



THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW

Features of A Structured Interview

A structured interview covers the following:

- Background information about the applicant.
- Questions directed at job related behaviour
- Follow-up questions
- Questions about applicant's education background
- Questions relating to specialized training & skills
- Questions about intangible factors - including applicant's goals & attitudes
- A description of the job and your organization.
- Time for candidate to ask questions.
- Concluding the interview

Preparing For The Interview

It is up to the interviewer to develop questions that will reveal if the applicant has the qualities needed for the position. You may already be using standard questions, but unfortunately they are standard and most applicants have prepared answers for them, so you don't get to see the real person.

You need to make some personalized questions from the application or resume:

"I see you're taking some university courses. What are you taking?"

"You were unemployed for three months between your last two jobs. Why was that?"

Two main tools to help you develop questions are the job description and the application form. Job specifications will also help you visualize how the applicant should perform in the position. It also tells you:

- the RESULTS that are expected from the position
- what SKILLS are required
- the EDUCATION, TRAINING or EXPERIENCE which is preferred
- the PERSONALITY type best suited to the position

Once you have that type of information, you will have a better chance of developing questions that will get you the right person for the job the first time.

Setting the Stage for the Interview

Setting the stage is relatively simple. Your goal is to present as businesslike atmosphere as possible, while at the same time making the applicant feel at ease.

- ✚ Try to pick a quiet, comfortable location for the interview. Sometimes that may be your office; other times another area of the hotel or restaurant; maybe a conference room. Ensure that

there will be no interruptions; people knocking on the door, phone calls etc.

- ✚ Never conduct an interview across a desk. This sets up a physical barrier between you and the applicant. Sit kitty corner to a table, or in two guest chairs facing each other.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

When you begin the interview -

- ✚ be sure to greet the applicant in a warm, friendly manner with a firm handshake, followed by some light conversation to relax both of you. You can tell how they feel by looking for non-verbal clues - worried look, licking lips, trembling hands. If you can make them feel non-threatened, they are more likely to open up and be themselves. Mention hobbies, organizations or other interests noticed on the application or resume. Current events or sports are other topics you can discuss.
- ✚ After establishing a rapport with the applicant, go into the work history first. Start with the candidate's most recent job first, he'll find this easiest to start with as it is fresh in his mind and not too personal. Get him talking and keep him talking as much as possible about relevant matters.
- ✚ Listen attentively; this calls for your best listening skills. Remember that you want to impress them favorably on behalf of your hotel or restaurant. A careless mistake at the beginning of the interview can ruin the whole thing.
- ✚ The interview involves a two-way exchange of information: you want to know about the applicant, and the applicant wants to know about the job.

You are after two kinds of information about the applicant: hard data on skills and experience, and personal qualities important to the job.

- ✚ As you go over the application in the interview, fill in all details the applicant left out and question any gaps in the employment record. People will often not list jobs where they had problems. If they have something to hide, they will hide it and it is up to you to get that information.
- ✚ Don't hesitate to probe if you are not satisfied with either the application or their answers to your questions.

As to personal qualities, you may never really know what they are like until you put them to work. If you can get them talking you can judge traits such as verbal skills, ease with people, behavior in stress situations and personality. You won't be able to tell about motivation, temperament, absenteeism, honesty, reliability and all those other characteristics you are looking for.

Make notes throughout the interview. Avoid writing subjective opinions or impressions and instead take note of specific job-related facts and direct observations.

BE OBJECTIVE, FACTUAL & CLEAR

Evaluation is a subjective business; it is based primarily on feelings and emotions. People turn you on or turn you off; you like them or you don't; and you will make your decision to hire or not primarily on the interview.

Ask open—ended questions, these are questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no. They require a lengthier response, and require him to give his opinion. Open-ended questions start with HOW, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY. Don't ask leading questions which suggest an answer the candidate will just give you the answer he thinks you want.

For example, try leading off with a question like, "Tell me about your job with ABC Company". The way he answers this question will tell you what he considered important about that job. Another good question is to ask him what he liked or disliked about his job; or why did he accept that job in the first place.

