



Careers Centre

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

# Your Interview Tips

JOB  
OFFER

Telephone Interviews

Face-to-Face Interviews

Sample Questions

Checklist

FAQs

Top Tips

For further information check our website  
[careerweb.leeds.ac.uk](http://careerweb.leeds.ac.uk)

# What is an Interview?

The purpose of an interview is for the employer to find out whether you will be suitable for a particular role and fit in well with their company. It is a good way for employers to find out a bit more about your personality as well as your skills. Interviews can be a scary prospect but with ample preparation and a few helpful tips they can be a lot less daunting.

## Types of interview

Interviews generally fall under one of the following categories:

**Face-to-face interviews** – This is the most common method of conducting an interview and usually involves a panel of two or more interviewers.

**Group interviews** – Several candidates are present and are asked questions in turn by the interviewers. You may be asked to participate in a group discussion or task.

**Telephone interviews** – Many large employers use these and you should prepare for them as thoroughly as you would for a face-to-face interview; it is just as formal and important. There are some key tips about telephone interviews later on in this leaflet.

## Preparation

Preparation is the key to interview success. Your preparation should include researching the company, knowing as much as possible about what your role would involve and about the training you will receive. You should also find out exactly what skills the employer is looking for.

Here are some key pointers about preparing for your interview:

- Confirm you will attend by telephone, email or in writing
- Find out how long the interview is likely to last, how many people are interviewing (and if possible their names/positions), whether there will be any other tests, eg. written, psychometric, etc.
- Know your application form/CV inside out: some interviews are heavily based around what you wrote. Prepare additional examples of skills and competencies
- Find out as much as you can about the opportunity, the selection criteria, the organisation and the relevant sector.
- Be clear about the skills required in the job and how you have demonstrated them in the past.. Check out our sample questions for more information
- Plan your travel arrangements well in advance; allow time for delays!

## Looking the Part

First impressions are very important - evidence shows that many employers make up their minds within the first 30 seconds! Dress well; things which impress are a good haircut, polished shoes, clean nails, and avoid wearing any overpowering fragrances.

## On the Day

Try to arrive around ten minutes early as it will show your enthusiasm and should give you ample time to collect your thoughts.

Be pleasant to everyone - the interview starts as soon as you reach the company.

Maintain confident positive body language: a firm handshake, direct and regular eye contact, smiling, and leaning forward when listening and replying.

## Telephone Interviews

- Ensure that you are relaxed and ready at the time the employer is due to ring you. Don't, for example, be rushing back from the supermarket as you will not be in the right frame of mind. Give yourself adequate time before the interview just as you would expect to with a face to face interview. Also, choose a quiet location where you know you will not be disturbed.
- Some employers may call you unannounced and ask to conduct the interview immediately. It is perfectly reasonable to tell them that the time is not convenient and to suggest another time.
- Check the basics: make sure your mobile phone is fully charged or plugged into the mains power. Make sure you have a drink of water close by and have a copy of your application and job details in front of you.
- Speak clearly and vary your tone. Smiling has a positive effect on the tone of your voice!
- Try to keep calm as being nervous can make you speak too quickly.
- Listen carefully before responding and don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you don't understand the question.
- Practise a telephone interview and get some feedback. Remember that it's just the same as a face to face interview in terms of importance and you need to do the same amount of preparation.
- Telephone interviews may feel more structured and less friendly because the interviewer has to follow a structured set of questions with each applicant and the focus is often on competency and career motivation questions.

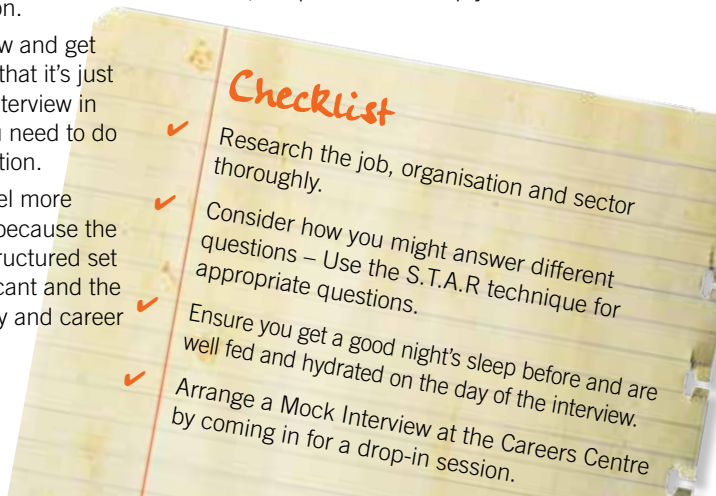
**TOP TIP:** Arrange a Mock Interview with the Careers Centre. This way you can practise through your answers and gain valuable feedback before your actual interview.

