

HOW TO SUCCEED AT INTERVIEWS AND OTHER SELECTION METHODS

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With thanks to Tate and the Open University, Logica CMG, Pfizer Ltd and Red Lorry Yellow Lorry. Thanks also to Benedict Lumley, Julia Stapelfeld, Ben Thompson and Nadine Yap for being prepared to share their experiences of interviews.

This publication can be provided in alternative formats upon request to the Head of Communication Services tel: 020 7863 6041 or email cs@careers.lon.ac.uk.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the selection interview has undergone constant scrutiny from managers, human resource professionals, psychologists and academics. Various structures and techniques have been introduced into the interview process in order to make it a more reliable method of assessing candidates. Many alternative selection methods have been developed (Section 7) - some of them are much better at predicting good employees than the interview.

Nevertheless, the interview has survived as the one certainty in any recruitment process. Whenever you try to get a job, at some point you will be face-to-face with another human being who will ask you questions about yourself. The format will vary (see Section 5). You might have an informal chat over coffee or face an intimidating panel of unblinking interrogators. You might be asked structured questions based on an exhaustive job analysis or have to deal with whatever bizarre question the interviewer thinks is a good idea at the time. One thing is certain, whatever variety of interview experience you are about to face, you will probably be nervous about it. Section 2 looks at the reasons why recruiters use interviews and what they expect to get out of them. As well as this, it suggests reasons why you should look forward to the interview as an opportunity rather than a threat.

There are so many things that can go wrong with interviews. Most people tend to worry about what might happen on the day: going blank, forgetting the question, saying something stupid, etc. However, the majority of what can go wrong happens before you enter the room. It is likely that more people fail in the interview through bad or insufficient preparation beforehand, than fail through bad performance on the day, mainly because the former often leads to the latter. Anyone who has been an interviewer will tell you that it is very easy to distinguish between the candidates who have thought carefully about the job and those who have not. Section 3 explains the

procedures that a conscientious employer will go through in order to be ready to interview prospective candidates. This should give you some idea of the corresponding amount of preparation that a conscientious candidate should undertake, and the advice in the rest of the section should help you to have a better idea of what to prepare and how to prepare it.

One of the benefits of good preparation is that, on the day, you will be able to focus more of your attention on creating a good impression. If you have to devote immense amounts of brain activity to recalling whether you have ever achieved a goal as part of a team, you are more likely to forget to behave like a friendly, yet professional, human being with whom the interviewer will get on well as a future colleague. Section 6 examines what is going on for the recruiter during the interview and explores the ways in which you can improve your chances of making a positive impact.

In Section 4, we give some advice and guidance for those of you approaching interviews with a disability and give you some pros and cons to disclosing your disability before and after the interview itself.

It is hard to answer the question, "How many job interviews can I expect to have to go to before I get an offer?" Anecdotal experience indicates that it could be anything from five to 35, depending on the quality of the candidate, the buoyancy of the labour market and the recruitment practices of the target sector. One thing is sure; most people are unlikely to land the first job they are interviewed for. This makes it vitally important to learn as much as you can from every experience. Section 8 discusses ways in which you can review your interview experiences in order to ensure that you keep improving your performance.

By now you should be convinced of the need to obtain some advice on how to approach an interview, but why should you read this book as

opposed to any of the vast number of books out there on the subject of interviews? A large proportion of interview advice books attempt give you 'perfect' answers to common interview questions. This is all very well if you are lucky enough to be asked such a question. Bear in mind, however, that interviewers can read these books too. They easily will recognise a standard answer and may avoid these questions altogether. In this book we try to prepare you for the interview as a whole so that you are ready for almost any reasonable question the interviewer may throw at you. Sections 9 and 10 do provide you with other sources of help, and some sample questions for you to practise with.

The authors of this book are careers professionals. Many of us have background

experience in recruitment and still get involved in selection interviewing. We conduct practice interviews more frequently than most interviewers will conduct real ones, so we have seen a multitude of examples of good and bad performance. In addition, through our regular contact with recruiters we have gained a wide variety of perspectives on the process rather than just one person's opinion. In this book we have tried to include that experience by obtaining comments and feedback from employers and successful candidates.

Attending an interview might always be a nerve-wracking process but it need not be a nightmare. Hopefully, this book will improve your confidence and equip you to perform as well as you can in whatever interview situation you may face.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF AN INTERVIEW?

FROM THE INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

A recruitment interview enables an employer to find out more about the information that you provided in your application. In particular, an employer will be looking for answers to the following questions:

Can you do the job?

You have been invited for interview based on the knowledge, skills and experience that you have demonstrated in your application. The interview will give the employer the opportunity to further explore your ability to do the job. Is your application a true representation of what you can do? Are there any gaps that need clarifying? The interviewer will look for examples of your past experience and could also ask you about hypothetical job situations similar to those that you might encounter in the job.

Will you do the job?

The employer wants to find a candidate with the motivation and willingness to do the job. They will, therefore, try to establish that you really want the job by exploring your career aims and goals. Is the role going to keep you interested? Are you going to work hard for the organisation? Are you going to be willing to do more than is expected of you? They will look for evidence that you have a genuine interest in, and an understanding of, the organisation and the role that you will be undertaking.

What are you like?

For an employer, there is no substitute for meeting candidates face-to-face as there are

things that they can learn about you in an interview that are difficult to establish through other selection methods. Your interview will give the employer the opportunity to see how well you communicate in person. Can you easily build a rapport with the interviewers? How well are you able to put your point across? In addition, the first impression that you make will be of particular importance if you are going to be working with external contacts. The employer will be looking for evidence that you will be able to represent their organisation with a confident, professional image.

Will you fit well into the organisation?

It is important to the employer that they recruit a candidate who will fit well into their organisation. During the interview they will be looking for evidence in your responses that you share the organisation's values and will fit in with their patterns of working. The interviewer will also want to feel that you would get on well with the staff team and will be interested in examples of how well you work with others.

Will you accept a job offer?

The interview is also a valuable opportunity for the employer to sell themselves to the best candidate - they want the best candidate to take the job with them rather than go elsewhere.

FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE

You should view an interview as a valuable exercise not only for the employer but also for

you, as it will give you the opportunity to sell what you can offer to the employer, as well as finding out more about what they have to offer to you.

Demonstrate that you could do the job

The interview is a chance to convince the employer that you have the skills they are looking for. You may be able to elaborate on the skills that you mentioned in your application, or to discuss how these skills might be used in the new role.

Show that you want the job

Meeting the employer in person is a fantastic opportunity to communicate your enthusiasm for the role. It's also the place to show off the

research that you have done and demonstrate your genuine interest in the organisation and the job.

Learn more about the job and the organisation

You should also take this opportunity to confirm that this is really what you are looking for. You should listen to the way the interviewer describes the organisation and the job role and ask any questions you have that remain unanswered at the end of the interview. You are likely to meet some of the people that you will be working directly with and, if the interview is at the employer's premises, you may get to look around and meet some of the other employees: can you see yourself working for this organisation?

PREPARATION

It is easy to focus on the performance element of an interview: how you will deal with unexpected questions, with nerves or with challenging interviewers. However, it is equally important to focus on the preparation that is done prior to the interview - both by the employer and by you as the candidate. The more work that is done by the employer to prepare suitable questions aimed at assessing candidates against the real requirements of the role, the more likely they are to elicit useful information from candidates. Likewise, the more time that you spend preparing for what you might have to talk about in the interview, the less likely you are to encounter difficulties on the day.

FROM THE INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Deciding on the ideal candidate - the person specification and job description

Before employers can recruit a new member of staff, they must first decide upon what kind of

person they are looking for. They will start to build up a profile of the ideal candidate; a list of the knowledge, skills and personal qualities that the perfect recruit would have to offer. This will depend, of course, on the requirements of the post that they are trying to fill as well as the type of environment and team which the new recruit would join.

One way of detailing the requirements of the job and the desired applicant is to draw up a Job Description (which details the duties and responsibilities of the role) and a Person Specification (which lists the skills, qualifications, experiences and personal qualities needed to do the job).

Below are two recent job descriptions and person specifications. Can you see the difference between each section of the documents? Read through these and see what you can pick up from them about the sort of person each organisation is looking for. How would this be assessed at interview?

Can you do some research around ► this information to find out more about the job? For example, can you figure out how many people you would be responsible for by going to Tate Modern and chatting to the staff?

Post:	Visitor Information Manager
Band:	Specialist
Department:	Visitor Services and Operations
Contract:	Full time, permanent
Reporting to:	Senior Visitor Information Manager
Responsible for:	Information Assistants
Location:	Tate Modern

Background

The aim of Tate is to increase public awareness, understanding and appreciation of British art from the 16th Century to the present day, and of international modern and contemporary art.

Note that there are obviously two main purposes to this role - to help visitors and to develop information resources. Will these require different sorts of talents? ▶

Can you foresee what sorts of issues you might need to deal with when working out the rota and so on? What sorts of skills would you need to achieve this? ▶

The words used in these two points, such as “all enquiries”, “efficiently”, “effectively”, “prompt responses” indicates the kind of fast pace, detail-conscious work that would need to be undertaken. Have you got experience you can talk about to match this? ▶

Clearly this role has an inward-facing element; you'll have to understand where your department fits into the Tate structure as a whole. ▶

Does it matter to you how often you're on duty? Would it be weekend or evening work, for example? You may want to demonstrate some flexibility in the past over work schedules. ▶

The Information team, within the Visitor Services and Operations department, provides support, advice and a wide range of information for visitors face-to-face at the Information Desks, on the phone, by letter and email. This team also develops information resources and signage within the Gallery and supplies information to the other departments in the Gallery.

Purpose of the Job

The post holder will work closely with the Senior Information Manager to manage and co-ordinate the visitor information service at Tate Modern, ensuring that visitors enjoy a high standard of service. You will manage the team of Information staff as well as co-ordinating the production and development of information resources and materials.

Main Activities/Responsibilities

- To manage the information team ensuring the various duty positions are staffed on a rota basis and dealing with any day to day personnel issues.
- To share responsibility with the Senior Information Manager for the line management of the full and part time Information Assistants.
- To ensure that all enquiries from the public on the collection, activities and other gallery matters are answered efficiently and effectively by the Information staff.
- To oversee and initiate research and replies to written enquiries, forwarding them to other departments as required and to co-ordinate prompt responses to complaints and comments from visitors/enquirers.
- To spend part of the time working at the Information Desk responding to visitor enquiries and dealing with written and telephone enquiries when in the Information Office.
- To initiate, research and develop information resources and ensure they are regularly updated and maintained.
- To maintain a high level of liaison with all other departments in the gallery. Producing internal bulletins and providing an interface between front of house and back of house activities and departments, including leading team briefings and training sessions.
- To represent the Information Department or the wider Visitor Services & Operations department at meetings within the Gallery, and deputise for the Senior Visitor Services Manager as necessary.
- To ensure that there is close liaison with Membership & Ticketing Services for guided tour bookings.
- To act on a rota basis as Duty Manager responsible for all aspects of public asset safety and visitor care.

If you've got an interview, the employer must think you meet all of these requirements. In preparing for the interview, think again about examples to illustrate these competencies. ▶

Here, the employer has been quite specific about the kinds of leadership skills they are looking for. ▶

There is less information here about what they mean by "highest level of customer service". What can you deduce from other aspects of the job description, person specification or even from visiting the gallery, about what they might be looking for? ▶

How might you show your commitment to an organisation you may not have worked in before? An interesting challenge for an interview. ▶

This means that you don't have to have another language; if you meet all the other essential criteria, you'll stand a good chance of being called for interview. ▶

Person Specification

Essential

- Previous experience of working in a similar front line, customer focused environment, ideally the information department of a major museum or gallery.
- Leadership skills - the ability to lead and motivate staff and create a high performing work environment.
- Demonstrable knowledge of history of art (1600 to contemporary) including British Art.
- Financial awareness and the ability to manage budgets effectively.
- People management skills - demonstrable experience of managing or supervising a team, including recruitment and performance management.
- Demonstrable commitment to the delivery of the highest level of visitor service.
- Excellent interpersonal, verbal and written communication skills. The post holder will be part of the public face of the Gallery and needs to represent the department at all levels.
- Strong organisational ability with good administrative skills, including word processing and a proven ability to use computerised databases.
- Self motivated, with the ability to work on own initiative, as well as part of a team.
- An interest in, and commitment to, the work of Tate.

Desirable

- Working knowledge of another language.



The Open University

Media Developer Traineeships **Salary: £24,402**

MAIN PURPOSES OF THE POST

To assist academic authors with the preparation and publication of learning materials in print and other media. To ensure that Open University learning materials are clear, readable and effective. To work within a team to facilitate the smooth development and production of learning materials.

