

Interview Best Practices



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What is the purpose of a job interview?

Fundamentally an interview is a conversation between two parties for gathering information. It is a two-way process which allows the interviewers the opportunity to see if the candidate is suitable for the offered position, and allows the candidate to get to know you and your business and decide whether they would want to work within your organisation, should they be successful. In all interviews the candidate should be asked about their credentials, work experience and skills pertaining to the role.

Types of interviews

There are a variety of interview types for different kinds of roles and positions within organisations. Below are the most commonly used styles for SME's:

Type of Interview	Pros & Cons
Face to face	Traditionally the candidate would meet at the base/offices of the organisation and a senior member or staff, HR or line manager would conduct the interview to discuss credentials
Video conference	This was the most popular type of interview during the pandemic and is useful for remote and hybrid workers
Telephone / Screening	These are proving more popular. It is important to remember candidates are unable to read your body language so be clear with questions and remember to tell them the next steps
Assessment centre	These can be quite intimidating for the candidates as they are lengthier than a standard individual interview. These are normally used when there are multiple positions available
Competency /Structured based	This interview has structured questions based on the specific skills required for the position
Case study	Case studies include hypothetical situations where the employer would ask the candidate questions on how they would resolve the situation
Panel	In this instance multiple people will interview the candidate simultaneously

For the candidate

Communication is key! This is your first opportunity to showcase your organisation. Important things to let your candidates know prior to interview:

◀ Are interviews online or in person?

- ◀ Online interviews – make sure they have a meeting link and are comfortable using the platform – keep your camera on at all times
- ◀ In-person interviews – ensure you have clearly communicated the meeting address – especially if you have multiple sites!
- ◀ Do they have a good connection for the duration of the interview?

◀ Is there a task or assessment to take place prior to the interview or on the day? Have they received the correct brief?

◀ Who is the best person to contact with any queries prior to interview? A HR representative or someone directly from management?

◀ Do you need to make any reasonable adjustments? Asking this question may help both you and the candidate as it may not be obvious from the candidate's application.



For the organisation

In an ideal world you would put together a panel of interviewers (ideally 2 or 3 people). Where possible, this should be a mix of sex, age group and ethnicity to minimise or eliminate any unconscious bias. However we know this isn't possible in most situations.

- ◀ Questions should identify the candidate's suitability to the role. Make sure to have the job description to hand
- ◀ In advance, divide the questions between the panel (if there is one) and agree on running order so things run smoothly
- ◀ Make time to familiarise yourself with the candidate's application- this should be done in advance and not during the interview – you may wish to ask further questions based on their application
- ◀ Consider questions the candidates may ask so you are prepared – e.g. staff benefits, salary, what the team looks like, key responsibilities, progression opportunities
- ◀ Ensure you have allocated enough time between candidates in case interviews run over, technical issues and to make notes after each session

Interview structure

Communicate the structure of the interview either prior to the interview day or at the beginning of the interview.

Example interview structure:

- ◀ Introduction - welcome the candidate and introduce the other members of the panel, if there are any. (names, job roles/teams and perhaps how long they have worked at the organisation)
- ◀ Explain the structure of the interview, what the role looks like, why has this role become available etc.
- ◀ Ask questions that relate specifically to the role they have applied for. Take notes during each response and where possible rate out of 5
- ◀ Allow the candidates to ask questions to the panel
- ◀ Explain the next steps of the recruitment process (when will decisions be made, when will people be notified etc.)
- ◀ Once the candidate has left – make a detailed summary, you may forget aspects of their responses, especially if you are interviewing multiple people

