

Selection Interviewing  
Developing and Administering  
Structured Behavioral Interviews

Supervisory Resource Guide

West Virginia Division of Personnel  
Staffing Services  
Test Construction and Research Section

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The West Virginia Division of Personnel used many excellent resources in preparing this resource. Portions of this document use the works of other state governments, as well as those from universities and other expert sources. These are listed in the References section. The Internet is an excellent source of information on job interviewing from both the interviewer and interviewee points of view. A phrase search in any popular Internet search engine for “behavioral interview,” “structured interview,” or “employment interview,” will yield hundreds of interesting interview tips, hints, and sample questions. Just remember, effective interviewing requires careful planning, thorough preparation, and consistent treatment for all candidates.

## Interviewing -- The Best and Worst Hiring Procedure

Interviews that are used to make personnel decisions—such as hiring and promotion—are applicant assessments, just like written examinations and ratings of training and experience. Interviews are used more often than any other assessment procedure.

Depending upon how they are conducted, interviews can be, and often are, the absolute worst predictor of an applicant’s potential job success and competency. Selecting the wrong candidate for a vacancy is often very costly, in terms of supervisor time, unit morale, staffing levels, complaints, retraining, transfer, and termination. In addition there are the possible costs of re-posting, recruitment, hiring and training a replacement worker. In fact, errors made in one recruitment and hiring situation may adversely affect organization productivity for 30 or more years. The production difference between the highest performing and minimally performing employee can be more than 200% of salary.



It is important that managers learn how to conduct effective interviews that follow all legal mandates and produce reliable results. Research indicates that the supervisor's chances for making the best selection decisions can be greatly improved through careful interview preparation, and by using structured interview techniques. This resource presents practical guidance on how best to: develop an interview plan, prepare interview questions, and conduct effective structured interviews. In this way the supervisor can be confident that his or her selection decisions are job related, reliable, acceptable to candidates, and meet all legal requirements.

We strongly recommend that managers and supervisors attend the Division of Personnel training class, **Selection Interviewing**. This class covers and reinforces many of the topics and techniques presented in this resource. If you want more information regarding a particular topic or procedure, or have questions or need consultation services in any critical hiring situation, please contact the **Division of Personnel 558-3950**.

## INTRODUCTION

The West Virginia Division of Personnel has prepared this resource to assist agency supervisors and managers in selecting the most competent and productive employees. The resource provides guidelines and specific methods to improve the quality of information gathered from employment interviews. We have also included critical information every interviewing supervisor must know to ensure that the interview process is consistent and in full legal compliance.

The most common selection method used is the interview. What many think is a simple, straightforward procedure is actually a multi-step decision process that is often misunderstood, unplanned, and misapplied. The sad fact is thousands of traditional employment interviews are conducted every day which provide little useful applicant information and result in hiring decisions based on intuition, false impressions, and even personal bias. And worse yet, the supervisor may not even realize the long term effect on the organization and productivity.

Most supervisors want to do a better job in interviewing. Most approach the process with a combination of hopefulness and a bit of uncertainty. Many supervisors only occasionally interview and therefore find it difficult to know how to prepare. While they know the job requirements, they need specific guidance to translate that knowledge into meaningful and effective interview questions. All too often the interviews go something like this: Candidate John arrives. You start with a short discussion of the weather, the drive in, or last night's big game. Next, you tell the candidate all about the job and the ideal skills you're looking for. Next, you ask John about his work history (most of which is on his resume). At this point, the interview may drift into a general discussion of unit problems or some common interest. Finally, you ask the candidate a few broad questions about his strong points and career aspirations. You thank him, answer any questions, and say you will be in touch. ----- Then you say to yourself, "There has got to be a better way."



### Structured vs Unstructured Interviewing

This resource discusses many aspects of effective interviewing. The overall objective is to make the interview more structured; more consistent from one applicant to the next. Selection interviews cover a wide range of informal and formal techniques. At one end is the unstructured interview, a casual conversation where the questions are unplanned and vary across interviews, and the results are applied subjectively. At the other end is the highly structured interview, where **trained interviewers** ask questions based on a **thorough job analysis**, ask the **same questions** of each applicant, and score answers using relevant **rating scales**. Interviews that fall between these two extremes are sometimes referred to as semi-structured.

Long term research clearly indicates that highly structured interviews with carefully developed job behavior questions can result in better selection decisions. A structured interview gives you more control over the process, provides a specific job-related focus, and allows each applicant to be assessed against the same standards. Structure, however, does not merely mean asking each candidate the same questions. A good structured interview must start with a systematic look at

those job behaviors which distinguish high performance from mediocre or poor performance. Structured interview questions are not merely designed to ask what the candidate did, but also how this relates to superior accomplishment and job performance. This will be discussed in more detail later.

