
SECURING A GRADUATE ROLE

YOUR CV,
COVER LETTER &
INTERVIEW GUIDE



National
College of
Ireland

FOREWORD

“We have prepared and guided thousands of students over the years as they transformed from inexperienced student to confident employee and know it can be difficult getting noticed amongst the sea of other graduates. With this in mind we have created this CV, Cover Letter and Interview Guide that we hope will provide NCI students with concrete information on how to make effective applications and succeed at interview.

Successful CVs and cover letters are about understanding your target audience and explaining how you match their requirements—they must capture the recruiter’s imagination and give them a positive picture of you and how you meet their requirements.

Once you get called for interview you will need to provide the employer with the evidence to prove you have the skills, knowledge, experience, abilities and qualities that match their needs. Although the interview is a two way process *i.e.* what they can offer you and what you can offer them, it is predominantly expected that it will be about what you can offer them!

Informed by industry, we have developed sample CVs, cover letters and lists of possible interview questions which we hope will assist you in making effective applications.”

The Career Development & Employability Centre



CV·TOP·TIPS

Looking for a job is marketing. You are marketing yourself, your skills, abilities and achievements. Your CV is the only thing standing between you and an interview and is your personal sales brochure tailored to the requirements of the position you are applying for. It is your representation of yourself and as such you should put significant work into it to ensure that it represents you in the best light possible. Whilst there are many things you can't control when job hunting such as the economic environment and the job market you have absolute control over the quality of your CV—in terms of the quality of your grades, activities, work experience and the quality of its presentation.

Before you start writing your CV

Before you take pen to paper think about your USP (Unique Selling Points) for example your grades, work experience, projects, awards, sporting achievements *etc.* Use the employability audit on page 22 to start building a profile referencing your key skills.

20 seconds

Your CV is your personal advert and you have 20 seconds to make an impression. Keep it to two pages if you are a graduate, three if you have a significant amount of experience. If they can't read two pages in 20 seconds they definitely won't read four! Get to the point early on and show an employer what you can do for them.

Make me want to meet you

Think about the person who is scan-reading your CV in a pile of dozens just like it. What does that person need to know about you that will make them want to meet you? Ensure this information is on the first half of page one. This area is often called the prime real estate of your CV.

Target the CV to the job spec

One size doesn't fit all. Although roles may be similar, there will be a slightly different focus each time. Use the job description to identify what is most important (for example, grades, particular experience or skills) and then address these requirements prominently in the first half of your CV. You will need to move sections and details around depending on the role to put the spotlight on different information. If a crucial requirement is a 2:1, put that prominently in your profile. If it's previous experience in sales, emphasise that instead.

Will adding this information encourage them to interview me?

When deciding what to include or leave out ask yourself will including it encourage or discourage them to interview me? Think for example how you explain your grades. Highlighting your result as a 2:2 will probably yield a less favourable response than selling it as a 2nd class honours.

Dealing with gaps

Gaps happen and it is up to you to disclose the reasons. Include volunteer work, travel, education undertaken, skills developed during the gap period.



CV BASICS

Presentation is key

Use black text (arial, tahoma, times new roman), no borders, pictures or fancy formatting. Maintain consistency throughout your CV. This includes the language used, font styles, bullet styles, formatting *etc.*

DOB, photo, marital status

None of this is required on your CV.

List your Professional Experience and Education in reverse chronological order

i.e. your most recent job/course studied at the top. This will allow whoever is reviewing your CV to gain a quick snap shot of what you have been doing most recently.

Errors

Spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, and formatting inconsistencies indicate shoddiness and poor attention to detail.



CV LAYOUT

Your CV is exactly that—yours, so not every CV will have the same information and not in the same order or format. However, there are certain standard pieces of information that should appear in every CV.

Personal Details

- There is no need to put the words Curriculum Vitae or CV at the top—it is obvious what it is.
- Include name, address, professional email address, mobile with activated voice mail and your personalised LinkedIn url.
- Highlight when you are available to start work and mention it if you have a driving licence.
- If you are a Non EEA national, include your visa status.

Profile

- A profile is an entirely optional but very useful opening to a CV explaining why you want *this* job and the benefits an employer would gain from recruiting you.
- Positioned near the top of the first page this is the earliest opportunity for you to show an employer you have the skills and aptitudes they have asked for in their job spec.
- Avoid generic statements—instead tailor the profile to the job you are applying to and focus on the quantifiable achievements and relevant skills you have in relation to the job *e.g.* skills in languages, IT *etc.* If you are not going to tailor the profile to the job then leave it out of your CV altogether.
- The profile can be three to five sentences or bullet points highlighting who you are, what you are looking for and should include your USPs.

