

INTERVIEWS

Why do employers use interviews and how do they vary?

Interviews are an essential part of the recruitment process as they give prospective employers an opportunity to gain real insight into your skills and personality. There are three main types of interview and an employer may use one, or a combination of all of these, in their interview format.

Technical Interviews

These are most common when specific technical skills are needed for the role. For example, if you want to work in mechanical engineering, it is not unusual for a mechanical engineering degree to be an essential requirement and for an interview to revolve around your knowledge in that area. Often, interviewers are interested in your actual knowledge as well as your thought process and logic skills.

General Interviews

This tends to be a general chat about you and your interests, usually including open-ended questions such as 'please tell me about being a prefect at school'. It is then up to you to work out which skills the interviewer are looking for and how they can transfer across into the job that you are applying for.

Competency based interviews

These are by far the most common type of interview and will be looking for evidence of your skills and abilities in the form of real examples and experience in handling certain situations. 'Competencies' are the skills that are directly transferable into the job you are applying for, that will make you good at that job. A couple of examples include:

- *"Tell me about a time when you have worked under pressure. What was the situation and how did you cope?"*
- *"Tell me about a time when you have experienced conflict. What was your role and how was it resolved?"*

Your interview experience will depend on the kind of organisation you apply to. Below is a description of mainstream practice used in most large organisations.

Telephone Interviews

Candidates are selected for interview on the basis of their CV or application form. Please see the skills supplement on [application forms and CVs](#) for more information on how to make yours stand out from the crowd.

Telephone interviews are most often in advance of face to face interviews and will be general in nature. They will test for your reason for applying for the job and for your communication skills. They usually last for between 10 and 20 minutes.

First Interviews

Usually with one person and lasting anywhere from 30 minutes and an hour, these can take place either on campus or at the employer's offices. These can sometimes take place via Skype.

These are often general interviews to gauge whether you are a possible employee. More frequently however, employers are now using this as an opportunity to find the real high fliers that will go on to second interview. They can therefore involve a mini assessment centre – with psychometric tests and a competency based interview.

Second Interviews

This is now often in the format of an assessment centre, held offsite or at the employer's offices. It will often include [group exercises, presentations](#), more interviews and [psychometric testing](#).

Top Tips

Preparation

An interview is not something you can just wander into and 'wow' with your personality. Well-prepared candidates are more confident and provide more thorough answers. You should allocate some time beforehand to do the following.

- Research the company and vacancy – look at the website, read company literature, and become familiar with the job specification. Check to see if the company or competitors have been in the press recently and study any financial data available. What products are they investing in and are they expanding globally?
- Look at your CV/application form to try to spot obvious questions e.g. Why did you take that year out? Why did you get a poor grade in maths A level?
- Check travel arrangements – book tickets in advance and telephone to confirm both interview and travel arrangements 24 hours in advance.
- Check to see if there will be any tests – revise relevant skills in advance if you need to.
- Make sure you have thought about the examples in your life that you are going to use to answer competency based questions like those above. You can search for similar questions online. Try not to rehearse your answers word for word - it will sound very false. You need to have the information ready to hand, but still sound natural when you give your answers.

In the interview

- First impressions are essential! Make sure that you turn up in plenty of time and when you are there – smile, be pleasant and display some enthusiasm!
- Stand out from the crowd by pointing out your individual selling points, showing off your research of the company and the industry, and by creating a clear match between your skills and experience and the requirements for the role.
- Make sure that the interviewer is clear that this isn't just about getting a job. It's about getting a job with them and in that particular role.
- Stay calm – speak clearly (but not too fast) and make plenty of eye contact. If you build a rapport with the interviewer then half the battle is won.
- Most interviewers will ask you if you have any questions at the end. Try to have a couple prepared to ask. However, if all of your questions have been covered in the interview, simply let the interviewer know and thank them for their time.

After the interview

- Shake hands firmly and politely ask when you can expect to receive some feedback.
- Always request feedback, even if you are unsuccessful in getting the job. This can be invaluable in highlighting to you any issues that you can address before your next interview e.g. a hole in your knowledge or an issue with your style of delivery or presentation.

For tips on interview preparation and technique, please click [here](#).

For more advice on particular competency based questions, please click [here](#).