

# Essex Interview

Recognise. Celebrate. Succeed.



# Essex Interview



The Essex Interview has been produced by the Employability and Careers Centre and Learning and Development at the University of Essex. It was developed in consultation with students, staff, and employers.

► [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexinterview](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexinterview)

The Essex Interview pack accompanies the Essex CV and Essex Application packs.

► [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexcv](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexcv)

► [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexapplication](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexapplication)

## Why use the Essex Interview?

- “Preparing for interview is something everyone thinks they do pretty well. This guide gives University of Essex students ALL they need to know and do to ensure they genuinely are well prepared for any type of interview.”  
Simon Reichwald, Director, Bright Futures
- “The Essex Interview pack is really helpful. I now feel confident that I can properly prepare for the different types of interview questions I might be asked, increasing my confidence. The STAR technique in particular is new to me and provides me with a logical way of mentally preparing answers to questions so that I will be able to answer in a relaxed and coherent way.”  
Rebecca Tyler, Graduate
- “The Essex Interview Pack is a very useful tool - It helps you to know what to expect and how to prepare for an interview to ensure you are successful. The checklist is particularly helpful as it identifies all the key points for before, during and after the interview so you can confidently go through the interview process.”  
AmberRose Hussyin, Student
- “The Essex Interview pack is great, it's very easy to find what you want to know about very quickly and I would feel more comfortable going into an interview having read through it, as it provides a thorough explanation of exactly what to expect. I wish I had been able to use it when I had an assessment centre back in April!”  
Paul Morris, Student
- “This pack will definitely be a useful tool for both internship and graduate job applicants across all industries. It really resembles a lot of what I covered with my Careers Adviser before my recent interviews, both telephone and face to face, but equally if I was to have just read through this pack before any interview then I'd feel well prepared and hopeful about the outcome.”  
Rachel Winfield, Student

## Using this pack

This pack has been designed to be quick and easy to read. It should not take long to get some major benefits from it.

The process of getting a job can involve many stages of interaction with your potential employer. You need to make the best possible impression when presenting yourself and your knowledge, skills, and experience. This pack will help you to do that.

### Making a positive impression

Interviews are often the final stage of the recruitment process so if you get that far, well done, you know you are making the right impression. While your suitability for a role will have been assessed through your CV or application, the interview will be designed to assess you further, including your personality and motivation, to determine whether you have exactly what the employer is looking for and if you would fit in well at their organisation.

### What do they want to know?

- Why you are interested in the company.
- Why you are attracted to the role.
- What makes you the best candidate for the role.

Employers want to see that you are keen to work for them specifically, so review your research into who they are, what they do, who their customers or clients are, and who their competitors might be. Use this information when you describe your interest in the company.

### This pack will help you to...

- Recognise the full extent of your skills and experience (especially those you have gained during your time at Essex)
- Talk about these in a way that is relevant to employers – and sell yourself in a way that does you justice
- Feel confident that you can create an excellent impression with employers in person
- Be ready to tackle psychometric tests and other selection tasks at assessment centres
- Be proud of what you have achieved

## The Essex Interview pack contains the following...

- 1. Interviews: types and tips – p.4**  
This includes the different types of interview you might face with information on what kinds of questions you might be asked and how to prepare and answer well. It will also help you to consider the finer details of interview preparation such as what questions you could ask and what you should wear to make the best possible impression.
- 2. Sample job description – p.8**  
This outlines the 'duties of the post' and the 'person specification' for a fictional but realistic job on which the example interview is based – it is exactly like the kind of job description you can expect to see – consider reading THE interview transcript in relation to this document so you can see how the interview questions relate directly to the person specification.
- 3. Example interview transcript – p.9**  
This is an example interview conversation with typical interview questions based on the sample job description and responses written to demonstrate good interview practice. It also includes annotations to explain important aspects of interviews such as what to expect, why certain questions are asked and what to think about when responding.
- 4. Interviews checklist – p.14**  
This lists the really important things you need to check before, during, and after your interview.
- 5. Assessments – p.15**  
This explains why some employers use wider selection techniques as part of the recruitment process, what you should expect and how to prepare, including links to some really useful practice tests and preparation resources.

[www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexinterview](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexinterview)



# Interviews

## Telephone, Skype and video interviews

Organisations often use telephone, Skype or automated video interviews in the early stages of selection. Automated video interviews are becoming more popular as there is no dependence on time zones or both parties being available at a particular time. The process is used more as a screening tool than for formal interviewing and suitable candidates would usually be selected for a face-to-face interview if their recorded interview makes the right impression.

