



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

How Can I Do A Great Interview?



DCU CAREERS SERVICE & INTRA UNIT
STUDENT SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT



Produced by **DCU Careers Service and INTRA Unit, Student Support & Development**
For the 2018-19 Academic Year

Note of Caution

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this document is correct but it is essential to check all details at source before making decisions. The Careers Service and the University accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage arising as a result of use of or reliance on this information .

This booklet is designed to help you succeed at both **INTRA** and **Graduate** interviews.

When going for an interview, job seekers often forget that the reason why they have been invited to meet with the employer is because that employer **WANTS TO** hire them. Therefore, when preparing for an interview you should remember that this is your chance to convince them that you **ARE** indeed the best candidate to fill their vacancy.

The better prepared you are, the more confident you will feel and the easier it will be to answer interview questions! You won't always know what type of Interview the employer will use so it is best to prepare for a few. Sometimes, companies will precede an interview with a phone call or online test, which may be a psychometric questionnaire or short technical exam. For graduate roles, the company will inform you of this prior to your interview. If you are applying for INTRA, details of such requirements and advice will be emailed to you by the INTRA Office. Further guidance can be found in the **How do I prepare for Assessment Centres** Careers booklet.

This is your chance to convince the employer that you **ARE** indeed the best candidate to fill their vacancy.



Interview Preparation

Punctuality and Location

- **Don't be late under any circumstances.** You should arrive at least 10 minutes early. This will allow you to get used to the surroundings, review the notes you have made about the company and take some deep breaths to relax.
- **Ensure you know exactly where the interview is taking place.** If the interview is at the employer's premises, use Google maps or AA route planner if you are not sure how to get there. If you are using public transport, make sure you know the correct bus route/train timetable and leave plenty of time in case of traffic jams or delays.

First Impressions for INTRA or Your First Professional Interview

- **Dress Well.** Wear a suit or a shirt, tie (properly fitting), jacket and trousers for the guys and formal footwear and socks (no white sports socks!). Girls should also wear a suit or a skirt/trousers and blouse with formal footwear. Minimise jewellery. We suggest that you remove visible piercings, go easy on the make-up, and use minimal perfume/cologne. Hair should be clean and tidy.
- If you have a bag or coat, ask at reception if you can leave them outside the interview room. When greeting the person at reception **present a friendly face and a professional demeanour and ensure to introduce yourself in full** (your name, the College you are from (in case of INTRA), why you are there and the name of the person you are meeting with). The receptionist may have been asked to take notes on their interaction with you as part of the interview process.
- When greeting the interviewer(s) **smile**, if they offer to shake your hand, give a firm handshake, say good morning/afternoon and thank them for the opportunity. Make sure to sit upright in the chair and make eye contact with the person asking the questions.

During the Interview

- When answering questions, you should make eye contact with each of the panel at some stage while you are talking. If eye contact is difficult then remember you can ask for reasonable adjustments in your interview prior to attending. You are welcome to discuss this further with The Careers Service or The INTRA team.
- If you have a head cold, please remember to bring a tissue (don't sniff).
- If you have a mobile phone with you remember to switch it off before entering the interview room.
- You are going to feel a bit nervous, but that's OK – it's a sign of respect for the situation.
- Try to appear friendly and happy to be there!

Body Language

Non Verbal Communication speaks louder than words.

55% of our message is communicated through our body language. It includes:

- Handshake
- Facial Expressions - Eye Contact
- Tone Of Voice
- Posture
- Gestures

Verbal Communication is Very Important.

- Whether you are communicating with a client or colleague in the organisation, it is important that you speak in a professional manner.
- Avoid using jargon and slang and make good eye contact. As mentioned above, if eye contact is difficult then remember you can discuss this further with The Careers Service or The INTRA Team.
- Learn to listen – Hearing becomes listening only when you pay attention and understand what is being said.

Do Your Research

- Know your CV in and out and ensure that you can clarify gaps (if any).
- Research the company thoroughly, this is essential. Know at least 5 key facts about them. Try to do some wider research other than the company web site. Perhaps Google them and read any articles from reputable sources, (Reuters, Financial Times etc). Have there been recent announcements about mergers/takeovers, new technological developments? Has the company been involved in community work or given charitable donations to support international disasters in recent times? Perhaps you could look at the share price on the stock exchange if relevant.
- If the opportunity arises, mention what you have learned about the company and quote the source and date of the information during interview. Say something like “during my research for this interview, I read an article entitled [New Developments] in the Sunday Business Post dated January 2019 and I discovered that [name the company] was involved in developing [xyz], or were first to develop [xyz]. I am really interested in this area/technology/policy/approach, and I think I am particularly good at [xyz]. My skills in this area would be...
- It is impressive to have specific examples that relate directly to the company and to match your own skills and interests to it; this shows evidence of advance preparation and interest in the company and the role. However, it is important not to choose negative examples or examples that put the company in a bad light.

