



# Advising on **Strength-Based Interviews**

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# Strength-Based Interviews - A Growing Trend



The Institute of Student Employers (ISE; 2018) advise that approximately 40% of top graduate recruiters now use a strength-based approach in their recruitment programme. This includes well known names such as EY, Barclays, Sky and Microsoft and the prediction is that more organisations will follow. Reasons for this shift include:

- The desire to understand more about individuals than whether they are simply 'able' to do the job.
- Frustration with the over-prepared nature of many competency based interview responses.
- The desire to raise the performance bar by recruiting candidates who will be energised and motivated by the role.
- A need to level out the 'experience bias' that competency interviews can show.

## What is a Strength-Based Interview and how does it differ to an Interview with a Competency Focus?



A 'Strength' can be defined as something that someone is naturally good at, loves doing and gains energy from. A Strength-Based Interview seeks to understand what an individual's strengths are, whether they can use these effectively and how engaged, energised or motivated they are by using them.

A competency based interview is looking at whether an individual can demonstrate the specific behaviours that are required to be successful in the role, typically through looking at past demonstrations of those behaviours.

In many ways the initial interview questions in both style of interviews, can look on the surface, a little similar; they may ask about a time when the individual has done something in the past or how they would respond if placed in a particular outlined scenario. However, the emphasis for the assessor in a strength-based interview is focused on the motivations and drivers and what was achieved rather than how someone behaved.



# Example Questions

Strength-based interview questions can be past example based, as with example 1 below, or situational, as with example 2.

1

Tell me about a time when you have needed to get to know a group of new people and the approach that you took to this. What did you find enjoyable and what did you find challenging about this?

2

You are working with three new colleagues on a critical project due to be completed in five days. Everyone has different ideas on how the project should run and conversations are getting quite heated. You've made little progress in the first day. If this were you, how would you approach this situation and how would it make you feel?

Strength-based interviews may also use more quick fire questions such as 'When do you feel you are at your best' or 'Tell me about what you enjoy doing?'.

## What are Assessors Looking for?



Typically, when employers use a strength-based recruitment process, they have a list of strengths they are looking to find evidence of in candidates; typically this list comprises 6-8 different strengths. They are not looking for a candidate to demonstrate all of these, but they need to show they possess some. Assessors will often look for evidence that a candidate is able to apply their strength effectively in order to achieve positive outcomes, as well as whether they are energised by a strength.

Let's take question 1 above as an example. The strength this question is assessing is relationship building; assessors are looking for evidence in the candidate's answer that they built effective relationships and had different methods for doing this (importantly, unlike with competency recruitment it doesn't matter how they did this but just that they achieved the positive outcome of building effective relationships). They are then looking to understand whether the candidate enjoyed this situation and whether it made them feel energised and motivated.



# How can the Careers Service Help?



It is very difficult to help a student to prepare per se for a strength-based interview - and indeed this is one of the reasons they have become more popular; interviewers are looking for instinctive, natural responses. However, there are a series of useful preparation tasks that can make talking about motivation and enjoyment feel more comfortable. These are listed below and could form a facilitated discussion with students:

## Identification of Strengths:



- Spend some time thinking about what tasks / activities / situations you have been in recently that you have really enjoyed; where time has flown by.
- Now think about any tasks / activities / situations you have been in recently where you have really struggled to motivate yourself to complete what you started.
- Can you find any patterns in your responses to these questions that might help you identify some of your strengths?
- Consider checking out any conclusions with friends and family; it is always really interesting to get a different perspective.
- Try to identify ways in which your strengths could be of benefit to the organisation / role you are applying for.
- Thinking about the things you didn't find so enjoyable or motivating; are there ways in which using your strengths more, or approaching those situations or tasks differently could have made you enjoy them more?

## General Preparation

In any interview it is still important to research the organisation and role applied for; students need to show they understand the organisation and the specifics of the role and what they can bring to it.



Encourage reflection on the role; is it genuinely of interest? If not then a strength-based interview will uncover this. Time may be better spent applying for roles that really are a good match.

