at the interview
Flinders University’s Bachelor degree programs aim to produce graduates who:

- Are knowledgeable
- Can apply their knowledge
- Communicate effectively
- Value ethical behaviour
- Are collaborative
- Can work independently
- Connect across boundaries
AT THE INTERVIEW

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interviews are really a two way process - strange though it may seem when you are on the receiving end of the interview questions. The employer is seeking someone to fill their organisation’s needs and you are assessing how they meet your needs.

Interviews vary enormously - from a 20 minute informal chat to an in depth interview of 45 minutes or more. There may be a screening interview followed by a second interview. The interviewer/s may or may not be trained and experienced in the conducting interviews. What follows are some general points.

We have other booklets available covering all aspects of graduate job search. You may wish to obtain your free copies of our booklets from the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre, or download them from our website.

• Creative Job Search
• Writing Your Application - CV and cover letters
• Addressing Selection Criteria
• Winning Graduate Applications – responding to application forms
• Assessment Centres & Selection Tests
• The booklet, ‘Networking - going proactive’ is also available to be downloaded from our website.

2. FLINDERS UNIVERSITY GRADUATE QUALITIES

As a result of successfully pursuing your studies at Flinders University, you will have developed program-specific professional competencies as well as being able to demonstrate a range of qualities.

Flinders University’s Bachelor degree programs aim to produce graduates who:
• are knowledgeable
• can apply their knowledge
• communicate effectively
• can work independently
• are collaborative
• value ethical behaviour
• connect across boundaries.
More information about the Graduate Qualities, including descriptions is available at: www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities/.

As you conduct your self-assessment and review your educational experiences, consider how you may both demonstrate and draw on these qualities as you embark on the next step in your career.

We are proud that so many Flinders graduates identify with, and can be distinguished by, these distinctive academic, professional and cultural characteristics.” (Flinders University Graduate Qualities statement www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities/graduate-qualities_home.cfm)

3. TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews can include:

Informal interviews
Usually unstructured, however, the interviewer often prepares points of discussion based on your background, and asks questions designed to reveal more about you. The interview will proceed according to the leads that you provide in your responses. It is important for you to be proactive in this process.

One-on-one interviews
In this type of formal interview, you are interviewed by one person (for example, a manager, recruitment consultant, human resources manager, senior executive, or owner of an organisation). These may be structured, where the interviewer will have a fixed set of questions that they will ask each candidate.

Two-on-one interviews
In this type of interview, you are questioned by two interviewers (for example, a recruitment consultant and a representative of the organisation), who will generally have planned who is going to ask which questions, and in what order.

Panel interviews
Used by employers such as the public service, universities, TAFE, government funded teaching establishments, research institutions, and some community service organisations. The panel could involve from three to seven interviewers.

Telephone Interviews/Video Conferencing
Smaller organisations or organisations recruiting staff from a wide geographical base, may use an initial telephone or videoconference as alternatives to a face-to-face interview. In both instances you lose the ability to fully read body language.

Behavioural or Competency - Based interviews
These use past behaviour as a predictor of future performance. The questions aim to elicit specific examples of how you have handled situations in the past. The interview may be entirely composed of behavioural questions, or they may be used in conjunction with other types of questions. For example:
• Can you tell us about a time when you had to gain the cooperation of a group over which you had little or no authority? What did you do and how effective were you?

• We all miss deadlines from time to time. Can you give us an example of when you missed a deadline? What were the causes and how did you deal with the situation?

See page 9 for more information.

Case Interviews
Typically, Management Consulting firms specialising in strategy work use case-style interviewing. They test your ability to analyse and solve problems, often of a business nature. They range from brainteasers such as: “Why are access holes round?”; “How many hotel-sized bottles of shampoo and conditioner are produced each year around the world?”; through to scenarios; “A global telecommunications firm is considering entering a new market. You are to assess whether or not it makes sense. How would you approach this problem?”

Visit websites with examples, and practice questions:

• www.mckinsey.com/careers/home.aspx
• www.bcg.com/
• www.joinbain.com/

Group Interview
This is where an employer interviews a number of candidates at the same time and determines how candidates interact with others. Remember that you do not need to dominate the group - in fact this can often disadvantage you.

Some employers use Assessment Centres. An interview may be a component of this process. A Booklet on Assessments Centres and a video are available at the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre.

4. PRESENTING A PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

The key to professional presentation at interview is preparation beforehand.

This includes gathering information (yes - more research) about:

• the interview and interviewer/s
• the organisation
• yourself.

The interviewer/interviewers
How many people will interview you? What are their names/positions? Where and when? Are there instructions for the candidates? What do you need to bring to the
interview? What is the structure and length of the interview? Are there any tasks to prepare for, such as a presentation?

**The organisation**

It is important to do some research about the organisation. Ideally, this will build on the research you have conducted when writing your application. Find out specific facts about the organisation, for example:

- What does the organisation do? What is its history and culture?
- Where does the organisation operate?
- What is the structure of the organisation and the type and number of its employees?
- What current initiatives is the organisation undertaking?
- Who is the head of the organisation?
- Have there been any recent media releases about the organisation?

**How to research**

- Thoroughly review the web site (including the media releases page), and any brochures, in-house magazines, or annual reports produced by the organisation.
- Talk informally with anyone you know in the organisation.
- Considering using Google alert: www.google.com/alerts. Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google results (web, news, etc.) based on your choice of query or topic. Some handy uses of Google Alerts include keeping up to date with an industry or employer.

> “I prepared for the interview by undertaking personal research into the organisation. I visited the web site and tried to get as much information as I could about the organisation to demonstrate not only my research skills but my eagerness to obtain position with them.” Tammy, Bachelor of Business & Economics (Hons), Graduate Officer, Australian National Audit Office (ANAO).

