

UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID CAREERS SERVICE

What happens at an interview?

Types of interview

Single interview

Sequence of interviews

- you will be interviewed by a number of different interviewers or panels in turn
- the interviewer may be a more senior member of the organisation each time
- the questions may become progressively difficult
- you may be asked about a different set of competencies each time

Answer every question fully even if you feel you have been asked it previously.

Face-to-face interviews

- the most common method
- one or two interviewer(s) or a panel of interviewers will conduct the interview
- one-to-one method is rare - sometimes used for informal pre-screening interviews
- two person interviews ideally have an interviewer of each gender
- panel interviews -can contain a mix of gender/ expertise and chair is the person to whom you will report if successful

Group interviews

- candidates will be asked questions in turn by two or more interviewers
- a group discussion on a specific topic may be encouraged
- you may be invited to put questions to the other candidates and/or to the panel

Telephone interviews

- increasingly used at an early stage of the recruitment process
- prepare in the same way that you would for a face-to-face interview
- choose a suitable time, date and quiet place where you will not be interrupted
- if using a mobile, make sure it is charged
- keep your CV and the job advert/information, in sight throughout the call

Interview format

Informal interviews

- often used as the first part of a multi-stage recruitment process
- usually a general chat about you and your interests

Be aware that it is still an assessment of you.

Structured interviews

- all candidates are asked the same set of questions
- can begin with a brief chronological review of your overall career to date or asking what you can bring to the post

Competency/criteria-based interviews

- structured to reflect the competencies or qualities required by the job
- interviewers are looking for evidence of your skills and abilities
- you are expected to support your answers with examples of your experience from your life

Technical interviews

- you will be asked technical questions or have a separate technical interview if the job requires specific knowledge
- questions may focus on your final year project or on real/hypothetical technical problems
- interviewers are often interested in your thought processes and logic even if you do not know the exact answer

Portfolio-based interviews

- if the role is within the creative, media or communications sectors, you may be asked to bring a portfolio of your work to the interview
- you will have an in-depth discussion about the pieces you have chosen to include

Case study interviews

- you may be presented with a hypothetical or real business problem
- you will be evaluated on your analysis of the problem, how you identify the key issues, how you pursue a particular line of thinking and how you organise your thoughts

Preparation

Employers note your professionalism at each stage of the process - use a formal style for every communication.

Before the interview find out

- where will it be held
- how long will it last
- what format will it take
- whether there are tests or group exercises
- if you need to bring or prepare anything specific

If this isn't included in the invitation, call the organisation and ask for it.

Knowledge about yourself

- the job description is a guide to what you'll be asked about regarding your personality, skills, work experience and qualifications
- think how you might distinguish yourself from other candidates
- highlight your strengths without sounding over-confident or aggressive

Knowledge about the job and organisation

- research the job on offer using the job description and person specification
- search the web for profiles of employees with the same or similar roles
- research the company website, recruitment information and annual report(s)
- search for media articles about the company

Current affairs/commercial awareness

- expect to be questioned about current affairs
- the possible impact upon the sector in which the organisation operates
- how developments may impact on the organisation's future

Disability

- check the physical access to the premises
- let the employer know in advance if you need any additional support

If you do not need any special arrangements, you may choose not to disclose your disability. For help and advice on when and how to disclose a disability, you can contact SKILL (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) or go to equal opportunities - disability.

Before the interview

- check the date and time of your interview
- plan how you will get to the venue and how long it will take
- check for planned disruptions to road or public transport services
- aim to arrive early, rather than rushing in late

What to take

- interview invitation letter , copy of your CV, cover letter and application form
- notes of key points you want to make and questions you want to ask
- cash in case you have an emergency

What to wear

- decide on your outfit well in advance - a suit or equivalent business wear
- have a second outfit as a back-up
- personal grooming is essential and avoid wearing overpowering fragrance
- avoid alcohol the night before the interview
- avoid smoking on the way to or while waiting for an interview

Personal safety

- let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return
- if invited to a private residence bring someone else and have them wait nearby

Psychological preparation

- get a good night's sleep the night before
- eat properly and drink plenty of water on the day
- practise breathing deeply
- think positive thoughts
- remember that, if properly harnessed, nerves can sharpen your performance

Remember that you are there because the employer is interested in you

First impressions count. The interview is an opportunity for you to build on that impression to secure the job.

