



**CONNECTING YOU TO YOUR FUTURE**

## **Guide to Interviews**

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## What are interviews?

- The opportunity to prove your suitability for the post.
- May be conducted by one person or by a panel of people.
- Usually in person, but they may also be conducted by telephone or Skype.

**If you've been invited to an interview, you can safely assume that, on the basis of your application, the employer considers you to have the potential to do the advertised job and they are considering you as a prospective employee.**

## What do I do if I'm invited for an interview?

- Make the most of it by planning and preparing.
- This is your opportunity to convince the employer in person that you are the best candidate
- Don't assume that they will remember your application, CV or cover letter
- Employers may schedule tests, tasks or presentations to take place during the interview but you should be informed of these in advance. How should I prepare?

## Research the employer:

- Show in your interview that you know the organisation who you are applying to work with.
- Read the company's website, research annual report; follow the organisation on LinkedIn, Twitter Facebook and other social media platforms.
- Use a SWOT analysis on the company (Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats). You may find it helpful to create a table to help you remember information.
- Look for key metrics like company's size, products or services, turnover, location, organisational structure, competitors and position in the industry / service as a whole.
- After you have researched the employer, ask yourself how you fit in with what you have read.
- What skills, attributes, and knowledge can you offer?
- Do the aims and culture of the company align in with your own?
- What might your career trajectory look like with the company?
- What problem can you solve or where can you add value to the company?

## Research the sector

- Commercial awareness is a key skill that employers seek
- Research industry journals, newspapers, company reports.
- Look at industry and company videos on YouTube and join industry groups on Facebook and LinkedIn. Think about your network and how valuable that might be to a potential employer?
- Find out how the industry is changing.

**By understanding the sector, you can then use this knowledge to formulate ideas about how you might be able to add value to the employer, or what experience you possess that may add efficiencies or grow the bottom line.**

## Example Swot Analysis

No. Employees	200	Location	Dublin, Cork, Galway
Products & Services	Fresh Food Distribution	Turnover	€5.8 million per annum
Structure	Management Team reporting to Board	Competitors	Fresh Food Inc., Active Energy, British Foods Inc.,

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Well-known brand Focus on organic local produce Delivery Network Strong Sales Performance	No Social Media Presence No online ordering facility Market Share not large enough to stop potential disruptors	European Export Market Online Ordering	Brexit

## Research the job

- Research the job area in general.
- Grad Ireland / [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), contains a large number of job descriptions. Speak to people in similar roles and become familiar with the general tasks and terminology of the role or industry.
- Re-read the job description, person specification and the list of the required competencies.
- Look for key words that may frame the interview and questions asked
- What personal qualities, skills, experience and knowledge are required?
- Can you demonstrate these to an employer?

## Research Interview Techniques

- There are a number of different types of interviews
- Some will focus on your past experience, while some will ask you more about situations and skills.
- You can never be certain of what questions maybe be asked, however, the below will apply to most interview situations.

## Confidence

**Fail to prepare ... prepare to fail.** You need to convince yourself that you are the right person for the job to enable you to convince the employer that you are the right person for the job. The purpose of an Interview is to demonstrate your knowledge, skills, experiences, abilities and personal qualities to an employer. In conducting quality research of the job, industry and company you will help to give you this confidence, so that you can come across in the best possible light.

## Prepare to be probed

Be prepared for probing questions: Think about how you have learnt from challenges, failure or mistakes and addressed or developed from these experiences to make sure to emphasise your positive outcomes.

## Remember the application process

Keep a copy of your CV, covering letter or application form, and re-read this before the interview. Look over the information you have provided and be prepared to develop and backup the examples you provided.

## Be ready to talk about what you know about the job, employer and industry

This is why it is so important that you have conducted research. If you have researched correctly this should come very easily and it gives you the opportunity to shine and show that you are invested in the process. A word of caution ... the people who are interviewing you will know more so don't WAFFLE. Be honest about your understanding of the job, company and sector and why your research has convinced you that you should work in this area.

## Develop answers that show where you can add value and what you can offer

Write down a list of five to eight points that you really want the employer to know about you and that also highlight your skills. Try to get these points across in the interview. Remember, if you don't tell them how will they know?

