

# INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

A CIEEM GUIDE  
FOR STUDENTS & EARLY  
CAREER PROFESSIONALS



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## INTRODUCTION

The recruitment process can be challenging, especially for first-time applicants. Many candidates at interview stage have similar credentials on paper and a strong interview performance is often key to securing the role.

During an interview, you should do aim to do around 60% of the talking - if you don't then you are losing the opportunity to get your qualities across.

Research highlights strategies to improve success, such as making a strong first impression early in the interview (1) - see "Making an Impression".



## DRESS CODE

A general rule of thumb is to dress one step up from what is normally worn in the workplace.

Casual wear in the workplace = dress up smart casual for the interview.

However if you are uncertain, you can contact the employer to ask them prior if there is any specific dress code.

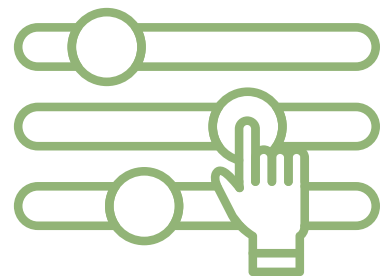


## ASKING FOR REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Under the Equality Act 2010 (1), employers are legally required to make reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process to support candidates with disabilities. However, you can request reasonable adjustments even without a formal diagnosis. Employers don't need definitive proof of a condition to offer support under the Equality Act

Here are some examples of possible adjustments:

- Allowing extra time for interviews, assessments, or timed exercises.
- Offering the interview in an alternative format, such as by phone, video, or written response.
- Adjusting the interview location or scheduling it at a more suitable time.
- Providing the interview questions ahead of time to support preparation.
- Presenting interview questions in a written format during the session.
- Arranging for a sign language interpreter or other communication support.



"Candidates should feel comfortable to advise prospective employers if they need reasonable adjustments before the interview - most decent employers should ask but candidates need to be able to perform at their best and this may be a way of improving that performance." Emma Hatchett, Head of Nature in the UK, WSP.

"Asking for reasonable adjustments is a completely acceptable request and should be encouraged" Jen Deane, Nature Based Skills & Jobs Officer, NatureScot.

1: Equality Act 2010, 2010. Available at [<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15>].

## INTERVIEW TYPES

Similar to all other sectors, there are a range of different interview techniques that are used within ecology and environmental management:

- Traditional Panel Interview
- Presentation (prepared prior)
- Hands-on Activity
- Knowledge Test
- Walking Interviews
- Virtual Interviews
- Group Interviews



## VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Get your tech and space sorted early so you're not stressing last-minute. Make sure you're confident using the interview platform, knowing how to mute, unmute, and screen share could come in handy. Use a laptop if you can, and find a quiet spot with decent lighting. Think about what's behind you, a plain-ish background with no mess is ideal. You don't need to wear a suit, just something clean, simple, and comfortable that won't distract on screen.

Top 5 Quick Tips:

- Check your setup early: Mic, camera, and internet - test them at least 30 mins ahead.
- Pick a good space: Quiet, tidy, with decent lighting. Give housemates a heads-up if needed.
- Keep your look clean but low-key: No need to dress up – just avoid stuff that might distract or rustle.
- Use notes smartly: Keep them on screen or beside your camera so you can glance without breaking eye contact.
- Do a dry run: Practice answering questions out loud to get comfy with your pace and tone.

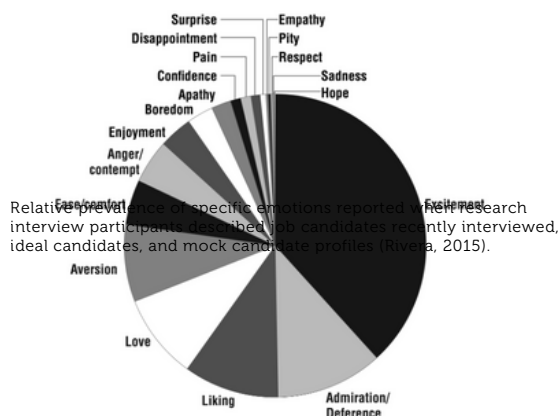
You can find more comprehensive advice for video interviews from the National Careers Service here: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/how-to-do-well-in-video-interviews/>



## MAKING AN IMPRESSION

In a US study (2), interviewers most believed that "going with their gut was a legitimate, effective, and efficient means of evaluating job candidate" at interview.

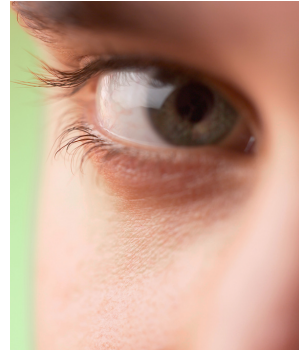
Strong interview performance is crucial, as candidates who engage well with interviewers often secure better career prospects.



## NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Research suggests nonverbal cues make up significant portion of communication - between 65% & 93% (3).

- Elements like facial expressions, eye contact, posture, & attentiveness play a large role in how we come across.
- i.e. a medium amount of eye contact is idea - as opposed to overly holding eye contact (4).



## PREPARE FOR "TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF"

Be concise but aim to fill, 2-3 minutes, it can help to structure your response:

- Present: Your current role/situation, scope, and a key achievement.
- Past: How you got here; relevant experience.
- Future: What you're looking for next and why this role fits.

