

Selection Interview Coaching

Mock Interviews

Advice for staff, including typical questions you might ask

University of Plymouth Careers Service



Mock interviews

This leaflet is to guide staff through giving mock interviews:

- Structuring your interview
- Tips for students
- Typical questions that employers ask
- Responding to FAQs students ask
- Interview dos and don'ts
- Tips for students to make the most of the interview experience.

Structuring your mock interview

This leaflet includes typical questions asked by recruiters. There is no order; the questions are simply to give you ideas of what you might ask. For ideas on structure, refer to the example provided of a Maritime Sustainability Developments Officer.

For ease, the questions in this leaflet are divided into two sections:

- General questions which an employer might ask, including warm ups and questions about weak points
- Examples of scenario and competence questions, together with definitions

Employers seek evidence of skills and so these latter questions are very important. Candidates will be scored on their responses depending on what level of evidence they can give that they can perform these skills.

To structure your mock interview, allow some time at the end to discuss with your student how they got on and to give feedback. For example, if you allocate a total of forty minutes, allow twenty minutes for questions and twenty for discussion.

Tip: Although you might want to discuss what questions the employer might ask about why the student wants to work for their company ('why us'), asking these in a mock interview does tend to make the interview into a role play and so you might want to leave these out of the mock interview itself.

Student preparation

To make the interview as realistic as possible, ask the student to provide you in advance of the interview with their CV or an application form for a real job advert (and person specification if this is available).

The student should read the job description to anticipate likely questions and list experiences which provide evidence of these skills.

Preparing for interviews – advice for students

- Research the organisation / industry beforehand. Look at the recruitment brochure, annual report, website, job description, and check the press for relevant reports.
- Check what you need to take with you, eg CV, dissertation, portfolio, etc.
- Plan what you will wear. The usual advice is comfortable but smart. Make sure you project a professional image.
- Re-read your CV and / or application form – be prepared to elaborate on things you have mentioned, particularly gaps in employment, skills, work experience.
- Anticipate likely questions and your answers to these. 80% of questions can be gleaned from your application, recruitment brochures and the job description.
- Write a list of questions you would like to ask at the interview.

The interview experience – advice for students

Do	Don't
Watch your body language: firm handshake, smile, good eye contact, etc	Arrive unprepared at interview
Act and appear professional from the first minute – first impressions count	Act too laid back and personal, although the odd bit of humour always helps
Present your skills as closely to the company's needs as possible	Waffle, wander or focus on your needs at the expense of the company's
Sell achievements and benefits you can bring	Appear too cocky, undersell yourself, talk too quickly or mumble
Keep positive, friendly, polite and confident - project your enthusiasm for the job.	Look unmotivated and bored
Listen to why the question is being asked	Jump in before questions have been completed
Bring support information and a list of key questions to ask to the interview	Undersell yourself by not providing back-up information
Ask questions that show you've done your background homework	Forget to ask some positive questions yourself – it's a two-way process
Seek feedback on your performance and keep doors open if unsuccessful	Take rejection personally and end on a sour note

Taken from 'The Art of Building Windmills: Career tactics for the 21st Century', Peter Hawkins 1999

Improving your interview skills – advice for students

1. List all the potential questions you may be asked. Practice your answers to these.
2. Refer back to your skills and attributes in your CV / application form. How do these match up with those required by the employer?
3. Listen carefully to any feedback from your mock or real interviews.
4. Evaluate your performance and compare your view with employers' responses.

Questions

Many of these questions are designed to obtain factual information from candidates to assess their suitability to the job.

Warm ups

- Tell me about yourself?
- What should I know about you?
- What are your main achievements to date?
- What is in the headlines this morning?
(readers of *The Daily Sport* are urged to exercise caution here)

Why Us?

- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why should we take you on?
- What can you do for us? What can you contribute to this industry?
- What is your impression of this industry / organisation?
- What are the main issues facing our organisation at present? Where do you think we stand in our industry?
- Who else have you applied to?
- Where did you hear about us?

Your Course

- Why did you choose your course, and what have you gained from it?
- What relevance has your qualification got to the real world?
- What extra curricular activities did you get involved in at University?

Getting Personal

- How has your vacation work contributed to your career aspirations?
- What are you looking for in your first job?
- Why do you think you will be a success in the position you are applying for?
- Which newspapers do you read?
- What time management strategies do you use? How do you set priorities?
- What kind of things annoy and upset you? Give examples.
- How do you deal with problems? Give examples.
- How would your best friend / worst enemy describe you?

- What is the most difficult thing you have ever had to deal with?
- Which historical figure do you most identify with?
- When have you had to introduce change into your work / course / life? Tell me about it.

Weak Points

- Tell me, what are your weaknesses?
- Discuss your A level / GCSE / Degree / HND results
- Why did you leave your previous job?
- Why have you not got much work experience?
- What have you been doing since you left university?

Others

- How geographically mobile are you?
- What do you think are the main skills and qualities required for this job?
- How much do you want to be paid?
- If you were me, what would you look for in a candidate for this job?
- How soon could you start?
- To make sure we get a good picture of you, what else should we know about you?

Scenario and competence based questions

Graduate recruiters use other forms of questioning techniques in order to find out whether candidates really do possess the skills and attributes they are looking for. Two common types of questions are used: 'competence-based' and 'scenario' questions.

Scenario questions

The interviewer will present a hypothetical situation and ask how you would respond:

- You are Brand Manager for a large confectionery firm. One day, you are sent a note telling you that some of your brands have been purposefully contaminated with a lethal substance before leaving the warehouse for the retail outlets. What should you do?
- As a manager, you are responsible for introducing a staff appraisal scheme into the work place. How do you allay some of the concerns voiced by your staff?

Competence based questions

You will be asked to describe situations you have been in so that the interviewer can gather real evidence about the extent to which you have developed and used particular skills. In answering you need to demonstrate that you understand how important the skills were to the situations, and how you used them:

- Give an example of when you influenced the work of others. What did you do and how did you achieve it? What were the outcomes?
- Give an example of when you successfully introduced change into a project or task. How did you do it and what were the outcomes?

Further examples of typical questions

- What frustrations have you encountered in your present or previous jobs? How do you minimise their effect on you?
- Describe a time when you were asked to co-ordinate a group task.
- What has been the most interesting project that you have been involved with during your present course? What skills have you developed from this?
- How do you deal with problems? Give me an example.
- Describe a time when you were particularly proud of an achievement on your course. What made you feel so good?
- Give me an example of when you have had to juggle more than one task at a time. How did you achieve your results? How successful were you?
- Describe a time when you have had to use your initiative to resolve a difficult situation. What did you do?
- How would you describe your preferred role when working in a team? Describe a situation where your role was not your preferred one. How did you manage yourself?
- Describe an occasion when you were not satisfied with a piece of work that you carried out during your course. What did you learn from this experience?
- What kinds of things annoy or upset you? Give examples.
- In a seminar or group task, how do you ensure that your point of view is heard? Back this up with a specific example.
- What motivates you as a student? How do you make sure that your motivation remains high?
- Describe a time when your motivation, in any situation, was low. How did you deal with this?
- How do you deal with problems? Give examples.
- Describe a situation where you used your initiative to resolve a difficult issue at work. How do you feel you did? Could you have done anything better?
- How well do you work as an individual?
- Give me an example of a problem you have encountered during your present course when working on an individual assignment, and say how you resolved it.
- Tell me about your most current or most recent job. What exactly do you, or did you, do?

- What examples can you provide which demonstrate your ability to communicate with members of the public?
- Give an example of when you were asked to plan, implement and evaluate a project or task. How did you feel you performed, and what were your measures of success?
- How do you set your priorities for your course work? Describe whether they vary, and if so, what changes them? Give specific examples.
- Describe your own coping strategy for dealing with stress at work. Illustrate your answer with a specific example.
- Why did you choose your current course? In retrospect, did you make a good choice? How might you have improved the decision you made?
- What is your view of people who consistently work over their allocated working hours? How would you deal with this situation?
- How would your worst enemy describe you?
- Describe a time when you have had to enforce a decision that was unpopular. How did you go about implementing this decision? Did you make any attempt to win over people's support? How successful were you?
- Have you, at any time, been ultimately responsible for a task or project at work? Describe it, and indicate how successful it was. How did you measure its success?
- What are your best qualities?
- How do you ensure that you keep a balance between your study and social life? Give me an example of how you set your priorities for these.
- How do you deal with difficult or aggressive colleagues? Give me an example. In this example, how successful were you?
- What are your weaknesses? How do these affect your study?

Questions students might ask – advice for students

Most interviews allow time for candidates to ask questions. If your questions have all been answered, say so. However, it's a good idea to have a number of questions prepared:

- Who could I be working with? Report to?
- What are the prospects for further promotion?
- What opportunities are there for staff development and further training?
- How have previous graduates fared in the company?
- How do you see the job role / function developing in the future?
- What are the arrangements for inducting new staff?

After the Interview – advice for students

Most people improve at interview with practice. These are tips you could offer your students:

- Write down the questions you found difficult – consider how you might answer these again now that you have had more time to think about them
- Consider what you could have done better, eg more preparation on the company, anticipated obvious questions or prepared better questions to ask
- Consider how you came across – Were you confident? Did you present well?
- Ask for feedback once you are aware of the result of the interview
- Keep a logbook or record of your interview experiences, so that you can refer to it when preparing for your next interview.