

A quick guide to

Interviews & Assessment Centres

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Congratulations, you've been invited to an interview or assessment centre! You've obviously been doing something right to get this far. Whether your interview and assessment centre is face to face or online, the principles are the same to help you nail it on the day.

This guide will help you prepare for interviews and assessment centres, deal with the questions or activities on the day, and learn how to handle your nerves!

Nothing beats practice for interviews so also go to [Shortlist.me](https://www.shortlist.me) on the **myCareer** resources tab to have a go at interview questions that are likely to come up.

Any questions?

www.worc.ac.uk/careers

Send us a query on
myCareer

Before you start

Preparation is key to building your confidence to perform well at interview. Do your research so you are not caught out by the obvious questions, and also think about your key strengths in relation to the role, so the employer leaves with a strong impression of you.

Get organised

Read and re-read your interview instructions so you know what to expect, take another look at the job details and your original application.

Research the employer

Find out as much as you can about them so you understand fully what they do, their client groups and competitors. Have they been in the news recently?

Be clear why you are there

Be clear about why you want that role and employer. This question always comes up, so prepare some convincing answers!

Know your strengths

Consider what your strengths are, and why you would be good at the job. Believe in yourself, and you'll convince the interview panel. Your strengths could include education, experience, motivations, values or interests.

Think what you might be asked

Plan out the questions you might be asked and prepare notes on your answers. Structure your answers using the STAR technique (see page 5).

What do you want to know

Make a list of all the questions you want to ask. Remember, this is not just about the things you genuinely want to know, but also giving the impression you are interested in and committed to the role.

Interview questions

You may not be able to predict all questions, but certain key ones will come up in some form.

Remember employers are trying to work out three things during the interview:

- Can you do the job?
- Are you a good fit for the role and company?
- Are you the best person for the job?

Make the most of every question

Three deceptively simple but also very revealing questions are:

- Tell me about yourself
- What questions do you have for us?
- Is there anything else you would like to add before you go?

It's very easy to skip over these thinking that the employer is making polite conversation but in fact these are your invitation to showcase yourself, your strengths, and interest for the role. Use them wisely!

Typical interview questions

How would you describe yourself?

How would your friends describe you?

Why have you applied for this job/course?

Why do you want to work here/study here?

Why should we offer you this job/accept you onto this postgraduate course?

What do you hope to be doing in 5 years' time?

Do you prefer to work alone or in a team, and why?

How do you handle pressure?

How would you describe the pace at which you work?

What would you do if you thought your boss was in the wrong?

What would your colleagues say about you?

What are you passionate about?

What can you contribute to this organisation?

What challenges are you looking for in your next role?

What major challenges have you faced and how did you react?

What have you learned from your mistakes?

What is your greatest strength?

What is your greatest weakness?

What do you see as the main challenges of this role?

What is your biggest accomplishment?

What is most/least rewarding about your current job?

In your experience, what makes a good team member?

Tell us about a time when you had a difficult issue to overcome.

Tell us about a time when you delivered outstanding customer service.

Tell us about a time when you have gone the extra mile.

How would you deal with a difficult customer/client/team member?

Tell us three interesting things about this company.



The rule of three

When preparing your answers, try to think of three things you can say about each question. So, for example, three reasons why you want the job, or three examples of communication skills. Even if you don't get the chance to use them all, it's always good to have more examples at hand.

Answering those questions

Many of the questions listed are competence based where they want you to show them you can demonstrate a particular skill or experience. A great way to structure your answers is through the STAR technique. This can help you keep to the point, and answer fully without over talking!

There are many different competencies you could be asked about - some frequently used ones include teamwork, problem solving, decision making and communication. The person specification will list them for the role.

S SITUATION	Provide a brief background of the situation/context you found yourself in when you used this skill.
T TASK	What were you required to achieve within this situation e.g. project requirements.
A ACTION	Describe the main actions or behaviours you demonstrated within the task and how you utilised the skill you are being asked about. This should be the majority of your answer.
R RESULT	What was the outcome as a result of your behaviour? Be as specific as possible i.e. grade obtained as a result, amount of money raised for a charity, etc.

