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*Opening Hours : 9.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. (Mon – Thurs)*

*9.00 a.m. – 4.30 p.m.*

# Interview Skills

## On the day

- Assume a neutral costume. You want to look like you fit in
- Invest in a decent suit - but don't bother with designer labels
- Polish yours shoes and avoid really high heels
- Avoid snazzy ties or glasses, and opt for minimal jewelry
- Tie long hair back or up
- Don't wear too much aftershave or perfume
- Avoid eating garlicky or spicy foods beforehand!
- Don't smoke
- Leave your coat at reception - and freshen up before you enter the interview room.

## During the interview

- Have a positive mental attitude
- Speakly clearly and slowly
- Take time to think before you answer a question
- Sit upright - don't slouch
- Appreciate others' point of view
- Use gestures sparingly
- Don't interrupt other speakers
- Make eye-contact, have a firm handshake and smile.

## **INTERVIEW ADVICE FROM EMPLOYERS**

### **Be yourself**

*'The best advice I can give to applicants is to be themselves, be open and honest. An interview is not like a written test of knowledge and we understand that students can be nervous and allow for this. We look at the full package in terms of suitability, knowledge, understanding, learning potential, communication skills and personal characteristics. Don't give very short answers, especially to open questions (this happens most when you are nervous): demonstrate as much knowledge and experience as you can in your own words. Our job is to assess candidates, and if you don't say enough it is hard to assess you fairly.'*

*Trish Horgan, Divisional HR Manager, RPS Group*

### **Come well prepared**

*'Come well prepared and present the real you in a professional but human way. Research the organisation and think about what you want to convey. Listen to the questions and think before you speak; have some real life examples of how you've worked in teams and be able to talk about things that matter to you and what inspires and motivates you as a person.'*

*Sandra Dawson, Recruitment Manager, Group HR, Anglo Irish Bank*

### **Practise first**

*'Interviews are the "border checkpoint" on your career road. Dress for the occasion, arrive in time, be confident and articulate, and answer the questions asked. It is as simple as that! But that is not always easy, so if you are someone who approaches an interview with 'trepidation', get help! If you are not confident, or have been rejected following an interview where you feel you should have done better, visit your careers service or invest in professional training: it is an investment for a lifetime'*

*Helen McGardle, Managing Director, Science Recruitment Ireland Ltd.*

### **Be confident**

*'When giving examples of past project work, sell what you have achieved and present what you have learned. Remember, joining an organisation as a graduate is as much about what competences you already have and demonstrating your ability to develop in the future. If there is something specific you want us to know and we don't ask you, tell us!'*

*Fiona Mullan, HR Operations Manager, Microsoft Ireland.*

## **Sell your strengths**

Emphasise your strongest relevant attributes.'

*Patricia Barr, HR Director, BCM Hanby Wallace Solicitors.*

## **Give examples**

Think of examples that will show you have the qualities they want, and practise with a friend beforehand.'

## **Interview questions**

There are typical questions you are likely to be asked at a job interview: knowing what to expect will make it easier to prepare.

### **Typical questions**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about your course.
- What subject have you enjoyed most and why?
- What subject have you enjoyed least and why?
- What are you best and worst at on your course?
- What project work have you done?
- Why did you choose to study...?
- Why did you choose this institution?
- What do you think you learned from your vacation jobs?
- What attracts you to your hobbies?
- Why have you chosen this job/career?
- Why do you want to join this organisation?
- What is the greatest challenge you have been faced with?
- How have you benefited from your disappointments in life?
- How would you solve the problem of...?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself in three years' time?

## Questions for you to ask the interviewer

Recruiters will also want you to ask them questions, so here are some suggestions. Aim to find out what would happen if you were to join the organisation:

- Where would you be working?
- How long would you be based there?
- Are there opportunities to travel?
- How important is mobility?
- Which projects would you work on?
- How much training is provided?
- Will you be working towards a professional qualification?

You might also want to find out more about the organisation and career prospects there:

- What are the organisation's plans in terms of product lines, new services, new branches?
- What are typical project timescales, deadlines and pressures?
- How varied is the work and what are the typical career paths?