Education

- Put your most recent education first.
- Highlight relevant modules and provide detail on relevant projects. If it is an IT project provide information on technologies used.
- Showcase your results if they are strong and will help you get an interview *e.g.* 1st Class Honours, 2:1.
- Highlight exemptions and professional qualifications.
- If you are a full time undergraduate student, leave out your Junior Certificate results, but give Leaving Certificate points if they are strong.
- Include an appendix on the back page with detailed results per module and for leaving certificate subjects if needed *e.g.* for Accountancy roles.
- For computing and design students include a link to your web portfolio/github to showcase your work and some brief technical information on your projects. *e.g.* technologies used.





Work Experience

- *Basics*: State the dates of employment, name of company and job title.
- *Avoid I, me and my*: write the CV in the objective third person.
- *Sell don't tell*: focus on achievements, value added and results rather than duties and responsibilities—what did I change, what did I improve, how did I add value, how did I save money, make money—highlight achievements.
- *Custom write your CV for each job*: so your achievements are written specifically for the job responsibilities.
- *Action verbs*: Action words create more impactful statements. Instead of using the “I” pronoun such as “I did this...I did that...” use positive action words to lead bullet points *e.g.* “Initiated this... Created that...” which is more dynamic.
- *Ask yourself so what and show added value*: Your employment history should not be written as just a series of dates and tasks you have undertaken. It should show what you have contributed and achieved. Asking ‘So what?’ about every line of your CV is a great way to critique content. What was the result and impact of this action? What specific benefit did I deliver by doing this? No matter what role you worked in, you need to show that you had a positive impact on your team, company or customers.
- *Buzzwords*: Avoid over used words like hard working, team player, detail oriented, self-motivated using instead words such as initiated, created, managed, improved.
- *Bullet points*: Your CV will probably be skim read at first. Bullet points are easier to read than large paragraphs—so learn to write in snippets. Use an ‘action-result’ format to make achievements stand out.
- *Avoid unnecessary detail*: When describing many jobs, the day-to-day detail is often unnecessary and just takes up space. Concentrate on the highlights and where you made an impact. If you had a summer job working in a restaurant, the duties are predictable—what is of more interest is how many people you served per shift, whether you met the sales targets, suggested any initiatives that improved sales or service *etc.*
- *Do the maths*: Back up your achievements with numbers. When writing your work history, don't just say that you increased membership in a club or society; tell them you increased membership by for example 70% over a six month period.





Interests and Achievements

- The majority of applicants will have a 2:1 degree and have worked part time so the interests section is what will set you apart from everyone else.
- Don't just give a list of interests—give the employer an insight into how involved you were, what you achieved within them.
- What clubs are you in—what position did you hold, what did you achieve, implement, improve?
- Did you win any awards? Did you raise money—how much? Have you travelled—where to?
- If you are a technical student include both IT and non IT related interests. Employers are expecting you to be passionate about IT so expect to see an involvement with IT outside the curriculum. This may include self learning you have undertaken and blogs you follow.
- Hobbies and achievements cannot be focused on transition year and school—you will need some more recent ones.
- Don't include passive interests like watching TV, solitary hobbies that can be perceived as you lacking in people skills.

Technical Skills

Give a bulleted list of the technical skills you have, technologies you have used, applications or software packages that you have worked with including brief information on your level of experience.

Referees

Don't waste space giving contact details of your referees—these can be supplied later (unless the employer has specifically asked for them). Instead state—Referees available upon request.

Assistance from NCI Career Development & Employability Centre

- Attend one of the CV Classes available throughout the semesters.
- Download information and CV templates from the careers section of the student portal.
- Attend the weekly CV clinics to have your CV reviewed.

The following pages show examples of CVs.





ANNA ANNAVILLE
I Annaville Drive, IFSC, Dublin 1
086 111 1111, anna.annaville@hotmail.com
www.linkedin.com/ckennedynci
Availability: May 2015

Concise contact details presented within the CV header. Availability also highlighted.

Explain why you want this job and why they should interview you as opposed to the other 100 applicants. It must be tailored to the requirements of the job spec.

PERSONAL PROFILE:

- Accountancy degree finalist with practical accounting experience and a 2:1 average. On track to achieve all CAP 1 exemptions. Keen to secure a graduate training role in practice.

Achievements:

- Strong work ethic and ability to multitask & manage deadlines demonstrated by working part time, actively participating in a number of extra-curricular activities whilst maintaining a 2:1 average.
- Successfully completed a 3 month accountancy internship which has given me a strong understanding of what is involved in developing a career in practice.
- Teamwork skills developed through college projects and part time work experience. Team achievements include raising €10,000 as part of the Peer Mentor Society.
- Fitness enthusiast - highlights include running the Dublin marathon, achieving a black belt in Taekwondo, playing for NCI soccer team and reaching the final in the College league 2014.

EDUCATION:

09.12-05.15: **NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND**

BA (Hons) Accountancy

Modules: Subjects: Financial Accounting, Management Accounting, Taxation, Financial Management, Economics, Management Information Systems.

Exemptions: CAP 1- ACA - dependent on maintaining results.

