



QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST

CAREERS,
EMPLOYABILITY
AND SKILLS

Study USA - Interview Prep Tips

What we will cover

- How to prepare for an interview.
- Tips to help performance.
- How to answer frequently asked interview questions.
- The STAR technique.
- Further sources of help.



WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

A two-way conversation with a purpose

You can...

Prove your abilities and knowledge

Show your personality.

Set yourself apart from the other candidates.

They can learn whether...

You have the knowledge & skills.

You have the motivation & interest.

Your values & personal qualities fit.

If you get to the interview stage, you have already impressed the employer on paper!



TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Small talk – the interview starts the moment you enter the building

How was your journey?

Do not be afraid to engage and sound friendly & enthusiastic!

Hypothetical - test of ability to think quickly, reason logically and produce practical solutions

How would you deal with?

They want to know your attitude and how your mind works

Motivational - test your motivation for the programme

Why do you want to study in?

Expand on what was in the application

Competency - based on the skills needed to achieve an effective performance

Can you tell me a time when you?

Use the STAR METHOD

Your Questions – have 1-3 questions ready to ask at the end

Have you got anything to ask us?

Demonstrate you've done your due diligence, avoid obvious questions

THE BEST- PREPARED (NOT BEST!) CANDIDATES GET PICKED

...SO, HOW DO I PREPARE?



THE OPPORTUNITY

Start with the original advertisement
What attracted you to this opportunity?
What type of person are they looking for?
What skills / knowledge / experience are required?
Can you see the future impact of this opportunity?

YOURSELF

Know what you have applied for
Remind yourself how you match and what you wrote
Know what you have to offer
Support what you say with evidence
Review your strengths and weaknesses
What is going to set you apart from other candidates?

THE ORGANISATION

Website: what they do, aims, awards...
Any recent news? e.g. expansion, projects
Social network: Facebook, LinkedIn, x, Instagram
Other media: press releases, trade publications
Trends affecting industry
Who are their competitors?

KNOW THE PROGRAMME

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Study USA



Work and study abroad

What can you expect from a Generation UK China Scholarship?

Artists' International Development Fund

Study USA

BRITISH COUNCIL

Recruitment presentation
Study USA

Part 1: What is Study USA and what is it like to study there?

www.britishcouncil.org

Watch now: What is Study USA and life as a US student

BRITISH COUNCIL

Recruitment presentation
Study USA

Part 2: Money matters and how to apply

www.britishcouncil.org

Watch now: Money matters & how to apply 

'TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF'

The *Present-Past-Future* formula

I'm currently studying ... at Queen's University Belfast and (highlight one or two recent, relevant achievements).

This has helped me develop skills in (highlight one or two relevant skills or areas of knowledge), and has increased my desire to (create a connection with the programme: how does it fit right now?)

In the next few years, I plan to...
And this opportunity will help me achieve this goal by (again, create a connection with the programme and be specific and realistic)

Motivational Interviews

- Questions seek to uncover the drive and enthusiasm behind an application.
- Aim is to find out more about your reasons for applying and whether your values and those of the organisation align.
- Less about specific questions in relation to the role/ opportunity



Motivational Questions

- Why are you interested in this opportunity?
- What interests you about this company?
- What interests you about this career?



MOTIVATIONAL
INTERVIEWING

Make it personal

Make sure your answer is about you. Your answers are stronger when they are backed up with evidence.

Instead of saying “I like working in a team”, try “I really enjoyed my group project and was really motivated by the exchange of ideas and creativity, using input from everyone to find the best solution”.

Link it to the employer/opportunity

You need to show your knowledge of the role and the company/opportunity. What motivates you for one role might not suit for the next.

Show you’re fully aware of what is involved and why you are a good fit. E.g. if you’ve read about the opportunity & organisation, mention how that relates to the career path you want to pursue.

Align your motivation with the company/opportunity

The employer will want to know where they fit in with your career progression and goals- If they ask what you are passionate about - explain how your passion lines up with the company/programme aims.

The key to answering motivational questions is to use personal details and properly-researched facts to give an informed, compelling answer that illustrates how you would fit in as part of their team.