**Yourself**

To market yourself effectively, you need to be fully able to discuss your ‘product package’ (you) - the benefits, features and so on. This will include:

- knowledge of your skills, strengths and competencies
- areas for development
- verbal summaries of your key accomplishments/skills examples.
Showcasing your skills

Identify the skills the employer is looking for and prepare an example of how you have demonstrated each one of them. If you are not asked directly about them, look for opportunities to contribute this information at appropriate points in your responses.

Here’s how:

• Review the job advertisement and statement of duties (if provided). These can often be the basis for the questions that will be asked at the interview. Reflect on what kind of person are they seeking. Review your application and match your skills and experience against their criteria.

• Review your degree details - you may be asked to discuss the content of your course, especially for technical fields.

• Prepare questions you want to ask the interviewer.

• Practice answering likely questions. Don’t try to be word perfect (you’ll sound over rehearsed), but prepare your thoughts and ideas about the points you want to convey in your answers.

What Questions?

You cannot predict exactly what questions you will be asked at an interview. However, there is usually only a narrow array of issues that employers want to cover in interviews - though they can be asked in a myriad of different ways. Be prepared to tell the interviewer what you have to offer the organisation.

Common Themes:

• job qualifications (previous work experience, training, job related interests and career goals, extra-curricular experiences)

• aptitudes, abilities, skills and experience (this can include your, motivation for work, enthusiasm, planning and organisation skills, ability to exercise judgment, management of staff, problem solving, decisiveness, financial and analytical ability, and integrity)

• oral communication and presentation skills

• adaptability, work standards

• initiative, independence, creativity, energy

• ability and willingness to work and learn

• ability to work in teams, or without supervision

• goal orientation, leadership experience and potential.
What to wear

Organise what you plan to wear well in advance of the interview. Dress codes do vary in different sectors, professions and workplaces. Aim to be consistent with the employer’s image (compare how you might dress for working in a bank as opposed to a youth drop in centre or in a highly creative/artistic role). Also be aware that some companies may have a casual/contemporary dress code. If in doubt, dressing on the conservative side is generally advised, or you could ask about the dress code.

For Graduate Recruitment Program interviews (Private and Public sector) smart professional attire is appropriate - a suit and tie for men and pants or skirt suit for women.

It is important that you look appropriate for your interview but equally important that you feel comfortable in your outfit – if you feel awkward, that is the impression you will convey. Whatever you are wearing, pay attention to all facets of your appearance, right down to your shoes. Your hair should be neat and tidy.

Physical appearance is a factor too - get a good rest the night before your interview so that you look and sound your best.

Punctuality

Allow for any foreseeable problems: traffic delays, unreliable public transport, parking problems. It may be a good idea to visit the interview venue beforehand and make certain that you know exactly where to go. Try to arrive 10-15 minutes before the scheduled time. This will allow you to catch your breath, relax as much as possible and to go over the issues you wish to raise in the interview.

What to take to the interview

• pen and paper
• anything you have been specifically asked to bring
• photocopies of the more important documents
• a list of questions you might ask.

5. STAGES OF THE INTERVIEW

“"The first question asked about what my understanding of the Housing Trust was and it's functions. The second asked what I had to offer the Housing Trust."” Eddie, Behavioural Science (Psychology, Management), Graduate Officer, South Australian Housing Trust.

Stage one: Establish rapport

During this stage an initial assessment of you as a person including your non-verbal presentation; attitude, manner, appearance; will be made. As you arrive at the
interview venue, greet the receptionist courteously (they may be asked for their impression of you).

First impressions are vitally important. As you go through the welcome/greetings/introductions, remember to smile and give a firm handshake. Acknowledge each person you are introduced to, wait until you are offered a chair before sitting down in a socially acceptable manner.

The interviewer/s may:

• Chat informally about the weather, recent news, sport, etc.

• Explain the structure of the interview and give brief details about the organisation/position.

• Aim to set you at your ease by asking open-ended questions to help you relax (see pages 24 - 25 for examples). For example: Tell us about yourself/What do you know about our organisation? Why do you want to join our organisation/?What made you choose your major? What subjects did you enjoy most/least? Why?

Stage two: Questioning
The interviewer/s focus on gathering information. They are looking to assess: your intellectual ability, personal qualities, technical qualifications and achievements. They will not only focus on the content of your response, but also the way in which you deliver it.

Intellectual Ability
The employer wishes to employ someone who is competent in the initial position, but also is capable of progressing.

They will assess:

• the quality of your thought processes

• your capacity to address a number of perspectives objectively

• your ability to adapt what you know to what is required.

They may also wish to administer tests to check on your aptitudes and attainment levels in key areas (see our booklet on Assessment Centres and Selection tests).

Personal Qualities
Recruiters usually ask themselves (ever so quietly) “Would I like to work with this person?/Will they fit into the team?” and “How would they fit into our organisation?” They decide the answers to these crucial questions on the basis of how they feel about you; as well as on the basis of the objective information that you give them about yourself.
Degree-related or Technical Knowledge
These questions are likely to focus on:

- your general expertise or area of study
- current issues affecting that occupation (e.g. government policy, new trends)
- how you would deal with specific technical questions (for example, in interviews for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, candidates have had to interpret statistical information).

Achievement Potential
Employers also want to know what you have initiated and achieved. From this, a prediction will be made on your likely future performance within their organisation. Therefore, on your own initiative, you need to tell them about your achievements in these areas. Remember, you are not ‘boasting’ when you offer evidence to support your claims. They do not know you; if you do not tell them - they will never know!

