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Leibniz  
Universität  
Hannover

# Application Support

The Interview: Tips for preparation, follow-up  
and typical questions

For  
international  
students



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# Foreword: A successful job application

Have you already been invited to an interview? Would you like to get prepared for this interview in particular? Or are you simply interested in finding out how to do well in interview situations in general?

In this starter guide, we outline the goals and the content of an interview and show you how to pro-actively prepare for the various questions that may be asked. In addition to this, we also explain the typical phases of an interview and give you some suggestions for follow-up work after the face-to-face conversation. We finish off the starter guide with some useful tips and checklists.

We will be focusing here on face-to-face interviews held on the company's premises. Tips on other formats, such as video or telephone interviews, can be found under „Special Formats“ on page 31.

Our extensive advisory experience in the Careers Service means that we are familiar with many of the questions that students ask on the subject of job interviews. At the same time, we are in close contact with Human Resources professionals across the Hannover region and therefore also have a good understanding of the company\* point of view.

You are also very welcome to visit us for an individual consultation to prepare for a specific interview, e.g. in the form of a role play. We look forward to meeting you!

You can find our contact details and times for consultation sessions, as well as information on our job application workshops, at [zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/career-guidance-and-service](https://zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/career-guidance-and-service)

Good luck with your interview from the team at

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Career Service

\* When we speak of „companies“ in the following, we also mean public institutions, associations, foundations and other organisations.



## Introduction: Getting to know people as equals

When you receive an invitation to a job interview, you have already cleared the first hurdle. This means that, in principle, you fit the job description in professional terms or would bring sufficient potential with you if you are moving into a new field. The purpose of a job interview is for you and the company to get to know one another.

As a rule, you will be keen to know who you are dealing with, what the atmosphere in the company is like, and how potential employees are treated. But you will also have the opportunity to get further information on the advertised position.

The company, on the other hand, wants to get to know you both professionally and personally so that they can decide whether you would be a good fit for the company, the position in question and the relevant team. Specifically: what motivates you, what are your expectations, and what are your strengths? Why are you interested in the position in question?

In general, a job interview is a well-balanced situation, as both parties are interested in finding out more about the other. This means that you are not actually in a subordinate position, even though you may at first feel that this is the case.

You should try to be yourself and to show yourself at your best. Try not to play out a rehearsed role, but rather behave in a manner that is congruent (appropriate) to the situation and occasion.

On the following pages, you will find some basic information, tips and guidance for a successful job interview which should ensure that you feel well-prepared and are able to feel positive when you go into this special situation.

## Preparation

Good preparation is the most important prerequisite for a successful job interview. It will allow you to go into the interview feeling secure and confident and will ensure that you come across as competent to the people interviewing you.

- **Organisation and time planning**  
Plan the journey with plenty of time to spare so that you arrive at the company approximately a quarter of an hour before your appointment. If it is a large company, you should take into account the fact that, once you arrive on the premises, you may still need further time to find the right room. Punctuality is absolutely essential when attending a job interview. Remember to bring a print-out of your application documents with you to the interview.
- **Dress code**  
Make sure that you dress smartly and look neat and tidy. Your style of clothing should be appropriate to the industry and the company in question. In general, it's better to be a little overdressed rather than underdressed. The company's website can give you a good indication of their dress code, as you will usually find photos of employees there.
- **Contact person(s) in the company**  
Before arriving for your appointment, find out who you will be talking to. You can request this information by e-mail or a phone call. It is often the case that several people will be involved, e.g. representatives from Human Resources, the specialist department concerned or the staff council. When several people are sitting opposite you in an interview, it is important to maintain eye contact with all those present to an equal extent and not to focus solely on the person leading the interview.
- **Information about the company**  
Find out as much as you can about the company – How big is it and where are the various sites? What projects is it involved with and what are its products? What are the company's key values (corporate philosophy) and what challenges is the company facing currently? Do some thorough research on these points on the company's website, read the press reviews and, in the ideal case, ask employees of the company. If you are also able to establish a personal link to the company, this may be an advantage. We have compiled a checklist for this purpose at the end of this chapter which you can use as a guide.



- **The vacant position**

Before your interview, take a good look at the job advertisement again, and take note of the tasks and challenges involved. Consider why you think you are a good fit for the job and prepare some good arguments (concrete examples from your CV) that show why your qualifications and skills make you particularly suitable.

- **Your career to date**

You will also need to take a good look at your own career up until this point. Presenting your career history is a fixed component of almost all job interviews. Practise a two to three-minute presentation of your biography in front of the mirror, in which you explain how you got to this point and why you are applying for this position now. It can be helpful to use a so-called elevator pitch. This is a short speech in which you describe who you are, what you have done so far and what you are offering and looking for (further information in Chapter 3 „The Questions“).

- **Open questions**

A further important component of an interview consists of the questions that the company asks you and those that you ask the company. Get well prepared for the typical questions that often come up in job interviews (see Chapter 3 „The Questions“) and consider what questions you would like to ask the company.

## Going into more depth: Information about the company

The following checklist highlights the sort of information you might want to gather about a company in preparation for an interview. Research the company in some depth, and tick off the relevant items in the list. You can make use of various different sources for your research:

- Company website
- The company's social media profiles (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or Xing)
- Newspapers and encyclopaedias
- Employer rating portals
- Personal contact at trade fairs, during job shadowing or excursions, conversations with employees

Once you have done your research, try to link the information you have collected with points in your own career. A mind map can help you to get your ideas down on paper and create a common thread that runs through the content of your preparation.