The structured interview is defined as one which is based on a systematic analysis of job performance criteria, contains predetermined questions, is accomplishment focused, uses defined candidate performance rating, and absolutely avoids any and all unlawful and non-job related topics.

Some supervisors might complain that developing and conducting structured interviews takes more time and effort. While this is true, always remember, a little extra time in the beginning can pay performance dividends for many years to come. Additionally, once you become familiar with the components of structured interviews, you will probably realize that traditional interview procedures can actually waste far more time. We know that all of the structured interview components described in this manual may not be feasible in every hiring situation. We recommend you use as many components as possible.

### **Strengths of the Structured Interview**

1. Bias is reduced because candidates are evaluated on job-related questions. No subjective and irrelevant questions are asked.
2. Since all candidates are asked the same questions, all have the same opportunity to display knowledge, skills, and abilities.
3. The use of pre-determined responses and rating scales reduces disagreements and increases the accuracy of judgments.
4. Structured interviews often use panels or multiple raters. Panel interviews can minimize individual rater biases.
5. Research shows that properly developed structured interview ratings are very consistent among interviewers and better predict future job performance.
6. The interview better represents actual job content and required behavior and skills.
7. Structured interview development procedures fully comply with accepted professional and governmental guidelines.
8. Managers have more control of the interview and apply what they know to procedure design.
9. Candidates view the process as fair because it is more obviously job-related.

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

## STRUCTURED BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW DEVELOPMENT

### Selection Interviews

Organizations often conduct screening interviews (sometimes by telephone) to obtain basic information, check candidate availability, and screen out persons who do not meet minimum position requirements. By contrast, selection interviews are used either to select a candidate for a hiring interview or are used to actually make a hiring decision. Selection interviews may be conducted in various ways, by single interviewer, interview panel, and having the candidates interview more than once. Selection interviews may be informal and unstructured or structured and more formal. This resource will focus on the design of a structured selection interview.

### Designing Structured Interviews

The development of a structured interview requires answering these basic questions:

- 1) What job behaviors and competencies identify high job performers?
- 2) What interview questions will enable candidates to describe or demonstrate high performance behavior?
- 3) How can we evaluate the levels of performance with each interview question?
- 4) How should the ratings be used in making the hiring decision?

Research shows that the information gathered and evaluated from a well designed structured interview enables supervisors to make good hiring decisions five times more often than by using unstructured interviews.

The key to selecting better candidates is learning how to structure the interview to your advantage. Developing questions based upon job analysis, is the critical foundation for the entire process. **(See Appendix A, Checklist for Developing a Structured Interview)**

### Conducting the Job Analysis

(Source State of Arizona)

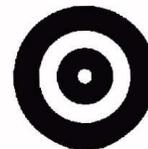
A systematic look at the job helps one take into consideration all of the important elements and differentiates them in terms of what is necessary upon entry and what is later learned on the job. As supervisor, you may think you already “know the job” and can intuitively apply that knowledge in evaluating candidates. The process described here simply enables you to organize that knowledge so that it can be more efficiently used in developing relevant interview questions.

Make a list of the most important job tasks (behaviors) and required KSAs.

Step one in the development of any selection procedure is identifying the critical or **essential tasks** necessary for successful job performance. Once the critical tasks are known the second step is identifying the **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)** necessary for an **entry level** candidate to demonstrate successful job performance.

## The Job Analysis Target

A job analysis can take many forms. The job analysis could be as simple as meeting with one or more “**job experts**” to identify and describe the critical **Tasks, Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)** for the position. These “job experts” are the incumbent(s) or the supervisor(s) of similar positions 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 job experts share tasks and/or critical incidents they have witnessed that show a necessary knowledge, skill, or ability that an incumbent needs for the job. **An effective job analysis must target important KSAs.**



Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) which are learned through on-the-job training or from policy and procedure manuals are **not included** as critical incidents in the job analysis.

To ensure that selection decisions are based upon current and accurate job requirements, any existing job analysis information should be reviewed and, if necessary, updated before developing structured interview questions.

Possible sources of job tasks, critical incidents, and job performance information include:

- interviews with incumbents and their supervisors
- questionnaires completed by incumbents and supervisors
- documents, such as a class specification, job description or job announcement posting
- activity and workload reports
- written job performance standards, record of complaints, problems, and successes
- direct observation of incumbents, especially high performers

Regardless of the process used, the results must specify the critical or essential tasks of the job and what knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) distinguish successful performers from other candidates. In addition, the working environment, the level of training expected of a new hire, and the type of supervision the employee will receive should also be identified.