## Tips

Try to respond thoughtfully to difficult questions. A good response shows that you have researched the employer and the job. With open-ended questions such as 'Tell me about yourself,' it will help if you have considered beforehand what you want to say. Focus on two or three points that advance your case the most strongly, rather than outlining your life history.

Demanding questions of the 'how do you solve a problem' kind are designed to assess your ability to respond on the spot. The interviewer is usually more interested in the logic you adopt than in the viability of your solution. It could help also if you can illustrate the points from your own real life experiences.

## At the interview

Some companies recruiting graduates do so with just one interview, but the selection process for most graduate jobs tends to involve two steps:

- preliminary or 'screening' interview, often held on the campus and running to about half an hour.
- second stage held at the company's location, where a more in-depth assessment of the candidate is carried out. This might be through a second interview or a series of different assessments.

Make sure you are clear what selection methods an employer is adopting. And, remember, the interview also offers you the opportunity to assess your desire to work for a particular employer.

- **“Tell me about your self”**—This is often one of the first questions a manager will ask you. Employers do not want to hear about your personal life when they ask this question. They are really asking you, “What about you would make me want to hire you?” You should be prepared for this moment. Before an interview, you should
- **Write down ten positive things about yourself that would make you a good employee.** After this is done, you should combine them all into about three sentences, or a thirty second speech. For example, here is mine:
- “I am currently being educated at Southwest Applied Technology College . I have a great deal of volunteer experience, including being a newsletter editor, thrift store employee, and a member of the Utah PAIMI Council. I am also computer literate, a quick learner and problem solver. I love to help others and am an excellent writer.”
- Emphasise the positive aspects of the things you have done. Play down the negative.
- If you are asked a question which demands a yes or no answer, do not leave it at that – volunteer information to support your answer.
- Be prepared to elaborate on something the interviewer seems to be interested in; curtail descriptions of those things in which he/she is clearly not interested.
- Be honest. If you don’t know the answer, do not waffle. Use the ‘but’ technique – eg ‘we haven’t covered that yet but we will have by the end of the course.’
- If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification.
- Have ready some questions of your own - **Ask about** job duties, environment, co-workers, and challenges that they face. When it's over, thank them, shake hands again, and say you'll be in touch.
- **After the Interview** -- A few days after your interview, send a thank you letter to anyone? who interviewed you. Remind them of a few of your strengths, and take the time to fill in any details you didn't get to talk about during the interview itself. Tell them you're available for a second interview if they'd like, and that you look forward to working with them in the future.
- **Be Persistent** – three or four days after you have completed the interview, call the company and ask to speak with the manager. Politely ask if you have had time to consider your application. This shows that you are very serious about getting the position.

## **Second interviews and assessment centres**

Second interviews for graduate jobs give both parties an opportunity to explore in more depth the match between the candidate and the organisation. Second stage selection can last from a couple of hours to over a day, depending on methods used. You may be invited to another interview or an assessment centre involving group exercises, psychological tests and more interviews.

Some organisations invite candidates for refreshments the evening beforehand. While some employers regard this as a pleasant social introduction to the firm, others admit that behaviour is noticed and preliminary impressions of people are formed.

### **Panel interviews**

In a panel interview different people can throw questions at you without a logical sequence. Give your attention to whoever is speaking at the time. Be prepared to be challenged on your answers. Remain calm and undaunted.

### **Group exercises**

The aim of group exercises is to see how you work with others and how quick and shrewd you are in summing up people and evidence. A group of six to eight people may be given a topic to discuss under observation by the selectors. This might be a general topic, a matter of a business nature or a complex hypothetical problem.

The topic will require careful analysis, discussion and decision. Your aim should be to make a constructive contribution. How you work together to solve the problem is usually more important than the solution.

### **Tests**

Tests are designed to assess your intelligence, logic, reasoning ability, numerical ability and verbal ability. Most employers use a selection of tests. Some employers use tests related to specific types of work, particularly computing.

