

INTERVIEW SKILLS

Interview questions and how to prepare for them





Getting an interview is an achievement in itself. Only a minority of applicants are selected for interview so you have already made a positive impression to have got to this stage!

This booklet contains tips to help you make the most of this opportunity.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

Interviews are held to assess candidates for various positions – most commonly jobs, courses or scholarships/awards. This booklet focuses on job interviews, particularly for graduate-level jobs and undergraduate placements/internships, although the advice given will be helpful in interviews for other positions and other types of job.

Interviews aim to help the employer to find out more about the applicant as a person, to assess how well they match the requirements of the job applied for and to get an impression of how they might fit into the existing team. They also give the employer an opportunity to get further information about a candidate than that already given in their application.

It is also the candidate's chance to find out about the employer and to 'sell themselves' and their key strengths to them.

Selection decisions may be based entirely on an interview but, especially in large graduate recruiters, may also use assessment centres and psychometric tests.

The interviewer will be seeking to assess:

- Your personal qualities
- How well you express yourself
- Your motivation and enthusiasm.

The recruiters will already have an indication of these from your initial application but now the interview will find out more by talking to you directly. This may be face-to-face (in person or via Skype/videolink) or over the phone. Increasingly employers are using video interviews. For more information on these see www.kent.ac.uk/ces for more details.

Interviews are a two-way process, so think of your interview as a conversation, not an interrogation – but remember that this conversation has a purpose.



PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

- **Re-read your application form or CV** as if you were the interviewer. Try to anticipate the questions they will ask.
- **Prepare answers to obvious questions.** Don't learn your answers by heart – you'd just sound stilted in the interview – but do work out roughly what you would say. Practise giving your answers out loud.
- **Think of your "Unique Selling Points" (USPs).** In other words, think of what makes you a good candidate and try to get these across during the interview. You may get the chance if the interviewer asks you questions such as "What are your strengths?"; "Why should we take you rather than other candidates?"; "How would your best friend describe you?" or "Tell me about yourself". Examples of these USPs could be:
 - an outstanding academic record;
 - relevant work experience;
 - skills and competencies that relate to the job;
 - an international or multicultural background;
 - significant achievements, or difficulties that you have overcome.
- Similarly, **think of how you would answer** any awkward issues that might come up, such as low academic results, gaps in your career history or questions about your weaknesses (see page 14).
- **Prepare some questions to ask.**
- **Enthusiasm is important.** Remind yourself why you find this career, and this employer, attractive.
- **Research the employer.** Be aware of what they offer and of what is going on in their business at the moment.
- **If you have been told the name of your interviewer, check their profile on the company website or LinkedIn.** This may give you some useful pointers about their interests or experience that you can work into your answers, but don't go into too much detail and don't try to connect with anyone before the interview.
- If you have a disability that may make the interview more difficult for you than for other candidates, make sure that the employer is aware of this so that any reasonable adjustments necessary to assist you can be arranged in advance.



WHO WILL INTERVIEW YOU?

Depending on the company, you are likely to be interviewed by one or more of the following:

- **Human Resources manager.**
HR staff are trained in recruitment and selection and will have been involved in every stage of the selection process: developing job descriptions and person specifications, preparing job adverts, checking application forms, shortlisting, interviewing and selecting candidates.
- **Line manager** – somebody working in the role or department you are applying to – perhaps even your future boss! They will know all about the job (and be able to answer your questions about it) but may not be skilled or trained in interviewing and can sometimes ask unexpected questions.
- **Senior manager.** If you have applied to a small company, you may find yourself being interviewed by the MD. In larger companies, senior managers may be involved in second or final interviews, although probably not at the first interview stage. Like line managers, they probably don't interview on a regular basis.
- **Recruitment consultant** – if you have applied for a job through an agency the actual employer may well delegate the first stage of the interview process to a consultant at that agency. Like HR managers they will be recruitment specialists.

If you have more than one interviewer, don't panic or let yourself feel overwhelmed. Listen carefully as each interviewer is introduced and try and remember their name and job role. Direct your answer to the person who asked the question but look briefly towards other members as your answer continues and try not to ignore anyone on the panel.



FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

What will you wear?

First impressions count and you want to be remembered for the right reasons – if you are remembered for what you wore, there is probably something wrong with it! This is not the time to make a fashion statement: smart and conservative dress is the norm.

- “Dress for the job you want, not the job you are applying for” – you cannot go wrong by being too smart
- Wear a plain dark business suit
- Pay attention to detail: clean fingernails, tidy hair, polished shoes and a smart bag or briefcase will complete the look but neglecting these details will wreck it
- Don't wear too much make-up, perfume/aftershave or jewellery

- Practise sitting down in front of a mirror – this will reveal if your skirt or trousers are too short/too tight

Plan how you will get to the interview location

Check your route and transport options in advance and don't just rely on your satnav or phone to guide you there on the day!

Try to arrive ten or fifteen minutes early. This doesn't just give you the opportunity to visit the loo – time spent waiting in the reception area can be very useful if there are publications about the employer or their field of work to read.

The interview begins from the moment you enter the building! First impressions are vital – they set the tone for the rest of the interview.

Be polite to everyone you meet, including receptionists and security staff. Remember to switch off your phone before you are called for interview.

In the interview room itself

- **Shake hands** warmly, but wait to be invited to sit down.
- **Smile**, and look at the interviewer.
- **Try to relax** – don't sit on the edge of your chair, but don't slouch.
- **Speak clearly** and not too fast
- **Don't fidget**, and try to avoid mannerisms.
- Keep up **good eye contact** with the interviewer.



TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Over half of the major graduate recruiters conduct first interviews over the phone. For employers, this is more time and cost-effective than carrying out interviews face-to-face: these interviews also test candidates' verbal communication skills, telephone technique and ability to cope with the unexpected.

For candidates, they offer the following advantages:

- You can refer (quickly!) to your application form

- **You don't need to wear a suit** (although many people feel that they perform better if they are dressed smartly!)
- **You don't need to spend time travelling** to interview or wonder if the employer will pay your expenses.

But there are also disadvantages:

- **You can't see the interviewer** to gauge their response.
- **They can seem to go very quickly**, without giving you much time to think about your answers – so be well prepared!

You will usually be contacted in advance to arrange a convenient time for the interview.

As well as preparing in the same way that you should for all interviews (see page 3) you should also:

- Try to take the phone to a quiet and private location.
- Keep a copy of your application, and information on the company, handy.
- Keep your phone with you, charged, topped up, switched on and readily accessible (not at the bottom of a large bag!) at the appropriate time.
- Keep a glass of water handy (but move the phone away from your mouth when you swallow...)
- **Smile** – it really does make a difference to your tone of voice.
- If it really is a bad time, or reception is poor, offer to call back and fix a time to do so.



THE QUESTIONS

There are really only two interview questions – but there are many ways to ask them!

- 1 **Can you do the job?** – do you have the right skills, abilities, qualifications, experience and personal characteristics?
- 2 **Do you want to do the job?** – are you committed, motivated and enthusiastic?

Your interview questions will be aimed at bringing out these qualities and learning more about your background and your interest in the position. These questions may be framed in a number of ways.

Common types of question include:

- Preliminary/ice-breaker
- Factual
- Competency
- Strengths-based
- Narrative
- Technical

- Hypothetical
- Motivational
- Challenging
- Ethical.

Examples of all these types of questions, and suggestions for handling them, can be found in the rest of this booklet.

Whatever questions you are asked, try to keep the following in mind as you answer them:

- Listen carefully to the interviewer and give an answer that is relevant to their question
- Don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat a question if you don't hear, or don't understand, it at first
- Keep your initial answers fairly brief, but watch the interviewer for signs of encouragement or impatience that will indicate whether or not they want you to continue

- There aren't any right or wrong answers to interview questions: how you come across is as important as what you say
- Be yourself – if you have to put on a completely false act to get through the interview, is this really the right job for you?



“One of the most common pieces of negative feedback that we receive about candidates is the tendency to waffle; too much time is spent talking around the point but not actually answering the question at hand.”