The ultimate goal of job analysis is to gather job behavior information which enables development of interview questions and rating scales which separate the unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and superior entry level performers.

What you must know...

- \* Good job performance information is the basis of a good interview.
- \* Never take for granted that you already “know” the job.
- \* Make a written list of the critical job tasks and job requirements.
- \* Don’t start writing interview questions until you “know” what to ask.

## Job Analysis Legal Concerns (Source: State of Oklahoma)

Several court decisions\* have ruled that interview questions must be clearly job-related. These decisions relate the importance of a job analysis for all selection devices, especially job interviews. Also, federal government guidelines consider the employment interview to be an employee selection device just as a written test is a selection device. Therefore, it is very important to document your job analysis, record the sources of all job information, and when and how the information was obtained. Do this even if you are developing information for your own interviews.

(\* *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))

## Developing Job-Related Structured Interview Questions

The next step is developing good interview questions. The job analysis is like the foundation of a house, the development of questions which distinguish candidates' potential levels of future job performance is like building the house.

If you talk more than 20% of the time, you're doing it all wrong.

## Types of Questions

There are many types of questions used in interviews. The most common types are described below. You may have used various types of questions in previous interviews.

### Background questions.

These focus on the work experience, education, and other qualifications of the candidates. Sometimes you can save time by obtaining this information from the application or resume. Don't waste valuable interview time allowing the applicant to merely repeat facts stated in the application or resume.

### Job knowledge questions.

Sometimes interviewees are asked to demonstrate specific job knowledge or provide documentation of job knowledge. This can be useful as screen out questions. Be careful, though, there usually is not much time in an interview to ask many knowledge questions. This may be better handled by having candidates fill out a questionnaire or take a knowledge test.

### Hypothetical/situational questions.

These 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. Hypothetical questions must represent "real" job expectations. Beware, while hypothetical questions have their place, people may not always give responses that reflect their real-life experience or true behavior.

## Actual Past Behavior Questions

**Many experts consider this the best question type.** This requires candidates to describe actual past job behaviors and accomplishments that relate to the job for which they are being interviewed. The use of actual past behavior questions in an interview is based on the assumption that a person's past behaviors can predict future behaviors. Most of the question development instructions and examples in this resource focus on "behavioral" questions.

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."

What you must know...

Interview questions should be developed from actual behaviors and requirements determined during the job analysis to be related to high job performance.

## Is there a "BEST" type of question?

The best questions are those that obtain the information you are looking for in the interview. So, it depends on the purpose of the question. All question types can be used. We should point out, however, that questions that address specific past behaviors, challenges, and accomplishments will provide better information. Questions should allow the candidate to talk freely about his or her own experiences solving specific problems, increasing production, meeting goals, working successfully with others, facing challenges, and dealing with the unexpected. If the applicant gives a hypothetical or brief response, simply **probe** or ask for more examples. Do not restrict your questioning to simply elicit facts. Ask behavioral questions related to the applicant's work style, attitudes about management, policy conflicts, and personality.

## Are there any "BAD" interview questions?

Yes. There are two types of really bad interview question; the ones that serve **no purpose and illegal** ones. That said, there are many tired old questions that simply fill up time and yield little valid information. Examples are: Where do you see yourself in five years? What does your ideal job look like? Are you a team player? I see you worked at Acme, what was that like? Tell me about yourself. What are some of your strengths/weaknesses? The fact is, if you carefully review the job and base questions on specific behavioral job requirements, you won't need any "BAD" questions. Legal considerations are discussed later.

## More About Interview Questions

(Source: State of Arizona)

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 5 to 15. If you want to ask a question to which you expect and want lengthy replies, you should ask fewer questions overall to stay within a reasonable time frame. Generally, interviews will be 30 to 60 minutes long. The interviewer should ensure that the behavioral questions developed do not require a knowledge or skill 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 and 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. Listed below are some of the more important characteristics of good interview questions:

1. Realistic, given the job requirements
2. To the point, brief, and unambiguous
3. Complex enough to allow adequate demonstration of the competency being rated
4. Formulated at the language level of the candidate, not laced with jargon
5. Not dependent upon skills or policy that will be learned after the person is hired

## Examples of Situational and Behavioral Questions with Rating Scales

Following the job analysis, interview questions should be developed from behaviors determined during the job analysis to be critical and essential to the performance of the job.

The following examples illustrate situational and behavioral questions and response rating scales. Rating scale development will be discussed later. **(Appendix B includes additional examples of behavioral and followup/probe questions.)**

## Situational Questions

(Source: State of Arizona)

The situation the interviewer is attempting to assess is in bold type.

