

Preparing for Interviews

Version 2.20

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Part 1 Preparing for your interview

How should I approach interviews?

Be positive, the employer already likes what they see on paper.

What can you offer them?

Although the interview is a two way process i.e. what they can offer you and what you can offer them, it is predominantly expected that it will be about what you can offer them. You need to impress the employer and show that you have done your research on the organisation and most importantly the role.

Making a match

It's all about providing the employer with the evidence to prove you have the skills (personal, practical, technical and often commercial), knowledge, experience and personal abilities and qualities that match their needs.

Approach it like a business meeting

The interview is an opportunity for you to tell them what you want to do and why, what you have done and perhaps what you like doing and why. The more factual you make it the more powerful it becomes. There is no need to oversell yourself. However you do need to be enthusiastic, energetic and show passion. Remain professional.

Coping with nerves

It is quite natural to feel nervous about an interview. The key to calming them is being fully prepared and anticipating the types of questions you may face. A practice interview which can be booked through the Careers Service can help familiarise you with the format of the interview process and get feedback on your performance before doing the real thing.

Breathing exercises or gentle meditation may also help you overcome your fears.

On the day of the interview, arrive in plenty of time to avoid any additional stresses. If you feel hot and flustered, try running cold water on your wrists. Then take a few breaths, remember to have a good posture and smile as you enter the interview. Many interviewers are aware that the interview is a daunting prospect so will start with general questions to help you relax.

Types of interview

Find out as much as you can:

Knowing what kind of interview to expect is essential to your confidence and preparation. It is acceptable for you to request information about this from the employer if none is provided. Aspects that are useful to know beforehand are:

- **What is the interview format?**

Employers use different types of interviews at each stage of the recruitment process. It will increase your confidence to know how many people you are meeting and what method of assessment will take place.

- **Who will be interviewing you?**

If it's a line manager/technical manager the interview may be more technical or based around the industry. If it's a Human Resources/Recruitment Manager it may be more motivation, personality traits and skills based. If it's a Recruitment Consultant on behalf of the employer, they may be less knowledgeable on the role/company details.

- **Interview styles**

If they ask you to come in for a 'chat' the structure may be more fluid. Don't fall into the trap of thinking it's casual. You should perhaps prepare even more thoroughly for a chat.

- **What type of questions will be asked?**
Is it a competency based, technical or strengths based interview?
- **How long will it be?**

Preparing for different types of interview

Face to face interviews

These are most common and you may undergo one interview or several interviews following each other. Sometimes there may be two people – one to ask questions, the other to observe and take notes. Ensure you don't ignore the other person when answering the questions and include them in your eye contact. Always remember to build a positive rapport with your interviewer.

Telephone interviews

This method is often used as a way of pre-screening applicants. It can work to your advantage as you can have all your notes to hand. It is rare to be offered a job after this stage, as a face to face interview usually follows. Telephone interviews may be outsourced to specialist recruitment organisations.

- Standard interview – a structured conversation, just without the face to face. This may be at a pre-arranged time or unannounced.
- Set interview pattern – a series of set questions or statements are asked, often by Human Resources or a Recruitment Organisation. It will feel less discussion based and more like a telephone version of a personality psychometric test.

Advice

- Unannounced Interviews – Inform who you live with of this possibility to ensure phone callers are greeted properly and you are given privacy if required. If the caller is going to ring your mobile, answer professionally. If you are expecting an unannounced call from more than one employer, keep their details in separate files clearly marked to avoid confusion and a disorganised impression.

- Make sure your answer phone message is appropriate and professional.
- Have your CV / application to hand. You may also find it useful to have a pen and paper, a diary for arranging a follow up interview and one side of bullet point notes as a reminder.
- Not being able to hear – don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat the question. Make sure you have a quiet environment with no background noise and inform the people you live with so that you do not get interrupted.
- Great importance is placed upon the tone and intonation of your voice and the rhythm of the conversation. A monotone voice will be more noticeable via the phone. An awareness of how you sound is essential. Practise giving answers with a friend and obtain feedback, or record your answers and play them back.
- Non-verbal – Smiling can be heard on the phone as it alters the shape of the mouth and sound. Feel free to use hand gestures as normal, as this may improve your conversational flow. It also increases confidence to stand whilst talking. Some people find it helpful to dress smartly to increase the feeling of formality.
- Don't be put off if you hear silence from the interviewer; this happens in face-to-face interviews too, they may be taking notes.
- Have a glass of water to hand in case you dry up during the conversation.