Tips for making a good initial impression

- arrive on time – 10 mins early will give you time to relax & collect your thoughts
- if delayed, contact the employer as soon as possible to explain the situation
- on arrival at reception, in a clear, friendly manner, give your name, appointment time and the person you expect to meet (the first person you meet may be asked about you)
- have all the relevant documentation ready to show e.g. CV, interview letter
- switch your mobile phone off before you enter the interview room

Once the interview commences

- listen carefully to each question and give concise answers with examples
- avoid saying just yes or no
- ask for clarification if a question is not clear
- ask for a question to be repeated if you want more time to think (don't do this too often)
- speak clearly and loudly enough for the interviewer to hear
- stay as relaxed as possible

Practise relaxation techniques, for example, repeat a silent mantra such as 'relax' or take a deep breath before you start to answer a question.

Body language

- be aware of your body language and how to use it to your advantage
- shake hands firmly with each interviewer at the start and end of the interview
- a relaxed but alert posture with a friendly expression shows a positive approach
- maintain good posture throughout the interview, don't slouch into a casual pose
- good eye contact - look at the person asking the question when you reply but glance at other interviewers from time to time
- interviewers often make notes as you are speaking to remind them of things when they are making their decision. Don't let it distract you
- don't fidget and/or wave your hands a lot when speaking, learn a technique that will help you to control movement and still appear natural & relaxed

Interview questions

Their questions

Most interviews will contain questions about your

- competencies/skills/personality/interests /values
- you will need to back up your answers with evidence from your life to date

THINK: What would you want to know if you were the interviewer? The job and/or person specification should be your guide.

Use the STAR technique:

- **Situation** - briefly describe the where/when/who
- **Task** - outline the task or objective (what you hoped to achieve)
- **Action** - describe what you did - focus on your role and your input
- **Result** - what the outcome was and what skills you developed

Use all aspects of your life to develop a range of examples.

Use spider diagrams if you want a more visual technique – write the skill at the centre and then around it put examples of how you used or developed it and then put the activity in the centre and the skills gained around it.

TIPS: Don't forget to update your examples as you go through your career.

Try not to sound too rehearsed.

Ask your Careers Adviser for a mock interview.

Challenging questions

What questions would you rather they didn't ask?

- Is there a gap in your CV?
- Do you have some poor academic results?
- Have you been fired?

Answer honestly, without being defensive or blaming anyone.

Turn your answer into a positive with a successful outcome by demonstrating how you overcame any difficulty and what you learned from it.

Some questions may be designed to provoke you. These are designed to test your emotional intelligence, i.e. will you just react or provide a calm and insightful response?

If you are asked a question that you feel you can't answer ask to return to it later and, if still unable to attempt it then, say so.

Personal questions

- Recruiters must not discriminate on grounds of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability
- If you feel uncomfortable about any question say so
- If you feel unsafe or very uneasy, end the interview politely and leave
- If you feel that you have been discriminated against, or that your personal safety has been compromised, discuss this with someone as soon as possible

For further advice go to: www.prospects.ac.uk/equal_opportunities.htm

Your questions

Have a list of questions in mind to ask. These might include questions

- concerning progression opportunities
- support for further study
- company plans to expand

TIP: Research the company and keep up to date with the news – you may find some questions you would like to ask.

If you feel that all your questions have been answered during the interview still try to ask something to show enthusiasm and interest.

Don't ask questions for the sake of it or basic questions you should already know

Ending positively

If the interviewer does not tell you

- ask when you should expect to hear news of their decision
- what the next stage of the process will be if you are successful

End the interview

- thank the interviewer
- shake hands
- reiterate your enthusiasm for the job

What do I do if they offer me a job?