6. ANSWERING QUESTIONS

- Listen carefully to the interviewer’s questions; if you do not understand anything, then ask for clarification.
- Pause, think and consider your response before answering the question.
- Speak clearly. Avoid trailing off (you know…sort of…); provide a definite closure to your responses. Try to avoid ‘pet expressions’ like “you know”, “I mean”, “like”, etc.
- If the question is complex or difficult you can state - “Can I have a moment to think about that?”
- Do not try to bluff or overstate your experience - as the interviewers ask probing and follow-up questions they will determine your level of experience and knowledge.
- Do not answer questions with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Expand upon your answer as much as possible. However, avoid long-winded responses.
- Remember to smile whenever it is appropriate during the interview.

Answering behavioural interview questions

“A major component of the interview was providing examples of situations in the past where I had displayed skills in problem-solving, negotiation and diplomacy amongst other things.” Michelle, Bachelor of Accounting, Analyst, Deloitte

“The interview questions asked were behaviourally based, that is, asking me to reflect on my past activities in order to demonstrate specific knowledge and skills.” Tania, Bachelor of Arts, Learning & Development Advisor, ABB Grain Ltd
A commonly used style of questioning at graduate interviews is behavioural questions. (‘Tell me about a time when…’ ‘Give me an example of…’). Interviewers ask these questions on the basis that the best predictor of your future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It provides a more objective set of facts upon which to base recruitment decisions.

Answering these questions involves providing a specific example of your experience. This is much easier if you have thought about it in advance, rather than having to come up with an example on the spot.

The interviewer may explore your response further, with probing questions such as: ‘What were you thinking at that point?’, ‘Lead me through your decision process’, or ‘Tell me more about …’.

**Before the Interview**

- Identify the skills that your research tells you that the employer is looking for.
- Develop examples of each of these using the STAR method (below).

**ST - Situation/ Task** - what was the situation/ task? Who was involved? What was your role? Use a specific example - don’t be too vague or general. Give enough detail to explain the context.

**A - Action** - what did you do? How? Describe the steps you took to handle the situation/ resolve the problem, and any obstacles you had to overcome. Be clear and concise, and focus on what you did. Show how your actions demonstrate workplace skills - don’t just list what you have done.

**R - Result** - what was the end result? What did you achieve? What did you learn? Quantify the results if you can.

Bill Byham, author of *Landing the Job You Want*, gives an example of a successfully answered question:

**Question:** Tell me about a time when you went out of your way to satisfy a customer.

**Situation/ Task:**

I was working in the production department of a large publishing company. We received a letter from a nine-year-old girl who was unhappy because the gold design had worn off the cover of a book we had published. She wanted a refund. My boss gave the complaint to me to handle.

**Action:**

I immediately requested a refund cheque from our accounting department. I also called our printer, who investigated and identified one run of books in which the
covers had been improperly printed. I obtained a copy of the book with a properly printed cover and sent the book, the refund cheque and a personal letter to the girl, thanking her for pointing out the problem and apologising for the inconvenience.

Result:

The girl’s mother called to thank me for the response. She told me she would recommend our books to all her friends with children.

**Question: Describe a time when you had to meet a deadline, what did you do?**

**Situation/Task**

Last semester, my course required the submission of 5 pieces of work in the same week. I was also working 20 hours per week in hospitality, volunteering as a Student Mentor in a High School and studying full time.

**Action:**

From the start I developed a schedule that helped me to allocate and better manage my time. First of all I tried to assess the amount of time I had to do the assignments. I then set short-term goals and deadlines within the assignments, breaking down the tasks into smaller chunks. These included deadlines for collecting reference materials and data; when I was going to read the material, complete the draft; and then submit the final document. The deadlines also took into account my work roster.

**Result:**

Organising myself in this way meant that I avoided a last minute rush, met my work commitments, and I achieved good results - high credits for all assignments.

Even if the interviewer doesn’t use a behavioural question, you will make your task easier and your responses more convincing if you use a STAR example to demonstrate your key skills when answering interview questions. See pages 25-26 for more examples of behavioural questions.

For example:

**Question: “Do you handle pressure well?”**

Instead of Yes/No, turn this into an opportunity to sell yourself.

Answer: "Yes, it gets the adrenalin going and I get a real sense of achievement. But I also like to plan and manage my time so as to avoid crises when possible." (Then provide an example of this using your \*STARS\*).
Answering Scenario interview questions

Many organisations may also give interviewees a hypothetical scenario to respond to in the interview. For some interviews you may be given some time to prepare your response prior to the commencement of the interview. This may vary from ten minutes upwards. You may then be expected to present this scenario to the interview panel and you should expect some exploration of your response.

Situational/scenario questions typically set up a hypothetical but realistic work-related problem that requires a solution. In Allied Health roles this could involve a case study. They will vary in length and complexity.

For example:

If you were given a project to research, what steps would you take to complete the task?

What would you do if you had an urgent deadline to meet, the telephone kept ringing, and you were suddenly asked to arrange a series of important meetings for your supervisor?

Your role is to describe how you would respond to, or deal with the given situation, the underlying premise here being that people usually do what they say they will. The interviewers will assess your ability to 'think on your feet', analyse information, to problem solve in a logical and structured way, and to prioritise actions. It is important to outline your reasoning to the interviewer/s and state any assumptions you are making. Use the 'ABCS' approach.

Articulate – what the key points in the scenario are
Brainstorm – the possible courses of action you could take
Choose - your recommended strategy
State - your rationale for choosing this option

Before the interview, familiarise yourself with the position responsibilities and consider the likely scenarios that could arise. How would you deal with these?

For more examples of these questions, see page 26.

Here are some examples of responses

You answer a phone call from a client who is extremely rude and angry because their overdue payment has not come through. How would you deal with this situation?

‘I’d ask the person to calmly explain their problem so I can help them. I’d stay polite and helpful. I’d allow them to have their say and I’d acknowledge their concerns. This can help to diffuse a heated situation. I would ask them for their specific details and tell them that I will look into their case, and get back to them soon. I’d keep them informed of progress and make certain that it was properly resolved.’

