

Starting Points: Interviews

Interviews come in various forms, but the main purpose of an interview is to try and find out if you are the right person for the job. If you have been offered an interview, well done - the organisation is keen to find out more about you!

Types of interview

Telephone / Video / Skype interviews: often used to screen candidates at an early stage. You still need to prepare thoroughly for this type of interview.

One to One interview: may be more informal, such as for part-time roles and jobs in small businesses. However, you still need to prepare!

Panel interviews: standard within large organisations and graduate employers. The panel will often consist of your prospective line manager, someone from Human Resources and a senior manager.

You may have a practical exercise, such as a presentation or other job-related task to do as part of your interview. This could form a small part, or a significant proportion of the interview.

Some employers, particularly larger ones, may have a series of steps to the interview process over several weeks. This could include: a video interview, psychometric testing, assessment centre and panel or one-to-one interview. Applii shows you what stages to expect for some companies, but always check with the company for the most up-to-date information.

Getting prepared

Think about practical preparation: Check that you know where you are going; how long is the journey time and which building should you report to? Do you need to take equipment or documentation? What will happen during the interview process?

Research the company: Make sure you know about the organisation; its structure, mission and core values. A good starting point is the company website but extend your research beyond this wherever possible (e.g. LinkedIn, Social Media, reliable news articles, [SHU library online resources](#)).

Research the role: Look back at the job description, person specification and your application. This will give you clues about what could come up at interview. Have examples of how you meet the points on the person specification from your knowledge, skills and experience.

Build commercial awareness: Do you understand how the business operates, what's happening in their industry and who their customers and competitors are? Are there any current or potential future challenges for this business?

Practice: Explore some possible question and answers and practice answering them and speaking aloud.

Types of interview questions

Listen closely to the question and ask for clarification if you are unsure what you are being asked. Common question types include...

Motivation questions: Looking at your motivation for the job/employer/industry. Examples include: *Why do you want to do this role? Why do you want to work for us?* A common mistake here is to be too brief. Try and link your reasons back to you – you need to be convincing and show you have researched the company / role.

Open questions: such as ‘what can you bring to the role?’, ‘what relevant skills and experience do you have?’ These offer you a real opportunity to sell your knowledge, experience and skills. Remember to link this back to the person specification (what they are looking for). If you’re asked ‘tell me about yourself’, this is a chance to show the employer why you are a good candidate so avoid just listing general facts.

Competency questions: allow you to demonstrate your skills and abilities by talking in detail about how you have effectively utilised those skills in the past. Questions will normally focus on specific skills outlined in the person specification / job advert / list of desired attributes. Identify examples that best demonstrate these skills / attributes. See ‘STAR’ technique on page 3 for a structure to follow when giving examples.

Strengths-based questions: Becoming more common and designed to look at what you enjoy doing and have an aptitude for, rather than what you *can* do. An example is: *What are your main 3 strengths and how could they help you in this role? Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team?*

Scenario-based questions: Looking at what you would do in specific situations and are usually linked to the role you would be doing. An example is: *Imagine you're working on a project with 3 other colleagues and a member of the team doesn't seem to be doing much work. What would you do?*

Knowledge checking questions. These are assessing your knowledge. Examples include: *What do you know about our company? What do you think you will be doing in this role? What would you need to know about your target audience when planning a new mobile app? What current issues are you aware of in the film industry?*

Technical questions: For any role that requires technical knowledge be prepared for very specific knowledge-based questions. If there’s something you don’t understand in the job advert, try and look into this before the interview.

Curve ball questions: some employers like to assess your ability to react on the spot. An example is: *If you were a cartoon character, who would you be?* Top tip: embrace the question and try and give a full answer. In this example, try and explain why and how it links to you!

Some interviews may focus more on one type of question (e.g. competency or strength-based), whilst other will utilise a combination of different types of questions). The above are just some examples of common question styles - we can't know exactly what employers will ask, but the important thing is to prepare well.

Interviewers may ask some more challenging questions to see how you respond. If you struggle with one question, try not to dwell on this as you will be assessed on your whole performance.

Using the 'STAR' structure

The STAR structure is useful for giving structured, focused and effective answers to interview questions based on past experience.

- Situation (What was the context? Where were you and what were you doing?)
- Task (What was the goal? What was the problem or challenge?)
- Action (What action did you take? How did you display the skill in question?)
- Result (What was the outcome?)

Questions for the panel

You will usually be asked if you have any questions. The worst thing you can say is 'no'! Plan 2-3 questions in advance that demonstrate your enthusiasm and interest in the job and the company. Avoid asking about things you could have easily found out from the website or job advert.

On the day...

Be punctual. It's better to be early than having to rush.

Think about first impressions - dress appropriately, display regular eye contact and be aware of your body language. It's not just *what* we say that is important.

Remember it's a two-way process - this is your opportunity to check that the role is right for you.

After the interview...

After you leave, make a note of the questions you were asked. Try and get as much feedback as you can from the employer. This will help with your preparation for future interviews.

Need some help?

- Video interview practice and example questions via [Graduates First](#).
- Interview simulator - Access this via 'suggested link' section [here](#)
- 121 advice on interview techniques from an Employability Adviser (book via Unihub or 0114 225 3752).
- Practice interview (book via 0114 225 3752) – please note: you need to have an actual up and coming interview to book this.
- Email: careers@shu.ac.uk