Head of a recruitment consultancy

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

THE QUESTIONS (CONT)

Preliminary/ice-breaker

- How are you today?
- Did you have a good journey?
- Did you have any trouble finding our office?
- How are you enjoying this sunny weather?

These are not “real” questions and serve a social, rather than an information-gathering, purpose. It is an opportunity to for both you and your interviewer to establish communication, get used to the sound and tone of each other’s voice and perhaps to fill the time while you are being shown to the interview room.

You should answer them in the spirit in which they are asked: with a friendly but brief response – not a moment-by-moment account of your journey or a rant about the state of Britain’s road, rail or bus services.

Questions like these are often used to put you at ease. After all, you must know the answer!

Factual

Basic information about your past education, employment, qualifications etc. should have been covered on your application form or CV but sometimes a candidate may have left gaps (intentionally or otherwise) or interviewers may just want to check the accuracy of the facts you have given.

Sometimes these questions are put in a “closed” way: a question that could be answered with just a “yes”, “no” or brief fact. It will help both you and the interviewer, though, to open up such questions, as in the following examples:

Interviewer: *“What grade did you get in your Maths GCSE?”*

Interviewee: *“I got a C but I do have good numeracy skills. I worked as a barman, which involved lots of mental arithmetic, and I’m confident in using figures in everyday life – I’m usually the one who works out everybody’s share of the bill at the end of a meal out”*

Interviewer: *“So you’re studying History at the University of Kent?”*

Interviewee: *“Yes, I’ve found it a very interesting course because ...”*

Interviewer: *“Have you ever worked in retail before?”*

Interviewee: *“No, but I worked as a waiter which needed good customer service and teamworking skills, especially when the restaurant was busy, and I think that would be a good background for this job”*

Competency

Many graduate recruiters use competency-based questions. These are designed to help candidates give evidence of the personal qualities (or competencies) needed to perform well in the job. Usually, you will be expected to give an example of how you have demonstrated these qualities in the past in reply to questions such as:

- **Describe a situation where you had to...**
 - show leadership
 - make a difficult decision
 - work as a member of a team
 - show initiative
 - change your plans at the last minute
 - overcome a difficult obstacle
 - work with others to solve a problem
- Tell me about a time when you’ve had to manage a complex workload and multi-task. How do you do this? What went wrong? How did you deal with this?
- Can you give me an example of when you failed to meet a deadline? What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when a task you were working on didn’t go to plan. What did you do?
- Can you give me an example of how you contributed to a time when your department implemented a strategic objective? What difficulties did you encounter?

The CAR approach

A good way of dealing with this type of question is by using the “CAR” approach which involves breaking down your answer into three sections: **Context**, **Action** and **Result**. This technique helps you to structure your answer and present the information in a logical order, including the background and the outcome as well as what you actually did.

- The **CONTEXT** forms an introduction, describing the scenario you faced, date and place.
- The **ACTION** forms the main body and should be the longest part.
- The **RESULT** is the conclusion, and, like the introduction, should be quite short.

Below is an example of this approach, in response to the question: Can you give me an example of a time when you have had to argue your case and convince another person of its merits?

Context: *I work as a part-time receptionist at a law firm. The firm had taken part in the “World’s Biggest Coffee Morning”, raising funds for Macmillan Cancer Support, for several years but basically were just setting out coffee and cakes in the reception area for the staff and any visitors.*

Action: *I suggested that we should make it more of an event by wearing fancy dress and promote it by giving out fliers in the High Street. Some of the staff felt that this would not give a very professional impression to clients, but I spoke to the senior partner and argued that it would generate good publicity for the firm and had the potential to increase clients by making more people aware of us. Before the meeting I had searched online to find examples of other law firms involved in similar fundraising activities and the way that they had been presented in their local press. The partners agreed that any staff who were not actually involved in client meetings or Court appearances that day would be allowed to wear fancy dress.*

Result: *On the day, about twenty staff dressed up as characters from children’s books and even the senior partner wore a Paddington Bear tie. As well as giving out the fliers, which advertised the event on one side and had information about the firm’s services on the other, I promoted the event on social media and about 100 people visited the coffee morning. We raised almost £500, the local paper ran a story and a photograph of us and the firm is planning to repeat the event this year.*

You can find further advice and examples of competency-based questions at www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/competency.html

Strengths-based interviews

A number of major graduate recruiters, such as Barclays, EY, Nestlé and Royal Mail, use this approach in their interview process.

While competency-based interviews aim to find out what you **CAN** do, strengths-based interviews assess what you **ENJOY** doing.

These interviews are based on the theory of positive psychology: that employees become more engaged, productive, and happy when they use their strengths at work. If candidates’ strengths can be identified and matched to the job role, they will enjoy their work more and perform better.

One advantage of strengths-based interviews is that candidates cannot do so much preparation in advance and are therefore less likely to come up with the hackneyed answers candidates think interviewers want. To prepare for these interviews, think about what you love doing both inside and outside work and think about how your preferences might fit with the organisation’s culture and the job requirements. Be open and honest: don’t try to be something you’re not.



THE QUESTIONS (CONT)

Questions you might be asked at strengths-based interviews include:

- What are you good at?
- What comes easily to you?
- What do you learn quickly?
- What do you do in your spare time and what do you get out of it?
- What things give you energy?
- Describe a successful day you have had.
- When did you achieve something you were really proud of?
- Do you prefer to start tasks or to finish them?
- What things are always left on your to-do list and not finished? (These are probably weaknesses: things you dislike doing)
- What do you least enjoy doing? (These are likely to be areas where you lack natural aptitude or skills).

Below are suggestions for how you might approach some of these questions:

What do you do in your spare time and what do you get out of it?

As well as showing your strengths and enthusiasms, your answers to this question may help you to show your individuality and stand out from all the other applicants. Anything you have done which is unusual, shows a high level of achievement or demonstrates your initiative or ability to take responsibility will help you here.

The interviewer will probably have some idea of these activities from your CV or application form.

If you have invented or exaggerated these – for example, said that you are passionate about scuba diving when you have only tried it once, on a family holiday when you were 14 years old – you could get rumbled if the interviewer turns out to be a genuine enthusiast who is keen to discuss your supposed hobby in depth!

Try to make links between your interests and your chosen career, but don't appear too one-tracked. An accountancy student with a passion for archery, for example, could show how accuracy and responsibility are important in both activities.

Useful activities to mention include: competitive sports; voluntary work; fundraising challenges; learning a language; technical interests such as car maintenance or computer coding.

When did you achieve something you were really proud of?

To say that your proudest achievement was getting to University, or getting your degree, will do nothing to distinguish you from other candidates. Unless you have had to contend with exceptional difficulties to gain your academic qualifications – such as illness or major family problems – try to say something different that will make you stand out.

This doesn't have to be an Olympic medal or an act of heroism. Ideally, it should give evidence of skills relevant to the job such as communication, initiative, teamwork, organising or determination:

- Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award – especially the expedition and community service parts
- Organising a sports or fund-raising event
- "Overcoming my fear of heights and learning to abseil"
- "Coming to the UK at the age of 12 speaking hardly any English and gaining 12 GCSEs with good grades four years later"
- Training for and completing a marathon (or a 5K race or even a sponsored walk).

"The feedback from applicants who have had a strengths-based interview has been great – they feel they have been better able to demonstrate who they are as a person not just trot out the same answers to the competency based questions which says little about them and does not engage them in the process as everyone else does the same thing!"

Simon Reichwald
The Bright Futures Society

THE QUESTIONS (CONT)

Narrative

Competency and strengths-based questions look for a narrative – for you to tell the interviewer about a situation, activity or an aspect of your personality. You are telling a short story about yourself and your response to different situations and events. Sometimes, though, questions will be asked that invite you to tell a similar story without any particular focus.

- Tell me about yourself
- Tell me about your experience working at...
- Why did you choose to study at the University of Kent and what influenced your choice?

To answer these questions, think about what you want the interviewer to know about you. What are your key selling points? Work them into your answer.

Get to the point quickly in your story. Avoid providing any unnecessary background information. It is important, instead, to provide details that support and add to the recreation of the incident for your listener. Every detail you provide should directly relate to your story's main point.

Example: 'Tell me about yourself'

Although this should be an easy question to answer, the problem is that it is so general that candidates don't know where to start and often end up either saying too much or giving information that is not relevant to the role.

Compare the two responses to this question below and note the difference in content, tone and style:

I'm studying Psychology at the University of Kent and I'm in the middle of my final year project at the moment. I've lived in London all my life and although Canterbury is so different I've enjoyed living there for the last three years but now I want to move back to London and work here. I love travelling and because Kent is so close to Europe I've been able to go over to France for weekends and for skiing holidays and I travelled round the USA last summer vacation as well. I've done all kinds of part-time jobs and I love learning new things and meeting new people so I'm really enthusiastic about your graduate training scheme.

I'm a final year student at the University of Kent studying psychology. What I love about psychology is how you can use it to analyse groups and individuals and

understand what motivates them in different situations – I'm currently doing my final year project on the effect of different leadership styles on the outcome of group tasks. Outside my studies, university has also given me the chance to get involved in new things: I joined the Ski and Snowboard Society in my first year and was elected to the committee last year so was able to help organise a skiing trip to France. I've worked in different part-time jobs since I was 17, mostly in retail and hospitality, so I've had to be very organised to fit my work in with my studies and extra-curricular activities.

This answer is more focused, gives an insight into the interviewee's personality (but not too much), shows some key skills and strengths, and a positive attitude.

When answering this type of question, try and bring in your relevant experience, qualifications and achievements. It can be hard to strike a balance between saying nothing that will interest the employer and going into a hard-sell sales pitch, so practise your answer in advance.

Technical

These are often asked at interviews where the interviewee's degree background is directly relevant to the job, particularly for science, engineering, computing, business/finance or research posts. Briefly revise any particularly relevant areas of your course, especially projects, to prepare for this.

Because they relate to your area of study, these questions should not be too difficult. It is important, though, not to take a purely academic angle when answering these questions and to be aware of the commercial issues (such as costs, time and client demands) that might be encountered in business or industry.

- What practical techniques have you carried out in University Labs?
- What laboratory experience have you gained on your course?

- What experience do you have of analytical techniques?
- Can you mend your bike?
- What is your top stock pick, and why?
- What do you think is the most useful function in Excel?

The interviewer may use a "funneling" technique, where the questions start at a simple and broad level and then gradually become more specific and detailed – perhaps until they reach the point where you cannot answer any further! A Biochemistry student applying for a patent attorney position was asked:

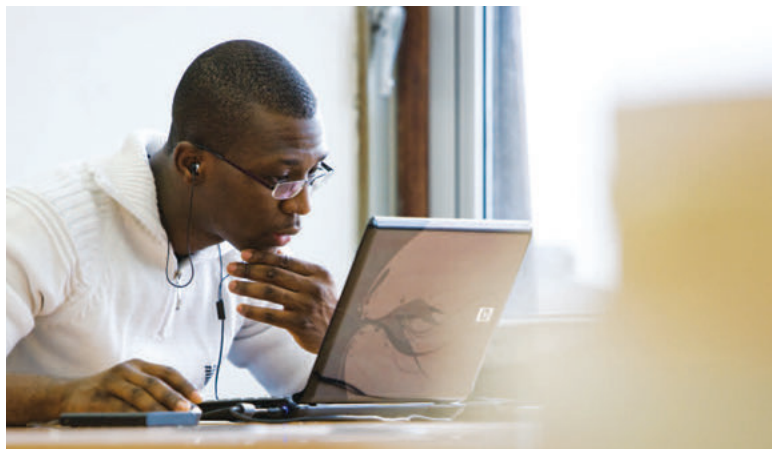
- What is the structure and function of an antibody?
- How do you make antibodies?
- What are the disadvantages of an animal-originating antibody?
- How can these be overcome?

Sometimes your interviewer may be a technical specialist without much interviewing experience. In this case, they may home in on the parts of your application that they feel most comfortable with – usually projects and work experience – which can be disconcerting for candidates:

"I was asked about my project in depth and felt that I had to fully justify why I chose it, how I did it and the results. It was like the Inquisition"

Bearing in mind that the interviewer may be as nervous as you are can help make such an experience less intimidating!

