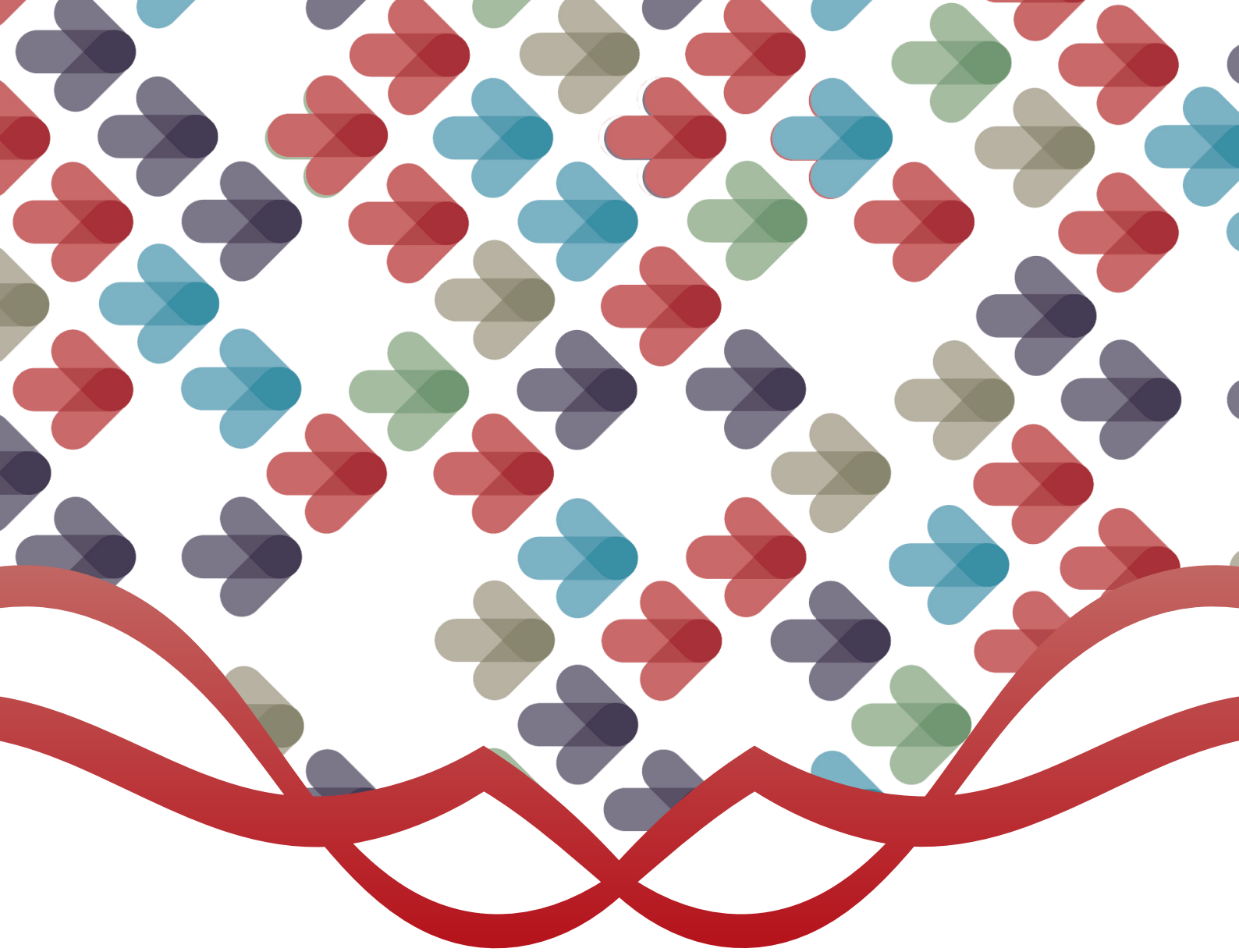




**FHASS Employability
Resource Hub:**

INTERVIEW GUIDE



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Introduction

This guide is designed to support Lancaster University students studying in the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences as they navigate the interview process. Whether you're applying for graduate jobs, internships, postgraduate study, or other opportunities, interviews are a critical step in showcasing your skills, personality, and potential.