## The big day ...

### Practical Preparation

#### How do I get there?

Check the venue and travel arrangements to make absolutely certain you will arrive on time. Map apps can be inconsistent and it's not unusual for delays if you are using public transport. If you are in any doubt where the interview is taking place call the company and ask. Nothing is more likely to jeopardise an interview than arriving late. It's better to arrive 20 minutes early than 2 minutes late and always try to be there 15 minutes ahead of your scheduled time.

- The email or letter inviting you to interview, location map, a copy of your CV / application form, notes on key points you want to make, and questions you would like to ask.
- Money for taxi if something happens to delay you.
- Water (leave the chewing gum at home ... you may forget to take it out)
- Any certificates you have been asked to bring (driving license, qualifications etc.)
- A portfolio (if relevant to the role)

#### What to wear?

- Plan what you want to wear .... What if you can't find those black shoes on the morning of the interview?
- Ironed clothes, smart haircut and overall appearance are important ... remember the interview starts the minute you walk in the door. You don't want it to be over before it starts
- If you can afford to it's always good to invest in a new suit or jacket to boost your confidence and professional look.

#### Nervous?

- Good you should be. It is totally natural
- Employers are not looking for perfection ... they are looking at your future potential and how they might mould you into their company. It's up to you to make sure that you don't leave them with any doubt. Research and demonstrate that your abilities, knowledge and motivation will add value to the company.

#### Help to settle your nerves

- Book an appointment with DkIT Careers to arrange a mock interview.
- Aim for a good night's sleep the night before.
- Eat a good breakfast in the morning and drink plenty of water.
- Practice mindfulness or breathing exercises for a few days leading up to the interview ... **IT WILL HELP!**

Most importantly **BE POSITIVE**. More than likely you won't get the job if you keep telling yourself that you haven't got a hope. There's a reason they've invited you. Companies tend to be too busy to waste time in interviewing people for the sake of it.

## At the interview

### First impressions last

- Be courteous and friendly towards everyone. Is that the CEO you just blanked in the car park?
- Switch your phone fully .... Vibrations can be heard as well as felt.
- If you are a smoker, make sure you have mints or spray to remove the smell.
- Greet the interviewer(s) with a firm handshake.
- Wait to be seated – you don't own any of the chairs just yet.
- Be positive. Any experiences you have (good and bad) as part of the interview process are an opportunity for you to learn / develop and hone your skills

### Body Language

- Body language can be as important as what you actually say.
- Non-verbal signals like posture, tone and gestures and the language you use will all affect the way you are received by the interviewer(s).
- It's important to maintain eye contact as it conveys that you are listening and interested. In panel interviews mainly look toward the person asking the question but also try to glance at other panel members. More than likely you will do this naturally but it's good to be aware of it. Don't be robotic though ....
- SMILE! Frequently smiling indicates that you have built a good rapport with the interviewer and shows that you are relaxed and confident.
- Sit back comfortably in the chair but don't slouch. Don't lean forward too often as they may be construed as aggressiveness. A good way to ensure this is to plant your feet firmly into the ground and imagine a piece of string holding the top of the back of your head to the roof.
- It is totally natural to gesture ... however if you have a tendency to fling your arms around place them on your lap.

### Answering questions

- Practise the **STAR** technique: the following method helps in crafting effective response: **S** = Situation (20% of your answer) **T** = Task (10% of your answer) **A** = Action (50% of your answer) **R** = Result (20% of your answer). It may not be suitable for all questions but is especially useful in competency based interviews.
- Listen carefully and ask for clarification if you don't understand the question.
- Answer questions fully. Avoid answers which are too long, are repeats or another answer you've already given or are irrelevant. Ensure your answers are not too short ... more than likely you have not evidenced or backed up your point. If you are unsure don't be afraid to ask if the interviewer would like you to continue.
- Avoid words like just, only, maybe.
- Don't lie ...
- If you feel that you haven't answered a question in the most effective way or you haven't been able to get your point across you can address this at the end of the interview. Don't beat yourself up ... you will have a chance to rectify it.

### STAR Technique

- Use the STAR to craft answers to difficult interview questions.

