

Interviews

This information has been written to help you when going for interviews.

We suggest that you read through, look at the potential questions provided, and then have a discussion with a Career Development Adviser to go through your possible answers.

Career Development Services also run a programme of workshops to help you improve your employability skills, including one on interviews - check our website for further details or contact us.

This leaflet can be downloaded in pdf format from our website – **www.careers.brad.ac.uk**. If you require this leaflet in any other format, please ask at the help desk in the Careers Service.

Congratulations – You’ve got an interview!

You can safely assume that, on the basis of your CV or application form, the employer considers that you have the potential to do the job for which you have applied and that they are considering you as a prospective employee.

Make the most of this achievement by preparing thoroughly for the interview, as this is your opportunity to convince them that you are the person they are looking for. Careful preparation will give you confidence, control and the ability to deal effectively with any questions you may be asked.

It is worth noting that more candidates talk themselves out of a job rather than into one! They do this by not being able to substantiate claims they have made in the application process and by not preparing well.

Increasingly, employers may include tests/tasks and/or presentations to take place during the interview and you should be informed of these in advance; however this should not be confused with Assessment Centres, another recruitment selection process.

For further information on Assessment Centres, please refer to our leaflet and/or website “Assessment Centres and Psychometric Tests”.

For information on tests/tasks at interviews, please refer to the section “Am I expected to do any task/test during the interview?” on page 17.

Do I really need to prepare?

“To fail to prepare.... is to prepare to fail.....”

Preparation is vital and a key factor to a successful interview. You should leave nothing to chance. If you are going to convince the interviewer(s) that you are the right person for the job, you first need to convince yourself. In an interview, you are “SELLING” yourself – your knowledge, skills, experiences, abilities and personal qualities – to an employer.

In order to do this effectively, you must find out as much as you can about the organisation and their needs and how you match the criteria.

But do remember, the interview is also a two-way process which should help you decide whether you feel you are well suited for, and would want to work for, a particular organisation.

How should I prepare for the interview?

It is certain that you will be asked about details you have provided in your application. The interviewers will look more closely at the evidence you have provided in your written application and explore your background in greater depth.

You should have made a copy of your CV/Covering letter or application form and have kept all the relevant information provided (advertisement, job description, job specification and any other details given).

Make sure you read and re-read these and use them to try to spot questions which may be asked.

Find out about the job

- What does the job entail? Some organisations provide a detailed job description/person specification (e.g. public sector organisations) whilst other organisations (e.g. private sector) tend to provide a list of the required competencies.
- What personal qualities, skills, experience and knowledge are required?
- What levels of commitment, energy, motivation and initiative are needed?

The Graduate Prospects website, www.prospects.ac.uk, contains useful information on a large number of jobs i.e. general activities and skills requirements – click on “Jobs and work experience” and then “Types of jobs”. The Information Room in Career Development Services (CDS) includes additional paper based information in occupational files.

If possible, speak to someone (e.g. family or friends) in a similar role and find out as much as possible about the job and the organisation.

Find out about the employer

- What is the company’s aim, size, products or services, turnover, location, organisational structure, position in the industry/service as a whole?
- Do the aims/ethos of the company fit in with your personal values and aims?
- Are there varied locations requiring geographical mobility?
- Will the size/location of the employer affect promotion prospects?

Research the organisation or company by looking at their website, looking at local and national newspapers and business directories and reading their annual report, if available. You could also do a web search to find out what is said about them by other organisations. The Information Room in CDS has up to date copies of graduate recruitment directories, specialist magazines etc. as well as a computer cluster you can use to do your research.

Keep up with current issues facing the industry/sector by reading relevant journals, quality newspapers, company reports and watching business/documentary TV programmes. Try to understand how the industry is changing or developing. Do try to formulate your own opinions regarding these issues. Commercial awareness is an important employability skill – you can find out more from the employability section of our website – www.careers.brad.ac.uk/employability.

Think about what you can offer

Reflect on the information you have gathered about the job and the employer – can you match the criteria?

- What personal and technical skills, knowledge, qualities, values and experience can you offer and do these seem to fit in with what the employer is looking for?
- Think of ways in which you could show the relevance of your past experience, knowledge, personal qualities and skills to the needs of the job and of the employer.
- Think of what you could do for the employer to make their business/service more effective.

We all have less positive experiences at some times. If you are conscious of inconsistencies, failures, changes of direction in your life history, prepare yourself to respond to any probing questions from employers by thinking about what you have learnt from these experiences. Be ready to emphasise positive outcomes. Never go along to an interview just hoping for the best as there is a chance they will want to ask you about these areas.

