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# TOP TIPS

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FOR SURVIVING  
**THE GRADUATE**  
RECRUITMENT  
**PROCESS**

Produced by



*The Royal Bank of Scotland Group*

**WE HOPE**

THAT YOU FOUND OUR

**TOP  
TIPS**

FOR SURVIVING

**THE GRADUATE**

RECRUITMENT

**PROCESS**

**USEFUL.**

GOOD LUCK

**WITH YOUR JOB HUNT!**

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From deciding which company to apply to, through to the hurdles of psychometric testing and the barrage of exercises at assessment days – there’s so much to consider when looking for a graduate job. But thanks to this handy guide of tips and hints from experienced graduate recruiters and recent graduates, your main concern will ultimately be which offer to accept.

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# WHERE DO I START?

As a student you have lots of information being directed at you. To ensure you are applying for the right opportunities you must take advantage of what's on offer to you.

## BOOK AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR CAREERS SERVICE

Before the appointment, you should ask yourself:

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**What skills have you gained both in and outside of university?**

**Which of these you'd most like to develop?**

**Who would you most like to work with – people, projects, customers, numbers or technology?**

**Do you want to work for a small, medium or large organisation?**

**Do you want to be locally or globally based?**

**Do you want to study for further qualifications?**

# **MAKE A WISH LIST OF COMPANIES TO TARGET**

Make a list of organisations you admire and think of brands you like and use. Do some research to see if they offer a scheme that suits you. Remember organisations have Finance, HR and IT departments, so think beyond companies that are specialists in your area.



## Attend careers fairs, company presentations and skills events.

### **CAREERS FAIRS**

Careers fairs are a great opportunity to fact-find and see what is on offer. Have a list of companies you want to meet and do some research on these companies and their opportunities beforehand.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

Presentations offer you a chance to hear more about the company and meet with their representatives in a more relaxed environment. They give you an opportunity to find out more from previous and current graduates.

### **SKILLS SESSIONS**

Use a skills session to pick-up tips and gain an insight from the recruiter's point of view. You can take part in exercises, to practise key skills that will be helpful for assessment centres.

# THE APPLICATION PROCESS

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## Application Forms

Most companies require you to complete an application form rather than submit a CV. Application questions are there to see whether you have certain competencies (behavioural traits) that the role requires.

## TOP TIPS

- Take your time when filling in the form. Tailor your form for every application.
- Think of activities or jobs you've been involved in i.e. hockey team captain, or working in a bar. You can use these as examples.
- A good application draws from a range of different experiences not relying solely on academic work.
- Think of the skills, or "competencies", you used in the past i.e. team work, communication, planning and organising.
- Always give a specific situation, explaining your role and how you influenced the outcome. The key is to say what you did, not to go into detail about the situation.
- Always read through your answers and check your spelling before you submit.

# Psychometric Tests

More and more companies are using online tools to test for skills. Tests can be on verbal reasoning, numerical ability and personality fit.

## TOP TIPS

- Read up on methods of assessment and try some practise questions.
  - Revise by doing basic calculations such as percentages and ratios.
  - Practise with crosswords for verbal reasoning tests. Sharpen up on your mental arithmetic (percentages, fractions) for numerical reasoning tests.
  - Read the financial press and specifically look at tables and graphs and the analysis of these.
  - During the test don't spend too long on a particular question – work steadily through the test as quickly and accurately as possible.
  - For personality/competency questionnaires, always go with your gut reaction – do NOT try and catch out the test.
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## Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews are used to examine your skills. They are competency based so use the techniques you used to fill out the application form.

### TOP TIPS

- Preparation is key – research the company, the industry and the role.
- Read the corporate website and visit the Press Centre for the latest information. Also read trade press and marketing publications for an overview of the company.
- Refresh on your application details, reminding yourself of your competencies and skills.
- Choose a suitable environment and time for the call. Don't squeeze the appointment in between lectures – you don't want to feel rushed.
- Build up a rapport with the caller by making conversation at the start to ease you in to the call.
- Keep a professional tone, you don't have to use business jargon, but do be aware of coming across professionally.
- Your examples don't need to be from the industry you are applying for.

When answering the questions you should use the



approach.

# THE STAR APPROACH

## SITUATION

A brief background to the situation.  
*This should last no longer than a few sentences.*

## TASK

What you had to do, what your role was and what had to be achieved.  
*This should last no longer than a few sentences.*

## ACTION

What you had to do to solve the situations, what skills you used, what was difficult and how you solved this.  
*This should be the majority of your answer.*

## RESULT

A positive outcome.  
*This should last no longer than a few sentences.*

Some questions may sound negative – don't worry, that is about seeing how you handle challenging situations. Think about follow up questions, known as probes, that an interviewer may ask, for example:

### Question:

"Tell us about a time when a team you were working in didn't work well together"

### Probes:

How did you identify the problem?  
What techniques did you use to change things?  
What were the difficulties?  
What was the outcome?  
What would you do differently?

# ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Assessment centres are a way to look at certain skills across a number of exercises. The day is usually themed around a make-believe organisation that may not directly relate to the industry you're applying for, so everyone is on a level playing field.

## TOP TIPS FOR THE DAY

- Revise your research on the company, their competitors and the industry.
- Revisit any job information and preparation from the application and telephone interview.
- Write a list of your key achievements, strengths and experiences. Think of which would make good examples and highlight your different skills.
- Think about why you want to work for that company and why you would want that role.
- Dress appropriately – smart, business attire.
- Make sure you know where you are going and allow plenty of time to get there.
- Pre-assessment dinners are an opportunity to ask questions on a more informal basis.

### Remember:

- The tests are not designed to trip you up.
- Don't feel you're competing with the other candidates, there's usually more than one job on offer.
- You'll be scored on your own merits, not comparably.

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## Group Exercises

A group exercise is designed to measure how you work as part of a team. Often they also look at your ability to influence, communicate and analyse problems. You'll be given a scenario based on the day's theme and asked to work as a team to solve the problems.

### TOP TIPS

- Listen carefully to the instructions.
- Ignore the assessors and focus on your team.
- There's usually no right or wrong answer, it's about the debate and way you work together.
- Think about involving quieter members in the group.
- Keep an eye on time and ensure that the group is on track with the original brief.
- Listen to others, make eye contact and find the balance of knowing when to put your point across and when to compromise.
- If there is a dominant team member, recognise their contribution and ask others their views.
- Never rely on a group vote. They can only see if you have the right skills from the way you discuss the issues.

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## Role Plays

Role plays are designed to see how you interact with someone face-to-face. There'll often be a trained actor who'll play out a part of a difficult customer, senior business person or team member. Your task is to resolve a situation as you would in a working environment. You'll be given a brief and time to prepare for the meeting.

### TOP TIPS

- Start the meeting by listening to the actor's point of view – ask them questions and summarise your findings.
- If they are being difficult, ask them what they want from the situation.
- Suggest alternatives.
- Play to their ego but be firm where you need to be.
- The key is compromising.
- End the meeting by summarising again and agree next steps.

# Competency Based Interviews

Face-to-Face interviews are a similar format to Telephone Interviews (see p6). Here are a few more tips to help:

## TOP TIPS

- Beforehand, be calm and think about all the positive things you have achieved.
- Prepare and practise examples. Pace your answers. Practise before you go so you learn to control the spread of your answers.
- Limited examples include your dissertation, achieving your degree and seminar work – every graduate has these examples.
- Always speak in terms of what 'I' did, not what 'we' did.
- Assume the interviewer knows nothing about you e.g. repeat info from your telephone interview.
- Use open body language.
- Remember to actively listen so you understand the question you are being asked.
- Build rapport when you meet your interviewer(s).
- Prepare some questions about the company or the role. Do not ask questions about your salary or other logistical points.

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## You'll also need to be the three C's:

### **C**onfident

Be positive and engaging.

### **C**onsidered

Listen to the questions.

### **C**onvincing

Provide evidence for your answers.

# **Presentations**

A presentation is usually a business scenario asking you to tackle a set of issues. You'll either be given time to prepare beforehand or on the day.

## **TOP TIPS**

- Read the information carefully and take time to plan.
- Make sure you cover everything that's been asked.
- Use the information from the brief in your presentation.
- Remember not just to promote the ideas but how you would implement them.
- Think of possible questions they could ask.
- Think of the audience you are speaking to.
- Make it sound professional. Top and Tail it. Introduce yourself and the topic and make sure you finish by thanking your hosts for their time and ask if they have any questions.
- Use a flipchart if provided to help animate your points.
- Stick to the time limit, but do not waffle.
- Make your talk engaging – never read a speech verbatim.
- Don't blag even if you do get stuck.

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## In-tray Exercises

In-tray exercises vary between organisations. They are a way of looking at planning and organising and prioritisation. You'll be given various documents to read through and arrange according to business need. The information will be a mixture of emails, memos, organisational charts and letters, all needing actions from various members of the organisation and external contacts.

### TOP TIPS

- Take time to read all the information before diving in.
- Make a 'To do' list to help guide you. Refer back to this throughout.
- Keep referring back to instructions and key information to remind you of the priorities.
- Say clearly what you would do. Do not fall into the trap of only suggesting what others should do.

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## Business Reports

Similar to presentations, the business report will require you to answer questions on a business scenario. It will include gathering and analysing information and you'll need to prepare a paper that clearly indicates your findings and recommendations.

### TOP TIPS

- Make a Mind Map – think of all the things you want to mention and separate them into clear headers.
- Vary the report using visual aids e.g. charts, stats, diagrams.
- Use bullet points to clearly present your findings, and follow this up with some commentary.
- Have clear sections and headers.
- Be clear in your summary about how you'll take things forward.
- Use professional language but avoid jargon and over complicated language.
- Make sure you leave time at the end to read through to check for mistakes.