



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Trinity Careers Service

YOUR GUIDE TO INTERVIEWING

Top Tips

**to succeed
in your
interview**



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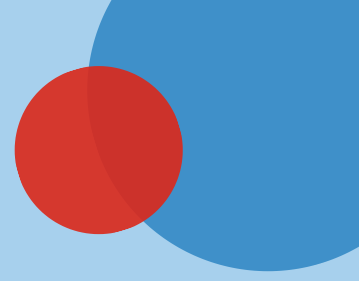
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Start your journey now!

➤ INTRODUCTION

★ Preparing for your first interview

Job interviews are one of the most important steps in the hiring process. Whether it's in person, over the phone, or on online / pre-recorded, interviews are designed to help employers figure out if you have the **right skills, attitude, and motivation for the role**—and if you'll be a good fit for their team.

Preparation is the key, and, in this guide, you will learn about the different interview formats, explore what interviewers will be asking and how you can best answer their questions, and master techniques on how best to prepare in advance of an interview. In addition to the advice on these pages, the Careers Service offers practice interviews, including the option to experience a pre-recorded interview. These are a great way to test your interview skills and identify areas for improvement.

Let's get you interview ready!



➤ TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews can follow many formats, so it's useful to understand what they are, and to be prepared for the different variations you might encounter.

★ Initial Screening (Telephone Interviews)

Telephone interviews are often used by employers at the start of the recruitment process to screen candidates for the next stage of interviewing. Often this is a short discussion about **your understanding of the role** as the recruiter tries to assess your **enthusiasm** and **interest in the role**.

Some things to remember when doing a telephone interview:

- Arrange a time when you can **avoid distractions** and when you won't be disturbed.
 - Have your **CV, cover letter** and the **job description** to hand for reference.
 - Remember that it is not only **what you say** but also **how you say it** that creates a favourable impression.
- 5 Your tone of voice can show enthusiasm for the role.

- **Stand up** while taking the call as this will make you feel and sound more confident.

★ **Competency-based Interviews**

These are the most common interview types in Ireland, used across all sectors—from finance to healthcare. Employers use them to assess whether you have the **key skills** (or “competencies”) needed for the role, **based on your past experiences**. You’ll be asked to give specific examples of when you’ve demonstrated skills like teamwork, communication, problem-solving, or flexibility. These can come from work, college, volunteering, or hobbies.



The interview will be based on the **specific competencies** that are usually **outlined in the job description**.

Competency based questions often start with “give me an example of...” or “tell me about a time when...” .

The interviewer is interested in your role in the examples:

- What did you do? •
- What **obstacles** did you face •
and how did you overcome them?
- How did it work out? •
- What did you **learn**? •



Structure your examples using the STAR framework (more on p. 9 & p.10), which can help you to communicate your competencies clearly and simply.

