



# Interview

Guidance Pack

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# Is that your final answer?

## Top 10 questions to ask in interviews

They may feel like an interrogation but an interview is an opportunity to open a dialogue with your potential employer and asking plenty of questions during an interview helps you find out whether the role is for you. You should have questions prepared before the interview, but if none come to mind, these are some good ones to fall back on. Don't be afraid to take questions in with you that you have written down, if anything it shows you're prepared.

What are the most enjoyable / least enjoyable aspects of the role?

This shows that you like to prepare yourself for what sort of challenge you'll face and are aware the job may not be exciting every day.

You mentioned there will be a lot of presenting/researching/visiting in this role, what do your current employees most enjoy about that?

A question like this shows you have been listening, and associates you with being successful in the role.

I appreciate this is a frontline role but might there be scope for progression in the future?

Just like the question around training, this shows a determination to succeed and that you are thinking about your long term development with the organisation.

Can you explain a little more how my role fits into the overall structure of the organisation?

This is showing a preference and eagerness for teamwork and helping to move the organisation forward as a whole.

How would you describe the work culture here?

Asking about the work culture shows you are self-aware and know what environment you need to be in in order to perform to your best. It can also show you are looking to have a positive effect on the work culture here.

In what ways would my performance be measured / reviewed?

Some jobs will be very target driven and this shows you value the importance of delivering results.

What are the most important issues that you think your organisation faces?

This shows your interest in the organisation and employer, and that you are behind them in facing these challenges.

You have recently introduced a new product/service/division/project; how do you hope this will benefit the organisation?

This shows you have done your research and are aware of how the company already works, giving the impression you could fit in easily.

If I was successful, would there be any training opportunities that come with the role?

This shows you are keen to advance your skills and add further value to the organisation.

Do you have any doubts about my capability for this position?

This is a risky choice so be careful to judge the situation before you ask, BUT it can prove to be rewarding if they aren't taken aback by it. It shows you are open to constructive criticism and also gives you the chance to address any concerns they might have.

Some questions not to ask:

How much is the salary / wage?

How much annual leave do I get?

How much paid sick leave am I entitled to?

Do I really have to wear that uniform?

When will I find out if I've been successful? This question is OK if asked alongside other questions but don't just have this as your ONLY question.

# What you see is what you get: Body language and interviews

First impressions are invaluable, and body language is the most effective tool in showcasing who you are in such a short space of time. Many employers will be drawn to a person with positive body language however the wrong body language can result in you being forgotten as soon as you leave the room, or leave them with a negative view of you.

Here are few things which you should address in order to project a good image of yourself.

**Handshakes** – a firm handshake is a great start and shows confidence from the outset.

**Posture** – standing tall with a straight back can help you project your voice further as well instilling confidence.

**How do you sit?** Do you look nervous and meek or do you look like a comfortable person who can hold their own in the work environment? Slouching in your seat (with your foot resting on the other knee) can show laziness, arrogance, and disinterest, whilst leaning towards the door looks as though you can't wait to leave! Don't sit with your bag on your lap either! Just place it on the floor next to you (Sounds simple but nerves can make you do silly things).

**Do you use your hands to talk?** Gesticulating whilst talking is a great way to convey passion and interest in your message but be careful that it doesn't get too much as it can be distracting.

**Personal space** – appear confident but try not to invade personal space by leaning in too much or being over friendly. This can make the interviewer uncomfortable and take the focus away from what you are saying.

**Eye contact** – you should address people whilst making eye contact but try not to stare. If there is more than one person on the panel, try and look at each of them and not just focus on one person, even if they are the one who looks most interested in your answers (some panel members will look disinterested on purpose!).

**Stop fidgeting** – if you are constantly moving, such as playing with your clothes, or bouncing your legs you will prove to be distracting and show how nervous you are.

A general rule to go with when thinking about your body language is; if you look it, you will become it. Try standing in some 'power poses' at home and notice the change in your attitude and confidence levels after doing this. Try it, it works! You may feel silly at first but it's worth it to get that edge in an interview.

However, as with all the tips in this guide, stay true to yourself and tailor this advice for the job you are going for. Some jobs may not require an overly confident character and will instead prefer to see a more humble approach: being shy is not a disadvantage.

