



Build Your Brand 04

Preparing for Interviews

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Take note!

Important - By **30 March 2024**, you should record an **invite to an interview** (if seeking employment) **or** a self-employment declaration (if seeking to be self-employed) at www.hyperiondev.com/outcome5. Additionally, you should record an offer of a **job** (if seeking employment) or evidence of obtaining **new work/contracts** (if self-employed or seeking to be) at www.hyperiondev.com/finaloutcome5 by **23 September 2024**. Please record these milestones as soon as you reach them.

A **limited** number of co-certifications will be awarded based on your achievement of all [four criteria](#) for successful completion of this skills bootcamp.

Introduction

This is the fourth task in the “Build Your Brand” series of tasks. This task focusses on equipping you for interviews. Although it will be of more relevance to job seekers than the self-employed, you’ll find that a number of aspects can be easily transferred to a situation like pitching for new business.

GENERAL INTERVIEW PREPARATION

At this point, most of you have probably applied for several jobs in the tech sector. It’s time to start preparing for when you are invited for an interview. In this task, we will cover what to expect and how you can prepare for the interview process. Let’s get started!

The interview process will differ from company to company. However, there is some general preparation you should do for any interview. For instance, you always want to start by researching the industry and company. The company’s website usually provides a wealth of information about the business and what they do. Use the information you collect to align your skills and experience with the company. This research will also help you to provide specific reasons you want the job and prepare meaningful questions about the company.

Another good exercise is to compare your skills, academic qualifications, and experience to the requirements and "good to have" area of the job specification. This will help you to anticipate an interviewer's concerns and reservations. Prepare answers for your possible gaps and remember that every answer you provide should demonstrate to the interviewer why you are the best hire for the job. You can use your list of achievements and transferable skills to craft these answers. For example, if you do not have experience in a specific tool you can express that you value learning and are keen to learn and grow so that you can excel in the role.



Extra resource

Evaluate your transferable skills using this [transferable skills checklist](#).

In addition to researching the company and comparing your skillset to the job specification, answering common interview questions should be part of your preparation. Think about how you would respond to these common questions:

- Tell me about yourself and your background.
- What do you know about the company?
- Why are you applying for this position?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What appeals to you about the job description?
- What are you passionate about?
- What are your salary expectations?
- Are you interviewing with other companies?
- When can you start?
- What type of management style do you prefer?
- What are your career goals?
- What are you most proud of and why?
- What are some lessons you've learned from your previous experience?
- Can you give an example of a time when you worked well in a team and what lessons you drew from the experience?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you had to deliver demanding results under time pressure?

An interviewer will almost always ask you to “tell them a little about yourself” so prepare a good [elevator pitch](#)! Candidates who are well prepared for interviews are more confident and provide more thorough answers. Practise answering questions aloud or with another person to build up your confidence and reduce your stress on the day of the interview. Remember to consider how you can leverage your strengths and mitigate your weaknesses in the role. You can also note where you have had a positive impact in professional roles or informal roles such as volunteer work or sports teams.

Some of the questions that are likely to be asked are behaviour and competency questions. The best way to answer this type of question is using the STAR technique ([Novorésumé, n.d.](#)).

STAR technique:

Situation: describe the situation to provide context to the interviewer.

Task: outline your role in the situation by explaining your duties and what was expected of you.

Action: explain how you performed your tasks including instances where you went above the call of duty to achieve a positive outcome.

Result: conclude your response with the outcome of your actions and whether the situation was resolved or not. If possible, it is beneficial to include quantitative data to quantify the outcome.

Practise answering behavioural interview questions using the STAR technique by referring to a list of [common STAR interview questions](#).



Extra resource

More examples of STAR interview questions and possible answers are available from career coaches [Amri Celeste](#) and [Richard McMunn](#).

