



Academic excellence for
business and the professions

Mastering the interview

IN2015 – Week 8
Monday 20th November 2018

By the end of the workshop you should be able to:

- Describe different styles of interview
- Prepare for a variety of interview styles
- State the types of questions you might be asked and how you should prepare for them
- Experience practising the role of both an interviewer and an interviewee

Before we start...

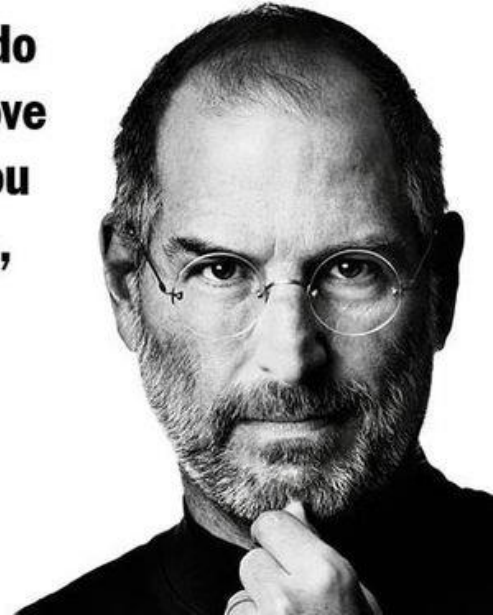
- If you have an interview do congratulate yourself, the majority of applicants do not get to interview stage
- If you have been selected for interview there is a lot that the company like about you already
- All you have to do now is **research** (the role, company and sector), **prepare** (your answers to possible questions), **practice** (by saying your answers out loud to yourself and having mock interviews) and **deliver** (on the day)

Back to basics ...do you know what type of IT role you are genuinely interested in?

*****Tip from the PLU*****
Don't blindly apply for every role we advertise without even reading the job spec – think quality not quantity!

“The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it, keep looking. Don't settle.”

- Steve Jobs



What an employer thinks about when they are interviewing

Knowledge

- What research have they done about the company and role?
- Are their responses specific or generic?
- Did they actually answer the question I asked them?

Personality

- Do they really want to work for the company?
- Are they excited about the role?
- Are they driven and energetic?

Fit

- Do they match the company values?
- Do they use similar language?
- Are they client focused?



The following scenarios are based on the interview experiences of students on your course....

For the purposes of this workshop we have focused on areas where these students needed to improve and names have been changed in order to protect their identity

Ali applied for every placement on InPlace, he targeted applications with a simple process and applied for programming and non programming roles

Due to the generalist nature of his applications he only received a few responses, however when he did succeed at securing an interview he received the following feedback:

- Lacked specific technical skills related to the role
- Didn't have a genuine passion for the placement
- Could only think of the team project when asked to describe a challenging situation he had faced
- Body language was poor (slumped shoulders, weak hand shake & poor eye contact)

David is not a programmer and applied to the general IT roles at multinationals, where often the role available isn't specified

Most of the roles he applied to are described as 'technology programme' or similar. His feedback indicated that he:

- Didn't demonstrate why he applied to the organisation
- Lacked varied examples for competency related questions
- All the examples he did give related to degree
- Didn't understand the market we operate in and wasn't aware of our projects

Sarah only applied for programming placements

She initially looked for roles in java but had to expand her search in order to secure an interview.
She later learnt that she:

- Didn't demonstrate any knowledge of programming languages other than those studied on degree
- Couldn't discuss any projects outside of coursework
- Was asked to explain sample code she had written but couldn't clearly articulate thought processes behind the code
- Struggled when provided with a written statement and asked to write the statement as a piece of code (in any language)

What type of role will you be interviewing for?

Placement type	Description
Non-technical	Consultancy, BA or PM. However consultancy can also be very technical
Technical v1	Software programming focus. Including web
Technical v2	Hardware
Specialist	Cyber Security, Data Science or Games programming
Hybrid	Mixture of the above

What are IT companies looking for?