As the interview progresses you can probe more deeply into;

- ✚ level and complexity of work
- ✚ extent of responsibilities
- ✚ motivation
- ✚ attitudes and feelings
- ✚ effectiveness on the job
- ✚ achievements
- ✚ interpersonal relationships
- ✚ level of authority
- ✚ education

INTERVIEW FORMAT

The use of an interview format is one approach to selection interviewing. It can be useful to ensure that the same material is discussed relative to all applicants who may be compared. This is not to suggest that all applicants get asked the same questions in the same order, but rather that the same ground is covered by the end of the interview, so that there is a basis for comparison. It should also be understood that the paperwork and the nature of the interview should result in different questioning for different applicants.

A selection interview should be a purposeful conversation. This means that it should not be stilted or rigid. It is not necessary to follow a format in sequence. An interview format is a guide, not a script.

ASKING PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Many interviewers feel reluctant to ask personal questions, as it seems an invasion of privacy. You must remember that it is necessary to interview the "whole" person, **but it is also critical not to violate human rights.** These items will have a very important bearing on how the candidate will do his job. If these questions are asked in a matter of fact tone, as though the interviewer expects a prompt answer, most candidates will respond. Here is the link to [A Guide to Application Forms & Interviews - Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission](#)

A sample interview format is outlined below and this format has 7 areas to explore. The emphasis placed upon each area is dependent, in large measure, upon the job to be filled. This or any format must be supplemented with material related to the specific applicant.

1. **Personal Characteristics**

This is a good way to start the interview. It will give an indicator of their ability to carry on a conversation and level of composure.

Sample Questions

- a. Tell me about yourself.
- b. What activities or hobbies do you enjoy?
- c. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

2. **Work Experience**

Although most of this information is on the application form, it is useful to have the applicant explain it.

Sample Questions

- a) What are (were) your job responsibilities?
- b) Tell me about the assignments you were given.
- c) What did you particularly like (or dislike) about the job?
- d) Describe the specific achievements in which you may have contributed to your employer (employers) in the past few years.
- e) What did it take to be successful (effective) in your previous job?

3. **Motivation for the Job**

Why is the applicant considering changing jobs; or seeking employment? Why this job?

Sample Questions

- a) Why have you chosen this time to leave? Or start to work.
- b) Why are you interviewing for this job?
- c) What is (was) the most unpleasant feature of your last job? Pleasant?
- d) What do you expect from your next job that you are not getting (did not get) from the present (past) job?

4. **Our Organization**

Does it appear to be a good fit? Does the applicant identify with the needs of the organization?

Sample Questions

- a. How does our organization specifically fit into your plans?
- b. What contribution do you feel that you can make to us at this time?
- c. Why do you think you will be successful at this time?
- d. Are you considering any other jobs at this time?

5. **People Orientation**

An applicant's skill in dealing with customers, co—workers and supervisors is critical to job success.

Sample Questions

- a. How do (did) your co-workers treat you?
- b. What kind of a person was your last supervisor? What are the qualities of your best supervisor? Worst supervisor?
- c. What is your philosophy of supervision?
- d. What kind of people rubs you the wrong way?

e. How do you handle subordinates? Irrate customers? Unreasonable associates? Demanding supervisors?

6. **Self Perception**

Will require the applicant to display judgment and objectivity? This should provide some insight into self-confidence and perception.

Sample Questions

- a. What would you consider to be your major strengths?
- b. What are you trying to improve?
- c. What failure, if any, have you experienced in school or in your work?
- d. What special abilities do you have?
- e. In a reference check, what would your last (previous) supervisor tell us about your job performance?

7. **Career Orientation**

In addition to providing information on career plans, this area can provide insights into more immediate needs and expectations.

Sample Questions

- a. What would be the most ideal job for you?
- b. How do you feel about your financial progress to date?
- c. What has given you the most satisfaction in life?
- d. What are your future goals?
- e. How will we be able to help you get there?

REMINDER

Probably the most common error committed by interviewers is asking questions that have obvious answers. Frequently these are questions that only require “yes” or “no” replies. These kinds of questions are easy to phrase, easy to ask and easy to answer.

Examples:

Poor: You’d like to move into restaurant management eventually, wouldn’t you?

Better: What kind of job would you like to have three years from now?

