

# Preparing for a non-academic job interview

An EMBL Fellows' Career Service Handout



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## Preparing for a non-academic job interview

A job interview is a two-way evaluation between a candidate and a potential employer. It allows the employer to evaluate your skills, motivation, and personality, and see if you are a good fit for the specific role and team. And for you, it is an opportunity to showcase your unique skill set and assess whether the position aligns with your career goals and values.

This handout is designed to equip you with essential knowledge and strategies for preparing for non-academic job interviews. For EMBL predocs or postdocs, we recommend combining this handout with an individual career guidance session with an EMBL career advisor to practice through a mock interview.

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## Non-academic job interviews: tips and tricks

The first step in the job interview process often involves a short interview by telephone or video call (approximately 30 minutes). This initial interview might be an HR screening of your non-technical skills, a technical assessment by the hiring manager, or a call to clarify points from your application. If successful in this initial interview, you may be invited to participate in one or more in-depth interviews with a hiring panel and, in some cases, with future team members. These later interviews aim to assess your technical abilities, interpersonal skills, and fit with the team and the company culture.

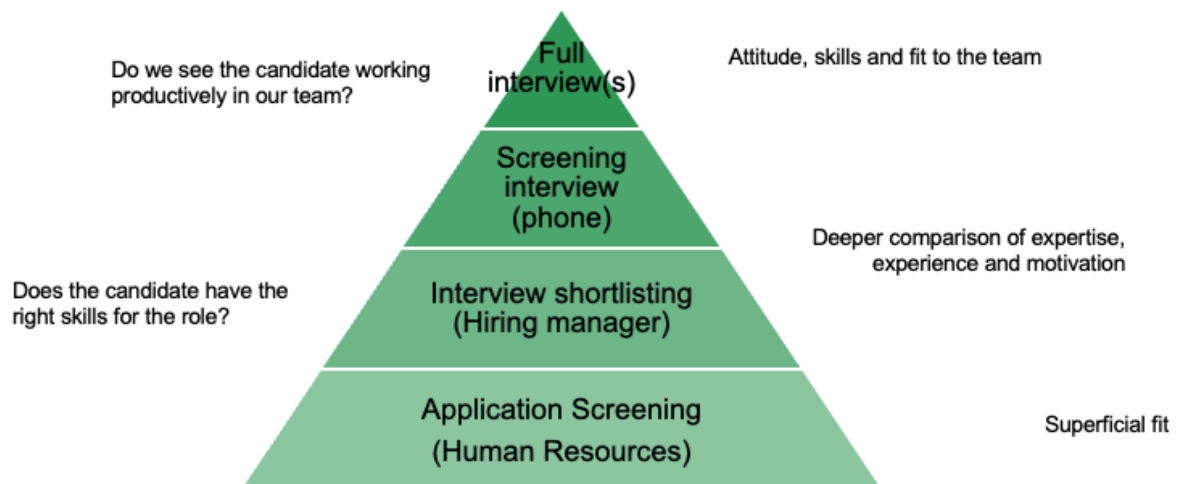


Figure 1: Typical application screening process. Adapted from iBiology video series 'Job Hunting in Industry', Bill Lindstaedt <https://www.ibiology.org/professional-development/job-hunting-in-industry/>

Here are our tips and tricks to prepare for non-academic job interviews:

- 1. Monitor your spam folder and be alert for calls from unknown numbers.**

While you will often be contacted by email first, if there are a few points they wish to clarify, a company might call you directly. If this happens and you need a moment to prepare, it is perfectly fine to ask if you can call back in ten minutes. If you are unable to take the call right then, politely ask if you can reschedule for a different time or date.
- 2. Read the invite carefully.**

When you receive an interview invitation, check for any missing or unclear information that might help you prepare. Make sure you know the main focus, expected length, language (if relevant), and who will be in the interview. Human Resources is there to support potential candidates, so do not hesitate to ask your HR contact to clarify any of these details when you accept the invitation. For the initial interview stage:

  - **If the time slot is short (15-20 minutes):** This is usually a short interview with HR, or occasionally the hiring manager, that will focus on confirming the first impression from your application materials and clarifying any key details.
  - **If the time slot is longer:** The interview may cover a broader range of topics, with questions assessing your fit for the position and your motivation for applying.

