicators such as 'Yes' and 'Mmmm'.



5. Never gossip about colleagues

You may notice other people gossiping. This is something that can be upsetting or cause offence to others, so it is advisable to stay neutral.

6. Be friendly

Try to engage in small talk, for example, ask if colleagues had a nice weekend. Try to participate in social activities with colleagues, for example going for lunch together.

7. Informal help

Offer to make tea, coffee or other drinks.





Activity: workplace guidelines

Think of some rules which are important to remember when you are at work. Think about what will be expected of you in the workplace, the information on talking and listening skills and also on teamwork that you have been given.

Write out each rule, the reason for it and any exceptions or times when rules will not apply. It might be useful to ask a friend or family member if it is difficult to think of examples.

Here is an example for 'working as a team'.

Example 1

Rule: Be prepared to help out colleagues with tasks when you are asked to do so.

Reason why: Everyone needs help sometimes. It's important to be fair and offer help to others as well as accepting help yourself.

Exception: If the task is something you are not trained to do, or would find difficult, then it is okay to say you wouldn't be able to help. Let the person know the reason why by saying

'I'm sorry, I can't help because...'

Now write some more rules of your own below.

Rule 1:

Reason why:

Exception:

Rule 2:

Reason why:

Exception:

Rule 3:

Reason why:

Exception:

Activity: teamworking skills

The following exercise is designed to build your understanding of the skills required to work effectively in a team.

Look at three scenarios. After reading through each scenario, try to answer the questions using the information from previous sections. It may be useful to speak to family and friends when completing the next sections.

Scenario 1

Stevie works as a security guard, patrolling a large car park outside a supermarket. His responsibility is to make sure customers' cars are secure and the car park is kept tidy.

Since his colleague left six weeks ago, Stevie has been working extra hours and has had very little time off. His employers have now hired another security guard, Alan, to work alongside Stevie.



1. Stevie asks Alan to swap a shift with him, to give him a chance to have two days off in a row. If Alan were a good 'team player', what would his response be?

How might Stevie feel if Alan were to refuse his request?

2. On Alan's first day, Stevie takes him around the car park and explains what the job involves. Compared to some of the other jobs Alan has done in the past, this job is quite easy. Alan feels he didn't really need anyone to explain it to him. What should he say to Stevie as a good team player?

How might Stevie feel if Alan did tell him that the job was easy and he didn't need anyone to show him how it should be done?

3. On starting his first shift, Alan notices that one of the bins in the car park has not been emptied and there are a few bits of litter here and there. How might Alan respond to this if he were a good team player?

If Alan were to go straight to his boss and complain that Stevie had not been doing his job properly, how might the boss feel? How might Stevie feel?

Scenario 2

Amrit has just started a new job working as a teller in a building society. This involves serving customers who have a variety of cash transactions to make.

Amrit enjoys meeting people and is good with figures so she is very pleased to get the job, but is feeling quite nervous as this is her first week. Most of the time, she will be working alongside Anne.

1. On her first day, Amrit gets confused when helping a customer open a new account. As a good team player, what might Anne do?



2. At the end of Amrit's first week in the job, Anne feels she has done OK but that she gets visibly anxious when there is a large queue of customers. As a good team player how might Anne deal with this?

How might Amrit feel if Anne were to go to the supervisor and tell her that she can't cope with busy periods?

Scenario 3

Mike and Sheena work together in a large insurance office, where they share a desk. Both Mike and Sheena carry out typing duties. Sheena also deals with paperwork relating to claims.

Recently, there has been a huge increase in the amount of paperwork Sheena has to process. Mike's work has not increased at all.

1. Is there anything that Mike could do as a good team player to assist Sheena?

2. In the canteen Mike overhears another member of staff say something unkind about someone's private life. He couldn't quite hear who they were talking about but it sounded like Sheena. Should he mention this to Sheena when he gets back to his desk?

How might Sheena feel if Mike did tell her what he had heard?



Activity: preparing for work quiz

Complete the quiz by circling TRUE or FALSE for the following questions. Answers can be found on page 222.