**Situation/Task:** Choose a situation that is as similar to scenarios you will encounter in the role.

- Be specific: specific examples have more impact.
- State the problem as briefly as you can while ensuring that the listener understands the situation.
- It is advisable that you don't discuss a situation you are angry about.
- Do not discuss a problem that you caused.

**Action:** Describe the action you took to resolve the problem or to complete the task

- This step should be the main focus of your answer (60%+).
- Don't overlook this as action is the key to resolving or completing
- Provide as much detail as possible and try to do this sequentially to show the employer that you are capable of approaching tasks or issues methodically .

## **Result**

- Describe the positive result of your action.
- If no positive result, demonstrate how you addressed any possible shortcoming into positive actions
- If you can use metrics to demonstrate i.e. achieved a grade, won a competition, secured funding.
- Don't forget to mention the positive result.

## **Types of questions?**

- Employers will more than likely focus on key themes at the interview.
- Why you have applied? Knowledge of job, sector, company? What can you do for us? Do you have skills, qualifications, knowledge and motivation to fit the role? What type of person are you? What makes you stand out from the rest of the applicants?

## **Questions relating to your education, experience and interests**

- Why did you choose to study in Dundalk Institute of Technology?
- Why this course?
- What do you enjoy most/least about your placement and why?
- Can you tell me about your final year project / dissertation?
- What is your greatest personal achievement?
- Outside of academic studies and work what are your interests?

## **Technical / Knowledge Based Questions**

- Describe your experience in ...?
- What experience have you in ...?
- How would you improve ...?
- What do you think of (a new development in industry)?
- Why do you choose to research ... and what relevance has this to our sector?

## **Situation Based / Decision Making / Hypothetical Questions**

- What would you do if ran this company?
- We are experiencing a drop in customer service ratings presently. What solution would you offer?
- A supplier lets you down and you need the product to hit manufacturing targets for tomorrow. What would you do?
- A client discloses ... what is the best course of action to take?

## **Theoretical questions**

- What are the key challenges facing our sector presently in your opinion?
- How would you define marketing, strategic management, HRM?
- Define management?
- What do you think the qualities need to be a successful ...



# Types of Interviews

## 1 on 1

- Conducted by one person ... there maybe somebody present to take notes but they will not ask questions.
- You may face several 1-1 interviews with different representatives focusing on different areas or skills.
- Generally these are first stage interviews and may take place at an assessment centre in conjunction with other activities.

## Panel Interviews

- Normally made up of three or more people. It is typical for a chairperson to coordinate the questions. Other panel members may include and a specialist who knows about the job in detail and a HR specialist and a direct line manager.
- This type of interview is daunting! Remember everybody will be nervous (including the panel) and all candidates will face the same process. Remember eye contact. Treat it like a 1-1 but try and include everybody when answering.

## Competency-Based Interviews

- This type of interview is used to assess if you have the relevant experience and competencies they are looking for (e.g. teamwork, communication, problem solving, leadership, critical thinking, and management).
- Remember **STAR**. Use appropriate examples from work experience, college, volunteering, student roles, sporting activities).
- All panel members will score you based on a set scale depending on how well you **DEMONSTRATE** you have the required competencies.

## Examples of competency based interview questions:

- Give me an example of when you led a team?
- Tell me about a time when you had to influence someone?
- How do you deal with criticism?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
- Describe a situation where you used your initiative
- What was your biggest setback?
- Describe a situation when you had a difficult decision to make?
- What is the largest project you have undertaken?
- Describe a situation where you had to plan or organises something?

## Strength-Based Interviews

- This type of interview focus on what you enjoy doing and are passionate about.
- Typically employers are looking for positive attitude and genuineness as well as suitability for the role.
- Questions tend to be shorter and body language is used as an identifier to ascertain your passion, motivation and willingness.
- The key for the organisation using this method is that they can identify candidates who will enjoy the job more and as a result perform better.
- Think about what you love doing both inside and outside college / work and be prepared to be open and honest. How do your preferences fit with the organisation's culture and the job requirements?

## Examples of strength based interview questions:

- What do you enjoying doing?
- What motivates you?
- What are you good at?
- What comes easily to you?
- Which gives you more satisfaction – meeting people or completing a project?
- What energizes you?

- Do you prefer to start tasks or finish them?
- What does a successful day look like for you?

