



Ms Bossy DeBoss

Namey Mc Name



Thank you for coming to see us for your interview today, Namey. How was your journey, did you have any trouble finding us?

## Things to think about

The interviewer will often ask you more personal questions as they greet you to help you to relax. These don't form part of the interview but it's important to be professional from the moment you meet your interviewer(s).



My journey was fine thank you, Ms DeBoss. The instructions I received for my interview made it really easy to get here. It's nice to meet you (shaking hands)

## Things to think about

A firm handshake is important. Be aware of your body language as you enter the interview and when you are seated. Sit up straight but naturally and don't fold your arms. Maintain good eye contact.



You too, Namey. Please have a seat and I will tell you about what's going to happen during your interview. As you know, I am the manager of the department you have applied to. I'll begin by giving you some more information about our graduate training scheme and I'll then be asking you some questions to find out more about your potential for the role, does that sound ok?

## Things to think about

The number of interviewers can vary from one person to a number of people as a panel. Where there is more than one interviewer, there could be people at different levels of management, people with a more general view like Human Resources or the graduate recruitment team, and maybe someone with some experience in the role you've applied for. If you are interviewed by a panel, a good tip when answering questions is to give the most eye contact to the person who asked the question, glancing at the other interviewers also as you speak.



Yes that sounds fine, thank you.



Great. Our graduate training scheme is a two year programme of training and development but you will be given responsibility from the very beginning and expected to use your initiative on your projects. Senior management have an open door policy for graduate trainees, so you can ask questions and discuss ideas, and you will also be allocated a mentor who will be a member of the team and have recently completed the graduate training scheme. You will also have regular training days and will start to work towards an accredited professional diploma in Example Studies with our support. The scheme is very successful and at the end of the two years you would ideally be ready to move into a junior management role in the team. Is there anything more you'd like to know about the scheme?

## Things to think about

As an introduction you will often be given more information about the organisation, the role you've applied for, the team you will join etc. so listen carefully to what you are being told.



Not at the moment, what you've outlined sounds great. I'm very interested in this opportunity based on what I've read about it and what you've said today.



That's good, let's get started then. Can you please tell me a bit about yourself, Namey?

## Things to think about

Interviewers ask this question to differentiate your skills, experience, and personality with that of other candidates. They want to determine if what you have to offer will match the organisation's mission and goals. They are not looking for your life story here. A good approach is to provide a brief introduction focusing on attributes that are key to the role you're being interviewed for. You can then provide a brief summary of your most recent career history including education and experiences. Try to tie your answer to the requirements for the role. Don't assume that the interviewer will be able to connect all the dots. It's your job as the interviewee to make sure the interviewer understands how your skills and experience are transferable to the role they are recruiting for.



Of course. I am about to complete my degree in Example Studies, a course I chose after getting some experience in the sector while I was in sixth form. Luckily having decided on the career route I wanted to pursue at that stage meant I could use my time at university to continue building relevant experience and ensure I developed all the important skills I'd need to progress in addition to gaining the right knowledge through my studies. I seized every opportunity to get involved in activities that were interesting to me while at the same time presenting an opportunity to improve myself. I took on some positions of responsibility, such as leading a team for a project and acting as secretary of a society, and found I had quite strong leadership skills. When I applied for this role, I could see that my background is a very good match to the requirements, and that it relates quite strongly to the internship I completed last summer, so I can see myself really fitting in well here.

## Things to think about

It's common for an interview to begin with your interest in the organisation and why you think you are suitable for the job. The interviewer will be looking for a genuine, personal answer from you and will expect that you have done your research into the organisation and role to prepare for the interview and that you can demonstrate commercial awareness.



Thank you, Namey. It's good to hear that you are really interested in the job. Can you please tell me a bit more about what attracts you to working for XYZ Ltd and what you think you can bring to the role?