Important things to consider

- ◀ Be mindful of unconscious bias – try not to discuss your opinion of candidates with other members of the panel as you may influence them. Examples of unconscious bias at an interview:
 - ◀ An attractive candidate with open body language could be thought of as good, whereas a quiet candidate with tattoos may be considered bad
 - ◀ A candidate went to the same university as you, whereas another decided not to pursue further education and went into the workplace from school
 - ◀ A candidate supports the same sports team as you
- ◀ Ask open questions – this will give the candidates plenty of time to provide you with examples and give you plenty of evidence, if the candidate is quite reserved don't be afraid to ask follow up questions to expand further. You should ask the same questions to all candidates and have a scoring matrix to ensure a fair and even process
- ◀ Implement 'Active Listening'. Listening is as important as asking the right questions and in some cases will encourage the candidate to become more relaxed and therefore more open. Be aware that a candidate has the right to ask what was written about them during the interview. Notes taken during the interview are invaluable and help to avoid subjectiveness or inaccuracies in your decision making
- ◀ Follow up with the candidate within a limited time frame. Ideally this should be no longer than 1 working week. If a candidate has been unsuccessful but has taken the time to meet you, provide feedback on areas to improve



Types of questions

MOST USEFUL

OPEN

- ◀ Example: What experience do you have that you feel is most relevant to this job?
- ◀ Example: How do you prioritise your workload?
- ◀ What? How? Why? questions that provide the candidate with an opportunity to talk and open up on a particular subject.

BEHAVIOURAL

- ◀ Example: Can you give an example of when you've had to solve a problem using your own initiative? What did you do in your last job to ensure that you met any deadlines you were set?
- ◀ Example: Can you give an example of when you've had to solve a problem using your own initiative? What did you do in your last job to ensure that you met any deadlines you were set?
- ◀ Research has shown that past behaviour is often the best indicator of future performance. Asking behavioural questions enables you to obtain evidence of how the candidate is likely to carry out a task or exhibit a skill in the future.

PROBING

- ◀ Example: That's interesting, can you tell us more about what you did?
- ◀ You may need to follow up your initial set question if you wish to pursue a particular point further to obtain fuller information.

USE WITH CAUTION

CLOSED

- ◀ example: Did you have to deal with difficult customers in your last job?
- ◀ Such questions can lead to one-word answers that can be useful if you are looking to clarify specific points but otherwise may have to be followed up.

HYPOTHETICAL

- ◀ Example: How would you go about training a new colleague in.....?
- ◀ May help to gauge the candidate's speed of thought or capacity to provide solutions. However, if used as a key question for one of your criteria, there is a danger that the candidate will give you the answer they think you want to hear, rather than an indication of how they would actually behave or perform.

BEST AVOIDED

LEADING

- ◀ Example: Presumably you work well as part of a small team?
- ◀ The expected response is generally obvious so you will get the answer you want but without actually finding out anything useful.

DOUBLE-HEADED

- ◀ Example: What experience do you have in a customer-focused role and what skills do you think lead to good customer service?
- ◀ Two questions in one - uncouple them and present as two different questions to ensure you get an answer to both.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

- ◀ Example: Did you leave your last job because of the unsocial hours or were you looking for a new challenge?
- ◀ Two questions in one - uncouple them and present as two different questions to ensure you get an answer to both.

ALWAYS AVOID

DISCRIMINATORY (GENERAL)

- ◀ Example: How do you think you will cope as part of a younger team?
- ◀ Any questioning along these lines that implies the person would be disadvantaged because of their circumstances, e.g. gender, ethnic origin, age etc. should not be pursued.
- ◀ Example: Do you plan on having a family in the future?
- ◀ You must not refuse to employ a woman because she is pregnant, on maternity leave or because she has (or has had) an illness related to her pregnancy. Equality law does not say that a woman applying for a job with you has to tell you that she is pregnant, nor must you withdraw a job offer if you discover that she is pregnant.

DISCRIMINATORY (REACTING TO DISABILITY)

- ◀ The content of an interview should be the same for a disabled candidate as for the other candidates, focusing on their ability to do the job and not on their disability.
- ◀ Avoid any questions relating to levels of sickness absence in previous employment.