

University Interviews

Although not all universities call students for interview, many will. This might be because the course leads to a profession (e.g. Medicine), has a high demand (e.g. Oxbridge courses), is bespoke (e.g. Contour Fashion) or a combination of these factors

The interview is an important part of the selection process – it's an extension of the UCAS form, it determines if an offer made & the level of offer made. It may be a life line if results are lower than expected, or it could give tutors a chance to learn more about you

Preparation is the key to success with university interviews!

Before the Interview

- **Practicalities**
 - what type of interview is it? When do you need to arrive? Where exactly (campus, building & room) is the interview? How are you going to get there? What are you going to wear? Do you have relevant paperwork, certificates, phone numbers, money & mobile (with credit)?
 - Find out if you need to prepare a portfolio & what to include
 - Plan your journey to ensure you arrive at least 15 minutes early (bearing in mind that campuses can be large and confusing to navigate)
- **Research:** the course, the department, the university – academic & social aspects, graduate destinations, current issues & developments, the profession & wider subject area – including current affairs
- **Re-read** your UCAS application – especially your personal statement!
- **Re-read** any course literature and prospectus to remind yourself why you have applied to that particular university
- Read a daily newspaper and/or specialist journals so you're up-to-date with current affairs and developments within your field of study
- Practice Makes Perfect: Have a mock interview before the real thing. This will give you the opportunity to think about the kind of questions you may be asked and to see how you cope under pressure. Most students benefit from some practice, preferably with someone they don't know as it creates a more realistic experience
- Think about answering common questions: Prepare answers for likely questions such as "why do you want to study this subject" or "why have you applied to this university"
- Think about questions you want to ask

Different types of Interview

- Auditions
- Group exercise
- Panel interview
- 1:1 interview

- Find out what's involved and don't panic!

The Interview

- Make eye contact & smile
- Be confident & remember to breathe!
- Listen & consider your replies
- If you don't understand a question – don't guess, simply politely ask the interviewer to rephrase or clarify the question
- Ask your own questions but don't ask anything they've already answered! It's helpful to write these down beforehand
- Maintain the rapport
- Admissions Tutors aren't looking for 'right' answers, just for motivated, engaging students who have interesting things to say
- You can't prepare for everything you're going to be asked to don't forget that if you don't know the answer to something, be honest about it. Don't waffle on in the hope that you'll get to the right answer eventually.
- When you do know the answer, give examples where appropriate

After the Interview

- Review – think about what you thought went well & what didn't – and why. Make some notes for future reference
- Get feedback
- Keep a record of interesting questions that you were asked and pass them to Mr Wells - this may benefit other students in the future

Useful weblinks

- [Interviews at Cambridge](#)

Advice from SLBS students who've been interviewed:

- Arrive on time
- Be prepared – have a rough plan of your answers and practice your answers before hand
- Look up questions you could be asked and prepare quick answers for the standard questions you are expecting to be asked
- Know your personal statement inside out
- They did not ask me anything on my personal statement which I was not prepared for.
- Research your course and any statements that you have made so you are fully prepared
- Be absolutely certain in your mind why it is that you want to study that particular subject at that particular university
- Know your subject

- The interviewer means to shake you up a bit; you are supposed to feel under pressure
- Don't be nervous
- Be confident. Tell yourself that you are good at your subject
- Dress smartly
- Try to be as open minded as possible, especially in relation to discussing a text
- Have confidence in what you are saying.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification or if you don't know what to say
- Don't get stressed out about mock interviews – they will be fine
- Don't be afraid to show yourself off and link all your skills in with your answer
- Try and answer questions by bringing in knowledge you have acquired from reading or work experience. Shows how great you are!
- Make sure you can talk about extra interest/what you do to relax
- Read books about topics that interest you and keep up to date with the news
- Read around the subject
- Try not to have too much stuff to shuffle around if you go to shake their hand
- The interviewer mentioned that some people put on their personal statement things they did years ago eg music grades which apparently annoys them as they cannot discuss it
- The interviewer suggested that I should put forward my opinion more forcefully and not be shy
- You will get out of the interview what you put in. Be enthusiastic and forthcoming.

Below are some common questions asked at university interviews; think about the answers that you would give to these and make some brief notes, but be careful not to script your answers!

- “Tell me about yourself”
- “Tell me about your current courses, what do you enjoy the most and least about these”
- “What are your strengths & weaknesses”
- “Why do you want to study [subject choice]”
- “Tell me about your work experience/wider knowledge & experience of the subject (eg field trips if non-vocational)”
- “What do you hope to do after you graduate”
- “What do you know about this course”
- “What do you think the course can offer you”
- “Besides the course, what are you most looking forward to about university”
- “Why do you want to study at this university”
- “Tell me about any current affairs that affect the course and/or profession”
- “Have you spoken to anyone within the subject area or profession”
- “Give me an example of a time when...you solved a problem, worked as a team, achieved something special”

