Challenging interview questions

General questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your key strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Tell me about a big mistake you have made.
- Why should we employ you instead of someone else for this role?
- Tell me something about yourself that I wouldn't know from reading your application.
- What do people rely on you for?
- What have you gained from your previous experiences that would make you useful to us?
- Do you consider yourself well-rounded? Why? Can you give me examples?
- What about yourself do you want to improve?
- When was the last time you surprised yourself?

Motivation and values

- Why do you want this job?
- What made you apply for this role?
- What other jobs are you applying for?
- What did you like most and least about your studies?
- What part of your studies was most challenging?
- If you had an extra hour in the day what would you do with it (excluding work or study)?
- What are your career goals?
- What energises you?
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?
- What would you look forward to most in this job?
- What are you looking forward to least in this job?
- What has been your most rewarding experience?
- What are your core values and how do they relate to those of our organisation?
- Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of? Why?
- What other career options have you ruled out? Why?
- What did you do to find out more about this role?
- What is the most exciting thing you have ever done?
- How have your motivations and priorities changed in the last five years?
- Describe an event in your life which has had a major impact on you.
- If you didn't have to worry about money, how would you spend your time?
- How long do you think you will be happy in this role?
- What do you think will be the most challenging aspect of this role?
- What does success mean to you?
- What initially sparked your interest in this area and what did you do to confirm that it was right for you?
- What is your ideal working environment?

Team work and interpersonal skills

- Think about a time when you worked as part of a team, tell me what you enjoyed most.
- What would your team mates say you needed to improve about yourself?
- Give me a specific example of something you did that helped build enthusiasm in others.
- Describe a situation where you had to deal with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?
- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle them?
- What qualities do you have that make you an effective team member? Can you give me examples?
- What sort of people do you work best with?
- Tell me about a task you accomplished as a member of a group which you now believe you could have done better alone.
- Describe a situation in which you have had to learn how to work with someone who is very different from you?
- Why do people like working with you? Why might they not enjoy working with you?
- Can you tell me about a time when members of a team you were in showed confidence in you?
- What is the best criticism you have ever received from anyone? What did you do about it?
- When was the last time you lost your temper with someone? What was it about?
- Can you tell me about a situation where building strong relationships with people was important in achieving your goals.
- Tell me about a situation where you changed your behaviour to make life easier for someone else.
- Can you describe a situation where you have had to resolve a conflict within a team?
- Can you think of an example of when you have had to stand up to someone in authority?
- Please describe a situation in which you had to demonstrate sensitivity and tact.
- Can you tell me about a time when you held yourself back in order to give someone else an opportunity?
- Tell me about a time when you helped a colleague who had made a mistake. What did you do?

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Prioritising and organising

- Recall a time when you had to complete a complex project. What steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? How happy were you with the outcome? What would you have done differently if given the chance?
- Describe a situation in which a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples.
- Can you provide a recent example of when you were under stress and how you coped?
- Tell me about a time you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?
- How do you balance your academic obligations and your non-academic interests?
- Give me an example of when you set yourself a goal that took a lot of organisation on your part to achieve it.
- Can you tell me about a situation in which you anticipated a problem early on that saved a lot of work later?
- Tell me about a situation in which your plans for something went wrong. Why did it happen? What did you do? What could you have done to prevent it?
- Tell me about something you have done which took a lot of planning.
- Describe a situation in which you have chosen not to do something you wanted to do in order to achieve something else.
- Give me an example of when you have had to work to a very demanding deadline. How did you go about it?
- Tell me about a situation in which you have had to make compromises in order to get something done by the deadline.
- Describe a decision you have made in which there were a number of variables to take into account?

Problem solving, analysis and creativity

- Describe a difficult problem you had to deal with. How did you approach it?
- Can you give me an example of a situation in which you have had to analyse complex information in order to make a decision? How did you approach it?
- Tell me about a problem, outside your studies, that you found hard to solve.
- Tell me about a situation in which you had to perform background research before solving a problem? How did you use the research? How did you ensure you hadn't missed something important?
- Describe a situation in which you had to change the way you approached a problem in order to solve it.
- Can you give an example of when you have had to make recommendations about something based on your analysis of information?
- Tell me about a time when your analysis of a situation was incorrect. What happened? What should you have done?
- Tell me about something that took longer to complete than you expected. Why did that happen? What could you have done differently?
- Describe a time when you came up with a creative solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you have had to overcome several obstacles in order to achieve something.
- Tell me about a time when your first solution did not resolve an issue. What did you do?
- Describe a time when you thought outside the box.

Decision making and judgement

- Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision on your own. How did you make it? How does it affect you today?
- Can you give me an example of a complex decision you have had to make and how you went about it?
- What is the best decision you ever made? How did you make it?
- What is the worst decision you ever made? Why did you make it? What would you do differently now if you had to make the same decision again?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you found it hard to make a decision about something? Why was it difficult? What did you do?
- Can you think of a situation where something you were convinced about was shown to be wrong? What did you do? What had convinced you?
- What is the riskiest decision you have ever made? How did you make it?
- Describe a time when you had to make a very quick decision and it went wrong. What did you learn?
- If you could go back and change a decision you made in the past, what would it be and why?
- Can you give me an example of when you have backed your own judgement against that of other people? What happened? How did you handle it? Has it ever gone wrong?
- Have you ever had to make a decision on someone else's behalf? How did you approach it?
- Can you tell me about a time when you have had to make a decision with incomplete information?