Have a look at this example to see how to put the STAR framework into practice:

SITUATION

"As a member of the University's Community Volunteering Society,"

TASK

"I was part of a small team organising a Christmas event for residents of a local care home. The event involved eight students performing for the residents."

ACTION

"I volunteered to be team leader. In this role, I identified what each team member's skills and interests were, allocated tasks, created an action plan, and maintained the team's focus and enthusiasm. I also developed links with the Drama Society by giving a presentation about our planned event and encouraging them to volunteer to take part."

RESULT

"It was so well received that we have been invited back next Christmas and two other care homes have asked us to run similar events."

Top tips for competency-based questions:

Check the organisation's values (e.g. courage; integrity; pride; social responsibility; excellence). Our values drive our behaviours and by answering competency-based questions you can show your values and how they influence your behaviour. The interviewer will be looking for this in your answers.

Unless you're told otherwise, you can provide examples from your work, study, volunteering or personal life.

Ensure your examples are relevant to the questions asked and provide evidence of the behaviours/skills/knowledge looked for.

Don't make things up; the interviewer may ask you to provide further information on examples you provided in your application.

Questions you can ask the interviewer

Prepare a list of questions that show you have a genuine interest in the role and commitment to the company.

Some questions may occur to you during the interview and others may be answered as you go along, but it's always good to have some up your sleeve.

Questions about salary are generally best left until the point of being made a job offer.

- What are my opportunities for advancement?
- What are the team's/company's plans for the next few years?
- What would a successful candidate look like for you?
- How can I impress you in the first few months of the job?
- When will I hear about the job?
- Can you tell me more about the team I would be working in?
- Why do you enjoy working here?
- What is the dress code?
- What can you tell me about the day to day responsibilities of the role?

On the day

So you've prepared your answers and thought through your examples, but what else do you need to think about to help you perform your best on interview day.



What to wear

This will depend on the dress culture of the job. So dressing for an interview for an accountant may be different to one for a sports coach. Always check if there is a practical element to the interview that requires particular attire, but otherwise think about what you might wear in your first week on the job and make it a notch or two smarter.



Getting there

If your interview is face to face, plan out carefully how you will get there and always allow more time than you think you will need. If you are getting a lift with a friend or relative, choose them carefully so you can be sure you will arrive on time, and also that they will help steady your nerves. When at the interview always be polite and interested to the receptionists and other team members you might meet, as they could be asked for their opinions of you.



Getting online

Video interviews are very common now, and it looks as though this trend will only increase. Always check your connection in advance, and if your wi-fi is erratic, make arrangements to go somewhere else. Check your camera and mic and be mindful of the background. No-one wants to see washing drying behind you! Make sure any housemates will not interrupt you, or are planning any downloads which could affect your connection.



Students with disabilities

If you have a disability it is your choice if and when you disclose this to an employer. If you do choose to disclose before the interview, you could ask the employer to make reasonable adjustments to the interview process. Alternatively you may prefer to disclose at the point of the job offer if you feel you need reasonable adjustments to your work environment. See the 'Job Hunting Guide for Disabled Students' on www.worc.ac.uk/careers/resources for more information.

Dealing with nerves.

Interview nerves go with the territory, and in fact increased adrenaline can help your performance. But if you're worried your nerves will get in the way, try these:

- Preparation – we've said this before, but the better prepared you are the more confident you will feel.
- Practice your responses out loud.
- Start relaxing the night before – gym, warm bath, early night.
- Have a light, healthy breakfast.
- Get some fresh air.
- Laughter reduces stress hormones & anxiety – watch a funny clip beforehand.
- Listen to music that will make you feel calm or confident.
- Slow deep breaths (in for a count of four, hold for two, out for four).
- Take a breath and let it out like a sigh. You'll probably feel your shoulders relax.
- Allow extra time for transport delay or IT technical issues & use that time to relax.
- Visualise success - your brain favours proving itself right.
- A smile and strong handshake will create the impression of self-confidence.
- Think of something you have achieved to build your confidence (e.g. lived abroad on your own).
- Replace negative thoughts ("I might not get the job") with positive ones ("I could accept the job").
- Put it in perspective – this isn't the only job out there & they wouldn't be interviewing you if they thought you lacked potential for the role.
- Think of it as a meeting – a two-way process.
- Successful or not the interview will be a useful experience.

