

## 10 Tips for Interview Success

### Introduction

Training and preparation for interviews tends to be formulaic. Consequently, interview candidates can produce predictable and off the peg answers that do not distinguish themselves from other job candidates. By being innovative in your approach to both preparing and performing in interviews, you can make yourself stand out as a leading candidate for the job. This article provides 10 key tips for excelling at interviews.

### 1. Conduct Extensive Background Research

- ✓ In addition to reading the strategic plan of the library, read the **strategic plan of the institution** in which the library is located so that you obtain a robust sense of the overall institutional culture (its goals, priorities and values). How does the Library Strategy align with this overarching institutional Strategy? Typically, interviewers want to appoint a candidate who shares the same professional vision and values as the recruiting institution.
- ✓ Do a **Google News search** for the recruiting library. Perhaps the library has made a new investment, designed a new building, launched a special collection or won an award. Interviewers want to recruit someone who is enthusiastic about their organisation's achievements. Show the interviewing panel that you are aware of these achievements.
- ✓ **Library Publications:** Check the website of the recruiting library. Conduct a Google search and a search of the literature of the Library. Search Slideshare to see what research or presentations library staff have undertaken. Check the library's institutional repository which often contains a collection of library staff's presentations and articles. Is this a library that is interested in open source software, or open access publishing as examples? Read some of the library's presentation and publication outputs. Recruiting a staff member who shares an interest in the publication, professional development and research activities of the recruiting library is an additional bonus.



- ✓ **Do a PDF search of the library:** Pop the library's name into Google followed by Pdf. This can retrieve reports about the recruiting library that may not be on their website such as an action plan for a particular area, a report on e-resource management or a report on information literacy activities. These can provide an additional level of insight into library operations. Mention these documents where the opportunity arises to showcase your extensive research. Include some of these materials in your interview presentation if relevant.
- ✓ **Speak to a professional in a similar role.** If you are going for an interview as an information literacy librarian as an example, reach out to a practising professional in this area. Get some advice on what the current challenges and opportunities are in relation to information literacy. Do they have any specific advice on key trends in relation to information literacy? Could they advise on possible interview questions? Contact this professional after you have received details of who is on the interviewing panel, to safeguard against approaching someone on the panel.
- ✓ **If you receive the list of interview panel members, research their backgrounds including their presentation and publication outputs.** Where do they work? Have they any key publications or presentations? The benefits of this exercise are two-fold. It is possible that the interview panel members' questions may be shaped by their interests. Subconsciously people are also more drawn to those with shared interests. Refer to a common area of interest where the interview questions permit and where it aligns to the role in question. Impress the panel by referring to research that they may have conducted if the opportunity arises in relation to discussions about the position.
- ✓ **If you do not receive details of the panel members, check who the line manager of the Librarian is.** Generally their immediate line manager is on the panel. Research this staff member's professional profile and interests.
- ✓ **Know the key trends, research, frameworks, experts and nomenclature in relation to the subject area that you are being interviewed for.** What is happening in Ireland and beyond in relation to this area? Search the academic and professional literature. Who are the key influencers and thinkers in this area? The websites of the Library Association of Ireland and the International Federation of Library Associations contain information on the activities of many special interest groups across a huge range of library areas. Draw on your knowledge of the subject area during the interview to impart a sense of authority and competence.
- ✓ **Thoroughly consult the website of the recruiting library.** Consult also the website of the organisation in which the library functions. Check the library's Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn pages. These can give a strong flavour of how the library supports its users on a day to day basis. It can also give a flavour of typical library user types. Perhaps you have engaged in similar professional activities and can elaborate on what you could bring or add to these activities.

Extensive background research can help with all aspects of the interview but particularly with questions such as:

- ✓ Why do you want to work in this library?
- ✓ What do you know about this library?
- ✓ What do you bring to this library?

Extensive background research can also help with the interview presentation if required. A key tip with the presentation is to keep it succinct and where feasible to include points diplomatically

worded that demonstrate how you would add value to current practices in the recruiting Library. Click [here](#) for further information on interview presentations.

## 2. Conduct a Thorough Professional Self-Audit in Preparation for the Interview

**Step 1:** Carefully match your skillset and experience against the individual job criteria outlined in the job specification drawing on specific examples from your current and previous roles. Open a Word document and create a three column table. In the first column enter the individual job requirements as outlined in the job description, in the second column enter specific examples of how you meet each of these requirements and in the final column write down the competency attached to this particular element of your work experience (leadership, team working etc.).

**Step 2:** Prepare answers for typical types of interview questions that can arise such as why do you want this job? What do you bring to this role? Where do you see yourself in five years time? Click [here](#) to see examples of typical questions asked during interviews along with recommended responses.

Be diplomatic and pragmatic when answering interview questions. For example, in five years time you see yourself as growing and developing with this library service (even if this isn't the whole truth). The recruiting library should never be positioned as a stepping stone to something better. When asked what is your greatest strength? Answers highlighting team work are appealing. Everyone likes a team player. When asked about a weakness, pick something genuine that you have overcome for example a fear of speaking at conferences. The recruiting panel will admire that you have worked hard to overcome an area of weakness.