**An example:** Imagine you want to apply to a company that has recently switched its production to sustainable processes and products. This can be seen in the press reports, the product range, the slogans and the corporate philosophy that you found information on when doing your research.

It may be that this is a topic that is also close to your heart, and you will then be able to link various points in your CV where you have demonstrated a keen interest in sustainability with the information you have found. Or perhaps your Bachelor thesis or your degree studies focused on this topic in general, giving you a good opportunity to score points in the interview.

Starting from one aspect or several aspects which you have focused on in particular in your research, you can then develop a mind map in which you link the individual stages of your career, your interests and the things you have focused on to the company and the position in question.



## Checklist for company information

- Market situation
  - Industry
  - Position in the market
  - Reputation
  
- Economic framework conditions
  - Development over the last five years
  - Plans for expansion
  - Annual turnover/profit
  
- Information on the structure and set-up of the company
  - Establishment
  - Size (group or SME)
  - Family business
  - Management board
  - Senior management
  - Number of employees
  - Subsidiaries
  - Branches
  - Sites
  
- Information on what the company does
  - products offered
  - service portfolio
  - services offered
  
- Company values
  - Corporate philosophy
  - Commitment (towards society and social)
  - Sustainability

## The Questions

In this chapter, you will find an overview of the various possible questions that could be asked in an interview. This is just a selection, however. Some of them are typical questions, some relate to specific situations – they will all help you to get thoroughly prepared.

Keep in mind the fact that a job interview is always a one-off situation, so every interview will have a different structure. If you spend some time looking through the examples provided here, you will at least have covered a wide range of possible scenarios.

### 3.1 The various parts of the interview

The initial focus will be on arriving and often on a little small talk. It may be that you will be offered a drink, which you may accept with thanks, providing it is a non-alcoholic drink.

After the formal greeting phase, you will move on to non-committal subjects such as the weather or your journey. It also makes sense to ensure that you are well-informed in advance about current developments in the industry and in the company itself, as this may provide some good starting points for conversation.

Normally, the other persons present will then be introduced. A short presentation about the company will often follow – but it is also quite possible that you may be asked to do your own presentation first.

It is clear from this example that the following categories of question cannot be placed in any fixed order, and that the structure and content of an interview will therefore differ from case to case.

### 3.2 Questions about you

#### 3.2.1 Questions about your career history

This category includes questions on your professional background and your experience to date. The focus is on a point-by-point presentation of your CV, your successes, your learning achievements and your qualifications. After each answer on your part, there will probably be follow-up questions to clarify specific personal details or details of the various positions you have held and to ask about your behaviour in certain situations.

- **Please tell us about yourself.**  
Here you are asked to present yourself in a way that has been carefully tailored to the company in question. Ideally, you will have prepared your presentation in advance, e.g. as an elevator pitch. Your presentation should not take more than three minutes and should summarise the key points about you and your career history, making reference to the position in question. You should clearly highlight your professional development to date, as well as your plans for future development.
- **Tell us about one of your biggest successes.**  
The interviewer wants to know which of your achievements you are proud of, as this allows them to build up a better overall picture of you. You should focus here in particular on presenting successful achievements that might be relevant for the new job from your degree course, from voluntary work or from practical experience.
- **What challenges have you been able to overcome?**  
This question aims to find out about your level of commitment and your motivation. Your answer will also provide information about how you deal with difficult situations and whether you are able to handle them successfully. Briefly describe the challenges you faced, outline the solutions that you found and explain what you learned from the experience.



## Method: Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is a method that you can use to present yourself. It is based on the idea of finding yourself in an elevator with a person who is important for your professional future, thereby having the opportunity to tell them something about yourself, but only for as long as you are in the elevator together. You will need to present yourself in a focused and goal-driven way.

Key questions here may be, for example:

- Who am I? (name, educational background, ...)
- What am I currently doing? (qualifications, main specialist subject, relevant work experience, ...)
- What can I offer? (skills, strengths, achievements, ...)
- What am I looking for? (career goals, job offers, ...)

- **Have you already had to take on responsibility (for a project) or had some management experience?**

Here you can talk about any early professional experience you gained from internships or part-time jobs, as well as experience gained in group work or project work in your degree course, and from voluntary roles, hobbies, etc. The interviewer wants to find out whether you are in general prepared and able to take responsibility for your own actions and for other people; this is not only relevant for future management positions.

### 3.2.2 Questions about your personal qualities

A working relationship always includes some social components as well, so it is important to have the right "chemistry" between you, your line manager and the rest of the team. The questions in this category enable the interviewers to make a better assessment in this regard by finding out more about you as a person and an individual.

- **What do you see as your strengths/areas with potential?**

The aim of this question is to find out how you see yourself and also about your ability to reflect on your own qualities. Name three strengths and describe situations in which you were able to demonstrate these strengths. The fact that it is now more common to ask about your potential rather than about your weaknesses shows that most HR professionals see this as an opportunity for development. You should therefore avoid mentioning weaknesses that can easily be turned into strengths (example: perfectionism) or that are not meant seriously (example: chocolate). If explicitly asked to do so, then talk about genuine weaknesses. The best approach is to explain how you deal with this trait in difficult situations and how you compensate for it in your everyday life. You can also clarify what you have learned from this weakness and what you are doing to work on the issue. You should ideally be prepared to talk about three weaknesses or areas with potential.

