

Preparing an Application for a First IT Sector Job

1 CV Preparation

1. Present your CV to the highest possible standard. Seek advice and help, e.g. from the Careers service, CV guidebooks/websites, IT practitioners, colleagues etc. The advice given here, or from IT practitioners should override the generic advice from Careers service or CV guidebooks/websites.
2. Many employers have a project underway using a set of technologies, e.g. Java, JavaScript with Oracle on a Linux platform under SVN. So they scan CVs looking for candidates with (most of) the required *skill set*. You should have a neat and complete list of your technical competences, *near the top* of your CV. For example:

Languages: Java, Python, C/C++, x86 assembly, SML, Prolog

IDEs: MS Visual Studio, Eclipse

DBMS: Oracle, SQL Server, MySQL

Web: ASP.NET, PHP, HTML/CSS, JavaScript

Operating Systems: Windows, Unix versions (including scripting)

Network/concurrency: Sockets, Java RMI, threads, MPI

Design: UML, Z

Graphics: CGI, Tcl/Tk

3. Relevant work experience is very important, and should be prominent in your CV. Any work experience is useful, and IT experience especially so. You can count the 3rd year group project. For each post indicate: project size, duration, your role (e.g. group project manager), and what you did.

2 Before the Interview

1. Undertake mock interviews with the careers service, and learn from them.
2. You can also read books/websites on job interview advice and etiquette. Be aware that these are often rather general. In contrast the following tips are for IT graduates.
3. It's essential that you've done some research into the company. Who are they, what do they do etc. You can often guess what technologies they will be interested in. So
 - Prepare responses like "I'm excited about the possibility of working for xPlay as I've always had an interest in Games, and have done

very well in Graphics and realtime programming parts of my course. I'm seriously considering this sector for when I graduate".

- Specialise your CV to emphasise the skills the company is looking for, e.g. Graphics, creativity for a games company.
4. You can probably guess about half of the questions you'll be asked in an interview, and you should prepare crisp, positive, informed answers for these. Classic questions include:
- "Why are you interested in working for XXXTechnobloggers?"
 - "What would you bring to the position?" (try to bring some special skill)
 - "Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?"
 - "What is your greatest weakness?"

3 In the Interview

Follow standard interview advice, e.g. dress smartly, be punctual and courteous etc. For IT sector interviews observe the following

1. Be very positive. Don't undersell yourself. e.g. if you're asked: "How much Java do you know?"
Don't say: "I've done a little"
Do say: "I've used it for 4 years, for a variety of applications, e.g. web development with PHP and SQL, GUI development with Swing. We've also undertaken a 1-year group project building a 3000-line codebase of Java/PHP/SQL"
2. Try to give informed answers, e.g. include examples to demonstrate your understanding and abilities, the suggested answer above illustrates this.
3. Never say No.
For example if you're asked "We work in C#, how well do you know it?"
Don't say: "Not at All"
Do say: "I know Java very well, and some C. I enjoy learning new technologies, and I'm confident I could pick up C# in a couple of weeks"
This is a positive, informed response.
4. Show energy and enthusiasm for the post. Interviewers are looking for motivated staff. Emphasise/demonstrate any stuff you do outside of the course, and what you've learnt.
5. Demonstrate your enthusiasm for your discipline. Interviewers are looking for a passion for their area, e.g. for software development. Don't be afraid to say that you enjoy programming/database construction/whatever.

6. Your aims must however be reasonable. In particular you should be realistic about your leadership prospects. You will need to prove you can develop code for a couple of years before managing software development teams.
7. Do expect some technical questions. Be calm, take your time, and try to say/write something reasonable. Example questions:
 - "What might cause a null pointer exception in Java?"
 - "Write some code to reverse a string in a language of your choice"

4 Feedback

These are evolving notes and tips. Feedback and additional advice very welcome. Phil (P.W.Trinder@hw.ac.uk).