# Example Interview Transcript



During my second year at University I started to research companies offering opportunities matching my career interests and XYZ Ltd. really stood out for me for a number of reasons. There seems to be a real focus on team working while at the same time I know I would be expected to work independently and accept responsibility early on in my career. As I mentioned in my application, I perceive XYZ Ltd. to be an industry leader and I feel that the company values relate to things I also feel passionate about, in particular supporting the local community. Having spent almost two years as a volunteer with The Anonymous Foundation during my time at university I am keen to be involved in further voluntary activity. I also had the opportunity to speak to some members of your recruitment team at the Options careers fair organised by the Employability & Careers Centre at the University and was really impressed by what they had to say about the culture at XYZ Ltd. and their own experiences of working here. In terms of what I could bring to the role, having looked at your expectations of employees and read some of the staff profiles on your website, I'm confident I have the right qualities to fit in well at XYZ Ltd. and that I have all the knowledge, skills and experience you require. In particular, I am confident that I could apply the experience I gained through my internship immediately in this role, such as taking responsibility for a project and communicating effectively with senior management.

## Things to think about

Listen carefully to the questions being asked as sometimes there will be more than one part to a question and it's important to answer everything fully to have the best chance of showing you are suitable for the job.



Thank you, Namey. In terms of the knowledge we require, because we pride ourselves on being cutting-edge in terms of our communication both internally and with our clients, we expect employees to be familiar with social and digital media. What can you tell me about your use of these as communication tools?

## Things to think about

You can often anticipate many of the interview questions through the person specification for the role. If you look at the one in the sample job description in this pack, you will be able to see what employer requirements relate to many of the interview questions being asked.



I have experience of using social and digital media in a range of ways. I use LinkedIn to have a professional online profile for interacting with groups I'm interested in and to contribute to discussions. I also found it useful to find out more about XYZ Ltd. and some of the employees when I was doing research into suitable career opportunities. In my role as Secretary of the Cheese Appreciation Society at university, I set up facebook, twitter and pinterest accounts and managed communications with members through these. I was also responsible for designing and arranging promotional media for events to be displayed on the Students' Union's digital signs around campus. I have written guidelines on all the Society's social and digital media use so that I can pass on this responsibility to the next Secretary when my term comes to an end.



That sounds good, thank you. Excellent interpersonal skills are essential for this role. Can you talk me through an example of a time you feel you have interacted and communicated well with others?

## Things to think about

This is a competency based question. The interviewer will be expecting you to provide a specific example when they ask this type of question. In the same way that the STAR technique is useful when applying for jobs, it is an excellent way to structure your answers to competency based questions in an interview:

- Situation: set the scene or context for the example you're using as evidence;
- Task: briefly outline what you had to do;
- Action: give details of what you did specifically, focusing on your responsibilities, including any problems or challenges that you overcame; and
- Result: include the outcome, and anything you learned from the experience.



This role would also require good problem solving skills. Can you please outline an issue you've had to deal with in the past and how you tackled it?



As I mentioned in my application, following an incident that I helped out with while working at The Big Supermarket, my manager asked me to help to plan and be involved in the induction and training of new staff to offer my perspective on the issues and procedures addressed. As part of my contribution, I identified some inconsistencies in staff training in different departments that were having an impact on how customer feedback and complaints were being dealt with. Slightly different messages were being conveyed by different members of staff leading to some confusion, and on one occasion, a complaint from a customer becoming quite serious. I discussed this with my manager, pointing out the inconsistencies, and suggested what I felt was a more effective procedure which resulted in a more consistent approach across all departments. As a result, a more efficient process is now followed, with positive feedback from staff that they are clearer on how to deal with any issues that arise.



We're looking for people who can demonstrate flexibility, so that they can work well both individually and as part of a team and respond positively to change. Tell me something about your experience to convince me you could be flexible in this way?



Working flexibly...let me take a moment to think...I feel my internship at The Place Ltd. is probably my best example as it was a steep learning curve for me and I adapted well to the environment and the working practices. Although I already had experience of working in Big Supermarket and volunteering, my internship was my first experience in a professional office environment. I was part of a team working on a major project but also had individual responsibilities within the project. I participated in weekly review meetings with my team, contributing to planning and decision making for the project and ensuring that my individual work was progressing as planned. At one review meeting, we discussed an unexpected amendment to the project plan as the client had changed their minds on aspects of the original specification. Much of this related to the part of the project I was working on so I reviewed my work with my manager and suggested an approach to the changes. This was agreed to be the best solution and I managed to make the changes without them having any impact on the planned completion date meaning we were still in a position to finish the project on time and on budget.