Video/online/Skype interviews

Online and video interviews are increasingly used by employers. Video interviews can take different formats and are used at various stages in the selection process. Broadly, video interviews fall into two main categories:

1. Recorded video interviews which are designed to be used early in the selection process, usually following submission of a CV or application forms.

For these types of interviews the employer usually has a standard set of questions and you will probably be instructed to login to some

online video software in your own time. As you choose when you want to record the video make sure to select a time when you are feeling fresh and full of energy.

Using a computer with a webcam and microphone you then record on video your answers to the employer's questions. You will usually have around 30 seconds to 1 minute to prepare, and a few minutes to answer for each question, although timings vary.

Depending on the system used, you may be able to practise first and/or re-record your answers. However, in most cases, (as with face-to-face interviews) you will only have one chance to get your answers right.

2. Live video interviews which replace a face-to-face interview or telephone interview. These are usually conducted at a pre-arranged time in a live 'video chat' with the recruiter via Skype or similar software.

They are particularly useful when geographical distance is an issue. If you are overseas (e.g. on a gap year) and are invited for a traditional interview, it may be worth asking whether the recruiter would consider a Skype interview as an alternative. However, this will probably not be an option if the process includes an assessment centre.

Advice

- Make sure you have set up the webcam and microphone correctly and you know how they work. Check the picture of yourself is bright and clear - a poor quality image and/or sound can make it more difficult for the recruiter to judge your performance. You should be in a brightly lit room, and if there is daylight it is better to face the window. Make sure you speak loudly and clearly.
- Pick a place where you will be undisturbed to conduct the video interview and ensure you have a clutter-free, plain backdrop. Make sure your webcam lens is at eye-level so you are not looking up or down too much. Your webcam should be far enough away so the picture of yourself includes your head and shoulders. Wearing formal interview attire is expected.

- Make sure you're well prepared. Before you have the real interview, practise answering interview questions on your webcam or phone and play the recording back to see how you are presenting yourself. You can usually use your webcam's own software and Windows Movie Maker for PC or iChat if you have a Mac. It's sometimes hard to be objective about yourself, so consider asking a friend to review the recordings to get a second opinion.
- When viewing video interviews, recruiters tend to pay particular attention to body language, tone of voice and 'personality', so ensure you are comfortable and relaxed. How you deliver your answer is as important as the content of your answer, so make sure you deliver with conviction, passion and enthusiasm.
- Look directly at the camera and smile frequently throughout. Some students have found it useful to stick a picture next to their webcam, or even googly eyes so their attention is drawn towards the lens!
- You may want to prepare some brief notes, or stick some post-it notes on the wall behind your computer screen regarding key interview topics. However these should be a quick visual aid to jog your memory, and you should not read from notes when answering the questions.
- For recorded video interviews, do not begin answering aloud until your time to answer countdown has begun or your answer may not be counted. On the other hand do not panic if you get cut off at the end and have not completely finished delivering your answer, take a breath and move onto the next question with high energy.

Assessment centre interview

These interviews are usually part of the second round selection process, although some employers use them at the first stage. Here you can expect an interview as part of a whole range of selection processes, group exercises, tests, presentation, discussion and socialising.

Second interviews

Typically for a major graduate employer, the selection process involves a second stage.

Second interviews can take various forms. The interview itself is typically around an hour but it may be part of an assessment centre lasting 1-2 days. You will normally be given some indication of the process - if you are not told in advance what will happen, you can ask.

Professional firms, small companies and some public sector organisations tend to rely entirely on interviews with directors, senior partners or managers, or on panel interviews. These second interviews may be along the same lines as the first, but conducted by different people.

Typically the second interview may be much more demanding, focusing on key competencies or more technical aspects of the role. You may have your responses to questions challenged or have to overcome an opposing view concerning your judgement. This is to assess to see how you react in these situations, will you give in or do you have the ability to persuade and assert your view in a professional manner.

