

Preparing for Academic / Industrial Interviews



"Being successful at interviews requires you to think carefully and strategically about your skills, objectives and the areas in which you need to develop. Pursuing development opportunities can be useful both as a way of thinking through what you need to do long term and as a way of developing and evidencing the skills that you will need to demonstrate." Vitae

"Every interview I have ever had has been different. Formal, informal, technical, generic, panel, non panel, evidence based, grossly biased, smart, casual. Different every time.

The ones that I did well at were the ones that I'd prepared properly for, and truly wanted..."

Dr. W (York)



There's more to



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Successful interviews

The key to success is to prepare well to show the interviewer(s) you understand the job, have researched the employer and match the characteristics they are looking for. You have cleared the first hurdle of selection with your written application. Now you have a chance to make a personal impression on the selectors at interview. Some jobs will involve one interview, others may have two or three in a series as candidates are screened out. Other recruiters may invite you to an assessment centre for a series of selection tests and activities.

The purpose of an interview

An interview is a two-way process. You are chasing your ideal job; they are chasing their ideal candidate. You are marketing yourself; they are marketing the organisation.

An interview is a two-way process.

The selector(s) want to

- verify your claims
- evaluate your skills and professionalism
- establish the relevance of your skills
- decide whether you would fit in as their employee
- promote the organisation
- find out if they can afford you

You want to:

- verify their claims
- understand what the job entails
- convince them your skills match the job
- decide whether you want to work with them
- persuade them you are worth employing
- find out if they will pay you enough (don't discuss this before an offer is made unless they raise the subject)

Preparation

It is essential to prepare for interviews. The more prepared you are, the more relaxed and confident you will feel and the better impression you will give. The balance of power in an interview is more equal than it may feel. Just as candidates are not all perfect, interviewers are human too - and not all are highly experienced or highly trained.

How to prepare for an interview

Once you get an invitation for an interview, try to find out what the day will involve and who will serve on the interview panel. You may need to prepare a piece of work beforehand, either a presentation of your research or your ideas for teaching a course to undergraduates.

There are 6 key areas of preparation:

1. Know yourself
2. Sector Knowledge
3. Research the Institution / Organisation
4. Research the job
5. Prepare for obvious and difficult questions
6. Create the right visual image

A combined awareness of your strengths (and weaknesses) and areas of expertise and thorough knowledge about the organisation / university, department, subject area and position on offer will put you in a stronger position at the interview stage.

- Ensure your message at interview is consistent with your application: Re-familiarise yourself with your CV, application form, covering letter and notes you made while researching the job
- Get back in touch with any personal contacts in the organisation to learn about any internal changes or issues. Ask about interview procedures
- Look at websites, the press, annual reports
- Look again at the person specification or advert to be clear about skills that you need to demonstrate. Check the evidence you included in your application and think of a couple of new examples for each skill. Draw examples from all parts of your life - not just from work
- Think about the kinds of questions you may be asked and how you will respond
- Try to find out what type of interview you will have and look at the tips below on presenting yourself
- Prepare your own questions to ask.

Although there will always be questions you cannot predict, certain key themes and questions are likely to form the basis of much of the interview. Think about these in advance:

- What skills and knowledge can you bring to the post?
- Why do you want the job?
- What do you know about the department/institution?

The careers service offers the chance to have a practice interview. Alternatively, if you are applying for a fellowship or post-doctoral position, academics in your department may be prepared to help you with a practice interview. Now is the time to draw on your contacts or ask for help from your mentor(s).

Dealing with difficult questions

<http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/interview-techniques/325225-the-top-nine-tricky-interview-questions-and-how-to-answer-them>

How to present yourself and make a good impression

Personal presentation is crucial. Even if the dress code in the organisation / department is decidedly casual, you are likely to make a much better impression if you look smart (it's more about seeming professional and showing respect than whether you will 'fit in'). If you are unsure about shaking hands, wait and take your lead from the interviewers.

Try to smile at the start of the interview and make eye contact with the interviewers (though don't outstare them!). You are more likely to impress if you look friendly and interested, particularly at the start of an interview.

In a panel interview, address your answers mainly to the person who asked the question, though glancing at others on the panel and making brief eye contact makes everyone feel involved and they will be more likely to warm to you.

Make sure you know who's who on the panel. It is common to have representatives of both Human Resources and another unrelated departments taking part. You need to take this into account when thinking about what they want in answer to their questions - this avoids you going into great technical detail on your ideas on quantum chemistry only to discover you were addressing the Head of the Department of Art History.

You may have the chance to meet other staff members before the interview or on the day, either individually, at a social gathering or over a meal – this is particularly true for academic posts. While your conduct may not be formally assessed, your prospective colleagues will certainly be asked their opinion of you, so act professionally at all times.

The tips below are common sense - but you'd be surprised how many people fall down on one or more of these.

'You never get a second chance to make a first impression'

Some dos

- Be punctual and unflustered
- Make a strong first impression - smile, firm handshake, confident body language
- Dress smartly, appropriate to the occasion and organisation, but be comfortable
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer(s)
- Listen carefully. Ask for clarification if unsure of the question - this is not a sign of weakness, but conveys confidence and assertiveness
- Speak slowly (but not too slowly!) and clearly
- Be interested and enthusiastic
- Answer questions fully, illustrating them with real examples and explaining your personal contribution (talk about what 'I' did, not what 'we' did)
- Be specific and succinct - don't waffle.
- Watch the interviewer's body language to gauge whether you are talking too much
- Maintain a positive attitude - even when describing difficulties you have encountered. Explain what you have learned from dealing with problems
- Be yourself - the interviewer is assessing your persona as well as your answers
- Take a list of your own questions. Use them to show your genuine interest in the job and the research you have done into the organisation
- When the interview is over, leave positively and thank the interviewer(s).

