

Interviews

Attending and performing well at interviews can be a daunting prospect. But **don't panic**, there are ways to prepare that will help you perform more effectively. It's very simple really – there are only **3** things that a potential employer wants to know about you.

1. **Can you do the job?** (Do you have the skills, experience and personality for the job?)
2. **Will you do the job?** (How motivated are you? Are you really interested in working for this company? Will you turn up on time every day?)
3. **Will you fit in?** (How flexible are you? Will you fit in with their way of working? Do you prefer to work alone or as a member of a team?)

There are many ways of asking these questions, but at the end of the day each question you're asked will be based on one of the above.

Interview Preparation:

- Prepare attitude
- Review job description
- Research organisation
- Reflect and analyse past experiences

Prepare Attitude

- Congratulations! Being called for interview means that you have been successful to date. The employer has deemed that on paper, you are capable of doing the job and you are among the top 5-10% of all applicants. As such the Selection Committee is already favourably disposed towards you and with this in mind you can approach an interview with confidence.

Review Job Description

- Reviewing the job description is a great starting point in preparing for an interview. Having reviewed and analysed the job description and person specification you will need to think about your ability to perform each of the duties and requirements and then prepare concrete examples of where you have demonstrated these competencies.

- ▶ You will need to reflect on the essential skills/requirements for the job and look for evidence in your academic, professional, and personal background.
- ▶ You will also need to reflect on desirable skills/requirements and again look for evidence in your academic, professional, and personal background. The **essential** requirements are obviously very important as they give you the eligibility to apply to the role, but much of the decision making takes place around the **desirable** requirements.

Having reviewed and analysed the Job Description and Person Specification it is a useful exercise to make note of all the key requirements and competencies, match yourself to the job bearing in mind your own experience and expertise, and identify specific examples of how you have developed and continue to use the relevant skills.

Use an evidence chart like the one outlined below to help you with this process:

Skill	Example	Develop the story-line
Teaching innovation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problem based learning 2. Students deliver part of module to class 3. Tutorial groups 	
Development of teaching aids	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Designed a board game 2. Designed case studies 3. Use blackboard 	
Development of assessment methods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students suggest one end of year question 2. Peer review of presentations 3. Weekly just a minute quiz 	

Research the Organisation

In researching the organisation it is important to consider the following:

Review the Organisation's

- Mission
- Culture
- Strategic goals
- Challenges
- Perception of itself
- Rankings
- Developments

Review the Academic Department

- Programmes and courses
- Student numbers/ recruitment/retention
- Developments
- Staff research interests

Review the Industry

- Products/processes
- Clients/customers
- Developments
- Competitors

Reflection, analysis & evidence gathering

On the basis of the research you have undertaken to this point you should be in a position to:

- Prepare an opening statement highlighting your key experiences, skills, interests etc.

- Prepare concise verbal summaries of key skills. This information needs to be specific and evidence based if it is to be meaningful.
- Anticipate questions as you now have a very good understanding of the job you are applying to, the duties and responsibilities, the challenges etc.

The Interview

Phases of an Interview

1: Settling In

As soon as you have been met by a member of the interview panel, whether inside or outside the interview room, the interview has started and you will begin to form a first impression. Creating a positive initial impression is a crucial part of the interview process. We all form opinions of each other without even realizing it, in the first couple of minutes we meet.

How you perform in the first few minutes of an interview is crucial – first impressions can make or break your chance of success. There are a few things you can do to create a favourable first impression:

- **A strong firm handshake can make all the difference.**

“When I had to choose between two candidates with similar qualifications, I gave the position to the candidate with the better handshake” CEO __ 500 company.

Do you have the firm strong type? Or are you more of a ‘dead fish’ hand shaker? Whose hand would you prefer to shake?

Think about it – there is no gesture so underestimated as the handshake. In the business world, this first approach to conversation and connection is of paramount importance. So it’s a very good idea to learn and practice how to extend and receive a good handshake.

- **Smile, look, and sound enthusiastic**

Previous research suggests that 93% of communication is non verbal and good communication is primarily to do with visual impact and tone of voice. So as well as presenting yourself with enthusiasm and positive body language, it is hugely important to be able to project an energy in your tone of voice that will show you are a person that the interviewers would like to work with. A big consideration for the interview panel is do they like you? Will you fit in to the organisation and will

you work well with the existing staff members? You need to address these points in the way you present yourself at interview.

