IChemE
Institution of Chemical Engineers

Get hired – a toolkit

The chemical engineering guide to CVs, applications, psychometric tests, assessment centres and interviews

A practical, no-fluff guide

Skills for Success

How to use this guide

This guide forms part of Skills for Success, IChemE's career development programme for chemical engineering students and recent graduates. Alongside this guide, Skills for Success provides webinars, resources and opportunities to help you build professional skills, develop your network, improve your employability and take confident steps into your career.

This guide is deliberately short. Everything in it earns its place because it changes outcomes – not because it fills pages. Read it once, cover to cover, then keep it within reach and dip back in before every application, test and interview.

Where you see a checklist, use it. Where you see a weak-versus-strong example, steal the structure and make it your own. Grab a pen – page 33 is built to be filled in and photographed.

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Before you specialise

Where chemical engineers actually work

Chemical engineering is one of the broadest engineering disciplines by destination – the same core skills apply across a surprising range of industries.

You don't need to have a sector picked before you graduate. Most students don't. But knowing the shape of the landscape makes career fairs, applications and even your final-year project choices easier to navigate.

Eight sectors, one skill set

- **Energy and petrochemicals** – oil, gas, refining and LNG. Still one of the largest employers of chemical engineers globally, and increasingly overlapping with the energy transition.
- **Low-carbon and energy transition** – hydrogen production, carbon capture, renewables integration. The fastest-growing destination for new graduates right now.
- **Pharmaceuticals and biotechnology** – drug manufacturing, bioprocessing, vaccine production. Highly regulated, and growing fast.
- **Food and drink** – process design, food safety, sustainable manufacturing at scale.
- **Water and utilities** – treatment, desalination, resource recovery. Less visible than energy, consistently in demand.
- **Chemicals and materials** – specialty chemicals, polymers, battery materials. Where a lot of product-level innovation happens.
- **Nuclear** – power generation, decommissioning, waste management. A specialist but stable field with long-term government backing.
- **Consultancy and engineering services** – design houses and EPC contractors who work across all of the above, often the fastest way to see multiple sectors early.

MENTOR NOTE

Don't worry about picking wrong. The underlying engineering – mass and energy balances, process design, safety, systems thinking – transfers between every sector on this list. Many senior engineers have worked across three or four of them

The easiest way to explore before you commit – IChemE's Special Interest Groups exist for most of these sectors – including Oil, Gas and Energy Transition, Biochemical Engineering, Food and Drink, Nuclear Technology and Clean Energy – and joining one as a student is free.

Where the profession is heading

Future skills and industry trends

IChemE's own strategy puts it plainly: chemical engineers are central to delivering a sustainable future – the world's climate and resource goals don't get met without this profession.

That's not a slogan for your personal statement – it's a genuine shift in what employers are hiring for. Five trends are worth understanding before you walk into any interview.

Five trends shaping the next decade

- **Net zero and the energy transition** – decarbonising existing industry while scaling up renewable and low-carbon energy. Touches almost every sector on the previous page, not just energy.
- **The hydrogen economy** – production, storage and safe distribution at scale. One of IChemE's own named technical priorities, and a fast-growing graduate destination.
- **Carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS)** – increasingly central to industrial decarbonisation, and a genuinely new sub-field for graduate engineers to enter early.
- **Digitalisation** – process simulation, digital twins and data-driven optimisation are changing how process design and plant operation actually happen day to day.
- **The circular economy** – designing out waste, bio-based materials, chemical recycling. Sustainable manufacturing is moving from a nice-to-have to a core design constraint.

RECRUITER INSIGHT

"We're not just hiring for what candidates know about today's plant. We're hiring for whether they can learn tomorrow's – sustainability literacy and comfort with new technology are becoming as important as the core fundamentals."

Building this into your own story

You don't need direct experience in any of this to talk about it well. Being able to explain why hydrogen storage is hard, or what a digital twin does, signals genuine engagement with the profession – exactly the curiosity Section 1 talks about. IChemE's Sustainability Hub gives student members free access to on-demand training across these themes, built specifically to help you build that literacy before you graduate.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The chemical engineers most in demand aren't just technically strong – they're aware of where the industry is going.

Five minutes reading on the Sustainability Hub about net zero, hydrogen or CCUS before an interview can be the difference between a generic answer and a genuinely engaged one.

Before you apply
Company and job research

Which positions should you actually apply for? Have you researched the full range of jobs and sectors chemical engineers work in?

Before deciding on the job you want, consider the positions genuinely open to a qualified chemical, biochemical or process engineer – the previous two pages are a good place to start. The sectors employing chemical engineers are becoming increasingly diverse, so don't be too narrow in your choice of role or employer.

It's also worth not limiting your search by location – the company may be flexible on this, or able to help with relocation costs. A slightly wider search radius often opens up considerably more opportunities.

The three layers of research

Do this properly for your first two or three target employers, then reuse the exercise for every application that follows. It's the single biggest lever on how strong your applications, cover letters and interview answers turn out to be.

- **The company** – what do they actually do, and who are their customers?

- **Their challenges** – what issues or trends are affecting their sector right now?

- **Their future** – where are they investing, and what's changing?

KEEP THESE NOTES

You'll use exactly this research again in your cover letter, your application answers and your "why this company" interview response. Filling this in once, properly, saves you rewriting it three times later.

The mindset shift
What employers actually want

'Employers are not hiring your degree. They are hiring your future.'

Most final-year students walk into applications leading with grades and modules. That's the wrong pitch. Employers already assume you're technically capable – that's why you were shortlisted for a chemical engineering degree in the first place. What they can't assume is everything else.

The four questions every recruiter is really asking

- **Can this person learn?** – technology, processes and regulations change constantly. Evidence of learning beats a snapshot of current knowledge.
- **Can this person solve problems?** – not perfectly, just logically and calmly.
- **Can this person work with others?** – engineering is a team sport played with operators, contractors, clients and regulators, not a solo act.
- **Would we want them on our team?** – rarely asked out loud, but it decides almost every hire.

RECRUITER INSIGHT

"The strongest graduate candidates aren't usually the ones who know the most. They're the ones who show they can learn the fastest."