- **What things upset or annoy you?**

This question is used to find out about your skills with regard to dealing with conflict and working in a team, and about your value system. In your answer, be sure to focus on taking a constructive approach to the way you deal with your emotions and to any potential conflicts. What values are important to you? If something is bothering you, how would you bring up the subject with a colleague? Explain how you control your emotions in work situations but avoid talking about mistakes made by others that you found annoying.

- **What do you do in your free time?**  
Answer this question with specific examples, but don't overdo it. If you have a number of hobbies, limit yourself to two or three and provide just a brief explanation. The hobbies you name will give the interviewer some ideas about your personality (do you prefer to work in a team or alone, do you do voluntary work, etc.).
- **What was the most useful piece of criticism you have ever received?**  
This question will provide an indication of your willingness to learn and to accept criticism. Your answer will show whether you are willing to take advice from others and to implement their suggestions. Explain why this criticism was useful to you and how you acted on it.

### 3.2.3 Questions about the way you work

This category includes questions about your style of working, your approach to solving problems and how you set goals in your everyday work. The interviewer is hoping to find out how you implement projects and tasks, and whether this would fit in with the company's workplace culture.

- **What approach do you take when you want to convince someone of an idea?**  
This question aims to find out how assertive you are, and also to get an idea of your team skills. Your answer should show a good balance between tenacity, openness and a willingness to compromise. In the ideal case, you will cite an example and describe how you succeeded in convincing someone of an idea, and how you dealt with their counterarguments.
- **What do you need to be able to work effectively?**  
This question does not require you to list all the wishes you might have in relation to your working environment. Rather, it makes sense here to address individual aspects that, in the ideal case, will match the job in question – for example, emphasising the importance of having a good atmosphere within the team, addressing the option of flexible working arrangements, a calm and quiet environment to allow you to focus on your work, or particular technical requirements.
- **When are you satisfied with your work?**  
The company wants to find out how you assess yourself and what demands you make on yourself with regard to your own work. Think about the last time you were satisfied with a project, a task in a part-time job, or any other result related to work you have done.

What goal did you achieve in this situation? How did you succeed, and why were you pleased with the results? You can cite this example in your answer, or simply use it to gain information for yourself on situations in which you consider your work to be successful.

### 3.2.4 Questions about collaboration

There are many professional fields where you would be required to work with others on a daily basis. Whether this is in a team, in a working group or when coordinating issues with other departments, the approach you take in a social context is of crucial importance in creating a good working atmosphere and ensuring the efficiency of the collaboration.

- **What experience of teamwork have you had up until now?**  
Previous experience allows conclusions to be drawn about your future conduct in team situations. Give some specific examples from your career history to date of situations where you have worked in a team and describe the situation. What was your contribution to a successful team result? How did you deal with any challenges that arose? What would you do differently today? This will allow the interviewer to get an idea of how you normally behave and also to what extent you have undergone development in this area.
- **What roles do you take on in a team?**  
This question allows the interviewer to learn a lot about the way you see yourself in team contexts and to assess whether you like to assume responsibility as a team leader, prefer to take on a harmonising role, or are perhaps happier simply offering support in the background. It may be that you take on different team roles depending on the context and would like to bring up this point. Here too, it is a good idea if you can give an example when answering the question.
- **What qualities do you value in a line manager?**  
This question focuses on your understanding of management and leadership. The answer you give will depend heavily on the nature of the job, your experience with managers and your own personality. Do you need to consult your manager frequently or do you prefer to work independently? Outline the positive qualities in a manager that you see as being supportive, then explain what you mean and how this affects your behaviour in work situations. If you are applying for a management position, this question will also concern your own behaviour in the forthcoming role. Think of an example of a context in which you have already assumed responsibility.



- **What is your approach to dealing with conflict in the team?**  
It is considered quite normal for conflict to arise in team settings. The company is interested in finding out how you would respond in this situation. Are you easily drawn into conflicts? How do you communicate in situations like this? What suggestions do you make for solving the problem? The best way to illustrate your approach is to describe a conflict that you have personal experience of.
- **What values do you consider important when you are dealing with other team members?**  
This question is certainly rather unusual, but it is possible it may be asked, in one of various possible versions. The goal here is, on the one hand, to compare value systems and, on the other, to get a better idea of your personality as a team player. Conclusions can be drawn as to the topics which have the potential to lead to conflict in your case, and as to whether your values fit in with those of the company. Give an honest and well-considered answer.

### 3.2.5 Questions about your personal motivation

An explanation of what motivates you personally will provide information about the things that are important to you in your (working) life, what you are striving for, and what you want to achieve. By asking questions on this topic, the interviewer hopes to find out what level of commitment you will be bringing to the job.

- **Where do you see yourself in the future in professional terms? What are your career goals?**  
You should be honest, but also realistic. In the ideal case, you can link your hopes and plans for your career quite specifically to the company you are currently applying to. For example, if you are well-informed about their opportunities for advancement, you can say that you would like to take on responsibility as a manager in the future. Professional development or specialisation in a particular field is equally conceivable, and you can explain this in concrete terms. If you do not yet have an idea of your long-term professional goals, then tell the interviewer which step you are hoping to take next.

- **Why did you choose your degree course / profession or this particular industry?**  
Your reasons can be backed up in various different ways. Consider what personal motives you can give for your decision. Motives that have a connection to the job or the company in question may be of interest, likewise a strong passion for the particular field or subject matter. The better the reasons you give for your answer, the more individual it becomes. The following "Why method" may be useful here.

