

Interview Hints and Tips

A guide for students and
graduates



If you have an interview lined up, it means the effort you have put in so far has paid off. The next step is knowing what to expect and how to prepare properly, so you can walk in with confidence rather than nerves.

The Purpose of an Interview

- It allows an employer to get to know you better and assess whether you are the right person for the role.
- It gives you a feel for the company culture, so you can judge whether the role is genuinely right for you too.
- It is your opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the business, the role, and the team you would be working in.
- It is your chance to make a strong impression and move a step closer to securing the job.

It helps to remember that an interview is not a test with a single right answer. It is a two-way conversation to check the fit is right on both sides.

What to Expect from the Format

- Most interviews involve a single candidate with one to three people representing the employer, though panel interviews with more people are not unusual.
- Interviews typically last 15 to 60 minutes, sometimes longer if a presentation or task is involved. You should be told in advance if you need to prepare anything extra.
- You will usually be given more information about the role, company, and team, then asked questions to assess your strengths, motivation, and personality.
- You will have a chance to ask your own questions, and you should be told about the next stage and when to expect to hear back. If you are not told, ask, since it shows genuine interest.

Some graduate processes involve more than one interview, such as an initial screening call followed by a more in-depth second interview, sometimes as part of an assessment centre.

Related Step Guides

This guide covers the general shape of a graduate interview. For deeper detail on specific formats and skills, see our other Step guides:

- Interview Question Tips, for answers to the most common interview questions
- Interview Tips: What to Wear, for dress code by sector and video interviews
- Interview Tips: The STAR Technique, for compelling answers using Situation, Task, Action, Result
- Interview Tips: Telephone Interviews, for phone-specific preparation and etiquette
- Interview Tips: Video Interviews, for live and pre-recorded video interview formats
- Interview Tips: Assessment Centres, for what to expect and how to stand out in assessment days
- Psychometric Tests Hints and Tips, for confidence in aptitude and personality tests



Preparing Thoroughly

- Research the company. Read their website and social media to understand their target audience, tone, and general message, and search for recent news articles or awards.
- Familiarise yourself with the role. Re-read the job description and understand exactly what they are looking for.
- Brush up on industry knowledge, such as naming relevant specialist publications or current developments, to show genuine interest beyond the one role.
- Plan your route. Use a map app to check timings and account for rush hour, and do a test run in advance if the interview is in person.
- Double-check the details. Re-read all correspondence to confirm the date, time, address, and contact details.
- Prepare any documents or presentations well in advance, not the night before. Treat a presentation like a university assignment and keep documents organised in a folder.
- Prepare a few questions of your own, such as how you could make an impact in the first six months, or what the interviewer enjoys about working there.
- Know your CV in detail, in case you are asked to expand on any part of it.
- Think about the role itself. Why do you want it, and what would you bring to the company, not just what you would gain from it.

Using AI To Prepare, Not To Replace The Thinking

AI tools can genuinely help with early-stage research, such as summarising a company's recent news or helping you structure practice answers. They are far less useful, and can actively work against you, if you try to memorise a fully AI-written script, since real questions and follow-ups rarely go exactly to plan. Use AI to prepare faster, then make sure the thinking and the examples are still genuinely yours.

Managing Nerves and Building Confidence

Feeling nervous before an interview is completely normal, and interviewers generally expect it and allow for it. The most effective way to reduce nerves is simply thorough preparation, since the less you are relying on thinking on the spot, the calmer you will feel.

- Practise answering likely questions out loud, ideally with a friend, family member, or your university careers service acting as the interviewer.
- Record yourself answering a question and watch it back. It can feel uncomfortable, but it is one of the fastest ways to spot habits like filler words or a lack of eye contact.
- Take a few slow, deliberate breaths just before the interview starts, and again if you feel rushed partway through.
- Give yourself permission to pause before answering. A brief silence while you gather your thoughts reads as thoughtful, not weak.

Making a Strong First Impression

An interview is a conversation, not a one-way interrogation, and the interviewer is a person too. A warm greeting, a firm handshake where appropriate, and genuine eye contact all help set a positive tone from the first moment.