You are working on the front desk of an organisation when all of a sudden a fax arrives, several phone lines start ringing, clients arrive at your desk and a courier delivers a package that requires your signature. How do you cope with this situation?

"My first priority would be to answer the calls whilst simultaneously presenting the waiting clients and the courier with a professional and friendly smile. The calls can be answered and put straight through or be put on hold, allowing me to deal with the client and the courier thereafter. The people waiting in front of me are able to see just how busy I am, whereas those on the phone will simply feel ignored if their calls are not answered and may consider it unprofessional if their enquiries are not dealt with promptly. Having successfully prioritised the visitors and the calls, I will then be able to respond to the fax when there is more time."

7. CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

You may be given the opportunity to ask questions and/or asked if there is anything you would like to add. Leave a final positive impression.

• Find out what will happen next and when.

• If you strongly wish to be considered as an applicant for the position, then express your enthusiasm to the interviewer.

• Thank the interviewer for taking the time to interview you.

Questions to ask

Think in advance about what to say when you are invited to ask questions. Two to three questions are enough. Make sure that the questions you ask are not already answered with the information on the organisation’s web pages, or in the job application package.

• How is the organisation dealing with current issues/trends and concerns in their area?

• What expectations does your organisation have of new graduates in their first year of employment? How will I be evaluated?

• What projects might I be working on in my first year?

• I am interested in knowing more about the culture of your organisation. How would you describe the culture in your workplace?

• Could you describe the work team that I would be joining?

• How would you describe the future of this organisation? Where is it heading?

• What opportunities for training/career advancement/mentoring are there within your organisation?
Save questions on salary, bonuses, benefits and conditions until the point of job offer (unless the interviewer raises these issues).

“Before the interview I planned about 5 or 6 questions I was going to ask them and organised a copy of my resume and other documents I thought they might like to see, for example my grades I achieved at university.” Jean, Bachelor of Medical Science, Technical Assistant, Department of Medicine, Gastroenterology, at Flinders University.

8. RELAX: YOUR BODY LANGUAGE AND THE JOB INTERVIEW

Communication experts suggest that no more than 25 per cent of the message is conveyed by your words. The rest comes from your body language. That is, how you speak (fast or slow, loud or soft, resonant or taut); how you stand and sit (tense or relaxed) and how you convey your message apart from the words (tight, rigid gestures or natural flowing ones; whether you look at the interviewer).

Nonverbal aspects of behaviour constitute a very important part of our communication. What we convey with our non-verbal behaviour often speaks louder than our words. Here are some hints on using body language to your advantage:

• Sit upright and lean slightly forwards in your chair (this indicates interest and attention).

• Do not slouch.

• Try not to fidget or shift around in your seat.

• Smiling indicates you are friendly, alert and co-operative.

• Make eye contact frequently with the interviewer. (This conveys confidence, co-operation, and empathy).

• Pay attention to your voice - loud enough, but not too loud. A strong voice conveys confidence.

• Be aware the tone of your voice can convey a wide range of emotions, from interest and confidence, to anxiety, uncertainty and boredom. Use your voice to project warmth, confidence, enthusiasm, and determination.

• Use hand gestures to emphasise key points.

• Speak clearly and thoughtfully - be sure to speak at an appropriate volume and do not speak too quickly.

• Sit facing the interviewer (this conveys attention and interest).

• Nod your head from time to time (indicates that you understand and are paying attention).
Look pleased to be there!

Note: we know we are stating the obvious but avoid any habits e.g. looking at your watch, playing with your fingers or a pen, tapping your feet, etc.

Relax

“Nerves are natural, so try and relax. It is as much about you interviewing the company as it is them interviewing you.” Will Blott, University Program Manager, Google Australia, Graduate Opportunities 07/08, pg. 43.

Interviews can be stressful – trained interviewers are aware you may be a little nervous and will try to settle you into the interview process with rapport building and open questions. The key to confidence at interview is your preparation beforehand – this is something that you can control!

“Remember the interview is a discussion, not a test, and we want to talk to you because we are interested.” Australian Public Service Commission, www.apsc.gov.au/publications07/crackingthecodefactsheet11.htm

Before the interview visualise yourself answering interacting positively with the interviewer/s and responding well to the questions.

• Get a good night’s sleep the night before the interview.

• Remind yourself that that you are there because the interviewer wants to meet with you – and remind yourself why you were interested in this job in the first place. Let that enthusiasm come through.

• Take a few deep breaths and then breathe slowly and calmly.

For more information, refer to our handout ‘Relax at Interviews’.

9. THE PANEL INTERVIEW

You will find that a job interview with more than one interviewer is quite different to a one to one interview. Even though there are more of them than there are of you, the real advantage for you is that panel interviews are more reliable and job-related, since panel members are accountable to each other. This process can also give you an opportunity to see how the employees of the organisation work together! The other advantage over the 1 to 1 interview is that you have more chances to ‘connect’ with the different personalities on the panel.

“Sell yourself. Panels always interview a lot more people than they hire. You need to let them know what skills you bring that make you the right person for the job.” Nick, Bachelor of Behavioural Science/Bachelor of Arts Hons (Criminal Justice), Policy Officer, Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department.
What is a panel interview?
A panel interview is an interview that is conducted by a team of two or more interviewers, who interview the candidate together, and take it in turns to ask questions. Generally, other candidates will be asked the same questions so that their answers can be compared. The task of the Selection panel is to assess applicants based on their skills and abilities and how well they fit the requirements of the job. At the end of the interview stage, the panel may ‘rank’ the candidates.

Who uses panel interviews and what is their role?
Panel Interviews are often used by the Government Sector, graduate employers, health and community organisations, and educational institutions as part of their selection process.

The selection panel conducts the recruitment and selection process for a job vacancy. By working together, they provide varying perspectives, help to eliminate biases and benefit the organisation by involving a number of employees in the hiring decision. After the interview, members of the panel may contact and document referees’ comments.

