



THE CABIN CREW INTERVIEW MADE EASY

From Candidate to Crew:

A Behavioural Approach To Getting Hired.

Written By:

Caitlyn Rogers



The Cabin Crew Interview Made Easy

From Candidate to Crew: A Behavioural Approach to Getting Hired

by Caitlyn Rogers

ISBN: xx

Seventh Edition: 20th Anniversary Special
Comprehensive Textbook Edition

Copyright © 2025 Caitlyn Rogers
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations used in reviews or scholarly work.

Disclaimer

This publication is independently authored and is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or sponsored by any airline mentioned. All opinions expressed are solely those of the author, based on personal experience and independent research.

References to specific airlines, uniforms, or cabin crew roles are included for informational and educational purposes only. The author's former employment with Emirates is noted for context and does not imply any current relationship or endorsement.



Published by
Crew Crosscheck

www.crewcrosscheck.com

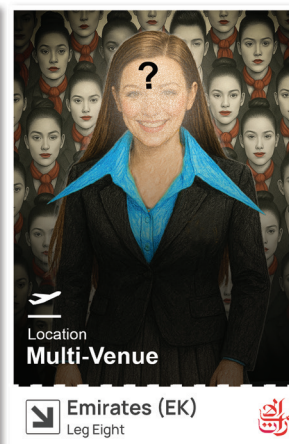
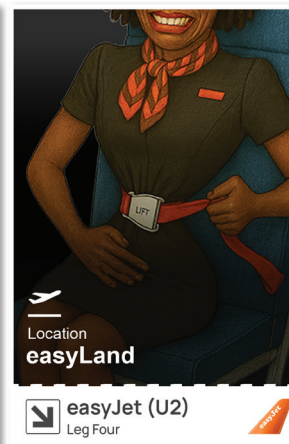


Welcome Aboard

Route Map

Airlines don't train in unicorn onesies — and neither do we. We take our cue from crew training, with dress rehearsals, in-the-unlikely-event scenarios, and full-kit drills. This is prep that earns a clipped wing.

Through real-time simulation, you'll shadow me through my most memorable interviews, using my experience as your case study. From multiple perspectives and through actionable activities, you'll move from theory to lived insight. After each scene, I'll draw on 30 years of research and experience to cut through the noise, make sense of the chaos, and guide you closer to your ideal airline. Along the way, you'll **build and refine the habits that naturally signal "Crew material."**





Itinerary



Leg 0 → Welcome Aboard (Induction)

Serial Reject

Caitlyn's Story from serial reject to Emirates



Leg 1 → Virgin Atlantic (VS) First Attempt

Leave your sensible shoes at the door and step into my seven-inch heels. We're boarding Virgin Atlantic — the airline that flies in the face of ordinary. Through it, you'll see how wildly recruitment can vary, and why this is nothing like a traditional interview. There's method in the madness — and you're about to learn how to read it.

1.1	Virgin Pre-Screening	Requirements and Crosschecking
1.2	Clipped Wings	Unravelling The 99% Failure Rate
1.3	Paperwork	Application Photos (Corporate Culture)
1.4	Getting Dressed	Grooming (Corporate Culture)
1.5	Planning	The Cabin Crew Lifestyle (Early Mornings)
1.6	Guest House	Grooming (Operational Clothing)
1.7	VHQ	Impression Management and Cabin Crew Habits
1.8	Uniforms	Why do you want to become cabin crew?
1.9	Lobby	Airline Intel
1.10	Briefing Room	Cumulative Impressions and Airport Time
1.11	Meet Your Crew	First Impressions and Personality Dynamics
1.12	Dress Code?	Grooming (Dress Like You Work There?)
1.13	Swimming Test?	Requirements and Listening
1.14	Meet Your Seniors	Livery vs Structural Integrity
1.15	Pre-Assessment Briefing	Observing Corporate Culture
1.16	Q&A Round	Ignorance vs Silence
1.17	Self Presentations	Alignment and Personality
1.18a	Discovery Mission	Self Deprecation and Conflict Resolution
1.18b	Discovery Mission	Curiosity and Teamwork
1.18c	Discovery Mission	Cultural Awareness and Pronouncing Names
1.19a	Pretty Woman	Flying Through the Crash
1.19b	Pretty Woman	Practical Personality Test and Leaning Into Tasks
1.20	Elimination Round One	Misunderstandings and Lopsided Eliminations
1.21	Looking For Help	A/B Thinking and Face Value
1.22	Debriefing	The Wrong Chain of Command



L1 Layover - Nikki's Taverna

One layover finds us in a Greek taverna. There, covered in splintered plates, adorned by a tower of flaming glasses, and festooned in bank notes, you'll meet Bambas. What he taught me about Thinking Greek, may be the most effective interview strategy I've ever stumbled across.

L1a **The Audition**

Bambas and Dad's Underpants

L1b **The Event**

Think Greek and Dance Through the Spills



Leg 2 → Old Wives

Stop trying to fit a myth and start aligning with reality. After we're given the collective cold shoulder and directed towards the rejection door, we'll take a detour to the local brewery, where we'll rub shoulder-pads with the Old Wives and soak up their airline recruitment "wisdom". Here, you'll get truth — crosschecked against policy, anchored in evidence, and stitched together with lived experience.

2.1 **The Toad In The Hole Pub**

Introducing the Old Wives and Group Think

2.2 **Research**

Illusion vs Logic

2.3a **Pillar One**

Reframe and Drop the Applicant Mindset

2.3b **Pillar Two**

Think Like and Align To Their Airline

2.3c **Pillar Three**

Think Like An Airline Recruiter

2.3d **Pillar Four**

Behave Like Cabin Crew

2.3e **Pillar Five**

The Simulated Flight



L2 Layover → Virgin Atlantic (VS) Ghost Flight

In another, we'll revisit a Virgin Atlantic ghost flight so mesmerising, it ought to have lit up every recruiter's face. Aboard this special ghost flight, you'll learn to reframe your stories so they speak for you, not against you. And learn why it's important to stop preparing for "an airline" and start preparing for "their" airline.

L2a **Virgin Atlantic Ghost Flight**

Alignment and Thinking Like Their Airline

L2b **Virgin Atlantic**

Surviving Rejection



Leg 3 → Virgin Atlantic (VS) Second Attempt

Then we'll circle back to Virgin Atlantic for a second attempt — only this time, everything is different. You'll move from self-focus to recruiter-awareness by stepping into their role, leading Crew Crosschecks and Debriefs.

3.1	Application Form	Turning Functional Into Bespoke
3.2	Q&A Round	Welcome To Your Simulated Flight
3.3	Self-Introductions	Pre-Flight Briefing
3.4	Boarding Announcement	Public Speaking with Confidence
3.5	Build a Bridge	Teamwork and Problem Solving
3.7	Mini One on One	Answering Traditional Questions

And then we'll take the Old Wives' advice on a whirlwind tour — from British Airways to easyJet, with a quick jaunt to Switzerland for CrossAir. Along the way, you'll learn to tailor your approach, decode each airline's distinct culture, and spot exactly what their recruitment style reveals about what — and who — they're really looking for. Buckle up — oh, but don't touch the...never mind, we'll get to that soon enough.

e Leg 4 → easyJet (U2)

4.1	Functional Jump-seat Test	Discrimination and Secret Tests
-----	----------------------------------	---------------------------------

➤ Leg 5 → British Airways (BA)

5.1	Functional Reach Test	Reality and Expectations
-----	------------------------------	--------------------------

+ Leg 6 → CrossAir (LX)

6.1	Introduction	Third Party Recruiters and Corporate Culture
6.2	Break With Sobranie	Old Wives vs Team Mates
6.3	CrossAir Flight	
6.4	Switzerland	Loss of Identity and Misalignment
6.5	CrossAir Flight	Attention to Detail and Readiness



Leg 7 → Emirates (EK) Open Day

After soaking up the lessons from each, we arrive at an overbooked Emirates Open Day — where you'll witness mass eliminations, herd mentality, and see the moment my strategy shifted and why it worked. Then you'll learn how to align your behaviour and approach with the values of your chosen airline — standing out authentically, even in a room of 100 identically dressed hopefuls.

7.1	Lobby	Open Day vs Invite Only
7.2	The Ballroom	Overbooked and Mass Eliminations
7.3	Infinity Mirror	The Cheatsheet Mill and Standing Out
7.4	Q&A Round	Gate Lice and Thinking Like A Recruiter
7.5	CV Handover	Undercover Recruiters and 6 Month Reapplication Rules
7.6	The Bathroom Break	Impression Management



Leg 8 → Ground(ed) School

Now that you've seen what works — and why — it's time to turn the spotlight on you. You'll gather your application materials, piece together your story, and build a solid foundation rooted in reality, not rumours.

Debriefing and Accident Report Cards
Customer Service Experience
ATS and CVs
Scar Declarations
Introversion and Airline Alignment
Swimming Requirements
Beauty vs Grooming
Luck and (Un)Fairness
Age and Other Discriminations
Researching the Airline
Understanding the Profession
Role Plays

From the Emirates **Application**, through the **Invite-Only Group Interview**, to the **Final Interview**, the **Golden Call**, and **Onboarding**, join me as we navigate the entire recruitment journey (complete with seven sets of rejected photos). See every lesson in action, revealing how expectations and reality rarely match.



Leg 9 → Emirates (EK) Group Interview

9.1	Application Form	Split Testing Your Application
9.2	Video Interview	And Other Pre-Screenings
9.3	Pre-Interview Prep	Mock Interviews and Blacklisting
9.4	Grooming	Aligning To Corporate Culture Without Sacrificing Authenticity
9.5	Setting Off	Warming up and Conversations on Paper
9.6	Arrival	Early Assimilation and Strategic Positioning
9.7	Emirates Video	Where Is Your Attention? and Oversharing
9.8	Q&A Round	Strategising Your First Impression and Cumulative Success
9.9	Group Discussion	Managing Chaos Like Crew and Focusing on Behaviour
9.10	Elimination Round One	Misaligned Expectations and Shifting Dynamics
9.11	Break	Maintaining Awareness and Strategising Breaks
9.12	Application Form	Essay Questions and Your Professional Persona
9.13	Personality Test	Outdated Labels and Attention To Detail
9.14	Group Discussion	Verbal Circles and Realignment / Topical vs Behavioural
9.15	Group Discussion	Energy Management and Repetitive Tasks
9.16	Eliminations	Silent Eliminations and Staying Alert
9.17	Mini One on One	Handling Success and Problematic Deviations



Leg 10 → Emirates (EK) Final Interview

10.1	Birmingham	Problem-Solving Like Crew
10.2	London Head Office	Expectations
10.3	Behavioural Questions	Turning Authentic Experience Into Memorable Answers
10.4	Top Ten Traditional Questions	The Authentic Approach



Leg 11 → Emirates (EK) Onboarding

11.1	The Golden Call	The Holding Pool and Timeline Expectations
11.2	Rejected Photographs	Rigid Requirements and Why Photos Matter



Leg 12 → Emirates (EK) Training

Finally, we'll jet out to Emirates Aviation College (EAC) in Dubai, where the myths unravel and all those unusual interview tasks and stubborn requirements suddenly make sense.

Body Image and Grooming

The Real Job

Mapping the Interview onto Training

SEP

Graduation

Image and Uniform Standards

90% Safety and Security / 10% Service

Real Reach Tests and Realities of Drowning

The Realities and Risks of Misalignment

A Behavioural Approach to Getting Hired

Through these particular airline experiences, you'll see:

- How recruitment approaches vary between premium and budget airlines.
- Cultural differences between international and regional carriers.
- The contrasting hiring styles of flag carriers and private airlines.
- How interview formats can differ, even within the same airline.
- What to expect from open days compared to invitation-only sessions.
- And exactly what it takes to succeed, or fail, at each stage.

But, I should break it to you early. We are not starting this journey in first class. Not even premium economy. I'm introducing you to the very bottom of the application pile — otherwise known as the Slag Heap. Catchy, don't you think.

I'm glad you smiled because you'll become intimately familiar with the Slag Heap during your time here. In fact, we'll first sink far deeper into it than you ever want to go, dragged down by the Old Wives, whose airline recruitment folklore has led many applicants astray — myself included.

But, don't worry. We won't be wallowing here forever.

Throughout the case study, we'll claw our way up the stack — chipped nails, crumpled hopes, and all — to show you exactly what it takes to earn that clipped wing. Whether you're starting in freefall or just stuck in limbo-land, you'll see the mindset shifts, the strategic pivots, and the strategies that buried me into or propelled me out of the Slag Heap.

This is a behavioural blueprint — grounded in the following five core philosophies that will carry you not just through the interview, but into your new career.

Think Like And Align To Their Airline

Think Like An Airline Recruiter (Aka Working Crew Members)

Drop Applicant Thinking

Behave Like Cabin Crew

Treat The Process As A Simulated Flight

**Don't just walk in prepared.
Walk in experienced.**

Your knowledge and behaviours will come together as the journey winds down, so that when you enter the interview room yourself, it'll feel as if you've already lived through it.



Caitlyn...Carrie...um, Clarke?

I'm Carrie-Ellise Poirier — though depending on the era, the outfit, or the identity crisis, you might know me as **Caitlyn Rogers** (pen name), **Layla** (stage name), **Jasmine Pfeiffer** (Hollywood misadventure), or **Ellette Morgan** (ugh, don't ask).

Names are my favourite accessories.

In all, I've tried on, worn, and immortalised at least **12 names**. Some of which I now have to explain at every future customs inquisition — because, yes, some have their own passports.

There was a Clarke in there somewhere, but only by pure accident and thankfully it never made it onto my credentials. (Oh wait, this book is a credential.)

It's safe to say, I've had a complicated relationship with identity, which explains why I've racked up almost as many names as I've had flight attendant interview rejections.

12 names + 19 cabin crew interview rejections = no coincidence. More like, a catalyst.

My pen name, **Caitlyn Rogers** made her debut in 2005 when I auctioned my flight attendant interview research on eBay — hiding behind a pseudonym, of course, because I had zero expectations. Except...the auction went viral and, just like that, my alter ego became an author and an overnight success.



Since then, Caitlyn Rogers has taken on a bit of a bad-ass reputation for herself, through six editions of this, my best-selling book "The Cabin Crew Interview Made Easy".

My factory setting — and the name stamped on my Emirates certificate — is Carrie-Ann Ellison, but I never use that name.

If this is all sounding a little crowded — don't worry. When it comes to cabin crew, just call me Caitlyn. She's the overnight success, after all.

But I was not an overnight success. The Cabin Crew Interview Made Easy was not so-called because it was easy for me. In fact, I have a confession:

I am a serial reject

Nineteen rejections, to be precise.

Yes, nineteen, not exactly the kind of thing you embroider on a tote, I know. It's a number that makes people exchange uncomfortable glances. Which is why it has been my dirty little secret for twenty years.

Being a serial reject comes with its curiosities (applicants), hecklers (Gordo), and exasperated sighs (Dad). No one expects someone who failed nineteen interviews to still be smiling, let alone trying, after seven years. (thirteen years when you count my teen prep).

Many people ask, how do you keep going after so many rejections?

If it's an applicant asking, what they're really saying is: *Please tell me I'm not doomed*. If it's Gordo or Dad, there's usually a job centre flyer involved. Folded. Thumbed. Definitely highlighted. If it's a recruiter: *Oh no. You again*.

So, why should you listen to me?

Well, allow me to lead by example and rephrase my introduction to something a little more inspiring.

I have a unique view of the airline recruitment process because I reverse-engineered my way from the bottom of the rejection pile and into the elite ranks of Emirates, one mascara-streaked rejection at a time.

Put another way...

Interview 18 — I couldn't even walk through the door.

Interview 19 — I walked out halfway through.

Interview 20 — Got the Golden Call.

So, what changed everything? You're asking the right question — now things get interesting.

But, where to start? Ah yes...

The measurement of failure:

♥ 183bpm

I finally admitted I was not cut out for this job at interview number eighteen. Rather poetically, in the same spot it all began, three years earlier: right outside Virgin Atlantic Headquarters, Crawley, West Sussex.

There I stood, nose to glass, staring at a flock of Virgin flight attendants. Everything mirrored my first, and second, and third, (and 4th...6th...8th...9th...) and on through my seventeenth interview: the building, the grey sky, even the perfume lingering in the doorway — save for one difference:

I glanced down at my Polar watch, where a furious little heart emoji flickered away with a resting heart rate of: ♥ 183bpm. I was motionless — but my body was already legging it down the M5 back to Bristol. I was having my first panic attack.

After years of dreaming, scheming, manifesting, prepping, preening, pretending — that tiny screen, lit in cold clinical LED clarity, served up the first honest and concrete feedback I'd ever received.

Whilst I was performing confidence, it was recording collapse and calling me out as a fraud, because...

...I looked like a wally

My reflection in Virgin's glass stared back. I tried focusing on the flight attendants in their stunning red, but I couldn't visualise myself wearing that dream uniform anymore — not with my fake flight attendant scarf flapping and choking the last bit of fantasy out of me.

It had been flailing and flapping in the breeze all damn morning. I'd bought it to "look the part" and thought blue made me look less desperate. But there I was — wheezing, overdressed, mid-palpitations — finally seeing the truth: I looked like a proper wally. And, on top of all that, I might have to ask Virgin's recruiters for the defib.

That was the moment I finally ditched my dreams at the curb like a dirty old fag butt, not realising I was standing in the seam between failure and success.

I told my boyfriend I'd failed the reach test. He bought me chips and gravy, then introduced me to his favourite airline: Emirates. This wouldn't have made any difference, except Emirates made no mention of swimming in its requirements. Nothing at all. Had I finally found an airline that didn't measure my suitability by the metre? That was enough to push me towards one more interview. If only I could enter the building.

I set my sights on an Emirates open day.

Binge-Watching Failure

A week after abandoning my Virgin Atlantic interview, I found myself herded — no, corralled — into a hybrid conference-ballroom-banquet-hall situation at the London Edwardian Hotel.

I stationed myself next to the nearest exit. Except, I was soon shepherded into the middle of the room, into the middle of an aisle, and into the middle of a tightly packed row. No leg room. No window seat. No emergency exit. Trapped.

This time, it wasn't my watch setting off alarm bells. 183bpm had become 183aia (applicants in attendance). Give or take. I didn't perform a head count. But someone did because the recruiters, somewhat politely, asked everyone still standing to leave — they'd run out of folding partitions and the 4-in-1 ballroom had reached and exceeded maximum capacity.