Strengths-based Interviews

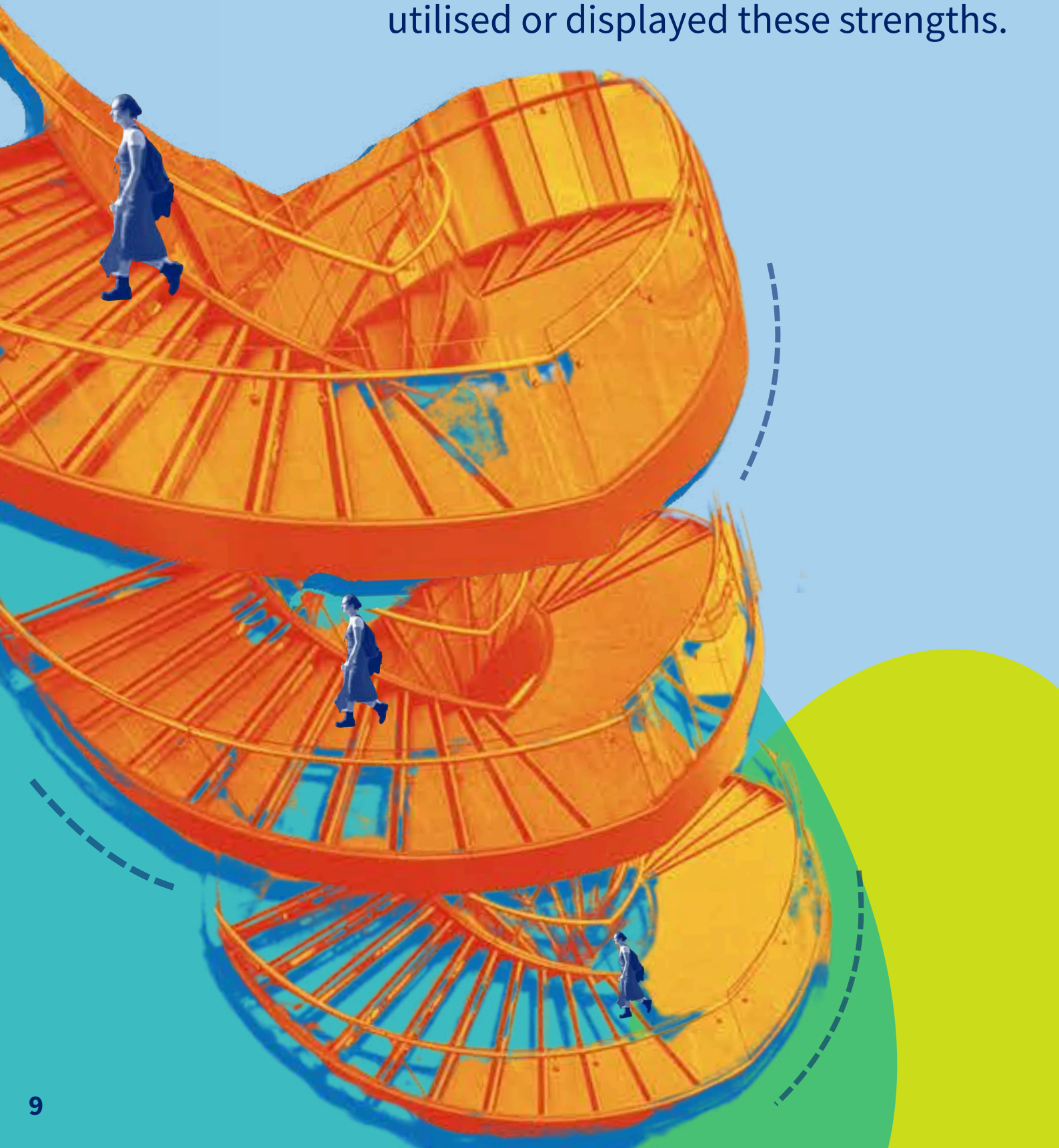
A strengths-based interview focuses on your **natural strengths** and **what you enjoy doing**, rather than what you can do. The rationale for this interview format is if you are doing a job that allows you to engage in activities that you are energised and motivated by (your strengths) you will be much more likely to perform better, to enjoy what you are doing and to remain in the role.

Employers look for **genuine, authentic answers** and they assess this in part by your body language and facial expressions when you are talking about a particular strength.

Examples of strength-based interview questions include:

- What **motivates** you?
Or what do you find draining or tiresome?
- Who do you **admire** the most?
- When do you feel **inspired**?
- Describe a **successful** day. What made it successful?

As with all interviews it is important to **research the company and the role**. Try and identify the strengths and values that the company is likely to be looking for. Spend some time reflecting on your own strengths and think of examples of when you utilised or displayed these strengths.



Academic Interviews

These may be structured to include some or all of the following:

- **Formal panel interview**
- **Individual discussions** with academics in the department
- A **presentation** relevant to the position such as: the impact of your research, or a lecture to students
- **Informal networking**, perhaps including a lunch or dinner

How You Can Prepare

- Ask who will be on the **interview panel** before the interview and do some research into each person.
- **Research the department or research group** as much as you can. Familiarise yourself with recent work that has come out of that department. Read any papers that have recently been published.
- Review the **essential and desirable criteria** as outlined in the job description. Prepare **answers** that describe examples of when you displayed each of these criteria. Be prepared to answer **competency-based questions**.

- Research the **University strategy and key areas of focus** e.g. A.I., sustainability.