It looks like this job is about how you communicate between different audiences: academics, who've written the texts, and students, who have to read them. Can you demonstrate how you've acted as an intermediary between different types of people?

How could you describe how the OU presents itself? What does its website look like? How approachable does it seem?

How do you think you'll communicate with the other people during these team meetings? What will your role in them be? Think about other situations where perhaps you've had to represent a particular view or angle; how did you negotiate and persuade other people to your viewpoint?

For this role, you'd have to really understand how the OU does its teaching. Have you spent time understanding how some of the courses are undertaken and how the students receive course material?

Every job description has one of these! It could form the basis to a question you ask during your interview: what tasks might it cover?

DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES

Editorial duties

Devise appropriate editorial styles for a course and ensure their consistency across media.

Provide structural and pedagogic editing of text handed over from authors to ensure that it reaches students as effective learning material in print and electronic media.

Copy-edit text as necessary for products in print and electronic media.

Advise clients on editorial issues.

Assist clients with content development to ensure quality of the handovers for production.

Ensure that learning materials conform to the University's house style.

Ensure that appropriate editorial standards are met.

Generic duties common to all Media Developers

In collaboration with academic colleagues, engage with the intellectual and pedagogic content of course materials.

Attend course team meetings and project progress meetings as requested.

Check the routine progress of tasks and deliverables from colleagues and suppliers.

Take responsibility for prioritising tasks and meeting deadlines.

Provide timely information to managers and colleagues concerning work in progress.

Ensure that the various course components are effectively integrated.

Be aware of the teaching strategy, academic level and target audience.

Contribute to the production of specifications and standards for proposed materials.

Contribute to the estimation of resources and time required to fulfil specifications for various project components.

Keep abreast of industry trends and developments.

Engage in personal development.

Ensure that corporate branding guidelines are adhered to.

Understand and appreciate internal procedures and standards and be proactive in recommending improvements.

Undertake other duties as and when required by their line manager.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential

Education/qualifications

- Degree-level (or equivalent experience).

Work and other relevant experience

- Experience in the effective editing, development, production or integration of publications (in print or other media).

Good communication skills are going to be very important in this job. Can you distinguish between the different types of communication required? Have you got effective examples you can draw on to provide evidence of these skills?

How could you demonstrate your interest in the use of IT in teaching and learning? What sort of journals are there around that you could mention? Have you had experience of any of this sort of learning yourself that you could use?

These are attributes it would be helpful you possessed, but they're not expecting you to have all them. Would you be able to articulate how you might learn or develop your abilities in these areas?

- Proficiency in editing texts for publication.
- Some familiarity with at least one of the following media: web, interactive CD/DVD, print, sound and vision.

Personal qualities and abilities

- An interest in what makes for effective open teaching and learning materials.
- Ability to interpret a brief in order to produce appropriate creative solutions.
- Ability to give a clear brief to colleagues or suppliers.
- Ability to demonstrate and explain solutions to colleagues, clients and others.
- Ability to create and enhance productive working relationships.
- Ability to cope with pressure and unforeseen problems, and to offer pragmatic solutions to these.
- Confidence and ability to use initiative within a managed team, prioritising tasks according to deadlines as required.
- Willingness and ability to embrace new ideas, learn new skills and adapt to changing situations or requirements.
- Interest in distance-teaching practices and an awareness of the implications of open access in higher education.
- Ability and willingness to work across academic subject areas
- Interest in industry developments and trends in terms of tools, technologies, etc.
- Ability to liaise effectively with appropriate external organisations.
- Willingness to embrace and promote continuous improvement.

Desirable

Education/qualifications

- Training in one or more of the media used by the University.
- In addition to core professional experience, some experience or knowledge of some of the following would be an advantage:*
- Applying learning design principles that are effective for the relevant medium.
 - Creating and editing web and CD/DVD materials.
 - Editing print publications.
 - Layout design (page/screen/packaging).
 - Client/server architecture, design and implementation.
 - Mark-up languages (e.g. HTML, DHTML, XHTML, XML, SGML).

Not all employers recruit in this structured way; others have decided that they will employ what they consider to be people with potential and will then train them into the company's 'way' of doing things.

While we expect prospective employees to have a reasonable level of academic and business acumen, for us it's much more about the person and their personality. If that's right, then we can teach the rest.

Rob Ettridge, Client Services Director, Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

Once the employer has an idea about the sort of candidate they are looking for, they must then decide how to structure the recruitment process to enable them to select the most suitable person from the range of candidates. An interview is usually one aspect of this process and, because of the time-intensive nature of holding interviews, it is important that the interview is structured in a way that is going to enable the employer to learn as much as possible about each candidate in order to decide who will be best suited to the job.

Candidates complete an online application form initially. If you pass pre-selection and if we think we find a good match in our business requirements, you are invited to do a half-hour telephone interview. If you are successful, this is followed by a one day assessment centre (interview, group exercise, written exercise and aptitude tests) and occasionally a second interview.

Gary Argent, UK Graduate Recruitment Manager, Logica CMG

Structuring the interview

The structure of the interview will naturally depend on the post being advertised. Candidates may be invited first for a one-to-one or panel interview, followed by a practical test, or be required to give a presentation to the interviewers prior to the face-to-face interview. There may be a written assessment before, during or after the interview process. Or there may be a group task to be assessed. The employer will also decide what type of interview will be most useful. It may be that they want to use a formal structure with

the same questions addressed to each candidate; or, they may prefer an informal approach which allows for greater discussion. It is also important to design questions that will draw out relevant information from candidates.

Lining up interviewers/assessors

Choosing good interviewers and/or assessors is very important. Ideally, they will be experienced interviewers who are able to establish a rapport with each candidate and help them to be at ease. However, it is also possible that you will be interviewed by someone with little experience of interviewing others. It is also worth remembering that interviewing is a difficult and tiring task requiring high levels of concentration, and that even experienced interviewers can get nervous sometimes!

We use interviewers from the business, so for them it is something different - a day out of their normal role speaking to people who are (hopefully!) enthusiastic about our company. And their input is the key element of the hire/no-hire decision, so they have a real chance to influence the business as well. And don't think it is just you who gets nervous - interviewers feel it too!

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I enjoy interacting with people and learning from their experiences. I don't very often find it stressful, sometimes a bit frustrating.

Elizabeth Collins, Senior Principal Scientist, Pfizer Ltd

Planning the questions

The employer will have taken time to identify what it is that they require from the ideal candidate and will have planned the recruitment interview accordingly. The employer will choose different types of questions depending on what they are looking to find out about you, for example:

- **Biographical questions** are used to obtain factual information about what you have done. They may relate to the CV or application form that you provided, so it is a good idea to ensure that you are familiar with everything in your application before the interview.
- **Behavioural questions** are used to assess your

skills, or competencies. Typically the employer will ask you for an example of when you have demonstrated a competency. For example, they might ask you, "Can you tell me about a time when you have worked as part of a team?" to assess your team-working skills.

- **Hypothetical questions** ask you to imagine a job scenario and consider what you would do in that situation. These are useful for assessing your ability to problem solve and for seeing how well you understand the job role.
- **Technical questions** test your knowledge of a particular subject.
- **Motivational questions** assess your enthusiasm and interest in the role to which you have applied. They may focus on your reasons for wanting to work in that role or for that organisation, or they may focus on your career aspirations.

A question may be open or closed, depending on the length of response required. Closed questions can be answered with "yes" or "no". These may be used when a shorter response is required. Do not be afraid to add a little more than simply "yes" or "no". Open questions leave you free to give a longer more detailed answer and often start with "Why did you ...", "How did you ..." or "Tell me about ...".

In addition to the questions that form the planned structure of the interview the interviewer is likely to explore your answers using follow-up questions. The interviewer will use different follow-up questions depending on the information that they are looking for, for example:

- **Probing questions** can be used to examine in closer detail aspects of your responses. They may be used to fill in any gaps or to obtain proof to support your claims, for example, "What was the outcome of that decision?" or "Can you give me an example of an event you have managed?"
- **Reflective questions** focus on what you have said in order to explore aspects of your answers further. They can be used by the interviewer to indicate an area of your answer that they would like you to expand on, for example, "So you say that you have experience of building databases?"
- **Funnel questions** are used to pinpoint the

detail within a particular response, by gradually narrowing the focus of the questions asked. For example, the interviewer might start by asking a broad question such as, "Tell me about your previous work experience" and go on to ask you where you worked, what you did whilst you were there, how you did this and how effective you were at it.

FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Preparing yourself - why do you want this job?

Most employers are looking for people who are enthusiastic and motivated about their work and who can demonstrate that they really do want the job. It is important, therefore, to think carefully about why you are applying for each job and what attracts you to the role and to the organisation. There are a variety of reasons why a person might want to work for a particular company; these might include:

- The size of the company, for example, a small, family-run business which has a personal feel to it; or an SME (small- to medium-sized enterprise) which has a close-knit feel to it but is big enough to allow for variety in its locations, departments, personnel or roles; or a large, global enterprise which has opportunities for travel or secondments, or for learning languages, or scope for promotion.
- The reputation of the organisation, for example, an organisation which is well-known or highly regarded.
- It may be an institution known for its commitment to training and development; or for the high quality of its training programme; or for its encouragement of staff progress.
- The ethical stance of the organisation whose ideas and values are similar to your own.
- An employer that you have long admired for its innovative approach or that is a world-leader in its field.

Similarly, you might want the job because it would allow you to:

- use many or all of your skills and abilities
- put previous experiences to good use
- work in an advisory, or supportive capacity
- campaign for the rights of others
- enable others, as a teacher or coach

- work at something which you really enjoy
- work in a busy, fast-paced environment
- work in a solo capacity
- work as part of a large team.

Prepare yourself prior to interview by writing down as many positive, specific reasons you can think of for wanting to do the job. If you have them, use the job advert, description and/or person specification to guide you. A useful technique for thinking about why you want to do a particular job is to describe the process that you went through to decide to apply for the job: when did you first become aware of this area of work? What initially attracted you to this area? What did you do to find out more? What specific factors developed your interest further and made you want to apply for this post in particular?

Of course you may be applying for a job because it offers certain personal benefits such as salary, location or proximity to your home. However, talking about these benefits without also mentioning what it is about the role and organisation that you find attractive, may lead the employer to question whether you have sufficient interest and motivation.

I'm impressed by candidates who don't just think about what they expect from the company (salary, training, job variety etc) but who have also genuinely thought about what they are going to be able to bring to the business.

Logica CMG

If possible, talk to people doing the same type of job. The more you can demonstrate that you know what the job entails, the more likely it is that the employer will believe you when you say you are well suited to that job.

It still amazes me when some candidates come along without any knowledge of who we are, or what we do. Why turn up if you're not interested in the job you're applying for? Those people generally last about two minutes.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

Preparing yourself - getting behind the job description

Unpacking the skills

It is easy to read a list of skills requirements from a job advert, job description or person specification and assume that we understand what is being asked for; everybody knows what is meant by communication skills, don't they?

It can help to break down or unpack the skills identified into their observable behaviours. For example, what might you observe someone doing who you thought has good interpersonal and team-working skills? Perhaps you might see them:

- encouraging other people in their own roles
- explaining their work to others in the team, and keeping them informed of changes or progress
- discussing potential solutions to problems with colleagues
- demonstrating tolerance of others, particularly different ways of working
- recognising alternative viewpoints and listening to constructive criticism
- being sensitive to the needs of others in the team
- responding flexibly to the needs of other people and of the team as a whole.

Being able to break down a skill in this way is the first step towards providing evidence of your own skills which goes beyond the obvious; the ability to provide clear, concrete examples of how you demonstrate each of the skills required.

Understanding the role/making it real

When you have thought about what is involved in each skill, try to imagine how they might be used within the context of the job. How exactly would the skills being asked for be used in different aspects of the job? For example, when would you be expected to demonstrate good team-working skills, and with whom?

Imagining yourself in the role, using various skills to do different aspects of the job, should enable you to identify what the employer will be looking for and how you might be able to do the job using the skills that you have already developed.

We have a competency-based assessment centre which examines areas such as business awareness, client focus, technical skills, team-working, planning and organisation, initiative and communication skills - the competencies which we have found to be important in our business.

Logica CMG

Matching experiences to skills

The next stage of preparation is to build up your bank of suitable examples. In an interview situation, few people are comfortable with the thought of answering questions on the spot; one of the biggest concerns is not being able to think of an answer or providing an inappropriate one. This is less likely to happen if you can spend some time planning a variety of examples, and deciding how you might describe them.