You should phone your employer if you are going to be late to work.	TRUE	FALSE
You should greet your colleagues when you arrive at work.	TRUE	FALSE
It is OK to be late back from a break, as long as it is no more than five minutes.	TRUE	FALSE
You should not spend 45 minutes chatting with colleagues when you get into work.	TRUE	FALSE
If you make a drink for yourself, you should also offer one to your colleagues.	TRUE	FALSE
It is OK to have an untidy desk at work.	TRUE	FALSE
You should wash up your cups and plate after you have used them.	TRUE	FALSE
It is OK to give yourself a break if you have finished all of your work.	TRUE	FALSE
You should not interrupt a colleague if they are on the phone.	TRUE	FALSE
There is no need to say goodbye to colleagues at the end of the day.	TRUE	FALSE
You should stay for a few minutes at the end of the day to finish a task if you have time.	TRUE	FALSE
If you are ill and unable to go into work you should phone your manager as soon as the workplace is open.	TRUE	FALSE
If your employer asks you to help with a task that is not in your job description, you should refuse to do it.	TRUE	FALSE
It is OK to have a short (less than five minute) chat with a colleague during the day if you are not too busy.	TRUE	FALSE
If you go to a shop at lunchtime, you should ask your colleagues if there is anything they would like you to get for them.	TRUE	FALSE

Answers: preparing for work quiz

There are many unwritten rules in workplaces. Unwritten rules are complex and changeable. They may change in different offices, and even in different teams in the same organisation.

The answers given here are based on what is expected in the majority of workplaces. You could take this activity to discuss with your supervisor when you start a new role to confirm the workplace rules.

You should phone your employer if you are going to be late to work.	TRUE	
You should greet your colleagues when you arrive at work.	TRUE	
It is OK to be late back from a break, as long as it is no more than five minutes.	TRUE	
You should not spend 45 minutes chatting with colleagues when you get into work.	TRUE	
If you make a drink for yourself, you should also offer one to your colleagues.	TRUE	
It is OK to have an untidy desk at work.		FALSE
You should wash up your cups and plate after you have used them.	TRUE	
It is OK to give yourself a break if you have finished all of your work		FALSE
You should not interrupt a colleague if they are on the phone.	TRUE	
There is no need to say goodbye to colleagues at the end of the day.		FALSE
You should stay for a few minutes at the end of the day to finish a task if you have time.	TRUE	
If you are ill and unable to go into work you should phone your manager as soon as the workplace is open.	TRUE	
If your employer asks you to help with a task that is not in your job description, you should refuse to do it.		FALSE
It is OK to have a short (less than five minute) chat with a colleague during the day if you are not too busy.	TRUE	
If you go to a shop at lunchtime, you should ask your colleagues if there is anything they would like you to get for them.	TRUE	

Activity: common workplace scenarios

You have recently started working as an office assistant with an insurance company.

Your main duties are photocopying and filing new insurance claims, typing letters, and franking and posting the mail each day.

You share the office with five other people. Here is some information on each of them.



Mr Shah is the owner of the company. He started the company in the late 1980s. The company has been doing so well recently that he is opening a third branch.



Christine is the office supervisor. She has worked at the company for nine years. Christine goes to the gym most nights after work and teaches aerobics at the local sports centre on Sunday afternoons.

Derek is also an office assistant. He has been working in the office for several years. He enjoys going for a drink most evenings, apart from Thursdays, when he plays five-a-side football.

Colin is the office junior. He has been with the company for the past year since he left school. He has joined the snooker club across the road from the office and can be found there most lunchtimes and evenings after work.

Sandra is the company's receptionist. Last time you spoke to her you found out that she is married to one of your friends from school, Ronnie, who is now running a music shop near your office.

Over the next few pages you will find eight scenarios involving this workplace and these colleagues. See if you can answer the questions.

It may be helpful to ask a friend or family member if you find the questions difficult.



Scenario 1

You arrive at work on Monday morning to take up your usual seat at the desk with Colin and Christine. Before starting work, staff at Shah Insurance usually have a brief chat over a cup of tea.

Give examples of the type of things you could chat to Colin and Christine about.