Motivations

- Evidence that you know what the opportunity entails (compared with other opportunities)
- Evidence of self-reflection – how your skills, experience and goals relate
- Evidence of what you've done to find out about all of this (online research, speaking to people, attending presentations, reading blogs or case studies, watching recommended videos)

Competency (or behavioural) based Interviews

- Often characterised by an opening such as '**Tell me about a time...**' or '**Give an example of how...**',
- Use 'past behaviour indicates future success'
- Objective way of comparing you to others
- Relate to skills and behaviour needed for the role
- They look for structure
- Use real scenarios with competency-based questions

Common Competency Interview Questions

- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a time when your views have differed from other team members?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem.
- Describe a project or idea (not necessarily your own) that was implemented primarily because of your efforts.
- Describe a time when you when you worked well under pressure.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time where you had to delegate tasks during a project.

COMPETENCY-BASED ANSWERS: THE STAR METHOD

EFFECTIVE STORY TELLING: direct, logical, meaningful and personalized



Do not think of new details as you answer. SAY what you had planned for & END

Example of how to use STAR (+R)

Tell us about a time when you.....
demonstrated your problem
solving skills/used your
initiative...

Introduction Least important part - should be as brief as possible.	SITUATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">When? Where? With whom?Set the scene quickly. TASK <ul style="list-style-type: none">What were you trying to achieve?Knowing your goal helps us judge success at the end.	<p><i>"Last summer, when I worked in the newly re-opened visitor centre of a local nature reserve, my manager asked me to look into negative TripAdvisor feedback."</i></p>
Evidence This will require the most words – it needs to be concrete. Let the employer visualise what you did.	ACTION <ul style="list-style-type: none">What did you do? How did you do it?Choose your verbs carefully: they need to be precise, relevant to the employer and the competency.Break down big ideas, e.g. time management = set and meet deadlines, plan, review, create contingency, etc.Emphasise your personal contribution by saying 'I' – even if you were part of a team.	<p><i>"I analysed the online feedback: the majority of complaints referred to the new layout of the centre as confusing, and another 40% of complaints described the staff as too busy to be welcoming. I recommended changes to the signage in the centre and introduced a large 'start your visit here' banner over the main tills. I also proposed that, at peak periods, a member of staff should be stationed at the entrance to greet visitors warmly and direct them to the right place."</i></p>
Conclusion The essential bit – the proof that you achieved something!	RESULT <ul style="list-style-type: none">What happened?Did you achieve your goal?What was your personal impact?	<p><i>"Both of my suggestions were implemented, and our feedback scores improved from 2.0 to 4.0 out of 5 over the course of two months. I was also voted employee of the month."</i></p>

If an employer states they want you to be able to learn from your mistakes/reflect on your performance, you could add a second 'R' for Reflection:

- What have you learnt?
- What have you done since? Or what would you do differently in the future?
- This gives you the chance to show your attitude to learning and personal development, i.e. you are not complacent, you are continually looking to improve and grow.

Can you give me an example of a time when you have worked well as part of a team?"

SITUATION	One Friday afternoon, at approximately 4 pm, my line manager rushed into the office and said that a delivery of stock was due any minute now. The delivery was scheduled for the following Friday, but the courier company had got the dates mixed up and therefore it was arriving a week earlier. This meant we had to drop everything and get ourselves prepared for the unexpected delivery.
TASK	The problem was, most of us were due to leave at 4:30 pm that day, so there were not many people around to carry out the task of taking in the delivery, which usually takes at least an hour to unload and stock check.
ACTION	I immediately volunteered to stay behind late to help the company out in its time of need. I set about preparing for the delivery by getting together a small group of workers who I knew would help me achieve the task quickly and accurately. Then, I handed out jobs to the people in the group, which included handling the goods, checking them off as they came through the warehouse and also stocktaking. I briefed all of the team so that everyone knew their role within the task. Once the delivery arrived, we worked hard to achieve the end goal.
RESULT	Following the team's hard work, we managed to get the delivery unloaded, stocked on the shelves and cross-checked, much to the gratification of our line manager. He thanked us all for volunteering to get the task completed quickly, safely and accurately.



