

Heidi Wright

RECRUITMENT

INTERVIEW PREPARATION GUIDE

Practical preparation to help you approach interview day informed,
confident and ready to demonstrate your value.

ACCOUNTANCY & FINANCE • CUMBRIA & DUMFRIESSHIRE

Good interviews rarely happen by accident. Preparation gives you the confidence to have a better conversation.

Prepare with purpose

Securing an interview means the employer has already seen enough in your CV to want to know more. Your task now is to bring that experience to life: demonstrate relevance, communicate clearly and decide whether the opportunity is right for you.

RECRUITMENT INSIGHT

Treat the interview as a professional two-way conversation. The employer is assessing you, but you are also gathering the information you need to make a well-informed career decision.

1. Research the organisation

Go beyond the homepage. You should arrive with a clear understanding of what the organisation does, how it operates and what may be important to it now.

- Understand its products or services, customers, locations, ownership and overall scale.
- Review the leadership team, company structure and - where relevant - recent filed accounts and financial performance.
- Look at recent news, strategic developments, investment, acquisitions, growth plans or leadership changes.
- Understand the wider sector: key competitors, market pressures, legislation and current trends.
- Use the company website, LinkedIn, Companies House, trade publications and credible news sources.

INTERVIEW CHECK

Can you explain, in your own words, what the organisation does, how it makes money and why this particular opportunity interests you?

2. Know who you are meeting

Review the names and roles of the interviewers where these have been provided. Understanding their responsibilities and background can help you anticipate the areas they may naturally explore and makes introductions easier on the day.

3. Revisit the job description

Read the job description alongside your CV. Highlight the recurring requirements and identify recent, relevant examples that demonstrate each one.

- Core technical responsibilities and reporting requirements
- Systems, software and data capability
- Sector or commercial experience
- Leadership, stakeholder management and business partnering
- Change, improvement or project experience
- Professional qualifications and personal attributes

RECRUITMENT INSIGHT

Do not rely on the interviewer to make the connection for you. If the role requires cashflow management, SAP, acquisitions or team leadership and you have that experience, make sure it is clearly discussed.

Prepare your evidence

Use examples, not general statements

Strong interview answers are specific. Prepare a small bank of examples covering achievements, challenges, change, teamwork, leadership, problem solving and occasions where you influenced an outcome.

For competency or behavioural questions, the STAR structure can help keep your answer focused:

S Situation	Briefly set the context.
T Task	Explain what you needed to achieve.
A Action	Focus on what you personally did and why.
R Result	Explain the outcome, ideally with evidence or measurable impact.

EXAMPLE

Rather than saying 'I improved month-end', explain the issue, what you changed, who you involved and the impact - for example reducing close from ten working days to six and improving the quality of management information.

Questions you should be ready for

- Talk me through your current role and responsibilities.
- Why are you considering a move, and why does this role appeal?
- What are your strongest technical or commercial skills?
- Tell me about an improvement or change you have implemented.
- Describe a difficult stakeholder, deadline or business challenge and how you handled it.
- How do you prioritise when several deadlines compete?
- What are you looking for from your next role and employer?

Interview formats

Do not try to predict one exact format. Interviews may be conversational, structured, competency-based, technical or a combination. Senior appointments may include several stakeholders, presentations, case studies or psychometric assessment.

Finance roles may also include Excel, systems or technical exercises. If a skill is central to the role, be prepared to demonstrate it rather than simply describe it.

Online interviews

- Test the link, camera, microphone and internet connection in advance.
- Use a quiet, well-lit setting with a professional, uncluttered background.
- Keep your CV, job description and brief notes nearby, but avoid reading from them.
- Join a few minutes early and close notifications or other applications that may distract you.

Interview day

Before you arrive

- Recheck the time, location, parking or travel arrangements and the names of the people you are meeting.
- Plan to arrive in the area with time to spare, but normally present yourself around 5-10 minutes before the interview.
- Dress appropriately for the organisation and level of role. If unsure, it is generally better to be slightly more formal than too casual.
- Take a copy of your CV and job description, plus a notebook if useful.
- Put your phone on silent before entering the building.