If you feel that nerves and anxiety are severely affecting you then it might be worth getting in touch with the Student Counselling Centre who can provide further advice and workshops.

## Dealing with nerves

It is perfectly normal to feel nervous before an interview however with a few useful tips you can help to manage your nerves and perform at your best.

- Ensure that you get a good night's sleep before the interview.
- Practise your interview technique in front of the mirror.
- Make sure you have a breakfast that sets you up well for the day.
- Keep yourself well hydrated throughout the day.
- If you feel your nerves building up while you wait then it is often helpful to take slow, deep breaths to help yourself to relax.



## Structuring your answers

A good technique for structuring and focusing your answers to interview questions is to use the STAR technique.

The acronym **STAR** stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

### Situation

Describe the situation that you were in.

### Task

What task were you confronted with? Try to be concise and informative so that the employer has a good understanding of the situation you were in and what you were trying to achieve.

### Action

This is the most important section and will take up the majority of your answer. You need to explain what it is you did and why you did it. Make sure you keep the answer personal; the interviewer is looking to find out what it is **YOU** did and not just the team. This is a great opportunity for you to highlight your relevant skills.

### Result

Explain the outcome and whether your actions helped to achieve the initial objective. It is important to state what it is that you learnt and how this has helped you since.

# Sample Questions Practising your Answers

## Introductory Questions

*Tell me a little bit about yourself?*

*Why do you want this job?*

*What do you feel you will bring to this role?*

These questions serve as an icebreaker and help the interviewer find out a little bit about who you are and what your motivations are for applying for the role. They are often open ended so try not to ramble on; it is worth practicing a short response of no more than one or two minutes to answer questions of this type.

## Questions relating to knowledge/ understanding of the company and the role you have applied for

*What do you know about our organisation?*

*Why did you decide to seek a position within our organisation?*

*How do you keep up to date with changes in the sector?*

Your motivation for the role and the company should come across strongly. Research their website beforehand and refer to media business pages for news in the sector. You can also refer to any presentations/fairs/events where you have met/heard company representatives. They want to hear that they are offering the factors that are important to you in your chosen career. You should also show that you have knowledge of the sector you are looking to go into.

*Why do you want to be an I.T. Consultant?*

*How would you describe the role of a Research Scientist?*

*How would you define what it is a Marketing Assistant does?*

Whether it is an I.T. Consultant, Research Scientist or Marketing Assistant you should know what the job entails. If you don't then it will be hard to convince the interviewers that you are right for the role. There is plenty of information in the Careers Centre which will give you an insight into different roles.

## Competency-based questions

These questions are designed to test how well suited you are to a specific role by drawing out your skills and finding out about your preferred methods of working. Here are a few examples about some of the competencies they may question you on:

### Influencing

*Describe a time when you have had to persuade someone to do something.*

*What do you do when you are right and others disagree with you?*

### Teamwork

*Describe a team that you worked in and what was your contribution.*

*What difficulties have you had in a team and how did you resolve them?*

### Time Management

*How do you manage multiple assignments?*

*Can you tell me about a time when you have had to prioritise your workload?*

## Communication

*Can you tell me about a time when you have demonstrated excellent interpersonal skills?*

## Leadership

*Give me an example of when you have taken a leadership role. What did you learn?*

You will need to support your answer with evidence from your past experience. A useful strategy for answering these questions concisely is to use the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) technique.

Give the brief facts of the situation and what the task involved, but focus on the skills you used, the outcome and what you have learnt. For further help with developing good examples for answering competency based questions come to the Careers Centre drop-in.

## Situational questions

*What would you do if...?*

You can't prepare for every question. Take time to think before rushing in. There usually isn't a right answer. A good answer will show logical thought and consideration of a number of factors.

*Your employment record shows you have had many jobs. Why is that?*

Try to focus on the positive. Mention how each job has helped you to move towards your present goal.

*Your previous experience is in a very different field. What makes you think you'd be suited to this post? Why do you want a change?*

Your answer will indicate whether you are making a reasoned decision, have the necessary commitment or are just jumping around. Identify what it was about your previous roles which failed to satisfy and clarify the process you went through to bring you to this change.

Mention experience you've gained in previous roles that is relevant. Think about what appeals to you about this job and focus on your motivation for this new position. Finally make sure you explain how the skills you have gained in previous job roles could be transferred to the one you are applying for now.