Just like that. Pffooff. 183 became 100. Or there about, let's not get nit-picky.

That was my first mass culling. And I "made it through" purely because I'd been forced into a chair.

Watching those applicants leave, I envied their rapid departure. I didn't want to stick around for my first mass humiliation. But, no such luck. For me, it was welcome aboard the absurdity that is an Emirates Open Day.

Looking up and down my row, it was like staring into an infinity mirror. All around me, across five, ten, fifteen rows of applicants, I was one of the dozens of identical black-suited, red-lipped, hair-doughnuttred, beaming, Pan-Am smiling applicants.

Then, as soon as the Emirates video concluded, I was stunned to silence as dozens of identical arms shot up. Each one asking a variation of the same identical question I had tucked up my identical sleeve.

I saw what happened when everyone follows the same advice.

I was everyone and everyone was me.

For the next thirty minutes, I saw everything. On loop. One hundred times over. And then I saw it all again — echoed in every one of my failed attempts.

Back at Virgin, I'd stared at my own reflection and seen a fraud. This time, I saw the choreography. We weren't just making the same mistakes. We were trapped by the same rules. Smile wide. Speak often. Perform confidence. Project charm.

We wore the same scarlet accessories. Recited the same laminated model answers through the same brittle, overbright voices. With our stiff buns tugged so tight it vacuum-packed all trace of individuality. And I had followed so many damn rules, I moved with doll-like precision, and was even monitoring my eye-

accessing cues. Trying to be perfect was exhausting and ineffective.

Then another number occurred to me. The statistic that casts a great big shadow over every hopeful applicant...

...99%

I'd heard about the 99% failure club. But I'd never stared that number down in the flesh. And if the numbers were true — if 99% really did fail — then the outcome had already been decided. Ninety-nine of us were walking out with nothing. Only one would leave with a job. Which meant, **we had already been mass eliminated. We just didn't know it yet.**

If I was doomed, there was no point in trying. The pressure to perform lifted. I had nothing to lose because I had nothing to gain. Then, I got curious. If only 1% succeed, who was that one? And, more importantly, how do recruiters figure it out? **In asking that question, I transitioned into success because I had shifted from applicant mode and into recruiter mode.**

The room felt less like a recruitment event and more like a departure gate during a delay — restless bodies all elbowing for acknowledgement. And the recruiters moved through the crowd with the same elegant detachment as cabin crew dealing with a flight full of entitled business-class upgrades: swift, polite, professionally disinterested. **Smile, nod, next.**

So I stopped watching the hopefuls and started watching them. What made them perk up. What made them tune out. I looked for the tiny cues: a flicker of a wince, a smile so sharp, it slashed a name off the roster. Not that we had names. We didn't even have numbers.

And it dawned on me — the anonymity went both ways.

I'd been operating under the grand illusion that this was all about me: my answers, my dream, my bloody outfit — that I'd never once considered the people behind the clipboard. I hadn't asked what they might need, or how they make a decision.

Had there been a moment of breath to ask a question that day, mine probably would have been, *"Um, wait, who are Emirates?"*

I knew — and lived by — all the so-called rules. But I knew nothing about the airline, and misunderstood the job. I had no customer service experience because I'd job-hopped my way through 30 jobs. And somewhere along the way, I had lost sight of my real goal and the real me.

The silly rules I'd followed seemed ridiculous, and I felt ridiculous.

I wasn't wearing that awful blue scarf this time. No. I'd upgraded my delusion. I'd dressed like I already worked there alright. I'd done it all, all the way down to the cream parchment resume with red headings. I was one sewing needle away from embroidering an Emirates cartouche onto my interview lapel.

I was trying so hard to be someone else, there was no space left for me. If I didn't walk out now, I'd be escorted out — by legal with a cease and desist stapled to my rejection slip.

Whilst applicants queued for the CV handover, I slipped out the exit.

I rushed home and used what the personality test labelled a handicap, my introverted nature, to research, study, and unpack the process like a combination lock.

For two years, I tested. I peeled back the polish, poked the soft bits, and found out where the system bends and where it snaps. In dismantling the system, I learned how the system is designed to dismantle us, to find out where we bend and where we snap.

So, I changed my habits and shaped my instincts. I stockpiled a variety of customer service experience. Learned to swim (or so I thought). Researched the airline. Validated every rumour and regulation. Binge-watched Airline. By the end of it, I had a revamped CV and 400 pages of rejection notes turned interview prep. It wasn't fast. It wasn't sexy. But it worked.

When I approached Emirates for a mock interview, I stopped playing by the imaginary rulebook. I showed up as someone no one else could imitate: Myself. No red lipstick. Hair long and loose, trailing past my waist. And because it was "just" a mock, I let myself have a little fun — a little rebellion. I reached into the back of my wardrobe and pulled out my old school shirt. And that's what I wore to my Emirates interview. Yes, really. Powder blue. Collars so wide they looked like they could generate lift — or pierce an eye.

Those ridiculous collars made me smile — Not that brittle, compliance-coded Pan Am smile I'd been straining to perfect for years. (photos in leg nine.)

For the first time, I made it through the first elimination round — and yet, that's when I took my most humbling walk of shame: past a mob of 30 or so rejected applicants flanking the exit.

Even though it was the first time I'd been truly myself, I felt like a fraud. And by the looks I got, I wasn't the only one who thought so. One woman even muttered, "Why did they make it?" And honestly — fair question. She was right to ask and be confused because I'd broken every "rule" they tell you to follow.

I managed only one half a comment in the group discussion. Wore the "wrong" clothes. Yet I blundered through that round, and seven more after that — all the way to the Golden Call where I had seven sets of

photos rejected. And then, in week three of SEP training, my team had to fish me out of the ditching pool when it became painfully clear I couldn't swim after all. Which, according to the "Old Wives," should've disqualified me. I sat shivering and alone in the raft, bracing for rejection #20.

Three weeks later, I graduated — even though I still can't swim.



Debrief

Jargon and logic doesn't make it credible

If you're new to the process, this might all sound dramatic and if I have anything to do with it, you never have to experience any of this yourself.

But if you're like me — or like the hundred others — and you've been rejected once, twice, maybe more times than you care to admit... And now you're scratching your head, exhausted, frustrated, quietly furious because you've done everything right, and still heard "no"... Yet you've watched others, like me, break every so-called rule and still make it through...

It's not luck. It's strategy. And you can learn it too.

The truth is, much of what you've been told isn't just incomplete — it's misleading. Sure, the 99% rejection rate is true, and you should dress like you belong, but each lacks critical context. And that's what's missing in this industry. Context and logic.

Because this industry is alive with echo chambers — filled to the brim with hundreds of thousands of applicants, yet starved of honest feedback — so we're at the mercy of old wives tales, faulty assumptions, and residual 20th century discrimination. And the misinformation is peppered with just enough industry jargon and logic to sound credible.



Debrief

Failure Dressed As Success

The fastest way to stay stuck is to keep moving without learning. And the most destructive is to keep moving whilst listening to the wrong advice. But, airlines don't give feedback, so we turn to the only chain of command we have: other applicants. They walked the same carpet, wore the same blazer, and left the same room holding back the same tears. They understand. They are kind and supportive.

But here's the problem: They were rejected too.

After every rejection, I rubbed shoulder-pads with my fellow rejects. And there, in that booth, I unknowingly handed them my dream and asked them to decode it. And I never questioned their responses — until the Emirates open day. That's when it hit me: We were all survivors of the same

crash, standing around the wreckage, trading theories about the cause — without any of us ever having the skills to decode the signals.

The mistake wasn't asking. The mistake was listening blindly. Taking advice without validation. And if you're not careful, you'll build each attempt on a foundation of confusion. And then you risk something far worse than time and another "no". You're risking erosion. Of your confidence. Your clarity. Your sense of self.

One rejection becomes four. Four becomes years. Years become a version of you that's exhausted, brittle, and starting to believe the story that maybe you're not cut out for this because now everyone is telling you you're too old at 25.

That erosion is why I didn't really succeed in the end. Oh, but I succeeded with Emirates, right? Yes, that is true, but I Lost My Airline Soulmate. That's why I'm still here, 20 years later. I never left the interview process. In fact, part of me is still in that damn interview room, staring at Virgin's rejection door, pining for the one that got away.

Virgin is the airline that makes my skin tingle, in a very good Aerosmith kinda way. I lost Virgin because I listened to the wrong people. I ignored the encouragement from actual Virgin crew, and instead believed the Old Wives that told me I wasn't "Virgin material."

Over the last 20 years, I've watched Virgin evolve even more into its bold, beautiful self. And I've come to see all the ways I did align — all the way down to the seven inch heels I wore to my first interview, if only I'd known how to make fun of them at the time.



Coaching Cues

Practical advice to shift you closer to crew-ready

I did get my Virgin Viv uniform and a pretty little clipped wing in the end — by piecing it together from eBay. And whilst I was there, I met others doing the same, holding onto what little they had left of their dream.

One young woman, only 22 years old, spoke about regrets for not pursuing KLM. Her mother and her aunt — a Purser at a top airline — had warned her off. Said the competition was too fierce, the odds too slim. And that's how it happens. That quiet detour away from your dream. The caution can come from anywhere — even the people who love you, even those who've clipped the wings to their perfectly pressed lapels.

Please, don't let anyone slam a nail into your dream box or direct you to the wrong airline terminal. An airline is not just an airline, it's your future family. It has to align.

I morphed into what others told me Virgin wanted, and lost my entire sense of self in the process. By the end, I couldn't even look at the mirror because I hated my face and was later diagnosed with

a severe form of Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). Don't let this process do that to you.

Don't go sandpapering your skin because people are telling you that freckles are flaws. Don't go filing your teeth because someone said they are too crooked. Things are blown completely out of proportion in this industry.

I didn't know how to ask questions. I had no internet or books to validate truth. But you have everything today, and that's part of the problem as much as it is the solution. Ask questions. Cross-check everything. Use your judgement. And don't let someone sandpaper your personality just to fit their version of what belongs.

There's a whole movement now about scar declarations. But nobody seems to ask why a declaration is required — other than assuming the "obvious", because of course it's about superficial beauty. But, could it be because airlines are hell-bent on safety and security and those scars are used to identify your body in an air crash? Huh, good question. Anyone reading this want to crosscheck the answer? or prove me wrong? Because you should absolutely crosscheck me too.

Advice gets passed around like in-flight peanuts. And your dream will get passed around with them, if you don't protect it. Your dream is delicate, and so is your mind. Handle it like the finest pair of lace panties — yours, precious, not to be sullied by someone else's soiled advice.



Lesson De-Brief

Success is not luck, or fuelled by cheatsheets — it's strategised

My story may seem naive, but it's no different to what I'm seeing today. Applicants confused by their rejections, yet don't meet the basic requirements. Misplaced effort. Misaligned choices. Fuelled by following outdated and misguided advice.

My Emirates success was not luck or fuelled by cheatsheets. It was strategised.

Inside this book, I'll teach you how to strategise your success. Not so you can succeed in two years, or write 400 pages of prep, and not with cheatsheets or model answers that will have you sounding and looking like everyone else. You never have to borrow an identity that doesn't fit. You just have to become the best version of yourself.

Being crew means taking charge. Solving problems. Staying steady under pressure — even when you don't have all the answers. And that's what you'll learn to do if you continue reading.

It's time to unlearn, relearn, and recalibrate everything you think you know about this process — so you can finally shift your results and earn your clipped wing.

So, if you're ready, grab your unicorn onesie and buckle up. Just don't try to hide your unbuckled seatbelt under a blanket. Recruiters will catch that a mile away.



LEARNING KEY

(The Only Cheatsheet We Use)



Caitlyn's Log

Move from theory to lived experience with Caitlyn's in-scene interview case study



Debrief

Caitlyn's post-event reflection with a recruiter lens



Coaching Cues

Practical advice to shift you closer to crew-ready



Crew Crosscheck

Shift from passive replay to intentional review.



Behave Like Cabin Crew

Crew habits that you can start today



Task Card

Crew habits that you can start today



Think Like A Recruiter

Peek inside the mind that's sizing you up



Think Like An Airline

Stop preparing for "an airline" — start preparing for their airline



Philosophies

Offbeat lessons that sneakily make you crew-ready



Ground(ed) School

Get grounded in what's real – not what's rumoured



Old Wives

Bad advice, stylishly retired



Thinking Like An Applicant

How Applicants Think – and Why the 99% Don't Make It



Simulated Scenario

Study real-world behaviour and refine your situational awareness



Case Study

Behind the scenes of crew-in-progress



Announcement

This is your captain speaking – with a wake-up call



Arrivals

Airline Interview Arrivals



Departures

Airline Interview Departures



Pre-Briefing

Aligning focus ahead of each lesson



Lesson De-Brief

Summing it all up

⁽¹⁾ See a little number floating above the line? That's your breadcrumb trail to the source. You'll find the full reference in the bibliography.





The method behind the madness



Virgin Atlantic Pre-Screening

Requirements & Crosschecking



Pre-Briefing

Crosschecking: Where Illusion Ends and Crew Mentality Begins.

Nothing derails your success faster than a misunderstanding, dressed up as truth and embellished by myth. In this lesson, we trace one back to its tragic little origin — a simple misread, four routine questions, and one unfortunate leap of logic. This is the anatomy of how, without crosschecking, myths spread — and quietly dismantle careers.

Lesson Objectives

- Understand how misinterpretations take root and spread during recruitment.
- Recognise how myths disguise themselves as advice or rules.
- Learn to course-correct early — before a small mistake becomes a story that sinks you.
- Sharpen your crosschecking skills, so you don't follow rules that never existed.



Caitlyn's Log

Okay, in the spirit of transparency, Emirates graduation wasn't the first time I'd announced "I am a flight attendant". It wasn't even my second. I think it was my third.

I was eighteen when I first announced it, giddy with excitement, after what I thought was my first interview with Virgin Atlantic. That's where we begin the first leg of this journey. And there's no time to waste. Buckle up because we're traveling all the way back to the 90s.



Arrivals

Virgin Atlantic (VS)

Location: Bristol, England

Date: September 1998

Age: 18

Stage: Telephone Interview

You've arrived. The precise location doesn't matter. You don't have time to appreciate the décor, which is probably for the best — it's not exactly guest-ready. Oh, careful now, watch your step because we're in my Spice Girl phase, and we're wearing seven-inch heels.

We have a telephone interview with Virgin Atlantic. I've already dialed the number. It's one of those old-school phones, which keeps us tethered to the wall by a permanently knotted cord, but at least it gives us something to fidget with.

Oh, deep breath, here we go.

"Good afternoon, this is Jodie at Virgin Atlantic. How may I help you today?"

"Hello. I'd like to apply for the position of flight attendant with Virgin Atlantic."

"Wonderful. Are you over 18?"

"Yes. Eighteen and... seventeen days."

"Happy birthday. Do you have the right to live and work in the UK?"

"Yes, I have a British passport because I was born here and I work at British Aerospace."

"Okay. Do you have the unrestricted right to travel to the USA?"

"Yeeaaaah? I just came back from there. I think that counts, right? My suitcase is still packed."

"Great. And, let's see, can you swim at least 50 metres and tread water?"

“Yes, I can swim and tread in water, absolutely”.

“Wonderful. Congratulations. You will receive paperwork in the post with an invite to meet our recruitment team. You will need two head and shoulder and one full-length photo, education certificates, and a copy of your passport. Do you have any questions?”

“Oh! Wonderful. Really, is that it? We’re done?”

“Yes, that’s all. Goodbye.”



Debrief

Wait? Was that Congratulations?

And just like that, I became a Virgin Atlantic Flight Attendant on my first ever phone call.

Well, no, not really. That’s what I thought had just happened.

By the time her voice morphed into a series of beeps, I was already imagining my glamorous new life aboard the Queen of the Skies, eating chocolates with Milk Tray Men (you’ll meet them later), and had forgotten all about the swimming question. I mean, honestly, those were all lifestyle questions, right? And they slipped from her lips as casually as a friend asking, “Did you remember your sunglasses?” And, naturally, that’s how I took it.

Could I swim fifty metres? Nope. I could swim five metres — or rather, I did. Once. When I was nine years old. I only knew what fifty metres was because my ex-best friend, Sarah, fluttered her forest green almond badge in my face for years.

Oh, wait a second. Maybe Virgin want fifteen metres? not fifty. I had no idea.

Could I tread water? Um, you mean like in a paddling pool? Anyway, what does swimming have to do with flying? Isn’t the entire point of a plane to avoid water? I wanted to soar over the ocean, not doggy-paddle through it.

Besides, I’m pretty certain someone said “telephone interview”. So when she said, “Congratulations,” I was absolutely convinced she meant, “Congratulations! Pack your bikini, grab your passport, and get ready for America!” Why else would I need to bring photos and a passport and all that if I wasn’t already hired? I even confirmed at the end of our call if that was it, and she said “Yes”. But no. She meant “Congratulations, you’ve successfully ticked ‘Yes’ four times in a row.”

Or maybe she never said “Congratulations” at all — maybe she said “Excellent.”

Either way, my brain translated it as “Welcome to Virgin Atlantic!” So, as far as I was concerned, I was going for my induction.

Hmm, not much to go wrong here then, huh? It’s not like they’ll throw me in a pool and see if I float... will they?



Debrief

The Golden Life Skill

Just a little harmless naïveté, right? It sure didn't feel significant at the time. Just four simple questions, a few dreamy-eyed assumptions, and one answer I didn't realise would hitch a ride on my psyche and infect my entire cabin crew journey.

Remember the Emirates pool incident I mentioned at the beginning? The one where I turned Emirates ditching into a real life emergency drill? Well, it started right here, with this naïve pre-screening.

Think you've figured out where this is going? Bless, it's not that predictable. And remember, I still graduated because I didn't even need swimming skills in the end. **Nothing here is what it seems.** Which brings us to: crosschecking.

If I could go back in time and gift my younger self with one golden life skill — and I mean, one, because let's face it, I wasn't going to listen to more than that — crosschecking is that skill. Because it would have transformed my entire journey. And it did transform my journey, eventually. But not until after my little white lie had been further mutated by applicant assumptions and half-truths, and spiralled into disaster.