☆ Types of Questions

You will be asked to answer questions based on the following areas:

- Your own **research experience, interests and potential**.
- Other research in your area.
- Your **competencies** and how these match with the criteria outlined in the job description.
- Your ability to secure **funding**.
- **Teaching experience** and ability at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- **Supervision** experience and/or ability.
- **How you have contributed to** your previous **university life** - e.g. committee membership.
- What you will bring to the role and how you will fit with the **culture of the department and University**.

★ Technical Interviews

Technical interviews assess your **technical ability and knowledge** required for the role and organisation you are applying for. The interview will be based on the **technical skills** that are **outlined in the job description and** any skills that you have **included in your CV**.

As an example, in an interview for a software developer job, you are likely to be asked to solve a coding problem by writing code on a whiteboard. Interviewers want to understand **how you approach this type of task, how quickly you can do it, and how you can explain your process**. While it's important to get the code approximately correct, they are less concerned with you writing the exact code required, and more interested in how you approach the task and your ability to solve it.



Assessment Centres

Assessment centres involve a series of **assessment activities** designed to allow you **to demonstrate** that you possess the **competencies** required for the role and realistic work scenarios. Assessment centres typically last a **half or full day** and are a mixture of **individual and group-based activities**, where you will be assessed on your contribution to these activities.

Examples of these activities may be as follows:

- **Psychometric testing** is a standardised method to measure cognitive abilities, personality and behavioural style alongside interviews.

Psychometric tests can increase the reliability of the selection process for employers, thereby increasing the chances that their new employee will succeed.

More in-depth resources around Psychometric testing can be found in: **Your Guide to**

Psychometric Testing.

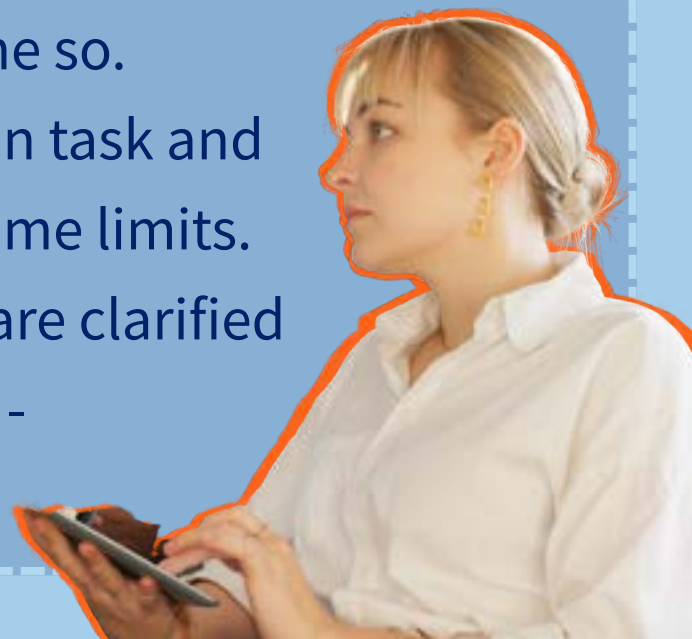
- **Group exercises/Group discussions/Practical group tasks** assess your ability to collaborate and work as **part of a team**: to participate, to contribute ideas, to persuade, to lead without dominating,

and to make practical judgments. The assessors are more interested in **how you interact with the group** rather than in you getting the “right” answer. These challenges can be related or unrelated to your role and can show employers how you behave **in unfamiliar situations.**



TIPS

- Ensure that your contribution is clear and persuasive without being pushy.
- Communicate that you are actively listening to others by acknowledging the contributions of others and giving constructive feedback as appropriate.
- It's fine to disagree with your teammates, but important to do so diplomatically.
- Avoid putting down others when making your contribution.
- Encourage other members of the group to contribute if they haven't done so.
- Ensure that the group stays on task and delivers the task within the time limits.
- It can also be helpful if roles are clarified before commencing the task - e.g. note-taker, time keeper.



- **‘In-tray’ or ‘e-tray’ exercises** simulate a **real work situation**. You will be given a description of your role and responsibilities in an organisation and given an **email inbox** to work through **within a set time limit**. You may also be given additional information about the organisation’s mission, colleagues, key external organisations and relationships etc. which should be kept in mind whilst working through the inbox. The assessors are looking at your ability to:
 - **Process information quickly.**
 - Identify **key issues and** prioritise **tasks**.
 - **Explain** the **decisions** you have made **and** the **actions** you have taken.