## Strengths-based questions

These questions revolve around self awareness and give the interviewer an insight into what motivates you and what tasks you learn easily and perform confidently. This helps them assess where you could be an asset in their organisation. Some examples could be:

*What accomplishment are you most proud of and why?*

*What do you consider to be your greatest strength?*

*What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?*

Remember the skills you need for the role. Pick strengths relevant to your application but admit weaknesses that don't impact on the job and describe how you are working to overcome them.

## Questions about your career plans

*What are your short- and long-term goals?*

*Where do you see yourself in 5/10 years time?*

*How will this job fit in with your career plans?*

You don't need to be too precise but you need something more than 'I want to be a success' or 'I want to be a manager'. Clearly your answer needs to match the prospects that this employer can offer you so you should have researched possible career routes. Don't give the impression that you plan to 'take the training and run' even if this is the case.

## Questions for you to ask

Interviews are a two way conversation and it is always a good idea to have a few prepared questions to ask at the end of the interview. It also shows that you are genuinely interested in the role and gives you a good opportunity to find out whether the role or organisation is suitable for you.

## The Organisation

What the interviewer likes about their job, the organisations plans for the future, discussion in the media about new developments.

## Career Development

Typical patterns for new graduates, expected rate of progress, what has happened to past recruits.

## Training

Further information about your initial training, participation in specialist courses and possible support for postgraduate study (don't sound more interested in this than the job!)

## Working Conditions

Location; amount of travel; size of team.

## Holidays and Salary

Avoid these if at all possible.

# FAQs

## **Q. What do I do if I am late?**

A. If you are late and it is something which is out of your control than make sure you call the employer as soon as you realise that you are going to be late. You should apologise immediately upon arrival and explain that it is completely out of character. If it is a cancelled train, or a serious accident on the road then it is not your fault and the employer should understand this.

## **Q. What do I do if I don't know the answer to a question?**

A. If you don't know the answer to a question then it is ok to take a pause and perhaps reflect the question back or ask the interviewer to rephrase it. This should give you a bit more time to think of an answer. A good technique to use is also to take a sip of water whilst you formulate an answer in your head or alternatively you can ask to return to the question later.

## **Q. What do I do if they ask about gaps in my CV?**

A. If there are gaps in your CV then make sure you have an answer prepared. It is important to stay positive in your answer and not to be defensive. If you were waiting for the right job then say so and reassure the interviewer that this has not impacted on your skills and that you are still more than capable of doing the job.

## **Q. What should I do if I am asked an unsuitable question?**

A. Employers are by law required to choose the person who is the right fit for the job. They are not to discriminate unfairly on grounds such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or disability. If you feel that you have been

asked a question which is unsuitable then say so. If you feel really uneasy then politely end the interview and speak to one of our consultants at the Careers Centre.

## **Q. What should I do if I am not successful?**

A. If you are not successful then don't let it knock your confidence. Getting to the interview stage is an achievement in itself and shows that you are doing something right. Make sure you reply to the employer thanking them for the opportunity and ask for feedback on your interview so you can take this advice on board for the next time. It is also useful to follow up an interview as the role may become available again due to an offer being turned down and it is good to still be fresh in the mind of the employer.

## **Q. How do I organise a Mock Interview?**

A. To organise a mock interview you first need to attend one of our drop-in sessions at the Careers Centre which run from 9am till 4pm Monday to Friday. From there we will give you some initial advice about interviews and will suggest some resources that will be useful to look at as part of your preparation. You will then be referred for a Mock Interview, which will usually be within a few days of the drop-in. We will then ask you to email over your information to the consultant so they can prepare some targeted questions to ensure you get the best possible practice.

Any further questions can be answered by using our drop-in service at the Careers Centre 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday. If you are no longer living in Leeds or away on a placement you can use our e-guidance service at [careerweb.leeds.ac.uk](http://careerweb.leeds.ac.uk)

# Top Tips for Success

1. Plan your journey in advance to avoid being late.
2. Prepare for the interview thoroughly by researching the company and considering how you might answer different types of questions.
3. Check out our website **careerweb.leeds.ac.uk** for more helpful advice.
4. Organise a Mock Interview with the Careers Centre.
5. Be positive and practise some relaxation techniques to help manage your nerves.
6. Dress and act professionally to ensure you make a good first impression.
7. Have a few questions to ask at the end of the interview.
8. Explain your skills in relation to the job role or the needs of the organisation.

## Further information

For further information visit the Careers Centre website  
**careerweb.leeds.ac.uk**



## The University of Leeds Careers Centre

5-7 Cromer Terrace  
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(we're around the corner  
from the Students' Union)  
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Monday to Friday

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**W: [careerweb.leeds.ac.uk](http://careerweb.leeds.ac.uk)**



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