3rd year result: 2:1

2nd year result: 2:1

1st year result 2:1

You have 3–4 years in College to develop a list of achievements.

09.06-06.12: **ANNAVILLE SECONDARY SCHOOL**, Dublin

Leaving Certificate- including a B2 in Honours Business

WORK EXPERIENCE:

06.14-09.14: **NAME IT ACCOUNTANTS**, Dublin

Accountancy Internship

- Worked with a range of clients including sole traders, wholesalers, farmers and charities.
- Executing audit assistant functions to check the accuracy of accounting systems and procedures.
- Reviewing accounts receivable and payable ledgers and general ledger for accuracy.
- Inspecting and reconciling bank deposits and payments.

01.10- 06.14: **ANNAVILLE STORES**, Dublin

Sales Assistant

- Working as part of an enthusiastic team within a fast paced fashion retail environment.
- Driving sales, meeting targets, ensuring excellent customer service and the smooth running of the shop floor.
- Actively greeting customers, offering advice to customers and assisting with product selection.
- Utilising specialist product knowledge to maximise sales
- Merchandising stock and maintaining strong visual standards within the store.
- Promoting specific lines and upselling various products under the guidance of management.

Dynamic, action oriented bullet points.

Key Achievements:

- Consistently exceed targets, typically by over 20% and won sales person of the month on a number of occasions.
- Only part time member of staff with responsibility for opening and closing the store.

INTERESTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

*Role achievements quantified.
Clear to see the value added.*

Boardroom Challenge NCI

- Part of a strategic team of 10 responsible for raising €10,000 in one week for 10 charities.
- Representing 5 charities which included Jack & Jill Foundation, Irish Heart Foundation, Down Syndrome Ireland, Laura Lynn and the Irish Cancer Society.
- Specific responsibility for securing collection permits in the IFSC and
- As part of the project we developed a dedicated website, you tube video, appeared in the National Media and won the NCI Society Event of the year and the National BICS Award for Society event of the year in a small to medium college.

Peer Mentor in NCI:

- Peer mentor for a group of incoming first year students.
- Assisting with transitional issues to college life
- Ensuring students are aware of the services and supports on offer.
- Identifying 'at risk students' and referring them to the appropriate support service for guidance and advice

Class Representative:

- Voted Class Representative for 2014 in NCI: This involves:
 - Gathering the opinions of the class
 - Voicing the opinions of the class at meetings
 - Acting as a liaison between staff and students
 - Informing the class of staff reaction to their opinions
 - Acting as a source of information for students

Fitness

- Black belt in TaeKwondo
- Keen runner and ran the Dublin Marathon in 2014
- Represented National College of Ireland on the soccer team in 2013 & 2014. Reached the colleague league final in 2014.

As most graduate CVs are almost exactly the same, extra-curricular activities are very useful in evidencing achievements and commitment as well as offering the reader an insight into what you are like.

COMPUTER SKILLS:

- Word, Excel, Sharepoint, Powerpoint, Social Media.
- ECDL completed

It is not necessary to include named references on a CV unless specifically asked.

REFEREES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

John Doe

johndoe@gmail.com

+353 (0) 87 111 1111

[linkedin.com/in/johndoe](https://www.linkedin.com/in/johndoe)

Full Clean Drivers Licence

Availability: Immediate

Portfolio | github.com/johndoe/portfolio

GitHub is a must for developers to display and promote your work to employers. Alternatives include dropbox or myspace.

Profile:

- 2:1 Software Development graduate with strong HTML, HTML5, CSS, CSS3, C#, ASP.Net, Ruby on Rails, JavaScript, AJAX skills keen to secure a graduate role as a web developer.
- Practical experience as an intern web developer with Irish Start up –Annville Systems and as a helpdesk assistant with National College of Ireland.
- Strong in designing relational database and web development skills with experience using Dreamweaver, visual studio 2008/2010, Notepad++.
- Keen interest in tech sites such as [Gizmodo](#), [pcmag.com](#) and [Engadget](#). Also interested in digital art sites like [Worth1000](#) and [Deviant Art](#) as I enjoy photo manipulation.

Visa

- Stamp 2 visa: Eligible to work 20 hours a week during term time, 40 hours a week during holidays. The [third level graduate scheme](#) eligible to work without restriction from October 2014-October 2016.

Languages:

- English (Fluent written & oral), Portugese (Native).

Highlight additional languages and proficiency.

International students: Explain your visa situation upfront.

Education:

09.11 – 04.15

National College of Ireland, Dublin | ncirl.ie

BSc (Hons) Computing

Modules: Computer Architecture, Operating Systems, Object Oriented Programming, Advanced Databases, Business Entrepreneurship, Software Engineering, Advanced Internet Technologies, XHTML & Web Design,

First year project: Developed a prototype Android mobile application to xxxxxxxxxx. This project exposed me to the full software development lifecycle and greatly increased my understanding of using Agile Development for enhanced UX. www.johndoe.com/xxproject

Technologies used: Android, Java, JSON, XML, SQLite, NFC and remote cloud storage.