CHECKLIST FOR STAR ANSWERS

- Get into the mind frame of the role you are applying for: what competencies are you likely to have to evidence?
- Examples must be recent, relevant and related
- Focus on the actions **YOU** took – 'I' not 'we'
- "Action" should cover skills and qualities sought by the role/opportunity
- Action and Result should account for 70-80% of any response
- Ideally examples should have a positive result

STAR – BACK TO THE ORIGINAL APPLICATION

Motivation

- Of all the opportunities available, why are you applying for the Study USA scholarship in particular and why is this important to you?

STAR – BACK TO THE ORIGINAL APPLICATION

Knowledge

- How do you think the education system at your US college will differ from your Northern Ireland university/college experience?

STAR – BACK TO THE ORIGINAL APPLICATION

College Life

- Study USA students are expected to play an active service role and make a positive contribution to college life and the local community. Drawing on your interests, hobbies, part-time / voluntary work, and personal achievements, describe how you plan to achieve this.

STAR – BACK TO THE ORIGINAL APPLICATION

Adapability

- Studying in the US will be a new experience culturally as well as academically, which will require you to be adaptable. What steps would you take, before and after arriving at US college, to help you with the transition? Please refer to academic, practical and social considerations,

STAR – BACK TO THE ORIGINAL APPLICATION

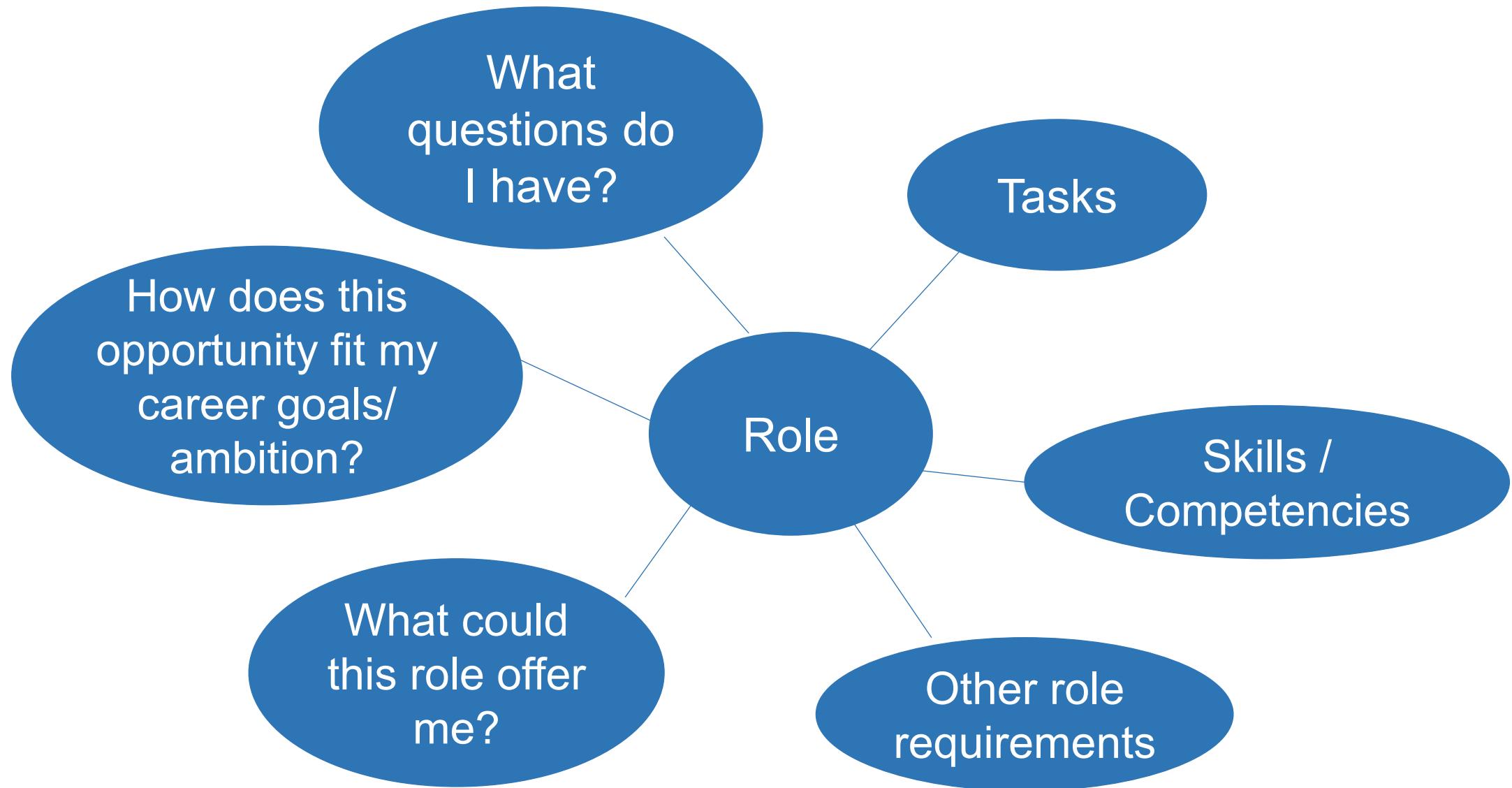
Leadership and Team skills

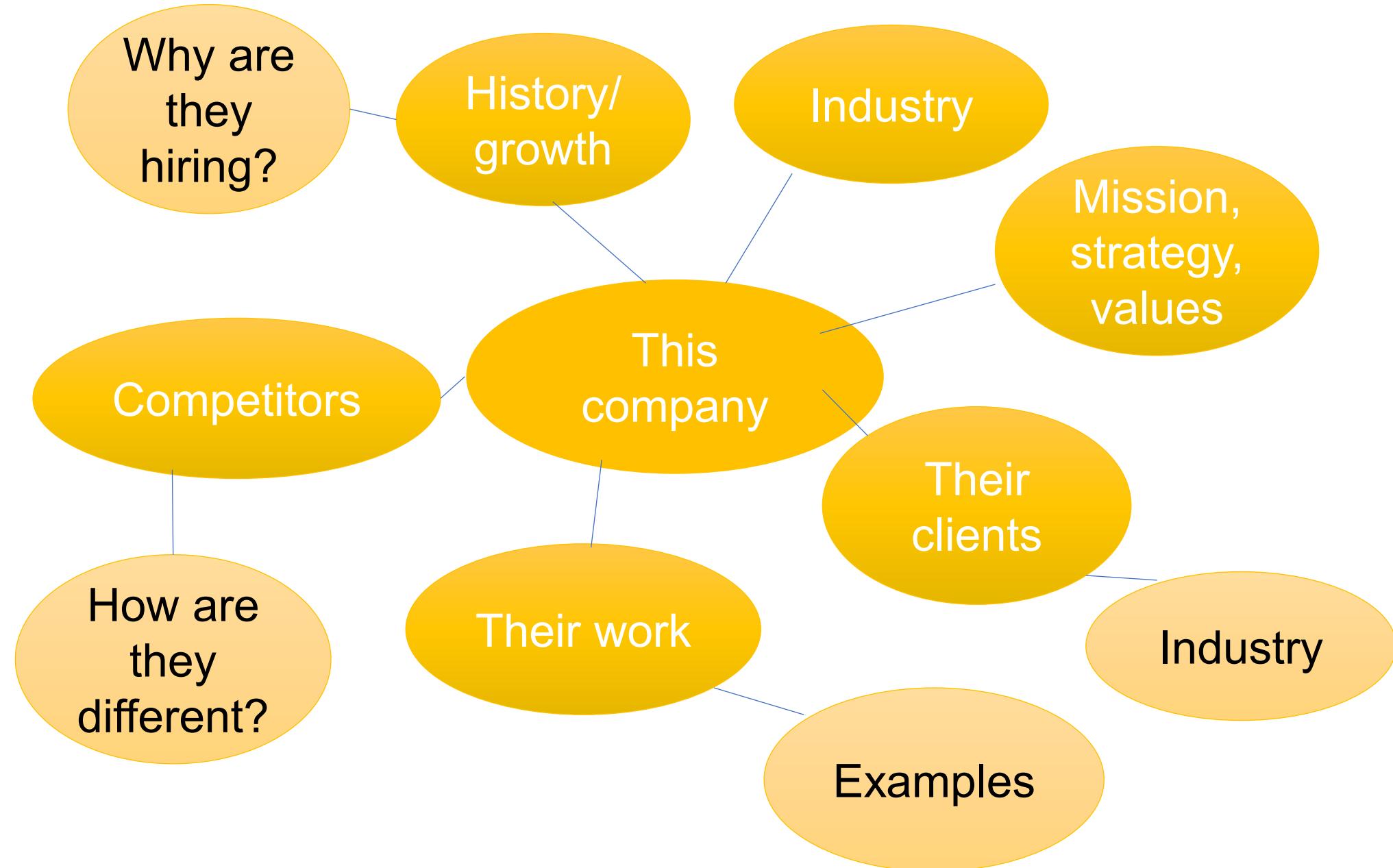
- Study USA seeks to develop the next generation of leaders in the Northern Ireland economy. Please describe one recent example where you have displayed leadership qualities? What was your role and what was the outcome? .

