

Advice for non-finance related degrees

Investment Banking › Interview Preparation



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Many students believe that having a degree unrelated to finance will hurt their chances of getting an interview with London investment banks. Truthfully, many investment bankers never studied accounting or finance when they were undergraduate students. Nevertheless, there are a few traps that you will need to avoid, and some good tips to best position yourself. Here is what you should bear in mind when applying and interviewing:

#1 If you were a science student, play on the analytical angle

In your early days as a junior banker, your job will be all about the numbers. Therefore, a background in hard sciences (physics, engineering, chemistry, etc.) is very well-regarded by investment bankers. In your application and during your interview, do highlight that you like to deal with numbers and highly analytical subjects. Bankers will always be impressed if you can show that you are mastering topics that sound complicated: abstract mathematics, theoretical physics, nuclear engineering, or organic chemistry.

#2 If you studied a "soft" subject (Politics, Psychology, etc.), then you will need to demonstrate analytical ability elsewhere in your CV

The first thing that enters the mind of a banker when seeing a degree in a soft subject is "can this person handle the numbers?". During the application process, you need to show analytical ability in your extracurricular activities or hobbies. These can be very simple things such as managing a budget for a club as its treasurer, having built spreadsheets, or worked on anything quantitative during a past internship. Also, highlight sections in newspapers such as the Financial Times to familiarise yourself with some of the finance jargon. Good way would be to read a few [banking and finance books](#) and try to familiarise yourself with some [valuation concepts](#).

#3 Use your non-finance degree to differentiate and indicate your preference for a specific sector

Are you a Computing Science major? Mention your interest in working with technology clients in the Technology M&A Group, or work in equity research covering technology stocks. Similarly....

-Chemistry major: Good for Industrials clients and covering chemical companies (i.e. Solvay, Dupont), know a couple of chemical companies' names.

-Biology/Medicine: Healthcare clients

-Physics: Industrials

-Engineering: Industrials, technology or telecommunication clients

-Marketing major: Retail and consumer clients, media clients

-Law: UK M&A group or UK companies, since you understand the legal environment

-Maths: Try complicated industries that like maths backgrounds such as telecommunications

-History/Geography/Psychology, etc.: It will be more difficult to find an angle but if you show interest in finance and numerical ability, you will be perfectly fine.

#4 Have a good story on why you want to do investment banking

Be prepared to answer the question: “Why did you choose to study History/Engineering/Biology, and [why are you interested in investment banking?](#)” If you are a non-finance student, try to get involved in finance-related activities as soon as you can.

#5 UK banks are very open to candidates’ non-finance backgrounds with good grades

While this is not generally the case in Continental Europe, where banks will typically want to see a finance-related degree (the exception being engineers and lawyers), the UK system is very open. Primarily, Investment Banks want to see evidence of analytical ability through your activities and through passing numerical tests and [brainteasers](#), and well-rounded personalities with maturity and good communication skills, who will be able to handle pressure and interact with senior people. In most cases, a non-finance degree can come as a blessing to differentiate yourself in an industry that is still mostly populated by economics and finance majors. Following the above advice will help you present it as a strength.

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