Second year project: Developed a mobile android application that persuades parents to make when preparing meals for their children using HTML, XHTML, CSS, JavaScript, JQuery, and JQuery working with Aptana studio and the Eclipse development suite. www.johndoe.com/otherproject

1st year result: 2:1

2nd year result: 2:1

Full projects available on www.johndoe.com

Detail relevant projects highlighting the technologies used and provide online links.

06.11:

Annville Secondary School

Leaving Certificate

Give an overview of your technology skills and if at graduate level provide information on your level of proficiency and highlight strong grades.

Technology Skills:

- **Languages:** Studied Java programming language for 3 years and have successfully achieved a 95% result in Data Structures and Algorithms module from the second year of my course.
- **Java:** Studied Java for 4 years and have successfully achieved a first class honours result in all of the modules throughout the degree.
- **JavaScript:** Use JavaScript in projects for developing dynamic web pages. Enjoy using jQuery and also have experience using the AngularJS Framework from my internship.
- **JQuery/JQuery Mobile:** Implemented the JQuery framework into my mobile application project in year 2 of my course.
- **HTML:** 3 years studying Hyper Text Markup Language. Developed a music review web site as part of my first year web design module. Also coded in HTML when developing my mobile application for my second year project class.
- **XML:** Studied XML and XSL. Developed a music web site using XSL as part of Web Development project

- **Databases:** Studied Databases in second year and developed a database for a bookstore using Microsoft Access.
- **SQL:** Gained knowledge of SQL, and developed databases by writing queries.
- **C++:** Studying this language since September and have acquired basic knowledge.
- **Operating Systems:** 3rd year of studying Operating Systems – covering studied Memory Management, Resource Allocation, Scheduling, File Systems and Permissions including FAT and NTFS.

Career History:

03.12- 06.12:

Annaville Technology, Dublin
(Online Education Portal)

Web Developer- Drupal (Internship)

- Interned with Annaville Technology an Irish start up online educational portal which will link students with institutions across a large range of disciplines worldwide
- Created a virtual environment with mash up of different APIs.
 - Creating, reusing, editing list class for users
 - Editing, rearranging classes
 - Cancelling, deleting and erasing classes
 - Creating, modifying, deleting user profiles

01.13-08.13:

National College of Ireland, Dublin

IT Helpdesk Assistant

- Providing frontline IT support to over 1,000 students and 150 staff
- Responding to questions from callers and walk-ins; remotely assisting students, staff, and technology problems in offices, classrooms, and residence; assisting in person with problems in the lab.
- Experience using logging problems and queries on the helpdesk system, troubleshooting, resolving and escalating IT issues on a day to day basis.
- Experience with PC hardware maintenance and PC software installations (Operating System, Office, Netbeans, SQL)
- Solving basic network connectivity issues i.e.- connecting new PCs, local server.
- Asset tagging of all IT related equipment
- The one of the first members of I.T support to be trusted with the resident internet on a DHCP sever

Quantifying the number of people you dealt with gives an insight into the role.

Highlighting technologies used gives insight into your abilities.

Interests and Achievements:

Own Projects:

- As a keen photographer I've created some books using www.blurb.com.
- ISTQB Certified Software Tester Foundation Level examination

Gaming:

- Keen pc and PlayStation 3 gamer. Active community member and Forum Moderator at xxx.net. Former in-game administrator for 'gamescompany'.

College Achievements:

- Finalist for Dean's Awards for Entrepreneurship 2013

Pool:

- Represented Ireland in 9 ball and 8 ball pool in 2013 & 2014.
- Achieved rank of 3rd in Ireland/Northern Ireland

Hurling:

- Won 4 County hurling championships with John Doe Hurling club. 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013,2014
- Hurlled with National College of Ireland and reached three all Ireland quarter finals
- Hurlled in New York Summer 2014 with John Doe hurling club

Include both IT and non IT related interests. Employers are expecting you to be passionate about IT so they expect to see an involvement with IT outside of the curriculum.

Back up your claims with proof.

REFEREES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST



COVER LETTERS

The purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself to a company, demonstrate your interest in both the role and the company, highlight how you meet their criteria and to ask for an interview.

- Every time you send your CV in response to a job advertisement, it needs to be accompanied by a cover letter.
- If sending the cover letter as an email—make sure to utilise the subject line fully: e.g. Job Application—HR Assistant—2:1 HR degree finalist with practical HR work experience.
- Your cover letter should be written to a specific person; never address your cover letters to “Dear Sir or Madam.” Take the time to get an appropriate contact name, correct spelling and accurate title. Write an original cover letter for each employer.
- A cover letter will yield the best results if it is targeted to “match” a specific job specification. Mass produced cover letters do not receive as favourable a response as an individually tailored one.
- Show what you can do for the reader; keep the focus on your qualifications and skills and how they match the job spec. The emphasis should be on what you can offer rather than placing emphasis on what you are hoping to gain.
- Be positive in tone, choice of words and expectations; convey your enthusiasm and ask for an interview.
- Pay particular attention to grammar, typing and spelling and keep it to one page.
- Use a professional rather than a conversational tone.
- Put your customised linkedin url after your signature at the bottom of the cover letter.

