**Job Interview Preparation Worksheet:**

**How to use this worksheet:**

This worksheet covers the most commonly asked interview questions, and will help you to plan your answers according to your personal skills. Obviously, questions will vary depending on the actual interview, but in general these responses can be adapted for different situations. Once you’ve filled it in for one interview, you’ll be able to adapt your answers for other interviews with minimal input.

Column 1 suggests information or likely questions that will come up in an interview, with tips on how to answer the question provided in column 2. In column 3 is an example of a good response. Column 4 is for your own personal answer. We suggest you take the time to fill this in in three stages:

1. **Note your answers.** Write down your initial thoughts in note form – the things you’d like to say, regardless of whether or not it’s a ‘good interview answer’. You can be as honest as you like at this stage, even answering negatively if you want to. The idea is just to get your real, personal thoughts so you can later turn them into honest but polished interview answers.
2. **Polish your answers.** Next, take the notes you’ve written and think about how you’d explain your thoughts to an interviewer, and how you’d want to come across. You should still be truthful, but you may obviously want to keep some things to yourself or highlight your qualities more than in round 1; use the ‘example responses’ as a guide. Keep working till you’ve written out full answers to all the questions, and you’re happy with them.
3. **Practise your answers.** Now, practice out loud – this should either be with a friend if possible, or on your own if not, but it must be out loud. It’s important to practice verbalising your answers, because you’ll find ways of answering which are fluent and coherent. You’ll be prepared and therefore more relaxed in your interview. You may also want to keep editing your answers as you go.

Your answers should not be more than 2 minutes long – 3 absolute max. Keep practising till you feel confident.

