

Careers & Employability

A Quick Guide To Interviews



University
of Worcester
Student Services

Interviews

A Quick Guide

There are many things you can do to help you to perform well at interviews.

This booklet advises you on things you can do before, during and after an interview. Most of it focuses upon job or placement interviews, but there are some sections which are relevant to interviews for postgraduate study.

Before An Interview

1. Do your research

Interviewers will expect you to have researched their company as well as the job so check the company's website, marketing literature and any recent news articles. Research the company's:

- mission statement
- values
- recruitment procedures
- staff competencies
- products/services
- main competitors
- customer service standards
- staff development

More information can be found on the following web pages:

<http://library.worc.ac.uk/subject-guides/wbs/business>

<http://www.thehiveworcester.org/business-centre.html>

You may also want to research any key issues affecting the company's sector – for example, any impending or recent legislation that will affect the way it trades.

If you're being interviewed for a postgraduate course, research the department you're applying to:

- Who are the lecturers?
- What are their research interests?
- What is the department's research rating?

Then ask yourself what particularly attracts you to that course at that University e.g. staff specialisms; research areas; links with industry?

Any Queries?

www.worcester.ac.uk/careers

or call:
01905 855 166

email:
careers@worc.ac.uk

2. Consider what questions you might be asked, and prepare your responses

You don't know what questions you'll be asked at a job or placement interview, but you can make an informed guess by:

- reading the job description
- reading the person specification (if there is one)
- visiting websites that provide feedback from people who have been interviewed by some major companies e.g. <http://www.glassdoor.co.uk/Interview/index.htm> and <http://www.graddiary.com/interview-questions/>
- Graduates First Question Identifier Toolkit generates interview questions and sample answers <http://www.worc.ac.uk/careers/psychometrics>
- continuing to read this booklet!

What are companies trying to find out when they interview you?

Companies ask questions that help them to identify:

Q. Can you do the job?

You will be asked questions about your experience and your approach to work.

Q. Will you do the job?

The company will be trying to find out why you applied for the job, whether you are likely to accept the job and whether you would work hard if you got it.

Questions could include:

- 'Why did you apply for this job?'
- 'How does this job fit in with your long-term career plans?'
- 'What do you know about this company?'

Q. Will you fit in?

The company will be assessing whether you will fit in with other team members and with the company's style of working. Questions may focus upon your strengths and weaknesses, and how you behave when working as part of a team.

- The Work Personality Questionnaire assesses your preferences in the workplace <http://www.worc.ac.uk/careers/psychometrics>

Q. Will you take this company forward and bring new fresh ideas with you?

The company will want to find out whether your skills and expertise will help them to be competitive and successful – for example, will you help them to win new contracts, develop new products and/or gain new customers?

A list of some frequently asked interview questions is shown at the end of this booklet.

Only about 15% of managers have been trained to carry out recruitment interviews so be prepared to meet bad interviewers as well as good ones

Some popular types of interview question

i) Competency-based questions

Many companies use competency-based questions - they ask you to talk about times when you demonstrated the competencies required by the job. These questions will often start with:

- 'Give me an example of a time when...' or
- 'Describe a situation where you...'

You'll usually know what the competencies are in advance of your interview - they may be in the job description/person specification or listed in the letter/email inviting you to an interview. If competencies haven't been mentioned, check the company's website to see if any desired competencies are listed.

When asked a competency-based question, think of a time when you demonstrated that competency. You can use examples from your degree course, from your working life, and from your interests and hobbies. Use **S.T.A.R.R** to frame your answer in a succinct and effective manner:

- **Situation:** briefly describe the situation **you** were in/what the issue was
- **Task:** what were **you** asked to do/what was **your** role?
- **Action:** what action did **you** take? Be explicit about the role **you** played: don't take the credit for others' actions but don't be too modest and play down what you did. Talk about 'I' whenever you can, and not 'we'.
- **Result:** what was the outcome? What made it successful or unsuccessful?
- **Reflection:** what would **you** do differently in the future?

ii) Values-based questions

Some companies will ask you questions to establish whether your personal values match theirs. Interviewers will ask you to tell them about a time when you demonstrated a specific value such as integrity, honesty or respect for others.