Technical questions may also be included in an interview, even if it is not framed as a “technical interview”. You should be able to answer specific technical questions related to the role and be able to explain your thought process in solving technical problems, as employers want to see that you are a problem solver and strategic thinker. Examples include:

- What are CSS selectors or practical aspects of CSS in everyday use?
- What is object-oriented programming?
- Explain the logic of a common algorithm such as a sorting algorithm

Explore the following resources to see example interview questions relevant to the programming language or role you are interested in:

- [Python](#)
- [Java](#)
- [Software Engineering](#)
- [Web Development](#)
- [Data Science](#)
- [Cloud engineering](#)

At the end of an interview, you will usually have the opportunity to ask questions. Prepare some well-informed questions to demonstrate that you have done your homework about the company and that you have a genuine interest in working for them. Some examples include:

- Can you tell me more about the day-to-day responsibilities of the role?
This provides an opportunity for you to sell yourself with regard to some of the skills required if you haven't had a chance to do so earlier in the interview.
- How could I impress you in the first three months?
The aim of this question is to identify goals or challenges the department is facing that you could support them with. Asking this type of question shows a goal orientated and growth mindset which is attractive to employers.

Before you leave, ask what the next steps are or when you can expect to receive feedback from the company.

TECHNICAL INTERVIEW

While you may ace your initial verbal interview, when it comes to hiring for any technical roles, the core of the whole process is to determine your ability to write quality code that is correct, efficient, and adheres to industry standards. Hiring managers often achieve this through in-person whiteboard technical questions and take-home tests or assessments.



Extra resource

Ace your technical take-home test using [helpful tips](#) from Jane Philipps.

The main aim of technical interviews goes beyond simply testing your ability to solve the problem. Hiring managers are trying to test your sense of logic, ability to think clearly in a high-pressure situation, and ability to work through problems by asking questions. Some questions hiring managers will be asking themselves include:

- What is your overall approach to solving a problem?
- What do you do when you get stuck?
- Are you able to 'brute force' your way to the solution?
- Are you methodical or do you just hammer through a bunch of approaches and see what works?
- Do you document your code?

During a technical interview, your best bet is to take a moment to organise your thoughts. Then, think through the question verbally and ask clarifying questions. Logically analyse (out loud) the different ways to approach the problem. Discuss why you would prefer approaching it in a certain way, and - if you get there - eventually describe your answer. Often, interviewers are not just looking for the right answer. Getting the right answer (or one of the right answers) is important, but it is equally important to showcase yourself as a logical, verbal, and analytical person who retains their wits in a stressful situation.

Here are some resources which will help you prepare for the programming part of technical interviews:

- [Full-stack developer interview questions and answers](#) provides questions across a range of tools including Python, JavaScript, SQL, and Git.
- [Software Engineer](#) focusses on questions rather than coding tasks for software developers.
- [HackerRank](#) allows you to practise your coding skills in Python and SQL and includes databases, algorithms, and data structures as topics.
- [Careerride](#) provides questions and some coding problems for Python and JavaScript as well as several other languages.
- [Topcoder](#) focusses on web development and data science.
- [CodeChef](#) allows you to choose a topic and then the programming language you would like to use.

- **Coderbyte** has an online environment where you can practise coding challenges in several languages including Python and JavaScript.
- **TestGorilla** includes tests for SQLite, working with data, CSS, and software engineering principles.
- **Exercism** helps you to develop fluency in the programming language of your choosing.

Explore online to find other websites to **improve your coding skills**.