Think about each competency related to the job which you have already identified (either that the employer has explicitly requested or that you've inferred from the job description and person specification). Then think about as many examples as you can from your own experiences which would illustrate the different aspects of that competency.

If we continue using the example above, it is unlikely that one example of team-working will cover every one of the observable behaviours identified. Try to come up with several different examples for each skill. Working on these prior to the interview will help you to think on the spot, and should provide you with a range of different examples that can then be used to answer several questions.

The art of structure

The final stage in this kind of preparation is to practise structuring the answers that you might give. Try to think in terms of a good piece of writing you've done: just as a reader needs help with identifying the main themes in a written text, so does your interviewer.

Always remember that your interviewer(s) have no idea what you are about to say in response to a question. You need to help them to understand

your point by structuring it appropriately, providing signposts, and keeping your message clear.

For each of your examples, think about how you might set the scene, describe what you did and how this demonstrates the required skill, and then highlight the outcome or result of your actions. Finally, try saying some of these examples out loud. You may think you have a very clear idea of events in your head, but if you can't translate that into words and make those words sound interesting, you will get stuck in the interview. Try taping yourself or ask other people to listen to you. Many careers services offer practice interview facilities which include feedback on your performance.

Structure through STAR

Some people find this acronym a useful tool in structuring their responses to questions:

Situation

Task (or problem)

Action taken

Result

You should briefly set the scene (Situation) - without providing any irrelevant detail - and outline the Task that you were engaged with. The majority of your answer should describe what you did (Action) to complete that task or resolve the problem. Focus on the skills that you used rather than talking generically about the performance of your team, whilst acknowledging how you worked with others in the situation if appropriate. Finally, provide a brief summary of the outcome (Result) of your actions including anything that you learnt from the process.

I always used the STAR method to answer my questions.

Nadine Yap, MSc in International Management, Queen Mary University of London. Accepted a post within the business department of Amey.

Preparing yourself - what do you have to offer?

Before setting off for the interview, it's very important to re-read your application form, CV or cover letter (always keep a copy of whatever you send to an employer). Try to imagine that you are the employer reading about you for the first time. What do you learn about this candidate? Do you think that they could do the job that is being advertised? What questions might you still have about their ability to perform the job? Are there any aspects of the application which might concern you that you would like to follow up in the interview (such as gaps in employment history)? Regarding your own application with the critical eye of the prospective employer might enable you to pre-empt some of the questions that could be raised and how you might address these on the day.

On the CV of one candidate I interviewed, he listed classical jazz as one of his interests. My fellow interviewer also happened to be a classical jazz fanatic so he was very interested in this and wanted to have a long chat about it. The trouble was that the interviewee didn't know anything about it and had clearly put this down presumably in the hope of making himself seem more educated or intelligent.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

You'll be asked in some form or another (or in several different ways) how you can add value to the employer. Think of what you have to offer in terms of:

- qualifications: first degree; higher degree(s); postgraduate diploma or certificate; vocational qualifications
- experiences: places you have worked in the past; volunteering schemes you have taken part in; periods of study you've undertaken; particular roles you've had
- skills: organisational; linguistic; technical; problem-solving; research; communication
- personal qualities: resilience; enthusiasm; flexibility; professionalism; commitment; motivation; determination

Highlight all the positive things you have said

about yourself in your application form, CV or covering letter and be prepared to expand on them at interview with examples that clearly demonstrate those positive points. Every person will have a combination of experiences, skills, qualities and abilities which will make them uniquely fit for the job.

I'm surprised by candidates who lie on their application forms - if you tell us you are an Oracle expert who has been designing databases for 5 years, then we are going to arrange for an Oracle expert to interview you.

Logica CMG

Preparing yourself - researching the organisation

Find out as much as you can about the employer. Visit the organisation's website or try to get hold of their annual report. Alternatively, you could visit the website of the City Business Library (free of charge) to find out more. Companies often have mission or vision statements or key principles: try to think of situations in your own life which demonstrate some of those principles.

Keep up-to-date with the news, specifically looking out for any stories about the organisation or their sector or their competitors. Make a note of the facts and try to form opinions. If something significant has occurred (such as a change in legislation) try to think what impact that could have on the organisation, or the sector, in case you are asked about it at interview. Read the relevant journal for that sector. Visit related websites such as trade associations, regulatory bodies or accrediting bodies.

The most common shortfall is insufficient research into the company, the sector, or the particular business area that they are being interviewed for. Candidates who have not thought about their own career objectives or what they will be able to offer to the company, or who don't have examples to back up what they have written on their application form will also come across as poorly prepared.

Logica CMG

Many organisations hold presentations. As well as being a useful source of information, these events can be an opportunity to get some insider knowledge about the organisation and to meet some of the people with whom you might be working if you are successful.

Also keep a record of anything that you cannot find out about the organisation or the role which you would like to find out more about when attending for interview.

Research checklist

There are many things you might want to know about the organisation that you're applying to, and the following are some examples:

- How large (or small) is the company?
- What is their main focus or function?
- What are their products and/or services?
- How are they perceived by their competitors?
- How are they doing financially?
- Do they have a strategic vision and, if so, what is it?
- Do they have affiliations or associations or partner institutions?
- How often do they recruit?
- Do they have a good programme of training and development?
- Is there scope for promotion? If so, is there a clear pathway?

I need to prepare for the interview. It really helps me to relax and helps me prepare my questions for them.

Nadine Yap

Preparing yourself - practising your interview technique

Some people find the process of being interviewed particularly difficult and can get

extremely nervous. There are some useful tips later in the book on how to keep calm on the day of your interview, but it can also be helpful to practise your technique a little beforehand to make you feel more confident.

Remember that an interview is not an examination or test; it is more like a structured conversation. The employer is genuinely interested to find out more about you and is not usually trying to catch you out or make you feel at a disadvantage. Difficult questions are often used to try to ensure that you would be comfortable doing the job and would thrive as a member of the organisation.

If you find it difficult to think on your feet, and prefer to take your time to think of a response to a question, then it may be helpful to practise having to answer questions on relevant subjects. Many careers services offer practice interview sessions, or you might want to practise with a friend who can give you feedback on your performance.

Ultimately, the employer wants to get to know the real you, so try not to worry too much about technique and instead focus on answering honestly and thoughtfully to any questions that are posed.

The interview process is a way of us gauging how much you know; we are not there to trick you. This is the one opportunity you will have to sell yourself so make sure you share all the information that you feel is important for the job role. Don't try to bluff your way out of tricky questions; 9.9 times out of 10 the interviewer will spot this a mile off.

Pfizer Ltd

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS AND REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

If you have special requirements or a disability, you should consider making this known at the appropriate time in your application. There is no legal requirement for a person to disclose a disability to an employer, unless there is a health and safety risk involved, and therefore whether to do so or not is entirely your decision. What you may wish to consider are the implications of not disclosing, particularly if you feel that you would need some adjustments in order to perform to the best of your ability.

If you feel that you would prefer not to disclose anything to the employer at the interview stage then that too is your decision but you should consider whether you are competing on a level playing field or, in fact, giving the other candidates an unfair advantage. Having adjustments made for you does not imply you are less able or receiving preferable treatment; it is simply allowing you to participate in tasks whilst minimising the difficulties that others might not have to contend with.

If you choose to disclose you will be covered by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) from the moment of disclosure; the employer must take all reasonable steps to provide the necessary adjustments and must not discriminate against you because of your disability. If you choose not to disclose, and then under-perform as a result of this, you will not be covered by the DDA if you are not offered the job. The DDA does not operate in retrospect and will not recognise any discrimination on the part of the employer if they were unaware of your condition.

If you do require adjustments to be in place and are prepared to tell the employer, then you should give them adequate notice to arrange the adjustments, particularly as some, such as alternative format material, may take some time to order. Don't expect to turn up on the day and then have immediate adjustments made. Neither can you expect the employer to second-guess your requirements.

'Reasonable adjustments' are explained in the DDA and can be to either physical features of the workplace or interview venue, or to flexibility of working arrangements or interview practices. Adjustments include things such as simple changes to layout, improved signage and information, and improved accessibility for disabled visitors. If you are invited for interview, the organisation is obliged to accommodate any needs which you may have. This may include mobility (for example, providing a ramp for wheelchair access); the ability to hear (for example, providing an induction loop or interpreter); impaired visibility (providing a guide or supplying any interview materials in another format such as Braille and spoken word packs). Furthermore, adjustments can be made for people sitting tests such as giving extra time to those with dyslexia, or using a note-taker.

If you have any other special requirements, whether directly concerning your application or affecting your ability to attend for interview, stating these at the outset may make your experience more comfortable. Don't feel obliged to do so if you don't wish to.

TYPES OF INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of different formats an interview may take and finding out in advance what type to expect will help you to prepare yourself and to limit the likelihood of unexpected surprises.

My interviews consisted of written assessments combined with two panel commercial and personal interviews, online and paper analytical thinking tests.

Julia Stapelfeld, LLB in Law with German Law, King's College London. Successfully applied for trainee vacation schemes with major law firms.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Otherwise known as 'one-to-one' or 'face-to-face', this is the most common type of interview, with only you and the interviewer present. The interview will take place in the form of a conversation about you, your CV, the role and the company, and will allow both parties to ask any job-related questions they wish to. The style of the interview will vary, from a formal, highly structured interview to a much more informal conversation, depending on the organisation's recruitment practices and, to some extent, the personal style of the interviewer.

A first selection interview is often used when there are a large number of applicants for a role to enable employers to weed out unsuitable applicants and create a shortlist. It is vital to

make a good impression and establish that you are the right kind of person for the organisation in order to be short-listed for a second interview. You will usually be asked general questions about yourself and your understanding of the role and organisation by an interviewer from the HR department. If the role requires specific technical skills you may be asked questions about those skills to determine your level of competency.

PANEL INTERVIEWS

A panel interview will entail two or more interviewers being present at the interview and may be used by the company for a number of reasons. The employer may wish to get a range of opinions about your performance or the different panellists may be there to assess you on different areas of performance or knowledge. They may wish to see how you interact with different types of people.

Facing a panel need not be a daunting experience. Finding out in advance whether you will be interviewed by a panel, who the panellists are and what their role within the organisation is, will help you to prepare yourself both mentally and practically and will remove the element of surprise. As with any interview you should ensure you research the organisation and think about what you have to offer and your competence for the role. When you meet the panellists you could ask for their names and, if you feel it would be helpful, write them down in the order they are sitting, on a pad, to remind yourself during the interview. Using their names sporadically when answering questions will help create a rapport. Do not, however, overuse their names.

If you're being interviewed by a panel I personally feel it's good to give everyone a bit of eye contact - rather than just directing all your answers to one particular person. Spread your charm and loveliness around the room!

Ben Thompson, BA in Contemporary Arts, Manchester Metropolitan University. Accepted a job as a sixth-form college librarian.

When answering a panellist's question remember that, whilst they have asked the question, all the panellists will be listening to the answer so avoid concentrating your answer solely upon that panellist. Address the start and finish of your answer to the questioner but ensure that you make eye contact with other panellists during the course of your answer. This shows that you are including them all in your response and are not clouded by 'tunnel vision'. You do not have to look at every individual during every answer but make sure you are making eye contact with all of them over the course of every few questions. Where possible, cross reference your answer with something another panellist has said to demonstrate your ability to recognise the links within the organisation, for example:

"As Chris said earlier, financial planning is vital in their department so, as a programme developer in your department, it is important that I understand the systems needed for accurate financial planning. My experience at . . . has demonstrated . . .".

Panellists may sometimes appear to repeat questions you feel have already been asked. This may be a genuine error or it may be that they are either looking for another set of competencies in addition to those you have already mentioned. They may also be probing further into claims you have made in previous answers. Whatever the reason, this gives you the opportunity to give another example of your abilities and experience. You may briefly refer to your previous answer if appropriate but then use a different example to demonstrate your suitability for the role.

At the end of the interview shake hands with each

member of the panel, thank them for their time and say you look forward to seeing them in the future. If you intend to send a thank you letter after the interview send one to each panellist individually. Do not treat any panellist as being more or less important than another either during or after the interview; remember they are all there because their input is valued and will contribute to the final decision.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

The telephone interview is increasingly being used by many organisations as the first stage of their screening and selection process. There are a number of reasons for an employer to conduct a phone interview. These include:

- Resource effectiveness for the organisation. Interviewing by telephone will allow more candidates to be interviewed in a shorter space of time and reduces first interview costs as only those who pass this stage will be invited for a face-to-face meeting.
- Effective screening of candidates who would otherwise have to travel long distances for a face-to-face interview.
- Allowing the interviewer to assess the candidate's telephone manner and competency, particularly important if the role requires a level of customer contact by phone.