Check the website of any companies you are applying to, to see whether they have mentioned their company values.

iii) Strength-based questions

Some graduate recruiters are moving towards strengths-based applications and interviews as a way of finding out what candidates enjoy doing and have a natural aptitude for. While competency-based questions focus on what you can do, strengths-based interviews focus on what you like doing;

'What do you do well?', 'When do you feel you are most like "yourself"?' and 'When are you at your best?' When were you most engaged? What did you take most pride in?

Practising your responses to potential questions will help you to remember your answers and consider examples you can use to provide evidence of what you've done before.

If you practise with someone else, they can give you feedback.

3. Consider how you'll present yourself

Unless you're told otherwise, dress smartly. It's important that you create the impression that you will fit in with the company style. Check what the dress code is and then go up a couple of notches in terms of what you decide to wear.

Some tips for making a positive impression, without even opening your mouth, are:

- **smile** and try not to look too serious or too nervous
- **eye contact** is important – look at all of the people who are interviewing you, nodding when you agree with what they are saying and looking interested when they are talking to you
- **rest your hands** but don't be afraid to use them when making a point. However, don't wave them around too much as this will distract the interviewer(s) and don't fold your arms as this creates a barrier between you and them.
- **sit upright**. When you are making a point, lean forward slightly but not too far!
- **keep your legs still**. It doesn't matter whether you cross your legs or not, as long as you feel comfortable. However, don't stick them out in front of you and try to keep them as still as you can – moving your legs around will distract your interviewers and make you appear uncomfortable and nervous.

4. Plan your journey

Planning your journey will help you to arrive in good time, and will help you to be calm and composed. Some key things to think about are:

- **where the interview is taking place**: some companies operate across more than one site, so make sure you know which site you need to go to
- **public transport** routes and timetables, or **parking** arrangements
- **the journey length**, allowing time for hold-ups and delays

Some tips:

- print out a location map and a number to phone if you get lost or are unavoidably delayed
- if you can, have a 'dry run' by making the journey at a similar time of day/day of the week to see how long it is likely to take
- plan to arrive around 15 minutes before your interview time. You can use this time to:
 - read any company literature on display
 - reread the information that was sent to you e.g. the job description/ person specification
 - check what you said on your application form, if you completed one

The interviewers' impression of you will be influenced by your body language, and your tone of voice, as well as by what you say.

5. Just before your interview

We're all nervous before an interview - here are some tips to help you minimise your nerves:

- have a good night's sleep (if you can!) and don't miss a meal on the day of your interview
- prepare your interview outfit in advance
- give yourself plenty of time to get ready
- take deep breaths if you start to feel panicky

During An Interview

Here are the most commonly used interview formats, with advice on how to perform well in them.

a) Screening interviews

Companies often use screening interviews to help them decide who to invite to a face-to-face interview. Popular formats are:

- Telephone interviews
- Skype interviews
- Video-recorded interviews

Some of the telephone interview tips given below are also relevant to Skype and video-recorded interviews.

Tips for telephone interviews:

- **Assume the interview will be formal** and act/speak accordingly, even if the company says it will be an informal discussion
- **Information:** have relevant information to hand e.g. job/company details
- **Have a professional-sounding voicemail message** on whichever telephone number(s) you've given to the company - they may ring you unexpectedly, when you're unable to answer
- **Stand up and smile:** it will make you sound more confident and positive
- **Avoid distractions:** don't look at, or fiddle with, your computer or mobile
- **Telephones amplify background noise:** Switch off the TV/ radio and don't smoke or eat. Make sure anyone nearby knows not to speak loudly whilst you're on the phone
- **Prepare a few questions** to ask at the end of the interview
- **Thank the interviewer** for their time

It's best to leave any discussion of salary until you've been offered the job.

If you mention it too soon, it can look like you're more interested in the money than the role. You're in a much stronger position when you know they want you and before you've accepted the job.