These types of interview can feel more daunting than face-to-face interviews but by following these tips you can ensure you make the most of the opportunity to impress potential employers:

- For Skype, use an account with a sensible username, ideally based on your name. Over the phone, answer with your name. It reassures the interviewer that they have got through to you directly and puts the onus on them to start the conversation.
- Most telephone interviews are prearranged but sometimes an employer might call in response to your CV or application. If this happens, try to take your phone to a quiet and private location, asking the caller politely to wait until you find somewhere quieter to speak. If the call happens at a completely inconvenient time then offer to give them a call back at a mutually convenient time. Ensure your voicemail greeting is appropriate in case they miss you altogether and want to leave you a message.
- If the time of the call has been planned in advance, decide where you want to be when they call - in your room, for example - and make sure there will be no interruptions or distractions from your housemates or family. Eliminate background noise like music and TV.
- Remember, first impressions always count whether face-to-face or over the internet, so for Skype and video interviews also think about your appearance. In fact, you may even come across more confidently over the phone if you are dressed professionally. Also think about the background, the employer will be able to see what is behind you, which will form part of the impression you make.
- For Skype and video interviews, practise speaking on camera in advance. You might feel a bit self-conscious but if you watch and record yourself talk, ideally practising answers to typical interview questions, you won't find it so alien when you are being recorded. You don't need to come across as polished as a TV presenter on screen, but it's a good idea to be aware in advance if you have a tendency to gesture a lot or be very expressive in your body language so that you can manage this.
- Otherwise, prepare in advance as you would for any other interview - research the company, be ready to say why you want to work for them and why you're interested in the role.
- It's OK to make notes and refer to them for a telephone interview, as the interviewer can't see you. For Skype, you could have some key points to glance at, using post-it notes around your screen for example, but maintaining eye contact with your interviewer remains important. You should also have a copy of the application or CV you used to apply, as they may ask questions based on these.
- Have a pen and paper handy so you can jot down the key words from the interview questions, meaning you can answer fully and refer back if needed. It's also useful to keep note of interview questions for future reference.
- It's a good idea to set up for the interview at a desk or table rather than on the sofa or your bed so that you are sitting up straight and the conversation feels more formal.
- On the phone, body language becomes less relevant, so what you say and how you say it is everything. Try to speak enthusiastically and positively so that you come across well – believe it or not smiling and good posture can help!
- On the phone, give slightly shorter answers than you might do in a face to face interview and then get clarification if the interviewer wants more information. Long answers can feel like you're rambling, and you can't see the interviewer's reaction to what you're saying for reassurance that you are on the right track.
- Have a glass of water beside you in case you start to lose your voice.
- If you don't fully understand a question or a question seems difficult, repeat it back to the interviewer for clarification. This will reassure you and buy you some time to think calmly about your response. If you don't know the answer to something, be honest, and show you're willing to learn if relevant.
- Reinforce your interest in the post and in working for the employer by asking a few well thought-out questions at the end, and thank the interviewer for their time.

## Face-to-face interviews

### Competency based

This type of interview examines what you can do. At the application stage, you will have focused on proving you have the skills and abilities that the employer is looking for. Use that to help you to prepare for competency interviews. The questions will dig deeper into the skills you demonstrated in your application, and you can often anticipate and prepare for questions based on the person specification for the role.



The STAR technique is useful at the interview stage as well as the application stage. Interviewers will ask questions with the expectation that when you answer, you really prove you have what they are looking for.

- **SITUATION:** set the scene or context for the example you're using.
- **TASK:** briefly outline what you had to do.
- **ACTION:** give details of what you did specifically, focusing on your responsibilities, including any problems or challenges that you overcame. For examples where you worked in a group or team, focus on what you did individually.
- **RESULT:** include the outcome and anything you learned from the experience.

Questions are likely to be worded in a way that suggests to you that the interviewer is looking for a detailed answer, for example:

- Tell me about a time when...
- Give me an example of an occasion when you have...
- Talk me through a situation where you...
- Outline an example of...

You can see some examples of competency based questions in the interview transcript included in this pack.

### Strengths based

Strengths based interviews are becoming increasingly popular with graduate employers. Unlike a competency based interview, an employer will expect you to talk about what you love doing, what really motivates you, your interests and what you think you are good at. The passion that comes from talking about these things helps to bring out the real you. Be enthusiastic and genuine when you are answering these questions. It's important to an employer to select not only someone who has what they are looking for, but someone they feel will fit in well and make a difference.

Strengths-based interviews can be more difficult to prepare for, as it's harder to anticipate the questions, but it would help to spend some time considering questions such as the following:

- What are your greatest strengths?
- What does success mean to you?
- What are you most proud of and why?
- How do you know when you've had a good day?
- What energises or motivates you?
- What things come naturally to you?
- What gets done first on your 'to do' list?  
What never gets done?
- When are you happiest?

#### Weaknesses

"What is your greatest weakness?" is a common and much feared interview question but it's something you could of course be asked about in addition to strengths. Try not to be put off by the seeming negativity of the question. The interviewer is not trying to catch you out, they are likely just trying to see if you are aware of any weaknesses you have (nobody's perfect!) and that you can manage them so they don't affect your work. Try to avoid saying "I'm a perfectionist", it's overused. Instead, think about your answer in advance, be honest and put a positive spin on your answer. See the interview transcript in this pack for an example.



"The job interview is a uniquely powerful opportunity for you to present yourself and interact face to face with the employer. By using the Essex Interview pack, you will be able to approach the interview with confidence, know how to tell your story and be able to make the right impression so that you stand out from the crowd."

Dave Stanbury, Director of Employability

# Interviews

## Technical

Technical interviews are used to assess technical ability or sector specific knowledge required for a role and are typically used in the IT, Engineering and Science sectors.