What employers do NOT expect from you

- **To know everything** – nobody does.
- **Years of industry experience** – that's what graduate programmes are for.
- **To be polished** – mistakes and questions are expected, not penalised.
- **To work unsupervised from day one** – good employers plan for a learning curve.

Five traits that show up again and again

- **Curiosity** – asking why, how, and what can I learn?
- **Work ethic** – showing up prepared and following through.
- **Communication** – explaining your thinking clearly, to engineers and non-engineers alike.
- **Adaptability** – engineering careers rarely run in a straight line.
- **Professionalism** – punctuality, accountability and reliability. Small behaviours, lasting impressions.

BEFORE YOU APPLY ANYWHERE

Write down three examples each of teamwork, problem-solving and leadership from your degree, jobs, societies or sport. You will reuse every one of them – in your CV, your applications and your interviews.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Employers aren't looking for finished engineers – they're looking for future ones.

The question isn't "How much do I know today?". It's "How much can I become tomorrow?"

Marketing, not a memoir
The CV that gets shortlisted

A CV is not a record of everything you've done. It's a marketing document designed to demonstrate potential.

A recruiter opening 186 applications for one graduate role doesn't read your CV – they scan it, for about twenty seconds, deciding whether you earn the next conversation. Nothing more. Your only job is to survive those twenty seconds.

The golden rule

Don't tell employers what you did. Tell them what happened because you did it.

WEAK

"Worked on a process design project. Attended meetings. Completed calculations."

STRONG

"Designed a process flow system for a chemical manufacturing project, contributing to a design that achieved a distinction-level assessment."

Cut the buzzwords

'Motivated', 'passionate', 'hardworking', 'dynamic' – anyone can claim these. Employers trust evidence, not adjectives. Replace "I am an excellent problem solver" with "Led investigation into process simulation discrepancies, identifying modelling assumptions that improved prediction accuracy".

The bullet formula

Every experience bullet should answer three questions in one line – What did you do? How did you do it? What was the result? "Led coordination of a five-person design team, managing project milestones and contributing to a process design project that achieved a first-class grade" does all three at once.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Sarah submitted over thirty applications with almost no success. Her CV read – "Responsible for project work", "Worked in a team", "Assisted with research". After rewriting the same experience around outcomes instead of duties, interview requests increased dramatically. Nothing about her experience changed – only how she described it.

The anatomy of a strong graduate CV

- **Contact details** – name, email, phone, LinkedIn. Skip date of birth, nationality and photos.
- **Professional profile** – a trailer, not the full film. It should answer – "why should I keep reading?"
- **Education** – degree, university, classification, relevant modules, and your final-year project.
- **Experience (the section that decides things)** – university projects, part-time work, societies, volunteering and sport all count. Use a what/how/result formula for every bullet.
- **Technical skills** – grouped, not dumped – Process and Engineering Software (Aspen Plus, HYSYS, AutoCAD); Data and Analysis (Excel, MATLAB, Python); Engineering Methods (mass and energy balances, HAZOP awareness).
- **Additional information** – only if it adds value – memberships, languages, notable achievements.

Five mistakes that kill CVs

- Treating it as a history document instead of a marketing one.
- Listing duties instead of achievements.
- Poor formatting that's hard to scan.
- Spelling and grammar errors.
- Sending the same CV to every employer.

THE TAILORING ADVANTAGE

Before every application – re-read the job description, pull out its keywords, and match your strongest, most relevant experiences to them. Twenty minutes of tailoring outperforms an hour of generic applying.

Score your own CV (1–5)

Open your current CV alongside this page and rate it honestly against each category. Rough anchor – one means duties and generic phrases, three means some evidence but inconsistent, five means every bullet has a number or named outcome and the whole thing is tailored to the role.

CATEGORY	SCORE 1-5 (WEAK TO STRONG)	
Professional profile	5	
Structure and readability	5	
Evidence of achievement	5	
Technical skills	5	TOTAL
Tailoring to the role	5	25

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR SCORE

Add up all five.

20–25 – ready to send.

15–19 – solid, but tighten anything scoring below a four.

Under 15 – worth a full rewrite, starting with your lowest category.

Not sure what a five looks like in practice? Turn the page – the CV template shows exactly that.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A CV is a marketing document, not a record of everything you've done.

The strongest CVs don't just say what happened – they show why it mattered. That difference decides who gets the interview.

Section 2 in action

A CV you can copy

Here's the information from the last two pages, applied. Copy the structure, **not the wording** – every line below exists to show a technique, not to be reused verbatim.

JORDAN OKAFOR

jordan.okafor@online.com·07XXX XXXXXX·linkedin.com/in/mynamehere

Professional profile

Final-year Chemical Engineering student (MEng, predicted First) with hands-on experience in process design, data analysis and cross-functional teamwork through academic and industrial projects. Particular interest in process optimisation and sustainable manufacturing. Seeking a graduate role applying core engineering principles while continuing to build technical and professional capability.

Education

MEng Chemical Engineering, University of Leeds – Expected 2027, First Class (predicted)

Relevant modules: Process Design, Reaction Engineering, Process Control, Heat and Mass Transfer

Final-year project: Techno-economic assessment of a green hydrogen production route

Experience

Process Design Team Lead – University Design Project, 2026

- Led coordination of a five-person team delivering a distillation column design to a strict deadline, achieving a first-class grade.
- Built a process simulation in Aspen HYSYS to validate mass and energy balances against target specifications.

Summer Industrial Placement – [Company], 2025

- Analysed operational data across two production lines to identify a recurring efficiency loss, presenting findings to the site engineering team.
- Shadowed HAZOP reviews and safety walk-downs, gaining early exposure to process safety in practice.

IChemE Student Ambassador, 2025–present

- Supported other students in making use of their IChemE membership benefits, and delivered a DiscoverChemEng outreach session to 300 school pupils.

Treasurer – University Chemical Engineering Society, 2024–present

- Managed a termly budget and coordinated four employer engagement events with over 100 attendees combined.

Technical skills

Process and Engineering Software: Aspen Plus, Aspen HYSYS, AutoCAD

Data and Analysis: Excel, MATLAB, Python

Engineering Methods: Mass and Energy Balances, HAZOP Awareness, P&ID Interpretation

Additional information

Student Member, IChemE · Conversational French · Full UK driving licence

NOTICE WHAT'S DOING THE WORK

Every bullet has a number or a named outcome in it – five-person team, two production lines, four events, 100+ attendees. Skills are grouped by category, not dumped in a list. And there isn't a single 'motivated' or 'passionate' anywhere.

