



## Notes from EPN Meet-Up Interview Skills Session - February 27<sup>th</sup> 2020

Job applications and interviews can be intimidating. However, knowing what to expect and how to prepare yourself can make the process less overwhelming. The Icon EPN Network has teamed up with conservators from the Parliamentary Archive and Tate and compiled a list of hints and tips for a successful application and interview. This document first looks at how to present a well thought out application, followed by how to prepare and how to make a good impression that best showcases your abilities during interviews. We hope that this document helps you feel more confident in your job applications.

*The Icon EPN Network*

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### Tips on Writing a Job Application

#### 1. Read the question completely and answer the question.

Read the job application several times, focus on the essential criteria of the application and systematically answer how you have matched the criteria with specific examples. Then add in the desirable criteria but don't worry if you don't meet these, it means you can grow in the role.

Make sure everything in your job application is applicable to the job.

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#### 2. Answer using the STAR method. Situation, Task, Action, Result.

It's not just the result, it's how you achieved it. The star method is a good way to format your answers to behavioural interview questions such as *'Tell me about an occasion when you have . . .'*

Firstly, the **Situation** - describe the context of the challenge you faced.

**Task** - then your specific responsibility within the situation and what you were required to achieve.

**Action** - what did you do and why?

Finally, **Result** - what was the outcome, and did you achieve your objectives?



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### 3. Don't limit yourself to one example per question. If you have multiple experiences mention them.

If you have multiple examples you don't always have to write a long answer, bullet points are fine to use.

You can also talk about something that didn't go well and highlight what you learnt from the experience and what you would have done differently.

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### 4. Keep answers clear and concise.

You need to talk about what you did within the context of the theme to make it a successful topic. Make sure that you cover the specific requirements by mentioning them directly in your answers, such as the desktop applications you're going to be using in the job role. This will make it easy to rank how you meet the criteria.

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### 5. Don't hesitate to include non-heritage experience.

As long as the examples relate to the criteria. Transferable skills matter and show you have a variety of experiences to draw from.

**Tip:** If you find it difficult to present yourself in an application, write as if you are talking about your best friend. Explain why you are that person for the role. You can also do this by going through your personal spec.



## INTERVIEW SKILLS

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### Before the Interview

#### 1. Preparation

Research the museum, the collections and the conservation department.

Be clear about what the role is and what skills you need to demonstrate to do it well.

Tailor your portfolio to showcase the skills listed in the job description.

- *have at least two really great examples that you know well.*

Anticipate what questions you will be asked and prepare answers.

- *for example, a common question is: Why are you the person for this role?*

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#### 2. Plan

Remember to flag in advance if you need any adjustments made on the day. If you have dyslexia or dyspraxia you can get assistance with the application process by contacting HR.

Plan your route to the interview - if you are unclear ask in advance.

Make sure you have everything you need ready in advance so you are not rushing on the day - what you will wear etc.

Relax the night before, eat well and try not to overthink it.

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#### 3. Punctual

Don't be late - if you are going to be late ring and let people know.

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## The Informal Interview

### 1. Studio visit/meet the team/tour

Remember to flag in advance if you need any adjustments made on the day.

Remember this is part of the interview, the teams will feed back.

This is a great opportunity to assess the working environment and people you will work with. Remember you are assessing them as much as they are interviewing you.

Be friendly, interested and ask questions - *e.g. comment on work or artworks in view*. This is a good opportunity to sell yourself.

Answer any questions comprehensively as you would in a more formal setting.

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### 2. Practical Assessment

Often tasks are set to test your written or hand skills.

If you are not sure of something, don't be afraid to ask for clarification.

This could be a written or physical task and may involve looking at or handling an artwork.

These are often timed assessments, so time management is crucial.

Try to be clear and concise.

These tests are scored evaluating knowledge/skills, approach and time management.

You are not just interviewed on your practical ability, but communication/written skills also.

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## The Formal Interview

### 1. Formal Interview

Having prepared for the interview in advance, you'll feel more confident.

Expect more than one person and be prepared for any size panel.

Listen, take your time to think about the question. You can write notes before answering the question if it's helpful.

If you don't understand a question just ask, there is no rush.

If you go blank, don't panic. Ask if you can come back to that question or to repeat it.

Come up with good examples to show/talk about - *e.g. possibly tied into questions on application the form.*

Highlight your strengths in your answers.

Show good communication skills and remember to maintain eye contact, keep an open posture and use hand gestures if appropriate to help clearly communicate your answers. Also try to make eye contact with the whole panel as it's easy to stare at one person.

Show collaboration but also independence as needed.

Show that you are willing to work within the team and remember to note you will run things by your manager. It's important to understand what levels of information management want within the team.

Have a couple of questions to ask at the end. Having questions shows forethought and that you take an active interest in the role and wish to understand how things work. Having no prepared questions might indicate that you haven't thought about the organisation/role as much.

If you are having an interview on Skype make sure you have a good internet connection.

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### 2. Presenting your Portfolio

You should adapt and update your portfolio for the role you are going for.



Don't bring too much. Two great detailed examples are better than many in less detail.

Know your projects inside out - you may find it useful to do a practice run in front of family or friends to help you learn your projects thoroughly.

If you are presenting your portfolio on the laptop have it saved in a format that is ready to go - you won't look prepared if you have to find your documents.

Be clear about what you contributed if you showcase a larger project. When talking about what you did, always say 'I' rather than 'we' - this will help demonstrate what you contributed in that team situation.

Don't just present practical or research skills. Use the portfolio to present the way you work, interact or collaborate - *e.g. examples of a spreadsheet/report/survey/H&S forms.*

Be prepared to talk about any treatment and answer questions on your portfolio or rationalise your approach.

You may be asked to hand in a portfolio prior to the interview.

If you would like more tips on putting together a portfolio, please refer to our [Creating a Portfolio](#) document (found on our website).

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### 3. Interview Appearance and Manner

First impressions are important.

Think about who you are applying for. What is the cultural and social etiquette? Are you applying for a position in The Royal Household/military museum/Tate? - *e.g. tattoos and piercings should not be a problem in this day and age, but just be mindful of who you are trying to work for.* Think about how you want to represent your whole self.

Wear appropriate clothing for the role - make an effort to look smart. A suit may not be appropriate if you have been asked to do a practical task.

Engage with all interviewers - be confident, make eye contact and smile.

Try to relax and enjoy the process.

If you are an internal candidate, pretend you do not know the panel and explain answers fully. Don't use shorthand or assume knowledge.



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#### 4. Unconscious Bias

Everyone has unconscious bias. Unconscious biases, or learned stereotypes, about people are inherent that everyone forms without realising it.

Trained interviewers are trained to balance this and it is why there is often an independent person on the panel or a non-conservation specialist.

The panel's aim is to be even and fair.

The same questions will be asked to all the candidates so they are directly comparable and will be scored individually.

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#### 5. Post Interview

After the interview, try and write down some of the questions that you were asked and pinpoint those that you struggled with (everyone has them). Put these somewhere for the next time you are preparing for an interview, and then think about something else.

Don't beat yourself up.

If you don't get the job it may not be down to anything you didn't do.

If you want feedback you can ask for it. You can also suggest how you want it, for example if you want an email or phone chat.

Be prepared to ask questions in the feedback. Take it on the chin - constructive feedback should help you for next time.

It may take several interviews to secure a position - don't give up!

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