



## Preparing for Interviews

For most employers, an interview with an applicant is just one part of the selection process, but often a very important part. It might be face to face, on the telephone or video conferencing. You might be faced with a panel of interviewers or just one.

The basic tips in this guide can help you to prepare. They apply to the UK job market only.

### Prepare

- Remind yourself what you told the employer and read over your application.
- Reflect on why you want the job and to join the organisation, and how you will get this across to the employer.
- Review the job requirements and how well you meet them, including the skills.
- Identify examples from your experience that demonstrate how you have applied the skills required.

### Research

Research the organisation again.

- Search their website, company reports, press archives and library databases e.g. Nexis UK (in the university library catalogue).
- Try to talk to current or past employees.
- Visit our office to try the Ask Alumni database. These are ex students who have agreed to advise and share their knowledge and experience if they can. Some may work at or know the organisation.

### Practice

- Anticipate the questions you might be

asked and practice answering them.

- List the questions you want to ask.
- Consider booking a mock interview with us in the Careers Service.
- Practice describing examples from your experience using STAR.
- Look at our useful resources on interviews at [http://www.delicious.com/City\\_Careers](http://www.delicious.com/City_Careers)
- Interviewers expect nervousness and practice can improve confidence, but if anxiety is a real problem for you, think about strategies to help. Talk to us.
- How to convey enthusiasm? The words you use and emphasis in your voice is important (especially on the telephone).

### Using STAR

The STAR model can help you structure your answer clearly, positively and logically, when describing an example.

- S Briefly describe the **situation**  
T Clarify the **task**  
A Focus on the **action** that you took  
R Finish with the **result** or outcome

### Telephone Interviews

- Consider using a landline to avoid problems with reception.
- Charge up and top up (if applicable), if you use your mobile for the interview.
- Choose the time and location carefully. Ensure there are no distractions/noise.
- Collect anything you might need to hand, e.g. water to drink, pen and paper, your questions, a copy of your application.

## The Interview

- Be punctual, whether for a face to face or telephone interview.
- Dress appropriately for a face to face or video interview.
- Think about the impression that you give to everyone that you meet, not just the interviewer (on the phone or in person).
- Smile and make eye contact when you meet the interviewer(s) and maintain a composed posture when you sit.
- Greet the interviewer and smile with a telephone interview too.
- Listen carefully to questions and answer them in full. If you do not understand, ask for clarification.
- Thank the interviewer(s) at the end, and any other staff who have helped or answered your questions.

## After the interview

Think about preparing for future interviews.

- Note down the questions you were asked.
- Think over your answers and especially any mistakes you may have made.
- Ask for feedback if you are unsuccessful.
- If an offer is made, be professional and respond as quickly as you can.

## Types of Interview Questions

The questions asked at an interview usually reflect the skills and experience required for the job, so be clear about the entry requirements. Questions will vary. The following are examples only:

### About you

These may be based on information in your CV or application; education, career plans, work experience and interests, e.g.

- What has challenged you most in your degree?
- Tell me more about one of the jobs in your CV.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Focus on positives, such as achievements.

## About your competence or skills

You may be asked to demonstrate how you have applied a skill required for the job, e.g.

- Describe a time when things went badly in a team.
- Describe a project and how you met the deadline.
- Tell me about a creative solution to a problem that you have implemented or suggested.
- What do you do when priorities change quickly? Give me an example.

Situation, Task, Action, Result, helps when you give an example from your experience.

## Situation questions

You may be asked how you would react or deal with a hypothetical situation, usually relevant to the job, e.g.

- What would you do if a customer complained about our service?
- Two members of your team are in conflict. How would you approach this?

You may not have been in such a situation but state what you would do and why.

## About your motivation

An employer usually probes your motivation to do a job and your commitment to the organisation, e.g.

- What interests you about this job?
- Why have you applied for this opportunity?
- What makes you want to be a ....?

Be original. Don't give a generic response that could apply to any job or any employer.

## About your awareness

Interviewers may assess your understanding of the job, the organisation and their sector, e.g.

- What are the implications for us of ..... ? (A current issue affecting the organisation or sector).
- What skills and qualities do you think are important to this role?
- What distinguishes us from our competitors?

Research the employer and current issues affecting them or their sector in advance.

## About your job specific knowledge

You may be asked questions that require knowledge of the job or sector, e.g.

- What is an audit?
- How have you applied your knowledge of C++ ?
- Give me an example of a recent legal decision you have disagreed with, and explain why.

Be very clear about the nature of the work, and your job specific skills and knowledge. Also be prepared to be challenged, especially when your opinion is sought.

## About your ability to cope when challenged

Interviewers may ask unusual questions, e.g.

- If you were an animal, what would you be?
- Imagine you could trade places with anyone for a week (real or fictional, living or not). Who would you choose?

Keep calm and show how quickly and coolly you can answer.

## Brain teasers

For some areas of work e.g. investment banking and consultancy, interviewers have sometimes asked brain teasers. e.g.

- How many petrol stations are there in the USA?
- How many people in the US own tennis balls?

The interviewer is usually interested in how well you approach this 'guesstimate'.

## Strength Based Interviewing

Some employers are moving away from competence to strength-based questions, to ensure that their employees recognise and use their strengths in their work. Questions may focus on what you enjoy and feel. How you answer will be important but interviewers will assess body language and voice too.

Ernst and Young have information about their use of this approach to selection:

[www.ey.com/uk/careers/strengths](http://www.ey.com/uk/careers/strengths)

One producer of strengths assessment tools is CAPP. See the profiles their tools produce at:

<http://www.cappeu.com/Realise2.aspx>

Before a strength-based interview, think about your achievements and your extracurricular activities. Reflect on the things that you feel passionate about and that energise you. Think about your experiences of work and the times when you have applied your skills, and how you have felt.

## Useful Resources

- Watch 'Making an Impact' on Moodle .
- Attend an Interviews workshop, see Careers Events on our website .
- Talk to one of our career consultants, book online.
- Book a Mock Interview with a career consultant.
- Search the Ask Alumni database of City University graduates willing to advise you, available in the careers centre.
- Use City University's library resources for your research into the organisation.
- Explore the City Business Library's resources on companies and sectors too <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation>.

## Useful Links

- <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/appsinterviews>
- [http://delicious.com/City\\_Careers/Interviews](http://delicious.com/City_Careers/Interviews)
- <http://www.jobsite.co.uk/bemyinterviewer/>
- <http://careers.guardian.co.uk/interview-help>
- <http://www.careerplayer.com/tips-and-advice.aspx>

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