Short, specific, structured

A cover letter that earns a read

A good cover letter is three short paragraphs, not a second CV. Here's a structure that works for almost any graduate application – swap in your own detail wherever you see brackets. If you're applying by email, a cover letter is simply the content of the email you send.

Dear [Hiring Manager's name],

I am writing to apply for the Graduate Process Engineer position at [Company], as advertised on [source]. As a final-year Chemical Engineering student graduating in 2027, I am particularly drawn to [Company]'s work in [specific area – eg sustainable manufacturing, hydrogen infrastructure] and the structured development your graduate programme offers.

During my degree, I have built strong foundations in process design and data analysis, most recently leading a five-person team through a distillation column design project that achieved a first-class grade. Alongside my studies, a summer placement at [Company] gave me direct exposure to how process safety and operational efficiency are managed on a live site – an experience that confirmed my interest in process engineering as a career.

I am especially motivated by [Company]'s [specific initiative, technology or value], and I believe my combination of technical grounding, teamwork and genuine curiosity about the industry would allow me to contribute meaningfully to your team from day one.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application further and have attached my CV for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

THREE THINGS EVERY COVER LETTER NEEDS

Specific research – pull it straight from your Company and Job Research notes at the start of this guide, not 'your great reputation'. One concrete achievement with a number attached. A clear, honest reason 'why you' – not a reason why the job would be good for you.

Why good candidates get rejected
Cracking the application

Employers cannot hire potential they cannot see.

Application forms don't exist to collect information – they exist to filter candidates. Every question is designed to answer one of two things – can this person do the job, and would we want them on our team? Once you see forms this way, they get much easier to navigate.

Four reasons good candidates get rejected

- **Generic applications** – "I am interested in engineering" tells a recruiter nothing. Specificity signals intent.
- **Weak examples** – claims ("I have strong leadership skills") without evidence carry no weight.
- **Not answering the question asked** – a teamwork question needs a teamwork answer, not a technical one.
- **Rushing** – hours are spent finding jobs, minutes completing the form. Flip that ratio.

RECRUITER INSIGHT

"Most rejected candidates aren't rejected because they're unsuitable. They're rejected because they fail to demonstrate suitability."

Before you submit, check

- Did I actually answer the question that was asked?
- Did I provide evidence, not just a claim?
- Did I explain my specific contribution, not just the team's?
- Did I include a real outcome or result?
- Did I proofread it thoroughly?

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Nathan had a strong degree, a CV reviewed by his careers service, and a completed internship. After forty applications he had no interviews and assumed something was wrong with him. It wasn't – he was treating applications as paperwork; employers were treating them as an assessment. Once he understood that distinction, and carefully researched each company, tailored his CV and applications, his results changed.

Competency questions – use STAR+R

"Tell me about a time you worked in a team" isn't a memory test – it's a request for structured evidence. Use five steps, not four:

- **Situation** – what was happening?
- **Task** – what needed to be achieved?
- **Action** – what did YOU specifically do?
- **Result** – what happened?
- **Reflection** – what did you learn, or do differently next time? Most candidates stop at Result. This is the letter that separates you from them.

WORKED EXAMPLE – "TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU WORKED IN A TEAM"

S A final-year design project needed six students to deliver a complex process design to a strict deadline.

T I was responsible for coordinating the simulation workstream and keeping information flowing between sub-teams.

A I set up weekly progress meetings, built a shared tracker, and kept communication regular across workstreams.

R We finished ahead of schedule, and the project achieved a first-class grade.

Reflection It taught me how much proactive communication and clear role definition matter in multidisciplinary teams.

Use the worksheet on page 26 to write your own STAR+R responses.

"Why this company"

WEAK

"I believe this role would provide valuable experience and help me develop my career."

STRONG

"I'm attracted to your graduate programme because of its structured development pathway, and your investment in sustainable manufacturing."

This is exactly where the Company and Job Research notes you took at the start of this guide earn their keep – the deeper your understanding of a company, the stronger every answer here becomes.

QUALITY BEATS QUANTITY

20 highly-tailored applications will consistently outperform a hundred generic ones. Keep a simple tracker – like the example on the next page – and treat your search like a project, because it is one.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The application process is a test of communication, not intelligence.

Employers cannot hire potential they cannot see – your job is to make it visible through evidence, structure and clear examples.

Fill this in as you go

Your application and research tracker

Photocopy this page, rebuild it in a spreadsheet, or just use it as-is – the point is to treat your search like the project it is. Log every application here before you submit it.

COMPANY	ROLE	APPLIED	STATUS	FOLLOW-UP

FIND YOUR NEXT ROLE

Scan the QR code to browse live vacancies on *The Chemical Engineer* jobs board – jobs.thechemicalengineer.com – and set up job alerts so new roles land in your inbox.

Need the company research prompts? They're in the Company and Job Research section at the start of this guide – fill those in for a role before you log it here.

Be findable, not just applying

LinkedIn and your professional brand

The opportunities available to you are shaped not only by what you know, but by who knows you.

Professional reputation starts before your first job. The students who build visibility early often create opportunities before they need them – small, consistent actions can have a genuinely long-term impact.

Why your profile matters – PIE theory

Great grades and strong performance aren't enough on their own. Harvey Coleman's PIE theory suggests that when people are considered for opportunities, Performance accounts for only around 10% of the decision. Image – how you work with others, and how you present yourself – accounts for roughly 30%. The remaining 60% is Exposure – whether the right people actually know what you can do.

As a student, you may not have much Performance to show yet – that's normal. LinkedIn is one of the easiest places to start building Exposure regardless, well before you have a long career history to point to.

Three fundamentals of using LinkedIn

Everything on this page and the next reduces to three habits – connect with new people, engage with others, and share your own perspective.

- **Connect** – search for people working in the field you're interested in and send a short, specific connection request. If they don't accept, you can simply follow them instead.
- **Engage** – comment thoughtfully on posts from people and companies you're interested in. This gets you noticed long before you ever apply anywhere.
- **Share** – post your own experiences, however small. Visibility compounds – it rewards showing up consistently, not posting perfectly.

