Interviews

Careers and Employability Service

University of Huddersfield

Contact us: Careers and Employability Service at Student Central
@HudUniCareers Huddcareers

www.hud.ac.uk/careers
The Careers and Employability Service will support you throughout your course and after graduation

**EmployableMe:** Our innovative and fresh approach to careers and employability at the University of Huddersfield is about taking control of your own career planning – with support from your professionally qualified and experienced award winning careers team. Look out for the green EmployableME character around campus and particularly within the careers centre in Student Central.

**MyCareer:** MyCareer is the hub of everything you do within careers. From here you can access everything! Including:

- JobShop
- The Huddersfield Graduate Programme
- Careers events on campus
- Resources

You can access MyCareer through the Student Hub via the Jobs and Careers tab.

**Career Resources:** The Careers and Employability Service provides you with access to personalised career resources. You can create a CV, listen to experts discussing job interviews, explore career options and test your skills through online assessments before facing the real thing.

You will be able to find:

- CV Builder
- Interview training
- Preparation for assessment centres
- Practice psychometric tests
- Short videos to help you with applications

You can access these resources from your MyCareer platform.

**Grad Jobs Bureau:** The Careers and Employability Service is here to help you with your future; whether that be moving into a graduate job, exploring postgraduate study options or training for a particular career. We continue to support you after you have finished your course to aid your transition from final year student, to graduate of the University of Huddersfield.

---

**Contents**

03 Introduction
03 Interview preparation
04 Talking about yourself
05 Researching the role
05 Researching the employer
05 Researching the industry
06 On the day of the interview
06 During the interview
08 How to answer interview questions
09 Examples of interview questions
13 Types of interviews
Introduction:

So: you’ve searched for a job, you did your research, you spent ages completing your application form and you’ve made it to the interview day. Well done! The hard work has paid off: if you’ve reached an interview stage then you are being taken seriously as a candidate for the post you’re applying for – and that you have just as much chance of being offered the job as any other candidate. Essentially an interview is your chance to convince an employer that you are the right person for the job.

Interviews can cause stress and anxiety. But you can lay many of your fears to rest if you prepare by researching companies and practicing answers. Preparation and enthusiasm are key to a successful interview.

Interview preparation

There are many types of interview that we’ll discuss later – but your research needs to focus on several key areas:

1. **Talking about yourself**:

   Before attending an interview you probably completed an application form based on a job description / person specification. The match you made on paper between your background and the post was effective enough for you to be offered an interview and so now you need to clearly articulate, in person, what you have to offer.

   **What skills, experience and knowledge do you have that they want / need?**

   Think of examples of things you have done which illustrate your skills, qualities, experience and achievements. These can be from your academic studies, employment, work experience, placements, voluntary work and interests. You need to be able to say how they are transferable to the role that you are applying to, emphasising the successful outcomes and the benefits.

   Use the STAR (Situation – Task – Action – Result) model to create responses to questions you might face ensuring that you give evidence and examples about what you have done and how you meet the criteria. You may be expected to give more detail about the information you have already provided on your CV/application; so ensure that you refer back to these documents in preparation for the interview.

   Think about your life and your experience – whilst it’s a good idea to use recent examples of the skills you’ve attained you could actually refer during an interview to examples from your whole life. For example if you were involved in volunteering or sporty activities in your first two years at the University of Huddersfield, but then stopped in your final year due to work pressure, it’s fine to refer back to earlier evidence so long as it supports a question’s answer.

   It’s rare that an employer would ask you about your grades from Year 1, or your a-level results, unless they have a direct relevance to the job. Rather, they are likely to ask you questions about:

   - What you enjoyed on your course.
   - Why you selected particular elements.
   - Projects where you took a lead.
   - Challenges that you faced on the course.
   - Examples of team work, leadership and decision making.
   - Practical skills, such as use of software, that your course enabled you to learn.

   In particular they will want to know what makes you different from other students on your course; in other words, focus on your own unique experience.