Panel interviews

These are mainly used by public sector organisations and usually consist of three or four people but can be up to six or more, from various specialisms in the organisation: e.g. HR specialist, technical specialist, the line manager, possible colleague/peers. These can be somewhat daunting, but try to treat them in the same way as a 1:1 situation.

Eye contact – always answer questions directly to the person who asks them, however briefly include every other individual via appropriate eye contact with them too.

Group interview

This is like a normal interview but with a group of other applicants. It is not very common and tends to occur in sales or management based roles. You may need to adapt your style.

- You must ensure your answers are heard at least some of the time and not be overshadowed. However, dominating the other applicants is not advised. It's about balance.
- Don't be aggressive by speaking too loudly, abruptly interrupting or speaking over others. Instead, be politely assertive, interrupt with phrases such as 'May I add something...'
- Take the initiative to answer questions first if possible to show confidence and leadership, but diplomatically say 'If I may answer that question first...' The key is appearing confident and assertive, whilst being polite and considerate to the team of other applicants.

Case study interviews

More employers use this type of exercise to assess your commercial awareness and logical thinking.

In the classic case study you may be given a business issue to read, analyse and then make recommendations and discuss with the interviewer. It is important to note the following:

- Read the case study background information carefully and then identify the key issues.
- Assess and evaluate the prime objectives raised in the case study.
- Develop a few key strategies e.g. what are those critical choices you have to make in order to meet the objectives.
- Finally turn those key choices into specific action steps.

In case studies there probably is a right answer. However don't worry too much trying to get through to the end – the interviewer will recognise that you will be under pressure and they will be more interested in your approach to solving the problem than you getting the right answer.

A tip is to approach the case study as if you really were in this situation – what would you really do. Don't miss the obvious! Keep it simple and be logical in your communication of your answer.

Companies that have selection processes which involve case study interviews usually have practice examples on their website to help familiarise you with what to expect. Alternatively attending employer sessions which feature business games may assist your understanding too.

Case study interview examples are available on the Careers Service website: www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/assessmentcentres

The casual interview or chat

You may be contacted to have a casual chat about a position; it could even be in a coffee shop. It's still an interview so do your preparation, but in some cases it may feel more like a conversation. Always consider the situation, what position am I interviewing for, who is interviewing me and dress accordingly.

What to prepare before the interview?

The interview may be based around just one type of question, a few or perhaps a combination of them all. If you have done your research you will have a fair idea about what is important in terms of technical knowledge, practical experience, attitude and skills required for the job, and be able to demonstrate your motivation for the role and commercial awareness.

The following steps are essential in your preparation for any interview:

1 Review your application

It's common for interviewers to ask questions about information on your CV or application. Be prepared to expand on examples or information you

may have given in an application or to provide alternative examples. Ensure you know what the recruitment process involves for the company and what the next stage in selection process is.

2 Research and understand the role you are applying for:

Q: Why are you interested in advice work / accountancy/ HR?

The interviewer will test your understanding and motivation for the job and you will be expected to provide well thought out reasons as to why you want to do the job.

Research the employer's website and attend careers fairs, employer presentations or workshops to speak to employees who are currently doing the job to find out as much about the role as possible.

The prospects profiles can be a useful guide to help you understand the typical requirements of a job role. <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles>

3 Research the company

Q: Why do you want to work for us?

Interviewers will ask why you want to work for the company and will probably test your knowledge about the business/organisation. For example:

- What do they do / make?
- Who are their clients?
- Why are they different from other similar organisations?

Some companies like to talk about their values, principles and ethics, think carefully about how your own aspirations and ideals match theirs. Focus on the job you are applying for - what will the training programme entail? (e.g. 2 years, rotations in different departments, mentor, buddy, personal development such as volunteering in the community as part of their CSR *Corporate Social Responsibility* policy and professional accreditation i.e. becoming a chartered engineer). This will help you

answer the motivation questions around why you want to work with the company.

4 Research the sector/industry

Employers will expect you to have commercial awareness and understand the context they work in, so be prepared to talk about current issues in the industry. Who are their competitors? What are the key issues faced by the sector? If there have been some dramatic developments in their sector (e.g. financial downturns, changes in legislation), think how this could affect their organisation.