A DVD “*Why ask me that?*” and “*Making an Impact – the graduate job interview*” about interview techniques (including telephone interviews) is available for viewing at CDS. For a list of further resources, see page 17 of this leaflet.

Practicalities – How do I know what to expect?

What format is the interview?

How long is the interview going to be? Are you required to do further activities (i.e. tests/tasks or presentation) at the interview? You can ask if it has not been covered/clarified in the letter/email sent inviting you for interview. On average, an interview alone (without additional tasks/tests), may last approximately 45mins to an hour.

Where is the interview?

Check venue/travel arrangements to make absolutely certain you will arrive on time. Allow time for delays – nothing is more likely to jeopardise an interview than arriving late. Better to be 30 minutes early than 3 minutes late.

What to take?

Things to consider taking are:

- The interview letter, location map, a copy of your CV/application form, notes on key points you want to make (and presentation notes, if applicable)
- Questions you would like to ask, money for a taxi and mobile telephone (in case you are running late due to emergencies beyond your control!) and a bottle of water as travelling and nerves can make you thirsty.
- Copies of your degree/diploma certificates, if applicable, your final project/dissertation/thesis and passport etc. (if you have been asked to bring these).
- If you have a portfolio of your work, take it with you and offer it, if it seems appropriate, but don't force it on your interviewer(s).

Some interviewer(s) allow candidates to refer to copies of their applications (CV/Letter/application forms) and job descriptions/specifications during the interview. Check with them if you want to do so.

Who's on the panel?

Make sure you know the name of your interviewer(s) and be ready to use it as part of your greeting. Knowing the background of your interviewer(s) would also be useful as a panel consisting of an interviewer with a technical background would indicate that you are bound to be asked some technical or specialist questions!

What to wear?

Plan what you will wear. At an interview your appearance needs to be smart but at the same time it is important for you to be comfortable:

- Make sure you wear the style of clothes that the interviewer would expect, and if in any doubt, choose the more formal option i.e. suit. Some candidates at interview may be more comfortable wearing their "traditional/cultural clothing" (which is completely acceptable) – however, make sure that it is formal and not too colourful.
- Don't overlook the importance of clean shoes, well ironed clothes, smart haircut and tidy appearance. Be well groomed but avoid too much perfume/aftershave and keep jewellery to a minimum!
- Remember also that the colours you wear can give you a more serious, business-like or informal/frivolous look. We recommend that you stick to dark coloured suits such as black, grey or navy blue.
- If you can afford it, invest in a new suit or jacket, it will do marvels for your confidence. For female candidates, a suit or other smart separates are recommended (e.g. avoid wearing low cut tops, short skirts or inappropriately high heeled shoes).

How to handle nerves

Don't worry if you feel nervous or apprehensive before the interview. Most people feel nervous in these situations and it shows itself in different ways e.g. a dry mouth, shaky hands, a fast-beating heart, sleeplessness, sweating, a squeaky voice, or several trips to the loo!

Remember that the interviewers are not expecting you to be perfect. They will be looking at your future potential, and how their organisation could help you to develop. Interviewers want to find out whether you have the ability, knowledge and motivation to fit into their organisation and make a valid contribution.

Whilst some nerves may be inevitable, there are things you can do to prepare yourself psychologically:

- Arrange a practice interview with your careers adviser, or go through some typical questions and answers with a friend.
- Try to get a good night's sleep the night before your interview.
- Eat breakfast on the morning of your interview. You may have a long and intense day ahead, so feeding your brain is important, and food should ultimately help to settle your nerves.
- Try to drink plenty of water throughout the day, which will be better for you than stimulants such as tea and coffee.
- Breathe! Try taking a deep breath in, holding it for a few seconds, and then exhaling fully, and then repeat this as necessary. There are lots of self-help resources available on topics such as breathing techniques, meditation, relaxation, and positive visualisation. Find something that works for you.
- Think happy thoughts! These may be about your friends, your family, the great goal you scored in last week's match or anything that makes you smile and puts you in a positive frame of mind.
- Remember that interviewers know that you will be nervous, and they are trained to ease you into the interview with casual conversation and some initial icebreaker questions. They will want you to be relaxed and be yourself, so that they can get a better overall impression of you. They will also realise that a few nerves are a sign that you really want the job!

Above all, try to stay positive and remember that any experiences you have as part of a recruitment process are an opportunity for you to learn and to develop.

If you have a disability

You can make the employer aware of any needs you have so that appropriate adjustments can be made for you at the interview. Contact the recruiter (i.e. the HR Department) as soon as possible to discuss your requirements.