The following two pages show examples of a sample cover letter and a sample speculative letter.





Dear Ms Kennedy,

Re: HR Graduate Opportunity

I have pleasure in attaching my CV for consideration for the role of HR Graduate as advertised within NCI.

I am very interested in this opportunity, am very aware of Annville Corporation as an organisation and that you have won the gradireland graduate recruitment award for training and development for both 2013 and 2014.

Specifically I believe I could offer the following to the position:

- I have maintained a 2:1 average throughout my degree during which time I gained a strong grounding in HR management & development, recruitment, talent development and employment law.
- I am committed to developing a career within HR and to augment my theoretical experience I secured practical work experience last summer within a recruitment role. During this time I sourced large volumes of candidates using both traditional and digital media, interviewed using competency methods and extended offers to successful candidates. I controlled the process tightly and had a 90% offer to acceptance ratio.
- I am highly motivated, hard-working, enthusiastic and pro-active as demonstrated through my involvement in extra-curricular activities in NCI.
- I have developed strong inter-personal, communication, teamwork and leadership skills through my part-time work experience in the retail sector.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and if you have any questions please do contact me at anna.annaville@gmail.com or 086 111 1111.

I hope my details are of interest and look forward to speaking with you in due course.

Yours sincerely,
Anna Annaville

www.linkedin.com/annaannaville





Dear Ms Doe,

Re: Graduate HR Opportunities

I am writing to explore whether an opportunity might exist to join Annaville Corporation in an entry level HR role. A recent article in The Irish Independent highlighted that your company had planned to expand from your current base of 1,000 employees to 1,600. I am very aware of Annaville Corporation as an organisation and would welcome the opportunity to work with you during such an exciting growth phase.

I am in the final year of a HR degree with National College of Ireland and have maintained a 2:1 average to date. The course has given me a strong grounding in HR and recruitment and modules have included Human Resource Strategies and Development, Employment Law and Talent Development. The degree has involved a great deal of independent research, requiring initiative, self-motivation, time management and strong administration skills. I also secured work experience last summer within a recruitment role during which time I sourced large volumes of candidates using both traditional and digital media, interviewed using competency methods and extended offers to successful candidates. I controlled the process tightly and had a 90% offer to acceptance ratio.

I believe that the skills I have gained from my part time work experience, which include skills in dealing with clients, problem solving, using professional judgment, working effectively in a team and being able to work independently would assist me when working within HR. In addition, I bring a positive, can do attitude and enthusiasm.

I am committed to developing a career within HR and feel confident that I would make an effective contribution to your team of researchers. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss any possible openings with you and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
Anna Annaville

www.linkedin.com/annaannaville







PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW

When called for interview

- React enthusiastically, thank the person for contacting you and be flexible about the interview time and date.
- Confirm who you will be meeting and the format of the interview.
- Ensure you know the exact location of the interview and where to check in once you arrive.
- Get a phone number in case you have follow up questions or need other assistance.
- If you need any accommodations for your interview, request it at this time.
- If it is an unscheduled telephone interview it is perfectly acceptable to explain that you are not free to take the call and ask to reschedule it for a time when you can make a positive impression.

Research the employer

- Inevitably, you will be asked at some stage during the interview why you want to work for the organisation. Never leave an employer feeling the company is just one of many you are applying to. To impress you need to do more research than the other interviewees and will need a number of key facts about the company, know why you want to work specifically for them, what issues are affecting them and their sector in general. Knowing they are a large employer with a great reputation is not enough!
- Explore their website, any news articles and annual reports.
- Visit LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms.
- Look to see if NCI alumni are working there—it may be appropriate to contact them for information.
- If you know someone in the industry/company, take the time to ask them for information.
- Check with the Career Development & Employability Office to see if they have additional information about the employer.

Research the role and anticipate likely questions

- Find out as much as you can about the opportunity. Review the job spec. Search linkedin for people working in this or similar roles—use this to view typical career paths *etc.*
- Employers generally ask interview questions directly around the skills listed in the job posting.
 - Review the job description and make a list of the skills and qualities required for the position.
 - Use the list of responsibilities and skills required to anticipate interview questions.

Mock interview

- Book a mock interview with a careers or work placement advisor in NCI. There is also the option to complete a taped video interview with feedback.





Think about the key strengths that make you suitable for the role

What are the top 3—5 reasons they should pick you? Think through common interview questions and how you can communicate these strengths in your answers.