Read industry journals and news. In finance for example, there is a basic understanding that you have been following the industry news for some time. The Economist and Financial Times are must reads!

More tips on researching jobs & employers

www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/findjobs/graduatejobs/researchemployer
[S](#)

Advice on how you can apply this preparation when answering interview questions about motivation and competencies is available in the section 'how can I answer interview questions'

5 Think about the key strengths that make you suitable for the role

Interviewers will be assessing you against a list of criteria, which you need to meet.

Look at the job description and key skills required. Think about how your own experiences from a personal and academic perspective match against the employer's criteria. For instance, if the job requires strong leadership and teamwork, can you provide a couple of examples from your own experiences that demonstrate these skills?

Completing a skills audit may help you to log examples of your skills in preparation for an interview:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/employable

6 Plan your journey

- Plan your journey; leave extra time to allow for cancelled trains/ buses or traffic jams. Heavy rain, gales, snow & sun can all cause chaos to our transport systems!
- If you need to arrive early in the morning and the interview requires considerable travel consider getting overnight accommodation (check whether employer will reimburse your expenses).
- Print off a map so you know where you are going.
- Take a contact name and number in case you get lost / delayed.
- Check out exactly where your interview will be held, the building, floor, room number etc. Multiple businesses may be located in one building.

7 What to take with you

- A copy of your CV or application – in case they ask for it and for last minute preparation.
- For certain sectors such as journalism, marketing or advertising, it might be an idea to take evidence of your work in a portfolio.
- Have a list of questions to ask at the end of the interview (see below).
- Keep all documentation in a professional looking wallet or a case.

8 What to wear

An interview is a formal occasion, even if the letter says smart casual or casual, they don't necessarily mean jeans and t-shirt! Think about going to a business meeting with the people who work in this industry, what would they wear?

- The most important thing is to wear a suit / business attire, it shows you have made an effort and you know how to present yourself professionally. With supermarkets and budget stores all selling affordable suits it is certainly worth the investment. Occasionally recruiters may specify a dress code of 'smart casual'; wearing a suit and tie would still be advisable. You can always remove the tie on arrival if you feel it is appropriate.

- A darker coloured suit is probably going to be the most flexible and easy to care for option. You must decide how on trend you want to appear and if it is a suitable way to present yourself for the industry. You would dress differently for a job in the fashion industry to a job in investment banking.
- Your clothes including jewellery, makeup & aftershave / perfume should not distract the interviewer from what you are saying.
- If you have an unusual hair style, facial piercings or tattoos then you will have to weigh up how much you want to be taken for who you are against any industry norms. This really is about work life balance and finding a company who are right for you.
- If going to an assessment centre they may state casual dress in the evening, it's very tricky to get right! Your suit without the jacket but with a fresh shirt or top would still stand you in good stead, don't be the one person who turns up in a mini-skirt or ripped jeans.

Interview Technique on the Day

On arrival

- Naturally you have arrived early and have had time to freshen up. Ask to use the washroom before you report in if possible, so that your interviewer doesn't come down while you are in there.
- Report in or wait in the appointed location. If you have overnight bags and there is a reception area, ask if you can leave them safely with them.

Meeting, greeting and leaving

- Smile!
- Shake hands – practice this with friends. It's not a grip contest, but a limp, damp hand is not nice!
- If you are asked about your journey or how you found the place - now is not a good time to tell them about the nightmare trip you just had, keep it brief.

- At the end of the interview, it is normal to shake hands again and to thank the interviewer for taking the time to see you.

Take a seat

- When invited to do so. Sit up straight and make sure you are in a comfortable position so that you don't fidget.
- During the interview don't slouch, and avoid fiddling with pens, papers, hair, or jewellery.

How do I sound?

- You want to convey your enthusiasm for the job, but don't let nerves take over and allow you to ramble. Speak calmly and clearly.
- It is natural to be nervous and this can make your mouth dry, take a sip of water if you need to.
- Answer questions in a structured manner the notes in this guide will help. If you find yourself drifting off the point STOP and collect your thoughts. It's ok to say that you have lost your train of thought or have digressed as long as you get back on track.
- If you are unsure about a question or need a second to compose your response, it's fine to ask for clarification or say you would like to think for a moment.