Interview etiquette – How do I behave at interview?

First impressions really do count!

- Your interview begins the moment you step inside the organisation! Be courteous and friendly towards everyone you meet, starting with the receptionist! Switch off your mobile telephone as soon as you arrive.
- The impression you create in the first 60 seconds can be very important in creating the right rapport between you and the interviewer(s).
- It is natural to feel nervous before an interview but try to relax as much as you can, make an effort to present a lively appearance and greet the interviewer(s) with a firm handshake. If it is a panel interview (see section on Panel Interviews on Page 14), you are also expected to shake hands with all of them not just one.

- NB: For cultural or religious reasons, some candidates may decline to shake hands with the interviewer(s) – this is an issue which is open to debate but due to interview custom and practice in the UK, could be interpreted negatively. If you wish not to shake hands with the interviewer(s), make sure you explain your reasons clearly and courteously.
- Wait to be seated – don't just assume one of the chairs is yours!
- If you are a smoker, make sure you have mints or spray to remove the tobacco smell before you enter the building.
- Be careful about accepting a drink of water, tea or coffee. Where will you balance the cup and saucer? Will you be able to drink and talk with composure? On the other hand, it could help you to have a glass of water nearby if your throat runs a bit dry

Body Language

Body language is as much a part of communication as any form of language! Initial impact is made within the first few seconds and research has shown that in face-to-face situations, the effect of communication may be broken down as follows:

- Non verbal signals / body language (clothes, gestures, posture) 55%
- Tone of voice 37%
- Message content (words used) 8%

It can be confidently assumed that the split will place more emphasis on the tone and rhythm of the conversation than the words themselves.

The above does not mean you can talk rubbish or switch off and miss something vital! Think about it – employers want to employ someone they perceive will fit well in the company, be happy in their work and get on with other staff.

There are four important areas of non-verbal communication worth paying attention to:

- **Eye Contact** – Try to maintain sensible eye contact; look at the interviewer during the conversation but without staring. Eye contact conveys listening, interest and honesty. If it is a panel interview, look (mainly) at the interviewer who is asking the question but also make sure you glance at or include the others on the panel when responding.
NB: For cultural or religious reasons, some candidates may find “eye contact” inappropriate or uncomfortable – again, this is an issue which is open to debate – but due to interview “custom and practice” in the UK, avoiding eye contact may well be interpreted negatively (i.e. not listening/interested or you may have something to hide...)
- **Facial expression** – Smiling naturally and frequently indicates a good rapport with the interviewer and indicates that you are confident and relaxed and potentially can fit into the team. Be careful to avoid the “embarrassed” smile, or the fixed grin
- **Posture** – Sit well back and comfortably in the chair. Relax (but be careful not to slouch) with your feet firmly on the ground. You may want to lean slightly forward at various points to demonstrate you are listening and interested (but don't over do it as you may invade their space). Keep your hands relaxed on your lap or on the arm of the chair and avoid fiddling or fidgeting with pens, clothing or hair.
- **Gestures** – Avoid too much gesticulation and “sketching” points in the air, which can detract from the message and may be seen as aggressive. Try and find the right balance – no movement at all is not natural and may be considered as passive and rigid behaviour. If you have the tendency to fling your arms around, you may be better off clasping them on your lap.

How do I answer questions effectively?

- Listen carefully and don't be afraid to ask for clarification or repetition if you don't understand the question or if it is not clear. This is far better than giving a wrong answer or, even worse, sitting in stunned silence! One way of doing this could be by saying "Would you mind clarifying what it is in particular that you would like to know?"
- You are expected to do most of the talking but view the interaction as a friendly yet purposeful conversation, rather than an interrogation. Generally the structure is that you will be doing approximately 80% of the talking whilst the interviewers will only be doing approximately 20%; but they will be controlling the interview.
- Try to steer the interview in the direction you would like it to go e.g. "In most of the group projects at work, I have always been chosen to lead the team, however my role as a Volunteer with "Youth in the Community" has shown more of my potential as a leader – perhaps I could tell you about this?" This is a good technique to use when interviewer(s) are asking about areas that may show you in a less "flattering" light.
- Interviewers expect applicants to talk much more than applicants generally expect! Answer questions as fully and positively as you can, whilst avoiding answers which are too long and repetitive (or the answers too short and blunt to be of little help to the interviewer). If in doubt, you could always ask the interviewer "Would you like me to continue...?"
- Don't answer questions in a negative way e.g. "I just..." or "I only..." when talking about your experiences. On the other hand, don't tell lies – it's simply not worth it – depending on the circumstances, this can lead to a breach of contract and instant dismissal.
- As the questions progress, you will become aware of whether you are on the same wavelength as the interviewer(s). If you feel you have been talking too much or too little, or if you feel you have been too familiar or not succinctly assertive, it is important to adjust your style as the interview proceeds.