The selection panel usually consists of 2 - 3 people (sometimes more) and may include:
- one person with a detailed working knowledge of the requirements of the position, usually the job supervisor
- at least one member of staff at the same salary level as the advertised position or higher; sometimes there will be one person from outside the work area
- one person trained in selection techniques, possibly from Human Resources.

One of the panel members will chair the interview. There may be a representative from outside their organisation or a community/consumer representative on the panel.

How do I prepare?
Prepare as you would for any interview. Read the documentation about the position and prepare responses for the questions you may be asked.

You may have anywhere between two to five names to deal with - theirs. Knowing the first name of each interviewer is a great advantage. Knowing their titles within an organisation is an enormous one. If you are not notified of this information via email or letter, contact the organisation to ask who is on the panel and their positions. Alternatively, make sure you ask about this when you are invited to an interview. You may then use this information in your preparation. As you research the organisation, check if there are staff profiles on the website, or other information about the panel members. Depending on the job and the organisation you may even Google them!
What is the format of the interview?
Most interviews follow a similar format, although they will vary depending the selection panel.
• The interview usually lasts somewhere between 30 and 45 minutes.
• The panel will have prepared questions to ask you. For public sector positions they are based on the selection criteria for the position. They are required to ask similar questions of each applicant they interview to ensure that all applicants have a similar opportunity to present themselves.
• Panel members will usually take it in turns to ask questions.
• Generally the panel will ask you questions first and then give you an opportunity to ask questions at the end.

Usually the panel members will take notes during the interview to help them recall details about you. This is for their future reference during their discussion about candidates and when making their decision. Don’t be put off by this and do not try to read what they are writing. It will not assist you in the interview and can distract you.

How can I best present myself?
On entering the interview room, greet each panel member in turn, using their names if possible. Smile and shake hands with each person if offered the opportunity to do so - this helps to establish contact and build rapport.

Use positive eye contact; look at the selection panel. When one panel member asks you a question, don’t respond to that person exclusively; glance occasionally at the others on the panel as well (trying not to look as though you are a spectator at a tennis match!) rather than focussing only on one person. Start and finish your answer with the person who asked the question and then get ready to shift your attention to the next person who speaks.

“However, I found the interview process to be much less daunting than I thought. All panel members are generally aware of nerves etc and are more than accommodating. If they offer you a glass of water - take it! Its amazing how clammy a throat can get when asked roughly 10 questions in a short space of time!” Belinda, Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Research Projects Officer, CSIRO.

Aim to remain positive and to establish rapport with each member of the panel. It’s important to remember that the panel regards you as a viable candidate, or they wouldn’t be meeting with you at the interview.

10. THE SECOND INTERVIEW
Some recruitment processes will involve not just one, but a second interview. They are often used for Graduate recruitment in Commerce and in Law, for Pharmaceutical Sales roles and in other sectors. So how are they different to the initial interview and what does this mean for your interview strategy?
While your first interview may have involved a representative from Human Resources (HR) or a Recruitment Consultant (or a mixture of the two, for example, a solicitor and a HR representative), at the second interview it is more likely that you will be interviewed by Line Managers/Supervisors/Senior Staff/Partners in areas of the organisation where you may be placed and so the interview can have a more technical focus. You may also be introduced to members of the work team.

These interviews may:
- further assess your knowledge, skills and abilities related to the functional and technical criteria of the role.
- focus on your suitability for a particular division, as well as your fit within the department and team.
- give you an opportunity to ask quite detailed questions about the role and organisational expectations.

“There was an initial interview which was generally used to confirm and expand on what I had written in my cover letter and resume i.e. Academic history, employment history, interests, career goals and objectives, technical skills, etc. The second interview was more intense. It involved a panel consisting of HR, Technical and Upper management representatives. … The third interview involved being offered the position and negotiations regarding pay and conditions.” Bachelor of Engineering (Electrical/Electronic), Network Engineer, Computing Organisation.

Preparation

The second interview may go over some similar questions to those asked at the first interview but may move onto deeper questions relating to that specific area of the organisation, your career motivation to work in that area and so on.

So review the skills the employer is looking for and reflect on your career goals and how they fit with the organisation. Be prepared to undertake further detailed research on the organisation.

As part of your preparation, review how you went in your first interview:
- What did the interviewer/s focus on in the first interview?
- Were there answers that could have been better?
- Skills and experiences that you didn’t get the opportunity to raise with the interviewer?
- Key issues/information mentioned by the employer?
- Questions that you would have liked to ask?

You could also prepare follow-up questions based on the information that was given to you at the first interview - for example, "When I met Ms X last week, she
mentioned such-and-such-a project - what would my team's involvement be in that area?" This not only shows enthusiasm but also that you're capable of listening.

“First interview - general questions such as what can you bring to the company? Why do you want to work here? What skills do you think are necessary for this position? Etc. Second interview - behavioural questions such as Explain a time when ...? Have you ever been involved in conflict and how did you deal with it?” Bachelor of Medical Science (Nutrition and Pharmacology) and Innovation and Enterprise, Medical/Sales Representative.

“My first interview was a 20-minute interview with the directors of the firm. My first question and one that has always stuck in my brain was, "So, are you a people person?" ... They asked me questions about my previous employment, what I did and so forth, but one key question was "why do you want to work in a accounting practice?" ... I was able to score a second interview a couple of weeks later which was with 2 managers and they basically asked the same questions and tried to get to know me and my personality. The next day I got a phone call and was told that I got the job.” Bachelor of Accounting, Graduate Accountant in a medium sized Accounting Firm.

The second interview is a great opportunity for you to assess your match with the organisation. You may also meet more people from the organisation. So your goal should be to use this extra opportunity to make a positive impression!