Think carefully about how you can demonstrate these skills / knowledge / competencies in an interview **(with evidence)**

Confidence &
ability to
communicate
effectively

Evidence of tech
skills/knowledge
from degree &
outside of degree

Passion for the
subject,
enthusiasm & a
positive attitude

Adaptability

Problem solving

Creative thinkers

IT employers are looking for employees who can move with the rapid pace of change (you need to demonstrate these qualities with evidence in interviews)

Consultancies require staff to move from project to project, constantly adapting to new environments and facing new problems

Software developers may be required to program in a language outside of the organisation's development framework

Support staff need to be able to support the constantly changing and upgrading of hardware and software

See from the above why adaptability, problem solving and creativity are crucial

Interview advice for hiring managers

3 TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Hiring new employees? Here are three types of questions to include in job interviews.

BEHAVIORAL

ASK ABOUT:

- past behavior
- experiences
- knowledge
- skills

Describe a job experience in which you had to speak up to let other people know what you thought.

SITUATIONAL

ASSESS:

- hypothetical situations
- responses
- culture fit

You're met with resistance when introducing a new idea at work. How would you handle it?

GENERAL

ASK ABOUT:

- professional goals
- strengths
- work style
- interest in company

What made you apply for this position? What are your strengths? What is your career path?

Face to Face Interviews

- Still the most common method
- Can be 1:1, more likely to be at least two people, or a panel e.g. the line manager, an HR representative, a colleague, a manager from another department
- There may be even a current placement/grad, be equally respectful to them – they are just as influential!

Telephone interviews

- Often used at an early stage of selection
- Prepare in the same way that you would for a face-to-face interview
- You may work with trans-global teams so you need to have good telephone skills so be aware that you will be assessed on your telephone style too
- Practise first with a friend
- Write down the questions to help you stay on track and answer the question that they asked you
- Use prompts and notes but make sure you don't rustle papers
- Smile, stand up, sound lively
- Slow your speech down



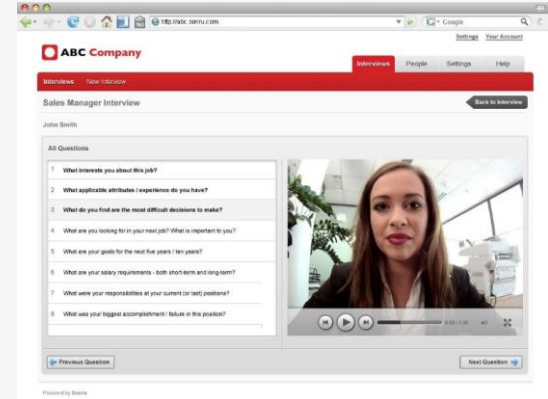
Video interviews

- Will soon take over telephone interviews in popularity with recruiters
- 2 types:

- 1) **Real-time**; done over Skype or similar
- 2) **Recorded on Video Interview Platforms** like:

- Sonru: www.sonru.com
- InterviewStream: <http://interviewstream.com>
- HireVue: <http://hirevue.com>

- 2 aspects to prepare for:
- **Questions** (content)
- **Technique** (looking natural on camera and getting your timing and pause right)



Preparing for video interviews

- Employers will send you a practice test link – use it!
- Get used to talking to nobody, talk to the wall at home
- Get a friend to video you or video yourself
- Dress as you would for a face-to-face interview
- Slow down your speech
- Look into the camera not the screen to make eye contact
- Control your environment – think about background, lighting, noise, potential disturbances and a reliable internet connection
- Download the plug-in in advance so you don't waste time
- Consider using headphones or a microphone
- Control your body language – sit up straight, be clear, don't mumble, smile and look attentive



Group Interviews

- You may be set a challenge to work on as a team or asked to carry out a discussion about a set topic
- Try and introduce yourself and get names of people whilst you are waiting, be inclusive and involve others in the conversation
- You don't have to be the loudest, be natural but show your talents
- When not speaking, don't let your eyes wander off - stay engaged
- Try and offer something to the conversation - you don't have to speak all the time
- If you want to contribute but jumping in would be interrupting, make a note so you can say it when the current conversation has ended 'referring back to what you said earlier..'