Scenario 2

Mr Shah pops in briefly on his way to a meeting. He passes your desk and stops to chat to you. He asks how you are getting on.

Give an example of a good reply and something you could ask Mr Shah in return.



Scenario 3

It is approaching lunchtime. You have overheard Derek and Christine, who have recently started dating, planning to go to the café round the corner. Colin is going to the snooker club as usual. Sandra has brought in a packed lunch and a magazine and will be spending lunchtime in the staff room. You have not brought anything in but you have money on you to buy something.

What might be some good ideas for how you might spend your lunch hour?



Scenario 4

On Tuesday, you attend the city centre branch for training. You arrive at the branch and are asked to take a seat in the training room. You go into the room to find that staff from a new branch are already there to attend the day's training. They are talking amongst themselves but look up when you walk in.

What would you say or do in this situation?



Scenario 5

Halfway through the morning's proceedings the trainer suggests that the group breaks for coffee and tea.

Give some examples of how you could pass the ten-minute break in terms of your interaction and conversation with the others.



Scenario 6

On Wednesday, you are back at the office and are experiencing some difficulties with the task that you have been assigned. You realise that you should ask for help. You look up from your desk to see that Mr Shah and your supervisor, Christine, are nearby.

Who would be the best person to ask for help?



Scenario 8

It is Friday evening. Traditionally, staff go to the nearby pub for a few drinks.

Give some examples of the type of conversation you could make with colleagues in the pub.



Outcomes checklist

You will have completed the following actions.

Action	Completion date
Identified three reasons why you want to work	
Identified three changes that employment may bring	
Identified how you can prepare for starting a new role	
Identified appropriate ways to behave on your first day	
Identified workplace expectations	
Thought about how to deal with different social situations at work	



This is an interview with David, a young man with Asperger syndrome who was employed in the House of Commons on the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme.

School days

There were good and bad elements to my school days. Compared to the young people I went to school with I behaved differently, therefore I was seen to be odd, eccentric, a freak. I was bullied and teased because of that and there was a sense of isolation. I didn't make a lot of friends.

The positives were that I studied hard. I really enjoyed studying. People called me a geek, but that's a term that didn't make me as upset because... well, I still am a geek. I was also encouraged to develop my political passion, which was very good.

University

At university I faced a lot of challenges. At the start I got bullied and hassled and teased from students who didn't quite understand that I was different. I was socially insecure and that was very challenging; particularly during classes, where I felt like I wanted to contribute.

As time went on I started to come out of my shell. I started to speak out in class. I gave presentations in class too. That started to make me more confident academically. I was always very good going in to the library, reading up on stuff and writing essays on my laptop on my own. That was the easy part. But what was a big barrier to me and what I had to overcome was contributing in class and making the tutors confident that I was taking in what they were teaching.


So, I would say that social insecurity was a key barrier for me at university, which I did break down over time and which thankfully didn't stop me getting a good degree.

Moving on

When I left university, my biggest worry was getting a job. That was the biggest difficulty and the biggest worry. I had to go on job seeker's allowance, I found this quite hard. But, it was actually by going into the job centre that I found the advertisement for the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme. Thankfully, my application for this opportunity was successful and I became employed in the office of the Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP.

Disclosure

I had no hesitancy writing about my disability on my application for the Speaker's Parliamentary Placement Scheme. The questions asked about campaign work and whether I was politically involved. I had to mention that I was an autism campaigner. So, I did not have any hesitancy at all mentioning my condition on that application.



I also knew that the scheme was looking for disabled candidates. That almost enabled me to believe that there was not a barrier in place. By them wanting to look for some disabled candidates it gave me the freedom to write about the condition in both a positive and negative way. I wrote about some of the negatives and the key positives that can come with the spectrum.

The positives I mentioned were that I'm very dedicated, very loyal, I work extremely hard and I'm passionate about politics. Autistic people usually are interested in one or two subjects often to an obsessive degree. Can I say I'm obsessed about politics? Well, I wouldn't say I'm far off that.

