

Key Stage 4

English Career Resources for Teachers

(Career Education Guidance Objective 16)

Understanding the Job Interview

When students at KS4 have identified a career path whether it is further education or the workplace; one of the first hurdles they face is the interview. However, few students will have experience of formal interviews. It was no surprise to find that most of the students involved in piloting these case study materials, consistently under-estimated the demands of the formal interview. So the ability to “understand the purpose of interviews and select and present personal information to make targeted applications” (CEG Framework, Objective 16, KS4) must be explored and developed if GCSE students are to be prepared for formal interviews. In English, working through the demands of a formal interview can encompass speaking and listening, issues around language and power, language variety as well as media work.

“Who’s had an interview already?” - Activating prior knowledge

Find out which students have had experience of formal interviews and to ask them to share their experience and knowledge informally. Their interview experiences may refer to:

- work experience;
- part-time work;
- post-16 education such as sixth form or college places.

Students could be asked to formalize their initial thoughts by having this framework of questions for the students to consider. These may include:

Thinking about a time when you were interviewed.

1. How did you prepare for your interview?

Did your friends and family give any advice? Did you practise with a friend who took the part of the interviewer? Did you feel nervous? If you did, how did you cope with this?

2. How did you present yourself?

What choices did you make about what to wear? Did you check your appearance with an adult? Were there any disagreements about what was suitable? Did you think about how formal you needed to dress?

3. What did you notice about the formality of the language used?

Were you addressed by your first name or your surname? People can show friendliness by deliberately choosing to use colloquial words and phrases (“mates” instead of “friends”, for example) – did you notice this at your interview? Were you aware of having to choose your words carefully? What was the experience closer to: talking to a school friend or a teacher? Can you explain why? What they noticed about the question and answer format of the interview? In most contexts, the person with the power speaks more and asks more questions – in your interview, who spoke most you or your interviewer?

4. How well did you cope with the situation?

Were you nervous? Did you stammer? Did your mind go blank? Any sweaty moments? Did you make any mistakes? What went well and why?

De-constructing the formal interview: “How can I be myself?”

At this point students can either view a video of a formal interview or they can begin to explore its ‘generic’ features. Small group activity will work well here; each group appoints a chairperson plus a scribe to record the group’s thoughts. Because there are often no ‘right or wrong’ answers in this area of interaction, students should decide on the best advice about (1) body language and (2) ways of speaking. The cards can be presented on the interactive whiteboard or printed off to guide the student’s deliberations.

Exploring interview strategies: “Who says what?”

Students involved in testing this unit of work were fairly blasé about the challenges involved in interviews. Most students will not have a great deal of interview experience, so take time to explore some of the different purposes and strategies which interviewer and interviewee can employ. Questions such as: “How do you put the candidate at their ease?” and “How can a candidate behave assertively?” need to be addressed both in terms of doing justice to the language issues but also to equip students to cope with the ‘real thing’.

Two 'card sort' exercises can be used for this. Teachers might start by only distributing the PURPOSE cards and elicit from students suggestions for effective strategies and appropriate examples. Once students are tuned into the concepts behind the exercise they can be given the STRATEGY and EXAMPLE cards. Classes may be divided into EXPERT groups who deal either with interviewer or candidate cards and then report back to each other in a plenary.

"How was it for you?" – dissecting an interview

It is now time to study an interview. Teachers can set up role-play exercises within their own classrooms. Students work in groups of three, taking it in turn to be: interviewer, candidate and observer. They should be able to build on the learning from earlier exercises to ensure that they study the interactions rigorously - as well as have some fun.

"We're not going to eat you!" – watching an interview

Students involved in this case study viewed a clip of Victoria Wood from Youtube where she is a student being interviewed for a place at university to study medicine. The address is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AwsegxfzN8. Teachers can download and store this clip very easily by going to a range of free downloaders such as: <http://youtubedownload.altervista.org/>. This clip can be studied in a variety of ways:

- Students anticipate the ways in which the candidate will show her nervousness
- Students observe the candidate's body language by watching the clip with the volume turned down
- 'A' students observe the candidate while 'B' students observe the interview panel.

The students should use the script cards to analyse the nervousness or body language of the candidate, making notes in the script as in this example.