Best: Tell me about your job hopes for the future.

**STUDIES SHOW THAT MOST INTERVIEWERS MAKE UP
THEIR MINDS IN THE FIRST 4 MINUTES !!**

CONTROLLING THE INTERVIEW

The interviewer must control the interview without appearing to do so. You want to be sure that all areas are covered and that each gets its full quota of time. You want to have the chance to get explanations for any gaps or inconsistencies you noted in advance of the interview.

DIGGING FOR NEGATIVES

When you are digging for possible unfavorable information, it is important that you do so in such a way the candidate is unaware of what you are actually seeking. For example, if you have reason to believe that the candidate is a slow worker, you might phrase your statement as follows “I get the impression that quality is especially important to you and that you will take whatever amount of time is necessary to make sure that it is done right, even though you may have to sacrifice speed to do so”

Statements of this kind give the candidate the idea that the interviewer is favorably impressed; and the way the interviewee responds will usually give the additional information required.

When a threatening question cannot be disguised, it is better to ask it toward the close of the interview, because it will usually affect the rapport with the candidate. You will not have so much to lose as the bulk of the interview will be completed.

Concluding The Interview

No matter who gets the job, everyone who leaves after an interview should think that your property would be a good place to work. Applicants may be qualified for other positions currently open or in the future. They may also tell others about their experience.

Before you officially conclude the interview, you should always give the applicant an opportunity to ask questions. These questions may provide additional insight about the applicant. Does he or she seem enthusiastic about the job, or are they mainly interested in vacations and holidays?

Closing is one of the more difficult aspects of interviewing. At the end of any interview you usually have several options.

- 1) The applicant is unqualified.
- 2) The applicant is qualified.
- 3) No decision is possible at this time.

Tell them what the next step is in the process and when you will make your final decision. Thank them for taking the time to come in and that you enjoyed meeting them. Shake hands and escort them out of the establishment.

Testing

Tests are sometimes used by companies as an additional method of evaluating candidates. Sometimes they are given before interviews - to help screen out candidates. Sometimes they are given to a short list of candidates to add objective data to subjective evaluations.

Various kinds of tests are used:

- *Intelligence tests* are intended to measure mental ability
- *Aptitude tests* are intended to measure ability to learn a particular job skill
- *Manual dexterity tests*, a form of aptitude test, measure manipulative ability
- *Skills tests* measure specific skills
- *Psychological tests* are designed to measure personality traits
- *Physical examinations* measure physical fitness

To be usable, a test must be Valid – Reliable - Relevant to the job

The Reference Check

Now that the choice has been narrowed to two or three people, the reference check becomes the final step before hiring. It is the way to weed out applicants who have falsified or stretched their credentials or who in other jobs have been unsatisfactory.

Interview Questions – Weak vs Strong

<u>Weak Questions</u>	<u>Strong Questions</u>
Are you a leader?	Give me an example of a time you emerged as a leader. How did it turn out?
Are you pleased with your career so far?	Where would you like to go from here in your career? How do you plan to accomplish this?
Can you learn complex information quickly?	How do you feel you learn best?
Did you find it easy to work with your supervisor?	How did you get along with your supervisor? What were some challenges?
Are you ready for more responsibilities?	What in your last job prepared you to move up to greater responsibilities?
Can you do this job?	What do you feel has prepared you for this job?
Do you work well with people?	How do you maintain important relationships within the workplace?
Can you take criticism?	Tell me about a time you were criticized. How did you handle it?
Can you make decisions?	Describe a situation where you had to make a decision. How did it turn out.

Behavior Oriented Questions

Tell me about a time you had to deal with a complex assignment.
Describe a situation where you had to work as part of a team.
Give me an example of how you went above and beyond the call of duty in your job.
Give me an example of a success in your life.
Describe a time you had to criticize someone's behavior
Tell me about a stressful situation that you have handled
Give me an example of how you have had to bend the rules to get something done.

