ual: london college of fashion



Illustration by Priscilla Fung

How to prepare for an interview

Prepare thoroughly to ensure you make a good first impression!

Purpose of an Interview

After submitting your application, CV and cover letter or digital portfolio, you may be invited to interview. This is a chance for the employer and applicant to meet and assess if you are right for the job, based on your merit and skills.

Types of Interviews

Depending on the company and the role, there are various styles of interview structures which can be used. Each type of interview lets the applicant showcase their experience skills and eligibility for the role.

Face to Face
This is a traditional interview method with one, or a panel, of interviewers. This could be an initial interview, followed by a competency test, second interview, or presentation. This type of interview can be a quick chat or up to an hour.

Telephone
Telephone interviews normally happen in the early stages of the application process. In order to reduce the volume of applications employers may pre-screen potential candidates. Successful applicants will then receive an invite to a second interview.

Video
This is a preferred approach for employers today. Video interviews can be live or pre-recorded and normally last 30 - 45 minutes. You need to ensure your microphone and camera are working. It is advisable to have a clear background, alternatively upload a plain background image through the platform. The location should be quiet and dress code is still important on video.

Assessment centres
These allow employers to compare performances of many candidates at one time. They can be conducted face to face or online. You will be expected to complete various activities like team exercises and psychometric tests.

Presentations
Employers may request a presentation as part of your interview process. You are given a brief, relevant to the role you have applied for, to research and present. There may be a time limit, but if not try not to exceed 20 minutes. You may present to one interviewer or a panel and this is often followed by competency questions.

Research

Do not leave your interview preparation to the last minute. Those who spend time preparing, feel more confident and less stressed in the interview. You should always complete research into the interviewers, company and role.



Image: Alys Tomlinson

Who is interviewing you?

Interviewer

Where possible, confirm the names and job titles of who will be interviewing you. Research them to find out their professional interests and experience. This knowledge may help you connect with the interviewers and show you are a good fit for their team. You can use LinkedIn to search and connect with their profiles.

Employer and company

You need to show that you understand the business beyond the basics. The job and the sector are vital. You can use Glassdoor to read company reviews and previous interviewer's questions.

- Who is the employer? (current news about the company or freelancer)
- Who are their clients or competitors?
- What appeals to you about the business or the freelancer's work?
- What challenges do you think they are facing in their industry? How can you help?
- What projects are they currently working on? Or their values?
- Do you have the same values? How does the company motivate you?

Image: Alys Tomlinson



Role

Read the job description again and go over the application you submitted. Remember how your skills and qualifications match the role. It is vital that you explain why you want the job and why are you more suitable than the other applicants.

- What does the role involve? What skills will you need to showcase?
- Why are you interested in the role?
- What makes you the best fit for the role and company?

Answering Interview Questions

You should consider how you will answer the interviewer's questions. The STAR technique is a great way to structure your answers.



Describe the situation, story or challenge you faced for context.

What was the task you were aiming to complete? Who was involved? What was the succesful outcome you were aiming for?

What were the actions you took and how did you do it? What was your personal contribution within a team?

What was the final outcome? What did you learn and accomplish?

Example

Describe a time you worked successfully within a team?

Situation

I have previously worked succesfully within a team during my part time role as a Fashion Sales Assistant for the sportswear brand Sweaty Betty. I work there during the weekends alongside my studies and am part of a team of 25 retail staff.

Task

Often the weekends are very busy and we have to work as a team to ensure all customers are served a first class experience for the shop floor to look presentable and for the stock to be replenished on time.

Action

In order to succesfully complete this each day, we work on an hourly rota schedule so that each team member has a specific priority per hour. This ensures we all keep productive and work in-sync collaboratively. I personally contribute by encouraging my colleagues to work together and help re-prioritise when the store gets busy.

Result

During my time in this role, we've been able to use team work to optimise performance and sales. I also learnt that the hourly rota system can help keepkeep people focused and energised, it's something I've now used for my own study schedule.



Image: Alys Tomlinson



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Asking questions

You will normally have the opportunity to ask your own questions to the employers at the end of the interview. You should always aim to ask at least 2 questions. This shows your interest and can clarify any questions you may have.

- Are there opportunities for training and progression within the role/company?
- Where do you think the company is headed in the future?
- Can you describe the working culture of the organisation?
- Can you tell me more about the team I would be working in?
- Can I propose innovative ideas to support business growth?
- What are the next steps of the hiring process?

Preparing for the Interview

Whatever style of interview you are about to have, you should always make time to prepare. You should be present and ready at least 10 minutes before your interview time.

Interview practice:
Practicing for your interview is a great way to limit stress on the day. Ask a friend to quiz you, answering questions under pressure could help you be more prepared for the real interview.

Avoid over-preparing:
Keep your answers simple. Do not over-rehearse your responses, you may not appear to genuine to the interviewers.

Dress code:
Employers now have a smart but casual approach to their dress code. It is always best to assess the company's culture, and then make a decision on what to wear. If you are still unsure on the dress code, ask before attending the interview. It is better to dress too smart, than too casual, but ensure you feel comfortable.

Video interviewing:
Make sure you have received the correct link, passcode and platform access before the call. Download the relevant software and test its in advance, familiarising yourself with the controls. Make sure your microphone, camera and internet connection are all working.

Image: Ivan Jones



In the Interview

During the Interview, little things can make a big difference. Interviews can give you mixed emotions, and this can happen to anyone. There are techniques you can use to minimise your stress levels and strategies to reduce your anxiety during the interview. It will make it much easier for you to manage the interview and build your confidence.

Ask for Water:
Most interviews will provide water as standard upon arrival. If there is none, and you feel you need a glass of water, it is always polite to ask for one before the start of the interview.

