

COMPETE

For success



Interviews

Interviews are used as part of the recruitment process to allow employers to assess your suitability for a role, and to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your abilities and personality.

Screening/Telephone interviews

Often used to decide which candidates to invite to a face-to-face interview, they explore how well your skills and experience relate to those required by the job. The interview is typically focused on the competencies that the recruiter is looking for, so make sure you have your answers to these ready. You will usually have advanced warning of the interview time and date but you may be called without prior notice. Some telephone interviews are automated which means you are likely to be given a Freephone number and a PIN number to log in with when you call. During the call, you may be asked to respond to a series of recorded statements.

Top Tips

- Have all the relevant information to hand, including job and company details
- Avoid distractions such as your computer or mobile phone as telephones amplify background noise and make sure anyone in the house knows to be quiet.
- Make a note of your interviewer's name and use it to make the contact more personal but don't use their first name unless they invite you to do so
- Keep your answers brief unless the interviewer prompts you for further information
- Listen carefully for any verbal clues that the interviewer gives you – this will help you to gauge whether they want you to talk a little more or a little less
- Try to make notes as this can help if you need some time to think of an answer to a question or you don't understand it, you can repeat the question back to the interviewer to clarify what they want from you
- Even though the interviewer can't see you some people find they come across better if they actually dress for the interview and smile!
- Have your skills stories in the style of STAR ready
- Beware of reading prepared answers because the question may be worded slightly differently and because the interviewer will know you are reading and your tone will be less enthusiastic
- Ask questions at the end of the interview to demonstrate your interest in the job and company
- Remember to thank your interviewer for their time

Face-to-face/One-to-one interviews

The format often involves the employer explaining a little about the job, asking you some questions and giving you time at the end to ask any questions you may have. Although you may be told that this is an informal discussion, it is best to assume that it will be formal so act and dress accordingly. Your interviewer may be writing while you are talking to make a note of your answers.

Access this page and more coaching topics at reading.ac.uk/careers/resources

EXPLORE your options

Panel interviews

Are conducted by a group of interviewers and you are usually told in advance who will be on the panel and what their roles are. This means you may be able to research their responsibilities and areas of interest. Panel members might include the person who will manage the successful candidate and a person who will work in a team with the successful candidate. You should be introduced to the panel members, who will take it in turn to ask you some questions. Direct your answer at the person who asks you the question but occasionally move your head so that you make eye contact with the other panel members.

Skype and video interviews

Provide a quick and cheap way to initially assess potential recruits. These are just like a face-to-face but in the comfort of your own home. Video interviews require you to log in to the company's website using a PC with camera and typically questions come up on the screen and you are filmed giving your answers (normally within a time frame).

- **Background:** make sure that the webcam is facing a plain background and avoid bright coloured backgrounds or those with a 'busy' pattern on them as computers can distort colours and make it difficult for the other persons eyes to focus on you
- **Lighting:** you will look best in sunlight from a nearby window. If your computer can be placed in such a location, make sure you are facing the sunlight and/or a table lamp that illuminates your face. Try to avoid bright or fluorescent overhead lights as they can wash the colour out of your face
- **Clothing:** wear the clothes that you would normally wear for an interview.
- Look smart and show that you have made an effort
- **Webcam:** Try to look into the webcam as this will make it look like you have eye contact with each other. If you can, make sure that the webcam is at eye level to give you the most flattering image - if it is below that, you will appear tired. If you do prop your laptop onto something to raise it up, make sure that it provides a secure base as you don't want it to collapse midway through your interview!
- **Have a test run:** before your interview, practice talking to a friend or family member on Skype or whatever online chat tool the interviewer specifies

Portfolio-based interviews

Sometimes used if your interview is for a creative role such as graphic design, animation, creative writing, or journalism. Depending on the nature of your skill, this may be required in paper-version, online, or a DVD so check what format the company requires. Before the Interview, prepare what you want to talk about:

- The examples you are presenting to them, your inspiration, influences; the process you used
- Writers/ designers/ artists whose work you admire the most
- Your aspirations - do you want to focus on a particular aspect of work or are you keen to be involved in a range of activities

Interviews for postgraduate courses

Are likely to cover some or all of the following areas:

- Your previous study - why did you choose the course? Did you make the right decision? What did you learn?
- Your dissertation or final year project - What did you focus upon and why? What
- Your interest in, and suitability for, the postgraduate course

Access this page and more coaching topics at reading.ac.uk/careers/resources

EXPLORE your options

- How the course fits with your career plans
- How you intend to fund your postgraduate study. It's okay to ask
- whether any funding is available through the institution itself, but this shouldn't be your only option

It helps to demonstrate that your application is based upon an informed decision based on reflections about your abilities and interests and on research that you have undertaken into the course and university. It will help if you research the department you are applying to in terms of its current research projects, its research rating and what attracts you to study there e.g. staff specialisms and research areas.