Planned Interview

Note: This is a general guide. Not all questions are pertinent to all jobs. Use your own judgment in omitting questions not pertinent to the job applicant you are interviewing. Feel free to ask follow-up questions and additional questions.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

How did you happen to contact us? _____

Who do you know that is working for us? _____

What do you know about our company? _____

When are you available for work? _____

A. Work History

1. Who is your present (or last) employer?

Company Name: _____

Address: _____

When did you start? _____

When did you leave? _____ Are you still there? _____

How did you apply for the job? _____

Why were you interested? _____

What was your first assignment? _____

How did your responsibilities change while there? _____

What is (was) your last responsibility? _____

To whom do (did) you report? _____ Title _____

How good a boss were they? _____

How often do (did) you see them? _____

How closely do (did) they supervise? _____

How many do you supervise? _____ What are their jobs? _____

What are your strongest points? _____

What have been your biggest work problems? _____

How well have you liked the job? _____

How has it failed to meet your expectations? _____

Reasons for leaving? _____

What other work have you done during that period? _____

2. Where did you work before that?

Company Name: _____

Company Address: _____

When did you start? _____ When did you leave? _____

How did you apply for the job? _____

Why were you interested? _____

What was your first assignment? _____

How did your responsibilities change while there? _____

What (was) your last responsibility? _____

To whom did you report? _____ Title _____

How good a boss were they? _____

How often did you see them? _____

How closely did they supervise? _____

How many did you supervise? _____

What were their jobs? _____

What were your strongest points? _____

What were your biggest work problems? _____

B. Additional employment information.

Of all your jobs, which did you enjoy most? _____

Why? _____

Who was your best boss? _____

Why? _____

When have you been unemployed? _____

How did you feel about this? _____

What kinds of co-workers or customers do you prefer? _____

C. Schooling and early background

General Information

Where were you brought up? _____

What were your interests and activities as a youngster? _____

College

What college(s) did you attend? _____

What degree/diploma(s) did you receive? _____

Why did you choose this (these) college(s)? _____

How were your grades? _____

In what activities did you participate? _____

What career did you have in mind? _____ Why? _____

In what courses did you receive your best grades? _____

Any failures? _____

D. Self-description

How do you spend your off-the-job hours? _____

What is your role in them? _____

What are your strongest assets? _____

What would you say your weak points are? _____

What haven't you told about yourself that would give a more complete picture of you?

Interviewer: _____

COMMENTS:

REFERENCE CHECKS FOR POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES

It is the responsibility of the hiring authority to conduct professional reference checks on the final candidates they are considering to hire. A search committee may also conduct reference checks during the search process, but it is still recommended that the hiring authority conduct their own reference checks before making the final decision. **The time it takes to conduct reference checks is nominal compared to the time, cost and consequence of hiring the wrong person for the job.**

An employer who fails to check references and hires a person with a history of physical abuse of co-workers or hires a person who is a registered sex offender to work with or around people can face numerous problems. The basic theory behind negligent hiring is that employers have a duty to protect workers, customers, students, and visitors from injury caused by such employees; this obligation exists even if the injury occurs miles from the work site.

PROCESS

While the candidate is asked to provide references, they should be informed that reference checking may be extended to their current and any or all of their previous employers, even though they may not be on their reference list.

Employers should be sensitive to coordinating the checking of the current employer's reference with the candidate. You don't want to jeopardize their current position. If a candidate tells you not to contact a specific person or employer, you should respect their request, but you may want to search out the reason.

The candidate is not required to provide this authorization, but checking references should be considered a very important part of the selection process and the hiring authority should be very cautious about hiring a new employee who will not provide adequate reference checking authorization.

All references should be relevant to the position sought. If a person provided as a reference by the candidate does not have knowledge of the candidate's ability to perform the tasks of the vacant position, then contacting that reference is of little use. The best references are, typically, former employers (supervisors/managers with direct knowledge of the candidates work), former co-workers, and former educators of the candidate.

INTERNAL CANDIDATES

Reference checks should also be done for internal candidates who do not work for you. You do not need an authorization form from the employee since you are already the employer. You should ask the same questions of the internal supervisor/manager as you would for the external candidate.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- Reference check questions should be directly related to the duties and performance of the person's job. Do not contact "character references" or references who have not worked with the candidate.
- While the employer has the right to check employment references, you should protect candidates and employees from unreasonable intrusions into their private, non-job related activities and status. (There are a few exemptions to this rule, for example, law enforcement candidates.)

