

CAREERS PASSPORT

Workshop 5

Job Interviews

OVERVIEW OF THE CAREER PASSPORT PROGRAM

Career management skills are an essential tool for the successful navigation of repeated career transition processes that individuals will engage in during their adult life.

In order to enable UNE students to develop the competencies required to develop these skills, the UNE Careers Service has developed the Career Education Passport. This series of interactive workshops are designed to be undertaken in sequence, as each succeeding workshop assumes certain knowledge and competencies.

Topic	Duration	Workshop Titles
Career self-management	3x3 hr workshops	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Self-reflection2. Surveying the work environment3. Serendipity
Job seeking skills	2x2 hr workshops	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Resume writing & applying for jobs2. Interviews & assessment centres
Making the transition from study to workplace	Various	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Preparation for Virtual Careers Fair2. Internships3. WorkReady4. Work Experience

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this workshop we will be developing the skills required to market yourself effectively to potential employers through well presented and targeted written applications.

After completing this workshop you should

- have the skills needed to successfully engage in successive career transitions throughout your working life
- have an increased self awareness and confidence in your ability to 'sell' your skills and abilities to employers
- be able to present yourself well at interview and assessment centres
- be able to identify the skills you have to offer an employer, and articulate these clearly and effectively
- be more mindful of the importance of developing Graduate Attributes and generic employability skills, identified by DEETYA as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology

This course will contribute to the development of the following Graduate Attributes: communication skills, information literacy, lifelong learning, problem solving, and teamwork.

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

- The interview is a face-to face marketing exercise. This is your opportunity to convince the panel that your skills, qualities and experiences make you the best person for their job!
- The interview is not a 'test' or a trap. The panel is talking to you because they believe that you may have something to offer. The interview will allow them to investigate your skills, experiences and qualities to determine if you meet their needs.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Check that you know exactly where the interview will be held. Double-check the time of the interview.
- Find out who will be interviewing you, their name and title - check pronunciation of their name if in doubt.
- Have you researched the company/organisation? If yes, review this information. If no, do your homework NOW.
- You have already assessed your skills and abilities for your application and resume. Review your application and resume and prepare in your own mind a number of examples to demonstrate your 'major selling points'.

3. FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

- Don't be late
 - Don't smoke or chew gum
 - Don't lie or exaggerate your capabilities
 - Don't undersell yourself
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- Do greet the interviewer by name
 - Do wait to be offered a chair before sitting down
 - Do maintain eye contact with the interviewer(s)
 - Do dress appropriately – dress more formally than you would for the workplace
 - Do answer questions clearly using examples to demonstrate your skills and qualities
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- **Don't forget – make the first and last 30 seconds work in your favour. Good first impression and good last impression**

4. TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Open questions-" Tell us a little about....."	Keep in mind the selection criteria and your strengths.
Hypothetical questions-What would you do if...	These will assess your ability to think on your feet.
Leading questions- The answer seems logical...	As a grower representative you will require good communication skills - do you have good skills in this area? Do not give a yes/no answer. Give examples to support your response.
Multi-barrelled- two or more questions linked to the same topic	Don't be afraid to ask to have the question repeated if you can't recall the full question.
Behavioural questions-uses your past experiences to predict future behaviours	Prepare examples of how your experiences have allowed you to develop specific skills and how these could benefit the employer. STAR: Situation, Tasks, Action, Result

THE 'STAR' APPROACH TO ANSWERING A QUESTION

S: Situation – describe the situation

T: Task or problem – what dilemma or problem did you face?

A: Action – what action did you take?

R: Result – what was the result of your action?

5. WHAT MIGHT THEY ASK?

Can you do the job?

Do you have the knowledge sets, skill sets and personal attributes to allow you to do the job?

Types of questions could include:

- What parts of your education do you see as relevant to this position?
- What prompted you to study.....?
- Tell me about a time when you had to communicate information to a group of people.
- Tell me about a significant achievement in your life.
- Tell me about a time where you had to work towards a deadline. Did you meet it? If not, what would you do differently next time?

Do you want the job?

Do you want to work in this position/organisation? Are you willing to learn? Are you ambitious and keen to succeed?

Types of questions could include:

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What do you know about our company/practice/business?
- What are your short term/long term goals?
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?
- Describe a time where you set yourself a challenging goal? What happened? What would you do differently?

Will you fit in?

The interviewer wants to determine if you will be a good team player, someone who will be absorbed into the organisation without disruption to the existing team dynamics.

Types of questions could include:

- Describe a time where you had to work with a group of people to achieve a common goal?
- Can you give me an example of working as part of a team. What was your contribution to the team and what was the outcome of this exercise?
- What would you do if.....?

Best fit between applicant and job?

What makes you the best applicant for this position? Why should the employer take you over other applicants?

