



Transparency and Self-employment
for migrant workers through
Assessment Center

GIVECOMPETENCEACHANCE



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



Supplementary Training for Assessment Centers with Female Migrants

+++ Training for Job Applications +++



Project:

GC-AC Give Competence A Chance

Transparency and Self-employment for migrant workers through
Assesment center

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Contents

Supplementary Training

1. Applications Materials – Composing Résumés and Cover Letters

- 1.1 Workshop: How to Compose a Résumé
- 1.2 Workshop: How to Compose a Cover Letter
- 1.3 Working Materials for Composing Résumés and Cover Letters

2. The Job Interview – from First Contact over the Phone to Presenting oneself during the Interview

- 2.1 Workshop: Establishing Contact over the Phone
- 2.2 Workshop: The Job Interview
- 2.3 Working Materials for Initiating Contact on the Phone and for the Job Interview

Training for Job Applications

If assessment centers for analysing competences are to have a lasting effect, their results must be integrated into career orientation, qualification planning, or job applications.

The people in the GCAC project's target group – women with migrant backgrounds – are searching in the host country for employment that corresponds with their competences. They are therefore primarily interested in how they can utilise the results of the assessment center in their own job search. One result of the assessment center is certainly an increase, over the course of the four-day assessment process, in the clarity with which the candidates understand their own competences as well as an increase in their self-confidence, enabling them to clearly and convincingly formulate these competences. In addition, the assessment center concludes with the awarding of a certificate, which attests to the observed competences of each candidate and gives an analysis and description of these competences. This certificate can also be presented to potential employers. In this respect, it would be advantageous for assessment centers to be seen by employers as instruments for the selection and development of personnel and for employers to grant a high degree of prognostic validity to assessment centers in terms of how they describe the applicants' profiles.

Within the context of the assessment center that we conducted for female migrants in Berlin at LIFE e.V., we asked ourselves which additional offerings might aid the candidates in finding employment.

In the past years, we have developed workshops to supplement the assessment center, which relate to the topic of 'applying to fill a job opening'. These workshops should support candidates in expressing – in both spoken and written form – the competences that they identified during the assessment center, i.e. on a résumé, in cover letters, and during job interviews.

These workshops are described in the following¹.

1. Application Materials – Composing Résumés and Cover Letters

Today more than in the past, employers expect applicants to present themselves in accordance with the job profile. The applicant must provide decisive arguments for why she would be a suitable employee. This holds true not only at the stage of the job interview, but already when preparing application materials.

The best possible qualifications are therefore little help if it is not possible to present them in a corresponding fashion. Generally, the résumé and cover letter comprise the first contact with the potential employer.

Therefore, both documents must provide an optimal presentation of the applicant's motivation and personality.

The objectives of the workshops about composing résumés and cover letters are therefore as follows:

- Participants become aware of which elements belong in the application and how to use these to optimally present themselves
- Participants understand the formal guidelines for creating résumés and cover letters
- Participants compose their own résumé and an example of a successful cover letter

Group Size

The workshops about writing résumés and cover letters are conducted in small groups with no more than 5 participants, since the advisor works together with each participant on her actual documents.

¹ The workshops were developed and conducted by Judith Burkhard, who also worked on this publication.

1.1 Order of Events for the Workshop ‘Writing a Résumé’

Duration: 2 x 5 hours

Preparation:

Prior to the start of the workshop, the participants are asked to bring along the résumés that they have used for past job applications.

Step 1

Since not all participants are familiar with application procedures, the following questions are addressed at the beginning of the workshop:

- Which documents are contained in a job application?
- How should a written application be designed?
- How can I present myself and my qualifications in an optimal way? How should I address any gaps on my résumé?
- What special things should be taken into account for online applications sent by e-mail or using online forms?

Step 2

The participants are introduced to the formal structure and layout options for designing a résumé. (see Working Material ‘Tips for an Impressive Résumé’)

Step 3

Each participant works on her own résumé and receives input from the lecturer and other workshop participants on how to optimise the content and layout of the résumé.

Step 4

Each participant continues working on her résumé at home. During a second face-to-face session, each participant presents her newly revised résumé and gathers feedback.