# The camera's rolling: 3 tips for a Skype interview

The beauty of a Skype interview is that it can eliminate all the pre-interview stress caused by finding the office, arriving on time, and making sure a fellow commuter doesn't spill coffee on your shirt. However, it is still an interview and so here are some tips on how to be at your best!

## Be prepared

You're in control of what comes up on the screen so make sure everything looks right. Avoid showing a messy room, or inappropriate things in the background. Similarly, make sure the lighting of the room is ok and that you can be seen clearly. Although you are in your own home, dressing in a suit will still help you get into the interview mind set and show you are still taking it seriously. However, even though you'll only be seen from the waist up, make sure you wear a full suit. The last thing you want is to have to get up to fetch something and give the interviewer a full view of your pyjama bottoms. A braver tactic is to film yourself interviewing and watch it back to see areas where you could improve.

## Plan B

You may not have the stress of getting lost on the way to the office, but technical issues can always throw a spanner in the works, disrupting your interview and testing the interviewer's patience. Make sure you log on early and have a good internet connection, try calling a friend first to test your system. Headphones and a microphone may also help limit audio issues. If you are anticipating technical issues it may be worth conducting the interview from elsewhere, possibly a room at the university? If you prefer to have the interview in a public place, you should inform your interviewer beforehand and make sure it is not too crowded, loud, or distracting.

## During the interview

A Skype interview unfortunately gives you less time and scope to show positive body language as only a small part of you is shown on screen. This means you have to try and get everything else right. A key point is eye contact, so as difficult or uncomfortable as it may seem, remember to look directly into the camera rather than into the eyes of the person on the screen. If you don't, all they will see on their screen is you looking away from them. You should show a good posture with what you have on screen, and try to match the tone of your voice with the message you are trying to convey. If you are enthusiastic then sound it!



# Hello? Is it me you're looking for?

## A guide to telephone interviews

Like Skype interviews, phone interviews are becoming far more common, and can sometimes feel not as serious as a face to face interview as you can do them from home. However the lack of face to face contact can make it harder to build rapport. These tips should help you maximise your performance on the phone.

### Time management

Some telephone interviews may just be a quick 15 minutes, however some graduate schemes may have telephone interviews lasting over an hour. You should be told beforehand how long it will be, this will help you plan your answers and not take too long, nor be too succinct with your responses.

### Avoid waffling

Over the phone it can be easy to continue waffling on about irrelevant information as you won't see the body language from the interviewer suggesting you should stop talking. Remember to stick to the key points but to give examples. You should similarly avoid interrupting the interviewer or talking over them.

### Don't drown in paperwork

It is tempting to have lots of notes to help you during the phone interview, however try not to keep the person on the phone waiting whilst you find a fact to read them off the paper. Keep your paperwork simple, a few bullet points around key points you would like to make.

### Acting the part

Bizarre as it may sound, some candidates will wear a suit for their phone interview. Although you won't be complimented on your suit, you will still be in the right frame of mind for the interview. Similarly try sitting behind a desk or at a table rather than slouched on the settee.

### Location, location, location

Try to find a quiet place to conduct the interview in order to give you the best chance. Avoid being in a public place or somewhere with limited signal; for example being on a train where the phone cuts out in the tunnels will not endear you to the interviewer. In a similar vein, make sure your phone is charged and you have an alternate number for them to contact you if they can't get through.

### Act professional

It is important to act as professional as possible, even down to making sure you answer the phone rather than your mum. If you cannot act appropriately on the phone for an interview, you are unlikely to do it whilst representing that company on the phone if you get the job.



# You've been Googled:

## A guide to social media and employment

Social media can be a great tool for finding work, however it can also severely detriment your chances of being hired if you showcase the wrong things. If you're among the 89% of job seekers who use social media, here are some things which can help and hinder you in your search for employment. 92% of employers check to see if their candidates are on social media so getting it right is paramount.

### Build relevant profiles

You should showcase yourself on social media using appropriate sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook. These sites should show what you have accomplished and notable achievements, as well as your strengths and how you can benefit future employers. You should use online media relevant to the industry you want to get into, for example to get into a creative industry it may be worth starting and promoting your own blog.

### Networking and engaging

You should use social media as an opportunity to connect with others in your industry. You can ask them about the organisation you work for, as well as putting yourself on their radar. You should make an effort to engage with these companies and demonstrate your knowledge about their industry. You should try to become a resource on your subject and help others by answering their questions about the industry you want to break into. Engaging with Twitter and Facebook profiles of companies will also allow you to see when they are hiring rather than trawling through pages of job websites.