And a few don'ts

- Don't lie or exaggerate
- Lose your temper
- Criticise your previous employer
- Fidget or slouch
- Swear
- Interrupt

Interview Checklist

Interviews can be scary, but with a bit of preparation you will feel more confident and less likely to be thrown by unexpected questions.

The following checklists will help you in your preparation for a panel interview, giving an interview presentation and other practical issues. They might seem a bit over the top, but ticking them off will help to put your mind at rest!



Panel Interview

I have predicted as many interview questions as I can by looking at the **person specification** ☐

I have predicted as many interview questions as I can by looking at the actual **job description** ☐

I can answer all of the above questions well, using examples from my previous experiences ☐

I have studied/made notes on areas that I am a bit weaker on ☐

I have prepared my folder of examples - I know what's in it, and it's easy to find the page I want ☐

I have a list of questions that I am going to ask at the end of the interview ☐

I have printed my CV/cover letter/application form, and it's exactly the same version as the one I sent in when I applied ☐

I have read the website and other information about the employer ☐

I have a reminder list of things that I **must** mention about myself and my experience ☐

I know who is on the interview panel and have thought about what their issues and interests might be ☐

Presentation

I have thought about the question and what the interviewers are looking for ☐

I have checked that I have read the question properly and understood it ☐

I have prepared a presentation that answers the question completely ☐

My presentation follows the format introduction, body, summary ☐

I have double-checked my presentation for typos ☐

My presentation is visually clear and I've resisted the temptation to put in too many animations! ☐

- Someone else has checked my presentation for typos ☐
- I have timed the presentation and it is the right length ☐
- I have practised my presentation three times by myself ☐
- I have practised my presentation at least once in front of another person ☐
- My presentation is backed up on more than one medium (e.g. memory stick, CD, emailed in advance) ☐

Practicalities

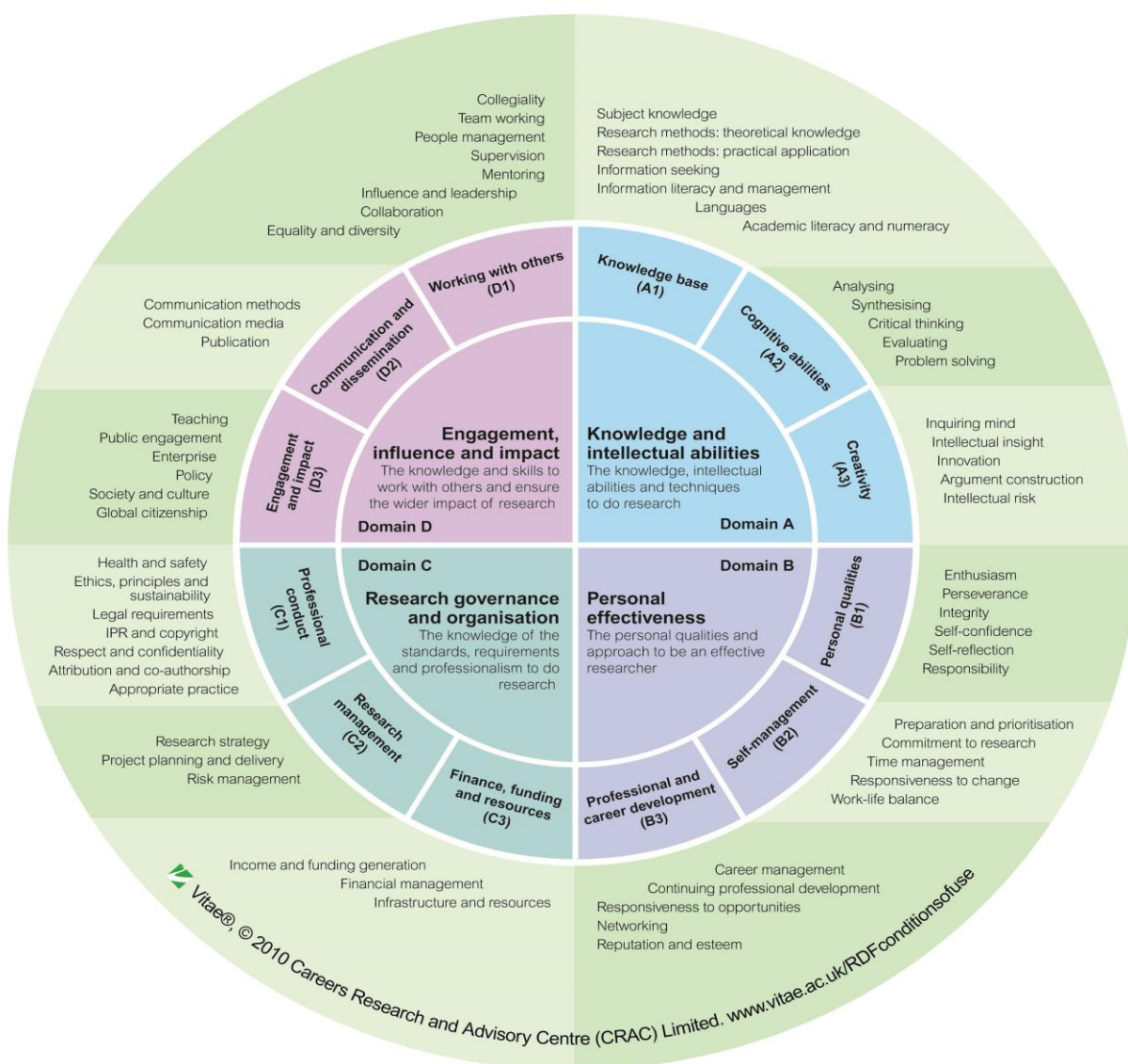
- I know exactly where the interview is to be held and at what time ☐
- My travel arrangements will give me plenty of spare time ☐
- I have the telephone number of the interviewer or their assistant should a problem arise ☐
- I have decided what clothes to wear, and they are clean and ready ☐
- I have my wallet and enough money to pay for train tickets, taxis etc ☐
- I have made a checklist of all the things I need to take with me (e.g. map, folder of experience, list of questions, list of things I must mention, USB stick and CD containing presentation, enough handouts for the audience) ☐

NOTES

RDF Employability Skills: Descriptors for Researchers

The Researcher Development Framework (RDF)

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/428241/Researcher-Development-Framework.html>



How can it support Researchers?