Practice talking through some experiences with students in a 'strengths' way; i.e. not just describing the situation and what they did but talking about what they enjoyed and what they found motivating in the situation.

Ultimately, giving honest and genuine responses is the best approach to take in a strength-based interview. Both employers and employees benefit when a match is found and a person is recruited who can do the job well but who also finds it motivating and energising.

# Who are

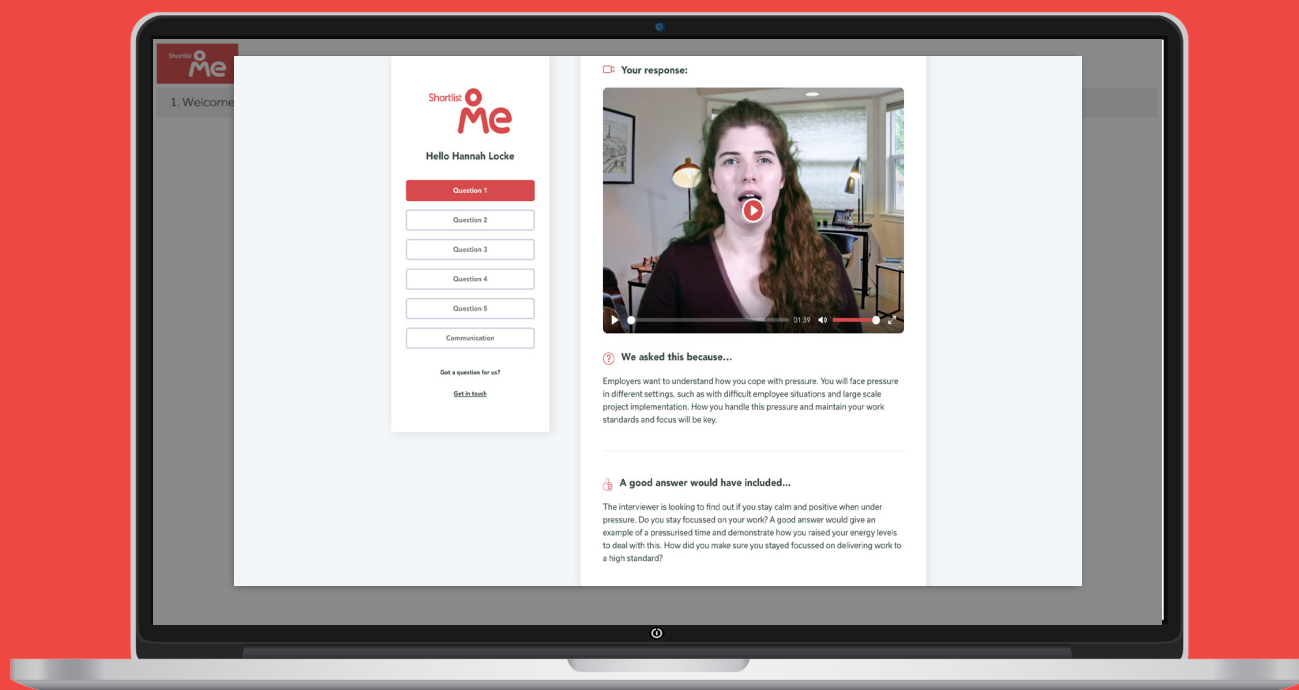
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Shortlist.Me is an online platform to assist interview preparation, using the exact same technology as employers.

We ask industry-specific interview questions, validated by leading employers, that are accompanied by coaching points to help interviewees improve the content, structure and presentation of their answers.

Careers Advisors can evaluate completed interviews using the feedback tools provided, producing personalised reports to help improve their performance.

Shortlist.Me helps Career Services to provide more people with practical support, whilst condensing the amount of time spent facilitating mock-interviews.



Get in touch to learn why so many Career Services are retiring their interview simulators in favour of Shortlist.Me. For more information or to schedule a demo **email: [info@shortlist.me](mailto:info@shortlist.me)** or **call: +44 (0)1904 279400.**



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