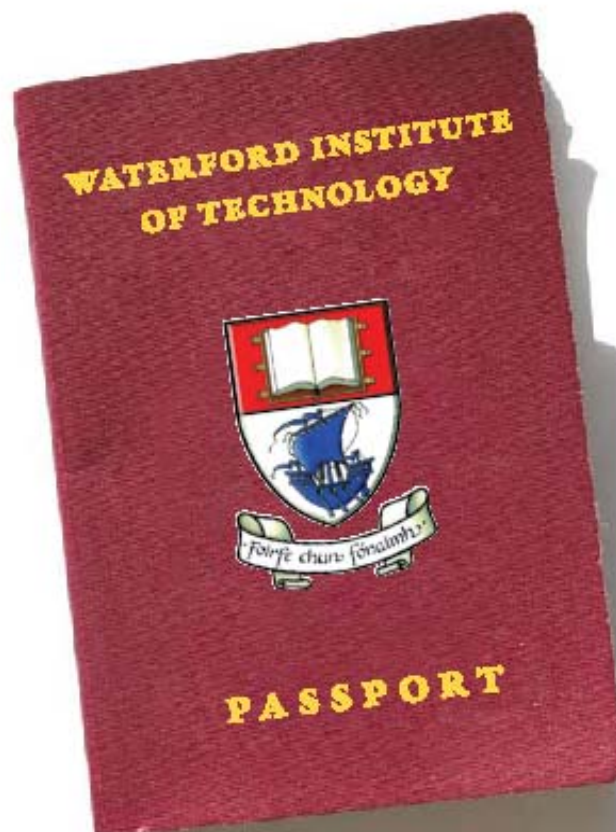


Job Search and Career Planning Workbook for International Students



Waterford Institute of Technology

Job Search and Career Planning Workbook for International Students

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Introduction

Welcome to this series of four seminars put together by the WIT Careers Centre.

These seminars are designed for international students who would like to improve their job-seeking and career-planning strategies in order to compete effectively in the Irish graduate labour market.

We hope you will find them enjoyable and informative. You can work through these four seminars / workshops and the related tasks. It is very worthwhile to spend time on these tasks, recording your thoughts and progress in the 'Job Search Reflective Journal' contained in this resource.

Acknowledgements

The WIT Careers Centre is very grateful to the Careers Service and EFL Unit in Glasgow, Liju Joseph, an international student and a member of the Student Communication Team and Sheila Power of the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS).

Part one

The four seminars

Seminar 1 - Effective job-hunting in Ireland

Welcome to the first in the series of four seminars, which provide advice for international students looking for a graduate job in Ireland. This first seminar looks specifically at searching for jobs effectively.

This seminar will help you to work through three main issues.

These are:

1. How to best identify graduate job opportunities
2. To understand the main job search strategies you need to follow to find a suitable job
3. To understand which skills and attributes employers of graduates look for.

Once you have developed effective job-hunting strategies, you will be able to target your CVs and applications towards suitable employers.

Test your knowledge quiz

You can test your knowledge about just some of the main issues to do with graduate job-search now.

If you want to do the quiz go to [Seminar 1, Task 1](#) in the Job Search Reflective Journal at the back of this resource. Look at the statements and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree,

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons for your choices whenever possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers but before that, you will find that much of the following seminar material covers these and related issues.

Now try the quiz!

The seven key stages in job-hunting

To job hunt effectively and successfully in Ireland you need to go through the process below. The steps or stages listed cover the entire process, but, in this first seminar, we will cover the first four: identifying the type of job you are looking for, the type of organisation, sector and location, sourcing the vacancies from a range of sources, and researching employers.

- Identify the type of job you are looking for
- Identify the type of organisation you'd like to work for
- Source the vacancies
- Find out more about the employers
- Apply for jobs and attend job interviews
- Review and evaluate your progress
- Look at ways to enhance your applications

Subsequent seminars in this series will give you help with the application and interview process.

Finding out about graduate jobs

It is important to understand the graduate labour market in the location in which you want to job hunt. You will probably be well aware of the main industries that employ lots of graduates in your home country and home city.

But the country you wish to focus on now has its own main industries and economic structure. It's important to understand how these differ from the economy you are familiar with back home.

Let's take Ireland as an example and cover a few of the main statistics for Ireland's graduate labour market.

What are the main jobs in Ireland? The main ones are also those which have seen major expansions in recent years.

- Business and financial services
- Health and social work
- Education
- Construction
- Real estate and related business activities.

It is also very important to pursue a dual approach when looking for job opportunities. Many job vacancies are advertised, but there are also many hidden vacancies in the jobs' market. There is no law in Ireland, which says that vacancies must be advertised, external to the company except for the public sector.

According to a 2006 Report at least 80% of all Irish job vacancies are never advertised – welcome to the hidden jobs market!

If these opportunities are never advertised, how can you possibly know about them and how would you apply for any of them? We'll take a close look at that within this seminar.

Sourcing advertised vacancies – but where?

There are many different sources of advertised vacancies for student and graduate job hunters. It is important to remember that some of them are more effective than others. All the sources below are useful in some way but each by itself has certain limitations. Let's consider some of the main ones.

Employer directories

Employer directories instantly alert you to numerous national and international companies seeking graduates with your degree discipline background. However, directories usually leave out more local and smaller companies (small to medium sized enterprises or SMEs) and there are a lot more of them. Feel free to pick up a copy of Gradireland and Prospects from the Careers Information Library situated in the main College Library.

Print Media

You can look through the main Irish newspapers and more specialist journals and magazines – places where employers frequently advertise.

Agencies

You can work with recruitment or placement agencies that deal with graduates. However, this depends on your subject area and your Careers Service can advise you on using agencies.

Recruitment fairs and campus-based employer events

The big graduate recruitment fairs organised by the Careers Centre and Gradireland are an excellent way of meeting employers informally to find out more about who they're looking for and what they're offering. Employers also visit your campus to run recruitment seminars locally.

Your careers service

You can also use your Careers Service's vacancy database www.wit.ie/careerscentre. This offers a terrific online resource and a whole range of graduate job opportunities.

This can be a more relevant vacancy resource than newspapers, for example, because you know that the employers posting their vacancies are explicitly looking for final year undergraduates, completing postgraduates or recent graduates.

Departmental notice boards

Some academic departments will also advertise vacancies on their notice boards.

This list is not exhaustive and you may be able to think of other possible vacancy sources such as professional or trade organisations.

Once you have decided on the type of job and organisation that would suit you, you need to think about where you can source the most relevant vacancies.

Job Search: Reflective Journal Task

Your Job Search Reflective Journal is located in Part Two of this seminar series. For this second task, contact your college Careers Centre and try to locate the destinations of graduates FDR data for recent graduates with your degree subject background. This information records initial employment and postgraduate study destinations for recent graduates 6 months after they graduated from your college. It includes graduates from postgraduate courses as well as graduates with primary degrees. If you have difficulty finding these statistics, your Careers Centre can help you locate this information.

When you find this information, make notes on the following in your [Job Search Reflective Journal \(Seminar 1, Task 2\)](#)

- What patterns are there in graduate destinations, both by name of employer and by graduate job title?
- Does this say anything to you about potential employers you might approach?

The hidden jobs market: Making speculative applications and networking

As we have seen, a considerable percentage of jobs are never advertised. These are either filled internally (within the company) or are filled through speculative applications by candidates who do not work for the company.

To apply speculatively is to send the employer an application without receiving a written message from them that they are recruiting. Some companies only recruit from speculative applications.

To do this successfully you need to research the sector and the relevant employers. Then approach these organisations in a focused or targeted way: you treat each organisation as a unique entity and customise your application to them. What you say about yourself must be relevant and attractive to that particular organisation.

This opens things out doesn't it? You are not restricted to merely responding to job adverts. If you like what a company is doing and they're not explicitly recruiting, you can still apply to them.

Networking

The process of networking can inform and improve the quality and impact of your speculative applications. Central to the networking process is the idea of direct personal approaches. You need to contact the right people to be successful. What does networking mean in an Irish job-hunting context? The focus is on gathering useful information which informs your applications which, in turn, could lead to employment. Networking is not about simply asking for a job.

You network to identify possible jobs in the hidden jobs market. There are two key stages to this:

- Obtaining information about jobs and possible openings by talking to and meeting with employers and employees in your chosen job
- Following this by sending out speculative applications – a CV and a covering letter both of which are customised towards that particular employer and which detail your skills, background and experience.

Let's explore further how you network, bearing in mind your own experiences. On the next page are three personal situations described for you. Given what these graduates are saying, can you think of any similar experiences of your own?

We have given you some space in your Reflective Journal to write similar networking experiences which occur to you. ([Seminar 1, Task 3](#))

**Three examples
of effective networking**

“My dad volunteered as a mentor for a small start-up company and he suggested that I spoke to the managing director about how he got started in the field of events management. He was happy to meet me and we spent several hours talking about his experience in the business as well as my plans for the future. It gave me a much clearer idea of the kind of company I wanted to work for and the opportunities which might be available if you know where to look”

“My friend’s brother did a graduate training programme at one of the big international IT consultancies in Dublin and he agreed to meet up with me and to talk about what it was like. He hadn’t come from an IT background either but said that the training was excellent and that after only 1 year he was already given quite a lot of responsibility. I’ve started looking into it more now – the job security and good salary appeal!”

“My supervisor used to work in industry before he took this job and he gave me a list of some names and companies he had worked with in the past and said I could contact them directly to see about getting some work experience. I managed to arrange to go to one of the companies for a week to shadow an employee and when I left, the boss told me that I could use him as a referee and to keep in touch in case anything more permanent came up in the future when I graduated”.

How good are you at using contacts already?

Here are some further networking tips. Remember:

Initial networking approaches are about finding information, not about asking for jobs! Getting a good idea of what people do, how organisations recruit and where they advertise are all products of networking which can lead you to the job you're looking for.

YOU are responsible for finding a job. Anyone who helps you is doing you a favour so consider the following **dos** and **don'ts**.

Do . . .	Don't . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • start with people who have a direct link to you – they're more likely to want to help • only contact people whose name you have • explain how you got the contact and outline the help you need • find a time which suits them • be prepared – have questions ready which will improve your knowledge of the occupation, organisation or industry • be confident • thank them for their time and advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask for a job – always ask initially for advice and information • forget to keep your contacts informed • waste their time • be too pushy

Networking: Using appropriate language

If you are not asking for a job when you are networking, what are you asking employer contacts and other contacts? To clarify this further and to consider the issue of language to use with employers in Ireland, we have designed the appropriate language task in your [Job Search Reflective Journal Seminar 1, Task 4](#).

Look at the questions and statements in this task. Just tick the ones which would be appropriate for a job-hunter to ask a networking contact. What is the problem with the others?

As with our introductory quiz, you'll be able to check your answers later.

At the networking stage, you're asking people for information – about their job, the company, the path they followed to get into the career they're in, and so on. Most people enjoy talking about their job for 20 or 30 minutes or so. This activity is also known as "*information interviewing*".

Networking: Being proactive

Listed below are some examples of type of contacts. Not all of these examples will be relevant to you, but some of them will.

- Family
- Friends
- Past and Present Colleagues
- Past and Present Employers
- Academics
- College Alumni
- People doing the job you'd like to be doing

This last example above is crucial. These contacts give you access to real experiences of the job you want. They can often give you insider information unavailable via any other channel.

At this stage now, it would be good to create a diagram of your network, thinking of the types of contacts above. Your Reflective Journal contains a network diagram to give you a start by filling in your contact names [Seminar 1, Task 5](#).

As you do this, we also invite you to list these contacts and record the following information for each one. As you start to find new contacts you can add them to your list. Remember to record this information:

- Contact's full name
- Company name and address
- Telephone number (if applicable)
- Email address (if applicable)
- Record of communication/advice

How does graduate recruitment operate in Ireland?

Different parts of the graduate labour market operate in different ways. The presence of large national and multinational companies is visible in the Irish market and they advertise widely. Their profiles are listed in employer directories, they attend graduate jobs fairs, they appear on campus to run employer events, and they advertise vacancies online on their own websites and through vacancy databases operated by college careers services.

They also operate flexible recruitment policies regarding degree disciplines. Often the vacancies are open to students and graduates from any degree background.

The majority of graduates actually obtain work in Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). We need to remember that 85% of Irish companies are SMEs.

The best way to access the labour market will depend on your degree, your experience and your occupational choice.

Graduate employers can really value any work experience you've already had.

Let's look now at the three-stage process to much of graduate recruitment in Ireland.

Stage 1: Vacancies advertised via college careers service online vacancy handling systems and other sources

Sometimes recruitment can start up to a year in advance with closing dates in October or November for a start the following summer or autumn. But in many cases, employers are more flexible than this, which is why it's important to do research before making applications. Do you wish to apply to companies which have such early closing dates?

Vacancies are also found in employment directories, employer websites and websites such as www.gradireland.com and www.Prospects.ac.uk, vacancy databases, newspapers, and through recruitment agencies.

Stage 2: Application process

You will be applying by completing an application form and/or sending curriculum vitae (CV) and covering letter, the method varying from sector to sector. Most application forms are available online and most national and international companies recruit using online application forms with competency based questions.

Stage 3: Selection process

Again this varies sector by sector but the process often takes the following form:

- application
- + interview
- + aptitude testing
- + assessment centre

Whatever stage you are at in applying or in selection, there is support available at your Careers Service so you shouldn't feel that you are on your own at any stage.

What do employers of graduates look for?

The top 25 attributes which employers look for in a candidate are listed below:

1. **Willingness to learn**
2. **Commitment**
3. **Dependability**
4. **Self motivation**
5. **Teamwork**
6. **Communication skills (oral)**
7. **Co-operation**
8. **Communications skills (written)**
9. **Drive/Energy**
10. **Self-management**
11. **Desire to achieve**
12. **Problem-solving**
13. **Analytical ability**
14. **Flexibility**
15. **Initiative**
16. **Ability to summarise key issues**
17. **Logical argument**
18. **Adaptability (intellectual)**
19. **Numeracy**
20. **Adaptability (organisational)**
21. **Commercial awareness**
22. **Time management**
23. **Self confidence**
24. **Ability to influence others**
25. **Creative thinking**

A particular employer will only be looking for some of the above, not for all of them. But for those skills which that employer is seeking, you as the candidate need to think about how you meet these criteria and address them at every stage of the job-hunting process:

- In your CV
- In your application form
- In your covering letter
- In your answers to interview questions.

Employers of graduates are looking for evidence of your transferable skills from a range of experience which added together would provide the right range of evidence.

In Ireland, about 80% of graduate jobs are open to students and graduates from any degree discipline. Yet at the same time, employers tend to place a lot of importance on a high-level pass plus work experience and evidence of outside interests. Different employers and occupations seek out different competencies so again it's vital to do research beforehand to understand what a company is looking for.

Identifying your key skills/attributes

When you apply for graduate jobs, it is critical that you demonstrate from your relevant experience that you have the skills which the employer is seeking. Your experience then becomes your evidence of these skills.