Most tests require you to answer questions as quickly and accurately as you can against the clock. You should keep cool and alert throughout the exercises. You may begin to feel jaded at the prospect of answering similar questions over and over again, but remember you are being assessed over a range of tests so give each one your best shot.

For general test information or practice tests see:

- [www.psychtesting.org.uk](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk)
- [practicetests.cubiks.com](http://practicetests.cubiks.com)
- [www.shldirect.com](http://www.shldirect.com)



## **Types of interview**

Some recruiters may just want you to expand upon your application form or CV, but interviews are increasingly structured to look for particular competences based on the selection criteria for a specific job.

### ***The standard chronological interview***

This is how all interviews used to be: a steady ramble through your life from school days via the present day to the misty future. The interviewer's aim is to get you to explain, and expand upon, your application form or CV. Some interviews are still like this, but the trend is definitely towards something a bit more scientific.

### ***The structured, competence-based interview***

In structured interviews, the interviewer sets down certain selection criteria and then asks questions to find out whether you fit them. This kind of interview can be taxing, but if you have already worked out their selection criteria you shouldn't be caught unawares. Because the main purpose of the interview is to explore your life against the criteria, the questions will be more detailed and the questioning more persistent. It may be helpful to see each set of questions as a series of levels, each one slightly deeper than the last:

#### **Level one - the question**

'Would you describe yourself as an organiser?'

#### **Level two - the evidence**

Be prepared to talk about several examples that illustrate each criterion, from different parts of your life.

#### **Level three - the personal contribution**

Look at the significant events in your life and your personal contribution to each (your role, your feelings, what you learnt).

#### **Level four - the general**

Be prepared to discuss criteria more generally. They may even relate criteria to current affairs, especially the business world ('What makes a good organiser, why is this important to businesses?')

#### **Level five - the challenge**

Don't be shocked to have your ideas challenged. Despite what you may feel, they are not getting at you. Keep calm, look them in the eye and stick up for yourself.

#### **Level six - back to the start**

'How else could you convince me that you're a good organiser?' Interviewers will probably visit each of these levels during the course of a structured interview, though not necessarily in this order.

### ***The panel interview***

Occasionally you will discover two or more people waiting to interview you. But don't panic! Panel interviews are often easier and sometimes fairer than the normal

one-to-one. If a solitary interviewer doesn't take a shine to you, you're sunk, but in a panel, the same person could be over-ruled by others. The rules of engagement are similar to one-to-one interviews, but there are some specific points to make.

- If you don't know who to look at during the interview, the safest thing is to give most of the answer back to the person who asked the question, with a few brief glances to the others.
- Don't be thrown if one of the interviewers starts scribbling notes or looks bored. The bigger the panel, the greater the likelihood that some of its members are not experienced interviewers.
- You will sometimes be asked the same question twice. This isn't a cunning ruse to test the honesty of your earlier answer; it's a mistake! Someone wasn't paying attention. Just get on with answering the question (again).

Sometimes it's helpful to know who's who on the panel. There may be a mixture of personnel specialists, technical and line managers. Knowing who they are, and therefore their special interests, can determine how you answer their individual questions.

## Technical interviews

If you are applying for a technical or highly specialised position, chances are your first interview will contain a high proportion of technical questions. It's not unusual for interviewers to show you a device and ask you to explain how it works. Alternatively, they could show you a wiring diagram or a line of computer code and expect instant analysis.

Even if they don't resort to visual aids, they will quiz you in depth about your course. As well as this, there are a few things to look out for particularly:

- Many final year students forget what they studied in previous years. Make a big effort to remember. It's really embarrassing, after having listed your course details on your application form, to waffle unconvincingly on about a second year project you barely remember.
- If you have any project work or vacation experience that is particularly relevant, produce a short digest of the information and take it with you to the interview. You can use it to illustrate your answers or you can leave it with the interviewer when you finish.
- Even though it may be a technical interview, the interviewer will still be looking at other, more personal, skills. There aren't many jobs that require only technical skills.