

# Developing and Administering Structured Interviews

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## FOREWORD

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The State of Oklahoma Office of Personnel Management, in keeping with the agency's mission to provide human resource programs and services to meet the needs of state government, is pleased to provide this new product to assist agencies in selecting capable and productive employees. This manual provides instructions to enhance the quality of information gathered from employment interviews while strengthening the legal defensibility of this phase of the selection process.

The most common selection method used is the interview. What many think is a simple, straightforward process is actually a complicated, sometimes litigious, and often misapplied practice. In order to provide state agency hiring personnel with an effective state of the art selection methodology, the Personnel Assessment Division of the Office of Personnel Management has researched the professional literature and compiled this collection of effective interviewing principles.

This manual discusses the many aspects of effective structured interviewing. Alternative methodological steps are listed, and when appropriate, a recommended procedural step is given. While using all of the components of a structured interview may not be feasible for everyone, the use of as many components as possible is recommended. Additionally, a selection process should also include the assessment of organizational fit. This is done by evaluating how a candidate would fit into the unit where the vacancy exists. While this is not part of a structured interview, it is an important step in the selection process that normally follows the structured interview and, therefore, is addressed in this manual.

This manual is not a simple how-to guide. It presents the theory and reasoning behind some of the principles and practices described. Therefore, the intended audience for this manual is human resource professionals. Agencies may wish to create their own condensed version of this guide to use in training managers and supervisors outside the human resources office.



## INTRODUCTION

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Most selection decisions are based on information obtained during personal interviews, yet the unstructured personal interview can be one of the most unreliable and invalid methods of selection available. The validity of the unstructured interview is reported to be lower than that for written tests, ratings of training and experience, assessment centers, and other types of selection devices. Due to the potential for subjectivity and bias, an unstructured interview process leaves an organization particularly vulnerable to legal attack. However, the structured interview described in this manual has been shown to be a valid and effective selection procedure. Also, candidates participating in structured interviews perceive the process as fair and are thus less likely to take legal steps to challenge it.

The structured interview has several strengths that contribute to reliability, validity, legal defensibility, and perceptions of fairness. The structured interview improves reliability and validity by using the same job-related questions for each candidate, anchored rating scales, and a trained interview panel. When compared to other types of interviews, the major strengths of the structured interview are that all candidates receive the same treatment, interview questions are directly linked to job behaviors, more than one person evaluates the candidates, and written accounts are created of each candidate's responses to the questions. These practices eliminate irrelevant questions and allow each candidate to be evaluated on the same criteria by multiple raters, reducing bias and subjectivity. This lends to the perception of fairness among candidates, and provides data to support selection decisions in the event of a challenge by a candidate. Finally, the well-designed structured interview has been proven in numerous studies to be just as predictive of candidate job performances as other forms of employment testing. Listed in Table 1 are the major strengths of the structured interview.

Table 1

*Strengths of the Structured Interview*

1. Bias is reduced because candidates are evaluated on job-related questions, which are based on an analysis of job duties and requirements. Subjective and irrelevant questions are not asked.
2. All candidates are asked the same questions so everyone has the same opportunity to display knowledge, skills, and abilities.
3. Pre-determined anchored rating scales are used to evaluate answers to interview questions. This reduces disagreements among interviewers and increases accuracy of judgments.
4. A panel of interviewers is used to record and evaluate answers in order to minimize individual rater biases.
5. Research has demonstrated that properly developed structured interviews can have high reliability among interviewers and predictive validity for future job performance.
6. Job-related procedures used to develop structured interviews increase content validity.
7. Procedures used to develop structured interviews are consistent with the advice of professional and governmental guidelines, and thus more legally defensible.
8. Structured interviews allow managers to take part in the selection process in a role with which they are familiar.
9. Job-relatedness and consistency of the process may increase the perception of fairness among candidates. The job-relatedness may also help candidates get a realistic perspective of the job, which can aid in self-screening.

(Campion, M.A., Pursell, E.D., & Brown, B.K., 1991, pp. 251-252.)

In addition, the job of evaluating candidates is made easier because questions and evaluation benchmarks are prepared in advance.

As mentioned in Table 1, a strength of this process is that it allows for content validation of the interview. Having content validity means that a selection device covers a representative sample of the behavior domain being measured (Anastasi, 1988). The following table lists the steps necessary to establish content validity.

Table 2

*Establishing Content Validity*

- Document the names, addresses, titles, qualifications, and training received for all interviewers.
- Document the date, time, location, and duration of the interview.
- Adequately sample important content areas.
- Ask questions that address the knowledge, skills, and abilities a candidate needs at entry.
- Ask questions that conform to observable job behavior.
- Administer the interview consistently and fairly.

Establishing content validity means more work must be done well before the interviews begin. This manual is provided to help those with selection responsibilities construct and use effective structured interviews. Chapter 1 focuses on how to develop a structured interview instrument. Chapter 2 addresses the implementation of the structured interview.



## CHAPTER 1

# DEVELOPING THE STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

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The essence of a structured interview is the standardization of questions. The same questions should be asked in the same order to all interviewees. However, before structured interview questions can be developed, a job analysis must be conducted on the job to be filled. Any method of job analysis may be used as long as it includes a determination of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) upon which to base interview questions. The KSAs found to be important, critical, and necessary **at the start of employment** are the aspects of the job that should be discovered during the job analysis. These are the KSAs that should be covered in the structured interview questions. Thus, the structured interview questions should have a direct link to the critical and necessary-at-entry KSAs required in the job. Content validity is established through this KSA-question link.

Structured interview questions must be clearly job-related. Several court decisions (*EEOC v. Rath Packing* (1986), *King v. TWA* (1984), *Harless v. Duck* (1980), *Reynolds v. Sheet Metal Workers* (1980), *Weiner v. County of Oakland* (1976)) that resulted in rulings for the plaintiff found the selection procedures in question to be unrelated to the job. These court decisions relate the importance of a job analysis for selection devices, especially job interviews. Also, the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (1978) and the *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures* (1987) consider employment interviews to be a selection device just as a written test is a selection device. Therefore, it is very important to document your job analysis, recording from whom you obtained the job information, and when and how the information was obtained. The job analysis could be as simple as a panel of subject-matter experts (SMEs) describing the critical KSAs for the position. SMEs are incumbents or supervisors of the position who have direct knowledge of the job duties and requirements. The most common method of job analysis is critical incidents job analysis. Critical incidents job analysis typically involves meetings where SMEs share critical incidents they have witnessed that show a necessary knowledge, skill, or ability that an incumbent needs for the job.

A job analysis increases the acceptance of the interview as valid by both interviewers and candidates. Involving the interviewers in the job analysis will increase their acceptance of the analysis as appropriate and valid (Campion, Palmer, and Campion, 1996).

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**Recommendation: Base interview questions on a valid job analysis.**

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### **The Interview Panel**

The interview panel should meet to review the job description and job analysis, design the interview questions, and set benchmarks for answers to the questions. The panel should also choose a coordinator to lead the interviews.

Interview panels should have three to five persons. Having the immediate supervisor of the open position serve on the interview panel is recommended since he or she may be the best expert on the duties and responsibilities of the position. Other panel members might include the division director, a coworker, representatives of other departments, or a representative of the customers served by the position. All members of the panel should be familiar with the duties and responsibilities of the position being filled. Every effort should be made to have the panel reflect the race and gender makeup of the candidate pool, which may reduce the potential for bias.

Using a panel to conduct the interviews may reduce the impact that personal biases of individual interviewers may have on the selection of an employee. It is also important to use the same persons as interviewers for all of the candidates. Different interviewers are likely to evaluate answers differently, but if the interviewers are always the same persons then there is at least some consistency in the ratings of candidates. This is most important when other components of the interview are unstructured because different interviewers will ask different questions as well as evaluate them differently, and may consider different supplementary information such as application forms, resumes, references, transcripts, or other documents the candidates submit.