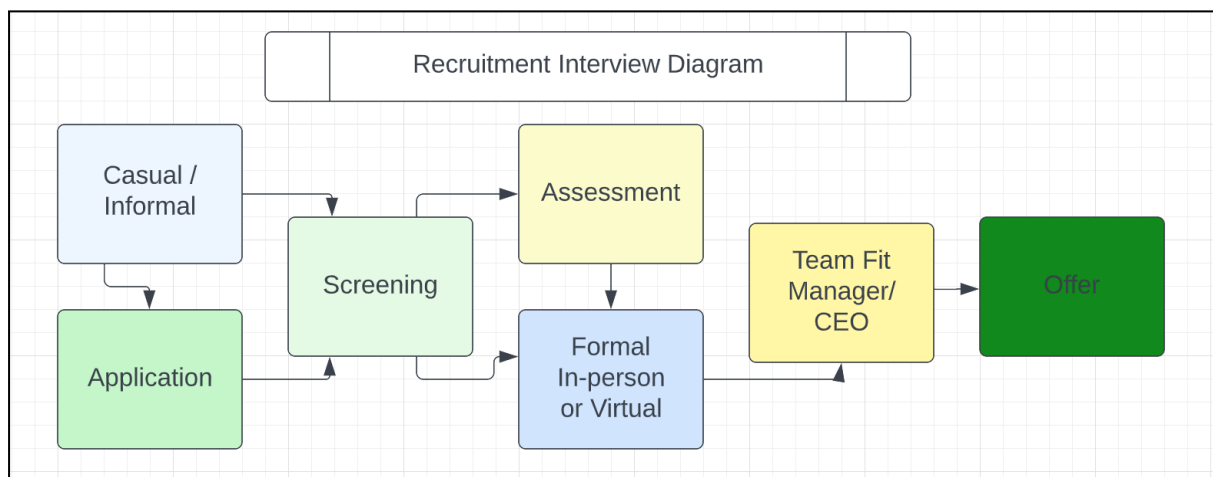


Extra resource

We highly recommend you look for a text called “Cracking the coding interview” by Gayle Laakmann McDowell, which offers valuable guidance and practice for tech interviews. This can be **purchased from Amazon**, but may also be available in your local public library or in other places online.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Each company will have a different interview process, however common elements include assessing behaviours and competencies (STAR questions), technical skills, and team fit. In this section, we will discuss the different types of interviews and assessments that may be included in the interview process. An example process is illustrated in the diagram below:



Note that some steps may be by-passed in some instances; for example, a candidate who is head-hunted in an informal interview may progress to a screening interview without submitting an application. Also several interview types may be grouped together or scheduled as individual interviews. If interviews are

grouped together the interview process may take a full day as you take part in a range of interviews and assessment activities.

Informal or casual interviews

Informal or casual interviews can happen at an informal industry meet-up, graduate network event, or conference dinner. Informal interviews allow the potential employer to observe how you conduct yourself and get an idea of whether or not you would fit into the company or department.

In the informal interview try to find out as much as you can about the role requirements and match them up with your relevant skills and experience - showing the potential employer you are a good fit. If the potential employer communicates any challenges or problems (often called “stucks” - areas they are stuck on), offer suggestions or solutions to show the value you would bring. If you receive an invitation to apply, send your application package the same day or as soon as you can. Remember to customise your details for the specific job.

Screening interviews

Screening interviews are normally performed after you have sent your application. They are similar to informal interviews in that they allow the potential employer to observe how you conduct yourself and gauge whether or not you would fit into the company or department. Telephonic screening interviews are generally 15 to 30 minutes. Ensure you're in a quiet place and have a good connection and a charged device for this call. Prepare using some [screening interview questions](#) assembled for tech roles.

Career history interview

Career history interviews are held with one or two members of the hiring committee. This interview aims to evaluate role fit and dives deeper into the different roles you've held in your career that are relevant to the role you've applied for. Employers use this interview to understand your day-to-day responsibilities, achievements, and low points, as well as find out about the teams you worked with in your previous roles. For technical roles, this will include going into the details of previous technical work, your side projects, and so forth. Explore [work history questions](#) to prepare for this kind of interview.

Focussed, competency, or behavioural interview

We have already touched on the [types of questions](#) you can expect in a competency or behavioural interview. This interview is typically attended by one or two members of the hiring committee and aims to evaluate culture fit.

Interviewers will focus on specific competencies companies know are essential to their team and to the specific role you've applied for. During the interview, the interviewer will take up certain competencies one by one and explain to you what the competencies mean to them. Then, they will ask you to reflect on previous roles and share instances or anecdotes demonstrating times when you feel you displayed each competency well, and when you could have displayed it better.