11. TELEPHONE AND VIDEO INTERVIEWS

There may be times when a face-to-face interview is not possible for a variety of reasons and you will be offered a telephone interview. The telephone interview should be treated as seriously and as formally as a face-to-face interview, and your general preparation will be the same. Here, we introduce you to some of the special aspects of the telephone interview, how to manage them, and also provides a few pointers for an interview by videoconference.

“I then took part in a 45 minute behavioural phone interview. The questions included providing an example of: a time I had to deal with an angry customer, a time when I had to use my initiative to meet conflicting deadlines, why this job interested me, and an example of when I had excellent feedback from a customer.” Jasmin, Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Customer Service Officer, Child Support Agency.

Why telephone interview?

Often employers may not be able to meet with interstate candidates, and you may not be able to get yourself to their location (be it interstate, or in a rural/remote region). The telephone link provides the best alternative.

Many employers and Recruitment Agencies also use telephone interviews as part of an initial screening process before arranging appointments with the most promising candidates. In this instance the objectives of the telephone interview are to undertake an initial assessment of your manner and professionalism, to confirm whether your
resume is an accurate reflection of your experience and abilities and finally to decide if they wish to invite you in for a face-to-face interview.

“There’s often less pressure on a job seeker when being interviewed over the phone … You can cut to the chase with your answers and participate in the interview from a safe environment that isn’t outside your comfort zone.” Eric Clementson, Managing Director Nayler Business Solutions cited in ‘Teleconference favoured interview technique’, http://www.careerone.com.au/jobs/job-search/op/edit/pid/1553

What’s different?
Firstly, you are. You present differently on the telephone from the way you do in person. Don’t believe it? Ask your friends about how you come across on the telephone. Think back to what people who don’t know you so well have said about your telephone style. People who are very vivacious in person may come over as quite subdued on the telephone.

Next, they are. They are different because they are faceless and a myriad of cues you normally use about ‘how am I doing?’ are not available to you. You could form vague, and possibly, misleading impressions from ‘the voice’.

Finally, it is. The whole process; It feels strange! The act of engaging and winning someone over when both parties are unseen and the handshake has been converted into pushing telephone buttons is not one any but the most hardened salesperson would want to do often.

Preparation
For an interstate telephone interview, be absolutely clear as to the precise time of the interview - for example, do they mean Eastern Standard Time or Central Standard Time?

Your general interview preparation will be just the same as if you were conducting the interview face to face. Do your research and think of examples to use in responding to potential questions.

Practice – including a rehearsal using the phone to get used to answering interview questions in this mode.

You might even choose to dress as if you were attending the interview in person.

Prior to the interview
Pay attention to the setting in which the telephone interview will take place – after all – you are in your own zone, so make it work for you!

• Organise your desk space. It’s a good idea to have pen and paper at hand to take notes as the interview progresses.

• Have a glass of water available.
• Don’t bring large amounts of resource materials to your desk. You won’t have time to look at them during the interview, they will distract you and people can hear papers rustling down the phone! You could put up notes/resume etc in an enlarged font size on the walls around you.

• Ensure you will have quiet space and uninterrupted time for the duration of the interview and alert flatmates, parents or friends to this. Place pets away from the interview space that you have created. Lock the front door and if possible seat yourself in a place where you are not visible to callers. Turn off call waiting, your mobile phone, TV/Radio etc.

Finally, reread your job application and any other associated documentation.

“Following my acceptance to interview process, I had a telephone interview set up due to my interstate location. I was faxed 5 interview questions 5 minutes prior to my interview.” Deborah, Bachelor of Archaeology (Honours), Heritage Officer, NSW Heritage Office.

At the start of the phone call

Be punctual - ensure you are available to take the telephone call at the appointed time.

• Smile before you pick up the phone.

• Speak slightly more slowly than you normally do. Practice this beforehand. It helps to measure your breathing and to exaggerate your mouth articulations.

• Begin with a greeting. If it is a panel interview ask for all members to introduce themselves. Check that they can hear you clearly.

• As soon as you establish to whom you are speaking write his/her/their names on a blank card in front of you and draw a bold circle around it. This will help, when someone asks you a question, to mentally ‘address’ the person behind the name. This is a psychological ‘engage’ that works to ‘include’ you and them in one network. Names can be seen as ‘inclusion anchors’.

• Make sure you are being interviewed over a clear phone line, with minimum echo and background noise. Don’t use speakerphone as this may disrupt your voice.

During the telephone interview

Try to imagine the interviewer/s are in the room with you and that you are addressing them directly – this could help you make your tone more natural and conversational.

Note down the key points of the question as it is read to you and then respond to the question taking care to address each aspect of it. Wait for the interviewer to finish the question before speaking!
As you don’t have the usual visual signs of interest, confusion, satisfaction, to go by, you need to ‘check out’ understanding (both yours and theirs) much more often than would be the case under normal circumstances. For example:
• ‘Chris, were you asking whether....?’

• ‘Have I explained that fully or should I give more detail, Jan?’

• ‘Did that answer your question?’

You can guide and control the call by:
• listening (use listening noises ‘yes’, repeat their words)

• asking questions (open & closed) to gather information

• recording and repeating key elements.

Remember to tell the interviewer/s what you are doing – for example, having a sip of water, or taking a minute to think about your answer - so the interviewer isn’t left wondering why you have gone all quiet!

Voice tone makes up 82% of your message over the phone. It is essential to remember that:
• Warmth communicates friendliness

• Crispness communicates self-confidence

• Enthusiasm communicates a positive attitude.

• Smile as you speak – this will help to project a positive tone.

• Standing up when answering a question ‘empowers you’ and provides an air of confidence.

As with the face to face interview, look for opportunities to volunteer any relevant information about yourself; for example, how you will fit the position or your strengths, skills or abilities.

Vital components of this communication process will be the clarity of your speech, variation of tone of voice, good listening skills and constant monitoring that your message is being understood.