Interviews allow you to present yourself beyond your CV or application. They are an opportunity to demonstrate how your skills—such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and problem-solving—can be valuable in professional environments. However, interview processes can vary widely depending on the sector, the role, and the organisation. Mastering different types of interviews, from face-to-face to online, and understanding key techniques, like the STAR framework, will help you stand out and perform to your full potential.

Types of Interview

Each type of interview requires a slightly different approach and knowing what to expect will help you tailor your responses effectively. Whether it's a video interview or a strengths-based assessment, being prepared for various formats will boost your confidence and allow you to demonstrate your abilities in the best possible way.

Video/Online Interviews

Video or online interviews have become increasingly common, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of remote work. These interviews can take place via platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or specialised video interviewing software. While video interviews offer

convenience, they also come with unique challenges like technical issues and the need to build rapport without being in the same physical space.

How Video/Online Interviews Work

Video interviews can take two main forms:

Live video interviews: These are conducted in real-time with an interviewer or a panel, similar to a traditional in-person interview. You'll have a direct conversation and can respond to questions immediately.

Pre-recorded video interviews: In this format, you are given pre-set questions to which you record your responses. There is no live interaction, and you often have limited time to answer each question (e.g., 1-2 minutes).

Both formats require you to adapt your body language and communication style to the virtual environment while ensuring that you appear professional and focused.

Preparing for a Video/Online Interview

To succeed in a video interview, preparation is key. You need to focus on both the content of your answers and the technical aspects of the interview.

Set Up Your Space: Choose a quiet, well-lit location with a neutral background. Make sure your surroundings are free of distractions and ensure that the lighting allows the interviewer to see you clearly.

Test Your Technology: Before the interview, test your internet connection, camera, microphone, and the video platform being used. Ensure you have any necessary software installed and practice using it if you're unfamiliar.

Dress Professionally: Even though you're not meeting in person, it's important to dress as you would for a face-to-face interview. This demonstrates professionalism and helps put you in the right mindset.

Maintain Good Posture and Look at the Camera: Sit up straight and look directly at the camera when speaking, as this simulates eye contact. Avoid looking at your screen or notes too often, as this can make you seem distracted.

Minimise Distractions: Silence notifications on your devices, close unnecessary applications on your computer, and let others in your household know not to disturb you during the interview.

Practice with Mock Video Interviews: Practice speaking to the camera so that you're comfortable delivering clear, concise answers without the benefit of direct in-person feedback. You can also record yourself to evaluate your posture, clarity, and body language.

During the Video/Online Interview

Be Engaged: Show enthusiasm and engagement through your facial expressions and tone of voice. Smile, nod, and react as you would in a face-to-face interview to build rapport.

Pace Your Responses: Since online conversations can sometimes have a delay, be mindful of pacing. Wait a moment after the interviewer speaks to ensure they've finished before responding, and speak clearly to avoid misunderstandings.

Handle Technical Issues Gracefully: If something goes wrong (e.g., your internet cuts out or the screen freezes), don't panic. Politely acknowledge the issue, and if needed, ask to reconnect or offer to continue via phone.

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews are often used as a screening tool, especially in the early stages of the recruitment process. They tend to be shorter than in-person or video interviews and may focus on verifying your qualifications, motivations, and general fit for the role. While telephone interviews may seem less formal, they require careful preparation, as you need to convey enthusiasm and professionalism without the benefit of body language or visual cues.

How Telephone Interviews Work

Telephone interviews are typically scheduled in advance, but sometimes employers may call unexpectedly. They usually last between 15-30 minutes, depending on the role and the stage of the hiring process. The questions asked during a telephone interview often focus on:

- Clarifying your experience and qualifications.
- Understanding your motivations for applying for the role.
- Assessing how well your values and goals align with the company's.

Since the interviewer can't see you, they will rely entirely on your voice, tone, and the content of your answers to gauge your suitability for the role. This makes clear, concise communication even more important.

Preparing for a Telephone Interview

Proper preparation for a telephone interview can help you feel more confident and focused during the call.

Find a Quiet Location: Choose a quiet space where you won't be interrupted. Ensure that your phone has good reception and is fully charged.

Have Your Materials Ready: Keep a copy of your CV, the job description, and any notes you've prepared in front of you. This will help you refer to specific details during the conversation without scrambling to find information.