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**Recommendation: Use a 3-5 member panel to conduct interviews. Use the same interviewers for all candidates.**

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### **Interview Questions**

Following the job analysis, interview questions should be developed from behaviors determined during the job analysis to be critical to the performance of the job. There are four types of interview questions: *job knowledge, past behavior, background, and situational.*

- *Job knowledge* questions may ask interviewees to demonstrate specific job knowledge or provide documentation of job knowledge.
- *Past behavior* questions require candidates to describe the activity of past jobs that relates to the job for which they are being interviewed.
- *Background* questions focus on the work experience, education, and other qualifications of the candidates.
- *Situational* questions present the interviewee with hypothetical situations that may occur on the job and ask how the interviewee would respond to the situations. The use of situational questions in an interview is based on the assumption that a person's intentions are related to behavior; thus, how a candidate says he or she will handle a problem is most likely how he or she would actually behave in that situation (Outerbridge, 1994).

Psychologists recommend using a variety of these types of questions (Campion, Palmer, and Campion, 1996). Examples of the different types of questions can be found in Appendix A.

Asking open-ended questions, as opposed to questions that can be answered with a yes or no, will allow the candidates to reveal more about themselves. If a question is developed to determine if a candidate does or does not meet a specific requirement, then a close-ended question could be appropriate; for example, "Do you have a driver's license?" or "Do you have experience with Microsoft Word?" Otherwise, open-ended questions usually gather more information; for example, "Describe any experience you have had in using computer-based word processing programs."

When choosing questions to include in the interview, it is wise to keep in mind the time frame within which you must conduct each interview. The number of questions should probably fit in the range of eight to fifteen. If you want to ask a question to which you expect and want lengthy replies, you should ask fewer questions overall to keep within a reasonable time frame. Generally, interviews will be thirty to sixty minutes long. If there are a large number of candidates to interview, such as with academies for Highway Patrol Officer, two or more panels may be needed rather than trying to limit the interviews to less than thirty minutes so one panel can do them all.

The interview panel should ensure that the situational questions developed do not require a KSA that will be learned on the job. For example, do not ask candidates how they would handle situations for which your organization has specific policies that will be taught to new hires.

Be careful that a question doesn't coach the candidate in how to respond. If you tell a candidate that punctuality is required in this position and then ask if he or she is punctual, the response is going to be virtually the same from all candidates. Also, be careful that your questions don't give too much deference to a candidate's self-assessment. For example, asking, "How would you describe your interpersonal skills?" is unlikely to elicit "not so good" from the candidate. A better question in this case would be, "Describe a

time when you had a conflict with a coworker, subordinate, or supervisor. How did you react to the situation?” Standard follow-up: “How was the situation resolved?”

Questions should be worded so that candidates will clearly understand what is being asked. The use of acronyms or other terminology that may not be familiar to some candidates should be avoided. Use job-related language, but avoid technical jargon and regional expressions. Keep the questions succinct; don't make it difficult for the candidates to understand what is being asked (Outerbridge, 1994). Table 3 lists some of the more important characteristics of good interview questions.

Table 3

*Important Characteristics of Questions*

- Realistic
- To the point, brief, and unambiguous
- Complex enough to allow adequate demonstration of the ability being rated
- Formulated at the language level of the candidate, not laced with jargon
- Tried out on job incumbents to check for clarity, precision of wording, and appropriateness
- Not dependent upon skills or policy that will be learned once the person is on the job (Outerbridge, 1994, p. 15)

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**Recommendations:**

- (1) Use a variety of the different types of questions in the interview.**
  - (2) Make certain questions are job-related and linked to KSAs critical at entry into the position.**
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**Developing Questions from Critical Incidents**

Critical incidents are actual job situations that show how effective or ineffective an individual is in a particular aspect of the work. The critical incident method is a procedure used to develop questions from KSAs. This method involves presenting SMEs with KSAs and asking them to write critical incidents that concretely demonstrate each required knowledge, skill, or ability. The SMEs write behavioral examples showing how incumbents have demonstrated the possession or lack of a particular KSA (Outerbridge, 1994).

After the questions are developed, benchmark responses should be prepared by the SMEs. “The benchmarked responses should...reflect behavior that is acceptable within the organization, or behavior that is unacceptable if the benchmark represents an unsatisfactory response” (Outerbridge, 1994, p. 15-16).

To develop benchmarks, it is recommended that panelists think of how persons whose performance on the job they would rate as superior, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory would respond to each question. After questions and benchmarks are agreed upon, each panel member should take copies of the questions and benchmarks to review and edit. The panel may need to convene again before the scheduled interview to go over changes until a consensus is reached (Outerbridge, 1994).

As long as the integrity and security of the interview questions can be guaranteed, it is recommended that the questions receive a trial run. A practice interview might be performed with incumbents or other persons with KSAs similar to the candidate pool. The appropriateness of the questions should then be reevaluated, and the questions revised or deleted if necessary.

### **Follow-up Questions**

The single, most important rule in constructing interview questions is to ensure that all questions are clearly job-related. The job-relatedness of a question should be documented in the selection process file through the job analysis information or a written justification by an SME. It is also extremely important that all candidates be asked the same questions in the same manner. However, this does not prohibit asking appropriate follow-up questions when clarification is needed. It is important to be aware that follow-up questions can be a source of bias. “Follow-up questions that clarify confusion are not likely to have negative effects. However, prompting that influences candidate answers or changes the constructs assessed would be undesirable” (Campion, Palmer, and Campion, 1996). It is recommended that spontaneous follow-up questions be limited.

When possible try to anticipate follow-up questions as you write the interview questions. Then standardize them and print them in the interview booklet. The interview panel should prepare questions well in advance of the time they wish to begin interviewing. The subject of follow-up questions is further addressed in Chapter Two under the headings “Asking Questions” and “Controlling the Interview.”

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**Recommendation: If follow-up questions are necessary, keep them neutral, e.g., “Would you give an example?” or “Would you explain further?” Standardize the placement and frequency of use for each interview in order to give each candidate equal encouragement and opportunity to elaborate on answers.**

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## Questions That Indicate Illegal Discrimination

The topics that should be off limits in most employment interviews include religion, national origin, race, marital status, parental status, age, disability, sex, political affiliation, criminal records, and other personal information such as financial/credit history. There are some exceptions, such as law enforcement positions, but those exceptions are beyond the scope of this manual.

### Marital/Parental Status

Do not inquire about marital or parental status, including pregnancy, number or age of children, or information about child care arrangements. You may ask if the candidate can meet certain work schedules, but this question must be asked of both males and females (Curzon, 1995). Court cases have focused on the type of questions asked during the employment interview. In *Weiner v. County of Oakland* (1976), the court ruled that adverse impact existed because of the type of questions asked during the interview. Typical questions were:

- Does your husband approve of your working?
- Will your family suffer if dinner is late?
- Can you work compatibly with young, aggressive males? (Outerbridge, 1994)

*King v. TWA* (1984) is a similar case in which a woman who was applying for a job as a kitchen helper was asked questions regarding her marital and parental status. The interview included questions about her recent pregnancy, her marital status, and the nature of her relationship with another TWA employee, who had previously filed an EEOC complaint. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals concluded that the other reasons the company gave for excluding the woman were a pretext for two reasons: (1) the offensive questions were not asked of any other candidates, and (2) the interviewer had a history of discriminating against female candidates with children (Outerbridge, 1994).

### National Origin

You should not ask about a person's birthplace or citizenship. You may ask, "If hired, can you provide documentation of your eligibility to work in the U.S.?" However, it is not necessary to ask this at the interview stage, since all new employees must complete the federal I-9 form, which requires that documentation. If you decide to ask this question in the interview, you should ask it of all interviewees. Do not ask it only to those whose appearance or language leads you to suspect foreign citizenship.

Do not ask questions that would elicit the national origin of the person or the person's relatives or ancestors. You may ask about language fluency if it is job-related, but not whether it is the person's first language (Curzon, 1995).

You may ask if the candidate goes by other names. When checking a candidate's work history, knowing former names and nicknames can be important (Curzon, 1995). Do not

ask about names in such a way that it would appear to be inquiring about ancestry, national origin, or marital status.

### Age

Never ask an applicant's age unless you are interviewing for a position in which incumbents are legally required to be of a certain age. The only other time a question regarding age would be appropriate would be to ask minors if they have proof of age in the form of a work permit (Curzon, 1995).