Types of questions could include:

- Why do you think you are the best person for the job?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Can you give me five words that best describe you?
- What skills and qualities can you bring to this position?

If you can't identify your strengths and weaknesses, you will need to put some time into reflecting on your experiences, both during your studies and outside your studies.

Is there anything you would like to add?

- This is an opportunity to bring particular skills or qualities to the attention of the interviewer. Have you stated your major selling points?
- Were you unhappy about a particular answer during the interview? This is an opportunity to address that.
- Why are you the best person for the job? Tell the interviewer!

Is there anything you would like to ask us?

- This is your opportunity to find out more about the job, the company, and the industry.
- You could ask questions like:
 - What are the career prospects within your company?
 - What staff training and development opportunities are available?
 - Who would I be reporting to?
 - Where would I be located?
- Avoid asking too many questions about salary and conditions of employment such as holidays but know what salary range you are prepared to accept.

6. EXERCISE – WORKING IN PAIRS, TRY OUT THESE SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Why did you apply for this position?

- **Tip: How do you think that you might fit into this company**

Would you tell us what attracts you to a career with us? How do you see your studies, skills, experience and personal qualities contributing to the work of the organisation?

- **Tip: How do you think that you might fit into this company**

Describe a time when you had to deal with conflicting demands. How did you deal with this situation and what was the outcome?

- **Tip: STAR**

Can you describe a time where you have been required to perform as part of a team? What was the situation? What part did you play in the team and what was the outcome of the exercise?

- **Tip: STAR**

How do you establish a working relationship with new people?

- **Tip: Team skills**

Where do you expect to be in 5 years time?

What will you do if you are not successful in gaining this position?

- **Tip: Demonstrate to the interviewer that you have thought about what it is you want from work and what you hope to achieve. Let them know you are flexible however, and willing to explore new opportunities.**

What particular skills and qualities do you bring to the workforce? What other skills would you like to develop in the future?

- **Tip: Strengths and weaknesses**

Tell me about a challenging situation you have faced. What was the situation and how did you cope with it?

- **Tip: STAR**

Is there an achievement of which you are particularly proud? What is it? Why is it significant?

- **Tip: STAR**

Imagine that you are a member of a small team responsible for the development and production of an internal publication. Your team is dependent on another workgroup to provide the data which will form the basis of your publication. The deadline for completing this project is not able to be relaxed. (a) What factors do you think might affect the team's ability to meet the publication deadline? (b) What could the team do to ensure the project is completed on time?

- **Tip: Hypothetical questions allow the interviewer to identify key competencies deemed important by the employer. No right or wrong answer**

What are the key elements of measuring performance and how can you establish whether an outcome represents a success? (Answer this in terms of your own work or study experience.) More specifically, what do you think might be some key indicators of the successful performance of a national agency?

- **Tip: STAR (Behavioural +Situational question)**

You have demonstrated in your CV that you have knowledge of entomology. Could you please expand on your experience and tell us what you think your strengths are in this field. An important component of the position will be the maintenance of water quality parameters within acceptable limits for the species. Can you outline your experience in water quality testing? What do you feel are the most important water quality variables?

- **Tip: Multi-part question**

The ability to work independently within a structured team is essential to the position. This will require the successful applicant to be self-starting, able to prioritise tasks, be a good communicator, as well as showing considerable initiative. Can you give us some examples where you have worked within a team environment and demonstrated these abilities?

- **Tip: STAR + multi-part question**

What do you feel is the potential for aquaculture in Australia and what are some of the major impediments to its development? What are some of the major aquaculture species cultured in freshwater? As well as the position involving general maintenance of the aquaria and pond facilities, a significant component will involve participation in scientific experiments through the collection and collation of research data. Can you describe previous experience you have had in the day to day running of scientific experiments?

- **Tip: STAR + multi-part question**

The research project and facilities the successful applicant will be involved with receives considerable attention from the general public. Therefore, a component of the job will involve liaising with the general public and media. This requires the delivery of information in a simple precise manner. How confident do you feel you are in delivering sometimes complex information in a simple manner?

- **Tip: give examples**

What computer programs are you familiar with, and more specifically, what programs would you use to write a report, enter research data, and to prepare a poster or seminar.

- **Tip: give examples of where you have applied the use of these programs.**

You have had an opportunity to look at the statistical table from the publication (this was supplied before the interview). (a) Imagine you were asked to write a commentary on the information in the table. Are there any significant or curious or interesting features revealed by the data which you think should be highlighted, and if so, what might you say about them? Can you offer any suggestions to explain these features? (b) What is your opinion of the general layout of the table? How might it be improved?