It is worth remembering there is rarely a single correct answer to every question. Some interviewers ask unusual or open-ended questions specifically to see how you handle uncertainty, stay calm, and think logically, rather than to test whether you know a specific fact. Showing a considered, positive attitude matters more than landing on the exact right answer.

On the Day

- Dress smartly and avoid distracting bright colours or big accessories, unless the role calls for you to show personal style. See our separate guide, [Interview Tips: What to Wear](#), for more detail.
- Be punctual. Leave earlier than you think you need to, so you have time for a final read of your notes without rushing.
- Pay attention to body language. Make eye contact, try not to fidget, and remember to smile.
- Breathe. Do not be afraid to pause between answers or ask a clarifying question rather than rushing to fill the silence.
- Use the STAR technique to answer competency questions with real examples rather than a simple yes or no. See our separate guide, [Interview Tips: The STAR Technique](#), for the full structure.
- Stay positive throughout, even if you feel it is not going to plan, and avoid saying anything negative about a past or current employer.
- Be honest about your experience. Do not pretend to have skills you do not have. Talk about what you do know and show genuine enthusiasm to learn the rest.

Action Point

Enthusiasm is one of the biggest deciding factors in a graduate interview. Two candidates can look equally strong on a CV, and the one who clearly wants the job usually leaves the stronger impression. Before you go in, write down two specific reasons you want this role at this company, and one question that shows you have thought about the work itself. Use all three during the interview, and the interviewer will remember you.



Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Appearing passive, disengaged, or cynical about the role or company.
- Focusing heavily on salary or benefits before you have even been offered the role.
- Coming across as arrogant or overly self-assured rather than confident.
- Untidy personal appearance, which can undercut an otherwise strong interview.
- Unclear or rambling communication, especially under a competency-based question.
- Talking about other job applications you are currently pursuing.
- Showing little knowledge of the employer or what they actually do.
- Being unable to discuss any sense of career direction or progression.
- Speaking about your interests without any real passion or energy behind it.
- Being short or defensive when asked a challenging or unexpected question.

What the Employer Is Thinking

- Is this person suitable for the role? Can they do the job to the standard required, and will they integrate well with the team?
- Will they like the job and enjoy working here? This usually comes through in your enthusiasm and motivation for the company, role, and industry.
- Are we going to enjoy working with this person? Personality fit matters just as much as experience, especially in smaller companies where you will work closely with the same people every day.



Ending the Interview Well

- Ask about next steps if you have not already been told, and express genuine interest in moving forward.
- Thank the interviewer for their time before you leave or end the call.
- Reflect on the interview soon afterwards. Note down what went well and what you would change, since this will help you in future interviews.
- Consider a short follow-up email restating your interest in the role, particularly if the process will take some time.

Do and Avoid

DO	AVOID
Research the company, role, and sector thoroughly	Turning up with only surface-level knowledge of the business
Prepare real examples using the STAR technique	Answering competency questions with a simple yes or no
Practise out loud or record yourself beforehand	Only ever rehearsing your answers silently in your head
Arrive early and leave time to settle before you start	Rushing in at the last minute, flustered and unprepared
Use AI to research and structure your preparation	Memorising a fully AI-written script word for word
Pause for a moment if you need to gather your thoughts	Rushing an answer just to fill a silence
Stay positive, even if a question catches you off guard	Speaking negatively about a past or current employer
Be honest about gaps in your experience	Pretending to have skills or experience you do not have
Ask thoughtful questions about the role and team	Leading with questions about salary or holiday entitlement
Follow up with a short thank-you or interest email	Going quiet and waiting to hear back with no further contact



Checklist Before Your Interview

- ☐ Researched the company, its news, values, and the specific role
- ☐ Reviewed the job description and prepared relevant STAR examples
- ☐ Confirmed the date, time, location or platform, and contact details
- ☐ Planned your route or tested your video call technology in advance
- ☐ Prepared any documents or presentations well ahead of time
- ☐ Written down two or three questions to ask the interviewer
- ☐ Practised answers out loud, ideally with someone else or on camera
- ☐ Chosen and tried on your outfit in advance
- ☐ Reviewed your CV so you can expand confidently on any section



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