

One aspect of the application process that is guaranteed to bring students out in a cold sweat are the interviews and assessment centres that around three-quarters of recruiters use to make their final decisions. Don't forget though – if you've made it to this stage then you've clearly got the skills and experiences the employer is looking for. Interviews and assessment centres are mostly about employers checking whether your attitudes and personality would be a good fit for them, so just be yourself and be confident.

Types of Interviews

Regardless of how many people are on the interview panel (and it will usually be at least two – normally someone from HR and a senior manager, possibly with another worker to ask some more technical questions) most interviews follow two different formats.

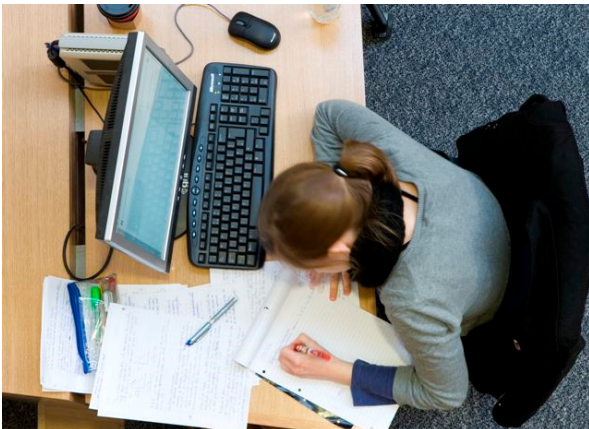
- Chronological interviews, which go through your CV and your application form (72% of recruiters use this type of assessment)*
- Skills-based interviews, which work through the various competencies needed to do the job (65% of recruiters use this type of assessment)*



Regardless of what sort of interview you are facing, either way you need to be able to convince the employer that you're capable of doing the job and that you'd be a good addition to the team.

So how do you do that?

Prepare Before The Interview



One of the first mistakes students sometimes make is not going back over the information that got them through the door in the first place. So read and re-read your CV and application form. It doesn't look good if an employer has to remind you of what you said on your CV – at the worst it can make you look like you were being generous with the truth. Researching your application answers should also arm you with several examples to use to show situations where you displayed certain characteristics that fit with the job description.

Other essential preparation includes reading through the company's website and any related news, so that you are up-to-speed with any developments in the industry that might be relevant to the job. As well as Googling for information, you can also speak to your careers service who will often have detailed and up-to-date information about the company.

Rehearse The Obvious Questions

There's a fine line between rehearsing and learning answers off-by-heart so that you can only deliver them with the emotion of an android. Sites like www.best-interview-strategies.com will give you a head-start on some of the most common interview questions and allow you to practice what you would say in response. Don't forget to prepare some questions yourself – you should take the opportunity to ask about the role too. Many recruiters say the best interviews are more like a conversation, rather than one side prompting the other for little bits of information.

When you are answering a question you should take a moment to make sure you've understood it, ask for clarification if necessary and plan your response. If you need to delay for time take a sip of water and then deliver your answer clearly and calmly using evidence to back up what you're saying. Avoid open statements like *"I'm great at sales"*, instead, explain your previous sales experience and quantify the successes you had in those roles (e.g. any awards you won, if you increased revenues, if you hit targets, etc).

How to Succeed at Assessment Centres

Assessment centres (which 34% of companies use in their recruitment process*) sound painful but often they're nothing more arduous than going to a company's headquarters and joining in a schedule of exercises and tests.

Get familiar with what to expect from the different exercises and you'll already have a head-start on the other candidates.

There is no secret to doing well at assessment centres. You've already proven that you have the necessary skills to do the job, now the company just wants to see what your personality is like and how it would fit in with the firm. It's impossible to second-guess whether they might want an outgoing type or someone who is more thoughtful – chances are that there are places for both.



Ultimately, the best advice is just to be yourself but when you're participating in the exercises always remember:

- Be positive
- Listen to everyone and consider all points of view
- Give constructive feedback, never criticise
- Enjoy the exercises
- Relax and be yourself

Finally, if there is a social element of the assessment centre, such as a meal or drinks, don't go mad as this is still part of the recruitment process, regardless of how many times you're told no one is watching! You'll make your mark for all the wrong reasons if you're the one who gets drunk.

*According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's 2008 Recruitment, Retention and Turnover Survey.

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