Drive and determination

- Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?
- Have you ever undertaken something just to prove to yourself or others that you could do it?
- Describe a task that you completed that you didn't enjoy. How did you motivate yourself?
- Give an example of a situation in which you had to demonstrate determination in order to succeed.
- Tell me about a situation in which you have had to cope with various setbacks.
- Tell me about something you gave up on. What else could you have done to succeed?
- What sort of tasks do you normally put off doing when you can?
- Give me an example of when you delivered more than was expected of you.
- Can you give me an example of when you persisted with something even though you were beginning to lose hope of success?
- Tell me about something, other than your studies, that you have had to work really hard to achieve.
- What is the most boring thing you have forced yourself to do?
- Tell me about a time when you've pushed yourself to the limit.

Adaptability and initiative

- Describe a situation in which you had to change your approach to a task in order to complete it.
- Can you give an example of a situation when you have had to adapt to an unexpected change?
- What do you find it hardest to adapt to?
- Describe a situation when you have taught yourself a new skill in order to complete a task.
- Can you give me an example of any tasks or projects you started on your own?
- Tell me about a crisis you have had to deal with.
- Can you give me an example of when someone criticised your work? How did you respond?
- Tell me about when you completed a task without all the resources that you would have ideally needed?
- Can you give me an example of when you spotted something important that needed doing without having to be told?
- Have you ever asked for feedback about your work?
- When was the last time you changed your mind about something?
- Tell me about a time when you improved something using your own initiative.
- Tell me about a time when you have used your free time to gain new skills or knowledge in order to be better at something.
- When did you last volunteer to do something that you weren't 100 percent certain you could do?

Communication and negotiation

- Tell me about a time when you demonstrated good written communication skills.
- Tell me about a time when you demonstrated good oral communication skills.
- What is the most difficult thing you have had to explain to someone? How did you do it?
- When was the last time you had to use your negotiation skills to get what you wanted?
- Can you think of a time when a misunderstanding on your part led to problems?
- What is the most challenging presentation you have had to give? What did you do to make it successful?
- Describe a time when you achieved a win-win result with someone who had competing needs.
- Tell me about when you have persuaded someone to change their mind about something.
- Can you think of a time when you have had to choose carefully how best to communicate with someone?
- What is the most significant communication failure you have been responsible for?
- What have you done recently to improve your writing skills?

Commercial awareness and customer focus

- Tell me about a recent business news story that you found interesting. Why?
- Can you give me an example of when you have done more than your duty in order to provide a good service to someone?
- What attributes do you have that would instil client confidence? Tell me how you have used them.
- Can you give me an example of when you've saved money for an employer?
- What do you think will be the most important issues facing this sector in the next five years?
- Can you give me an example of when you have sought to understand someone else's job in order to do your job more effectively?
- Are there things that our competitors are doing that we should be worried about?
- Can you think of a situation in which you have given a bad impression of an organisation you were representing to a client? What did you do? What would you do differently now?

Leadership

- Give an example of your ability to motivate people.
- How do you get the best out of people? Can you give me an example?
- Describe when you took responsibility for achieving something.
- What skills have you developed that will make you a good leader?
- What attributes do you need to work on in order to become a good leader?
- Describe a time when you had to change your leadership style.
- Tell me about a time when you found it necessary to make an unpopular decision?
- How would you describe your leadership style? Can you give me an example of it in practice?
- Tell me about a time when you have spotted and utilised other people's talents.
- Tell me about a time when you have had difficulty delegating work to others.
- Give me an example of when you took the responsibility for a team failure.
- Tell me about a time when you had to give feedback to someone on their performance in a task.
- Can you give me an example of a situation where you have had to carefully balance approachability and authority?
- Tell me about the best and the worst people you have worked for. What lessons about leadership have you gained from those experiences? How have you applied them yourself?
- Describe a time when you helped someone to develop their skills.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with someone who was not pulling their weight.

Professionalism and diligence

- What does professionalism mean to you? Can you give me an example of when you put it into practice?
- Can you think of an example that demonstrates your commitment to integrity and honesty?
- Tell me about a time when you have made an ethical stand that has cost you something.
- Tell me about an activity in which it was important to pay attention to detail over a long period. How did you maintain your accuracy?
- What is the biggest risk you have taken?
- Describe a task which required a great deal of concentration?
- Give me an example of when you have spoken out against something which you didn't think was right.
- Describe a situation in which a lapse of concentration on your part led to difficulties.
- Can you describe a task in which you have had to follow very stringent procedures?

Personality and interests

- If you could spend a day with any person living or dead, who would it be?
- Tell me about a situation that really tested your patience? What did you do?
- What was the last book you read for pleasure? Tell me why you think I should read it.
- What's your favourite film? Why?
- How is your personality reflected in the activities that you enjoy?
- If you had to sum up your personality in three words, what would they be? Can you give me examples to demonstrate these attributes?
- Tell me about an interest that you outgrew.
- If you were an animal, what animal would you be and why?

Critical reasoning brain-teasers

- What is the best shape for a manhole cover? Why?
- Approximately, how many baby's nappies were used in the UK last year?
- How many hairs are there on a dog?
- How many table tennis balls will fit into a 747 aeroplane?
- How many gents' barbers are there in London?
- What is the angle between the hands on a watch when the time is 3:45?
- How many different ways can you think of to find a needle in a haystack?