**Videoconference interviews**

Dress in plain, bright colours, possibly without too much of a pattern - checks and stripes can blur. Avoid polka dots and fabrics with small flecks as they can look like ants on a screen.

Do not watch yourself on the screen or direct your answers to the image of the interviewers on the screen (natural though that is); look directly at the camera so the interviewer feels that you are looking directly at him or her. Try to talk to the camera in the same way that you would talk to an interviewer in a face-to-face context. That
is, remember to smile, maintain ‘eye-contact’ and focus on speaking clearly and confidently.

Be aware that there can be a time delay, so that words and actions are not synchronized. While you and the interview/s are adjusting to this, you may inadvertently speak over one another when asking or responding to questions. Don’t be thrown by this. If you do encounter any difficulties with the technology, such as sound/image quality, make sure you alert the interviewer/s to this.

Avoid sudden movements that could cause blurring on the received picture.

Regardless of the mode in which your interview occurs, the key to success is in carefully targeted preparation.

12. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

It can be a good idea to send a ‘thank you’ letter/email to the interviewer. Thank them for the opportunity for the interview, indicate your continued interest in the position, reiterate your strengths, and state your anticipation of notification of the outcome of the interview.

Review your interview performance

• What skills did the interviewer comment on or want to know about that you did not describe in your application documents or cover adequately in the interview?

• Look honestly at your handling of difficult questions and how you might improve your answers. Plus, what did you do well?

• Coping with rejection. If you did not get the job, it is important to seek feedback on your interview performance - how could you improve your interview performance, and which criteria were not met?

“Keep trying! If you are not successful, ask for feedback to help you in your next round of interviews. Be positive!” Chris, Bachelor of International Business & Bachelor of Accounting, Analyst, Deloitte.

Each interview is a learning experience that can build your performance for next time.

13. TRAPS TO AVOID AT THE INTERVIEW

Ensure you avoid the following issues:

• poor preparation for the interview, poor personal appearance

• lack of punctuality

• inappropriate manner; (over-bearing, aggressive, arrogant or opinionated behaviour is unacceptable).
• inability to express ideas clearly - poor diction or grammar
• downplaying your skills and experiences - “It was only…”
• lack of drive and enthusiasm – ‘laid’ back or indifferent
• poor organisation and planning
• over-emphasis on monetary reward
• poor social skills, immaturity, lack of tact (e.g. too friendly or too glib)
• evasive answers - failure to be honest about negative factors
• failure to maintain eye contact during interview
• tendency to criticise past employers
• lack of knowledge about the organisation, the role and the duties involved
• failure to ask questions about the position.

14. HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER … ?

At the interview you can be asked questions that are open informational, behavioural, situational, philosophical, and perhaps be expected to respond to a scenario. The examples below are to give you an indication of some of the questions that may be asked.

The points are intended only to stimulate your thinking. They are not model answers (sometimes there may be no right or wrong answer). You will not necessarily be asked all or even many of the questions here. These questions do not include questions that relate to specific job competencies, e.g. research skills, technical knowledge (for example: “What can you tell me about market-based incentives and devolved funding options?”). Be original in your responses - draw creatively on your unique experiences!

Open Informational Questions
Used to gather information about you and your knowledge.

*What do you have to offer us/Tell us about yourself?*
• Focus on skills and qualities relevant to the job.

*Why did you choose to study (degree/ major)?*
• Clear reasons why you choose the topic - your idea, choice, responsibility.
• Show evidence of a positive attitude towards study and an understanding of how your knowledge and skills connect to your realistic understanding of the workplace/career sector.

• What aspects of the sector are particularly attractive to you?

Why have you applied for this job?
• Assessing your enthusiasm and passion to work in this role with this organisation and how you see your skills and values connecting to this.

• Summarise your strengths and motives for work and discuss aspects such as: intellectual challenge; the opportunity to be creative; a chance to learn new things, and to enhance and develop skills; career advancement opportunities; the opportunity to work for other people; career development; and, aspects of the organisation’s work that really interest you.

• Do not answer in terms of pay, or other indications of self rather than job interest.

E.g. “I feel I am confident, assertive and I enjoy meeting with people and solving problems. From what I have learned about your organisation, and from the job description, these skills are important.....”

Why are you interested in joining this organisation?
Has the candidate done their homework and researched relevant information about the organisation and the position?

• Explain why you are interested in the organisation.

• Show an interest in the objectives and values of the organization, and describe how you see your own career aspirations fitting in with these.

• Try not to focus on what you will get from the organisation, but the qualities you will bring them.

What do you do in your spare time?
Questions about hobbies and interests can come up as an icebreaker – both helping you to relax, but also building up the interviewer’s picture of you as a well-rounded candidate.

Behavioural Questions
Tell me about a particular conflict you have had in a relationship with someone (preferably at work, university or a group you are involved with). How did you resolve the situation?

Example of interviewer’s criteria
Candidates' answers were rated on a scale of 1 to 6. The following points were looked for:
• maintained an open mind
• worked through the issue
• acknowledged and understood the other person's point of view
• aware of their individual input
• stayed in the relationship to solve the situation.

Tell me about a decision you've had to make, how did you go about it?
• Show evidence that you have worked through a logical process to arrive at a particular decision (one example is career choice - what factors influenced your choice of career?).

What is the most difficult decision you have faced? What made it so difficult?
• How do you define difficult?
• Find a situation that was challenging and shows you in a good light and describe how you handled it.

Tell us about a project or piece of research you have worked on while at university.
• The interviewers are interested in the steps you took in completing the project/research and your degree-specific knowledge.
• Skills identified in your answer may include: preparation and planning, team work, problem solving, time management, organising, and researching.

Tell me about an initiative you have taken on your course or elsewhere?
• The ability to act without help or advice, to see opportunities, to make things happen, and overcome any problems or challenges.
• Have you developed or organised something?