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### 3. Research the company, role and potential interviewers.

The more information you gather about your potential employer and the job profile, the better prepared you will be. Familiarize yourself with the company's mission, goals and history, check for any recent news about the company and review its website and social media platforms. Learn the jargon associated with the position and understand the job profile, including the key skills required. ChatGPT and similar tools can be particularly helpful with understanding the role and associated jargon. You can for example ask "Could you provide a list of key concepts in regulatory affairs, each with a brief explanation and suggestions on how I can learn more about them?" or "Based on the job title and job description that I will paste below, please could you provide further ideas on what this role would involve including key responsibilities and desirable skills and traits for the post holder". Finally, if you know the names of your interviewers, look them up on LinkedIn to get familiar with their backgrounds and career paths.

### 4. Consider what questions you may be asked, and prepare bullet points for your answers.

Anticipate the types of questions you might be asked. We include a list of types of question below, with further details in the 'Potential questions' section. ChatGPT and similar tools can also help with identifying potential questions. You can for example ask "Can you help me generate potential interview questions based on this job advert? Here's the text of the advert." In a recent [survey](#) from Nature Careers, almost 25% of industry hiring managers admitted to using AI to generate questions – so your interviewer might also be doing the same!

Once you have an idea of the types of questions, think about key points you want to bring across in your answers. There is no need to write down or memorise full answers; in fact, very rehearsed answers often appear less genuine and make it harder to connect with the interviewers. Instead, prepare a few concise bullet points with key ideas and phrases to help you respond quickly and convincingly during the interview, especially if it is conducted in a language, you do not use daily.

Possible types of questions include:

- **Opening general questions about yourself and your career aspirations:** These may include questions like, 'Why don't you start by telling us about yourself' or 'Could you summarise your CV for us?'. For more examples, see section on 'Potential questions'.
- **Questions about your technical expertise, knowledge, or previous experience in relation to the role:** If they ask something that you don't know, don't be afraid to admit it. If appropriate, you can share your best guess: 'The exact answer doesn't come to my mind right now, but if I had to guess, I'd say...'
- **Competency-based, behavioural or situational-based questions:** Most non-academic employers, including those in big pharma and biotech, incorporate these types of questions. They may ask about times you have demonstrated specific skills (competency-based), how you have handled situations in the past (behavioural), or how you would approach hypothetical situations (situational). For further advice on preparing for these questions, see the relevant section within 'Potential questions'.
- **Skills, weaknesses, and personality:** Possible questions include 'How would your colleagues describe you?', 'Can you tell us a bit about your top three skills?', 'What type of task should we not assign to you?' or [What is your greatest weakness?](#) For questions about weaknesses, be honest and demonstrate self-awareness. For example, you can admit a real one that will not significantly impact much your work or you can acknowledge an obvious one and describe potential approaches to overcome it.
  - *My biggest weakness is that I have a shy introverted personality. Over the years, I have developed several strategies that ensure that this does not hold me back. One strategy that I find particularly useful is to volunteer for a role that will make me visible at events. This approach makes the initial contact with people easier and also allows me to build a network more efficiently.*
  - *For this role, my biggest weakness is my lack of experience in X. However, I do have experience in the related area Y, and I am confident that with some mentoring and*

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*training I would be able to quickly get up to speed. I would also be happy to do some reading on the topic before starting the role.*

If you find it difficult to articulate your skills, weaknesses, and personality, you may benefit from our [Self-awareness resources](#).

- **Salary expectations and potential starting date:** The first conversation around these topics can come up early in the hiring process (e.g. during the first interview with HR), at the end of the last interview round, or once you have an offer. Therefore, prepare for these questions from the very beginning. If you want to learn more about this, please check our handout on '[Negotiating a non-academic job offer](#)'.