   Prepare for these questions by reading any reflective logs / diaries that you kept; and read the course description within the University of Huddersfield prospectus as that will often describe the course using skill based terminology rather than simply listing what you learnt.
Interview preparation continued

2. Researching the role
The employer will be looking for candidates that meet the criteria and also stand out from the competition. Ensure that you understand the role and what is expected of you. Familiarise yourself with any documentation they have provided, in particular the job description, person specification and advert.

Think about other ways that you could discover information about a job. Could you use LinkedIn, or company internet profiles?

Areas to research also include:
• Thinking about why you want the job.
• The extent to which you match the job description / specification / advert.
• Considering why you feel you are suited to the position.
• And: preparing an answer to the question ‘Why do you want the job?’

You will need to convey enthusiasm for the role and organisation.

If you have not already done so at the application stage then go through the job specification prior to the interview and provide examples as to how you meet each of the criteria. This preparation will help you to answer the interview questions.

3. Researching the employer
Do your research about the organisation and industry – their customers, culture, competitors and market trends. Try to have several key facts that you can refer to during an interview.

Find out:
• What they do.
• Think: why do you want to work for them?
• What do you think sets them apart from their competitors?
• What do you know about current issues they/the sector they are in are facing?

Most companies will have a web and social media presence and so finding answers to these questions is a relatively easy task.

4. Researching the industry
Employers will expect you to know what is going on in their industry so it is essential that you keep up to date or refresh yourself with current issues affecting them prior to the interview.

News pages, trade journals and industry blogs are all a good source of research.

Look at LinkedIn groups: these are often an excellent place to read information and news about specific industries and also you can contribute to discussions about trends which can help you to establish a strong professional image.

On the day of the interview
Read anything that is sent to you prior to the interview. Make sure that you understand any instructions and advice as it could include:
• Location: ensure you know where you’re going as it is easy to assume that an interview will take place at a company’s head office whereas in fact hotels, conference centres and even health clubs are all places used by employers to host their recruitment events. Ensure that you turn up on time as failing to do so will leave a negative impression. Plan ahead, be prepared for any delays by building in enough time. Keep contact details for the company handy in case of any problems whilst travelling.
• Information you need to bring eg qualifications, proof of identity.
• Interview tasks – you might be asked to prepare a presentation or to research a topic for discussion.
• Assessments: an interview day might also include an assessment prior to the interview itself. If this is the case read our ‘Assessment Centres’ booklet.
• Instructions on how to confirm your attendance: this might require you to call an office or send an email.

During the interview
• Arrive in good time – at least 20 minutes early. Use the time to ‘get a feel’ for the company or go through your final preparation.
• Act professional at all times with every member of staff you meet on the day. You will be assessed from the time you arrive to the time you leave.
• Introduce yourself.
• If offered, give a firm handshake, smile and introduce yourself clearly to the interviewer(s).
• Ensure that you bring along any information that they have requested.
• Speak clearly and firmly. When answering questions try to be consistent, clear and concise – don’t waffle. It is acceptable to pause briefly before answering questions to give yourself time to compose yourself and your answers.
• Avoid using slang or jargon. Equally, ask the interviewer to explain any jargon used.
• Smile – showing enthusiasm and interest is priceless when trying to make a good impression.
• Avoid distracting mannerisms, such as playing with your hair, touching your face or excessive hand movements when speaking. Don’t fold your arms in the interview as it looks defensive.
During the interview continued

- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. In panel interviews, concentrate on the questioner but remember to look at the other panel members from time to time.

- Smells – avoid smoking prior to the interview and avoid wearing strong scents this can be off putting for the interviewer in a room with you.

Try to use the interview as a way of reinforcing the key benefits that you will bring to the role. There are five things that you need to get across to a potential employer:

1. ‘I want this job’: interviewers want candidates that are enthusiastic; after all, if you can’t show motivation at this stage, will you be at all motivated if actually employed? It’s fine to manipulate an answer to show that you’re keen on a job and most employers will be looking out for your reasons – so tell them that you want the job and tell them why.