### Religion, Schools, and Organizations

Do not ask any questions related to religion. Advise all candidates of the working schedule of the job in case it conflicts with religious practices. Regarding education, do not ask about the religious, racial, or national affiliation of schools attended. It is acceptable to ask about membership in professional organizations but not about organizations that reveal race, national origin, or religious affiliation (Curzon, 1995).

### Criminal Records

Do not inquire about arrests; however, you may explore convictions if they are job-related. For example, you could inquire about an embezzling conviction if you are hiring a bookkeeper since such a conviction would reasonably relate to one's fitness to perform the duties of the position (Curzon, 1995).

### Military Service

Ask about education and experience during military service, but do not inquire about the type of discharge. Such an inquiry could be viewed as an attempt to gain information about a disability, arrests, or unrelated convictions.

### Disability

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), interview questions in the area of a job's physical requirements and applicants' abilities and disabilities have become complicated and full of potential pitfalls. The most basic guidelines are covered in this portion of the manual, and Appendix B is an excerpt from a U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ADA Enforcement Guidance on preemployment disability-related questions. The full text of this publication can be found at [www.eeoc.gov/docs/preemp.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/docs/preemp.html) or [www.eeoc.gov/docs/medfin5.pdf](http://www.eeoc.gov/docs/medfin5.pdf). People who interview candidates for employment should read and follow these guidelines.

Interviewers should be trained to clearly describe the requirements of the job, and to focus on the applicant's ability to meet them. All candidates may be asked if they are able to perform all of the essential job assignments safely.

*Ask the candidate whether he can perform the functions of the job, with or without reasonable accommodation. Employers may inquire as to the applicant's ability to perform both essential and marginal job functions. However, don't specifically ask whether reasonable accommodation is needed, or what type of accommodation would be required. This is a fine distinction, but an important one. (Disability Compliance Bulletin, 1995, p. 7)*

**Example of an acceptable question:** "This job requires a person to lift and move 20-30 pound boxes, stand and/or walk for up to two hours at a time, and read written instructions. Can you perform all of these functions with or without reasonable accommodation?"

Voluntary disclosure. If a candidate voluntarily discloses a disability, or the candidate has an obvious disability that you reasonably believe will require accommodation to perform the job, you may ask limited follow-up questions. You may ask what type of reasonable accommodation may be required to perform the job. However, do not ask questions regarding the nature or severity of a disability (Curzon, 1995).

Job attendance. An interviewer may state the job's attendance requirements and ask the candidate if he or she can meet them. It is also legitimate to inquire about an applicant's attendance record at previous jobs, because employees are sometimes absent for reasons other than illness. However, it is not permissible to ask how many absences at a previous job were due to illness. It is also not permissible to ask about prior job-related injuries or workers' compensation claims. Also, don't ask about the health of family members or associates, because it is illegal under the ADA to discriminate against a candidate based on the person's relationship or association with an individual who has a disability (*Disability Compliance Bulletin, 1995*).

*Don't ask questions about the ability to perform major life activities, or about substantial limitations in those activities, unless they specifically and directly relate to the applicant's ability to perform job functions. For example, an employer can ask about an applicant's lifting ability, but only if it is one of the job functions. (Disability Compliance Bulletin, 1995, p. 8)*

Drug usage. An interviewer may legitimately ask a candidate about current use of illegal drugs, but not prior use (see Appendix B). Also, do not ask about an applicant's current use of prescription or other legal medication unless it is to validate a positive test for illegal drug use (*Disability Compliance Bulletin*, 1995).

Injuries not covered under ADA. Some conditions, such as a broken limb, are usually not serious enough to qualify as disabilities under the ADA. Questions regarding these types of conditions are permissible; however, it is suggested that this line of questioning be avoided altogether since it may be viewed as an attempt to obtain information about a disability and thus violate the ADA (*Disability Compliance Bulletin*, 1995).

Demonstrating performance. If a candidate is going to be asked to demonstrate how job-related functions would be performed, exercise extreme caution. If a candidate has a disability that is completely unrelated to the ability to perform job functions, then all candidates in the same job category must also be requested to perform a demonstration of the job functions. For example, do not require a candidate who is a paraplegic and seeking a data entry position to perform a keyboard test, unless all candidates for the position are required to do the same test. However, if a known disability can reasonably be viewed as a hindrance to the performance of job functions, then the candidate may be asked to demonstrate the performance of those job functions even if other candidates are not required to do so. For example, it would be reasonable to request a quadriplegic candidate seeking a data entry position to perform a keyboard test or to describe how it would be performed with accommodation.

If a candidate requests an accommodation in order to demonstrate performance of a job function, the employer needs to either provide the accommodation or ask the candidate to describe how the function would be performed. In any case where a demonstration will be performed, an employer can best ensure his or her selection process is fair and legal by simply making the request to all candidates and being prepared to respond to a request for accommodation (*Disability Compliance Bulletin*, 1995).

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**Recommendation: Train all interviewers on questions to avoid.**

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### **Rating Scales and Benchmarks**

A decision must be made regarding the scoring system or rating scale to be used in the interview. The rating scale can be as simple as "acceptable" or "unacceptable," or it can be a three, four, or five-level, point-based scale. "It is difficult to define more than five levels that can be meaningfully and consistently assessed. The most critical element of the rating scale is not how many levels it has, but rather how those levels are defined" (Valadez, 1987, p. 8).

Rating scales should be defined by benchmarks for each question. Benchmarks are suggested answers to the questions that are linked to the rating scale. Benchmarks provide a frame of reference for assessing the candidate's responses objectively and consistently. There should usually be at least three suggested answers for each question: a superior, a satisfactory, and an unsatisfactory response. For example, with a five-point rating scale, develop benchmarks for five points (superior answer), three points (satisfactory answer), and one point (unsatisfactory answer). To develop benchmarks, using the guide in Table 4, ask SMEs to create answers that fit the different levels of the rating scale. If the questions have been used in interviews previously, SMEs may use actual answers they have heard from candidates.

Table 4

*Example of a Five-Level Rating Scale*

- 5—What would one expect or want an outstanding candidate to give as the best possible answer?
- 4—
- 3—What is an acceptable answer that one would expect a qualified candidate to give?
- 2—
- 1—What would one expect as a poor answer from a candidate who has little or no knowledge or skill on this job requirement?

It is not essential to describe the 4 or 2-level answers, because the 5, 3, and 1 answers give adequate anchor points for making a rating decision on any of the levels (Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1991). The 3-level benchmark is usually the easiest to develop, so try describing that answer first.

Example answers should fit the requirements of the job. Superior answers should not far exceed the requirements, and unsatisfactory answers should not be so low that they do not help distinguish between candidates. Also, try to avoid making the superior answer a more sophisticated or simply reworded version of the satisfactory answer. Organizational jargon, acronyms, and slang should be avoided (Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1991).

Developing benchmarks is also a method of evaluating the interview questions. If it is too difficult to determine the benchmark answers for a particular question, the question should be reviewed for possible revision or elimination (Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1991: 254). See Appendices A and C for examples of questions and benchmarks.

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**Recommendation: Use a rating scale anchored to benchmarks (example answers, descriptions, or definitions of answers). Use SMEs to develop the scale and benchmarks.**

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## **Training Interviewers**

An orientation or training for panel members is highly recommended. The training program should address the goal of the interview procedure, expectations of interviewers, how to rate candidates' responses, practices to avoid in the interview, and examples of superior, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory responses to interview questions. Potential panel members should also be warned to be alert to the possibility of a conflict of interest, and if necessary, decline the request if their past history with any candidate is negative. According to professional literature, the average length of training programs for interviewers is one to two days. At a minimum, interviewers should receive two to three hours of training.

Training should emphasize that interviewers need to focus on the observable behaviors and responses of candidates. Interviewers should be taught to focus on descriptions rather than judgments, and facts rather than opinions. Record only what is heard and seen. Even when a candidate is well-spoken and communicates a well-organized response, interviewers need to focus on the content of the answer. Communication ability, if a necessary KSA, is best rated separately at the end of the interview with its own benchmarks and the interviewers reflecting on the whole interview.

The importance of note taking during an interview should also be stressed in the training session. Notes not only provide documented evidence of the interview, but also assist the interviewer in making ratings as objective as possible. "Note taking requires justifying or documenting the rating given. This encourages interviewers to attend to candidate answers in more detail and to organize their thoughts, thus possibly increasing accuracy" (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1996, pp. 32-33).