1.2 Order of Events for the Workshop ‘Writing a Cover Letter’

Duration: 5 hours

Preparation:

Participants select a job opening they want to apply for by looking through job advertisements in newspapers or online.

Step 1

Participants are introduced to the function, formal structure and layout options for a cover letter. (see Working Material ‘What should be in a cover letter?’ and ‘The Unsolicited Application’)

Step 2

Each participant formulates a cover letter for the selected position.

Step 3

Copies of the cover letters are made for everyone and each participant receives feedback, input and, where needed, assistance from the lecturer and other workshop participants in formulating the cover letter.

For participants who are not writing their applications in their mother tongue, it would be advisable for the lecturer to look over the completed cover letter in order to make corrections and ensure that everything is perfect in terms of grammar and spelling. This can also be done online following the conclusion of the workshop.

1.3 Working Materials for Writing Résumés and Cover Letters

Tips for Creating a Striking Résumé

Make your résumé clear and simple

A résumé is nothing more than a schematic outline of your professional career. Use it in order to draw attention to your strengths. During the job interview, you can go into details. Make it easy for the person reading your résumé to get a quick overview. Divide your résumé into blocks.

Work chronologically 'back to front' and leaving out any time gaps

Begin with your current position and work backwards chronologically. List the name and location of your employer, beginning and ending of your employment (by month), job title, and a short description of your responsibilities. If you are entering the job market for the first time, list any past work experience irrespective of whether this work was paid or unpaid.

Adjust your résumé to match the respective companies

Employers like having an application that is individually matched to their company. This means that if you are looking for a job in the field of computer science, you should place particular emphasis on experience in this area.

Honesty

Cheating on your résumé won't help. Adding on an extra six months of job experience may seem like a good idea, but if you are caught in the act, you will lose the job. But make sure you also don't under-sell yourself. If you worked without pay for three months in France and during this time learned about the country and its culture while improving your language skills, then you should mention this.

Honorary Positions

Make sure to also list volunteer work, e.g. as a board member of an organisation, the leader of a self-help group, as a student representative, or as an assistant on stage design for a theatre piece. All of these things indicate an active person with initiative.

Spelling

If your résumé is filled with spelling errors, then it will certainly be tossed directly in the garbage can. No employer will hire a person who fails to proofread their own work. Don't rely solely on the grammar and spell-check on your computer.

Two heads are better than one

Another person's attentiveness can help you to find mistakes and unclear passages. After all, when you have already read through your résumé three times, it's difficult to distance yourself and regain objectivity. Don't try to write your entire résumé in a single sitting – come back to it again after a couple days have passed.

References

If you add references to your application, make absolutely sure that you have the consent of the people you cite.

What should be in the cover letter?

How did I become aware of the position?

- e.g. from an announcement, from acquaintances, etc.

Why am I particularly interested in this position?

- e.g. because of many years of experience in the field in which the position is being advertised, or because I want to take on new challenges and responsibilities.

What is attractive to me about the company / employer?

- e.g. size, reputation, specialisation, etc.

Which experiences, competences and skills do I offer?

- e.g. career, job experience, driver's license, etc.

What makes me especially well qualified for this position?

- Summary of my qualifications and experience.

Which of my characteristics distinguish me in particular?

- e.g. flexibility, patience, creativity

Why am I looking for a new position, or why am I changing profession?

- Formulate this positively! e.g. how I would like to have a new challenge, would enjoy a new job, have finally found my dream job, etc.

Which additional qualifications have I acquired (perhaps while unemployed)?

When can I start in the new position?

The Unsolicited Application

Unsolicited application or blind application – a big difference

'Blind applications' involve mass mailings, which always make use of the same standard text. Usually the person reading the application notices within a couple lines that this is someone who has sent multiple applications all at once. Unsolicited applications, on the other hand, require 'initiative', a search for information, contacts, telephone conversations, and a precisely crafted cover letter and résumé.

Applying with large or small companies?

Unsolicited applications make sense with small companies as well as large ones. Large companies like applicants who show commitment. Smaller companies usually don't publicise all their openings as they take unsolicited applications into account.

Research potential employers online

Companies are potential employers as they invariably hire new employees. It therefore makes sense to go through online job sites and look for companies that are advertising positions. Doing research online is practical, because it makes it possible to find a

contact person and a telephone number. The first step into the company is already done.