Tips for Skype interviews:

- **Webcam:** look at the webcam (not the screen) to make it look as if you have eye contact with the interviewer. Make sure that the webcam is at eye level to give you the most flattering image. If you prop your laptop/ tablet onto something to raise it up, make sure that it provides a secure base.
- **Background:** make sure your webcam is facing a plain background.
- **Clothing:** wear your usual interview clothes - for women, a blouse with a jacket; for men, a shirt and tie with a suit jacket will look smart.
- **Tidy:** make sure the area around you is clean and neat as you don't want to distract the interviewer's attention.
- **Lighting:** face the light from a nearby window and/or a table lamp – this will illuminate your face and avoid bright or fluorescent overhead lights.
- **Have a test run:** before your interview, practise talking to a friend or family member on Skype and ask them for feedback.

Tips for video-recorded interviews:

A video recorded interviewer asks a series of questions that you respond to, and your responses are recorded (visual and audio).

You can usually start the recording at a time to suit you, before a given deadline date, unless you are told to attend a specific venue at a given time.

Once you start the recording, you can't rewind or change your answers.

- **Arrive a little early**, if the recording is taking place at a specific venue and at a set time. This will give you time to get settled and to understand how the equipment works
- **Dress smartly** (see above under 'Tips for Skype interviews')
- **Don't fidget:** remember the microphone will amplify any noise, so don't tap your pen or shuffle your papers

b) Face-to-face interviews

When invited to an interview, you'll usually be told who you will be interviewed by, so do some online research into their background, responsibilities and areas of interest - [LinkedIn](#) can help you with this.

The person chairing the interview panel will usually introduce the other panel members - they will then take it in turn to ask you some questions. Direct your answer at the person who asks you the question but occasionally make eye contact with other panel members.

Here is some advice on specific types of face-to-face interview.

Don't forget to prepare some questions that you want to ask at the end of your interview.

Researching the company will help you to prepare. You might want to ask about:

- the job
- the company
- the team
- staff development opportunities

Portfolio-based interviews

If your interview is for a role requiring creative skills, you may be asked to provide a portfolio of your work. Before putting it together, check what format is required e.g. paper-based, online or on a DVD. Before your interview, prepare what you want to say about:

- **the examples you are presenting:** your inspiration/ influences; the process used to develop them
- **any writers/designers/artists** whose work you admire the most
- **your aspirations:** do you want to focus on a particular aspect of work or are you keen to be involved in a range of activities?

Technical interviews

If your interview is for a role that requires particular technical skills, the company may want to assess your technical abilities. Technical interviews are particularly popular amongst employers recruiting for engineering, IT and/or scientific roles.

They may test how you apply your technical knowledge to real-life situations, either by questioning you or by giving you a task to complete. As well as checking whether you come up with the right answer, they will be interested in the process you use to reach your decisions.

Interviews for postgraduate courses

The questions you'll be asked may cover some or all of the following areas:

- **Previous study:** Why you chose your course(s)? Did you make the right decision? What did you learn?
- **Dissertation or final year project:** What did you focus on and why? What did you learn? What would you do differently?
- **What you learnt** from your time at University
- **Your interest in** and **suitability for** the postgraduate course
- How the postgraduate course fits with **your career plans**
- **How you are planning to fund your postgraduate studies.** It's okay to ask whether any funding is available through the institution you've applied to, but this shouldn't be your only option

After An Interview

Reflect on your performance

As soon after the interview as possible, ask yourself:

- 'Which questions did I answer well, and why?'
- 'Which questions did I struggle to answer, and why?'
- 'Would I want to work for the organisation (or accept the university place)?'
- 'Why am I attracted/not attracted to it?'

Use your own reflections and any interview feedback, to think about how you could improve your performance at your next interview, write down your ideas.

If you're offered the job

You need to decide whether you want to accept the job or not. You'll have been considering this already, and may have reached a decision, but if you're struggling to decide here are some questions to help you make up your mind:

- Is this a job I want to do?
- Will I enjoy working with these people?
- What are the financial benefits e.g. salary, pension, bonus, car, shares, health cover?
- Where is the job located?
- What impact will a move have upon me/my family?
- Will doing this job make me more employable in the future?