Practice Speaking Clearly: Since the interviewer will rely solely on your voice, practice speaking clearly and at a moderate pace. If you tend to speak quickly when nervous, focus on slowing down and speaking clearly.

During the Telephone Interview

- **Listen Carefully:** Pay close attention to the interviewer's questions and tone. Without visual cues, it's important to listen for verbal clues that indicate when the interviewer has finished speaking or when they expect a more detailed answer.
- **Keep Your Answers Clear and Focused:** Because telephone interviews are often shorter, it's important to be concise. Stick to the main points, but also be sure to answer each question fully.
- **Use a Professional Tone:** Since your voice is the only way to convey professionalism, enthusiasm, and confidence, focus on keeping your tone positive and engaging. Avoid sounding too casual or monotone.

- **Ask for Clarification if Needed:** If you're unsure about a question or need time to gather your thoughts, it's okay to ask the interviewer to repeat or clarify a question. This shows that you're attentive and committed to giving a thoughtful answer.

Handling Common Telephone Interview Questions

Telephone interviews often include questions to verify your qualifications, understand your motivations, and gauge your fit with the company's culture. Here are a few common questions:

- "Why are you interested in this role, and why do you want to work for our company?"
- "Can you walk me through your CV and highlight your most relevant experiences?"
- "What do you consider your key strengths, and how do they align with this position?"
- "How do you handle tight deadlines or competing priorities?"

It's also a good idea to prepare thoughtful questions of your own to ask the interviewer at the end of the call. This shows you're genuinely interested in the role and helps you gather more information about the company.

Strengths-Based Interviews

Strengths-based interviews focus on what you enjoy doing and where your natural talents lie. The aim of this type of interview is to assess how well your strengths align with the tasks and culture of the role and company. Unlike competency-based interviews, which focus on past behaviour, strengths-based interviews are more forward-looking and designed to explore your motivations and passions.

How Strengths-Based Interviews Work

Instead of asking for examples of past experiences, strengths-based interview questions focus on uncovering your core strengths and understanding how you approach tasks. These questions often explore:

- What tasks you enjoy and find energising.
- What kinds of work environments suit you best.
- How you naturally approach problem-solving and working with others.

Questions in a strengths-based interview might include:

- "What activities make you feel most energised at work or in your studies?"
- "What do you find most enjoyable about collaborating with others?"
- "Can you tell me about a time when you felt you were doing your best work? What made it so?"

Preparing for a Strengths-Based Interview

To prepare for a strengths-based interview, reflect on what tasks or activities you enjoy most in your academic and extracurricular life. Think about what you do well naturally, where you've excelled without feeling drained, and what environments allow you to thrive. Make sure your answers reflect your genuine interests and play to your strengths, as authenticity is key in these interviews.

Portfolio-Based Interviews

Portfolio-based interviews are commonly used in creative and design-related fields. In this type of interview, you'll be asked to present and discuss a portfolio of your work. This could include projects, designs, research, essays, or any other work that demonstrates your creative process, technical skills, and critical thinking.

How Portfolio-Based Interviews Work

In a portfolio-based interview, the interviewer will typically ask you to walk through your portfolio, explain the thinking behind your projects, and highlight particular pieces that showcase relevant skills. This gives you the opportunity to demonstrate not just the final product but also your process and problem-solving abilities.

Typical questions in a portfolio-based interview might include:

- “Can you explain the creative process behind this piece of work?”
- “What challenges did you face during this project, and how did you overcome them?”
- “Which piece in your portfolio are you most proud of, and why?”

The interviewer will want to see a clear connection between the skills demonstrated in your portfolio and the requirements of the job. This type of interview is often used in fields like graphic design, film, fashion, or any role where a visual or creative output is key.

Preparing for a Portfolio-Based Interview

The key to succeeding in a portfolio-based interview is to curate your portfolio carefully. Only include work that is relevant to the job you're applying for and that showcases a range of skills. You should be able to confidently explain the purpose of each project, your creative process, and the outcomes.