Your Reflective Journal duplicates the above set of 25 skills and offers you an opportunity to reflect back over some of the experience you have already acquired. It is important to analyse this experience in the following way so that you record the set of skills you realise you acquired or developed through the experience.

An initial worked example (waiter) is provided for you. Read through this and then complete the table ([Seminar 1 Task 6](#)) with at least three more REAL examples of your relevant past experience. For each one:

1. State the role or position you were in
2. What activities did this role require of you?
3. What skills/attributes did you develop through doing these activities?

Examples of experiences do not have to be only paid or voluntary work experience - you should include, for example, academic projects and sports and hobbies. You should aim for a description of your attributes from a broad range of experiences.

Finding out more about a target vacancy or employer

This seminar is considering the first four stages of job search and career planning. Bearing in mind the material we have covered already, think about your own specific situation. Hopefully the material and your Reflective Journal tasks so far are contributing towards your own developing personal plan to help you find a job.

Our last task in Seminar one relates closely with stage 4 in job search: finding out more about the employers.

In your Reflective Journal, you will find [Seminar 1, Task 7](#) and this will help you to undertake a focused piece of research on one of the employers which interests you.

After completing [Seminar 1, Task 7](#), you can check your responses to Tasks 1 and 4 in the Reflective Journal - the Answers and Feedback are available at the end of the section.

Some useful websites related to Seminar 1

1. Additional Information

Students are welcome to use the Careers Centre Information Library, make an appointment with the Careers Advisor and visit the following websites:

www.wit.ie/careerscentre

www.gradireland.com

www.careersportal.ie

2. Working in Ireland Schemes and Programmes also include the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

For general advice about living and working in Ireland, see The Council for International Student Affairs at www.icosirl.ie

3. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs c/o Forfas

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) is a body appointed by the Irish Government to advise it on aspects of education and training related to the future skills requirements of the enterprise sector of the Irish economy www.skillsireland.ie. This is an excellent site.

4. Transferable skills

See the following link for discussions of transferable skills www.skillsproject.ie

5. Language

See the BBC Learning English resources at www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/

For useful advice, guidance and lessons on improving your English for academic writing see <http://www.uefap.com>

6. Cultural awareness

For fun, interesting and useful resources for learning more about other cultures and widening your intercultural awareness see www.culturocity.com

Seminar 2 - Creating effective Irish-style CVs and covering letters

Welcome to the second of the series of four seminars which provide advice for international students looking for a graduate job in Ireland. This seminar looks at creating effective Irish-style curriculum vitas (CVs) and covering letters.

This seminar will help you to work through three main issues. These are:

1. the purpose of CVs and covering letters
2. what to include in your CVs and covering letters
3. how to present effective, targeted CVs and covering letters to employers.

An Irish-style CV is personal to you and to some extent, you need to decide how you want to present yourself through it. But there are also a number of social conventions governing what CVs and covering letters should look like in Ireland and what they should cover. So it is possible to say whether someone's CV or covering letter is strong or weak.

Test your knowledge quiz

You can test your knowledge about Irish-style CVs and covering letters now with our quiz!.

If you want to do the quiz in this resource go to [Seminar 2, Task 1](#) in the Job Search Reflective Journal in Part Two of this workbook. Look at the statements and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons whenever possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers but before that, you will find that much of the following seminar material covers these and related issues.

Now try the quiz!

Two examples of Irish-style CVs

On the following pages, you will see two CVs prepared by international students seeking a graduate job in Ireland.

As you consider these CVs, it would be good to address four questions about them. These are included in your Reflective Journal under [Seminar 2, Tasks 2 and 3](#). The journal includes space for you to record your thoughts about the two CVs. The four questions to address are:

1. What does each CV include and in what order?
2. How does each CV compare and contrast with CVs used in your own country?
3. Comparing the two CVs, in what ways are they similar and different to each other?
4. Are they both effective CVs? Why?

[CV1]

Julia Plaski**Term address (until 25/06/2008)**

Flat 4/2, 33 Lower St.,
Waterford.

Tel: 087 83 729922**Email:** 0306218p@student.wit.ie**Nationality:** Polish**Home address**

21 Wilska Street,
Warsaw,
Poland 01 660

EDUCATION**2003 - 2007****Waterford Institute of Technology, Waterford**

BA (Hons) Accountancy with Finance

Average grades: Year 1 - 72% Years 2, 3 - 66% Expected result 2:1.*Modules include:* Financial accounting, Taxation, Audit, Business statistics. Finance, Financial markets, Business law and Management.*Skills developed:* Strong numeracy and analytical skills, business/commercial awareness, project management, and groupwork skills.

Leading our team in the inter-university Business Plan Game improved my leadership and teamworking skills.

2001 - 2003**University of the Basque Country, Alava, Spain**

Diploma in Spanish and English Languages and English Literature

FINANCIAL EXPERIENCE**Summer 2006**

Financial Services Authority, Dublin and Kilkenny

Work experience (Business Growth Potential Project)

Worked in the FSAs Small Firms Division on a project which analysed Irish SMEs in the manufacturing sector to investigate business and investment growth potential.

Achievements: Analysed growth potential across wide range of markets, ran project on day-to-day basis, presented findings on time to senior management. Also gained understanding of the FSA's wider role through work shadowing and discussion.*Skills gained:* teamwork, attention to detail, multi-tasking, working under pressure.**Summer 2005****Morgan Stanley, Dublin**

Business Summer Internship

A member of the business support team, I provided effective administration support for a range of business areas in the Glasgow office. Assisted in collecting and analyzing data which management could use to assess areas of inefficiency.

Achievements: Developed awareness of several online software packages, MS Excel and Visio. Participated in several large projects such as the improvement of business processes through Six Sigma methodology.

Proved myself as a hard working, resourceful member of the team. Gained real life insight into the financial sector

ADDITIONAL COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCE

2004 - 2006 **Tinderbox Coffee Emporium, Waterford**

Barrista/Supervisor

- Experience of team supervision and training of new staff in this popular coffee bar.
- Creating and serving coffees to a high creative standard. Working responsively and flexibly in the team to manage tasks at busy times.
- Stock maintenance, multi-tasking in very fast-paced environment.

Skills gained: Communication skills, teamwork, organisational skills.

ACHIEVEMENTS & AWARDS

Academic **2006 - Co-Winner of Project Prize** for best team project in Business Plan Game competition presented at inter-university awards dinner.
2003 & 2004 - top performing class awards for excellent grades.

Societies **Launched a new society at Waterford Institute of Technology** - After being a residential volunteer at the Bird Sanctuary reserve in Waterford for a week, I launched a bird watchers society on campus. Some friends and I have recruited 20 students in the first 5 months and we have already organized species surveying and bird reserve maintenance projects.

Community Involvement - Worked with Cash for Kids and New Horizons Asylum Seekers' Project to fundraise on campus. Involved team training, budgetary and communication skills to coordinate student involvement and fundraising activities. Raised €800 for children of asylum seekers housed in Waterford.

Sport **Sailing** - Member of the college sailing club, participating frequently in team racing events. I manage this alongside study and part-time working. Last year, my ladies' team was runner up in the Irish Universities / Colleagues League. This activity has taught me a lot about health & safety, motivation and encouraging others. It has enhanced my resilience and my determination to succeed.

SKILLS

IT Advanced capability in all MS Office packages such as Excel, Powerpoint and Word. Working knowledge of Six Sigma, Visio and Sage.

Languages Polish - native language.
 English - fluent (CAE - Grade A)
 Spanish and Czech - intermediate reading, writing and spoken.

REFERENCES

Academic - Dr Gary Roberts, Department of Accounting & Finance,
 Waterford Institute of Technology
 Tel: 051 203040. E-mail: G.Roberts@wit.ie

Employer - Mrs. Jennifer Norman, Graduate Recruitment Manager,
 Financial Services Authority, Ballyloogy Industrial Est. Dublin 14
 Tel: 01 4109302 E-mail: jennifernorman@fsa.ie

[CV 2]

Antony Zhao

16 Crown Road North, Waterford

Tel: 051 302035

Mobile: 087 31 226537

Email: azhao77@msn.com

Nationality: Chinese

A bilingual and determined graduate with excellent communication skills, resourceful and adaptable, aiming to pursue a career in financial services. Eager to develop my career within a major financial player in the new global society.

Education and Qualifications**2005 - 2006****MSc in Accounting and Financial Studies, Waterford Institute of Technology****Modules studied:** Management Accounting, Computing for Finance and Accounting,

Comparative International Accounting, Money and Capital in Developing Countries, Project Management, Options and Futures, Security Analysis.

Developed my commercial awareness, my problem solving, numeracy and analytical abilities. Enhanced my group work skills through team projects.**1999 - 2003****BA in Business Management & Accounting, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China****Work Experience****11/05- 10/06****Waiter and Bar Staff, The Townhouse Hotel, Belhaven Terrace, Waterford**

- Received on the job training in customer service and health and safety.
- Worked evenings and weekends providing professional food and drink services to residential customers, managing orders, remaining friendly and calm under pressure.
- Skills developed: time management, customer service skills, English language skills, dealing with payments.

09/03 - 09/05**Accounting Officer (Financial Reporting), Oriel Capital Investments, Chengdu, China**

- Assisted in financial reporting
- Prepared tax schedules and liaised with regulatory bodies
- Worked with 12 other banks and law firms to establish trusts
- Assisted other team members with more general company documentation work
- **Skills developed:** knowledge of MS Excel and Access, professional communication and project management skills, working to tight deadlines, diplomacy.

06/02 - 08/02

Internship, Godfrey Stern International, Hong Kong, China

- Worked in Product Control (Equity Derivatives) and supported the front office traders
- Analysed the month end reconciliations to produce profit/loss reports
- Gained an insight into equity derivatives markets in Asia
- **Skills developed:** assimilating information in a dynamic environment, business and financial product awareness.

Achievements

- Employee of Month for Most Excellent Performance - Oriel Investments
- Awarded class prize two years running at Sichuan University, China

Interests and responsibilities

- Basketball - member of WIT's men's team. Demands mental and physical strength, discipline and competitiveness.
- Travelling - I have travelled widely in Asia and Europe and I enjoy experiencing new cultures and ways of life. My travels have enabled me to test my resourcefulness and develop my languages. Talking to locals has led to some good friendships with people from many different countries.
- Committee member WIT's Chinese Society. Was involved in organising many events such as Chinese New Year celebrations and also liaising with staff to encourage some international employers to make presentations on campus to international students. Developed my project management, budgeting and communication skills.

Other skills

- Fluent written and spoken English, Cantonese and Mandarin
- Familiar with MS Office (e.g. Word, Excel, Access), Eximibills, Swift and Bloomberg.

Referees

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Masters Course Director
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Tel: 051 304050, e-mail: Joeblogs@wit.ie

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Chengdu, China 610150
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What is a CV used for?

Your CV is your marketing document and it has to be convincing and attractive, something which gives you a competitive edge over and above your rivals.

Sending a CV is still one of the main ways of applying for jobs in Ireland - for advertised jobs and also when you apply speculatively. You may be targeting employers who hardly ever use application forms (such as SMEs Small Medium Employers).

Your CV lists your career history and demonstrates your relevant experience from that history and from other areas of life such as your courses and interests.

Your CV sells your skills and demonstrates your wider qualities and achievements. Your hard skills could be in foreign languages and IT software packages. But maybe you recently ran a marathon and obtained sponsorship money for that. That says more about you as an individual and you could use this activity to emphasise attractive qualities like perseverance and strong motivation to succeed.

The purpose of your CV is to impress the reader so much that they give you an interview - because they already think from your CV that you could do the job. They just need to be persuaded at a face-to-face meeting with you.

You should send a CV whenever an employer asks you to. It's very important to always give the employer the information in the way determined by them. If you vary from that, the employer may think you just don't follow instructions.

You may also be using your CV to apply speculatively or when you're working for an employer and a new internal job vacancy comes up.

Guidelines for an effective CV

Here are some initial guidelines for an effective CV

- Always send your CV with a covering letter or email message - this personalises your application and it can show your motivation.
- Your CV should be two sides of A4, including details of your referees.
- Divide your CV into sections and use clear, appropriate headings - this makes it easy to read and accessible to the reader.
- Your layout must be consistent regarding use of fonts, boldened text, headings and so on.
- List your most recent and relevant experience first and then work back in time.
- Target your CV towards a type of job or career - targeting determines how you describe your skills and experience and the amount of emphasis you give to different experiences.
- Check spelling and grammar for accuracy - ideally your CV should be word perfect - an electronic spell checker is necessary but probably insufficient to correct all errors - human proof readers are a valuable additional check particularly native English speakers if English is not your own mother tongue.

Another very important guideline is that before you start writing your CV for a particular sector or employer, you first identify the skills which these employers seek. Your CV must contain information which addresses the actual needs of the employer. At the very least, graduate recruiters all want graduates who can:

- solve problems by thinking independently, analytically and creatively
- communicate effectively by interpreting data and use it to present ideas and information
- work with others by negotiating and working well in a team

- improve their own learning and performance by setting targets and managing their time effectively.

But there will be some further skill areas that different employers seek. The examples will focus a lot on this and how you can determine which skills are sought. But by way of introduction to this, you will get a sense of the skills an employer is seeking mainly from the vacancy information (advert or job description and person specification in the “job pack”) or the employer’s website.

Your CV needs to link an explicit definition of your skills with evidence to demonstrate that you have these skills. In your CV, your evidence should cover a good range: from your courses (such as projects you’ve worked on), your work experience (especially customer facing work experience) and your involvements in other activities such as student societies. This is all before you start writing your CV. You first draw together the evidence you will select your CV material from. In your CV, you’re saying: here’s the match between what you say you need and what I can demonstrate I have.

If you’re asked to send a CV online, the employer may use online searches using keywords to see which CVs include words which describe what the employer is seeking.

Recommended CV content and structure

The following chronological format is our suggested layout since it is the format which many Irish and UK based recruiters expect and are most familiar with. However you could also have a look at the other recognised styles outlined on the Prospects website. Type ‘Sample CVs’ into the Prospects site search box. www.prospects.ac.uk

In Ireland and the UK CV content and structure often follows the format below, section by section

- Your name and contact details

- A customised personal profile (such as a career objective) - this is optional
- Education history with most recent first and with a description of skills you have acquired through university education
- Employment history with most recent and relevant first and with descriptions of skills you have acquired in your various jobs
- Additional skills not detailed already (such as languages and IT skills)
- Interests and achievements - this can help to differentiate you from other candidates by defining your wider skills and qualities
- Referees (usually two) with their contact details

Let’s now look at these seven different sections of an Irish-style CV in more depth.

Name and contact details

You need never write Curriculum Vitae across the top of your CV since it’s absolutely clear from the document itself that it’s a CV. Instead, let your name appear at the top.

Then give your contact details, making yourself as contactable as possible. Include term-time and home addresses if different, a landline phone number and a mobile phone number, and your email address.

That is all the essential information for this top section. You have the option of also adding your nationality, gender or date of birth. If you thought that your name may be an unfamiliar one to Irish and UK employers, this would be a reason to add your gender.

You should not include any of the following: your religion, health, photograph, place of birth or national insurance number. A photograph just takes up space and employers in Ireland and the UK are not expecting one.