Assessments

Interview assessments can include a challenge, project, or test. Sometimes you're asked to do a take-home assignment. The length and difficulty of assignments differs widely depending on the company. In other industries, any of these assessments may be referred to as the "technical interview". Testing aims to determine a candidate's true personality and abilities and not just what they say about themselves. It also allows an organisation to see how a candidate copes under pressure. There are many methods that can be used to test a candidate's ability. Some examples are listed below.

- An **aptitude test** is essentially a skill and capability test that looks at the candidate's ability to acquire skills (intellectual, motor, etc.).
- **IQ** assesses mental ability, which includes problem-solving, numeracy, and literacy. These skills are some of the most sought after skills in the tech sector.
- **Psychometric tests** look at a candidate's potential suitability for a company by measuring traits such as intelligence levels, values, and behaviours, as well as ability and personality.
- Stemming from the field of psychology, **personality tests** have been used to better understand character traits in a variety of settings, including the workplace.
- **Technical assessments** are a combination of application-based techniques and knowledge-based questions employed to measure an employee's understanding of concepts, tools, and frameworks on a required technical skill or technology. Although this usually forms part of the technical interview, some companies will test your technical skills with a preliminary test before giving you the full tech assessment or interview.
- **Business simulations** may be paper-based or computer-based. You may be split into small groups with other candidates, and over a series of rounds, compete with other groups to develop, manufacture, market, and distribute products.

- **Presentations** are used to assess your self-confidence and ability to communicate and manage mini-projects. You may be asked to present in person, virtually, or by pre-recording a video. If you are asked to give a presentation, take it seriously. Management time is very valuable and if the company has gathered an audience to listen to you, then you can be sure that they will be taking it seriously.
- **Take-home tests** are assessments in the form of a written assignment or presentation that you complete at home. The questions will most likely be focussed on the actual job specification and the type of tasks that you would be expected to perform in the actual role. Take this very seriously and make sure to deliver it in a professional format. Aim to showcase your insights, research done, and your unique interpretations or suggestions.
- **Group discussions** assess interactive skills by giving the group a problem to solve. Common problems are simulations where your group has been stranded at sea, in the desert, or on the moon.

VIRTUAL VS IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

It is also very important to be prepared for the nature of the interview, whether it is face-to-face, telephonic, or video conferencing.

More companies are opting for virtual interviews, which is great for both parties as it is time-saving and cost-effective. For virtual interviews, you need to prepare a neutral or neat background and ensure you have a quiet room. Also, consider the lighting from windows and outside interference. From a technical standpoint, you need a good working laptop or device with a camera and microphone. Download the interview platform selected by the interviewer ahead of time, e.g. Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, or Zoom. Test the platform a few days before the interview and ensure you have a stable Internet connection on the day.

Make a good first impression by dressing comfortably but professionally and being punctual. During a virtual interview, eye contact will be the main method an interviewer uses to determine your confidence as body language is limited. Ensure you maintain eye contact, switching between panelists if more than one person is interviewing you.



Extra resource

Learn some [tips and tricks for virtual interviews](#) on the HyperionDev blog.

An in-person interview requires more preparation time due to transport planning, parking logistics, and appearance preparation. Give a firm handshake and smile when introducing yourself and try to get there ahead of time to show punctuality (aim to be at least 10-15 minutes early). During the interview, maintain a good posture but feel free to lean forward to show interest when the interviewer is asking a question or nod to show interest. Eye contact also contributes to confident body language. Resist the urge to fidget; keep your arms relaxed and hands folded in your lap.



Extra resource

Read more [tips for a successful interview](#) and [advice on body language](#) to make a good first impression.

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Use the infographic and the checklist following it to do a quick review of the key steps you need to take to prepare for an interview.