Most of the time I first had a telephone interview and then an assessment centre where I had a chat over lunch and then a formal one-to-one interview.

Nadine Yap

Both Transport for London and the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) use a telephone interview before the assessment centre. Telephone interviews were all one-on-one but were being transcribed by the interviewer as I gave my responses.

Benedict Lumley, BA European Social and Political Studies, University College London. Accepted a place onto the Civil Service Fast Stream.

There are three ways in which a company may conduct their telephone interviews. If the job advertisement requires that you ring for an application form or further information, it is possible that the organisation will use that initial phone call to screen your suitability for the role. You must ensure that even at this stage you have some knowledge of what the organisation does, why you wish to apply for the role, and why you are suitable for the role.

The other two methods are used once an application form has been submitted and deemed suitable for taking forward to the telephone interview stage: the 'unannounced' call, where you are given no notice when the call will take place, and the 'pre-arranged' call, where a specific time is given for the interviewer to call you or you them. Do not assume that you will be given any prior warning; ensure that you are ready for the call whenever and however it comes. Telephone interviews are sometimes conducted by third-party recruitment agents acting for the organisation you're applying to, who will probably be working from a prepared script.

It may be difficult to treat a telephone interview as being as real as a face-to-face interview. You'll need to do similar preparation as for an interview conducted in person. (See Section 3 on Preparation for more information.) Questions will almost certainly cover your knowledge of the organisation and role and your reasons for applying but they may also be testing specific areas of competency and, if relevant, technical knowledge. If a job specification has been supplied, look at the section that describes what type of person they are looking for, what skills they must have and what skills would be preferred.

Tips for telephone interviews

- Ensure you are in a quiet place where you will not be distracted. If the call is unannounced and at a time that is really not convenient, for example if you are on the bus, politely explain and ask them to call you back at a more convenient time.
- Do not have background noise such as a television or radio playing, children or friends chatting, dogs barking, or loud traffic noise nearby. Move to a quiet room where both you and the interviewer will be able to hear clearly.

- Do not smoke, eat or drink. The interviewer is assessing both what you say and how you sound. These actions may be audible to the interviewer and will change your natural rhythm of speech.
- Make sure you are using a reliable, fully-functioning telephone. If using a mobile phone, keep it fully charged and topped-up at all times leading up to the interview.
- If possible have a copy of your application form in front of you to remind you of what you have already said. There is a good chance you will be asked questions relating to what you have said in your application.
- Have in front of you a list of the skills you wish to demonstrate and prompts for potential answers you have prepared in advance.
- If you have been given a time to call or be called, ensure that you are ready and available at the stated time.
- Some telephone interviewers will test your ability to perform under stress by leaving long silences at the end of your answer. Do not be tempted to try to fill the space. If you have prepared well-structured answers in advance, stop when you reach the end. If the interviewer remains silent, check to see if they would like you to elaborate, give another answer, or whether they are ready to move on to the next question.

Although you cannot pick up on the visual clues as you would in a face-to-face interview, reassure yourself that the interviewer cannot see you either. A telephone interview also allows you to have the prompts in front of you whilst a face-to-face interview demands that you rely on your memory and the ability to think on your feet. In the absence of visual feedback from your interviewer, it is a good idea to ask for verbal feedback using questions such as, "Was that the sort of information that you were looking for?"; "Would you like me to expand on that?" etc.

VIDEO INTERVIEWS

It is highly unlikely that you will be interviewed by video or webcam but in the event that it does happen ensure that you prepare and present

yourself in the same way you would for a face-to-face interview. When speaking look at the camera, not the screen, so you will appear to be looking directly at the interviewer.

INTERNAL INTERVIEWS

An internal interview will take place when you are applying for a job within an organisation you are already working for. You might be going for a permanent post if you have been on a temporary contract, or you might be applying for an alternative role or a promotion. As with any interview you should research both the organisation and the role. Do not assume that internal candidates already know enough and are more likely to be successful than an external candidate. The interviewer will be more impressed by an external candidate who has done their research than an internal candidate who hasn't. Treat the interview in the same way as you would any other and prepare and present yourself accordingly.

One aspect of internal interviews that people find particularly difficult is being interviewed by someone that they know or have worked with. This situation can present some challenges for both interviewer and interviewee, and can be more tricky in some ways than an interview with strangers. If you are going to be interviewed by someone you know, then treat that person as you would any other interviewer. Be friendly and acknowledge that you know them, but remain professional and don't make any assumptions about what they may already know about your abilities.

Tips for internal interviews

- Use your experience and knowledge of the company to demonstrate how you will be the ideal person for the job. Do not assume the interviewer knows all about your past achievements. Regardless of whether they do or not, give specific examples and also select examples from your experiences outside the organisation.
- If you know that the company values specific behaviours or approaches, ensure that you answer questions with examples that

demonstrate your effectiveness or interest in these areas.

- If you know that the company is thinking about recruiting an external candidate to offer fresh perspective and new ideas, show creativity in your answers. Demonstrate innovation and inventiveness and convince the interviewer that you can produce fresh ideas yourself.
- Ask your current manager for a letter of recommendation. If you have worked well for them, they should be happy to support your progress.

INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

An informal interview may take a number of different formats. You may be invited to interview over lunch, dinner, or for 'a friendly chat' to find out more about the organisation. This kind of interview is common if you've sent in a speculative application, where you weren't necessarily applying for a job that had been advertised.

A lunchtime or dinnertime interview will usually be more casual than one that takes place in an office but you do need to remember you are still at an interview and your suitability for the job is still being assessed. Try to choose something you'll find straightforward to eat rather than fiddling with fish bones, for example. Order something that costs a similar amount to the meals ordered by those you are eating with. Picking a particularly expensive dish could look greedy, unprofessional, and as though you are taking advantage of the fact that your meal is being paid for. If you're unsure whether to drink alcohol or not, take your lead from the interviewer but don't overindulge.

If you are called in for 'an informal chat', don't be lulled into a false sense of security. Even if the interviewer genuinely believes the interview is informal they are still assessing your suitability for any job they may have and are looking for the best person for their organisation. Be relaxed and friendly but ensure you have researched the likely role, prepared, and presented yourself in the same way that you would for any interview. You may find that it is you who is setting the agenda in

this informal setting so make sure you're prepared with questions that you do actually want to find out the answers to so that you can lead the conversation if necessary.

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Congratulations! You have impressed the interviewer enough at your first interview that you have been called back and are now being seriously considered for the job. The first interview will have assessed your suitability for the role; the second will probe further to assess which of the short-listed interviewees will best fit in to the organisation.

The second interview will allow the organisation to find out more about you and question you in more depth about areas mentioned in the first interview. You may be interviewed by the same people you met at the first interview or by a completely different set of people, often those who would be working with you more directly on a day-to-day basis such as line managers or more senior figures in the organisation who become involved in the later recruitment stages to make a final decision.

You have done well to reach this stage, and have probably laid good foundations for further research. Reread all the information you've gathered so far. Think about the questions you were asked in your first interview and how you could expand your answers if asked. Were there any areas that you felt let you down, in which you gave weak answers, and how you can strengthen these answers second time around? Do you feel that lack of experience in certain areas may be questioned in the second interview? If so how can you answer these questions in a positive, confident manner?

Practise selling your strong points, even if you have met some of the interviewers first time round. If you felt they were impressed when you first met them, reiterate your strengths at the second interview, to remind them of what originally impressed them. This is your opportunity to close the deal.

In the first interview it's all about finding out what makes them tick, and if they have the passion, energy, drive, initiative and confidence to be an employee. As we're quite a small team (there are about 25 of us in total), it's vital that whoever joins can fit in.

The second interview is a bit more in-depth and really looks at "Can they do the job?" As part of this we may also ask them to do a short presentation or a writing task - this shows if they really want the job and allows us to assess their core skills.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

INTERVIEWS FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDY

An interview for postgraduate study may appear to be less formal than a business interview but as with any interview you should research the organisation and the role/research you will be carrying out. The interview will be based around your degree subject and area of academic interest along with your knowledge and understanding of the department and institution to which you are applying. Ensure that you know and have investigated any particular areas of expertise the department is known for or any current topics they are researching and be prepared to answer questions on how your experience will make you an ideal fit for their department. If you have already done work in these areas take evidence with you, and if not be prepared to demonstrate how you can transfer your skills and knowledge successfully to a new setting.

Some postgraduate study roles will consist of pure research but some may involve teaching undergraduate students. If you are expected to teach as part of your role, it is likely that you will be asked to describe any teaching experience you have had, how you would plan your sessions and how you would deal with different groups of students. You may also be asked:

- how you plan to fund your studies
- how you feel you might be able to attract research funding to the department

- how extensive you anticipate your production of research publications will be.

Ensure you know the subject matter you wish to study inside out, along with your methodology for successfully carrying out the research. Be prepared to discuss the reasons behind your interest and experiences you have had in your studies to date. Anticipate questions about any difficulties you may encounter and how you are equipped to deal with them. Present yourself as smartly as you would for any interview and remember that you are there to convince the interviewer that you are the best candidate for the post.

INTERVIEWS WITH RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

Many employers now use recruitment agencies as their agents for a variety of reasons. Using an agency to carry out the initial stages of their recruitment processes can save the employer both staff and time resources particularly when they are popular organisations, likely to be inundated by applicants for advertised vacancies. The agencies promote the employer's vacancies and find suitable candidates for a fee which is usually a percentage of the successful applicant's starting salary. Many agencies specialise in recruiting for a particular job market and identify appropriate candidates through interviews before passing on a selected short list to the employer

for a final interview. The agency makes its money from the employer fees and should never ask the candidate for money other than for services such as CV checking.

Before you arrange an interview with a recruitment agency, investigate what kinds of roles the agency recruits for by looking at the agency's website. It's only worth meeting them if they look for the sorts of jobs you're interested in. An interview at a recruitment agency should be treated in the same way as any other interview. You will be asked questions about your past job experience or experiences during your academic career, your skills, and any training that you have received. It is important to tell them both what you have enjoyed and would like to have as part of your working life and what areas you wish to avoid. Ensure that you are clear about the kind of work you would like to do and which types of vacancies you would like them to consider you for. It is important to try and establish a good rapport with the recruitment consultant as they will be the strongest influence in persuading the employer to meet and interview you. Provide them with any documentation requested promptly and professionally. Attend interviews smartly dressed and on time and follow up agency interviews with regular calls to check on vacancy status. The more reliable and efficient you appear to the consultant, the more likely they are to promote you to their clients.

PERFORMANCE - ON THE DAY

FROM THE INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

What are they looking for?

The employer will invite to interview the candidates who they feel are likely to have the right mix of knowledge, skills and experience to do the job. They are hoping now to have a successful interview day which finds them a candidate, who is not only able to do the job effectively, but will also be enthusiastic about the role and will fit well into the team and organisation.

How will they achieve this?

As you read in Section 3, the employer will have taken time to identify what it is that they require from the ideal candidate and will have planned the recruitment interview accordingly. Within the interview they are likely to want to find out more about what you can do as well as about your interest in the job and what you are like as a person. Therefore, you should expect that these three areas will all be covered in the interview.

Some interviews follow a planned structure which is similar for all candidates. This allows the employer to gather the same types of information about all interviewees and, therefore, increases the fairness of the assessment process. Not all employers work this way, however, and so you should anticipate a range of different ways of being interviewed. Sometimes the interviewer will follow a set of scripted questions regardless of what you have responded previously; others will react to the answers that you have given and ask further questions on the same theme.

Classically, some of the opening questions I was asked were, "Tell me a little about yourself". Beyond this, all my interviews have been competency-based and thus progressed directly onto the "can you give me an example of a time when..." type of questions.

Benedict Lumley

How will your performance be assessed?

Your interview responses will be considered in relation to the job description and person specification for the job role. Some organisations draw up a 'competency framework' such as the one on the next page in order to map the skills required for a role. For each skill, or competency, the interviewer might then use a rating scale to consider your interview responses. The employer will have identified what it is that they are looking for in the responses of a 'good' or 'poor' candidate and will score accordingly. Other organisations will not adopt such a structured approach; instead they might require interviewers to form an opinion of the candidate in relation to the qualities and skills of their ideal candidate.

Competency scoring criteria

The following framework gives examples of the evidence that an employer might be looking for when rating your interview responses against some of the most frequently-used competencies.