If I'd learned to crosscheck sooner, instead of graduating as a trainee at 25, I'd have been toasting my senior promotion, and never would have choked on chlorine in Emirates' training pool.

Crosschecking is the holy grail of skills you can develop during the recruitment process and as future cabin crew. It separates the clueless from the crew-ready, and cuts through illusion. Which is why this book is built around the concept and why we kick off with it.

But, first, what is crosschecking?



Philosophies

How We Use Crosschecking

In aviation, crosschecking is a safety procedure — basically, a fancy way of saying “Do your job, then make sure no one else has missed theirs.”

Onboard, crosschecking is most commonly used to prevent the accidental deployment of emergency slides during door arming/disarming (amongst many other things). It falls under Crew Resource Management (CRM) — we’ll get to that fancy stuff later.

Since we’re not handling aircraft doors or emergency slides on this course, we use crosschecking for self and situational awareness, and, most importantly, to separate fact from the Old Wives (We’ll get to those later).

In other words, **know the truth and make sure nobody feeds you their misunderstood version of it**. Because if you don’t, you’re one urban legend away from swallowing a recruitment myth and believing it came from the airline itself.



Simulated Scenario

Ditching After A Bird Strike

Because airlines love their role plays, let’s dive into a simulated scenario right now.

Let’s assume I’ve landed myself aboard an unlucky flight from: **Dubai International Airport (DXB)** to **New York’s (JFK) Airport**.

And let’s further assume that somewhere between Greece and Libya, we’ve had multiple bird strikes, taking out all four A380 engines — yeah, it’s a pretty heavy flock of Falcons that escaped the first class cabins (you do know Emirates allow these birds of prey to travel as passengers, right?)

And because every passenger had one, the plane went down and we’ve ditched, like Sully. And now all 600 passengers are standing on the wings, so we’re sinking, fast.



Crew Crosscheck

Birds of Prey as PAX

Alright. crosschecking training starts now. And what better way to begin flexing your debunking skills than by questioning my absurd claim that Emirates allows birds of prey to board flights and just... you know, hang out with passengers.

Does an eagle look like something that should be casually buckled into seat 14A, picking at a microwavable tray of raw fish while you pretend not to make eye contact?

Surely no airline just allows a raptor to settle into economy, stretch its wings, and passively-aggressively eye up your microwaved chicken?

But, then again. Maybe hawks are emotional support animals, like guide dogs. Maybe a falcon's piercing stare is the only thing keeping a nervous passenger calm mid-flight.

Or maybe it's time we question everything we think we know about airlines and birds. Because what you might think is right is actually wrong and what you think is wrong, is probably wrong, but could be right, because what sounds logical is not necessarily correct — Ugh, you'll see exactly what I mean as we move forward. Keep your wits about you.

- What is your initial instinct on this?
- Do falcons have passports and earn frequent flier miles?
- Are birds free to fly about the cabin or strapped down?
- Are they really inside the cabins or in the cargo hold?

Please pause this lesson now and crosscheck.



Coaching Cues

Fly Better With Emirates

Yes. Falcons are on the permitted pets list.

Qatar, Etihad, Emirates and Royal Jordanian Airlines don't just allow them in the cabin; they welcome them. Emirates' pet policy states: *"In-cabin animals are not allowed. However, falcons and guide dogs are exceptions."*⁽²⁾

In the Middle East, falcons are the ultimate status symbol — the Ferrari of pets. So, it's completely normal to see one or ten lounging in the royal cabins, complaining about the wing room, or casually chilling in economy, talons firmly hooked onto a passenger's Armani cuff — or your armrest. Forget

asking: “Chicken or Fish?” — try “Cat or Snake? instead”.

As for passports and frequent flyer miles, “Between 2002 and 2013, the UAE government issued more than 28,000 falcon passports.” **Apparently, even Falcons “Fly Better” with Emirates.** ⁽¹⁾

Not eagles or hawks, though. If you caught my breed mix-up, nice work. **Some airlines love throwing in sneaky tests of attention and memory during recruitment.** And guess what? So do I. So, stay sharp. Keep your eyes peeled — just like you would if you found yourself sharing an armrest with a bird of prey at 30,000 feet!

Wow, this lesson is like a social network. You begin with a pre-screening phone call and suddenly you’re staring at photos of prestigious Falcons.

Just as airline recruitment tasks have purpose beyond face value, so too does every story and every exercise. And the payoff? It rarely shows up where you expect it. I’ll be throwing around all sorts of claims in this book, and you’ll want to crosscheck me too. After all, I did confuse four questions for a full interview.

Oh, where were we? Ah yes, Welcome to Virgin Atlantic?



Coaching Cues

Simple Screenings

Not every interaction earns a black mark on your record. A poor impression here is unlikely to be remembered. But **every interaction builds habit. And habit is what shapes you — not just for the interview, but for the long haul.**

This pre-screening call is the perfect example of how habits are shaped in the smallest, simplest moments. I didn’t mean to lie about swimming. My brain just followed the rhythm of “correct” answers, and before I even realised, the lie had landed. That’s habit. It’s small, it only took four questions, but you’ll soon see how that habit becomes career-defining.

As we move forward, you’ll build lots of small crew habits. Each task is a training ground. Not necessarily because you will be marked on it. But because **it’s training you — to be ready when it counts.**





Lesson De-Brief

Summing it all up

I am not unique in my little white lie.

Somewhere along the yellow brick road, applicants booted all sorts of absolutely mandatory requirements off the list — to make space for more urgent obsessions: unibrows, scars, teeth, ankle definition. Swimming was the one I ditched. For some it's the reach requirement. For others it's customer service experience.

Scroll through any feed and you'll see it — CVs without customer service experience, accompanied by a high-definition close-up of someone's earlobe "in natural light". **It seems very few applicants are zooming into their CVs and asking, "how do I better align with the role?"**

Requirements exist for a reason. They're not arbitrary hoops. **Just like every bolt and wire on an aircraft, each one serves a purpose. Yank one out and maybe the plane keeps flying. Or maybe you've just weakened the captain's window — and it blows out when you hit turbulence.**

As we move deeper into this course, you'll see how each requirement, and indeed the recruitment process itself, maps onto the real-world demands of the job — not just on paper, but in the cabin, in crisis, in the space between service and safety where real crew earn their stripes.

As for the whispered "requirements"? The myths. The rules-that-aren't-really-rules. The grey areas — like swimming requirements, scar declarations, and whether your teeth are "crew ready" — we'll get to all of that and other types of pre-screenings in good time.



Clipped Wings

Unravelling the 99% Rejection Rate



Pre-Briefing

It's all smoke and mirrors (aka, marketing and illusion)



NEWS HUB



LATEST UPDATE

Last year 150,000 applicants applied for roughly 1,200 coveted flight attendant jobs at Delta. After reviewing 35,000 video interviews and conducting 6,000 in-person interviews, fewer than 1 percent of applicants were selected – based on those odds, it's easier to get into an Ivy League school than to become a Delta flight attendant*.

And that's not just Delta. That level of selectiveness is industry-wide.

At first glance, these numbers sparkle with prestige and exclusivity. But look closer. Much of it is marketing. A numbers game. A carefully engineered illusion.

In this lesson, I'll strip away the sparkle, unpack the system, and show you what's really going on behind the headlines — and what it actually means for you.





Caitlyn's Log

I intended to wait until I got my new Virgin Atlantic uniform before telling everyone about my new job. But who was I kidding? I've never been good at keeping secrets. Especially one bubbling over with I told you so's.

By the time I'd untangled my fingers from the matted-up phone cord and hopscotched through the debris of decapitated doll heads, I'd somehow blurted it all out.

Dad's eyes splintered pink. "Stop being so bloody naive," he snapped. "Go get your job back at BAC."

Okay, fine. He was right. I was 100% ambition, 100% delusion. But I'd long ago wrapped my dream role in razor wire and approached any discussion around it like a hunted creature — with fists clenched. And anyway, I had one small, smug victory: "Actually — it's BAe. Not BAC. Changed ages ago."

The more he poked, the more I doubled down. I told him all about the ghost flight and the Milk Tray men, which, though true, somehow made me sound utterly delusional. So then I overcompensated by telling him about the moment I was "headhunted".

I wasn't doing myself any favours. But once I started, my blabbermouth could not stop.

Within a week, I'd told the entire neighbourhood all about my new career. I even got congratulations' cards. But not Gordo. He laughed so hard he toppled off his bar stool.



Debrief

A Dream, Grounded in Rejection

From the moment I first dreamt of slipping into my dream flight attendant uniform, the armchair experts sidled up. All eager to peck the winged emblem off my budding ambition. They all knew the odds. And they made sure I did too.

During high school career week, my career "encouragement" arrived in two soul-crushing instalments. First, a personality test asserted: "Flight attendants are extraverts — you're an introvert, so don't even bother." Then an Eastern Airlines job poster chimed in, "We look at nineteen girls before we find one — the rest are Losers." According to everyone and everything, I was one of those losers.

Back then, flight attendant didn't even warrant a formal career folder, just a battered, dog-eared manilla envelope containing vintage magazine clippings. No formal job sheet. No bulleted pathways

to career success. But it didn't need any. The captions did all the heavy lifting.

"Introducing The Losers."

One simply said: "I'm Cheryl." That was it. Her name and face was her résumé for success.

Another offered more character development: "Just call me Mother."

Naturally, the posters and personality test looked at me, saw my home-cut hair, my mismatching daps, and said: meh, you're neither.

I was thirteen. Never even kissed a boy, worn heels, let alone earned my first passport stamp, yet my wings were clipped and thrown onto the Slag Heap. But, I found something wondrous in that folder: Turns out, the airlines had Charm Farms — magical little academies where they transformed ordinary girls just like me into trolley dollies. That was it, my fate sealed. I dreamt of one day attending that Charm Farm.

First, I changed my name to...

Ah. How terribly impolite of me. This is only lesson two, not customs. I'll keep my suitcase zipped and save the declarations for later. Let's get you settled in and initiated first. We'll begin by cracking open a statistic that casts a gloomy shadow over the recruitment process.

But this topic gets panties in a twist, so let's creep upstairs to my bedroom — fewer doll heads and more trolley dolly posters. Plus, we can find some clothing for our first encounter with Virgin.



Coaching Cues

100-1 What?

You know when you're sitting on your bed in a towel, half-scrolling, half-eating peanut butter with a teaspoon, and bing, your inbox glows with the news you've long waited for: "Recruitment is open". Within seconds, the towel is gone, because now you're strutting the cabin, cinched in scarlet, or beige, or blue, depending on the airline's aesthetic du jour.

And then, like a cruel plot twist, your foot goes numb. Pins. Needles. Reality. You blink.

300,000 300,000 300,000
300,000 **300,000 applicants** 300,000
300,000'300,000

You read it twice, convinced you're seeing too many zeros. Possibly hallucinating. Might be peanut butter-induced. But no. It's real. It's the population of a small island nation. (Barbados, if you're curious. Though I doubt Barbados has quite so many people frantically Googling "How to fit my hair into a 7cm bun?")

In the gilded days of the 1960s, Eastern Airways boasted a 19-to-1 selection ratio — a genteel figure compared to our modern day 100-to-1 monstrosity.

If those odds have just hit you like a cold brew to the face, I'm truly sorry. I know that glassy stare. But hold that espresso shot and don't even think about settling for that barista job. Here's where I coming running in with hot towels, smelling salts, and perspective.

One of the keys about airline recruitment is **never take anything at face value**, including the 99% rejection rate. Whilst technically correct, those stats mean a lot more to the airlines than they should to you.

Still breathing? Excellent. We're about to crosscheck the 99%. Let's pull back the galley curtain and peek into the profit-driven minds of the airline execs, shall we?



Think Like An Airline

Weaponised Recruitment

Airlines drop recruitment drives like Taylor Swift drops albums — Loud. Pre-buzzed. Destined to trend and guaranteed to crash either the servers or the stock-market.

When Emirates reopened recruitment in 2022, 300,000 people applied. ⁽⁴⁾ Jeez. At this rate, we're maybe two recruitment cycles away from a concert wristband, an overpriced entry fee. and VIP lounge.

That jaw-dropping applicant number doesn't just say "we're hiring" — It signals dominance. It cements brand prestige and sends out a siren call to customers, investors, and rivals that screams: "Look how adored we are. We're fabulous" Work here. Fly here. Invest here.

Welcome to the golden age of hiring-as-marketing. Airlines found a way to do it all and look fabulous doing it.

A single job ad becomes:

- A brand campaign
- A shareholder aphrodisiac
- And customer infatuation
- A prestige generator
- A competitor's migraine

Meanwhile the world reposts, retweets, replays it. CNN reports the hiring frenzy and server meltdowns as news. Tabloids and applicants repost, breathless and wide-eyed:

“Harder than Harvard.”
“Virgin applications doubled overnight.”
“Chinese airlines swamped with applications.”
“Southwest servers crash under applicant surge.”
“1000 hopefuls converge at an Emirates open day.”

Airlines get the press, the people, and the proof of desirability — all for the budget-friendly cost of one recruitment post. And zero need to remind the world how fabulous they are — because “World” of mouth does it for them.

Meanwhile, you stare wide-eyed at your monitor, chewing your cuticles.



Think Like An Airline

The Law of Averages

Finding top talent is a numbers game. And airlines, of course, are seasoned players who know power lies in having loads of people desperate to work for them.

If only 10,000 people apply for 6,000 roles, the power shifts. Suddenly, the applicants are in control and the airline is the one panicking as they rifle through a sad little bin of “available” instead of “excellent.”

As Brendan Noonan, then Senior Vice President of Learning and Development at the Emirates Group, explained back in 2013:

“We get a great catalogue of individuals who want to work for the airline. We are in a very lucky position where we can cherry-pick the best of the people we want.” ⁽²⁾

That’s right, airlines cherry-pick alright because no self-respecting carrier wants to cobble together a flagship crew by hiring Dave who stuck orthotic insoles to his feet to sleuth the reach test and thought customer service experience meant chatting at the pub.

Volume means more options. More options means better hires. It’s a bit like online dating, but with fewer shirtless selfies — Oh, wait, no, that’s just hit my inbox, complete with a teethe (teeth selfie).

And that brings us to an important point.

Volume, whilst advantageous, swiftly turns messy when the world and their flatmates descend. And that brings us full-circle to the 99%.



Thinking Like An Applicant

What does 99% even look like?

I understand how debilitating this number sounds. The odds and I go way back. So far back, I can't actually recall where or when I first heard the stat. Somewhere between Dad's fourth and fortieth plea for me to join his doll-selling empire or sign on the dole and become an actual dole head. (Yeah, my family had a major doll obsession.)

Naturally, I ignored the odds because "can't do" passed straight through the teenage rebellion filter and came out the other side as: "Oh really? Watch this." Which is exactly how I temporarily reverse-engineered popularity in high school.

And anyway, what does 99% look like? Sounds like maths. I was no good at that. I needed failure I could see, like the F grade penned to my maths text paper.

Fast-forward three decades, a shameful collection of rejection emails later, an inbox soaked with crying emojis, and I can't unsee the damn 99% because it is tangible, after all.

To show you what that number actually looks like, allow me to open my inbox and show you:

"Hello Mam. I meet all the requirements. Why do I keep getting rejected? Can I send you my CV?"

In the P.S. the applicant stuffs said CV, full-length photos, browfies and skinfies into my inbox. Then, at the bottom, barely breathing:

P.P.P.P.P.S. "I don't have xyz, but..."

The follow-up emails unravel fast.

surprisingly, some didn't even follow the rules — like not shaving or not wearing a black suit — yet they still got through. Really

Im very disappointed.... Its reallyyyy unfairrrr



My AD is on 21st July, I'm very nervous. Honestly, I don't know how to start or what to do.

I don't have customer support experience. I didn't even write it in my CV.

Now please guide me:
• Should I edit my CV and add fake experience?

“Um, can I fake it?”

“Well, I see applicants who don’t have it being invited to the AD.”

“But what about the scar above my brow?”

Then comes the keyword-stuffed CV.

And, inevitably: “Will such-and-such airline know it’s me if I apply again with a new email?”

Then they are eliminated from an open day and tell me, “It’s unfair.”

Cabin crew is a popular profession with deceptively low entry requirements. You’ll find the glamorisers chasing the lifestyle, the speculators hedging a career bet, the underprepared hoping charm will cover the gaps, and the utterly incompatible who think ‘human’ is enough.

So many follow misguided advice then show up to the open day dressed like they already work there — down to the perfect shade of lipstick — and call that preparation.

Others don’t want to do the work, they just want to look like they’ve done it. That’s why cheatsheets exist. It’s why every other online thread is about ATS-optimising a CV. We are like ballerinas, but instead of stuffing our buns with rolls of coins to make weigh-ins, we’re bringing the beehive back in fashion to sleuth the height test.

And yes — I said we. That wasn’t judgement. It was confession. You’ll see as we go forward, I’ve been that girl. I was the 99%. That’s how I know all the tricks. I invented some of them.

But, not you, you’re here. Reading. Prepping. Already ahead. And while that should give you a certain comfort, sadly, it doesn’t make the process any easier. The process is still bloated with applicants, and recruiters have one hell of a job to do. And that means you do too.



Philosophies

Structural Integrity Vs Livery

Imagine the 99% as a runway packed with jets. All gleaming under the sun. Fresh paint, pristine liveries, ATSed spec sheets that scream “ready for takeoff.” But get closer and the truth rattles. Some have fudged their odometers. Parts cobbled together. A few slap on bold decals, hoping no one notices they don’t even have spec sheets. Some haven’t even taxied, but mimic the sound of a jet engine to perfection.

And right there in the middle is you: a well-built aircraft. Streamlined. Balanced. Structurally sound. Designed to fly long-haul, not just taxi in circles. You’ve had upgrades, been maintained. But you’re parked alongside 300,000 others, all sporting the same livery, copied tail numbers, and all swearing they’re airworthy too.

Then the chatter starts: “They only pick jets with pink stripes.” “No, it’s the winglets.” “Forget that — just fudge the numbers. It’s all luck anyway.” Suddenly you’re second-guessing. Is your paint too matte? The pink too salmon? Slightly off-brand? Should you look like a different model entirely? Is your nosecone too big?

Fortunately, airlines don't fold their arms and pick aircraft by paintwork. They don't trust spec sheets at face value. Experienced crews run rigorous, revealing tests — Because they need to know what's under the paint. That's exactly what the recruitment process is for. Every test, every question, every group exercise — designed to pop the hood and test structural integrity.

