



Interview Skills

Essential ways to structure your organization's interview content and process

One accepted tenet of effective interviewing is that the interview content and process should be standardized.

Research clearly shows that a uniform or consistent interview will result in higher reliability. The concept of standardization can be thought of as a continuum from the completely unstructured, "shoot-from-the-hip" approach to a methodology where both the content (what is assessed during the interview) and process (how the interview is conducted and evaluated) are completely standardized.



Standardization provides each candidate the same opportunity to perform, increases the reliability of the interview, and is more legally defensible.

Although the most basic component of structure is standardizing interview questions (e.g., asking the same questions of all candidates), there are a number of other ways in which both content and process can be standardized:



- Questions are asked of each candidate in the exact same order
- The same probes or follow-up questions are asked of each candidate
- Interviewers are prevented from using ad lib or “on-the-fly” probes
- The same interviewers are used to conduct each interview session
- Candidates are given the same amount of time to respond to the questions (i.e., the time frame for the interview is held constant)

Generally speaking, the more structured the content and process, the better. This standardization provides each candidate the same opportunity to perform, increases the reliability of the interview, and is more legally defensible if the results are challenged. It is recommended that every effort should be made to structure the interview to the furthest extent possible. However, the realities of conducting interview sessions may mitigate the use of a purely structured interview. Those deviations might include:

- Allowing interviewers to generate probe questions “on-the-fly” based upon candidate responses to the lead question. This should only be done if interviewers have been appropriately trained (e.g., avoid leading and yes/no probes, asking probes that are consistent with the lead question and competency being measured).
- Allowing interviewers to ask additional (prepared) questions aimed at a specific competency if they feel a more in-depth assessment is needed (e.g., a single question does not seem to totally address the KSAO or competency in question). Interviewers are often given a list of optional questions that can be used for a more in-depth assessment of various KSAOs or competencies.
- Tailoring questions to specific competencies based on results from other assessments. Many commercially available tests or inventories trigger questions based on assessment results (e.g., a person scoring low on a particular personality factor or a counterproductive behavior scale/item). This should only be done when all candidates have been given the same assessment(s) and all interviewers are privy to the same feedback information.