

Preparing for University Interviews

You should remember that receiving an interview invite means that the admissions tutors are impressed with your application so far and you are in the running for an offer of a place at that university. It is an opportunity for you to discuss a subject that you and the interviewer share an interest in.

Why do universities ask applicants to attend an interview?

Interviews are one of the ways that universities assess your suitability to study your chosen academic course. Universities ask applicants to attend an interview so that they can gather more information about them. Universities want to:

- Check the information on your UCAS form
- See if you have realistic expectations and a genuine interest in the subject
- Assess whether you can successfully complete the course
- Give you information about the course and university
- Allow you to ask questions
- Assess which applicants are best matched to the programme – which students will benefit and contribute most.

Different types of interviews

- One to one (standard)
- Panel (being interviewed by several people)
- Group (being assessed whilst you complete a group task)
- Assessment (numeracy/literacy)

Some interviews are more selective than others such as Medicine and Dentistry. At Manchester, students for some courses will often be invited to a Visit Day, where they will get a tour and a talk about the course, with a short interview as part of the day.

There can be some flexibility around attending these days – not all interviews are compulsory. However some are and students will only be made an offer if they attend. Where possible you should attend a university interview, but if you are unable please contact the academic school or department and see whether it is compulsory or whether you can change the time and date.

What are Admissions Tutors looking for?

Admissions tutors are looking to see whether you have met the selection criteria set for your chosen course. Selection criteria are the required qualifications, skills, characteristics, abilities or knowledge which are relevant to the successful completion of the academic course. Interviewers will be looking for you to demonstrate how you met the criteria advertised in the prospectus and UCAS entry profiles, but will not always ask you about them directly.

Some examples of criteria used by Admissions Tutors include:

- Interest, motivation and commitment to the subject
- The ability to study independently
- The ability to work with others
- The ability to manage time effectively
- An interest in the university.

TOP TIP

Review your UCAS form, the entry profile and the university prospectus before attending a university interview

Interview Questions

University interview questions are usually derived from the following sources:

- Your UCAS form
- The selection criteria as specified in the prospectus and entry profiles – see activity 1
- Current developments in the field of study – see activity 2
- Professional standards (for some courses).

STAR Method

TOP TIP

When answering an interview question, you should try to respond with enough detail so that you meet the admissions criteria and try to include a 'real life' example.

Activity 1: STAR Method

The STAR method can be a good way of answering questions, allowing you to evidence situations that have enabled you to develop the skills and experiences relevant to your chosen course.

Situation: What was the situation? Give the interviewer a brief outline of the situation faced and your role.

Task: What were the main issues involved with the situation?
What needed to be done?

Action: What task/s needed to be achieved and what was the desired outcome?
What obstacles had to be overcome?

Result: What was the outcome?

Why not try for yourself? We have given an example to help. The student below is applying for English and Drama.

Question	Can you tell us something about how you organise your time when you are studying?
Situation	Attending Sixth Form College and having a weekend job in a clothes shop.
Task	Complete my A' level coursework on time and attend my weekend job where I am responsible for ordering stock and serving customers.
Action	Manage my time effectively to leave enough time to complete my school work, whilst also working hard at my weekend job ensuring I complete the tasks I am responsible for.
Result	By doing this part time job I have developed good communication skills, the ability to manage my time well and have taken on levels of responsibility. This will help with my English and Drama degree, as I have experience of managing my workload successfully and will work well with my fellow students in the team work activities that are required as part of the degree.

Question	Have you completed a project or some other study by yourself? What was good and bad about this?
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	

Question	Can you give an example of a time when you have worked with others to complete an activity? What did you like the most/least about this?
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	

Question	Can you give us an example of when you had to have something ready for a certain date? How did you organise your time to make sure you met the deadline?
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	

TOP TIP

Practise speaking clearly and concisely, practise talking about yourself in a professional manner.

Current developments in field of study

Whatever your chosen course it is important to keep as up to date as you can on developments in that field. For example, if you are applying for a healthcare related course you may wish to consider what new treatments are being developed?

Activity 2: Mind Map

We recommend that you use a mind map to brainstorm everything you know about the current developments in your chosen field of study.

Step 1: In the centre box write the subject area you are applying to.

Step 2: In the circles list:

- Any new research that is being done in this area.
- Any related news stories that are relevant to this field of study.
- Topics in your subject area that go beyond your course syllabus.
- What have you read in journals or on relevant websites?