Five components worth getting right

- **Photo** – good lighting, professional, no group shots or heavy filters.
- **Headline** – don't waste it on 'Chemical Engineering Student'. Try – 'Final Year Chemical Engineering Student, Process Engineering, Sustainability, or Open to Graduate Opportunities'.
- **About section** – answer three questions in a few lines – who are you, what interests you, where are you heading?
- **Experience** – design projects, research, part-time work and student leadership all count as experience.
- **Skills** – a short, honest list beats a long, generic one.

THE 15-MINUTE WEEKLY HABIT

Five minutes reading industry news. Five minutes commenting thoughtfully on two or three posts. Five minutes connecting with one or two professionals. Consistency beats intensity.

Getting over the cringe factor

- Your first posts will feel awkward – that's completely normal.
- You're not posting for your friends – you're communicating with your professional network. Different audience, different tone.
- You don't need to sound like an expert. Share experiences, lessons and honest questions instead.

The awkwardness is temporary, but the upside of connecting with others online isn't. Consistency is what makes it feel normal – the more you post, the less strange it feels. You don't need a finished career to start using LinkedIn; you need to show up, so don't wait for graduation or a long list of achievements before you begin.

What to post

Three simple pillars cover almost everything worth posting – what you're learning, what you're experiencing, and what you're thinking.

- A lesson from a design project.
- An industry event or webinar takeaway.
- A placement reflection.
- A question about an emerging technology.
- An observation about sustainability or process engineering.

Five common mistakes

- Treating LinkedIn like Facebook.
- Only logging in when job hunting.
- Sending connection requests with zero context.
- Posting often but adding no value.
- Leaving the profile half-finished.

A CONNECTION MESSAGE THAT WORKS

"Hello [Name], I'm a final-year Chemical Engineering student with an interest in process engineering, and noticed your experience in the sector. I'd be delighted to connect and learn from your insights into the profession." Simple, professional, respectful – that's the whole formula.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Priya regularly shared updates about her university projects and the industry events she attended – nothing dramatic, nothing excessive. Months later, an engineering manager contacted her directly about a graduate opening. "We could see your genuine interest in the profession," he told her. She never went looking for that opportunity; her visibility found it for her.

KEY TAKEAWAY

LinkedIn is a visibility platform, not an online CV.

Performance only accounts for a fraction of how opportunities find you – Exposure is the lever most students leave completely untouched.

Relationships, not contacts
Networking (without the cringe)

Networking is not about collecting contacts. It's about building relationships.

A huge number of graduate roles are filled through referrals, recommendations and internal conversations before they're ever advertised – the so-called hidden job market. It isn't unfair; it's employers reducing risk by starting with people they already trust. Visibility earns you a place in that conversation.

Where it actually happens

- **University** – lecturers, guest speakers, alumni, industry visitors. Hugely underused.
- **LinkedIn** – the easiest and lowest-pressure place to start.
- **IChemE Connect** – the online space for IChemE members, a surefire place to meet other engineers.
- **Professional institutions** – IChemE events and Special Interest Groups (Oil, Gas and Energy Transition, Biochemical Engineering, Food and Drink, Nuclear Technology, Clean Energy and more) put you in a room with practising engineers in the sector you're curious about.
- **Your existing network** – family, friends, past employers and academic supervisors. Closer than you think.

Ask to learn, not to be hired

Swap "can you help me get a job?" for genuine, career-focused questions – "How did you get started?", "What surprised you most about your career?", or "What skills matter most for graduates right now?"

AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW MESSAGE

"Hello [Name], I'm a final-year Chemical Engineering student with an interest in process engineering. I came across your profile and would greatly appreciate a short conversation to learn about your career journey and any advice for someone entering the profession." Afterwards – say thank you, follow up, stay in touch – don't disappear or immediately ask for a favour.

YOUR 4-WEEK NETWORKING CHALLENGE

Week 1 – connect with one professional.

Week 2 – attend one webinar or event.

Week 3 – have one informational conversation.

Week 4 – reflect on what you learned, and do it again.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Chloe messaged a process engineer she'd found on LinkedIn – not looking for a job, just insight. Their twenty-minute conversation led to an introduction to a colleague. Months later, when a graduate role opened up, Chloe was encouraged to apply. She still had to earn it. But the relationship helped open the door.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Networking isn't about collecting contacts – it's about building relationships.

Approach it as learning rather than self-promotion, and the opportunities that change careers often begin with a single conversation.

Choose the learning, not the label

Graduate scheme or direct entry?

The question isn't "is this a graduate scheme?". It's "will this help me become a better engineer?"

Graduate schemes are structured, multi-year development programmes – usually built around rotations, formal training, mentoring and chartership support. Direct-entry roles trade that structure for earlier responsibility and faster hands-on experience. Neither is automatically superior.

GRADUATE SCHEME	DIRECT ENTRY ROLE
Structured and supported	Immediate responsibility
Broad exposure via rotations	Faster practical experience
Formal development plan	Greater ownership, sooner
Often strong chartership support	Earlier specialisation

Questions to ask before accepting a scheme

- What training is provided, and how is my progress measured?
- Which departments will I rotate through, and how are placements chosen?
- Will I have a mentor, and how often will I get feedback?
- How does the organisation support Chartered status?
- What typically happens to people after the programme ends?

MENTOR NOTE

When evaluating opportunities, focus less on the label and more on the learning. A great direct-entry role will outperform a poor graduate scheme every time.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Daniel skipped the graduate scheme and joined a mid-sized manufacturer instead. Within a year he'd supported major plant improvements, led small projects and worked closely with operators – while some graduate-scheme peers were still rotating between departments. Five years on, both routes had produced strong engineers. The journeys were simply different.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Graduate schemes can be excellent launchpads – but they're not the only route to success.

The right question isn't "is this a graduate scheme?". It's "will this help me become a better engineer?"

The silent interview
Psychometric tests

For many employers, psychometric testing is the first interview – and it eliminates thousands of capable candidates before a human ever reads their CV.

These tests exist because employers can't interview 500 people for ten roles. Treat them with the same seriousness as an interview, because that's exactly what they are.