### **Group-Based Interviews**

- Again these can be a very daunting prospect! The key here it to remember that you are not competing against other candidates.
- None of you may be successful!
- Follow the same principles for normal interviews and ensure you allow other candidates to answer questions as well as making sure your answers are heard. Don't jump in.

### **Telephone Interviews**

- Used at the first stage of the selection process.
- Can range from a basic check in for suitability to probing interview. Be ready!
- Will follow the same format as a 1-1 but maybe unscheduled.
- Can be difficult to assess how you are doing. Try and relax.
- If the company call you unannounced it can be a good idea to excuse yourself just for a couple of seconds "to close the door". This gives you an opportunity to compose yourself.
- If it is genuinely a bad-time offer to call them back or arrange a more suitable time.

### **Preparing for a Telephone Interview:**

- This is an interview ... get your game face on. Howya won't cut it when you pick up the call.
- Be ready 15 minutes before the call with CV / Application from printed out and list of skill / qualities.
- Make sure your mobile is charged (or turned off it taking the call on landline).
- Let people know that you are taking a call and CAN'T be disturbed.
- Your tone of voice is really important. Be enthusiastic.
- Smile ... it can be heard down the other end ... really! Telesales people who smile are the most successful.
- How are you sitting? At the end of a bed is probably not the best place. Find a comfortable chair and sit up straight. It will help with projection. You can stand but don't if you tend to walk around when you talk on the phone.
- Have a glass of water ready. Best to excuse yourself if you need to take a gulp!

### **Video / Webcam / Skype /**

- Companies are using this style of interview more and more often now.
- Usually first or second stage in the recruitment process.
- Follow exactly the same protocol as outlined above.
- Take it as seriously as a face to face interview.
- What's behind you? Can the potential employer see it? Best to have a bare wall.

### **Automated Video Interviews**

- Companies invite candidates to record their answers to set questions by a set deadline.
- Same interview protocol as above applies.
- Login to a web-based platform with password and username provided.
- As it is not live you don't need to be online at the same time but be conscious of what time you do it at. Logging in a 3am is probably not a good idea.

### **Tips for Video Interviews**

- Test call a family member to make sure everything is working and the setting is comfortable.
- Dress as smartly as you would for a normal interview. You may have to get up from the chair at some point.
- Minimize the video image of yourself ... this will ensure that you're not interviewing yourself.
- Test the lighting of the room.
- Look into the camera ... remember eye contact.
- Avoid speaking over the recruiter. Sometime there may be a slight delay so allow people to finish speaking. If you miss a question, ask again.
- Make sure the caller has ended the call before you fist pump the air!

## What questions should I ask at the end?

- You can ask questions about the job, company, training and opportunities for progression.
- The next stage of the recruitment process (if appropriate).

## What questions should I not ask at the end?

- Information already covered in the employers literature or website
- Trivialities such as holidays, what time you can go home
- Pay or benefits. You can contact HR directly if it is not covered in the job specification or literature.
- Testing questions i.e. Why did the company let 40 people go last year in the UK branch or what is your opinion in the sudden drop in your share price?
- How did I get on?
- If you don't have any questions it's a good idea to state that they have already answered any questions that you had during the course of the interview.
- Remember this is also the opportunity to state something relevant that you may have missed during the interview itself.
- Always thank the interviewers (s) for the opportunity or inviting you to the interview.

## Your interview hasn't finished yet!

- Remember your interview only finishes when you leave the organisation.
- Have you been invited to stay for lunch ... you're still at the interview.
- Be courteous to everybody ... remember the CEO in the car-park? Did you say goodbye this time?

## Job Offer

- You are likely to get a phone call.
- This is the stage to clarify salary and other benefits if not discussed
- A formal offer should be sent to you in writing.
- Take time to consider.
- The shoe is on the other foot now ... how did you find interviewing the company? Where you impressed by the process and people?
- You don't have to accept the offer ... there's a good chance you'll be successful in future applications.
- If you do accept send through you formal acceptance along with any requests from the company to avoid delays.
- Check the contract to make sure that it is what you expected. If not ask for clarification.

## Unsuccessful

- It happens ... to everybody.
- Think what you can improve on for the next opportunity. You've probably learned a lot from the process.
- Ask politely for feedback to pin-point what you can improve on.