- Identifies the strengths and priorities for professional and career development
- Framework of the knowledge, behaviour and attributes of successful researchers
- Enables self-assessment of strengths and areas for further development
- Common framework across institutions in the UK
- Universal language for communicating researcher capabilities within and outside of academia
- Enhances the personal, professional and career development of researchers
- Developed through UK-wide interviews with successful researchers in a range of disciplines
- Led by Vitae in collaboration with the HE sector and other stakeholders
- Adopted by the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency)

RDF Knowledge, Behaviour & Attitudes

- Self-management
- Written and oral communication
- Working with others
- Problem solving
- Data analysis
- Professional & career management
- Project management
- Leadership
- Commercial awareness
- Creativity & innovation
- Social, cultural & global awareness
- Drive & motivation

RDF: Descriptions of Knowledge, Behaviours & Attitudes

Self-management

- Plans, prioritises and conducts work/research in a proactive way
- Delivers (research) projects and results on time
- Awareness of, and helps others to achieve work-life balance
- Has focus, commitment & ambition
- Flexible and responsive to change

Key words: Preparation & prioritisation, commitment to research, responsiveness to change,

Project management

- Applies project management tools and techniques
- Sets goals and plans and manages resources to deliver results
- Effectively assesses and manages risks
- Evaluates the effectiveness of projects
- Recognises and validates problems; formulates and applies solutions to a range of problems

Key words: Project planning & delivery, risk management, time management, problem solving

Written and oral communication

- Uses appropriate communication and dissemination mechanisms for different audiences
- Communicates effectively in both written and oral modes with a range of audiences formally and informally through a variety of different techniques and media
- Activity engages in publication and dissemination of research results and impacts

Key words: Communication methods, communication media, publication

Commercial awareness

- Demonstrates an understanding of corporate social responsibility
- Seeks ways of working in a sustainable manner
- Respects, upholds and meets professional standards and requirements

Key words: Health & safety, ethics, principles & sustainability, appropriate practice, legal requirements, IPR and copyright, attribution & co-authorship, respect & confidentiality

Drive & motivation

- Approaches tasks/research with enthusiasm, passion and confidence
- Resilient and perseveres in the face of obstacles
- Self-reflective; seeks ways to improve performance and strives for (research) excellence
- Proactive, independent, self-reliant and takes responsibility for self and others

Key words: Enthusiasm, perseverance, integrity, self confidence, self reflection, responsibility

Working with others

- Actively works in an inclusive, respectful and constructive way with colleagues, stakeholders and research users
- Recognises and acknowledges the contribution of others and own part in team success
- Builds relationships within and beyond academia; approachable and interacts constructively with others; manages expectations and resolves conflict
- Leads, motivates and influences where appropriate, persuades through listening and discussion
- Respects individual difference and diversity

Key words: Collegiality, team working, people management, supervision, mentoring, influence & leadership, collaboration, equality & diversity

Problem solving

- Analyses and evaluates findings using appropriate methods
- Thinks originally, independently and critically; develops theoretical concepts
- Critically synthesises information from diverse sources
- Evaluates progress, impact and outcomes of research
- Recognises and validates problems
- Demonstrates a willingness to give and receive constructive criticism

Key words: Analysing, synthesising, critical thinking, evaluating, problem solving

Creativity & innovation

- Develops new ways of working; has novel ideas and realises their potential
- Identifies new trends; creates new opportunities
- Develops convincing and persuasive arguments to defend research
- Takes intellectual risks; challenges the status quo
- Is open to new sources of ideas

Key words: Inquiring mind, intellectual insight, innovation, argument construction

Social, cultural & global awareness

- Demonstrates knowledge of global, organisational, cultural, economic, and environmental contexts, and the wider impact of work/research
- Demonstrates knowledge of the social and ethical implications of research, and public attitudes
- Contributes to increasing public awareness, engagement and understanding of research and associated impacts
- Appreciates and works with diversity and difference (in research and education)
- Recognises the importance of accountability of research with regard to social and economic impacts, internationalisation and global citizenship

Key words: Policy, society & culture, global citizenship

Data analysis

- Analyses and evaluates findings using appropriate methods
- Thinks originally, independently and critically
- Critically synthesises information from diverse sources
- Evaluates progress, impact and outcomes (of research)
- Recognises and validates problems; formulates and applies solutions to a range of (research) problems
- Willing to give and receive constructive criticism

Key words: Analysing, synthesising, critical thinking, evaluating, problem solving

Professional & career management

- Demonstrates a knowledge of career and employment opportunities inside and outside academia
- Takes ownership of and manages professional development
- Shows commitment to continuing professional development and enhancing employability
- Maintains and develops relevant skills set and experience in preparation for a wide range of opportunities within and outside academia
- Actively networks for professional and career purposes and seeks to enhance research reputation and esteem

Key words: Career management, continuing professional development, responsiveness to opportunities, networking, reputation and esteem

Leadership

- Leads, motivates and influences where appropriate; persuades through listening and convincing discussion

Key words: People management, supervision, mentoring, influence & leadership

Job and Person Specifications

What is a job/person specification?

