

Your Guide to... Interviews

Interviews are a two way process, a structured conversation – not an interrogation. It's an opportunity for the employer to assess you and for you to decide whether the job, the employer and the work environment is right for you. If you've been invited for interview then you should be excited as the employer is keen to meet you - they were impressed with you on paper and want to test this further to assess whether you will be a good 'fit' for the organisation and whether you have the skills and the motivation to do the job.



Top Tip – Be Prepared!

Interviews are a bit like an exam and just like exams you are very unlikely to do well if you haven't prepared. You may not be able to exactly predict every question that the employer will ask but you will be able to think of the topics that are likely to come up so there's no excuse not to be ready for them.

Do your homework before the interview and be prepared to talk, with examples, about your skills, knowledge, experience, personal qualities and your motivation.

Types of interview

Some employers will have a single interview to decide on the preferred candidate, while others may require applicants to attend two or more interviews.

The level of formality of the interview and the number of people interviewing candidates can vary from one employer to another, though this should make no difference as long as you are well prepared.

Competency based interviews

- This type of interview is used to evaluate your competency (some employers may call them skills or behaviours).
- All candidates are asked the same questions - this type of interview is often the most common for graduate positions.
- You could use the STAR technique to help you structure your answers:

Situation - briefly give the background to the example or situation you were in.

Task - briefly explain the nature of the task / problem / activity you were involved in.

Action - explain what you did to make a difference, highlighting the skills you used.

Results - describe the outcome – hopefully a positive outcome, and what you learned from the experience.

N.B. It's the Action and Results which will score you marks so be brief on the Situation and Task.

Group interviews

- A group of candidates are interviewed together and may be asked to complete a task as a team. You will be monitored on your interaction within the team and how you work with others. A group discussion may also take place so participation is key.

Technical interviews

- Common for jobs that require technical knowledge, such as those within engineering, science and IT.
- Questions may focus on specific technical issues and could focus on project work that you have done as part of your degree.

Telephone interviews

- Often used by companies as a first stage interview - the interviewer will normally call at a prearranged time.
- Treat telephone interviews in the same way as a face to face one and prepare in the same way.
- Make sure that you are somewhere where you won't be disturbed, with good signal and plenty of battery!
- As the interviewer cannot see you more emphasis will be placed on the sound of your voice. Consider recording some practice answers beforehand so you have an idea of how you sound.
- As you would with a face to face interview do remember to smile. Smiling changes the tone of your voice so the interviewer will notice.

- Have your CV / application and a pen, paper, and diary at hand.
- You might even decide to dress up smart for your telephone interview to help you get in the right frame of mind.

Skype / Video interviews

- Video interviews are becoming more common in recruitment, particularly when being interviewed from overseas.
- Prepare in the same way as for a face-to-face interview.
- Appearing professional is just as important as in a face to face interview. Dress smartly and use lighting to ensure you look your best on a webcam.
- Arrange a test call, particularly if it's an international call.
- If you are not familiar with Skype then practice with someone before the interview.
- Prepare by using the "Interview Simulator" in the Employability Tools on UnilifeConnect – you can record yourself to watch back.
- Be careful to avoid speaking over anyone.
- Once you've set up your webcam position, consider turning off the box in the top right which shows your own image as it may distract you.

Preparation before the interview

Do some research

- Research the organisation and sector – look at websites, annual reports, and newspaper articles for information.
- You don't need to memorise their annual report backwards or be able to regurgitate a full history of the company, but you should know who they are, what is important to them, current news, and key things going on in the sector.
- People often forget to think about themselves but employers will usually ask questions about you, your career plans, decisions that you have made, your motivations etc.

Prepare answers to standard questions

- Re-read your application form in detail and spend some time thinking about how your skills and abilities match up to the job. Be aware of the different 'types' of question that may arise. (see right)
- It's a good idea to think about how you might want to answer these questions and prepare a few key words or bullet points to jog your memory.
- Sometimes people prepare paragraphs that they learn word for word and deliver them rather like a robot in the interview which really isn't a good idea!

Practical preparations

- Dress appropriately – plan in advance what you are going to wear, that it is appropriate for the position you've applied for, and that you feel comfortable in it. If in doubt, dress smartly. Ensure that you are well groomed though don't go overboard with the perfume / aftershave.
- Find out who will be interviewing you as it could be a surprise if instead of the one-to-one you were expecting you are faced with a panel of six! You should also check whether there will be any selection activities e.g. presentation, personality or skills testing.
- Plan what you need to take with you such as the interview letter, job description, CV, map, mobile phone etc.
- Research your journey - consider doing a test run (if the organisation is close by) so you can get your timings right.
- Arrive in plenty of time but not too early – about ten to fifteen minutes before the interview is about right.
- Consider what you want to find out from the employer e.g. induction information, career development, though do not ask questions to which you could find the answer from basic research.
- Be aware that employers may have carried out some research on you so ensure that your social media reflects you in a positive light – or lock it down.