Examples of Situational/Scenario questions
You are part of a company that is experiencing financial difficulty. The company markets biscuits and has 80% of a particular market segment. This provides $65 million of revenue (65% of the company’s revenue). It is the company’s flagship product. The company is investing $70 million in new machinery. Over the last 3 months share of the market segment has declined by 30%. The CEO has just resigned. An inferior product has been launched and taken 20% of the market. The company’s flagship product has a shelf life of 3 months. Product is piling up in the warehouse. What should the company do?

You are in charge of a factory, the major employer in a town of 25,000. The product of the factory is dangerous. There are two methods of disposing of the waste:
• Convert to a less harmful product the company can sell - although there would still be impact upon the environment.

• Eliminate the by-product completely. This is expensive and would force the company to close its operation in the town.

• Environmentalists would like you to adopt the second option. What would you recommend?

An elderly visitor in your tour group has trouble keeping up with the group. She wishes to sit down awhile. The tour route is a circuit and does not pass the location again. How would you handle this situation?

Philosophical questions
Philosophical questions are used to try to find out your values, or your views on issues and are often used to determine how you will effectively fit into the workplace culture. For example:

• What do you think the role of this Department should be?

• Feminism and Social Justice are part of the values and vision of this service. What do they mean to you?

• Social Justice - What is it?

Strengths and Weaknesses
“What are your strengths and weaknesses”
This question is to help the interviewer assess how well you know yourself and how honest and open you are. It gives you an opportunity to show your strengths and to reveal a couple of not too serious weaknesses.

“What are your strengths?”
The interviewer is asking: what are you good at and how is that going to help the organisation? Match your strengths to the job such as technical proficiency, ability to learn, determination to succeed, ability to achieve goals, positive attitude, ability to relate to people well, and to achieve a common goal. Provide examples.

“What are your weaknesses?”
The interviewer is asking: What risk do we take in employing you? What don’t you know? Can you motivate yourself? Can you evaluate yourself? Can you show what you are doing to change, improve or develop?

The response should always indicate how you have worked to improve on this aspect. Rather than talking about ‘weaknesses’, you could also refer to ‘areas for development’.

Here are a couple of examples.
“I like to get on with a task without too much discussion, but I have come to understand that I need to take other people’s ideas into account to get good results, and I realise it’s important to do that in this organisation.”

“My greatest weakness had been delegation. I would take it upon myself to do many small projects throughout my shift as a manager that could have been done by others in an attempt to improve my workers’ efficiency. Once I realized that I was doing more work than the other assistant managers, and they were achieving better results, I reevaluated what I was doing. I quickly realized that if I assigned each person just one small project at the beginning of their shift, clearly state expectations for the project, and then follow up that everything would get done, and I could manage much more efficiently and actually accomplish much more.”

Do not ever say you have no weaknesses! You have three main options.

The first is to use a ‘professional’ are for development and to select something not necessarily required for this job. For example: “An area for improvement is my lack of public speaking experience. As this is a useful skill for any job, I have recently completed a training course on giving business presentations. I’m looking forward to building on the skills I learned.”

The second option is to describe a personal or professional weakness that could be perceived as a strength – but be careful not to be drawn into clichéd responses – such as excessive attention to detail, being a perfectionist, etc, etc!

Alternatively, you may describe what you like most and like least, making sure that what you like matches up with the most important qualifications for success in the position, and what you like least is not essential.

In a role requiring extensive communication and teamwork they could say “If given a choice, I like to spend as much time as possible with my colleagues, as opposed to being in an office. Of course I learned long ago the importance of paperwork, and I do it conscientiously. But what I really love to do is talk to people.”

**Other types of questions**

*At the end of the first year, if you got this job, how would you measure your success?*

• Think about the tangible results you could achieve on the job that contribute to the goals and objectives of the organisation.

• How do you go about planning and assessing your own performance?

• Are there ways you currently measure your success in part-time work or study e.g. sales figures, grades, or feedback from your supervisor, lecturer or tutor?

*Where do you see yourself in five years time?*

• Provide a general picture of what interests you now and how you see that developing.
• Show evidence of ambition, motivation, and commitment to the sector and organisation in question.

• Aim to be regarded as a professional and as a team player; that will seek opportunities for career progression and self-development in the company whenever they arise.

Closure questions
• Is there anything else you would like to add?
• Do you have any questions you would like to ask?
• Is there anything further you would like to tell me about yourself?

15. MORE PRACTICE, INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Information Handouts and Booklets
The following handouts are available as paper copies from the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre or you can download them from our website: Practice Questions For Interview Preparation, and Relax At Interviews. In the booklet Assessment Centres & Selection Tests there are sections on giving presentations at interview, and undertaking work sample tests.

Virtual Interviews
A number of virtual interviews are available at the Monster web site, including the Virtual Campus Interview. This interactive site allows you to consider an interview question, and choose what you think is the best answer from the sample answers provided. You will then receive feedback on your choice, along with tips on how to answer such questions and what the interviewer is looking for.
http://resources.monster.com/tools/

Be my interviewer - includes interactive videos, and a range of interview topics from which to select, as well as interview tips from our experienced interviewers: www.jobsite.co.uk/bemyinterviewer/

Videos/DVD
Videos on interview skills are also available to be viewed at the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre:

• Why Ask Me That? (22 minutes) – shows the progression of a typical selection interview. See 2 selectors commenting on the candidate’s performance.

• Essential Interview Skills (30 minutes) – answers many common questions about interviews.

• Getting The Job (32 minutes) – presents job seeking strategies and language for the job interview for speakers of English as a second language.
• **Making an Impact: the graduate job interview** (108-minute DVD) - shows real students and graduates being interviewed by actual recruiters. It includes extracts from each interview, selectors' verdicts and candidates reflecting on their own performance.

**SOURCES**