Phases of an Interview

2: Down to business – Questions & Answers

The formal questions in the interview begin here. Remember to listen carefully to the questions asked and don't be afraid to take some time to think about your response. Be sure that you are answering the question that was asked and if the question isn't clear, ask for clarification.

The interviewer may also present information about the organisation and there may be opportunity for you to ask questions during this time.

Lets now look at some techniques that will help you to answer some important interview questions:

The Elevator Speech

- An elevator speech is an important networking tool that can be used to market yourself in an interview

- **Duration:** 2 minutes approx
- **Concise:** succinct, as few words as possible
- **Clear:** audience understands what's in it for them
- **Informative:** talk about demonstrable accomplishments
- **Engaging:** a conversational starter

An Elevator Speech is also a very useful way of preparing a response to an opening question in an interview which can frequently be:

Why don't you start by telling me about yourself?

- What is required here is a short **commercial** about yourself, which you should prepare in advance and which could include:
 - Your qualifications
 - Your key strengths
 - Your most recent experience
 - A recent (relevant) achievement

- A summary of what you will contribute in the position
- Don't forget to align your answer to the core competencies!

Competency Based Interviews

A competency based interview is an interview that is based on your strengths and the competencies required for the job. Your past performance is the best indicator of your likely future performance and for this reason Competency Based Interviews are the most widely used.

Using competency-based interview questions in conjunction with standard questions can improve the accuracy of selecting the best candidates over standard interviews by as much as 500%

Source: The Advisory Board Company

Preparation for Competency Based Interviews

On the basis of a vacancy arising, an organisation/company will produce a job description and person specification. In writing this document the employer will identify essential and desirable competencies for the role which in turn will influence the questions asked at interview.

The chart below summarises how you can mirror this process in preparation for interview. On the basis of undertaking a forensic review of the job description and person specification you will need to provide evidence and prepare multiple verbal summaries for each of the essential and desirable requirements. You can do this most effectively using the STAR format.

Company		You
Job description Person specification	Blue print	Forensic review

<p>Identify competencies Essential and desirable</p>	<p>Template</p>	<p>Provide evidence X 3 Prepare stories</p>
<p>Brainstorm questions</p>	<p>Diagnostic tool</p>	<p>Use the STAR technique</p>

The STAR format is:

S – Situation: background, set the scene

T – Task: specifics of what is/was required

A – Action: what you did, skills used, behaviours, characteristics

R – Result: outcomes, what happened?

- The STAR format will enable you to answer tough work related questions (not limited to job interviews) in a subtly, compelling and powerful manner.
- People like hearing stories, facts are easier to remember if wrapped in a story, stories tend not to get interrupted; basically stories are an ancient proven method of getting a message across!
- Listeners will remember more of your answers, and the messages within them, yet your message will be delivered in a friendly likable style.
- As far as job interviewing is concerned, your success ratio will go off the scale.

Building a STAR response:

A STAR story should be about 2 minutes long, and delivered with energy and enthusiasm about a real experience you have had (it does not have to be a work experience, as long as it describes a relevant skill or behaviour).

Let's look at an example:

Question: *What is your approach to dealing with students?*

Situation: *I can illustrate my approach through an example. Last year, I was a lecturer on a nutrition course with over 40 students in the class. Near the end of the term, I was approached by a student who was unhappy with her grade. She thought I had graded her final paper too harshly.*

Task: *I realized that the way I handled this situation would have very important implications, because if I was too lenient with this student I could acquire a reputation as a pushover. Yet I also needed to listen to this student carefully to assess whether she had a valid complaint.*

Action: *I asked the student to bring a copy of her paper to me during office hours where we would discuss the situation. When we met, I first discussed with the student the criteria I used for grading, why points were subtracted, and the basic requirements for an A paper. Then we looked at the paper and how I had graded it. I identified ways in which her paper failed to meet the criteria for an A paper and suggested ways to improve her organization and writing.*

Result: *While the student was still unhappy with her grade, she was satisfied that she had been graded fairly. She no longer contested the grade, and I felt that I had dealt with the student both fairly and respectfully*

Phases of an Interview

3. Over to You

Have you any questions for us?

