

## Interview Guide

The key to performing well in any interview, whether it is face to face or over the telephone, is to prepare well. Overall, it is essential that as an applicant you can demonstrate a strong, innate interest in both the role and the organisation and that this is reflected throughout the interview process. This introductory guide has been designed to encourage you to think about some key areas of preparation.

### **Motivation and suitability**

Central to the interview process, will be the employers' need to understand your reasons for applying to the role. They may ask 'why do you want to work for this company/organisation?' Or 'what interests you about the role?' Knowing about new developments or key issues in the sector can really help to demonstrate your enthusiasm and knowledge, so keeping up to date with industry press etc. is vital in your preparatory research.

Carrying out thorough research about the organisation will also assist you in your response to this. Consider who the organisation works with; what their mission statement, objectives or values are; what projects they have worked on recently and then relate it to your desire and enthusiasm to work with them.

The employer will also want to ensure your suitability for the role. In order to address this, review the information provided about the job role, including the person specification and revisit the content of your application.

The employer will also address this through asking a range of other questions.

### **Competency-based questions**

These questions are designed to identify specific skills the employer is looking for in their candidate. When answering these questions provide clear examples and analyse the situation.

To enable you to give a thorough response, use the STAR approach - this allows you to ask what the situation was? What tasks were involved? What action was taken? What was the result?

Examples and evidence can be drawn from across your experience - study, part-time work, volunteering and leisure interests.

Examples of competency-based questions include:

- Can you give me an example of a time when you had to coordinate the work of other people?
- Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a personal or group task.
- Describe a situation where you had to work effectively as a member of a team.

## Strength-based questions

The strengths that the employer will be looking for in their candidate will be dependent on the role you have applied for. Through strength-based questions the employer will want to ensure that your abilities match the role; resulting in you being happier and more productive in your work.

These questions may be more personal and allow the employer to gain a genuine insight into your personality and see if you would be a good 'fit' for the company.

Some examples of strength-based interview questions include:

- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- What energises you?
- How would your close friends describe you?
- What are you good at?
- When did you achieve something you were proud of?
- Do you think this role will play to your strengths?

As with any other interview questions, you will need to include examples to justify and illustrate your responses. Think about specific examples - from your studies, work experience, previous employment, volunteering or extra-curricular activities - where you can evidence the relevant strength(s) and use the STAR technique to develop your response.

Weaknesses:

If employers want to know about your strengths, they will almost inevitably want to know about your weaknesses.

If asked 'what are your weaknesses?' you can positively frame your answer by picking characteristics that you have actively taken steps to improve. For example, self-confidence issues could have previously led to difficulty accepting criticism; but tell the interviewer that you've learned to embrace constructive feedback as it allows self-improvement.

Avoid saying that you have no weaknesses, that you are a perfectionist, or that you work too hard. These responses may be interpreted by the employer as being indicative of a lack of self-awareness.

Alternatively, employers may be looking for you to reflect on your experiences, for instance, they may ask, "tell us about a time you made a mistake, what was the impact of this and how did you deal with it?" Again, frame your response positively; evidencing how you have been proactive in changing your behaviours.

Similar questions may include:

- How do you respond to criticism?
- How would your worst enemy describe you?

## Other types of questions

The questions asked within interviews will not be limited to your motivation, competencies and strengths; employers use a range of questions and may choose additional questions depending on your industry/discipline.

- Scenario-based: These questions are designed to see if you can think on your feet and will ask you how you would deal with a particular situation.
- Technical: For some job roles, the employer will be looking for you to demonstrate a technical skills set. These are more common for scientific or technology-based roles.
- General: These questions tend to be broader, where the employer may not be looking for a specific response, for example, 'why did you choose to study at the University of Portsmouth?' or 'what have you learnt from your past work experience?'

## Presenting yourself

Alongside this essential preparation and providing thorough responses, making a good impression on the employer will be key to your success. Therefore presenting yourself in a professional manner is vital.

- Dress code/self-presentation: What you wear and how you look are essential elements as to whether an interviewer gains a good first impression of you. Check the dress code and if you are not sure always opt for smart over casual. Other considerations include avoiding too much jewellery or make-up; using aftershave or perfume sparingly; and ensuring you have washed and ironed your outfit.
- Being positive: Be polite and well-mannered with any staff you meet before, during and after the interview process. Avoid speaking negatively about previous employers and/or experiences.
- Good body language: Ensure that you offer a firm handshake to your interviewer(s) before and after the interview. Once you are seated, try to avoid slouching; maintain a good level of eye contact; and most importantly, remember to smile.
- Showing confidence: It is natural to feel nervous, however, it is important to show you can manage anxiety in difficult situations. Remember, to take a deep breath and don't feel pressurised to rush any of your responses. The employer will look forward to finding out more about you and ultimately wants you to do well.

## Questions to ask the employer

At the end of most interview processes, the employer will offer you the opportunity to ask them any questions you may have. Anything that you ask should cover the work itself or career development. Prepare some questions in advance, but do not panic if all your queries have been answered - mention this positively. Remember to ask questions if the moment naturally arises during the interview itself.

Examples of good interview questions to ask the employer may include:

- What support does the organisation offer to new graduates?
- How often is a graduate's performance appraised?
- What development plans does the organisation have?
- What is a typical career path in this job role?
- What's your experience of working for this organisation?
- What do you think will be the major challenges facing this company over the next three years?

## **Resilience and seeking feedback after interview**

The job-hunting process is a challenging task and in itself requires high levels of resilience, but if you're facing rejection following an interview, it is important not to let this knock your confidence.

Try to remain positive about the experience. Both your preparation and your performance will have allowed you to reflect on important areas, such as your experiences, skills and motivation behind applying to different companies.

- It is very rare for a candidate to be offered the first and only job they have applied for; it is likely you will have a number of rejections and resilience and self-belief will ensure you continue to apply.
- To assist you with preparation for your next interview, seek feedback from the employer if you are unsuccessful to help you to identify and address any weaker areas and build on your strengths moving forward.
- Send your contact at the organisation an email within a week of the rejection, politely thanking them for their time. Ask what you did well and where your application and/or interview fell down. This can help you approach the next one more confidently.

Boosting your employability;

Being unemployed for a period following graduation, or even further down the line, need not be viewed negatively. Embrace this opportunity to continue boosting your employability through ventures such as an internship, learning a new language, volunteering in the local community or (finances-permitting) travelling as part of a gap year. All of these activities will allow you to continue developing content to improve your CV and future applications.

## **Disability disclosure**

The decision whether to disclose a disability to an employer is often a personal one and maybe based on a number of factors, such as the nature of the disability and the demands of the role being applied for. If necessary, speak with a careers adviser or contact the employer directly before attending an interview to discuss any support that may be required during the selection process or in the role itself. If disclosing disabilities always do so in a very positive manner, explaining any assistance that maybe needed.

## **Further information and advice**

This introductory guide has offered an overview of some key areas of preparation, however, for more detailed information and advice please visit the Careers and Employability website at: [port.ac.uk/careers](http://port.ac.uk/careers)

The website sections include further information on:

- Different types of interviews
- Preparation for video and telephone interviews
- Scenario-based questions
- Technical questions
- Building and demonstrating resilience

If you need further support and advice about interview preparation then you can speak with an Adviser as part of our drop-in service.

To book a full mock interview, please call us on 02392 842684 or come into the Careers and Employability Centre to book.