Interviewers should be trained to record specific answers and behaviors to support their ratings. These notes should never include conclusions or opinions. For example, appropriate notes might show the following: "sized-up the situation by indicating that she would immediately contact Headquarters for information on the license plate," or "knew when to take action by calling his subordinate in to discuss the EEO issue." On the other hand, "candidate was a great problem-solver," would be inappropriate because it is an opinion and a conclusion reached by the interviewer; it provides no factual evidence of the candidate's response to the question. If interviewers take detailed notes, their evaluation of candidates is more likely to be consistent.

Interviewers also need to be told that they must inform candidates that notes will be taken throughout the interview. Interviewers should take care not to let their note taking

become a signal to the candidate, as it is inappropriate for interviewers to reveal any emotion about the candidate's responses (Outerbridge, 1994).

Another important aspect of training is teaching interviewers the importance of nonverbal communication. Facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements communicate much, both from the interviewer to the candidate and from the candidate to the interviewer. To get a candidate to respond freely, simply look at him or her and appear to listen attentively to the candidate's responses. "An interviewer who slouches, looks down or away, leans back folding his or her arms, or doodles with a pen communicates disinterest or boredom" (Outerbridge, 1994).

Training on EEO and ADA guidelines is essential. Interviewers should be aware of candidates' legal rights and questions that would be considered discriminatory. Training in this area should reduce bias toward particular groups of people.

### Rating Errors

Training for interviewers should also include the common types of rating errors. Making interviewers aware of the common errors is the best way to minimize them. *First impression error* is one common error made by interviewers. This is the tendency to let a first impression or an overall impression of a candidate affect the rating of the candidate on all criteria. This results in highly similar ratings given to the candidate on different criteria. To prevent this error, focus only on one rating factor at a time, and keep the rating independent of any other factors (Outerbridge, 1994).

A second common rating error is the *contrast effect*, which is the tendency of interviewers to compare one candidate to the performance of the previously interviewed candidate. The influence can be positive or negative, and "is most likely to affect the rating of an average candidate rather than a high or low performer" (Outerbridge, 1994, Appendix K p. 1).

General tendencies to rate candidates consistently high (*leniency effect*) or low (*stringency effect*) are two other common rating errors. The tendency to avoid high or low ratings and limit ratings to the middle of a scale is known as the *central tendency effect*.

The tendency of raters to judge more favorably those people they perceive as being similar to themselves is also a common error. This is simply referred to as *personal bias*, which allows non-job related biases and prejudices to influence ratings.

Among other possible errors an interviewer can make are rater fatigue, negative information, and halo effect. *Rater fatigue* refers to an unconscious change in the interviewer's rating standards due to less stringent note taking, listening, or application of the rating criteria. *Negative information* is an error that occurs when an interviewer places more weight on negative information than on positive information. *Halo effect* is

the tendency to rate a candidate on several factors based on an overall impression or judgment on only one factor.

To avoid all of these errors, focus on comparing candidate responses to benchmarks and using the benchmarks to determine ratings. Benchmarks provide a standard for comparison that helps to eliminate the influence of various rating errors. Table 5 lists guidelines to help you avoid rating errors. Table 6 provides a list of important areas to cover in training interviewers.

Table 5

*How to Avoid Rating Errors*

- Focus on only one rating factor at a time.
- Keep the rating independent of any other factors.
- Record exactly what is observed in the interview.
- Focus on comparing candidate responses with benchmarks, and rate solely on that comparison.

Table 6

*Principles That Are Commonly Taught in Training Interviewers*

1. The background and purpose of the interview
2. How to write interview questions or how to use questions already written
3. Job requirements and how questions are related to the job
4. Rapport-building techniques
5. How to ask questions and how to probe
6. How to evaluate answers and use rating scales
7. How to avoid rating errors
8. The importance of note taking for rating and documentation
9. EEO and ADA laws and requirements
10. How to weight questions and use ranking or cut-off scores

(adapted from Campion, Palmer, and Campion, 1996)

Effective training of the panel members will increase the validity and reliability of the interview. Following specific procedures taught in the training session will allow the interviewers to evaluate candidates from a common reference point (Outerbridge, 1994).

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**Recommendation: Provide extensive training for interviewers.**

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## CHAPTER 2

# THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

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### Setting

Interviews should be held in a quiet, private place free from distractions and interruptions. Make the room as comfortable as possible. All facilities should be the same for each candidate, and the setting should be accessible to candidates with disabilities.

One of the sources of stress for job applicants is not knowing what to expect in the interview process. Some candidates have never had an experience with a panel of interviewers and can be distressed to see three or four people as they walk into the interview room. An easy way to relieve stress and be courteous to your candidates is to include information about the selection process in the letter inviting them to an interview. Also tell them about any other tests that they will be required to take. For example:

*The selection process for this vacancy will include a structured interview with a panel of three, and an in-basket exercise which will test your abilities to prioritize work and proofread and edit documents. The interview will be 60% of your final score and the in-basket exercise will be 40% of your final score.*

Knowing what to expect will relieve candidates' stress as they come to the interview. Letting them know the weighting of each test also allows them to decide on what areas they need to spend most of their time and energy preparing for the selection procedures. Of course you should always let them know how much time to allow for the entire process. Candidates will appreciate your forthrightness in these issues.

## **Seating Arrangements**

Eliminate physical barriers by getting out from behind your desk. Seating panel members and the candidate together around a table is an effective seating arrangement. It is best *not* to have all panel members on one side of the table and the candidate on the other, yet it is crucial that the candidate be seated in a position so that he or she can be easily observed and heard by all panel members. The candidate should be seated facing the evaluation panel at a normal, conversational distance. The seating arrangements should be the same for all candidates (Outerbridge, 1994).

## **Conducting the Interview**

Panel members should meet a few minutes before the first candidate is expected, so the panel coordinator can verify that all members understand the procedures they are to follow and that all necessary materials are present. The interview process should be described in detail in an interviewer's guide, and the guide should be provided to each panel member. The guide should include general instructions, specific instructions for coordinators and panel members, specific rating instructions and standards, questions with benchmarks, and room for notes after each question (Outerbridge, 1994). See Appendix C for an example from an interview guide.

When each candidate arrives, go out to the waiting room to escort him or her, instead of having a receptionist give directions to the interview room. Smile, shake hands, introduce yourself, explain who you are in the hiring process, and give a business card. Use the candidate's first name two or three times early on to make the person feel more comfortable. In order to put a candidate at ease, you might engage in small talk, take them on a tour, etc., but make sure you treat all candidates the same. Give signals that you are interested in the person and the interview you are about to conduct. Signs of interest include eye contact, smiling, nodding your head, leaning forward, restating what the candidate says, and maintaining open body language.

As you enter the interview room, introduce the candidate to each panel member. You may engage in small talk to put the candidate at ease and build rapport. Topics such as the weather and parking are benign and help set a conversational tone for the interview. You may also want to offer coffee or water to the candidate. The panel coordinator's comments that follow the small talk should be standardized and in writing in the interview guide. The panel coordinator should give information about the organization and a description of the job. In addition to the job responsibilities, information should be given as to what training will be provided, conditions of employment (random drug testing, dress code, etc.), working conditions (high noise level, outdoors, office setting, etc.), and special requirements (passing a licensure/certification exam within six months of hiring, etc.). Briefly describe the general pay range and benefits. The coordinator should then explain the interviewing format to the candidate emphasizing that the same questions are

asked of all candidates, the number of questions that will be asked, that panel members will be taking notes, and how much time is allowed for the interview. It is important to describe to each candidate how the main portion of the interview will proceed. It is not only important that each candidate be treated fairly, but also that they perceive they are being treated fairly. Letting candidates know what to expect puts them more at ease than waiting for the unknown.

## **Taking Notes**

Taking good notes is extremely important in conducting a structured interview. Interviewers should not rely on memory for two reasons. First, what seems perfectly clear during an interview can quickly be forgotten or confused, especially after interviewing several candidates. Second, all employee selection decisions should be documented. In the event of a court challenge, documentation made at the time of the interviews carries much more weight than documentation created at a later time (SelecTools). When informing the candidate that interviewers will be taking notes throughout the interview, validate in the candidate's mind the reason for taking notes as being in the best interest of the candidate—you want to be sure to give full credit for all the knowledge, skills, and abilities demonstrated during the interview.