2. ‘I can do this’: your application form or CV has got you to the interview and now you have to back it up in person. Think about what the job involves and prepare the examples from your experience that you want to bring to their attention. Always back up your interview answers with evidence that you’re an ideal candidate.

3. ‘I’m enthusiastic’: it may be the case that you really need a job to pay off student debt, or it might be a means to another end but a positive approach to an interview will make you shine.

4. ‘I’m reliable’: more evidence here will let you stand out. Try and think of times when you’ve demonstrated real commitment to a course, a job or a project – for example how long was your degree? Think about what you’ve learnt and how you managed to last on the course over those three or four years. Even if you only want to stay at a job long enough to afford a new car, employers value dedication and loyalty so do try and express these standards.

5. ‘I know about your company’: if you research a company and use that knowledge to inform the answers you give during an interview then you will stand out against other candidates even if they have broader and more relevant experience. Interviewers are just as susceptible as everyone else to flattery and by demonstrating your research you’re showing an interest in the workplace that they inhabit. Think beyond just googling the name of the company – could you network with their staff through LinkedIn? Do you understand their ‘products’ or what they do? And don’t forget that practise can be the key to success – contact us if you want a mock interview before the real thing.

How to answer interview questions

The best preparation for answering questions is plenty of practise. You can access the MyCareer resource from the Careers and Employability Service and this not only gives you the opportunity to look at real examples of interview questions, it also lets you time your answers. You can also talk to us about a ‘mock’ interview where a careers adviser will ask you questions of the kind that you may be likely to face. We’ll even provide feedback on your performance too.

Don’t presume that the interviewers will make the link between what you say and the requirements of the position - make it clear that you see the link and that you can demonstrate how your skills, abilities, qualities and knowledge are relevant and will benefit the organisation. You can then expand on these key points during the interview.

It is essential that you go through the job specification prior to the interview and provide examples and evidence of how you meet the criteria using the ‘STAR’ method. This provides a useful model when answering interview questions and providing evidence to support your answers.

$ = Situation  
T = Task  
A = Action  
R = Results 

The aim of STAR is to help you structure your answers so that you address the question asked and cover all aspects of an answer.

For example if you were asked a question about whether you had a strong commitment to training and education you could talk about your degree:

Situation: talk about how you chose your course, what you hoped to gain from your degree and why you chose the University of Huddersfield.

Task: Discuss how you applied, maybe mention researching the course.

Action: Think about what you learned whilst on the course, about your successes and challenges that you faced.

Results: Talk about your accomplishment of graduating – and reflect on your achievement.

Another example might be an employer asking you to demonstrate that you had team working skills; you might answer along the following lines:
Whilst working as part of the stock replenishment team at Tesco, I volunteered to do a night shift to help prepare our store for a VIP visit.

Along with a team of 6 others we were assigned the task of improving the presentation of the main aisles.

As the work was repetitive, and we were lacking sleep, I realised many of my colleagues were not fully motivated. I was the person with most experience of the company requirements, so I used my initiative to split the group into 3 teams and give specific goals to each team. I spoke to the store manager to ask if I could offer an incentive to my colleagues, which he agreed to.

By giving clear instruction and encouragement, along with an incentive for completing the task, we finished the job on time and were praised by senior managers after a successful VIP visit.

The more detail you can give about your skills the better, but don’t waffle – the STAR framework can help you to keep your answers succinct.

The STAR technique works best when you use language to show that you were at the heart of the example that you use. For this reason it’s always a good idea to practice using STAR. Try to use words that show ‘what I did’ rather than describing ‘what everyone else did’ and ideally show that you understand the question by referring to it directly as part of your answer.

### About you
- Tell me about yourself
- What made you apply for this position?
- What have you learned from your university course that would be of benefit to our business?
- What are your main strengths and weaknesses? Why do you feel we should offer you the job?
- What are your goals in life?
- What key skills have you gained from your university course? How could these skills be of use in this job?
- What skills do you think you need to develop?
- What qualities / skills do you have which make you particularly suitable for this role?
- Communication skills are essential in most jobs. Give me two examples that illustrate that you have good communication skills.

