

Graduate Interviews

As the jobs market is showing no sign of an upturn, graduates can no longer rely on strong academic grades to land their first job. A greater supply of graduates has resulted in employers being more demanding in their requirements. They are now looking for strong interpersonal skills and a sharp, polished interview performance. Understanding what employer is looking for and matching your background to their needs is the first step on this journey.

So what is an employer looking for?

For graduate level roles, an employer is looking for somebody who can demonstrate the following skills:

- Good team player
- Ability to work under pressure
- Strong communication Skills
- Leadership skills

Your main challenge is to find strong examples to prove that you have all of the above competencies.

Teamwork

Group work and projects have become increasingly popular in third level courses and are an excellent way to show your ability to work in a team. Many employers will want to know what part you play in a team. It is always good to present yourself as a flexible person whose role really depends on the make-up of the team. You could then highlight the role that you naturally gravitate towards (e.g. leader/the ideas person/ the organiser/motivator etc).

Pressure

Talking about exams in isolation to show your ability to work under pressure is a little light weight. If possible, mention that you had to juggle studying, working part time to finance your degree and meeting your sporting commitments (mention if you were a member of a rugby, rowing club etc). Explain how you managed the pressure – organising your schedule, starting projects early, prioritising commitments, strong time management etc and how you successfully kept all the balls in the air and achieved a strong grade.

Communication Skills

In a tight market place, having strong client facing skills will be seen as a very attractive quality to an employer. Summer or part-time jobs are often a great source of examples to demonstrate this skill. One example could be successfully dealing with an angry customer when you were working on a customer service desk or when you successfully dealt with conflict in the work place or on a group project.

Leadership Skills

Even though you may not be applying for a team lead role, many employers look for leadership potential. A good way to highlight these skills is to talk about your involvement in sports or college societies – your role as captain of the football club or president of a particular committee. Otherwise you could point to an example where you took the lead role in a class project, making sure that everybody was pulling their weight and that work was submitted to deadline.

Conclusion

To successfully distinguish yourself from other graduates, you need to prove to an employer that you have a strong work ethic, an ability to learn quickly and can hit the ground running. Drawing on all of the transferrable skills you have developed through your university placements, summer jobs, sporting activities, voluntary work etc - will help present you in a very compelling light and make you very attractive to prospective employers.

For advice on how to answer specific interview questions go to our website www.interviewtechniques.ie

About the Author

Laura McGrath is the owner of *Interview Techniques*, a leading provider of interview coaching services. She has spent the last 15 years in staffing and recruitment and is a regular contributor with *Recruit Ireland* and the *Sunday Business Post*.

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