- **Tip: multi-part question**

7. ASSESSMENT CENTRES

This article is taken from the 2002 edition of GCCA's employer directory Graduate Opportunities Author: Seymour Maddison, Careers Counsellor, University of Technology Sydney © 2001-2 Graduate Careers Council of Australia

Experience and research has led employers to conclude that no single selection method can satisfactorily assess job seekers. As a result, many now combine a variety of assessment tools – for example, business case studies, psychometric tests, one-on-one and group interviews, panel interviews, role plays, and giving a presentation. Collectively, these make up what are known as assessment centres.

Design

Assessment centres differ greatly in design. They may, for example:

- be the final stage of the selection process, before job offers are sent
- run for only a couple of hours, a whole day, or (occasionally) longer
- occur in the employer's head office, at a hotel, or other venue
- assess you in groups of six to twelve or more
- involve some outdoor activity (non-physical, unless of course it is a key job requirement)
- have lots of silent, anonymous people apparently loitering around (these are the trained assessors – sometimes managers of the organisation, sometimes external consultants).

Preparation

- To succeed in any stage of the recruitment process, and particularly in the assessment centres, you need to research thoroughly the exact criteria you will be evaluated against – often referred to as the key competencies.
- Ask the employer if you can see exercises similar to the ones you will encounter. Ask your Careers Service for sample case interviews popular with consulting firms, role plays, or assistance in preparing presentations.
- Dress as you would for an interview with the organisation.
- Relax and enjoy! As long as you've left no stone unturned with your preparation, simply aim to do your best and learn from the experience.

Handling Group Assessment

- Have the right attitude from the start – unless told otherwise, your task is not to 'win' against the other members of your group. There is, of course, an undercurrent of competition, but you are all being assessed against the same standards – it's possible that everyone in your group could be selected.
- You must demonstrate that you can work effectively with others. Putting another person's ideas down or talking over them won't impress – and certainly doesn't constitute relationship-building or leadership skills if they are being assessed!
- Be actively engaged at all times, and be yourself – not who you think the assessors are looking for.
- Don't rush. Take a few moments to establish which criteria the employer is assessing and plan your strategy.
- Flexibility of thought, sensitivity towards others, a sense of humour, and appropriately asserting your viewpoint is usually preferable to confrontation and talking just to be heard.
- Don't be put off either by 'high fliers' or by people you assume have no chance of succeeding. Remember that everyone will do better in some exercises than others, so concentrate on demonstrating your own strengths – that's what the assessors are looking for.
- You may be asked in a subsequent interview how you feel you went in the group exercises.

Afterwards

Ensure you take some time to reflect on your own performance.

- Contact the employer within a few days and politely request as much feedback on your performance as they can give.

Psychometric and Other Tests

There are many different types of test, usually designed by psychologists, which can provide additional information that helps form the employer's overall profile of you and, importantly, of how you may operate in their workplace.

Types of Test

Personality tests

In personality tests there are no 'right' answers and it's therefore not wise to try and second-guess them. From your answers to questions designed to reveal your interests and motivations (often involving the selection of preferences from available choices), psychologists develop a profile of you which is then often matched with a profile of the person the employer is seeking.

Aptitude tests

Aptitude (ability) tests are used to assess your numerical, verbal, comprehension, and abstract or spatial reasoning skills. Sample computerised and paper tests are widely available – seek them out. Get your brain in gear by doing crosswords, number games and puzzles found in newspapers and magazines. Pay special attention to your weaker areas.

Handling Tests

Contact the employer and obtain as much relevant information as you can: What sort of test(s) will you sit? How long will it/they take, or is there no time limit? How is/are the test(s) weighted in terms of accuracy versus numbers of answers attempted? Will 'wrong' answers (where applicable – see 'Personality tests' above) be ignored or scored negatively? Can you use a calculator in numeracy tests?

While it's not always possible to find samples before the real tests (the employer and/or your Careers Service may be able to help), prepare yourself mentally beforehand.

Some tests are multiple-choice, others require 'true' or 'false' answers. Conversely, other tests will ask you to express a personal preference or choose the next in a given sequence. The golden rule is to read, then re-read the requirements before putting pen to paper.

Afterwards

Good employers will ensure you receive appropriate feedback following tests. Take notes so that this valuable information isn't forgotten. Even if unsuccessful, take heart from knowing that test results tailored for one organisation don't mean that you will be viewed identically by others. And you've had a bit of practice...