What do they want to know about me?

There are four fundamental areas which employers usually concentrate on. They can ask any number of different questions to get this information:

- Why have you applied to this organisation / for this job?
- What can you do for us? (What skills, knowledge, experience and intellectual ability can you offer?)
- What kind of a person are you? (What are your attitudes, values, motivation levels? Do you have the ability to get on with others, work in a team?)
- What distinguishes you from all other applicants?

Question time – What kind of questions can I expect?

Questions to explore your knowledge of the job vacancy and the organisation:

- What attracts you to our organisation?
- Who do you think are our main competitors?
- What do you think are the difficulties/key issues facing our industry?
- How would you define marketing/personnel etc?
- What do you understand by the term "management"?
- What do you think are the qualities needed by a Civil/Mechanical Engineer; Social Worker; Teacher; Business Analyst etc?

Questions relating to your education, qualifications, interests and work experience:

- Why did you choose the University of Bradford and why this course?
- What do you enjoy most about your course and why? Least enjoy and why?
- What do you think you have gained from your time at the University of Bradford?
- Tell me about your Final Year Project/Dissertation/Thesis.
- What do you regard as your greatest personal achievement?
- Tell me about your interests outside of your academic studies.
- What have you learned from your past work experience?

Questions aimed at finding out more about you (attitudes, values, motivation, personal qualities and interpersonal skills):

- Tell me about yourself – For this question, prepare a brief and relevant snapshot about yourself. The question is about your ability to communicate clearly confidently and (most importantly), concisely!
- Why did you apply for the job?
- What do you think are your particular strengths? What are your main weaknesses?
- What skills/qualities do you think make you suitable for the job?
- What would be your criteria for deciding if a job is acceptable to you?
- What other qualifications are you considering?
- Are you willing to be mobile as and when the job requires it?
- Where do you see yourself in 5/10/20/30 years time?

Hypothetical / Situational questions:

“What would you do if...? Best describe these types of questions. These are used to test your overall style and approach and can be asked at any time during the interview. From the interviewer(s) point of view, these types of questions are best used when they want to test someone’s specific knowledge, experience or judgement.

Examples of hypothetical questions include:

- What would you do if you were the Managing Director of this company?
- Lately we have noticed that the “After Sales Service Department” has been receiving an increasing number of complaints from customers. If you were the leader of the team, what would you do?
- If you found someone unconscious on the pavement, what would you do?
- An important client has indicated that you should sell his shares when they reached a particular price but that you should check with him first. You were unable to contact him despite trying for the last few days, what would you do?
- A supplier has just informed you that he cannot deliver an essential product you ordered tomorrow – you were counting on this delivery as it will affect production. What would you do?

You are unlikely to have a complete answer as all the facts will not be available to you. Try to suggest a logical approach – the steps you would take to clarify the problem and possible courses of action. The employer is looking for a rational, sensible approach rather than a complete solution.

Questions which need well thought out answers:

- What would you say are your weaknesses and what steps have you taken to address these?
- What kind of situation would make you frustrated and give up on the task that you have been doing?
- You seem to have left your job search until after completing your degree. Is this a deliberate choice?
- You took four years to complete your degree course rather than three. Can you tell me why?

These questions revolve around self awareness. Everybody has weaknesses and employers want to know that you are aware of yours and that you are doing something to improve them.

- Try to answer all questions which draw attention to weak points in a positive way (e.g. I used to be rather nervous during presentations but I realise that this is an important aspect of my studies, so I kept practising and volunteering to do presentations at every opportunity – I have improved quite a lot now”); but don’t pick a weakness essential to the role.
- Try to avoid answering “I’m a perfectionist” as this seems to be a classic textbook example and may sound rather trite!
- It is also recommended that you give only one weakness (rather than several) but make sure you are prepared with another example if the interviewer(s) persist in asking for another.

Remain positive when answering the last two questions above and don’t try to make excuses – deal briefly and factually with your reasons and, if applicable, tell them what you have learnt from the experience.

The technical / specialist questions

If you have applied for a job or a course which requires specific technical/specialist knowledge (e.g. engineering, pharmacy, science or IT), it is likely that at some stage in the selection process you will be asked technical/specialist questions or have a separate technical/specialist interview to test your knowledge.