Tips on the day

- Smile! Positivity will breed positivity!
- Interviewers will understand that the candidates are nervous. They are not there to catch you out.
- Keep your body language open and try to avoid fidgeting.
- Ask the interviewer to repeat/rephrase a question if you are not clear.
- Make eye contact. Where there is a panel, remember to include everyone.
- Ask if you can consult your notes. They will be impressed that you have prepared.
- Ask to take a minute to consider a question or take a sip of water to buy time.
- Avoid saying "we", "just" or "had to". Own your achievements yourself, don't apologise for them.
- Don't act a part – be authentic but the best version of yourself!

After the interview

As soon as you have recovered, reflect on your performance. Ask yourself which questions you think you answered well and why, and which you think you struggled with. Job interviews are a skill, and just like any other they improve with practice.

If you are offered the job

If you are offered the job, you'll need to decide fairly quickly whether you want to accept it or not. You may want to consider:

- Is this a job I want to do?
- Will I enjoy working there with those people?
- What are the benefits – financial and otherwise?
- What impact will this job have on me and my family?
- Will this job make me more employable in the future?

Once you have accepted the job you have entered into a verbal contract with the employer, who should then send you through a contract to sign.

If you are not sure about whether to accept it's reasonable to ask the employer to give you a few days to decide, but you both need to be clear about when the decision will be made.

If you are not offered the job

Not getting the job can be disappointing, especially after all the effort you put in, but it doesn't mean that you were a bad candidate or performed poorly. It might be that there was another candidate who had the experience and skills required, and they were just a closer match on this occasion.

- Think about how you did and what went well and not so well.
- Ask for feedback from the interview panel about how you performed.
- Or if they are not prepared to give you feedback, you could ask about what made the successful candidate stand out.
- Remember, it's not a personal rejection, but a sign that another candidate was a closer fit for the job.

Then, put it down to experience and move on. This may not have been the right job for you and the next interview may well be the one where you are successful!

Assessment centres

Assessment centres enable companies to judge the suitability of job applicants for a specific role. Either face to face or online, they may last from a few hours to several days and will involve completing a series of activities designed to test competencies and personal attributes.

Assessment centres give employers the chance to:

- Observe how you behave in a range of situations and under pressure.
- See how you work with others and on your own.
- Obtain feedback from a number of assessors.

Assessment centres can be very tiring as you are under scrutiny for long periods of time, even when you might not expect it, such as at a drinks reception. Be authentic, and if you feel that one section did not go well, do not worry as there will be plenty of other opportunities to redeem yourself!

Typical assessment centre activities:

- Presentations
- Written exercises
- Aptitude tests
- Personality tests
- Situational judgement tests
- In tray exercises
- Group tasks and discussions
- Role plays
- Business case studies
- Physical challenges

Presentations

You may be asked to prepare a presentation on a given topic, either in advance or on the day. You are likely to be assessed on your planning and organisation as well as your communication skills.

Top tips for presentations:

- Keep to your topic, address the brief
- Keep visuals clear and simple, and number of slides to the minimum
- Include an introduction, middle and conclusion. Say what you are going to say, say it, then say what you have said!
- Check the technical aspects, how you can save your presentation, what equipment you will have
- Have a contingency plan in case the technology fails you!
- Practice and prepare in advance, time yourself carefully
- Speak clearly and vary your tone and pace
- Stand up straight, face the audience, and act confidently
- Make eye contact with your audience and smile!
- Keep notes in cards, don't read from the screen

Written exercises

Written exercises will test your skills in written communication, decision making and problem solving. Your task may or may not be relevant to the job, but you will be given information to read, analyse and interpret.

For example:

- If you've applied for a healthcare role, you could be given a clinical scenario to read and then asked what actions you would take in that situation
- If you've applied for a customer service role, you could be asked to respond to a customer complaint
- If you've applied for a marketing role, you could be asked to produce a short report on potential markets for a new product.

There is often no right answer, however you will be assessed on:

- Your approach to the written exercise(s)
- Your findings and how you reached them
- How you present your findings and recommendations.

Aptitude Tests

These tests cover aptitudes relevant to the role you've applied for, such as literacy, numeracy, problem solving or situational judgement.