Competency	High score criteria	Low score criteria
Team work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate provides examples of participating in group work, shows that they can co-operate with others in sharing tasks and demonstrates their understanding of the value of collaborative effort. They demonstrate their ability to lead group projects and take responsibility for the work of others by effectively planning, delegating and monitoring tasks. The candidate talks about times when they have offered support to colleagues or put themselves out for the benefit of the wider team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate cannot provide examples of working in a team, or their responses suggest that they do not co-operate effectively with others. They cannot give an example of leading a team or their answers suggest that they can not effectively take responsibility for the work of others. The candidate does not mention supporting colleagues or making compromises, or their responses suggest an unwillingness to be flexible within a team.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate's examples show an ability to explain ideas to others in a way that is understood. They talk about discussing problems with colleagues and their examples show an ability to both present structured arguments and listen to the views of others. The candidate gives evidence of their ability to negotiate with others and persuade them to see their point of view. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate provides no evidence of their ability to explain ideas to others, or the examples provided suggest that they do not have the skill to make themselves understood. They do not mention discussions with colleagues, or the examples they provide suggest that they make weak arguments or fail to listen to the opinions of others. The candidate cannot demonstrate their ability to negotiate with, or persuade others in order to reach satisfactory solutions.
Business awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate's responses show a good understanding of the organisation's customer base, their needs and views. They provide examples of commercial activity in which they have played an effective role. The candidate demonstrates in their answers an awareness of current issues of influence within the industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate shows little understanding of the organisation's customer base. They cannot demonstrate any commercial experience, or do not satisfactorily demonstrate the role that they played. The candidate shows little knowledge of current issues within the industry.

Competency	High score criteria	Low score criteria
Problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate's responses show that they have been able to think on their feet to quickly and effectively resolve problems by: identifying obstacles, understanding implications and devising a course of action. They demonstrate their ability to gather and analyse information about a problem from different sources. The candidate provides examples of procedures/mechanisms which they have improved to increase efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate cannot provide an example of a time when they have resolved a problem quickly, or provides an example which shows an ineffective approach to problem solving. They do not show that they are able to gather and analyse data about a problem effectively. The candidate gives no evidence of having applied problem solving to improve procedures/mechanisms.
Organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate talks about a project that they have been responsible for and demonstrates their ability to set goals, allocate resources, monitor project progress and achieve results by a fixed deadline. Their responses demonstrate that they are able to attend to the detail of a task whilst not losing sight of the task's key objectives. The candidate shows an awareness of the outside influences upon work that they have undertaken, and shows that they have been able to anticipate and manage factors that may otherwise hinder progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The candidate is not able to provide an example of a project they have undertaken, or their example suggests little ability to plan the project effectively. Their responses suggest that they can get caught up in detail, or neglect important details, to the detriment of the task's key objectives. The candidate does not show the ability to identify and manage the risk from outside influences on the progress of a project.

The importance of 'organisational fit'

In addition to assessing your skills in relation to the job role and your understanding and interest in the job, the employer will also use the interview to evaluate how well you would 'fit' into their staff team and organisation. In order to do this, the interviewer may consider the following:

- How well do you communicate within the interview?**

Your ability to communicate and get on with other people will be important to the employer, especially for roles where you will have to work closely with colleagues or clients. Are you pleasant and polite to others? Do you

communicate your point articulately? Do you show enthusiasm and confidence?

- Does your personality fit?**

Different personalities suit different job roles. Are you chatty and persuasive, or quiet and diligent? It is likely that the employer will have certain personality types in mind to fit the role.

- Are your values compatible with those of the organisation or its employees?**

Different organisations have different values which impact on their culture and, therefore, the type of employees that they attract and recruit. The interviewer may have questions in

mind that relate to these values; for example, are you driven by success? Are you excited by innovative ideas? Do you understand the organisation's client base?

FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE

The day has arrived! By now, you should be confident that you have prepared well; that you feel you have done your research into the organisation and what the role entails; how your skills and experience are relevant; and have thought about why you want the job. You may, however, still be feeling understandably nervous about the day ahead, particularly if you really want the job.

Making the right first impression

Remember that you have already impressed the employer enough to secure the interview. They are very keen to secure the right person for their job. Your first few moments in the interview room are crucial in creating a good impression of yourself and help the interviewers feel disposed to liking you. Therefore, you should aim to:

- **Look professional and suitable for the organisation.** To create a professional image you should be smart, clean and tidy. For many jobs, you may wish to dress in smart business attire (a suit, blouse or shirt and tie, and sensible shoes). You should also remember to dress comfortably as you want as few distractions as possible during your interview. If at all unsure what to wear, try to find out from the HR department, or take a look at staff if you can walk past the organisation when people are arriving or leaving.

Interviewees turn up in a range of dress. This is a way of people expressing their personality and that is fine. We are not rating people on their wardrobe. The most important thing is that people are comfortable.

Pfizer Ltd

- **Arrive on time.** Arriving in good time will help persuade the employer that you are a reliable individual. Plan your travel arrangements and know exactly where it is that you need to go

before the day. If you are unfamiliar with the area, take a map with you.

- **Be prepared for the unexpected.** Take the contact name and number for the interviewer with you, and check that your phone is charged. If the worst should happen and your car breaks down or your train is delayed, giving the employer a call to let them know will look courteous and show initiative. Switch off your phone before the interview.
- **Have everything with you.** Show that you are an organised person by having with you everything that the employer has asked you to bring. For example, you may need to bring details of your referees or copies of any qualification certificates. You may like to bring a notepad and a pen, and a copy of your application.
- **Give a good handshake.** Try to make your handshake with the interviewer(s) a confident one. Shake hands firmly whilst looking the interviewer in the eye and smiling. A good handshake will get the interview off to the right start.

Answering the questions

When answering the interview questions try to follow these guidelines:

- **Be relevant.** When choosing examples for your responses keep the job description and person specification in mind and choose those that most closely demonstrate your ability to do the job.
- **Show your understanding and knowledge of the job.** Demonstrate that you have researched the organisation and job role thoroughly. Show that you understand what you are likely to be doing in the role, and the skills required. Use language that is consistent with that used within the organisation or sector and refer to current news or issues to highlight your commitment to this field of work.
- **Know yourself.** Show an awareness of what you have to offer the organisation - and sell this to them. Talk about your strengths and weaknesses (but talk about these as opportunities for personal development). Have an understanding of why you want to do this particular job for this particular organisation so that you can speak with genuine enthusiasm.

- **Listen and respond appropriately.** Show the interviewer that you are listening to what they are saying and answer the question that they ask, not the one you thought they'd asked. Don't start to formulate your answer whilst being asked the question as you may miss something; instead take a short pause if you need one before responding (you could take a sip of water at this point to give you something to do whilst thinking). If you are unsure of how to answer a question it is better to take a few seconds to think before you start speaking, rather than just blurt out the first thing that comes to mind and then regret it.

I had no formula, but I tried to make the introduction/context of each answer quite concise to leave more time for talking about my particular contribution/skill/action relevant to the question. I tried to conclude answers by summarising in a sentence or two the main gist of my response.

Benedict Lumley

Ask the interviewer for clarification, and if that fails just be honest and say you don't know. We don't expect everyone to know everything, and your interviewer will usually try to help guide you a little bit if possible.

Logica CMG

- **Give yourself time.** If you need a few moments to think about your answer then tell the interviewer that this is what you are doing. Asking them to repeat the question can give you some extra time to think, and phrases such as "That's an interesting question, I would just like to think about that for a minute" can be useful in buying you some time to think. You should then focus on the question that you have been asked and think about which example from your experience might be the most pertinent. Briefly identify the key points that you want to cover so that you have a loose structure in your mind before you begin speaking.

I just asked for a moment's thinking time. If even after pausing for extra thought I could not quite come up with what I thought was an ideal answer, I'd say something like "feel free to stop me if you feel this is the wrong approach to the question, but...". I think interviewers realised when a question was a real challenge and did not really count it against you if you struggled at times.

Benedict Lumley

- **Help your interviewer.** Remember that your interviewer is trying to absorb a lot of information from you during the interview. Help them out by clearly structuring your answers with verbal signposts such as "I think that there are three main issues ..." and summaries, such as "So, to summarise the three main points that I would prioritise ...".
- **Be informative but concise.** Don't talk too little or too much. Avoid giving one-word answers to questions: expanding your answers slightly holds the interviewer's interest; may encourage them to ask you more; and may give you the opportunity to steer the interviewer towards something you would like them to ask you about. Try not to go off on a tangent or fill your answers with unnecessary details; look for cues from the interviewer that you have said enough. If you do find yourself drifting away from the subject area then simply pause and acknowledge that you may be giving unnecessary information and then recap your main points in order to get back on track.
- **Follow cues or ask for feedback.** If you are unsure about whether you have answered a question adequately then look for visible cues from the interviewer. Are they still looking engaged? Do they look like they want you to continue? You could also ask explicitly for feedback from the interviewer on whether you have met their expectations by saying for example, "Would you like me to expand further on that?"

I felt I had lost contact with the interviewer. My gut feeling was that this was just a strategy as it otherwise would have been so rude. I started using body language more and tried to be more engaging.

Julia Stapelfeld

- **Be honest but positive.** Show the employer that you are the type of person who is solution-not problem-focussed, and that you can learn from your mistakes and see your weaknesses as opportunities for improvement. If you need to tell them about something that did not go so well, such as a project that did not meet its objectives or a bad exam grade, present it as something that you have learnt from and explain how you would do it differently next time.
- **Answer all parts of the question.** You may be asked a question which has more than one element. For example, "Tell us about a time when you had to persuade somebody of something. What techniques did you use and how did you know whether you were successful or not?" When answering a multi-part question such as this one, make sure that you do include a response to each part of the question in your response.

Competency-based questions

The employer may ask you about a time when you've demonstrated a particular skill, or competency. For example, to assess your communication skills they may ask you, "Describe a time when you had to communicate a message to a group of people - how did you ensure that the message had been understood?" Section 3 has information on preparing your responses to these types of questions. However, the following framework for structuring your answers is a useful summary. When answering competency-based questions, your answer should contain the following parts:

- **Situation** - the situation surrounding the example.
- **Task** - the problem you were given to solve or job that needed to be done.
- **Action** - what you did or the decisions that you made.
- **Results** - the outcome and what you learnt from this.

Remember when answering questions like this to describe a specific and real example and the role that you played. If you are unable to think of an example, say so; don't make something up or you might be caught out. If you are stuck you could offer to give a hypothetical example, or an example of something similar that you have done.

When faced with tricky questions I give myself a bit of extra time by drinking some water or by saying, "Hmm... That's a very good question." You shouldn't feel bad about needing to stop for a while to think about a question. Also, I think it's good to try not to appear flustered, even if you feel that way.

Ben Thompson

What if things go wrong?

Don't worry if you feel that your answer to a question has not been as good as it could have been. Try to move on and concentrate on the rest of the interview. Remember that you are being assessed on your overall performance, so don't assume that you will not be successful because you make one mistake.

I'm impressed when candidates show openness and honesty and the confidence to follow up on a question they may not have the answer to, therefore showing their willingness to learn.

Pfizer Ltd

Do you have any questions?

At the end of the interview you will usually be given the chance to ask the interviewer questions. At this point, remember that an interview is an opportunity for you to find out about the employer and job role, not just for the interviewer to find out about you. It is useful to make a list in advance of the things that you would like to find out during the interview, which may include:

- opportunities for training and development within the organisation
- work that you would be involved in within the role and the level of responsibility you would have
- the structure of the organisation
- projects that the organisation is currently working on
- the organisation's future plans.

You can refer to your list at this point in the interview to check that all your queries have been covered. This will also show the employer that you have thought carefully about the job and organisation. If the interview has been a really thorough one and everything has been covered it is better to say so than ask a poorly thought-out question. In particular, be careful not to fall into the trap of asking the interviewer about something that has already been covered in the interview or that you could have found out for yourself by doing relevant research.

Presenting yourself with confidence

It can sometimes be difficult to appear confident when you are in a situation where your performance is being assessed, especially when the outcome of that assessment has such important implications for you. However, appearing in control is really important in an interview situation where you need to be able to sell what you have to offer and persuade the employer to give you a job. So how can this be achieved?

I'm impressed if a candidate is natural, with no airs and graces, can think on the spot and go beyond the stock answers everyone gives out in an interview.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

- **Think positively.** Firstly, remember that you are not only trying to impress the employer, they are also trying to impress you. Knowing that this is not a one-way assessment, like in an exam room, may help you feel less pressurised. Also, take confidence from knowing yourself and your strengths and understanding why you are right for the job. Remind yourself that you have been successful so far, you have already shown that you meet the employer's requirements closely enough for them to have invited you to interview.

A good tip from a friend was to remember all that I had already achieved, which boosts confidence.