8. ASSESSMENT CENTRE TYPE EXERCISE
THE MAGAZINE GAME FOR TWO TEAMS AND OBSERVERS
OBSERVATIONS PAGE

25 WAYS NOT TO LAND A JOB

1. Poor personal appearance
2. Lack of interest and enthusiasm; passive and indifferent
3. Over-emphasis on money
4. Criticism of past employer
5. Poor eye contact with interviewer
6. Late to interview
7. Failure to express appreciation for interviewer's time
8. Asks no questions about the job
9. Unwillingness to relocate
10. Indefinite answer to question
11. Overbearing, aggressive, conceited with 'know-it-all' complex
12. Inability to express self clearly; poor voice, poor diction, poor grammar
13. Lack of planning for career, no purpose or goals
14. Lack of confidence and poise, nervous, ill at ease
15. Failure to participate in activities
16. Expects too much too soon
17. Makes excuses, evasive, hedges on unfavourable factors on record
18. Lack of tact
19. Lack of courtesy, ill-mannered
20. Lack of vitality
21. Lack of maturity
22. Sloppy application form
23. No interest in company or industry
24. Cynical
25. Intolerant, strong prejudices

AND NOW.....A FINAL WORD FROM THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE

All Employers want the “Balanced Graduate”

When it comes to recruiting graduates you might sometimes wonder how we differentiate between thousands of applications coming in the top of the funnel. Well to start with, all (and I mean all) employers want the “balanced graduate”. If they can get a straight “A” student with loads of personality they are delighted. However, there aren't too many of us left, so invariably they have to trade off academic performance against personal development when they are assessing candidates. It is one of the reasons many graduate employers now use psychometric testing and assessment centres in their graduate programs.

So what is a ‘balanced graduate’ and how do you rate?

The first step in deciding this generally occurs when someone is reviewing the application. Typically, they may consider some or all of the following:

Academic Performance

- **relevance of the degree to the job** – is it an exact match or is there a degree (excuse the pun) of flexibility needed;
- **quality of secondary school results** – not just the TER but the balance of subjects ie: humanities : maths/science and particularly the English mark;
- **quality of tertiary results** – some may apply a grade point average criteria, however, most recognise it is a combination of factors and will discount failures if a logical reason is given (I often tell students for goodness sake don't leave it up to their imagination – explain yourself!!). They were young once too (Oh yer!! you say) and know sometimes students have difficulty settling in to uni. The range of subjects and whether grade averages are improving over time or declining are important. Variances between university courses are also taken into account;
- **academic achievement** – such things as awards, scholarships, dean's honours list, post-graduate study, etc., will receive some brownie points in the right circles

Now for the Balancing Act – Personal Development

- **team orientation** – the issue here is the extent to which a student seeks out and participates in team involvement both sport and non-sport and not only when they have been forced into it in university assignments. It might be achieved on the sporting field or in extra-curricular activities or at work. They need to realize that even if they haven't done much then it is never too late to start – stamp collecting, reading, bushwalking and surfing the internet as your only interests will not win the day. The continuum of team based activity from school to uni/work is also considered – many students are involved at school when they have to and drop all activity when they leave school. Activities that stretch and place demands on them will also invariably outweigh basic social activity.

- **demonstration of leadership** – note the small 'l' in leadership. A student doesn't have to be school captain or president of something. What is being looked for here is how prepared they are to take the front running on things that are important to them, take the initiative and be proactive. Students far too often hide their light under a bushel – they should be encouraged to express in their resume when they have been a self-starter, independent and self reliant, eg: maybe they have travelled or been given responsibility at some stage – how did it develop them, what did they learn from it - these are the issues they need to sell.
- **involvement in extra-curricular activity** – do they just study, do some part-time work and socialize with friends like the majority of the student population or do they do things that develop their personal skills in organizing, planning, communication, business acumen, influencing & negotiating. If they don't, then they should start now – it really carries favour with employers. It doesn't have to be at uni and it should be fun - if they play tennis, join the match committee; if they like bird-watching!! join the club committee; if they are concerned for others, join a community/charity group – but, for goodness sake. get off your backside and be proactive.
- **relevant work experience** – all work experience is well regarded. However, the more relevant it is to the job for which they are applying, the more value will be placed on it, eg: jobs that have a lot of customer service involvement are considered highly, particularly if they are applying for a role that requires dealing with others. Again, what they need to sell in their resume are the skills they have learned from the experience and how it relates to the employer's graduate role.
- **career reasoning** – this is where the reviewer will look across the combination of education, work experience, personal interests and activities to gauge the extent to which they point towards stated career goals and the employer's job opportunities. Is there a common thread – a student can input to their thinking by talking about this inter-relationship in their resume – it is all about being creative.

As you can see, it is not just a matter of 'gut feel' and students need to clearly differentiate themselves if they want to get to the interview stage in the recruitment process. The issue for most university graduates is not whether or not they will get a job, it is whether or not they will get the job they really want. So they should begin asking themselves how they rate against the above criteria and begin building a case. It is never too late to start.

So tell your children, tell your friends, tell your grandmother!!! In reality, these principles don't just apply to graduates, in one form or another and at differing levels of complexity, they are essential to all career development activities – even yours???

Chris Perry

Former GM, National Graduate Recruitment

Chandler & Macleod