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

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

### Example Rating Scale:

(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. Assessing **communication skills** at a level needed by many jobs:

**Question:** Suppose you had many projects with rigid deadlines, but your manager kept requesting more paperwork, which you felt was unnecessary. This extra work was going to cause you to miss your deadlines. What would you do?

### Example Rating Scale:

(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. Request assistance. Request extension of deadline.

(1) Do the best I can.

## Behavioral Questions

The **KSA** the interviewer is attempting to assess is in **bold type**.

Assessing **willingness to work at heights** as may be required by many construction jobs:

**Question:** 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.

### Rating Scale:

(5) Gives several examples and mentions heights do not bother me. I have done similar work at heights in the past

(3) Gives at least one example and mentions I am not 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.(No examples given)

## **KSAs and Sample Behavioral Interview Questions**

**KSAs and their definitions are in bold.** Some examples include follow-up and/or probe questions.

**ADAPTABILITY-Maintaining effectiveness in varying environments, tasks and responsibilities, or with various types of people.**

Tell me about a situation in which you have had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it?

Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives.

By providing examples, convince us that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.

**ANALYTICAL SKILLS & PROBLEM SOLVING-Relating and comparing data from different sources identifying issues, securing relevant information, identifying relationships and implementing solutions. The ability to reach logical conclusions, solve problems, analyze factual information, and take action.**

Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities. What was your role?

Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation. To whom did you make the recommendation? What was your reasoning? What kind of thought process did you go through? Why?

Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem. What did you do? What was your thought process? What was the outcome?

**COMMUNICATION-Ability to clearly express ideas verbally or in writing.**

Tell me about a recent successful experience in making a speech or presentation. How did you prepare? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?

Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your classmates or co-workers? Supervisor? How did you do it? Did they accept your idea?

Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in

order to get an important point across. What was the outcome?

Tell me about a situation when you had to convince (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.

**CREATIVITY-Ability to use imagination and originality to create or improve something.**

Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way.  
What was the outcome? Were you and/or your boss happy or satisfied with it?

Give me an example of when someone brought you a new idea that was odd or unusual. What did you do?

**CUSTOMER SERVICE ORIENTATION- efforts to listen to and understand internal and external customer needs and give high priority to customer satisfaction.**

Describe the most difficult internal or external customer service experience that you have ever had to handle-perhaps an angry or irate customer. Be specific and tell what you did and what the outcome was.

**DECISION MAKING-The ability to make a choice from among a number of alternatives; a statement indicating a commitment to a specific course of action.**

Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.  
What obstacles did you face? What did you do?

What is the most difficult decision you've had to make? How did you arrive at your decision? What was the result?

What was your most difficult decision in the last six months? What made it difficult?

What kind of decisions do you make rapidly? What kind takes more time?

What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?

**GOAL SETTING-Ability to define and prioritize objectives according to the intensity, direction and priority of desires or ambitions.**

Give me an example of an important goal which you have set and tell me how you achieved it. What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter?

Tell me about an organizational goal setting process you have participated in. What was your role? What obstacles did you encounter? How did it make you feel?

**INITIATIVE-Making active attempts to influence events to achieve goals. Taking action to achieve goals beyond what is necessarily called for, originating action.**

Describe a project or idea (not necessarily your own) that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?

Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do? What was the result? What do you wish you had done differently?

Tell me about a project you initiated. What did you do? Why? What was the outcome? Were you happy with the result?

Tell me about a time when your initiative caused a positive work process change to occur.

What was the best idea you came up with during your professional or college career? How did you apply it?

**INTEGRITY AND HONESTY-Moral soundness; honesty; freedom from corrupting influence or motive.**

Tell me about a time you demonstrated your trustworthiness at school or at work.

Tell me about a business situation when you felt honesty was inappropriate. Why? What did you do?

Give an example of a policy or directive you conformed to with which you did not agree. Why?

Describe a time when you choose not to follow a policy or directive. What did you do? What was the outcome? What is your definition of business ethics? Provide examples.

**INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND SENSITIVITY-Acting out of consideration for the feelings and needs of others.**

Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How/why was this person difficult? How did you handle it?

Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?

Describe a recent unpopular decision you made. How did you handle it?

Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team with someone you did not get along with. What happened? How did it affect the result?

Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it. What was the outcome? How did you feel about it?

Describe a situation in which you had to work with someone who you found very different in their needs and values. How did you feel about it?

**LEADERSHIP-The ability to significantly affect the thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of a significant number of individuals.**

Give an example of your ability to build motivation in your co-workers, or classmates, volunteer committee members, or subordinates.

Tell me about a team project when you had to take the lead or take charge of the project? What did you do? How did you do it? What was the result?

Describe a leadership role of yours. Why did you commit your time to it?

