

Interviews

At some stage in your job search you will find yourself invited to an interview. A helpful way to think of an interview is as a 'conversation with a purpose'. The purpose for the interviewer is to gather evidence to see if you are the right person for the job. Your purpose, as a candidate, is to build the interviewer's confidence that you will be a good hire.

To convince the interviewer, you need to show you understand the role/opportunity and the organisation that you have applied to. You will need to show you are motivated and that you have the skills, knowledge and experience they are looking for. It's important to use the time effectively in the interview to get across the key points you would like the interviewer to remember when you leave the room. Preparation will help you to select the most appropriate information and examples to talk about and practice will help you to deliver your answers clearly and confidently.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are several different types of interviews you may encounter:

- Video - The candidate is recorded answering a set of interview questions and then this is reviewed separately by the recruiter. The candidate does not meet the recruiter in person. Often this is one of the first stages of selection, before a face to face interview later.
- Phone or Skype - The candidate is interviewed by one or more interviewers over phone or Skype.
- Face to face - The candidate meets one or more interviewers in person.
- Technical - Where technical skills are required you may be asked to talk through your approach. For an IT role, for example, you may be asked how you would handle a programming problem.
- Case study – Often used in consultancy and law interviews. These require specific preparation, see 'Further Information' at the end of this handout for resources

IMPORTANT! Don't fall into the trap of thinking that it's 'only' a video, Skype or phone interview and so you don't need as much preparation. Prepare just as carefully for these as you would for a full face to face interview.

PREPARATION AND PRACTICE

Preparation and practice are the keys to success in interviews. Spend time on each of these 5 steps before your interview:

1. Review your application and the job description

It may be some time since you sent off your application, so refresh your memory of what you sent them. Your application has impressed them enough to get you to interview, so be prepared to reinforce the impression you have made on paper at the interview.

Review what you know about the job and the organisation you've applied to. You should re-read the job description and information on their website. Compile a list of what they will be looking for in the interview e.g. commercial awareness, attention to detail, time-management. The 'About Us', 'Latest News' and 'Annual Reports' sections on their website can be helpful for understanding the organisation. Do some extra research into current issues and trends affecting that sector.

2. Prepare a list of interview questions you think may be asked

You cannot know in advance exactly what questions will come up on the day, however you can make some reasonable guesses as to the types of questions that are likely to come up. There are lots of resources of interview questions available online and in books, but here is a starter list. Typically you should be prepared for questions about:

Your motivation

What do you know about us?

Why do you want to work for this department/organisation/sector?

Your skills/competencies/behaviours

These will be linked to the job you have applied for. Examples where time management is a requirement: 'Tell us about a time you met a challenging deadline.'

Where personal impact is a requirement: 'Give an example of how you have personally influenced a colleague to change something.'

Biographical

Tell us about yourself.

How do you fit with our values?

What did you learn from your internship?

What gives you energy?

Where do you want to be in your career in 2 years' time?

Knowledge

These questions are very hard to predict but will be linked to the job you have applied for.



Don't try to predict the specific questions you might be asked, but be aware that these types of questions may come up. Your research into them and background reading will help you.

Examples are:

Finance: How do you keep up to date with financial news?

Marketing: What marketing campaign has impressed you and why?

3. Prepare your answers

Think about what points you want to get across to answer the interview questions you have listed. Reflect on your motivations and your previous experience. Think about your strengths – what makes you good at what you do. For example, are you particularly organised, or are you great at motivating people? Think of examples of where you have demonstrated your strengths, skills, competencies and the behaviours that your interviewer is looking for. The ideal examples are recent and where you have had a personal impact with a good result. They can be from any area of your life: academic study, extra-curricular work, sports, hobbies, work experience. Think into the detail of what you did, what was at stake and how you made a difference. Avoid the temptation to learn your answers as though they are a script as this can sound mechanical and may not deliver the best result. Just make notes of the key points you want to make and practice out loud.

4 Practice

Many people underestimate the importance of practicing out loud. Practice makes a big difference to how you perform on the day. You can practice on your own, with a friend or have a mock interview with the Careers Service. Aim to deliver your answers in a structured, confident and engaging way. Be positive in what you say. If you are worried about how much eye contact or gesturing is appropriate, seek feedback. Remember that this is a conversation with a person, so be pleasant and friendly.

5 Get ready

Plan your journey and allow plenty of time to get there. Dress smartly. Make sure you get a good night's sleep and eat properly and if possible, give yourself some time to relax before the interview.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Do you have any questions for us?

This is nearly always the last question in the interview. This is a good chance to make a final impression and you can prepare some questions in advance. Questions could cover training, career development or show that you have researched the organisation by asking about the impact of a new product or expansion plan. Don't ask about topics that are fully covered on the organisation's website. Don't feel you have to ask questions just because you have been asked to. If everything has been covered then explain that this is the case.

Negative questions

Some interview questions can push you into talking about negatives. For example 'what is your weakness?' or 'tell me about a time you made a mistake'. In answering these effectively, you should draw out some positives from your experience. For example, what did you learn from your experience, how have you addressed any weaknesses, how will

you do things differently in the future.

Awkward biographical questions

There may be something you are worried they will ask you about. For example, if you had some time out of your course for medical reasons or got a bad result at some stage of your degree. It's good to do some preparation on what you will say for any issues like these. Employers are focussed on how you will perform in the future with them, so think about how you can talk about your experiences in a way that reassures them. Remember that you can have an appointment with the Careers Service to help you prepare.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Explore more resources** - information and top tips to help you succeed at interview from our website www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/interviews.
- Our events programme includes a variety of talks and workshops which are designed to enhance your chances of success in the application process - for details, see JobsLive*.
- **A variety of 1-2-1 appointments** - can be booked via JobsLive* including access to mock interviews. Please check www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/appointment for further details.
- **Reference books** - including: *Handling Tough Job Interviews*, *Competency Based Job Interviews*, *More Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions*, *Case in Point: complete case interview preparation*, *Case Interview Secrets*, available in the Careers Service, level 5 Sheffield Building.
- For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/services/disability.
- Additional support is available from two national careers information resources; www.prospects.ac.uk and www.targetjobs.co.uk under their "careers advice" sections.

* www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive