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THE QUESTIONS (CONT)

Hypothetical questions

These outline an imaginary, but not unlikely, situation, and ask what you would do in that situation. Usually they relate to situations you might meet in the job for which you are applying but (as in the last example, once asked at an IBM interview) not always:

- “How would you deal with...?”
(for example, “an irate customer” or “a staff member caught stealing a jar of sweets from the warehouse”)
- “Your manager goes off sick for a week and leaves you in charge. You hear staff complaining about the way he runs things, and how bored they are with their job – what do you do?”
- What would you do if you were set a task that you had never done before and your manager was not available for help?

They aim to test your quick thinking, problem solving skills and understanding of the way in which you will need to work. There may be many possible answers but few that are definitely wrong.

What you actually say in your answer doesn't matter, so long as it sounds reasonable, confident and well-thought-out and you show awareness of the issues involved.

You may want to ask questions to clarify the background to this situation, or find out more about the employer's policies.

If you can relate your answer to a similar situation that you have encountered in the past, this is even better:

I would talk to the irate customer to find out what their problem was. Usually the best thing is to apologise and tell them what you are going to do to try and resolve the problem – and make sure that it gets done. I've had to deal with a lot of difficult situations like this in my restaurant job when the kitchen is busy and orders take a long time to arrive or when something is wrong with the food and have found that listening to the customers, trying to sort things out as quickly as possible and keeping them informed usually works well.

Motivational

Motivational questions are used to find out what makes the candidate tick and to see if the role suits your chosen career path, aspirations, industry etc. Typical motivational questions would be:

Why are you interested in this company?

This is a predictable question and very important! You need to demonstrate that you have researched the employer (see page 3) and tie your knowledge of them into the personal skills and interests that led you to apply.

Try and find some specific feature on which the employer prides themselves: their training, their clients, their individuality, their public image, etc.

“Although you are one of the biggest companies in this sector, you only recruit ten graduates a year so I know that I will be able to make a real contribution. The feedback from current graduate trainees on The Job Crowd was really positive and I was impressed by how much responsibility they have been given in such a short time...”

This may not always be possible with very small organisations but you may be able to pick up something of this nature from the interviewer.

For example, an interviewee applying to a small organisation might say:

"I'm always ready to take on responsibility and feel this will come more quickly with a firm of this size. A small firm also gives the chance to build closer working relationships with clients and colleagues and I've found through my past work experience that this makes an organisation more effective as well as more satisfying to work in."

What other companies have you applied to?

It's fine to say that you are applying to other employers – if you weren't it could be seen as either lazy or over-confident.

You don't have to tell them every single other application you have made – you can be selective. Focus on those that are:

- Relevant – related to the business you are presently being interviewed for
- Prestigious. They will reflect well on the firm interviewing you
- Consistent. Not from lots of different job areas or employment groups of less interest to you than the present opportunity
- Successful so far. Do not list those firms who have rejected you.

You should also stress the positive things about the employer who is interviewing you and make them feel that they are your first choice.

Other questions of this nature could include:

- What type of management style gets the most out of you at work?

- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- What gives you job satisfaction?

Challenging

"Challenging" questions may be those that challenge you personally, by picking up on your weaker points, or may be designed to challenge all candidates by asking off-the-wall questions that they could not have been expected to prepare for.

- You don't have much experience of this type of work – do you think that you'll be able to cope in this job?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- You graduated a year ago and don't seem to have had a proper job since then – what have you been doing?
- Why did you take that year out during your degree?



THE QUESTIONS (CONT)

When you review your application before your interview, think what points you really don't want the interviewer to pick up on and prepare for questions on these points carefully – they will almost certainly ask all the questions that you hope they won't!

Remember that you are one of a relatively small percentage of applicants who have been invited to interview, so the employer has already seen more positives than negatives in your application. Don't panic and don't be apologetic but try and respond as positively as you can.

