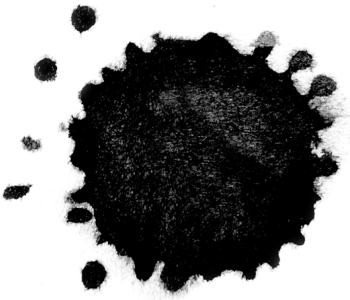


University of the
Arts London * *
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creative careers

preparing for interview

Creative Careers is part of Student Services
at University of the Arts London

First Floor
65 Davies St
London W1K 5DA

tel: 020 7514 6150
fax: 020 7514 6219
textphone: 18001 0207 514 6150
minicom: 020 7629 6371
email: careers@arts.ac.uk
website: www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers

preparing for interview

Interview – an overview

Job interviews form a vital part of a selection and recruitment process. If you have been invited for interview you will probably have either sent your CV or completed an application form - and the organisation will have short-listed you as potentially suitable – on paper at least. Interviews should be a two-way process, the employer needs to assess your suitability and you need to assess if this is the right position / organisation for you. The interview is not a perfect tool. Some people are relaxed and find it easy to talk about themselves, while for others nerves can get in the way of creating a really good impression. It's worth noting that interviewers can also be nervous and some may be unskilled at getting the best out of you. Given the very competitive creative job market, you need to make the most of each interview opportunity. The best way to do this is to be systematic. Preparation, research and practice most definitely help success rates, but whatever the outcome, reflect on the interview experience and see it as a way of improving your technique.

It may sound obvious, but remember to be courteous to your interviewer. Be on time for interviews or meetings and if you are unavoidably held up, phone the company to let them know what has happened and to apologise.

Types of interviews

One to one interviews

In this scenario, one interviewer will be assessing you on your skills, talents, personal qualities, future potential and overall suitability for the role. Given the time constraints and psychological perspectives, this is not an easy task, so it's up to you to help them get to know you. Try to appear relaxed and be ready to answer questions they are likely to ask. Establishing an early rapport allows the conversation to flow and helps the interviewer to make an informed decision.

“Pop in for a chat” interviews

Informal drop-in interviews should not be seen as casual social meetings. Small, busy companies – quite often artists, designers, film makers, photographers and TV companies - may ask you to 'drop in for a chat' and (where applicable) a quick look through your portfolio. This may be the way they recruit, particularly when taking on freelancers or temporary staff. This is an equally important opportunity, so prepare for it as you would for any other interview. Treat every contact with a prospective employer, even if it is for ten minutes, as an opportunity to impress.

Telephone interviews

A company may ask you to phone in response to an advert – in which case you can prepare yourself in advance, but increasingly telephone interviews are used as a method of initial screening. If you have sent your CV to a company or to a recruitment agency, remember to be prepared for a call at all times. It only takes a few seconds to create an impression, so make sure

it is the right one. Don't forget to check your answer phone message - is it giving the right impression?

Panel interviews

These usually consist of between 2 – 4 interviewers who take turns to ask questions linked to their position or expertise within the company. Panels are easily manageable if you direct the answers to the person who asks the question - whilst involving the others by making eye contact. Generally panel interviews are considered to be fairer – as more than one person is involved in selecting the most suitable applicant.

Interviews for graduate trainee programmes

Larger organisations, many of which recruit onto graduate training programmes, often use sophisticated selection procedures to help identify skills, abilities, personalities and future potential. Applicants may spend up to two days at an assessment centre taking part in a range of activities including panel and one to one interviews, presentations, role play exercises, work related tasks, and psychometric or personality tests. These selection procedures are a huge investment in time and resources and a luxury most of the small creative and artistic companies cannot afford. The UK creative industries are mostly small companies which rely heavily on the one to one or small panel interviews - often where applicants are asked to bring visuals like portfolios – story boards – look books - slides – audio / visual CDs etc as important supporting evidence of creativity.

Subsequent interviews

If you are invited back for a second or even a third interview – don't become complacent. It might be with the same interviewer who needs to ask more questions or to meet colleagues you might be working with. Generally speaking subsequent interviews mean there are a number of suitable applicants and interviewers are trying to make that fine line decision.