Be Enthusiastic

- The biggest and most common criticism from employers is that the student demonstrated very little enthusiasm for the job at interview. This may relate to nervousness. It is difficult to appear enthusiastic when you might be nervous or unsure of yourself, but try to put yourself in the interviewer’s shoes, this will help you to understand what the interviewers are looking for.
- Make every effort to give the impression that you are delighted to be there and would give anything to work for them! The interviewer(s) will then have the impression that you are a positive, friendly person and would make an invaluable addition to their team!

- Appearing a little nervous is a sign that you respect the interviewer(s) and that you are taking this opportunity seriously.
- Give yourself a break.
- Don't be afraid to say things like "I consider myself to be good at [xyz]" "I think I have excelled at [xyz]" or "I consider myself to be hardworking, conscientious and always willing to learn new skills". Don't forget that you will need to back your claims up with solid examples from your professional or academic experiences.

Specific Role Preparation

- In preparation for your interview, make sure to read the job description (for INTRA this will be on the portal) and underline key words that describe both the job and the skills required. Then 'map' your own skills and experiences backed up by examples to the key areas underlined. You may need to learn these off by heart to ensure that you can remember these key requirements and skills at interview. However you will need to ensure your answers do not sound rehearsed.
- Be prepared to tell the interviewers that you have the skills and abilities that fit their requirements OR ask questions about the requirements if you are not sure.
- Make them feel that you belong in the job, or with a bit of training that you will be an excellent fit for the organisation.
- Listen to the question being asked. Make sure to listen carefully to the questions and answer the specific questions asked. Not listening to the question is akin to not reading an exam question properly. If you feel you did not quite understand the question, don't be afraid to ask for clarification or additional information. Don't waffle! For example, if asked what skills do you have to do the job ensure that you list 3-4 skills (this should include specific technical skills and soft skills which are relevant to the job description. Examples of soft skills could be communication, teamwork, initiative and organisational skills) and expand these points with examples from your work experience and academic life.

Types of Interviews

- Traditional Interview
- Competency Based Interview
- Strengths Based Interview
- Telephone Interview - Phone Screening
- Whiteboard - Technical Interview
- Online/Video Interview
- Skype Interviews

Traditional Interview

Traditional interviews generally follow the organisation of your CV. These are commonly used for INTRA. Employers use your CV as a guide to probe your preferences, decisions, and achievements as demonstrated through academic, work, campus, and community involvement.

Most Common Questions asked during Traditional Interview:

- Could you tell us a bit about yourself?
- Could you tell us about your last job?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Why would you like to work for us?
- Why should we hire you over other applicants with the exact same experience and qualifications?
- What skills/abilities do you have that you can bring to the job?
- Why do you think you are the best person for this job?
- What is your biggest strength?
- What are/ is your biggest weakness? (always explain some of the steps you are taking to rectify your weaknesses)

Competency Based Interview

In a Competency-based Interview the questions are designed to help candidates give evidence of the competencies which are needed to perform well in the job. Usually, you will be expected to give an example of how you have demonstrated these competencies in the past. INTRA employers are increasingly using this approach in combination with the traditional interview.

Competencies That Employers Want:

Communication – the ability to communicate clearly and openly

Interpersonal – the ability to relate to others

Teamwork – the ability to work as part of a team

Problem Solving – the ability to use your judgement skills and apply them in a difficult or a challenging situation

Organisational – the ability to organise tasks and responsibility and prioritise the most crucial ones

Prioritisation – the ability to determine the urgency of a task

Multitasking – the ability to perform various task at the same time

Flexibility – to be open to changes

Adaptability – the ability to adapt to changing environment and priorities

Positive Attitude – can do attitude

Initiative – the ability to begin tasks and work on your own initiative

Computer Literacy – good IT Skills: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Internet

The most popular technique used in competency based interviews is the STAR technique.

