



## UNIVERSITY INTERVIEWS: HOW TO PREPARE

### How universities use interviews:

Interviews (and auditions) are just one part of the university admissions process along with your:

- Predicted grades
- GCSE and other confirmed grades
- UCAS reference
- Personal statement
- Submitted work (where requested)
- Entry test results (where applicable)

The likelihood of being invited to an interview depends on the university or the courses you're applying for.

### Universities that tend to interview:

Very few universities interview all or most of their applicants. The exceptions that most people know about are Oxford and Cambridge, where the interview forms an important part of the process. But they're not the only ones; Imperial College London and University College London will also interview most of their applicants.

### Courses that tend to interview:

Ultimately it comes down to an individual course department as to whether you'll be interviewed or not, but the likelihood of interview can be categorised broadly by subject:

- **Most likely:** professional training degrees, such as dentistry, primary education, social work and nursing.
- **Possible:** talent-based degrees such as music, acting, art and design.
- **You never know:** sciences, engineering, computing.
- **Least likely:** humanities and social science degrees such as English, politics, history and geography.

There are of course exceptions to these trends. You should therefore read the entry requirements of the course you are considering to find out whether they typically interview applicants.

### **How to prepare for an interview:**

If you are shortlisted for a University interview it is almost certain that – in the current climate – you will be interviewed via video conferencing. This is already a popular method used by many recruiters. This may either fill you with fear of the unknown, relief that you won't have to leave the comfort of your house, or maybe even a bit of both.

Firstly, try not to let the prospect of an online interview scare you. Remember that, because we are a Google docs school, you will be much more familiar with video conferencing technology compared to most students who don't use this type of technology on a daily basis.

A video interview will have a large amount of similarities to a regular face-to-face interview, but here are some specific video interview tips that you should be aware of in order to ensure you perform your best on the day:

#### **1. Prepare your surroundings**

Make sure you choose a quiet space for the interview, and tidy the area so it looks presentable. It's always good to have a clear, uncluttered space to help you to concentrate on the task at hand, and to remind you that you're in a formal situation.

Also, get rid of any potentially inappropriate belongings lying around. Your interviewer will be able to see more than you think, and the smallest distraction in the background that you thought wasn't in view could reflect badly on you.

#### **2. Test your technology**

Once you are invited for an interview, find out which video conferencing app they will use. The most common are Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Hangouts.

Whichever app the recruiter is using, get to grips with it first (obviously google hangouts should be easy for you!). Don't make your interview the first time you use the technology. Try it out with family and friends well before the interview date to make sure you've got the hang of it. Remember you will need a device with a functioning camera. Being comfortable with how the apps work will give you extra confidence on the day.

**Tip:** Connect early - don't leave your logging on until the last minute. Give yourself plenty of time to get settled, test your connection, and make sure everything is working well.

#### **3. Look the part**

Ultimately, a video interview will follow the same rules and format as a face-to-face interview, so it's a good idea to wear the same outfit you'd wear if you were visiting a

University. Being professionally dressed will also put you in the right mind-set, and stop you from falling into an overly comfortable 'I'm at home' state.

Since you'll be sat down, and only viewable from the waist up, it might be tempting to wear interview-appropriate clothes on top and not on the bottom. But, as comfy as it sounds, you should dress professionally from top to toe, including smart shoes. There might be a chance that you have to stand up and you don't want to be caught short in a suit jacket and fluffy slippers!

#### **4. Avoid any potential interruptions**

Switch off your phone, tell your friends you're out, lock your bedroom door and so on.

Awkward interruptions that interfere with the smooth running of your interview are best avoided as much as possible. You want an interviewer to see you're serious about their course, so show you're prepared.

Always turn off the TV, music, and close other programmes on your computer. And finally, ensure those you live with are aware.

#### **5. Look at the camera, not the screen**

Eye contact is important in any kind of interview, but video calls make it a lot harder to follow. If you look directly at the interviewer on the screen, it might feel like you're giving good eye contact, but all they'll see is you looking down. Focus on looking directly at the camera instead, at least for the most-part of the interview.

Avoid the interviewer getting over-acquainted with the top of your head! Position the camera face on, creating the illusion you are sat across from them.

**Tip:** Remember to smile! A friendly and confident 'hello, nice to meet you' at the beginning along with a smile will make a great first impression.

#### **6. Make use of notes, but don't rely on them too much**

The good news is that having notes to hand is acceptable in a video interview. As long as you do it subtly, there's no reason you can't have handy tips nearby. Use them to help you answer any difficult questions or remember specific facts about the course.