It's not that you have to ask questions but if you don't then you are certainly missing an opportunity to make a further positive impression and express a further interest in the role. You will need to have a number of questions prepared as oftentimes questions can be inadvertently answered in the interview and so it is a good idea to have some back up. Some tips in formulating questions are:

- ▶ Choose with care.
- ▶ Don't ask too many or sound critical.
- ▶ Don't ask questions that are answered in the literature.
- ▶ Use the opportunity to show your knowledge.
- ▶ If you know the answer to your question then it is a poor question as you will come across as poorly researched.

Some typical questions:

- ▶ ... objectives and responsibilities?
- ▶ ... training and promotional opportunities?

4. Anything else to add

You can also be asked if there is anything else you would like to add to conclude the interview. This is one final opportunity to make a positive and lasting impression on the interview panel. The focus here should be on your experience, your expertise, your suitability for the role, and a summary of what you believe you can contribute in the role. A good final summary will:

- Reinforce everything you have said already.
- Be remembered when the decision is being made.
- Make one last effort to sell yourself.

People will remember you the way you tell them to remember you!

5. After the Interview:

- Record the questions while still fresh.
- Reflect on your performance.
- Review by asking for feedback if necessary.

Critical review of your interview

• Points to Consider	Your review
• What were the names and titles of the people who interviewed you?	
• Did you make a good initial impression?	
• Which questions did you feel you were not well prepared for? How would you prepare in future?	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which questions did you answer well? • What made you successful in these answers? • Can you translate this learning to your weaker answers? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What lasting impression did you feel you made during the interview? Confident, quiet, capable? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the most difficult question you had to answer? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you take the opportunity to make sure you got across your key selling points? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you gained any new personal insight? 	

Action plan for future interviews

<p>What research should I do next time and what resources can I use?</p>
<p>For which type of questions do I need to work out better answers?</p>

Are there any aspects of my personal performance I need to improve on, e.g. being more assertive, trying to do more to combat nerves?

Sample Interview Questions for Academic and Research Posts

Motivation:

- Why appeals to you about this job/college?
- What are your ambitions for the post?
- What personal opportunity would your appointment to this post represent to you?
- What appeals to you about working at this college?

Teaching:

- How would you define the role of a tutor?
- How do you evaluate your effectiveness as a teacher?
- How do you plan and organise your teaching?
- How do you measure classroom effectiveness?
- How have you participated in the professional development of your own teaching skills?
- What is your involvement to date in course organisation and preparation in the area of syllabus design and development of the syllabus teaching methods and materials?
- What has been your role in the assessment of student learning?
- What are your current departmental teaching duties; undergraduate and postgraduate?
- What have been your examination responsibilities?
- What has been your experience of acting as Course Director or Tutor?
- Give details of continuing education or extra-mural courses you have organised, whether on campus or off-campus, and those in which you have participated, but not organised.
- Describe fully any innovative work in which you have been involved in relation to teaching, and any contributions which you have personally made to curriculum reform and development, whether within your own department or elsewhere.
- Describe your teaching, indicating, for example, the extent of your teaching load in comparison with the departmental average, and highlighting any particular areas in which you feel you have made a significant contribution?
- How do you enable students to articulate issues and solve problems on their own?
- How do you make yourself available outside the classroom for further instruction or advice?
- How would you “label” your current teaching style?
- What do you see as your strengths as a teacher?
- What do you see as your weaknesses as a teacher?