Some airlines — such as Emirates — remove the livery issue altogether. Everyone gets the same dress rules and the same conditions. So, how does your jet stand out? You strengthen your structural integrity. Then, you get tested. Because **when you prep the right way, the process will reveal your alignment.**



Case Study

The Closet of Unfulfilled Dreams

R. wanted to be cabin crew. Wanted. Past tense. But no sooner had she received an application form, her buzz dulled. "...to be honest, my mom kind of put me off the idea because she had friends who had a real real hard time getting into KLM." Her Purser cousin agreed, "It's really competitive".

Then her Purser cousin got sick. Which, in R.'s house, meant: flying is a giant, airborne petri dish of disease. And just like that, R.'s dream walked itself through the rejection door. And now, years later, she collects airline uniforms as souvenirs of a dream she never chased. That's how I met R — while I was purchasing my unfulfilled airline dreams on eBay.

Is getting into a premier airline like KLM tough? Sure. Is it impossible? Not even remotely. Did her cousin get sick because of flying? Who knows? That's not up for debate. But here's what we do know: **R. let someone else's fear write her rejection letter.**



Lesson De-Brief

Do the Work — Be the 1%

You control the odds by how you treat them.

Some applicants get nervous. Others get serious. So, get serious — because **when hundreds of thousands want the same job, there's no room for whim or wishful thinking.** You've got to be polished and prepped. And not just any prep — the right prep.

P.S. The closet of unfulfilled dreams is stuffed with good intentions, petri dishes, and secondhand uniforms from eBay.

P.P.S. The statistics are how headlines are born, courses get sold, airlines woo shareholders — and cherry-pick top talent.

P.P.P.S. The process is designed to weed out the dabblers and the dreamers.



Preparing Paperwork

Application Photos (Corporate Culture)



Pre-Briefing

We're not here to rehearse ordinary

In this lesson, we strip back the fear, the filters, and the Old Wives' warnings to reframe what those application photos are really for — and how to approach them with clarity, strategy, and just the right amount of personality. Because when airlines ask for a photo, they're not asking for your best angle. They're asking: "Can we trust who you say you are?"

You'll also learn what happened when I submitted a small army of computer-generated applicants.



Caitlyn's Log

Okay, let's see, Virgin's invitation letter says to bring:

- The all-important invite to meet Virgin's recruitment team. — check.
- Education Record of Achievement. — check.
 - Oo, I'll include my Mensa certificate to offset my school grades.
- Passport. — check.
- Two photocopies. — check.
- No mention of swimming badges.

○ Hmm, full length photo? Ugh, no, not that one. Or that one. Oh, maybe, no, maybe not. Oh here we go, Hollywood. That's perfect. — check.

○ A head and shoulder photo? Headshot? I guess? no, better not look like I'm trying too hard. Seems a shame to waste passport photos. — check.

Now it's all down to logistics.



Debrief

That's the best I will ever look

I assumed Virgin's photo request was a measurement of beauty and femininity, so I considered the professional headshots I'd had produced in Hollywood, except I hated every one of them and didn't want Virgin to think that was the best I had to offer. I wanted to look good, but it couldn't look like I was trying. Professional photos said "This is the best I will ever look."

I'd worked hard on getting decent passport photos, and everyone knows nobody looks good in those, so those left room for potential.

The full-length shot was trickier. What kind of full length photos? Casual? Smart casual? Business Professional? And then there was the issue of actually having photos. I didn't feel good getting in front of the camera, so I wasn't in the habit of collecting evidence.

There was that one of me standing in front of Virgin's 747. In theory, a smart move — visual alignment, brand proximity. In reality, posing next to the Scarlet Lady just made me look like her short, stumpy, and bewildered plus-one.

Then I considered the mid-flight photo, taken by the crew. But that wouldn't work. Not with lipstick on my forehead and crumpled clothing. And besides, I wanted to pitch myself as fun, independent, and well-travelled — not a tragic groupie who sleeps in "I ♥ Branson" pyjamas, wears three pairs of in-flight Virgin socks at the same time, and collects crew autographs.

So, I opted for props. And that's how I decided on the photo of me standing in front of the Hollywood sign. It didn't matter that I was too awkward to smile in front of the judgy stranger behind the camera. My backdrop would give me street cred and make me look cool by association.



Debrief

Must look like a girl — Troll Doll or Trolly Dolly?

I've never quite mastered the art of photographs. I seem to lack that elusive gene that transforms ordinary women into influencers — no instinct for lighting, no intuition for angles that might whisper something flattering.

Case in point: I once torpedoed a perfectly decent flirtation over what should've been a harmless little request. I'm fairly certain he asked for a photo of my leg — singular — because that's exactly what I sent. Actually, half a leg, knee to ankle. One lone limb, captured like it had been surreptitiously snapped beneath a toilet stall.

He ghosted me, naturally. Then married a woman whose legs now appear regularly, propped against his bedroom wall.

Application photos were a special kind of torment. Not just because I lacked the influencer gene — but because before my flight attendant dream ever found its legs, people were already busy sizing up mine.

“You want to be a flight attendant? Have you ever looked in a mirror? You know you have to be tall and pretty, right?” That was Gordo. Sweet guy. Always a pleasure.

If you haven’t figured it out yet, I wasn’t one of those destined-to-become types whose high school yearbook photos practically come with a boarding pass. I was mostly known for my homecut hair, my mismatching shoes, and bitten fingernails. If we’d had a yearbook, some punk wielding a biro would have turned my Trolley Dolly aspirations into Trolley Dolly instead.

And they weren’t saying anything I hadn’t already read in the school’s outdated career library. The job posters on my wall could have been written by Gordo.

Braniff International insisted, “Must look like a girl,” while Eastern Airlines followed up with nineteen different ways they would confirm those mandatory “girly” qualities. *“We look at her face, her make-up, her complexion, her figure, her weight, her legs, her grooming, her nails, and her hair”* ...and on it continued.

I had become accustomed to this sort of scrutiny. By the time I applied to Virgin, my appearance had already been assessed in the job market several times.

First, an audition at The London College of Fashion, where I hoped a modelling course would help me tick every box on the “looking like a girl” criteria, a pre-airline Charm Farm if you will — speaking of tall and pretty, there I stood, nipple height, in a room of top fashion models. No surprise, I wasn’t selected.

Then, I auditioned for a belly dancing gig — courtesy of Gordo, after he flung the Trade-It newspaper at me with a job ad circled in red: “Wanted, belly dancer for Greek entertainment evenings”. And since I’m competitive, hate being underestimated, and saw an opportunity for reinvention, I said “you’re on” and transformed his taunt into a dare. Somehow... it went well and I got the gig — thereby proving Gordo’s point about my belly.

Same lesson each time: looks mattered.

So, when Virgin asked for full-length photos, they might as well have been asking for my Troll Doll yearbook photo.



Think Like An Airline

Airlines aren't Gordo

My choices reflected my skewed view of the airline industry. I was so worried about being judged, that I minimised myself. And in doing so, I missed the whole point of the photographs.

Okay, so what is the point of the photos?

It's simple, **this industry prioritises safety and security**. Heck, those are your top priorities for cabin crew.

The photos aren't about beauty. They're about identity. They confirm the person who shows up to the interview is the same person who gets hired, cleared, and granted airside access. Because when there's 150,000 or 300,000 applying, it's not far-fetched to imagine someone sending in a photogenic friend to ace the interview, only to swap places before training. Without those reference photos, HR and trainers would be none the wiser.

Your interview photos are to recruitment what your passport is to international travel. But... yes yes, I can already hear the Old Wives warming up.



Old Wives

Are Photos Used For Discrimination?

Is it really as innocent as all that? Or is there something discriminatory going on? — I crosschecked.

Over the past four years, I've applied to more than 40 airlines. And since I'd prefer those airlines not know it was me, the author, behind the curtain, I had to get creative. So I built a team of fake applicants — digitally generated avatars who could do the visual heavy lifting on my behalf.

Say hello to Joelle and Tyrone, two of my digitally generated avatars.



I think you'll agree, they are not even remotely convincing as real humans. If appearance mattered at this stage, they'd have been binned immediately. But, **can you guess how many of my fake applicants were rejected? Not a single one. (I couldn't pull off the video interview without giggling, so that was a fail.)**

It's not definitive proof, but it's telling. At least at the application stage, **those particular airlines weren't dismissing candidates based on photos.**

With all that said, the further you progress, the more important your photos. Can photos create an impression? Absolutely. Will they inform a decision? Depends on the photo.



Coaching Cues

The Best Photos Are Aligned With The Airline's Personality.

One full length and one head and shoulder photo. That was the extent of Virgin's requirements. No artistic direction. No rules. Just send us two photos and see what happens.

What do you do with that?

- a) Go casual, show yourself as a human with a personality and doing that cool thing you love?
- b) Or maybe smart casual, because you want to show you are a professional, but still have a personality and a life?
- c) Or do you get suited up to stand in front of a white bedsheet, fingers steepled with authority?

Your decision really depends on the airline, its corporate culture, and the story you want to tell. And, of course, if instructions are given, be sure to follow those to the letter. Some airlines are finicky about their photo requirements, and they'll let you know what they want.

Consider the airline and its corporate culture.

Take Virgin, for example. It's not a beige-carpet kind of airline — it's playful, cheeky, and brandishes racy taglines with pride. That means you've got more leeway: slightly casual, personality-forward photos won't count against you.

But does that mean you should send in that bodybuilding competition shot? You could, if that's how you want to be remembered. That kind of strategy might've landed you a seat on Hooters Air back in 2004, or a page in Ryanair's now-controversial "Girls of Ryanair" calendar in 2014.

Use common sense.

Sure there are some fun airlines, but they are still professional organisations. Treat the photos as you would your resume, an extension of your professional life.

Smile.

You'll be the face of the airline, so show recruiters what that looks like. Toothy smile or closed mouth? Choose your preference. To my knowledge, no airline mandates facial expression. I'm sure Old Wives will say otherwise.

If you have a backdrop, don't let it dominate.

You should be the centre of attention.

Candid or Posed?

Sure, candid captures your most natural and beautiful Duchenne smile, but you lose control over lighting, framing, and overall presentation. Posed photos carry the risk of a forced smile and looking unnatural, but you'll have more control over body language and composition. And remember, flight attendants invented the fake smile — It's called the Pan-Am smile.

Tattoos, keep those hidden.

Even if your tattoos are in the safe zones (everywhere below uniform) casual shots which reveal tattoos might get airline panties in a twist. (Some airlines, such as Air New Zealand and Virgin, now permit tattoos. Check the airline requirements.)

Background tells one story, context tells another, and how you are dressed tells one more.

These are all factors to consider when making a decision. In my case, my everyday environment, inside the hangars at British Aerospace, positioned in front of the landing gear or wind tunnel would have made some great candid shots and showed the real me. And that photo of me wearing "I ♥ Branson" pyjamas mid-flight would have made one hell of an application photo, wouldn't it?

Browfies and Scarfies.

Unless an airline explicitly requests high-resolution documentation of your scar tissue and eyebrow symmetry — more on that later — resist the urge to send in 10x zooms of your scarfies, skinfies, or browfies with your application. If they've requested a full-length photo, they don't mean one toe at a time.

We'll dive into other airlines and hyper-specific photo requirements later.



Getting Dressed

Grooming (Corporate Culture)



Pre-Briefing

Costume or Alignment?

Seven-inch heels or closed-toe court shoes. Which is the faux pas, and which is the fashion genius? One whispers you're at the wrong door — the other says I belong. And not necessarily in the order you'd expect.

In this lesson, we crack open the old mantra: dress like you work there. But what if you could dress like you — and still look like you belong?

Because **dressing for the corporate culture isn't about red hats, cream scarves, or pinning a cute little clipped wing to your lapel. That's costume. What we're after is alignment — the kind that mirrors the brand's energy without losing your own.** Only, it's not always easy to decode which is which.



Caitlyn's Log

Okay, no time to waste. Let's slip out of that unicorn onesie and into something a little more interview appropriate, shall we.

I've rummaged my sisters clothing donation bags, and either she's shrinking or I'm growing. Despite her three-year head start, she wraps her fingers around her wrist with room to spare. My fingertips barely touch if I squeeze hard enough to make my skin pink and veins bulge. Each boned and underwired piece, nips, tucks, and tightens around me like tourniquets.

I managed to pair a grey skirt with a grey blazer and it sort of works. The skirt is a clever wrap around style, and that's the only way anything of hers will ever fit anything of mine, except it can't decide if it's a knee or ankle length. It's like that awkward in between hair growth stage. So, I grabbed my scissors and gave it a trim.

The blazer is a little tight around my pits and I can't fasten any buttons, which is just fine because I'm wearing my favourite blouse, with ruffles around the neckline and sleeves. It does a good job of offsetting the legal secretary vibes.

Plus there's my Hollywood heels — of course I'm wearing those.

I'm channeling Career Spice Girl.



Debrief

Are you working tonight?

Until I was eighteen, my only mentors for becoming a woman came from my doll-head obsessed father, eating disordered sister, and a pair of sexist 60s flight attendant posters. That about sums me up as a teen.

Then, in 1996, Ginger Spice appeared in her platform boots and Union Jack dress, and I thought, yes, that's it. That's the blueprint. Naturally, my first order of business? Finding the perfect pair of platform Spice boots.

It took me two years of searching, until I finally tracked them down on Hollywood Boulevard while shopping for my Virgin Atlantic interview outfit, in a dance wear shop, right next to a gun shop, with a Hollywood star right on its doorstep. Talk about classy.

I broke in my new shoes by strolling up and down the star-studded Walk of Fame, all the way from Arnold's handprints outside the Mann's Chinese Theatre to the Pretty Woman filming locations. Somehow, I didn't register I was giving off wildly inappropriate vibes until a man at a crosswalk leaned over and asked, "Are you working tonight?" That is when I learned to scurry in my seven-inch heels.

And soon I'll be wearing those Hollywood heels that I think are Spice Girl shoes to the interview I think is an induction.

But hey, if there's any airline that might appreciate a pair of shoes with more inches than economy-class legroom, it's gonna be Virgin, right?



Think Like An Airline

Stop preparing for “an airline” — start preparing for their airline

On the surface, this looks like a catastrophic lapse in judgment. And in many ways, it was. But! My naïve eighteen-year-old self may have been onto something rather smart — if only I’d known it back then.

Airlines, much like people, have distinct personalities. You might have heard of it, it’s called corporate culture. Since flight attendants represent the airline, recruiters seek applicants who complement that culture.

To understand how corporate culture influences grooming standards, let’s peek behind the galley curtain of four top airlines.



Case Study

Singapore Girls - Buckets of Tears

Key points:

- Deportment for walking.
- Grooming to look right because girl next door is not a Singapore Girl.
- Post-pregnancy weight must be lost to fit into the uniform.
- Strictly-regulated hairstyles.
- Buns must be spherical and measure between 6.5cm and 7cm.
- “This is where I tell you if you need to cut your hair.”
- “You can cry buckets of tears, but you know what you need to do, right?”
- “Those eye circles, you need more sleep, okay.”
- “Your ears are on the obvious side, so, tomorrow, I need your hair to cover your ears.”
- “Can you cover more forehead?”
- “I need you to cut your hair. Because when you tie it like this, you look like a young mother-in-law hiding in that bun.”



“You can cry buckets of tears but...”





Case Study

Etihad - Great Pride In Appearance

Key points:

- Great pride in appearance.
- Foundation, blusher, eyebrow pencil, 3 or 4 shades of eyeshadow, eye liner, mascara, signature purple lipstick and lip liner.
- Lash gel to set.
- Winged eyeliner and along the water line.
- Two applications of mascara.
- Any shade of blusher as long as it complements the skin tone.



Case Study

Emirates - Long-lasting Makeup

Does her hat meet the sacred two-finger-brow rule? Because I'm not convinced. I got corrected so many times for that exact sin, it's basically tattooed on my corneas. I can't not see it. At this point, I'm a reluctant, unpaid member of the Hat Compliance Squad.

Key points:

- Emirates Beauty Hub.
- Carry items: Face mist for hydration, blotting paper, powder to touch up, red lipstick.
- Dior Hydra Life cream for a glowy base.
- Forever foundation.
- Forever Skin Correct concealer.
- Set foundation with powder.
- Contour bronzer.
- Blusher.
- Eyeshadow in 3 shades.
- Diorshow On Stage Liner - long-lasting.
- Mascara.
- Signature red lips, liner and signature 999 Forever from Dior.
- Stronghold cream for fixing baby hair.
- Hairstyling, nutrition, fitness, and skincare.





Case Study

Virgin Atlantic - I Am What I Am

Key points:

- Diversity and individuality are at the heart of Virgin Atlantic's mission.
- Makeup is not mandatory.
- LGBTQ-inclusive.
- A guy wearing sparkly sunset eyeshadow.
- Emphasis on being themselves.
- "Your life is a sham, Til you can shout out, I am what I am."



"Your life is a sham, til you can shout, I am what I am."



Coaching Cues

Cultural Differences

Let's be real — those videos are marketing. They do not represent the entire grooming regime of the spotlighted airline. We're seeing the sanitised, preened, and groomed PR-approved version, a curated glimpse based on what is available through official and verifiable channels. There's more going on behind the galley curtain. And yet, even within this curated glimpse, the cultural differences are as obvious as Etihad's darling shade of purple lippy.

(Note to self: Check eBay for an Etihad purple lipstick.)

At one extreme, **Singapore Airlines run a military-grade beauty camp**. Hair — Strictly regulated. Buns — Spherical orbs measuring precisely between 6.5cm and 7cm. Bun too big? Cut it. Too small? Also cut it. And if you dare get emotional about it — irrelevant, here are the tissues. Eye bags? Unacceptable. Prominent ears? Better find a way to hide them. A forehead exceeding regulation proportions? Disguise it.

In short: If your face doesn't fit the Singapore Girl standard, fix your face.

At the other end, we have **Virgin Atlantic**, the flamboyant, gloriously unbothered counterpoint to Singapore's strict regimentation, where the philosophy is simple: be yourself. Think of that effortlessly cool aunt, who gives you wine at 16, rolls her eyes at your mother, then sighs dramatically as she tosses a glittery scarf over one shoulder and says, — "Life's too short for sensible shoes, darling, but be sure to use edible glitter in your eyeshadow in case it gets in the food."