Employers may look at how you can practically apply technical knowledge to real working situations and how you set about solving a problem, assessing you on how you think, and how you communicate your thinking during an interview. The interviewer will not only be looking for a correct answer, but for how you reach that answer, testing your reasoning and analytical skills, as well as whether you can think laterally and creatively under pressure. While there would be a focus on technical knowledge, employers could also be considering how you think by testing your problem solving or your numerical abilities by using a few brainteasers or a numerical reasoning test for example.

It's not so straightforward to prepare for this type of interview as it's tougher to predict specific questions, but by familiarising yourself with the exact details of the role from the job description and looking at staff profiles if available on their website, YouTube or LinkedIn, you should be able to anticipate any technologies, coding, techniques or methods they might ask you about. Remember, if you don't know the answer to something, it's better to be honest and say so. In some cases with technical interviews, even if you get the answer wrong, your thought process and how you reach the answer may be just as important.

## Other types of interview question

### Scenario based

A scenario based question will usually be based on something that could typically happen in the role you are being interviewed for so that the interviewer can assess how you would react to and deal with a particular situation.

They could be considering things like how well you work under pressure, how you analyse situations, whether you can prioritise and delegate if appropriate and that overall you can think creatively and suggest a sensible approach to dealing with the situation.

### Career motivation

The way you answer questions based on this are very important. Employers are likely to use it to differentiate you from other candidates. They will want to know more about your career goals and ambitions and what motivates you to want to work for them. Preparing answers to these kinds of questions in advance will show the employer that you have done research into the role and the company and know what you are letting yourself in for. Questions could be based on why you want to work for them; what you think the role would involve; where you see yourself in the future e.g. 5 year's time.

It's a good idea to address professional future plans rather than personal ones and to come across as ambitious but realistic. Do some research in advance into more senior staff if possible (e.g. staff profiles, LinkedIn) to see how long it took them to progress within the organisation and how so that your

response is comparative. Talk in terms of achievement and responsibility rather than any financial reward or perks that would come with progression. Demonstrate that you are keen to make a difference and willing to be flexible.

### The unexpected

Sometimes employers will throw in a curve ball question, which may or may not be related to the job you're being interviewed for. The reason for the question is likely to be to get an insight into how you tick by seeing how you react to the unexpected and deal with that under pressure. They may also be looking for creative thinking.

You may have heard of some questions used by employers in the past such as 'what biscuit best represents you and why?' or 'if you had a superpower, what would it be and why?'. These are less common now, but you may get questions more like

- How many golfballs could you fit in a Mini?
- How much does a Boeing 747 weigh?
- If the time is 11:50, what is the angle between the hands?
- What do you think about when you're alone?

Your interviewer won't necessarily be looking for a right answer to these questions, they will be interested in the thought process you use to reach your conclusion, or to find out more about you and your potential fit to the role and the organisation. While it's not possible to prepare, and not all employers will ask something like this, be on alert and try not to panic and blurt out the first thing that comes into your head. Instead, be calm, take a moment to think and give the most reasonable response that you can, making sure it reflects positively on you, and if possible, frames you as a suitable candidate for the role.

## Questions to ask at interviews

At the end of any interview, the interviewer is likely to ask you if you have any questions for them, so you need to be prepared. The best questions are ones that reinforce your interest in the employer and the role.

Things you might want to find out more about could include training and development opportunities; what a typical day or week is like; future plans or challenges/opportunities for the organisation; anything topical for the employer (learned from their website, social media pages and the media in general). You could ask your interviewer why they think it's a good place to work. This is a bold question and the tone with which you ask it is very important but it could make for interesting conversation and impress your interviewer. Only ask it if you are confident you can ask well though!

If you have prepared questions but they end up being answered by the interviewer through the course of your conversation with them, just say that you don't have any questions at the moment. It's better not to have any questions than for it to seem you weren't listening or to ask something trivial. It can be disappointing to an interviewer if you don't have any questions though, so it can be a good idea to have them written down or saved as a note on your mobile so you can refer to what you wanted to ask, reassuring the interviewer that they have covered everything for you. That way they will see that you cared enough to think in advance about what you wanted to know about the role and the organisation. It also means you won't forget to ask anything you intended to.

Don't ask about anything you can easily find out about from their website and definitely don't ask about pay and holidays at this stage! You will find out this kind of information in the contract if you are offered the job, or in some cases, be given an opportunity to negotiate if you are made a job offer.

## What to wear?

It may seem a basic question, but first impressions count and this includes your appearance. While some workplaces are less formal than others, an interview is a formal meeting so it's safest to dress on the conservative side.

For larger corporations and organisations like financial institutions and law firms, formal business dress will be expected. For men, a smart, well-fitting suit is guaranteed to make a good impression. Don't be tempted to borrow a suit from someone who is a completely different build to you, or to team up old trousers with a mismatched jacket. If you don't have a suit and your budget is stretched, you could have a look in local charity shops to see if you can get a good second hand one. With your suit, choose a neutral shirt, a plain tie, plain socks and smart, polished shoes. Make sure your hair is neat and it's generally advisable to shave before your interview. For women, it's often a tough decision between

a trouser suit or one with a skirt, or a tailored work dress. It's best to wear what you feel the most comfortable in, provided it is smart, and like the boys, match your choice with a plain, neutral shirt. Heels are ok but make sure you choose something that's not too high and that you can walk comfortably in. Keep make-up and accessories minimal and neutral so as not to be distracting.