- Determine your weaknesses as they relate to the position. Create a plan for how you will address and minimise these weaknesses in the interview.
- If you are a technical student ensure your portfolio/github is up to date.
- They need to know that you want *this job not just a job*.

What you are really doing in an interview is living up to your promise

The CV gets you to an interview. The interview gets you the job. If they thought you weren't good enough, they wouldn't waste their time interviewing you. What an interviewer aims to do is find out whether the information on your CV or application is a true reflection of the past and your abilities and investigate how well you would fit the company. You need to know your CV inside out and ensure you can stand over every claim you have made on it. Ensure you know your dates, results and can give examples and provide evidence on every point.

Prepare for the “tell me about yourself” question

When asking this question interviewers have no interest in hearing about pets, brothers, sisters, social life *etc.* What they want to know is “Why should we hire you”? They are looking for an elevator pitch—for you to summarise in 1—2 minutes why your education, skills, experience and future career plans match what they are looking for. Ensure you mention your USPs in relation to the role.

Commercial awareness

Employers will often ask questions about current affairs and future trends affecting their industry and expect you to be able to comment. For technology students they may ask about the most recent development in the technology industry that impressed you.





Whiteboard Interviews

Interviewers use whiteboard coding problems to evaluate how you problem solve and the depth of your technical knowledge. Following the 5 steps below will help you structure the session.

1. Write The Question On The Whiteboard

After you write the question on the board confirm with the recruiter that this is the question asked.

2. Requirements Gathering

Ask qualifying questions so that you can correctly implement code based on the requirements. Document the answers to all questions on the whiteboard.

3. Analysis

Draw pictures and have a discussion with the recruiter to think through the processes aloud.

4. Implementation

Write the code.

5. Testing

Walk through and test the code with the recruiter. Research this further and view a taped technical/whiteboard interview on the NCI Student Portal.

Prepare for Competency Interview Questions

Most employers are looking for applicants to demonstrate a specific set of skills and competencies which they believe are essential to the job role; for example team work, communication, problem solving and time management. Competency questions are based on the belief that past actions are a strong indicator of future performance. For each competency the interviewer is looking for a specific example in which your actions showcased the competency.

You will be questioned in detail about each competency so will need to use a solid example where you can remember a lot of detail. You may use examples from work, college and extra-curricular activities. Be specific in your examples, don't generalise. Have a number of specific examples ready. Although job specs should give you an insight into the competencies that will be investigated at interview it is worth preparing specific examples around the common competencies that appear in most job specs. *i.e.* communication, client service, teamwork, time management, leadership, flexibility, analytical skills, commercial awareness, relationship management, management, drive, problem solving. Use the employability audit overleaf to think of ideas. *Once you hear "give me an example" or "tell me about a time" you know it is a competency question.*





To answer these questions effectively you must use the four step STAR approach.

S. Situation

Give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome.

T. Task

Describe what you set out to achieve.

A. Action

Describe the action YOU took, the suggestions YOU made, the obstacles YOU overcame.

R. Results

Highlight the positive result that was achieved as a result of your actions. Be prepared also to review the outcome, what did you learn from it, what would you do differently the next time.

Dress Code

Men: Traditionally a suit is required for interview. However a number of industries are now open to smart casual (trousers, long sleeved shirt and shoes) so if in any doubt it is best to ask when invited for interview about what is appropriate. Avoid short-sleeved shirts and as a general rule jewellery is not appropriate.

Women: Should wear a conservative suit or conservative work dress. Wear minimum make up and jewellery, hemlines should be to the knee and avoid very high/platform heels.

Closing an Interview

Having asked your final questions it is worth having a closing statement that thanks them for their time, re-highlights your key qualifications, and states your interest in the position. It is appropriate to ask for the next steps and time line for the hiring process. Never close the door on an opportunity—even if you feel you are not interested at the end of the interview or feel it did not go in your favour always finish on a positive. You never know what other opportunities may arise.

After the Interview

- If the interview was arranged through a recruitment agency or the NCI Careers Service call them straight after the interview to update them.
- Send a thank you email within 24 hours of the job interview, thanking them for meeting you and reiterating your interest in the position.
- Write down questions you were asked in the interview as a tool for future interview preparation.
- No matter how badly you want to update your social media status, don't share details of the interview on twitter or facebook in case the employer is checking!



EMPLOYABILITY AUDIT

As a first step to determining your current skills profile, tick the boxes where you have used each of the skills on your course, at work or in your extra-curricular activities. At the end of the process you will be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses and will have examples to use during the competency questions at interview.

