

# First Interviews

The Selection Process



careers & employability service

t: 0151 794 4647

[www.liv.ac.uk/careers](http://www.liv.ac.uk/careers)

e: [careers@liv.ac.uk](mailto:careers@liv.ac.uk)

**If you are going for an interview, your application form or CV must have impressed. The interview is to find out more about you, your knowledge, skills and experience. This leaflet aims to help you market yourself effectively by explaining what to expect from an interview, how to prepare and how the Careers & Employability Service can help you.**

The interview gives the employer the opportunity to consider if you will fit into a particular team or department and whether they have the confidence that you can work effectively for their company. The focus should be on what you are able to offer in relation to their requirements. Remember that the interview is a two way process - you are also deciding whether the employer is right for you. Not all employers are efficient and well trained in staff selection but good practice would be to:

- have trained interviewers
- have a job description and person specification that state what skills or competencies the job requires. During the interview they will measure you against these requirements
- be fair and work within the law i.e. no questions unfairly related to gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age
- be prepared to give feedback after the interview

## Types of Interview

Interviews come in many different forms and guises. Depending on the kind of job you are applying for and the company you are applying to, you may be required to undergo one or more of them. Usually you will know what type of interview you will be having once you receive the invitation to interview from the employer. Don't be afraid to ask if it has not been covered in the letter. Finding out as much as possible not only helps with your preparation, but also puts your mind more at ease.

**Initial or First Interviews** are used by some employers who have a fairly lengthy selection procedure. They will offer you an initial interview to establish your overall suitability and whether or not you will go on to the next stage. However, some employers, particularly small and medium sized employers, will only conduct one interview to select an employee.

**Telephone interviews** About a third of employers who recruit graduates use a telephone interview as the first interview, so if you apply for a job, always give a telephone number where you can be contacted easily – but remember a mobile number is not ideal. For further information on how to deal with telephone interviews see page 6.

**One-to-one interviews** are just you and the interviewer. Sometimes one-to-one interviews can appear to be fairly casual, a two-way conversation or chat about the job and your application. Others can be more formal with the interviewer asking all candidates the same set of questions and making notes on your answers.

**Panel Interviews** consist of a number of people who are involved in the selection process asking you questions in turn. There could be anything from two to five or six people present, probably consisting of a department manager, divisional manager, the post's immediate line manager, a personnel representative or others.

**Technical interviews** - if you have applied for a job or a course which requires specific technical knowledge (e.g. engineering or IT), it is likely that at some stage in the selection process you will be asked technical questions or have a separate technical interview to test what you know. Questions may focus, for example, on what you are doing in your final year project and why you are approaching it as you are, or on real or hypothetical technical problems. Be prepared to prove yourself but, equally, be prepared to admit to what you don't know, while stressing that you are keen to learn.

**Assessment Centres or Second Interviews** - this is normally the final stage in the selection procedure. You will be invited to spend one or two days taking part in a range of activities, often on the employer's premises. These could include business games, group discussions, presentations and possibly one or more individual interviews. It is a much more demanding, but probably a much fairer method of selection than an interview alone. Read the Careers & Employability Service leaflet 'Assessment Centres' if you have been invited to an assessment centre.

## Preparing for interviews

Thorough preparation is the key to a successful interview. One of the main ways to prepare is to research. You need to research the employer, the industry sector and the job role and clearly relate your findings to your own skills and experience.

### Research the company & the sector

As soon as you know about your interview read as much as possible about the company or organisation. Use the recruitment literature, the Careers & Employability Service and the internet to find out:

- what the company does
- what are its current priorities and developments
- who are its major clients, customers, suppliers
- who are its competitors and what are they doing

- what are the major trends in the sector in which they operate
- has any legislation impacted upon the sector

Ask the Careers & Employability Service if there are any useful articles, press releases, professional or trade journals or current reports relating to this area of work.

### Research the job

Be sure that you have a clear understanding of what the job involves.