Panel members should use the interviewer's guide to record their notes during the interview. A new, clean interview guide should be used by each panel member for each candidate. Interviewers should attempt to quote important information directly from the candidate; these comments should be placed in quotation marks. Ellipses (...) should be used to show that information has been left out of a quotation. Omitted information should not substantially change the content of the quotation. Summarized information may be written in abbreviated form without quotation marks (SelecTools). Take notes as the candidate responds to a question.

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**Recommendation: Interviewers should take good notes and either score answers while the interview is in progress or immediately after.**

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## **Asking Questions**

Candidates may be given a candidate's question booklet containing only the questions, and asked to follow along as a panelist reads each question. It is preferable for one person to ask all of the interview questions; however, if questions are to be divided among panel members, the same person should ask the same questions of all candidates.

Candidates may even be given the opportunity to prepare answers approximately fifteen minutes prior to being interviewed; however, this method is not often used. Whatever

method of question presentation is used, it should be consistent for all candidates. If a candidate booklet is used, the panel coordinator should be certain to get the booklet back before the candidate leaves the room (Outerbridge, 1994).

After asking a question, several seconds of silence from the candidate is usual. Candidates are searching their memories for an example, thinking about different examples and deciding how to answer. Interviewers who begin talking again after only a few moments of silence may interrupt the candidate's memory recall. A silence of ten to fifteen seconds should be allowed without interruption. After that time, the stress upon the candidate begins to increase. This is the time to rephrase the question or provide clarification (SelecTools). These follow-up questions should be standardized, and if possible printed in the interview guide.

### **Controlling the Interview**

The interviewers control the interview in three ways. First, they ask follow-up questions to gain more information or clarify a response. Second, they interrupt a candidate who has gotten off track and bring him back to relevant topics. Third, they interrupt candidates who have trouble getting to the point and help them come to a conclusion.

Interviewers should not accept vague answers. Do not move on to the next main question until enough information has been collected to evaluate the candidate's competency in that area. Use probing questions to understand exactly what the candidate is describing. When a candidate is describing a work experience, make sure you are very clear about the candidate's role. The following excerpt illustrates how without the interviewer's probing question, the candidate's role could easily be misinterpreted.

**Candidate:** "We designed a forty-story building complete with a four-story, underground garage and glassed-in mezzanine."

**Interviewer:** "*What was your specific role in the project?*"

**Candidate:** "I assisted the architects by making multiple copies of the plans using a blueline machine and by running errands."

(SelecTools)

When a candidate wanders to irrelevant topics or takes too long to make a point, interviewers should use polite interruptions to bring a candidate back to a relevant topic or

to a pertinent conclusion. This role may be uncomfortable for some interviewers, since interrupting usually is considered impolite. However, when it is necessary, interrupting is the responsibility of the interviewers.

To interrupt a candidate, the interviewer can make a brief comment or compliment about the candidate's remarks and then firmly move back to the original topic.

**Examples:** *"I appreciate you providing that information, but we need to move on now to our next question."*

*"That's very interesting. In the interest of finishing the interview within our allotted time, let me ask..."* (SelecTools)

Interviewers may need to interrupt a verbose candidate to help bring his answer to a conclusion.

**Examples:** *"What was the outcome?"*

*"What was your contribution?"*

*"What is the main point of this illustration?"* (SelecTools)

### **Closing the Interview**

Some scholars argue that the candidate should not be allowed to ask questions of the interview panel, and instead be given an opportunity after the interview to discuss the job with a personnel representative in a non-evaluative setting. The reasoning for this viewpoint is that unrestricted questions from a candidate "reduces the standardization" of a structured interview "by changing the interview content in unpredictable ways" (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1996, p. 26). However, Campion, Palmer & Campion (1998) note in a later article that candidates' questions can provide important information. Both candidates and interviewers are likely to react negatively to a restriction of no questions from candidates. Furthermore, the interview is a recruitment tool as well as a selection tool. Interviewers use this time to sell their organization, and candidates gather information to use in their decision to accept or reject an offer as well. Some examples of open-ended questions a panel might want to ask at the end of the interview are: "Is there anything else you want us to know about you?" and "Do you have any questions for us?" In closing the interview, explain the notification process again, even if you did it earlier.

The coordinator should thank the candidate, answer any general questions, and then escort the candidate out of the room.

### **Evaluating the Candidate**

Raters should independently take notes regarding a candidate's comments on each question as it is answered. Raters should also independently, either during the interview or immediately after, score each question.

When one interview has concluded, raters should give themselves approximately fifteen minutes before beginning the next interview to review their individual ratings as a group and make sure that there is a general consensus on each question. For example, on a scale of 1 to 4, if one rater gave a 4, one a 3, and the other a 1 on the same question, this might indicate some rater bias or misunderstanding of the candidate's comments. All raters should be no more than one point away from all other raters' scores. For example, it would be acceptable to have two 3s and a 2 given on the same question. If raters find that there is not a general consensus on a question, they should discuss the reasons for their ratings and attempt to reach a consensus.

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**Recommendation: Do not discuss the candidates between interviews. Only discuss large discrepancies on specific scores.**

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### **Final Rating**

You may want some questions to be weighted more than others. A simple way to do so is to multiply the preferred weight (i.e., 1.5 or 2) by the rating given to the candidate's answer. Most research findings suggest that all questions should normally be weighted equally unless some strong, definitive reason exists for differential weighting.

To arrive at a final score for one candidate's interview, it is most common to take a simple average of ratings for all questions. For example, three interviewers had the following total scores for a candidate in a ten-question interview with a four-point rating scale in which all questions were weighted equally (total possible points equaled 40): 33, 30, 28. The average of the three scores and the candidate's final interview score is 30.33. Round final scores to ignore small differences; in this example, the final score would be rounded to 30. Scores carried out to one or two decimal places attempt to show differences that don't really exist.

## Assessing Organizational Fit (The Hiring Interview)

An employer should never hire a candidate without assessing the organizational fit of that individual. To meet that goal, some questions should be asked that will not be exactly the same for each candidate. Those questions include following up on things like leave usage (within ADA guidelines), performance evaluations, or gaps in employment history, which will be different for each candidate. Some selection experts recommend that this be done in a separate interview from the structured interview. This other interview is sometimes referred to as a “hiring interview.” It is recommended that a hiring interview be the last step in the selection process. A hiring interview is usually a one-on-one meeting with the person who will make the hiring decision. This type of interview is less structured but must still include only job-related questions; however, those can and should include inquiries regarding aspects of an applicant’s resume, transcripts, and application. The questions asked depend on the answers given in the structured interview, the individual’s education and experience, and supplementary information about the individual. (Do not ask any questions that illegally discriminate against people, and refrain from discussing anything that is not job-related.) This assessment is almost always unscored since the questions vary from candidate to candidate.

There may be several ways to conduct a “hiring interview.” One option is to conduct the structured interview and use it to determine the top three to five candidates, and then invite those three to five back for a “hiring interview” with the entire panel or only the person who will make the final decision. Another option is to hold the structured interview first, and then while panel members are scoring the interview, the candidate could be given a tour of the facility/agency. The candidate could then be brought back for the hiring interview with the entire panel or only the person who will make the final decision. This last option does not require candidates to return and the panel to reconvene for second interviews. Giving the break between the two allows the panel members to complete scoring of the interview and thus prevents any of the discussion in assessing organizational fit from influencing rating decisions, thus preserving the integrity of the structured interview.

These are not necessarily the only acceptable options for acquiring this information. Each agency should choose the most appropriate and efficient combination of methods for its selection procedures.