- You state that you are well-organised and able to work to deadlines. What have you done recently that proves this?
- How do you schedule your time? Set priorities?
- Under what conditions do you work the best? When don’t you work so well?
- Give me an example of when you have worked well in a group. What role did you take?
- Tell me about a time when you’ve been in a team that didn’t work well together.
- Do you prefer to work on your own or in a team? Why?
- What is the toughest decision you’ve had to make? What alternatives did you consider?
- Why do you think you would make a good _____?
- What did you do to prepare for this interview today?
- How would your best friend describe you? How would you describe yourself in one sentence?
- Tell me about your work experience. What did you like best about working at …?
- What did you learn from your time working at…? What did you gain from your placement?

### Career motivation/direction
- What are your goals for the next five years? Where do you see yourself in ten years’ time?
- Are you willing to move - how mobile are you?
- Which other jobs/careers are you applying for? Is this your first choice? Why?

### Educational record
- What key skills have you gained from your university course? How could these skills be of use in this job?
- What degree classification are you expecting? Could you have done any better?
- Why did you choose to go to university? Why did you choose this subject?
- How did you decide which university to study at?
- How could your degree subject be of use to our organisation?
- What have you got out of academic life? What is the main lesson you learnt at university?
- Tell me about your project/dissertation. If you could do it again, what would you do differently?
- Your ‘A’ Level results seem disappointing, was there a reason for that?
- Tell me about your BTEC qualification.
## Knowledge of the vacancy

- What do you know about the job? What do you think a typical day would involve?
- How would you define (insert job)? Why would you be good at it?
- What do you understand by the term management? Why would you make a good manager?
- How would you describe the role of a manager in our company?
- Do you think you can cope with the professional examinations?

## Knowledge of the organisation/industry

- What do you know about our business/organisation?
- Who do you think our customers are?
- Why have you decided to apply to us? Who else have you applied to?
- What do you think of our product/service? Why are we the market leaders in our sector?
- Who do you see as our major competitors?
- What are the main challenges facing our organisation over the next few years?
- What factors did you take into account when applying for a position in this industry?

## Interests / activities

- How do you spend your free time? What has your membership of.........involved?
- Have you done any voluntary work?
- How have you dealt with awkward people when organising these activities?
- Tell me something about yourself.

## Competency questions:

- We want excellent team players. Describe a time when you demonstrated good team work.
- Time management is crucial in this job. Tell us of an occasion when that was important to you.
- Could you tell us about a time when you faced a major challenge and how you overcame it?
- Attention to detail is a key component of this job. Have you ever needed to approach a task where accuracy was important? What did you do – and how did you judge whether you’d been successful within that task?

## Unusual interview questions

There is a trend amongst several of the biggest graduate recruiters to ask ‘oddball’ questions and in fact many smaller organisations are also now developing a tendency to ask more unusual questions. They can appear light hearted and frequently unanswerable, however the purpose is usually to see both how a candidate reacts under pressure and to reveal an applicant’s approach to tackling a baffling query. The following examples were all asked in 2014:

- If you could throw a parade of any calibre through our office, what type of parade would it be?
- If you were a box of cereal, what would you be and why?
- How many square feet of pizza is eaten in the US each year?
- Describe to me the process and benefits of wearing a seatbelt.
- How honest are you?
- Are you more of a hunter or a gatherer?

They’re designed to uncover how you think and so firstly, pause whilst you consider your answer. Try and understand the context – could it have any relevance to the company? Seek clarity if you want more information and remember that a strong answer will try to address the question as well as showing you in a good light.

## At the end of the interview

Most interviews are strictly time bound and so the interviewer / panel will make it clear when this point has been reached. Thank the interviewer for their time and there may be a chance for you to ask your own question. Prepare two or three questions to ask the interviewer or panel and always ensure that they are relevant to the organisation. You could write these down and take them on the day.

