

INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

The four segments of an interview are:

- **Opening** (makes the applicant comfortable; speak about the organization and the job).
The first three minutes will determine the tone of the interview.

- **Body** (asks background, situational, and job interest questions; discuss employment conditions; clarify resume information)

- **Closing** (give applicant an opportunity to ask questions about the organization, job benefits, and advancement opportunities; tell the applicant when a decision will be made, and establish how soon the applicant could report for work, if selected)

- **Evaluation Period** (the individual conducting the interview prepares a summary of the interview along with his or her observations).

ASK JOB APPLICANTS ONLY FOR INFORMATION THAT IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE ABILITY TO PERFORM THE JOB.

Pre-interview Preparation

1. Document the job requirements that will be covered in the interview.
2. List the knowledge, skills, abilities or competencies which are required to perform the critical tasks of the position.
3. Think about what you are looking for that will support the essential elements of the job.
4. Design questions which verify the candidates have the knowledge, skills, abilities, or competencies required to perform the critical tasks of the job. Ask questions which begin with "How would you handle the following situation...? Use typical examples of situations which may arise in the performance of the critical tasks, i.e.:

Competency: ABILITY TO RESPOND TO DEADLINE PRESSURE.

Question: Describe a time you made an extraordinary effort to meet a deadline. What did you do and what were the results?

Competency: CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Question: Give me an example when you were working with a client who was unhappy with the service they were receiving from you. What did you do and what were the results?

Competency: INITIATIVE.

Question: What was the most difficult task you have had to learn? How did you learn it and what was the result?

Competency: RESULTS ORIENTED.

Question: Describe a time you were involved in developing a new program or service. What specific steps did you take to contribute to a successful implementation?

Competency: STRESS TOLERANCE.

Question: Tell me about a situation which involved a highly sensitive project, budget constraints, unrealistic deadlines, or rejection of your work. How did you handle the situation?

5. List the questions to assure all candidates are asked essentially the same questions.
6. For each requirement or job category to be covered, design a rating strategy for evaluating responses.
7. Script your interview by preparing an outline for the opening, body, and closing.
8. Be prepared to explain any special employment conditions, organizational procedures, or job requirements.
9. Review the application before the interview. Note key points on which information is needed. Identify positives and negatives.
10. Determine how much time each interview will require and set up a schedule. Arrange a suitable setting, free from interruptions. Come out from behind your desk to conduct the interview. Leave enough time between interviews to prepare a written record.

Information Gathering

To ensure a good fit with your office, ask job applicants about their values as well as their accomplishments. Applications and resumes suggest skills, but what candidates believe in and how they make decisions will equally affect their performance. Enrich the hiring process with the following steps:

1. Establish rapport. Your opening remarks should refer to some facet of the applicant's background.
2. Introduce NPS and your park, region or your organization's values. Encourage the candidate to ask questions to get a sense of the organization's culture. If possible, provide written information on your organization.

3. Completely cover the applicant's training, education, work experience and achievements in a chronological and systematic manner.
4. Avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" answer.
5. Ask questions which will assist the applicant in expressing ideas and feelings in a frank and honest manner.
6. Begin with broad introductory questions which build confidence and set the stage for more specific questions to follow. As the interview progresses, ask open-ended questions. Example: ask what the candidate did or did not like about a previous job, management style, or office; who helped the candidate succeed and how; what caused the most problems on the last job (or any job) and how the candidate found a solution; what activities does the candidate avoid or feel ill suited to perform. Observe how the candidate chooses key details from many experiences.
7. Ask questions which follow up on key thoughts (ideas, opinions, or experiences) expressed by the candidate which appear to have an important bearing upon the matter under discussion.
8. Use comments or actions which indicate understanding and will encourage the candidate to continue speaking. Be a good listener.
9. If a candidate indicates he or she does not want you to contact a former or current supervisor, ask them to explain their reluctance and work through it with them if possible. If the candidate is afraid the supervisor will say something bad about them, ask them to describe what they think the supervisor will say and why they think this. If the candidate thinks you may get negative information from a current or previous supervisor, assure the candidate his or her explanation of the situation will also help you weigh what you hear. Encourage the candidate to give you the names and phone numbers of others in the organization who might be able to give countering or balancing information.

SENSITIVE AREAS TO AVOID

1. Work-related injuries or the history or extent of disabilities.
2. Religious preferences.
3. Racial or ethnic background.
4. National origin.
5. Marital status/children.

Concluding the Interview

1. Ask the candidate if they have any questions.
2. Tell the candidate if you are considering other candidates.
3. Avoid creating the impression of offering employment when this is not the intention.
4. Immediately write up the results of the interview and be specific as to which of the applicant's answers were good or were unsatisfactory. Check your interview notes for patterns. Overall, what does the candidate think is important: salary, pride in skills and work, sociability, job security? Focus on patterns rather than single answers or experience. Compare your findings to your organization's values. Be wary of applicants who did not let you end the interview, bad-mouthed former employees or employers, had difficulty with or refused to answer certain questions, were more interested in your office décor than in what you were saying, or arrived late with no explanation.