For smaller companies and organisations with more creative roles like publishing houses and design or marketing consultancies, men could possibly get away with a fine-knit jumper or cardigan and smart trousers with a shirt and tie instead of a suit. If you usually sport facial hair, it's advisable to ensure you look very well-groomed. For women, slightly less formal attire would also be acceptable, a more fashionable blouse or top with a smart skirt or trousers, for example, or a dress. Don't wear anything too short or revealing though. Colour and pattern would be more acceptable for either gender, but nothing too loud or distracting and nobody should ever wear jeans to an interview! If you are in any doubt, go with formal.



“My top tip for interviews is to tie your answers to the requirements for the role as much as you can. Don't assume that the interviewer will be able to connect all the dots. It's your job as the interviewee to make sure the interviewer understands how your skills and experience are transferable to the role they are recruiting for.”

Dee Hardcastle, Careers Adviser

Post Title: Graduate Trainee

Job Ref: GTS1012

### Duties of the post

- To meet all **targets and objectives** of the assigned graduate training scheme as set out by the Department Manager, Human Resources Manager, and Divisional Director.
- To learn specific **in-house systems** and processes, developing an ability to contribute to future **decision-making** and process improvement.
- To contribute to overall **team performance**, using both **individual effort** and working effectively in collaboration with others.
- To undertake **research** and offer suggestions for improvement to the main assigned project, as well as when working on **specific project tasks** and other **departmental projects**.
- To **manage** and drive own career path, attending all graduate and job specific **training**, demonstrating learning application as a result, and **completing assessments** where applicable.
- To participate fully in and **take the lead** when directed at departmental and company meetings, including **networking** with colleagues and **external partners** as required.
- To take a **proactive** role in assigned team, and fully engage with other functions in the Company to develop strong knowledge of the **organisational aims** and objectives and how the team contributes to these.
- Any other additional duties and responsibilities considered commensurate with the nature of the post.

### Person specification

Key competencies	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Educated to Degree level</li> </ul>	
Knowledge and experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Strong <b>commercial awareness</b> and knowledge of the sector</li> <li>■ Familiar with using social and <b>digital media</b> for communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Experience</b> in a similar or related role</li> </ul>
Skills and abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Excellent <b>communication</b> and interpersonal skills, both verbal and written</li> <li>■ Highly developed <b>problem solving</b> skills</li> <li>■ Ability to work <b>flexibly</b>, on own initiative and as part of a team</li> <li>■ Excellent <b>time management</b> skills, including the ability to <b>prioritise</b> and meet targets and <b>deadlines</b></li> <li>■ Highly proficient in <b>MS Word and Excel</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Practical experience</b> in delivering presentations</li> <li>■ <b>Demonstrable leadership</b> skills</li> <li>■ Good knowledge of <b>MS Access</b></li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ability to manage own learning and development and willing to undertake training and development as required</li> <li>■ <b>The ability to meet the requirements of UK 'right to work' legislation</b></li> </ul>	

### Apply

Please follow the instructions to complete our online application at [www.xyzltd.com](http://www.xyzltd.com)



**Ms Bossy DeBoss**

**Namey Mc Name**



Thank you for coming to see us for your interview today, Namey. How was your journey, did you have any trouble finding us?

### Things to think about

The interviewer will often ask you more personal questions as they greet you to help you to relax. These don't form part of the interview but it's important to be professional from the moment you meet your interviewer(s).



My journey was fine thank you, Ms DeBoss. The instructions I received for my interview made it really easy to get here. It's nice to meet you (shaking hands)

### Things to think about

A firm handshake is important. Be aware of your body language as you enter the interview and when you are seated. Sit up straight but naturally and don't fold your arms. Maintain good eye contact.



You too, Namey. Please have a seat and I will tell you about what's going to happen during your interview. As you know, I am the manager of the department you have applied to. I'll begin by giving you some more information about our graduate training scheme and I'll then be asking you some questions to find out more about your potential for the role, does that sound ok?

### Things to think about

The number of interviewers can vary from one person to a number of people as a panel. Where there is more than one interviewer, there could be people at different levels of management, people with a more general view like Human Resources or the graduate recruitment team, and maybe someone with some experience in the role you've applied for. If you are interviewed by a panel, a good tip when answering questions is to give the most eye contact to the person who asked the question, glancing at the other interviewers also as you speak.



Yes that sounds fine, thank you.



Great. Our graduate training scheme is a two year programme of training and development but you will be given responsibility from the very beginning and expected to use your initiative on your projects. Senior management have an open door policy for graduate trainees, so you can ask questions and discuss ideas, and you will also be allocated a mentor who will be a member of the team and have recently completed the graduate training scheme. You will also have regular training days and will start to work towards an accredited professional diploma in Example Studies with our support. The scheme is very successful and at the end of the two years you would ideally be ready to move into a junior management role in the team. Is there anything more you'd like to know about the scheme?

### Things to think about

As an introduction you will often be given more information about the organisation, the role you've applied for, the team you will join etc. so listen carefully to what you are being told.