This can also be a good opportunity to reveal positive aspects about yourself that the interviewer’s questions may not have elicited. Good questions to ask are those that demonstrate your eagerness to develop within the organisation and take on responsibility.

Questions about training or what the process is for progression in the company are also a good idea but make sure these are relevant to the organisation. You could ask them to tell you about the company culture. This is also a good opportunity for you to demonstrate your research into the organisation by asking questions about relevant articles you may have read, for example, ‘I read in the newspaper last week that you are expanding into Europe. Is the company thinking of expanding into any other markets?’ Remember to show an interest - ask about the job, organisation, employees, products and processes, future training and / or opportunities.
Don’t:

- Ask about pay, pensions or other perks - it is not appropriate at this stage.
- Ask questions that have been answered in the graduate brochure or other literature sent out with the invitation to interview.
- Ask questions for the sake of it but if your questions have been answered during the interview, say so.

Lastly, end the interview by asking when you’ll hear the outcome.

After the interview

After the interview write down as many questions that you can remember being asked. You can use this to prepare for likely interview questions in the future.

Do not dwell on the negative. Be positive and think about how you might approach similar questions in the future. Remember to note down the things that went well during the interview.

If you don’t hear anything from them it is acceptable to telephone to ask the employer about the outcome of your interview.

You can also contact an employer to thank them for the interview and ask for feedback on your performance. Whether it is good or bad news this information will help you to make improvements to your applications in the future.

Remain professional when seeking feedback, keep doors open to you. They may keep your details for future positions.

Interviews take many different forms. Whilst there are several ‘types’ that we can discuss in reality an interview is likely to be a mixture of types dependent on both the job and the interviewing experience of the employer.

**Competency/capability based interviews**

These are structured to reflect the competencies or capabilities that an employer is seeking for a particular job and these are often detailed in the job specification. Competencies are specific skills, knowledge and abilities that are essential to perform certain tasks. You should have focused on the job specification in your CV and application form.

**Chronological interviews**

These work chronologically through your life by date and are usually based on your CV or a completed application form.

**Technical interviews**

If you have applied for a job or course that requires technical knowledge, for example, positions in engineering or IT, it is likely that you will be tested on technical issues. Questions may focus on your academic/work achievements/skills/knowledge gained or on real/hypothetical technical problems. You should be prepared to prove yourself but also to admit to what you don’t know and stress that you are keen to learn.

**Unstructured interviews**

Sometimes an interview will have no clear structure and feel more like an informal chat about you, your interests and your career ambitions.

**Portfolio based interviews**

If the role is within the arts, media or communications industries then you may be asked to bring a portfolio of your work to the interview, in which case the questions will focus on your work. You will talk in depth about the pieces you have chosen to present in your portfolio.

**Case study interviews**

These can range from a straightforward brainteaser to the analysis of a hypothetical business problem. You will be evaluated on your analysis of the problem, how you identify the key issues and how you pursue a particular line of thinking.

**Informal interviews**

Not every job opportunity recruits through a formal, structured process. In smaller companies, especially for part time or temporary work, an interview with a manager or supervisor could very feel more like a ‘chat’ than an interview. Even with professional posts you may face an ‘informal’ interview. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that an ‘informal’ interview is any less significant than a normal one. It’s important as a candidate to treat them exactly as you would any other interview – in other words do your research, dress formally and approach them seriously.

**Panel interviews**

This will usually be a situation you face with larger companies and employers within ‘the public sector’. Employers with smaller workforces are more likely to have only one interviewer.

Even if you’re a seasoned interviewee the prospect of the panel can still be unsettling but it’s important to remember that the panel are hoping to find successful applicants and that you’ve been invited because the application process so far has indicated that this could be you.