3 key aspects of interviews

By being systematic you can minimise the chance element and maximise your chances of success. There are 3 key aspects the interviewer will need to assess.

Your skills in context

A prospective employer will be looking for evidence of your abilities, skills, talents, experience and possible future potential? Re-visit the skills included on your CV or application form - see if you can add to or update these. Ask academic staff, close friends, family members - the people who know you well - what they consider to be your skills and talents and possible future potential and most importantly, ask why.

Analyse past experience - think about a situation when things went really well for you, then break down the skills and abilities you used at that time. Real contexts and real experiences make it easier for you to identify and express positive statements about yourself. Examples that work well are: a successful college project; a collaborative team venture; a personal achievement; responsibilities given in a part-time job etc.

Practice voicing these scenarios out loud to yourself – or even better – to a friend or relative and ask them for honest feedback. This will help you to pace your answers and to hear the tone of your voice. The more you practice the more natural you will feel when the time comes. If you are preparing for an interview and feel you need advice and maybe some encouragement, book in to see a Careers Adviser at Davies Street.

If you have received a job description or person specification for the job you are applying for, then make sure you are able to give examples of skills and/or experience that show you are suitable for the position in question.

Supporting visual evidence

Visual evidence can sometimes demonstrate your creative talents to an interviewer even more effectively than words, so if appropriate take your portfolio, or a sample of work to show. Be prepared to talk through the creative ideas, techniques and packages used. It's also important to have something to say about how your work is developing.

“If you're interviewing for anything creative, a well presented "book" of all the work you've done is pretty essential and could be the basis of the interview. Make sure you've got something to say about each piece if necessary and make sure it's well presented and large enough to see. It could be online, but is most impressive nicely printed out in a portfolio.”

MF, Production Director, Atticmedia

Body language messages

Interviewers rely on body language to pick up on enthusiasm, sincerity, reliability and whether you will fit into their organisation. Body language communicates messages about us the minute we walk into a room. Research shows that psychologically we cannot help but make quick assessments of strangers – even when we are trying not to! Up to 70 % of our minds can be persuaded within a few minutes –after which we feel psychologically compelled to justify our first impressions. This is known as “the halo effect”.

Eye contact, (don't stare!) a smile, a frown, how we hold our heads, the way we stand, walk, sit - all give powerful clues as to the kind of people we are. However we are not always aware of how we come across - especially in a new or stressful situation. For example we may not appear enthusiastic, even when we are! The simple gesture of looking down at your shoes - or avoiding eye contact can be interpreted as boredom or disinterest, while putting a hand to the mouth when speaking can imply insincerity. Be aware of non-verbal messages – they really do speak volumes!

The way we speak also reflects on our overall suitability – so speak clearly and don't rush your answers, take a couple of deep breaths, and vary your tone if possible - for added interest! Be sensitive to obvious cultural differences - especially when meeting and greeting - and allow appropriate personal space. Don't lean too close, even when showing your portfolio. Always remember to ask the interviewer if they have time to view your work – and pace yourself accordingly.

Presentation - what should you wear?

It helps your confidence if you feel you look good and are comfortable. Making an effort does impress. A suit may not always be appropriate, but even the most casual of companies expect an interviewee to arrive in “smart casual”. If you have time you could do a “dummy run” to the company at the end of their working day. This will allow you to check out the journey, get a feel of the environment and to see what the staff are wearing as they leave. This way you can pitch your interview outfit to reflect the company culture – bearing in mind that once in a job people tend to be more relaxed about what they wear.

Your knowledge of the job / company / industry

“While suitability for the post is very important, for jobs at the beginning of your career, enthusiasm is key. So prove you are interested in the field and the company by doing your research properly... if you haven't done that type of job before, find someone who has, ask them about it, and let the interviewing panel know this.”