<p>Interviewer: Only an interview. We're not going to eat you.</p> <p>Sarah Ha ha ha. <i>(bad nervous laugh)</i></p> <p>Interviewer: I see you're taking chemistry, physics, biology, English. All good A levels for medical school. How do you think you're going to do?</p> <p>Sarah Well I might get an A in Physics and I might get an A and two Bs but that very much depends. <i>(nervous long sentence)</i></p> <p>Interviewer: Thank you. I see you're doing the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. Do you think that's character building?</p> <p>Sarah Yes. I think it builds character. Yes. It is character building. Yes. It is a character building thing. Yes. <i>(reflecting herself)</i></p> <p>Interviewer: In what way does it build character, do you think?</p> <p>Sarah In what way? I think in a way, just in the way you'd expect really.</p> <p>Interviewer: Thank you.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you think there is any link between environment and</p>

In subsequent discussion, students can draw on their prior learning to analyse this interview. Script cards containing extracts from the interview can be used to make closer readings of the actual language used together with annotations.

Student observations on Victoria identified these areas for improvement:

dressed smartly but crooked bow tie; shaking with nerves; nodding head too much; frequent hand movements; eye contact; looks too desperate (as if begging?); shrugs a lot; talks quickly; nervous laugh; high-pitched voice

Getting your act together – taking it further

Youtube also hosts a range of short videos, which give advice on interview technique such as: www.businessballs.com/interviews.htm which helps candidates deal with potentially difficult questions. Another website invites you to be interviewed by a real 'boss' and attend an interview surgery for further advice – www.jobsite.co.uk/bemyinterviewer. It has to be said that much of this material is either American or of indifferent quality (or indeed both!) and students with access to media hardware could be set the task of producing their own 'how to' videos on the whole interview process. Outcomes could be used to provide speaking and listening assessments for GCSE English.

Putting it on paper – scriptwriting activities

Students can be offered opportunities to explore interview interactions and to apply what they have already learned, through scriptwriting. As well as the Victoria Wood example, they could read the extract from 'Kes' where Billy tests the patience of his careers adviser to its limits (pages 138-140 of the Penguin edition). Here are some scriptwriting possibilities:

- Adapt the Billy Casper episode so that it becomes a television script;
- Script an interview where misunderstandings cause problems;
- Script an interview where the candidate manages to cope with a difficult situation and succeeds in spite of it all;
- Script a training video which shows the 'do's and don'ts' of interviews.

Other writing opportunities

Students can enjoy exploring the interview situation through **descriptive** writing. Here is an extract from a student piece entitled 'The Interview from hell':

I had been through seventeen candidates who were all very much the same. But the next one I did not expect! I called out "Enter" and she walked through the doorway.

"A'reet, pet!" The candidate said as she plonked herself down.

I paused for a second then caught my breath. Her clothes! She was wearing a colourful top and skirt, long gloves and her hair –

This piece of description calls to mind the scene from 'Educating Rita' where Frank interviews Rita for an Open University course in literature.

Asking students to write to **advise** about interviews invites them to stand back from the topic and to reflect on what they have learned. Students will write more effectively if they have been clear guidance about format, audience and purpose.

type of text ideas

purpose audience

Words

Many young people find their first job interview a real challenge. Write an article for a school leavers' magazine which gives advice on how to prepare for your first interview and how to cope with the questions.

Notice how, in this case study, the teacher has analysed the task for key words, which provide its context.

Imagine – your first interview! You turn up chewing gum and wearing a back-to-front baseball cap. Nightmare! Not if you follow my advice because I have been in your position many times and can pass on my tips for 'Interview Survival!'

First of all, let's start with what you can do before you even leave your house for the interview. Your clothing will give your interviewers their first impression of you – so show them you care by dressing right. Your physical appearance is a vital part of the interview so get that hair cut and brush those teeth till they

This is how another student used listing as a device for imparting clear advice:

DO's:

Maintain eye contact, but look away from time to time.

Nod sometimes to show you follow what is said – but not like a donkey!

Try to find something you have in common to break the ice.

Be friendly and open – they're not going to eat you!

DON'T's:

Walk into the interview unprepared – if you do, they will eat you ALIVE!

Look bored or not interested.

Be negative

And here's another student advising on keeping it relevant:

When you answer a question, look directly at the interviewer to keep your focus. Always make sure your answer is relevant but don't be worried if you wander off the topic a bit because sometimes this is where your reply might be most interesting. The best idea is to keep your answers short, to the point and straightforward.