The offer can be made by telephone or email, followed by a letter containing the following information:

- your name and the name of the organisation
- date of the offer
- job title and department or location
- salary
- period of notice required for either party to end the contract
- start date

It may also include:

- hours of work
- holiday entitlement
- other information, e.g. pension scheme, bonuses, benefits (company car)
- details of any probationary period

The offer may be contingent upon the following:

- acceptance of the offer by a given date
- completion of a medical examination
- proof of a specific class of degree
- positive feedback from your referees
- police vetting or clearance

Keep your letter safely - it is part of your employment contract. Enquire about anything you do not understand/ think is missing. If you have concerns about any aspect of the job offer, discuss it with your Careers Adviser.

Making a decision

Consider:

- the job, organisation and location
- the working conditions and salary
- training and career development
- your own values and needs

Remember:

- you may opt for an 'ok-for-now' job to earn money and gain experience
- few people find their ideal job initially
- every job can open unexpected doors into other career options or provide you with a valuable network of contacts and new skills
- any issues? discuss them with your immediate supervisor or the HR department to try and resolve them
- you can leave giving the appropriate period of notice - it is in no one's interest for you to stick with a job that makes you really unhappy

THINK: it can be easier to find another job if you are still employed.

Accepting an offer

- telephone the employer to state your initial acceptance
- follow with a reply in writing by the deadline given or on the next working day - either sign and return the form/letter included with your offer or write a letter stating that you accept the job & agree to the terms & conditions
- address your acceptance to the person who wrote the offer letter

NB. Your reply is the other half of your contract of employment so keep a copy and store it safely with the offer letter.

When your offer of employment is confirmed, i.e. no longer conditional, you should immediately decline all other job offers or invitations to interview and withdraw any outstanding applications.

Declining an offer

- think very carefully before deciding to reject an offer
- respond in writing to the person who sent you the offer, thank them and outline your reasons for declining it (if you feel happy to disclose these)
- send your response as soon as possible so that the employer has time to offer the job to an alternative candidate

This approach will leave a better impression, especially if you decide to seek employment with the organisation again in the future.

Why can't I get a job offer?

NB The written application you send is all the employer has when making a decision about who to short-list for interview.

Not getting interviews?

- if you meet the minimum criteria but are not being asked to interview take a critical look at your CV and application forms
- see your Careers Adviser to help to review and improve them
- are you demonstrating that you know:
 - what the company does
 - what its products are
 - what the job is about
 - how your skills, experience and personality relate to the requirements of the job & organisation?
- is your letter and CV tailored to each specific job application?
- when you make speculative applications, call them within a few days to check they have received your application
- consider other ways of getting into the organisation e.g. a junior position or work shadowing

Not getting past interviews and assessment centres?

- **Stay positive!** the employer may decide another candidate is a better fit for the organisation
- get feedback - if not done automatically ask for it
- discuss how to improve your performance with your Careers Adviser
- do your own critical review on how things went and learn from the experience Ask yourself:
 - Was I as prepared as I could have been?
 - Did I demonstrate my interest and enthusiasm in a positive way?
 - Did I articulate my personal skills, strengths and abilities clearly?
 - Was I able to relate my previous experience to the position?
 - Did I provide concrete examples of my skills and experience?
 - Did I under-sell myself by using 'only' in my examples? E.g. 'I've worked as part of a team, but I was only a waitress and it was only a part-time job.
 - Was I able to show the interviewers how much I wanted the job?
 - Did I demonstrate a good knowledge of the organisation and the position?
 - Which elements of the assessment centre did I do well/ not so well?
 - Was I presented as well as I could have been?
 - Did my body language or nervousness detract from my performance?
 - Would more coaching and practice tests improve my performance?

Further Information

- University of Kent Applications and Interviews
- University of Edinburgh CVs, applications and interviews
- Jobsite Be My Interviewer

Contact our Careers Advisers:

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