### Why method

The Why method involves repeating the question „Why?“ five times – you can either do this yourself or get someone else to ask you the questions. The idea is to take the answer to the first question and transform it into a second „Why“ question, and then to continue in this way until you have answered at least five such „Why“ questions.

The goal of the method is not only to arrive at obvious answers, but also to try to find and give more individual and in-depth answers.

- **What are you really enthusiastic about?**  
Enthusiasm is considered a great driver for a fulfilling and successful working life. If you can tell the interviewer that you are really passionate about some particular aspect of the job, this demonstrates determination and commitment. Underline your answers with examples of specific situations in which you have shown great enthusiasm and commitment for the areas in question.

## 3.3 Questions about the job

Here the questions will explicitly address whether you are a good fit for the job in question and why you have applied for it. You can show what it is that you find particularly attractive about this job.

- **Why are you the right candidate for this job?**  
Ultimately, this is one of the most important questions since it is closely related to the question as to why you applied for the job. Here you have the opportunity to make it clear how you stand out from the competition. It goes without saying that you will need to keep in mind the requirements

and tasks listed in the job advertisement. At the end of an interview, your answers may also be seen as a summary of your most pertinent arguments in favour of you as the best candidate.

- **What attracts you to this job?**

This question likewise addresses your personal motivation. It is relevant to the interviewer to find out why you chose this job and what you find interesting and attractive about it. This will allow them to assess whether you will show real commitment in dealing with your tasks.

- **Do you have any questions about the job?**

Use this opportunity to find out anything that you really want to know before potentially starting the job. At the same time, you can show that you have spent time looking at the job advertisement in some detail. Please refer here to the points mentioned in "My questions" later in this chapter. You should, however, avoid asking any questions that you could have answered yourself by doing a little research. You can write down your questions before the interview and bring them with you, and you may also want to add to them during the course of the interview.

### 3.4 Questions about the company

The interviewer uses these questions to find out to what extent you have done your research on the company beforehand. It is important to find out whether you would fit in, but also to get an idea of how motivated you are to work for this company.

- **What do you know about us?**

It is important for a company to see that you have made efforts to find out something about them. This includes, for example, knowledge of their corporate mission statements and corporate philosophy, and of course their product portfolio and their field of activity. The company's website is the best place to prepare for this question.

- **What do you admire about us?**

Employees who identify with the company they work for are very important assets. This question gives you the opportunity to highlight the factors that you personally find appealing about this company, and to explain the values that are important to you.

- **Why would you like to work for us?**  
Again, this is a key fundamental question, which, in the ideal case, you will have answered when you were preparing your written application. Don't be afraid to take time to answer this question – the same applies when answering the question for yourself.
- **What do you expect from us in terms of your working conditions?**  
This question provides an opportunity to give the interviewer some insight into your attitude. Make sure that you don't come across as too demanding, however. Most companies provide information on what they can offer their employees on their websites. Using this as a basis, you can consider what factors are important to you, and what you might request over and above this in order to be able to work effectively.
- **What is your assessment of our company's position in the market?**  
This question again aims to establish how well you have done your research on the company in advance of the interview. Potential employees – in particular prospective specialist staff and managerial staff – should try to get some idea of the company's position in the market, so that they can make a better assessment of the challenges that the company is currently facing.
- **What is your favourite product from our portfolio?**  
Here you are given the opportunity to tell some personal anecdotes that may create a connection between you and the company. A further reason for asking this question is to find out whether you can identify with the company's products.

### 3.5 Questions about the framework conditions

Once the questions on the actual content of the job have been clarified, the company will be interested in finding out whether you agree with certain framework conditions. This is also an opportunity for you to consider whether this position is the right one for you.

- **When can you start?**  
Consider when it would be realistic for you to start the internship or job. Would you like to have time to finish your thesis first, or could you start sooner and do both in parallel? Are you planning to go on holiday when you have completed your degree? Show that you are prepared to compromise,

but only within the framework that you think is possible for you. If you already have a job and are applying for a new job, you will need to find out what your notice period is and work out the earliest possible starting date.

- **Are you prepared to travel for work?**

Here you can first of all ask how often you would be expected to travel, how long the trips would be and where you might be asked to travel to. You will need to think about this in advance to decide how flexible you can be, and you will also need to consider any commitments you may have in your private life. Take time to think about whether you enjoy travelling (including travelling abroad) and what frequency and length of business trips you would feel happy with.

- **Is it possible for you to work in various different locations?**

Here the interviewer wants to find out about both your flexibility in terms of location and your organisational skills. You will need to think about similar issues to the ones you considered with regard to business travel. However, your answer should also include some ideas on how you would approach the organisational aspects of working at various sites

- **Would you be prepared to use your own car to travel to work / for business trips?**

You will of course only be able to agree to this if you have a car of your own. Otherwise, you may want to consider whether you might need to buy one, and whether it would be worth it for the job in question. If you already own a car, it is advisable to find out how much the company will contribute towards your running costs if you use it for work. You can then decide whether you are prepared to use your car for this purpose.

- **Are you prepared to work overtime or to work at weekends?**

With this question too, you can first ask for more information about overtime and weekend work. Find out under what circumstances this might be expected and whether there would be compensation, either in terms of time or extra pay. Use this information to help you to decide on your answer.