Soft Skills	Study	Work	Extra Curricular	Your examples of using this skill
Interpersonal Skills (Able to relate to co-workers, inspire others to participate, make and main working relationships)				
Problem Solving (Able to find solutions to problems using creativity, reasoning, and past experiences along with the available information and resources.)				
Initiative (Able to act on initiative, identify opportunities and proactive in putting forward ideas & solutions)				
Adaptability/Flexibility (Adapt successfully to changing situations & environments)				
Organisation Skills (Able to design, plan, organise, and implement projects and tasks to deadlines. Also involves goal-setting)				
Networking (Able to build and maintain contacts (symbiotically) that are ready, willing and able to help you through your working life.)				
Negotiating/Persuading (Able to influence and convince others to discuss and reach agreement.)				
Teamwork (Able to work collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals, showing diplomacy and flexibility when there are conflicting opinions; supporting other people's performance to achieve required results.)				
Motivation/Drive (Determination to get things done. Make things happen & constantly looking for better ways of doing things.)				
Work Ready Skills	Study	Work	Social	
Writing Skills (Able to write concisely and convey meaning in a manner appropriate to different readers, presenting a persuasive argument)				
Numeracy Skills (Able to handle numbers, gather statistical data and analyse, interpret and present it in a clear and accurate way)				
IT Skills (Word-processing, using databases, spreadsheets, the Internet & email, designing web pages etc.)				
Time Management (Manage time effectively, prioritising tasks and able to work to deadlines)				
Presentation/Oral Communication (Able to verbally express ideas in a way that is easily understood by others who are unfamiliar with the topic; including delivering a presentation, giving accurate information or acting as a spokesperson.)				
Commercial Awareness (Understand the commercial realities affecting an organisation and the industry in general, the organisation's goals, priorities, market position and future direction)				
Fluency in a Foreign Language				
Drivers Licence				



TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background

Tell me about yourself and how it relates to this role?

Talk me through your CV?

College/School

Why did you choose to study at National College of Ireland? Tell me about NCI?

Why did you pick your leaving certificate subjects?

What result do you hope to get? Are you happy with your results to date?

Why did you pick your course of study?

What have you gained from your studies?

If you could improve anything about your school or college, what would it be?

How will the degree you have studied benefit your career?

Which subjects did you like best/least? Why?

What did you like/dislike about college/school?

Career and Motivation

Why have you applied for this position and this organisation?

How do you see your career developing in three years time?

How are you preparing yourself to achieve this goal?

What other careers are you considering/have you considered?

Where else are you applying?

What influenced you to choose this career?

What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?

In what areas do you lack qualifications? What are you doing about this?

What people or events have been the most important in influencing your decisions?

How do you keep informed about important changes in your field?

How long do you think it would take you before you could contribute to this role?

What parts of this job/your current role do you find most/least attractive?

What motivates you?

What achievement has given you the greatest sense of achievement?

What will you be looking for in a new role? How would you describe your ideal job?

In examining you for this opportunity, in what areas do you feel you would be a particularly strong performer? Why?

Current Role

Why are you looking to leave your current role?

What do you like most/least about your current role?

What were your two most important achievements in your current job?

What is a good example of a pressurised situation for you? How do you handle pressure/stress?

What types of criticisms are directed at you most often?

What would your colleagues/supervisor say about your abilities to complete tasks as assigned?





Describe your 3 greatest strengths and explain how you used them to bring about improvements in your current or most recent position?
In what kind of work environment are you most productive?
In what areas could you improve your overall performance?
Describe a time when you were frustrated with your employer. How did you handle it?
Why have you changed jobs so often?
How long have you been looking for a new role?
Are you actively interviewing at the moment? For what type of opportunities?
What could your current employer do to make you stay?
Describe a time when you failed to meet a deadline
What is your current salary?

Research and Company Information

Tell me what you know about our company. What research did you do?
What do you know about what we do?
Why did you decide to seek a position in this company?
Who do you think are our major competitors?
What do you think are the main issues for our business over the next few years?
What are the current challenges facing this industry?
What do you see as the main priorities for someone in this position?
How long do you think it would take you to make a contribution to the team?
What value will you add to this business?

Strengths/Weaknesses/Self Awareness

What qualities do you have that will make you a success in this career?
What has been your greatest achievement? Biggest disappointment?
Tell me about the biggest mistake you have made?
Give your top five strengths/weaknesses?
Why should we recruit you over everyone else we spoke to today?
What would your manager/friends/lecturer say about you?
How do you evaluate success? Give me an example of one of your accomplishments?
How would you describe yourself?
If you could start again what would you do differently?
How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as part of a team?
What plans do you have for self-development in the next 12 months?
What will I learn about you in 6 months that will disappoint me?





Extracurricular Activities

What are your main extracurricular activities?

Tell me about your achievements in extracurricular activities?

Describe your most rewarding college experience?

During your college activities, what positions of responsibility did you hold?

What campus activities did you become involved with? What did you gain from them?

Sample Competency Questions

Describe a situation when you had to maintain a high level of enthusiasm when things were very difficult. How did you do it?

What do you do to keep up with current and possible future trends and issues in this sector?

Describe a time when your relationship with a customer was difficult and what you did about it?