I have a scenario question for you next, Namey, and here is a paper copy of it for you to refer to while answering. Imagine you are on your own in the office after lunch as there is a management meeting until 4pm and your other colleagues are visiting a client about a project for the rest of the afternoon. You are working on a report that must be completed for a meeting first thing the following morning. You answer a phone call from a colleague in another department reminding you about a proposal they need from your team urgently by the end of the day. You know another colleague had been working on this so you agree to get back to him. As you end the call, the Director of another division pops in for an update on a collaborative project that your team and hers have been working on, with some very specific questions. What do you do?



As the Director of another division had come to see me in person, I would do my best to answer her questions first but explain that I was on my own for the rest of the afternoon and suggest scheduling a project update meeting with her and relevant members of both teams. Thinking about the other things, I feel the best course of action would be to check on the proposal document my colleague had been working on, and depending on whether it was completed or

#### Things to think about

While it's ok to use some of the same examples to answer competency based questions at interview as you did in your application, try to give more detail if you do, and where possible use different examples to give a broader picture of your skills and achievements.

#### Things to think about

It's fine to pause and think before answering a question if you need to gather your thoughts or decide on the best answer you can give. This is much better than blurting out the first answer that comes into your head.

#### Things to think about

When an interviewer asks a scenario question, it will usually be based on something that could typically happen so that they can assess how you would react to and deal with a particular situation.

They will be looking for things like how you work under pressure, how you analyse situations, whether you can prioritise and delegate if appropriate and that overall you can suggest a sensible approach to dealing with the situation.

# Example Interview Transcript

not, I would prioritise that as it was urgent. I would check my decisions with management when they returned after their meeting and would then arrange the project update meeting and get back to working on the report for the following morning, staying in the office a bit late if necessary to get it completed.



That sounds like good time management. Could you talk me through a real situation where you have shown the ability to prioritise and meet deadlines?



Yes quite recently actually. Since I applied for this role, I have been working 8 hours per week as a frontrunner at university. Frontrunners is a placement scheme at the University of Essex where students can apply for opportunities to develop high-level skills on campus. My frontrunner role is social media related in Communications and External Relations. Part of the role involves launching and overseeing social media campaigns and a recent campaign aimed at prospective students proved so popular that overseeing the resulting communications was taking up most of my time. This had the knock on effect that I had less time to focus on my blog and maintaining regular posting on the different social media platforms we use. Although I had to prioritise my final year project and a couple of assignments that I had due, I arranged with my supervisor to have more flexibility in my hours over a two week period so that I could keep an eye on the campaign on my mobile, including outside office hours, fitting this in around my academic workload and making responses on demand where possible. I was therefore in a position to dedicate more time to my other duties when I was in the office. This worked well and I managed to complete everything required at that busy time.

## Things to think about

It's possible there will be a considerable amount of time between applying for a job and going for an interview so make sure you use the interview as an opportunity to showcase any new skills and experience you've gained in the meantime to build on the evidence you provided when you applied.

If you are talking about frontrunners, the big Essex award, the v-Team or anything else specific to the University, ensure that you explain to your interviewers what it is and was involved as they may never have heard of it before.



If I asked your best friend to describe you in three words, what do you think they would say and why?



I believe my best friend would say I am friendly, reliable and enthusiastic.



What would you say is your greatest weakness?



I have a tendency to be a little bit disorganised as I often switch easily from one task to another and can lose track of time. As a student I've had to juggle my academic workload with working, volunteering and other activities so I've learned to become more organised by prioritising the things I have to do, making lists and using the calendar on my mobile phone to keep track of everything so as a result I've become much more organised and better at staying focused.

## Things to think about

There is no right or wrong answer here, the interviewer will be trying to get a feel for the type of person you are to see if you would fit in well with the team. The best approach is to be honest and reflect positive things about yourself that would transfer well to a professional work environment. You don't need to provide examples unless they ask you to expand on your answer.