- What form does your postgraduate teaching take?
- What are your experiences of undergraduate teaching?
- How important is formal teaching training?
- How do you keep abreast of developments in teaching?
- What, in your opinion, are the main qualities of a good 3rd level teacher?
- How do you create interest in the subject at undergraduate level?
- Are there any new ideas or techniques, which you have brought to your teaching?
- Having taught/supervised in different styles and settings (e.g. tutorials, lectures, practicals, workshops, seminars, demonstrations, fieldwork, in placements, in clinical and other professional situations), which setting do you enjoy the most?
- What contributions have you made to the enhancement of teaching quality (including the design of units of study) within the department or faculty?
- What course would you prefer to teach?
- In the context of lecturing first year students, what material would you teach in the area of <insert relevant subject area>?
- What courses would you see yourself offering here at this college?
- What improvements would you seek to make to the existing departmental curriculum?
- What new specialist modules would you suggest should be developed?
- What experience do you have of designing modules?
- How would you approach teaching a topic which was not in your area of expertise?
- What are useful ways of assessing students?
- Have you any views on more effective assessment tools?
- How would you approach the teaching of large groups in 1st year, (200+)?
- How have developments in IT impacted on the way we teach undergraduates?
- How would you deal with potential conflict between teaching and research commitments?
- How do you encourage students to probe the literature?

Research:

- What experience do you have of supervising research students?
- What has been your achievement in the organisation and promotion of research?
- What activity or success have you had in organising and attracting seminars and conferences?
- What research grants have you secured (e.g. from Research Councils or other bodies), give brief details of the amount of the grant, the duration, the nature of the project, your own position (e.g. as Supervisor) and the number of assistants (if any) employed
- How do you go about putting a grant application together?
- What are the key ingredients of success in grant writing?
- What is your experience of major research seminars or conferences you have organised ?
- What are your research interests outside Ireland?
- Comment on the notion of evidence based research?

- What theories are developing your approach to research?
- Based on your research experience, how do you see this facilitating research led teaching?
- What other areas excite you outside your own research area?
- What do you see as being the most popular research topics in this area in the next five years?
- Outline your current research and its possible development. You could include details of planned research visits or collaborations which have not yet taken place, and invitations to contribute to future conferences or seminars.
- What reception was given to your most recent publication?
- What has been critical reception of your work through reviews and citations?
- What invitations by outside organisations (conferences, other universities) to present work?
- To what extent have the results of your research or creative activity been accepted in the form of publications highly respected within the discipline?
- To what extent have you contributed to the national or international activity in your research?
- You have published a number of papers, which is your best?
- What if any, answers has your research provided you with?
- Describe a major research accomplishment.
- What is your research plan for the next five years?
- From what sources would you expect to fund your research in the future, if you were to be appointed to this post?
- How significant is research funding in the area of <insert subject area >and what opportunities are there for this?
- How did you choose your PhD theme?
- What specifically did you do in your theses?

Impact/Contribution

- What in your opinion has been your contribution to the development of the subject?
- What public services have you provided in a professional capacity (i.e. service by invitation of an expert and/or advisory nature)?
- Have you had general responsibility for an area of departmental or faculty academic activity?
- What have been your particular responsibilities in the area of departmental or Faculty academic activity?
- What professional relationships have you developed with outside bodies such as affiliated institutions, schools etc?
- What has been your experience in serving as an official at departmental, Faculty or University level (e.g. holding office in a Departmental Board or Committee, as a faculty Tutor, or as a University officer in a Hall of Residence or other unit of student accommodation); service on departmental, Faculty or University Committee or on external bodies as a university representative?

- What is your experience of having received academic invitations for the presentation of external lectures and papers, contributions to conference proceedings etc?
- Describe any significant instance of work which has involved your giving advice in an area in which you are recognised as having special distinction or skill
- What positions of leadership have you held in professional societies?
- What liaison have you had with constituencies in ways which promote scholarship, teaching and research/scholarship/creative work?
- What contribution have you made to departmental faculty or university committees?
- Do you see any opportunities for interaction with industry?
- What resources would you bring to the post/department and what resources would you expect the department to provide for you?
- Are there any interdisciplinary projects which you would wish to develop and contribute to?
- What opportunities can you see for attracting students at undergraduate and postgraduate level?
- With your experience and knowledge, what would you bring to the Department?

Administration:

- Explain the nature and the extent to which you are involved in administrative responsibilities?
- What is the relative importance of these administrative tasks within the department/faculty?
- What is the relationship between teaching and administration?

Personal effectiveness:

- What have you done in the past to demonstrate leadership and team work skills?
- Describe how you have shown teamwork in your current post?
- Describe how you have shown initiative in your current post?
- Describe how you have shown leadership in your current post?
- What is your approach to the management of postgraduates?
- How do you promote collaboration between students?