A job/person specification describes the requirements a job holder needs to be able to perform the job satisfactorily. These are likely to include:

- Education and qualifications
- Training and experience
- Personal attributes / qualities

How does this compare with a job description?

A job description describes the job; a person specification describes the person needed to do the job. A person specification can, therefore, form the basis for the selection of the most suitable person to fill the job.

How should a person specification be created?

The most common approach now used by recruiters is to use what are known as "**competencies**" to design the person specification. A competency is a set of actions that someone must be capable of carrying out in order to perform well in some aspect of the job. These are then classified as "essential" or "desired" to determine which are most important.

Competencies might include some or all of the following:

- Physical attributes (e.g. state of health, aged, speech)
- Attainments (e.g. highest level of education completed, relevant market experience, ability to supervise/manage)
- Aptitudes (e.g. verbal reasoning; numerical aptitude)
- Interests (social activities; sporting activities)
- Personal circumstances (e.g. ability to travel; full or part time)

Examples of **key competencies and evidence you can use** are:

Communication	Analysing data and preparing/ presenting results accordingly Assisting and advising students in a seminar or small group setting Undertaking teaching responsibilities
Responsibility	Taking control of your PhD project
Leadership	Training and supervising new lab members
Commitment to career	Contributing to the development of and the submission of grant applications
Commercial awareness	Identifying appropriate journals for publication

Person specifications have to be prepared and used with great care. In particular, it is important to ensure that the list of essential or desired competencies does not lead to unlawful discrimination against potential employees.

Relating skills to job opportunities or job specifications: Competency based questions

Competency based questions are interview questions that require candidates to provide real life examples as the basis of their answers. Candidates should not talk in broad terms, be too general, or use their imagination when replying to interviewers. Instead, candidates should use specific situations from their life as examples when answering this type of interview question. Candidates should explain why they made certain decisions, how they implemented these decisions and why certain outcomes took place.

Why are Competency Questions used in Interviews?

Recruitment professionals believe that the best way to find out about a candidate's potential future performance is to find out about examples of past performance. The job specification will be used to isolate specific key competencies and ask competency based interview questions designed to force candidates to reveal their skills in these areas.

How do I evidence these?

1. Set the scene: Describe a particular situation or situations where you displayed most or all of the activities making up a particular competency
2. Describe what you did, how you did it (how you performed this at a high level) and the effect this had – the outcome and impact of your actions on others and on the situation.

An example of a typical competency interview question is:

"Tell me about a time when you failed to complete a task or project on time, despite intending to do so?"

In your response your interviewer will want to find out how you manage your time during difficult tasks and the reason why you failed to meet your deadline on this occasion (and consequently a reason why you may fail to meet deadlines in the future).

Interviewers using behaviour-based interviewing techniques such as competency questions are likely to probe for additional details during your responses. Always make sure you provide concise, highly specific answers that are well explained, thought out and detailed. Although your interviewer will at times ask you to give examples of past failures (such as the question above) rather than achievements, you must adequately justify why you failed to complete tasks, and defend the reasons for your failure. Clever candidates will justify failure by giving examples of positive personality traits.

NOTES:

The STAR Technique

Employers are more interested in what you can achieve for them, than the skills you possess per se. The interviewer will try to establish what benefits you will bring to the company, and where your benefits might be greater than those of other candidates. Therefore, when giving examples try using the S.T.A.R. statement format:

S Situation

T Task

A Action

R Result/Reflection

S.T.A.R. helps you to demonstrate your achievements, or in other words how your key skills are applied in work. Your STAR examples should illustrate your depth of knowledge, level of ability and value for each key skill.

Situation / Task:

Describe a work-related situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. Be very specific and give details, but keep it short and concise. Throughout your interview you'll want to make many S.T.A.R. Statements when using 'FOR EXAMPLE...'

Action

Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did - not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you MIGHT do, or WOULD do - tell what you DID do.

Results

Describe what you achieved. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? How did it make people feel? How did you feel? How did your boss feel? How much time and money did you save?

Reflect

What have you learnt? What would you do differently next time?

It is important to identify your skills and traits. After you write down five to ten accomplishments you may begin to see a pattern of skills and traits emerge. These are the core skills and traits you probably use, no matter what the situation. They will help you to identify other positions and types of work in which you would do well. In both academic and non-academic settings you are likely to face situational or behaviour-based interview style questions – they are more challenging and try to unpick your answers to see if your behaviours match up with the essential and desirable competencies they are looking for.

Useful links:

<http://mrl8nite.com/2009/11/30/resume-writing-star-statement/>

<http://mrl8nite.com/2010/05/25/resume-writing-star-statements-part-2/>

<http://jobinterviewclinic.com/star-statements/>

Be positive about your actions throughout your response and do not make up an example as you will NOT come across as believable. If you cannot think of good examples instantly, ask the interviewer for a moment or two to think about the question and then give your answer.

STAR Worksheet

Situation
General context:
Where:
When:
Who else was involved or impacted:
One problem I had to overcome was:
Task
One specific issue I addressed was:
Action:
To solve the problem, I:
Result
The end result was:

Interview Practice Exercise

Instructions:

- You will be working in pairs. You will each have an opportunity to be interviewed, to interview and to provide feedback to each other.
- Pick a criterion you would like to be questioned on based on your “Some essential and desirable criterion” questionnaire. Choose one which will challenge you and that you need to practice, rather than one you feel confident in answering.
- Take turns to be Interviewer: start with a brief introduction to the interview and then ask a question of the interviewee, using the starter and follow up questions provided under each criterion as a prompt. You may need to adapt questions.
- Interviewer notes observations on p18. Interviewee notes reflections on p19

1. STRONG ANALYTICAL SKILLS

- Tell me about a time when you had to collate and quantitatively analyse experimental data
- What did you do?
- What made this challenging?
- What did you learn about yourself?