If your salary hasn't been finalised, this is the best time for you to negotiate - you know they want you, but they don't yet know whether they've got you! To help you decide upon your position, think about:

- your market value i.e. how much does someone with your skills and experience earn in that sector and in that geographic location?
- the non-salary benefits being offered to you e.g. pension, bonus, car, shares, health cover
- the responsibilities of the role

Once you and the company have reached an agreement, you should receive a letter confirming the job offer. Then, hopefully before your first day at work, you will receive a contract of employment.

If you decide to turn down the job offer, make sure that you have given sufficient thought to this decision. When you are sure that you are not going to accept the job, contact the company to tell them this - speak to the person whose name is on the email/letter offering you the job or who invited you to the interview.

If you're not offered the job

Ask for feedback to find out how you performed, you could also ask what it was about the successful candidate that made them stand out. You may not get an answer but it's worth a try. The more information you get, the better you'll be able to prepare for future interviews.

Not getting the job doesn't mean that you weren't a good candidate - the company clearly thought that you had what they were looking for as they'd invited you to an interview! There may have been one outstanding candidate, who had the experience and skills they were looking for and who performed well at the interview. Or there may have been a number of candidates who performed well and the final decision was based on one or two key factors.

Some useful websites

General interview advice:

<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/careers/interviews>

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/get-a-job/top-10-interview-questions>

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips.htm

<http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/interview-techniques>

Feedback from people who have been interviewed by large companies:

<http://www.glassdoor.co.uk/Interview/index.htm>

<http://www.graddiary.com/interview-questions/>

Advice on equality and diversity matters in relation to job applications and interviews:

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/equality-and-diversity>

Advice for people with hearing impairments:

<http://whatwilltheyask.co.uk/Articles/2011/Hearing%20impaired%20job%20interview%20tips.html>

Advice on declaring a criminal conviction:

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/equality-and-diversity/320081-people-with-a-criminal-record-diversity-matters>

<https://www.nacro.org.uk/resettlement-advice-service/support-for-individuals/disclosing-criminal-records/>

Frequently Asked Interview Questions

- Q. How would you describe yourself?
- Q. How would your friends describe you?
- Q. Why have you applied for this job/course?
- Q. Why do you want to work here/study here?
- Q. Why should we offer you this job/accept you onto this postgraduate course?
- Q. What do you hope to be doing in 5 years' time?
- Q. Do you prefer to work alone or in a team, and why?
- Q. How do you handle pressure?
- Q. How would you describe the pace at which you work?
- Q. What would you do if you thought your boss was in the wrong?
- Q. What would your colleagues say about you?
- Q. What are you passionate about?
- Q. What can you do for/contribute to this organisation?
- Q. What challenges are you looking for in your next role?
- Q. What do you like/dislike about your current job?
- Q. What do you expect from a supervisor/line manager?
- Q. What problems have you encountered at work/at University?
- Q. What major challenges have you faced and how did you react?
- Q. What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Q. What is your greatest strength?
- Q. What is your greatest weakness?
- Q. What training would you require if we offered you this role?
- Q. What do you see as the main challenges of this role?
- Q. What is your greatest regret?
- Q. What is your biggest accomplishment?
- Q. What is most/least rewarding about your current job?
- Q. In your experience, what makes a good team member?
- Q. Tell us about a time when you had a difficult issue to overcome.
- Q. Tell us about a time when you delivered outstanding customer service.
- Q. Tell us about a time when you have gone the extra mile.
- Q. How would you deal with a difficult customer/client/team member?
- Q. Tell us three interesting things about this company.
- Q. Are there any questions that you'd like to ask us?

Specialist Interview Questions

In addition to the 'generic' types of question asked at interviews, you will also be asked questions relating to the role you've applied for. Make sure you read and reflect upon the job description - and person specification if there is one - as they will give an indication of the questions you might be asked.

If you have a question that isn't covered by this booklet, or would like to talk through your ideas with a member of the Careers team, sign up for a careers appointment at www.timecenter.com/worcester, or via your SOLE page.



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