Not at the moment, what you've outlined sounds great. I'm very interested in this opportunity based on what I've read about it and what you've said today.



That's good, let's get started then. Can you please tell me a bit about yourself, Namey?

### Things to think about

Interviewers ask this question to differentiate your skills, experience, and personality with that of other candidates. They want to determine if what you have to offer will match the organisation's mission and goals. They are not looking for your life story here. A good approach is to provide a brief introduction focusing on attributes that are key to the role you're being interviewed for. You can then provide a brief summary of your most recent career history including education and experiences. Try to tie your answer to the requirements for the role. Don't assume that the interviewer will be able to connect all the dots. It's your job as the interviewee to make sure the interviewer understands how your skills and experience are transferable to the role they are recruiting for.



Of course. I am about to complete my degree in Example Studies, a course I chose after getting some experience in the sector while I was in sixth form. Luckily having decided on the career route I wanted to pursue at that stage meant I could use my time at university to continue building relevant experience and ensure I developed all the important skills I'd need to progress in addition to gaining the right knowledge through my studies. I seized every opportunity to get involved in activities that were interesting to me while at the same time presenting an opportunity to improve myself. I took on some positions of responsibility, such as leading a team for a project and acting as secretary of a society, and found I had quite strong leadership skills. When I applied for this role, I could see that my background is a very good match to the requirements, and that it relates quite strongly to the internship I completed last summer, so I can see myself really fitting in well here.

### Things to think about

It's common for an interview to begin with your interest in the organisation and why you think you are suitable for the job. The interviewer will be looking for a genuine, personal answer from you and will expect that you have done your research into the organisation and role to prepare for the interview and that you can demonstrate commercial awareness.



Thank you, Namey. It's good to hear that you are really interested in the job. Can you please tell me a bit more about what attracts you to working for XYZ Ltd and what you think you can bring to the role?

# Example Interview Transcript

 During my second year at University I started to research companies offering opportunities matching my career interests and XYZ Ltd. really stood out for me for a number of reasons. There seems to be a real focus on team working while at the same time I know I would be expected to work independently and accept responsibility early on in my career. As I mentioned in my application, I perceive XYZ Ltd. to be an industry leader and I feel that the company values relate to things I also feel passionate about, in particular supporting the local community. Having spent almost two years as a volunteer with The Anonymous Foundation during my time at university I am keen to be involved in further voluntary activity. I also had the opportunity to speak to some members of your recruitment team at the Options careers fair organised by the Employability & Careers Centre at the University and was really impressed by what they had to say about the culture at XYZ Ltd. and their own experiences of working here. In terms of what I could bring to the role, having looked at your expectations of employees and read some of the staff profiles on your website, I'm confident I have the right qualities to fit in well at XYZ Ltd. and that I have all the knowledge, skills and experience you require. In particular, I am confident that I could apply the experience I gained through my internship immediately in this role, such as taking responsibility for a project and communicating effectively with senior management.

## Things to think about

Listen carefully to the questions being asked as sometimes there will be more than one part to a question and it's important to answer everything fully to have the best chance of showing you are suitable for the job.

 Thank you, Namey. In terms of the knowledge we require, because we pride ourselves on being cutting-edge in terms of our communication both internally and with our clients, we expect employees to be familiar with social and digital media. What can you tell me about your use of these as communication tools?

## Things to think about

You can often anticipate many of the interview questions through the person specification for the role. If you look at the one in the sample job description in this pack, you will be able to see what employer requirements relate to many of the interview questions being asked.

 I have experience of using social and digital media in a range of ways. I use LinkedIn to have a professional online profile for interacting with groups I'm interested in and to contribute to discussions. I also found it useful to find out more about XYZ Ltd. and some of the employees when I was doing research into suitable career opportunities. In my role as Secretary of the Cheese Appreciation Society at university, I set up facebook, twitter and pinterest accounts and managed communications with members through these. I was also responsible for designing and arranging promotional media for events to be displayed on the Students' Union's digital signs around campus. I have written guidelines on all the Society's social and digital media use so that I can pass on this responsibility to the next Secretary when my term comes to an end.

 That sounds good, thank you. Excellent interpersonal skills are essential for this role. Can you talk me through an example of a time you feel you have interacted and communicated well with others?

## Things to think about

This is a competency based question. The interviewer will be expecting you to provide a specific example when they ask this type of question. In the same way that the STAR technique is useful when applying for jobs, it is an excellent way to structure your answers to competency based questions in an interview:

- Situation: set the scene or context for the example you're using as evidence;
- Task: briefly outline what you had to do;
- Action: give details of what you did specifically, focusing on your responsibilities, including any problems or challenges that you overcame; and
- Result: include the outcome, and anything you learned from the experience.

 During my internship in the Development Department at The Place Ltd. we had regular social events for team building and engaging with the community. On one occasion we arranged to spend the day in a local Primary School getting involved in a range of activities with the children. I worked with a group of my colleagues, including my manager, using drama and role play to help the pupils learn more about the history of ancient Greece. For this to work successfully I had to collaborate with my team to prepare activities in advance and work with them successfully on the day, while also communicating effectively with the children. I also spent some time later in the day teaching pairs of students the basics of tennis. Overall, it was a very successful and enjoyable day where I feel I demonstrated really good interpersonal skills at a range of levels.