2. EXCELLENT ORAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Describe a recent situation when you had to explain something that was particularly complex (to someone with whom you were unfamiliar).
- Tell me what you explained to them.
- How did you know they understood you?
- What makes you think you were successful?

3. ABILITY TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY USING OWN INITIATIVE

- Tell me about a piece of work you did where you had to use your own initiative.
- How did you feel about using your own initiative?
- Why was it necessary to do so?
- What was the outcome?

4. WILLING AND FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO NEW AREAS OF WORK

- How do you feel about the challenge provided by new areas of work?
- Can you think of a situation when you were involved in a different piece of work?
- What did you have to do differently?
- In retrospect, could you have changed your approach to be more effective?

5. SUCCESSFUL PROJECT MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

- What do you think makes a successful project manager?
- What particular skills did you need to display in your most recent project?
- What was your main contribution to the project?
- How successful was the project?

6. EXCELLENT ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS

- Can you give me an example of where you had to organise a piece of work or an event?
- What did you have to do?
- How did you prepare and plan for it?
- How well did it go?

7. ABILITY TO PRIORITISE AND MANAGE OWN WORKLOAD

- Tell me about a time when you had to prioritise a number of activities.
- Why was this necessary?
- On what basis did you work out your priorities?
- How did this work in practice?

8. WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE IN CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Tell me about a significant investment you have made in your own personal development.
- Why did you choose this as an area for development?
- What did you do?
- How have you applied this in your role?

9. EXPERIENCE OF INITIATIVE IN PROBLEM SOLVING

- Describe a problem at work which you recently had to solve using your own initiative.
- What made it so challenging?
- How did you handle it?
- What was the outcome?

10. EXPERIENCE IN LEADING AND MOTIVATING OTHERS TO ACHIEVE RESULTS

- Tell me about a time where you were able to motivate others to achieve team goals.
- What exactly did you do?
- What was the outcome?
- In retrospect, would you do anything differently?

11. ABILITY TO LEAD, MANAGE AND DEVELOP A TEAM OF STAFF

- What kind of skills do you feel a leader requires?
- Describe a situation where you helped to inspire a positive attitude within a team?
- How did you do this?
- How did you know the team “bought in”?
- What did you learn from this?

12. ABILITY TO WORK PRO-ACTIVELY, EFFECTIVELY AND CO-OPERATIVELY AS A MEMBER OF A TEAM

- Tell me about a time when you worked in a really effective team.
- What made the team so effective?
- What was your particular contribution to the team?
- How did your colleagues relate to you?

13. EXPERIENCE OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCH OR PROJECT WORK

- What do you consider to be the most important piece of research in your career so far?
- How did you manage such an important piece of work?
- What application does your research have in a wider context within society?

14. KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF CONTEMPORARY TEACHING METHODS

- Which contemporary methods of teaching do you feel are particularly important for today's teaching within a University environment and why?
- I'd like you to identify one particular method of teaching that you have been influenced by.
- How does this show in your teaching methods?

15. INDEPENDENT THINKER AND SELF MOTIVATOR

- Tell me about a time where you displayed independence of thought.
- How did this show itself?
- Why do you feel it was necessary to take this approach?
- In retrospect, would you have done anything differently?

16. KNOWLEDGE OF THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS

- What do you see as being the main needs of our students, either in terms of teaching or of pastoral care?
- Can you give me an example of how you identified and met a specific student need?
- How did you measure their level of satisfaction?

17. COMMITMENT TO INTERDISCIPLINARY and/or MULTIDISCIPLINARY WORK

- What value do you believe that an interdisciplinary way of working can add?
- Can you tell me about an example where you have been involved in this way of working?
- What internal or external contacts did you need to develop?
- How do you feel this approach enhanced the overall outcome?

18. ABILITY TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY

- What do you see as the advantages of working collaboratively?
- Tell me about a piece of work where you have done so?
- What was your role in it?
- How well do you think it went?

19. EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS IN GENERATING INCOME FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITY

- What are the key elements of a successful grant application?
- Tell me about one in which you've been involved.
- What do you think made it successful – or if it was unsuccessful, what did you learn?

20. EXPERIENCE OF DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING EXPERIMENTS

- Describe a recent situation where you had to design and conduct a particularly complex experiment.
- What did you do?
- Did you come across any problems?
- How did you overcome them?

21. A TRACK RECORD OF EXCELLENCE THROUGH PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH OUTPUTS

- Tell me about your main research publications
- Why have you chosen to tell me about these ones?

22. ABILITY TO MAINTAIN AND REVIEW ANALYTICAL DATA AND DOCUMENTATION

- What kind of skills do you think you need to effectively maintain and review analytical data?
- Can you tell me about a situation where you have had to do that?

23. EXPERIENCE OF MAINTAINING, INSTALLING AND TESTING EQUIPMENT

- Can you give me an example of where you had to install, maintain and / or test equipment.
- What did you have to do?
- Were there any procedures you had to follow?

24. EXCELLENT PRESENTATION SKILLS

- Tell me about a situation where you had to make a presentation.
- What were the challenges?
- How did it go?
- What did you learn about yourself?

Observing and giving feedback:

Try to make notes to help you give constructive feedback. Think about the questions that were answered particularly well and how questions which were answered less successfully might have been improved; consider body language, tone of voice etc.

INTERVIEWER OBSERVATIONS:

Reflection

What went well when you were an interviewee? What didn't go so well? Learning points?

What answers / tips did the group share that you might want to make a note of?

Presentations

It is common, (particularly for academic jobs), to be required to do a presentation, perhaps to a mixed audience. Alternatively, you may have to present a topic as if to a specialist group.