Writing to advise can be done in a variety of formats. For example, students could be asked to design advisory posters to be put up in all Year 11 form rooms or careers areas. Alternatively, students could be set the task of producing a PowerPoint presentation about coping with interviews for actual use in careers guidance lessons. Evaluations by careers teachers and students could be used to refine and improve the presentation.

Speaking and listening – “you don’t always have to write about it!”

Finally, it’s always worth remembering that students do not always need to produce a piece of writing in order to demonstrate their learning in English. The interview is an interaction between two people and it is carried through the spoken word and the gestures of the body. As such it provides opportunities for role-playing and acting out which can be studied in the moment by a class or captured on video for detailed de-construction. Students can work in pairs, trying out ideas and applying coaching tips. They can collaborate in groups to combine and improve ideas as they come to reflect on the process of entering the world of work and continuing education. In this way they will enjoy learning about the world of work and their own futures.

Card 1

BODY LANGUAGE

How you dress appropriately for the interview?

How you enter the room and sit down?

How you sit and what you do with your hands and your legs?

Eye contact.

Where you look and for how long?

Your whole posture as you listen to and answer questions.

Card 2

WAYS OF SPEAKING

Speed Talking too quickly, gabbling.....

Volume Too loud, too quiet, getting it right.

Clarity Do you mumble when uncertain, stammer if nervous, tail off where you lose your train of thought?

Fillers 'Hmmm', 'you know', 'well' are they good ways of buying thinking time or symptoms of lack of preparation?

Accent Can you subtly alter the way you speak to suit audience and situation?

Dialect Can you choose your words to suit the situation?

If you are unsure what a question is – do you ask for it to be repeated?

The Interviewer Card Sort

Purpose	Strategy	Example
Purpose Put the candidate at their ease.	Strategy Welcome the candidate and guide them.	Example “Good morning. Take a seat.”
Purpose Put the candidate at their ease.	Strategy Introduce the process and explain the basics.	Example “My name is X and this is Y. We will each ask you some questions to find out how suitable you are for this job”.
Purpose Find out what the candidate knows.	Strategy Ask an open question.	Example “What do you think are the key skills you will need to do this job well?”

<p>Purpose</p> <p>Find out what the candidate knows.</p>	<p>Strategy</p> <p>Ask a closed question.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>“Do you think punctuality is important for this job?”</p>
<p>Purpose</p> <p>Find out how well the candidate does at absorbing information.</p>	<p>Strategy</p> <p>Provide some information as part of your question.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>“This company prides itself on its ability to meet all of its customers’ needs. How could you help us meet this goal?”</p>
<p>Purpose</p> <p>Let the candidate know how they are doing.</p>	<p>Strategy</p> <p>Provide feedback.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>“That’s an interesting point of view. Perhaps you could expand on it?”</p>
<p>Purpose</p> <p>Help the candidate if they seem nervous or to have misunderstood the question.</p>	<p>Strategy</p> <p>Re-phrase the question or provide an example.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>“Let me give you an example of what I mean.....”</p>

<p>Purpose</p>	<p>Strategy</p>	<p>Example</p>
<p>To show you understand what is being said to you.</p>	<p>Strategy Give feedback to the interviewer.</p>	<p>Example “Thanks very much. I wasn’t quite sure what to expect.”</p>
<p>To show that you are enthusiastic about your application.</p>	<p>Strategy Tell the interviewer your positive feelings.</p>	<p>Example “I am really excited about this course..”</p>
<p>To show that you have a clear understanding of the question.</p>	<p>Strategy Provide detail such as examples, reasons, evidence and comment on these.</p>	<p>Example “On my work experience I had to use the internet to research addresses and telephone numbers.”</p>

<p>Purpose</p> <p>To show that you understand that there is not always a right or wrong answer.</p>	<p>Strategy</p> <p>Balance a statement by providing an argument that challenges what you just said. Use words like: however, but, although.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>“Although I feel that good leaders are determined, this does not mean they need to be ruthless.”</p>
<p>Purpose</p> <p>Find out what the interviewer really is expecting in answer to their question.</p>	<p>Strategy</p> <p>Ask what the interviewer means by the question or ask them to re-phrase it.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>“Could you just explain again what you mean by that?”</p>
<p>Purpose</p> <p>Take command of a tricky question.</p>	<p>Strategy</p> <p>Define or explain what you think the question means.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>“Well, it depends what you mean by that. I think that this issue involves.....and so....”</p>

The University Interview: Script Card A

CARD A

Interviewer: I see you're taking chemistry, physics, biology, English. All good A levels for medical school. How do you think you're going to do?