This role would also require good problem solving skills. Can you please outline an issue you've had to deal with in the past and how you tackled it?



As I mentioned in my application, following an incident that I helped out with while working at The Big Supermarket, my manager asked me to help to plan and be involved in the induction and training of new staff to offer my perspective on the issues and procedures addressed. As part of my contribution, I identified some inconsistencies in staff training in different departments that were having an impact on how customer feedback and complaints were being dealt with. Slightly different messages were being conveyed by different members of staff leading to some confusion, and on one occasion, a complaint from a customer becoming quite serious. I discussed this with my manager, pointing out the inconsistencies, and suggested what I felt was a more effective procedure which resulted in a more consistent approach across all departments. As a result, a more efficient process is now followed, with positive feedback from staff that they are clearer on how to deal with any issues that arise.



We're looking for people who can demonstrate flexibility, so that they can work well both individually and as part of a team and respond positively to change. Tell me something about your experience to convince me you could be flexible in this way?



Working flexibly...let me take a moment to think...I feel my internship at The Place Ltd. is probably my best example as it was a steep learning curve for me and I adapted well to the environment and the working practices. Although I already had experience of working in Big Supermarket and volunteering, my internship was my first experience in a professional office environment. I was part of a team working on a major project but also had individual responsibilities within the project. I participated in weekly review meetings with my team, contributing to planning and decision making for the project and ensuring that my individual work was progressing as planned. At one review meeting, we discussed an unexpected amendment to the project plan as the client had changed their minds on aspects of the original specification. Much of this related to the part of the project I was working on so I reviewed my work with my manager and suggested an approach to the changes. This was agreed to be the best solution and I managed to make the changes without them having any impact on the planned completion date meaning we were still in a position to finish the project on time and on budget.



I have a scenario question for you next, Namey, and here is a paper copy of it for you to refer to while answering. Imagine you are on your own in the office after lunch as there is a management meeting until 4pm and your other colleagues are visiting a client about a project for the rest of the afternoon. You are working on a report that must be completed for a meeting first thing the following morning. You answer a phone call from a colleague in another department reminding you about a proposal they need from your team urgently by the end of the day. You know another colleague had been working on this so you agree to get back to him. As you end the call, the Director of another division pops in for an update on a collaborative project that your team and hers have been working on, with some very specific questions. What do you do?



As the Director of another division had come to see me in person, I would do my best to answer her questions first but explain that I was on my own for the rest of the afternoon and suggest scheduling a project update meeting with her and relevant members of both teams. Thinking about the other things, I feel the best course of action would be to check on the proposal document my colleague had been working on, and depending on whether it was completed or

#### Things to think about

While it's ok to use some of the same examples to answer competency based questions at interview as you did in your application, try to give more detail if you do, and where possible use different examples to give a broader picture of your skills and achievements.

#### Things to think about

It's fine to pause and think before answering a question if you need to gather your thoughts or decide on the best answer you can give. This is much better than blurting out the first answer that comes into your head.

#### Things to think about

When an interviewer asks a scenario question, it will usually be based on something that could typically happen so that they can assess how you would react to and deal with a particular situation.

They will be looking for things like how you work under pressure, how you analyse situations, whether you can prioritise and delegate if appropriate and that overall you can suggest a sensible approach to dealing with the situation.

# Example Interview Transcript

not, I would prioritise that as it was urgent. I would check my decisions with management when they returned after their meeting and would then arrange the project update meeting and get back to working on the report for the following morning, staying in the office a bit late if necessary to get it completed.

 That sounds like good time management. Could you talk me through a real situation where you have shown the ability to prioritise and meet deadlines?

 Yes quite recently actually. Since I applied for this role, I have been working 8 hours per week as a frontrunner at university. Frontrunners is a placement scheme at the University of Essex where students can apply for opportunities to develop high-level skills on campus. My frontrunner role is social media related in Communications and External Relations. Part of the role involves launching and overseeing social media campaigns and a recent campaign aimed at prospective students proved so popular that overseeing the resulting communications was taking up most of my time. This had the knock on effect that I had less time to focus on my blog and maintaining regular posting on the different social media platforms we use. Although I had to prioritise my final year project and a couple of assignments that I had due, I arranged with my supervisor to have more flexibility in my hours over a two week period so that I could keep an eye on the campaign on my mobile, including outside office hours, fitting this in around my academic workload and making responses on demand where possible. I was therefore in a position to dedicate more time to my other duties when I was in the office. This worked well and I managed to complete everything required at that busy time.

## Things to think about

It's possible there will be a considerable amount of time between applying for a job and going for an interview so make sure you use the interview as an opportunity to showcase any new skills and experience you've gained in the meantime to build on the evidence you provided when you applied.

If you are talking about frontrunners, the big Essex award, the v-Team or anything else specific to the University, ensure that you explain to your interviewers what it is and was involved as they may never have heard of it before.

 If I asked your best friend to describe you in three words, what do you think they would say and why?

 I believe my best friend would say I am friendly, reliable and enthusiastic.

 What would you say is your greatest weakness?