What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?  
What were the obstacles? How did you handle these? What was the end result?

In a supervisory or group leader role, have you ever had to discipline or counsel an employee or group member? What was the nature of the discipline? What steps did you take? How did that make you feel? What was the outcome?

**MOTIVATION -The ability to combine desire and energy toward achieving a goal.**

Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.

Describe a situation when you were able to have an influence on the actions of others.

Tell me about the situation in the last six months where you worked the hardest.

**PLANNING, ORGANIZING AND MANAGING TIME -Establishing a course of action for**

**yourself and others to accomplish specific goals. Planning proper assignments for personnel and appropriately allocating resources, including your time and that of other people.**

Describe a time when you had multiple projects or assignments due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?

Tell me about a project that you planned. How did you organize and schedule the tasks? Tell me about your action plan.

How do you schedule your time? Set priorities?  
How do you handle doing 20 things at once?

What do you do when your time schedule or project plan is upset by unforeseen circumstances? Give an example.

**STRESS-The ability to use coping skills in order to work efficiently under pressure.**

Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills. What was the outcome? What did you learn from the experience?

**TEAMWORK-The ability to work effectively with others at various levels of the organization (i.e., peers, other units, senior management) to accomplish organizational goals and to identify and resolve problems.**

Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?

Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or help others to compromise. What was your role? What steps did you take? What was the result?

Describe the types of teams you've been involved with. What were your roles?  
Describe a team experience you found rewarding (disappointing). Why?

**TECHNICAL & PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE-Candidate's level of understanding of specific technical and professional information and his/her ability to apply technical and professional skills.**

Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on an assignment.

Give examples of specific accomplishments that demonstrate your mastering of \_\_\_\_\_.

Give an example of how you applied knowledge of \_\_\_\_\_ to a project or assignment.

**WORK STANDARDS-Ability to meet goals or standards of performance, or to set them for subordinates.**

Describe some times when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it? What was the outcome?

Describe specific steps you have taken to improve your performance.

Describe a time when you supervised others or lead a team who did not meet work standards. What did you do? What were the results?

**Interviewing for Entry Level Work**

If you are interviewing for a job which requires no specific experience and/or the applicant pool is likely to include many recent school students, you will have to be a little more creative in obtaining information about job-related potential. Most behavioral questions can be adapted to address non-work achievements. Don't merely ask about grades and favorite courses. Include questions about group activities, special challenges, awards, class projects, research papers, class presentations, personal goals, job interests, and after-school jobs. Also, you might include a few critical job-related knowledge or problem-solving questions.

You will notice that many **behavioral type questions** start with these phrases: “**Tell me about a time you...**” or “**Describe a time when you...**” or “**Give examples of times when you...**” These questions often require the applicant to relate information about specific past experience, involving complex problems, dealing with obstacles, major accomplishments, and working with a variety of people. Your objective is to force the candidate to talk freely about specific situations and describe his or her own actions. Remember, if you ask “textbook” questions you will only get “textbook” answers.

No interview procedure is perfect. By systematically reviewing the job competencies, and writing job-related behavioral questions, you will enable all candidates to do compete equally and enable yourself to make the very best hiring decision based on consistent and relevant criteria possible.

**Developing Rating Scales and Benchmarks**

(Source State of Arizona)

Step three is making a decision 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.

Rating scales should be defined by **benchmarks**. Benchmarks are predictable and/or expected answers to the questions that are linked to the rating scale. These provide a frame of reference for assessing the candidate's responses objectively and consistently. There should usually be at least three levels of answers for each question: superior, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory response.

Use either a three or five point rating scale. Try to define benchmarks for the most commonly expected responses. Benchmarks define the superior, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory answers. To develop benchmarks, using the guide below, describe the answers that fit the different levels of the rating scale.

### **General Guidelines for Developing a Five Point Scale** (5 is highest)

<u>Points</u>	<u>Benchmarks/Scoring Criteria</u>
5	What would one expect or want an outstanding candidate to give as the best possible answer(s)?
3	What are acceptable answers that one would expect a qualified candidate to give?
1	What would one expect as poor answers from a candidate who has little or no knowledge or skill of this job requirement?

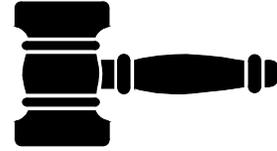
**It is not necessary to describe the 4 or 2 level answers**, because the 5, 3, and 1 answers give adequate anchor points for making a rating decision on any of the levels. The 3-level benchmark is usually the easiest to develop, so try describing that answer first. Example answers should fit the requirements of the job. Superior answers should not far exceed the requirements and unsatisfactory answers should not be so low that they do not distinguish between candidates. Also, avoid making the superior answer a more sophisticated or simply reworded version of the satisfactory answer. Separate benchmarks should be developed for each question since these correlate to specific knowledge or job competencies you want to assess. Organizational jargon, acronyms, and slang should be avoided.