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**Recommendation: Assess a candidate’s organizational fit before making an offer, preferably in a manner that will not influence the interviewers’ ratings of the structured interview questions.**

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## **Ancillary Information**

As in candidates asking questions, there are two prevalent viewpoints regarding reviewing ancillary information (resumes, recommendations, test scores, transcripts, personnel files, work histories, application forms). In order to maintain the validity and reliability of the interview, psychologists recommend that ancillary information not be viewed by members of the interview panel until after all interviews are completed and scored (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1996). If such information were viewed before an interview it would bring the validity of the interview into question. One could not be certain if the validity of the selection process was a result of information received from the interview or to the additional outside information. Ancillary information can also be the cause of unreliability if the interviewers evaluate the information differently, or the same information is not available for all candidates or not given to all interviewers (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1996). Candidates who try to introduce this information during an interview can be told that the information will be considered after the interview.

Those same psychologists also recognize that “interviewers may react negatively to not having all available information, and candidates may perceive the interviewers as unprepared or uninterested and react negatively” (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1998, p. 80). While contamination may be reduced in some cases by withholding ancillary information, it could also result in the loss of valid and important information about a candidate. If a panel is conducting a hiring interview following the structured interview, they definitely need to be given access to all available information about the candidate. If the goal of the structured interview is to identify the top three to five candidates and ask them back for a second interview (hiring interview), then it would be appropriate to give the panel or person conducting the hiring interview the ancillary information after the structured interviews have been completed and the top candidates identified.

Another type of ancillary information is performance appraisals. Oklahoma law (O.S. 74:840-4.17) requires an agency to consider performance appraisals of state employees in the selection process. Consideration of performance appraisals should in no way be reflected in the interview scores; however, review of a performance appraisal may raise a red flag that the candidate should be questioned about. It is appropriate to ask questions about a candidate’s performance appraisal, resume, or other ancillary information when the candidate’s organizational fit is assessed. These questions should not be scored along with the structured questions asked of all candidates; but the information obtained through these questions can and should be considered in the selection decision.

## **Documentation of the Interview Process**

As mentioned before, it is essential to document an interview during the interview. Take a few minutes after the interview to refine your notes and make final ratings.

For external and internal candidates hired, all documentation of the selection process including the interview guides, applications, transcripts, resumes, letters of recommendation, and other records pertaining to employment applications and job interviews should be retained by the agency according to internal policy. For external and internal candidates *not* selected, under Oklahoma law (O.S. 51:24A.7), agencies shall retain all applicable records for two years after the date the records were created or the personnel action occurred, whichever is later. These records may be destroyed after two years provided no legal actions involving hiring or promotion are pending. If legal action is pending, destroy records two years after exhaustion of all legal remedies, provided records meet all stipulated retention requirements (Oklahoma Archives and Records Commission, 1995). Retaining interview records is not only important because it is the state law, but it is also a good business practice. Court decisions (*Green v. USX Corp.*, 1988; *Colon v. Sorensen*, 1987) have resulted in victories for plaintiffs due to an employer's lost interview notes (Outerbridge, 1994).

In addition to questions, scores, and the notes taken during the interview, it is also recommended that the following information be recorded and retained:

- Date, time, place, and length of the interview
- Names, addresses, job titles, race and sex of the interviewers
- The credentials and experience that qualifies each panel member to serve on the panel
- Distribution of interview scores among candidates
- Training provided to the interviewers as well as their background in personnel selection interviewing
- Interview format, interview guides, rating scales and criteria, and other materials used by panelists (Outerbridge, 1994).

## **Evaluating the Interview**

As with any new selection device, a structured interview needs to be evaluated both before and after its use. Evaluation prior to use can be done by testing the interview on coworkers and incumbents. The benefits of such a trial run are determining whether incumbents' answers meet your expected answers. Other managers or supervisors may be able to provide constructive criticism about details that might have been overlooked by the interview panel.

After using the interview with a group of candidates, the interview coordinator can evaluate its effectiveness by discussing the following questions with other members of the interview panel.

- Did the candidates easily understand the questions or exercises?
- Were the questions too easy or too difficult?
- Did interviewers find the materials easy to use correctly?
- Did interviewers learn what they needed to about candidates?

The answers to these questions will assist the panel and/or coordinator in determining what components worked well in the interview process and what components should be improved before the next similar position is to be filled (Valadez, 1987).

If the structured interview was previously used, it would be valuable to ask if employees hired through use of the structured interview meet performance standards for the job. The most important measure of the validity of a selection instrument is whether employees hired via the instrument are doing a good job.

### **An Interview Is Only Part of the Selection Process**

It is important that the criteria for making a hiring recommendation be established before the position is posted or advertised. The criteria should be job-related, documented, and applied equally to all candidates. If a structured interview is to be used to compare or rank candidates in order to identify the candidate most likely to succeed on the job, the method used to rank or score candidates must be set up prior to the selection process. Individual selection procedures used to rank candidates may be weighted according to their importance. For example, if a selection process uses merit system test scores, a writing sample, and an interview to rank candidates, use of weights indicates the relative importance of each measure. The rankings of candidates will be affected by the decision to weight different scores a certain way. The justification for why the weights were assigned in the way they were should be documented in the selection process file. Do not decide on weights after the selection procedures have been administered. These decisions should be made and documented before the position is posted. The following table is an example of how weights can change the rankings of candidates.

Table 7

*How Weights Can Affect Ranking of Eligible Candidates*

Candidate A

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Raw Score</b>	<b>Weight Assigned</b>	<b>Final Score</b>
Test Score	97.00	25%	24.25
Writing Sample	75.00	25%	18.75
Interview	67.00	50%	33.50
<b>Total Score</b>			<b>76.50</b>

  

Candidate A

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Raw Score</b>	<b>Weight Assigned</b>	<b>Final Score</b>
Test Score	97.00	50%	48.50
Writing Sample	75.00	25%	18.75
Interview	67.00	25%	16.75
<b>Total Score</b>			<b>84.00</b>

In Table 7, Candidate A received a final total score of 76.50 when the test score and the writing sample were each worth 25% of the total score, and the interview was worth the other 50%. Multiply the candidate's test score of 97 by .25 for a final test score of 24.25. Multiply the candidate's writing sample score of 75 by .25 for a final writing score of 18.75. Multiply the candidate's interview score of 67 by .5 for a final interview score of 33.5. The sum of the three final scores equals the candidate's final total score, which in this case is 76.50. Notice in the second example the change in the weightings and the change in the candidate's final total score as a result. Because weights can drastically change a candidate's score, a candidate may appeal this procedure. This is why it is necessary to document the justification for weights before the selection process begins.



## CONCLUSION

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This manual was designed to assist employees of the state agencies of Oklahoma in conducting more effective and legally sound interviews. A completely structured interview is the most reliable and valid instrument you can use in the interview process. While using all of the components of a structured interview may not be feasible for everyone, the Personnel Assessment Division of the Office of Personnel Management recommends the use of as many of the components of a structured interview as possible. For your convenience, a checklist for developing a structured interview can be found in Appendix D of this manual.

Please direct any questions or comments regarding this manual to the Personnel Assessment Division of the Office of Personnel Management, (405) 521-6367. Email addresses may be found at the OPM website at <http://www.state.ok.us/~opm>.



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## APPENDIX A

# Examples of Structured Interview Questions

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### Job Knowledge Questions

1. Question assessing low-level mechanical knowledge such as that needed for many entry-level factory jobs:

After repairing a piece of machinery, why would you clean all the parts before reassembling them?

- (5) Particles of dust and dirt can cause wear on moving parts. Need to have parts clean to inspect for wear and damage.
  - (3) Parts will go together easier. Equipment will run better.
  - (1) So it will all be clean. I don't know.
2. Question assessing specialized electronics knowledge needed for some process control technician jobs:

What is the difference between a thermocouple and a resistance temperature detector?

- (5) A thermocouple will produce a millivolt signal itself. A resistance temperature detector is usually connected to a balanced wheatstone bridge. When the resistance changes due to temperature changes, an unbalanced voltage is produced on the bridge.
- (3) Defines one correctly.
- (1) Incorrect answer.

### **Past Behavior Questions**

1. Question assessing willingness to work at heights as may be required by many construction or factory jobs:

Some jobs require climbing ladders to a height of a five-story building and going out on a catwalk to work. Give us examples of when you performed such a task, or your feelings about performing a task such as this.