Julia Stapelfeld

Try to surround yourself with positive people - they are helping to build up your confidence you will come across better.

Logica CMG

- **Coping with your nerves.** It is only natural to be nervous about an interview but your nerves can sometimes give you away and make you appear less confident: your hands may be shaky, your palms sweaty or you may speak too quickly. Be aware of these nervous behaviours and try to use some of the following tips to help control them:
 - Breathing deeply and slowly is a good way to feel more relaxed - so try taking three or four long, deep breaths before entering the interview room.
 - If you are worried about your palms being sweaty when shaking hands try imagining that you are holding a ball of fire in them - you may be surprised to find them feeling dryer!
 - Eating a light meal before your interview (even if you do not normally eat breakfast) will help to settle your stomach and prevent you feeling faint.
 - If your mouth feels dry ask for a glass of water when offered a drink, or have some mints with you which may help (but don't eat them in the interview room).
 - If your hands are shaky just place them in your lap when you take your seat in the interview, rather than accepting a hot cup of coffee.
 - Try to consciously slow down your speech and take your time answering. You will sound more confident and relaxed.

Trying to prepare up until the last minute can work you up into a bit of a state, so I always tried to take a couple of minutes just to sit and calm down and try to think about anything other than the impending interview.

Benedict Lumley

I stop preparing the afternoon before and go for a long walk to help me relax and get my thoughts in order.

Julia Stapelfeld

Using body language and non-verbal communication

The way in which we communicate with others involves a lot more than just what we say. To communicate effectively with the interviewer and project a confident image you need to be aware of your body language.

Do

- Find a comfortable position at the start of the interview, to avoid fidgeting during it.
- Make eye contact with the interviewer, both when they are speaking and when you are speaking, and smile when natural to do so.
- Show that you are listening to the interviewer by keeping eye contact, looking interested and nodding to show that you have understood points.
- Be aware of the interviewer's body language. Are they nodding and smiling to encourage you to continue, or looking down in preparation for the next question?

Body language is not a primary marker but can give us clues as to how nervous a candidate is and therefore whether we need to work to relax the candidate to get the most out of them.

Pfizer Ltd

Body language is a great indicator for looking beyond the hype. Particularly important are eye contact and keeping the hands above the table.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

Don't

- Fold your arms across your chest or cross your legs as these are 'closed' postures and can look defensive. Instead keep your posture open, for example with your hands in your lap and your ankles crossed.
- Speak with a monotone voice. It is good to appear friendly and enthusiastic and you are more likely to give this impression if you have energy in your voice and smile.

OTHER TYPES OF SELECTION METHODS

INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT

Psychometric tests

Psychometric tests are structured exercises used for measuring a person's occupational potential and personality. It is becoming increasingly common for graduate employers to use psychometric tests as part of their selection process. Psychometric tests provide not only a cost-effective option for the employer, as they can assess many candidates at once, but also provide an objective measure by which to compare candidates against a particular set of skills or attributes. Each candidate receives a score which is calculated from the answers that they provide to test questions, rather than relying on the observations of an assessor. Recruitment tests are, therefore, often considered a 'fairer' assessment method. In addition, employers use psychometric tests as they have been shown to significantly improve the ability of the selection process to predict how well a candidate will perform in the job.

Tests can be administered by pencil and paper or on a computer. You may be asked to take them whilst attending an assessment centre, in a designated test centre or online. Some employers set a particular score which you need to achieve in order to proceed to the next stage of the selection process; others use the results from the tests later, towards the final stages of the process.

There are two main types of psychometric tests: aptitude tests and personality questionnaires.

Aptitude tests

These test your logical reasoning or thinking style. They are also known as 'cognitive', 'ability' or 'intelligence' tests. Generally, they take the form of multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and are administered under exam conditions with strict time limits. The questions in these tests have definite right or wrong answers. The aim of aptitude tests is to assess your potential rather than your knowledge.

Numerical tests are designed to measure your mental agility and accuracy: to see how quickly your mind is able to understand numbers, not how accurately you can do algebra or quadratic equations.

Verbal reasoning tests aim to assess how easily and quickly you understand written text and how accurately you can assimilate information.

Non-verbal reasoning involves the ability to understand and analyse visual information and solve problems using visual reasoning. For example: identifying relationships, similarities and differences between shapes and patterns, recognising visual sequences and relationships between objects, and remembering these.

There are also more specialised diagrammatic reasoning tests (also known as inductive tests)

which can be used if you are applying for particular careers in IT, science or engineering. These tests are closely related to abstract reasoning in that they present complex abstract problems in an analytical way. Questions are presented in the form of flowcharts, diagrams and symbols, testing the candidate on the speed and accuracy with which he or she can interpret them.

It is a good idea to do some practice tests so that you know what to expect. Practice will help you to familiarise yourself with the structures and timings of tests which could lead to a significant improvement in your performance. In order to do well, you need to be both quick and accurate. However, be aware that the faster you go, the more mistakes you are likely to make; the slower you go, the fewer questions you can answer within the time limit. The skill is to find the balance. Many organisations and specialist testing companies include sample questions on their website for you to practise.

Tips for aptitude tests

- Check with your careers service to see if they have practice test books.
- Find out whether your careers service runs practice tests with feedback.
- Alternatively, there are plenty of practice psychometric test books around; you could buy one or two for yourself or share the cost among friends.
- There are a number of websites which contain (free) examples of tests (see Section 9 Resources for links).
- Avoid alcohol the night before a test and get a good night's sleep.
- If you get stuck on a question, don't spend too long on it and move on to the next one.
- If you're not sure of an answer, put down your best guess but avoid wild guessing - in some tests, marks are deducted for wrong answers.
- Be aware that often the questions become more difficult as the test proceeds.

Online psychometric tests

Many employers are moving towards online tests as it is more cost-effective for them. You will be asked to complete and submit the test within a set time period. As with the written psychometric tests, online versions comprise statements with

multiple-choice answers: you have to tick (or click on) the relevant box.

Tips for online tests

- Make use of the practice questions and make sure you understand the instructions.
- Make sure you are in a quiet room and that you won't be disturbed. If necessary, tell others around you that you are taking an important test and that you would appreciate their support.
- Make sure you are sitting in a comfortable chair and that your computer screen is at the right height.
- Put a clock or watch in front of you so that you can continually check the time, or use the clock on your computer screen (but check it's correctly set first).

Personality questionnaires

Personality questionnaires are used to indicate how you are likely to function in particular circumstances - in this case, in a particular job. They measure a variety of personal qualities such as how determined you are or your social skills. They can be used to explore the way you tend to react to, or deal with, different situations such as how you relate to other people; your preferred work style; your ability to deal with your own and others' emotions; your motivations and determination; your general outlook.

Tips for personality questionnaires

- Be honest. You won't know exactly what personal qualities the employer is seeking. Often they will be looking for a variety of different personalities rather than one particular profile. These questionnaires are usually designed to assess the level of consistency across a range of answers given so it is in your best interests to answer as honestly as you can.
- Personality questionnaires are often not timed but it's usually better to write down your first, instinctive answer. Don't spend time pondering over the meaning of the questions.
- Don't try to second-guess what you think the answers 'ought' to be.

Written exercises

Most graduate employers need people who can

communicate clearly in writing but the traditional face-to-face interview cannot test this skill. In order to assess your ability to write concisely, critically and persuasively, you may be asked to carry out written exercises as part of the selection process.

Written exercises not only assess your thinking and drafting abilities but also your ability to work quickly and to act decisively under pressure. You will be given information to analyse followed by written tasks to undertake within a set and fairly short time frame, usually without prior warning of the subject matter.

These exercises can test your ability to:

- process large amounts of information quickly
- analyse problems
- decide what information is most important
- reach conclusions and argue for them
- express yourself clearly, concisely and tactfully
- ignore irrelevant information.

Tips for written exercises

- Aim to be completely focussed - don't allow yourself to be distracted.
- Follow the instructions - if possible, highlight or underline key words and phrases.
- Don't give way to the impulse to race ahead, without first being absolutely clear what it is you are being asked to do.
- Spend a couple of minutes at the beginning skimming over the whole task and make a mini-plan.
- Remember that the selectors are not looking for perfection, but the right level of potential.

In-tray/e-tray exercises

These exercises aim to simulate the types of dilemmas and decisions which would crop up in a typical day's work for that organisation. Employers often use these as part of their selection processes to assess how you might cope in such a situation. You would be presented with the supposed contents of your in-tray which will consist of phone messages, emails, internal memos, and letters. E-tray exercises are simply an electronic version of the paper-based in-tray and will require the same actions and responses from you.

The scenario is often presented as a Monday morning work schedule, perhaps after being away on holiday, so that there is quite a build-up of correspondence to deal with, some of which will have become urgent by now.

You will be given a time limit in which you would have to perform a number of activities. These may include returning a phone call, writing a letter or sending an email, calling a meeting, reading and responding to a report or drafting a report. You will be expected to prioritise all the tasks indicating the most important and/or urgent as well as giving an indication of what type of action is required, whether you need to delegate and, if so, to whom. In some instances, you will actually have to perform the task (for example, write a letter); in others, you would give an indication of how to tackle the task, suggesting an outline solution.

Tips for in-tray/e-tray exercises

Read through all the tasks and prioritise as follows:

- Which request should you deal with first?
- Which should you delegate and to whom?
- Which should you postpone for now?
- What, if anything, is urgent? What action will you take to deal with it?
- How will you eventually tackle the task(s) that you decided to postpone?

Look out for inbuilt contradictions in the materials. Scan-read all of the tasks so that you gain an overview of what you have to do within the time available. Saying "yes" to one request might conflict with another item elsewhere in the in-tray.

The selectors will be interested in how you allocate priorities to the different problems. Make sure you indicate the reasons for your decisions. Remember also that the items may reveal the existence of other staff to whom you could delegate. Do not let seemingly urgent but trivial matters outweigh issues which do not necessarily have to be sorted out straightaway but which nevertheless may be more important.

Don't spend too much time analysing the tasks in excessive detail. The selectors want to know

whether you can grasp the essentials of an issue rather than all of its subtleties. Above all, make sure you have time to finish commenting on all the items.

Finally, bear in mind that this type of selection method may also be used to test your IT skills.

Case studies

These are an in-depth analysis of a complex topic. You will normally be given a lot of information about an issue which may be presented in a variety of ways such as official reports, tables of figures, newspaper cuttings, memoranda, emails or letters.

You have to decide what the main facts are, what the problem is, and possible alternative solutions. You are usually then asked to write a report (or give a presentation) which summarises the facts, indicates the various alternatives and outlines your own preferred solution, with reasons.

Possible examples

- The pros and cons of whether an office or factory should relocate to one of two new sites, expand while remaining in its existing premises, or stay put without expanding.
- Critically review the relationship between an organisation and a Trade Union.
- Advise on an organisation's public relations strategy. (You will be given a number of options.)
- Write a press release about the organisation's point of view on a new piece of legislation. (You may be given information about the organisation's policies along with previous correspondence discussing the changes.)

Tips for dealing with case studies

- Watch out for contradictions and irrelevancies in the information.
- Decide as quickly as possible which information is useful and relevant to the task in hand, and which can be discarded.
- You will probably have to make a recommendation so be decisive and argue the case for your preferred course of action.
- Don't forget to acknowledge what the other options are.
- If you can't decide between two or more solutions you may be penalised.

There is unlikely to be only one right answer. Sometimes, all of the possible alternatives could work although some may be more sensible than others. What is important is how you analyse the problem and how effectively you argue your case. Even if you choose a 'wrong' solution, the assessors will give you marks if you argue your case well.

The most tricky questions I have been asked were in the business case studies. But these are questions you can't prepare for. They want you to think on your feet. They are designed to be difficult and test you. And most of the time, it is about topics you won't know about so that everyone gets the same chance.

Julia Stapelfeld

I was surprised simply by the detail in which each case study I discussed was examined, with four or five follow-up questions asking for more detail or analysis on a topic I already thought I had covered.

Benedict Lumley

Drafting exercises

You are given the facts about a sensitive issue and have to express them in writing in a clear but tactful way. You may be supplied with letters, memos, emails, reports - or a combination of these. The emphasis is less on analysing a problem and more on whether you can select the right facts and arguments, and present them effectively.

As with the case study, there is usually no 'right' answer. While the decisions you make are important, most of your score will be derived from the way in which you present your case. As long as you argue your point of view well and show awareness of the issues involved, you can get away with choosing a course of action which the selectors would not have chosen.

Possible examples

- Write a letter to an important customer saying why you are unable to waive a bill which they are querying.
- Respond to a journalist requesting your

organisation's comments on accusations made by a competitor.