**Step 3: Map your skillset to the library's Strategic Plan.** How does your library studies course or your work experience map to this strategic plan? Perhaps the Library's strategic plan has a focus on open access, UX or research data management as examples and you have studied about or have direct work experience in these areas. Be familiar with how the role you are being interviewed for is situated within the interviewing library's strategic plan.

**Step 4: Consider what value added knowledge or experience you can bring to the role.** Draw on your complete skillset to make yourself stand out in the interview. Do you speak a language or have other useful qualifications such as a diploma in digital marketing? Perhaps you have work experience in a non-library role that might also be helpful. When all things are equal between candidates, the presence of a value added skill or experience is helpful.



A great way of adding value to your profile is to consider undertaking a MOOC or a National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning digital badge. You might be the only candidate who has completed a short MOOC on a library related topic from Yale or Harvard as examples. Examples of digital badges that are useful in the library sphere are badges on universal design, online teaching and learning and professional development. See examples of National Forum digital badges click [here](#).

A particularly useful digital badge is the new L2L Joint Digital Badge, a collaboration between the Library Association of Ireland and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning which is led by Mary Buckley, Head of Library Services at the National College of Ireland and Isabelle Courtney, Lecturer on the MSc in Information and Library Management at DBS. The badge encourages library staff at all grades to reflect on their professional development using an evidence-based approach.

The information that you gather up as part of your professional self-audit helps with questions such as 'why do you want this job?' (You meet the criteria etc. Provide examples of how). It also helps with questions like 'Is there anything that you would like to add?' (You might give an example of additional value-added skills or qualifications that you also feel would be helpful in the context of the job) etc.

Information derived from a professional self-audit may also be incorporated into a closing slide of your presentation in relation to how you can help achieve the topic or goal under discussion.

### 3. Assess and Articulate Your Real World Competencies

You may be supplied in advance with details of competencies that will be discussed during the interview. If you do not receive these in advance, it is likely that they will be discussed in any event. Typical competency focused questions include things like: tell me about a time that you led a project, handled conflict, dealt with an underperforming member of staff, implemented an innovation or successfully completed a project as part of a team.

Competency areas will vary according to the level of the post. For example candidates being interviewed for a library manager role will be expected to showcase managerial competencies.



To instil confidence when responding to competency based questions it is important to be factual and succinct. Candidates should not over talk or waffle. Refer to specific examples and contexts. Proactive and capable employees are decisive and to the point. The STAR framework is helpful for framing these responses. See image below. More on the STAR technique [here](#)

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>S</b> <b>Situation</b> | Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?                        |
| <b>T</b> <b>Task</b>      | Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?         |
| <b>A</b> <b>Action</b>    | Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use? |
| <b>R</b> <b>Results</b>   | Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify.    |

**'STAR' Technique to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions**

<http://www.RightAttitudes.com>

What employers are looking for in exploring these real world scenarios is the proactive and sensible resolution of difficult situations with the minimum of disruption and a strong focus on user satisfaction whilst also being mindful of institutional culture, hierarchies and budget constraints. Typically interviewers are attempting to see if you can:

- ✓ Plan and organise
- ✓ Communicate and liaise
- ✓ Persuade
- ✓ Maintain a strong results focus
- ✓ Maintain a strong focus on customer service
- ✓ Remain within budgetary and institutional policy guidelines (sometimes when discussing a project or innovation in an interview, it can be helpful to occasionally add a point like 'subject to budget' or 'subject to discussions with my line manager.' Libraries want to recruit can do and innovative employees who are also mindful of institutional constraints and costs. Show that you are a safe pair of hands even when innovating.

Many interviewees draw on examples of initiatives or practices that didn't work. Only do this if you can give an example of how knowledge of this failure informed a better solution going forward.

For example, perhaps you are a teaching librarian who uses apps to encourage student engagement. Within this list of apps, you discover that two apps do not have a robust security and privacy policy in line with the institutional privacy policy. You replace these apps with more reliable and secure alternatives which conform to the organisation's privacy policy. Perhaps your actions prompt the institutional librarian to review the privacy policy of apps used across routine library operations and services. It is important to show that despite initial challenges, you eventually secured positive results. Examples do not have to be complex. Sometimes simple innovations such as the production of a Libguide with details of library services during the COVID-19 pandemic, as an example, can be hugely powerful.

Drawing on innovations that you have affected is also helpful in relation to competency based questions. Perhaps you initiated training with other staff on a piece of software like Libguides; or you introduced virtual office hours for online library users or worked extensively with a vendor to secure more e-book titles. Describe how you led or contributed to these changes.

Keep a work diary and/or purchase blank postcards. When you are involved in work projects that develop your competencies in relation to conflict resolution, leadership, team work, innovation and user satisfaction, record the details of these in the STAR format so that you have examples readily available to draw upon for future interviews.



## 4. Appearances Matter

In interviews, non-verbal communication is as important as verbal communication. Be aware of your body language. Sit comfortably, not stiffly. Remember to smile occasionally, particularly at the start and end of the interview. Have a firm, warm handshake. Say thank you at the end of the interview. An interview assesses your suitability as a fellow team member so interviewers are anxious to see that you are pleasant and approachable.