 I have a tendency to be a little bit disorganised as I often switch easily from one task to another and can lose track of time. As a student I've had to juggle my academic workload with working, volunteering and other activities so I've learned to become more organised by prioritising the things I have to do, making lists and using the calendar on my mobile phone to keep track of everything so as a result I've become much more organised and better at staying focused.

## Things to think about

This is a strengths based question. An interviewer will often want to find out more about where your strengths lie and what you are good at.

## Things to think about

There is no right or wrong answer here, the interviewer will be trying to get a feel for the type of person you are to see if you would fit in well with the team. The best approach is to be honest and reflect positive things about yourself that would transfer well to a professional work environment. You don't need to provide examples unless they ask you to expand on your answer.

## Things to think about

While this question can seem quite negative, the interviewer will not be trying to catch you out, they will be looking for you to show that you are aware of any weaknesses you have and that you are able to manage them so that they don't affect your work.

 If you were a part of a bus, what part would you be and why?

 Oh, that's a tricky one. Thinking about it, I would be the engine, as although I may not always be the most visible part of the effort, I am always working hard to keep things running smoothly.

## Things to think about

Sometimes interviewers will throw in a really unexpected question at an interview. The interviewer will not be trying to catch you out, they will be interested in seeing how you react to the question and how you respond to the unexpected under pressure.

Once again, there is no right or wrong answer to this type of question. The best approach is to stop and think about it and try to come up with a relatively sensible answer that reflects on you in a positive way.

 A pretty good answer, Namey. I know I put you on the spot a bit there. My final question now. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

 If I was successful in getting selected for your Graduate Training Scheme, I would see the move into a junior management role after two years as an opportunity to really develop my leadership and management

## Things to think about

Interviewers may ask a question like this to assess your ambition and to find out if you have thought about how you want your career to develop.

It's a good idea to address professional future plans rather than personal ones and to come across as ambitious but realistic. Do some research in advance into more senior staff (e.g. staff profiles, LinkedIn) and see how long it took them to progress within

(cont)

skills as well as my project management skills, with a view to moving into a more senior management role within five years as this seems to be the nature of progression for your most successful junior managers. I would be keen to contribute to the organisation at a higher level as I enjoy planning and discussing new ideas and hope that I could make a difference from a strategic perspective in the future.

(cont)  
the organisation so your response is comparative. Talk in terms of achievement and responsibility rather than financial reward and perks that come with progression. Demonstrate that you are keen to make a difference and willing to be flexible.

#### Things to think about

It's highly likely that an interviewer will ask you if you have any questions for them so it's a good idea to have a few prepared. It's a good opportunity to find out anything you want to know and also to show the interviewer that you are genuinely interested in the organisation and the role.

 Thank you, Namey. I think we've covered everything I need to know about you. Do you have any questions for me?

 Yes, I have looked up lots of information about what it's like to work for XYZ Ltd. but I'd be interested to know more about the culture is like in the team I'd be joining if I was selected and what a typical week is like?

 Well, I'd describe the team as a balance of hardworking and being able to have fun. It's a very busy and professional environment but I feel there's always a good atmosphere, with everyone willing to help each other out when the pressure is on. We often go out together at the end of the week, and have quite regular social events. We also have team away-days twice a year which are always very enjoyable. I don't think I can describe a typical week as every day brings new challenges but in general terms, we kick off the week with a 1 hour Monday morning team meeting followed up with a less formal review meeting on Friday over lunch. Throughout the week, it's a mix of working on projects, doing research, attending other meetings and occasionally undertaking training. Is there anything else you'd like to ask me?

#### Things to think about

Questions that show more interest in the organisation and your development if you got the job are always good ones. It's best to avoid questions about things like salary and holidays at this stage. You will usually get this information if you are offered the job so you can wait and ask any questions on your contract then if necessary.

 You mentioned there would be an opportunity to do an accredited professional diploma in Example Studies, which sounds great. What other training and development opportunities are offered at XYZ Ltd.?

 During the Graduate Training Scheme, much of the initial training is based on in-house systems and processes and on how we work as an organisation. As you get more experienced, there are opportunities to develop leadership and management skills, networking and negotiating skills and if there are particular areas you feel you would benefit from training in, we are always open to discussing this with you and helping you to find suitable courses. Is there anything else you need to know?

 That sounds great, thank you. I don't have any more questions at this stage, I feel I've learned all I need to know so I'd just like to say that I am very interested in this opportunity and I hope that I've convinced you that I would be suitable for the role. Thank you for your time today.

#### Things to think about

You will usually be given an idea of when you should expect to hear from the organisation about the outcome of your interview, but if not, it's acceptable to ask them.

 Thank you for your time too, Namey. We hope to make a decision by the end of the day tomorrow and get back to candidates the following day so you will hear from us soon. Goodbye and have a good journey home.

 Goodbye and thank you again (shaking hands).

# Interview Checklist

When preparing for an interview check the following...