#### 5. Prepare questions for the interviewer(s).

Not asking questions during an interview can leave a negative impression on the interviewers, as it may suggest a lack of interest or preparation. Therefore, it is essential to prepare relevant questions about the company, the role, and the team. This shows genuine interest in the position and helps you assess whether you would enjoy working in that specific role and with that team. You can find a sample of potential questions in the section titled 'Questions to Ask the Interviewer'.

#### 6. Ensure you have everything needed for the interview day. You will need:

- A copy of your application and the job advert you applied to.
- Paper and pen for notes; water.
- Your list of your questions about the position/company.
- The clothes you will wear.
  - If you are not sure what to wear, start by looking at the company's website and their employees' LinkedIn profile to see what employees typically wear. Choose clothes that make you feel comfortable and confident, and are slightly more formal compared to what you found.
- For phone and video call interviews, additionally:
  - Your list of bullet points to help answer questions you are expecting, and a clock to keep track of overall time, and also check how long you are using for each answer.
  - Headphones to minimise feedback for video calls. An external microphone (integrated into the headphones, or separately) may provide better sound quality, but isn't as critical – the in-built microphone is normally okay as long as you are not in a busy place.
  - The computer/phone you will use, with any chargers. The relevant software (Zoom, Teams etc) should be installed/updated in advance and tested.
  - A quiet location where you won't be disturbed, with a reliable Wi-Fi connection or phone signal as needed. For video interviews, consider and test different workstation setups so that:
    - You are facing the laptop, with the webcam positioned roughly at eye level. This makes it look like you are making eye contact.
    - Your entire head, and ideally the top of your shoulders, are in view, and your face is not in shadow (you may need a lamp on the desk). Keep in mind that lighting can change throughout the day.
    - The background behind you is tidy and professional.
    - You can quickly refer to your notes without looking too far away from the camera. For example, put a couple of key points on a post it note close to your webcam or use a recipe book stand to hold your notes upright next to your computer.
    - If you tend to swivel a lot in an office chair when nervous, opt for a stable, non-swivelling chair to minimize distractions.

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## 7. Practice.

If possible, practice a mock interview with a friend, career advisor or AI tool (e.g. [Google's Interview Warmup](#)) trying to recreate the format of the interview. If you are doing this with a friend, you will need to give them a short list of questions you expect. For a career advisor, provide background info on the position, the job advertisement, your job application materials and some time for them to prepare.

- Practise answering the type of questions you expect for the interview, using the bullet points you have already prepared.
- For video call interviews consider filming the practice run, so you can review this yourself later to analyse how you come across – if you find, for example, that you make a lot of big hand movements, that are distracting on the video, you can think about strategies to minimise this during the interview.
- For phone interviews, the lack of visual feedback can make it hard for you to know when you've answered the question to the interviewer's satisfaction, and for the interviewer to know whether you are just pausing to think, or if you have finished your answer. Practise bringing your answers to a close in a way that signals that you are finished. For this you can:
  - Ask a question e.g. *'I hope that answered your question?'* or *'Are there specific aspects you would like me to expand on further?'*
  - Use signalling words like *'Finally, I would highlight that...'* in your last sentence, or
  - Close by repeating the question *'So that would be one example of when I have managed a project with tight deadlines.'*

## 8. On the day of the interview, double-check everything.

Make sure you have everything you need ready and be sure you arrive on time.

## 9. During the interview stay composed but enthusiastic.

- Try to remember who the interviewers are. You may want to refer to someone specifically, for example, asking "Jan" if you answered their question, and it will also allow you follow-up with a personalised thank you.
- Listen carefully to the questions – it's very easy to start thinking of the answer before the question ends, and miss a key part of the question. You don't need to start your response right away: you can say *'that's a good question'* or *'let me think about that for a second'* while you consider your answer.
- Keep track of your answer length. For opening questions, your answer should be max. 30 seconds and for behavioural questions 2-3 minutes.
- For in-person/video interviews, try to keep your body language open (sit slightly forward, with your shoulders open), and smile, you will sound (and look) more positive and enthusiastic.
  - For phone interviews: you can also consider standing up and walking around, if this helps you relax. Allow for slightly longer pauses than you would in a real-life conversation, as there may be a lag.

