

Preparing for job interviews

This tip-sheet highlights some of the considerations when preparing for any job interview – in particular, what to research beforehand, the types of questions you may be asked, how to prepare your answers, and what you might ask the panel.

1. Top tips

Find out whether you're being interviewed one-on-one or by a panel. Email the appropriate contact if this isn't clear from your interview invitation.

Check what resources are available to you, e.g., access to a laptop or PC for your presentation. Don't assume that they have everything you need – check with the relevant contact.

If it is online, test the technology before the real interview.

Work out your route to the interview. Allow extra time for delays and plan a back-up route.

Prepare answers to the questions that the panel are likely to ask. Having a **mock interview** will help you do this, as well as enabling you to get feedback on your answers.

2. What to research

Why does this job exist? Why now?

Who are the employer's collaborators? Who are their competitors? Check out their profiles on Google Scholar, institutional research portal, LinkedIn, ORCID, Research Gate.

What, in their opinion, makes this employer unique? What would their competitors say?

What is the mission of the organisation, and what are their values? How do they measure their success?

What is the institutional research strategy? What are their Institutes/Research Centres? What are their REF outcomes?

What is their commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion? Athena Swan, Stonewall, Race Equality Charter?

How do they address career development and support for ECRs? The Concordat?

What is their commitment to Public Engagement, Open Access, Research Integrity?

Any contacts at the future company within your LinkedIn contacts? Any Imperial Alumni?

What is their business model? Where do they get their income from? What do they produce?

What are Regulations that the industry is subject to? What are the industry best practices? Which software(s) do they use?

What are they saying about themselves on their website? What do they post on social media? Have they been in the news recently?

What else are they involved with? How could you contribute?

3. Types of question

Motivation

The employer will ask questions to find out:

- why do you want this job
- why do you want to work for this employer
- how much you know about the sector
- whether you are motivated to work hard.

Skills and experience

The employer will want to be sure that you **can** do the job – i.e., you have the necessary qualifications and experience.

Go through the person specification: what's your best evidence for each item in the specification?

Competency-based

This is a special type of question about skills, where you are asked to give an example of a time when you have demonstrated a particular skill:

Can you describe a situation where you have had to persuade someone to do something that they didn't want to do?

Tell us about a time when you worked successfully in a team.

Can you give me an example of how you have solved a problem creatively?

STAR is a useful tool to ensure that you include enough detail in your answers:

Situation	Where were you, when, who with?
Task	What were you trying to achieve?
Action	What, specifically, did you do?
Results	What happened? Who benefitted?

Don't spend too long setting the scene with the situation or task – focus instead on the action and results. As far as possible, **quantify** the results.

Technical

You might be asked to discuss practical applications of your subject knowledge and methods.

If you're changing careers significantly, you might also be asked technical questions to test how much you know about the sector you're moving to, e.g.

What, in your opinion, will be the big challenges facing scientific publishing in the next few years?

Self-awareness and personal attributes

The employer will want to know that you are realistic about your own strengths and weaknesses.

They will also be wondering:

- what kind of person you are
- whether you will fit in with the rest of the team
- whether they will like having you around

4. Preparing answers

It is best not to assume that the interviewers remember anything about you when you enter the room. This means that **you have to do the work** – tell them what you have achieved and how well you fit the position.

Re-read your application. Be prepared to expand on the information you have provided and explain any gaps.

Write down your Top 10 achievements. Make sure each one is evidenced, i.e., not just **your** opinion that it was successful.

Try to 'tag' your achievements, so that you know how you could use them in the interview. For example, a particular achievement might be an excellent example of 'teamwork', but it could also be adapted to 'leadership', 'problem solving' 'dealing with setbacks'.

Book a **mock interview** with us. The PFDC will organise a panel and ask tailored questions.

5. Do you have any questions?

It's important to think about what you want to ask the panel at the end of your interview.

Outside academia, it may be frowned upon not to have at least one question for the panel – it can be taken as a lack of interest.

Sometimes, your questions will have been answered during the interview, in which case it's OK to say so.

Don't ask anything you could find out for yourself.

Don't ask anything that should really be negotiated after you have been offered the job (e.g., salary, start date, relocation support, mentoring).

Don't be selfish – use this as an opportunity to show interest in the employer, not to ask about what you might get.

During the tour, your colleague mentioned that you are planning to relocate to new offices and merge with another team. Can you tell me more about how that will affect this role?

Always **thank the panel** for their time.

6. Example interview questions

- Why are you interested in this role?
- What are the most satisfying and the most frustrating aspects of your present job?

- Describe a time when you felt ineffective: what did you do about it, and what was the outcome?
- Can you describe a time when you felt particularly effective?
- How were your assignments handled – individually, or were they a team effort?
- Where do you see yourself in ten years' time? What will people be saying about your achievements?
- Why have you changed/remained in jobs so frequently/long?
- Why is your salary so low given these achievements in your CV?
- What is the biggest problem at work you have had to overcome?
- If you had your life over again, what one thing would you change?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Whom do you find it difficult to work with?
- What is the most difficult aspect of your job?
- How does this job fit in with your career aspirations?
- What is your greatest achievement to date?
- What did you achieve in that job?
- How did you develop or change the role?
- What will you be remembered for in that job?
- What are you most proud of in your career?
- What makes you feel that you did a good job?

7. Checklist

When you receive an invitation to interview, you should do the following:

1. Research the employer.
2. Write down a list of questions that you expect to be asked. Write down the question you really hope that you won't be asked as well!
3. Prepare answers to all of those questions and put together your list of Top 10 achievements.
4. Think about what questions you want to ask the panel. Remember: if you don't have any questions, explain that any questions you had have been answered during the interview process.
5. Book a **mock interview** with the PFDC.

If you have any questions about your upcoming interview, or to arrange a mock interview, **contact us:**

pfdc-support@imperial.ac.uk