It's often very difficult to write about negatives, or weaknesses, because you're not sure if that's going to lead to your application being rejected. But, I had to be honest and said that there are times when I do get very tense. If I make mistakes I usually get very upset with myself because I like high standards. I'm a perfectionist, therefore the slightest mistake can really kick off a bit of a reaction from me and I need reassurance from the people around me. I also mentioned that it can sometimes take some time for me to settle in to a new working environment. But, just a bit of support can help a lot.

Working life

The placement enabled me to push myself and build skills in new and unexpected areas. Before the placement, I did not think I was good at public speaking. I had done a few presentations at university, in front of my classmates, but I did not think I had the talent for public speaking. But then, I organised an autism awareness event in parliament before the Easter recess. I had to do a public speech in front of parliamentarians, their staff and staff from the House of Commons including the Speaker of the House of Commons himself. That was a high pressure situation. I delivered a very good speech. When I sat down afterwards I remembered saying to myself... I'm pretty good at this public speaking thing.

I gave two more speeches after that, one at an autism awareness event and another at an all party parliamentary group on autism. I was becoming a complete natural at public speaking. And that was a skill which I genuinely did not think I had. I can remember at university I was absolutely nervous and highly reluctant to speak in front of my classmates. And here I was now in Westminster giving speeches in front of MPs. It was almost like I was a different person. To have developed that skill has also meant I have become a much more confident and positive individual.

An aspect to work which was a key difficulty for me was that there was very little structure. No structure apart from the time I started, the time I finished and when I went for lunch. Things could happen unexpectedly. You always had to be prepared about that. There was uncertainty from day to day about what was going to happen. I struggled to deal with that at first. But I got used to that as my internship went on.

I coped by adding routine where I could. I came into work at 10 o'clock, had lunch at 12, and dinner at 5.30-6.00. I had that in my diary. That was my routine. Everything else, I had to keep a degree of flexibility. You had to keep that degree of flexibility because you just didn't know what would happen in the office from day to day. I coped with it but I would have to say each individual would probably do things differently.

My biggest regret was probably not having many discussions around my condition at the start of my placement. I just told people as I went along. By the time the scheme ended I think everybody got a fair idea of how to support me. With hindsight, I think sitting down with everybody and having a detailed discussion about my needs would have been handy. I hope that when I go into my next job that will happen.

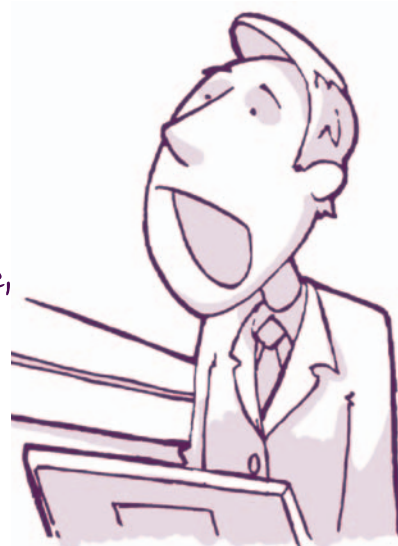
Hazel Blears MP said:

"I was impressed with David at our very first interview. He was earnest and passionate and had a clear sense of what he wanted to do with his life. When he worked in my office in London he was diligent, conscientious and had a real eye for detail. His written reports were excellent.

"This was the first time I had worked with someone with Asperger's and my time with David really helped me understand his condition. We learnt as we went on what kind of support he needed, and I used The National Autistic Society's website to research the kinds of challenges David might face and how I might make his working life in my office easier, like providing routine and structure and giving him reassurance in stressful situations.

"I was really proud of his achievements – like speaking in public – and it was wonderful to see him flourish and get a true sense of accomplishment. It was great for him to challenge himself and see just what he could achieve.

"I wish David every success for the future. His time with me has reinforced my view that everyone, regardless of their background, age or disability, can realise their potential and make a really important contribution to our society. If you are thinking of hiring someone with autism, please be encouraged by the positive experience I had with David."