- **Case studies** assess a candidate's ability to **deal with real problems** faced by professionals working in the sector to which they are applying. You will be given documents, such as market research reports relating to a particular problem or issue and you will be required to **analyse the documents, make business decisions and give a presentation** of your findings and recommendations. You may also be asked to complete a case study as part of a group activity. **Review** any **company reports and financial statements** that you can access in advance. The case study interview is used mainly by strategic consulting firms. It is generally a **one-to-one discussion on a business problem or exercise** and tests a number of **skills** e.g. analytical, problem-solving, how you respond under pressure, your thought process, your professional style, creativity.

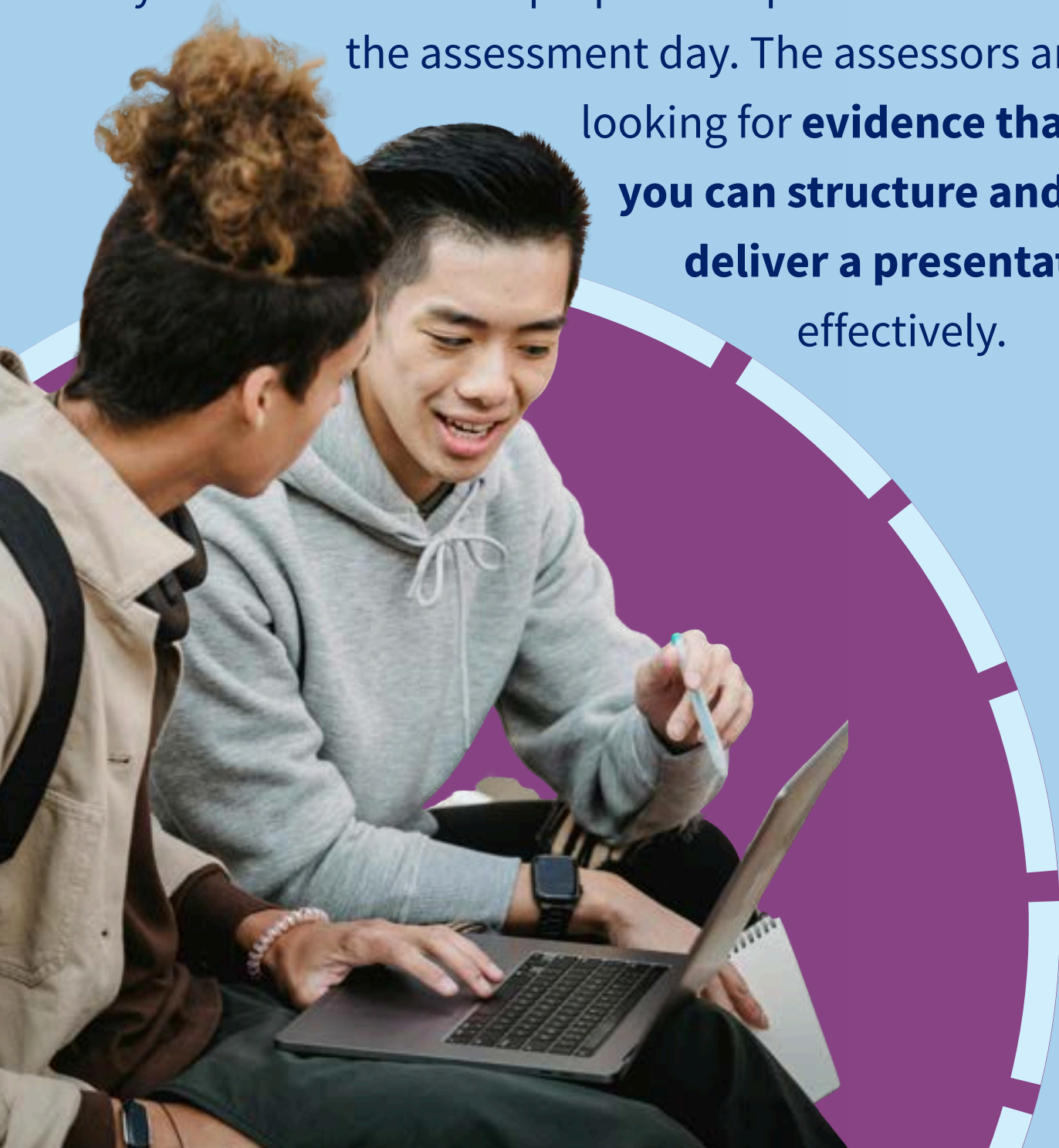


RESOURCES

Practice case-study interview resources:

- **[Practice case studies from McKinse](#)** ;
- **[Acethecase.com](#)** (Tips on preparing for case studies and sample case studies with worked solutions).