Interviewers ask STAR questions for a couple of different reasons:

- They want to know whether you've actually had the experiences that prove you can handle this new position. For example, if you are interviewing for a customer service job, the employer might ask you to provide an example of how you have dealt with a difficult customer in the past
- They want to understand how you think - For instance, how you approach and solve problems, as well as how you apply certain required skills

The STAR Technique involves presenting the employer with examples of past behaviours that follow the below structure:



- S-Situation** Detail the background. Include the context. Where and when?
- T-Task** Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done?
- A-Actions** Your action. What did you do and how?
- R-Results** Explain the results and accomplishments

The most common and frequently asked Competency-Based Interview Questions:

- Could you tell us about the time when you used your communication skills effectively?
- Can you tell us about a time when you have worked in a team, including your role?
- Could you tell us about the time when you used your interpersonal skills?
- Can you provide us with an example of when you had to multitask in the workplace?
- Could you tell us about the time when your problem solving skills really paid off?
- Could you describe a situation in which you used initiative?
- Describe a situation in which you motivated others?

Strengths-Based Interviews

Some Graduate Recruiters such as, for instance, Ernst & Young, Barclay & Aviva use “**strengths-based interviews**” in their graduate recruitment process.

- In contrast to Competency-based interviews in which employers want to understand ‘what you CAN do, the aim of Strengths based Interviews is for an employer to establish **what you really ENJOY doing**.
- The focus is on making sure you **do more of what you are good at** rather than what you are capable of doing.
- Strengths Based Interviews have a simple aim: **TO FIND OUT YOUR INTERESTS**.

How to prepare for a Strengths-Based Interview:

- The truth is that you can't do much preparation and are less likely to come up with the overused answers candidates think interviewers want. Think about what you love doing both inside and outside work and be prepared to be open: don't try to be something you're not.
- Even though you cannot prepare what you are going to say, it is recommended that you do some research on the company to try and understand what their strengths and values are. This can be used as a guide for you as you may be asked about these strengths and values in your interview.
- Be honest about what tasks you don't enjoy doing and think about how your preferences might fit with the organisation's culture and the job requirements!
- Strengths are argued to lead to higher performance than competencies and are easier to spot. Strengths are innate: talking about strengths gives candidates energy and real authenticity.

Questions you might be asked at Strengths-Based Interviews:

- What are you good at?
- 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?
- Do you prefer to start tasks or to finish them?
- Do you find you have enough hours in the day to complete all the things you want to do?
- If a colleague was struggling to make a complex decision, what would you do to help?
- If a customer was unhappy with the service they'd received, how would you persuade them to keep on using your business?
- What things are always left on your to-do list and not finished? These are probably weaknesses: things you dislike doing!
- What do you enjoy doing the least? These are likely to be areas where you lack natural aptitude or skills.

Telephone Interview – Phone Screening

Sometimes, recruiters do their initial screening through telephone interviews. You should prepare for these as seriously as for a face-to-face interview. The purpose of a telephone interview is often to check out whether you are a serious applicant. These are sometimes used by INTRA employers.

Because you can't see the interviewer, you won't get the normal visual clues. Much of the impact you make will come through your voice, so it is even more important that you sound animated and enthusiastic. Try imagining that the other person is in the room and you are talking directly to them. In fact, in telephone interviews it can be easier to hide nerves and relax.

**If you smile it will come across
in your voice!**

Tips for telephone interviews

- Ensure you have a suitable environment where you won't be disturbed.
- If at home, turn off the telly. Let your housemates know that you are going to have a telephone interview to avoid any background noise to be heard by the interviewer.
- Only use speakerphone if you're sure there will be no interruptions and you are comfortable with this way of using a phone.
- If in college or a workplace, use a quiet room where you know you will not be interrupted.
- Avoid distractions: don't drink, eat or smoke during the call.
- Have your CV or completed application form next to you.
- Practise before your phone interview.
- Prepare a smooth opening.
- Aim to keep the number of pages of notes in front of you to a minimum.
- Set up a professional voicemail greeting on your mobile.

Whiteboard Interview –Whiteboard Coding

Currently many graduate employers use Whiteboard/Coding Interviews as a standard part of technical interviews.

Interviewers use whiteboard coding problems to evaluate how quickly, clearly, and concisely candidates articulate their designs.

Common mistakes that candidates make are: writing messy code, running out of space, and forgetting essential parts of the question.

Keeping a few very simple tips help avoid these pitfalls during an interview.

Tips for being successful at Whiteboard/Coding Interviews:

- Write down the question
- Write down examples
- Take time to write clearly
- Use double-spaced lines
- Use the space provided efficiently

Useful resources for Whiteboard Interviewing:

- <http://www.codingforinterviews.com/practice>
- <https://www.jobtestprep.co.uk/3m-assessment>

Online/Video Interview

Online/Video interviewing is often used as a pre-screening tool and also by international firms working across numerous time zones. For employers it is useful as they can be accessed by various people such as HR and line Managers at a time that is convenient to them.