Diversity? Check. Individuality? Double check. Makeup? Optional. Sunset glitter lids? Sure. Want to go full drag? Oh, yes, love that look. Feel like rocking bare skin? Oh, love that too.

In short, instead of “Fit into this mould or else,” it’s “Be your fabulous self, babe” because, and I quote, “Your life is a sham ‘til you can shout out, I am what I am.”

And then, of course, we have the in-betweeners — the airlines that aren’t quite coming at you with callipers to assess the spherical integrity of your bun, but will absolutely scrutinise the precise tilt of your hat, the exact nipple length of your veil, and whether your lipstick is one scandalous shade away from individuality.

P.S. This isn’t an attack on any airline. I love and wanted to work for Virgin. But oddly enough, it wasn’t Virgin’s be yourself approach that first made me dream of flying. It was the extremely precise approach similar to Singapore that first made me think, yep, this is the life for me. Neither is wrong — it’s just a question of which cult, sorry, culture, you want to belong to. Some people thrive on the structure of a precision bun. Some people want freedom to wear sparkly eyeshadow. Others, like me, just want a uniform and instructions on how to use it so I don’t have to dress or think for myself.



Crew Crosscheck

Bold or Stupid?

What do you think of my fabulous garment choices now? Seven-inch heels — Bold? Stupid? An absolute power move?

But, wait, a little devil’s advocate first.

Let’s pretend, for a moment, that I am sensible, and entertain my sister’s tragically dull suggestion: grey jacket, grey skirt, alabaster tights, white blouse, grey court shoes, and a prim little up-do.

Is that going to scream Virgin? No way. That says, “Hello, I am here to audit your tax returns”, or “Hello, I thought this was British Airways.”

I know this because I made that mistake before, at a modelling audition for the famous London College of Fashion. I was fifteen, desperately seeking help in the grooming department, and I thought modelling school would teach me poise, you know, whip me into feminine shape. And, there I stood, nipple height, in the corporate getup my sister picked out for me, surrounded by models wearing the latest ballgowns and jumpsuits. Talk about awkward.

Virgin doesn’t do grey. Virgin is blood red. Virgin is so red it named itself after a state of sexual inexperience and still managed to sound thrilling. Their website says, “It’s being bright red when others are grey.” In other words, wearing grey makes me “other”, and then I am literally defining myself as not Virgin material. So, grey is definitely out.

But, if grey is out, does that mean red is in?

Damn, I should have bought those Hollywood heels in red.

But, they do say be yourself, so technically, grey is not a problem, right? Except, if I turn up in grey, am I actually being myself? Clearly not. Which means I'd actually be betraying their motto. By that logic, I must wear the seven-inch heels. Ugh.

So, what do you think? Given what you've seen of those four airlines, what would you have worn to Virgin?:

- a) Be bold and wear those Hollywood heels?
- b) Be ultra-conservative and wear my sister's grey, soul-crushing, closed-toe courts?



Lesson De-Brief

There is no one-size-fits-all way to dress

Obviously I chose (a), so you'll get the insight in simulated real time. In the meantime, be aware of all or nothing thinking. **When people claim flight attendants have to fit into some universal mold, they fail to grasp the intricacies of airline culture.**

There is no "one-size-fits-all" airline culture, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" standard of dress, behaviour, or approach either. But there is an airline standard. Know the difference, then groom and behave accordingly because understanding the airline's corporate culture is the first step to knowing what the recruiter's are seeking.

What you wear and how you approach Emirates or Singapore or British Airways should not be the same as your approach to Virgin or Etihad or Southwest.

Corporate culture will not only influence your grooming, but also your attitude, how you approach your answers, and your shoes. It also dictates how different airlines choose to conduct their auditions — I mean interviews.

Alright, if you're ready, let's see how these shoes and my ankles hold up around the cobblestones of Crawley. Dressing to look pretty is one thing, dressing for functionality and practicality is, ouch, quite another. We'll get to that soon enough.





Preparing For The Event

The Cabin Crew Lifestyle



Pre-Briefing

We're not here to rehearse ordinary

Rise and shine — or, just rise. That sodium-orange, flickering streetlamp, that's your new sunrise. Welcome to the witching hour that is the cabin crew lifestyle.

Lesson Objectives

We're not here to rehearse ordinary. We're here to train for a career that begins before the purple fades to red, stretches past orange, and chases daylight across time zones. But how do you assure recruiters you're built for it — not just in theory, but in practice? You need evidence. Stories.

Get ready to:

- Experiment with small, intentional routine changes.
- Gather evidence that demonstrate consistency, discipline, and foresight that you can shape into talking points.



Caitlyn's Log

Dateline: Two days before the ~~interview~~ induction

I will check in at Virgin Headquarters at 9am on Saturday morning. I plan to arrive at 8:30am. The journey from Bristol's a bit of a saga — three to four hours by train, not including getting to and from the station. Technically doable with a 4am wake-up, but risky. And there's no way I'm getting up at 3am. So, I'm planning an overnight stay.

Cash-wise, I'm still sitting on \$1,190 in American dollars. But that only shrinks down to something closer



to £500 UK pounds. I haven't had time to swap it for Sterling yet, but I've been reassured that London is prepped for travellers and won't flinch at foreign currency.

They even gave me a tip: don't book accommodation in advance. Apparently, if I hold my nerve and wait till I arrive, I've got a better shot at landing a Hilton suite for the price of the Banana Bungalow.

As for the train fare? Free. I've accumulated enough loyalty points to cover the whole trip. So, whatever's left of my US dollars at the end of today, I'll use to pay down the deposit on moving to Crawley.



Debrief

Lifestyle Incompatibility

Arriving by 8:30am? Strong move. Staying overnight? Smart. Or was it?

From the outside, I look like a planner, a go-getter, right? Reality. I was desperate to avoid getting up too early, because who in their right mind gets up at 3am? — Oh, right. Flight attendants do. Yeah, I hadn't considered the lifestyle at all. Well, actually, that's not quite true. As far as I was concerned, my life would be divided into three fabulous parts:

- I'd live a third of my life at the Virgin's charm farm in Crawley,
- another third in California, and
- the final third, I'd be a trolley dolly aboard a near empty Queen of the Skies 747 with chocolates delivered by Milk Tray Men.

Not exactly something you want to admit to a recruiter, but this is actually quite logical and reasonable, compared to my other hair-brained ideas. But, full disclosure, it wasn't early mornings I hated, it was midnight makeup.

If application photos weren't stressful enough with my self-image concerns, applying makeup without the perfect ratio of day to artificial light was a disaster just waiting to happen. Too much eyeliner. Half-blended foundation. And even if none of that happened, I'd spend the day feeling self-conscious about my delusional half-blended mess anyway.

So, what does this mean for my becoming cabin crew? Good question. You're thinking like a recruiter. But I wasn't thinking about any of that. In my fairy-tale delusion, we'd be chasing the sunset across time zones and I'd never have to worry about midnight makeup. We'll see the fallout of this thinking when we get to CrossAir and Emirates.





Ground(ed) School

The Cabin Crew Lifestyle - It rules everything

Being a flight attendant isn't just a job, it's a lifestyle. Let me pull back the curtain for you. Not that it matters, it's dark outside. Street lamps are your new sunrise.

Your flight departs at 6am and it's an international route. As with any passenger, you must arrive at least two hours prior to departure, which means arriving at the airport by 4am — ouch. This means your journey begins at 3:30am, assuming, of course, you had the foresight to relocate to an apartment near the airport.

Your alarm will buzz at 3am, but only if you are wildly irresponsible or work for a regional airline without tight constraints. Except you did not set your sights on mediocrity. No, you aimed for glamour, prestige, and the unyielding discipline of a premier airline. Therefore, you have an eight step skin and makeup routine ahead of you. Gents, you can skip the makeup, but don't you dare skimp on skin care. You can expect full grooming checks before flights, so you'll want to be polished.

If you're dreaming of a spot with an airline like Emirates or Singapore, assembling their entire wide awake and polished illusion will eat up a solid hour, assuming everything goes well when your eyes are red, puffy, and hurt from being forced open at the inhumane hour of 2:30am — 2am if you are wise and hope to eat breakfast before boarding. In all, this is a tight and efficient schedule with no buffer or room for error.

How are you at waking up at 2am? scraping the sleep off your face, dolling yourself up under the ghastly glow of your bathroom light, and smiling like you mean it for five, ten, twelve, sixteen hours? Meanwhile, breakfast is at 3am, lunch at 7am, dinner at 1pm, bedtime at 5pm. Recruiters want to know. You should too.



Crew Crosscheck

A cross-examination of traits, choices, and crew potential

That can't possibly be true. 2am, 3am wake-ups? Twaddle. Time to crosscheck these absurd claims.

- Aren't there noise curfews to prevent jets blasting off over sleeping civilians at ungodly hours?
- And do flight attendants truly rise at the unholy hour of 2:30am for a 6am flight?
- Do flight attendants have to report two hours before an international flight, or is that just passengers?
- Isn't the rule for international flights actually three hours before departure?
- How common are these brutal early-morning schedules for flight attendants — is this a rare case or business as usual?
- Does a full skin and makeup routine really take an hour? Or is that just for influencers?



Ground(ed) School

Aviation Time

Oh, great. So **2:30am is a real wake-up time**. Not a punishment. Not a prank. A normal, scheduled part of crew life. Wonderful. And the first flights out of airports? That depends on the airline and airport.

Heathrow, being a civilised establishment, keeps flights to reasonable human circadian rhythms. But other airports? They're unhinged. Luton Airport (LTN) ⁽⁵⁾ have flights at 00:30 and 05:25, and Seattle Tacoma Airport - SEATAC (SEA) ⁽⁶⁾ is absolute anarchy — Planes launching whenever they feel like it. 12am, 1am, 3:30am., some at midnight, 1am, 3:30am. Wait, did I repeat myself? I'm still wiping the crust from my eyes. The witching hour means nothing to them.

So, when do you actually wake up for a 3:30am flight? Yesterday? Last week?



Case Study

Bob Brain at easyJet



Meet Bob Brain .Mr Brain is a Purser for easyJet, from the UK television series, *Airline*. In season 10, episode 1, Mr Brain casually mentions waking up at 3:30am for a 12-hour shift. (Timestamp: 8:22)

Now, let's be clear. Mr Brain is not the type who wakes up at 3:30am just to devote an hour to perfecting a winged eyeliner. And easyJet doesn't require its crew to painstakingly attach a silk scarf at an artful 47-degree tilt.

The point is, easyJet is a short haul carrier, with no absurd rituals and Bob is not your average influencer type. But, still, Bob wakes at 3:30am to get to the airport.

Welcome to Aviation Time.

It's relentless and we'll be diving into it several times along our journey.





Think Like A Recruiter

Can You Outmanoeuvre The Recruiters?

Recruiters know the flight attendant lifestyle is brutal because they live it. Many are working senior crew, former flight attendants, or cabin crew trainers. They've done the 3am wake-ups, the sleepless nights, the constant pressure to look polished. And they're trained to sniff out applicants like me who show up starry-eyed, clutching a Pinterest board of glamorous layovers, with zero clue about sleep deprivation, or the fact that "presentable" is non-negotiable even when you're dead on your feet.

But they won't catch me. No, I'm too clever for that. I'll stroll into Virgin HQ at 8:30am with glowing, and perfect makeup and not a pink eye in sight. They won't know I strategically booked a hotel just to avoid the morning struggle. Except, they'll figure it out eventually because at some point — directly or subtly — they'll probe. **Their job is to make sure we understand what we're signing up for.** The last place in the world they want to figure this out is 2am at SEA airport, where they now have to summon standby crew.

So, can you outmanoeuvre the recruiters? Sure. But that's the wrong question. The real question is, can you outmanoeuvre the job? Nope.

As a recruiter, would you trust eighteen year old me to arrive on time for a 6am flight? Will I be an effective member of Virgin's cabin crew team? Don't answer that. There's no need. It's obviously no. **But what about you? How can you prepare for this? I'm glad you asked. But you may not love the answer...**



Think Like A Recruiter

Recruiter's Prefer Concrete Examples

Ever slipped into bed when it's still daylight? Woken up before the streetlights turn from purple to red to orange? Didn't know there was a purple before red? No? You should, because maybe there isn't one. Is there? Huh?

Imagine the recruiter asks: *"How do you feel about working ungodly hours?"* You could spin them a fluffy little fantasy that goes something like: *"I know all about the responsibilities. I'm enthusiastic and am willing to do whatever it takes to succeed because this is my dream job."*

Or you can give them a true and grounded story that goes something like:

"I wanted to know if I could handle it, so I tested myself. I set the alarm for 2 a.m., three days running, and treated each like a real shift. No lounging in unicorn onesies — full skincare, intentional makeup, disciplined hair, tailored suit. Day one was brutal. Smudged makeup by midday thanks to too much moisturiser. Day two hit harder because the novelty had worn off. But, by day three,

I found some equilibrium. I discovered, some amount of discomfort could be overridden by small, consistent rituals: such as (daily meditation, yoga, wearing a bra, etc) Through this experiment, I found myself preferring early mornings. Now, I rise two hours earlier than I used to and find it far easier to perform those 2 a.m. experiments."

Guess which answer they prefer? If you guessed the second, you are correct. But why? Have a think about that before you continue reading.



Behave Like Cabin Crew

The Wake-Up Call Drill

Any time you have a story — especially if you tested yourself intentionally to see how you'd handle the flight attendant lifestyle — it tells the recruiter you're proactive, you understand the demands of the job, and you take the role seriously. It tells them, you behave like cabin crew already. And even if you never have the opportunity to tell them anything about your midnight mayhem, you will know you did it, and these experiences begin to shape your habits and your confidence because you'll be behaving like crew, not in theory, but as a practice.

But before you can deliver that lovely little story, you have to actually do it. Oh dear lord. If you've never had the pleasure, imagine trying to stop peeing mid-flow.

Step 1: Select Your Shift

Level 1: 4am — You're easing into it. We'll allow it.

Level 2: 3am — Ah, Paris, first class, international.

Level 3: 2am — Oh, look at you. The stories you will have.

Bonus points if it's on a workday. Double bonus if you can do it more than once.

Step 2: Ready Yourself For The Day

Whatever your shift, resist the temptation to lounge in a unicorn onesie all day. Toddlers can do that. You're here to condition for crew life — and that calls for uniform — not unicorn-style elegance.

Start with skincare: fresh, deliberate, awake. Follow with intentional makeup as necessary — polished, practical, photo-ready. Hair: disciplined, smoothed, styled, and secure. You don't need to replicate the exact flight attendant look — but you do need to be interview ready. Workday presentable. Then, go about your day as per usual, and be sure to keep notes.

Step 3: Reflect

- What helped you get up? Was it routine, mindset, preparation, or sheer will?
- What choices did you make to stay sharp and positive? Cold water, affirmations, a playlist?
- How did your posture, face, and energy shift once you got into 'crew mode'?
- Did you notice yourself becoming irritable or sluggish?
- What cracked first — your foundation or your willpower?
- What saved you — was it the lipstick? The playlist? The trousers with pockets?
- Could you reach the top cabinet in your kitchen?
- What about picking up that pen that fell behind the freezer?

Congratulations. These raw notes can later be polished into interview answers that demonstrate motivation, preparation, insight, and authenticity — without a single cliché.



Lesson De-Brief

Summing it all up



Remember in Lesson One, we spoke about the Captain's window? Well, we're back there. Head over to YouTube and search for **Flight 5390**. (*Warning — the reenactment is unsettling.*)

The bolts securing the captain's window were just 0.66 mm smaller than required. Less than a millimetre. A margin so small it's nearly invisible to the naked eye — but it was nearly fatal. (For context, the ruler at the top of each page is set to 0.66mm increments.)

Now, we're not talking about something as dramatic as a Captain being sucked out of a window — we're talking about waking up at 2am to apply makeup. Hardly a worthy comparison, but who saved him? Cabin Crew.

Hopefully, you'll never be faced with a situation like this. But **safety and security are your ultimate responsibilities. Building habits is how you strengthen your own structural integrity. It starts small — one habit here, another there. Over time, those micro-adjustments form something recruiters can't ignore because it shows in your presence, your confidence, and your overall approach to problem-solving.**



The Guest House

Grooming (Operational Clothing)



Pre-Briefing

Dress like you belong up there

There's a reason airlines no longer issue uniforms made of silk, denim, or wool, and why go-go boots and plastic helmets were retired to museums. Sure, airline uniforms flirt with haute couture, but they're not made for the fashion runway. They're built for the real runway.

Today's airline uniform is designed like a toolkit — engineered for movement, endurance, and long-haul wear. You'll find crease-resistant fabric, breathable linings, moisture-wicking layers, and two or three choices of footwear: heels for aesthetics, flats for action.

You, however, are not yet crew yet. And while no one's expecting you to evacuate an aircraft during your interview, you won't be sitting completely still either. Recruitment days are long, some are physically active and unexpectedly demanding. You may be walking, waiting, reaching, lifting, crouching into brace position, and weaving your way through a maze of group exercises.

This isn't about dressing like you work there — it's about dressing like you belong up there. There's a world of difference between the two.



Caitlyn's Log

Dateline: The night before the event.

I leave Bristol somewhere around midday and arrive in Crawley ahead of schedule, just gone 4pm. Lucky thing too. I've been to five hotels, two motels, and a bed & breakfast, and so far not a single vacancy.

According to the front desk clerk at the Bulls Head Inn, Crawley is a hotspot for jet-setters flying in and out of London Gatwick Airport. And Friday night, duh, is their busiest night of the week. Oh, and even if they did have vacancies, they won't accept US Dollars.

So I'm teetering around the front, side, and back alleys of this unfamiliar and crowded little town in my seven inch heels. And, it turns out these shoes were not made for distance, or curbs, or cobblestones, or stairs, or glossy tiled hotel lobbies.



Arrivals

The Lamb and Blanket Public House

Somewhere on the outer outskirts of town, I stumble upon a cute little guest house with one vacancy — and there's a reason for that.

Next door, The Lamb and Blanket Public House is not hosting peaceful business travellers. Nope, it's bustling with a boozy crowd of Ibiza-bound football hooligans, and everyone is singing "Goodnight Irene". Not ideal, but I finally have a bed, a door that locks, and somewhere to fix my face in the morning.