Part 2 Interview Questions

Structuring your answers: Use the CAR Model

Practice structuring your answer using the CAR model (context, action, result). This may also be referred to as STAR (situation, task, action, result). You will provide most detail in the 'Action' part.

Context – Say who, when, what, where, how and why this situation was.

Action – Say specifically what you did and how you demonstrated that competence.

Result – Say something specific or quantifiable, a learning point or feedback from others.

Ensure you choose examples that are as relevant to the role as possible, that were challenging and really show off your skills. Avoid saying 'we' to describe actions taken in a team, as the employer is not recruiting the team but needs to be clear what 'you' specifically contributed. Be prepared to be questioned about what you learnt from the experience and how you might do it differently in future.

There are further examples of application form and interview questions testing various skills on our website:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/employable

Types of questions

1 Warm up questions

These types of questions usually occur at the beginning of the interview and are usually about you or subjects that are familiar and easy for you to answer. The question may seem easy but remember the interviewer can tell a lot about your personality from the way you respond and how much you have prepared by the structure and length of your answer.

Examples of warm up questions:

- **Tell me about yourself?**

Knowing what to say and how long to talk for can be challenging. Try and keep it brief and then check with the interviewer if they would like you to expand on particular areas. Prepare a brief and relevant snapshot about yourself. The question is about your ability to communicate clearly, confidently and concisely.

- **Why did you choose to study at The University of Manchester?**

Consider your reasons, what was it about the course and or the city that attracted you.

The interviewer may then conduct the interview based on what you have originally said. The key to remember is start with a positive impact and make a good first impression.

2 Motivation & commitment questions

These questions will assess your enthusiasm and research into the job role, offer and company. Don't slip into 'speech mode' – keep your response personal and specific to you, this role and this organisation. You can demonstrate your research about the role and company to show you have made informed decisions.

- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why are you interested in this role?
- Why you have applied for the job?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

This looks at your commitment to your career and is a chance for you to demonstrate your knowledge about the career routes available with the employer you have applied to. Key things to discuss would be around the management opportunities available, opportunities to experience new areas within the organisation (e.g. secondments) or working abroad if the organisation is international.

3 Competency based questions

Competency based interviews give employers an indicator of how you could potentially perform in the workplace, by asking questions about how you have reacted to and dealt with previous academic, work or social situations. The competencies that employers focus on are related to the job, so you should be able to anticipate the types of questions you may face.

You will be asked to give an example of a situation or task which led you to take a certain course of action. Probing questions will then be used by the interviewer to determine the course of action you took, what changes were created by those actions, and the effects of those actions on you and/or others.

You need to research what the key competencies are for the role you have applied for. Use the job description, person description, company

website, company values/mission statement, company literature, application form, or any company events you have attended.

If there isn't a job description, the Prospects website includes job profiles that will help you find out typical skills and activities in many different types of jobs: www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs.htm

Examples of competency based questions include:

- Tell me about a time when you were faced with a difficult challenge?
- Can you describe a time when you had to persuade others around to your way of thinking?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with conflict in a team?
- Can you give me an example of when you have effectively led others?
- How do you go about motivating team members?

Ensure that you have at least two situational examples of when you demonstrated a particular competence. Try to use examples from all aspects of your academic, work and social life.

4 Commercial awareness questions

Many employers tell us that this is where candidates fall short. Developing commercial awareness requires time and research, and at interview you need to prove to the employer that you understand and are interested in the industry and their company. To help you prepare, think about the following:

- Know and understand the range of products / services the company provides.
- Who are their competitors? What are the risks associated with the work they do?
- Who are their clients and what are their needs?

- What legislation might be relevant or have an impact on the company / sector?
- What current events / trends might be important?

Example questions:

- What do you see are the main challenges facing the Law profession in the next few years?
- What do you understand about the CIMA qualification? How does it differ from ACCA?
- Please tell me your views on current legislative standards affecting the Tax profession?
- How do you think we can attract more customers to buy X?
- What are your views on current educational standards?