- **What would be your ideal working hours?**

This question may be asked with several goals in mind – it may be that the interviewer wants to compare your ideas with the company's existing system of working hours. If this is very flexible, it may be a way of finding out how many overlapping periods there are with others in your team. This question can also be used to find out what parts of the day you consider to be your

most productive. Be sure not to go below the specified number of hours per week and find out in advance about the company's working hours model to ensure that you give an appropriate response.

- **What does work-life balance mean to you?**

This question aims, on the one hand, to find out how you keep a balance between your work and your private life – How much free time do you need? How do you relax? What are your hobbies? – and on the other, it is also an indirect way of asking how motivated you are to work – How much time will you invest in your work? It also addresses your personal values – What is important to you and how do you maintain a balance between your work and your private life? Give an honest answer, but one that is also realistic.

- **If team members are off work due to illness, do you think you will be able to step in to help?**

What type of work and which members of the team could you stand in for? What conditions would have to be in place for you to do this? What information would you need to be provided with in advance? If you are given the opportunity to think this through properly before the job starts, you can tailor your answer to this question more precisely. If you are not yet clear to what extent you would be required to step in, you can indicate that you are in principle willing to help out, but that you would make a decision based on the particular situation.

- **What are your expectations in terms of salary?**

It is often the case that the salary for a job is fixed and non-negotiable (for example, in the case of particular pay-scale groups which may also be cited in the job advertisement). Many companies will have fixed groupings for your professional group and your level of professional experience, but they may still want to know whether your expectations with regard to salary are realistic. They want to be able to make a comparison between actual and desired earnings. If there is no indication of the salary for the role, do some research as part of your preparation to get an idea of the annual gross salary you can reckon with. We have compiled a list of the key points in this respect on the following page.



## Salary negotiation – research and tips

You can do some research in advance to find out what level of annual gross salary\* you can expect in a comparable role working for a company of a similar size in this sector.

Factors that may be relevant here are the size of the company, the sector, the region and the company's situation, as well as the job in question and the area of responsibility associated with the role.

The following sources may be helpful: [lohnspiegel.de](http://lohnspiegel.de), [absolventa.de](http://absolventa.de), [gehalt.de](http://gehalt.de), [kununu.de](http://kununu.de) and [gehaltsvergleich.com](http://gehaltsvergleich.com).

Some jobs, for example in the area of Sales, have a salary that consists of a fixed component plus an additional flexible component, made up of bonuses payments which will depend on performance.

Tip: Always be sure to look at the complete package of company benefits. For example, will you get a work phone or laptop that you can use privately? How many days annual leave will you be entitled to? Is there a company pension scheme? Does the company offer support for employees in other areas, for example by providing an on-site crèche or nursery, a subsidised train ticket or a discounted sports programme? If you are not able to negotiate a higher salary, additional benefits can enhance your earnings. You can also ask about these in the course of the salary negotiations.

When you are asked about your expected salary, you can specify either a fixed amount (e.g. EUR 45,000 annual gross salary) or a range, indicating your willingness to negotiate. If you want to give a range, stay within a maximum of 10% difference, for example: EUR 50,000 – 55,000.

When negotiating a salary, you should also take into account your own market value, your education and training, and any practical experience you have. The best approach is to briefly summarise the added value you will bring to the company, thereby justifying the appropriateness of the salary you are requesting.

\*Annual gross salary includes all payments, including any holiday and/or Christmas allowances and special payments..

## 3.6 Further questions

- **Specialist subject questions**

These specialist subject questions deal with the actual specialist knowledge required for the job in question. Questions may also be asked about your degree course or your thesis, especially if they are closely related to the job you are applying for. If you are asked a question that you are not able to answer, simply say that you don't know the answer and explain how you would obtain the necessary information if this question were to come up in the course of your work.

- **Presentation, case study, concept creation**

You may be asked to give a presentation, solve a task or create a concept as part of the application process. Here, the company is hoping to gain some more specific insight into your skills with regard to giving presentations, logical thinking, creativity or perhaps also your knowledge of the specialist subject matter in question. Your solutions can be seen as a first test to see how you would approach specific tasks. In most cases, you will be informed that you will be given such a task in the invitation to the interview. Get as well prepared as you can, consider how you want to present your work, and perhaps ask what presentation media and materials will be available for you to use and what you should bring with you.

- **English questions**

In particular in cases where the job advertisement stipulates that good English skills are required, it may be that part of the interview will be held in English. Generally, topics will be chosen that should be familiar to you or are relatively simple, so that the entire focus can be on your language skills. However, when it comes to holidays or your hobbies, be careful not to disclose too much private information.

- **Stress questions**

Stress questions are used to test your resistance to stress and your tolerance limits. It could be that a particular point on your CV will be questioned in a critical manner, or an aspect of your appearance might be criticised. Try not to get upset by this. Answer in a calm and confident way, without coming across as arrogant. It is important to give an honest answer, but it's also okay if you want to make things sound a little better than they actually are.





## Examples of stress questions

- Why didn't you complete your degree within the normal time?
- Why have you already completed so many internships?
- Why do you want to change your current workplace so soon?
- Don't you think you are maybe over/underqualified for the job?
- Why did you apply for the job despite this?
- How do you rate your chances of getting this job?
- As a woman, are you able to assert yourself?
- As a man, do you think you are sufficiently able to empathise?