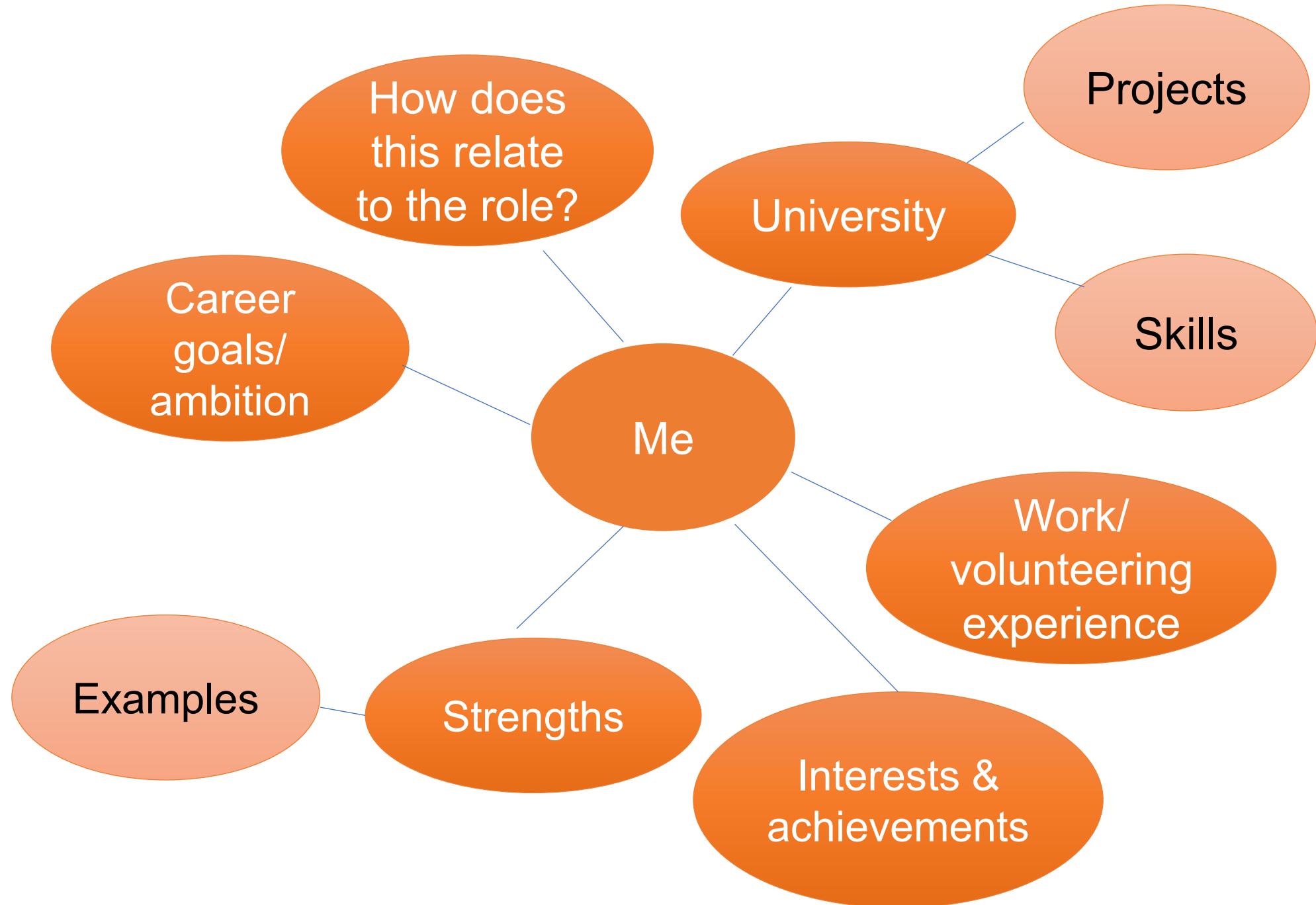
STAR – BACK TO THE ORIGINAL APPLICATION

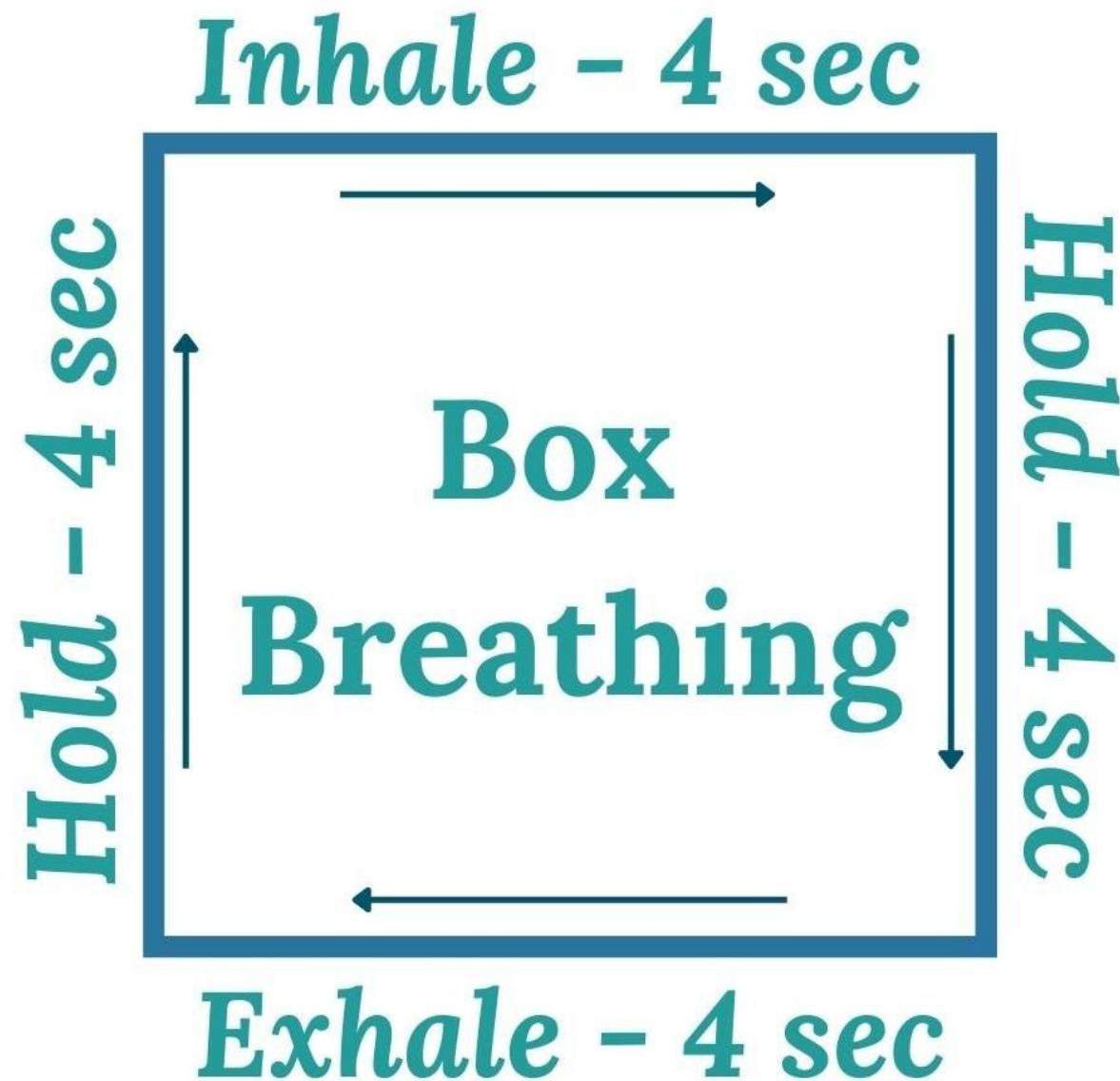
Employability

- In what ways do you hope that your participation on Study USA will impact on your employability and future career plans? You should support your answer with specific examples.