## 10. After the interview reflect and follow-up.

- Within a few hours, try to make a summary of how the interview went including interview questions and how you felt about your performance.
- Within 48 hours, you can consider sending a thank-you note to the hiring committee or your contact person (see an example below). Follow up with Human Resources if you do not hear from them within a reasonable time frame (2-3 weeks).
  - *Thank you for the opportunity to discuss my skills, the position, and my potential fit with your team. I really appreciate all the information provided about the current portfolio of projects and the opportunity to meet with your team. I am very excited about the role and genuinely excited about the possibility of working with you. Thank you again for the opportunity, and I look forward to hearing from you.*

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# Potential questions

## Opening questions

These types of questions are fairly standard in non-academic job interviews and usually help to break the ice during the first few minutes of the interview. These questions do not mean that Human Resources and the Hiring Manager have not read your job application materials. It is rather a little starting phase to allow you to feel comfortable and less nervous. To answer them effectively, be concise (approx. 30 seconds). Here are some of the most common opening questions along with tips and examples for some of the hardest ones to answer:

- How did you learn about the opening?
- Tell me about yourself
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- What kind of tasks have you worked on so far, related to the position?
- Why are you moving away from academia?
- Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?
- Describe the professional accomplishment that you are the proudest about.

## Example answers

### Question: Tell me about yourself.

**How to answer:** Give a brief overview of your relevant academic training, relevant skills/accomplishments, work experience, and interest in the position.

**Example:** *I am a single-cell biologist, currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg. I have over 5 years of international experience in the field of genomics and a broad understanding of molecular biology. During my career I have managed and implemented 3 interdisciplinary research projects, communicating results at 4 international conferences and publishing in academic journals. I am interested in this position because it would allow me to expand my project management and communication skills, but also make use of my scientific expertise to strengthen the personalised medicine research field in Europe.*

### Question: Why are you moving away from academia?

**How to answer:** Focus on what you know about the type of role you are applying for, and what attracted you to apply. Don't focus on the aspects you don't like about academia – this can give the impression that you simply want any non-academic role, and may not be making a considered choice about your next step. Show that you are taking an informed-decision about your next career step.

**Example:** *The aspect that I enjoyed the most during my PhD was when I had the opportunity to exchange with other team members to solve a problem. I am very proud of my academic training, and my PhD at EMBL has been a rewarding time, both personally and professionally. However, I am looking forward for opportunities to work with a wider range of projects, in close interaction with others and where short-term results can be obtained more regularly. I have had several conversations with colleagues who moved from EMBL to industry settings, and it sounds like your position would provide an intellectually and dynamic environment to balance my scientific curiosity and professional interests.*

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**Question: Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?**

**How to answer:** Focus on your career aspirations in general (not a specific job title) – i.e. what you want your future job to involve. This can help you ensure that the role is a good match, and demonstrate that you would like to expand and develop your skills, without giving the hiring manager the impression that you actually want a different type of role, and will move at the first opportunity.

**Example:** *It is important to me to develop myself together with the strategic goals of the company. Of course, first of all I want to get familiar with the role I am applying for and become an expert in my field of responsibility. In the long-term I am really willing to develop my expertise and managerial skills to further support the company. I can imagine taking over additional projects and leading a team in the future.*

**Question: Why are you interested in this position?**

**How to answer:** Be ready to give a brief, but specific answer highlighting some of the requirements of the position.

**Example:** *I was searching for a position in the industry and your company is well-known for scientists in the structural biology field. I have used your microscopes since the beginning of my scientific training. When I saw your job advertisement, I knew that I really want to have this job in your company. It perfectly fits my scientific background and entails some of the tasks that I have enjoyed the most during my PhD such as providing training, setting up equipment, and delivering presentations.*



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## Behavioural and competency-based questions

Behavioural and competency-based questions are one of the most common type of interview questions and are based on the premise that past behaviours are the best indicator of future behaviour for key skills (e.g. project implementation, communicating results, working with others, working under pressure, solving problems...). The questions are usually open-ended questions that relate to your previous work experience, and can be answered in 2-3 minutes.