It is an online software package which facilitates the recording of an interview. This is different from Skype/Google Hangouts. The interviewer is never present. Each question appears written on the screen and there will be a limited amount of time to provide a verbal answer. As this is an automated system each set of questions may be randomised.

For INTRA students, your co-ordinator can provide specific assistance in preparing, but to date this has not been a system often used for INTRA interviews.

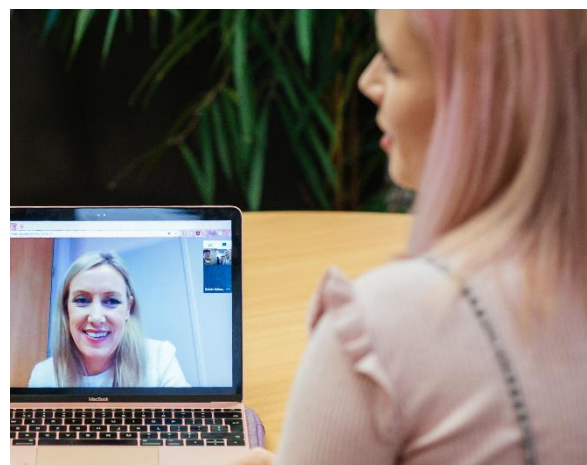
The Process:

- You will be sent a link to access the software. It will include technical guidelines such as adobe flash player, access to a camera from your computer and critically you need access to good quality broadband. It will also include the date and time that you must submit your interview.
- In advance, set up your profile and avail of any practice interview sessions in order to be familiar with the software.
- Use Skype as a guideline to help you adjust the height of your camera on the screen.
- You will be asked one question at a time, however, the time provided to answer varies depending on the question posed. Be prepared for anything from 30 seconds to 90 seconds. There is a countdown clock which is helpful - but be aware it could become a distraction.
- Sometimes there is an option to record a different answer if you are unhappy with your first attempt but usually you only have one opportunity.

General Tips:

Work on creating an 'interview' environment. Check your surroundings and ensure you are not sitting too close to a window as the light may cause a shadow on your screen. Sit on an upright chair and ensure computer is at regular desktop height. Remove any distracting pictures or posters behind you.

1. Arrange to complete your interview in a quiet area and ensure that other people are aware that they are not allowed to enter the room. Keep doors closed to avoid pets arriving during the interview.
2. Turn off your phone or place on flight mode.
3. Dress appropriately. It is better to dress for this interview as if you are meeting the interviewer in person.
4. Although you cannot see your interviewer, they can see you. Concentrate and engage with the camera as if you are directly speaking to the interviewer. In essence you are directly speaking to the interviewer, there is only a time delay.
5. Make sure you look at the camera and not the screen when answering the questions.
6. Speaking to someone that is not present at the same time as you is challenging. Depending on the nature of the screen set up, it could be useful to put a picture of someone in front of you to help maintain your focus.



Skype Interview

Used at various stages of the recruitment and selection process for the same reasons as online interviewing.

General Tips

1. Practice using Skype with friends/family and be familiar with all of the features in advance. Prepare yourself, computer and your surroundings as advised for online interviews.
2. Have your email opened as another communication tool in the event that there are any technical difficulties with Skype during the interview.
3. There is the option to have a Split screen to bring up your CV during the interview. Use full screen unless you are advised to change to split.
4. Have your CV ready to bring up on a Split Screen and also have one printed beside you.
5. Place a 'post it' over the view of yourself to avoid becoming distracted.
6. There is a tiny delay on Skype. Allow the interviewer to completely finish speaking before responding.
7. All of the guidance for face to face interviews also applies to Skype interviews. Be aware of body language and keep your focus on the camera when answering the questions.

Questions To Ask At Interview

Generally at the end of your interview, the employer will give you the opportunity to ask them any questions. Remember that the interview is a two way process – the company will be asking you questions to assess your suitability for the job but it is also an opportunity for you to ask the employer questions to ensure this is the right role and company for you.

It is recommended that you typically have two questions ready to ask. The questions should stand out and should demonstrate your interest in the company.