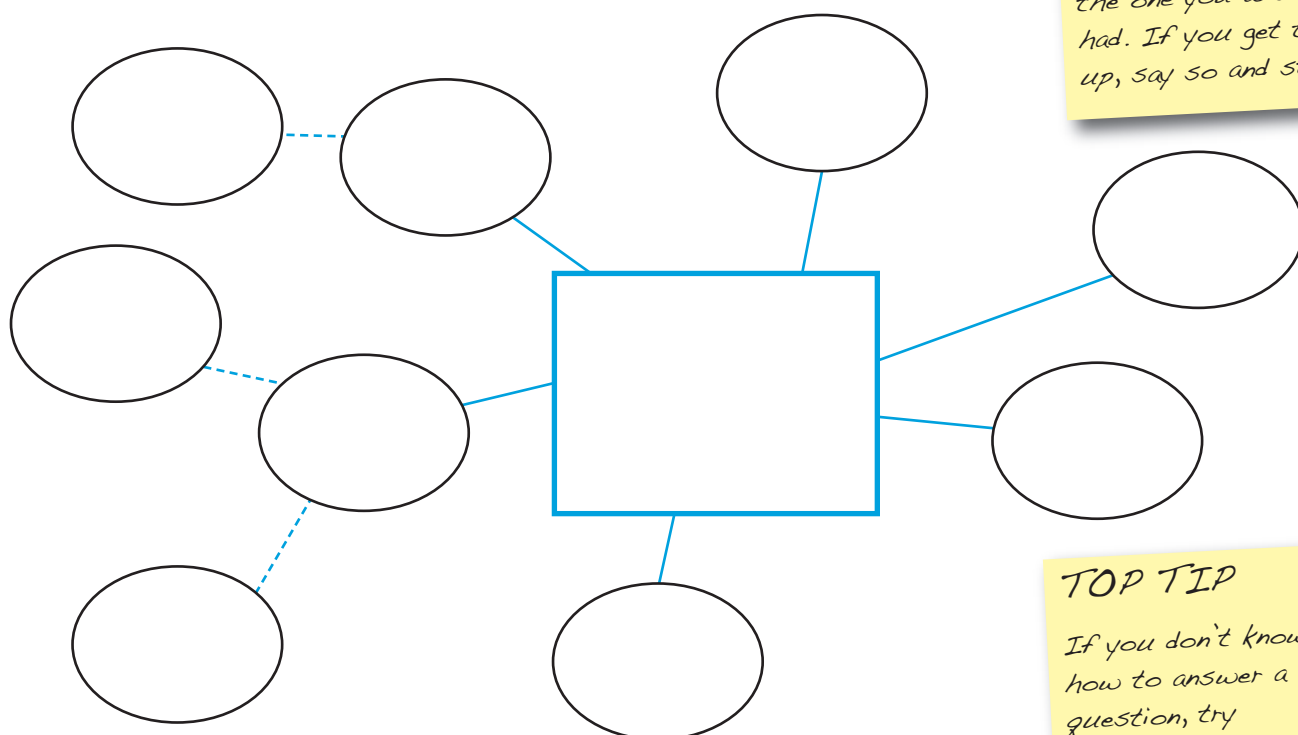
It is important that you only talk about what you know.

If it's a subject like English or History for example, list some of the activities you have done to learn about this subject area outside of college, for example: read books that are not on the syllabus; visited museums etc.

Step 3: Use the lines off the circles to record your thoughts on these issues/developments.

TOP TIP

Listen really carefully to the question, and take time to think about your answer. Answer the one you have been asked, not the one you wish you had. If you get tangled up, say so and start again.