Developing benchmarks also forces evaluation of 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. You should review the questions and the rating scales for clarity, job relatedness, and level of complexity. This provides a "reality check" for your efforts. At this point, you have completed the most difficult parts of developing a good structured interview. As you repeat this process for different vacancies, the process will become easier.

## **LEGALLY CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW AND REFINING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

### **Legal Considerations**

There are many laws which regulate the employment process and many deal with the pre-employment (screening and/or interviewing) phase. A brief discussion of these is warranted due to the potential consequences for an organization and its supervisors. However, these laws will not be discussed in depth and the discussion is not intended nor is to be construed as legal advice; rather the examples presented are intended as informational guidelines. If you need specific assistance contact your agency legal staff or the Division of Personnel Employee Relations Section at 558-3950, ext. 511.



Most supervisors are familiar with some illegal interview questions. The most common illegal interview questions are presented here. However, this is a short refresher and not intended to be all inclusive. Further sources for more detailed information are included for your convenience.

### **Questions That Indicate Illegal Discrimination** (Sources: State of Oklahoma and Curzon, 1995 )

The topics that are off limits in most employment interviews include religion, national origin, race, marital status, parental status, age, disability, sex, political affiliation, military status, 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 resource. These topics, and others, are addressed in the Division of Personnel management training class, Managing and the Law, and on the DOP website under Significant Statutes and Case Law (<http://www.state.wv.us/admin/personnel/emprel/default.htm>)

#### **Marital/Parental Status**

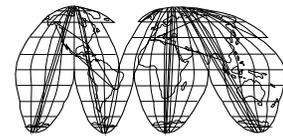
Do not inquire about marital or parental status, including pregnancy, number or age of children, or information about child care arrangements. You may ask if the candidate can meet certain work schedules, but this question must be asked of both males and females.

Typical questions to avoid:

- 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)

#### **National Origin**

You may 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 only if it is job-related, but



not whether it is the person's first language.

You may ask if the candidate goes by other names. When checking a candidate's references, knowing former names and nicknames can be important. 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 a work permit.

### Religion, Schools, and Organizations

Do not ask any questions related to religion. Advise all candidates of the working schedule of the job and verify that they are able to work those hours. You may not ask if the work schedule 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.



### Criminal Records

Do not inquire about arrests. You may, however, explore criminal convictions if they are job-related. For positions in which there are security risks to vulnerable populations, money, or property, you should **always** do a formal criminal background check. **Never depend on the interview to obtain this vital information.** All applicants should be informed that authorization for release and completion of background inquiries are part of the hiring process for the position. This topic will be discussed in more detail later in this resource.

### Military Status

It is illegal to discriminate based on current or potential future military obligations. You may ask about education and experience during military service, but do not inquire or ask about military status or 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. Only the most basic guidelines are covered in this portion of the manual.

**Note: You should ask ALL potential candidates these questions when setting up interview appointments: Do you need any reasonable accommodation to participate in the interview? If so, what type?**

For comprehensive guidance, see the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ADA Enforcement Guidance on Preemployment Disability-related Questions at [www.eeoc.gov/ada/adadocs/html](http://www.eeoc.gov/ada/adadocs/html). (for additional advice, see Appendix C, excerpt from ADA Compliance Guide, Appendix D, ADA and Disability Assistance Organizations and Appendix E, Tips for Interviewing Disabled Candidates.)

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 duties.



### **A Final Word on Unlawful Questions**

During the course of an interview, many candidates will innocently divulge personal information which the interviewer(s) cannot legally address. Some of this information can be quite intriguing. Even so, the interviewer(s) should **never** encourage such disclosure or comment on the information. While such voluntary disclosures do not invalidate the interview, the interviewer(s) should cordially ignore all non-job related information and immediately redirect the interviewee back to the prepared questions. For example, an interviewee tells you she just had twins. Don't ask her how she manages to work and take care of two babies. If she is not chosen for the position, the candidate may allege discrimination based on your seemingly innocent comment. To minimize liability, interviewers should receive legal issues training prior to conducting interviews.

### **Interview Overview and Preparation**

(Source State of North Dakota)

Interviewers must prepare well for the interview and prepare well in advance of the interview. Several decisions must be made prior to the interview. How many people will interview the candidates? Will the initial interview be used for screening of viable candidates for a second hiring interview? Or, will the initial interview be used to hire a suitable candidate? What are the perils of the interview process? What are some tips for better interviewing? How will the candidates' answers be documented and scored? How long must the documents be kept? If these issues are not decided prior to the interview, the selection process will be flawed and at risk of legal challenge.

