

Preparing for Application & Interview

Paragraphs highlighted in yellow are about **internal** recruitment and selection.

Writing an application

The Application: Basics

- The application is used by the selection panel to choose who to interview. It will be scored against the Person Specification for the role.
- Most of an application form will be factual: your work history, your education and qualifications, and personal details such as your address and phone number.
- You may be asked to attach a copy of your CV. Having an up-to-date CV is useful as it will help you to record your educational and employment history on an application form.
- If you're applying for a role within a restructure, you may only have to indicate which roles you're interested in and write a personal statement (see below) about your suitability.
- In most application forms, there will be a section asking for personal information such as your gender, sexual orientation, religion etc. **This is optional**; you can complete all of it, some of it, or none at all.
 - This data is used for statistical purposes **only** (to identify gender differences in recruitment, for example) and will not be seen by the selection panel.
 - The one exception is around disability. You do not **have** to disclose any disability you have. However, some employers use the Disability Confident (previously Two Ticks) scheme, which guarantees an interview to applicants who meet all the essential criteria for a role.
- Make sure that everything is accurate and spelled correctly! If you have time, writing it and going back to it the next day will help you to look at what you've written with fresh eyes, so it's easier to catch mistakes.

The Application: Personal Statement

The personal statement is the part of an application where you write about your suitability for the role(s) you're applying for. This should be written in full sentences rather than bullet points, and you may have a word limit.

You do not have to repeat things you have already written (e.g. your qualifications).

If you're applying for an internal role, **you cannot assume the selection panel already know anything about you or your achievements**. They can **only** use the information you give them to make their decisions. Write this statement as if the panel members don't know anything about you or your work!

Using the Person Specification as a checklist, it should be easy for a selection panellist to read your Personal Statement and check how you meet the criteria. Writing your statement in the same order as the Person Specification makes it easier for both of you!

Most panels will use a scoring system, such as this example:

- 0 points** Does not meet the criteria: Criteria not mentioned. No examples given.
- 1 point** Partially meets the criteria: Criteria mentioned but no examples. Relevant examples included but connection with criteria not made explicit.
- 2 points** Criteria met in full: Criteria explicitly addressed and supported with evidence from past/current practice.

Therefore, a good format is to mention the criterion, then give an example of how you meet it. For example, if the criterion is:

Ability to handle difficult situations with tact and sensitivity

Then you could write something like this, referring to your own experience:

I am able to handle difficult situations sensitively and tactfully. In my current role, I have identified distressed students and approached them privately, ensuring there are no immediate needs before asking about their situation and signposting to the appropriate source of support (e.g. the Disability & Dyslexia Service).

This mentions the criterion (1 point) and gives an example which is clearly linked to it (2 points).

Since you will have to repeat this for all criteria not covered elsewhere in the application, keep it concise: 1-2 sentences per criterion should be enough!

If you can't fully meet some of the criteria, don't ignore them. For example, if the criterion is:

Experience of line management or supervision of staff

If you don't have this experience, you could draw on experience you **do** have to say something like:

I have not yet line-managed staff, however I do have experience of project management, which has involved delegating work and giving feedback. I have also been responsible for mentoring and inducting new colleagues.

In this example, you may be able to get 1 point instead of 0 for this criterion.

If you aren't shortlisted

If you are not shortlisted for interview, in most cases you will not be offered feedback. You will probably be sent an automated message such as: 'Unfortunately, in this instance you have not been shortlisted for interview'.

If you are applying for an **internal** role, Queen Mary policy states that you should be offered feedback by the Recruiting Manager. If you have the opportunity for feedback, take it! It may help you to be successful next time.

The Interview Process

Preparing for Interview

- If you're invited to interview, you'll probably be asked to either book an interview time using an electronic system, or reply to an email offering dates and times. Respond promptly and politely!
- Depending on the role, you may be asked to prepare something in advance: for example, a presentation or 'micro-teach' which you will deliver on the day. You will have a time limit, so rehearsing ahead of the day is a good idea! Make sure any slides or written materials are clear, accurate, and easy to read.
- If you need any reasonable adjustments due to disability (for example, more time to complete an assessment), you should mention them now if you haven't yet been able to.
- You may be asked to do some kind of psychometric questionnaire. This might be a test of your verbal and numerical reasoning, or an assessment of your behaviours and personal preferences at work.

Give yourself plenty of time to complete any assessment you have to do, and respond to questions as fully and honestly as you can. You should be 'debriefed' and learn about your results on (or around) the day of the interview.

- Read about the organisation (and the department/faculty/school, if you can get that information). What is their overall strategy? What are their organisational values? What are their recent achievements? What are their priorities?
- Look again at the Person Specification. Most interview questions will be 'competency-based', focused around these criteria. Can you give examples from experience of the skills and abilities they ask for?
- Take up any opportunity for informal discussions so you can find out more about the role. This will help you perform better in the interview, and will provide more information on whether the role is for you.
- If you are an internal candidate, you can ask if you can speak to members of the team, or ask people you know about the work of the team.
- Prepare for an internal interview as you would an external interview. Don't assume you're automatically more likely to succeed than an external candidate.

Before the day:

- Decide what to wear. This will depend on the role and workplace, but clothes should be clean, neat and comfortable. There is a lot of advice online, for example these articles on [Indeed](#) or [Reed](#).
- If your interview will be remote (via Zoom or Teams), test your camera and microphone in advance. Make sure you'll be somewhere quiet, with good lighting and no interruptions. Check that the angle is good and that the camera isn't too close to you: the panel should be able to see your head and shoulders.
- If you need to travel, check traffic or public transport ahead of time and make adjustments as needed. Understand where you're going – Google Street View can be useful for this! Aim to arrive at the venue 5-10 minutes before the time of your interview.
- Make sure you know where to report to (a reception area, for example) when you arrive, and the name of the person who needs to know that you're there.
- Assume that anything that happens at the venue can (consciously or unconsciously) influence the panel's decision. Be polite to everyone, even if they're not directly involved in your recruitment!