Your interview attire is extremely important. First impressions are significant. A key consideration that is overlooked by many candidates is dressing appropriately in relation to the level of the job that they are being interviewed for. So for example a job applicant attends a library assistant interview dressed as if he or she were being interviewed for a Library Director role. This can make a candidate appear unrealistic, over-qualified and even intimidating. Remember that the recruiting organisation is looking for a candidate who will fit in with the team, who has good interpersonal skills and is approachable.

Be professional looking but not so severe that it makes you look unapproachable and unfriendly. Strike a balance between creating a professional but approachable look. For more junior library roles, formal casual is sufficient, It may not be necessary to wear a tie as an example.

Click [here](#) to access helpful resources on interview attire from Balance Careers. Do a Google Image search before interviews to get ideas of smart looks e.g. formal or smart casual etc. There are also lots of useful Youtube videos on dressing appropriately for interviews.

## 5. Do a Mock Interview



Having done extensive background research and spoken to someone in the field; craft some questions and get a friend to ask you these questions. Doing a mock interview can reduce nerves during the actual interview. Never learn answers by rote as this can produce the dreaded brain freeze on the day. Do a second mock interview with another friend instead. It's a more proactive way to practice and retain knowledge. Do your mock interview by Zoom or Google hangouts so that you are comfortable with this format which is currently the norm

during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 6. You don't have to ask a Question at The End of the Interview



It is better not to ask a question at the end of the interview than ask a question that opens a can of worms or exposes a resource that the library service doesn't have or worse your lack of knowledge in relation to an area of library practice.

It is perfectly acceptable to say (and often a relief to a tired interview panel) that the information provided in advance was very helpful and consequently you have no further questions. This also has the added benefit of complimenting the interviewing organisation and of ending the interview on a positive note. Alternatively if you feel that you have an additional point to make that you didn't get the opportunity to discuss, use the time at the end of the interview to supply this additional information.

If you do ask a question, make sure that it is context specific and pragmatic. Asking a small library if they can fund your PhD as an example may put the recruiter on the spot. There are certain questions that we would caution against using. For further information on the do's and don'ts of asking questions at the end of the interview, see [here](#).

## 7. It's Okay to Not Know the Answer to Something

Even a Library Director does not know the answer to everything. What's more important is showing the interviewing panel how you handle not knowing something. Even if you don't have direct experience of an area, demonstrate awareness of it. So you would tell the interviewer that you don't have direct experience of the area but that you are very interested in it. In fact you have read an article about it, or it featured in your library studies programme or you attended a conference on the area as examples. Perhaps you did a thesis on this area. This provides reassurance to the interviewing panel that in the event of your lack of direct experience of a specific area that you at least have some knowledge or interest in the area. Do not attempt to bluff experience in relation to work experience that you don't have.

## 8. Don't Fix Your Sights on One Job and One Interview

Job applicants should not fixate on obtaining one particular job. This brings additional pressure and stress which can compromise interview performance.

Job seekers should expect to do anything up to ten interviews before successfully securing a role. Job seeking is an iterative journey in which you grow in confidence, acquire new knowledge and expand your professional network. You will eventually get the right role.



## 9. Obtain and Learn from Panel Feedback / Reapply to Libraries That Have Rejected You

If you have been unsuccessful in an interview, obtain feedback from the panel. Obtaining interview feedback is a constructive process that informs your future success. Don't fear or be offended by it. Learn from it. It is tantamount to free career coaching! For further information on dealing with feedback, click [here](#).

Prove your passion for a library service by reapplying again for other roles that they advertise. It is not uncommon for candidates to apply to one institution on several occasions eventually securing a role.



## 10. Online Interviews are Still a Great Opportunity to Promote Yourself!

Tips 1 to 9 in this article also apply for online interviews. In online interviews it is equally necessary to be prepared, to be smartly dressed and to have positive body language. Ensure that you conduct the interview in an area of your accommodation that is well lit, tidy and free from distraction. Test your technology in advance. To thrive in the online interview context, bravery is required. When the sound quality is poor, it's always best to politely ask a panel member to repeat a question than to supply the wrong answer.

Always have a contingency plan in place. If you are having wifi issues, be honest at the outset, letting the panel know that in the event of disruption to the connection, you will connect to your hot spot as an example. Being preemptive in this fashion depicts you as being positive and proactive. For further information on online interviews, click [here](#).



**5 TOP ONLINE INTERVIEW TIPS**

Make an Impression from a Distance

- ★ Look directly into the camera and not at the screen or monitor to make good eye contact
- ★ Don't be afraid to ask for a question to be repeated if you have not heard it properly. It is better to clarify
- ★ The sound system can be less than perfect so speak clearly and avoid mumbling or rushing your words
- ★ Be aware of your facial expressions and posture - they are a large part of your message online
- ★ Pause before answering a question to be sure the interviewer has finished speaking

Best Job Interview

Source: <https://www.best-job-interview.com/online-interview-questions.html>

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