It is recommended that, whenever possible, interviewers use the panel approach. Using an interview panel can improve interview validity and reliability. The supervisor over the vacant position should be included on the panel. Two heads are better than one and three heads are the ideal number for a structured interview panel.



A chairperson must be chosen to keep the process orderly, legal, on track, and to ensure that

candidates completely answer the questions. The panel should be composed of various races and genders. This may reduce the potential for bias and increase the chance of a more diverse workforce. 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 should be more consistency in the ratings of candidates. Training the interviewers will increase consistency.

Structured interviews require a great deal of focus and concentration, good note taking, consistent application of questions, scoring each candidate's answers, making a hiring decision, and maintaining good documentation of the process. All interviewer(s) should have a copy of the interview form (which has structured interview questions and rating scale), job description and candidate rating form. Panelists should meet ten to fifteen minutes prior to the candidate's arrival to review the structured interview procedure to be followed for all candidates. One panelist may ask all the questions, or they may be divided among panelists. During the interview, panelists should stick to the script (the questions listed on interview form), asking the structured questions, recording the candidate's responses for each question, and asking probing or follow-up questions only when needed to clarify the candidate's answers. (Source Oklahoma) **(See Appendix B)**

If a panel cannot be assembled, the same preparation and structured interview techniques can be successfully applied to individual, one-on-one, interviews, but reliability may not be as good.

### **Note Taking Tips** (Sources: State of Oklahoma & Advantage Hiring Newsletter Feb. 2000)

The candidate should be informed that notes will be taken. Explain that taking notes will help interviewers document the candidate's knowledge, skills, and abilities. Taking good notes is extremely important in conducting a structured interview. This is your best opportunity to gather and document relevant job-related information about the candidates. 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. Taking notes requires interviewers to pay close attention to the candidate's answers, organize their thoughts, and justify their ratings. It also increases accuracy and consistency, a distinct legal advantage over unstructured interviews.



Panel members should use an interview guide/form **(See Appendix F)** to record their notes. A new interview form (structured interview questions and rating scale) should be used by each panel member for each candidate. In order to be less distracting to the candidates, some interviewers choose to place the interview form on a clipboard and hold the clipboard on their laps rather than taking notes on the table or desk.

One problem you may run into is that the candidate may be distracted by note taking. Politeness may cause the candidate to stop talking every time the interviewer(s) begin to write. You may have to tell the candidate to proceed with his answers. It is impossible to take verbatim notes.

Sometimes an interviewer may only need to jot down a word or two on the form.

Don't make any notes about the applicant or the applicant's responses that could be considered discriminatory or illegal

Don't make notes about how an applicant looks even if it's just to remember who's who. Don't make any notes about gender, race, religion, color, or age.

For example, a white male applicant for a receptionist job comes to the interview in a coat and tie. An African American female shows up in torn jeans and a T-shirt. It is legal not to hire the African American female because of her clothing choice. But the reason for rejecting that particular applicant should **factually** describe that "the applicant appeared for the interview in torn jeans and a T-shirt."

The documentation should not be an open-ended statement that the female was rejected because she "did not have the proper appearance". That statement could easily be interpreted to mean that she was rejected due to race or gender.

### Common Interview Pitfalls

(Source: State of Oklahoma)

It is important that individual interviewers and those participating on an interview panel become aware of these common personal behaviors and strive to avoid them:

- **Halo Effect**  
Forming an overall favorable impression of a candidate based upon his/her responses to only one or two questions.
- **Leniency Effect or Stringency Effect**  
The tendency to give all candidates a high or low rating.
- **Central Tendency Effect**  
The tendency to rate all candidates in the middle of the rating scale.
- **Warm Body Syndrome**  
The tendency to hire someone, anyone, as soon as possible.
- **Oversell**  
The tendency to enhance the realities of the job to snag a well qualified candidate.
- **Friendship Factor**  
The tendency to rely heavily upon personal references of your friends.
- **Memory Fade**  
Recollection of the first candidate and the rest seem like a blur.
- **Unfairness to the First Up**

Recognizing potential pitfalls is the first step towards correcting them.

Research by Robert Half International has shown that the first person interviewed is least likely to get the job. Use the same objective criteria for all candidates.

