

CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY CENTRE

A graphic of several interlocking puzzle pieces in a light blue color, scattered across the page. The pieces are of various shapes and sizes, some overlapping each other. The word 'Interviews' is written in white serif font across the middle of the page, partially overlapping the puzzle pieces.

Interviews

US

UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX

A person is shown from the back, wearing a headset with a microphone. They are in a classroom or lecture hall, with a whiteboard and other people visible in the background. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

“The Careers and
Employability Centre’s
interview skills workshops
are really insightful”

UNDERGRADUATE
(SCHOOL OF LAW, POLITICS AND SOCIOLOGY)

INTERVIEWS

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW?

Organisations invite candidates to interview to find out more about them and assess whether they're suitable for the role.

They will assess whether an applicant:

- has the skills and experience needed for the job
- is motivated to do the job
- will fit into the team and workplace culture.

WHAT KIND OF INTERVIEW CAN I EXPECT?

Your invitation may tell you what kind of interview to expect. If you haven't been informed, you can ask the employer if they can provide more details. Knowing what type of interview it will be can help you to prepare and reduce any nerves.

Common interview types include:

- face-to-face panel interviews
- telephone/video interviews (usually selection interviews)
- group interviews.

HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW?

Preparation is key! Employers often report that candidates are unsuccessful at interview because they don't prepare well enough. You can prepare by doing research and thinking about practical considerations beforehand.

Do your research

Research the organisation

What is important to them? Who are their clients and competitors? What makes them different from the rest? Read the About Us or Careers section of their website and research the wider sector to demonstrate a broad awareness of their work. This will help you be informed at interview, show motivation and interest, and help you plan questions to ask them.

Research the role

Go over the job specification to help you plan answers to questions about how your skills and experience match the role. Plan answers about your motivation and reasons why you want to do the job. Find out about similar roles by talking to employers at events, using our Sector Guides and looking at vacancy websites.

Go over your application

Revise your CV, covering letter or application form so that you know it inside out. It's common for interviewers to ask questions about your application; so think about how you could expand on this, with more examples or detail. Talking about your skills and experiences out loud will help you rehearse.

What do you want them to remember about you?

An interview is a two-way process, so decide on five key things that you want the employer to remember about you. Which of your strengths make you suitable for this role? What will distinguish you from the rest, your unique selling points? Which examples from your experiences demonstrate these strengths?

INTERVIEWS

Questions to ask the employer

You will usually be asked if you have any questions at the end of the interview; it's a good opportunity to show your enthusiasm and research. Prepare some questions in advance, more may also arise during the interview. Make sure that your questions are about the role or organisation, eg. long-term options in the company, key challenges in the role, a typical day in this job, when you're likely to hear about the outcome of the interview. Avoid questions about salary and holidays.

Practical preparation

Find out more about the interview

What type of interview will you be having, how long will it take, will you be asked to make a presentation or answer questions on a case-related study? Can you find out who will be interviewing you? You can find out more about them online, eg. LinkedIn. This could give you an idea of what their focus might be.

Plan your journey

Leave extra time to allow for transport or weather problems. Make sure you have a contact number in case of delays.

Plan what to wear

It's best to dress smartly unless told otherwise eg. a suit or equivalent.

What to take with you

In a folder take a copy of your application, the job specification and a list of questions that you want to ask the employer. For some sectors, evidence of a portfolio may be necessary, eg. journalism, design.

Dealing with nerves

It's normal to feel nervous, but the key to dealing with nerves is being prepared. Practise interview questions with a Careers Adviser or use an online interview practice resource like the Big Interview:

► [sussex.biginterview.com](https://www.sussex.biginterview.com)

On the day, reduce stress by arriving in plenty of time. Smiling will help you to create a positive attitude; other strategies to help you cope with nerves include conscious breathing and mindfulness exercises.

HOW DO I APPROACH DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEW?

Face-to-face interviews: These may be one-to-one or a panel with more than two interviewers. Try to build a positive rapport, listen carefully to the questions and make eye contact. With a panel, direct your answer to the person who asked the question, but involve the others on the panel by briefly including each individual with appropriate eye contact as you speak.

Telephone interviews: Use a telephone interview to your advantage by having your research notes with you. Questions may be discussion-based or a structured list of set questions.

TIPS FOR PHONE INTERVIEWS

- Practise with a friend or Careers Adviser to get feedback on your tone of voice
- Ensure you have privacy during the call
- Have your CV/application with you and a pen and paper to make notes
- Have water to hand

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Video/online interviews: Much of the advice for telephone interviews is relevant for video interviews. Follow on-screen instructions carefully, talk to the camera and not the screen, and focus on your tone of voice and speed of speech. Refer to notes on your CV but avoid sounding like you're reading a script.