- **Tailor Your Portfolio:** If possible, tailor your portfolio to the role. For example, if you're applying for a graphic design role, focus on pieces that demonstrate your design versatility, use of software, and ability to meet client needs.
- **Highlight Key Projects:** Be ready to discuss 2-3 key projects in detail. Focus on the skills that are most relevant to the job, and make sure you can clearly explain why you made certain creative choices and how you solved any challenges.
- **Bring Physical and Digital Versions:** Some interviews may be conducted in person, while others may be virtual. Having both physical and digital versions of your portfolio ensures you're prepared for any format.

Competency-Based Interviews

Competency-based interviews are designed to assess whether you have the specific skills and behaviours required for the role by looking at your past experiences. These interviews focus on competencies like teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and communication. Competency-based interviews are a chance to showcase how your academic and extracurricular experiences have developed the skills relevant to the job.

How Competency-Based Interviews Work

In a competency-based interview, the interviewer will ask you to provide specific examples of situations where you have demonstrated a particular skill or behaviour. These questions often start with phrases like:

- “Tell me about a time when...”
- “Can you give me an example of...”
- “Describe a situation where...”

They are designed to understand how you’ve applied your skills in the past, as this can indicate how you’ll perform in the future. Competency-based questions require you to think critically about your experiences and articulate them in a structured and logical manner.

Preparing for a Competency-Based Interview

To prepare, review the job description and identify the key competencies required. These are often clearly listed in the “requirements” or “desired skills” section of a job advert. For example, if the role requires strong leadership and teamwork, think of examples from your academic projects, group work, internships, or voluntary work where you demonstrated these qualities.

It’s useful to brainstorm 3-5 examples that demonstrate a range of competencies, such as:

- **Teamwork:** Working in group projects or societies.
- **Problem-solving:** Solving issues during research or a challenging academic task.
- **Communication:** Presentations, debates, or leading discussions in seminars.

Use the **STAR method** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure your answers, ensuring you clearly articulate the context and your specific contribution.

The STAR Method

The STAR method is a powerful tool for answering competency-based interview questions. It helps you structure your responses to show interviewers how you have successfully applied your skills and knowledge in real situations.

What is STAR?

The STAR method is a structured approach to answering questions that ask for examples of your past behavior, which are common in competency-based interviews. Here’s how it works:

- **S (Situation):** Describe the context of the situation you faced. What was happening, where were you, and who was involved?
- **T (Task):** Explain the task you were responsible for. What was required of you?
- **A (Action):** Focus on the specific actions you took to handle the task. What did you do, and how did you do it?
- **R (Result):** Share the outcome of your actions. What was achieved, and what did you learn from the experience?

This framework ensures that your answer is clear, concise, and focused on demonstrating the relevant skills. You can draw on a wide range of experiences, from academic projects to extracurricular activities, internships, and part-time jobs. The key is to select examples that showcase relevant competencies such as communication, research, problem-solving, teamwork, and leadership.

Common Questions & How to Apply STAR

Some typical competency-based questions might include:

- “Tell me about a time you worked in a team.”
- “Can you give an example of when you had to manage multiple priorities?”
- “Describe a situation where you demonstrated leadership.”

For each question, apply the STAR method by walking the interviewer through your specific example, ensuring that you highlight key skills and outcomes that relate to the job you're applying for.

How to Choose STAR Examples

It may often be the case that you have more than one example you can use to evidence your skills or experience. For example, if an employer is looking for someone with ‘strong teamwork skills’ there may be many instances in which you have worked as part of a team. Perhaps you’ve undertaken a team-based university assignment, participated in a team-based sports club, worked as a team in your part-time job or been part of a team summer volunteering scheme.

When thinking about which specific example to choose, ask yourself:

- What is your most relevant example?
- Is the example recent (try to use examples within the last 5 years where possible)?
- What example best describes the skill being asked for?
- Does the example adequately enable you to structure your answer using the STAR(R) Approach?

Examples STAR Answers

Leadership: describe a time you lead a team successfully.

S – “When at university I was president of the Student Union...”

T – “...one of my tasks was to lead a team of ten organising the Winter Ball”

A – “As team leader, I first had to recruit the team members and then had to brief them as to their responsibilities. I then had to co-ordinate them in terms of their tasks and strengths, and finally I had to motivate them to achieve high standards. I organised regular meetings, in addition to our email communications, as well as managing the budget using Excel, which was regularly reported to the Student Union.”