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## Before

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- You have reviewed the description and person specification for the job you are being interviewed for and re-read all the application documents you submitted when you applied.
- You have anticipated questions they are likely to ask you, planned how you will answer and thought about what specific examples you will use, bearing in mind that it's best not to be over-prepared to the point where your answers will sound like you are reciting lines.
- You have re-familiarised yourself with information about the organisation, including research on their website, all of their social media presences and in the media.
- You have seen a Careers Adviser to talk through likely interview questions and how you will prepare or to have an interview preparation appointment to practice in advance.
- You have read all the details provided for your interview so that you can plan ahead. You may be asked to take certain documents with you and to prepare things in advance, a presentation for example.
- You have planned your journey for the interview carefully, giving yourself plenty of time to get there and aiming to arrive about 10 minutes early.
- You have the organisation's contact details with you so that in case anything unexpected delays you, or you get lost, you can phone ahead.
- You have dressed in smart, business attire.
- If it's a telephone interview and you will be using your mobile, ensure it is fully charged and you have a good signal. For Skype, check in advance that everything is working ok, perhaps doing a test call with a friend.

## During

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- You are polite and professional with everyone you meet from the moment you arrive until the moment you leave the building.
- You think positively. While it's natural to be nervous, be confident and remember that they wouldn't be interviewing you if they didn't think you were suitable.
- You shake hands with your interviewer(s) when you enter the interview room.
- You listen carefully to everything your interviewer(s) tell you and ask you.
- You are aware of your body language, sitting up straight, not crossing your arms or legs and not fidgeting. Maintain good eye contact but don't stare.
- You politely get clarification from the interviewer(s) if you are not sure exactly what is being asked of you in any of the interview questions.
- You answer questions fully and accurately, using the STAR technique when responding to competency questions.
- You consider the full range of your skills and experience, identify which are the most relevant for each question, and articulate them in a positive way that the employer will understand.
- You ask any questions you have prepared when prompted to do so and if appropriate.
- You thank the interviewer(s) for their time when the interview comes to an end.

## After

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- You make a note of the questions you were asked and an outline of the answers you gave as soon as possible as you are likely to forget and this may help you to prepare for future interviews.
- You send a brief thank-you email to your interviewer(s) the following day if you feel it's appropriate, thanking them again for the opportunity and affirming your interest in the role and the organisation. Check that your spelling and grammar are spot on and don't pester them for a decision!

## Psychometric tests

Psychometric tests are often used by larger organisations as part of their recruitment and selection process. They are taken just as seriously as the other stages and can be used to look at things like logic, numeracy, technical ability, literacy, verbal reasoning, inductive or deductive reasoning, spatial or diagrammatic reasoning, situational judgement, motivation and personality. You may be asked to complete tests online before or after applying, or as part of an assessment centre or interview. Some areas that psychometric tests are used to assess, like personality or motivation for example, require you to answer instinctively, so don't require you to practise, although you can think about them in advance to some extent. Others, like numeracy or verbal reasoning for example, you can practise and we strongly recommend that you do. Often, these tests will be timed and under pressure it can be difficult to do well.

### Top Tips:

- Take these tests seriously. Find somewhere quiet to complete them so you can really focus. They are usually pass/fail only.
- These tests are not usually negatively scored so use the time allowed wisely e.g. if you have 30 minutes for 60 questions, that's 30 seconds per question. If you can't answer in that time, move on.

Some employers provide practice tests, the Civil Service for example, but most don't. There are many organisations who offer practice tests online but some charge a fee.

### Be prepared

We subscribe to online tests exclusively for Essex students, which you can access via our website to practice and get feedback on your performance. We also have a list of other free online practice tests that we recommend for further practice. [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/applications/tests.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/applications/tests.aspx)

## Assessment centres

Larger organisations often consider a number of candidates at the same time through assessment centres. They use a range of tasks, such as psychometric tests, group challenges, role play, presentations, in-tray/e-tray exercises and interviews. They consider this an objective and fair way of selecting staff using a variety of activities over a longer period of time to minimise bias. Assessment centres are carefully designed to see which candidates fit the role and the organisation, so as well as testing your skills and abilities further, they may be considering your personality; your approach to solving problems and dealing with situations; leadership potential and overall ability to work in a team; your commercial awareness.

### Top Tips:

- At the assessment centre, don't view the other candidates purely as competition. The assessors may be impressed by all of you or none of you on the day. Getting on well with others and demonstrating the ability to work in a team will make the best impression.
- In group activities, be yourself and take a role you are comfortable with so you behave naturally and keep an eye on the time.

Prepare as you would for an interview (see our interview checklist on page 14). Dress and behave professionally, be punctual and bear in mind that everyone you meet on the day may be asked what they thought of you.

### Be prepared

We provide an online assessment centre preparation tool exclusively for Essex users on our website. This will help you to be ready for and stand out at assessment centres, with information on what the different tasks could involve, how to prepare and information about the assessment centres run by several well-known companies. [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/applications/assessment\\_centre/default.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/applications/assessment_centre/default.aspx)

## We can help

We provide practical advice and information on getting it right, from your CV or application, right through to preparing for assessment centres and job interviews.

## Contact the Employability and Careers Centre

► [www.essex.ac.uk/careers](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers)

Visit: Square 2

**E** [careers@essex.ac.uk](mailto:careers@essex.ac.uk)

**T** 01206 872494

## For more information

- [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexcv](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexcv)
- [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexapplication](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexapplication)
- [www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexinterview](http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers/essexinterview)



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