The four you'll most likely meet

- **Numerical reasoning** – tables, graphs, percentages, ratios. The maths is rarely advanced; the challenge is speed under pressure.
- **Verbal reasoning** – true/false/cannot say, based only on the text given. Golden rule – use only the information provided, never outside knowledge.
- **Situational judgement (SJTs)** – workplace scenarios asking, "what would you do?" The strongest answer is rarely the most dramatic one – employers value communication and collaboration over heroics.
- **Personality questionnaires** – there's no 'pass'. Answer honestly; trying to guess the 'right' personality usually produces inconsistent, easy-to-spot answers.

YOUR 14-DAY PREP PLAN

Days 1–4 – numerical reasoning practice.

Days 5–8 – verbal reasoning practice.

Days 9–11 – situational judgement scenarios.

Days 12–14 – full timed mock tests, start to finish.

On the day

- **Before** – read instructions carefully, find a quiet space, have a calculator ready if allowed.
- **During** – manage your time, don't chase perfection on one question, move on and come back if needed.
- **After** – don't overanalyse – focus your energy on the next stage.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Rebecca sat a numerical reasoning test with no preparation and didn't progress. For her next application she spent three weeks practising timed numerical and data-interpretation exercises. Same ability, different result – she comfortably passed and moved on to interview. Her preparation, not her aptitude, had changed.

KEY TAKEAWAY

For many employers, psychometric testing is the first interview.

Preparation is not cheating – it's exactly what closes the gap between a strong candidate and a shortlisted one.

What assessors are really watching
Assessment centres

Employers aren't looking for individual heroes. They're looking for future colleagues.

Assessment centres are not a competition to be won – they're a simulation of how you'll behave at work. The candidate who talks the most and dominates every exercise usually performs worse than the one who listens, contributes and helps the group succeed.

What's really being assessed

- **Communication** – clear, structured, concise. Not necessarily loud.
- **Teamwork** – do you encourage participation, listen actively, build on others' ideas?
- **Problem solving** – assessors often care more about your reasoning than your final answer.
- **Professionalism** – respect, courtesy, reliability. Small behaviours create strong impressions.
- **Leadership** – means helping the group progress (summarising, clarifying, drawing in quiet members), not taking control.

WEAK GROUP BEHAVIOUR	STRONG GROUP BEHAVIOUR
Interrupting, dominating, ignoring quieter candidates, becoming argumentative.	Listening actively, inviting input, building consensus, keeping the discussion productive.

Presentations – keep the structure simple

- **Opening** – explain the objective.
- **Analysis** – present your key findings.
- **Recommendation** – give your conclusion.
- **Summary** – reinforce the key message.

THINK OUT LOUD

Assessors can't evaluate reasoning they can't see. In case studies and group exercises, narrate your assumptions and your logic – you don't need to match a hidden 'right answer', you need to show sound thinking.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Sarah worried she was too quiet for assessment centres. Instead of competing for airtime, she focused on listening, asking questions, summarising key points and drawing others in. She never dominated the discussion – and assessors later described her as one of the strongest collaborators in the room. She got the offer.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Employers aren't looking for individual heroes – they're looking for future colleagues.

You don't need to dominate the room. You do need to contribute to it.

What interviewers are really thinking

Interview masterclass

The interviewer isn't asking, "can this person answer my questions?" They're asking, "can I imagine working with this person?"

Types of interviews you may encounter

- **Screening** – a short recruiter call to check basic fit and confirm your interest. Low-pressure, but still being assessed.
- **AI or video interview** – often pre-recorded, answering set questions to a camera with no interviewer present. Treat it exactly as seriously as a live interview – practise speaking naturally under a countdown timer beforehand.
- **Psychometric tests and assessment centres** – covered in full in **Sections 7** and **8**, but worth remembering – these are also a form of interview, and often the first one you'll sit.
- **Panel interview** – several interviewers at once. Make eye contact with whoever asked the question, but bring the rest of the panel into your answer.
- **Competency-based interview** – structured around specific past-behaviour questions, where STAR+R does most of the work.

By interview stage, the employer already knows you have a degree and sufficient technical grounding – that's why you're in the room. What they're really assessing is four things:

- **Competence** – can you demonstrate relevant skills through real examples?
- **Potential** – can you grow into the role, not just fill it today?
- **Motivation** – do you genuinely want this, or are you applying everywhere? Interviewers can usually tell.
- **Self-awareness** – do you know your strengths, and recognise where you need to develop?

RECRUITER INSIGHT

"One of the strongest indicators of future success is self-awareness. Candidates who understand themselves tend to develop faster once hired."

Three types of questions, one interview

Almost every graduate interview blends competency questions (about your past behaviour), technical questions (about your engineering understanding) and motivational questions (about why this role, this company, this path). Prepare for all three – not just the one you're most comfortable with.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Tom left an interview feeling defeated, even though the questions hadn't been especially hard – he'd prepared extensively and knew the company well. The feedback surprised him – "You clearly had strong technical knowledge, but we never really got to know you." He'd spent the interview trying to sound impressive. The panel was trying to understand who he was.

Competency questions – STAR+R, spoken aloud

Same framework as your written applications – Situation, Task, Action, Result, Reflection – but this time you're saying it, not writing it. Most candidates stop at Result; adding a genuine Reflection is what signals maturity.

Technical questions – start simple, think out loud

Interviewers are rarely trying to catch you out – they're assessing fundamentals, logic and how you communicate under pressure. Start with the basics ("A heat exchanger transfers thermal energy between two fluids at different temperatures without allowing them to mix...") before adding complexity. If you're unsure, say so and explain your reasoning anyway – silence demonstrates nothing; a structured guess demonstrates engineering thinking.

MENTOR NOTE

Interviewers don't expect graduates to know everything. What they do expect is structured thinking, and a willingness to work through problems logically, even when you don't have the answer memorised.

Motivational questions – be specific

WEAK

"You seem like a good company and the role looks interesting."

STRONG

"I'm drawn to your commitment to process innovation, your graduate development programme, and your work in sustainable manufacturing."

If you genuinely don't know

WEAK RESPONSE

Guessing wildly, becoming defensive, or panicking into silence.