Day of Interview: Assessments

You will probably have been told what to expect. Forms of assessment include:

- **Selection panel interview:** this is often the only form of assessment that takes place. You can expect competency-based questions (see below). There may also be questions which have right and wrong answers, depending on the role. For example, in a role that involves working with sensitive information, you might be asked about GDPR, so research to make sure you are up to date
- **Psychometric assessment:** see 'Preparing for Interview', above. It's possible that you'll be asked to complete this on the day.
- **Presentation:** see 'Preparing for Interview', above. You may be asked to prepare something in advance, however, you might also be given some time to prepare something on the day of interview. If this is the case, carefully read any material you've been provided and pay attention to how much time you have to prepare and deliver.
- **Work-based assessment:** This can be many different things, depending on the job role. For example, a role which involves a lot of data analysis might ask you do to some work with an Excel spreadsheet; an administrative role might ask for an 'inbox exercise' involving prioritising tasks and responding to emails.
- **Group task:** These are more common in roles which will have a large number of applicants (training schemes, for example). You will be observed while you work with other candidates to solve a problem or discuss a given topic. This exercise will assess whether you can work effectively with others.

The Interview: Competency-based questions

It's likely that most of the questions you'll be asked will be 'competency-based', linked to the criteria on the Person Specification.

They will ask about previous experience ('Tell us about a time when...', 'Give us an example of...') or describe a hypothetical ('In this situation, what would you do?').

You can use the STAR technique to construct effective answers which will give the interview panel all the information they need.

S	Situation	What situation or event were you involved in? What is the context of the story you are about to tell?
T	Task	What was your job within that situation? Were there any barriers – deadlines, technical problems, costs?
A	Action	What did you do, and how? How did your activities demonstrate the competency the interview is asking about?
R	Result	What was the outcome of what you did? How do you know? Can it be quantified in any way? Any lessons learned?

STAR Example

Question: Have you had experience of working with a team to resolve a problem?

Questions about problem-solving, and working with others, are very common. Using ‘we’ in situations like this is easy to do, but remember – the interview panel needs to know how **you** contributed in this situation. Only use ‘we’ if you’re really talking about everyone in the team.

Here’s an example of an answer to this question, using STAR. Notice that the ‘Action’ part is longest – this is where you’re explaining how you displayed the competencies being asked about.

S	Situation	I was working with my team to deliver an event when our caterer pulled out at short notice.
T	Task	I was responsible for sourcing a replacement.
A	Action	I asked around other members of my team, and asked them to use their own networks, to identify potential replacements. I then contacted some by phone to explain the situation, and two colleagues volunteered to contact the others. Three were able to work at short notice. We came together to compare notes around cost, quality and customer feedback, and on that basis I contacted the caterer we chose.
R	Result	The event was a success. The catering cost slightly more than we had budgeted for, but a lot of our feedback reflected that the quality of food and drinks was much higher than expected.

There is some more information on the [STAR model](#) in this LinkedIn Learning resource.

Being Interviewed: Hints & Tips

- Make sure you have water! You’ll be talking a lot.
- An interview is a stressful situation: give yourself time to breathe and think. Don’t be afraid to ask to skip a question and go back to it later if your mind has gone blank.
- If you’re interviewing for an internal role, remember: even if you know the panel, **they cannot assume anything about you**, or give you credit for skills or experience they know you have. It might feel odd, but answer questions as if you’re talking to strangers!
- You should be asked at the end of the interview if you have any questions for the panel. If you have questions, ask them. You won’t be penalised for not having questions, but if you want to ask something, some examples include:
 - What is the biggest challenge facing this team/department?
 - What do you enjoy most about working here?
 - What are the team’s priorities?
- You should be told when to expect to back from the panel about the outcome of your interview. If you’re not, just ask.

After the Interview: Outcomes & Feedback

The Panel's Response

The recruiting manager or selection panel chair will contact their successful candidate(s) first.

If that's you, **congratulations!** If you accept the offer, you will be told what the next steps are. If you need some time to consider the offer, ask for it, but be prepared to agree (or be given) a reasonable deadline for your decision.

In more senior posts, or if there have been a lot of candidates, you may be invited for a second-round interview.

If, unfortunately, you aren't offered the position: try not to take it personally. This doesn't mean you did badly or that you're 'not good enough', just that another candidate was a better match to the role.

You should ask for feedback, or accept it if it's offered. Sometimes this feedback can be vague or unhelpful, but sometimes you can get some useful pointers on how to improve next time.

You can also **reflect** on your own performance at interview:

- What was the impact of nerves? Did you freeze up and struggle to answer a question you know you should have been able to answer?
- Did you make full use of the STAR technique – for example, did you talk about the result or outcome of your experiences?
- If you had to give a presentation (for example), how did it go? Was the material you prepared the right length and level of detail?

Unfair Recruitment

If you believe that the selection process was unfair at any stage – for example, if you think you were at a disadvantage because of your age, sex, marital status etc. – you have **three months less one day** to make a complaint.

Citizens Advice [offers help](#) on what to do in this situation.

Other Resources

LinkedIn Learning offers a number of resources on interview preparation, including:

- [Prepare for interviews with the Interview Preparation Tool](#)
- [Mastering Common Interview Questions](#)
- [How to succeed in an internal job interview](#)

Keep in mind that these all offer generic advice – what is considered a 'good' interview differs between organisations.