- Write an email to an important senior colleague explaining a course of action you took which s/he is very unhappy about.
- Prepare a letter to a large City firm stating why you no longer wish to have their sponsorship.

Tips on drafting

- Be aware of your readership. In this case there are effectively two groups - the person you are supposedly addressing in the written exercise and the actual selectors who will assess your efforts.
- If you are making a sensitive point regarding a difficult issue, acknowledge any problems that this may cause the supposed reader(s) of the letter.
- Without being unrealistic, try to emphasise the benefits of your chosen course of action to your supposed reader(s).
- Stick to your brief. For example, if you have to say "no" to a customer, make sure you do just that. As well as being sympathetic, you may have to be assertive.
- Make sure you use the standard layout for whichever type of document you are producing (business letter, report, statement, etc)
- Once finished, read your piece of writing to check that it makes sense, flows logically, and that it fulfils the brief.
- Finally, proof-read your work to check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Oral presentations

You may be asked to prepare, and deliver, a presentation as part of the interview process. The employer will want to assess your oral communication skills. Can you present your case in a way that your audience will understand and find interesting?

The employer may ask you to prepare your presentation before the day of your interview, or you may be given a limited time for preparation once you have arrived at the interviewer's premises. Sometimes you can choose the subject of your talk, possibly from a list of suggested titles. Otherwise, you will be given a set topic.

You will normally be told how long your presentation should be, for example 3 minutes, 3-5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes. Audio-visual

equipment such as a whiteboard, overhead projector, laptop or flipchart may or may not be available for you to use. Your audience will probably consist of your interviewers; expect them to make notes as they assess your performance. Sometimes, the other candidates may also form part of your audience.

Even if you have not been given information about a presentation in advance it is still worth considering what subject you would present on if asked and how you would structure the delivery. This will take much of the pressure off if you are asked to give a presentation on the day. If you have been put on the spot on the day itself try not to panic. The other candidates are in the same position as you. Start off with a simple premise and if you then feel confident elaborating within the time you have do so, but remember assessors are aware of the situation and are looking to see how you perform under pressure.

The interview at the science museum was an 'individual interview'. I was expected to give a short presentation. I was given a topic, some fact sheets and some props and then given fifteen minutes to prepare. I was then taken to a different room, where I had to give my presentation to a panel of three people. Each of them then asked me a set of questions.

Ben Thompson

All interviewees will have an HR interview, management overview, one panel technical interview and a tour. In addition at post-grad level you would be expected to do a presentation and have an additional technical interview. At a more senior level further discussions with senior managers would be expected.

Pfizer Ltd

At second interview we may also ask them to do a sort presentation or a writing task - this shows if they really want the job and allows us to assess their core skills.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

Examples of presentation topics

A Day in the Life of ... (3-5 minutes; your perception of what the role entails).

Tell us about yourself and what you can offer this organisation (5 minutes; a very open subject).

Tell us how your object is representative of you (5 minutes; you have been asked to bring along an object).

A Marketing Strategy for [name of organisation] (10 minutes; you will have prepared this in advance).

Why I enjoy Latin-American dancing (5 minutes; chosen by the employer from information you gave on your application form).

Choose a science topic, currently in the news, of interest to pupils aged 11 years (15 minutes; interview for teacher training course).

Devise a new product or service for the organisation and 'sell' it to the Board of Directors (10-15 minutes; prepared from materials sent in advance of the interview).

Tips to improve your performance

Planning what to say:

- Think about the subject: if you have a choice, choose a subject that you feel confident about.
- If you have time practise delivering your talk in front of a trusted friend or the mirror. The more you practise, the more your performance will improve.
- Think about your audience and ensure your delivery and content is at an appropriate level.
- Use signposting. Plan your presentation in three simple sections: describe what you're going to present; present; summarise presentation.
- Keep it simple; focus on a few key messages and stick to them. Don't give too much detail and back up ideas with anecdotes, examples, statistics and facts.

- Think about the purpose of your presentation - it may be to inform, to persuade, or to demonstrate your level of knowledge.
- Make some note cards consisting of key words - make sure you number the cards and use large writing with highlighted words so that you can follow them when under pressure.

During the presentation:

- Time yourself. Stick to the allocated time; it is better to end a little early than to overrun.
- Ensure that the audience at the back of the room can see and hear you.
- Remember that the audience wants you to succeed. They also want you to recover from any disaster.
- Use your notes as a prompt but ensure you are not looking at the notes throughout rather than your audience. Ensure you look up frequently to maintain eye contact with your audience.
- Be aware of how you sound. Speak in a steady, clear manner. When nervous it is easy to speed up speech or slow it down too much. Also, try not to speak in monotone.
- Watch your body language. Smile, show enthusiasm and the audience will respond more enthusiastically. Make eye contact with individuals in the audience and they will feel more involved. Maintain a relaxed but confident posture. Try not to fidget or move around too much during your talk and if using a projector make sure you are not standing or walking in front of the screen.
- When answering questions, thank the questioner, rephrase the question for the benefit of the audience and to ensure full understanding of the question, answer the question, check whether the questioner is happy with the answer, and then thank them again.

If you plan to use notes during the presentation then try not to read your notes aloud as this will sound stilted and boring. Brief notes consisting of key words on small cards can be more helpful as prompts, rather than simply printing out everything that you intend to say. It is also a good idea to make your notes large and clear to read so that you can follow them easily when speaking. Ensure that you look up frequently to maintain eye contact with your audience and to engage

them in what you are saying.

Be prepared to answer questions from the audience on the content of your presentation. Although you will not know exactly what you might be asked, you should think about relevant issues and any contentious points within your presentation that may be questioned or challenged.

Using visual aids

You may be invited to use visual aids to help the audience to understand the points that you are making in your presentation. Visual aids can make your presentation much more effective: people retain just 10% of what they hear, but 50% of what they hear and see. Visual aids may take the form of a PowerPoint presentation, overhead projector slides or simple hand-held cards or props. When planning how best to use any visual aids always think about what might be most appropriate for your audience and the content of your presentation. Presenting a report might benefit from diagrams and key points; pitching a new marketing idea might be better suited to a different style of presentation.

If you have created an electronic presentation then remember to check what sort of equipment will be available on the day. It might be a good idea to email your presentation to the organisation beforehand so that they can load it onto their computer, but remember to take a copy with you on the day in a format that will be accessible. Taking along hard-copies of your presentation is also a good idea.

Tips for using visual aids

- Keep it short and simple.
- Use bullet points not sentences - too many words are distracting.
- Use large print and bold images.
- If possible, use a variety of colours.
- It can be difficult to write neatly on visual aids, so check that what you have written is clear and spelt correctly.
- Do not block the audience's view by standing between them and your visual aid.
- Do not talk to the screen or flipchart - talk to the group.
- If you're unsure about using equipment make

sure you practise with it before your interview.

Other tasks

If you are being interviewed for a technical post, you may be asked to demonstrate your proficiency with the use of technical equipment (such as camera work, audio-visual console, tracking equipment, setting up laboratory equipment). Similarly, you may be required to carry out a process or procedure to check your knowledge of setting up, the correct order of each stage, and the completion of the process.

GROUP ASSESSMENT

In any organisation, you will be required to work as part of a group at some point - in meetings, on projects, giving presentations, preparing bids, etc. Group exercises, where several candidates are given a joint task, are used by many employers; these help them to evaluate how you perform in a group setting with your peers. Are you a regular team player, a natural leader, or a maverick? Do you tend to be the ice-breaker, the protagonist or the ideas generator in the group? In particular, they are interested in the skills and qualities that make you effective; for this reason, this is likely to be the most closely observed part of an assessment centre.

You will be assessed on your performance so make sure you have understood the instructions and exactly what you are required to do. If the assessment involves simulated interviews, team exercises or role-play, be aware of your non-verbal signals such as eye contact, facial expression, and gestures.

Don't make assumptions about the way you should respond. If you try to guess what the assessors are looking for, you may be wrong. Be yourself and respond honestly. Remember that it's not in your interest to get a job for which you are not well suited.

If there is more than one exercise, you will have plenty of opportunities to show what you can do. If you feel you have done poorly in one exercise, don't give up; your performance in all of them will be taken into account.

The way you come across especially in the group exercise and the interview will all contribute to the picture that we build up of you.

Logica CMG

Tips for group assessments

- Be yourself: try not to allow the experience of being assessed affect how you would behave naturally.
- Don't make assumptions about the way you 'should' respond. If you try to guess what the assessors are looking for, you may be wrong.

If it is a group interview, it can be helpful to chat to the other candidates. This means you're not just spending the whole time worrying about how you're going to do.

Benedict Lumley

Types of group assessment

Group assessments often involve a discussion topic, a case study or a physical task.

Discussion groups

This is the most common type of group exercise. A group of candidates are given one or more topics on current affairs or issues relevant to the organisation. The group is given a set amount of time for discussion, and may be asked to reach a unanimous decision by the end of this time. The main objective of the exercise is to observe how you relate to others in the group, not what decision is reached by the group.

During the discussion, your performance will be carefully observed by assessors. Each candidate will be scored using a competency framework. Assessors want to see how you work in a team and interact with others. The key thing to remember is that the objective of good team working is not about always getting your ideas taken on board but listening to and co-operating with the rest of the team and using the ideas of others to reach a goal. Assessors also look for candidates who demonstrate good analytical and logical reasoning skills. Try to show this by:

- Communicating clarity of thought and expression.
- Being able to understand and absorb

information easily.

- Thinking through the issues in a logical manner.
- Being able to identify key points and reach a conclusion.
- Thinking laterally and producing new ideas.

Examples of topics used by employers

- There should be a £2m limit on the lottery jackpot.
- This country has too few roads, not too many. What is needed is a proper motorway network.
- Everyone should be made to have a year out between school and university.
- The school starting age should be raised to six.

How to prepare

To contribute to group discussions with confidence you need to be well-informed. Read broadsheet newspapers (the weekend papers also provide useful summaries of events) and trade journals and specialist periodicals which are relevant to the organisation. You could also visit relevant websites to make sure you are up to date with any developments affecting the organisation or its sector.

In addition, it is helpful to practise your discussion skills by actively contributing to seminars, tutorials and student union or society/club meetings. You could also practise your discussion skills with friends and ask for their feedback on your skills in listening, summarising, and explaining.

Tips for group discussions

- Make regular contributions without appearing competitive or domineering.
- When stating your views, back them up with reasons.
- Respond constructively to the ideas of others without taking offence if they do not reflect yours.
- Be supportive, sensitive and friendly, encouraging contributions from quieter members.
- Try to focus on the key issues and not get bogged down with the minutiae.
- Use diplomacy and tact to avoid digression.
- Only lead when it comes naturally and is appropriate or if instructed to do so.

- Show that you are engaged with the topic by listening attentively, summarising, moving the discussion forward and timekeeping.

Group case studies

You may be asked to analyse a case study as a group, which would be of a similar type to those addressed above. The group will be required to study the evidence and come up with solutions to the problem within a set timescale. As with group discussions, the assessors will be more interested in the behaviours within the group than the precise solution to the case problem.

Tips for group case studies

- Ask others their opinion: particularly impressive if you encourage someone who appears to be quieter to share their view.
- Suggest allocation of a set amount of time to each specific section of the task and ensuring it is adhered to whilst still participating in discussion of the case.
- Persuade through reasoned argument without

being arrogant.

- Ensure instructions are fully understood and followed.
- Be instrumental in the smooth running of the decision-making process.

Physical group tasks

Sometimes the assessors will ask the group to carry out an activity with a clear goal, rather than discuss a topic. For example, you might have to construct a tower out of plastic bricks or build a bridge using only paper clips and straws. This task will require careful analysis and planning before you embark upon the physical part of the activity, and will demand a high level of team co-operation under pressure. Sometimes the exercise has rules to ensure that different members have specialised roles. The assessors will be looking to see how well you communicate and co-operate within the group. They may also evaluate your level of motivation, enthusiasm and ability to generate ideas.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW - REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT

FROM THE INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

Evaluating the candidates

After the interviews or other assessments have finished, the interviewers will review their notes on each candidate and any scores awarded. There will often be a meeting to discuss impressions with other interviewers. If an interview was the only method of selection used then the interviewers will often be able to make their decision there and then. If the interview was part of a wider selection process then all those involved may meet together to discuss each candidate's performance across all the exercises.

Evaluating the process

The final part of the process for the employer is to review the recruitment process in order to assess how effective it was in identifying suitable candidates. This may be done quite soon after the selection process or it may form part of a more general review of recruitment procedures used by the organisation, perhaps linked to the performance and retention rate of people recruited using these methods.

FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Reflecting on your performance

When you have finished any form of interview or selection procedure, it is a good idea to take some time to reflect on your performance. Try to identify what went well during the interview and what you feel could have gone better. A useful way of doing this is to keep a reflective interview record like the one below. Writing something down as soon as you can after the interview is a very good idea; details tend to be forgotten quite quickly after the event.

Interview Record

Organisation:

Interview date:

Interviewer name/position:

What happens next?

What went well?

Comments made by the interviewer(s):

What additional preparation would have been useful?

Any difficult questions?

How might I have approached these better?

How was my presentation/style?

General comments:

Keeping a record of your interview experiences does not need to be a long or formal process; a few notes that will jog your memory when you are preparing for future interviews will be extremely useful, and may help you to improve both your technique and your confidence.

After my interviews I always think about my performance. I have a set of criteria that I complete after each interview and that really helps me. I also follow up with the interviewers and I use their feedback. I use all this information for the next time.

Nadine Yap

If you can spend time on this reflective review of interview experiences, you should become better at evaluating your own performance. However, if you find it difficult to judge yourself in this way, practise with someone who could give you feedback on your interview style and the way in which you present your ideas as well as how you respond to key questions. Many careers services offer feedback and discussion on interview performance as well as the opportunity to plan your strategy for the future.

Asking for feedback

The other aspect of a post-interview review is feedback from the employer. Sometimes you will receive informal feedback from members of the selection team on the day and it is worth making a note of this. However, it is more likely that any feedback will be given to you when you are notified of the interviewers' decision about your application. Again, at this stage, it is not common

to be given structured feedback on your performance, but you could ask for comments if you are notified in person. Alternatively, you could contact the organisation to request feedback at a later date and to arrange a time when this might be given.

Feedback can sometimes be quite vague and so it is a good idea to ask for feedback in relation to specific aspects of your performance. For example, if you have been unsuccessful at any stage of the process, you might ask whether there were any particular skills or qualities that the employer felt were missing. This should help you to identify exactly why you were not successful and whether it was the way in which you presented yourself on the day or a lack of relevant skills or experience.

If you are given feedback on any aspects of your performance, remember that these are the subjective opinions of a couple of people within one organisation. They will have formed a particular impression of you based on limited time spent with you asking specific questions or observing you in certain situations.

It can be very useful to think about how they perceived you during the assessment process and how they interpreted your performance. We are not always aware of the impression that we give to others and so receiving constructive criticism can be very useful in learning about the way in which others interpret our style and attitude. If you receive any critical comments about your personal style, ask yourself whether close friends would agree with the comments made. If you think that they might, then consider whether there is anything you could do to improve the impression that you are making. Again, think about what a close friend might advise you to do.

Learning from mistakes

There may well be occasions when you do not perform as well as you might have wanted. Hopefully the time spent reviewing your experience and gathering feedback from others will help you to identify what let you down on the day and any areas in which you need to improve.

Although it is always disappointing to be turned

down after an interview, it is important to recognise that you might not have been suited to the job and would therefore have been unhappy within the role, or found it difficult to carry out all the requirements of the post. Try to identify why you were not successful. Was it your interview technique, or your performance in another part of the selection process? Was it a gap in your knowledge, skills or experience that you need to fill? When you have identified potential areas for improvement you can move forwards to address those issues. Go back to the job description and person specification for the role and think again about whether you feel you would have been suited to the job and had all the necessary skills.

It is also important to remember that your performance might have been good and your skills appropriate for the job, but the interviewers felt that you might not have fitted into the organisational culture or working style. Their decision may be in your best interest so try to think as objectively as you can about what you can learn not just about your technique but about your direction and focus.

Setting an agenda for the future

When you have taken some time to reflect on the interview and identified any areas which you need to improve upon, think about how you might work on these areas. For example, you may have felt that nerves let you down on the day. If this was the case, you could consider researching some techniques to help you to relax, or taking part in activities which enable you to practise public speaking or reacting quickly to questions and ideas. You may not have done enough research on the organisation to be able to answer all of the questions convincingly; planning for future interviews might therefore include time spent researching the new organisation and thinking about key issues.

Reflecting on the whole experience

An interview experience is not always just a means to getting a job; it can also be a way of discovering whether a particular role or career area would suit you. As well as reflecting on your performance during the selection process, spend some time thinking about your experience with the organisation; the impressions that you made; any additional information that you picked up; and who you met. Thinking about these issues will help you to decide whether you would accept the job if you are successful. It might also help you to clarify whether this sort of job is really right for you. Again, using a reflective log or simply jotting down your impressions after the interview can be helpful in planning your future direction.

Next steps checklist

- Understand and unpack skills from job advert, job description, person specification.
- Build a bank of key examples of skills.
- Get help with practising interview or presentation technique from a friend or a careers service.
- Understand the format to be used during the interview.
- Research organisation thoroughly.
- Be up-to-date with industry issues.
- Plan questions to ask during the interview.
- Have copies of documents required, application form or CV.
- Plan routes to the interview location; charge and top-up mobile; have contact details; have cash ready for a taxi.
- Be alert to the kind of person that would fit with the organisation's aims and values.
- Decide whether or not to accept job if offered.
- Be prepared to reflect on interview performance.

FURTHER RESOURCES

BOOKS

- Ace Your Case V: Return to the Case Interview: Wetfeet Insider Guide**, Wetfeet, 2005
- Ace Your Case! Consulting Interviews: Wetfeet Insider Guide**, Wetfeet, 2005
- All About Psychological Tests and Assessment Centres**, Jack Van Minden, Management Books, 2004
- Applying for a PGCE**, AGCAS Teaching Task Group, Annual. Includes a section on preparing for the interview process.
- Brilliant Answers to Tough Interview Questions: Smart Answers to Whatever They Can Throw at You**, Susan Hodgson, Pearson Education, 2007
- Brilliant Interview**, Ros Jay, Pearson Education, 2005
- Brilliant Presentation: What the Best Presenters Know, Say and Do**, Richard Hall, Prentice-Hall, 2007
- Career Skills: Opening Doors into the Job Market**, David Littleford, John Halstead and Charles Mulraine, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004
- Competency-based Interviews: Master the Tough New Interview Style and Give Them the Answers That Will Win You the Job**, by Robin Kessler, Career Press, 2006
- Getting a Teaching Job**, AGCAS Teaching Task Group, Annual. Includes a section about interview preparation for jobs in teaching.
- Going for Interviews**, AGCAS, 2007, www.prospects.ac.uk/downloads/documents/prospects/IDD/Special%20Interests%20Series/Books/ets/2006/going_for_interviews.pdf
- Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions**, Martin John Yate, Kogan Page, 2005
- How to Analyse and Promote Your Skills for Work**, University of London Careers Service, 2000
- How to Pass Graduate Psychometric Tests**, Mike Bryon, Kogan Page, 2007
- How to Pass Verbal Reasoning, Numerical and IQ Tests**, CJ Tyreman, ELC Publications, 2004
- How to Succeed at an Assessment Centre**, Harry Tolley and Robert Wood, Kogan Page, 2005
- Mastering the Job Interview: the MBA Guide to Successful Business Interviews**, Alexander Chernev, Brightstar Media Inc., 2006
- Practice Psychometric Tests: How to Familiarise Yourself with Genuine Recruitment Tests and Get the Job You Want**, Andrea Shavick, How To Books, 2005
- Successful Interview Skills: How to Present Yourself with Confidence**, Rebecca Corfield, Kogan Page, 2006
- The Academic Job Search Handbook**, Mary Morris Heiberger and Julia Miller Vick, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001
- The Essential Guide to Recruitment: How to Conduct Great Interviews and Select the Best Employees**, Margaret Dale, Kogan Page, 2006

The Medical Job Interview: Secrets for Success, Colin Mumford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005

The Ultimate Interview Book: Make a Great Impression and Get That Job, Lynn Williams, Kogan Page, 2005

The Vault Guide to the Case Interview, Mark Asher and Eric Chung, Vault.com, 2005

Top Answers to 121 Job Interview Questions, Joe McDermott and Andrew Reed, Anson Reed, 2006

DVDS

How to Crack Case Study Interviews, Bain & Company

The Assessment Centre, AGCAS. DVD showing what happens at an assessment centre and how to maximise your chances of success.

Why Ask Me That? AGCAS. DVD illustrating a typical selection interview with comments from the selectors on the performance of the candidate.

WEBSITES

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk To find the City Business Library, search under 'Leisure & heritage - City of London Libraries'.

jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewsnetworking/a/interviewguide.htm?nl=1 Job Interview Guide - everything you need to know about interviewing.

www.kent.ac.uk/careers/interviews/ivpostgrad.htm#Questions Practice interview questions for

postgraduate study. The Careers Advisory Service, University of Kent.

www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/Just_for_Postgrads/Marketing_yourself_to_employers/p!ejFpgLp UK GRAD Programme for postgraduate researchers. This section about marketing yourself to employers includes insights into interviews, assessment centres and other recruitment techniques to help make a successful transition to future careers.

www.ase-solutions.co.uk/support.asp?id=62 A variety of practice tests including FGA (First Graduate Assessment) and GMA (Graduate and Managerial Assessment).

www.morrisby.com/Morrisby Morrisby Profile practice questions and FAQs, select 'Practice Test' from the menu.

www.shldirect.com Verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning tests. Timed practice and feedback given.

www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/recruitmen/selectn/selnintvg.htm CIPD factsheet on Selection Interviewing, January 2007.

www.careers.lon.ac.uk/cep The Careers Group, University of London publishes a number of help sheets covering various aspects of interviews and what to expect. They are available online and if you are a current student at the University of London then you can pick them up at your college Careers Service. Titles include: Group Exercises; Interviews; Oral Presentations; Personal Statements; Psychometric Tests; Students with Dyslexia; Telephone Interviews; Written Exercises

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

BIOGRAPHICAL

- Tell us about yourself.
- Tell us something about yourself that I wouldn't know from reading your application.
- What has been the most challenging aspect of your degree course/current role?
- What has been your greatest achievement to date?
- Why did you choose to study your degree subject?
- What did you learn from your experience in ...?
- When was the last time you surprised yourself?
- Summarise yourself in a couple of sentences to explain why we should employ you.

BEHAVIOURAL/COMPETENCY-BASED

- Give us an example of a time when you showed leadership: how effective were you? What was the outcome? What could you have done better? What did you learn from this experience?
- Give an example of when you have acted against the advice of others and the results of your action.
- Give us an example of a time when you planned a project or event. How did you go about this? Would you do anything differently were you to do this again in the future?
- Give an example of a situation in which you had to be flexible.
- Give an example of an occasion when you have been innovative in your approach to a problem.
- Describe an occasion when a team member did not pull their weight within the team and how you responded.
- Give an example of a time when you felt demotivated. What did you do to overcome this?

- Give us an example of when you have successfully overcome a challenge.
- Describe a situation in which you took a risk. What were the results?
- Give us an example of when you delivered more than was expected of you.
- Could you give us an example of a time when you have had to balance approachability and authority?

HYPOTHETICAL

- What would you do if you had to work closely on a project with somebody who had a very different style/approach from you?
- What would you want to achieve in your first six months in post here?
- What would you do to build the department's internal reputation?
- What would you do to convince one of our clients that we are worth their continued business?
- How might you prioritise the different goals that have been set for this post?
- If you didn't have to worry about money, how would you spend your time?
- If you could change any UK law, which one would you like to change and why?
- How would you respond to a customer who is abusive and rude?
- How would you explain a technical aspect of your work to someone who was not familiar with this area?

MOTIVATIONAL

- Why have you chosen to apply to (our company)?

- What have you done to confirm that this is the right career area for you?
- How long do you think that you will be happy in this role?
- What do you think will be the most challenging aspect of this role?
- Why are you not considering a career in (law, IT whatever ...) having chosen that as your degree subject?
- What are your goals?
- What does success mean to you?
- What occupies you during any spare time?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

ANALYTICAL/REFLECTIVE

- What would you say is your main strength and your major weakness?
- What aspects of your working style would you like to change or improve upon?

- What has been your greatest achievement to date?
- What do you understand by diversity, equality of opportunity?
- What skills or abilities do you think you can bring to the team here at ...?
- What makes a good team?
- When was the last time you lost your temper with somebody? Looking back, what did you learn about yourself from this experience?
- What do you consider to be the key skills of an analyst/solicitor/teacher/care worker etc?
- What do you think are the major issues facing the sector?
- What do you consider to be the disadvantages of working as a commercial solicitor/IT consultant etc?
- If you had to sum up your personality in three words, what would they be? Could you provide examples to demonstrate these attributes?