"I knew that I wanted to take some time out to travel after I graduated so I spent a few months working in a restaurant. Because I'd worked there before while I was a student I was given responsibility for supervising and training new staff. At the same time, I was preparing for a trip to South America by planning an itinerary and learning Spanish and I flew to Peru at the end of March. My planning paid off so everything went well and I had a really great time: I volunteered in an orphanage for three weeks and hiked the Inca Trail. Since I got back I've been spending a lot of time thinking about my career so I know that this is exactly the sort of job that I want and I'm really keen to get started"

When answering the weakness question, pick a weakness that:

- you have corrected or learned to manage, and describe how you did this
- will not impact too negatively on your ability to complete the job
"I used to be very shy when I was at school and found it hard to talk to people I didn't know well, but my job in the library meant that I had to help people with all kinds of queries. Now I'm happy talking to anybody one-to-one and I've joined the debating society to give me experience of speaking in front of an audience."
- You could also choose a weakness that might be seen as a strength, but beware of saying "I'm a perfectionist" – this answer has been given so often that it has become a cliché.

Off-the-wall questions

These are often asked by corporate employers such as investment banks, management consultancies and advertising agencies.

Some look to assess your logical reasoning skills:

- Why are manhole covers round? (Don't say "because the hole is round")
- What is 21 multiplied by 19?
- How do you fit a giraffe in a fridge?

- "There are three boxes, one contains only apples, one contains only oranges, and one contains both apples and oranges. The boxes have been incorrectly labelled such that no label identifies the actual contents of the box it labels. Opening just one box, and without looking in the box, you take out one piece of fruit. By looking at the fruit, how can you immediately label all of the boxes correctly?"

Others aim to assess your initiative, individuality or self-awareness:

- If you could be any character in fiction, who would you be?
- If you could be a superhero, what would you want your superpowers to be?
- If you could have dinner with anyone from history, who would it be and why?
- If you won £5 million in the lottery, what would you do with the money?
- How do I rate as an interviewer?
- If you were a car, what type would you be?

Obviously there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but employers that ask them will be looking for confident individuals who can think on their feet and handle pressure.

Interviews may also be unintentionally challenging, especially if you are dealing with an untrained, inexperienced or plain unpleasant interviewer. Try to always remain calm and professional, even if you are mentally planning to report the interviewer to their HR manager or never to have anything to do with that company again.

Don't assume that an interviewer who is asking hard questions and challenging your answers is prejudiced against you in some way. This is often a positive sign – the interviewer feels that you are potentially suitable for the job and is putting you to the test before making their final decision. Don't be afraid to argue a point and to disagree with the interviewer: so long as this is done politely and reasonably most interviewers will rate your assertiveness highly.

Case study interviews

Finance, management consultancy and legal employers are also likely to use more extensive “case study interviews”.

Case interviews are two-way conversations that demonstrate an ability to think creatively in unfamiliar businesses. Your interviewer will describe a strategic or operational challenge such as the following:

Our client is a flagship national airline. They experienced consistent growth between 2009 – 2014 but since then their profits and market share have declined significantly. They are looking to us to offer a solution to the problem: what would you recommend.

You will be expected to put questions to the interviewer that will enable you to gather information about the background to this problem that will allow you to pick out significant facts and reach a viable conclusion in a short period of time.

Other case studies may involve you being given a set of papers relating to a particular situation. You will have to read through these (in a limited period of time), make recommendations in a brief report and then discuss these recommendations with the interviewer.

This format aims to test your ability to analyse information, to think clearly and logically and to exercise your judgement.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF



THE QUESTIONS (CONT)

Ethical

- 1 If your friend was seriously injured and you had to get him to hospital, would you speed and go through a red light? (Solicitors' firm)
- 2 Do you believe that honesty is always the best policy?
- 3 Your boss went out to meet friends for lunch and is late arriving back. A client has arrived for a meeting with him/her and is not happy that s/he is not available: what do you tell them?
- 4 Your newspaper has published a report which concluded that many supermarket ready meals contain excessive amounts of sugar. The report included responses from supermarkets and sugar manufacturers, but a major national supermarket chain has now threatened to withdraw all its advertising with your newspaper (worth over £1 million a year) unless you run another story focusing on the benefits of ready meals. What do you do?
- 5 What would you do if a potential supplier offered you an "incentive" to offer them a contract?
- 6 If you had made a mistake and nobody had noticed it, would you admit to it?
- 7 Should the NHS fund treatment for medical conditions resulting from smoking or excessive alcohol consumption? (Medical school)

These questions are most often asked at interviews for jobs in "professional" areas such as law, accountancy, teaching or medicine, where integrity and trust are paramount, but can be asked at any interview for a role involving responsibility.