It’s increasingly rare that interviews for graduate training schemes involve only the candidate and one other person. Whilst ‘panel’ can refer to any number of people, many tend to have between three and five individuals. They are designed to ensure that the application system is fair and consistent and also to allow a diverse range of questions to be asked.
Areas that you can consider as part of your preparation include the following:

• Who will you face? As part of your research contact the company and ask who will be on the panel and whilst some employers might not disclose names they could tell you the roles that the panel members hold. This information is useful as it will give you some idea about what they might ask, and why. Some panels might even include ‘service users’ e.g. pupils might assist on a panel for a teaching post, or young people may support the recruitment of youth workers.

• There are company roles and then there are panel ‘roles’. Most panels will have a ‘script’ of set questions and each member will take turns to ask their questions which relate to their position e.g. a team leader might ask you questions about how well you perform in a team. However as they won’t all be talking at once the panel might also be taking on roles such as
  o Questioner – panel member taking the current lead on interacting with you.
  o Recorder – writing down as much of your answer as they can.
  o Listener – someone who is paying close attention to your answers.

• Who do you talk to? When faced by a panel always address the person asking the question. But try to look around the room and catch the attention of other panel members too. The best interviewees often engage the panel in a conversation while at the same time answering the questions fully.

• Why are they all writing? Panels often convene when there are a large number of candidates and their notes form an important part of the selection process especially if ‘scores’ are attached to answers. Don’t be put off if you see the panel writing – it means that they’re paying attention to you.

• Any questions for us? If you did your research this can pay dividends at the end of the interview. For example if you know that your prospective line manager is present you could ask a question related to the team or current projects. Again, planning is key.

Group interviews
Several candidates are present and will be asked questions in turn. A group discussion may be encouraged and you may be invited to ask questions of the other candidates.

Sequential interviews
These are several interviews in turn, with a different interviewer each time. Usually, each interviewer will ask 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.

SKYPE / telephone interviews
A distance interview is one where you’re not in the same room as the interviewer. You will usually be told to expect it to take place at an agreed time so you will normally be able to control the environment.

There can be many reasons why a recruiter might chose to use a camera or a phone to assess you, common reasons include:

• The employer is based overseas.
• The interview is part of an assessment process – with a face to face interview being reserved for the next stage of the recruitment process.
• The career lends itself to distance contact for example sales or marketing.
• Distance interviews might be run by a recruiter who is screening candidates on behalf of an employer.

Automated telephone assessments also exist, using touch-tone phones. Candidates respond to a number of statements using the numbers on the phone to indicate how far they agree with each one. For jobs where an excellent telephone manner is essential, a telephone test may be used to assess your communication skills and telephone manner.

Preparing for distance interviews:

• Get a friend to talk to you on the phone to give you feedback on how you sound.
• Practise – try to ensure that you’re familiar with any technology required for the interview.
• If using Skype, take note of your surroundings and think what impression it might make on a viewer; avoid mess!
• Make sure you are in a quiet location where you won’t be disturbed or distracted.
• Have a copy of your CV / application form within easy reach, together with details of jobs you’ve applied for and other relevant correspondence.
• Have paper and a pen to take notes, and your diary in case you’re asked to attend a further interview.
• Dress up for a Skype interview; some candidates also wear interview dress for phone calls. Dressing smartly may have a psychological effect leading you to behave in a more business-like manner.
• When preparing for pre-arranged interviews, do everything you would do to prepare for face-to-face interviews.
Types of interview continued

• A lot can be detected from a person's voice and how they appear on a screen. Use intonation and positive vocabulary; feelings such as enthusiasm are often conveyed by body language, so be explicit about your attitude to the job.

• Sit up straight - slouching will come across in your voice.

• Smile as you speak - it adds warmth to your voice.

• Speak clearly and try not to rush.

• Curb potentially annoying vocal mannerisms, such as talking too loudly, or saying "mmm" or "yeah" every few moments.

• Don’t be afraid to pause, but do remember pauses seem much longer over the phone than in a face-to-face conversation.

• Be sure to check with the interviewer what will happen next, and make notes of any further actions you or the interviewer are to take.

• Thank the interviewer at the end of the interview.