

A Graduate Guide to Interviewing

The Interview Process

Interviews are not just a way for employers to assess whether you have the necessary skills; they are also an opportunity for you to determine if the company and role are the right fit for your career aspirations. Whether you are a permanent employee attending an interview for the first time in years or an interim contractor who attends interviews more frequently, it's essential to be well-prepared.

In interviews, you should focus on:



Your technical knowledge and past experience: Demonstrate your skills and how they align with the role.

Why you are looking for a new role: Be ready to explain your motivation for seeking a new opportunity.

What you can offer the employer: Show how your skills, experience, and knowledge will benefit the company.

Where you want your career to go: Articulate your long-term career goals and how the role fits into that trajectory.

Asking the right questions: Use the interview to find out what it would be like to work in the organisation. This will help you assess whether it is the right fit for you.

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Researching the Company

Before your interview, it's essential to research the company thoroughly. Understanding its reputation, financial health, culture, competitors, and industry trends will give you a competitive edge during the interview.

Key areas to focus on:

- **Reputation:** Look into the company's history, reputation in the industry, and customer reviews.
- **Financial Health:** Understand the company's financial stability and future growth prospects.
- **Company Culture:** Is the company's work culture and values aligned with yours? Find out how the company treats its employees by looking at social media.
- **Competitors:** Know who the company's competitors are and how they differentiate themselves in the market.
- **Industry Trends:** Stay up-to-date on the latest developments and trends in the industry by looking at business or industry press and government statistics.

Interview Etiquette

The way you present yourself during the interview plays a crucial role in forming a positive impression. Here are some etiquette tips to ensure you make a good impression:

- **Arrive Early:** Aim to arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview. Being punctual shows your respect for the interviewer's time.
- **Turn Off Your Phone:** Avoid distractions by ensuring your phone is on silent or switched off.
- **Dress Appropriately:** Tailor your attire to the company's culture, ensuring it's professional and polished.
- **Positive Body Language:** Make eye contact, smile, and give a firm handshake. Avoid crossing your arms, fidgeting, or slouching during the interview.
- **Be Prepared:** Know your CV and the job role inside-out. Prepare to talk about your strengths, weaknesses, and experience.



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Types of Interview Questions

During interviews, you may be asked different types of questions designed to assess various aspects of your personality, experience, and capabilities. These questions typically fall into one of the following categories:

1. Situational Questions

Situational questions are designed to understand how you would handle hypothetical situations. They often begin with “How would you...” or “What would you do if...”.

Examples:

- How would you react if a colleague undermined you in front of your manager?
 - Response Tip: Focus on how you would remain calm, address the issue diplomatically, and work towards resolving the conflict in a professional manner.
- What would you do if you were asked to manage a project with limited resources?
 - Response Tip: Explain how you would prioritise tasks, make efficient use of available resources, and communicate effectively with the team to meet project goals.



2. Behavioural Questions

Behavioural questions ask you to provide examples from your past work experience. They are designed to assess how you have handled situations in the past and predict how you might approach similar situations in the future.

Examples:

- Describe a time when you disagreed with a colleague about a project. How did you resolve it?
 - Response Tip: Use the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method to structure your response. Describe the situation, what you needed to achieve, the steps you took to resolve the disagreement, and the positive outcome.
- Tell me about a time you faced a major deadline challenge. How did you manage it?
 - Response Tip: Highlight your time management skills and ability to stay organised and focused under pressure.

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3. Competency Questions

Competency questions focus on the specific skills required for the job. These questions may ask you to demonstrate your expertise in a given area by providing examples of past work or discussing how you would apply your skills in the role.

Examples:

- How do you ensure quality and accuracy in your work?
 - Response Tip: Explain your attention to detail, methods for double-checking work, and any processes you follow to maintain high standards.
- What project management tools and techniques have you used to successfully complete a complex project?
 - Response Tip: Talk about any relevant tools you've used (e.g., MS Project, Jira) and specific project management methodologies you've followed (e.g., Agile, Waterfall).



Using the STAR Technique

The STAR technique is a powerful method for structuring your answers to interview questions, particularly behavioural and competency questions. STAR stands for:

Situation

Briefly describe the context of the scenario.

Task

Explain the task or challenge you faced.

Action

Detail the actions you took to address the task or resolve the situation.

Result

Share the outcomes of your actions and the impact they had.

Example of STAR response:

Question: "Describe a time when you had to resolve a conflict with a colleague."