Advice from a university admissions interviewer

- Arrive promptly and smartly dressed. Be courteous and polite
- Be appropriately respectful of a person you do not know well but also be prepared to engage with the interviewer and express your own point of view. Your willingness to participate and make a proper contribution will make the job of the interviewer a lot easier.
- Be prepared to back up your case with an example. Be careful not to fall into the common trap of saying (for example) 'I like W. H. Auden' and then being unable to say why.
- Convey a genuine interest in your subject; it will impress your interviewer. You can do this by, for instance, citing examples of your own background reading, or your awareness of something you felt you wanted to know more about. Evidence of this kind can make superior candidates shine!
- Try to avoid giving inconclusive 'on the one hand this, on the other hand that' types of answers. The interviewer may feel that you are trying to find out what view might please them rather than expressing your own opinions. It may be difficult for someone at your age to feel confident when arguing with an academic of 20+ years' experience (as your interviewers are likely to be), but you should not be afraid to stand your ground. The interviewer may well play 'devil's advocate' anyway, so there's little point in trying to second guess his/her views; he/she will in any case be more ready to respect a person who knows her mind but is willing to explore other options. If an academic fights back and/or comes back at you with stronger arguments, it's not a sign of weakness of your part, it's actually a compliment: he/she thinks that your views are worth engaging with and that you are worth talking to.
- It's worth remembering, too, that interviews aren't about 'right' and 'wrong' answers. Your interviewer is your prospective tutor for the next 3-4 years, and will want to see whether you're willing to learn, grapple with problems, try out new ideas and come out stronger for the process. So be prepared to think things through with your interviewer in a collaborative way if you're invited to. If you get something unfamiliar thrown at you, don't say 'I'm afraid I don't know anything at all about this' (he/she probably knows that's the case already, which is why you've been given it). Say instead "I'm afraid I don't know anything at all about this, but I know a little about [X which is relevant here], and I wonder whether that might be significant here?" or even "I'm afraid I don't know much about [this text you've just given me about dictatorship under Franco]. Could you please tell me [who Franco is/what this word means]?". Either would open up the possibility of a dialogue in which the interviewer may be guiding you, but you are showing him/her that you have an interest and willingness to think things through.

Job Interviews

Competency Based Interviews: What are they and how to answer them:

'Competencies' is another word for 'skills' and competency-based interviews are simply interviews that include questions which look for evidence of skills that you have used.

Questions may start with "Describe a situation where you had to" or "Give an example of when you".

Competency-based interviews enable interviewers to understand *what* you've done as well as *how* you've done it. Competency-based questions are now common on both application forms and at interview.

What competencies (or skills) is an interviewer looking for? This will vary according to the job but competencies of importance to many recruiters include:

- Team working (respecting others, co-operating, negotiating, persuading, contributing to discussions, awareness of interdependence with others)
- Problem solving (Analysing facts and situations and applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions)
- Application of IT (basic IT skills including familiarity with word processing, spreadsheets, file management and use of internet search engines etc)
- Communication & literacy (ability to produce clear, structured written work and oral literacy, including listening and questioning)
- Application of numeracy (Manipulation of numbers, general mathematical awareness and its application in practical contexts eg weighing, estimating, applying formulae)
- Decision making (Determines the best course of action. Evaluates options based on logic & fact & presents solutions)
- Planning and organisation (Able to plan activities & carry them through effectively)
- Leadership (Able to motivate and direct others)

Questions will be asked in a format such as: "Describe a situation where you showed leadership".

The 'CAR' Approach: A good way of dealing with this type of question is by using the CAR approach. CAR stands for Context, Action, Result. It helps you to structure your answer as a mini essay:

- CONTEXT forms an introduction, describing the situation you faced, date and place
- ACTION forms the main body and should be the longest part
- RESULT is the conclusion, and, like the introduction, should be quite short

Example Question: Describe how your planning and organisation skills resulted in the successful achievement of a task.

Example Answer:

- CONTEXT (*Describe the situation and the specific task you were faced with, when, where, with whom?*) When I was in Year 10 I was given the task of organising a class cake sale to raise funds for our school charity

- **ACTION** (*How? What action did YOU take? Sometimes people focus on what the group did without mentioning their individual contribution*) I compiled a spreadsheet containing the names of girls in my class and made a note of what cakes they would be bringing. I wanted to ensure there would be a wide variety of items for sale in lots of different flavours to appeal to everyone's tastes. I recorded email addresses of class members in the spreadsheet and devised a mailing list so that I could email reminders to each girl about what they were bringing and when to bring it. I also worked out what prices to charge for each item, recorded it on the spreadsheet and printed a handy price list in good time for the sale so that everyone in the class was clear about what to charge for the various cakes
- **RESULT** (*What results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach/what did you learn from the experience?*) The cake sale was a great success and we raised £100 for our charity, a much higher figure than our previous sale. I learnt that organisation is key to the success of a venture like this and because everyone knew exactly what they were doing in advance of the event, it was more successful than before

The focus should be on you even if the situation involved a group. Interviewers will want to know more about *your* specific role in achieving the desired result.

More Example Questions

- Describe a situation where you had to work as part of a team
- Give an example of a time when you had to solve a problem
- Tell me about a situation where you made a decision and then changed your mind
- Give an example of a situation where your communication skills made a difference to a situation.
- Tell me about a time when you played a key role in a team
- Give an example of a time when you showed strong leadership

More Information About Competency Based Interviews: Visit the University of Kent's website at www.kent.ac.uk/careers/compet/skillquest.htm for lots more examples of competency-based questions and answers.

Useful weblink

- [How to perform well at interviews](#)