Questions may focus, for example, on what you are doing in your final year project and why you are approaching it as you are, or on real or hypothetical technical/specialist problems. Be prepared to prove yourself but, equally, be prepared to admit to what you don’t know, while stressing that you are keen and able to learn quickly.

Examples of technical/specialist questions:

- What area(s) of research are you hoping to pursue and why?
- Why have you applied for this particular research fellowship?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge facing our industry at the moment?
- What do you think are the issues facing our industry?
- Tell me about your thesis/dissertation/final year project.
- Describe your experience in database design.
- What experience have you had of analysing new systems?
- How would you improve our store layout?
- What do you think about the new drug on the market?
- Should Britain close its borders to immigrants?

What is a competency based interview?

Many employers now use this form of interview to check whether you have the “competencies” they are looking for (e.g. teamwork, communication, problem solving, leadership, planning and organising etc.) and to ensure a more objective assessment of candidates.

They will have decided on the selection criteria for each job in advance, i.e. what skills, knowledge and experience is needed, and will then ask each applicant similar questions to gather evidence to determine whether or not they have the skills to do the job effectively. Applicants are marked on a set scale, according to how well they have demonstrated that they have the competencies required.

It is unlikely that you will have done the job itself, but you may have demonstrated some, or all of the skills sought, in your university life, your social activities, your previous employment/work experience/voluntary work.

The rationale for asking competency based questions is that this past performance and behaviour are the best predictors of future success in your chosen job.

What is competency?

In simple terms, a competence is about the way we do things or ‘behaviours’ we use. If you are successful at ‘team working’ for example, you will do things in a certain way or demonstrate appropriate behaviour that will contribute to the effectiveness of the team working situation. Competencies describe these behaviours and are the result of a mixture of skills, abilities and knowledge. A competence brings all these things together

The top 12 competencies as identified by employers (source: AGR – Association of Graduate Recruiters) are:	
Commitment and Drive	Problem Solving
Motivation and Enthusiasm	Managing your own learning and career
Teamwork	Commercial Awareness
Oral Communication	Planning and Organisation
Flexibility and Adaptability	Time Management
Customer Focus	Leadership

See the employability section at www.careers.brad.ac.uk for more information on these skills.

Principle (Why use competency based interviews)?

- The past is an indication of the future (i.e. based on the principle that past behaviour predicts future behaviour).
- Skills are transferable.
- Gives an indication of ability/capability.

Choose the right example for each situation/question asked

It is recommended that you give recent examples (last 3 years if possible). For each question, choose an example which best illustrates your competence in the area. Examples can be taken from:

- Employment / Work Experience / Voluntary Work.
- Education (Academic Studies).
- Extra Curricular Activities (e.g. membership of societies/leisure interest)
- Personal / family circumstances.

Though examples can be given from any aspects of your life, do remember that the more relevant the better (e.g. employment situation may be more suitable than say, studies or personal situation). Use examples that relate most appropriately to the role!

Try to give other examples rather than “Doing a group project at university” for a team-working situation. Recruiters commented that 99% of candidates give this example – you will break the monotony of the interviewer(s) hearing similar answers!!

Try not to use the same examples to demonstrate more than one competence – a range of examples is much more interesting to listen to!

Structure – How to answer competency based questions

The competency based interview is demanding and requires careful preparation. For example, if the job requires you to “work closely with others to achieve an objective” (i.e. team work), one question might be:

“Tell me about an occasion when you have worked in a group. What was the group’s objective and how did you contribute to this?”

You should prepare for questions by taking some time before the interview to think about the times when you have worked with others in a group either at work, at university or in other situations.

There are some useful techniques to help you structure your answer to competency based questions as shown below (the technique regularly referred to by most employers is the STAR technique):

- The STAR Technique: – S = Situation T = Task A = Action R = Result
- The SBO Technique:– S = Situation B = Behaviour O = Outcome
- The CAR Technique – C = Context A = Action R = Result

So for the question on team work above, your answer might be something like:

*“Last summer, as a Volunteer for a local charity, I worked with a group of six people, over a period of eight weeks to plan a fundraising event. **(Situation or Context)***

*As well as attending and contributing to weekly meetings my role was to contact local companies to ask them to donate prizes for a prize draw. I also helped one of the other group members who was responsible for publicity distribute posters to local community centres as I have a car. **(Task and Action or Behaviour)***

*The charity event was a huge success. As a team, we raised over £2,000 for the local hospital and although we were all very tired at the end of the day, we felt a huge sense of achievement”. **(Result or Outcome)***

In this style of interview, questions are more detailed and probing than in the traditional approach and you will need evidence, ranging from the general through to very specific. It is likely that the interviewer will challenge you on your opinions to test how well formulated they are.