Visit job fairs

Many companies take the initiative to establish contact with applicants, and are represented at fairs, offer company presentations, or invite people to tour their facilities.

Clarify your own profile

Before every application, each job seeker should clarify their own profile. Questionnaires from internet job sites, which inquire into one's applicant profile, can be helpful for this. Such questionnaires ask about specialised knowledge, soft skills, and individual characteristics. In the advertisement for a trainee programme, for example, one may find terms like 'resilient', 'provides impetus', 'effective networker'. Prior to applying, one should think about two or three examples with which one can demonstrate their listed characteristics such as experience gathered from professional life, internships or from writing a thesis.

Cover letter of an unsolicited application

Making clear reference to a possible work area is important. Therefore you shouldn't just write 'unsolicited application' in the subject line, but rather 'Unsolicited Application in the Marketing and Human Resources Department'. This makes the focus areas immediately apparent and if this mail has been preceded by a telephone conversation then 'Following from our telephone conversation on...' also belongs in the subject line.

Links

www.

2. The Job Interview: From First Contact over the Phone to Presenting oneself at the Interview

2.1 First Contact over the Phone

Whether it's an unsolicited application or an application for an advertised position, it's common for a telephone conversation to precede the written application. Inquiries need to be made as to which type of application the company prefers (e.g. e-mail or regular mail), what the company values, or whether it makes sense to send in an unsolicited application. Making contact over the phone is particularly difficult for people who are not applying in their mother tongues, since they are unable to compensate for their lingual 'deficits' with mimicry, gesticulations or body language.

Objectives of the workshop 'First Contact over the Phone' therefore include:

- Participants use the telephone to initiate contact with potential employers.
- Participants are able to assess the possibilities and limitations of this medium.
- Participants practice making contact over the phone, receive feedback, and integrate it into their learning process.
- Participants receive suggestions as to how they can optimise their own behaviour.

Group size: 10 to 15 people

Duration: 5 hours

Order of events for the workshop

Step 1

The participants identify a personalised approach to the workshop topic by speaking about their own experiences, because there are some people who find it easy to deal with phones and others who try to avoid this

communication channel. Exchange of ideas regarding the topic: 'What is easy for me and what is difficult for me when talking on the telephone?'

Step 2

The participants use a flipchart to compile a list of occasions for talking on the telephone during the interview process.

Examples of occasions and questions that can be posed on the phone:

- Name of the contact person who the application should be sent to
- Status of the application process (does it still make sense to apply?)
- Is an internship also possible?
- Details in terms of qualifications, task profile, work hours
- How should the application be sent (email or regular mail)?
- Interview location

Step 3

The participants learn about what they should pay attention to when initiating contact over the telephone (see working materials 'Rules for Initiating Contact over the Phone' and 'Formulation Aids')

Step 4

The participants simulate telephone conversations in short role-play games. Every person who wishes to participate prepares a telephone conversation designed to match an occasion they themselves have selected.

In the subsequent role-play, the lecturer plays the other person on the telephone at the company and surprises the participant now and then with unexpected questions or comments.

Step 5

During the subsequent assessment of the role-play, the following questions are asked of not only the protagonist and lecturer, but also the other participants: 'What things went well and were successful during the telephone conversation? What can XY still work on improving?'

Examples of suggestions from the group:

- Practice pronunciation ahead of time, especially job titles and terminology (ask a native speaker!).
- Clarify responsibilities right away: 'Are you responsible for ...' or 'Can you answer questions related to ...?'

- Be brief (assume that the person on the other end of the line doesn't have any time).
Tip: write down everything ahead of the conversation and then cross off whatever isn't necessary.
- Despite the excitement, continue speaking slowly and clearly, take pauses, breathe. Perhaps write down important sentences prior to the conversation.
- Introduce yourself only by your family name, in the case of difficult compound names, select a single name (for comprehensibility)
- Be prepared for the unexpected.
- In the case of unfriendliness from the person on the other end of the phone, don't lose courage; continue on and remain friendly.