I clamber up the stairs, crabbing sideways, my butt sliding across the wall because I cut my skirt too short and now it's unsuitable for stairs.

The partying is unrelenting. No matter how many times they sing goodnight to Irene, this woman does not sleep, which means I do not sleep either. I don't trust the locks on the door so wake up every few minutes clutching my shoe as though it's a knife.

Come morning, the breakfast room hosts one exposed butt crack after the other.

Front desk says they won't hold my luggage for me to collect later and checkout is at 11am, so I'm stuck lugging this cumbersome suitcase around for the rest of the day.

I skip breakfast and feast on leftover American chocolate.



Coaching Cues

Functional Clothing

When selecting your interview outfit, remember: the mirror is just one checkpoint — not your final clearance.

It's easy to get caught up in surface polish. A fitted pencil skirt might show off your waist-to-hip ratio beautifully, and that corset you've been eyeing might cinch things in just right. But before you commit, can you move?

You never know what a recruitment event will throw at you. At a minimum, most airlines will want to

know if you can reach the overhead bins — and you'll be asked to prove it. Sometimes it's a mark on the wall. Sometimes it's a full functional drill. If your outfit limits your range — whether it's fabric, boning, boobs, or badly placed buttons — it's going to work against you.

This includes that rib-constricting corset you've been eyeing because that whisper-network tip about "secret waist measurements." Retire it. Or better yet, turn it into a weightlifting belt — you'll get more use out of it at the gym, training for the lift test because there is no secret waist measurement test.

Remember this mantra:

"You can fly the plane without the paint, but but you can't fly the paint without the plane."

Translation? Your outfit might look incredible on Instagram and match the airline palette, but if it stops you from performing — bending, reaching, squatting, demonstrating a brace position — or functions like scaffolding, you're not dressed for aviation and that's a real problem — not your outfit's colour, cut, or cleavage.

I say this with love — and a wardrobe full of regrets. I'm risking a complementary flash of my Care Bear knickers, all because I didn't plan for movement.

So before you fall down the rabbit hole of colour swatches and collar shapes, zoom out. Think structure. Think movement. This is not the moment to be ornamental — this is about proving you're operational.

But what does operational look like in an interview setting? Great question. Let's peak behind the galley curtain.



Think Like An Airline

Your body needs to move on demand

Let's begin with British Airways. Before they hand you a lanyard and a jumpseat, they want to know: Can you actually do the job?

The BA functionality check goes something like this: Right arm gripping a handle up there at two o'clock. Left arm down to seven. Now squat. Touch the tag on the floor. That's not choreography — that's simulating an actual onboard task.⁽⁷⁾

Some airlines include a jump-seat test. It looks deceptively simple. Sit. Buckle. Brace. But here's where the folklore whispers about secret waist measurements and cruel fat checks. Result? Candidates turn up trussed in corsets, terrified of seatbelt shame, and guess what? They fail the



very test they were trying to cheat.

This isn't about beauty. It's about mobility, response time, basic safety mechanics. Aviation is a world built in curves and angles, and inside that cylindrical cabin, nothing is conveniently placed. Emergency kits, fire extinguishers, oxygen valves — they're tucked into recesses, up high, down low, behind panels. Doors don't open or close in straight lines and have handles around corners. You'll need to reach, lunge, twist — often fast, sometimes in the dark, and always with calm precision.

So when airlines test your reach, your grip, your brace position — they're not being cruel. They're making sure you're fit to fly.



Behave Like Cabin Crew

Pre-interview field test

We'll dissect the technicalities of reach tests when we reach British Airways. In the meantime, let's put your garments through a real-world field test because if you're arriving to your interview having never worn your bracers, waistcoat, scarf, tie, corset, spanx, and blazer in an active setting, that's the equivalent to arriving at your first half marathon never having broken in your trainers. I have done both with expected results.

Put the outfit on. The whole thing — underpinnings, overpinnings, secret support structures, jewellery, all of it. Wear it. For at least three hours. Don't stand still and pose. Live in it. Walk up stairs. Sit on the floor.

- Can you reach the top kitchen cupboard without putting your pits into a stranglehold?
- What happens when you bend over to grab the knife that slipped behind the washing machine?
- Did anything split? reveal? or otherwise go whoopsy?

If reach is a challenge, layers are your friend. Dress like it's a snow day — then remove one layer at a time and see how it affects your range. Still struggling? We'll deep-dive into stretching when we reach British Airways.

At the end of your test, go stand in natural light and assess:

- Any wrinkles forming in odd places? Do your trousers resemble Venetian blinds?
- Any translucence?
- Any suspicious sweat patches under pressure points?
- Any threads pulling, seams twisting, fabrics bunching?

And most importantly: What's the first thing you want to do? Are you ready for the next challenge — or desperate to crawl into your unicorn onesie? Any skin chafing? Buttons carving hieroglyphs into your torso?



Coaching Cues

Desert-Island Breakfast

Whilst you're clawing at the top shelf for the cereal boxes, take a moment to test your breakfast too. Mid-day bloat is a real thing — and so are five-hour interviews.

Airlines do not operate on the ground the way they do in the air — at least, not in the way we expect. Think in-flight emergency, rather than hospitality.

Sure, there will be flight attendants overseeing the event — Perfectly groomed, poised, and glowing with that “I've been awake since 2:30am but you'd never know it” energy. But they are not here to bring you tea and biscuits.

There is no drinks trolley rolling down the aisle every 45 minutes. No guarantee that you'll even see a bathroom before the day is done. Someone might gesture vaguely toward a vending machine.

Eat breakfast like you're about to be stranded — on a deserted island or, more realistically, inside a jet delayed five hours with no clear end in sight.

But, of course, I don't have that kind of foresight, so I'll be fasting with nothing but American chocolate that has an aftertaste of vomit for who knows how many hours, and in heels and skirt unfit for function.





Arrival at Virgin Atlantic Headquarters (VHQ)

Crew Habits



Pre-Briefing

Dress like you belong up there

How do you prove you're ready without saying a word? No cheat sheets. No rote memorisation. No checklists.

It starts in the moments no one rehearses — the pauses, the nothing-in-particulars. That's where the interview really begins. Not outside the building, phone in one hand, digging a wedgie out with the other, waiting to "switch on" at 9:00 sharp.

We're not here to teach you how to flip on a set of rehearsed behaviours the instant a recruiter appears — by then, it's already too late. Instead, we're shifting your entire frame, so readiness isn't an act you switch on, but it's who you are.



Caitlyn's Log



Arrivals

Airline: Virgin Atlantic (VS)

Venue: Virgin Headquarters (VHQ)

Location: Crawley, West Sussex, England

Year: 1998

Time of Arrival: 08:30am

Age: 18

Stage: Induction Group Interview

Type: Invitation Only (1st time at Virgin)

I reach Virgin HQ at 8:30am. At least, I think it's Virgin HQ. It looks more like a retirement home.

I envisioned the hangars at Heathrow Airport, with jets parked outside, maybe a Concorde sculpture on the lawn, but there's not a bi-folding door or wingtip in sight. Not so much as a red door or a Scarlet Lady to give a sense of it belonging to Virgin. Just a bunch of Union Jack flags fluttering around the entrance like little wind socks and a teeny weeny logo on the door.

I'm so early, I stand next to the entrance and light a cigarette.



Debrief

Impression Management

Smoking right outside Virgin's corporate headquarters. What was I thinking? Oh right — I wasn't.

Cabin crew are the face of the airline, and are supposed to be polished, professional, and permanently infused with the scent of duty-free lavender hand cream, not come with a HAZMAT warning. And fine, I don't actually work for them yet, I'm not in uniform, but I thought this was my induction, so same thing.

Had a recruiter walked by — and who's to say one didn't — I could've blown it all before I even stepped inside. And just to crown the moment with irony: Virgin's iconic uniform at that time was designed by Elizabeth Emanuel — the designer best known for the late Lady Diana's wedding gown. Uniform or not, I may as well have been lighting up in the royal cabin and flicking ash into crystal champagne flutes.

Luckily for me, no one caught me. Or if they did, they had the grace not to stop me. They knew — there'd be plenty of other opportunities to confirm I had no idea what I was doing.



Crew Crosscheck

When does the interview start?

Let me ask you. When does the interview actually start?

- Is it when you shake hands with the recruiter?
- When someone with a clipboard calls your name?
- The moment you step inside airline premises?

I know you're smarter than those questions, so here's the real question: **When do you start behaving like crew?**

Why is it a better question? Think about it before you continue reading.



Philosophies

Applicant Thinking vs. Crew Thinking

“When does the interview start?” That’s the kind of thinking that puts everything into a box — a box of time, a box of behaviour. It treats the interview like a stage show: lights on, you perform. Style hair. Wear something red. Smile. Sit up straight. Say something clever. Look up and to the left to show thoughtfulness. Then, the lights dim and the door opens. Breathe, slouch, relax. Box goes back into storage for six months. Rinse. Repeat.

This was my reality for seven years, which is how I’m able to pull those boxes out of my closet and package them into tidy little lessons and case studies.

This is also what the 99% do when they cling to cheatsheets, memorise model answers, and follow checkboxes. They’re preparing for their assessment as though it’s a driving theory test or a high school history exam. But this isn’t theory. It’s practical. It’s a lifestyle change that starts before the clipped wing perches on your lapel. The right moment to “switch on” isn’t a single event.

Now, shift the question: “When do you start behaving like crew?”

It’s no longer about schedules or countdowns. It’s not a performance you rehearse — it’s identity. A series of habits that don’t turn on and off at will, but stay a part of you. They show up in how you walk, how you think, how you respond — even when no one’s watching, even when under interview pressure.

Habits don’t care if it’s 10:04am on Interview Day or Tuesday in the bakery queue.

That’s what we’re aiming for. Not reactive — proactive. Not pretending — aligning. Not trying to impress — learning to belong. As you’ll soon see, airline recruiters look for evidence and consistency, not a performance. And proof comes from practice.

If you’re outside the building, waiting to “switch it on” the moment you get inside — you’ve already missed the mark. It has to be lived-in. Worn not like a second skin that you take on and off like your daily kicker rotation, but your new skin that you maintain like hydration.

So, let’s reset your frame and recycle that tattered old box. You’re not preparing for an interview. You’re preparing for your future career.



Behave Like Cabin Crew

Crew habits that you can start today

Ah, so you're ready to begin building your habits — the real ones, the ones that show up when no one's clapping. Good. Let's start with something deceptively simple.

Your first task: Stand Around and Do Absolutely Nothing.

Yes. That's it. No clipboard. No coffee. No phone. No prop. Just you — in public — doing absolutely nothing. Try it at the bus stop. Outside the lift. In the queue for lunch.

Uncomfortable? Excellent. Because that's exactly what we're here to work on.

Suddenly, you have no idea what to do with your hands. And where do you look without risking eye contact? Your arms feel like flaccid wind socks so you tug your sleeve, shift your weight, reach for your button for the fifth time and...if you found your phone — put the gadget back in your pocket.

That little digital rectangle isn't just a distraction, it's a comfort blanket. It gives your body a script. Take it away, and the silence becomes physical. But you can't hide behind comfort blankies at the recruitment event, even though you most certainly will stand in queues, wait in silence, and you'll be observed while doing nothing at all.

And in those moments, your body will say everything.

So, keep practicing until stillness doesn't feel like vulnerability.

And while you're doing it, notice others:

- Who looks grounded?
- Who looks nervous?
- Who's genuinely at ease — and who's concealing boredom?

That's just a taste of how recruiters read a room. We'll get to them soon enough. For now, let's just say, it isn't Karen with the brown jumper from HR who never leaves her desk.

Of course, none of this is on my mind while I'm stood outside Virgin HQ puffing away on a cigarette, nose fogging the glass, thinking deep thoughts like "Do I have time for another?" and gawking at a gaggle of flight attendants in the lobby.



Lesson De-Brief

Crotch Watch

If you're yanking a wedgie out of your crotch, scrolling your phone, or puffing through a cigarette outside the building — just know, you're not doing it as you. You're doing it as future-you, in uniform. And by extension, yes, the airline's crotch is right there with you.

Because like it or not, the habits you carry — every idle twitch, fidget, eye-roll — don't vanish when you slip into your haute-coutured uniform. They come with you. If you want to wear the wings, you've got to iron out the creases before you're standing at the crotch of the building. (Alright, alright, I'll stop with the crotch watch.)

Bottoms on the line: No airline wants its brand stitched to poor behaviour — especially when said applicants are also wearing seven-inch heels and a scissored hemline.



My Forever Uniform

Why do you want to become cabin crew?



Pre-Briefing

Dress like you belong up there

“So, why do you want to become cabin crew?”

We’ve touched on the importance of cabin crew habits. Now it’s time to ask what the profession means to you.

Every applicant has a story. A moment. A memory. A fantasy. And this question is designed to test whether yours is built on hotel breakfasts and uniform envy, or whether you understand the role well enough to actually live it... and survive it.

When you’re ready, noses against the glass — let’s stare past the fantasy and into the reality.



Caitlyn’s Log

Dateline: Fifteen minutes later. Still standing outside Virgin’s entrance. Second cigarette.

Inside VHQ, a flight attendant is wearing my forever uniform. If I position myself just right, I can sort of align my glassy reflection with hers and, if I use my imagination, her clipped wing perches on my chest, her buttons trail my torso, and my face wears her hair. And if I really blur my focus, I look like a ballerina Nutcracker doll.

The door flings open and a gaggle of cabin crew billow out. They board a crew bus, bound for London Gatwick, South Terminal.

Maybe those are trainees. Oh! Perhaps we will get our uniforms today.

Okay, I'm ready for my fitting, let's do this.

I flick the half-smoked cigarette to the ground, crush it under my platform, linger in the afterglow of crew perfume, then teeter inside.



Debrief

I ♥ Uniforms

I ♥ uniforms.

The first uniform to seduce me was my school uniform. That should tell you everything you need to know about my childhood. And high school career week just so happened to land on no-uniform week. During which, I was the only pupil still wearing mine — because, well, let's not unpack all that here. Suffice it to say, I clung to mine like a comfort blankie. It kept my secrets, secret. Smoothed out the curve that marked me as different — as long as you didn't look too closely at the rest of me.

There I sat, in my mismatching shoes, in two different sizes, wearing the remaining mess that was my home cut hair when out slipped a slew of magazine clippings, each containing a medley of mouth-watering airline colours. It was like piercing the seal on a fresh tin of assorted chocolates before all the good one's are gone.

United Airlines — creamy Milky Bar Buttons. TWA — rich, golden caramel. PSA — strawberry cream and orange fondant. Everything chic, everything coordinated from their hair to their boots. Crimson lips. Matching hats perched at a precise, flirtatious angle. Even the smiles had a brand name: the Pan-Am smile. They weren't just wearing uniforms. They were the uniforms.

It seemed like airlines had decoded the entire mystery of womanhood — and were running secret charm farms to transform ordinary girls into polished Trolley Dollies. I, meanwhile, was still trying to work out how to repurpose a felt tip pen as eyeliner.

That was the pivot point. I stopped playing with Dad's dolls... and started chasing my own dolly fantasy.



Debrief

Complimentary Uniforms with a Side of Delusion

Wow, what a dreamer I was back then. Nose pressed to glass like a Dickensian orphan watching a family carving Christmas turkey. And that origin story makes it a little tricky to answer interview questions. Partly because I didn't really know anything about the job. Not the actual role. I only knew what it looked like. The surface-level fantasy.

I'd only just taken my first ever flight two weeks earlier — and as you'll see, it was a fairytale ghost ride that somehow managed to upstage the City of Dreams. So there I stood, outside VHQ, cigarette smouldering at my feet, suitcase bursting with delusion, with nothing but a uniform obsession to call ambition.

(You didn't really think I'd lug a suitcase around just for a one night hotel stay did you? Ah, bless, but no, I was packed, all the way down to my baby book packed. I'd even resigned from my internship at British Aerospace.)

I thought jobs distributed uniforms like complimentary refreshments. And since I was "headhunted" by Virgin crew (more on that later), I anticipated a let's-get-the-tailor-in-here-to-get-her-uniform-fitted welcome at Virgin HQ. I was ready to board the next Lady Penelope back to La-La Land.

Uh Boy!



Ground(ed) School

Get grounded in what's real — not what's rumoured

I'm not alone in my dreamy-eyed delusions. Sure, most applicants aren't foolish enough to expect they'll swagger out of the interview dressed in the finest haute couture with an autographed designer tag kissing their necks — but many still believe the job is simple to acquire. And in this industry, that's the same mistake.

This role comes with deceptively low entry requirements, paired with an image so spectacular, it's easy to get swept up in the influencer's version of events — all filters, fragrances, and flat lays from 34,000 feet.

Some applicants become mesmerised by the overall image. And who could blame them? It's sleek. Iconic. Photographed into legend. The uniforms unravelled from the imaginations of top fashion designers. Steeped in heritage, stitched into brand identity. For decades, airlines have poured their marketing budgets into that very silhouette. There are flight attendant uniform museums for a reason.

It looks like glamour. And the historical legacies certainly encourage that impression.

So the question becomes: are you drawn to the responsibilities of the uniform, or just the image of the uniform?

Eek, what a question. Puts a bit of a lump in the throat. But recruiters will want to know. Not because it makes for a clever interview trap — but because they've seen the delusion before. And the truth is... so have I.

I spot versions of myself all the time now — hopeful, appearance-driven applicants tangled in old wives' tales. They flood socials with selfies and hairfies, fretting over lipstick shades and haircuts. But when their CVs arrive, the essentials are missing — and yet, they're left confused when they don't make the cut.

They've mistaken the marketing for the job. They see the uniform as style, not status. As glamour, not responsibility. And that's where things begin to fray because it's not just a tailored silhouette or a matching lipstick shade — it's a coded badge of trust.

Did you ever see *Catch Me If You Can* — the film based on the memoir of a real-life con artist?

In one scene, Leonardo DiCaprio (playing Frank Abagnale Jr.) sweet-talks his way into the uniform department of a major airline. With nothing but charm and confidence, he walks out dressed as a pilot — and suddenly, people let him through doors he has no business opening.

Let's be clear: Airlines don't go handing out their haute-couture stash to just any Tom, Dick, or charismatic high-schooler with good cheekbones and a forged ID. And they certainly don't hand it out to dreamy-eyed applicants chasing the aesthetic, either.