Personal profile

Your profile provides a summary of the key strengths you want the employer to focus on and/or provides a statement of the type of

work you are looking for. This section is optional. When it works well, it can help to customise your CV towards an employer or job sector. If the profile is too general, it can fail to do that and fail to impress.

Education

This section is very important and is critical where the job applied for is discipline specific. You need to profile your degree course(s) by length, relevant subjects and projects, and skills gained (such as team working, time management, research skills and analytical skills). Your performance can be defined by final result or by grade average.

Detail your current or most recent degree first and give your university education more space than secondary school. For your highest level of pre-university education, it is good to also give the Irish equivalent (such as Leaving Certificate) if known.

Employment

Your most recent and relevant experience should be covered first. This can be achieved by using subcategories for different types of experience and using the most relevant category (for the target employer or sector) first on page 1. Take another look at Julia's and Antony's CVs ([CV1] and [CV2]) for an example of this approach.

For each experience, give dates, job title, employer's name, and location in that order. Describe your main responsibilities and activities but also the skills you developed through the experience. You do this to demonstrate your suitability for the target job and to show your potential for success in that career area. It's good to use action words when you describe what you did, words such as "*analysed*", "*managed*", "*presented*", and "*initiated*".

Remember to include a broad range of employment if relevant - from your paid and voluntary experience, family business and so on, and mention any notable achievements. Don't undervalue your experience. Be

positive about what you did and what you got out of the experience.

Additional skills

This section is optional because you may already have summarised your skills in earlier sections of your CV. However there may be skill areas which need to be covered at this point. It's important to think about the job you are applying for and match this section to the job (for example by matching it to the description/person specification).

You need to use examples in this section since evidence of skills remains important. For instance, you could define your levels of proficiency in different IT packages or levels of proficiency in foreign languages.

Interests and achievements

You should not merely list your interests and you should avoid passive or bland words like "*cinema*", "*reading*" and "*socialising*". Instead you should use this section to provide evidence of skills and qualities, introducing additional skills which you have developed through your interests.

Where an activity involved quite a lot of responsibility (such as a society committee position), it is good to emphasise that, using power words such as "*organised*", "*coordinated*" and "*initiated*".

You are using your interests and achievements to underline your suitability for your target job.

Referees

It is better to list two referees at the end of your CV rather than saying "References available on request". Usually one is an academic who can comment on the quality of your work and one is a professional able to comment on your success in a recent job.

Give their names, job titles, postal addresses, email addresses and telephone numbers. Always ask their permission first and keep them updated about what you're doing and what your career aspirations are.

CV presentation

It is what you actually say which, makes your CV convincing. But your CV also needs to be attractive. This has much more to do with how the CV looks.

With this in mind, ensure that your CV is well laid out and easy to read. Avoid lengthy paragraphs and use the same size of font throughout (no lower than size 11).

Avoid time gaps in your information and get your spelling and grammar checked over. There may also be a simpler, better way of describing something. Your Irish friends will often spot such things and advise you.

Don't undersell your achievements. Instead give examples to provide real evidence of the skills and qualities you say you have.

Your CV has to be readable and relevant to the employer but it also has to be honest. Anything you say could come up at interview or be checked in other ways (such as through referees or documentation you're asked to provide). You need to be able to expand or defend anything on your CV later on in your interview.

The following page demonstrates a third example of a CV by a student seeking a graduate job in Ireland. As you consider it, return to your Reflective Journal, this time to [Seminar 2, Task 4](#). The Journal includes space for you to record your comments about this further example. It is also important to answer the question: What would you change and why?

You will be able to get some feedback about this later in [Seminar 2 answers and feedback](#).

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Paul McNeill (Hamza Minhas)
Age: 27
Marital Status: Single
Place of birth: Pakistan
Address: 24 Wadley Rd., Waterford
Tel: 01 3456789
Mobile: 087 49886945
Email: realdealmcneill@gmail.com

EDUCATION

1994-2000 Lahore High School
Higher Levels: AAABC
 I took my Highers in Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Computing, English

2000 – 2004 University of Pakistan
Bsc Hons Phyics

2004 - 2007 University of Glasgow
PhD in Physics

WORK EXPERIENCE

Summer 2000 Porter/Washer Up, Lahore Cricket Club, Lahore Pakistan
Duties:- Delivering meals to the right place, carrying products within the stadium, clearing rubbish and debris, washing up in the kitchens
Skills gained: Working under pressure, time management, meeting dead lines

Summer 2001-2004 Data Entry Clerk, City Hall, Lahore, Pakistan
Duties: - typing data entry on forms, monitoring office supplies, some work with the public
Skills gained : Presentation skills team work, communication skills, time management

2004 - 2006 Glasgow University, Department of Physics
Duties:- Tutorial assistant/mentor
Skills gained: Communication skills, presentation skills, meeting deadlines, multi tasking

INTERESTS

Meeting interesting people, good food and cricket, IT, foreign travel

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

I enjoy driving and I have had a clean licence now for six years
I also enjoy playing electric guitar in a band
My health is excellent

References are available on request

CVs - language focus

As you can see from Julia's and Antony's 'model' CVs, the style is very specific. You do not have to write in full sentences with 'I' and 'my'

e.g. Worked evenings and weekends providing professional food and drink services to residential customers, managing orders, remaining friendly and calm under pressure. (Antony Zhao)

But you **do** use lots of buzz words or key CV words.

e.g. This activity has taught me a lot about health & safety, **motivation** and **encouraging** others. It has **enhanced my resilience** and my **determination to succeed**. (Julia Plaski)

Formal language

It is important that the language you use is formal but it must also be natural.

- **Don't** overuse the dictionary or thesaurus
- **Don't** directly translate from your language unless you are sure it also sounds like natural English
- **Don't** copy someone else's CV but
- **Do** follow conventions
i.e. learn the rules of CVs, follow the rules but make it individual to you.
It is a difficult balancing act.

Remember: You must be able to answer questions about everything on your CV.

If you look again at our 'model' CVs, it may help to underline any useful CV language
e.g.

- ... ability to manage projects effectively.
- Actively participated in .
- has helped me to develop my skills.

CVs - 12 Guidelines

1. Target your CV for the job you are applying for. A general CV is much less successful than a CV for a specific job.
2. Demonstrate clearly how your skills and experience meet the employer's requirements.
3. When explaining your previous work experience, keep it brief. Focus on your key responsibilities, achievements and skills. There is no need to describe in detail what the company does.
4. Use evidence from all parts of your life. Highlight relevant achievements and skills from your interests and activities outside of work and study.
5. Use strong verbs and positive qualities to describe yourself in your CV.

Examples of strong verbs are:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| • Achieve | • Investigate |
| • Enjoy | • Demonstrate |
| • Prepare | • Lead |
| • Analyse | • Devise |
| • Evaluate | • Improve |
| • Budget | • Organise |
| • Raise Money | • Research |
| • Implement | • Manage |
| • Set up | • Negotiate |
| • Co-ordinate | • Develop |

Examples of positive qualities are:

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| • Accurate | • Responsible |
| • Impartial | • Self-reliant |
| • Resilient | • Persuasive |
| • Adaptable | • Conscientious |
| • Logical | • Determined |
| • Resourceful | • Tactful |
| • Methodical | • Commercially aware |

NB: Make sure you understand what it means and use it accurately! Be ready to explain it further in interviews.

6. Focus on the activity or action you did and not on you. Here are two examples of the difference between these styles!

Example 1

Focus on me (X)

“My duties included doing promotion for in-house sales incentive programmes. I used a database to locate sources”

Focus on action (✓)

“Developed and managed customer promotions and sales incentive programmes. Managed a database to provide source information”.

Example 2

Focus on me (X)

“I was an assistant to the editor of the Students’ Union newspaper which involved handling day to day queries and arranging printing and distribution”.

Focus on action (✓)

“Assistant Editor of Students’ Union newspaper. Organised printing and distribution using new outlets which increased sales by 10%”

7. Place the **most important and relevant points first**.
8. Remember the ‘space rule’ when you write a CV. Give **more important areas more space**.
9. Be relevant. Research the job and highlight relevant experiences. Use logic and your imagination to work out how your life experience matches the job requirements.
10. Use **evidence**. Use facts and figures and avoid bland statements.
11. Sell your skills, interests and achievements.
12. Persuade employers to interview you.

Writing covering letters

On the next page, you will see the covering letter which Julia Plaski wrote to accompany her CV.

To introduce the topic of covering letters, we'd like you to turn once more to your Reflective Journal, this time to [Seminar 2, Task 5](#). There you will see a series of five questions which Julia is answering in her letter. You are asked to put the questions in order according to where she answers them in her letter.

You will be able to check your responses later. You should address the five questions in their correct sequence when writing your covering letters.

Purpose and rationale of covering letters

The points below give you the purpose and rationale for sending covering letters:

- A covering letter should always accompany a CV
- The letter is just one side of A4 paper and just 4 or 5 paragraphs
- You should address the letter to an appropriate named person
- You should show enthusiasm and motivation
- You should also use the letter to ask for an interview
- The letter introduces your CV and personalises your approach
- It also encourages the employer to read your CV
- The letter highlights the most relevant facts, your 'key selling points'
- It can also explain why you are sending a speculative application

Your letter can be a major determinant of success and it needs to be constructed specifically for the vacancy for which you are applying. The letter therefore demonstrates that you've thought about your application and about the job and company. It should never read like a standard letter sent to many employers at once.

When you are responding to advertised jobs, you should use the job advert and job description to help you write your covering letter. With a speculative application, you have to work a bit harder on the letter, detailing the kind of work you're seeking, but the overall structure of the letter is the same as for other covering letters.

The format of covering letters

The format of covering letters is very straightforward. This is the structure to follow:

- The opening
- Why them?
- Why you?
- The positive ending

The main body of the letter answers two key questions -

Why them? (Why is that company/job attractive to you?)

Why you? (What evidence do you have that you've got what they're looking for?)

The letter is also a business letter so your address must appear top right, followed by the employer's address top left. Unlike your CV, you must use full sentences. But like your CV, your language should be enthusiastic, positive and professional, focusing on action and on skills. Let's now look at the covering letter sections in more detail.

*Flat 4/2,
33 Lower Street
Waterford
14 February 2008*

*Mr Stephen Reagan
Graduate Recruitment Manager
Goldman Sachs
Fleet Street
London*

Dear Mr Reagan

Graduate Analyst Programmer

I am writing to apply for your Graduate Analyst Programme advertised in the Gradireland Graduate Directory 2008 and enclose my CV for your consideration.

I have been interested in investment banking for some years and this was confirmed during my work experience at both the AIB and Morgan Stanley. I feel that investment banking would offer an ideal opportunity to combine my skills and interests in finance, project management, team working, leadership and interest in business. I am particularly interested in financial modelling and working with clients towards solutions to their financial needs but also very interested in the range of asset management and capital markets services.

Goldman Sachs in London attracts me because it offers so many opportunities as your regional European headquarters. Through my project supervisor's contact at Goldman Sachs, I was also able to meet her and two of her recent graduate analyst colleagues last month. They all spoke highly of the early responsibility and the opportunities they had experienced. Also your business principles, commitment to client service, and focus on employee learning and development all greatly attract me.

I have excellent numerical and analytical skills combined with strong team-working skills including leadership and motivating others as well as myself to succeed. The range of projects I worked on at university, at the AIB and at Morgan Stanley greatly enhanced my project management skills as well as my awareness of financial services. My additional experience commercially and in societies also demonstrates that I excel in leadership in demanding situations. I have a strong commercial focus and have developed services as well as fundraising opportunities, and made an impact.

My secondary school education was in India so I am unsure about the equivalent points. However, I achieved an overall grade average of A, I was within the top 5% of students in my final school year.

I hope that when you consider my CV, you will realise that I have the skills, experience and evidence of potential to excel as a trainee graduate analyst at Goldman Sachs. I am extremely interested in your organisation and am available for interview at anytime. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Julia Plaski

Julia Plaski

Job title or reference number

After Dear... and before the opening section of your letter, you should give the job title and/or any job reference number as a header.

The opening

In your opening paragraph, you're introducing yourself and saying where you saw the advert (for instance on their website) and you're saying what you're applying for. You can also say when you are graduating. Here's an example:

"I am currently studying a Postgraduate Diploma in Management at Waterford Institute of Technology and would like to apply for the position of Sales Executive (Dublin based) as advertised on your website."

If you are applying speculatively, this is also where you can say what type of job or type of employment (eg work placement, full-time graduate job, part-time position) you're seeking.

Why them?

Why are you interested in the job and organisation? In this section, you show that you've thought about the company and the job - you know about some of the specifics of the job or what the company does. Sometimes it's also good to show awareness of current business/industry issues for that sector.

Why do you consider this organisation as a relevant, attractive next step in your career? Show them briefly that you've researched the organisation. And pick out some important aspects which attract you to them e.g. the level of responsibility given early on to graduates. Here's an example:

"I am particularly interested in the Sales position as I believe it offers great opportunities to develop my knowledge and experience in the retail sector and would help me develop my commercial awareness further and my customer focused skills."

Why you?

Here you bring together a few key strengths or "*selling points*" of skills and experience which you have mentioned in your CV and which are the most relevant to the job and the organisation. Match your strengths and skills to the targeted job. If you are applying speculatively, explain how your skills will benefit the organisation. Here's an example:

"I believe I would be ideal for the job as I have very strong organisational skills which I developed in my previous job as an office administrator. These would be most useful in the development of your Dublin based Telesales Centre."

You can also explain here whether you have permission to work in Ireland or whether you are eligible to apply under a scheme such as the Graduate Scheme.

The positive ending

In your ending, you convey your motivation and enthusiasm, and restate your interest in the job. You can also indicate your availability for interview. Here's an example:

"I am particularly excited about this position and hope that you are interested in finding out more about my background. I am available immediately for interview."

If you were able to identify who you should write to by name, you should end your letter with "*Yours sincerely*". But if you are writing to Dear Sir/Madam, you should end with "*Yours faithfully*".

Sign your letter and type your name underneath the signature. It is good to email your letter and CV and also to send a copy by post. Email is received earlier but a hard copy is less easy to ignore.

Building your covering letter

1. Read the advert or job description and person specification.
2. Highlight the key requirements.
3. Construct some sentences to use.
4. Type a rough draft.
5. Re-draft the letter until it sounds right.
6. Try to say it in fewer words.
7. Check for consistency with your CV - for style and positive words.
8. Ask a native English speaker or a careers adviser to check it.
9. Explain any gaps in time periods carefully using positive language. If you want to mention any circumstances such as disability, take advice from www.prospects.ac.uk or www.skill.org.uk and/or speak to a careers adviser.

'Building your covering letter' was first developed by Loughborough University's careers Service. Used with permission.

Covering letters - language focus

First impressions are very important. Your covering letter must be clear and accurate. Your Reflective Journal includes these sentences below in **Seminar 2, Task 6**. These are all real examples of students covering emails when applying to do the face-to-face version of this course.

How would you improve them? Edit these sentences and write in your improvements in **Seminar 2, Task 6**. You will be able to check the answers later on.