2.2 The Job Interview

If an applicant is invited for a job interview, then they have already succeeded in convincing the employer with their application materials. The first hurdle in the application process has now been cleared. Now the focus is on confirming this positive impression during a personalised conversation. It is, however, also important to determine whether the company and the workplace really are a match with the applicant. Depending on the company, branch office or open position, the framework for the interview can vary widely. As an applicant, it is not a foregone conclusion that you will find yourself in a one-on-one situation. In the case of larger companies in particular, it is common for the human resources officers to be joined at the table by other executives or future colleagues – a conversational setting that causes many people to lose their composure. This makes it all the more important to be well prepared for the interview and, if possible, to practice such a conversational setting ahead of time.

Objectives of the workshop 'The Job Interview' therefore include:

- Participants reflect on their past experiences with job interviews
- Participants know how to prepare for a job interview
- Participants practice for the job interview, get feedback, and incorporate this feedback into their learning process.
- Participants receive input about how they can optimise their own behaviour.

Group size: 10 to 15 people

Duration: max. 3 x 5 hours (independent of group size, since as many participants as possible should gain experience during the role-plays)

Order of events for the workshop

Step 1

The participants identify a personalised approach to the workshop topic by speaking about their own experiences. Exchange of ideas on the topic: 'My experiences with job interviews – what went well, what was difficult?'

Step 2

The participants learn about what they should pay attention to during job interviews. Specialised input regarding 'Order of events during job interviews, roles and behaviours during job interviews'. (see working materials 'Typical order of events during a job interview', 'Tips for the job interview', 'Questions from the employer', 'Questions from the applicant')

Step 3

The participants prepare for their job interviews. In addition, they select a job opening that they want to apply for and do a written preparation for the interview based on the following points:

- My reasons for applying for the advertised position with this employer rather than any other
- Qualifications, skills, strengths, which distinguish me for this position
- What I want to learn in this position, new experiences that I'd like to have
- Since many employers begin the job interview with the request to 'Tell me about yourself!', the participants should consider how to answer.
- Questions that you would like to ask the interviewer.

Step 4

Using role-plays, participants simulate sequences from their prepared job interview (no longer than 10 minutes per role-play). The points listed above should be addressed a little at a time. Initially the lecturer plays the role of the employer, but interested participants can also take on this role.

Step 5

In the subsequent assessment of the role-play, questions are posed not only to the interviewee and the lecturer, but also to the other participants: 'What was successful and went well during the job interview? What can XY still improve?' During the process, the interviewee answers first, then the other participants in the group, and finally the person who played the role of the employer.

Examples of input from the group:

- Answer questions concretely and directly.
- Listen carefully.
- Maintain eye contact and adopt an attentive posture.
- Let people finish speaking.
- Read the job advertisements carefully: don't 'fantasise' during the interview; refer back to the advertisement.
- Describe weaknesses and gaps, and explain how you deal with them.
- Bring along and make use of prepared keywords and notes.
- Only talk about those things on your resume that are important for the employer.

2.3 Working Materials for Initiating Contact on the Phone and for the Job Interview

Rules for Initiating Contact on the Phone

Be well prepared.

An important phone conversation requires good preparation: as with the personal job interview, you must know which questions you want to ask and how you would like to respond to questions about yourself. Write down your own bits of information and questions ahead of time.

Have paper and pencils ready so that you can take notes.

Whenever possible, ask questions starting with a “w”:

What, Why, (How), Which, Where, etc. These ‘open’ questions push the person on the other end of the phone to answer with more than a brief “yes” or “no”.

Get the right person on the phone.

If the name of the contact person is not mentioned in the job advertisement, this is the human resources manager in larger companies and the manager in smaller companies. Write down the person’s information and address them by their name.

Ask first if the contact person has time to answer your questions. If not, then agree on a new time to call.

Keep brief and precise.

Give brief information about why you are calling, who you are, and your profession.

Speak slowly and clearly.

If possible, arrange for a personal conversation.

Formulation aids for the phone conversation

How do I begin?

‘Hello / Good morning / Good evening... my name is ... / I am ... (only use family name and speak very clearly and slowly!)

‘Who in your company / business / organisation is responsible for hiring new employees?’
... ‘Are you responsible for hiring new employees?’