You may be asked to complete these as part of your assessment day but it is more likely that you will have already completed them online as part of the shortlisting process.

Practice the tests as often as you can in advance, as this can really help you improve your speed and accuracy.

Search online for examples of free practice aptitude or psychometric tests, such as on Assessment Day: www.assessmentday.co.uk

Personality tests

Personality tests assess how you behave in a given situation - there are no right or wrong answers, and you can't pass or fail, but the company will want to see if your responses match with the type of person they want to appoint. They're designed to identify any inconsistencies in your responses so answer each question honestly.

Some of the most widely used personality tests are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), 16PF, and OPQ. You may be asked to take a test online, either before or at the assessment centre.

Group tasks/discussions

As most jobs require the ability to work effectively in a team, many assessment centres will include at least one group task: the skills being assessed are usually leadership, team working, problem solving and communication.

You will be assessed on how well you work with team members, debate and negotiate, as well as your interpersonal skills and the contribution you make to the completion of any task.

Tips for group tasks/discussions:

- Keep your ideas and suggestions relevant to the discussion
- The quality of what you say is more important than how much you talk
- Listen carefully to others, and show that you have understood by nodding and responding where appropriate
- Ask for other people's opinions and include others in discussions
- Don't interrupt or talk over other group members
- Stay calm, even when someone is annoying you
- Don't look at the assessors
- Keep an eye on the time

Situational judgement tests (SJT)

SJTs present a range of scenarios that job applicants may experience on-the-job. You are asked to choose between different options and decide which is the most effective course of action, and which is the action you would take within that scenario. SJTs are usually written tests which you may complete at application stage or at the assessment centre.

The Assessment Day website provides more information about SJTs with a free example test: www.assessmentday.co.uk

In-tray/e-tray exercises

In-tray (paper-based) and e-tray (computer-based) exercises test your planning and organisational skills, plus your ability to prioritise work and make judgements.

You will be given a range of materials (e.g. letters; emails; reports) and will be asked to decide in what order you will tackle them and how you will respond to them. You may also be given later additional items of information or be interrupted during the exercise to see how you respond to pressure.

Assessment Day is a useful website which offers some free sample in-tray and e-tray exercises: www.assessmentday.co.uk

Physical challenges

Physical challenges assess your physical fitness and may also assess other competencies such as leadership and organisation when working with others. They may be used for occupations such as the Armed Forces or Police, or for roles where physical prowess is important such as Sports and Fitness training.

Role plays

Some employers ask applicants to role play a scenario you could face when doing the job you've applied for. This helps the employer to find out how you would behave in a similar situation, how you communicate with others, and what impact you have on those around you.

Some role play tips:

- Read the brief carefully: don't make any decisions about your approach until you have read all of the information you've been given.
 - Identify and prioritise the most important issues: address them first.
 - Get into role at the start of the role play, and stay in role until the end.
 - Be polite and calm, but be firm if necessary – don't show extremes of behaviour i.e. don't lose your temper or shout!
 - While still in role play make sure you bring the situation to a clear end, clarifying what is going to happen next.
-

Business case studies

Case study activities are based on real-life scenarios. They help the company to see how you work with others and to assess competencies relevant to the job you've applied for.

During the case study activity you will need to focus upon:

- Identifying the key data/facts relating to the task you've been given
- Discussing these with other group members
- Putting forward your ideas and giving due consideration to others' views
- Contributing to the group's decision about the best way forward.

The main points

1

It's great news! An employer will only invite you to an interview or assessment centre if they think there is a good chance you will be the successful candidate.

2

Preparation for both interviews and assessment centres is key. Research as much about the employer as you can but also prepare a list of your own strengths and think about the impression you want to leave.

3

Prepare your answers to competency-based questions by using the STAR method.

4

Nerves are normal and even useful. Employers will expect nerves, but if they do get the better of you, breathing techniques and visualisation can help to steady you.

5

Interviews and assessment centres are your opportunity to shine. Be yourself and enjoy your chance to tell your story.

Notes

If you have a question that isn't covered by this booklet or would like to talk through your ideas with a member of the Careers & Employability team, send us a query or book a careers appointment on **myCareer**.



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