Sarah: Well I might get an A in Physics and I might get an A and two Bs but that very much depends.

Interviewer: Thank you. I see you're doing the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. Do you think that's character building?

Sarah: Yes. I think it builds character. Yes. It is character building. Yes. It is a character building thing. Yes.

Interviewer: In what way does it build character, do you think?

Sarah: In what way? I think in a way, just in the way you'd expect really.

Interviewer: Thank you.

The University Interview: Script Card B

CARD B

Interviewer: Sarah, do you think there is any link between environment and disease?

Sarah: Do you mean the “environment”?

Interviewer: Living conditions. Do you think living conditions can affect health?

Sarah: Yes, I think they probably can.

Interviewer: In what way?

Sarah: Hmm. If you shared a bedroom with someone who had measles then you would probably catch measles. Or if you are very rich and have very thick carpets you might trip over and break your ankles so it would affect you in that way.

Interviewer: What about if you were very poor?

Sarah: If you were very poor you wouldn't have that kind of carpet.

The University Interview: Script Card C

CARD C

Interviewer: Do you think poor housing would have an adverse effect on health?

Sarah: Yes, I think it would have an adverse effect on health because it would affect people's health adversely.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Interviewer: Sarah, do you think there's a gap between the media's portrayal of doctors and doctors in real life?

Sarah: Yes, I think there is a gap because the doctor in 'Eastenders' has bushy eyebrows and it might make people think that if you want to be a doctor you have got to have bushy eyebrows and you might not have bushy eyebrows but you might want to be a doctor and that's not really fair.

The University Interview: Script Card D

CARD D

Interviewer: What do you think about the National Health Service?

Sarah: In what way – think?

Interviewer: Do you think it's crumbling or doing very well?

Sarah: Probably parts are crumbling and probably parts are doing very well. I think. You have to look at both sides really.

Interviewer: Go on.

Sarah: Probably because lots of people say 'let's close casualty and use the money for nuclear weapons' but I think you have to sit back and say 'if there is going to be a nuclear war then we'll need casualty departments'

Interviewer: You don't think in a nuclear war we'll all be annihilated?

Sarah: No.

The University Interview: Script Card E

CARD E

Interviewer: What was the last book you read, Sarah?

Sarah: 'Othello'. It's a book by William Shakespeare. Of the Royal Shakespeare Company. I've got the book and I've got it on little cards as well.

Interviewer: What do you think is the main theme of 'Othello'?

Sarah: I don't think it's got one really. It's just various people talking. Sometimes they do things in brackets.

Interviewer: Do you think Othello was ill?

Sarah: No.

Interviewer: To act in the way that he did. Was he suffering from something when he discovered Desdemona's handkerchief?

Sarah: I think he might have been suffering from a cold.

Interviewer: Right, Sarah. Thank you very much indeed.

How to use hot-seating to interview a character from a novel.

Stage one

In your group, agree which character from the book you would like to interview. Also agree on the point in the book at which you want the interview to take place. You might even want to decide on two separate points in the book to hot-seat the character.

Stage two

You can't skip this bit and just rely on your memory. Re-read the part of the book and make notes on your selected character under these headings:

- what they say
- what they do
- what other characters say about them
- what other characters do to them
- how other characters react to them
- how their mood alters.

Stage three

Re-read these notes and try to think of reasons which the hot-seated character might give for each point. Then try to think of alternatives. Then think how you would have reacted if you had been in their situation.

Stage four

Plan to ask open questions. An open question gives the interviewee an opportunity to explain themselves. Examples of good open question beginnings are:

- How did you feel when
- Why did you say
- How have you changed in your attitude to
- Why has your attitude changed
- What was your deepest fear/anxiety/hope at this point and why?
- What is your opinion of and why?
- What did you mean when you said
- If you could change one thing about your character, what would it be and why?
- Which character do you most hate/respect/like/distrust/trust and why?