TIPS FOR VIDEO INTERVIEWS

- If using a system like Skype, make sure your profile and username are professional
- Practise presenting yourself on video
- Dress professionally and find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed
- Make sure that any software or equipment you're using works correctly
- Close any other programs on the computer in case they make a noise during the interview eg. Facebook notifications

Group interviews and interviews based on case studies are more likely to happen in assessment centres – see our **Assessment Centres and Selection Tests** booklet for more information.

HOW CAN I MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION?

First impressions are very important. As you enter the employer's premises you are on show, so be aware of how you come across as soon as you arrive; make eye contact and smile, shake hands firmly and speak clearly.

During the interview:

- sit upright and keep an open posture
- keep hands on show and minimise things you do when nervous, like fidgeting
- maintain good eye contact
- speak clearly
- remember to breathe!

Be professional and enthusiastic.

WHAT QUESTIONS WILL I BE ASKED?

There is a range of interview question categories: general, competency-based, technical and strengths-based.

General questions

- These tend to be open, eg. Tell me about yourself. What are your strengths? Why do you want to work for this organisation?
- They test your motivation for the role and organisation

Competency-based questions

- These refer to specific competencies important to the job role and organisation, eg. creativity, teamwork, leadership, analytical skills; these will be in the job specification, job advert or on the organisation's website.
- These test your skills and experiences, asking for examples of when you've demonstrated the competency, to find out how you could potentially perform in the role; eg. Tell me about a time when you faced a difficult challenge. Can you give an example of when you have effectively led others?

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Strengths-based questions

- These test your energy and enthusiasm by asking you to give examples of what you're good at and enjoy doing. Not easy to prepare for, but take time to reflect on your strengths before an interview.
- Examples include: What are you good at?, What do you learn quickly? Describe a successful day that you've had. Tell me about an accomplishment you're proud of.

Technical questions

- These test your specific technical

knowledge about aspects of the job, eg. software needed, key laboratory processes etc.

HOW DO I ANSWER QUESTIONS EFFECTIVELY?

Using the STAR model will help give your answers a structure and enable you to give calm, clear and concise responses. STAR is particularly useful for answering competency-based questions eg. Can you give me an example of when you have positively contributed to a team? Tell me about a time when you've had to solve a difficult problem.



SITUATION

What was the occasion/setting?



TASK

What did you need to do?



ACTION

What did you do?
Describe the action that you took.



RESULT

What was the result?

STAR example for problem-solving skills

Situation – Assessed presentation of a group project to academic staff and peers at University. The student presenting for our group was ill on the day and unable to attend.

Task – To present the project as planned to gain maximum results: a distinction.

Action – I'm a strong presenter and wanted to ensure that we gained a good grade for the project, so I volunteered to do the presentation. As a group we

agreed that we needed time to go over the presentation and plan delivery. I explained the situation to the course convener, who agreed to reschedule our time-slot to the end of the day and for us to use a room to plan our new delivery. This ensured that the whole group had confidence in my presentation.

Result – I successfully used problem-solving skills to restructure the afternoon and present the talk. Feedback was positive and we achieved our goal of a distinction for this work.

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Give your answers more impact by:

- using recent examples
- making the action part (what you did, organised, planned etc) the biggest part of your story
- talking about what you achieved and learned and how this will help you in the future or in the job you're applying for
- mentioning positive feedback
- using data to quantify your result if possible.

HOW DO I ANSWER COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS?

Tell me about yourself

Choose four or five key things about yourself that are relevant to the role eg. specific skills, qualifications, experience, something you're particularly proud of, or passion for your area of expertise. Practise answering succinctly to create a good impact.

Why are you interested in working for this organisation?

Do your homework and research their products, services, expansion plans, and working culture. Think about what appeals to you eg. You've run some great innovative campaigns and I would love to be part of that creative thinking.

Why should we hire you?

First make it clear that you believe you meet all of the role requirements. Then, back this up with relevant examples of how you've demonstrated two or three of these key skills. Demonstrate your enthusiasm and motivation throughout.

What are your strengths?

Focus on what you can bring to the job and offer the company. Before the interview, decide on four or five key strengths: this is an opportunity to match your strengths to the job role using relevant examples. Hint – they'll be particularly interested in your ability to solve problems.

What are your weaknesses?

Identify a weakness or an area that you could develop further and talk about what you're doing to overcome this. This demonstrates your ability to reflect and problem solve.

Where do you see yourself in 5–10 years' time?

Research what a reasonable career path in your role would look like in five years' time. Don't be overambitious but emphasise your enthusiasm for the current position and look to the next steps for building your career in this area.

NEED MORE HELP?

We can help you get ready for your interview by going through test questions and giving pointers on how to prepare. You can book to attend our interview skills workshop or make an appointment with a Careers Adviser at:
► careerhub.sussex.ac.uk

You can also use the Big Interview for mock interview practise:
► sussex.biginterview.com

We can provide a private space for your telephone or video interview. Contact us or ask a member of staff to book a consultation room for you.

FIND OUT MORE

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The Careers and Employability Centre recognises the diversity of Sussex students and graduates and is committed to addressing their individual needs.

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