1. I'd like to join the workshops and attached my application form.
2. I am interested in the job search workshops. Please find attached the application form.
3. Looking forward to hear about you.
4. Enclosed you will find my application form for the career planning workshop in November 2006. It would be great to take part on that workshop!!
5. I would like to apply the workshops.
6. Please find the attachment
7. I am postgraduate students and I like to attend the job search working for international students Nov 2006

Some useful resources related to Seminar 2

1. The AGCAS booklet "Making Applications" covers many issues to do with creating CVs and covering letters and is available at your college/institute Careers Centre. The following websites: www.prospects.ac.uk, www.gradireland.com and www.wit.ie/careerscentre will also cover this information: Type 'Sample CV's' or 'CV layout' in the search box.
2. You should also have a look at the information on CV's in the Careers Information Library situated in the main college library.
3. Visit your institute Careers Service and discuss your draft CV with a Careers Adviser or go along to the CV Clinics that are organised by the Careers Centre.

Seminar 3 - Effective application forms

Welcome to the third of the series of four seminars which provide advice for international students looking for a graduate job in Ireland. This seminar looks at completing employer application forms as effectively as possible.

This seminar will help you to work through three main issues.

These are:

1. identifying employer requirements
2. considering what skills and experience you can offer
3. understanding how to produce effective application forms that demonstrate through evidence your suitability for the job

Addressing these three issues will help you send forms which get you through to the next stages of the recruitment process.

Test your knowledge quiz

You can test your knowledge about application forms now with our quiz.

If you want to do the quiz go to **Seminar 3, Task 1** in the Job Search Reflective Journal in Part Two of this resource. Look at the statements and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree,

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons whenever possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers but before that, you will find that much of the following seminar material covers these and related issues.

Now try the quiz!

Why do employers use application forms?

Application forms are usually used as pre-selection tools or first stage filters, using a set number of criteria. At this stage, applicants are usually competing against a set standard. The candidates who reach that standard will tend to go through to the next stage of selection. The standard is a set number of competencies which indicate a candidate's abilities.

Application forms are very time effective for employers who use them to request the information they're seeking. They also require candidates to give evidence-based responses: specific examples from life experience to demonstrate their abilities.

What do employers of graduates look for?

Let's revisit the top 25 attributes which employers of graduates look for in candidates. These are listed below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Willingness to learn | 14. Flexibility |
| 2. Commitment | 15. Initiative |
| 3. Dependability | 16. Ability to summarise key issues |
| 4. Self motivation | 17. Logical argument |
| 5. Teamwork | 18. Adaptability (intellectual) |
| 6. Communications skills (oral) | 19. Numeracy |
| 7. Co-operation | 20. Adaptability (organisational) |
| 8. Communications skills (written) | 21. Commercial awareness |
| 9. Drive/Energy | 22. Time management |
| 10. Self-management | 23. Self confidence |
| 11. Desire to achieve | 24. Ability to influence others |
| 12. Problem-solving | 25. Creative thinking |
| 13. Analytical ability | |

However, each employer will only be looking for some of these and they will want some attributes more than others. In order to make your application form effective, you first need to find out which attributes are the most important ones for your target employer. A number of sources will give you this information (i.e. the job advert, job description, person specification and/or the company's website).

Sometimes an employer could use an expression which relates to several attributes on our list. An example would be "*an enthusiastic and confident personality*". You need to define the meaning of such a term. Most employers would mean a "*can do*" approach involving a number of attributes in our list of 25 such as self motivation, drive/energy and initiative.

Occasionally, an employer will be seeking an attribute not on our list. No list is absolutely definitive.

In your application form, how do you demonstrate that you have the attributes you know the employer is looking for? You provide evidence from your life experience. Often the question will allow you to select from any area of life (e.g. your degree course, vacation work, voluntary work).

You can gain some experience right now in working out what attributes an employer is looking for. Consider the job advert below. Which of the top 25 attributes do you think this employer is particularly looking for? Label the advert with the numbers of the relevant attributes (according to their numbers in the table above).

Can Do Investment Services

Trainee Financial Analyst

Can Do Investment Services is a leading provider of financial and economic information to financial investment companies and our services are used by the top 10 global investment banks.

Due to continuing growth, we are looking for highly skilled and motivated graduates to join our Waterford team. You will be involved in:

- working on large projects
- answering day to day queries from clients
- visiting clients to provide on site support and training
- training clients both individuals and groups
- managing a group of client accounts to ensure client satisfaction.

You will have a good bachelor's degree (2:2 or above) or postgraduate qualification, have strong numeric, analytical and problem solving skills and excellent communication skills.

You must also be adaptable and an enthusiastic team member with a proven ability to take the initiative and find creative solutions.

Can Do Investment Services will consider graduates from any discipline. Industry experience and experience in a client facing role desirable.

Closing date: December

Apply using our online recruitment procedure at
<http://www.candoinvest.com>

Assessing your suitability

Once you've worked out from a job advert or similar employer information, the attributes being sought, you should then identify how and why you meet these criteria. You can assess your suitability against each employer requirement by listing your best evidence against it. You can see this approach mapped out below in a table related to the job advert you have considered.

This table is also included in your Reflective Journal within **Seminar 3 Task 2**. Are you a suitable candidate? Fill in the table first by transferring information from the advert where you identified the skills being sought. Is there a top 5 set of attributes which the employer is seeking? and are there any other essential or desirable criteria this employer is seeking?

Then consider whether you meet these criteria. Tick each one if you believe you meet it. Then make a brief note of the best evidence you could use to support this.

Trainee financial analyst		Do I meet these criteria?	Make a note of evidence you could use to support this
Top 5 attributes for this job	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.		
Other essentials			
Other desirables			
Am I a suitable candidate	YES	NO	

However, the weakness with this approach is that you may have strong evidence for meeting employer criteria but just not have thought about it. You may not have made the link before between what you did and the attributes/skills you can say you developed through that experience.

Somehow you need a ready pool of evidence (of skills) from which you can draw specific evidence when you need to. Your Reflective Journal (**Seminar 3, Task 3**) includes an example of a procedure you can follow in order to gather together your pool of evidence. We have called it a self assessment template.

Here is how to complete it. First, in the left hand column, define each role or key event in your life - from work experience, studying, student societies, interests etc. Then in the middle column, detail what you actively did. Finally, in the right hand column, you define the skills you developed through each main activity.

If you have relevant recent work experience to place in this table, that's great. But many students don't have a lot of work experience yet. Fortunately, you can still record an excellent range of skills by pulling in other types of evidence. This can be just as relevant to the employer.

The self assessment template in your Journal starts you off with two examples, one from employment and one from interests.

Constructing effective answers

Before you begin to construct answers to application form questions, you need to work through several stages of preparation. These different stages are:

- researching the job and the employer
- identifying the skills and qualities being sought
- ensuring you have assessed and recorded your pool of evidence (of skills)
- matching your skills and qualities to those the employer is seeking
- reading the application form instructions carefully and following them

Many of the application form questions will be "competency based". These questions are designed to check your relevant skills. The questions are asking you to provide evidence from your life experience that you have these skills.

How to answer competency based questions

It is very important to recognise the skill or skills being sought by employers. This has to do with employer information but it also has to do with how employers' questions are worded. With some practice, it is possible to quickly identify the skills that many different questions are targeting. But at the same time, it is important to ensure that you understand the precise wording of a question.

When you understand which skills are targeted, you must then ensure that you talk about those skills and how you developed them. If you don't do this, your answer will be off-target, and perhaps irrelevant. Also these questions are about you - your past or present behaviour. You are not being asked to explain what something means. For instance, if you are asked about when you demonstrated leadership, you must show this from how you behaved in a situation and the strategies you followed. You are not being asked to say what you think good leadership is. You need therefore to give examples from your life experience.

One of the best ways to identify the skills being targeted in competency based questions is to first underline the key words in the question. Then think about each key word. What are the most relevant skills? It is good to gain some practice in doing this. In your Reflective Journal (**Seminar 3, Task 4**), there are four typical competency based questions. For each one, underline what you think are the key words. Then record the skills you think the question is designed to target e.g. by considering our list of top 25 skills. You will be able to check your answers later.

Structuring your answers

Follow this structure to give a full and focused answer

- Context - briefly set the scene
- Action - demonstrate and sell your approach and what you did
- Result - briefly outline the outcome using objective criteria.

These three sections should not be of equal size or focus in your answers. The context should be explicit but it should also be brief. All it does is introduce the narrative. It says what type of example this is. The action section is the main section; here you focus on your personal contribution in detail, even if the example is about what you did within a group or team. Thirdly you need a results section, again brief. What was the successful outcome for you personally, for the group or the company?

Competency based questions: Example answers

Here are five example competency based questions and answers. Each example also gives you the skills being asked for. But remember that as well as analysing the question you also need to know about the company and the job to know the most important skills being sought. You always need to do that research.

Please note however that you would **never** write “*Context*”, “*Action*” or “*Result*”. These terms are just used here to make the structure more explicit.

1. Self-management, problem-solving, analytical ability

Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a personal or group task.

Context	Whilst employed at College Careers Library last summer I was given the task of rationalising the stock control system.
Action	I looked at factors such as when the stock was last ordered, what it was used for and how often it was used. I worked out a method of streamlining the paperwork involved in this process and redesigned the relevant forms, which I then submitted to my manager.
Result	My ideas were accepted and implemented and a 15% reduction in stock levels was achieved.

2. Communications skills (oral), can summarise key issues, logical argument

Describe a situation where you were successful in putting your ideas across

Context	Whilst employed at Ryan’s Accountants, I took the initiative and volunteered to provide some IT training to the other administration colleagues. There was a range of age groups and backgrounds and some were reluctant to work with the new programme being used; and to be trained by a young, temporary employee.
Action	I organised a series of 3 practical workshops, which took them step by step through the new programme, showing how it was relevant to their jobs and how it could make it easier in the long-term. These sessions also gave my colleagues the opportunity to voice their concerns and raise any questions. I dealt with the majority of the questions myself and persuaded them of the effectiveness of the programme whilst adapting to their needs where possible.
Result	At the end of the workshops, all of my colleagues were ready to start using the new programme, acknowledged its usefulness and were happy to come to me with any further questions.

3. Self motivation, drive/energy, initiative

What is your greatest achievement and why?

Context	I am an active member of the Institute's International Society and last year I was elected Chairperson of a committee who undertook the challenge of organising and overseeing the annual Bollywood Film Night. This was an event that took months of organisation from choosing the venue to raising sponsorship, of which we managed €2,500.
Action	As the leader of a committee of about eight people, each with different ideas and agendas, I found that good communication between members of the group and working as a team was essential. As chair of the committee, I had to lead the team and make each person feel as though they had an important role to play. I identified the main duties and delegated responsibility to those most interested and skilled in particular areas and followed their progress closely. However, there were some conflicts within the group but as chair it was my responsibility to make sure that, taking into account other people's ideas and advice, any disagreements were sorted out.
Result	Our hard work was worth it as we overcame problems, both logistical and financial, and raised over €3,000 for charity as well as providing a fantastic evening of entertainment with guests from more than 20 countries.

4. Influencing, communication and teamwork

Describe how you achieved a goal through influencing the actions or opinions of others. What were the circumstances? What did you do to make a difference? How do you know the result was satisfactory?

Context	I was elected to the Staff/Student Liaison Committee in third year. At several meetings, the final year rep. voiced dissatisfaction at the lack of time available for students to complete their final year projects successfully, given their other commitments.
Action	I persuaded the fourth year rep. to meet with some of the third year students to explain the problem in more detail. I put forward the idea that if the department could allow us to choose projects and supervisors in the final term of third year, that could allow us time over the summer in which to make a start on the project. My peers agreed and I raised the issue at the Staff/Student Liaison Committee. Despite initial misgivings by academic staff, I managed to persuade them to move the initial dissertation workshops forward.
Result	Most of this year's final year students, who made the most of the opportunity to begin in the summer months, are much happier with their dissertations this year as their time management has been made easier.

5. Analysis, problem solving and creating thinking

Describe a difficult problem that you have solved. State how you decided which the critical issues were. Say what you did and what your solution was. What other approaches could you have taken?

Context	As part of my study exchange trip to Brussels, I had to undertake a piece of research into how a Belgian company might exploit the EU single market through their marketing strategy. I was assigned to a senior manager of company X, which I chose as a case study. My manager was fluent in both English and German, which was vital as he helped me to liaise with the company's customers throughout the EU. Unfortunately after one week he fell seriously ill and I was left to contact companies myself.
Action	I quickly realised that my German was not of a sufficient standard for me to gain all the information I required in the time available. I asked others in company X for help but no one had time. Consequently, I managed to persuade one of my classmates who studies German as part of his degree to carry out the telephone research for me by offering to help word process her project.
Result	This resulted in the successful completion of my project. With hindsight, I could have tried to learn some German, but this would have taken too much time. I also could have relied more heavily on secondary research, but this could have devalued my results.

Competency based questions: Journal task

Your Reflective Journal contains two further competency based questions along with answers (Seminar 3, Task 5). Read through them and ask yourself the question, are these answers effective? Write some comments in the boxes provided. Later you can check your answers.

Application forms - Language focus

Because application forms are formal documents, you need to keep the language formal. You should never lapse into text speak or be too chatty. However it is also advisable to use “I” and “my”. It is also important to use clear, professional language on your application forms. The words and phrases below should be useful. But remember only to use expressions which you fully understand and can provide evidence of in an interview. For example, **don’t** say you have ‘**diverse** experience of the retail trade’ if you have only worked in **one shop**.

Choose the best language to accurately describe YOUR experience and background. Use action words to describe what you did in different situations and to convey your abilities and enthusiasm. Here are some examples for describing your recent or current employment/work experience:

Roles:

- Established...
- Planned...
- Negotiated...
- Created...
- Designed...
- Formulated...
- Initiated...
- Implemented...
- Managed...
- Organised...
- Presented...
- Worked closely with...
- Collaborated with...

Experience:

- More than ... years’ extensive and diverse experience in...
- Demonstrated skills in...
- Extensive academic...
- Practical background in...
- Experienced in all aspects of...
- Knowledge of...

Responsibilities:

- In charge of... (Who/what?)
- Supervised...
- Responsible for...
- Delegated...
- Co-ordinated...
- Employed to handle...

Ability:

- Extensive training/involvement in...
- Proficient at...
- Competent in...
- Familiar with...
- The ability to...

Looking good - online and on paper

Who will be reading your application form? It will be someone who doesn't know you but is deciding whether they want to employ you. The selector has read many, many forms so yours needs to look good.

Avoiding typing errors and grammatical mistakes will help. Try to avoid careless cut and pastes. Many application forms get rejected because the applicant cut and pasted from another form and forgot to change the employer's name.

Also avoid using bland phrases by themselves such as *"I am a good organiser"*. You always need to provide evidence for your claims such as your level of responsibility in a specific situation. For example, if you are a good organiser, you can state this but link it to further detail such as *"I planned and facilitated the following group tasks for 16 children when I worked as a leader in the College Summer Camp"*.