There are other ways employers can test your commercial awareness, such as a reasoning question or a case study. There is little you can do to prepare for those types of questions. However the key to success is structuring your answers and being prepared to support your point of view with evidence. Skills learnt on your course such as report writing, summarising, problem-solving and presenting will all help.

Further information about commercial awareness online:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/experience/skills/commercialawareness

You can find links to useful resources for industry news on the Which Career pages:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/whichcareer

5 Technical / Specialist

Here the interviewer wants to find out if you meet the required standard of knowledge for the job or are able to adapt your current knowledge to new situations. The specialist areas and the possible questions that could be asked are endless.

The more specialised the job, the more detailed questions you can expect. For very practical skill based jobs, it is possible that you will be given a practical test e.g. debug a computer program, identify the key compounds in a chemical solution by normal chemical laboratory methods.

If you are applying for further study, questions may focus around projects and presentations you have been involved with, for instance taking the interviewer through the research and methodology you used to reach the required results. It would be a good idea to look at research papers authored by the academic whose area you have applied to work in.

6 Strength based interviews

A number of graduate recruiters have begun to introduce strength based, rather than competency based, interviews into their recruitment processes.

Employers who have recently used this approach include Aviva, Standard Chartered, EY, Royal Mail, BAE systems, and Unilever.

Strength based interviews concentrate on what you are good at and what you enjoy doing rather than, as with competency based interviews, focusing on what you can do and have done in the past. Strength interviewing has its foundations in positive psychology; everyone has innate strengths that engage and energise them. By recognising these strengths and matching them to a role, not only will you perform better in your role but enjoy it more too.

Employers are opting to use this strength based approach as they feel candidates can be over rehearsed in competency interviews and often give pre-prepared 'perfect' answers. Strength based interviews are difficult to prepare for, other than by taking the time out to reflect on your own strengths beforehand. Questions are generally asked at a quick pace and, combined with your body language and tone of voice, are used to sense your energy and engagement and therefore your strengths.

You may want to ask yourself the following questions:

- What are you good at?
- What comes easily to you?
- When are you at your best?
- What subjects do you most enjoy studying?
- What motivates you?
- When did you achieve something you were really proud of?
- What things do you always put off until the last minute? These are probably weaknesses and things you dislike doing!

These questions are not necessarily straightforward. It's not always easy to realise your true strengths, values and motivations. It may help to work through the online assessment 'Profiling for Success' to help find out more about your personality type and learning style:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/psychometric/takeassessment

Examples of the type of questions that might be asked include:

- What do you do when you find a task boring?
- How do you make sure you always do your best?
- What have you contributed to a team to help their success?
- Would your friends describe you as organised?
- Have you ever done something differently the second time around?
- Do you keep your promises?
- If you had a couple of hours free at work, what would you do?
- How do you handle working with someone you don't like?
- What did you most enjoy doing at School? What did you excel at?
- Do you get more enjoyment from working on your own or in a team? Which comes more naturally to you, working in a team or working on your own?
- What work-related activities energise you and which ones do you find draining?
- Do you prefer to start a task or finish it?
- When are you at your best?

- What do your friends think are your best qualities and, conversely, most annoying characteristic?

Answers should be supported with an example that is structured using the STAR – Situation, Task, Action, Result - or CAR – Context, Action, Result - approach

<http://blog.cappeu.com/2013/01/31/how-to-prepare-for-a-strengths-based-interview/>

7 Situational questions

What would you do if.... happened?

This tests your understanding of the role and how you behave in certain circumstances. There is not usually an expectation that you would know exactly how an organisation works in every circumstance.

- Think about the circumstance you are presented with – what is your evaluation of the situation.
- What are the logical steps you would take?
- What could happen as a result of your actions and what would you do?

8 The reasoning test question

Here the interviewer is focusing on your ability to think logically, make reasoned analyses and judgements. There is no right answer but the assumptions and processes you use to come up with your figure should be sound.

An example of this question:

- How many light bulbs are there in the UK today?

9 The creative question

Occasionally used in creative organisations such as advertising.

Types of questions include:

- If you were a biscuit what biscuit would you be?
- What is your favourite product and why?