## Things to think about

While this question can seem quite negative, the interviewer will not be trying to catch you out, they will be looking for you to show that you are aware of any weaknesses you have and that you are able to manage them so that they don't affect your work.



If you were a part of a bus, what part would you be and why?



Oh, that's a tricky one. Thinking about it, I would be the engine, as although I may not always be the most visible part of the effort, I am always working hard to keep things running smoothly.

## Things to think about

Sometimes interviewers will throw in a really unexpected question at an interview. The interviewer will not be trying to catch you out, they will be interested in seeing how you react to the question and how you respond to the unexpected under pressure.

Once again, there is no right or wrong answer to this type of question. The best approach is to stop and think about it and try to come up with a relatively sensible answer that reflects on you in a positive way.



A pretty good answer, Namey. I know I put you on the spot a bit there. My final question now. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?



If I was successful in getting selected for your Graduate Training Scheme, I would see the move into a junior management role after two years as an opportunity to really develop my leadership and management

## Things to think about

Interviewers may ask a question like this to assess your ambition and to find out if you have thought about how you want your career to develop.

It's a good idea to address professional future plans rather than personal ones and to come across as ambitious but realistic. Do some research in advance into more senior staff (e.g. staff profiles, LinkedIn) and see how long it took them to progress within


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skills as well as my project management skills, with a view to moving into a more senior management role within five years as this seems to be the nature of progression for your most successful junior managers. I would be keen to contribute to the organisation at a higher level as I enjoy planning and discussing new ideas and hope that I could make a difference from a strategic perspective in the future.


(cont)  
the organisation so your response is comparative. Talk in terms of achievement and responsibility rather than financial reward and perks that come with progression. Demonstrate that you are keen to make a difference and willing to be flexible.


#### Things to think about

It's highly likely that an interviewer will ask you if you have any questions for them so it's a good idea to have a few prepared. It's a good opportunity to find out anything you want to know and also to show the interviewer that you are genuinely interested in the organisation and the role.

 Thank you, Namey. I think we've covered everything I need to know about you. Do you have any questions for me?


 Yes, I have looked up lots of information about what it's like to work for XYZ Ltd. but I'd be interested to know more about the culture is like in the team I'd be joining if I was selected and what a typical week is like?


 Well, I'd describe the team as a balance of hardworking and being able to have fun. It's a very busy and professional environment but I feel there's always a good atmosphere, with everyone willing to help each other out when the pressure is on. We often go out together at the end of the week, and have quite regular social events. We also have team away-days twice a year which are always very enjoyable. I don't think I can describe a typical week as every day brings new challenges but in general terms, we kick off the week with a 1 hour Monday morning team meeting followed up with a less formal review meeting on Friday over lunch. Throughout the week, it's a mix of working on projects, doing research, attending other meetings and occasionally undertaking training. Is there anything else you'd like to ask me?


 You mentioned there would be an opportunity to do an accredited professional diploma in Example Studies, which sounds great. What other training and development opportunities are offered at XYZ Ltd.?

#### Things to think about

Questions that show more interest in the organisation and your development if you got the job are always good ones. It's best to avoid questions about things like salary and holidays at this stage. You will usually get this information if you are offered the job so you can wait and ask any questions on your contract then if necessary.


 During the Graduate Training Scheme, much of the initial training is based on in-house systems and processes and on how we work as an organisation. As you get more experienced, there are opportunities to develop leadership and management skills, networking and negotiating skills and if there are particular areas you feel you would benefit from training in, we are always open to discussing this with you and helping you to find suitable courses. Is there anything else you need to know?

 That sounds great, thank you. I don't have any more questions at this stage, I feel I've learned all I need to know so I'd just like to say that I am very interested in this opportunity and I hope that I've convinced you that I would be suitable for the role. Thank you for your time today.

 Thank you for your time too, Namey. We hope to make a decision by the end of the day tomorrow and get back to candidates the following day so you will hear from us soon. Goodbye and have a good journey home.

#### Things to think about

You will usually be given an idea of when you should expect to hear from the organisation about the outcome of your interview, but if not, it's acceptable to ask them.

 Goodbye and thank you again (shaking hands).