- **Giving a presentation** is common in roles that require you to frequently present **complex information** including sales, finance and management consulting. The presentation might be based on one of the other assessment centre exercises that you have already completed, for example a case study, a discussion or role play. Or you will be asked to prepare the presentation before the assessment day. The assessors are looking for **evidence that you can structure and deliver a presentation effectively.**





TIPS

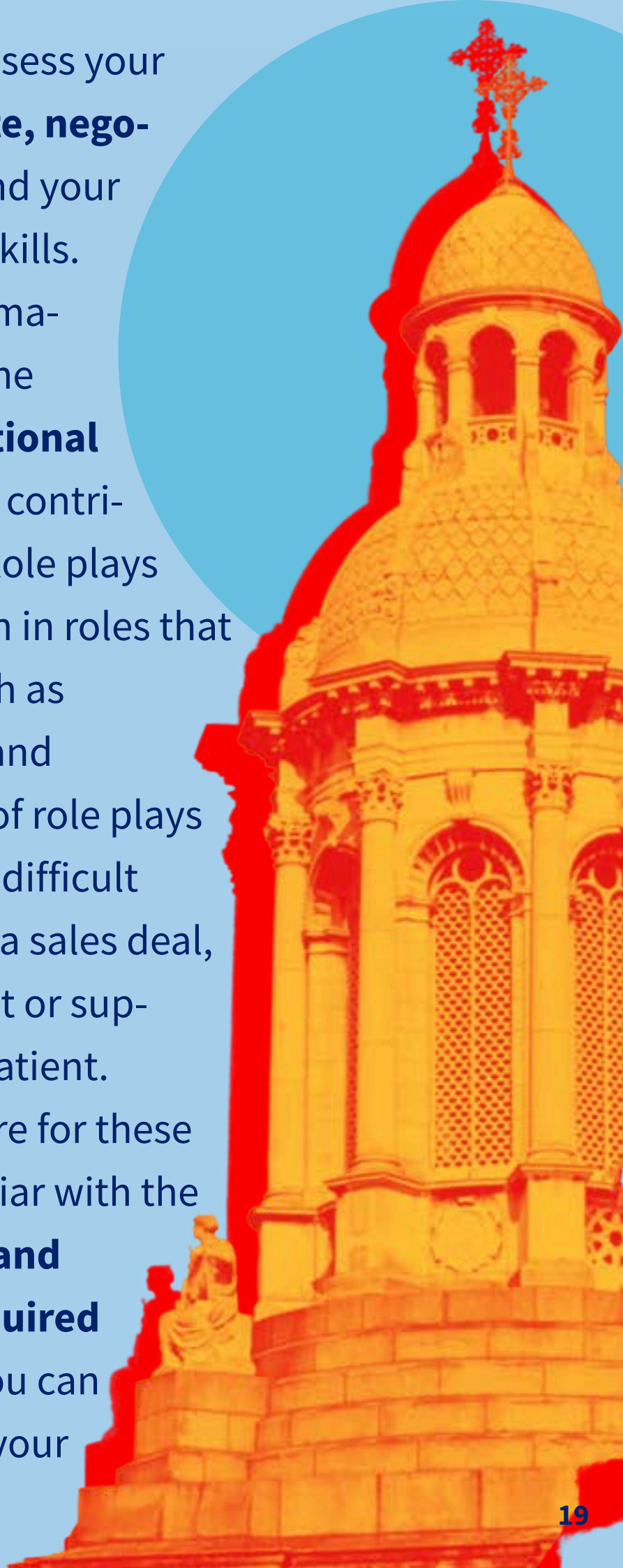
How to prepare your presentation:

- Identify a few **clear and concise key messages** that you want to convey;
- Your **structure** should include a **beginning** (introduce what you will say), a **middle** (content) and an **end** (summarise your main messages);
- Stay within the **time limit**;
- Be prepared to answer **questions**.