Do your research



Dedicate some time a few days beforehand to research the company. Make note of any significant milestones, the company structure, the ethos and the culture.



Dress for success

Make sure that you are neat and presentable: a collared shirt, tailored pants and smart shoes are always a safe bet.

Be honest



Don't pretend you know an answer. If you're unsure, say so, and then explain how you would go about finding an answer. Employers want to see that you know your limitations but are also keen to learn.

How to ace an interview



Preparation is key

Have a look at possible interview questions and practice your answers - especially for technical interviews

Mind the time



You need to arrive at least 15 minutes before your interview.

Also be mindful of keeping your answers succinct. If the interviewer needs more information, they'll ask.

Before the interview

- You should respond quickly when a company reaches out to you to arrange an interview. Respond to emails or other messages sent out by interested companies (even if you are no longer interested in the role) to foster good relationships with companies you may approach again in the future.
- Research the company to make sure you understand their strategy. This also shows you have a keen interest in the company's product.
- Be prepared to talk and 'tell the story' of how and why your education and experience make you a good fit for the role. Yes / No answers don't give the interviewers enough information to make a decision about you.
- Recap your technical knowledge from your Skills Bootcamp (although you can be trained on the job, and this is an increasingly common practice, most companies would like to see a basic level of technical knowledge that indicates you're a fit for the role).
- If you're doing an online interview, connect to the platform and install any required software the day before your interview, as previously mentioned.

On the day

- Be punctual. It is mandatory to be on time for a job interview and rescheduling is going to put you at the back of the shortlist and allow other candidates a better shot, so it's important to both prepare and be punctual for the interview slot you have been given.
- If possible, log in or join the meeting ahead of time for virtual interviews to check if your microphone and camera are working. This will enable you to troubleshoot glitches and sort them out before the interview.
- Whether online or face to face, use positive body language: maintain eye contact, sit up straight, and ensure you convey enthusiasm and interest in the job.
- Dress appropriately, even if the interview is online. Looking like a professional helps you feel professional and gets you into the right headspace.
- Try to smile and look happy to be there. This can be difficult if you're very nervous, but do your best.
- Motivate why they should hire you by selling your strengths and showcasing your potential contribution to the role.

- Ask what the next steps are before leaving the interview.
- Thank the interviewer for their time and perhaps follow up with an email expressing your enthusiasm for the role.



Take note!

A reminder of the important dates.

By **30 March 2024**, you should record an **invite to an interview** (if seeking employment) **or** a self-employment declaration (if seeking to be self-employed) at www.hyperiondev.com/outcome5. Please record this milestone as soon as you reach it.

You can record any of the following:

- Joining an apprenticeship programme that utilises some of the knowledge obtained in your bootcamp.
- Obtaining a paid work opportunity for a duration of at least 12 weeks that utilises some of the knowledge obtained in your bootcamp.
- Obtaining a full-time job that utilises some of the knowledge obtained in your bootcamp and is with a new employer or your current employer (e.g. a promotion or extension of role).

Additionally, by **23 September 2024**, you should record an offer of a **job** (if seeking employment) or evidence of obtaining **new work/contracts** (if self-employed or seeking to be) at www.hyperiondev.com/finaloutcome5. Please record this milestone as soon as you reach it. You can record any of the following:

- An offer of a new job or apprenticeship that utilises part or all of the skills acquired in your bootcamp. You don't need to accept the offer to fulfil this requirement.
- New contracts or opportunities you obtained that utilise the new skills acquired through the bootcamp, which may include self-employed contract work or starting your own company.

Remember to keep an open mind and **explore various opportunities** to help you practise your interviewing skills and broaden your engagement with the tech sector. If you receive an invitation to a job or apprenticeship interview, please remember to fill out www.hyperiondev.com/outcome5 **before attending** the interview.

Co-certification: A **limited** number of co-certifications will be awarded based on your achievement of all [four criteria](#) for successful completion of this skills bootcamp.

