



Candidate Guidance

Interviews

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Preparing to do well at interview

Here are 6 main steps to help you be your best at your interview:

1. Research the job

- Really understand the specific job – re-read the job description and any other information you have been given carefully.
- Are there any questions that spring to mind about the job? If so, make a note of these to ask the panel at the end of the interview.
- Find out as much as you can about the work of the team/unit/school/department, including the challenges faced and how you might contribute to overcoming those challenges.
- Research Higher Education sector issues and non-sector issues that impact on the job and/or the area the job is in. This will also help with preparing to do well in any other selection activities that you are asked to complete.
- Find out what the objectives are of the department/unit and consider how the job may contribute to the achievement of these.
- Put yourself in the position of the interviewers for this job; what would you be looking for and what might the challenges be in the job? Discuss your thoughts with any relevant contacts you have who may be able to provide useful information or a different perspective on the job.

2. Keep a positive mind set

- The interview panel want and need to know about all the great things you have done and the positive impact you have had in your current and previous jobs.
- Think of preparing as an enjoyable experience where you are taking time to recall all the great things you have done in your jobs to date.

- Get into a positive mind set by imagining yourself doing the job and doing it really well. Then ask yourself what it is you would be doing and what approach you would be taking in the job that will make you good at it.
- If you haven't had much interview practice you can use the technique of positive visualisation. Play a 'video' in your mind of you arriving at the interview, appearing confident and answering questions confidently and positively.

3. Become an expert about yourself

To give an impressive interview you need to be able to recount examples of the excellent work you have done:

- Use your application and CV to think through in detail all your knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, qualifications, professional memberships publications etc
- Think back to the challenges you faced and your achievements in each previous job and gather evidence of this.
- Consider what your approach is to your work and how your strengths and values influence your approach.
- Remember to think through your 'soft' people skills as well as the 'harder' technical skills and experience.

4. Predict questions and prepare impressive answers

- Prepare to answer questions on your strengths and development needs and how you have developed yourself over the last year. For any development needs you decide to mention to the interviewers make sure you say how you are addressing these needs.
- Prepare to answer questions around the skill areas listed in the job description and particularly in the person specification, giving examples of what you have achieved and your experience in each of these areas.
- The **STAR model** can be helpful in the interview to help you structure your answers and relate them in a style which holds the attention of the interviewer:
 - **Situation** – describe the situation in which you applied the knowledge/skill/ability such as the problem, issue or challenge you faced – give the context to bring to life what you faced. Include any quantitative indicators of the situation.
 - **Task** – then explain what you decided you needed to do or what was required of you.
 - **Action** – explain the actions you took, decisions you made and how you used your knowledge/skill/ability to address the situation.

- **Result** – explain the outcome in terms of the positive effect of your actions and back this up with any feedback you had or relevant quantitative or qualitative data.

Example Interview question: *“tell us about a time when you solved a problem to a tight timescale”?*

Example response using the STAR structure

“We were due to be delivering a presentation to a group of 10 interested potential enterprise partners and Stuart, the person due to deliver it, got stuck on a train from Birmingham. It was my responsibility to find an alternative so it didn't reflect badly on the university and we didn't waste the opportunity. I spoke to the event organisers to find out if they could change the running order. They agreed so we bought ourselves some time. I contacted Susan, another member of the team, who at a push could step in. She agreed to drop what she was doing and head to the event.

Stuart didn't make the meeting on time but we explained the problem to the delegates and Susan's presentation went well – a bit rough around the edges but it was warmly received. Stuart managed to get there for the last 15 minutes to answer questions. As a result we gained some good contacts and a new enterprise partner”

Example Interview question: *What do you do when a team member refuses to complete his or her portion of the work?*

Example response using the STAR structure

“When there are team conflicts or issues, I always try my best to step up as team leader if needed. I think my communication skills make me an effective leader and moderator. For example, once I was working on a team project, and two of the team members got into an argument, both refusing to complete their project tasks. They were both dissatisfied with their workloads, so I arranged a team meeting where we rearranged the tasks for the team. This made everyone happier and more productive, and our project was a success”.

5. Be prepared for different styles of interview question.

- You may be asked hypothetical questions such as “what would you do if a student/colleague became angry...” or competency based questions such as “Can you give us an example of a time when you have dealt with an angry student/colleague”. Questions will be relevant to the job description and person specification so pay close attention to the wording of these when preparing potential answers at interview.
- It is possible you will be asked to provide an example of when you have not been successful in achieving/delivering something. Be prepared for this but ensure that you include in your answer what you learned from it and how you have applied your learning in subsequent situations.
- For managerial and leadership positions you can expect to be asked about your approach to managing and leading others and what that looks like in practice.
- You may find it helpful to practice saying out loud possible answers to anticipated questions using the STAR structure and responding concisely. You may also find it useful to listen to recordings of yourself rehearsing answers.

6. Presenting yourself well on the day

Things to avoid

- When asked a question do not rush into answering it. Pause and repeat it back to yourself to be sure you’ve heard it correctly before answering. Do not be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat the question.
- Avoid using the word ‘we’ when really you mean ‘I’. The interviewers are interested in you as an individual and what you have done, your unique approach, the decisions you have made etc. If you are asked a question about team work then the word ‘we’ will be relevant to what you were working on as a team but you still need to highlight what your particular contribution is to the team.
- Avoid going over the time limit on presentation exercises. When practicing your presentation, time yourself.

Keep positive

- Use positive words and expressions. Use words such as I ‘managed’, ‘delivered’, ‘coordinated’, ‘negotiated’, ‘presented’, ‘lead’, ‘achieved’. Avoid words that diminish the impact of what you are saying such as it was ‘quite’ good, it ‘seemed’ to go well, I had ‘some’ success.
- If you are asked a hypothetical question such as ‘what would you do if’ make your answer even stronger by adding an actual example of when you have done what they are asking about.

- Be yourself and even if you are not directly asked to, highlight what you are passionate about in relation to the job, how you think you might approach key challenges in the job and the value you can bring to the team.

End on a high

- At the end of the interview if there is something relevant to the job you really wanted to tell the interviewers that you have not been asked about say something like 'I am really interested in the job and I would like to add...'

Other selection methods

Other selection methods are commonly used in addition to the interview to select the best candidate for the job. These include presentations and case studies. Your invitation to the interview will state what selection methods will be used.

If you are provided in advance with the topic area and so can prepare for it, allow time to practice your presentation with someone who can give you honest and helpful feedback. Ensure that the presentation addresses the topic/presentation statement. Think about the types of question you could be asked about the presentation and draw on your own experiences to 'make it real' when you are responding. Once you have finalised what you are going to say and how you are going to say it, practice it a few times. Interview nerves can result in us forgetting things; practicing a few times beforehand helps to prevent this.

Case studies, in-tray exercises, technical tests and knowledge tests are all potential selection methods. Usually a briefing for these is given on the day and you are not required to prepare in advance. Group discussions are also occasionally used; they can be used to help you and the interview panel decide if the team environment will be one in which you will thrive.