Disability issues

- If you have a disability, contact the employer to check the physical access to the premises and pre-arrange any specific requirements that you may have.

Types of interview questions

Specific Questions

- Invite factual replies and may cover specific technical issues.

Open questions

- Open questions begins with what, where, when, how, which, who or why. They are used to encourage full replies.

Hypothetical questions

- Test your speed and quality of thought. They require you to imagine yourself in a situation and describe the actions you would take to solve the problem presented.
- Illustrate your answer with real examples from your experience if possible.

Competency based questions

- Ask about your experience to determine your ability to do something e.g. 'Tell us about a situation where you identified a problem and took steps to resolve it'.
- Try using the STAR model to frame your answer (see earlier).

Negative questions

- Some questions seem to ask you to be negative about yourself e.g. 'What are your weaknesses?' For these questions it is essential to point out how a weakness can really be a strength. For example you could say, 'I care too much about my work'.
- You could chose to highlight something which used to be a weakness that you have worked on e.g. "I was always terrified of giving presentations but have taken every opportunity during my course to get experience in presenting and now I feel quite confident about them..."

Types of interview questions

About the job / employer

- What attracts you to this job?
- What is the key skill you would bring to this job?
- You've had an opportunity to view our three-year development plan, what do you think of it?
- What market trends / government policies are currently affecting this organisation / business?

Competency

- Can you give an example of a time when you identified a problem and took steps to resolve it?
- Can you give an example of a project that you have had to manage in the past? What challenges did you face?
- This position requires excellent communication skills. Can you tell me about a time when you have had to communicate complex information? Why did you have to do this and how did you go about it?

Career development

- What are your long term aims?
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?
- What training / support do you think you might need if we offer you this job?

Work experience

- What have you gained from your work experience?
- What were your main responsibilities?
- Can you give an example of when you had to deal with a difficult situation?
- What did you learn from having to deal with the public?

Academic

- Why did you choose your degree subject?
- What was your favourite aspect of the course?
- Tell me about your dissertation / project?

Personal

- What are your major strengths / weaknesses?
- What is your idea of success?
- What motivates you?
- How would your friends describe you?

Other activities

- What are your hobbies?
- What was your major contribution to (e.g. sports team, club, project)?

Your questions to the employer

- Where would I be based?
- Can you tell me more about the appraisal process?
- What has been the progress of graduates who have been recruited in the last 3 years?
- What do you envisage being the greatest changes in this organisation in the next 5 years?
- When can I expect a decision on my application?

At the Interview

Do

✓ Be professional and make a positive impact - be aware of the importance of the impression you make. Be polite to everyone from the receptionist onwards. Start the interview in a positive way by smiling and introduce yourself along with a 'firm but friendly' handshake.

✓ Be aware of body language - sit in a relaxed upright position with positive and open body language and also ensure that you read your interviewer's body language.

✓ Switch your mobile phone off – don't just put it on silent, turn it off.

✓ Show what you have to offer – take the opportunity to showcase all of your skills, abilities, experience and show that you are motivated to do the job.

✓ Make sure that you talk to everyone - if it is a panel interview, rather than directing your answers at one or two people. Maintain eye contact and look at the person who asked the question but don't exclude the others.

✓ Listen carefully and answer the question that's asked - not the one you wish you had been asked. Give full answers, be succinct, to the point, and give examples from your experience.

✓ Think before you speak – it's okay to pause to think. Pace yourself and speak clearly. Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.

✓ Show your understanding of the job / employer / sector – make your preparation count by demonstrating that you understand the job role, the employer and issues in the sector.

✓ Be prepared to ask questions. Find out what you want to know about the job e.g. who you would report to, why the job has become vacant etc.

At the Interview

Don't

× Be late! Or way too early, arrive around 15 minutes before your interview slot. That will give you enough time to freshen up and compose yourself.

× Ramble on for too long or digress.

× Worry about long silences. Tell the interviewer you are taking a moment to think.

× Be flippant - be wary of using humour and take the lead from the interviewer.

× Ask too many questions.

× Try to take control of the interview – it's not a power struggle.

× Criticise current or previous employers, being negative can give a bad impression.

× Leave without finding out what is the next stage in the recruitment process.

Additional help and information

Interview Simulator

• Our Employability Tools in Unilife Connect contain an Interview Simulator to help you practice your interview skills.

Interview Resources

• View our interview resources, including videos on the careers website to www.southwales.ac.uk/careers

Mock Interview with a Careers Adviser

• If you have been invited to an interview by an employer you can book a Mock Interview with a Careers Adviser. Book online at www.southwales.ac.uk/careers

If you require this leaflet in an alternative format please contact the Student Services Department.

Careers & Employability Service • www.southwales.ac.uk/careers

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