However, don't use notes as a script, or you will sound monotonous, and you won't be able to look at the camera at the same time.

**Tip:** Stick post-it notes around your computer with prompts.

#### **7. Body language is still important**

Although you're not in the same room as your interviewer physically, body language remains important. Sit up straight, look attentive and enthusiastic.

Be aware of the limitations in sound quality and volume in this situation – you want your interviewer to hear you clearly. Don't cover your mouth, remain conscious of your hand-to-face gestures, and try and keep your hands on your knees.

**Tip:** If you sit perfectly still, the interviewer might think the call has frozen. Sit forward, smile and nod but try not to wave your hands around too much because it could be distracting for the interviewer, especially if the connection is patchy.

**Tip:** There is usually a slight delay during video conferencing so make sure you give the interviewer time to finish their question before you jump in.

## **8. Prepare, prepare, prepare!**

An online interview is just like any other interview so you should be fully prepared. That said, compared to many job interviews, sixth form interviews tend to be fairly relaxed. The University's main aim is to find out whether you are well-suited to University life. Rather than a series of formal questions, they tend to be more of a discussion. However you still need to be prepared so make sure you research the course and University in-depth and prepare a list of questions.

Read your personal statement and make sure you are ready to answer questions about it. Whilst you can't predict what you are going to be asked, you can prepare some answers to likely questions such as:

1. What do you know about the course you're applying to study?
2. What particular aspects of the course interest you and why?
3. What skills have you been developing that will prepare you to study on this course?
4. Why do you want to attend this college in particular?
5. What are your long-term goals? Is there a certain career you wish to pursue? How do you think your chosen course will help you to reach those goals?
6. What do you like to do in your spare time? Have you participated in any extracurricular activities? Have these activities provided you with any useful skills?
7. Are you happy with your GCSE results? Do you feel you could have achieved a higher grade with any of them?
8. Why did you choose your A level subjects?
9. What book are you reading at the moment? Has anything in the news interested you?
10. What makes you more suitable for the course than another applicant with the same grades?
11. What do you think will be your biggest challenge whilst at University?

Draw a mind map, or bullet point your answers so that you have them at the forefront of your mind. Here are a few useful articles that will help to prepare answers to common University questions:

<https://www.allaboutcareers.com/careers-advice/university-interviews/university-interview-questions>

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/applying-for-university/getting-into-university/preparing-for-a-university-interview>

<https://www.studential.com/university/applying/UCAS-application-guide/interviews/questions-and-answers>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/10-common-college-interview-questions-and-how-answer-them>

**Tip:** The school has collected interview feedback/questions from ex students who have previously attended University interviews. If you are invited to interview, email Mrs Beck who will send you any information that is relevant to your course/University.

**Tip:** Unifrog has lots of useful guides on how to prepare for interviews, and there are also dedicated guides for Oxbridge and Medicine applicants. The most useful guides are in our *Know-How Library*, where you can type in 'Interview' in the search box. If you scroll down there are lots of guides under 'tests and interviews'

## **9. Practice**

Having a video interview trial run is not only important for gaging the best body language and practicing your answers, but also to test your equipment. Because technology isn't always the most trustworthy of things, and you never know when it might decide to malfunction, it is important to try it out before the interview.

**Tip:** Check the best angle for your webcam, the best height of your chair, and the speed of your connection.

**Tip:** Request a mock interview through Connexions. Please email Mrs White ([cwhite@tringschool.org](mailto:cwhite@tringschool.org)) who can organise this for you. Mrs Beck is also happy to do a mock online interview with you via a Google hangout, so do email her if you would like to arrange this.

## **10. Stay calm**

Even the most prepared student can come undone on the day of the interview, and if that happens to you, don't panic. If you are disturbed during the interview for example or suffer a tech meltdown, remain calm and smile. Be positive, it's a perfect chance to demonstrate your ability to keep a cool head under pressure.

Also, remember that the interviewer does not want to make you feel uncomfortable. They understand that most students have not attended an interview before, and they will go out of their way to try to make you feel at ease. They are not trying to trick you, or catch you out.

## **11. Prepare some good questions**

Asking good questions will impress your interviewer just as much as good answers. Make sure you're prepared so you can show you're engaged in the course and interested in the university. You should have some questions about the university prepared first and then you should also have course-specific questions prepared too.

## **12. Be yourself**

Remember that the admissions tutors will want to see what you're like as a person, so let your personality shine through. Show enthusiasm for your chosen course, speak clearly, and smile!

Good luck!

**Mrs Beck**

**UCAS Coordinator**