- (5) Heights do not bother me. I have done similar work at heights in the past [and gives examples].
  - (3) I do not think I am afraid of heights. I know that this would have to be done as part of the job.
  - (1) I am afraid of heights. I would do it if absolutely necessary.
2. Question assessing willingness to travel as may be required by many professional and managerial jobs:

This job requires traveling out of town at least three times a month. Usually each trip will involve flying on a commercial airliner and staying overnight. Describe the traveling requirements of a previous job and how you dealt with the difficulties it presented; or, describe any difficulties traveling in this job would pose for you.

- (5) Traveling is not a problem. I have traveled in previous jobs [and gives examples]. I enjoy traveling and flying.
- (3) I am willing to travel as part of the job.
- (1) I do not like to travel, but would do it if necessary.

### **Background Questions**

1. Question simulating a task and assessing low level reading ability for a forklift operator job:

Many of the jobs require the operation of a forklift. Please read this (90-word) forklift checkout procedure aloud.

- (5) Reads fluently pronouncing all words accurately.
- (3) Can read most words but hesitates.
- (1) Reads with great difficulty.

2. Question simulating a task and assessing selling skills for a sales job:

Please sell me this product using basic selling techniques.

- (5) Candidate simulates selling the item to the interview panel by incorporating the following selling techniques: (a) identifies and presents the product, the customer needs, and the benefits of the product; (b) demonstrates the product; (c) handles resistance; and (d) closes the sale by asking for an order.
- (3) Candidate uses only three of the techniques or performs one poorly.
- (1) Candidate uses only two of the techniques or performs them very poorly.

### **Situational Questions**

1. Question assessing awareness of meeting attendance protocol, which is necessary for most managerial and professional jobs:

Suppose you were going to miss an important business meeting due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., illness or family emergency). What would you do?

- (5) I would contact the person in charge of the meeting to forewarn of my absence, and I would arrange for a responsible person to attend in my place.
  - (3) I would send someone in my place.
  - (1) Afterwards, I would try to find out what went on in the meeting.
2. Question assessing communication skills at a level needed by many jobs:

Suppose you had many important projects with rigid deadlines, but your manager kept requesting various types of paperwork, which you felt were totally unnecessary. Furthermore, this paperwork was going to cause you to miss your deadlines. What would you do?

- (5) Present the conflict to the manager. Suggest and discuss alternatives. Establish a mutually acceptable plan of action. Communicate frequently with the manager.
- (3) Tell the manager about the problem.
- (1) Do the best I can.

(Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1991)



## APPENDIX B

### **Excerpt from ADA Enforcement Guidance: Preemployment Disability-Related Questions and Medical Examinations**

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The entire publication may be found at the EEOC website in both html and pdf formats.  
[www.eeoc.gov/docs/preemp.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/docs/preemp.html)    [www.eeoc.gov/docs/medfin5.pdf](http://www.eeoc.gov/docs/medfin5.pdf)



## THE PRE-OFFER STAGE

### *What is a Disability-Related Question?*

**Definition: “Disability-Related Question” means a question that is likely to elicit information about a disability.**

At the pre-offer stage, an employer cannot ask questions that are likely to elicit information about a disability. This includes directly asking whether an applicant has a particular disability. It also means that an employer cannot ask questions that are closely related to disability.

On the other hand, if there are many possible answers to a question and only some of those answers would contain disability-related information, that question is not “disability-related.”

Below are some commonly asked questions about this area of the law.

- May an employer ask **whether an applicant can perform the job?**

Yes. An employer may ask whether applicants can perform any or all job functions, including whether applicants can perform job functions “with or without reasonable accommodation.”

- May an employer ask applicants to **describe or demonstrate how they would perform the job** (including any needed reasonable accommodations)?

Yes. An employer may ask applicants to describe how they would perform any or all job functions, as long as all applicants in the job category are asked to do this.

Employers should remember that, if an applicant says that s/he will need a reasonable accommodation to do a job demonstration, the employer must either:

- provide a reasonable accommodation that does not create an undue hardship; or
- allow the applicant to simply describe how s/he would perform the job function.

- May an employer ask a **particular applicant to describe or demonstrate how s/he would perform the job**, if other applicants aren't asked to do this?

When an employer could reasonably believe that an applicant will not be able to perform a job function because of a known disability, the employer may ask that particular applicant to describe or demonstrate how s/he would perform the function. An applicant's disability would be a "known disability" either because it is obvious (for example, the applicant uses a wheelchair), or because the applicant has voluntarily disclosed that s/he has a hidden disability.

- May an employer ask **applicants whether they will need reasonable accommodation for the hiring process?**

Yes. An employer may tell applicants what the hiring process involves (for example, an interview, timed written test, or job demonstration), and may ask applicants whether they will need a reasonable accommodation for this process.

- May an employer ask an applicant **for documentation of his/her disability when the applicant requests reasonable accommodation for the hiring process?**

Yes. If the need for accommodation is not obvious, an employer may ask an applicant for reasonable documentation about his/her disability if the applicant requests reasonable accommodation for the hiring process (such as a request for the employer to reformat an examination, or a request for an accommodation in connection with a job demonstration). The employer is entitled to know that the applicant has a covered disability and that s/he needs an accommodation.

So, the applicant may be required to provide documentation from an appropriate professional, such as a doctor or a rehabilitation counselor, concerning the applicant's disability and functional limitations.

- May an employer ask applicants **whether they will need reasonable accommodation to perform the functions of the job?**

In general, an employer may not ask questions on an application or in an interview about whether an applicant will need reasonable accommodation for a job. This is because these questions are likely to elicit whether the applicant has a disability (generally, only people who have disabilities will need reasonable accommodations).

Example: An employment application may not ask, "Do you need reasonable accommodation to perform this job?"

Example: An employment application may not ask, "Can you do these functions with \_\_\_ without \_\_\_ reasonable accommodation? (Check One)"

Example: An applicant with no known disability is being interviewed for a job. He has not asked for any reasonable accommodation, either for the application process or for the job. The employer may not ask him, “Will you need reasonable accommodation to perform this job?”

However, when an employer could reasonably believe that an applicant will need reasonable accommodation to perform the functions of the job, the employer may ask that applicant certain limited questions. Specifically, the employer may ask whether s/he needs reasonable accommodation and what type of reasonable accommodation would be needed to perform the functions of the job. The employer could ask these questions if:

- the employer reasonably believes the applicant will need reasonable accommodation because of an obvious disability;
- the employer reasonably believes the applicant will need reasonable accommodation because of a hidden disability that the applicant has voluntarily disclosed to the employer; or
- an applicant has voluntarily disclosed to the employer that s/he needs reasonable accommodation to perform the job.

Example: An applicant with a severe visual impairment applies for a job involving computer work. The employer may ask whether he will need reasonable accommodation to perform the functions of the job. If the applicant answers “no,” the employer may not ask additional questions about reasonable accommodation (although, of course, the employer could ask the applicant to describe or demonstrate performance). If the applicant says that he will need accommodation, the employer may ask questions about the type of required accommodation such as, “What will you need?” If the applicant says he needs software that increases the size of text on the computer screen, the employer may ask questions such as, “Who makes that software?” “Do you need a particular brand?” or “Is that software compatible with our computers?” However, the employer may not ask questions about the applicant’s underlying condition. In addition, the employer may not ask reasonable accommodation questions that are unrelated to job functions such as, “Will you need reasonable accommodation to get to the cafeteria?”

An employer may only ask about reasonable accommodation that is needed now or in the near future. An applicant is not required to disclose reasonable accommodations that may be needed in the more distant future.

- May an employer ask questions about an **applicant's impairments**?

Yes, if the particular question is not likely to elicit information about whether the applicant has a disability. It is important to remember that not all impairments will be disabilities; an impairment is a disability *only* if it substantially limits a major life activity. So, an employer may ask an applicant with a broken leg how she broke her leg. Since a broken leg normally is a temporary condition which does not rise to the level of a disability, this question is not likely to disclose whether the applicant has a disability. But, such questions as "Do you expect the leg to heal normally?" or "Do you break bones easily?" *would* be disability-related. Certainly, an employer may not ask a broad question about impairments that is likely to elicit information about disability, such as, "What impairments do you have?"

- May an employer ask **whether applicants can perform major life activities**, such as standing, lifting, walking, etc.?