Producer, Independent Theatre Company, Glasgow

It is important that you do some careful research before your interview, so that you are as informed as possible about the post you are applying for and also the industry/culture it is a part of. You might be lucky enough to have a good idea of the key aspects of the position either via a job description or advertisement, but even so, make sure you can look beyond this and read between the lines. Would you be working with a team? Would you be liaising with customers? Would you need to use your initiative? Would you need to have ideas, be adaptable, be a fast learner perhaps? These personal skills are often what “sells” you to an employer, so think about how you can highlight your personal skills whilst delivering your answers with positive body language.

Try to research the jobs around the job you are applying for. This will give you information on related job roles, departments and the structure of the organisation, as well as an insight into related careers, and progression routes. You should also read up on relevant industry developments and news. You can do this research by looking at industry and university careers websites, industry journals and relevant books and directories. Visit the Careers Information Centre at Davies Street, where we have a wealth of useful resources – including guides and directories, job profiles, and over 40 current newspaper and magazine titles relating to the creative industries.

“One thing which drives me mad is candidates who are completely under prepared and have not bothered to trouble themselves to find out anything about the company. With the Internet etc, this is inexcusable.”

Sales and Marketing Director, Book Publishing

Virtually all companies have a website giving information on their products/aims/services and staff. Researching the company from the outset will help you decide if you want to apply for the position, as well as giving you an insight into their ‘brand’ or house style and possible clues as to their organisational culture.

Disclosing disability

If you have a disability, you may or may not have decided to disclose this to a prospective employer before interview. You may be planning to disclose your disability at interview, or if you have already raised the issue, you may want to prepare for questions related to your disability. SKILL is the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities and it provides a number of information sheets covering a range of subjects, including disclosing disabilities to employers. For contact details see the 'Further information' section at the end of this handout.

Example interview questions: are you prepared?

About your time at college questions

Tell me about your course.

What is the most surprising thing you have learned from your time at university?

Are there any aspects of your course you particularly enjoyed – and why?

Any aspects you found difficult? Why?

Have you been involved in any collaborative projects?

What aspects of your course did you find most useful?

What are the main skills and abilities you have developed at university?

About you / self-awareness questions

What do you see as a key strength? How has it helped you achieve a goal?

Tell us about a difficult situation and how you dealt with it?

What is your greatest weakness?

How would you like your career to develop in the future?

What would you say your main skills and abilities were?

Have you ever had any positions of responsibility: at college, at work or while on a work placement?

How do you think you respond to being given responsibility?

Tell me two things your best friend would say about you.

Tell me two things a previous boss would say about you.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team?

Why this job / this company questions

Tell me what you think the key aspects of this job are.

Why do you think this job might suit you?

Why do you want to work here?

What skills and abilities do you think this job requires?

So what have you got to offer us?

What challenges are you looking for?

Tell me what you know about us?

Have you seen our website– what do you think of it?

How do you think our company / products fit into the market place?

Do you have any relevant experience gained through work or through work experience placements?

How important is it to keep to deadlines in this job?

Do you have any questions for us?

Tricky questions/ attitudes to work

- What are your salary expectations – how have you arrived at this figure?
- What do you consider a good reason for missing work?
- What is the greatest lie you have told?
- What would you do if you disagreed with your boss?
- How would you deal with a situation where didn't get on with one of the team?

About your ideas / creativity

- Tell us about your artistic / creative influences.
- What designers / artists / practitioners do you admire?
- How do you think this scene / industry might develop in the next five years?
- What exhibitions, galleries, workshops or industry events have you visited recently?
- What creative work/designs have you particularly liked or disliked over the past year?
- How would you like to develop your skills and talents in the future?
- Are you involved with (or do you have ideas for) any personal creative projects at the moment?
- Do you have a favourite creative medium?
- Do you think you have talent?
- Have you got an artist statement?

Personal safety at interview

Do not let your enthusiasm to secure employment override any precautions that you would normally take with regard to your personal safety. In the creative industries in particular, it is not unusual for employers to work from home or from a private studio. An interview or meeting with this type of employer should not normally be a problem but when arranging any meeting or interview, bear the following points in mind.