Preparing your presentation

It's never safe to assume prior knowledge of your presentation topic, so start your talk with a short general introduction to the subject area. Follow this with a more focused look at aspects you want to concentrate on. If you have been given a particular topic to present on – make sure you do that and if you have been given a time limit, plan your talk so you won't go over time – this is REALLY important! Authenticity is important so either talk about something you know really well or do your research and perhaps keep it simple. If it is for an academic post, be honest about things you tried which may have pushed you off onto unexpected directions. Talk about your results and how these fit within the wider context of the field. End by briefly indicating future directions for your research before inviting the audience to ask questions.

It is important to pitch your talk correctly. If it is too technical or specialised then your audience will lose interest so avoid obscure terminology, references and above all, acronyms. Similarly if you dumb it down too much, they may feel patronised. Your audience may have a good general background but may not be familiar with all of the terminology and methodologies you use.

Only extremely experienced speakers can pull off an unprepared presentation. Don't risk it - this is too important. Practice your presentation beforehand, preferably to colleagues.

Questions and answers

At the end of the talk there is usually time for the audience to ask questions. If your talk has engaged the audience then this session may be a lively affair. If you get asked any seemingly controversial questions, or perceive yourself to be on the end of some aggressive questioning - do not panic. The questioner is not trying to undermine you or make you look foolish, but just giving you an opportunity to justify your ideas. Academics particularly love a hearty debate. So keep your cool, take a moment, smile and then make your case. Be honest and enthusiastic about your work, and at the end of the question and answer session thank the audience for coming to hear your talk.

Top tips...

- Structure and delivery are just as important as content
- Find out in advance about your audience: help to focus and pitch appropriately
- Bad delivery can ruin everything: audible/well paced – Practice!
- Visual aids and technology: only use what you're confident using and check what equipment is available
- Practice timings: deliver to a friend/colleague or record it, reading alone will give you a false impression
- If you are given a remit keep to it and cover the issues raised
-

There is a separate workshop “Present with Confidence” that focuses on presentations if you want to further develop those skills. See [Skills Forge](#)

Academic job interviews

For jobs in higher education, panel interviews are most common, with from two up to ten or more interviewers. These may be drawn from across the university, not just from your discipline. Sometimes, you will also be seen informally by a number of departmental staff before or after your panel interview. This is a chance to learn more about the department and your potential future colleagues.

To prepare for your interview, revisit the job description and essential and desirable criteria. Talk to others about their experiences of academic interviews. Try to organise a mock interview - perhaps with job-searching contemporaries. Look again at the research you did into your own skills so that you have plenty of evidence to support your suitability for the job when answering questions.

Controlling Your Nerves

We may prepare the most marvellous material and then fear that we will spoil its delivery through the stuttering and mental blanks that nervousness can cause. All good speakers, even experienced performers, are nervous. It is just that they have developed several techniques for controlling these nerves and making them work **FOR** them rather than **AGAINST** them.

Breathing	Slow, deep breathing should replace short, panicky breaths. It is better to do this through the nose to avoid the mouth drying up.
Preparation	Before looking at the audience, take up position and, if appropriate, clear the area of work. Arrange visual aids, notes and feel comfortable – THEN look at the audience.
Relax	When ready to begin, relax the shoulders and let the tension drop from them. With a confident pose, this exercise will benefit the whole body – relaxed body = relaxed presenter
Warmth	Smile at the audience generally, or at known individuals. Warmth conveyed is likely to be returned.
Speed	Nervousness will show its face by the pace at which you proceed. Slow down a bit and think before speaking.
Opening	Having gained the audience's full attention, nerves will build up before the first few words. Know your first lines exactly and, if possible, open with a question to relieve some of the initial pressure.
Diversion	Have an early visual prop (OHP slide or flip chart information) built into the presentation. The audience's eyes are diverted giving a few moments to relax and gain confidence.

Hints

- If your hands are shaking, avoid drawing attention to them by clenching and unclenching them.
- Leave your notes on the table or lectern – the merest shake will accentuate the movement of your notes.
- If one leg starts to tremble, shift your weight onto the other leg.
- If you require a drink, be as swift as possible.
- Avoid drinking anything with caffeine in it (coffee, tea, coke etc.) as this can stimulate the nervous system.
- Don't panic if you get lost, remember the audience don't know the script! A pause may seem a long time to you, but very natural to the delegates.
- Don't admit you're nervous unless it's a deliberate device to gain the group's sympathy.

Stance and control

- Stand tall or sit upright – hold a dominating pose and respect will follow immediately.
- Keep good eye contact with all the individuals as it's the easiest way to hold their interest.
- Avoid large-scale movement or excessive gesticulation as it distracts from the message.
- Avoid involuntary mannerisms – fidgeting, itching, hands in pockets, twitching, walking. This will distract and possibly make the delegate think there is something wrong with you!
- Avoid verbal mannerisms – *um, er, basically, actually* etc. which are only there to fill a gap. The audience will be distracted and the chance to use a powerful silence will be lost.
- If you want to tell jokes, practise on someone beforehand and get their opinion. Make them relevant to the objective.
- Use head-raisers or waking up techniques if a delegate is not paying attention or the group is 'wandering'.

After the interview

If all has gone well, you should receive a job offer or progress to a second interview or assessment centre.

If you aren't selected, spend some time reflecting on what to improve next time. Do ask for feedback, it can be very valuable. Most employers are willing to give feedback to unsuccessful interview candidates, but few are ever asked.

The contract

When you are made a job offer, you have convinced them you have what they are looking for. They want you to join them. Equally, you may want to join them. If you have any concerns about terms and conditions, this is the time to ask. You might want to raise issues such as salary level, their commitment to your development or flexibility of hours around caring responsibilities. Once you have signed the contract, it will be much more difficult to renegotiate.