While the uniform might look like fashion, it functions like clearance. It signals authority and grants identity. With the right credentials behind it, that uniform gets you past airside security, onto the aircraft, and into the safety briefing. It earns you a place in the chain of command.

Nowhere is that more evident than in the iconic clipped wing.



Ground(ed) School

A clipped rank is still a rank

Pinned to the lapel of many uniforms is a single clipped wing.

These are not typically the full, gleaming insignia worn by flight crew — those are dual wings, solid, balanced, whole. They represent the highest of ranks, earned through hundreds of hours in the flight deck.

The clipped wing is a symbol of partial command. Cabin crew aren't flying the plane. And in the early days, if you were a woman, you weren't even considered capable of it. The wing was clipped before you ever reached the runway.

Back in the golden era, if stewardesses reached the dreaded age of "womb sickness," your clipped wing was plucked from your bosomy go-go dress and tossed on the slag heap. That sexist legacy still lingers in the rumours and assumptions. But we'll leave institutional sexism for when we meet the Old Wives in Leg Two.

At first glance, a single wing seems to imply support, not leadership. Service, not strategy. Presence — but not power. You're in the chain of command, yes. Just not quite at the centre of it.

And yet.

There's a deeper truth here — one that airlines don't embroider on the lapel. Cabin crew are trained in emergency response, conflict de-escalation, first aid, fire containment, evacuation. They don't just serve the flight; they safeguard it. And when something goes wrong at 35,000 feet, it's often the ones with the half wing who act first — and last.

Clipped does not mean lesser. Clipped means chosen. Trained. Trusted. It's a symbol not just of service — but of responsibility.

Focusing only on the glamour is like saying you want a dog because it's cute in photos — but forgetting it also poos, chews your sofa, and needs walking in the rain. Do you want to be cabin crew... or do you just want to be seen as cabin crew?

I knew my answer to that question. The uniform wasn't a credential — it was the dream. A promise stitched together from magazine clippings and childhood imagination.

The wanting part is easy. Plenty do. The fantasy is seductive — red heels, hotel keys, jet lag and tiny wine bottles. But the reality? Not everyone knows the reality of the position.

That's exactly what this question is designed to reveal — and why recruiters want to hear your answer.



Think Like A Recruiter

Peek inside the mind that's sizing you up

When the recruiter asks "So, why do you want to become cabin crew?" or a variation there of, before you launch into something about loving people and wanting to serve, let me pull you back by the collar.

This deceptively sweet question is the recruiter's scalpel and it's the most revealing question in the entire process because it exposes the gap between fantasy and reality. They're not just asking why you want it or where it all began. They're slicing into what you think it is.

Whether you're still outside the glass, nose pressed against the fantasy... or whether you've taken the time to dismantle it and see what's underneath.

Can you describe it without the Instagram filter? Do you know what lives beneath the lipstick and lanyard? And when the glitter settles, are you still choosing this — on purpose, with your eyes open?

There are five layers hidden within this one question — and each one reveals something different about you.

- **Why** – What's driving this dream of yours?
- **Do YOU** – Why you, specifically? What do you bring?
- **Want** – What's your motive. We'll see how this differs to your why later.
- **To BECOME** – Is it the role you're drawn to, or just the image?
- **Cabin crew** – Do you even know what the job actually involves?

In this lesson, we're focusing squarely on the last layer: What do you know about the role?

And no — "I know it's about safety and security" doesn't count if you're just playing lip service.

Let's open that up. Let's challenge it. Let's make sure your answer is built on understanding, not fantasy.



Task Card

What Do You Think the Role Involves?

Before you answer "Why do you want to become cabin crew?", pause. Not to rehearse your lines, but to let the glitter settle... and gather a little truth.

Because yes, the job sparkles. But it also snaps.

During Emirates training, we were polished on service and plunged into chaos, often within the same morning. This role doesn't ease you in. It hurls. The glamour and the gore — served side by side, like canapés and catastrophe.

Very few are prepared for the whiplash: one moment you're learning to pour champagne like a five-star maître d', and the next, you're watching childbirth in full HD — no afterbirth spared. Before you've recovered, you're thrust into a ditching reenactment: alarms blaring, lights strobing, passengers panicking as they inflate their vests before evacuating the aircraft — a fatal mistake, and one you'll never unsee.

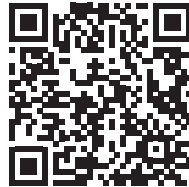
And that's the point. This job isn't compartmentalised. It doesn't politely ask if you're ready for the shift from heels to havoc. It just shifts, mid-flight, mid-sentence, mid-smile.

So, let's get you grounded in some of that reality. Nothing replaces lived experience, but video footage can get you frighteningly close. So consider this your complementary in-flight horror reel.

Strap in. Viewer discretion advised. Some of these videos don't hold back. They're vivid and graphic depictions of those unlikely event scenarios you might one day face onboard.



**Aggressive Passenger
Airline UK**
s5-e3
Timestamps 2:31-5:56
and 8:09-8:48 and
10:12.



The Sun
Angry Passenger
Compilation



Birthing Protocols
!!! Graphic Footage !!!

Watch until your skin prickles, then after you've sat with the discomfort for a moment, return to your earlier definition of the role.

- What has changed?
- What surprised you most?
- What disturbed you?
- What human behaviours stood out to you — from passengers and crew?
- What did the best crew do differently?
- Could I be part of the crew that handled that?
- If not — what would have to change?

This isn't your final answer — it's your foundation. Your surface-level dream has just had its first reality check.

Or you could binge on “get ready with me” videos — curated tours of the crew lifestyle that only show you the guest room of their world, where no one has dragon breath or wakes up with a crusty eye.

You're officially past the induction phase, and I'm about to be late for the interview. If you're with me — and I hope you are, because I need an interview buddy to hold my bitten hand and stop me lighting another cigarette — let's step inside Virgin Atlantic Headquarters (VHQ).

Where the dream walks through automatic doors and collides with clipboard reality.





Welcome to Virgin

Airline Intel



Pre-Briefing

A Triumphant Arrival

Darling, stop refreshing the careers page for a moment. That's not where the real clues live. If you want to know when your dream airline is about to crack open the hiring door — or when something juicy is brewing behind the scenes — stop stalking the socials and start flipping through their diary instead.

Yes — their diary. The corporate kind. Less poetry, more projections. But don't be fooled: hidden between the shareholder updates and cautiously phrased forecasts, airlines spill their secrets. A surprise livery update. A hefty aircraft order. A blink-and-you'll-miss-it line in the quarterly report. That's not admin. That's a confession.

Because airlines leak. Constantly. And once you learn how to read between the lines, you'll start spotting signals others miss — not just signs of growth, but signs of recruitment before the official announcements drop.

Even better, when the recruiter leans in and asks, "Why us?" — you won't be reaching for a Pinterest quote or a fan-girl fact about Richard Branson. You'll have insider information, and you'll have been the only one reading the diary all along.

So, lace up. It's time to start thinking like an insider. Let's snoop where it counts.



Caitlyn's Log

The lobby is so heavily fragranced. It's as though Virgin's AC units are pumping out leftover duty-free cologne.

Flying Lady impressions dangle their Union Jack flags along the walls, each pointing me toward the front desk. Union flags are everywhere — strung up as bunting, even tucked into vases.

It's only when I get closer to front desk that I even notice the receptionist, dressed in Virgin red, and almost completely hidden behind bouquets of flags and signs touting "Britain's Flag Carrier".

After handing over a visitors pass, she directs me toward the induction room, "Beyond the stairwell, turn right, and through the _second red door_ on the left".

Red doors bracket both sides of the plastic-white corridor. The split in the second door, my door, billows with the air-conditioning and I can't help noticing how the doors look exactly like flight attendant skirts.



Crew Crosscheck

Shift from passive replay to intentional review.

Did you notice anything unusual here? Something I noticed and yet somehow dismissed?

No, not the doors that look like skirts — although, those are so on point with Virgin's flair.

If you said Union Jacks, you are correct, but so what? It's a British airline, national flags are normal, right?

No, they're really not. Brits aren't like Americans. We display the national flag about as often as we decorate a Christmas tree. Flags usually come out for something royal, something sporty, or something really really special.

I knew this and I noticed the flags and yet I said nothing to the receptionist.

Have you guessed their significance?

Okay, let's step back to 1998.

- a) Lady Diana had passed the year before. Could this could have been a simple spillover of remembrance?
- b) Oh, I know, maybe this was the year Virgin's CEO, Sir Richard was knighted?
- c) Oo, could England have finally won the FIFA World Cup?
- d) Um, maybe an airline innovation or award?
- e) I have no idea. All the above.



Debrief

Concorde in drag or just plain beige?

Buckle up, here's your fly-by:

If you guessed (D), you're not far off the runway. If you guessed exactly, I'll buy you a Union Jack chocolate bar one day.

Had I simply asked the receptionist — or lifted my eyes beyond my own reflection — I might've caught the joke. At the time, British Airways — our stiff-lipped, government-backed flag carrier (and Virgin's long-standing nemesis) — had ditched the Union Jack from their tail fins in favour of the "World Images" livery. A £60m PR disaster. ⁽⁸⁾

Branson, ever the provocateur, swooped in, seized the flag, and all but purred: We'll take it from here, sweetheart. Thereby positioning itself as Britain's flag carrier — bold, cheeky, and unmistakably red. And this adopted position still stands to this very day. ⁽⁹⁾

Classic Branson. One part mischief, one part marketing masterstroke, poking a cheeky tongue at his Dirty-Tricks competitor. All timed to perfection while BA fumbled to recover its tail fin.

And me? The joke soared overhead like a Concorde in drag — fast, fabulous, and totally lost on me.





Announcement

I ♥ Virgin Atlantic

Let me rudely cut across myself and just say — bloody hell, I adore Virgin Atlantic.

If my husband's cat hadn't already arrived with the name, Chesterfield, I'd have christened him Lady Penelope, in honour of my first Virgin flight.

And while we're on confessions, when I met my husband, he was dressed head to toe in what I can only describe as Branson livery. Chin-length mop, chaotic shirt, big grin, and that irreverent twinkle that says, Yes, I probably did climb something I wasn't supposed to. That's what endeared me to him.

Wait, maybe that whole dress in livery thing does have some merit after all. Hmm.

See the uncanny valley here? No? Eye of the beholder.



Anyway. Where were we? Ah yes — attention. Let's put it back where it belongs.

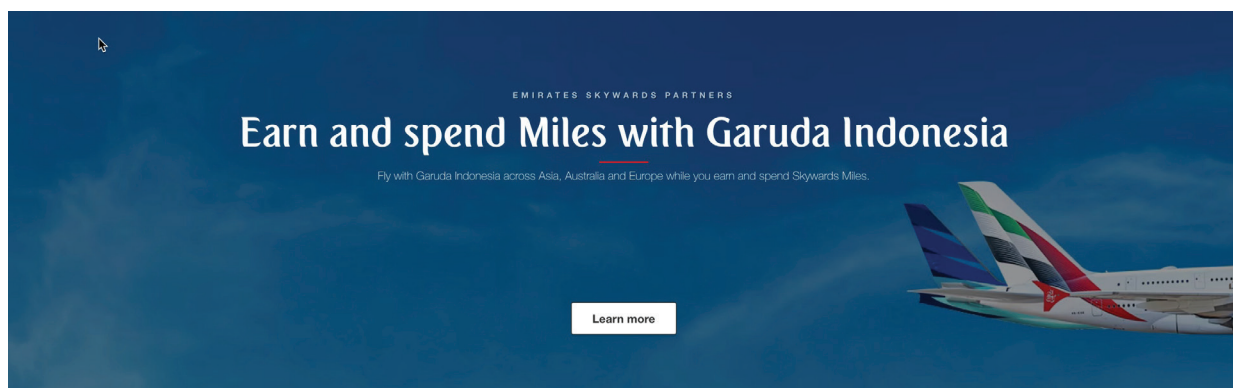


Case Study

Emirates livery update

Two decades on, I have trained my eyes since those early days.

Recently, a quick browse of Emirates' homepage had me pausing, squinting at this banner, thinking, hang on a minute...



The strategic alliance was the headline, but what caught my eye was something more subtle. Emirates had slipped in a fresh new livery — not a wild overhaul, more like a subtle eyebrow pluck.

Easy to miss. But as British Airways can attest, a livery refresh isn't just a fresh coat of paint. It's a statement, an expensive one. Emirates unveiled theirs in 2023, right on the heels of a massive recruitment drive that pulled in 300,000 hopefuls.

While most airlines were still nursing their sanitised Covid wounds behind layers of masks, Emirates chose to spruce up its look — something they hadn't dared since 1999. This isn't just a tweak; it's a signal. When a new livery takes flight, you can bet new routes, new planes, and new hires aren't far behind. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Oh, and yes — new uniforms too. I'll keep my thoughts on those to myself for now.



Task Card

Snooping for the gossip

Because you're here, I'm guessing you keep a casual eye on airline news — so let's treat this as a message to my younger self (and maybe a gentle nudge to yours). Stay sharp. Follow the buzz like it's gossip from a cousin you secretly admire.

Those tidbits add up. One day they help you predict a recruitment drive — handy if your ideal airline has been in a hiring hiatus. The next, they become the foundation of an answer that makes a recruiter sit forward — not because you're loud, but because you're informed.

When searching for airline news, there's one solid place to begin — it's the same way you'd find out what your sibling is up to. No, not the social media. Even more private than that. You thumb through their diary, aka: corporate reports.

Yes, they're dry. Yes, you'll have to wade through phrases like “fleet optimisation strategy” and “Q3 leverage ratios.” But buried in there? Hiring intentions. Strategic shifts. Branding plays.



So before you stride into that interview in your best lipstick and pressed collar, ask yourself: can I speak like someone who belongs? Because when they ask, “What excites you about our airline?” wouldn’t it be compelling to say “Oh, I really admire the bold move to claim flag carrier status — it’s so like Virgin to turn industry shifts into branding opportunities, and it’s one of the things I love about the organisation.” rather than “I think Richard Branson is cool”?

One gets you one step closer to that clipped wing. The other gets your interview clipped in the bud.

On the other hand, if you’re heading into a British Airways interview, maybe keep the flag grab to yourself. It’s a bit like bringing up your ex on a first date — awkward, unnecessary, and guaranteed to kill the mood.

P.S: Picking up on the subtle cues isn’t just useful for decoding airline livery or tracking press releases. The more rounds of this simulated recruitment process you go through with me — the practice runs, the crosschecks, the debriefs — the more fluent you’ll become in recruiter signals too.

Suddenly, the cryptic tasks aren’t so confusing after all.



Behave Like Cabin Crew

Crew habits that you can start today

Task 1: Head over to your dream airline’s website and do some gentle snooping. Scroll past the glossy crew photos and keep going. The corporate reports are usually stashed out of sight — think: under the digital mattress — buried in the footer, tucked inside the media or investor section.

Task 2: Before we head inside the interview room, think about how might you have used the Union Flags and the flag grab story in the interview?

Alright, time’s ticking — and if you’ve read anything about aviation time, you’ll know it waits for no one (especially not fools like me who ramble at the door). Let’s slip through the split in the recruitment door because I sense those woulda-shoulda-coulda regrets already tiptoeing in ahead of us, ready to trip me up for the next five hours.



Briefing Room

Cumulative Impressions and Airport Time



Pre-Briefing Airport Time

You're stepping into a world where seconds and smiles are budgeted by the minute.

Welcome to ****airport time****.

In airport time, "early" is expected. "On time" is flirting with too late. And "fashionably late"? That's standby crew territory — and standby means something's gone wrong. It's the aircraft door being held. A fuel recalculation. A chain reaction of sighs from gate to galley. One late arrival can trigger a delay no airline schedule was built to absorb.

To a recruiter, being late is as inconceivable as Christmas with family.

Miss the rhythm, and it's not just your watch that's off — it's your whole credibility.

Airlines don't run on excuses. They run on choreography. Let's get you synced.





Caitlyn's Log



Arrivals

Location: Virgin HQ Induction Room
Time of arrival: 08:45 am

Thirteen girls sit in a semi circle. Hair twisted into near-identical undo's, legs crossed in perfect symmetry. Heads all bend in the same direction, towards the one guy smack bang in the middle of them.

He's dapper, dressed to the ninety-nines, full on suited and shiny booted, and wearing a waistcoat. A waistcoat! It's hot and he's hot, so they're all giggling and bent around him like wind socks in a gale.

Nobody so much as looks at me.

I stow my suitcase in the corner, keeping the Los Angeles (LAX) flight tags purposefully on display.



Debrief

Early is on time

Did you catch the time?

Although I'm fifteen minutes early, butts are in the seats and applicants are already in such deep conversational flow that even their bodies bend the same way. How did that happen?



Think Like An Airline

On-Time Performance

In aviation, early is on time — because before language, before currency, before coffee, time is the universal language of flight. It's how the entire system stays airborne. Miss the rhythm, and everything wobbles.

And we're not talking regular time here — the kind where you can be "five minutes late" and get away with a sheepish smile. Oh, no. Airlines have their own timezone, it's called Airport Time.

Regular time is for regular people with regular lives. Airport time is strict, calculating, does not care about your morning traffic and is entirely indifferent to your feelings. If you've ever been to an airport or watched Airline, you'll know airlines don't do fashionably late. I speak from experience — I once missed two flights within three hours... while already inside the airport. Yes, really.

In aviation, minutes aren't measured in time. It's measured in money and panic.

According to Airlines for America, in 2023, it cost U.S. airlines \$100.80 per minute just to have a jet sit still. ⁽¹¹⁾

And it's even more important for crew to arrive on time. One missing flight attendant puts the whole operation in DEFCON 1 because planes cannot legally run without a set number of crew on board. FAA regulations: One flight attendant per 50 passengers. ⁽¹²⁾

Pardon me — did someone just whisper standby crew? Gold star for you. You're already thinking like senior crew — which means you're thinking like a recruiter. Time to shift perspective.



Think Like A Recruiter

Standby protocol

Recruiter's live on airport time also and standby protocol is exactly what's running through their mind the moment someone shows up late.

In aviation, standby doesn't mean flexible. Standby means uh oh, something's gone wrong. It means contingency. Plan B. Last-minute scramble. No airline hires a Plan B.