Some examples of the different areas that you could ask questions around include:

- Opportunities for successful candidate
- Expectations for the successful candidate in first 1-3/3-6 months (for INTRA students, this will depend on the duration of your placement)
- Key Challenges/Projects
- Training/Mentoring/Support Available
- A Typical Day
- INTRA students could consider asking about the graduate programme. The interviewer(s) will be impressed if they feel that you might be willing to consider working for them after graduation.
- Do not ask about salary in your interview

Top Tips – Dos and Don'ts

- Dress professionally and be on time.
- Research the company and the role.
- Avoid negative language in your answers. You need to be positive. For example in an INTRA interview instead of saying 'I dislike presentations' consider saying 'I haven't had the opportunity at college to do many presentations.' Don't complain about College, your lecturers, classmates or exams and don't moan about your commute.
- When giving examples, it is never advisable to put a previous employer in a negative light; this only reflects badly on you, it may seem disloyal which might alarm your interviewer(s).
- Don't ask about benefits in the interview.
- It's better to avoid examples that refer to drugs, addiction, assault, crime, race, religion, sexual orientation; essentially anything that might offend or upset.
- If you have a gap, acknowledge it and move on with a positive response. For example, if asked whether you have Microsoft Publisher experience and you do not, it's important to answer positively. Consider the following reply "I haven't had the opportunity at College to study Publisher, however, I have a good knowledge of Microsoft Front Page and web design which I believe is similar. I have also done ECDL. I am a quick learner and enjoy learning new technologies. I am confident that with some training I could learn Publisher easily and quickly." This is a much more positive response than "No, I don't."
- Use a range of examples from your professional and academic life (e.g. work experience, University life, sports, clubs and societies, charitable work). Avoid focusing primarily on one area like sports or music.
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm in your words and in your demeanour. Consider using language like 'I was very excited when the role with [company] was first advertised as I felt I was a perfect fit because...

- For Journalism INTRA students in particular – consider presenting your interviewer(s) with a portfolio of relevant documentation at the end of the interview. This shows evidence of advance preparation and enthusiasm for the role. The portfolio could include the following:
 - copies of published works or recordings and copies of exam transcripts
 - copies of certificates/diplomas for achievements (these don't necessarily have to be related to the job you are being interviewed for)
 - written references and details of referees (name, role, address, tel, email) of people that have given their permission to be contacted as referees for you

Practice Makes Perfect

- Would Rory McIlroy walk onto the first tee of a tournament without having played the course before? Would U2 risk stepping onto a stage without having learned the words of their songs or rehearsing together for weeks or months? Remember the old adage, “the more you practice, the luckier you get”.
- Presenting yourself at interview is literally the performance of your life, so investing time in rehearsing your interview technique will pay dividends. Practice your answers to interview questions out loud in front of the mirror or preferably with a friend. Listen to how your voice sounds. You will become familiar with your own responses thereby making the actual interview a more comfortable experience. Ask yourself:
 - Do I sound fluent and confident?
 - Are the examples of my academic achievements, work experience and the application of my skills relevant for this job?
 - Do I appear friendly and enthusiastic?
 - Am I confident in my knowledge of the company, the job, the degree programme?

Both Careers and INTRA are very happy to facilitate mock interviews on request to help you prepare.

After the Interview

- **Thank the interviewers** for giving you the opportunity and tell them that you look forward to hearing back from them soon.
- **Reflect** on the interview – think about what you did well and note down the questions you were asked - especially noting any difficult questions.
- Most employers will provide you with **feedback** within 4 weeks. If you have not heard from the company by then, you can follow up to request feedback. For INTRA please contact your co-ordinator for follow-up.
- Remember that **all interviews matter** and each interview will further develop your interview skills!

Resources:

<http://www.slideshare.net/search/slideshow?searchfrom=header&q=interview+skills>

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/interview-types/456283-how-to-answer-typical-competency-based-interview-questions>

http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_st_john_s_8_secrets_of_success?language=en

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/interviews/strengths-based-interviews.html>

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/interview-types/275395-strengths-based-interviews-for-jobs-and-grad-schemes>

DCU Careers Service

If you are thinking about your next step, or need help deciding what is the best option for you, the Careers Service at DCU can help you to develop a plan for when you graduate. Go to our website to see the range of services available to you:

To make an appointment to meet one of our Careers Advisors and to check current opportunities on our Jobs Board please log into engage.dcu.ie, using your DCU email address and password.

Make sure to check our [Events Page](#) regularly for details of employer talks on campus, career workshops, skills sessions and CV clinics.

DCU INTRA Unit

INTRA Students should make an appointment with their INTRA Co-ordinator with queries not answered by our online resources www.dcu.ie/intra.

How Can I Do A Great Interview?



dcu.ie/careers