

What will I be asked in my interview?



Often, you can guess the content of an interview based on the job advert and sector that you are applying to. It is a good idea to look over the advert for the role and write a list of potential questions that the employer may ask you. Any questions are likely to fall into one of these three categories.

Competency and Situational questions

A competency question will ask for an example of a time you have demonstrated a skill or worked in a particular way. A situational question is similar, except, rather than asking how you have worked in the past, it asks how you would act in a future situation.

Examples are:

Tell me about a time you have worked in a team.

Describe a time you have used strong interpersonal skills.

Talk me through a project you have led from start to finish.

What would you do if you found out a colleague had breached confidentiality?

How would you respond if a customer told you that they were not happy with your service?

When planning an event, what would be the first steps you would take?

For competency questions, the STAR method is the appropriate way to answer a question. This is when you give an example, ensuring that you cover the:

Situation – Explain where you were working / studying / volunteering.

Task – Clearly outline what you were trying to achieve.

Action – This should be 50-70% of your answer. You need to clearly explain how and why you did something in a particular way.

Result – This should be positive! And can be learning, a good grade, increased efficiency, positive feedback and so on.

For situational questions, you can say how you think you would approach the situation, and then back this up with an example of how you have acted similarly in the past, using the STAR method.

Strengths and Weaknesses questions

Often, for this type of question, you will need to identify your own strengths and weaknesses. The important thing is to clearly explain why you believe something is a strength or weakness of yours by giving examples, this can be done by using the STAR method or by summarising experience and achievements. If you are talking about a weakness, it is important to state how you are trying to overcome it, or have made progress with it. Example questions are:

What are you good at?

What are your weaknesses?

What do you enjoy doing the least?

Do you most like starting tasks or finishing them?

Motivational and Sector questions

These kinds of questions will be on why you want the role and why you want to work in the sector. It is very rare not to be asked 'Why have you applied for this role?' in an interview, so it is smart to prepare a really good answer to this! Other questions you could be asked are:

Tell me about yourself.

What do you know about us and our sector?

What are the key challenges facing our sector?

What motivates you?

What have you read in the news recently regarding our sector?



How should I prepare for my interview?

Consider examples

You will likely be talking about yourself and your previous experience for the majority of the interview so it is important to decide in advance what you would like to share with the interviewers. A good plan is to think of five different examples that you can use. These could be university projects, or instances from work, placement or volunteering. Often, a good example covers more than one skill, for instance, a university presentation could cover: communication, research, attention to detail, planning and organising, problem solving and teamwork.

Research and revise

It is important that as well as thinking of some examples that you also revise them well. Often, people find that the same techniques that work for them when preparing for exams work just as well when preparing for interviews. You will also need to revise information about the employer, role and sector before the interview. Make sure you look beyond the employer website if possible, looking at sector magazines, LinkedIn, blogs and the news. For large employers, you can sometimes find accounts of previous candidates' experiences in interviews on [glassdoor.co.uk](https://www.glassdoor.co.uk).

Practice out loud

Use your list of expected questions and try saying your answers out loud. You may find that you stumble or muddle the order of what you want to say at first, but the more practice you do the clearer your answers will become. You can also check that you are speaking at the right pace (rather than rushing or hesitating too much) and ensure that your enthusiasm for the role comes across in the tone of your answers.

On the day

It sounds obvious, but make sure you are on time for your interview and are polite and professional with everybody you meet in the building, not just the interviewers. Ensure you give a firm handshake, and, throughout your interview, maintain eye contact and show your enthusiasm for the role through leaning forward, listening attentively and smiling. You will need to ask the interviewers questions about the job at the end of the interview.

Good topics are:

- Asking more about the nature of the work such as specific projects or objectives in the organisation currently.
- Learning more about the nature of the team you would be working with.
- Development opportunities.
- How previous post holders have developed in the past.

Mock interviews

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