When recruiters meet you, they're thinking one thing: "Would this person be a reliable addition to my in-flight team?" And if your interview kicks off with a whiff of standby energy? That's more than a rocky start — it's a red flag flapping right in the recruiter's face because they imagine you holding up an actual aircraft.

Try your best not to trigger their panic protocol before you've even said hello.



Behave Like Cabin Crew

Don't tattoo liability to your forehead

Treat your interview as you would a flight. Arrive early. Arrive ready. Arrive like crew ready for the briefing.

Traffic? An accident on the motorway? Someone in your family couldn't find their shoes? No one



cares. Those are all the excuses that might one day prevent your arriving on time for your pre-flight briefing.

Arrive late and you might as well tattoo “liability” on your forehead. And we all know what airlines think of tattoos.

Better to arrive absurdly early, awkwardly perch on a chair in reception, and scroll through cat memes on your phone than to show up one minute late — (Although, recruiters don’t love the whole dead-eyed scrolling thing.)



Debrief

Seduction by stationery

Oh — did you clock my suitcase tags? Of course you didn’t. No one did.

Yes, they were a shameless little boast. A soft, swinging hint at my recent jaunt to Los Angeles. Had them perfectly positioned for maximum visibility. Also had a whole Virgin ghost flight story queued up — as you’ve no doubt gathered from the cookie-crumbs I’ve been dropping throughout.

Somewhat socially awkward and desperate for connection, I let my tags bat their lashes and do what I couldn’t — make the first move.

Had anyone asked — “LA? Virgin? Tell me everything!” — I would’ve lit up, launched into the whole tale. Maybe then my day would’ve unfolded differently.

But alas, it wasn’t my tags that got the room talking. Instead, Mr Waistcoat showed up looking like a three-piece fever dream and everyone flocked to him.

Funny enough, it wasn’t the first time LA got upstaged by a Mr Waistcoat. The Virgin crew had already done it on my ghost flight. I clocked it immediately: Mr Waistcoat = Virgin material.

Meanwhile, my perfectly crafted tale of airborne adventure — complete with Virgin crew compliments and ghost-flight mystery — dangled pathetically in the corner.

Twenty years on, I’ve only ever told the ghost flight story to my husband, dad, and Gordo. All because one man’s tailoring outshone my social skills.



Think Like A Recruiter

Looking the part and being the part are two very different things

Ah yes, Mr Waistcoat. Keep your eye on him — and not because he’s hot.

It's tempting to assume his show-stopping appearance is the whole act. He's certainly giving it the full curtain-call. But perhaps there's more at play than a sharp outfit and some spit-polished charm.

When someone steals the room, don't just watch — observe. Slip into recruiter mode. There's a lot of noise out there about looks, so it's not uncommon for applicants to dress their personalities like Broadway stars and cloak themselves in dazzling costumes. But looking the part and being the part are two very different things.

There's always a Mr or Mrs Waistcoat in the mix — someone who's come to be seen. But are they really all they seem, or is it just insecurity dressed up in sharp lines? This is what recruiters have to figure out — what's behind the pizzazz?



Think Like A Recruiter

Airlines will add its livery to the right aircraft

In a field where precision, safety, security, and reliability are paramount, recruiters aren't looking for people to sit pretty in the jump seat, they're scouting rock-solid crew members who might have to deliver a baby at 38,000 feet and handle afterbirth without passing out, be assertive with the twelve Ozzies on a stag bender, and maybe evacuate an aircraft in under 90 seconds. Hopefully not all in the same flight, but you never know.

Recruiters know a pretty face loses its shine when oxygen masks drop. A chatterbox won't catch a disgruntled passenger's warning. False confidence won't raise a red flag in a pre-flight briefing. And a soft voice won't cut through the chaos when the Captain yells, "Brace for impact!"

And when none of that is happening, it's all about the airline's unique corporate culture and elevating the passenger experience.

Think of applicants as jets.

The double-decker A380 is Emirates' crown jewel — perfect for long-haul, high-capacity routes. But that same plane would be overkill for a budget carrier like easyJet. It's not inferior, it's just the wrong fit for that airline.

Airlines will add its livery to the right aircraft, but a fancy facade won't fix a structurally unsound or incompatible aircraft. The same applies to applicants.

Look beyond the surface, and you'll be thinking like a recruiter.

Speaking of looking beyond the surface, it's time to get sociable. Let's break the ice.



The following pages are taken from later
sections of the textbook.



1.16 Round One - Q&A

Ignorance vs Silence



Pre-Briefing

Asking a question

Should you speak up during the Q&A round? Most candidates either treat it like a harmless warm-up or panic and over-perform.

Every time you step forward and ask a question, you're shaping the recruiter's impression. Are you grounded and curious, or eager to impress? Are you showing initiative — or trying to be what you think they want?

In this lesson, we unpack how easily alignment slips in this opening round, and how small decisions — like going first, or asking a forced question — can signal the wrong thing entirely.



Caitlyn's Log

Nosecone asks, "Before we get started, does anyone have any questions?"

She reminds me of Dad, and the way he used to give me the "are you sure there's nothing you need to tell me?" speech. I must show I'm an extravert, and that means going first.

Okay, I'm going to say something. But what? I don't have anything to say. Hmm, oh, I know, I'll ask about the swimming test, there's no harm in asking. And if she says, "yes", I'll say I don't have my costume and I will leave.

I raise my hand before nerves can stop me.

Nosecone looks directly at me. She smiles.

"Um, do we really need to be able to swim?"

Oh god no! That's not what I meant.

"Yes." voices Nosecone's stinging-red lips. "It's in our requirements."

As soon as she speaks, I catch the clue that was there all along. Virgin **Atlantic**, the second part of its name is a sodding ocean.



Debrief

Game of Telephone

Yeah, I know. What the hell just happened? Well, actually, no I don't know because I'm usually the last to find out what I'm going to say.

Do you remember that game of telephone, also called Chinese Whispers, Russian scandal, Whisper down the lane? That's what it's like inside my mind.

My question begins logical, in this case, it started out as, "Will there be a swimming test today?" You know, nice and tidy, nothing complicated, or consequential. Even though it should be a direct route from brain to mouth, the words get stuck on the lump in my throat where I realise, "Wait! Will they kick me out? Then the knot in my stomach asks, "Is it fifty or fifteen?" Then the morse code in my chest points out, "Isn't the point of flying, to avoid water?" And out pops "Um, do we really need to be able to swim?"

But, okay, it's not the worst question in the world, is it? Maybe I'm blowing it out of proportion.



Crew Crosscheck

What is a bad question?

What do you think?

- Is this just a naïve question that could be overlooked as nerves?
- And, come on, is it really that bad? There are worse questions, right?
- What does my question say about me?
- Does it really reveal I can't swim, or does it just sound like a question about swimming?



Think Like A Recruiter

Dual ignorance

My question reflects dual ignorance.

First, I'm revealing my incompatibility for the role. It is the equivalent to asking, "Um, do we really

have to serve passengers?” The entire phraseology of it is damning, all the way down to the strained “really”.

And on top of all that, it’s a fundamental error to ask questions that have been:

- a) listed in the airlines requirements, and
- b) clarified during the pre-screening call.

Here are the thoughts likely bouncing around nosecone’s nosecone: “This person does not follow instructions. She can’t be trusted to complete on board checklists. She is a liability to the airline and passengers, and is likely to drown during training.”

Yikes, not a great impression at all.



Coaching Cues

Asking Questions - The Union Flag

So, it turns out I really should have asked about the flags in reception, huh.

Um, yes, sort of.

A flag question could have made a wonderful follow up to Shady Lady’s opening joke, but only if I can command presence — meaning: delivered clearly, confidently, and fully.

Only, given how my mind works, I’d mean to ask, “Hello Sandra, I’m Carrie. I noticed the sign touting Virgin as ‘Britain’s new flag carrier’. Is that in response to British Airways dropping the union flag from its tail-fin?”

But instead, what would come out... “Um, Shady Lady, what are those flags in reception?”

And she’d give me the classic head tilt, then say, “Well sweetheart, it’s our country flag, of Great Britain. Do you know where you are? Do you have anyone taking care of you?”

And then I’d overcompensate by waffling on... “I mean, because I know about British Airways and the rivalry and everything. I could be wrong. Forget I said anything.” And then I’d spend the rest of the event picking at my nails.

Having something decent to say is one thing. Delivery is quite another.

But, why do we even need to ask a question? Now that is a great question.



Coaching Cues

Should You Ask A Question?

Asking a question during this early stage is a power move that should never be underestimated.

And yet, I have seen applicants make the same mistakes over and over again. No, wait, that was me. I have watched myself make the same mistakes over and over again and then I watched other applicants make my mistakes.

At interviews with extreme turnouts — and we're talking Emirates with its four hundred fold ratio here — the Q&A round is a vital opportunity to get noticed (More on that later), but in this particular case, with only fifteen applicants, it really isn't necessary. There are plenty of opportunities to speak to the recruiters directly, plus it's not difficult to get noticed. Which is kinda the problem I was having here, being noticed for all the wrong reasons.

If you do have a real question, remember, raising your hand during this session affords you the recruiter's undivided attention. That is what makes the Q&A session as powerful as it is risky. Each time you gain the recruiter's attention, they begin to shape decisions.

We'll cover questions in greater detail as we move forward. In the meantime, remember what Abraham Lincoln said — or maybe it was Mark Twain, the internet can't decide — "It is better to keep silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubts."

But, it's a little late for me. As is Virgin's 2019 swimming criteria.



Announcement

Virgin's 2019 Swimming Criteria

In 2019, Virgin Atlantic changed its pre-employment swimming criteria. Here is that updated policy:

'It is a requirement for the role that all cabin crew are able to swim a minimum distance of 25 metres and tread water (both unaided) by the start of their training course.' We provide multiple accredited swimming schools where applicants can learn to swim between their interview and the beginning of their training.

Oh well, that's 25 years too late for me, but that's okay, I'm over it now.

Some airlines have a softer approach to the whole swimming requirement, but that's a huge topic with many misconceptions. We'll talk more about those when we meet the Old Wives.



9.8 Emirates - Round 1 - Q&A

Cumulative Success



Pre-Briefing

A softly lit stage on a velvet cushion

Stop waiting for your moment — and take it. Step into silence and own it with a crew-ready mindset. No perks-chasing. No filler. Just one precise question that makes recruiters lean in and wonder, “Who the hell was that?”

Lesson Objectives

Treat the Q&A not as a throwaway, but as a decisive one-on-one.

Identify the types of questions that signal maturity, awareness, and a crew-ready mindset.

Read the recruiter’s rhythm — and time your strike like a boarding call — not a gate stampede.

Craft a question that positions you as thoughtful, perceptive, and memorable..





Caitlyn's Log

Recruiter A asks if we have any questions. Right on cue, arms shoot up all around me. The recruiters randomly point and applicants randomly ask the usual questions:

"Can we choose our own accommodation?"

"When can we join?"

"Do we get paid for training?"

"Do we get concessionary travel?"

It's less Q&A, and more a spillover of excitement still foaming at the edges from the promo video.

One guy asks if Emirates have ordered the A380 super-jumbo. My ears prick. That's a proper question. The recruiter smiles. *"Yes, the first is arriving in 2008."*

Suddenly I'm more excited — not just for Emirates, but for the chance to nerd out with Mr A380. Only, he's camouflaged somewhere in the thicket of black suits and red scarves. Then I feel it. The shift. Momentum dips. My heart ramps up. Timing is everything, and mine is approaching.

Because I've waited so long, there's a risk of the recruiters calling time. I have to act fast. Without overthinking, I stand and raise my hand. Standing indicates my serious intent and ensures I'm not passed over. I'm the only one standing and I feel exposed, silly, but it's too late for all that.

Recruiter B points at me.

Okay. Challenge one: ask a decent question. I take a breath and speak louder than I normally would, throwing my voice at the back wall just like how my performing arts teacher told me, slow and deliberate so I don't trip on my dry, traitorous tongue. *"Hello, I'm Carrie. I wonder, how did you find the transition in moving to a Muslim country?"*

She smiles and says, *"Thank you for your question, Carrie,"* then talks about cultural integration training, tours of the Mosque, and Ramadan. I can hardly concentrate on her answer because I'm away with the fairies, and my smile is on the fritz.

She turns to address the room. I seize my exit and fold neatly back into my chair.



Debrief

Slam Dunk

And, just like that, I got hired by Emirates. Well. Not hired hired. I was finally beyond all that naïveté. But this was the ignition that ultimately lead the way to my success.

As I've repeated several times, **this process is a slow, deliberate accumulation of impressions, a slow-burn seduction.** And what you just witnessed was a slam-dunk impression — mid-icebreaker, no less. And it took me from faceless applicant to Carrie.

The moment I asked that question, it singled me out. And for the first time in nineteen interviews — that attention wasn't because I'd made an over-eager wally of myself. When we step into the next round, you'll see exactly why this moment matters. Not because it won the game. But because it made sure I was in it.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's walk back into that room and unpack exactly what happened.



Debrief

Swarming Like Gate Lice Is Not How You Get Remembered

There's a name that gets passed between crew at boarding gates with a sigh. **Gate lice.**

Gate lice is the unflattering nickname bestowed upon eager travelers who swarm the boarding gate long before their group is called. They cluster, create bottlenecks, and pressure other passengers into performing the same ritual. It's airport herd behaviour at its most undignified. And, I'm afraid the same affliction plagues the interview room. Particularly for recruitment events with large turnouts such as these — vast, anonymous, pulsing with competition.

Hands shoot up before a question is even invited, eyes gleaming with the urgency of someone desperate to speak first. Not to contribute or enrich. But to claim something for themselves.

They want to board first. Speak first. Be noticed. But they forget that **attention and regard are not the same thing. They are revealing that their first instinct isn't to listen, to learn, or to read the room.**

As you've already witnessed, multiple times now, I've been gate lice more than once — fielding my own ill-considered questions with the breathless urgency of someone who didn't yet know how to hold a room or my tongue.

We're all doing the best we can, straining to stand out, to leave a mark. And wanting to use the Q&A to make an impression? That instinct is spot on. But, **swarming like gate lice is not how you get remembered.** It's how you get a big ole sigh.



Coaching Cues

Resist the Lunge. Timing is Key.

Don't be gate lice. Resist the lunge. Observe. Listen. And when the room finally exhales — then you step forward with something so thoughtful, so rooted in awareness, that the whole room recalibrates. Because **a good question, asked at the right time, does for you what behaving like gate lice never will — it earns you a first impression that lingers like perfume on silk.**

But timing alone won't save you — Not if what you offer is limp, transactional, or forgettable. A well-timed question still needs to earn its place. So — let's break this down.



Debrief

Powerful Questions

“How did you find the transition to living in a Muslim country?”

See how the energy shifts? It doesn't chase perks — it seeks perspective. It's not asking what the airline can give me — It asks: what do I need to understand — about the job, the context, the world I'm stepping into.

My question was chosen to include cultural adaptation, because:

- It acknowledged the UAE's cultural reality — a Muslim country.
- It hinted at potential, real-life challenges beyond the glossy brochure.
- It couldn't be answered with a quick scan of the Emirates website.
- And it gave the recruiter the rare dignity of a question that hadn't been reheated a hundred times before.

Then, to encourage reciprocation, I gave my name. The first person in the room to do so.

When you enter the event, you maybe have a number. You definitely have no face or name. No impression at all. At best, you're applicant #38, and if you're really unlucky, applicant #1278. But **with a little forethought, suddenly, you can be on a first-name basis with the recruiters. It's a subtle shift that closes your distance, even if that distance is no wider than 0.6mm.**

But don't fold your arms or retreat into comfort just yet. There's more stitched into this moment than it first appears. To understand that, we need to change perspective.



Think Like A Recruiter

Recruiter's Prefer Concrete Examples

The recruiter's, active cabin crew, have likely been on a whirlwind recruitment tour. Perhaps this is the fourth event in just over a fortnight. Which means, **they've stood in four different hotel function rooms, and have assessed over four hundred hopefuls, each giving hundreds of iterations of the same questions.** You'll see exactly how much it all blurs when we meet the recruiters later.

By now, their smiles are choreography. Their answers are script. **They know when to nod. When to pause. When to laugh politely. They know what questions are coming and their ears are tuned to repetition. They're detached.**

And that's exactly why a well-timed, well-phrased question works. Because it breaks the loop.

They may not remember exactly what you asked. And it's unlikely they will remember your name, even if they say it, but they will remember how you made them feel. And even if that feeling is surprise, relief, or curiosity, isn't that a wonderful start to the event?

It means your first impression is already wearing heels. Your nameless number has a heartbeat. It's a small heartbeat, but remember, it's all about cumulative impressions — 0.6mm — and you've landed yours before the assessments have even begun.



Coaching Cues

Slam-Click with a Slam-Dunk

If you're a quiet type, like me, **the Q&A isn't just a chance to speak. It's a softly lit stage, handed to you on a velvet cushion.** For a brief, golden moment, the recruiter controls the floor — while you hold the room. No interruptions. No time limits. No competing. This is the opposite of a group discussion where gate lice turn feral and good luck breaking through the noise.

At large events such as this, most applicants won't speak directly to a recruiter until round seven, or round one if they're cut. And that was my reality through nineteen failed interviews.

But this moment? It's your unofficial one-on-one. And **the spotlight is begging for someone who knows what to do with it** and doesn't treat it like a shopping list.

Stop waiting for your moment — and take it. It's right here.



Behave Like Cabin Crew

Don't vie to be seen or heard. Vie to be remembered.

Remember, the interview is a simulated flight, and the Q&A is your pre-flight briefing. But, asking transactional questions such as “Do we get concessionary air travel?” is no more impressive than a passenger dinging the call bell and slurring, “Do we get concessionary vodka?”

A question about culture, about the lived realities of the role — that's more like a crew member asking: “How will the passenger with the skin condition in 34B affect service timing, and what accommodations need to be made?” It signals readiness. Judgement. Crew mindset.

You never want to make recruiters feel like they're interacting with passengers. Least of all a gate lice passenger. Always aim to remind them of crew. You do that by asking a question that doesn't grab, it offers. It asks what do I need to know to do this well, to serve, to fit, to last?

And after dozens of transactional questions have been flung about like call bell pings, a slam-dunk question, with considered timing, can slice through the room like a sudden depressurisation.