During the interview

- Listen to the full question before answering and take a moment to think when needed.
- Keep answers relevant and structured; enough detail to evidence your point, without losing the question.
- Be positive about previous employers and colleagues. Explain reasons for moving professionally and factually.
- Maintain natural eye contact and engaged body language.
- If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification rather than guessing.
- Show genuine interest in the role and organisation rather than waiting until the final question to demonstrate enthusiasm.

INTERVIEW CHECK

Aim for a professional conversation, not a performance. You do not need a rehearsed answer to everything; you do need to know your experience well enough to discuss it confidently.

Questions to ask

Good questions should help you understand the role while demonstrating that you have thought carefully about the opportunity. Choose those that genuinely matter to you.

- What would success look like in the first six to twelve months?
- What are the immediate priorities or challenges for the person joining?
- How is the finance team structured and how does it work with the wider business?
- What prompted the vacancy?
- What systems or process improvements are planned?
- How would you describe the culture and management style?

- What are the next stages and anticipated timescale?

Handling key conversations

Salary & package

There is no need to avoid salary at all costs. If the interviewer raises it, answer openly and consistently with the discussions you have already had with your recruiter. Where Heidi Wright Recruitment is representing you, we will normally have established your expectations and can manage detailed package negotiation on your behalf.

RECRUITMENT INSIGHT

Do not improvise a different salary expectation in the interview. If your circumstances or expectations have changed, discuss this with your recruiter before the meeting wherever possible.

Reasons for leaving

Keep this constructive. Focus on what you are moving towards - broader responsibility, progression, a different sector, location, culture or type of organisation - rather than criticising your current employer.

If you are asked something difficult

- Pause. A thoughtful answer is stronger than a rushed one.
- Be honest if you have not encountered something directly, then explain the closest relevant experience or how you would approach it.
- If discussing a mistake or setback, show ownership, what you learned and what changed as a result.
- Avoid one-word answers, but equally do not fill silence by going off on a tangent.

Second interviews, presentations & testing

A second interview is not simply a repeat of the first. Revisit what you learned, note any areas that were explored in depth and prepare for a more detailed discussion. You may meet additional stakeholders or be asked to demonstrate how you would approach the role.

- For presentations, clarify the brief, timing, audience and whether questions are included.
- Keep slides simple and make your thinking easy to follow.
- For case studies, state assumptions and explain your reasoning rather than focusing only on the final answer.
- For Excel or technical tests, refresh the skills specifically relevant to the role.

Close the interview well

Thank the interviewers for their time. If the meeting has strengthened your interest, say so clearly. A simple, genuine closing comment is enough - there is no need for a rehearsed sales pitch.

FINAL CHECK

Before you leave, do you understand the role, the immediate priorities and the next stage? Have you clearly communicated your interest and the most relevant evidence from your experience?

Your interview preparation checklist

☐ Organisation	I understand the business, sector, structure, recent developments and key commercial context.
☐ Role	I have reviewed the job description and know the key requirements.
☐ Evidence	I have prepared relevant examples and measurable achievements.
☐ Interviewers	I know who I am meeting and their roles where this information is available.
☐ Questions	I have prepared thoughtful questions I genuinely want answered.
☐ Practicalities	I have confirmed the time, location/link, travel and appropriate dress.
☐ Salary	My expectations are clear and consistent with discussions with my recruiter.
☐ Close	I am ready to explain why the role interests me and to confirm my interest at the end.

After the interview

Make a few notes while the conversation is fresh: what appealed, any concerns, questions that remain and how you feel the meeting went. If Heidi Wright Recruitment arranged the interview, contact us promptly afterwards so we can gather your feedback and speak with the client while the discussion is still current.

PREPARED FOR INTERVIEW?

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