### Keep it clean

According to Forbes Magazine, a third of employers have refused to hire someone based on their social media presence. Things to avoid are; bad mouthing employers, posting or liking inappropriate things, and having an unsuitable online name. If you are unsure about your social media presence it may be worth revising your security settings to cover your back. The golden rule is, if you wouldn't say it to your employer, don't say it online.



# Reach for the stars: A guide to using the STAR technique

Many large organisations will conduct competency based interviews. These are designed to remove any interviewer bias by asking every candidate the exact same questions; however they can also mean you lose the opportunity to build rapport and have a free flowing dialogue. Competency based interviews are usually formed of asking variations of 'Tell me about a time where you...' and the STAR technique can help you answer them effectively. For the example below, we will assume someone has been asked the question; 'tell me about a time you solved a problem with a tight deadline'

## Star - Situation

Set the context for your story. "We were due to be delivering a presentation to a group of 30 interested industry players on our new product and Stuart, who was due to deliver it, got stuck on a train from Birmingham"

## sTar - Task

What was required of you? "It was my responsibility to find an alternative so it didn't reflect badly on the company and we didn't waste the opportunity."

## stAr - Activity

What did you actually do? "I spoke to the event organisers to find out if they could change the running order. They agreed so we bought ourselves some time. I contacted Susan, another member of the team, who at a push could step in. She agreed to drop what she was doing and head to the event."

## staR - Result

What was the result? "Stuart didn't make the meeting on time but we explained the problem to the delegates and Susan's presentation went well - a bit rough around the edges but it was warmly received. Stuart managed to get there for the last 15 minutes to answer questions. As a result we gained some good contacts, at least two of which we converted into paying clients."

Using the above steps can be a great way to structure your answers and ensure you hit all of the key competencies they are asking for! Remember to have details in your answer and quantify it with results, for example mentioning the two paying clients. You should create a range of answers in this format so you are well prepared. Done well and the interviewer won't even realise you've used it, it will just be a perfectly constructed and free flowing answer!



# Let's make a day out of it!

## A guide to what to expect at assessment days

Many graduate schemes or large employers who are hiring for multiple positions may have assessment days, in which a large number of candidates are all invited at once in order to see how they interact together. They are a great opportunity to showcase a range of your skills all in one day and show potential employers your versatility.

Assessment days can be especially daunting as you may feel you have to compete directly with other candidates, however you should remember you are being judged against the employer's criteria, not the other candidates and you should be working with them to achieve the goals set.

Employers design their own assessment centres to test for skills and aptitudes that are right for their own organisations, but they typically contain similar elements and exercises.

As well as interviews you could expect to do a combination of group work exercises, presentations, aptitude and psychometric tests, in-tray/e-tray exercises, or case studies linked to the job function. Employers will also give you the opportunity to find out more about them and to meet with current employees. Below we will detail some of the important things to remember.

### Be on your best behaviour

You may be assessed throughout your time at the centre from the moment you walk in to when you leave, so the first step is to make sure you arrive on time. You should treat all the candidates as if they are your co-workers, be pleasant and introduce yourself.

### Group work

Group tasks are often the most difficult part of the assessment centres as to an extent other candidates can affect how the group works. The main thing is to not be bossy but to not be passive either. You need to be aware, flexible and responsive but don't attempt to force your personality on the situation. Be yourself, but be aware that ultra-competitive behaviour can easily come across as arrogance and if you are too shy to speak your qualities won't be assessed. You should also show the assessors that you are listening to other candidates through your body language. A top tip here is to ask quieter members of the group how they feel the task should be done, including them in the dialogue and therefore directing the group in a positive way.

### Prioritise your time

One of the most common failings at assessment centres is candidates failing to do themselves justice because they run out of time in exercises. Many assessment centres will involve digesting a brief and responding in some way such as delivering a presentation. It is important to initially process the information quickly at an overview level by skim reading. After this there is a chance to go back and study elements in more detail once you have a feel for the overall challenge and what is required.

### Relax and be yourself

In a situation where people are observing you in order to assess you, of course there is an extent to which it is wise to keep your guard up and manage the impression you are making. However, if this is taken to an extreme level what people see is someone who is uptight, wary and they are likely to be frustrated because they just don't feel they are seeing a real person. Therefore if you can relax sufficiently to let your personality shine through and to let something of your unique individuality be seen the assessors are more likely to warm to you.