### Potential questions

#### *Project implementation and management*

- Tell us a bit about how you implemented your most recent research project and the results you obtained.
- Describe a long-term project that you kept on track. How did you monitor progress?
- How did you set priorities when working on multiple projects during your PhD/postdoc?

#### *Working under pressure*

- Give me an example of a significant crisis that you have managed in your most recent position. How did you overcome it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work effectively under pressure.

#### *Problem solving*

- Tell me about a major mistake you made, and what you did to correct it. What would you do differently?
- Tell me about a time when you faced a difficult problem and how you solved it.
- Tell me about a time when a project did not go as expected.

#### *Working with others*

- Can you think about a situation where you had to work as part of a team? What was your role?
- Describe a time when you had to motivate a colleague.
- Tell me about a time you knew you were right, but still had to follow directions that you did not agree with.
- What type of supervisor works best for you? What do you expect from your supervisor?
- Tell me about a time when a work colleague was not taking care of their responsibilities and that impacted your workload or the progression of a project. How did you handle it?
- Talk about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.
- How do you handle criticism from a work colleague(s)? Can you give us an example?
- Tell me about a time you needed to get information/feedback from someone who wasn't very responsive.
- Tell me about a time you delegated tasks effectively.

#### *Taking the initiative/independence*

- Describe a time when you figured out a problem and took the initiative to correct it rather than waiting for someone else to do it.
- Can you give us an example of a project where you had to work independently?

#### *Adapting to change/unfamiliar subjects*

- Describe a situation when your team or company was undergoing some change. In which sense did that impact you, and how did you adapt?
- Think of a project where you had to get familiar with a topic outside of your expertise. How did you approach this?

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### *Communicating complex information*

- Give me a past example of a successful presentation you gave and why you think it worked out.
- Give me an example of a time when working on a project you successfully persuaded someone to follow your advice.
- Describe a time when you were talking to a non-specialist audience. How did you manage to translate complex technical knowledge so everyone could understand you?
- Can you give me an example when you had to rely on your written communication skills to get your ideas across your supervisor?

### *Leadership and management*

- Give me an example when you had to make use of your leadership and management skills.
- When supervising the work from others, what is your style?
- Tell us a situation where you had to take a difficult decision, how did you approach the decision-making process?

### **How to prepare**

If your interview includes these types of questions, you will have to quickly recall and describe relevant situations where you were faced with a certain challenge or demonstrated a certain skill. To prepare for these, we, therefore, suggest that you create a list of possible examples. To do this:

- Reflect on things you have done that demonstrate the skills and personal attributes listed in the job description, or have similar challenges to the tasks this role will have. These should be mostly work-related, but can also include examples from extracurricular activities.
- Also include examples where things did not go as planned but you learnt something and solved the situation – you may also get questions like ‘*Tell us about a time you were unable to meet a deadline*’ or ‘*Describe a stressful situation at your previous positions and how you handled it*’.

### **How to answer**

In the interview, try to follow the **STAR** approach to answer these questions, giving the details from one of your example situations. The STAR structure (below) helps you focus on the key actions and skills demonstrated, which is often what interviewers prioritise. Where possible, use a different example for each question.