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Sign In

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THE CAREERS SERVICE CAN HELP!

Guidance appointments (30') – mock interview or general chat

Give as much detail as possible when booking on the position applying for

Bookable on MyFuture > My Appointments > Careers Guidance Appointment

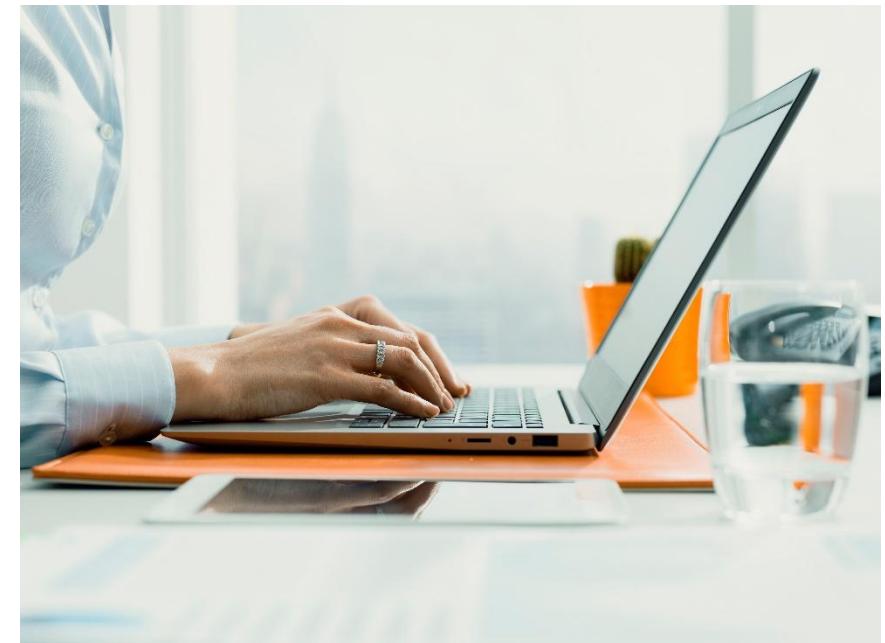


View our handy digital guide here → [Big Interview - Student Guide | Scribe](#)

- Log in via MyFuture – click on the ‘tools and resources’ tab, click on Big Interview and sign in using your QUB credentials

Key functions of Big Interview:

- Interview Practice and Feedback
- Build an interview answer using STAR
- Video demonstrations of mock interviews
- Practice interview questions tailored by sector