# It's not me, it's you.

## Dealing with rejection and getting feedback

Not getting the job can be a big dent to your confidence, especially after spending time preparing and feeling you can do the job. You should use every rejection, not as a stick to beat yourself with, but as an incentive to improve and opportunity to learn. Always ask for feedback where they are willing to give it (sadly, not all employers are).

### The positives

If you did everything you could do and still didn't get the job you may feel frustrated. However you should take comfort in the fact that that employer may not have been right for you or it's just not the right time. If you have a number of rejections under your belt despite performing well, it can lead to building resilience, which is always an advantage.

### Are you being too fussy?

Are you applying for the right jobs? Maybe it's worth narrowing down your search in order to target vacancies which you are better suited for, and therefore increase your chance of success. It's tempting to buy into what recruitment agencies tell you when they are trying to hire you, however, don't be afraid to only accept interviews that are suitable.

Researching the employer can help you see whether you would fit in and whether you think you'd pass the interview. If you are being represented by a head hunter, ask them to give a more accurate representation of you to employers.

Graduates often fall into the trap of applying for jobs which are well above their capability, which will almost always end in rejection. Many employers will always prefer experience over a degree therefore you should maybe try more entry level positions with the aim of working your way up and building your experience. You could try volunteering or securing an internship as a means to build your experience whilst job hunting. Pre-recession organisations had bigger budgets and could afford to take on more people who may have hit just a majority of their specifications. However today's economy means they may have smaller budgets and therefore stricter recruitment procedures, meaning you have to hit every single point on their personal specification to get the job. The level of competition for graduates is higher than ever before so be prepared to go in at the bottom and work your way up.

### Getting feedback

Some large organisations with vast recruitment drives may be unable to provide individual feedback, but you should always ask just in case. It may be difficult to see the criticisms but use it as a tool for your development. Contacting the organisation (emails are better as you won't put anyone on the spot) is something not everybody will do and it sets you out from the crowd. You should emphasise that positive and negative feedback is welcome as you use every interview as a learning tool. You never know, this positive attitude may lead them to contact you if another vacancy comes up! Don't ever question the employer's integrity or accuracy in their feedback OR their processes in not selecting you – it will make you seem argumentative and lacking in humility, which won't stand you in good stead either if future vacancies arise.

### Be reflective and then proactive

You should address the issues that are raised in the feedback, even if it's difficult to hear – you WILL get over it, even if it takes a few days. Employers will be giving you honest feedback for your own benefit. If it is a lack of knowledge maybe it's time to revise the subject area, or perhaps consider further training or qualifications. Volunteering and work experience are a great gateway to getting technical knowledge and experience. If they felt you didn't express your experience in an effective manner, you should look at your interview technique, possibly using the STAR technique detailed in this guide.

# What we said: Students' Union's tips for candidates

We asked all the employees at the Students' Union to list their top tips for interviews. Here are the most common tips they said:

1. Fail to prepare, prepare to fail – this includes researching the company, and planning out your answers beforehand to eliminate the risk of being stuck for something to say.
2. Dress to impress – first impressions can make the difference. Don't ruin yours by dressing inappropriately for the role you are going for.
3. Prepare 5 or 6 key achievements or work-related successes that you have had that you can adapt to the questions you may get on the day. The sorts of things that are generally asked about in interviews are similar to those that you will see on a Person Specification (see our guide to filling in an application form...) so:
  - Working in a team
  - Ability to work on your own initiative
  - Ability to deal with a range of individuals
  - Dealing with a difficult situation or difficult colleague
  - Having a new idea or suggestion in the workplace that led to an improvement
  - Examples to demonstrate that you are organised, flexible, hard-working etc
  - Evidence that you can handle multiple priorities or projects at once
  - How previous colleagues or employers would describe you
  - The achievement about which you are most proud
  - Why you want that job
  - Why you?
4. Practice makes perfect – keep practicing your interview techniques and potential answers to hone your skills and maximise your potential. Practice in the mirror or to the cat if it helps. It will help, honestly, even if you feel silly to start with.
5. Don't give up – it can take years to find a job that really suits you so if you don't get your perfect job first time, keep trying. Resilience and remaining in employment regardless will impress potential employers and show that you have a good work ethic and tenacity.

Good luck!