R – “Strong communication, teamwork and social media promotion resulted in the event being organised successfully and ticket sales exceeded the target set. Although I put a lot of effort into ensuring I recruited the right staff, they did ask me a lot of questions which meant I had less time for my other tasks. In hindsight I would put some time aside for weekly team meetings.”

Problem Solving: tell me about a time you had to solve a problem.

S – “A good example of problem solving is when I worked in customer services.”

T – “One of my tasks was to deal with customer problems, a specific example was helping a customer who had lost their receipt.”

A – “I listened very carefully to the customer, summarised their problem and repeated it back to them to ensure I’ve not misunderstood, I then...”

R – “By staying calm and listening to the customer, they always felt that I was doing the best for them. On one occasion a customer returned to say thank you for helping to solve their problem.”

Building Confidence and Resilience

Confidence and resilience are crucial to success in interviews, as they help you present your best self and handle challenges along the way, many students may feel unsure about how to translate their academic skills into practical roles. This section will help you build the confidence you need and develop resilience to manage the ups and downs of the interview process.

Preparing Mentally for Interviews

Mental preparation is just as important as rehearsing answers. A confident mindset helps you project self-assurance and stay calm under pressure.

- **Visualization:** Visualize yourself in the interview, answering questions confidently and building rapport with the interviewer. Imagine the interview going well to reduce anxiety.
- **Relaxation Techniques:** Breathing exercises and mindfulness can help reduce interview nerves. Take deep breaths before the interview starts to calm your mind.
- **Positive Affirmations:** Replace self-doubt with affirmations like, “I am prepared,” “I can handle this,” and “I bring unique strengths to this role.”

In addition to these techniques, thorough research into the company, the role, and the sector will provide you with the knowledge and context you need to feel more assured during the interview.

Overcoming Nerves and Building Confidence

Nerves are natural, especially if you’re not yet experienced in interviewing. Here are some ways to overcome them and build your confidence:

- **Mock Interviews:** Practice makes perfect. Arrange mock interviews with a member of the careers team or ask a close friend or family member to support. The more you practice, the more familiar the process will feel, reducing anxiety.
- **Prepare Key Answers:** Prepare for common questions such as “Tell me about yourself” and “Why do you want this job?” Having confident answers to these foundational questions will help you start strong and build momentum throughout the interview.
- **Body Language:** Your body language can influence your confidence levels. Sit or stand up straight, smile, and maintain good eye contact if you can. Confident body language can actually help you feel more confident.

Resilience

Resilience is essential for dealing with tough questions, unexpected scenarios, or even rejections. Remember, not every interview will go perfectly, and that's okay.

- **Bouncing Back from Difficult Questions:** If you don't know the answer to a question, don't panic. Take a moment to think and respond as thoughtfully as possible. It's better to ask for clarification than to try to bluff your way through.
- **Learning from Mistakes:** Every interview is a learning experience. After the interview, reflect on what went well and where you can improve. Each interview, even the tough ones, is an opportunity to grow.
- **Staying Positive:** If you don't get the job, remember that rejection is part of the process. Stay positive, ask for feedback where possible, and use it to improve for your next opportunity. Rejections don't define your abilities; they are just stepping stones on the path to success.

Accepting Imperfections

It's important to recognise that no interview will ever be perfect. Even if you stumble on a question or feel you could have answered better, employers are often looking for a blend of skills, attitude, and potential. Be kind to yourself and trust that imperfection doesn't negate your qualifications.

By preparing mentally, practicing your interview skills, and developing resilience, you'll not only boost your confidence but also become more adaptable and capable in any interview situation.

Following Up After the Interview

Following up after an interview is a critical yet often overlooked part of the process. It not only demonstrates your professionalism but also reinforces your interest in the role. A well-crafted follow-up can leave a positive impression on interviewers and keep you top of mind as they make their decision.

The Importance of Follow-Up

After the interview, taking the time to thank the interviewers for their time and consideration is a simple but effective way to show that you value the opportunity. It reinforces your enthusiasm for the position and helps build a relationship with the employer.

- **Professionalism:** A follow-up shows you understand business etiquette and are genuinely interested in the role.
- **Demonstrating Interest:** It's a final chance to reaffirm your desire to contribute to the company and reiterate your key qualifications.