STRONG RESPONSE

"I haven't encountered that specific situation, but my approach would be..." – honesty plus a reasoned approach.

The interview starts before the first question. How you join the call, greet your interviewers, introduce yourself and handle the opening minutes all shape their first impression.

Prepare a 60–90 second introduction covering who you are, where you study, what interests you about chemical engineering, and why this particular opportunity.

Body language that helps

- Maintain natural eye contact and sit professionally.
- Listen actively – don't just wait for your turn to talk.
- Let genuine engagement (and the occasional smile) show.

NEED PRACTICAL HELP?

Skills for Success runs a dedicated interview skills webinar, free to IChemE student members – see the **Further Resources** page for details.

www.icheme.org/education-career/skills-for-success

A simple structure for any answer

- Answer the question directly.
- Provide evidence.
- Explain the outcome.
- Share what you learned.

Good questions to ask them

- **Development** – "How do graduates typically develop in their first two years?"
- **Support** – "What mentoring is available?"
- **Success** – "What distinguishes your most successful graduates?"
- **Future** – "What's the biggest challenge facing the business over the next few years?"

FIVE COMMON MISTAKES

Talking too much, or too little. Arriving without preparation. Memorising answers word-for-word instead of knowing the story. Making claims with no evidence behind them.

BEFORE EVERY INTERVIEW

Research the company. Re-read the role description. Prepare five STAR+R examples (use the worksheet on page 26 to help). Practise explaining one technical concept aloud. Prepare two or three good questions. Run one mock interview – out loud, not just in your head.

After the interview

- Send a short thank-you email within a day or two.
- Reaffirm your interest in the role.
- Mention one discussion point you found genuinely interesting.
- If unsuccessful, politely request feedback – it's one of the fastest ways to improve.

Interview readiness audit (1–5)

Score yourself honestly on each area below before you walk in.

CATEGORY	SCORE 1-5 (WEAK TO STRONG)	
Technical knowledge		
STAR+R examples ready		
Company research		
Body language and delivery		TOTAL
Questions prepared		

LOW SCORE? GO STRAIGHT THERE

Technical knowledge – the Q&A Bank, page 23. STAR+R examples – build them properly on page 26. Company research – your notes from page 5. Body language – page 21. Questions prepared – "Good questions to ask them," above.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Interviews aren't designed to find perfect candidates – they're designed to find future colleagues.

The interviewer isn't asking, "Can this person answer my questions?" They're asking, "Can I imagine working with this person?"

Chemical engineering fundamentals
Technical interview Q&A bank

Chemical engineering technical interviews tend to test three distinct things, often without saying so explicitly – what you know, whether you can apply it, and how you think when you don't know the answer. This bank is organised around exactly those three categories – use it to practise the structure of your answers, not to memorise a script.

A. Fundamentals of chemical engineering

Core theory – the building blocks everything else in this bank is built on.

Explain how a heat exchanger works

Tests: *Fundamentals, and whether you reach for basics before complexity.*

- Start simple – transfers thermal energy between two fluids at different temperatures without mixing them.
- Name a type if you can (shell-and-tube, plate) and one factor that affects performance (flow arrangement, fouling).
- If asked to go deeper, talk through counter-current vs co-current flow and why counter-current is usually more efficient.

Walk me through how you'd approach a mass balance on an unfamiliar process

Tests: *Structured thinking under uncertainty, not a memorised formula.*

- Define the system boundary first – what's crossing in and out.
- State your assumption – steady state, unless told otherwise.
- Write the general balance (in = out + accumulation) and explain how you'd simplify it for this case.

How would you explain a basic control loop to someone outside engineering?

Tests: *Communication as much as technical recall.*

- A sensor measures something (eg temperature), a controller compares it to a setpoint, and a final control element (eg a valve) adjusts the process to close the gap.
- Keep the analogy simple – a thermostat is a control loop most people already understand.
- If pushed further, mention feedback vs feedforward control.

Why do pumps cavitate, and why does it matter?

Tests: *Whether fluid mechanics is a working tool for you, not just an exam topic.*

- Cavitation happens when local pressure drops below the fluid's vapour pressure, forming vapour bubbles that then collapse violently.
- It matters because it damages equipment and reduces efficiency over time.
- Link it to a practical fix if you can – check available NPSH against the pump's required NPSH.

B. Application of chemical engineering

Translating theory into a real engineering decision – not just defining a concept, but using it.

Why might you choose distillation over another separation method?

Tests: *Whether you understand trade-offs, not just definitions.*

- Lead with the driver – separating components by relative volatility.
- Mention when it stops being the right choice – close boiling points, heat-sensitive materials, energy cost.
- Naming an alternative (extraction, membrane separation) and why it might suit those cases shows range.

What factors would you consider when selecting a reactor type?

Tests: *Practical judgement, applied to a real design decision.*

- Reaction kinetics and whether the reaction is fast or slow, exo- or endothermic.
- Batch vs continuous – production scale and flexibility needs.
- Safety and control – how easily the reaction can be managed if something goes wrong.

What is a HAZOP, and why does it matter?

Tests: *Whether you take process safety seriously, even without direct experience.*

- A structured, team-based review that uses guide words (more, less, no, reverse) to identify how a process could deviate from its design intent.
- It matters because it catches hazards on paper, before they become incidents on a plant.
- If you've observed one, say so briefly – direct exposure stands out.

How would you improve the energy efficiency of a process you're unfamiliar with?

Tests: *A structured problem-solving approach, not a specific right answer.*

- Start by asking where the energy is going – you can't improve what you haven't measured.
- Look for obvious wins first – heat integration, insulation, waste heat recovery.
- Frame it as a process – measure, identify the biggest losses, prioritise by cost and effort.

C. Reasoning and problem solving

These don't have one correct answer. What's being scored is how you think under uncertainty – not whether you land on the exact right number.

A distillation column that's run reliably for years suddenly shows falling product purity. How would you start investigating?

Tests: *Diagnostic reasoning under real operating conditions, not textbook recall.*

- Start with what's changed – feed composition, reflux ratio, reboiler duty, fouling. Something has shifted.
- Check operating data first – temperatures, pressures, flow rates against normal ranges – before assuming equipment failure.
- Narrow systematically – rule out feed and utilities before assuming a mechanical problem inside the column itself.