- **Situation (10%)** – describe the who, what, where, when, and how of the situation. Keep this brief, focusing on the details the interviewer needs to understand the context.
- **Task (15%)** – highlight the specific challenge or constraints – what do you need to overcome to complete the task or improve the situation.
- **Action (55%)** – describe what actions you took – ideally (but truthfully!) highlighting the desired behaviours / skills (e.g. proactivity, communication, listening). This is what the interviewer will be most interested in, so should be the most detailed part of your answer.
- **Result (20%)** – conclude with what your actions achieved – if possible with quantification.
- **Reflect** – if appropriate, reflect what you learnt or on anything would have done differently.

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## Example answers

**Question: Describe a time when you had to demonstrate leadership and management skills.**

**Answer:**

**S** - I demonstrated leadership when I had to manage and implement a project related to cancer genomics during my first postdoc.

**T** - My supervisor asked me to create a work plan for our team for the first nine months of the project.

**A** - My goal was to identify key components, team members and project activities, while identifying monthly milestones. To this purpose, I organised a meeting to brainstorm with the team the first week after the assignment was given to me. Collectively, we identified the critical components and key expertise and then I designed a work plan with an online project management tool. After this I set up weekly meetings to discuss progress, upcoming deadlines, and make any adjustment to the work plan if necessary.

**R** - We met all deadlines early and we were able to present preliminary results in an international scientific conference with an audience over 300 people. Finally, 2 scientific publications resulted from this project, one where I was the lead author.

**R** - One thing I recognised was how allowing people to provide input in the early brainstorming, helped get them engaged with the project and workplan.

**Question: How did you set priorities when working on multiple projects?**

**Answer:**

**S** - During my PhD and postdoc I worked on four discrete projects.

**T** - Managing a large number of parallel tasks from multiple projects strengthened my project management and prioritisation skills.

**A** - I first set the objectives for each of the project, created a detailed work plan, and established regular check points to discuss and monitor progress with my supervisor. This ensured that each project stayed on track and that my priorities were in line with the overall goals of the lab. When the work plan had to be adjusted, I classified pending tasks according to their importance. At both stages, I made decisions about what to prioritise based on a range of factors – including bigger picture aspects such as potential impact of the project; as well as more practical aspects such as when major pieces of equipment needed for certain experiments were free.

**R+R** - I think this worked well. Initially, I did not plan enough buffer time for the unexpected and had to adjust the plan frequently. As the projects progressed, I got better at this and we made good progress with all four projects. Two are already published, and the others are being continued as a PhD project for a new member in the lab.

**Question: How do you handle criticism from a work colleague(s)? Can you give us an example?**

**Answer:**

**S** - In my PhD, I had to update to my scientific committee every year. On one occasion the committee gave me the feedback that the presentation was difficult to follow.

**T** - That was difficult for me, as in the past I've actively sought feedback on my presentations and considered it to be one of my strengths – but I wanted to learn from it.

**A** - I listened carefully to the criticism and thanked them. I then reflected on the reasons. I realised I had not spent enough time preparing, as I had too much to do with both my main and two side projects. I discussed with my supervisor that my workload was getting too much, and brought a few ideas of how to manage this. After discussing, we agreed that I should drop a side project. I also proactively took a project management course, and used the tools from that course to make a strategic plan for the rest of my PhD and improve how I communicated progress and challenges to those involved.

**R+R** - While the situation was embarrassing, it prompted me to take a more proactive approach when things get too much. This has improved my project management skills and I have since successfully published the quite ambitious main project within timeline of my PhD, and also won a poster presentation prize for the remaining side project.

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**Question:** Describe a time when you were talking to a non-specialist audience. How did you manage to translate complex technical knowledge so everyone could understand you?

**Answer:**

**S+T** - Last year I was invited to speak at an international conference in translational medicine where many of the attendees were medical doctors with limited knowledge of my research field.

**A** - To ensure that presentation was clear, I avoided using technical jargon and included visual aids to explain the most complex topics. I also included questions through a free live polling tool to increase interaction with the audience and ensured that everyone was on the same page, and finalised my presentation summarising the key points. Before delivering my presentation, I reached out to a colleague working in a pharma company who usually delivers presentations to medical doctors and asked for feedback to adjust the presentation.