- **Brain teasers**

Brain teasers are questions that encourage you to reflect. Often the focus is not actually on finding a real solution, but rather on the way you deal with the question and your approach to finding a solution. In technical fields, questions will sometimes be asked that aim to assess your approach in technical terms and to see whether you use a logical approach – for example “How many Smarties fit into a Smart?” In creative fields, the focus is more likely to lie elsewhere – for example, “What is blue?” The aim here is not just to find out whether you can list obvious associations, but to see whether you come up with any unusual ideas. You may also be given a practical problem to solve, such as a picture puzzle or a match puzzle, which is a challenge in terms of spatial or logical thinking. Overall, it is important that you remain calm, that you try to outline an approach to finding the solution and that you allow yourself to think creatively. Try to put your approach into words and to provide reasons for the results you achieve. You may of course also ask questions.

### 3.7 Inadmissible questions

Questions on the following subjects are considered inadmissible:

- Religious affiliation (except when applying for a job with an organisation owned by the Church)
- Faith
- Membership of a trade union or a political party (except when applying for a job with one of these)
- Political beliefs
- Pregnancy (except for certain jobs, e.g. in a laboratory)
- Family planning
- Dependency-related conditions (except for certain jobs, e.g. in logistics)
- Impairments and illnesses (except where directly related to the job in question)
- Sexual orientation
- Age and origin (permissible to ask about professional experience and language skills)

Only in the cases that are indicated in brackets above will you have to give an honest answer and be obliged to disclose the required information. Otherwise, questions on these subjects are considered inadmissible.

You may answer as you see fit, you can even lie. There are no general tips on how to answer such questions. You will have to decide for yourself how honest you want to be.

As a rule, people working in Human Resources know that they are not allowed to ask questions on these subjects, so if you are asked them, it would be worth considering afterwards whether you actually want to work for a company that deliberately poses questions such as these.

## 3.8 Your questions

The questions that you ask are an important element of the interview. They not only show that you are interested in the job and in the company in question, but also that you are well-prepared. You will need to decide for yourself whether you keep the questions in your head or perhaps make a note of them before or during the interview.

It is a good idea to consider in advance which questions you are really keen to know the answers to before you start the job. These may be technical or specialist subject questions or questions about the framework conditions for the job. However, do not ask any questions about things that you could have found out about by means of a simple online search.

If you can't think of anything, the following questions may give you some ideas:

- Is this a newly created position?
- What kind of induction or training will there be?
- What are the key challenges in this role?
- What would a typical working week be like?
- What would be the approximate split between teamwork and working independently?
- Does the role involve collaboration with external organisations?
- What are the rules with regard to core working hours, flexitime, working from home?

## 3.9 Conclusion of the interview

If the interviewer fails to make it clear what the next step will be after the interview, ask them when you are likely to hear from them with their decision, whether it would be okay for you to call them to find out, whether there will be a second interview, etc. Once these points have been clarified, thank the interviewer for their time and say goodbye to all those who took part in the conversation.

## Follow-up and reflection

The follow-up work after your interview is just as important as the preparation work – both are key elements of the application process. After all, things learned from one interview can help you with the next one. Regardless of how well the interview may have gone, some structured follow-up work will help you to reflect on the conversation and draw conclusions from it which you can use in subsequent applications, and it can also be a chance to make a good impression on the company in question.

Be sure to do your follow-up work whilst your impressions of the interview are still fresh in your mind. It may be helpful at this point to write down both your gut feeling and some more systematic thoughts. Doing this can also help to bridge the period of nervous anticipation before you get some feedback and will help you to become clear about whether you really want the job.

### 4.1 Expressing your thanks

Before the company gets back to you, take the initiative yourself. It has become usual and goes down well if you send an e-mail to your direct contact person the following day to thank them for seeing you. This gives you the following advantages: Saying thank you leaves a good impression. A follow-up move also gives you the opportunity to express increased interest in the advertised position and in the company itself. It also gives you a chance to ask any further questions that may have arisen from the interview. And if there is something important that you want to add, you can do this too.

### 4.2 Reflecting on the interview

Firstly, consider how you came across in the interview. Ask yourself whether you did sufficient preparation beforehand and whether you were satisfied with the way you presented yourself. You can also evaluate the new information you have obtained about the company and about the advertised role. Getting a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses in the way you presented yourself with the help of your own notes gives you an opportunity to actively work on certain areas and perhaps to improve the way you prepare, what you wear, or the questions that you ask for future scenarios. A table like the one below can provide a helpful overview.

Aspects related to the way you come across	Aspects related to the company and the role
Areas in need of improvement in your preparation	Atmosphere, mood, whether you liked the interviewer
Successful self-presentation	Company presentation
Appropriate outfit	Your interest in the company, in the role
Quality of the questions you asked	Convincing framework conditions
How the company reacted to you	Questions that still need to be answered
	Future prospects

An evaluation of the interview can also be helpful because it allows you to weigh up whether you are still keen on the advertised position. As well as the right framework conditions and interesting tasks, the atmosphere in the interview and factors such as whether you got on well with the interviewers can also be key in helping you to decide for or against taking up the position. Think about the factors that are especially important to you. In concrete terms – what factors are a must for you? What compromises are you prepared to make?

### 4.3 Getting feedback

As a rule, you will be given information at the end of the interview about the next step in the application process, including an estimate of how long it will take for the company to get back to you. The timeframe for this is normally between one day and two weeks. During this period, the company may need to consult various committees, the works council, equal opportunities officers or similar stakeholders. The selection process may take even longer for large corporations or authorities. You will therefore need to be patient and wait until the stated period of time has elapsed before enquiring as to their decision. If you were not given any specific date by which you should have heard, you could perhaps call after a period of two weeks to find out what the current status of the selection process is.