Competency-based interviews

- Employers identify the vital skills and abilities (competencies) and measure your suitability by asking questions where you will need to draw on examples when you have applied particular competencies.
- Examples of competencies: communication, problem solving, teamwork, analytical thinking, leadership.
- Competency-based questions will usually start with “Tell us about..” or “Can you describe a time when you....” and then they will ask about the competency they are interested in.
- For example, “Can you tell us about a technical problem that you have solved?”

Always use the STAR technique to answer competency questions

The STAR technique... (again)

Situation: give the interviewer a context by describing the situation.

Task: what was your goal or the challenge you had to overcome?

Action: tell the interviewer what your specific actions were. Justify your decisions. Draw upon other related skills you used.

Result: the end result – make sure it shows you in a good light, even if the overall project was not a success. Did you receive any positive feedback? What did you learn?

How to prepare for competency-based questions

- If you want to be successful at interview you need to write up answers to as many competency themes as possible in the STAR (L) format
- You will find that you can recycle this preparation across a range of questions and interviews
- Always review the job spec before an interview and look at the competencies they are seeking. Be sure you have answers that evidence your skills in all of the competencies listed – hard work but really very simple!

Strengths based interviews

- Increasing in popularity, interviewers are interested in what you enjoy doing – generally you perform well at things that you enjoy
- Competencies can be defined as “what you CAN do”, while strengths are “what you really ENJOY doing”.
- We have heard that recruiters are bored of hearing students sound like robots answering pre-prepared answers to competency-based questions so they are moving to strengths-based recruiting
- Recruiters say that everybody has strengths but not everybody has previous experience that they can use to answer competency-based questions, therefore they think strengths-based recruiting is fairer
- Competency-based recruiting will not be replaced any time soon so prepare for both types of questioning

How to prepare for strengths-based interviews

- Find out if the company you are applying to follows a strengths-based recruitment model. EY and Aviva were early adopters of it. Barclays, Nestle and Standard Chartered also use it
- Do some research to figure out what strengths or values the company recruits for
- There is no right or wrong answer, we all have different strengths and a mix of strengths are needed in a team but some strengths will be central to the role
- Identify your top three strengths and find examples to back them up
- If creativity is a strength, craft an answer about when you were successfully creative
- *Be aware that you might also be asked about your weaknesses*

Answering strengths-based questions

- Sometimes this style of questioning will feel repetitive but recruiters will be looking for differences in your body language from question to question
- It is easy to tell if somebody is really organised by seeing how animated and happy they look when they talk about how they keep themselves organised
- The interviewers are looking for **performance, energy and authenticity**
- More than any other type of interview you need to watch your body language as the body doesn't lie....
- *All answers are acceptable if you justify them. Don't give a one word answer*

Example questions:

- *Tell me about something you are particularly proud of*
- *What do you find is always left until last/un-done on your to-do-list?*
- *What is your greatest strength?*
- *What energises you?*
- *What is a successful day for you?*
- *Do you prefer quick action or careful planning?*

How to talk about your weaknesses

- Don't say chocolate, shoes or being a perfectionist
- Be genuine but choose something that is non-critical to the role
- People often speak quickly in presentations and interviews. If this applies to you, you could say that you know that you speak quickly but that you are working on it
- Whatever you choose, make it clear to them *how* you have been working on it and what progress you have made
- You could choose something that you have almost completely mastered and say "I used to but then I and now I so I am now almost fully capable in that area but I'm still working on it."