They may also be asked to stimulate discussion and to allow you to argue for or against a particular point of view.

In the above questions, there is unlikely to be a single right or wrong answer. If asked the first question, for example (If your friend was seriously injured and you had to get him to hospital, would you speed and go through a red light?) there are at least four possible answers:

- Of course I would – it's a matter of life and death
- Of course I wouldn't – speed limits and red lights are there for public safety and I could injure more people by breaking the rules
- Would it be necessary? Might it benefit my friend more to wait for an ambulance so that he can be treated by paramedics before getting to hospital?
- It depends. If it would be unavoidable for you to drive, you might mention factors such as the amount of traffic, your knowledge of the roads and the seriousness of the injury while considering your response.

Although you want to come across as a trustworthy and honest person you should normally avoid knee-jerk responses and consider issues such as practicalities and sensitivities. Whichever of the above answers you might choose, it is worth considering the other options and showing why they are, or are not, appropriate.

YOUR QUESTIONS TO THE INTERVIEWER

Before the end of the interview, you will usually be asked if you have any questions that you would like to ask the interviewer.

Don't feel you have to wait until this point to ask questions – if the chance to ask a question seems to arise naturally in the course of the interview, take it! Remember that, as said earlier, an interview is a conversation and that asking good questions will help to show your interest in, and enthusiasm for, the job.

Prepare some questions in advance: it is OK to write these down on a piece of card and refer to your notes to remind you what you wanted to ask. Make sure that your questions are not answered on the employer's website!

Keep them brief: there may be other interviewees waiting.

Ask about the work itself, training and career development: not about holidays, pensions and parking facilities.

Some questions you might consider asking:

- Is there a fixed period of training for graduates?
- Do you send your managers on external training courses?
- How often is a graduate's performance appraised?
- What is a typical career path in this job function?
- Can you give me some examples of the sort of projects I would be working on?
- What opportunities would there be for me to use my specific skills? (such as languages or technical skills)
- How many graduates stay on at the end of the training scheme?
- How would you see this company developing in future?
- How would you describe the company culture here?
- What are the challenges that your organisation is facing?
- What is your personal experience of working for this organisation?

You can also use this opportunity to tell the interviewer anything about yourself that they have not raised in the interview but that you feel is important to your application. Although these examples may be helpful, try to make your questions original, relevant to the individual job and about things you cannot find out for yourself.

It sometimes happens that, during the interview, all the points that you had noted down to ask about will be covered. In this situation, you can respond as follows:

Interviewer: *"Well, that seems to have covered everything: is there anything you would like to ask me?"*

Interviewee: *"Thank you: I'd made a note to ask about your appraisal system and the study arrangements for professional exams, but we went over those earlier and I really feel you've covered everything that I need to know at this moment."*

The interviewer should then give you an idea of when you can expect to hear their decision, but if they don't mention this then do feel free to ask.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW



- You may hear the result of the interview within a few hours, a few days, or a couple of weeks. If the employer doesn't contact you within this time, then contact them to check what is happening.
- Not every interview will result in an immediate job offer: the next stage may be a second interview or assessment centre. See our web pages on these topics at www.kent.ac.uk/ces/student/assessmentaptitude.html
- After the interview, make notes on the questions asked, where you felt you could have given better answers, and what else you could have done better. Work on these points before your next interview.
- If you are accepted, congratulations! But, if you are uncertain whether to accept this offer, see www.kent.ac.uk/careers/joboffers.htm or talk to a careers adviser.
- If you are turned down, you may pick up some useful tips to improve your performance next time by phoning or emailing your interviewer to ask politely what – if anything – you did wrong. Not all interviewers are willing to provide this feedback, but it's worth a try. Don't be disheartened. You did well to make it to the interview, and the more interviews you have, the better you will get.

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