Estimate how many litres of water a typical UK household shower uses in a year.

Tests: *Structured estimation under uncertainty – a classic 'Fermi problem'. The final number matters far less than your method.*

- Break it into parts you can actually estimate – flow rate per minute, shower length, showers per day, days per year.
- State your assumptions out loud as you go – for example, eight litres a minute, an eight-minute shower, one a day.
- Multiply through and sanity-check the final number – does it feel roughly right?

You spot a change that would increase plant output, but you're not fully sure it's safe. What do you do?

Tests: *Judgement and prioritisation – whether safety genuinely comes first under pressure, not just on paper.*

- Say clearly you wouldn't implement or recommend it until the safety question is resolved.
- Explain how you'd resolve it – raise it with a supervisor, or run it through a proper safety review or HAZOP.
- Avoid sounding like output doesn't matter – the strongest answer balances both, but never trades away safety.

How would you approach a technical problem you've genuinely never seen before?

Tests: *Your problem-solving process itself – this question can appear in almost any form.*

- Say the process out loud – clarify the problem, identify what you know and don't know, break it into smaller parts.
- Reach for fundamentals – mass and energy balances, first principles – before reaching for a memorised formula.
- It's fine to say what you'd look up or who you'd ask – knowing the limits of your own knowledge is part of the answer.

IF YOU DON'T KNOW

Say so, then reason anyway – "I haven't covered that in detail, but based on [related principle], I'd expect…" A structured guess beats silence every time – interviewers are scoring your thinking, not just your recall.

Build these once, reuse everywhere

Your STAR+R bank

Five examples cover almost every competency question you'll be asked. Fill these in properly, in full sentences, before your first interview – then you're just retrieving, not improvising.

1. A TIME YOU WORKED IN A TEAM	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	
Reflection	

2. A TIME YOU SHOWED LEADERSHIP	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	
Reflection	

3. A TIME YOU SOLVED A DIFFICULT PROBLEM	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	
Reflection	

4. A TIME YOU FACED A SETBACK OR FAILURE	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	
Reflection	

5. A TIME YOU WENT BEYOND WHAT WAS EXPECTED	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	
Reflection	

USING THESE IN THE ROOM

You won't get to pick which competency comes up – but most questions map onto one of these five. Practise saying each one aloud, not just reading it back, so it sounds like a story and not a script.

Choose the right one, not just the first one

Evaluating (and negotiating) offers

The best offer is not always the highest salary. It's the one that moves you forward.

An offer arrives with relief, excitement and urgency – exactly the conditions that make objective decisions difficult. Slow down for a day before accepting anything. Salary matters, but it's one factor among many.

Eight factors worth weighing

- **Learning opportunities** – usually your highest priority early on.
- **Chartership support** – mentoring and competency development toward professional registration.
- **Quality of management** – a good manager accelerates your growth more than almost anything else.
- **Technical exposure** – what will you be doing, day to day?
- **Responsibility** – will you own real work, with support alongside it?
- **Culture** – how people interact, not just what's written on the website.
- **Location and lifestyle** – commute, cost of living, work-life balance.
- **Salary and benefits** – real, but often the least important factor five years from now.

RED FLAGS TO NEVER IGNORE

Nobody can explain what you'll be doing. High staff turnover. Consistently poor communication during recruitment. No visible development or training plan.

Declining professionally

"Thank you very much for the opportunity. After careful consideration, I've decided to pursue an alternative role that aligns more closely with my current career goals. I appreciate the time invested in the process and wish you continued success". Professional relationships outlast any single application – protect them.

GRADUATE CASE STUDY

Ben chose his role mainly because of the manager he met at interview – not the highest salary, not the most prestigious name. That manager invested heavily in his development. Within three years Ben had built real technical competence, taken on leadership opportunities and made strong progress toward chartership. He credits much of it to who he chose to work for.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Getting an offer is an achievement. Accepting the right one is a career decision.

Choose the opportunity that helps you become the engineer you want to be – everything else tends to follow.

Confidence comes later, competence comes first

Bonus – your first 90 days

You won't be expected to know everything on day one – you'll be expected to learn quickly.

Most graduates expect to feel confident almost immediately. Most instead feel uncertainty, information overload and the occasional wobble of self-doubt. That's completely normal – not a sign you've made the wrong choice.

Four habits that build a strong foundation

- Listen more than you speak, especially in your first few weeks.
- Ask questions – good employers expect them, and they save you from bigger mistakes later.
- Keep a simple learning log of what you're picking up week to week.
- Be relentlessly reliable on the small things – punctuality, follow-through, doing what you said you would.

A simple shape for your first 90 days

- **Weeks 1–2** – observe. Learn names, systems and how work flows before trying to change any of it.
- **Weeks 3–6** – contribute. Start owning small, well-defined pieces of work. Ask for feedback early and often.
- **Weeks 7–12** – build momentum. Take on more responsibility, start shaping how you want to be known, and revisit what you've learned so far.

ON FEELING LIKE A FRAUD

Sitting in a room with engineers who have ten or twenty years of experience, it's easy to conclude everyone else knows exactly what they're doing and you don't. What's really happening is you're comparing your beginning to someone else's middle – not a fair comparison, and not evidence of anything except that you're new. A better question than "why don't I know as much as everyone else?" is "am I learning more than I knew last month?"

KEY TAKEAWAY

Confidence comes later. Competence comes first – and competence is built through repetition, not talent.

Every senior engineer in the room was once the newest person in it.

The qualification behind the career

Chartership explained

Chartered Member status is IChemE's way of saying – your professional competence and commitment have been independently verified.

It isn't a formality and it isn't automatic. Chartered Member is IChemE's senior grade, carrying the postnominal MIChemE, and it gives you the right to call yourself a Chartered Chemical Engineer – the highest level of recognition in the profession, and one only IChemE can award. Most chemical engineers who reach senior technical or leadership roles hold it.

What the standard actually covers

IChemE assesses five areas, drawn directly from the UK's official standard for professional engineers (UK-SPEC). The first four are competence; the fifth is commitment.

A Knowledge and understanding.

B Design, development and solving engineering problems.

C Responsibility, management and leadership.