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PROSPECTS

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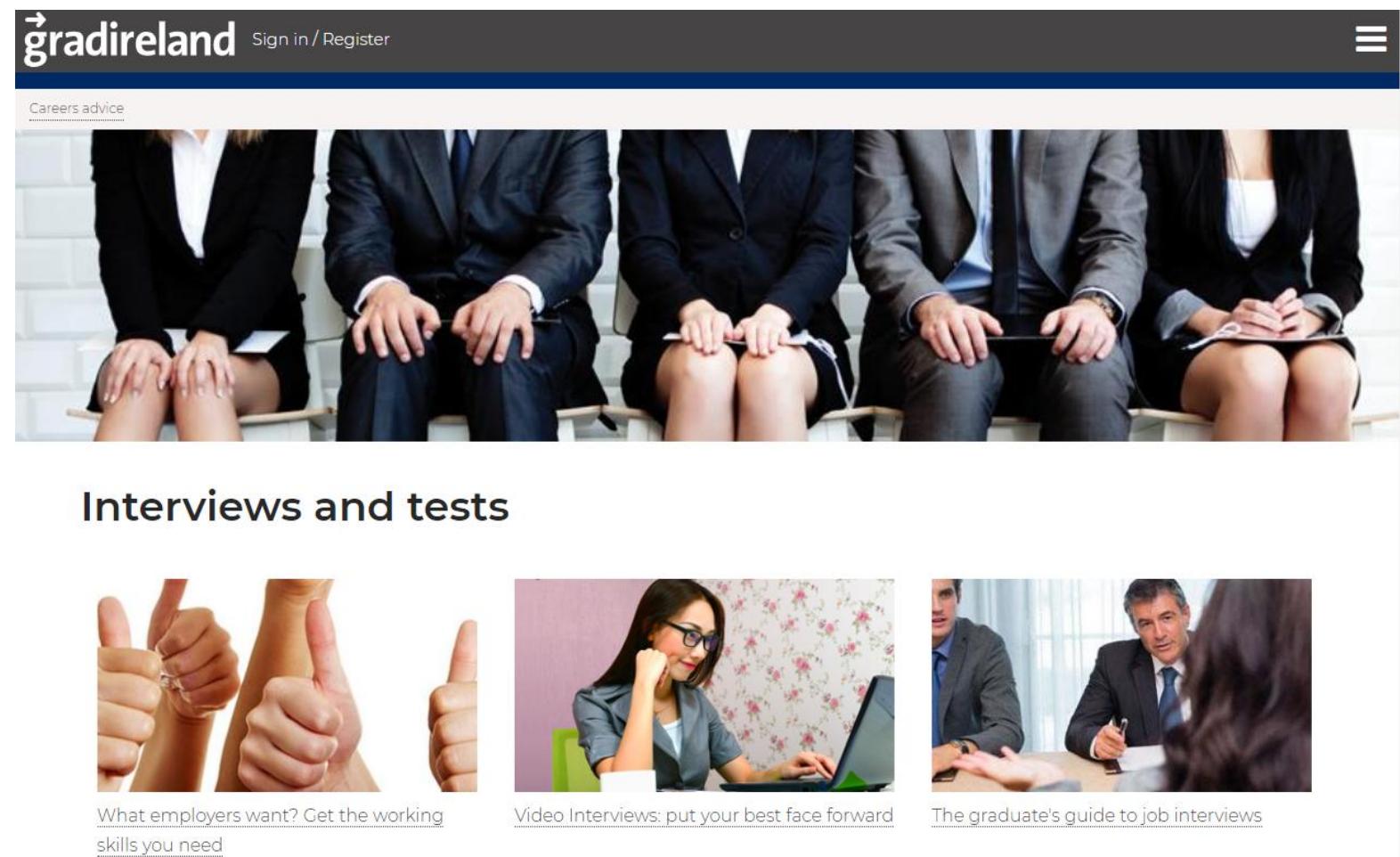
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www.gradireland.com



The image is a screenshot of the Gradireland website. At the top, the 'gradireland' logo is on the left, followed by 'Sign in / Register' and a menu icon on the right. Below the header, a banner titled 'Careers advice' features a photograph of six people in professional attire sitting in a row, likely waiting for an interview. The main heading 'Interviews and tests' is centered below the banner. Three smaller images with accompanying text are displayed below: 1) A close-up of hands giving thumbs up, with the text 'What employers want? Get the working skills you need'. 2) A woman wearing glasses working on a laptop, with the text 'Video Interviews: put your best face forward'. 3) Two men in suits sitting at a table, with the text 'The graduate's guide to job interviews'.

gradireland Sign in / Register

Careers advice

Interviews and tests



What employers want? Get the working skills you need



Video Interviews: put your best face forward



The graduate's guide to job interviews

Final Considerations

**Know what the interviewer
wants**

skills, personal qualities, knowledge and
experience

**The best prepared person will
get selected and not always the
most qualified!**

If you prepare well and if you are not
selected,
at least you know you gave it your best.



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After your interview

- Reflect.
- Don't be too hard on yourself if you feel it didn't go well.
Treat it as a learning experience.
You will improve with practice.
- Note down the questions you were asked and use them to practise for future interviews.
- Relax!



Questions?



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