The same point applies to hobbies and interests. For example, rather than simply saying you play cricket, you could also explain that you trained for it weekly, you raised sponsorship money to buy new cricket bats and so on. You should always relate this evidence to the job in terms of transferable skills which you know you developed through the activity, skills sought by the employer.

Watch the length of your responses. You may need to stick to a word limit. Stick to the important points and facts and never leave a response space blank.

Also remember to check your responses carefully. An electronic spellchecker is necessary but insufficient in itself. Ask a Careers Adviser and/or Irish friend to check over your draft and give you some feedback. Then when you send the form, it will be your best effort.

Completing application forms - more tips

If the closing date for applications is some time away, you don't need to submit the form right away or the day you start it. It is not wise to just log on, do it and send it. Any application for a graduate job will take a significant length of time to do well. And you will also need to begin the process by:

- finding out as much as you can about the job, the employer and the sector
- matching your skills to the employer's requirements.

You will often be able to download the form. When you print it out, you can work on your draft copy. You will also often be able to register and create a password so you can save what you write and return to your online draft later. It is important to take your time and to be thorough. You can also practice your responses to online application form questions at www.selectsimulator.com

It is important to read through all the questions before you start answering any of them. Work out from each question the skills it is asking you to demonstrate. These will often be in our list of top 25 but sometimes the skills required will be in addition to these. You should also read through the whole sequence of questions to understand the overall context and to decide which evidence to use for different questions. If you are not able to scroll down to view questions in advance, save or download into a Word document.

Make sure you use appropriate keywords like *"teamwork"* and *"communication"* to describe your skills and achievements. During the sifting process, employers often search online applications for keywords and phrases important to them. Use keywords which you believe match the employer's needs i.e. that relate to the core skills and criteria the employer has identified as essential to the future job holder.

Remember to keep a copy of your completed application for future reference. If you're invited for interview, it's vital to remember what you wrote. Also your responses can potentially be used again or adjusted for another application - **if** you're careful about cutting and pasting and take account of the different employer needs and preferences.

Some useful resources related to Seminar 3

1. Visit your Careers Service to view the 25 minute ASCAS video/DVD “*Your Job’s Online*” (2003). This considers online applications from the employers’ perspectives and is available in the Careers Information Library situated in the basement of the main college library.
2. Visit www.selectsimulator.com to practice completing an online application form. This site contains helpful advice on completing each section and you can use your draft as a basis for real applications. You can also save and print your work and discuss your draft with a university Careers Adviser.
3. www.gradireland.com www.careerportal.ie www.wit.ie/careerscentre and www.prospects.ac.uk contain additional helpful advice about making effective applications. Type ‘application forms’ into the site search box.
4. Feel free to make an appointment with the Careers Advisor by emailing careers@wit.ie or by calling 051 302038.
5. www.targetjobs.co.uk for their general advice section and www.get.hobsons.co.uk/advice/applications is also an excellent resource.

Seminar 4 - Successful job interviews

Welcome to the last of the series of four seminars which provide advice for international students looking for a graduate job in Ireland. This seminar looks at how to succeed in job interviews.

This seminar will help you work through three main issues.

These are:

- 1. gaining practice in preparing for job interviews**
- 2. gaining practice in responding effectively to interview questions**
- 3. understanding the interview process and how to market yourself during interviews.**

Addressing these three issues will maximise your chance of being offered the job.

Test your knowledge quiz

You can test your knowledge about job interviews now with our quiz.

If you want to do the quiz go to [Seminar 4, Task 1](#) in the Job Search Reflective Journal in Part Two of this resource. Look at the statements and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons whenever possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers but before that, you will find that much of the following seminar material covers these and related issues.

Now try the quiz!

The purpose of interviews

When you get invited for an interview, congratulations! The employer is interested in you and on paper you already meet the selectors' criteria. During the interview, you need to demonstrate that you really do meet the criteria.

From the employers perspective the interview is used to question you on the essential and desirable criteria required for the job and listed in their job advert, job description or person specification. The employer is asking:

- **Can** you do the job? (skills)
- **Will** you do the job? (commitment, interest, attitude and motivation)
- **Will** you fit in to the organisation and the team you will be working with? (your fit with the employer's culture)

From your perspective, you should use the interview to sell yourself to the employer. Use the questions and discussion to your advantage, giving evidence of your skills to convince them that you are the right person for the job.

The interview is also your chance to assess the employer and decide whether you'd like to work for them.

Types of interview

All the main types of job interview aim to achieve the same purpose but it's important to be aware of how to maximise your chance of success in each type.

Face-to-face

This type can occur early on in selection and can be a one-to-one meeting. The employer may run one of these or there may be a sequence of these interviews each with a different member of staff.

Telephone

These are usually also one-to-one and are just as formal as face-to-face interviews so you need to be well prepared. Remember to use your voice well and try to sound interested

and enthusiastic. You can refer to pre-prepared notes and your application which you have by the telephone. Try to arrange the interview for a time and place where you won't be interrupted.

Panel

Here you will meet several interviewers in one interview. It is important to maintain eye contact with the person who has asked you the question but to also include the others in your gaze as you're talking. Don't be concerned about panel members taking notes as you speak - that is routine practice.

Chronological

This type takes your CV or application as the basis for the interview. The employer will work through your experience. It's important to memorise what you wrote in your application responses. You should also reflect in advance on why you chose your courses and jobs and what you gained from them.

Structured competency-based

Interviewers will ask you questions designed to obtain responses from you which demonstrate the right job-related skills and competencies. Often these questions begin with "Can you tell us of a time when...". You need to understand what the competencies are and to have prepared examples from a range of life experiences to relate to the employer.

Preparation

You need to prepare well for a job interview. Part of the preparation is to focus on two key questions:

- What are the competencies the employer is looking for?
- What evidence do I have of these competencies?

For each competency, try to think of at least two examples of evidence, drawing these from different areas of your life experience such as study, work experience and involvement in clubs/societies. You are preparing what you'll say. Successful

candidates are those who have examples to talk about and who communicate them in an effective way.

You also need to cover the following three areas in your preparation.

Know yourself

Your CV/application form was successful so consider it again to refresh your memory.

Knowing yourself is about self assessment, something you have already considered in this seminar series. But for an interview, it's good to go into this in more depth. Identify your key selling points: five or six areas in which your skills and experience especially match the employer's requirements. You let the interviewers know about these whenever you can. You can transform open-ended questions like 'What are your main strengths?' into opportunities to get these points across.

It's also good to gain practice before the interview in responding to interview questions. For instance, you can arrange a practice interview at your Careers Service. This can give you useful feedback on how to improve your performance.

Predicting interview questions

Most interview questions are pre-planned and standardised: all candidates are often asked the same questions on why they're interested in the job, on their skills, on their work experience and so on.

If you can accurately predict a number of questions you will be asked at interview from the employer's information, you certainly gain an advantage in the interview. You can gain some practice now in going through this process.

On the next page, you will see the job advert from Seminar 3. This time though, you also have the related person specification. Employers often write this to describe the attributes necessary for a successful candidate. This information is usually available on the employer's website or is sent to you when you indicate interest in the job - so you can clearly see if you meet the employer's criteria.

In an interview, the questions asked will often come directly from the person specification. Look at the job advert and the person specification on the next pages. Predict five questions which an interviewer might ask a job candidate.

Know the job

You need to clearly understand what the job is about. It's good to read occupational profiles produced by ASCAS and if possible, to speak to people already doing the job you're interested in.

Employers often use case studies of their employees on their websites. These can provide helpful insights into day-to-day activities across a number of graduate roles.

Know the organisation

Researching the employer beforehand is crucial to interview success. Investigate resources such as their website and their recruitment literature. Find out about their products, locations and numbers of employees. What are the company's long-term strategies?

Knowing something of the business sector the employer operates within is also very useful. Who are the employer's competitors? Interviewers sometimes ask questions to assess how much the candidate knows about relevant business issues or topics. Reading relevant material such as the business sections in quality newspapers can often give you useful insights and examples to talk about.

In your Reflective Journal, there is space for you to record your predictions (Seminar 4, Task 2). The Journal starts you off with one predicted question.

A person specification is a written document that sets out the criteria for a certain position or job. It will tell you what **you must have** and at **what level**. For example, “a basic knowledge of Microsoft Word”. The **experience, skills, knowledge, abilities, qualifications and personal attributes** sought by the employer may all be addressed in the person specification.

When you indicate interest in a **paid position** you should receive a **person specification** or be able to print this document from the employer’s recruitment website. For a **voluntary position** you may not receive one but should **ask what is expected of you**.

A person specification will normally come together with a job description. You should **read these both carefully before writing your application**.

The person specification will also tell you whether each criteria is ‘**essential**’ or ‘**desirable**’. If something is described as **essential**, then you **must have this** in order for your application to be successful. If something is **desirable** then it is **better** if you can prove that you have it but it is **not completely necessary**.

Can Do Investment Services

Trainee Financial Analyst

Can Do Investment Services is a leading provider of financial and economic information to financial investment companies and our services are used by the top 10 global investment banks.

Due to continuing growth, we are looking for highly skilled and motivated graduates to join our Glasgow team. You will be involved in:

- working on large projects
- answering day to day queries from clients
- visiting clients to provide on site support and training
- training clients both individuals and groups
- managing a group of client accounts to ensure client satisfaction.

You will have a good bachelor's degree (2:2 or above) or postgraduate qualification, have strong numeric, analytical and problem solving skills and excellent communication skills.

You must also be adaptable and an enthusiastic team member with a proven ability to take the initiative and find creative solutions.

Can Do Investment Services will consider graduates from any discipline. Industry experience and experience in a client facing role desirable.

Closing date: December

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<http://www.candoinvest.com>

Person Specification (or “Person Spec.”)

The employer will have a very clear idea of the perfect candidate. Always familiarise yourself with the criteria before the interview. Think about how you can prove that you meet these.

Personal specification: Trainee financial analyst

	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications	Undergraduate degree (2.2 +) or Postgraduate qualification	
Skills/abilities/competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Analytical ability • Reasoning skills – numerical and verbal (will be tested) • Problem solving • Good team worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT experience • Planning and organisational skills • Business awareness
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of work of a similar nature, including internships or projects • Dealing with people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 year’s industry experience • Experience in client facing role
Personal attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiastic and willing to learn • Adaptable • Creative/imaginative • Uses initiative • Dependable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient and calm under pressure • Flexible
Circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to work out of office/on site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to travel abroad at short notice if necessary
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart, business like appearance 	

Some tips for interview success

Confirm your attendance

Confirm by telephone or email within a couple of days of receiving the invitation that you will attend the interview.

Be on time

Ensure you know where you're going and how to get there in good time - 10 minutes early. Lateness will jeopardise your chances and also make you more nervous.

Be pleasant to everyone

You can be assessed from the moment you arrive. The receptionist who gives you travelling expenses could be asked later to comment on the candidates.

Dress appropriately

If in doubt as to what to wear, be smart and formal. A suit is usually a good idea. It is better to dress conservatively than too informally.

Be positive and enthusiastic

The employer's interest in you gives you a reason for confidence. Try to sound genuinely enthusiastic and motivated to do the job and work for the organisation.

First impressions are crucial

It's good to give a firm handshake, a confident smile and eye contact at the start to create a good first impression. Some social psychologists say that an interviewer will have formed judgements about the candidate after only four minutes. But the **whole** interview is important too. You need to stay alert and focused the whole time.

Use 'open' body language

Most messages in human communication are physical, not verbal. Sit upright, only use moderate hand gestures and don't cross your arms. An erect posture and uncrossed arms can convey energy, confidence and interest.

Maintain good eye contact

It's important to maintain good eye contact with the interviewers without staring. If you look away or look down too often, you may be perceived as insincere, lacking in confidence or lacking interest in the employer.

Be yourself

Remember to be yourself. Don't put on an act because the employer will usually see through it. It is okay to feel nervous: this can give you the energy to perform well.

Three don'ts

Don't be negative

Try not to become negative about yourself, your course, difficult people you work with and so on. You don't want an interviewer to think that you might complain a lot. Even if the question is 'negative', turn the focus round to emphasise the positive instead.

Don't 'waffle' or over-communicate

'Waffle' means to keep on talking in a vague and unfocused way. Say what you want to say. Expand as you feel necessary to convey your answer and then stop. If you are unsure whether to continue further, it is fine to ask the interviewer if he/she would like you to. Don't over-communicate by talking too much. It is also important to speak clearly, with a moderate tone of voice and not too quickly. The interviewers need to easily understand what you are saying.

Don't expect the interviewer to be an expert

An interviewer is unlikely to have as much understanding as you have in your specialist subject areas so keep the language simple. If you can communicate complicated information to a non-specialist in your interview, this is a further demonstration and evidence of your communication skills.

Types of questions

You could be asked any of the following types of question in a graduate job interview but currently competency-based and open questions tend to predominate. With all these types, it is fine to take a few moments to think before you respond. The Careers Centre Information Library has a number of resources to help you prepare. You may also like to have a look at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) website resource to view many of the following types of question from the employers' perspective, at:

www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/recruitment/selectn/selnintvg.htm?lsSrchRes=1.

Biographical

An interviewer may ask you for further information or clarification about something on your CV/online application. Try to answer in ways relevant to the employer's needs.

Open/closed questions

Good interview questions are usually open but sometimes the interviewer could ask a "closed" question where a reasonable answer is "yes" or "no". In these cases, it is good to try to give more than this in the answer.

Hypothetical/situational

These questions usually ask candidates to say what they would do in a certain situation such as dealing with a difficult customer. They test candidates' understanding of how to deal with future events based on previous learning and experience. It is sometimes possible to predict situational questions, based on your researching of the job and its specific challenges. There will also usually be no right or wrong answer, the interviewer is looking for logical, clear thinking.

Competency-based

Interviewers ask these questions to obtain evidence from you on the job-related skills and competencies. Often they begin with "Can you tell us of a time when..." You need

to understand what the competencies are and to have prepared examples from a range of life experiences to relate to the employer. Employers believe that your behaviour and approach in the past is predictive of your future performance.

Technical

These questions ask candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of concepts, tools and specialist terminology. They will often feature in interviews for engineering, scientific and IT roles. Sometimes these employers will set aside one of the interviews for technical questions.

Surprise

Interviewers occasionally ask a surprise question which has no obvious relevance to the job or the candidate's own experience. In these cases, it's important to give a calm response. It is a chance for you to show how well you think "on the spot" and deal with the unexpected.

Inappropriate

The only questions you need not answer are inappropriate ones. Anti-discrimination legislation in the Ireland makes it illegal for employers to recruit on the basis of age, gender, marital status, disability, religion and various other personal characteristics.

If you think the question is inappropriate, you have several choices of response. Most of these questions are asked inadvertently and often you can turn the response round into a further positive message about the skills and experience you offer. However, you can choose to ask politely why the question relates to the job and if you feel it necessary, politely refuse to answer the question.

You will tend not to come across such questions if applying to graduate programmes offered by large national and international companies. These questions are less rare in some smaller organisations where interviewers may not have had rigorous training in selection and recruitment.

