

Succeeding at Non-Academic Interviews for PhDs and Research Staff

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Today's Topics

- Principles behind interviews
- Presentations
- Non-academic interviews



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What is an interview for?

For the recruiter:

- To assess the candidate against the CV
- To explore the candidate's potential

For the candidate:

- To assess the employer against the advert
- To explore the opportunity in more detail

Interview Structure

- Candidate presentation
- Candidate group work or case study exercise
- Panel interview with senior employer representatives

Principles behind Interview Questions

- Explore your competence in key skills or expertise
- Assess your communication and self-presentation skills
- Assess your qualities under pressure
- Explore your potential to deliver in areas not specified in the job advertisement

So what you need to do is...

- Identify and understand key components of job
- Select examples that demonstrate your relevant skills/expertise
- Practise expressing those examples concisely and effectively
- Know what else you offer that is of interest
- Research and understand the job context

Presentations

Non-Academic jobs

- Communication style
- Context intelligence

Marketing your own business to clients

- Identifying product
- Pitching service

Tips for a good presentation

- Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!
- Take presentations on USB stick and CD and if possible email ahead
- Do you need handouts? If so keep them to one side
- Short time limits require structure, clarity, conciseness
- Keep to three key points
- Try to anticipate some questions and prepare outline answers

Presentation

- What do you think the greatest challenges facing our organisation/sector/industry are at the moment?
- What ideas do you have for attracting donors?
- How do you think the current recession will affect work in this sector?
- What strategic priorities should we focus on in the coming year?

Case Studies and Group Exercises

- Generally used for corporate recruitment
- Case Studies:
 - Assess your understanding of process, not just ability to get an answer
 - Numeracy, problem solving, communication skills
- Group Exercises:
 - Assess teamwork, motivation, communication skills
 - Important for refuting perception that PhDs are too independent/individual to function well in a team role
 - Expect questions about teamwork experience roles with collaboration or management component

The Interview

- Social skills matter from the moment you arrive
 - Be polite, clear, friendly
 - Talk and listen
 - Make good eye contact
- Try to look beyond your nerves - get a sense of the workplace
- Over-dress rather than under-dress!

Interview Technique

- **PREPARE AND PRACTISE!**
- Expect to elaborate on detail from your application and the job specification
- Rehearse some opening lines to obvious questions, and choose good examples that fit key skill/expertise requirements
- Give yourself a moment to think before answering
- Be positive
- Keep your answers informative but not too long
- Avoid too much context, focus on outcomes
- You can keep your options open: 'I'm interested in the possibility of....'
- Try to use an objective view of your achievements rather than describing your experience in minute subjective detail
- Make good eye contact with all panel members

Be a STAR

Useful model for planning answers and explanations

- **Situation:** *Keep this brief*
- **Task:** *Clear objective*
- **Action:** *what did YOU do?:*
- **Result:** *Show objective met, or if not, why not*

Non-Academic Interviews

- Presentation, case study or group work
- You may not meet other people from the company
- Panel of line manager, department head, HR rep, external observer
- Prepare examples that show relevance of existing experience and skills, and personal passion to job specification
- Know your facts about the organisation, the sector, and the issues

Opening Gambits

- Your CV looks very disjointed – can you explain that?
- Why do you want this job?
- Why don't you want a career in academia?
- Do you feel that you might be overqualified for this role?
- We haven't had a PhD work for us before?
What do you bring that other people don't?

Other Questions

- How will your academic experience help you in this role?
- Give an example of how you have:
 - managed resources
 - managed people
 - managed a project/ met a deadline
 - influenced stakeholders
- Expect questions that assess your ability to succeed at the key job functions – skills and knowledge

Negative perceptions...

- Non-academic recruiters are not often familiar with the strengths of PhDs
- See yourself through their eyes:
 - Allay their concerns
 - Resonate with their hopes
 - Show what value you bring
- Know the job spec and your skill set...

Match your competences, know their fears

PhD Competences

- Analytical skills
- Research skills
- Writing skills
- Dealing with information effectively
- Capacity for self-direction
- Ability to accept supervision
- Project management
- Communication skills
- Presentation skills
- Teaching/mentoring skills
- Networking
- Organisational awareness/political sense
- Perseverance
- Subject specific knowledge

Recruiter Perceptions of PhDs

- + Maturity
- + Research ability
- + Analysis and critical thinking
- + Initiative, self-reliance, independence
- + Project management
- + Alternative perspective
- Too narrow in interest and outlook
- Lacking commercial awareness
- Lone worker not team player
- Unsophisticated social skills
- Speak a 'different language'
- Would find it hard to integrate into any non-academic culture
- May have unrealistic expectations

What questions should you ask?

- Consider the organisation's culture – will I fit personally and as a professional?
- What scope is there for me to develop in this role?
- How do you treat new staff – training, induction, immediate involvement in projects etc.
- If you have specific questions, ask 2 or 3 max.

Resources

- Careers Service website has lots of interview practice resources
- Practice interviews with CS staff in specialist areas



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Any Questions?

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30 minute appointments Wednesdays and
Thursdays



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