**R** - Following the presentation, we were approached by a clinical group about a possible future collaboration, which I hope reflects that the presentation was clear.

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# Questions to ask the interviewer

Towards the end of your interview, you may be asked if you have any questions. Not asking questions can suggest a lack of preparation or interest in the role. You can bring your questions with you in a notebook and it is fine to have a look at them during the interview. When asking your questions:

- Avoid negative questions or asking about salary, health insurance, vacations, bonuses...
- Focus on the role and company culture
- Ask one question at a time, focussed on a single subject
- Ask open questions to create a dialogue
- Do not ask personal questions

Here are some potential questions to assess if the company/team is a good match for your skills, interests and career goals:

## About the position

- What are the main challenges associated with the position?
- How would you describe an average day in this position?
- Can you describe the initial training program/period for the position?
- Can you tell me how do you envision the first month for this position?
- What are your expectations for this role in the first 3-6 months?
- What do you think are the most important qualities for someone to excel in this role?
- How much travel is expected for this role??
- What are the biggest rewards of this position?
- Is this a newly created position, or an existing position?

## Team/Supervisor

- How many people work in the department?
- How does this position interact with your position/department?
- How long have you been in the company? What did you do before?
- What do you like the most about your position?
- How would you describe your management style?
- How do you ensure proper communication in the team?

## Company

- What do you like most about working for this company?
- Can you tell me more about the company's values?
- What are the main challenges the company will face in the next 5 years?
- How has the company evolved over the last few years?
- How would you describe the company's culture and management style?
- How do you assess the performance of an employee with the company/team's goals?

## Career growth

- What is the typical career progression for someone starting with this role at your company?
- How long do people typically stay in this role, and what kinds of roles do they move into after?
- Do you offer in-house professional development training?
- Are there any examples of a career path beginning with this position?
- How does an employee advance in this company?

## Others

- Do you have any reservations about my qualifications?
- Is there any aspect of my work experience that you want me to clarify?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?
- What is the expected starting date for this position?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?

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**For start-ups (to understand financial stability/growth plans)**

- How long will the remaining funding last before the company will seek another round of financing?
- Who are the major investors in the company?
- Are there any key milestones for the company to meet in the next year?
- Could you briefly summarise the company's business model? (for e.g. service-focussed business)
- Do you see the company ultimately being acquired or going public? When do you think that might happen?
- From the original founders and staff, how many are still with the company?
- What has the growth rate in personnel been in the last year, and do you expect to continue to grow at that rate?

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## Calls with external recruiters

Some companies hire external recruiters to fill positions. If you are approached by a recruitment company, it is likely that they will ask for an initial call (approx. 30 mins) to discuss a job opening. Important to know:

- Recruiters are most often used for roles requiring specialist, in-demand skills at big companies or for roles at rapidly growing small companies.
- Recruiters do not usually share the name of the company who is hiring, or information about the company that would make this obvious. In general, they will only disclose the name if the company decides to proceed with your application. There are a few reasons why this might be, including:
  - they don't want you to simply go around them and apply directly to the role (they only get paid if they are the ones to fill the position)
  - they want to convince you that the role would be a good fit, particularly if the hiring company has a poor reputation that may be based on an inaccurate myth or preconception
  - or even that the hiring company is moving into a new area, and does not want to alert competitors.
- PROS: a professional recruiter will help you through the application, interview, and negotiation process with insider tips and feedback; a good recruiter may already have established a strong working relationship with the company, which can help your candidacy. Additionally, recruiters often work for multiple companies, so they can suggest other roles you can apply to.
- CONS: there can sometimes be a contractual lock-in that means that once the recruiter has submitted your job application materials to a company, that company has to pay the recruiter a recruitment fee if they hire you for that particular role - *or any other role at that company* - within a certain time period. The standard recruiter fee they have to pay will be around 15-25% of your first-year salary. Thus, this may affect applications you would like to make to other roles at that company, where the company did not plan to use a recruiter. Additionally, some recruiters are less professional – they first try to get as many potential candidates as possible signed-up, and then approach hiring companies to sell access to their candidates.