- Make sure that someone (e.g. a friend, partner, relative) knows where you are being interviewed and at what time you expect to return. Leave them the telephone number and address of where you are going and the name of the person you are meeting.
- Do not put yourself in a position that you are not comfortable with. If an employer works from a private address rather than company premises, you may be able to arrange your interview in a public place. You could even take along a friend who could wait at a discreet distance.
- If the interview has to take place outside working hours, you could ask a friend to collect you at a specified time. If you feel uncomfortable you will then be able to tell the interviewer that someone is coming to meet you.
- No matter how well the interview is going, avoid extending it into a social setting – over drinks for example. Never accept a lift home from the interviewer.
- If the job is overseas be especially careful to check out the employer and the type of work you will be expected to do, as well as the provision of safe travel and suitable accommodation. If you are offered the position ensure that everyone knows your contact details.

Further information

Body language

There is further information about body language in an interview situation in *'Be Prepared! Getting Ready For Job Interviews'* by Julie-Ann Amos. A reference copy is held in the Careers Information Centre.

Disclosing disability

SKILL – The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
Chapter House, 18-20 Crucifix Lane, London SE1 3JW.
Telephone / Minicom: 020 7450 0620 Fax: 020 7450 0650
Information Line: 0800 328 5050 or 020 7657 2337.

www.skill.org.uk

Information sheets including *'Looking for Work: disclosing disability'* can be found on the website at **www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets/emp_disclose.doc**

General interview skills

More information on interview skills can be found on the Prospects website. Go to www.prospects.ac.uk and expand the 'Jobs and Work' menu on the left hand side, then pick 'Applications and interviews'. Also try the Guardian Jobs site at:

<http://jobsadvice.guardian.co.uk/interviews>

Personal safety

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is the national charity for personal safety. It aims to create a safer society and enable people to live safer lives, providing practical personal safety advice. Tel: 020 8876 0305 or visit **www.suzylamplugh.org**

Psychometric testing

The Guardian Unlimited Website has sample psychometric tests.

Go to: **<http://money.guardian.co.uk/work/psychometrics/0,1456,589733,00.html>**

Starting points for your research

Occupational profiles (job outlines) can be found on the Prospects.ac.uk graduate website. Go to **www.prospects.ac.uk** and choose 'Explore types of jobs' from the left-hand menu. Job profiles are then grouped by area. Areas covered include 'Arts, Design & Crafts', 'Advertising, Marketing & PR' and "Publishing, Media & Performing Arts".

Reference copies of relevant periodicals and journals are held in the Careers Information Centre. For opening hours see the Creative Careers website at:

www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers/13177.htm

Many of these publications also have websites, so you may want to look them up online too.

A list of useful web links can be found on the Creative Careers website at

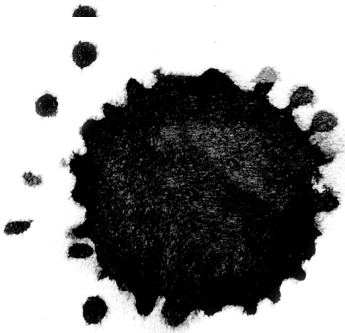
www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers/1740.htm

Links are grouped by specialism (e.g: media, fashion, design etc).

Written and researched by Astrid Katcharyan & Bianca Rodway

University of the Arts London
– a creative constellation

Camberwell College of Arts
Central Saint Martins College
of Art and Design
Chelsea College of Art and Design
London College of Communication
London College of Fashion
Wimbledon College of Art
www.arts.ac.uk



The main purpose of our written material is to provide specialist careers information, that is not readily available elsewhere, for our students and recent graduates.

All eligible students and graduates are welcome to use Creative Careers. We provide a range of services from information, advice and guidance through to practical group workshops. To find out how we work with students and leavers at your college or how to contact us visit www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers.

We aim to be disability friendly so do let us know of any particular requirements you may have. All our handouts and workshop materials are available in alternative formats on request. Please contact us to discuss your needs and how we can help. To make comments about this handout or suggestions for new ones we could produce, please email us at careers@arts.ac.uk

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