- **Situation:** "In my previous role as a project manager, I was working on a team project where two team members had a disagreement regarding their roles."
- **Task:** "My task was to resolve the conflict quickly to avoid delays in the project and maintain team morale."
- **Action:** "I arranged a meeting with both colleagues to understand their perspectives. I facilitated a discussion where they could openly express their concerns and find common ground. I then clarified roles and responsibilities to prevent further confusion."
- **Result:** "The conflict was resolved amicably, and the team was able to complete the project ahead of schedule with improved collaboration."

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Preparing a Portfolio

Do I Need a Portfolio?

When preparing for a job interview, it is easy to focus on perfecting your CV and rehearsing answers to common questions. But what about a portfolio? Will it help or hinder you? Do you really need one, and how can it influence your chances of success in securing your next role in the highly technical built environment sector?

Portfolios are a lot more common in some areas that we work in than others. In architecture and interior design for example, professionals will have had one since day one. Design engineers also more commonly have them than other disciplines, however, there are sometimes restrictions on what can be shared, especially in security cleared positions such as nuclear for example.



What is a Portfolio?

A portfolio is a collection of work that showcases your skills, experience, and accomplishments. It can be a physical document or a digital file, depending on the industry and job you are applying for. In the built environment sector, a portfolio might include examples from your degree work, such as design plans, project management timelines, case studies, photographs of completed works, or detailed reports that highlight your contribution to university study modules.

Is a Portfolio Necessary?

Whether a portfolio is necessary largely depends on the role you're applying for. If you are expected to have one, your recruitment consultant will advise you. If it is not mandated, then you need to consider what benefit it will be to you. Even if it is not required, it allows employers to see the tangible outcomes of your work and understand your approach to tasks.

However, for roles that are more focused on people or operations for example, traditional portfolio might not be essential. In these cases, your soft skills, and how you present yourself in the interview will be more important. Yet, even in these roles, bringing along a portfolio that highlights key achievements and successful projects can still be a powerful tool.

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The Benefits of Having a Portfolio

- 1. Demonstrates Your Skills and Experience:** A well-prepared portfolio showcases your areas of interest, your attention to detail, your study areas and the quality of your work. It provides tangible proof of your capabilities, which can be more convincing than simply discussing your achievements.
- 2. Sets You Apart from Other Candidates:** In a competitive job market, having a portfolio can differentiate you from other applicants. It shows that you are thorough, prepared, and take your career seriously.
- 3. Supports Your Interview Responses:** During an interview, you may be asked to discuss examples of challenges you've faced in tasks you have completed for university. A portfolio allows you to provide concrete examples, making your answers more credible and memorable.
- 4. Facilitates In-Depth Discussions:** A portfolio can turn the interview into a more interactive discussion. It gives the interviewer something to look at and ask questions about, which can help you to build rapport and demonstrate your expertise or areas of interest in greater detail.

How to Create an Effective Portfolio

If you decide to bring a portfolio to your interview, ensure it's well-organised and relevant to the role you're applying for.

- **Tailor It to the Job:** Include the most relevant examples related to the position. If you're applying for a design role, focus on examples that highlight your technical abilities as well as more non-tangible skills like teamwork and problem-solving skills.
- **Keep It Concise:** Quality is more important than quantity. Select a few key examples that best represent your skills. Too much information can overwhelm the interviewer.
- **Present It Professionally:** Whether it's digital or physical, your portfolio should be neatly organised, easy to navigate, and visually appealing. If you're using a digital portfolio, ensure that all links work properly, and the design is user-friendly.
- **Prepare to Discuss It:** Be ready to explain the work included in your portfolio. Know each example inside out, and be prepared to discuss the challenges faced, and the outcomes achieved.

Alternatives to a Traditional Portfolio

If you're applying for a role where a traditional portfolio may not be necessary, consider other ways to showcase your expertise:

- **Project Case Studies:** These can be included in your CV or as a separate document. Case studies highlight your problem-solving abilities, teamwork and your ability to learn.
- **Professional Social Media:** Platforms like LinkedIn allow you to display projects, articles, and presentations. A well-maintained LinkedIn profile can act as a dynamic portfolio, especially for those in consultancy or management roles.
- **Work Samples:** If you've written reports, white papers, or have other work samples that demonstrate your expertise, these can be valuable additions to your application.

Whether you choose to create a traditional portfolio or opt for other methods of showcasing your work, the key is to make sure it is relevant, well-organised, and presented with confidence.



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