REFERENCE CHECKS

A reference check is done as a follow-up after an interview in order to confirm your impression of the candidate, either positive or negative. This step in the hiring process allows a supervisor to verify the information already provided by the candidate, and to ask about performance and accomplishments. According to the Society of Human Resource Management over 50 percent of the information presented on a resume or application by a job candidate may be false or misleading. **Supervisors cannot afford not to call references.** With stock questions, reference checking rarely gets you beyond what you learned in the interview. Try some open-ended questions and listen for nuances in the answers. They yield better profiles and often make the difference among your top choices. Information gathered from a reference check is strictly **CONFIDENTIAL**.

Conducting the Reference Check

Prepare carefully:

1. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the information the candidate has already provided, including the application, resume, and interview responses. Note those candidates who have requested you NOT contact their current supervisor. Identify areas or issues that require elaboration or verification.
2. If a candidate does not want you to contact a current supervisor, honor his/her request.
3. Set up a telephone appointment with references provided by the candidate. To make a good decision you should get feedback from at least three reference providers going back at least five years. Personal or “character” references are seldom useful because they usually cannot offer direct information on how a candidate would perform in a work environment. Often they are personal friends and may not be neutral and objective.
4. Write down your questions before you call, highlighting the information you want verified or expanded upon. Ask only position-related questions, including questions about past job performance. Only ask questions about personal characteristics if they are relevant to the position responsibilities or conditions. Refrain from asking leading questions or ones that the reference provider can answer by a simple yes or no.

Set up an environment that encourages the reference provider to respond willingly, cooperatively, and honestly:

1. Begin your conversation on common ground by referring to information that has already been provided by the candidate. For example: verify what the candidate said in terms of title, length of service, responsibilities, salary, and accomplishments.

Describe the position:

1. Describe the responsibilities, duties, and working environment of the position for which the candidate has applied.
2. After describing the position, ask, “Given our requirements, what is your assessment of the candidate’s qualifications for the job?”

In addition to your prepared questions, ask follow-up questions:

1. If you get a general response, follow up with a specific question.
2. If the reference provider declines to answer a question, ask if someone else might be able to share information about the topic.

Evaluate information with caution:

1. Document in writing all the references you attempted to contact, or did contact, (both academic and employment) and all of the relevant information you received. Maintain your documentation in a drop file. In an investigation, the lack of notes may be seen as suspicious.
2. Don’t immediately rule out the candidate for whom you receive negative information. Try to get confirming or refuting information from other sources.
3. Evaluate positive information carefully. Some individuals subscribe to the “if you can’t say anything nice don’t say anything at all” school of giving references. Read between the lines. Always listen carefully to the tone of the person providing the reference. If you sense the reference provider is avoiding something, probe further.
4. If a position requires positive education or professional credentials, it is well worth the time involved to double-check degrees, certifications, and licenses noted by applicants for professional positions. Job seekers have been known to falsify their education or professional credentials.

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING A REFERENCE CHECK

Reference checks enable supervisors to collect firsthand information about the past performance of job candidates. All questions asked during a reference check should be carefully planned in advance. The questions should cover any gaps in information provided by the candidate, as well as verify, expand, and probe into the information you have in the application or resume.

Below are examples of open-ended questions which could yield valuable information to help you better distinguish among your top choices:

How would you characterize the applicant's success with your organization?

Can you tell me in measurable terms the biggest impact this person made on your organization?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate this person's performance—and (if not a 10) what would it have taken for him/her to become a 10?

What would you tell this person about how he/she could improve his/her effectiveness?

Are there any unproductive work habits or behaviors (e.g., inattention to detail, failure to communicate effectively, missed deadlines, poor attendance, etc.) that I should be aware of? (NOTE: Do not ask or collect information on medical leave absences or disability related issues.)

How would you characterize his/her energy level?

What did this person do above and beyond the basic needs of the job?

Have you observed this person learning something new, and if yes, how did he/she handle it?

How was this person viewed by his/her peers?

What role in a group situation suits this person best?

How flexible do you consider this person?

When the person was faced with meeting demanding expectations, how well did he/she meet them?

Describe the types of decisions this person made on a daily basis?

How did this person manage their time?

Describe a disagreement or a challenging situation and how this person handled it?

Why did this person leave your organization?

Based on what you shared today, would you hire this person back?

Is there someone else within your organization who can give me an additional reference on this job candidate?

MAKING THE HIRING DECISION

The following information is provided to help you strengthen your reference checking process and eliminate those who will not be a perfect fit, long before a position is ever offered.

Do not force the fit. Do not fool yourself by just looking at the good things about a candidate because you are being pressured to fill a position. Make sure that you make a good decision based upon the facts you found in the interview process and the fit with the requirements of the job.

Limit the number of decision makers. Too many people trying to make the decision will drag out the process and cause extra problems.

Be wary of candidates who:

- quit a job without adequate notice
- arrive late for the interview
- request that you match a counter offer by their current employer
- can't supply verifiable references
- reveal confidential information
- talk too much in the interview and do not listen
- concentrate on the negative behavior of others