Questions about whether an applicant can perform major life activities are almost always disability-related because they are likely to elicit information about a disability. For example, if an applicant cannot stand or walk, it is likely to be a result of a disability. So, these questions are prohibited at the pre-offer stage *unless* they are specifically about the ability to perform job functions.

- May an employer ask applicants about their **current illegal drug use**?

Yes. An employer may ask applicants about current illegal use of drugs because an individual who currently illegally uses drugs is not protected under the ADA (when the employer acts on the basis of the drug use).

- May an employer ask applicants about their **lawful drug use**?

No, if the question is likely to elicit information about disability. Employers should know that many questions about current or prior lawful drug use are likely to elicit information about a disability, and are therefore impermissible at the pre-offer stage. For example, questions like, "What medications are you currently taking?" or "Have you ever taken AZT?" certainly elicit information about whether an applicant has a disability.

However, some innocuous questions about lawful drug use are not likely to elicit information about disability.

Example: During her interview, an applicant volunteers to the interviewer that she is coughing and wheezing because her allergies are acting up as a result of pollen in the air. The interviewer, who also has allergies, tells the applicant that he finds “Lemebreathe” (an over-the-counter antihistamine) to be effective, and asks the applicant if she has tried it. There are many reasons why someone might have tried “Lemebreathe” which have nothing to do with disability. Therefore, this question is not likely to elicit information about a disability.

- May an employer ask applicants about their **lawful drug use** if the employer is administering a test for illegal use of drugs?

Yes, *if* an applicant tests positive for illegal drug use. In that case, the employer may validate the test results by asking about lawful drug use or possible explanations for the positive result other than the illegal use of drugs.

Example: If an applicant tests positive for use of a controlled substance, the employer may lawfully ask questions such as, “What medications have you taken that might have resulted in this positive test result? Are you taking this medication under a lawful prescription?”

- May an employer ask applicants about their **prior illegal drug use**?

Yes, provided that the particular question is not likely to elicit information about a disability. It is important to remember that past *addiction* to illegal drugs or controlled substances is a covered disability under the ADA (as long as the person is not a current illegal drug user), but past *casual* use is not a covered disability. Therefore, the question is fine as long as it does not go to past drug *addiction*.

Example: An employer may ask, “Have you ever used illegal drugs?” “When is the last time you used illegal drugs?” or “Have you used illegal drugs in the last six months?” These questions are not likely to tell the employer anything about whether the applicant was addicted to drugs.

However, questions that ask how much the applicant used drugs in the past *are* likely to elicit information about whether the applicant was a past drug addict. These questions are therefore impermissible at the pre-offer stage.

Example: At the pre-offer stage, an employer may not ask an applicant questions such as, “How often did you use illegal drugs in the past?” “Have you ever been addicted to drugs?” “Have you ever been treated for drug addiction?” or “Have you ever been treated for drug abuse?”

- May an employer ask applicants about their **drinking habits**?

Yes, unless the particular question is likely to elicit information about alcoholism, which is a disability. An employer may ask an applicant whether s/he drinks alcohol, or whether s/he has been arrested for driving under the influence because these questions do not reveal whether someone has alcoholism. However, questions asking *how much* alcohol an applicant drinks or whether s/he has participated in an alcohol rehabilitation program are likely to elicit information about whether the applicant has alcoholism.

- May an employer ask applicants to “**self-identify**” as individuals with disabilities for purposes of the **employer’s affirmative action program**?

Yes. An employer may invite applicants to voluntarily self-identify for purposes of the employer’s affirmative action program *if*:

- the employer is undertaking affirmative action because of a federal, state, or local law (including a veterans’ preference law) that requires affirmative action for individuals with disabilities (that is, the law requires some action to be taken on behalf of such individuals); *or*
- the employer is *voluntarily* using the information to benefit individuals with disabilities.

Employers should remember that state or local laws sometimes permit or encourage affirmative action. In those cases, an employer may invite voluntary self-identification *only* if the employer uses the information to benefit individuals with disabilities.

- Are there any **special steps an employer should take** if it asks applicants to “**self-identify**” for purposes of the **employer’s affirmative action program**?

Yes. If the employer invites applicants to voluntarily self-identify in connection with providing affirmative action, the employer *must* do the following:

- state clearly on any written questionnaire, or state clearly orally (if no written questionnaire is used), that the information requested is used solely in connection with its affirmative action obligations or efforts; and
- state clearly that the information is being requested on a voluntary basis, that it will be kept confidential in accordance with the ADA, that refusal to provide it will not subject the applicant to any adverse treatment, and that it will be used only in accordance with the ADA.

In order to ensure that the self-identification information is kept confidential, the information must be on a form that is kept separate from the application.

- May an employer ask **third parties questions it could not ask the applicant directly?**

No. An employer may not ask a third party (such as a service that provides information about workers' compensation claims, a state agency, or an applicant's friends, family, or former employers) any questions that it could not directly ask the applicant.



## APPENDIX C

### Excerpt From an Interview Guide

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Note: This example is for an executive position. Numerical ratings are more appropriate for lower level positions. Also, this is an excerpt and is not meant to be inclusive of all instructions that should be provided.



**Pre-interview Preparation by Interviewers**

Members of the selection advisory committee should review this booklet and discuss evaluative criteria prior to beginning an interview.

**Have you read this booklet and discussed evaluative criteria with the other interviewers?**

Yes  No

**Interview Questions**

Invite the candidate into the interview room. Introduce the selection advisory committee to the candidate. The member of the selection advisory committee most knowledgeable about the position to be filled should describe the job duties to the candidate. Explain the interview process and ask for any questions before the interview begins. Give the candidate a copy of the job duties and then read the following job description:

**The Executive Director is responsible for: the supervision and direction of all office and field staff; interviewing, hiring, promoting, demoting, and terminating office and field staff; composing and implementing an Affirmative Action Plan; conducting personnel meetings and evaluations; maintaining all departmental records; composing written correspondence; directing investigations according to rules established by the Board; composing rough drafts of revisions of statutes, rules, and regulations pertaining to the field; meeting with legislative committees or individual legislators; preparing reports; and being present at all board meetings.**

- 1. Describe the position you have held which is most similar to this position.**

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**UNRATED**

2. **Describe some projects or developments that you have been largely responsible for initiating and/or completing in your previous work experiences.**

**Superior**

Responsible for initiating and completing several major projects or developments.  
Candidate describes how projects were accomplished and the results.

**Satisfactory**

Responsible for initiating or completing several major projects or developments.

**Unsatisfactory**

Worked on projects, but had no part in their initiation or responsibility for their completion.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Superior

Satisfactory

Unsatisfactory

3. **Suppose as the new Executive Director, several of the Board members have come to you with different lists of priorities for you to handle. Describe how you would handle the situation.**

**Superior**

Discuss the problem with the Board Chairperson in private.  
Ask board members to discuss their priorities with the Board Chairperson.

**Satisfactory**

Discuss the multiple lists with each board member privately and try to determine consensus priorities.

**Unsatisfactory**

Discuss the issue in open meeting.  
Make a decision without discussing the situation with Board members, or fail to discuss with Board members or chairperson.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Superior                       Satisfactory                       Unsatisfactory

4. **Describe your experience in proposing legislation and/or working within the legislative process.**

**Superior**

Has been to the State Capitol during the legislative session to work for or against a bill or has worked closely with a legislator to help draft or pass a bill.

**Satisfactory**

Can describe the legislative process and how one would propose legislation.

**Unsatisfactory**

Has never been a part of and knows nothing about the legislative process.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Superior                       Satisfactory                       Unsatisfactory



## APPENDIX D

### Checklist for Developing a Structured Interview

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- Select an interview panel that is representative of race, sex, and national origin.
- Document all decisions made about the selection process as they are made.
- Conduct or review job analysis.
- Train interviewers in writing questions, conducting the interview, and rater error.
- Write questions based on the job analysis.
- Prepare benchmark responses. Anchor the rating scales for scoring answers with examples and definitions. Also, write justification for questions that do not have an obvious job-relatedness.
- Review questions and benchmarks. Do a trial run on trusted coworkers.
- Revise questions and benchmarks if necessary after trial run.
- Consistently administer the process to all candidates.
- Consistently document all candidates' responses to all questions.
- Monitor interviewers' ratings for inconsistencies.