Answering Questions

Because many questions can be predicted, you should be able to prepare well beforehand and use your answers on the day. But depending on the precise wording of the question, you will often have to pause for a few moments to customise your response. You need to stay focused on answering the exact question.

The four features below are also aspects of good answers at interview:

- Being positive
- Being enthusiastic
- Being natural
- Being honest

Your Reflective Journal contains two tasks on answering interview questions. The first of these is [Seminar 4, Task 3](#). The task gives you one candidate's responses to five questions and asks you to reflect on the answers as well as the questions. Try this task now.

It's good to practice answering interview questions before attending an important job interview. You could ask for a practice interview at your Institute's Careers Service. You could also role play with a friend and take it in turns to ask a question and respond to it. [Seminar 4, Task 4](#) gives you a feedback table to use if you role play with a friend. The table is to be filled out by the interviewer and then shared with the interviewee. [Seminar 4, Task 4](#) also gives you a list of commonly asked interview questions to choose from.

Difficult questions

Below are some questions often considered as among the most difficult to answer in a job interview. It is always important for candidates to think about why they are being asked any of these questions. – “What are they designed to test?”

Tell me about yourself

This has sometimes been called the toughest question of all. But if you are well prepared for it, you can easily address it. Research the employer and the job to discover what the employer's needs are. Then at interview, concisely deliver some main points about your education and professional background but then move on to some key messages about your job-related skills and achievements - to address and match the employer's needs. Try not to talk for longer than two minutes.

What are your main strengths?

This question also requires preparation. You need to present job-related strengths and achievements. What are you good at - related to the job? As you prepare, create a list of your greatest strengths. Also prepare one or two examples to illustrate each strength. This helps you avoid over-generalising. Match your strengths and examples of them to the employers needs. Again, don't talk for longer than two minutes.

What is your greatest weakness?

There are several ways to deal with this question but you should never choose a weakness which relates to the job. One option is to pick a non-related weakness which you've worked on to develop and improve upon. Another option is to select a weakness which could sometimes be viewed as a strength. However, this approach has been used so often (e.g. “*I'm a bit of a perfectionist*”), it can fail to impress. A third option is to be entirely positive. You say that your research of the job convinces you that there is nothing which would hinder you

from excelling in the role. Then summarise some of your most relevant strengths.

Sell me this pencil/mobile phone

You are unlikely to be asked this question unless you are at an interview for a sales or marketing position. Again, there are options. One is to respond with your own question: *“Tell me about the type of pencils/mobile phones this company currently uses”*. Why? Because you show an interest in their needs and a desire to listen before making a sales pitch! Another option is to creatively list as many positive and attractive qualities of the object as possible. Either way, it is important to be confident, maintain eye contact and have a reason for your approach.

What encouraged you to apply for a job with us?

This question tests how much you know about the employer and the job, so again, preparation is critical. You need to research their website, annual reports and other print material available at your Institute’s Careers Service (employer files) and recent newspaper articles focusing on the company. What challenges does it face and who are its competitors? What is its range of products or services? What are its corporate values? Your answer should show that you have thoroughly researched them.

Be positive about why you want the job. This question offers you another opportunity to sell your job-relevant skills. Also mention your genuine interest in the job and enthusiasm about the sector.

When were you last angry?

This question is relatively rare but may be asked to assess professionalism. It may focus on a work setting - when were you last angry at work? Remember that this question could lead to related questions such as *“What happened?”* and *“Was the situation resolved?”* You need to give an answer which fits your personality and the employer’s culture. You may not need to give a specific example. The employer may be satisfied with a general scenario such as

“people who fail to get things done in a reasonable and agreed timescale”. It’s also important to set your example within a positive description of your personality and your relationships with colleagues.

We have seen five other candidates today; why should we employ you?

This is a very key question. Even if it is not an explicit question, it is a question in the interviewers’ minds which they need to answer. Again, your research of the company will pay off. Your response should focus on a number of needs the employer has and for each need, you should give them the skills and experience which match that need. It’s also important to be genuinely positive and to convey a *“can do”* attitude.

If you were an animal/biscuit, what would you be?

You will probably journey through your entire career without being asked this kind of surprise question. But it can happen. By definition, a surprise question can’t be prepared for. In fact it is asked to test quick thinking or creativity. It is fine to take a few moments to think. Then it is good to just go with it but be ready for the follow up question, *“Why?”* Try to give a response which allows you to mention at least one of your strengths.

The close of the interview: Your questions

Before the interview ends, almost all employers will ask you if you have any questions. Many employers say that the worst mistake a candidate can make at an interview is not to ask any questions so it is very important to have at least two questions ready.

Asking good questions allows you to show confidence, interest, willingness to take on responsibility, and a keenness to develop in the organisation. Your questions should also demonstrate again that you have researched the job and the organisation.

Avoid questions about holidays, pensions and other benefits until later! Also avoid questions which have already been answered in the job pack or during the interview. But it is good to raise one question related to some of the discussion at interview.

Here are just a few examples of the kinds of question you may want to ask.

- How would you describe the culture of the organisation?
- How is performance and development assessed?
- What roles do the graduates recruited over the last three years now have?
- Can you give me a fuller picture of your training and development programme?
- I read in the newspaper last week that you are expanding into new European markets. Is the company planning to expand into any other markets?
- What do you most enjoy about working here?
- How is the job likely to develop over the next two years?

After the interview

If successful

Reflect on the interview. Think it through. If you accept the employer's offer of the job, you should receive a written contract which defines your start date, hours of work, annual leave entitlement, and the notice period - the amount of time you must give the employer later if you choose to leave. Once you start, tax will usually be deducted from your salary before you receive the money.

If unsuccessful

Graduate recruitment in the Ireland is very competitive so don't let lack of success on this occasion get to you. Your time will come. Most employers will be happy to give you feedback on your interview performance so take the opportunity to gain further insight on what you did well and what they think could be improved. Contact the employer and ask for feedback.

Some useful resources related to Seminar 4

1. Visit your Careers Service to view the 22 minute ASCAS video/DVD ‘*Why Ask me That?*’ (1998). This considers a typical selection interview from the perspectives of one candidate and two recruiters. Your Careers Service will also have the ASCAS booklet “*Going For Interviews*” as well as many books and other print resources on succeeding in job interviews.
2. www.prospects.ac.uk contains additional helpful advice about succeeding in interviews and assessment centres. Type ‘interviews’ and ‘assessment centres’ into this site’s search box.
3. Please feel free to make an appointment to see the careers advisor if you require further assistance by emailing careers@wit.ie or calling 051 302038
4. The general advice section of www.targetjobs.co.uk also has useful hints and tips on interviews.

Part two

Job search reflective journal

Job Search Reflective Journal

Seminar 1, Task 1

Test your knowledge quiz

Look at the statements below and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons whenever possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers. Now try the quiz below!

	1-5	Reasons/Notes
1. The Institute's Careers Service can find you a job.		
2. All Irish job vacancies must be advertised		
3. Most graduates find work through newspaper and magazine job pages.		
4. A good degree in the specific field I want to work in is the main consideration for employers.		
5. It is easy to find out about my right to work in Ireland.		
6. When job-hunting, it's not what you know it's who you know.		

Seminar 1, Task 2

Locating and considering relevant destinations of graduates from higher education (First Destination statistics)

Once you have located the most relevant First Destination Statistics for you, given your degree subject(s), make some notes below to answer the following questions:

- 1) What patterns are there in graduate destinations, both by name of employer and by graduate job title?
- 2) Does this say anything to you about potential employers you might approach?

Seminar 1, Task 3

Considering examples of effective networking and recording some personal examples

Given the three examples of networking described for you, can you think of any similar experiences of your own? Capture these experiences in the space on the next page.

Three examples of effective networking:

“My dad volunteered as a mentor for a small start-up company and he suggested that I spoke to the managing director about how he got started in the field of events management. He was happy to meet me and we spent several hours talking about his experience in the business as well as my plans for the future. It gave me a much clearer idea of the kind of company I wanted to work for and the opportunities which might be available if you know where to look.”

Julie Stevenson

“My friend’s brother did a graduate training programme at one of the big international IT consultancies and he agreed to meet up with me to talk about what it was like. He hadn’t come from an IT background either but said that the training was excellent and that after only 1 year he was already given quite a lot of responsibility. I’ve started looking into it more now - the job security and good salary really appeals!”

Gail McIntyre

“My supervisor used to work in industry before he took this job and he gave me a list of some names and companies he had worked with in the past and said I could contact them directly to see about getting some work experience. I managed to arrange to go to one of the companies for a week to shadow an employee and when I left the boss told me that I could use him as a referee and to keep in touch in case anything more permanent came up in the future when I graduated.”

Richard Evans

Space for reflection

Seminar 1, Task 4

Networking using appropriate language

Look at the questions/statements below. Tick the ones which would be appropriate for a job-hunter to ask a networking contact. What is the problem with the others? Note down some other questions, if any, which you'd like your contacts to answer.

1. I want to talk to you about getting a job in your company.
2. When would be a good time to talk to you about the type of work you do?
3. How much do you earn?
4. I need information about working in this industry.
5. Could you tell me how you got into this line of work? What are your educational and career backgrounds? Would you do anything differently if you were starting over?
6. What would you say is the best path to this career?
7. Could you tell me a bit about what you do in a typical day or week?
8. What are some of the defining characteristics of the graduates who have been hired by your company in the past for this position?
9. Looking at my CV, what advice would you give me on the next steps I should take if I am interested in this industry?
10. Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me. It's been really useful.

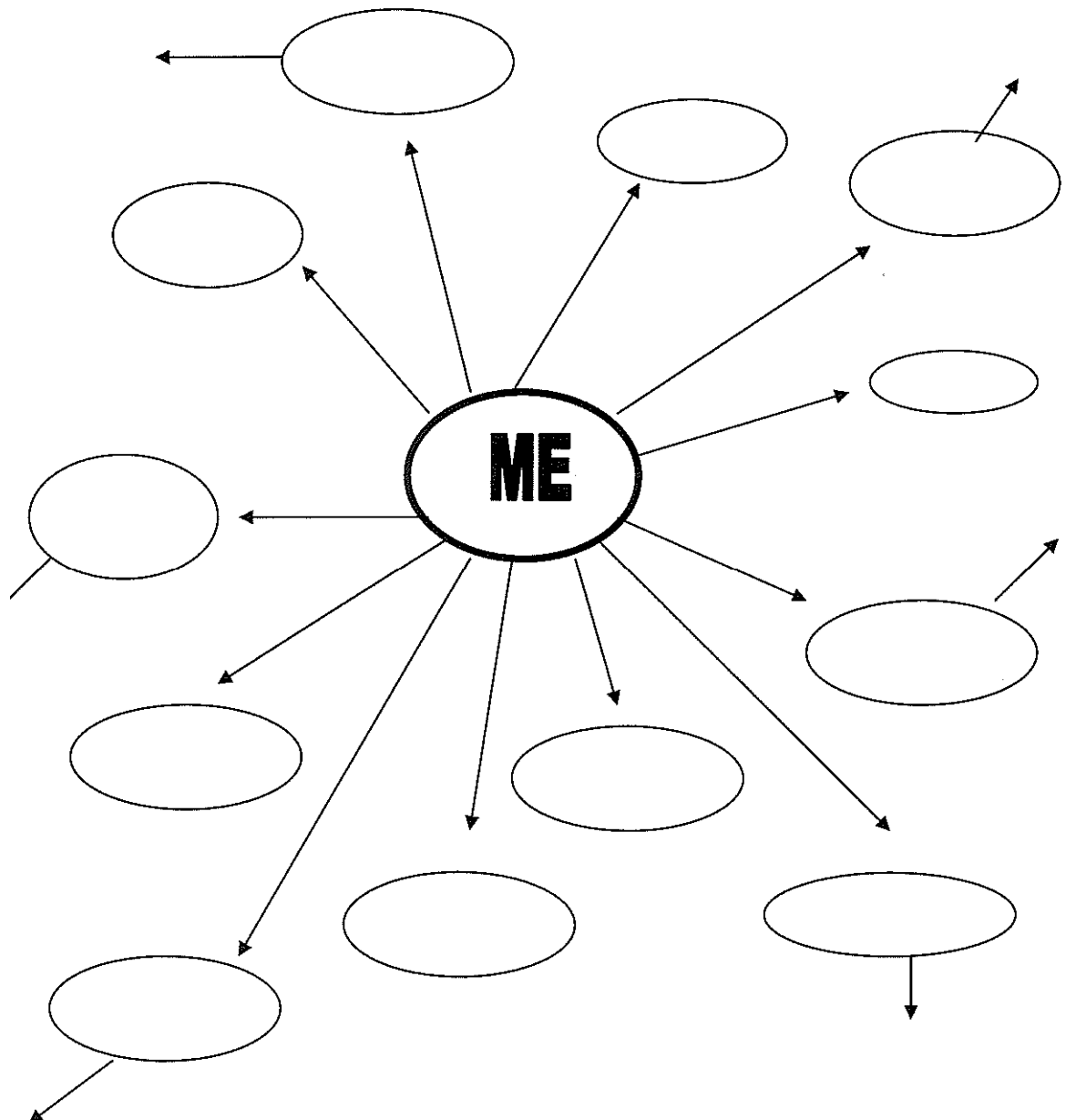
My Questions: note down here some other questions you'd like your contacts to answer.

-
-
-
-

Seminar 1, Task 5

Creating your network

You are invited to create a diagram of your network, thinking of the types of contacts listed in Seminar 1. Before you do this, it is good to think about the type of job or organisation you want to target. Who has information about this type of job or organisation? Who could you ask for help or advice? Fill in the network diagram below with their names.



Remember: Not only your friends and your family but your friends' friends and your friends' families and your family's friends Etc ...

Seminar 1, Task 6

Identifying your key attributes

The top 25 attributes which employers look for in a candidate

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Willingness to learn 2. Commitment 3. Dependability 4. Self motivation 5. Teamwork 6. Communications skills (oral) 7. Co-operation 8. Communications skills (written) 9. Drive/energy 10. Self-management 11. Desire to achieve 12. Problem-solving 13. Analytical ability 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Flexibility 15. Initiative 16. Ability to summarise key issues 17. Logical argument 18. Adaptability (intellectual) 19. Numeracy 20. Adaptability (organisational) 21. Commercial awareness 22. Time management 23. Self confidence 24. Ability to influence others 25. Creative thinking
--	--

Read the example (waiter) below and then complete the table with at least three more REAL examples of your relevant past experience. For each one:

1. State the role or position you were in.
2. What activities did this role require of you?
3. What skills/attributes did you develop through doing these activities?

Examples of experiences do not have to be only paid or voluntary work experience – you should include, for example, academic projects and sports and hobbies. Aim for a description of your attributes from a broad range of experiences.

Role	Activity	Attributes
e.g. Waiter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Setting up and serving at tables ▪ Handling cash ▪ Supporting other staff ▪ Dealing with customer complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Co-operation ▪ Numeracy ▪ Dependability ▪ Communication skills (oral) ▪ Problem solving ▪ Initiative

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Seminar 1, Task 7

Identify a suitable target job vacancy or employer

- a) For this task, narrow down your job search to a specific vacancy, graduate programme or organisation you are interested in.
- b) Do some research to find out relevant background information (e.g. graduate labour market or sector information) and/or specific job and employer information?