Make sure you prepare several examples from different activities to illustrate each competence. Don’t just rely on the examples you have provided in your application form as sometimes, employers may ask you to provide a different example.

Being familiar with a range of, and definition of, competencies will enable you to give better answers during the interview.

The following are examples of behavioural indicators which the interviewer(s) will seek to confirm the candidate’s level of competency in “team working” and “communication”.

Team Working	
Team working is about being able to work as part of a team and build relationships with other team members. It is about enjoying the team aspects and being able to contribute effectively to team goals	
Positive Behaviours	Negative Behaviours
Recognises strengths and weaknesses in others and self Is an enthusiastic contributor to the team cause Takes responsibility for a designated part of the project Enjoys working with others Dedicates time to understand the importance of good inter-team relationships Offers help to colleagues and recognises when this is needed Asks others for their views and positively accepts contributions and shares information	Doesn't enjoy working as part of a team Pays little time/effort to getting on with and getting to know colleagues Unlikely to ask others for input/assistance Works alone wherever possible Fails to recognise skills within other team members

Communication	
Ensure that the message is clear and understood	
Positive Behaviours	Negative Behaviours
Self confidence in communicating style – communicates clearly and concisely Able to show evidence of relating to others easily Actively listens to others, asks questions if unsure and checks understanding Communicates with customers and seeks feedback on the services they receive Encourages a two-way exchange of information Tailors approach to suit audience	Lacks self-confidence, quiet or shy Lack of structure in communication, difficult to understand Does not ask questions if unsure or check for understanding

Your answers should therefore give specific action/tasks which are indicative of the positive rather than the negative behaviours of the above competencies.

The interviewer(s) may then use some probing questions to delve deeper into your insight and understanding of the situation and the way you perform your role (e.g. *can you tell me what you mean by that...? Can you elaborate on that...? How did you feel at that time...?*).

Your responses should be in the first person i.e. "I". Talk about what YOU did; avoid using "we", "my team", "the group" etc.

Some examples of competency based questions:

- Give an example of when you have had to explain something to someone. How did you ensure they understood you?
- Give me an example where you had to influence someone to your point of view...
- Tell me about one of the toughest groups you have had to work with. What made it difficult and what did you do?
- Can you give me an example of an occasion when you feel that you have provided a piece of good customer service?
- Can you tell me about a time when you have dealt with a customer who was unhappy with the service they received?

Imagine that you have been appointed to one of (a bank's) branches and you are serving one of our customers. Tell me how you find out what the customer wants?

- What aspects of your work have involved working with others?
- Can you tell me about a situation where you have been part of a group working towards a specific goal?
- Describe a situation where you have planned and organised an event, project or activity, which involved a fixed deadline. How successful was the result?

Strength based interviews

Some large graduate recruiters are now using “strength based interviews” in their graduate recruitment process. As opposed to competencies which can be defined as “what you CAN do”, strengths are “what you really ENJOY doing”. The focus of these interviews is on exploring what you are good at rather than what you are capable of doing. The benefit to an organisation is that this style of interview identifies successful candidates who will enjoy the role more and perform better as they are built for the role rather than have to adapt to fit it.

You can identify your strengths by asking yourself the following:

- What are you good at?
- What comes easily to you?
- What do you learn quickly?
- What did you find easiest to learn at school or university?
- What subjects do you most enjoy studying?
- What things give you energy?
- Describe a successful day you have had.
- When did you achieve something you were really proud of?
- What things are always left on your to-do list and not finished (these are probably weaknesses, things you dislike doing!)

What types of interviews can I expect?

The 1:1 Interviews

As the name implies, the interview is generally conducted by one person, though sometimes there may be two people – one to ask the questions, the other merely to take notes. You might undergo several such interviews following each other. This may be because each interviewer is focusing on particular/specialist skills or is from different departments or it may be that the organisation wants to ensure that it gets assessments from more than one person!

This type of interview is generally conducted at assessment centres (as there will be other activities for them to get assessments of one candidate), or as a first stage interview.

Panel Interviews

In this type of interview, you are questioned by several people sitting on a panel. The actual number of interviewers can vary (4 to 5 members are not uncommon!), but there is usually a chairperson to co-ordinate the questions, a specialist who knows about the job in detail and a HR specialist. Try to identify the roles of everyone on the panel as this will give you an indication as to what type of questions to expect!