REFERENCE CHECKING

Before making the first reference call, you should be prepared with a set of questions that are related to the position and valuable in helping you make a decision.

At the beginning of the conversation with the reference, it is often helpful for you to describe the position that the candidate has applied for and describe what you are looking for in the ideal candidate. This should assist the reference responder in framing their responses in a more meaningful way for you.

When calling a reference, introduce yourself, state that you are checking the reference on (name), a candidate for (state the position) and you have the candidate's permission and/or an authorization and release to talk with the reference. If they want to see the signed authorization and release form before responding, please make arrangements to fax or mail a copy to them. If they refuse to provide a reference, ask them what their policy is on providing references for current or past employees. Try to assess whether the issue is their blanket policy on providing references or the fact that they will not provide a reference for this particular employee (or former employee).

Questions regarding attitude, skills, experience and performance should be asked. For example:

1. Did the candidate work under your supervision?
2. During what time period did you supervise the candidate?
3. Are you familiar with the candidate's former job? If yes, please describe the position the candidate held (or holds) in your organization. Review: a) duties, reporting relationships, scope of responsibility, level of autonomy; b) how long they were in the position and what other positions they held in the organization; c) confirm dates of employment, job title, salary and dates in current or last position. Always compare this information to what was provided on the application/supplemental questionnaire and/or resume.
4. What were the candidate's strongest skill areas?
5. Using a 1-5 scale, with 5 being high, how would you rate the candidate in the following areas:
 - a. List specific knowledge, skills, abilities, or tasks that are pertinent to the position.
6. Please describe how the candidate interacted in the workplace with: subordinates, peers, immediate supervisors and management (use each one that is appropriate for your position).
7. Was the candidate a person whom you had to motivate or were they internally motivated?
8. What aspects of candidate's job did (he/she) do well? In what aspects of their job did they require a higher level of supervision or seem to struggle with?
9. Describe the candidate's quality and quantity of work.
10. Did the candidate understand, follow and respect workplace rules and administrative processes (this could include dependability, attendance, punctuality, etc.)?
11. Did the candidate demonstrate flexibility when appropriate?
12. Please describe the professional areas that the candidate either struggles with or should continue to work on developing.
13. Was the candidate a "team player"?

14. How has the candidate demonstrated their commitment to diversity in your workplace? Please describe.
15. Based on the description of the position that the candidate has applied for and reviewing their current or past job description, can you foresee any problems with the candidate being able to perform the duties of the position for which they have applied?
16. Would you re-hire the candidate if given the opportunity?
17. Is there anything else relevant to the candidate's performance and attitude in your workplace of which I should be aware?
18. Would you recommend the candidate for this position?

For Supervisor/Manager candidates the following should be covered:

1. How long has the candidate been a supervisor/manager?
2. Please describe the number and title of the employees that the candidate supervised directly.
3. Please describe the number of people indirectly supervised by the candidate (number of people reporting through other supervisors to the candidate).
4. Did the candidate do the following: (Clarify as to whether they had the authority and had actual experience in each of these areas.)
 - a. Hiring
 - b. Establishing job duties
 - c. Recommending pay increases
 - d. Evaluating
 - e. Disciplining
 - f. Firing
 - g. Supervising/managing in a union environment
5. Describe the candidate's supervisor/management/leadership style. (You should clarify and evaluate if it was an effective style.)

You should use the same basic questions for each reference for all of the candidates. If, in the course of responding to your questions, the reference refers or alludes to something not covered that is not in the prohibited or protected area of questions, please pursue that line of inquiry. Please note if you are only allowed to talk with the Personnel or Human Resources office for the reference information, your questions should be modified accordingly to fit into this situation. You may want to frame them around information found in the Personnel file such as performance evaluations, exit interviews, etc.

CONCLUSION

What do you do with the information you have gathered? If you received conflicting references about a candidate, you may want to check further. Occasionally you may need to “throw out” a reference because of suspicion or knowledge of bias or unfairness of the reference provider. If you are satisfied that you have all the information to make a good hiring decision, then you are ready to make an offer to the potential employee.