How to Write a Thank You Email

Sending a thank-you email within 24-48 hours after your interview is a standard practice. Keep it concise, respectful, and focused on key points discussed during the interview.

- **Structure of the Email:**
 1. **Greeting:** Address the interviewer(s) by name.

2. **Thank You Message:** Express gratitude for the opportunity to interview and for their time.
3. **Reiterate Your Interest:** Briefly mention your enthusiasm for the role and the company, referring to something specific discussed during the interview.
4. **Closing:** Offer to provide any further information and thank them again for considering your application.

- **Example:**

Dear [Interviewer's Name],

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me yesterday to discuss the [Job Title] position. I enjoyed learning more about [specific aspect of the role or company] and am excited about the opportunity to contribute to your team at [Company Name].

Our conversation reinforced my interest in the role, particularly how my skills in [specific skills discussed] align with your current needs. Please let me know if you need any further information.

Thank you again for the opportunity, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,
[Your Name]

Managing Expectations and Waiting Periods

The period after an interview can be nerve-wracking as you wait for a response. It's important to manage your expectations and stay productive during this time.

- **Be Patient:** Hiring processes can take time. It's appropriate to follow up if you haven't heard back after the timeline provided by the employer, but avoid excessive follow-ups.
- **Stay Positive:** Instead of stressing, focus on preparing for other opportunities or continuing your job search. Keeping busy will help manage your anxiety while waiting.

Handling Rejection and Moving Forward

Rejection is an inevitable part of the job search process, and it's important to handle it constructively. While receiving a rejection can feel disheartening, it's an opportunity for growth, reflection, and resilience. How you respond to rejection can shape your future success.

Dealing with Rejection

It's natural to feel disappointed when you don't get a role you were hoping for. However, it's crucial to remember that rejection is often not a reflection of your abilities but rather a matter of fit for a specific role or company.

- **Acknowledge Your Feelings:** Take time to process the disappointment, but don't dwell on it. Understand that everyone faces rejection, even the most qualified candidates.
- **Reframe the Experience:** Think of the interview as a learning opportunity, not a failure. Each rejection brings you one step closer to finding the right fit for your skills and career goals.

Seeking Constructive Feedback

Asking for feedback can be an invaluable tool for improving your interview performance. While not all employers may provide feedback, many are open to sharing areas where you can grow.

- **How to Ask for Feedback:** Be polite and professional when requesting feedback. You can send an email thanking the employer for the opportunity and asking for advice on how you can improve in future interviews.
 - Example: “Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the [Job Title] position. While I’m disappointed not to be moving forward, I would greatly appreciate any feedback you may have on my interview performance or areas for improvement.”
- **Using Feedback:** Take the feedback constructively and use it to refine your skills, whether that’s improving your interview answers, building confidence, or addressing specific gaps in your experience.

Building Resilience for Future Interviews

Resilience is key to bouncing back from rejection and continuing your job search with optimism and determination. Each interview is a chance to refine your approach, and each rejection is part of the learning process.

- **Keep a Growth Mindset:** Embrace setbacks as opportunities for learning and growth. Focus on what you can improve, and celebrate the progress you’re making along the way.
- **Stay Persistent:** Rejections may feel discouraging, but persistence is essential. Keep applying, keep networking, and continue developing your skills. The right opportunity will come.

Conclusion

Preparing for interviews can be a challenging but rewarding process, especially for students in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences disciplines. By understanding the different types of interviews, using structured frameworks like STAR, building confidence, and developing resilience, you’ll be well-equipped to handle any interview situation.

Remember, interviews are not just about proving your qualifications—they're also about finding the right fit for your skills and career aspirations. Each interview is an opportunity to learn more about yourself, develop new skills, and refine your approach. Whether you face success or rejection, every step is valuable in helping you grow both personally and professionally.

As you continue your job search, don’t forget to use the resources available to you, including university career services, networking opportunities, and online tools. Stay proactive, be resilient, and trust that your unique background and experiences will ultimately lead you to the right path.



If you would like further support from the FHASS Employability Team you can visit our Blog, book an appointment through Careers Connect or email us at fhassemployability@lancaster.ac.uk

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this resource guide is accurate but we recommend that you check all details carefully.