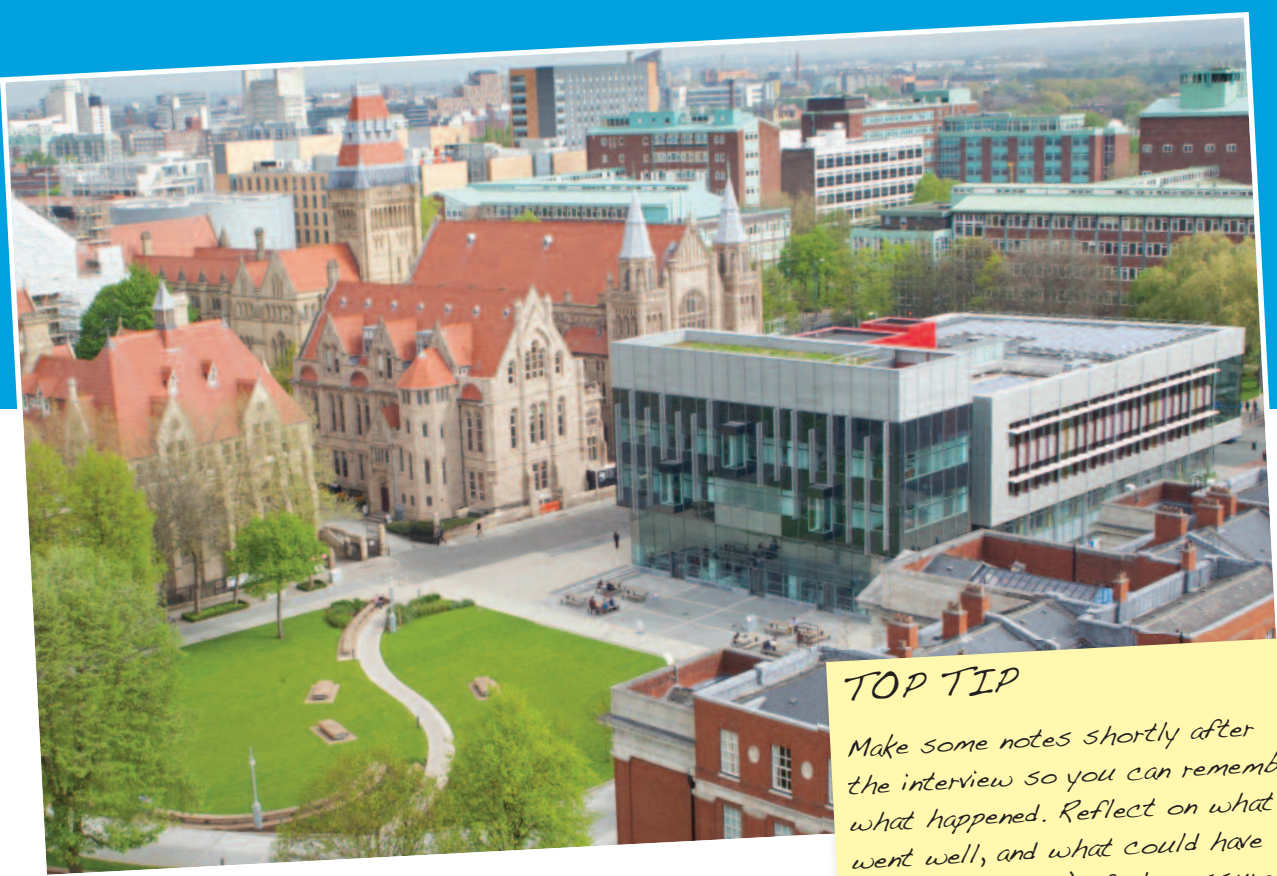


TOP TIP

If you don't know how to answer a question, try brainstorming out aloud!

Extension activity: Can you answer the following questions?

- Can you give me an example of a recent 'topical' development in this field of study that you may have seen in the media recently and do you have a view on this?
- What are you reading at the moment that is of interest?



TOP TIP

Make some notes shortly after the interview so you can remember what happened. Reflect on what went well, and what could have gone better. Don't feel pressured to share what happened with other people. The interview is between you and your interviewers. Finally relax and try to forget about this one - it's over!

Commonly asked questions

General questions

- Tell me about yourself?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What are your main interests?
- What are your strengths and your weaknesses?

Interest, motivation and commitment to the subject

- What have you enjoyed most about your current studies?
- Why have you chosen to study (degree course)?
- What aspects of the course interests you most?
- What skills do you have that will make you a successful student on (degree course)?
- What do you hope to accomplish by studying (degree course)?

Working with others

- Do you belong to any teams, clubs or groups?
 - If yes, what do you like the most/least about this?
 - If no, can you give an example of working alongside others?
- When you make decisions, what importance do you give to the opinions of others?
- As part of university study, students often attend seminars. This is an opportunity for you to discuss your current work in small groups. What would you hope to gain from such discussions?

Interest in specific university

- What has attracted you to studying (degree course) at (University)?
- Given that (degree course) is offered by lots of different universities, what is it about studying at (university) that appeals to you?
- What contribution do you feel you would make to the student community at (university)?

Where to find out more:

The University of Manchester

For information on how to apply and courses offered
www.manchester.ac.uk

UMASS University of Manchester Aspiring Students' Society interview advice

www.umass.manchester.ac.uk

UCAS Course search function and advice for preparing for university interviews www.ucas.com