- Read the person specification that comes with the vacancy details (if there isn't one then read careers leaflets on that particular job)
- Look through the recruitment brochure or on the company's website to see which skills or attributes are mentioned. Read employee profiles.
- Think of situations where you demonstrated these skills, choose your examples from all areas of your life, academic work, outside interests, work experience.

### Anticipate the questions

- Think through the questions you are likely to be asked and how you may answer them (see page 4).
- Prepare a list of questions you want to ask the interviewer but make sure you don't ask anything they would expect you to know from reading the company brochure.
- Read through your application or CV before going to the interview and try to anticipate what they might pick up on. Some questions are likely to be linked to your major achievements from your degree, work experience, interests. Be ready with a positive answer to explain any areas of weakness.

### A strategy for preparing answers to interview questions

An interview is no different from your CV or application form in that the employer is seeking to see how you meet their requirements. They will have decided on the selection criteria for the job and will then ask each candidate questions to supply evidence to determine whether or not they have the skills to do the job effectively. Applicants may be marked on a set scale, according to how well they have demonstrated that they have the competencies required. In order to answer questions effectively you may find it useful to do the following preparation:

Look at the job description and write down the skills and qualities that are required. If no job description is available then use careers booklets or the internet to research that career.

For each skill write down a couple of examples of how you have gained that skill e.g.:

Requirement	Evidence
Team work	Working in Pizza Hut, Field Work, Organising Student Ball
Analytical Skills	Dissertation, Project
Communication	Call Centre Work, Making Presentations in Seminars
Planning/Organising	Travelling, Organising Sports Team Training Schedule

Once you have done this you need to go a stage further and be more specific in what you did and what you learned from it. When talking about your skills the employer wants to know the context in which you gained these skills and what the result was.

It might be helpful to remember the **CARE** approach - set the **Context** of your situation and describe your role, explain the **Action** you took, what was the **Result** of your action, how did you **Evaluate** what you learned.

What you learnt from the activity is not just about gaining skills – it is also about reflecting on the experience. It is important to be able to show that you can evaluate situations and your personal performance. You may have learned how important it is to set regular deadlines for an overall target date or if the result was not what you expected, what would you do differently next time?

### Preparing mentally

Most people get nervous before an interview and employers generally take this into consideration. Be aware of ways you can successfully manage stress. Common ways include talking things over, taking exercise, breathing exercises and having practice interviews with friends or a careers adviser.

### Preparing practically

- If possible, establish the name, role and job title of the interviewer(s).
- Choose clothing that fits in with the image and culture of the organisation. Make sure you feel comfortable wearing the clothes you choose.
- Work out what transport you are going to use, how long the journey takes and times of departure.
- If necessary, make the journey beforehand so that you are familiar with it.
- Make sure you know where the building is and who to ask for on arrival.
- Go to bed at a reasonable time the night before.

## On the day

- Take your invitation letter which has details of the location of the interview and contact details for the interviewer in case you are delayed or get lost!!
- Aim to arrive at least 10 minutes early
- Take with you a list of questions you want to ask, and a pen and some paper to write the answers down.
- Try to relax in the waiting room before your interview (slow, deep breaths)
- Be pleasant to the person who greets you - they may be asked later for their impressions of you.

## During the Interview

First impressions are very important. Studies have shown that someone forms judgements about you within four minutes of your meeting and that these judgements inform their subsequent impressions.

**Research shows that the first impression is made up as follows:**

- 55% visual impact i.e. dress, facial expressions and other body language
- 38% tone of voice
- 7% from what you say

So even if you are very nervous try to create the best first impression you can.

### Non-verbal Behaviour

- Shake hands when offered, or if you think that it's appropriate.
- Sit in a relaxed, upright position.
- Maintain eye contact, firstly with the person asking the question then with the rest of the group if more than one person is interviewing you.
- Smile occasionally
- Do not fold your arms.
- Do not smoke or chew
- Try to avoid fiddling and fidgeting (do not hold a pen, for example, as you may find yourself fiddling with it subconsciously)
- Be aware of spilling a drink when nervous, a glass of water is less dangerous than hot coffee
- Try and keep calm, relax your shoulders, jaw and fists if you feel tense

