

UNIVERSITY INTERVIEW TIPS

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Gaining a coveted place on a design course is the first step into a career in the creative industries. Many courses are 'over-subscribed' and it is quite common for some universities to have one just place for every ten applicants or more. To stand a fighting chance of gaining a place on a reputable course, ARTS THREAD offers the following tips.

THE PORTFOLIO

An excellent, well-presented design portfolio is, of course, essential and you should give lots of time and attention to compiling your portfolio. Get the advice of your tutors or someone well used to viewing portfolios. A key tip for compiling a great portfolio is to start and end with your best pieces of work and put your less successful pieces towards the centre of the folder. However, do not include work that you or others view as weak. Tutors are looking for quality not quantity—so an edited small but excellent portfolio is infinitely preferable to one stuffed with lots of mediocre work.

Another point to remember is to include some work which includes annotation – preferably in the form of reflective evaluation notes. Most likely, your portfolio will be viewed without you being there to explain your work (due to the time factor from the number of applicants for each university place) and so this annotation helps the decision makers understand your thought processes. Tutors will be looking for someone with an enquiring mind, who can communicate their ideas well. You should ensure your work is presented as professionally as possible—'dog-eared' pages with tears, stains or marks translate into 'sloppy and un-focused' in the mind of the viewer. Aim for your portfolio to be a joy to look through.

PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW: PREPARATION

Prepare by practising showing your portfolio to a friend or family member. Prepare some possible discussion points

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

Nowhere is this more relevant than in the image-obsessed design sector. In any interview, image and body language are said to count for a massive 70% of an interviewer's impression of a candidate and these judgements are made in the first five minutes of an interview. Plan carefully what you are going to wear, and aim to arrive early.

WHILE IN THE INTERVIEW

Listen carefully to the interviewer's questions and prepare to be asked, "Why do you want to study here particularly?" Ensure that you have done your research into the university and the particular course. Talk enthusiastically about why you chose it. Try to remain calm and recall your all-important preparation. If you have done enough preparation, it will give you lots to draw on for your responses in the actual interview. Relax, but don't be too relaxed, as this will lull you into a false sense of security. You should aim to create an impression of being keen with lots of energy and ideas, interested and informed about both your chosen specialism and also the broader areas of art and design.

Finally, don't forget the simple but really important things such as eye contact and smiling. Good luck!

—scan the newspapers and trade press for current topics. Questions that you are likely to be asked include:

- What inspires you and your work?
- Who are your favourite designers?
- What are your aspirations for the future?
- Where would you like to see yourself in 5/10 years time?
- What would you say are your personal strengths?
- What would you say are your weakest points?

Be prepared for this last question particularly and ensure that you phrase your answer in a way that shows that you are self-aware and capable of improving and growing. Turn what could be a negative response into a positive one. For example, instead of "I leave everything until the last minute", say instead, "I have a tendency to leave things until the last minute, but I realise that by doing this, I often don't do myself justice and I'm really trying to rectify this by planning and pacing myself".

ON THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Ensure you know exactly where you are going, plan your route and make sure that you have a contact telephone number for the university/college so that you can ring in case of unforeseen problems. Allow for the unpredictability of the weather and transport failures or delays. Have a 'Plan B' route. Remember that many university campuses are quite sprawling, so that even when you arrive, it may take you another five or ten minutes to get to the actual interview location. Don't leave anything to chance. Arriving late, breathless and agitated sets you apart for all of the wrong reasons.