Vacancy/organisation:

Research:

Seminar 1: Answers and Feedback

Task 1: Test your knowledge quiz.

Answers and feedback

Statement 1: The Institute's Careers Service can find you a job.

Answer: Your College Careers Service cannot find you a job. The Careers Service is an information, advice and guidance service rather than a placement service.

Statement 2: All Irish job vacancies must be advertised.

Answer: There is no law within Ireland that compels employers to advertise their vacancies. Employers use a range of strategies such as advertising, using recruitment agencies and sifting speculative applications. Some employers only recruit from speculative applications because they find more than sufficient numbers of high calibre candidates this way... and it doesn't cost!

Statement 3: Most graduates find work through newspaper and magazine job pages.

Answer: Most graduates do not find work through newspaper and magazine job pages though some do. Many advertised vacancies in newspapers (such as for managerial positions) require a number of years of relevant experience and many new graduates do not possess this yet. Other types of employer advertising (such as in careers service online vacancy systems) are much more targeted at final year undergraduates and recent graduates.

Statement 4: A good degree in the specific field I want to work in is the main consideration for employers.

Answer: This depends on your subject of study and the employment sector you are targeting but about 50% of vacancies for final year undergraduates and recent graduates do not require any particular subject background. These employers are more interested in transferable skills, good academic attainment, and candidates' wider experience outside of academia.

Statement 5: It is easy to find out about my right to work in Ireland.

Answer:

It is as easy to find out about your right to work in Ireland as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment can make it. The websites featured at the end of Seminar 1 should help you clarify your rights. Your College International Office will also have great expertise in relation to the various schemes and programmes open to international students.

Statement 6: When job-hunting, it's not what you know it's who you know.

Answer: Various issues covered in Seminar 1 (such as effective networking, reflecting on your transferable skills, researching target employers) combine to indicate that it is both what you know and who you know that are important when job-hunting. Part of the "what you know" relates to self knowledge and being able to market your skills in an attractive and convincing way.

Task 4: Networking using appropriate language**Answers and feedback**

1. I want to talk to you about getting a job in your company.
2. When would be a good time to talk to you about the type of work you do?
3. How much do you earn?
4. I need information about working in this industry.
5. Could you tell me how you got into this line of work? What are your educational and career backgrounds? Would you do anything differently if you were starting over?
6. What would you say is the best path to this career?
7. Could you tell me a bit about what you do in a typical day or week?
8. What are some of the defining characteristics of the graduates who have been hired by your company in the past for this position?
9. Looking at my CV, what advice would you give me on the next steps I should take if I am interested in this industry?
10. Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me. It's been really useful.

Numbers 1, 3 and 4 are too blunt and might be considered rude.

1. DON'T say "I want ...". Try, "I'd like.." OR "I'm interested in..." REMEMBER: don't ask for a job, ask for information!
3. In Ireland it is rude to ask someone his or her salary. Try asking, "Could you give me an idea of the average salary for graduates?"
4. Remember: they are doing you a favour. Try, "I wonder if you could give me some information about"..

Job Search Reflective Journal

Seminar 2, Task 1

Test your knowledge quiz

Look at the statements below and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons whenever possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers. Now try the quiz below!

	1-5	Reasons/Notes
1. Your Irish style CV can be as long as you want.		
2. When applying for a job using a CV, a covering letter should always be included.		
3. When writing a CV, you should include information on your interests and achievements.		
4. If you send out hundreds of speculative CVs, you are bound to find a job.		
5. Posting your CV to a jobs website will find you a job.		

Seminar 2, Task 2**Two examples of CVs – content and structure**

In the space below, record your thoughts about the content and structure of the two CVs, addressing the following questions:

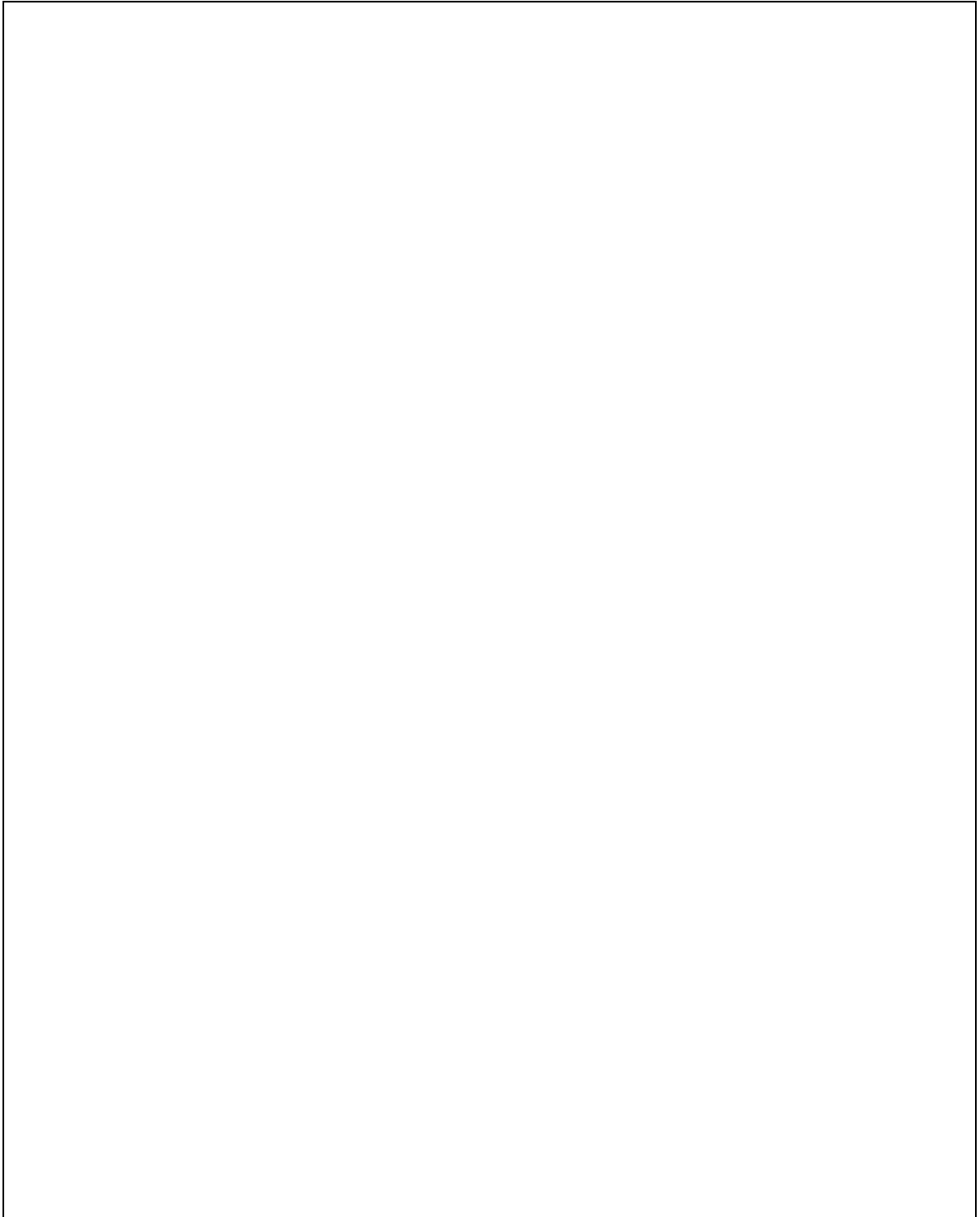
- 1) What does each CV include and in what order?
- 2) How does each compare and contrast with CVs used in your own country?

Julia Plaski's CV	Antony Zhao's CV

Seminar 2, Task 3**Two examples of CVs – comparison and effectiveness**

Use the space below to address two further questions about the two CVs

- 1) In what ways are the two CVs similar and different?
- 2) Are they both effective CVs? Why?

A large empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their answers to the two questions listed above.

Seminar 2, Task 4

Commentary on third example of CV

In the space below, and given your knowledge and understanding of Irish-style CVs, make some comments about this CV.

- 1) Is this CV convincing/attractive?
- 2) What would you change and why?

Seminar 2, Task 5

Questions to answer in covering letters

On the next page of the Journal, you will see the covering letter that Julia Plaski wrote to accompany her CV.

Below is a series of five questions that Julia is answering in this letter. Put the questions in order according to where she answers them in her letter. We have started this off by placing a 1 against C since she addresses this question first.

You will be able to check your responses later. You should use these five questions *in their correct sequence* when writing your covering letters.

You will be able to check your responses later.

Use these questions as a guide when you are writing your covering letters.

	A. Why are you a good candidate for the job?
	B. Is there anything on your CV which needs to be clarified?
1	C. Why are you writing?
	D. Why are you interested in the job/sector?
	E. When are you available for interviews?

How does Julia's letter relate to and differ from her CV?

*Flat 4/2,
33 Lower Street
Waterford
14 February 2008*

*Mr Stephen Reagan
Graduate Recruitment Manager
Goldman Sachs
Fleet Street
London*

Dear Mr Reagan

Graduate Analyst Programmer

I am writing to apply for your Graduate Analyst Programme advertised in the Gradireland Graduate Directory 2008 and enclose my CV for your consideration.

I have been interested in investment banking for some years and this was confirmed during my work experience at both the AIB and Morgan Stanley, I feel that investment banking would offer an ideal opportunity to combine my skills and interests in finance, project management, team working, leadership and interest in business. I am particularly interested in financial modelling and working with clients towards solutions to their financial needs but also very interested in the range of asset management and capital markets services.

Goldman Sachs in London attracts me because it offers so many opportunities as your regional European headquarters. Through my project supervisor's contact at Goldman Sachs, I was also able to meet her and two of her recent graduate analyst colleagues last month. They all spoke highly of the early responsibility and the opportunities they had experienced. Also your business principles, commitment to client service, and focus on employee learning and development all greatly attract me.

I have excellent numerical and analytical skills combined with strong team-working skills including leadership and motivating others as well as myself to succeed. The range of projects I worked on at university, at the AIB and at Morgan Stanley greatly enhanced my project management skills as well as my awareness of financial services. My additional experience commercially and in societies also demonstrates that I excel in leadership in demanding situations. I have a strong commercial focus and have developed services as well as fundraising opportunities, and made an impact.

My secondary school education was in India so I am unsure about the equivalent points. However, I achieved an overall grade average of A, I was within the top 5% of students in my final school year.

I hope that when you consider my CV, you will realise that I have the skills, experience and evidence of potential to excel as a trainee graduate analyst at Goldman Sachs. I am extremely interested in your organisation and am available for interview at anytime. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Julia Plaski

Julia Plaksi

Seminar 2, Task 6

Language focus in covering letters

First impressions are very important. These are all real examples of students' covering emails when applying to do the face-to-face version of this course.

Can you improve these sentences by editing them and writing in some changes?

1. I'd like to join the workshops and attached my application form.
2. I am interested in the job search workshops. Please find attached the application form.
3. Looking forward to hear about you.
4. Enclosed you will find my application form for the Career Planning Workshop. It would be great to take part on that workshop!!
5. I would like to apply the workshops.
6. Please find the attachment
7. I am postgraduate student and I like to attend the job Search working for international Students Nov 2006

Seminar 2: Answers and Feedback

Task 1: Test your knowledge quiz.

Answers and feedback

Statement 1: Your Irish style CV can be as long as you want.

Answer: No! Your Irish style CV should be two A4 pages and this includes the contact details of two referees. Only in the case of an academic CV (for a teaching or research job) should a CV be longer -where the candidate is including details about publications, research projects and conference papers presented.

Statement 2: When applying for a job using a CV, a covering letter should always be included.

Answer: Yes. A covering letter or email should always be included and should always be targeted at a particular employer.

Statement 3: When writing a CV, you should include information on your interests and achievements.

Answer: Yes. Interests and achievements help to make your CV unique. If you have a section on achievements, make sure you give details of at least four or five. Don't just list one. Describe your interests and achievements in such a way that you emphasise the additional skills and qualities you have developed through them.

Statement 4: If you send out hundreds of speculative CVs, you are bound to find a job.

Answer: This approach is sometimes referred to as the "shotgun method of job hunting". If you fire off hundreds of CVs, you're bound to hit something. No. The chances are you won't hit anything. Targeted CVs are much more attractive to employers and much more likely to open doors for you.

Statement 5: Posting your CV to a jobs website will find you a job.

Answer: This could work so it could be **one** of your job search strategies. But don't let it be your only strategy. Although posting a CV to a website could get you a job, it is quite a passive strategy - you have no control over which employers will be reading your CV.

Task 3: Two examples of CVs – comparison and effectiveness**Answers and feedback**

Although these two CVs differ in some important respects (e.g. one has a career objective and one does not), they are both attractive and convincing. You do have some choice as to structure and layout. These CVs adopt slightly different approaches to format and description of skills and experience but they are, more or less, equally strong examples.

Task 4: Commentary on third example of CV**Answers and feedback**

Poor Mr McNeill! His CV is neither convincing nor attractive. Let's just work from the top down and list some of the problems with his CV.

1. It is unnecessary to say Curriculum Vitae. He should have his name at the top.
2. He should not give his marital status or place of birth and he does not need to give his age.
3. He has a jokey email address. This can fail to impress employers. It is better to have a more professional or neutral email address (e.g. gmail) on a CV.
4. The Education section should be in reverse chronology and there should be much more detail for both his degrees to give the employer an idea of subject coverage and projects. On one occasion, physics is spelt wrongly. He has also separated his higher passes from their respective subjects.
5. Paul's Work Experience section should also follow a reverse chronology and again, there should be much more detail about main activities and skills developed, especially for the most recent three jobs.
6. Paul's Interests and Additional Information sections do not really add to his CV. Most are far too general (everyone likes good food!).
7. He should give the names and contact details of two referees. This completes the information which an employer is seeking, all within one document.

Conclusion: This is a very lazy application. Paul has taken an old version of his CV from 2001 which gave some detail of his casual work experience up to that time. He has then tried to update it more recently but with very minimal information about his later jobs and his university education. The result is a CV that falls well short of the standard necessary to apply successfully for graduate jobs. Unfortunately, this CV will not open any doors to graduate work.

Task 5: Questions to answer in covering letters
Answers and Feedback

3	A. Why are you a good candidate for the job?
4	B. Is there anything on your CV which needs to be clarified?
1	C. Why are you writing?
2	D. Why are you interested in the job/sector?
5	E. When are you available for interviews?

Task 6: Language focus in covering letters
Answers and Feedback

1. I would like to join the workshops and have attached my application form.
2. I am interested in the job search workshops. Please find attached the application form.
3. I look forward to hearing from you.
4. Please find enclosed my application form for the Career Planning Workshop. I am very interested in taking part in these workshops.
5. I would like to apply for the workshops.
6. Please find attached the application form.
7. I am a degree / postgraduate student and I would like to attend the Job Search workshops for International Students.

Job Search Reflective Journal

Seminar 3, Task 1

Test your knowledge quiz

Look at the statements below and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree,

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons where possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers.

