

# UNSW Careers and Employment

## Interview Skills

### Creating a Good Impression

Interviews can be won or lost in the first five minutes. Your relationship with the interviewer, especially your non-verbal communication is crucial in the success of the interview. If you appear to be confident and enthusiastic from the outset, your answers are more likely to be viewed positively.

Reflect on the following topics and consider how you can create a good impression:

- The introduction
- The handshake
- Building rapport & small talk
- Body language & eye contact

Other reminders for the interview:

- Plan your trip
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview
- Bring a copy of your application, a pen and a note pad
- Dress appropriately
- Arrive early
- Turn off your mobile
- Be polite and professional with everyone you meet
- Look out for the non-verbal cues from interviewer. Are they interested in your answer? Do you need to provide more details?
- Listen attentively, show interest
- Never exaggerate your achievements
- Never complain about anyone you have worked with
- Always thank the interviewer at the end

### Standard & Open-Ended Questions

Many interviews start with open-ended questions to put the applicants at ease. While some of these questions are quite easy to answer, it is important for candidates to take this opportunity to differentiate themselves from other applicants.

Some of the common questions:

- Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself?
- Give us a brief overview of your previous employment.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- How much do you know about our organisation / institute?

- What can you bring or contribute to our organisation / team?
- What have been your main achievements?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years from now?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

### Preparing for Standard & Open-Ended Questions

When preparing for standard and open-ended questions, it is important to:

- Consider the selection criteria related to your answers, to the requirements for the position
- Give the impression that you are the ideal candidate they are looking for
- Most applicants have similar background; consider what your top 3-4 selling points are and what differentiate yourself from the others in your answer

Other tips:

- Do a search on the top 10 common interview questions online
- Prepare your answer in advance
- Prepare multiple examples on your strengths and weaknesses

### Behavioural Questions

Behavioural questions are based on the idea that past behaviour predicts future performance. You will be asked to provide specific examples of how you have used a skill to achieve a desirable outcome.

Behavioural questions often start with:

- Give us an example of ...
- Tell us about a time when ...
- Describe a situation where you had to ...

### The STAR Approach

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Organisation Skills</b>
<b>Task</b>	<b>[S]</b> I have shown strong organisational skills as a project assistant while assisting an Event team.
<b>Action</b>	<b>[T]</b> One time, I helped the team to schedule an art event.
<b>Result</b>	<p><b>[A]</b> That involved booking facilities and lighting equipment plus arranging for participants to attend. I developed a spreadsheet where I recorded feedback efficiently.</p> <p><b>[R]</b> Doing this ensured the event ran smoothly, despite the tight schedule. I was invited to join the team again when they received funding for a new event.</p>

## Preparing for Behavioural Questions

- Prepare specific examples for each selection criteria using the STAR approach
- Avoid just giving a definition of the skills required
- Ensure your examples are recent, relevant and special
- Choose a variety of examples from your academic, extra-curricular and employment experience
- Focus on your individual contributions when describing a team experience
- Be prepared for negative questions

## Sample Behavioural Questions

- [Teamwork] Tell me about a time you have had to deal with a difficult co - worker. How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
- [Communication Skills] Tell me about a time when you explained something to somebody from a different cultural background. What approach did you use?
- [Organisational Skill] Tell me about a time that you had conflicting deadlines that were equally important. How did you manage that situation and what was the outcome? Would you do anything differently?
- [Analytical Skills] Can you describe a time where you have had to analyse a complex set of data?
- [Coping with Change] When have you been placed under pressure to establish new techniques or approaches to replace the existing one?
- [Leadership] Give me an example of when you provided feedback to someone you supervised. How did you handle that and what was the outcome?
- [Problem Solving] Describe a complex problem you have solved.

## Situational Questions

Situational questions can be the most challenging of all. In these questions, the interviewers seek to gain a better understanding of how you approach problems by presenting you with a hypothetical situation and asking how you would respond if you were put in such a position. Situational questions can also be used to assess the candidate's technical knowledge.

Situational Questions tend to be prefaced by "What would you do if...?" For example;

- If you were given a task of developing a marketing strategy for ..., what process would you go through?
- You are managing a customer service team in a team of four. One of your team members is frequently missing the reports' deadlines. What steps will you take to address this situation?

- What would you do if you thought your supervisor gave you incorrect information in a staff meeting?

### Answering Situational Questions

When answering situational questions you can **make assumptions** when describing your course of action. For example, “Assuming A, this is what I would do and why. However, if A were to change then my response to the problem would change in this way”. The thing to remember with situational questions is that there is not necessarily a definitive (right) answer. Most of your points will be gained through the reasoning. It is therefore important that you explain fully the **“Why?”** as well as the **“What?”** you would do.

For example,

Question: What would you do if you thought your supervisor gave you incorrect information in a staff meeting?

Answer: In this situation, I would consider the magnitude of the error and I would be very careful not to damage my working relationship with my supervisor. If it was a trivial mistake, such as stating slightly inaccurate sales figures, then I think it would be the best not to correct him/her in front of other staff. However, if it was a more serious mistake which would affect the team’s next course of action, I would try to tactfully point out the error to save the team wasting time working from the wrong information.

### Sample Interview Questions

A list of practice interview questions can be found on our website:

[https://careersonline.unsw.edu.au/docs/45/Info-Sheet\\_Sample-Behavioural-Question.pdf](https://careersonline.unsw.edu.au/docs/45/Info-Sheet_Sample-Behavioural-Question.pdf)

### Challenging Questions

1. Why are you applying for this job?
2. Tell me one of your achievements that have given you major satisfaction.
3. Do you prefer to work independently or in a group?
4. What sorts of people do you find difficult to work with and why?
5. What was your worst mistake and what did you learn from it?
6. How do you feel about working long hours and weekends from time to time?

## How to prepare for your interview

**Find out as much about the interview as possible:**

- Who are the interviewers? What are their names and job titles?
- How long will the interview be?
- What format will they use?
- What do you need to bring on the day?

**Conduct further research on the organisation and the position:**

- Expect questions to assess your knowledge  
e.g. How much do you know about our organisation / unit / expertise?
- Consider the reasons of joining the organisation  
e.g. Why do you want to join us? Why are you interested in this position?
- Prepare 4-5 questions to ask the interviewers

**Review your application - cover letter, resume and selection criteria document:**

- Be ready to elaborate on your experience  
e.g. Can you tell me more about this experience?
- Consider the links between your previous roles / research projects with the new position  
e.g. How is this experience relevant to the new role as a ...?

**Revisit the selection criteria for the role:**

- Prepare examples for each criteria using the STAR approach  
e.g. Can you give me an example when you have demonstrated ... skills.
- Consider the ways you would handle a negative question  
e.g. Tell us about a time when you have

**Explore common interview questions:**

- had to work with a difficult person.
- Consider what are your strongest criteria or your “selling points”  
e.g. What can you bring to our organisation?  
e.g. Why should we offer you the position among all the applicants?
- Prepare your answers for questions such as:  
e.g. Tell us about yourself?  
e.g. What are your strengths and weaknesses?  
e.g. Where do you see yourself in 3/5/10 years?

**Note: Go beyond typing your answers into a Word document. Set aside time to practice your interview answers out loud.**