Future plans

I hope to be as successful as I can possibly be. My ambitions are to get a good job, perhaps in the city of London, to get married, have kids and get a nice house. I think these are pretty realistic ambitions that most young people have. Ultimately, I do want to become an MP in the future. That is my main ambition, to try and get into the House of Commons.

As an MP, I would hope to show our society that people on the autism spectrum can do it. If they have the support then there is absolutely no reason why they couldn't be extremely successful and become very good at what they do in their jobs.

I want to prove this to people because I think there are still people out there who hold negative stereotypes and that needs to be challenged. I feel like I have a duty, if I do become an MP, to challenge that stereotype.

How employers can help

My message to employers would be that autistic people can make very good employees. They can be very loyal, very dedicated, very passionate and very hard-working. They can give their 110% best. But they do need support and they may need encouragement and reassurance. To good employers that shouldn't be a problem. That's a key message.

Autism is not a condition that employers should be frightened about. With a little bit of investigation, a little bit of research, they'll soon discover that autistic people have got good qualities which could really enhance their businesses.

I think it's all about creating a workforce which is disability-friendly. Ultimately, it's about having employers who value difference, diversity and don't treat people who behave differently in a negative way. I also think it's important to make people, from the management down, far more aware of autism. There are too many employees, I fear, who have got autism and have real difficulties at work because their fellow employees can't understand why they behave differently. By raising awareness, at all levels of the company, the autistic person will be better understood and will feel positive, supported and confident in achieving their potential.

Message to jobseekers

The advice I would give to autistic jobseekers is to keep fighting, keep positive and never give up. That would be my simple answer.

There will be barriers. You will have applications rejected, which can lead to a lot of distress. I've been there. I've been to job interviews and been turned down. It creates very difficult and challenging emotional experiences. It's not good. But you have to keep going and keep positive, because ultimately if you persevere you will get that job you want. That would be my key advice to autistic people.

Further information

The National Autistic Society's website has information on a wide variety of autism-related topics for autistic people, their parents and carers, as well as for autism professionals and anyone encountering autistic people during their working life.

You can visit the website at **www.autism.org.uk**

Autism information

You may find the following information pages particularly helpful:

- > What is autism?
- > What is Asperger syndrome?
- > Anxiety in adults with an autism spectrum disorder
- > Social skills for adolescents and adults.

Information for employers

You can find information for employers on what autism is, recruiting an autistic employee, and managing an autistic employee at **www.autism.org.uk/employers**.

You can also call our Autism Helpline on **0808 800 4104** and ask for the information sheets to be sent to you.

Online Community

The NAS Community is a place for autistic people, their carers and relatives, and professionals to share their thoughts and experiences.

Visit **community.autism.org.uk**

Support services

The NAS Autism Helpline provides impartial and confidential information, advice and support to autistic people and their families.

The helpline can:

- > answer general questions about autism and Asperger syndrome
- > talk through options available to autistic people
- > talk through support options available to family members
- > provide information on local services and other relevant organisations.

The contact details for the helpline are:

- > Phone: **0808 800 4104** (open 10am-4pm, Monday-Thursday, 9am-3pm Friday)
- > Email: **autismhelpline@nas.org.uk**
- > Website: **www.autism.org.uk/helpline**

Autism Services Directory

The NAS Autism Services Directory is an online directory of services that cater for autism. It is a UK-wide database of diagnostic services, schools, employment services, support groups, training courses, residential services and much more.

The directory is designed to help autistic people, their families and the people who work with them professionally find out more about the services available to them. You can find the directory at **www.autism.org.uk/directory**

General information about autism

Attwood, T. (2008). *The complete guide to Asperger's syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The definitive handbook for anyone affected by Asperger syndrome.

Gomez de la Cuesta, G. and Mason, J. (2010). *Asperger syndrome for dummies*. London: John Wiley and Sons.

Written in a friendly, readable style, this book explains the condition and gives practical advice on how to cope with difficulties and enjoy everyday life

Hendrickx, S. and Salter, C. (2010). *The adolescent and adult neuro-diversity handbook*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Looks at a range of neurological disabilities, including autism and Asperger syndrome, as well as conditions that may co-exist such as dyspraxia.