General interview question themes

- 'Tell us about yourself' (your education/work history – a warm up)
- 'What could you bring to the company, role or team?' (why are you the best person for the job? / why should they hire you?)
- 'Give an example of when you...' (competency-based)
- 'What would you do if...?' (scenario-based)
- 'What do you know about the company?' (commercial awareness)
- 'What do you know about the job role and career path?' (testing your commitment to the technology sector)
- When have you self-taught yourself something new? (testing your potential to develop the skills they need quickly – refer to your PDO!)
- **You must anticipate some variations of these questions!**

Individual Activity - Prepare for a mock interview

- You will soon have an opportunity to have a mock interview with your peers
- The imaginary job that you will apply for will be the one that you based your answers to assessment 1 on
- Review both the job description and your answers to the application questions that you submitted in assessment 1
- Think about how you might say them out loud in an interview and what you might change
- We will assume that you want to interview for the same role that you wrote about in assessment 1 but you may choose a different role for this activity if you like
- You have 10 minutes to prepare

Group Activity – Have a mock interview

- Get into groups of 4
- Tell me who wants to interview for which role so that I can give you the correct worksheet
- Everybody will have the opportunity to be an interviewer and an interviewee. Everybody will be an observer twice.
- The interviewer will use a pre-prepared question sheet based on the role that the interviewee has chosen to apply for
- The interviewer is not expected to make lots of notes but please do jot down some comments if you can
- The observers should use the feedback sheets provided – be nice!
- At the end of each interview the observers and interviewer should feed back to the interviewee with comments and constructive (but kind) advice
- You need to rotate roles after each interview
- You have 30 minutes for this activity so manage your time accordingly

Technical Interviews

- Interviewers are interested in your thought processes and logic
- They want to discover your potential ability to handle unfamiliar technical problems calmly and creatively
- Technical interviews are also a test of how clearly you can communicate technical ideas and information
- Expect to be tested to the limit of your knowledge. Don't be defensive or defeatist if you get to a point where you don't know any more
- You need to come across as someone who is easy to work with and who enjoys a challenge
- A test would usually assess a technical skill essential for the role



Technical interview preparation

- Find out what sort of specialist work the company does and anticipate what questions you might be asked relating to their work
- Find out what the company values and weave that into your answer, some companies favour clean code, or thorough testing, or well designed and easily extensible code
- Revise key principles and concepts that you have been taught
- Read through relevant coursework and be prepared to talk about it
- Practice writing/typing something whilst making eye contact with someone
- Explain technical concepts to non-technical people in daily life
- Remember that if you can't explain something simply you probably don't understand it well enough
- Always ask yourself how you could make something run faster
- Practice brain teasers for fun

Possible technical question types

- Usually start with easy questions about university modules and projects that are relevant to the role you are applying for
- Questions may be hypothetical technical problems that get more and more complex
- They may ask you to bring a project you have developed and ask you to talk them through the coding and thought processes involved
- Whiteboard coding exercises are very fashionable at the moment as are brain teasers
- You might be asked to design a technical solution to a business problem
- Make sure that you can name some emerging and disruptive technologies and how they have been applied successfully and where problems and reputational damage have been caused

Coding type questions

- **Specific code writing questions:**

- *Convert a natural language statement into a piece of code (of your choice)*
- *What is wrong with this line of code?*

- **General coding knowledge:**

- *What is/are Polymorphism, abstract classes, interfaces*
- *Describe a software development methodology its positives & negatives*

Use this site for a huge selection of technical questions on a range of programming languages

http://www.tutorialspoint.com/questions_and_answers.htm

Whiteboard coding exercises

- These involve physically writing code on a whiteboard
- This will feel very different to typing code as you think things through
- Sharing your thought processes in front of an audience is challenging, even if you know the answer, its not as private as sitting at your PC and entering, editing, deleting code before you come to the solution you want.
- The employer will learn a lot about you through the process you use to get to that code - not necessarily through the code you produce
- To prepare, purchase a small whiteboard and ask friends to ask you questions from the activities section of your programming text books or stay here at uni in the evenings to use the classrooms here

Portfolio-based interviews

- Used more with small to medium size companies but many candidates take examples of their work to interviews at big corporates as well
- You might be asked to bring a portfolio of your work e.g. code and games to showcase your skills at the interview and to have an in-depth discussion about the pieces you have chosen to include
- Select work carefully – you might be proud of something you did during college but you now have more skills to show off
- Talk through your rationale
- Learn to talk to the person not the screen, make eye contact and have a conversation with the person
- Genuine enthusiasm on your part will help you engage the interviewers