Such interviews are popular in the public sector. They can be daunting but remember that every candidate has to go through the same process – try to treat them in the same way as you would a 1:1 situation!

For a panel interview, initially answer questions directly to the person who asks the question but also try to include everyone with appropriate eye contact as you give your answer.

Sequential Interviews

These are several interviews in turn, with a different interviewer each time. Usually, each interviewer asks questions to test different sets of competencies. However, you may find yourself answering the same questions over and over. If this does happen, make sure you answer each one as fully as the time before.

Group Interviews

Occasionally (but very rarely), you may be interviewed by a panel together with other candidates.

The same principle applies as for other interviews, though you will need to ensure that you allow other candidates to respond to questions put forward to them i.e. not competing against one another!

Telephone Interviews

Types

These are becoming more popular as companies try to streamline their selection process. Sometimes they are outsourced to specialist recruitment organisations. There are several types of telephone interviews:

- Just like a normal face to face interview but without the face to face! It might be unannounced or pre arranged.
- If a company rings you to conduct a telephone interview without having made an appointment, politely say "Thank you for calling, do you mind waiting for a minute while I close the door/turn off the radio/take the phone to a quieter room?" This will give you a little time to compose yourself. If it really is a bad time, **offer to call back**, and arrange a date and time that is convenient. It is important that you are in the right frame of mind to be interviewed; otherwise it could be a recipe for failure.
- Structured response questionnaires in which you select answers to specific questions using your touch tone telephone. These are usually done to a freephone number using a personal PIN number (to identify you) and the answers are recorded for later analysis. Such questionnaires can consist of up to 80 questions – so choose a time and a place where this can be done comfortably without pressure. Be genuine and don't try to double guess the answers – a good questionnaire will have several ways of finding out!

An increasing number of organisations currently use telephone interviews as their first stage of selection. These can range from a basic check to see whether you match the selection criteria, to a very probing interview.

Top Tips

Some people find the process challenging because the usual visual clues are missing, so it's difficult to assess how you are doing. Try to relax and act as you would in a face-to-face interview:

- Be ready 10 minutes before the interview time. Get into the 'interview mentality'. Have your CV/application form and a checklist of the skills or qualities the employer requires in front of you so you can clearly focus on what they want.
- Don't forget to switch off your mobile phone (if on a landline) as you don't want distractions. Make sure your environment is free from interruptions (make arrangements in advance and if you live with others let them know that you are expecting a telephone interview call). If using a mobile, make sure it is fully charged!
- Answer the telephone confidently and professionally – a dozy sounding "Wassup man?" or "What did you say your name was?" or "Which company are you from?" is not going to help you – remember first impression counts!!
- Think of the tone and volume of your voice – be as enthusiastic as possible, because the interviewer only has your voice to go on and remember, a smile can be "heard" down the line!
- Think of your posture. The way you sit can help you relax, breathe properly and project your voice and yourself more effectively. Imagine the posture you would have for a face-to-face interview. Some people stand up and dress as they would do for a face-to-face interview as this gives them confidence.
- Have a glass of water handy in case you dry up!

Interviews using video/webcam on "Skype"/MSN/Yahoo

Increasingly, companies have now started using web/videocam to conduct an interview. This is similar to telephone interviews except that you are now able to see each other. The format of the interviews can follow any of the types of interviews as explained above. These interviews should be treated as seriously as face-to-face interviews.

Some of the tips explained in the section on telephone interviews are applicable though you will now have to consider dressing formally and do choose an un-cluttered environment! You must still project yourself as a professional.

The DVD "*Making an Impact – the graduate job interview*" also includes an extract of a telephone interview. This DVD is available for viewing at CDS or, for current students only, at www.careers.brad.ac.uk/destinations

What questions can I ask at the end of the interview?

At the end of the interview you will usually be asked the following or similar: "Are there any questions you would like to ask?" Use this opportunity to show that you have a genuine interest in the role and the organisation and have done some thinking about what you need to know. Research the company and have two or three questions prepared, any more could be seen as too many. This is your opportunity to "sell yourself" once again as the interviewer(s) will see that you are thinking carefully about the role.

Don't ask about:

- Things that are covered in the employer's literature or on their website. You should already know this thoroughly.
- Anything considered trivial e.g. Christmas holiday closure dates.
- Pay, pensions and benefits. However, if you really do need to ask then either contact Human Resources separately or ask in a sensitive manner e.g. "Sorry to ask this but please can you give me an indication of the salary range of this post as it was not indicated on the literature."