Now try the quiz below!

	1-5	Reasons/Notes
1. When sending an application form, you should also send your CV.		
2. Employers reject more candidates at the application form stage than at any later stage of selection.		
3. At the job application stage, applicants are assessed against each other, not against the relevant job criteria.		
4. In an application form, you should use active words and sentences with "I" and "my".		
5. When completing application forms, it will be acceptable to leave a section blank in some cases.		

Seminar 3, Task 2

Assessing your suitability

Consider the job advert in Seminar 3. Are you a suitable candidate? Fill in the table below first by transferring information from the advert where you identified the skills being sought. Is there a top 5 set of attributes which the employer is seeking? And are there any other essential or desirable criteria this employer is seeking?

Then consider whether you meet these criteria. Tick each one if you believe you meet it. Make a brief note of the best evidence you could use to support this.

<i>Trainee Financial Analyst</i>		Do I meet these criteria? (✓ / X)	Make a note of evidence you could use to support this
Top 5 attributes for this job	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 		
Other Essentials			
Other Desirables			
Am I a suitable applicant? YES NO			

Seminar 3, Task 3

Completing a self-assessment template to develop a pool of evidence

Completing this self-assessment template will help you develop a pool of evidence.

In the left hand column, define each role or key event in your life – from work experience, studying, interests such as student societies and so on. Then in the middle column, detail what you actively did. Finally, in the right hand column, list skills you developed through each main activity.

Relevant recent work experience recorded in this template is great. But many students don't have a lot of work experience yet. Fortunately, you can still record an excellent range of skills by pulling in other types of evidence. This can be just as relevant to the employer. Your self assessment template includes two illustrative examples.

You may well need to continue your self assessment on an additional sheet.

Role of key event	Tasks/activities involved	Skills acquired or developed
Waiter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up and serving at tables • Handling cash • Supporting other staff • Dealing with customer complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operation • Numeracy • Dependability • Communication skills (oral) • Problem-solving • Initiative
Events Co-ordinator, South Asian Society / Chinese Students Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and managing Chinese New Year event • Raising corporate sponsorship for social/cultural events • Organised marketing/awareness campaign in student/staff media • Lead team of students in organising cultural visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Team working • Co-operation • Budgeting • Creative thinking • Drive/Energy

Role of key event	Tasks/activities involved	Skills acquired or developed

Seminar 3, Task 4

Analysing competency based questions for skills targeted by the employer

To gain some practice in analysing competency based questions, you will see below four typical questions of this type. For each question, first underline what you think are the key words. Then record the skills you think the question is designed to target e.g. by considering our list of top 25 skills. You will be able to check your answers later.

1. Apart from your academic career, what has been the biggest challenge in your life and how did you overcome it?

Skills targeted:

2. Describe a particularly difficult issue or complaint you have had to handle. How did you resolve it?

Skills targeted:

3. Outline an occasion when you were faced with conflicting priorities. What did you do and what was the result?

Skills targeted:

4. Describe a situation where you were successful in putting your ideas across.

Skills targeted:

Seminar 3, Task 5

Critiquing answers to competency based questions

Look at the two questions and example answers below.

Are they effective answers?

Why?

Why not?

Write your thoughts in the comment boxes.

- 1. Outline an occasion when you were faced with conflicting priorities. What did you do and what was the result?**

I often have to face conflicting priorities. I have learnt to manage my time well and to select the most important task which I should address first. Like many people in this day and age, I have a busy life and often have to deal with many tasks at the same time, for example, university essays, sports, family commitments and a part-time job.

Comments:

- 2. Think of a time when you were doing something as part of a team. Describe the situation and explain the part you played.**

I currently work for a large retail company that adopts a strong team based culture. Recently, the store in which I work introduced a new clothing department and this meant the entire shop floor needed to be rearranged to create space. This experience required me to use skills such as planning, organisation and coordination whilst remaining committed and results focused.

Comments:

Seminar 3: Answers and Feedback

Task 1: Test your knowledge quiz.

Answers and feedback

Statement 1: When sending an application form, you should also send your CV.

Answer: Not unless the employer invites you to. Usually the completed application form is all the employer wants. Always ensure you obey the employer's instructions.

Statement 2: Employers reject more candidates at the application form stage than at any later stage of selection.

Answer: Yes, this is true. Sometimes hundreds of candidates are rejected at the application form stage. In this respect, the application stage of recruitment is the most competitive and demanding stage of all.

Statement 3: At the job application stage, applicants are assessed against each other, not against the relevant job criteria.

Answer: No. At the application stage, candidates are assessed against the employer's essential criteria for the job and, when necessary, the desirable criteria as well. However, because candidates are assessed against objective criteria, a variable number of candidates can pass. For many of the large graduate development programmes offered by national and international companies, the employers can be flexible on the number of candidates passed through to the next stage of selection.

Statement 4: In an application form, you should use active words and sentences with "I" and "my".

Answer: Yes, absolutely. Use active words such as those listed in this seminar and use "I/my" when referring to yourself. This helps to make your answers positive, interesting and personal.

Statement 5: When completing application forms, it will be acceptable to leave a section blank in some cases.

Answer: Not true. You must fill out all sections of the application form and answer all the questions. For biographical questions, occasionally your answer may be "No" or "Not applicable". But most questions are asking you to promote your skills and experience and you always need to answer them, giving examples to illustrate what you did and what the result was.

Task 4: Analysing competency based questions for skills targeted by the employer.**Answers and feedback**

1. Apart from your academic career, what has been the biggest **challenge** in your life and how did you **overcome** it?

Skills targeted:

You could choose to describe either a voluntary or involuntary challenge but either way, you could talk about a challenge which required you to set goals for yourself. Then you could give evidence to demonstrate skills/attributes such as problem solving, showing resilience and determination.

2. Describe a particularly **difficult issue or complaint** you have had to handle. How did you **resolve** it?

Skills targeted:

Probably a work-based example fits best here but other types of example could be considered. The main skills sought here are conflict resolution, communication and negotiation skills. But you would need to consider what behaviours make up these skills. Then your answer could emphasise the behaviour which demonstrated these skills. You could include, for example, questioning, listening, professionalism, and working to achieve satisfactory outcomes to the situation.

3. Outline an occasion when you were faced with **conflicting priorities**. What did you do and what was the result?

Skills targeted:

This question is about the ability to prioritise. It's important to emphasise here how you developed and implemented a plan or strategy to achieve your targets. Maybe you also involved other people by using strategies such as delegation and skills such as negotiation.

4. Describe a situation where you were successful in **putting your ideas across**.

Skills targeted:

Interpersonal skills are being sought here but maybe you can think of an example which shows the employer that you demonstrated additional skills such as influencing or persuading others, demonstrating leadership and the ability to bring others with you.

Task 5: Critiquing answers to competency based questions
Answers and feedback

1. Outline an occasion when you were faced with conflicting priorities. What did you do and what was the result?

I often have to face conflicting priorities. I have learnt to manage my time well and to select the most important task which I should address first. Like many people in this day and age, I have a busy life and often have to deal with many tasks at the same time, for example, college essays, sports, family commitments and a part- time job.

Comments: This response fails to answer the question which asks for a specific example. The response is also very unfocused.

2. Think of a time when you were doing something as part of a team. Describe the situation and explain the part you played.

I currently work for a large retail company that adopts a strong team based culture. Recently, the store in which I work introduced a new clothing department and this meant the entire shop floor needed to be rearranged to create space. This experience required me to use skills such as planning, organisation and coordination whilst remaining committed and results focused.

Comments: This response is a little better because the candidate provides a situation and specifies some of the skills which he/she thinks were utilised. However the example is a very passive one: the candidate is describing a situation where he/she was reacting to the decisions/plans of others. There is no evidence of positive teamworking. There is also no focus on actual outcome/result.

Job Search Reflective Journal

Seminar 4, Task 1

Test your knowledge quiz

Look at the statements below and decide if you agree or disagree with each and to what extent, where,

1 = completely agree,

5 = completely disagree.

Give reasons whenever possible in the boxes provided. Later you will be able to check your answers.

Now try the quiz below!

	1-5	Reasons/Notes
1. It is more important in the job interview to have a nice smile than to have a good posture or to speak clearly.		
2. It is often possible to predict in advance which interview questions will be asked.		
3. When in doubt, you should always wear a suit for a graduate job interview.		
4. When the employer asks if you have any questions, you should always ask at least one question.		
5. It doesn't really matter if you're a few minutes late for an interview.		

Seminar 4, Task 2

Predicting interview questions

Most interview questions are pre-planned and standardised: all candidates are often asked the same questions on why they're interested in the job, on their skills, on their work experience and so on.

If you can accurately predict a number of questions you will be asked at interview from the employer's information, you certainly gain an advantage in the interview. You can gain some practice now in going through this process.

Look at the job advert and the person specification given in Seminar 4. Predict five questions which an interviewer might ask a job candidate. For example:

- Can you tell us about a time when you have worked in a team?
-
-
-
-
-

Seminar 4, Task 3

Critiquing a candidate's answers

Read the following extracts from a job interview and fill in the table on the next page. What advice would you give the interviewee?

- Interviewer:** What have you gained from your course?
Candidate: An MSc in Computer Science.
- Interviewer:** Did you have to work in groups or teams on your Degree/Masters course?
Candidate: Yes.
(long pause)
Interviewer: And... did you enjoy that?
Candidate: (enthusiastically) Yes I did.
- Interviewer:** Can you tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills?
Candidate: Yes. Good leadership is very important. I have good communication skills which are essential for good leadership. So it's easy for me to talk to other members of a team. and because of my leadership style, team members are usually happy to follow me and to accept my advice and guidance.
- Interviewer:** Why do you want to work for us?
Candidate: Em...ah. . .why?...I think...well...
- Interviewer:** If you were a biscuit, what would you be?
Candidate: A biscuit? Oh no. No thank you.

Seminar 4, Task 3 (continued)

Question	Notes on candidate's answer	What is the question designed to test
What have you gained from your course?		
Did you have to work in groups or teams on your Degree / Masters course?		
Can you tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills?		
Why do you want to work for us?		
If you were a biscuit, what would you be?		

Seminar 4, Task 4

Feedback table and questions for use in interview role-play

Listen to your friend giving their answer to one of the questions given on this page. Fill in the table below and given them some helpful feedback.

	Tick (✓)	What was good?
Did they answer the question?		
Did they expand their answer by giving specific reasons/evidence?		What could be better?
Did they refer to key attributes?		

Frequently asked interview questions

You should consider your answers to the following questions and be able to provide evidence for each answer.

- What made you decide to study your particular subject at university?
- What have you gained from your course?
- Why did you change course/have resits (if this applies to you)?
- Tell me about your dissertation/project.
- What degree do you expect to get (if you are a current student)?

- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why do you want this job?
- Why do you think you'd be good at this job?

- What have you gained from your work experience?
- What are your strengths?
- What would you say was your greatest weakness?

**Make sure you answer the question you are being asked.
Therefore, make sure you understand the question!**

Seminar 4: Answers and feedback

Task 1: Test your knowledge quiz.

Answers and feedback

Statement 1: It is more important in the job interview to have a nice smile than to have a good posture or to speak clearly.

Answer: No. While it's good to have your posture right and to smile occasionally, speaking clearly is vital. You also need to speak loudly enough and not too quickly. It is also vital to show enthusiasm and to make good eye contact.

Statement 2: It is often possible to predict in advance which interview questions will be asked.

Answer: Yes, it is often possible to predict many of the questions in advance based on the job description and the person specification. There will probably also be a few questions which you didn't expect but preparing answers to the more difficult questions given in this seminar is a good insurance policy.

Statement 3: When in doubt, you should always wear a suit for a graduate job interview.

Answer: Yes, you should. Even though many employers adopt relatively informal dress most of the time, they often expect formality in dress in recruitment situations. It is better to dress conservatively than too informally. If still in doubt, ask anyone you know who works for the company or a Careers' Adviser.

Statement 4: When the employer asks if you have any questions, you should always ask at least one question.

Answer: Yes. You must always ask a good question and preferably more than one. Employers use a "rule of thumb": candidates with no questions are not interested enough in us.

Statement 5: It doesn't really matter if you're a few minutes late for an interview.

Answer: It does matter. Surveys show that most employers will be unwilling to consider you if you're late for an interview. Try to arrive 10 minutes early and take account of possible delays (such as traffic) when you're planning the journey. Arriving early also enables you to gather your thoughts, compose yourself and observe the employer culture.

Task 3: Critiquing a candidate's answers

Answers and feedback

Interviewer: What have you gained from your course?

Candidate: An MSc in Computer Science.

The candidate fails to answer the question. The interviewer is looking for evidence of job-relevant skills and experience gained from the course, not the course subject or title which, presumably, is already known to the interviewer, from the candidate's application.

Interviewer: Did you have to work in groups or teams on your Degree/Masters course?

Candidate: Yes.
(long pause)

Interviewer: And... did you enjoy that?

Candidate: (enthusiastically) Yes I did.

The candidate again fails to understand the question. The employer is actually looking for at least one clear example from the course of teamwork. To answer this question, the candidate would need to define the example, explain what the activity was, clearly define his/her role in the situation, and give an objective measure of the team's success.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills?

Candidate: Yes. Good leadership is very important. I have good communication skills which are essential for good leadership. So it's easy for me to talk to other members of a team. and because of my leadership style, team members are usually happy to follow me and to accept my advice and guidance.

The candidate doesn't answer this question either. He/she fails to give an example which would give the interviewer some evidence that in a specific situation in the past, there was a clear demonstration of leadership skills.

Interviewer: Why do you want to work for us?

Candidate: Em...ah. . .why?...I think...well...

The candidate comes across as very under-prepared. He/she hasn't thought about why they'd like the job or to work for this employer. It is almost guaranteed that this question will come up in your job interviews, though the wording of the question will vary. This question is an opportunity to show how much you have researched the job and employer and to also give some examples of your job-relevant skills.

Interviewer: If you were a biscuit, what would you be?

Candidate: A biscuit? Oh no. No thank you.

The candidate either mishears or misunderstands the question. He/she needs to pause to think, give an example, and a creative reason for the choice. Ideally the reason should sell at least one job-relevant skill or attribute.

Job search and career planning seminars for international students: Course Evaluation form

It would be helpful if you could let us know how helpful you have found this course.

Seminar 1: Effective job hunting in Ireland

The most useful part of this seminar was:

What part of this seminar was not so helpful/could be improved?

Any other comments:

Seminar 2: Creating effective Irish-style CVs and covering letters

The most useful part of this seminar was:

What part of this seminar was not so helpful/could be improved?

Any other comments:

Seminar 3: Effective application forms

The most useful part of this seminar was:

What part of this seminar was not so helpful/could be improved?

Any other comments:

Seminar 4: Successful job interviews

The most useful part of this seminar was:

What part of this seminar was not so helpful/could be improved?

Any other comments:

Are there any other topics which you think should be included in this type of course for international students?

Have you any other comments?

Course _____

Nationality _____

Thank you for completing this evaluation. Please email it to careers@wit.ie