There is no right or wrong answer, you need to back up your answer and prepare to be challenged. Normally these questions are testing your ability to remain calm under pressure, so think carefully how you will structure your answer.

10 Strengths & weaknesses questions

Many candidates fear the question, 'What are your weaknesses?' You don't want to say something that could prove detrimental to your chances of success such as 'I'm argumentative' or 'I miss deadlines frequently', but equally employers are wary of candidates saying 'I tend to be a perfectionist' or 'I have no weaknesses'. This question isn't trying to catch you out, really it is assessing your self-awareness and how you manage your personal development.

Focus on a real weakness and talk around how you overcame it. For example, if you used to dislike public speaking, perhaps taking on a role such as student representative or joining a debating society has helped you deal with this fear. You are therefore showing the interviewer that you have areas for development but you can take steps to turn them into a strength.

The interviewer might ask you questions around negative experiences you have faced, e.g. you may have failed the first year of your degree or had poor A-levels. As with the weakness question, be positive and focus on what you have learned from that situation.

Sample Questions for different industries

Engineering

- What kind of engineering projects most appeal to you?
- Can you give me an example of when you have delivered results in a challenging situation?
- Tell me about a project or idea you implemented and the steps you took to make it succeed?

- Where do you feel nuclear power fits into a wider energy debate?

Finance (Accountancy, Banking etc)

- How do you think the economic downturn is affecting our Firm?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the CIMA qualification versus the ACA qualification?

Finance (Investment Banking)

- Why investment banking versus sales and trading? What is the difference?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge facing City institutions at the moment?

IT Games Programming

- What are your two favourite games and why?
- What areas of games software development are you interested in and why?
- Tell me about a programme that you have written that will interest our company?

IT Database Programming

- Do you treat your test and production systems differently? If so, why?
- What experience have you had analysing new systems?
- Have you had to change the timeline of a project? How did you go about it?
- Describe your experience in database design.
- What was the worst disaster you ever caused and how did you recover from it?
- There are two ways of programming - inside out and outside in. Which is your preference and why?
- What is a variable and what are they used for within a computer program?

Law

- Why did you choose your A levels?
- Why do you want to be a barrister/ solicitor?
- What do you see as the main challenges facing the legal profession in the next few years?
- How would you demonstrate to a client that you were commercially aware of their business and their needs?
- What do you think the future of the Bar is?
- How do you keep up with commercial awareness?

Medicine

- What are your motivation and reasons for wanting to study medicine?
- How has your work experience confirmed your vocation for medicine?
- Tell me about a recent medical news story which took your interest.
- What is the value of empathy for a GP?
- Why is effective team working so important for patient care?

R&D

- Please give an example of a research project that you recently completed that required you to use your analytical skills and demonstrated your technical expertise in a scientific area. Explain your work.
- Describe a project where it was important for you to collaborate or consult with another group or organisation with whom you did not usually interface. What steps did you take to facilitate cooperation or resolve a conflict? What was the outcome?
- Even though we all try to be expert in our area of study, it is impossible to know and understand everything. What aspect of your technical field are you still working to master? What steps have you taken to further your learning?

Retail Management

- How would you improve our store layout?

- Who are our main competitors on the high street and why?
- Can you give me an example of where you have had to motivate others to achieve an objective?
- What are the issues facing the food industry in the UK?

Teaching

- What evidence do you have to prove your commitment to become a primary or secondary school teacher?
- Tell me about the best presentation you ever gave. What made it so good?
- From your experience why are you suited to working with children?
- Describe a lesson you would teach about your subject to a final year (primary or secondary) class.

Academic Jobs

- Why have you applied for this particular research fellowship?
- What area of research are you hoping to pursue and why?
- What teaching experience do you have?

For further advice on preparing for academic job interviews, see our 'Interviews and assessments for research students' guide:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/startingpoints

Do you have any questions for us?

It is normal for an interviewer to ask you if you have any questions at the end of an interview. Preparing some questions to ask the employer is a good way to show you are keen and enthusiastic about working for the company. If you don't ask any questions some recruiters may interpret this as disinterest.