Consider writing a thank you note/e-mail

Research from a variety of sources tells us that a thank you note/e-mail is the most overlooked step in the interview process. A note or email should be sent to every panel member (or the panel chair at the very least). It will help you to stand out from the other candidates, provide additional evidence that you have the communication skills you claimed, can reiterate your interest in the job and allow you to add anything you forgot to tell them.



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Establishing an Academic (research/ teaching) profile: some possible question areas

Remember: Each Role and Department is different – you need to know the details and how to relate your answers to the Role and Department

1. Typical Opening Question

- What interested you in applying for this post?
- What do you see as your main strengths?
- What is your most significant achievement to date?
- What will you bring to this role?
- What do you consider to be the most important discovery or conclusion in your career so far?

2. About your Past & Present Research

- What do you consider to be the most important discovery or conclusion in your career so far?
- What application does your research have in a wider context within society?
- How does your research relate to the current research themes within the Department?
- What is your understanding of the current research funding environment?
- What does impact mean to you?
- Can you explain the current context around the impact agenda and what it means for your research?
- Who are the key researchers in your area? How does your work compare with theirs?
- What are the big issues in your research area?
- What is innovative about your research?
- How is your work distinct from your supervisor's/principal investigator's? How intellectually independent are you?
- What influences have you been exposed to? Do you think you have enough breadth of experience?
- Who has influenced you the most?
- What has been your role so far in developing research ideas and carrying them forward?
- What do you consider to be your best paper/work and why? What did it change about the way people approach the field?
- What are your most important publications?
- What has been the impact of your research?

3. About your Future Research

- What is exciting in your research and what is your vision for its development if you are appointed as.....
 - May be required in the form of a brief verbal presentation, possibly with power point or similar
 - From this type of question the panel will delve deeper
- What papers do you have coming through in the next year?
- What do you see as the main direction of your research over the next five years?
- How do you envisage your research group growing in terms of size and composition?
- Where do you see opportunities for funding of your work?

- Which funding agencies would you approach?
- What is the next grant proposal you will write?
- How will this job help you achieve your long term career plans?
- What would you do on the first day of the job?
- Who are your main competitors? What are they doing? How will you compete with them?
- Why would someone come to work for you and not for your competitors?
- How does your work align with contemporary trends or funding priorities?
- How would you bridge the gap from your research to research users?
- The university is keen to serve the wider community and economy. Does your planned research have any potential in these areas?
- How do you feel about translating your research into innovation or spin-outs? Can you give an example of when you have been enterprising?
- Describe in layman's terms why your research project is interesting in two minutes.

4. About you and your capabilities

- How have you managed your research project?
- How do you balance your time? If several challenges came up at the same time (grant deadline, pastoral care for a student, teaching commitments) how would you prioritise?
- If you were starting your project again today, what would you do differently?
- Describe a research problem you have faced. What did you learn?
- What has been the most productive period in your research career and why?
- Why do you think you are ready for this position?
- If you get this position how will you run your research project?
- If we gave you the position, what might go wrong with your research? How will you manage the risks
- Why do you think you are the right person for this position?

5. About your ability to gain funding

- What experience do you have of attracting funding?
- Previously, you have only brought in small amounts of funding: how can you convince us you will be able to bring in larger amounts?
- Where will you apply for grants? If your funding applications are unsuccessful, what alternatives do you have in mind? (looking for knowledge of the funding infrastructure)
- How would you convince a funding body that they should fund your research rather than one of the other hundreds of proposals they receive?
- Who are you currently funded by, and why do you think they were interested in funding your project?

6. About your Interdisciplinary Research & Collaboration

- Who do you think you might collaborate with at York if you obtain this position?
 - "Within the Department?"
 - "Outside the Department?"

- What external research links would you want or need to maintain or develop?” & “How would you manage these links?

7. About your Teaching & Outreach

- What experience do you have in teaching undergraduates?
- How would you engage 150+ 1st year undergraduates in (subject) lectures?
- Please describe a laboratory/fieldwork/subject specific practical that you could run? Tell us how you would make sure that the students would get the most out of the practical you have described?
- How would you ensure that students take an active part in tutorials?
- Please give an example of an undergraduate or masters research project you might run?
- How would you involve yourself in supporting the Department in terms of student recruitment?
- What does Widening Participation mean to you?
- What experience do you have of explaining subject to ‘the public’ across the generations’?
- How would you engage with the local/ business/industrial/public sector community?
- Can you summarise who might be interested in your research outside of your academic community and have you taken any steps to engage with end users of research?” (Social Science may well be more well versed in this)

8. About your role as supervisor/ teacher

- Describe your teaching experience. How do you feel about teaching? What is your teaching philosophy?
- Do you have any experience in curriculum development?
- What supervision of research or technical staff have you done in the past?
- Have you supervised doctoral candidates, and how did you find this experience? How did you manage them?
- What advice would you give to a new researcher about supervising undergraduate or masters students?
- How would you go about interviewing a prospective postgraduate researcher?
- How would you induce a new doctoral candidate into their research project?
- How would you go about motivating a researcher who is going through a low point?
- How would you deal with a weak researcher?
- How would you deal with any conflict/disagreement within the research group? Do you have an example of when you have had to deal with a disagreement?
- Do you anticipate building a research group? How many people would you like for it to be optimal?

7. About your Leadership & Management Skills

- How would you describe good Academic leadership?
- What leadership skills would you bring to the Department?
- What do you understand are the management requirements placed on Academics?

- Understanding there is sometimes a conflict between academia and management, how would you meet the demands of both?
- What academic management roles are essential to the running of a Department, and why?
- How would you manage your workload within the Department?
- What 'management' roles in the Department would you consider, and why?
- What other roles/duties are there in the Department that will enhance the student experience?
- What do you understand about the University's Medium Term Planning process?
- Tell me about a time you had to explain something complex (a process, your research, an issue) to a colleague (or colleagues) at work – what did you do? How successful were you?
- Describe a time when you had to lead a group to achieve an objective
- Give me an example of a problem you have faced in the past, either as part of a team or as an individual. How did you solve the problem?