## Verbal Hints

- Speak clearly, with reasonable volume
- Be positive and enthusiastic, show a genuine interest in the organization
- Be aware of language. Try to speak clearly and avoid any verbal bad habits such as repeating fillers e.g. "um", "er", "OK" or "you know?"
- Do not undersell yourself with words like "I have only been a..."
- Listen to the questions carefully. Be precise and to the point in your answers, don't ramble on.
- Try an answer to every question but, if you have never met the situation in question or have no knowledge about an issue or subject, do not be afraid to say so
- If you need time to think, explain what you are doing and ask if you can return to the question later
- Do not be flippant. Be careful about the use of humour – take the lead from the interviewer
- Don't interrupt
- Be assertive but do not be aggressive

Above all, try to be yourself!

## Examples of Interview Questions

Ensure that you are able to answer the most obvious interview questions, such as:

### General questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want this job?
- What does being course representative/captain of netball involve?
- How would you define marketing/personnel etc?
- What qualities/skills do you have which you consider valuable to our organisation?
- Do you think you can cope with the professional examinations?
- What evidence do you have that you can handle our different types of customers?

### Knowledge of organization

- Why have you decided to apply to us?
- What do you know about our business?
- What do you think of our application form/brochure?
- What do you think of our product/service?
- Who do you see as our major competitors?
- What do you consider to be the main difficulties facing our management?

## Situational Questions

- What would you do if...?
- How would you cope with...?
- How would you deal with...?

## Career motivation/direction

- Why have you applied for this type of work/career?
- What do you see yourself doing in 5/10 years?
- Are you willing to move – how mobile are you?
- For which other jobs/careers are you applying?
- What do you want out of life?
- Tell me about your vacation work
- Is there a particular holiday job you enjoyed?

## Educational record

- What class of degree are you expecting?
- Why did you choose this subject and your particular course?
- Do you regret choosing this subject/your university?
- Your 'A' levels seem disappointing, was there a reason for that?
- Why did you choose to go to University?
- What have you got out of academic life?
- Can you explain to me what your project is about?
- Would you say you are good at examinations?

## Your personal skills

- Give me an example of when you've worked as part of a team
- Tell us about a difficult problem you've had to solve
- Describe a project you've had to plan or been involved in
- Do you find it easy to take risks?
- Are you the type of person to take the initiative?

## Some Answers...

### Tell me about previous work experience

Describe what was involved in your previous jobs, including the skills you used, any responsibilities you had, people you have dealt with, equipment used and emphasise the particular relevance to the job you are applying for. Remember to mention relevant unpaid work that you have done.

### Why are you interested in this type of work?

Describe experiences, which show you have knowledge of the work and actual ability wherever possible. If you don't have much work experience, describe other life experience which show your ability to learn a job quickly and your keen interest and enthusiasm. Briefly

list your positive characteristics even if repeating things you have already said. Sentences such as 'I know I would be good at this job because...' and 'I would be able to make a contribution to this organisation because...' help to instill confidence in the employer that you are confident about yourself.

## Situational Questions

These cannot always be anticipated but try to think beforehand what situations you might have to face in the job you are applying for e.g. how would you deal with a difficult customer, what would you do if a member of your team was under-performing, how would you persuade someone to buy this product? If you are asked a situational question "what would you do if....." then it is quite alright to ask for a moment to think about it and then give your considered answer.

## What salary would you expect to receive?

Normally you will be told the salary in exact terms. If the salary is negotiable, think about it beforehand and be prepared to negotiate firmly but within reason! Ask the Careers & Employability Service for information on average salaries for a particular job.

## What are your weaknesses?

Be prepared to talk about one weakness but try to turn it around into something positive if possible. For instance, "I used to get nervous about giving a presentation but I have been on a short course and now feel more confident when I give presentations as part of my course".

## How is your health?

If you have health problems which have affected your work be prepared to mention them briefly but stress your fitness now.

## I notice you didn't do well at school

Don't apologise too much, speak positively about how you have learned from your past experience and about your current progress and strengths.