## 4.4 Dealing with a job offer

It may be that you sent out a number of applications at the same time in an attempt to increase your chances of success. This could mean that you end up receiving more than one job offer. You have therefore reached the goal of your job search. You will sign an employment contract and will be starting your new job in the near future. If you can't decide between the various offers or are still due to attend further interviews or waiting for feedback, then making a decision will be more difficult.

The advantage of getting several job offers is that you can choose between them. The disadvantage: the company that has already sent you a job offer will be waiting for a prompt reply. Your options here are to either agree to the offer straight away, to delay things for a few days, or to be open in communicating your situation to them. If you make a provisional verbal or written agreement, you risk perhaps having to go back on your word or hand in your notice with retroactive effect, and this could damage your chances of working with this company in the longer term.

Delaying your decision for or against a company by a couple of days may leave a negative impression on the company, but it can also create an atmosphere of transparency if you are open about your reasons. Go for the option that you feel most comfortable with.

## 4.5 Dealing with a rejection

Getting a rejection will often make you feel disappointed. It is difficult not to take it personally and to find the objective distance that you will need to get motivated again for the next steps.

There are many possible reasons for a rejection. On the one hand, it may be that your qualifications were not suitable, or the chemistry was not right. On the other, with the large number of applications that companies receive, it is possible that someone may have been just a little better suited to the job than you.

Try not to let yourself be discouraged. On the contrary, try to see the interview as a helpful experience which you can learn from. You could also contact the company to enquire about the reason for your rejection. We would recommend a polite telephone call. Ask what you could do differently another time. You may get some specific tips. It is often the case that companies prefer not to make any statements about why a candidate was rejected, as they are worried that people may contest the decision.

## Special Formats

In response to the increasing number of job applications that companies receive, especially when it comes to popular roles, they are increasingly responding by introducing a range of different formats for their job interviews. To follow, you will find information on the second interview, on job interviews conducted on the phone or via video call, on interviews at assessment centres and on group interviews. Just as it is with a personal interview, these all require good preparation and a confident and convincing manner.

- **The second interview**

If there are to be two interviews in the application process, the first round of interviews can be seen as a pre-selection process, during which key information will be requested. It will not be until the second round that there will be an opportunity to go into more detail and also to establish whether the candidate is a good fit in interpersonal terms. The company can therefore examine suitability for the advertised position by means of a targeted two-stage process. It also means that any issues that were not clear after the first interview can then be addressed in the second one. Contract negotiations are often dealt with and framework conditions agreed upon in the second interview. A second interview may also sometimes be arranged spontaneously if the company is finding it difficult to choose a candidate in the first round.

- **Job interviews on the phone or via video call**

Phone interviews or video interviews are a cost-effective option, both for you and for the company. If candidates need to travel a long way or if there are a lot of applications, this method is often used to make a pre-selection. However, a digitally held interview requires special preparation. Make sure you can be reached and that you are in an undisturbed, presentable environment. A headset, a microphone and a camera can help to ensure that you have good quality sound and images. Create a pleasant atmosphere for yourself. Facial expressions, gestures, voice and appearance will come across differently on the phone or in a video from the way they do in a face-to-face situation. You will therefore need to be conscious of the way you communicate. Speak clearly and comprehensibly and at a reasonable pace.

- **Interviews at an assessment centre**

An interview at an assessment centre usually involves a series of tasks. In terms of content, it differs from a classical interview in that, in addition to the usual procedure, you will also be asked to assess your achievements to date in an assessment centre. There will also be a strong focus on your motivation to achieve. Emphasise any good results from the assessment centre and make use of the opportunity to openly address any tasks that didn't go so well. There will usually be a one-to-one interview where you will find out what the company's impressions of you were, and you may even receive some detailed feedback.

- **Group interviews**

In a group interview, you will be tested for your suitability together with other candidates. This competitive situation therefore presents an additional challenge in such an interview. Your goal is to convince the observers that you are the right person for the job and to stand out accordingly. As well as self-confidence and the ability to present yourself well, you will also need to demonstrate openness and team skills. Confrontation and overly competitive behaviour often come across as being rather fake. From the company's perspective, a group interview provides an opportunity to interview several people at the same time whilst also observing how they behave in a team setting. You may therefore be asked to solve tasks within the group. With a good strategy, you can show how you deal with stress and how you stand your ground in a friendly way in a group setting, and you also have the opportunity to stand out from the crowd. Put forward your point of view with plausible reasons and without trying to justify it.



## Tips for emergency situations

Sometimes things don't work out the way you had expected. Here are a few tips to help you out when things go wrong.

- **You are extremely nervous.**  
Perhaps you are especially nervous because this is your first job interview, or because getting the job is particularly important to you. Either way, being nervous is normal and generally it helps you to concentrate. However, it may be that you get so worked up that you feel completely overwhelmed. Here are a few tips that can help you to calm down if this should happen. If you want to do so, it's quite okay to tell the interviewers that you are feeling very nervous. As a rule, this will generate understanding, it may even make you more likable. Many people appreciate honest feedback.