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| **Question** | **Tip** | **Example response** | **Your personalised answer** |
| **Job title** |  | *Trial coordinator – malaria vaccine trial* |  |
| **Date of interview** |  |  |  |
| **Why have you applied for this post?** | Tailor your answer to the post in question: for example, why you would like this specific role. Don’t just say ‘I need a new job’, you need to explain why you’re perfect for this job, so as to make the recruiter feel that they want to employ you. | *I applied for this role because my current trial has come to an end. It was a small study and I’ve really enjoyed working in a single-site environment, but I’d love to learn about a multi-site environment and apply my skills to a wider setting. This post is ideal because my experience is within the field of malaria vaccinology, and I also feel that I’d also really enjoy working in a large organisation such as XXXXX.* |  |
| **What are your main strengths? Name three** | List three strengths, and make sure to include examples of each to back up your answer if asked | *I’m a good organiser: my previous role was very busy and involved balancing multiple deadlines, as it was a very small team and I was fulfilling multiple roles.*  *I get on with other people well and am used to working with people all over the world, of many different backgrounds and educational levels, so I’m a good team person and am good at drawing together lots of different groups, which is useful in a trial.*  *Thirdly I’m very dedicated and I like to learn. I hadn’t worked in vaccinology before my previous trial, but I took courses in my own time learning about it so as to facilitate my work, and I really enjoy this aspect of my job – the opportunity to learn about new things all the time.* |  |
| **What are your main weaknesses? Name three** | This one is tricky, be careful! Be honest but consider carefully what you want to say and how to say it. For example perhaps you panic when under pressure; don’t say ‘I am not very good at working under pressure’ but instead you could say, ‘I have had to learn how to prioritise my time effectively’. | *Firstly, I’m a project manager by nature. This means I’m very good at looking at the big picture and planning multiple deadlines, but it means I need to be careful with detail. I know this and plan accordingly.*  *Secondly, because I like managing projects I also like being in control of them – though I enjoy working in a team, I sometimes find it hard to delegate work effectively because I like to know the work is being done, and when! This is something I worked hard on in my last role; I’m much better at handing over responsibility now and make sure I give really clear instructions so that I can relax and know the team are working on it together.*  *Thirdly, I find that I have to work on my confidence with presentations to large groups. I’ve definitely learnt to be more confident in my last job, and it helps if I prepare a really good talk so that I’m less nervous on the day, but I do get nervous.* |  |
| **What qualities do you have, which make you ideal for this role?** | On the left, make a list of the skills laid out in the job description or advert, then in the right hand column explain how you know you have those skills and give specific examples. This will help feed into the questions asked below.  Carefully consider the skills you have that make you ideal for this job, and explain them with examples. | ***Job description reads:***  *Good organisational skills*  *Experience in clinical trials*  *Team player*  *Computer skills.*  ***My skills (notes):***  *I’m good at organising people and balancing multiple deadlines*  *I’m organised and efficient*  *Good experience in trials, though not multicentre trials*  *Comfortable working in a team, though not very experienced leading others*  *Have relevant experience on computer, though I would like more experience with data management systems and CTMS*  ***My answer****:*  *I think my experience and my skills suit this role perfectly. I have a background in managing clinical trials, and though I haven’t managed a trial as large as this before, I have the necessary knowledge and can apply the skills I’ve built up in this new situation. I’m a quick learner and like learning new things, so I will enjoy working in this new environment. I’m used to working in a team as this is similar to my previous role, and am good at bringing together lots of people and making the team work as a cohesive unit, which I think is really important for a trial coordinator. I’ve got good general IT skills, though of course all systems are different and I will be keen to learn new skills.* |  |
| **Tell me about yourself** | Split your answer into three small chunks as follows:   * Your qualities * Your career history * Why you are here today | *I’m a trial manager and I think my main qualities lie in the fact that I’m a good organiser; I like being prepared and I like having multiple tasks and ‘keeping all the balls in the air’. As you can see from my CV, I did a biology degree, and I learnt about clinical trials from my first job as an admin assistant for a trials unit. I really enjoyed learning about the process, and was promoted to trials assistant before working as trial manager on my last trial, which was malaria based also. I loved working on that trial from initiation to close-out, and it’s been really exciting being part of that whole process. However, now that it’s all wrapped up I’m looking forward to my next challenge, and ideally for me the next step would involve working on a larger, multi-site study which is why this project appealed to me; I’m also really keen to work with an organisation whose values I share, as I do with XXXXXX.* |  |
| **What do you know about the organisation?** | The interviewer is checking whether you have done your homework and know about the company. You absolutely must prepare for this question; if you don’t, it appears that you do not care about the role and have just applied to anything. Make sure you’ve read the aims of the company and of this specific role. | *I’ve always known of XXXX of course due to your far reaching work. I particularly like the focus your organisation has on bridging the gap between research and policy, as I think this is missed in so many occasions and is obviously key. I think that your policies about open-access publishing of your protocols and methods make a big impact on this too.* |  |
| **What do you think of our website?** | This comes up more commonly than you’d think! Have a read of the website and form some opinions that make it clear you’ve looked at it. | *I have used the website as a means of finding resources; I particularly like the ‘methodology’ pages. I think the blogs are a good way of making research methods accessible, and I’ve enjoyed reading them.* |  |
| **Where do you see yourself in five years?** | Be honest but make sure that you link your answer to the role in question | *My aim is to work in research for organisations whose values I share. One day in the future, I’d love to head up a clinical trials unit, as I am fascinated by the operational barriers people face in trials and I think methodology is really important. However my aim for the next five to ten years is really to build experience working in a range of settings, and I love working on the whole trial process from initiation to close out, so ideally in five years’ time I’d be at the other end of a trial!* |  |
| **Can you tell us about a time that you encountered a problem at work, and how you dealt with it?** | Prepare an interesting, truthful, relatively recent example – e.g. did a project go wrong and you helped deal with it? Perhaps suppliers let you down and you had to find a new one at short notice? You had multiple conflicting deadlines? Did you have to deal with a difficult member of staff? Anything like that, and choose a true example in which you played an instrumental role in solving the problem. | *On my last project we’d subcontracted our trial database build and management to a small company, and my role was to oversee them. We had continuous problems with them, because the database kept freezing and wasn’t really fit for purpose, and they were very slow at fixing it. We tried to have meetings with them to resolve the problems but they were too slow to fix things, and in fixing one thing they’d just break something else! In the end, I worked with the data manager of the study and the IT group at my last organisation to move the database to our own server, and the IT guys worked with a consultant to fix it. This was a great solution as we had someone in house to fix any new problems arising, and the IT guys said they’d be more confident to build a database themselves in future rather than subcontracting.* |  |
| **Can you give us an example of how well you work in a team?** | Again use truthful, real life, specific examples. | *Yes, I have lots of experience of making teams work and I think this is integral to making a trial run successfully. I think the trial coordinator has to be like the hub for the team.*  *For example, on my last trial we had a lack of cohesion between the nurses and the data staff; the nurses were doing some of the data entry but they didn’t really understand why they were getting queries, and the data staff and nurses were getting frustrated with eachother. I realised this and spoke with all the parties, and we organised extra training which I led, with plenty of time for discussion afterwards, so they everyone knew what they were doing and why. It worked much better after that. I also tried to get everyone together more often, for example for team lunches, and I think that really helped too.* |  |
| **Can you give us an example of how well you work individually?** | Again use truthful, real life, specific examples. | *In my last project I was obviously part of a team, but I had to be very motivated and independent. The PI was very busy so a lot of the time I had to just work out problems and solutions for myself, and be motivated to keep everything up and running with minimal input from the PI. I liked this sense of responsibility, and am comfortable with this.* |  |
| **Why did you leave your last job/why are you considering leaving?** | If your contract is ending then this question is easy; if not then be honest (within reason) – for example perhaps you feel you’ve learnt all you can and need the ‘next step’, then that’s fine to say. The key is to make sure that the new job is viewed as a planned career move. | *My contract has come to an end because the trial has finished. However this is also good timing as I am now comfortable in the environment of a small single study centre trial and would enjoy the challenge of a larger trial.* |  |
| **What do you like to do outside of work?** | Consider this carefully; be truthful, but ensure you also think about the employer’s point of view. If you just say ‘shopping’ you might appear a little bland; on the other hand if you say you love bare-knuckle boxing they may get the wrong impression of you! | *I have a family so lots of my spare time is taken up with activities with my two children. However I also love running; I’m working towards a marathon in a few months’ time!* |  |
| **What do you want to ask us?** | This one must not be ignored! Make sure you have some questions answered which shoe how interested you are. This should NOT be something to do with, hours worked, lunch breaks, holidays etc.  Try to ask questions about the actual role, but if you’re stuck, examples of good suggestions are on the right hand side. | *What do you enjoy about working for XXXXXXXXXXXXX? What is the atmosphere like?*  *Could you tell me about how XXX organisation deals with career progression – are there training opportunities available?* |  |