How to deliver your presentation in-person or online:

- **Smile** and make **eye contact**- it's important that you connect with the audience. This will also help settle any nerves;
- Be aware of how quickly or slowly you are talking. Make a conscious effort to **speak calmly and clearly** in a **conversational style**, despite your nerves!
- Don't try to memorise a scripted presentation or read from note cards or text-heavy slides.

- **Role play exercises** assess your ability to **communicate, negotiate and persuade** and your overall interpersonal skills. You will be given information about your role, the organisation and a **fictional scenario** and asked to contribute to the role play. Role plays are especially common in roles that are **client-facing** - such as marketing, sales, law and consulting. Examples of role plays include dealing with a difficult customer, negotiating a sales deal, consulting with a client or supporting a vulnerable patient. The best way to prepare for these exercises is to be familiar with the **competencies, skills and aptitudes** that are **required for the role**, so that you can demonstrate these in your role play.



- **Social gatherings and meeting personnel** during the recruitment process offer a valuable chance for both you and the employer to **connect in a more informal setting**. These gatherings allow the employer to observe **how you interact** outside of formal assessments, while giving you **insight** into the company's culture, the nature of the work, and the people who work there—including recent graduates, recruiters, and senior staff. Although the atmosphere is more relaxed, **your behaviour is still being evaluated**. If it is an in-person event, you may be offered food and drinks, and it's important to **remain professional** throughout.



RESOURCES

Assessment Centre Pathway on MyCareer

A series of assessment activities outlined above have been designed to prepare Trinity students to successfully perform at an assessment centre through the Assessment Centre Pathway, which simulates a half day virtual assessment centre. Visit the Pathway tab on **MyCareer** to start preparing and practising.

➤ PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

Now it's time to explore how you can prepare for your actual interview. Let's explore the steps that will ensure you are fully equipped to succeed in your interview.

★ Research

Employers want to hire people who they believe genuinely want to work for them, in this position, as opposed to someone who just wants “any job”. Communicating that you are **really interested** in the opportunity can make the difference between a job offer and a rejection, even if you have all the right skills.





How to research the company or role:

- Read the original advertisement / job description and become very familiar with the **competencies, knowledge and experience** that are **required** for the role.
- Read the **organisation's** website, brochure or annual report. Check their **social media** for current news about the organisation. You could also follow them for updates.
- Identify what the **company's culture, mission and values** are and be able to show how you will be a good fit for the organisation.
- Research the **key people in the company**. Read their staff bios and see what they are saying on Twitter and LinkedIn – you might be able to find a link between their interests or projects and your own that you can mention at interview.
- Research the **sector** more broadly to find out who the company's main **competitors** are and to have some sense of the **market issues** it might be facing to be able to demonstrate commercial awareness.
- Talk to someone who works there if there is someone in your **network** you can approach. Use the **Trinity Alumni LinkedIn page** to identify alumni who may be working there and who can give you some informal advice and information. Note that this is not a recommended approach where the job advert specifies a “no canvassing allowed” policy, as this type of approach could risk being interpreted as canvassing.

Interview questions

Firstly, review the job description, highlight the **key requirements and skills**, and come up with a **list of questions** that you think they could ask, alongside a list of your **evidence** to support the reasons why **you are a suitable candidate**. You can then **practice** answering these before the interview itself.

* Check the previous section '**Types of Interviews**' for additional sample questions.

Sample Questions

Below you will find sample questions to help practice answering in advance of an interview.

Knowledge of The Job

- What do you think is the **most important part** of this role?
- What **qualifications** do you have that will make you successful in this job?
- What **practical skills** have you gained from your education or work experience that you could apply here?
- What do you think you can **add to this role**?



Knowledge of the Organisation

- What do you **know about our business?**
- What do you **think of our website?**
- Why are you **interested** in our company?
- Why do you **want to work with us** rather than one of our competitors?
- What makes us **different from other companies** in this space?



Career motivation / direction

- What are **your career plans?**
- **Why have you applied** for this kind of work?
- Where do you **see yourself in the next 5 years?**
- Why should we hire **you?**