### Tips to help you to keep calm

- Take several deep breaths, in and out.
  - When you breathe in, count to three - when you breathe out, count to six.
  - Think about something especially nice.
  - Listen to some music that you find relaxing.
- 
- **You arrive late.**  
Generally, you should always allow plenty of extra time when you are travelling to an interview. However, this won't always help if something unforeseen happens. If you are going to arrive late because you are stuck in traffic or the means of transport you are using is running late, make sure you call the company to let them know.
  - **You notice a mark on your clothes.**  
Despite all your careful preparations, you have somehow managed to get a mark on your clothing – clearly visible on your blouse or shirt. You have two options: Either you ignore the stain and stop worrying about it, after all people can't always be perfect. Or, if it's more your style, you can throw in a little joke about it at the beginning of the interview.

- **Your mobile phone rings during the interview.**  
 In all the excitement, you seem to have forgotten to switch your mobile phone on to silent mode. Turn off your phone immediately and apologise to the person interviewing you. But try not to get upset by this – mistakes can happen.
- **Your mind goes blank.**  
 Up until now, the interview has been going well, but then suddenly your mind goes completely blank. First, take a deep breath to stop you from panicking. You can also tell the interviewer that you need a moment to think – this will buy you some time. Take a sip of water to help you to calm down. If you still can't think of anything to say, then tell the interviewer what has happened. Your honesty will make you more relatable and you will come across as more authentic than you would if you start simply talking in circles or trying to make up some kind of answer. This is something that can happen to anyone.
- **You have forgotten the interviewer's name.**  
 You simply can't remember what the interviewer is called. If it is important to you to address the people you are taking to by name, ask again politely and explain, for example, that things went so quickly when you arrived that unfortunately you weren't able to remember their name, but of course you won't forget it now.
- **You have ended up in the wrong building or have been sent to the wrong place.**  
 The most important thing here is to first of all call your contact person and let them know as soon as it becomes clear to you that you will not be able to arrive at the agreed place on time. In such a case, it is also particularly helpful to have all the paperwork for the interview with you. It may be that your contact person can help you to get to the right place. If this is not the case, speak to someone on the premises and ask them for help.
- **You are ill and cannot attend the interview.**  
 It is important that you let your contact person know that you are ill as soon as possible. When you speak to them, make it clear that you are still interested in the position and are keen to arrange an alternative date. Do not go to a job interview if you are ill, as this will affect your performance and will also put those present at risk.

- Your interviewer makes some negative comments about your former company or starts gossiping about their employees.

This is unprofessional conduct. Do not be tempted to join in with this negative talk about your former company or your former colleagues. It would leave a bad impression. Sometimes such negative talk can be a deliberate ploy to see how you react. Either way, think about what has been said afterwards and consider whether the job is still the right one for you despite the fact that such comments were made.

## Conclusion

Interviews are a fundamental component of (almost) every application process. At the end of this starter guide, we would like to provide you with a summary of the most important points that you need to consider in the preparation and follow-up for every interview you attend.

You will need to focus above all on you and your strengths. Preparing for an interview provides the perfect opportunity for you to think about what these are, as having a good understanding of yourself is essential if your job interview is to go well.

Be sure to prepare thoroughly and tailor your preparation to the interview in question. In particular: What do you definitely need to know for this company and for this job? Which phases of your life can you use to clearly demonstrate that there is a good fit between you and the company or the job?

Show that you are interested in the job and in the company but remain authentic and be yourself. You will want to feel at home in the company and be a good fit for the job in the long term too. You can achieve this by being honest and by being yourself from the very beginning.

Being open and honest is not only a virtue in a job interview. Tell the interviewers about yourself and your successes; be curious and interested. Always use examples from your career history to make it easier for the interviewer to understand the things you are explaining.

Do your follow-up work after the interview: What went well? What would you like to do differently next time? What points would you like to work on in terms of your personal development?

We wish you every success in getting a job that suits you well, with a company you feel at home with!

# More success for your studies and job entry

Consultation and Workshops of ZQS/Schlüsselkompetenzen

## Application, internships and job entry

Having a clear career goal, first practical experience and business contacts as well as a convincing manner and attitude throughout the application process: All these are considered to be important factors for a successful career entry.

The Career Service supports students of all faculties and graduates up to one year after their graduation along their personal career path.

We offer consultation and workshops on the following topics:

- Career exploration / internships
- Application documents, Job interviews and selection process
- Contact with potential employers and companies (job fair, job shadowing and mentoring)
- Job searching strategies

Further information: [zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/career-guidance-and-service](https://zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/career-guidance-and-service)

## Learning strategies and exam preparation

University studies differ highly from school, apprenticeships or learning on the job. They are far more demanding with heavier content and short assessment periods. Lernwerkstatt supports students to enhance their study-related skills aiming to facilitate the exam preparation, study organization and the overall learning process. Lernwerkstatt helps students to master the enormous workload and tight deadlines.

We offer consultation and workshops on the following topics:

- Learning strategies
- Exam preparation
- Organization of class materials
- Time scheduling
- Self-organization

Further information: [zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/learning](https://zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/learning)

## Academic Writing

Academic writing is a complex process ranging from a first vague idea to the finishing touches - and everything that is happening in between: planning, formulating, and revising. Team Schlüsselkompetenz Schreiben supports students of all faculties to successfully complete their writing projects in German language (essays, reports, final theses etc.).

We offer consultation and workshops on the following topics:

- Formulating a research question
- Developing an outline and structuring the content
- Managing your writing project
- Reviewing sources and structuring material
- Avoiding plagiarisms
- Describing experiments, surveys and visuals
- Formulating and revising texts

Further information: [zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/academic-writing](https://zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/academic-writing)