Often there will be things you genuinely need to know, but it is also a really good opportunity for a more informal conversation. You need to think about the people on the panel, their roles and what questions are appropriate though.

- There may be genuine questions that occur to you during the interview so try to make a mental note of these.
- Don't ask questions that are easily answered on the company website or that the interviewer has already answered.
- Do think about:
 - Long term options with the company – shows you really are committed to them.
 - What products and services they offer.

Some ideas for questions to ask...

- What are the best and worst things about working here?
- Where do you see the company in 5 years' time?
- Ask the interviewer a question about their background.
- When will I hear about the results of the interview?
- What do you think are the most challenging aspects of this role?
- What are the next steps in the interview process? (unless this is clear on their website / literature)
- What is the typical career path for someone in this role?
- Where do you think the company is headed in the next 5 years?
- Can you tell me what a typical day would look like in this role?
- Is there anything else I can provide to help you make your decision?

Asking questions around salary is normally to be avoided at interview. However, if it hasn't been mentioned in the advert or during the interview, it is only reasonable at the end of the interview to ask. A better turn of phrase would be to ask about the 'employment package' with regards to salary and for instance, pension or healthcare.

For some jobs where a fixed salary is not given in the job description, you may be asked at interview what your salary expectations are. See our job offers and 'how do I negotiate a salary' section for more advice:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/faqs/joboffers

Handling inappropriate questions

It is very rare that you will face these types of questions, but you might be asked questions about your personal life or lifestyle, which are inappropriate, for example, 'Are you gay?' or 'Are you thinking of having children in the near future?'

In these situations, stay calm. It may be that this particular interviewer is inexperienced and/or simply not up-to-date with current UK employment legislation. If you get offered the job, reflect on it all and consider whether or not you really do want to work for that organisation. Don't be afraid to request a follow up interview to clarify these points with, perhaps the HR contact.

Be aware that in other countries the laws relating to employment are different; you could be asked these types of questions.

Part 3 After the interview?

At the end of your interview, you can ask when you will hear from them and what the next steps are following your interview. Doing this helps you know the timescale they are working to. You may wish to send a letter or email to thank the employer for giving you the opportunity to meet them. This could set you apart from others and demonstrate your enthusiasm.

Usually if you've been successful, the employer will get in touch via phone, email or letter. However, during the peak recruitment times, there may be delays in correspondence from the employer. If you have not heard anything after for instance two weeks, try ringing or emailing them to check the outcome.

Handling rejection

If you are informed you were not successful but have no specific feedback on why, you may show your initiative by contacting the employer to request feedback. You can approach this conversation by saying 'I appreciate I was not successful on this occasion, however what advice can you give me because I need to apply to other organisations and would like to learn from the experience'.

Be aware they may not be able to do it there and then, ask when would be a good time to ring back. The employer may not be able to provide detailed feedback for a number of reasons, but you can use the opportunity to thank them and to bear you in mind for any future applications.

If you do receive detailed feedback and advice on where you went wrong, do not be tempted to defend your case. You may express your disappointment but respond professionally. You never know in what capacity you will encounter this company again during your career.

Dealing with job offers

If you are offered a job following an interview, congratulations! All your hard work has paid off. If you have more than one job offer to consider or are required to negotiate salary, you can find further advice on dealing with job offers on our website:

www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/applicationsinterviews/faqs/joboffers

Part 4 Further help and resources

- Practice interviews may be available to help you practise interview technique and receive feedback on your responses:
www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/services/practiceinterviews
- Attend events on interviews and selection centres. On occasion employers run practice interviews or assessment centres, watch out for these they are an excellent opportunity to practice.
www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/events
- Making an impact at interview videos are available to watch online or at the Careers Service:
www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/interviews
- Interview feedback forms file. Students who have been for interviews generously fill these in to give you the benefit of their experiences. Available at the Careers Library.
- A full list of resources and reference books can be downloaded via our online careers library on our website:
www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/library
- Ask friends and family about their interview experiences.
- Look at the Employer Insights on the Target jobs website for inside information about interview and selection tips for the company you have applied to:
<http://targetjobs.co.uk/employer-insights>
- Use blogs, forums and opinion websites, but remember that these sites may contain misleading information or people's opinions rather than fact.

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