Autism and employment

Grandin, T. (2012). *Different...not less: inspiring stories of achievement and successful employment from adults with autism, Asperger's and ADHD*. Texas: Future Horizons.

Presents a collection of personal success stories from people on the autism spectrum. Contributors were chosen from a variety of different skill sets.

Simone, R. (2010). *Asperger's on the job: must-have advice for people with Asperger's or high functioning autism and their employers, educators, and advocates*. Texas: Future Horizons.

Looks into employment from the points of view of the employer looking for staff with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the employee with ASD looking for work. The author asked over 50 adults with Asperger syndrome to describe their experiences with work and employment.

Edmonds G. ed. and Beardon L. ed. (2008) *Asperger syndrome and employment: adults speak out about Asperger syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Explores the issues surrounding employment, providing practical advice for adults with Asperger syndrome, as well as their employers, colleagues and employment services.

Hawkins, G. (2004). *How to find work that works for people with Asperger syndrome: the ultimate guide for getting people with Asperger syndrome into the workplace (and keeping them there!)* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Aimed at people who want to help somebody with Asperger syndrome find and keep a satisfying job, or for people with Asperger syndrome. In 1995 the author founded Mission Possible, the first employment agency in North America for people with Asperger syndrome.

Finding employment

Most jobcentres have disability employment advisers (DEAs) who provide support to jobseekers with disabilities. DEAs may not have autism-specific knowledge but will be able to advise you about getting work and the law relating to disability. To find your nearest Jobcentre Plus service visit www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance to help you make decisions on learning, training and work opportunities.

www.prospects.ac.uk

Prospects is a graduate careers website.

www.employ-ability.org.uk

Employment opportunities for disabled and dyslexic students and graduates.

Social skills

Yeomans, H. and Richards, D. (2010). *Socialeyes: exploring the social world with people on the autism spectrum*. London: The National Autistic Society. A learning resource that facilitates social skills and social understanding for people on the autism spectrum. The resource contains two DVDs with filmed examples of social situations and explanations of why they were or were not successful. It also contains a CD-ROM with a user guide, session plans, materials for facilitators and practical worksheets and resources for people on the autism spectrum. Available from www.autism.org.uk/pubs

Patrick, N. J. (2008). *Social skills for teenagers and adults with Asperger syndrome: a practical guide to day-to-day life*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Advice on day-to-day social skills, friendships and relationships eg visits to the dentist or doctor, searching for a job or dealing with public transport.

Post-16 transition

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

The Autism Education Trust has developed a toolkit about common issues surrounding transition for young people on the autism spectrum, as well as a guide to the things that should be considered by those supporting them.

www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk

Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) is a programme funded by the Department for Education as part of the delivery support for the *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability* green paper. PfA's vision is that young people with special educational needs and disabilities have equal life chances as they move into adulthood, including in the areas of paid employment, independent living, choice and control, community inclusion, friends and relationships.



This comprehensive workbook contains information, templates and practical activities to help autistic people to find a job and prepare for employment.



The toolkit includes:

- > **information on autism, including Asperger syndrome**
- > **guidance on how to choose a suitable role and apply for work**
- > **interview techniques**
- > **tips on how to gain work experience**
- > **advice on effective communication and social skills**
- > **strategies for managing anxiety**
- > **case studies and viewpoints of autistic people.**

About The National Autistic Society

We are the leading UK charity for autistic people (including those with Asperger syndrome) and their families. With the help of our members, supporters and volunteers we provide information, support and pioneering services, and campaign for a better world for people on the autism spectrum.

Around 700,000 people in the UK are autistic. Together with their families they make up over 2.8 million people whose lives are touched by autism every single day. From good times to challenging times, The National Autistic Society is there at every stage, to help transform the lives of everyone living with autism.

We are proud of the difference we make.

The National Autistic Society

393 City Road

London EC1V 1NG

Switchboard: **020 7833 2299**

Autism Helpline: **0808 800 4104**

Minicom: **0845 070 4003**

Fax: **020 7833 9666**

Email: **nas@nas.org.uk**

Website: **www.autism.org.uk**