General interview preparation

- Return to the employer research you did when you made your original job application and build on it.
- Look on the organisation's website, social media, news stories for details of recent work or clients
- Make sure you know what do they do, what their strategic goals, mission, vision and values are
- Be aware of negative press that the company may have had
- What industry do they operate in, what are their products and services, who are their competitors, what projects are they involved with? Why do you want to work for them?
- From a commercial perspective – 'know the brand'
- Refer back to the commercial awareness slides from week 5

Understand the role

- You'll need to demonstrate an understanding of the purpose and responsibilities of the role
- Read and re-read the job advert, job description and person specification.
- How does it link to your degree and your career ambitions?
- Get a sense of what team or department the role sits in
- Learn about any jargon that they use. For example – what does end to end digital transformation actually mean? What are supply chain services?
- If they say they work with disruptive technologies, read a case study and learn about what they have done and have some thoughts about what they could do in the future

How to be the perfect fit

- Different companies attract and value different types of people
- Know what charities the company supports and what the social life is like
- Listen carefully to the words they use and repeat them back to them
- Some companies give plus or minus scores for mentioning certain words, phrases or skills
- Be careful, you mustn't use acronyms or words you don't actually understand
- Often there are key words that a company uses to describe itself, they want their staff to be that. Collaborative is a big one at the moment, do your research
- Some companies have internal slogans, Google's was 'Don't be evil'.
- Apple's "think different" slogan was used in an advertisement, but it also says a lot about what they are looking for in staff

The image shows the Google logo in its multi-colored font (blue, red, yellow, blue, green, red) with a slight shadow. Below the logo, the slogan "Don't be evil." is written in a red, serif font. The entire graphic is set against a white background within a rectangular frame.

Google:
Don't be evil.

Will an interview at a large employer differ from an interview at an SME?

- SME's have **smaller budgets**, recruit **less students** and may require a greater and quicker **return on their investment**
- Interview questions or tests may therefore be **more direct** and link specifically to the **tasks** you will be carrying out every day

Professionalism & body language

Look smart, awake and enthused

A number of employers tell us every year that candidates were not successful because they didn't appear interested. Being enthusiastic and interested is the easiest thing you can do on the day

Give a firm handshake

Look them in the eye - no limp wrists

Maintain eye contact

When facing a panel, focus on the person asking the question. Focusing only on the person you perceive to be the most important can leave a very negative impression

Sit up straight and maintain good posture

Body language can make a big impression on hiring managers. Your interviewer will be visualising you in their team or with their clients. How do you come across?



We asked employers for their interview advice

They said....

- Do answer questions honestly. A lack of ethics will rule you out.
- Don't guess answers to questions. If you guess you will get caught out and lose credibility – better to admit you do not know something
- Don't mention acronyms or anything that you cannot talk about in more detail
- Do ask for clarification if you don't understand something during the interview.
- Do ask questions at the end of the interview, the worst thing you can say when you are asked if you have any questions is 'No'
- Don't be negative about previous experiences & people, or even how bad the weather is/how tough the journey to get in was
- Do act confidently and smile when relevant – put the interviewer at ease
- Don't be arrogant. You may be smart and you need to be confident but if this crosses over to arrogance then you will not get the role.

Additionally, we would advise that you

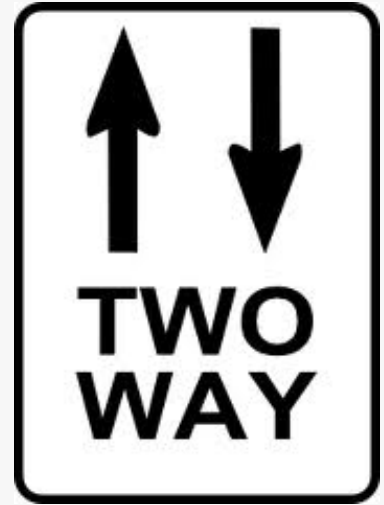
- Don't turn up late or too early
- Definitely avoid overpowering scents/perfumes
- Save street speak for the street, articulate yourself professionally, this means no “yeahs”, “innits” & filler words like “umm”
- Recognise that there will be a scoring system of some kind. You will have a limited time allocated to you – if you waffle on and over-talk they won't get through all of the set questions and you will lose points
- Appreciate that if you give one word answers and they have to coax you to speak you probably won't get full marks either – be easy to interview