If you are looking for an internship

‘I’m interested in completing an internship with you as a’ ... ‘Do you have an internship opening?’ ... ‘Do you make internships available?’ ... ‘Would I have the opportunity to work with you as an intern?...

If the person on the phone answers with ‘no’: ‘Do you not offer internships in general, or just not at the moment?’

Finishing the conversation

‘Should I send you my application by regular mail or email?’

'Thank you very much for your information. Goodbye.'

Typical order of events during a job interview

Opening phase

Greeting and introduction of the interview participants, small talk (the employer often asks: 'Did you have any trouble finding the office?') Offering of drinks, etc.

Questions about the applicant

Things that have lead to your application, professional career, questions about professional aspirations and motivation (The question: 'Tell me about yourself' is often used to enter into this phase.)

Information from the employer

Information about the business, information about the position, the team, etc.

Material concerns and conditions

Work hours, pay, spatial conditions (e.g. possibility of home office), additional services

Closing phase

Setting dates for further action, conclusion of interview

Tips for a job interview

Information is your trump card

Gather a lot of information about your new employer. Most businesses have a website; use it as a source of information.

First impressions are important

Wear clothing that fits the situation and in which you feel comfortable. Avoid strong smelling perfume. Be punctual and allow some extra time in the case of unforeseen events like traffic jams. Try to arrive a little before the set time so that you can gather your thoughts one more time prior to the interview.

Excitement is a part of it

Calmly address your excitement. Don't try to be different from the way you are and try to act as naturally as possible.

How do I begin?

Let the others initiate and lead the interview.

Be courageous

Ask the questions that are important to you. Prepare the questions ahead of time by writing them down, and don't be shy about using your 'cheat sheet'. Address critical topics yourself in a positive fashion.

Speak clearly and precisely

Express yourself clearly and precisely. View the job interview as an opportunity to show who you are and what you can do. Prepare for it with these things in mind.

Don't criticise past employers

At the end

Usually when the interview is over, you will not know yet whether it has led to success or not. Be friendly and polite when saying goodbye and continue believing in yourself and your abilities.

Questions from the employer during the job interview

There are some favourite topics, which are addressed by employers during the job interview:

- Career up to this point (schooling, university studies, professional experience)
- Reasons for selecting your profession
- Motivation for applying
- Practical skills
- Attitude towards work, success, performance
- Specialist focus areas
- Future plans, interest in continuing education
- Mobility
- Strengths – weaknesses
- Private situation, family circumstances

You should consider these things when preparing for the interview as it is difficult to think of meaningful examples when in the stress situation brought on by the job interview. You should be well prepared rather than leaving the answering of questions about professional and personal qualifications up to spontaneous intuition. This becomes possible if one reflects on every phase in their resume, which tasks and projects were carried out, and which qualifications were gained in the process. If one is then asked e.g. to describe which situations one has already demonstrated problem solving, it is considerably easier to describe such situations.

Examples of questions from employers during job interviews:

'Which motivations were crucial to selecting your field of study?'

'Why were you studying at University XY?'

'Can you please describe your personal interests and the focus areas of your work?'

'Why do you think you are a suitable candidate for the advertised position? What sets you apart?'

'Did you carry out additional functions outside your studies or job, and if yes, which ones?'

'Why did you apply to work with our business rather than another?'

'Do you know about the sector in which our business is active?'

'What would you like to learn with us?'

'Do you have any other questions?'

Questions from the applicant during the job interview

You should ask your own questions, particularly during the second part of the job interview following the reciprocal introductions. After all, those who ask questions receive important information, guide the course of the conversation, and show that they have their own concepts.

Examples of questions that applicants can pose:

'What will my future work be like?'

'How is the workplace equipped?'

'Which systems / technologies will I use in my work?'

'How will I be incorporated into the company?'

'Can I see my future workplace?'

'Why is the position opening up / being created?'

'How many colleagues will I have?'

'Will overtime come up?'

'Do I need my own car?'

'How much travel should I expect?'

'What continuing education possibilities are there?'

'Which opportunities for further development will I have with your business?'

'When is the exact start date? Is there a trial period?'

'Is it a limited contract? Is it possible to extend the contract?'

'How is the pay? Working hours? Is flexitime possible?'

'How will things proceed following the interview?'

'When can I expect a decision?'

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