## How to cope with difficult questions

Sometimes you may be asked a question that you just cannot answer, for example if you were asked about a particular IT program that you have not used. The best way to deal with this is to be honest but say you have learnt other packages quickly and feel confident that you would do the same for this one. If you really don't know how to answer then say so – don't waffle! Do allow yourself some time to make a considered answer though.

### Your Questions to the Interviewer

If you are facing a panel of interviewers try to address your question to the relevant person (conditions of employment to a personnel manager, future developments in the business to the most senior manager).

Try and make your questions single questions, not multiple questions in the same sentence. The questions you ask will depend upon the interview and will vary according to the circumstances. They should not be questions that the employer would expect you to know from simple research, but here are a few possibilities:

- How do you define the training period for graduates?
- Do you send your managers on special training courses e.g. at Business Schools?
- Where would I be based?
- How frequently would you expect graduate managers to move location?
- I understand your firm operates performance appraisals – how often do these take place?
- What rate of progress should I make in...?
- What would be a typical career pattern for graduates entering...?
- Can you give me a fuller picture of your training programme?
- What are the possibilities of using my foreign languages(s)?
- What has happened to the graduates who have been recruited in the last 3-4 years?
- What do you envisage being the greatest changes in this company in the next 5 years?
- How do you see the company performing over the next few years?
- Are there opportunities to work overseas?
- When can I expect a decision on my application?

**Focus on your reasons for asking questions. These could include:**

- Filling in gaps in your knowledge and understanding
- To prove that you were listening
- To make the employer aware that you are a sharp candidate
- To demonstrate your planning and research
- To be remembered - you will stand out above other candidates

## Telephone Interviews

An increasing number of employers now use telephone interviews for initial screening of applicants and for first interviews. Their use is particularly prevalent for sales, retail and other roles where a strong emphasis is placed on customer service or customer contact.

You should prepare for a telephone interview just as rigorously as for any other type of interview.

Why are they used? They are cost effective for employers, who can use them to screen potential applicants without the expense of bringing them to interview. They also can reduce the length of the selection process.

### Different types of telephone interview

**'Out of the blue'** – you may get this type of call anytime (and anywhere, if you've given a mobile number), so you could be caught unawares. If you do receive a call from a potential employer and it is really inconvenient, ask if it is OK to phone back when you are in a quieter, calmer environment! If you have given a number with an answer machine or voicemail facility, make sure your outgoing message is polite!

The questions you are likely to be asked in this situation will probably be aimed at sorting out serious candidates, so will include reasons why you want the job, how your experience and qualifications match up to the job description, what you know about the company.

**Pre-arranged** – Sometimes employers contact applicants to let them know they have been selected for the next stage of the interview process which can be a telephone interview. This can take one of two forms:

**Fully automated** – you are given a telephone number and a Personal Identification Number (PIN). Within a given time period, you phone this number and are asked to respond to a series of questions using the key pad of your telephone e.g. press 1 if you strongly agree, 2 if you agree and so on. Your response time can be monitored to ensure you are giving genuine responses.

**Structured** – a trained interviewer will ask you a set of questions which will be posed to all applicants. These questions are likely to reflect the competencies the job and the company require. Your conversation could be recorded and analysed at a later stage.

### How to deal with a telephone interview

Much of the advice you would normally receive on how to prepare and conduct yourself at a face to face interview will apply.

- Most employers will use a telephone interview to assess whether the candidate is serious about their application, so prepare to be asked questions about why you have applied, why you want the job, how your experience, skills and abilities match up to the company requirements.
- If you have been given prior notice, have your CV/application form to hand but, in any case, know your CV inside out as you are likely to be asked questions based upon it.
- Keep calm
- Choose a quiet environment where you won't be disturbed or distracted
- If you know your mobile network is unreliable in certain areas, use a landline number.
- An advantage of telephone interviews is that, unlike face to face interviews, you can take notes! Jot down key words to remind you of what has been asked, but do stay focused on answering the question and **not** on your notes.
- Have your diary with you in case the company wants to arrange a further interview with you.