Describe a situation in which a customer had an unusual business need, and you were responsible for finding a way to meet the need?

Describe a time when you faced challenges on a particular job, which you had to overcome and work at to achieve positive outcome?

Tell me about a presentation you have given recently? How did you prepare?

Who did you deliver the presentation to? What was their reaction?

Tell me about a time when you identified a new, unusual or different approach for addressing a problem or task?

Describe a goal you set yourself that you didn't achieve. What did you do about it?

Tell me about a time when you had a heavy workload. How did you deal with this?

Describe a time when you went through a series of steps to influence an individual or a group on an important issue?

Describe a situation in which you were a member (not a leader) of a team, and a conflict arose within the team. What did you do?

SAMPLE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

Requirements

Can you name a number of functional and non-functional (or quality) requirements?

How do you search and find requirements? What are possible sources?

Functional Design

What are metaphors used for in functional design? Can you name some successful examples?

Can you name different measures to guarantee correctness of data entry?

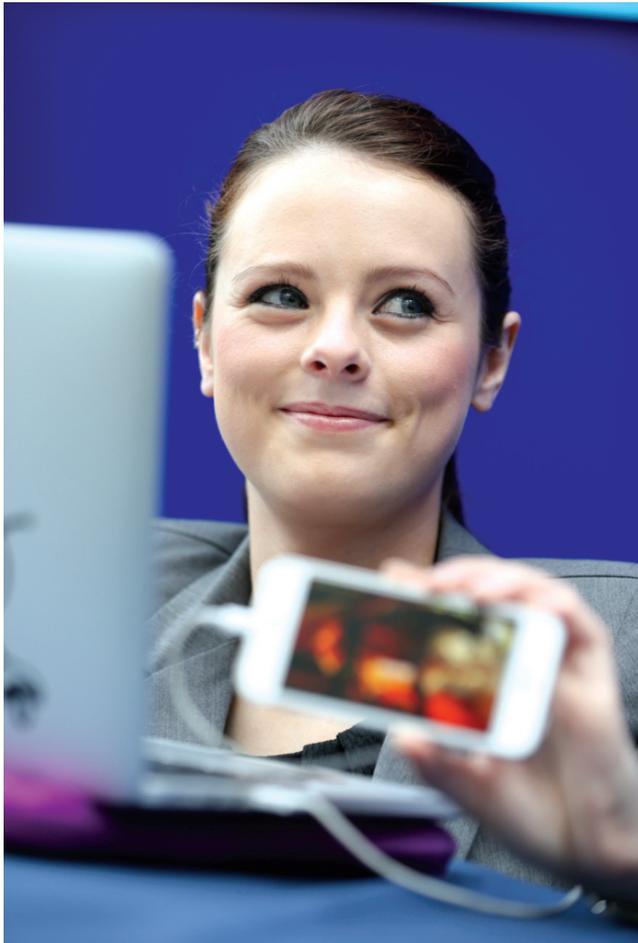
Technical Design

What do low coupling and high cohesion mean? What does the principle of encapsulation mean?

How do you manage conflicts in a web application when different people are editing the same data?

Do you know about design patterns? Which design patterns have you used and in what situations?







Construction

How do you make sure that your code can handle different kinds of error situations?
Explain what Test-Driven Development is? Can you name some principles of Extreme Programming?
When do you use an abstract class and when do you use an interface?
When do you use polymorphism and when do you use delegates?

Algorithms

How would you change the format of all the phone numbers in 10,000 static html web pages?
How would you write a function to reverse a string? And can you do that without a temporary string?
In an array with integers between 1 and 1,000,000 one value is in the array twice. How do you determine which one?

Data Structures

How would you implement the structure of the London Underground in a computer's memory?
What is the difference between a queue and a stack?
What is the difference between storing data on the heap vs. on the stack?

Testing

Which tools are essential to you for testing the quality of your code?
How can you implement unit testing when there are dependencies between a business layer and a data layer?
Do you know what code coverage is? What types of code coverage are there?

Maintenance

What is important when updating a product that is in production and is being used?
How do you create technical documentation for your products?
How can you debug a system in a production environment, while it is being used?

Questions to ask the Interviewer

What would you like this person to achieve in the first 3 months for you to consider them a success?
What would the person do in a typical day/week? *e.g.* Percentage of time on different areas of spec?
What are the top 3 priorities for the person undertaking this position?
What would I get involved with in the first three months?
What makes a graduate successful in your program?
What paths have most of your recent graduates taken following completion of their training?
What are you looking for in a candidate?
How did the role become available (growth/someone leaving)?
(Will I have a handover with the person I am replacing?)
How is the department structured? What are the backgrounds of the people in the team?
DO NOT ask questions about salary, benefits or annual leave at this stage in the interview process.



NOTES

*Career Development & Employability Centre
National College of Ireland, 1 Mayor Street, IFSC Dublin 1*

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