Practical Task 1

First, create a Google doc with a uniquely identifiable filename that includes your name and email address and a task identifier for this task (**BYB4**). For example, if your name was John Smith and your email address was john_smith@gmail.com, your filename would be **John Smith - john_smith@gmail.com - BYB4**. As you progress through the Practical Task you will fill your answers into this Google doc, which you will save as a PDF and upload to your Dropbox at the end.

As usual, the instructions below differ slightly for job seekers and self-employed students. Read them carefully and follow those that fit the category you are in.

JOB SEEKERS

Time to apply for some more roles! You can follow these steps, which should be familiar by now:

- Once again, consider the sort of roles you might like to apply for and the sort of companies you might want to work for. Take into consideration the role, the skills required, location, ways of working (remote, hybrid, or on-site), the type and size of the organisation, and the industry.
- Find 5 junior tech roles currently being advertised - **different from the roles you identified in the last Build Your Brand task** - ensuring you consider **a range** of employers - large (1000+ employees) and small (500-100 employees) companies as well as tech scale-ups (up to 100 employees), paid internships and apprenticeships, or companies that source, hire, and train.

Remember that we specifically request that you search for and apply to a broad range of organisations. We find this to be **best practice** for a number of reasons: it pushes students out of the comfort zone of just applying to work for the major brands they're already familiar with; it helps students to broaden their knowledge of which companies form part of the tech hiring landscape, particularly small to medium enterprises (SMEs); and, it ensures that we meet the DfE requirement to address the needs of the broader, especially SME, tech market. Keep in mind that our team will review your submitted data and create relationships with your identified companies wherever possible. We already have relationships with many larger tech companies, so focussing on companies of different sizes and profiles will

also help to diversify your application profile and increase your chances of success.

- **For each of the roles** you have identified, again identify the recruiting or hiring managers (possibly the Talent or HR people at each company) and their contact details if possible (**email addresses for at least 2**) and **LinkedIn profile URLs (for all, mandatory)**.
- **Create and submit applications** to these 5 opportunities. Also, **reach out** to the contacts you have identified in whatever way possible (email, LinkedIn direct message, phone call, etc.), drawing their attention to your application to their company's role.
- Remember to track your applications in the [tracker spreadsheet](#) we provided a template for earlier in this task.

SELF-EMPLOYED STUDENTS

- Once again, consider companies and business contacts that you would pitch your services or products to. Note the contact and other details of 5 such companies and contacts.
- **Create and submit pitches** to these 5 opportunities.
- Remember to track your pitches in the [tracker spreadsheet](#) we provided a template for earlier in this task.

ALL STUDENTS

- Fill in the details of the contact people you have identified into [this form](#). Take screenshots of the form showing all the data you have filled in, and paste them into the Google doc you created at the beginning of this task, so that the mentor marking your work can see that you have completed this part of the task.
- Put a publicly accessible link to your Job/Interview/Pitch Opportunities tracker into your Google doc.
- **Remember, if you secure an interview, it is absolutely vital that you notify us** via hyperiondev.com/outcome5.

Practical Task 2

Using one of the job listings you identified in Practical Task 1, prepare for an interview at the company by writing answers to these common interview questions in the Google doc that you created in Practical Task 1.

Written work

- Copy the job description you will be using into your Google doc.
- Describe the company and its product in a short paragraph, explaining why you would be a good fit (150-200 words).
- Outline your background and what appeals to you in the job description.
- Describe a time when you made a mistake and identify a lesson you learned from this incident. (Hint: use the STAR technique).
- Ensure your Google doc contains the answers to Practical Task 1 (screenshots and tracker link), and the written work answers to Practical Task 2 that you've just completed. Then save your document as a PDF (using menu options File -> Download -> PDF) and upload the PDF file to your Dropbox.

Coding

- Try the [Little Sister's Vocabulary](#) coding challenge and write the code in the file.
- Save your file as **challenge.py**.
- Upload your code file to Dropbox in addition to the Google answers doc you've already uploaded.



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