Before the interview you could prepare this in writing and practice it in front of others to time yourself and get feedback.



## ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Employers are increasingly favouring behavioral and situational questions in interviews (5).
- Candidates who struggle with storytelling may find it difficult to leave a strong impression on interviewers (6).
- Using the STAR technique helps structure responses clearly, making answers more engaging and impactful.
- Consider adding an extra "R" - for reflection - what would you do differently next time?



3: Bonaccio, S., O'Reilly, J., O'Sullivan, S. L., & Chiocchio, F. (2016). Nonverbal behavior and communication in the workplace: A review and an agenda for research. *Journal of Management*, 42(5), 1044–1074.

4: Helminen, T. M., Kaasinen, S. M., & Hietanen, J. K. (2011). Eye contact and arousal: The effects of stimulus duration. *Biological Psychology*, 88(1), 124–130.

5: Culbertson, S. S., Weyhrauch, W. S., & Huffcutt, A. I. (2017). A tale of two formats: Direct comparison of matching situational and behavior description interview questions. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27(1), 167–177.

6: Bangerter, A., Corvalan, P., & Cavin, C. (2014). Storytelling in the selection interview? How applicants respond to past behavior questions. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 29(4), 593–604.

## ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - EXAMPLE USING STAR

Here's an example of a poor answer compared to a strong one using the STAR technique, in response to the interview question: "Can you tell me about a time when you faced a challenge during a project and how you dealt with it?"

✗ Poor Answer:

"We went on a field trip to Norfolk and some of our equipment got damaged, but we still managed to finish our report on time."

This response is weak because it:

- Lacks context (What was the goal or significance of the trip?)
- Doesn't describe any specific actions taken by the student (What did you actually do?)
- Offers no clear result or reflection (What was achieved or learned?)
- Fails to demonstrate initiative, problem-solving, or leadership

✓ Strong Answer (Using the STAR Technique):

Situation:

"In my second year, we went on a week-long field trip to the North Norfolk coast to collect data on coastal ecosystems. The aim was to gather enough information for a group report and presentation."

Task:

"I was leading a small group, and we were in charge of setting up quadrats and recording plant species over four days. Our data was a key part of the overall project."

Action:

"Halfway through, heavy rain damaged some of our equipment and ruined our data sheets. I suggested we switch to using GPS on our phones to mark quadrat locations and record results digitally. I also spoke to another group working nearby so we could share some of the missing data."

Result:

"By reorganising quickly, we managed to finish on time and still handed in a strong report. Our work was highlighted for how we adapted to the situation, and it gave me a lot of confidence in leading a team and problem-solving under pressure."

This example shows how the STAR technique can transform a vague or underdeveloped response into a compelling story that clearly highlights your skills, decision-making, and impact. By providing structure: Situation, Task, Action, Result, you not only answer the question more effectively but also stand out as reflective, capable, and ready for the workplace or further academic challenges.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS? YES - YOU DO!

Asking thoughtful questions shows your commitment and enthusiasm for the role.

Not having questions at the end may suggest a lack of interest in the organisation.

Example questions to ask:

- What is the top priority for the new hire in this role?
- How do you measure success in this position?
- What do you personally enjoy about working here?

(7)

"Whilst it is good to have a question, make sure it is one that you are comfortable asking and are prepared to understand the answer e.g. there's no point in asking about how the organisation measures success if you're not sure what that means and why it is relevant! Be prepared- it may be that some interviewers, turn the question back to the interviewee and ask what they think before answering themselves!"

Gillie Hayball, Ranger Services Manager, New Forest National Park Authority



## TIPS FROM ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

### Interview Nerves:

"It is key to remember that an interview can be a high stress environment, for both the applicant and the panel. It is quite common, and can help to build rapport, to acknowledge those nerves and address them at an early stage. You will never be marked down for mentioning that you are nervous because the role is important to you. In fact, most panel members will relate to this!"

**Jen Deane, Nature Based Skills & Jobs Officer, NatureScot**

### Trial Runs:

"I'd say a good tip if the interview is in person, do a trial run of the route before the interview date if you can – there's nothing worse than getting lost or not leaving enough time for the journey, turning up late and flustered. Also arrive at an appropriate time: not too early but don't cut it fine. Have a phone number to call if something happens on the day and you are going to be late or not make it - we once had a lady who didn't turn up but we got a phone call from a first aider at the supermarket nearby, she was with the lady who had been knocked off her bike on the way to us! It showed how important it was to her that we knew she hadn't just not shown up – a good quality!"

**Joanna Martin, People and Talent Officer, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust**

### Transferable Skills

"Remember, there are tonnes of transferable skills in all sorts of other roles and examples for situational questions don't have to come from related industries! We try to help make candidates feel more comfortable by letting them know this early in an interview."

**Emma Hatchett, Head of Nature Services in the UK, WSP**

### First Impressions

First impressions count! Even if you're not feeling it, walk in to the interview with confidence, make eye contact with the interviewers and greet them with a smile, this makes a huge difference. We all get nervous, even the interviewers, so it's ok to say so. We want you to succeed and see you at your best, helping you feel relaxed and comfortable is a big part of this.

Always answer questions with examples of how you meet the requirements and demonstrate relevant things you've done. These do not always have to have been in previous work; experience from hobbies, travel and personal interests also count and help demonstrate the person you are.

**Gillie Hayball, Ranger Services Manager, New Forest National Park Authority**