Interview preparation

Preparation includes working out what you are going to wear, how you are going to get there, answers to potential questions and questions you are going to ask the employer. The more preparation you do the more confident you will be on the day.

Researching the job and the company

Although you can't know what questions will be asked at your interview, you can anticipate the type of questions. This means researching as much as possible about the job by reading the description, the person specification and any other related information. To find out about the company you can use their website and read their marketing literature. Pay particular attention to any information on the companies; mission statement, values, recruitment procedures, competencies of choice, products and services, main competitors, customer service satisfaction and areas of staff development. Wider research will include investigating the issues affecting the sector that the company operates within. If you know the names of the people who are interviewing you, you could search for information on them, their roles and specialist areas.

For more information you can also visit Careers, talk to other people involved with the company and anyone who has been interviewed by them. Employers will expect you to do this level of research to demonstrate your interest in the role. It will help you devise a few questions that you can ask at the end of your interview and help give you confidence.

What do interviewers want to know?

1. **Can you do the job?** The employer has already seen something in your application that has made them take an interest in you. They now need to find out more about your skills and experiences. This might include questions like 'What would you do if...?' or 'Tell us a time when...?'. They may also want to test your skills by asking you to give a presentation or take part in a group discussion
2. **Do you want the job?** This is usually the harder part of the interview as the interviewer(s) will be trying to find out why you applied for the job, whether you are likely to accept it and if you would be motivated to work hard. Questions could include "Why did you apply for this job?", "How does this fit in with your long-term career plan?" and "What do you know about this company?"
3. **Will you fit in?** You will need to be ready to answer questions about yourself, how you work within a team and what you see as your strengths and weaknesses. Questions may therefore include: "Tell us about a time when you made a significant contribution to a team that you were part of?" and "What are your main strengths and weaknesses?"

Typical interview questions

- Tell me about yourself
- How would your friends describe you?
- Tell me about time you were part of a team, what was your role, what would you do differently next time?
- Describe a challenge you have faced, what was it, how did you cope?

Access this page and more coaching topics at reading.ac.uk/careers/resources

EXPLORE your options

- How would you persuade someone to your point of view?
- Why should we take you?
- Do you understand the job and how motivated are you?
- What do you think the challenges will be in this post?
- Who else have you applied to?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- Do you understand what we do?
- What attracted you to applying to us?
- Who do you think our main competitors are?
- What challenges do you think we will be facing in the next five years?

Using STAR to structure

If you are asked competency-based questions, you can use STAR to compose your answer

- **Situation:** Describe the situation.
- **Task:** Describe the task that was required of you.
- **Action:** Tell the interviewer what action you took.
- **Result:** Conclude by describing the result of that action

Top Tips: Making a good first impression

- Smile and try not to look too serious or nervous. Ensure you look and make eye contact with all of the people who are interviewing you. Nod when you agree with what they are saying and look interested when they are talking to you
- Do not fold your arms as it creates a barrier between you and the people you are speaking with. Find position in which you can rest your hands and don't be afraid to use them when making a point, but try not to wave them around too much as this will distract the interview from what you are saying.
- Sit upright and when you are making a point, lean forward slightly.

Coping with nerves

It is natural to be nervous so here are some tips that should help

- Make sure you get a good night's sleep prior to the interview day
- Ensure you eat well and do not skip meals prior to the interview
- Prepare your interview outfit in advance, making sure it is clean and crease-free
- Allow yourself plenty of time to get ready and travel to the interview
- Take deep slow breaths if you start to feel panicky

If you are unhappy with an answer you can ask to come back to it and try again. If you did not understand or hear a question correctly then ask the interviewer to repeat themselves or clarify their request. You can also ask for a little time to consider the question if you do not feel confident to answer it immediately.

Interview practice

It is great getting the chance to consider examples you can use to provide evidence of your achievements and experience. If you find it difficult or uncomfortable talking about yourself, practise at home by talking aloud so you get used to hearing yourself talking about you! Practising with someone else is great for feedback and advice and in the first instance you might want to ask a friend or family member. You can make an appointment to see one of our Careers Consultants to go through your prepared answers with you.

Access this page and more coaching topics at reading.ac.uk/careers/resources

EXPLORE your options