## Things to note

In a face to face interview, lots of cues and signals are given by **non-verbal** communication – your posture, clothing, gestures and mannerisms. It has been estimated that up to 50% of our impression formation about another person is based upon these non-verbal cues.

On the telephone, you will not have this additional method of communication. You will have to rely on **what** you say, **how** you say it and **what** is said to you and **how** that is put across. You may find it more difficult to gauge the interviewer's response to your answers – 'feedback' on your performance, to encourage you or let you know if you are on the wrong track, is more difficult to obtain during a telephone interview.

Being fully prepared will make you sound more confident. Practice answers to typical interview questions. Record your own voice and play it back. Listen out for talking too quickly; talking in a monotone; using phrases repeatedly; saying 'erm' or 'you know' too often!

Pauses, hesitations, stumbling over words may sound more pronounced over the telephone, so try to keep them to a minimum. If you are unsure what to say, let the interviewer know you need time to think – otherwise they may think you've hung up!

Keep your voice upbeat (but not hysterical!) You're bound to be nervous, but do try to relax and let your personality and enthusiasm come across. It is said that a smile can be 'heard' down the telephone, so see if you can communicate your enthusiasm and friendliness this way. Some people recommend standing up during the interview as being a method of remaining focused and businesslike.

**Remember** that communication is a two way process and you should also **LISTEN** carefully to the questions that you are being asked. Only answer those questions - keep to the point and don't ramble - but do help the interviewer by giving as full answers as possible – don't make the interviewer have to work too hard!

At the end of the interview, it is usually acceptable for you to ask questions of the interviewer. Have a few questions written down – but don't overdo it! Only ask questions about things you are genuinely unsure about. This probably isn't the time to ask about salary and other conditions – telephone interviews are usually used as a preliminary stage – so save details like this

until you have been offered something definite by the company – a further interview or a job offer.

If you have a hearing impairment or some other communication problem, then you may have to let the employer know that a telephone interview is not appropriate. Suggest alternatives e.g. Typetalk, email, text phone or a face to face interview with the services of an interpreter/lip reader. The 'Access to Work' initiative through your local Jobcentre can fund an interpreter's service at an interview. You should be prepared to explain the alternative methods, as employers may not be familiar with them.

## After the Interview

If you don't get the job, it may be that you didn't perform well at interview, but you could have been fine and someone else just had the edge (more experience, more relevant qualifications). Other reasons why people don't get the job include:

- interviewer(s) may think the candidate is too 'good' for the job and may feel that the role will not be challenging enough
- poor interviewing
- interviewing panel really can't make up their minds
- occasionally prejudice and stereotypes affect selector's judgment
- sometimes vacancies don't exist – some employers try to find out what 'talent' is out there!

If you feel that you have been unfairly discriminated against, or the interviewer has acted unlawfully, then you may wish to seek advice on how to deal with this. Contact the Careers & Employability Service if this is the case.

After an interview it can be a good idea to talk over what happened with a friend.

- Try to think about what you have learned from the situation
- Review your behaviour – could you have done anything better?
- Which questions did you feel you could have answered better?
- Try to see it as practice for the next one

If you are turned down for the post, you may want to request feedback. This means that a member of the panel will talk through with you about your performance and give you reasons why you were not selected. This will help you to perform better next time.

## Disclosing Disability

If you have a disability you may be wondering whether, how and when to tell the employer. There are no rules about this but this is what SKILL - the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities advises:

### Before going for an interview

If you are short listed for an interview and need practical support, such as a sign language interpreter or help getting to the interview, you could contact the employer to arrange this. In a large organisation you would probably contact the Personnel Department. It is much easier for employers to respond to your needs if they can prepare in advance. It will also show how you can manage matters relating to your disability, and may also improve how well you do at an interview. You will feel more relaxed if you know the right support will be in place. Support is also available from the Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre. The 'Access to Work' scheme provides practical help to all job seekers, including graduates.

### At the interview

You may have a disability that you cannot hide from an employer. It may surprise them if you have come this far in the application process and not said that you have a disability (even if it has no effect on your ability to do the job). They may end up asking irrelevant questions about your disability that you could have simply explained in the application form. This time should be spent explaining how you are suitable for the job, not focusing on any disability.

