

A Guide to Interviews for Post Graduates

Careers & Employability Service

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**Manchester
Metropolitan
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This handout is designed to be useful to all Post Graduate and Research students; it aims to consider the different types of interviews that you may face in Industry, Commerce or in academia.

First Interviews

By reaching the interview stage you are being seriously considered for the job, your first part of the selection process has been successful and now you need to be well prepared, be successful at Interview and be offered the job!

Preparation

Consider what the Interviewer is looking for? This will help you prepare for the interview. Interviewers look for evidence that you are suitable for the job - i.e. you meet their criteria for a successful candidate. Most interviewers have a list of criteria based on the job requirements against which you will be measured at interview.

- Can you do the job? Your academic ability and appropriate skills.
- Will you do the job? What is your level of motivation and interest?
- How well will you do the job? Work style and personality and relevant experience

Identify what they will be looking for

- Use any information you have from the organisation - the job description/ job analysis.
- Research the job and organisation, preparing for the most easy and likely and difficult questions
- Think about the impression you will create, ensure you both look and sound the part!

Types of Interviews:

Academic Interviews

Practices vary greatly, but candidates can expect a more formal interview process for a permanent academic post or research fellowship, perhaps involving a formal presentation of a research paper in front of a panel; or even having to present an actual lecture! Direct your answers to the individual questioners, but glance at the other panel members as you speak. Talk to other researchers/lecturers about their experiences of interview.

Questions are likely to concentrate on three main areas:

- The Course contents/New course development
- Teaching skills/method/experience
- Research

The questions are likely to focus on your academic and research skills and relevant experience, and you can unlikely to be asked many if any situational questions: i.e. what would you do if?

For further information see: <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/>

Criteria/competency based interviews

These are commonly used in industry, commerce and local government; every candidate will be asked similar questions, related to the employer's recruitment criteria/competencies. This type of interview is based on the view that your past behaviour is the best predictor of your future behaviour. Interviews tend to be very structured and have questions that relate directly to the essential criteria/competencies. Questions are likely to start with: "Please give me an example when..." or "Please describe an occasion....."

Be prepared to give specific examples about what **YOU** did in such situations.

Case Study Interviews

Case study interviews are becoming more popular especially for management consultancy. The aim of the case study interview is to see if the candidate would suit and enjoy the type of work. Questions give you the opportunity to use your problem solving skills and abilities.

Two useful websites to help you practise your case study skills are: http://www.mckinsey.com/careers/how_do_i_apply/how_to_do_well_in_the_interview.aspx and http://www.marakon.com/car_app_grad_case.asp

Technical Interviews

Technical interviews are likely to be used for scientific, engineering, IT or other technical positions. The questions relate to your technical knowledge and skills e.g. relevant subject area studied and hypothetical work-based scenario type questions.

Checkout: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/content/1/c6/06/93/54/interviewtips.pdf>

Useful Research

Whatever interview type you face:

- Be well prepared!
- identify individuals in similar employment and contact them if you can
- read the organisation's Annual Report and/or browse their website
- read through the job description and list your evidence for each of the requirements
- Think about the questions you would ask a potential candidate?
- If you are making a complete career change, be prepared to answer questions about why you wish to leave? Ensure your responses are positive

At the Interview:

First impressions

- Dress appropriately.
- Smile and make eye contact. Be quietly confident.
- Be friendly, polite and enthusiastic
- Try to speak clearly and concisely

Answering Questions

- If you cannot think of an answer straight away, ask for a moment to consider it.
- If asked about a weakness, present it in a positive way, explaining how you overcame it. Choose a weakness that is not relevant to the job.
- Look at those interviewing you for clues. Are they looking bored, in which case your answer may be too long? Check with them if unsure- "Has that answered your question? Is that sufficient information? Where would you like me to begin?"

Asking Questions

- Make sure your questions have not already been covered in the information pack or during the interview.
- Useful topics include: Career development opportunities, Training, Career prospects.
- You can ask about salary at this point, but don't make it your only question.
- Intelligent questions add to the positive impression you are trying to convey.

After Your Interview

If they don't contact you within the allotted time, telephone or e-mail to find out why. If you are rejected, ask for some feedback in order to improve your performance in the future. Some employers are unable to do this, but when they can this is beneficial to future interviews.

Sample Questions:

General Questions

- Why do you want the job?
- What skills can you offer us?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What can this University/organisation offer you?
- Why do you want to work at this institution/organisation?
- What are your training needs?
- Do you think it will be difficult coming back to a Faculty where you were recently a student?
- Why do you want to lecture here?

Research Questions

- What are your research interests?
- Tell us about the research methods you have used.
- What problems did you experience with using this methodology/approach?
- Where do you see your research fitting in with the interests/priorities of the Department?
- What ideas do you have for further research and what are the potential sources of funding?
- Would you want to do mostly teaching or half teaching and half research?
- When do you hope to finish your PhD?
- Where do you see your research going in the next few years?
- How will you manage the pressures of teaching and research?

Teaching/Course contents Questions

- What are you able to offer this University in the way of teaching?
- What innovative teaching methods have you used?
- What teaching skills have you developed over the past year/s?
- What are the differences between teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students? What are your views about student assessment?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses in relation to your subject matter?
- How do you see advances in technology impacting on the role of the lecturer?
- Where do you see the potential for new course development?
- Do you see any room for change in the way we teach large groups of students in lectures?

- What strategy might you use to assess a large number of students?
- Would you make any changes to the current undergraduate and or postgraduate programme?

For Further Information:

www.prospects.ac.uk/Links/Interviews

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/applicn.htm#Interviews>

<http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/media/services/careersandemployabilitydivision/careersservice/crcpublications/startingpointseriesofhandouts/a4/Interviews-and-Assessment-Centres-for-Research-Students.pdf>