8. About your People Skills

- What supervision of research or technical staff have you done in the past?
- Describe how you managed your staff's work?
- What is the most challenging interpersonal issue you have ever faced at work? How did you address it (challenging interpersonal issue)?
- What would you do in the circumstances of a difficult person who does not agree with you or the way you are working?
- How would you handle a student with concerning personal issues?
- What would you do where a student's work exhibits signs of plagiarism?
- How would you deal with a challenging administrative situation, for example a timetable conflict?
- How would you ensure that the excellent work of other members of staff is recognised?
- How do you balance the demands of those around you and your own research?
- Do you prefer to work in a team or by yourself?
- Describe how you have contributed effectively to a team
- Tell me about a situation when you needed to offer constructive feedback to a colleague / team member – what did you do and what were the results?
- Where do you see yourself in five year's time?

9. About your 'fit' with the department

- Why do you think you are the right person for this position?
- Why do you want to come here?
- What will you bring to the institution?
- We are keen to develop collaborations between departments. What opportunities for multi-disciplinary work does your research offer?
- How would you fit with the existing activities in the department? Who do you expect to collaborate with in the institution? Why do you want to collaborate with them?
- What committee work have you done and what challenges has it presented?
- In what ways, other than research and teaching could you contribute to this department?

Establishing a Non Academic profile: some possible question areas

Competencies / Themes:

Teamwork	Responsibility	Decision making	Communication
Leadership	Results orientation	Commitment to career	Commercial awareness
Career motivation	Problem solving	Ethics & trustworthiness	

1. Teamwork

- Do you prefer to work in a team or by yourself?
- Tell me about a time when you worked successfully as part of a team.
- Describe a situation where you were successful in getting people to work together effectively.
- Describe a time when a team member has annoyed you.
- Tell me about a time when you have had to modify yourself (or a way you do something) to take into account someone else's views.
- Tell me about a situation when you needed to offer constructive feedback to a colleague?
- Describe a time when you were a member of a team and witnessed a conflict within the team. What did you do? What were the results? What could you have done better?

2. Responsibility

- How do you perform your responsibilities?
- Are you a responsible person? Explain why
- Do you enjoy having responsibilities?
- What responsibilities have you been given in the past?

3. Decision making

- What is the toughest decision you have ever made? Why was this so difficult?
- How do you come to conclusions?
- Tell me about a decision you have made that has affected other people.
- Do you find decisions difficult?
- Give me an example of a bad decision you have made. Why was this a bad decision?

4. Communication

- Give an example of how you dealt with a difficult or sensitive situation that required extensive communication.
- Give me an example of how you dealt with a difficult customer at work.
- Tell me about a time when you had to explain an issue or process to a colleague (or colleagues) at work.
- Tell me about a time when you taught someone else something.
- How do you explain things to other people?

5. Leadership

- Describe a time when you had to lead a group to achieve an objective.
- Describe a work based situation where you had to lead by example to achieve an objective.
- Describe a situation where you inspired others to meet a common goal.
- How do you motivate team members to do something they decide they do not want to do?

6. Commitment to career

- Be able to describe what you will be doing in your first year at the organisation.
- Be able to give a rough account of where you imagine you might be in 5 years time. (e.g. a certain position in the organisation)

7. Commercial Awareness

- Describe a company/ organisation you think is doing well/badly and explain why you think this is so.
- What do you think are key qualities for a company to have to be successful?
- What significant factors have affected this industry in recent years?
- What do you understand of the role this organisation plays in this industry?

8. Career motivation

- Why do you want to work for our organisation?
- Why do you want to work in the area to which you have applied?
- What can you tell me about us and the area to which you have applied?

9. Problem Solving

- How do you solve problems?
- Give me an example of a problem you have faced in the past, either as part of a team or as an individual. How did you solve the problem?
- What do you do when you can't solve a problem?

10. Results orientation

- Are you successful?
- Give me an example of a time you have been very successful.
- Why do you think people aren't successful?
- Give me an example of a time you were not successful. Why do you think this happened?

11. Ethics & Trustworthiness

- Give me an example of a time a member of a team you were in had a problem. What did you do to help?
- Would you lie if your job depended on it?
- Do you think it can sometimes be ok to deceive people if this leads to a positive final outcome?
- It's late on a Friday afternoon. The rest of your team, including managers, have left the office for the day but you have stayed to finish some work. A client company calls and you are the most relevant person to talk to. They are angry and demand that you shred some key documents immediately, otherwise they will terminate their relationship with your firm. You are almost certain destroying these documents is illegal. What do you do?

NOTES

Online resources for Computer Science Interviews

Websites for Computer Science Interviews Advice:

<http://louisrli.github.io/blog/2014/01/18/tips-for-computer-science-internship-interviews/#.VTfTVp1wZl8>

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/interviews/ivcomputing.htm>

<http://alexbowe.com/failing-at-google-interviews/>

<http://33bits.org/2012/10/01/five-surprises-from-the-computer-science-academic-job-search/>

<http://matt-welsh.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/how-to-get-faculty-job-part-2-interview.html>

Websites for Computer Science Interview Questions:

http://www.reddit.com/r/cscareerquestions/comments/20ahfq/heres_a_pretty_big_list_of_programming_interview/

<http://www.nerdparadise.com/tech/interview/>

http://www.cs.ox.ac.uk/ugadmissions/how_to_apply/sample_interview_problems.html

<http://www.datasciencecentral.com/profiles/blogs/66-job-interview-questions-for-data-scientists>