Talking about your disability at an interview can be difficult. This is true if you do not find it easy to discuss personal matters in a new environment. It might be easier to put any relevant information down on paper when you first apply rather than having to deal with it in a face-to-face situation when you may be nervous. You will also have the time to prepare what to say, rather than having to come up with what to say at the interview. However you may feel quite happy to tackle this kind of question in an interview. You may be better at explaining your disability or learning difficulty by talking about it, rather than putting it in writing.

For more information see the leaflet "Disclosing Disability". This is available at [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk) or from the Careers & Employability Service.

## How the Careers & Employability Service Can Help

### Free Handouts available from the Careers & Employability Service Helpdesk

- Assessment Centres

### Careers Resource Centre Reference Files

- Employer files – to get background information on major graduate recruiters
- Career Options files – to research the job, skills required and the sector
- Interview Feedback files – ask at the Careers & Employability Helpdesk to see completed questionnaires from students who have attended interviews with the company

You can help us by completing a feedback questionnaire after your interview - ask for a blank form at the Helpdesk.

### Videos (can be viewed in the Careers & Employability Service - ask at the Helpdesk)

- Why Ask Me That? (AGCAS - covers first interview procedures)
- The Assessment Centre Video (AGCAS – covers assessment centres/second interviews)

### Reference Books (some examples of those available at the Careers & Employability Service Helpdesk):

- Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions (McGraw Hill)
- Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions (Kogan Page)
- Job Interviews: top answers to tough questions (McGraw Hill)
- How to Succeed at Interviews and Other Selection Methods (University of London Careers Service)
- Pass that Interview: your systematic guide to coming out on top (How to Books)
- Perfect Interview: all you need to get it right first time (Random House)
- Successful Interview Skills (Kogan Page)
- Secrets of Successful Interviews: tactics and strategies for winning the job you really want (Piatkus)
- Ultimate Interview Book: make a great impression and get that job (Kogan Page)

## Careers & Employability Service Talks

Talks and seminars on interview skills, run by the Careers & Employability Service and outside employers, are held during both semesters. Look in our What's On guide – available from the Careers & Employability Service Helpdesk – or see our website for full details.

## Need Some Interview Practice or Advice on Interview Technique?

Quick query interviews are available on each day, bookable on the day. Lasting a maximum of 15-minutes, they offer the chance for you to discuss your interview preparation or an interview that you have already had. Ask at the Careers & Employability Service Helpdesk or visit our website for full details.

Book a practice/mock interview session. A careers adviser will interview you as if for the particular job for which you have applied. You will then receive feedback to help you prepare for the real thing. Book at the Careers & Employability Service Helpdesk at least three days before your interview date. Make sure you bring a copy of your application and job details when you book.

## NOTES:

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## Where Can You Find Us?

The Careers & Employability Service is based on the first floor of the Student Services Centre, next to the Guild of Students.

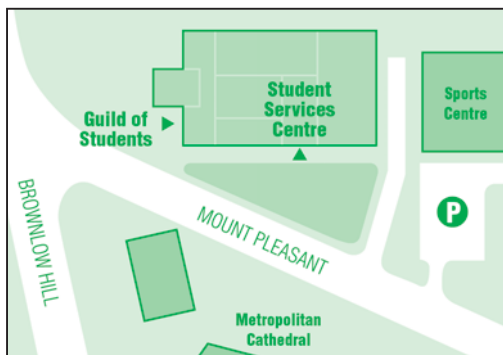
### Address

Careers & Employability Service  
Centre for Lifelong Learning  
University of Liverpool  
Student Services Centre  
150 Mount Pleasant  
Liverpool L69 3GD

**Telephone** 0151 794 4647

**Email** [careers@liv.ac.uk](mailto:careers@liv.ac.uk)

[www.liv.ac.uk/careers](http://www.liv.ac.uk/careers)



**Opening hours:** Visit the website for the latest opening hours.

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**e: [careers@liv.ac.uk](mailto:careers@liv.ac.uk)**