In a call with a recruiter, they may ask you general questions like:

- Tell me a bit about your background
- Can you give me an overview of your technical skills?
- What type of position are you looking for?
- What is your preferred geographic location?
- What are your salary expectations?
- When would you be available to start working?
- Is it ok for you if I pass your file to the hiring company?
- Have you been contacted by the same recruitment firm before?
- Can you please send an updated CV?
- Can we make your CV available to other companies/recruiting branches for future opportunities?
  - Note: If it's a professional recruiter sharing your CV for positions you fit well for with companies they have been hired by, this could be great; however, some recruiters will also send your CV to a wide range of roles without keeping you updated on who your CV has been sent to. Make sure that you are working with a professional before you say yes.

To assess the role and whether the recruiter is professional, you can consider asking:

- Can you tell me a little bit about what the company is looking for?
- What can you tell me about the company?
- Why is the position open?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the team?
- What is the salary range for the position?
- How long have you been recruiting in this industry?

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- How long have you been working with the hiring company, and have you placed clients with them before?
  - Will you contact me before sending my CV to other companies?
  - If I proceed with you as a recruiter for this role, will there be any recruiter lock-in period that will apply if I apply to other roles at that company directly or through another recruiter?

If they are not able to answer these questions satisfactorily or do not share who their client is after the initial discussions have gone well, this could be a red flag.

## Ability and psychometric testing in job interviews

Many employers use ability and psychometric testing as part of the job interview process. Please find some basic information about the role of these tests, and how to prepare. This section is based on a seminar from Maria Møller Jeppesen - Recruitment Partner at Novo Nordisk - and the additional resources listed in the last page of the handout.

### 1. The role of these tests

Together with other aspects of the application process, these tests are used to gain insights about working style, personality, fit to the position, and identify areas where individuals might require further development. Generally, these tests (particularly the personality test) are not pass-fail but are used as part of the overall assessment. Additionally, the results of the personality and logic tests may influence the focus of questions in a structured interview.

### 2. Types of tests

There are multiple types of tests, including:

- personality assessments that assess candidates' work style and motivation. These tests have built-in controls that show inconsistency, so answer honestly.
- verbal, numerical and logical reasoning tests that assess the ability to interpret text, handle data and apply logic. The verbal reasoning tests may be offered in multiple languages.
- situational judgement tests that assess how you make decisions and solve problems.

### 3. Preparation

There are many tests out there, so it is not possible to prepare completely. However, doing some practice tests can help you perform efficiently and accurately on the day. In some cases, the prospective employer e.g. the [European Personal Selection Office](#) provide sample tests for applicants. If no sample is provided, doing practice types tests from a few different sources may help you prepare for the different types of test you may be faced with (see additional resources below). To prepare for numerical reasoning tests, revisit basic maths topics such as fractions, percentages etc. The test day, read the instructions carefully and calculate how long, on average, you have per question. If one question is taking you too long, consider going on to the test and returning later if time permits.



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## Further resources

### *For interviews*

- [First encounters with behavioral interviewing](#) - Science Careers
- [Everything you need to know about answering behavioral interview questions](#) - The Muse
- [Interviewing skills for industry scientists – Bill Lindstaedt](#) - Video | UCSF
- [Sample industry interview questions](#) - UCSF

### *Ability and psychometric testing*

- Overview of types of tests and list of external resources from [Oxford University Careers Service](#), [Target Jobs](#) and [Prospects](#).

### *On working with recruiters*

- [How to work with a scientific recruiter](#) - Nature Careers Blog
- [Four truths about working with recruiters the they'll never tell you](#) - The Muse
- [Tooling up: On headhunters](#) - Science Careers
- [Ten questions to ask when the headhunter calls](#) - Forbes

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