D Communication and interpersonal skills.

E Professional commitment.

How you're assessed

Two stages, once you apply:

- **Underpinning Knowledge and Understanding** – usually satisfied by an IChemE-accredited degree.
- **Competence and Commitment** – a Technical Biography, a Competence and Commitment Report, and a Professional Review Interview with trained IChemE volunteers.

MENTOR NOTE

Chartership isn't a reward for years served – it's an assessment of demonstrated competence. If you're ever unsure whether you're ready, IChemE explicitly recommends finding a mentor – through your employer, your local area network, or IChemE's own Mentor Match service.

Your chartership starting point

You don't need a job offer, or even a plan, to start. The groundwork begins now, as a student.

- **Join IChemE as a Student Member** – it's free for undergraduates on a chemical, biochemical or process engineering degree, with no application fee or subscription until after you graduate.
- **Use your studies** – check that your course is IChemE-accredited; it's what satisfies the Underpinning Knowledge requirement later on.
- **Start noticing your own competence** – the design projects, placements and team roles you're already building evidence in without realising it.
- **Transfer to Associate Member after graduating** – the typical next step once you hold an accredited degree, and the base from which you build toward Chartered Member.

What about CEng, EngTech and IEng?

IChemE holds a licence from the Engineering Council to award all three. For most graduates, Chartered Engineer (CEng) is the relevant one – and it isn't a separate application – when you apply for Chartered Member, you can opt into CEng registration at the same time, for an extra fee but no extra assessment, since the same standard already covers it. EngTech and IEng exist for different stages and types of engineering practice.

A realistic shape, not a fixed timeline

There's no single official countdown – progress depends on the responsibility and complexity you take on, not the calendar. Broadly:

- **Student Member** – now, while you finish your degree.
- **Associate Member (AMIChemE)** – after graduation, once your accredited degree is confirmed.
- **Building competence (IChemE calls this Initial Professional Development)** – several years of increasingly complex engineering responsibility, often supported by a mentor or a structured Accredited Company Training Scheme.
- **Chartered Member (MIChemE)** – once you can evidence the required competencies, with CEng available alongside if you want it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Chartership is a career-long credential, but the groundwork starts now, not after graduation.

Free student membership, an accredited degree and a habit of noticing your own evidence are the whole starting point.

Free to access as a student member

Further resources from IChemE

Everything below is provided by IChemE, the professional body for chemical, biochemical and process engineers. Student membership is free – there's no reason not to be using these already.

For finding your first role

- Student Hub – resources built specifically for student members, from study tools to early-career advice. www.icheme.org/education-career/student-hub
- *The Chemical Engineer* jobs board – vacancies from employers actively looking for chemical and process engineers. www.jobs.thechemicalengineer.com
- Find an accredited company training scheme (ACTS) – browse employers with graduate schemes accredited by IChemE. www.icheme.org/education-career/accredited-company-training-schemes
- Salary insight – real data on what chemical engineers earn, by experience level and sector. www.icheme.org/education-career/salary-insight-how-much-do-chemical-engineers-earn

For building your network and knowledge

- IChemE Connect – a global online community to ask questions and meet other members. www.icheme.org/knowledge-networks/communities/icheme-connect
- Special Interest Groups and regional Member Groups – join as many as genuinely interest you; free events and webinars throughout the year.
- DiscoverChemEng – IChemE's campaign showcasing where a chemical engineering career can lead. www.icheme.org/education-career/discoverchemeng
- Volunteer for IChemE – committee roles, Student Ambassador schemes and event support look good and build your network early. www.icheme.org/education-career/volunteer-for-icheme

ONE THING TO DO THIS WEEK

If you haven't already, join as a Student Member – it's free, it takes a few minutes, and it unlocks everything on this page.

EXPLORE SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

This guide is one part of a wider programme. Skills for Success brings together webinars, resources and opportunities built specifically for chemical engineering students and recent graduates – scan the QR code to see what's currently running.

www.icheme.org/
education-career/skills-for-success

The cheat sheet

One page. Every stage. Pin it up and run through it before you hit submit, log in, or walk through the door.

CV

- ❑ Evidence over adjectives – what happened because you did it
- ❑ Six clean sections, tailored keywords, zero typos
- ❑ Include IChemE volunteering and online presence where relevant

APPLICATION

- ❑ Answer the question actually asked
- ❑ STAR+R for every competency answer
- ❑ Research – company, challenges, future plans

PSYCHOMETRIC TEST

- ❑ Practise under timed conditions beforehand
- ❑ Verbal reasoning – use only the text given
- ❑ Move on – don't get stuck on one question

ASSESSMENT CENTRE

- ❑ Contribute, don't dominate
- ❑ Think out loud so assessors can follow your logic
- ❑ Help others look good – it's a team simulation

INTERVIEW

- ❑ Five STAR+R examples, ready to go
- ❑ 'Why this company' answer that's genuinely specific
- ❑ Two or three sharp questions prepared for them

OFFER

- ❑ Weigh learning, mentoring and culture – not just salary
- ❑ Sleep on it before accepting anything
- ❑ Decline gracefully if it's a no

A final word

The question isn't "How much do I know today?" It's "How much can I become tomorrow?"

Every engineer you'll compete against on paper has a similar degree, similar modules and similar technical skills. What separates candidates is far more ordinary than most students expect – evidence over adjectives, preparation over luck, and a genuine, visible curiosity about the profession you're about to join.

You will be rejected sometimes – sometimes a lot. That's not a verdict on your ability; it's a normal, unremarkable part of a competitive process. Improve, adjust, and keep going. Nobody's graduate job search is a straight line.

None of this requires you to become a different person. The CV formula, the STAR+R structure, the assessment-centre mindset, the interview framework – they're all just ways of making the person you already are easier for a stranger to see in twenty seconds, a written form, or a thirty-minute conversation. You already did the hard part by studying. This is just about showing your working.

ONE LAST THING

Keep the cheat sheet on the previous page somewhere you'll actually see it – pinned above your desk, saved as a photo on your phone, whatever sticks. Run through it before every application, every test and every interview. That's it. That's the whole system.

Good luck. Go get hired.

Notes

Contact us for further information

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Get hired
part of Skills for Success –
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www.icheme.org

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