With any type of interview be aware of repeated questioning or the interviewer looking bored

- If the interviewer keeps asking more and more questions about the same thing (grilling you) it probably means that you haven't answered the question fully or you haven't actually answered the question that they asked you
- Make yourself easy to understand and be aware that you know what happened because you were there so take a moment to set the scene – who, what where, when... (look at week 3 slides)
- If you can tell that you are losing the interviewer's attention try to animate your delivery – don't slip into monotone
- Most people need to slow down, don't ramble on and on and on....
- The STAR technique gives you a framework but storytelling will captivate your audience – make sure you attend next week's session on presentation skills

An interview is also your chance to:

- Ensure that the role and company are right for you
- Articulate your skills
- Sell yourself in person
- Perhaps talk through some code/games
- Clear up any queries you have



Questions you can ask..

- How many other people work in the team? What are their job roles?
- What do you like most about working for this company?
- What kind of work would I be responsible for over the next year?
- What is a typical career path in this job function?
- How would you describe the atmosphere or culture of this company?
- What challenges is the business dealing with at the moment?
- What would I have to do to be a brilliant placement student?
- When can I expect to hear from you?

Plan your day



- Good first impressions count for a lot.
- Plan for your interview day in fine detail - it will help you relax and shows employers that you are organised and committed
- Plan your outfit
- Plan the journey
- Reading through your application again
- Print out a fresh copy of your CV and organise any supporting information you'll be taking with you like your passport

Common questions

- Tell me about yourself
- Please describe yourself in three words
- Why do you want this placement?
- What is your main weakness?
- Describe a time when you were innovative.
- How do you manage conflicting priorities?
- What are your career goals?

Curveball questions

- If your friend was seriously injured and you had to get him to a hospital, would you speed and go through a red light?
- Would you rather fight a horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?
- How do you fit a giraffe in a fridge?
- How many ways can you get a needle out of a haystack?
- If you were an elephant what would you do with your trunk?
- Describe the sky without using colours.
- Imagine you are in a plane falling from the sky without a parachute: what's good about it?

Recruiters are increasingly faced with standardised answers to their questions during job interviews and curveballs help selectors discover the real candidate and test their ability to think on their feet.

Mock interviews..

Book an appointment with your PDIT tutor for a mock interview, speak to the PLU for some advice or practise answering questions with a friend or colleague.

To prepare for your mock interview look at the job description and think of examples/skills you have for each of the required competencies on the job description. Prepare responses to possible interview questions for each competency.

Ask for constructive feedback and work on your weaknesses

Being successful at interviews is also about:

- Dealing with stress and anxiety – find something that works for you, sports, meditation, breathing techniques, counselling, apps...
- Coping with failure – any entrepreneur will tell you that they learnt the most when something went wrong – develop a growth mind-set
- Building confidence – ask for feedback each time and keep doing what you do well and stop doing what you do badly and develop in areas suggested
- Perseverance – we advertise roles through until September – don't give up!

Watch this week's video at home



https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are#t-4409

Next week's morning lecture
will be in the Birley lecture hall
(HG0) from 9.00am – 11.00am

Reading list

1. Successful interview skills: how to present yourself with confidence, Rebecca Corfield (e-book)
2. Inside interviewing: new lenses, new concerns, James A. Holstein, Jaber F. Gubrium
3. Successful interview skills: how to present yourself with confidence, Rebecca Corfield (e-book)
4. The employment interview handbook, Robert W. Eder, Michael M. Harris
5. The Job Interview Toolkit: Exercises to Get You Fit for Your Interview, Ann Reynolds, Julie Cooper
6. Now You've Been Shortlisted: Your Step-By-Step Guide to Being Successful at Interviews and Assessment Centres, Denise Taylor
7. The Interview Book: Your Definitive Guide to the Perfect Interview, James Innes

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