Deal with nerves:
Interviewer's will expect you to be nervous. It is normal and can show that you are keen to secure the role. If you feel too nervous, take some deep breaths to help you relax.

Body language:
Good body language is a vital component of a successful interview. How you look and conduct yourself is important and shows your professionalism. You may shake hands at the beginning of the interview, so make sure it is a firm and dry handshake, this gives the impression of confidence. If your nerves make you fidget, this could be a distraction for the interviewer. Being aware of this will help you manage your body language. Placing your hands on your lap, smiling and looking relaxed will be welcoming to the interviewer.

Image: Ivan Jones



Thoughtful answers:
Pause before answering any questions, it is not a race to respond immediately. This will help to be clear in your mind and be more thoughtful about what you want to deliver in your answer.

Ask if unsure:
You can always ask the interviewer to repeat or rephrase a question if you are unsure.

Gratitude:
At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer for the opportunity of meeting them. Courteous and polite manner shows that you are professional and approachable.



Image: Alys Tomlinson

Do's

- Do be professional and be positive during your interview
- Do engage with the interviewer in conversation and be an active listener
- Do ask them to repeat or rephrase a sentence if you are unsure of the question
- Do ask them your prepared questions at the end
- Do give real-life examples when you talk about your skills and strengths
- Do celebrate and feel proud that you completed the interview regardless of how it went as it takes a lot of time and effort
- Do take a small amount of time to reflect on the positives that came out of the interview and any suggestions on how you can improve for next time

Don'ts

- Don’t be negative about your current employer or your universities
- Don’t mention the salary, annual leave or sick leave at this stage
- Don’t fidget, look bored or avoid eye contact
- Don’t give vague answers

Useful Links

UAL Interview Simulator

Business of Fashion: How to Impress in an Job Interview in Fashion

Video: Mastering the art of the interview

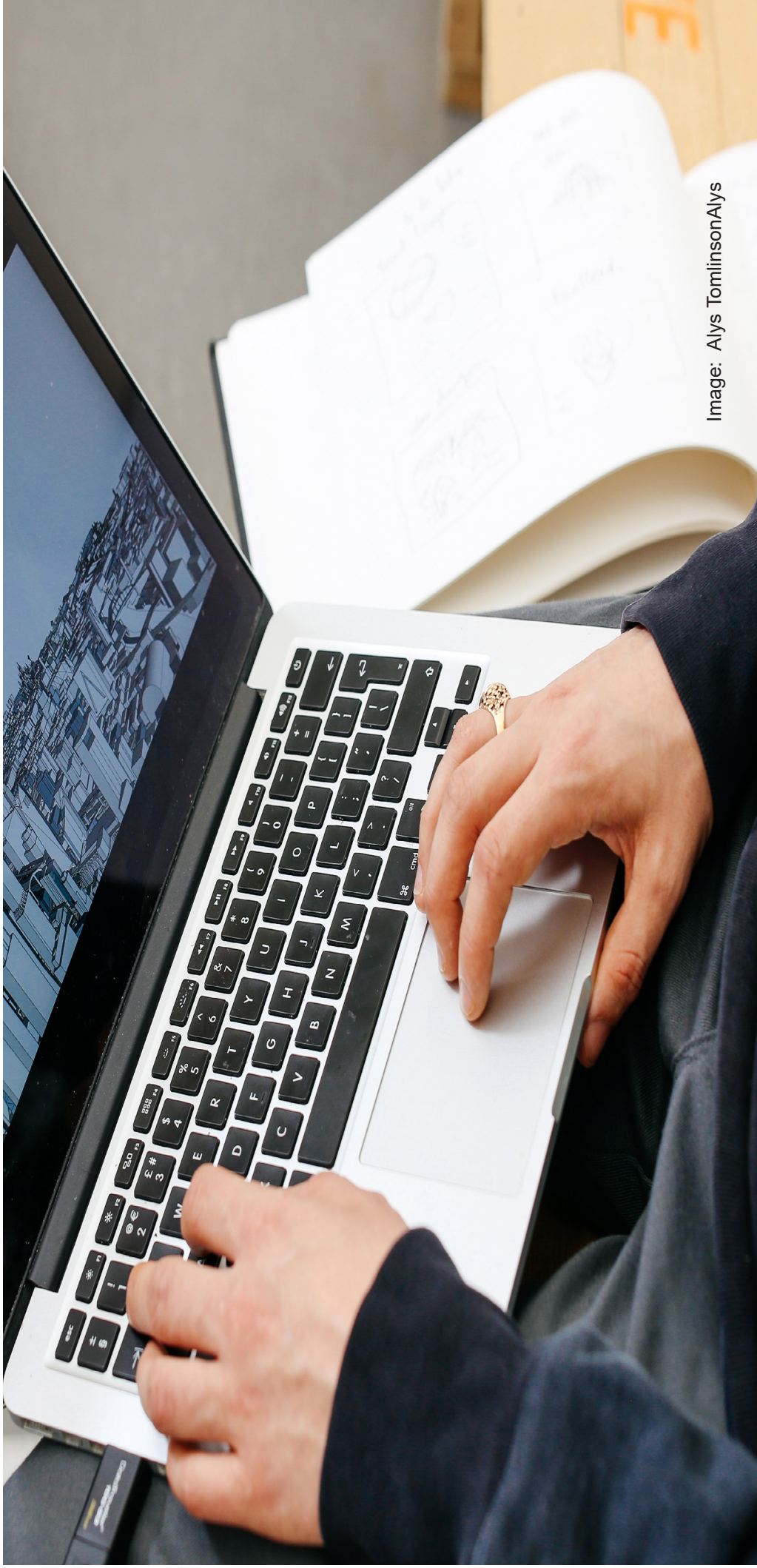


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