- “Smart Alec” questions where it could appear as though you are trying to catch out the employer e.g. “What are your views on the recent press coverage of the company’s share price fall?”
- How you have performed in the interview. The interviewer(s) are unlikely to tell you as they will need to review all candidates at the end of the interviews and what will you gain from asking at this stage?

Do ask about:

- The job, organisation, department, training and opportunities for progression.
- Information you need which may affect your decision about whether to accept the job or not.
- The next stage of the recruitment process; if appropriate.

Some suggested questions are as follows BUT make sure that they have not been answered already during the course of the interview:

- Can you tell me more about the specific projects I would likely be involved in?
- Who will be my direct line manager or who will be supervising my work on a daily basis? What is their role? Could you tell me a little about your role in the company?
- In terms of career progression, what has happened to graduates or others who have held this position in the past? What is the typical career path for people in this position?
- What are the objectives of the post in the first 3 – 6 months? How will they be measured? What training and / or induction am I likely to receive?
- Does the department or role have particular peaks and troughs in workload?
- Can you tell me more about.....something that you have seen or heard as part of the recruitment process?
- How is performance measured in the job? How is good performance rewarded?
- Who are the key people that interface with this position?
- Why is the position open?
- What is the company’s strategy for the next 5 years?

If all your questions have already been answered during the interview, then say so politely rather than appear uninterested. For example, you may want to say “Thank you but you have already answered my questions during the interview”.

Am I expected to do any task or test during the interview?

Increasingly, interviews are conducted together with other activities (see below). You will be informed in advance if this is the case. For further information on the following activities, please refer to our leaflet/website “Assessment Centres and Psychometric Tests”.

- **Presentation** - Generally the presentation topic is given in advance and you are expected to research and present it in PowerPoint format. The topic may range from your field of study or a general topic (not related to your field of study). The presentation is normally at the beginning of the interview (e.g. 10 to 15 minutes presentation with a further 10 - 20 minutes question-and-answer session with the interview panel). You may want to consider making copies of the PowerPoint presentation as handouts for the interviewer(s).
- **Tests/Tasks** - Sometimes you may be asked to sit tests or carry out tasks – these are generally relevant to the role you are applying for e.g. you may be asked to do a keyboard exercise to test your competency on manipulating data using Microsoft Office Excel or Access or, if your role involves finance/calculations, you might have to sit a numerical test.
- **Role Plays** - The role play is often based on the organisation and the type of work you have applied for. For example, these are very common for roles involving sales and customer services where you could be asked to “sell a product” to or “advise a customer” on the products or services available.

What do I do after the interview?

Remember, your interview finishes only when you leave the organisation. Any informal tour or meal could be part of the selection process, so be professional at all times. Finally, reflect on how the interview went. Highlight what went well and what could have been improved on. Then think what action you can take to improve in future.

Do consider asking for feedback about an unsuccessful job interview. This way you can learn about what you did well and how you need to improve in your next interview. You need to be specific and polite. Something along the lines of *“Obviously I am very disappointed at being unsuccessful but it would really help if someone could take me through the selection criteria and indicate which you feel I did not meet”*. Although an employer is not obliged to do this, many will give you constructive comments.

Further resources in Career Development Services

Appointment with Advisers

You can discuss your interview technique and practice typical questions at an appointment with a Career Development Adviser. You can book a 45 minute guidance appointment in advance by telephoning 01274 234991, calling into Career Development Services or emailing careers@bradford.ac.uk.

Alternatively, during term time, you can use our 20 minute Drop-In Duty sessions which are bookable on the day.

There is no limit on the number of appointments you may have – we encourage you to get as much help as you need.

Information Room

We have a wide range of job-seeking resources in the Careers Service in Student Central including specialist reference books such as Brilliant Answers to Tough Interview Questions, the Pre-registration interview for Pharmacy students; the Perfect Interview etc; DVDS including Making an Impact – the graduate job interview (which includes extracts of interviews with various companies including ERAC, KPMG and Winning Moves Creative Agency and a telephone interview) and Why Ask me That by AGCAS.

Call in and see us and we can advise you on the best resources to use.

Workshops and Talks/Presentations

We also regularly run workshops on a wide range of topics including interviews. Visit our website to view the current workshop programme.

Internet

- Visit www.careers.brad.ac.uk - useful information on all interviews, and an employability skills section containing information on what recruiters look for in a candidate.
- Go to www.careers.brad.ac.uk/destinations - an additional section on our website which is for current students only (you will need to use your Bradford login to access the resources).
- Try www.prospects.ac.uk – applications and interviews pages have useful information

Equality and Diversity

- The employability section of our website has resources and information on a range of equality issues – www.careers.brad.ac.uk/employability.