- **Talking Too Much (80/20 rule)**  
The tendency of the interviewer(s) to talk more than the candidate. *Your goal is to solicit information about the candidate.* As a rule, the interviewer(s) should talk no more than 20% of the time; the candidate should talk at least 80% of the time.
- **Rescuing**  
Often, there will be periods of silence from a candidate. Interviewer(s) are tempted to “rescue” the candidate by filling the silence with conversation or trying to answer the question for the candidate. In reality, the candidate may be using the silence to gather his thoughts and frame his answer. Be patient and resist the urge to talk.
- **Personal Bias**  
The tendency to allow non job-related prejudices and attitudes about cultural stereotypes, lifestyles, personalities, appearances, or other irrelevant perceptions to affect the rating of candidate responses.
- **Attractive Person Bias**  
The tendency to select attractive people regardless of qualifications.
- **Personal Similarity Bias**  
The tendency to rate individuals with interests, background, or experiences that are similar to the interviewer’s more favorably than other applicants.
- **Good Interview Bias**  
The tendency to hire someone who can express themselves well or interview well.

### **How to Avoid Rating Errors**

- Focus on only one question (behavior or competency) 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 scale benchmarks, and rate solely on that comparison.
- **Do not compare the candidates between interviews; this step will be taken after all interviews are completed.**

### **During the interview:**

### 1. Establish rapport.



- Greet the applicant with a pleasant smile, firm handshake, and a casual statement or two. Outline the interview objectives and structure. For example, say "In the time we have, I would like to...." The interview room should be quiet, comfortable, free of distractions and interruptions, and the seating arrangements should not present barriers. The candidate should be seated so that all interviewer(s) can see him/her clearly. The interviewer or chairperson should explain the process, including the note-taking and the schedule.
2. **Briefly and carefully give information about your agency and even "sell" the position.**
- Tell the candidate an opportunity will be provided to answer questions after the interview. If you tell the applicants exactly what you're looking for first, they can adapt their answers to fit what they perceive as your needs.
3. **Gather information by using structured behavioral questions.**
- Stick to the scripted questions. Only deviate when necessary to ask follow-up questions to ensure complete information is gathered.

**The interview panel chairperson should ensure that the candidate completely answers each question asked by having him/her describe the Situation or Task, Actions she/he took, and the Results. This is known as the STAR ★ method.**

4. **Allow a few minutes for candidate to ask questions about the job or the agency.**
- Ask "Do you have any questions for us?" This is the appropriate time to satisfy the candidate's curiosity. Be **careful and honest** in answering an applicant's questions; resist the temptation to oversell. You have to give applicants information that keeps their interest in working for you high. Giving applicants a false sense of what to expect is foolhardy; applicants have been disappointed and left an agency as soon as another opportunity presented itself.
5. **If appropriate, have candidates complete reference release and reference request forms so you can check references. (See Appendix G)**
6. **Close the interview.**
- Thank the candidate for his or her attention and interest. Close the interview with an open-ended question such as: "Is there anything else you want us to know about you?" In closing the interview, explain the notification process again, even if you did it earlier. Indicate what the next step will be and the time frame within which it will occur; approximately when the hiring decision will be made and how applicants will be notified.

**After the interview:**

### 1. Evaluate your notes and expand them.

- **Immediately** after the candidate is dismissed, while impressions are fresh and recall is good, the interviewer(s) should expand their notes.
- Remember that your notes are permanent records which are subject to discovery (can be obtained by opposing legal counsel if a candidate and/or employee files a lawsuit). It is imperative that your notes do not contain anything that could be construed as discriminatory or inappropriate. Complete an evaluation form or firm up your notes, noting specific information about the candidate wherever possible.



### 2. Rate each candidate individually immediately after the interview.

- Do not discuss and/or compare the candidates with other members of the panel between interviews. This is crucial to ensure the objectiveness of the process.

### 3. Compare candidates against each other when the final evaluation is done.

## Interview Scoring and Documentation

### Evaluating the Candidate

(Source State of Oklahoma)

Raters should independently take brief notes regarding a candidate's answers to each question as it is given. **Raters should independently score each question during the interview.** When one interview has concluded, raters should give themselves ample time, at least ten to fifteen minutes, before beginning the next interview to complete their interview notes.

### Final Interview Score Rating

After the interviews have been completed, the panel should **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 answers. **All raters should be no more than one point away from all other raters' scores.** 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.

It is important that the criteria for making a hiring recommendation be consistent with the posting or job advertisement. 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.

### Equally Weighted Scores

(Source State of Oklahoma)

**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 five-point rating scale in which all the questions were weighted equally (total possible points equaled 50): 43, 40, 38. The average of the three scores and the candidate's final interview score is 40.33. Round final scores to ignore small differences; in this example, the final score would be rounded to 40. Scores carried out to one or two decimal places attempt to show differences that don't really exist. If two candidates final scores are tied, the chairperson may ask the panel to review their scores and to revise them if desired or to repeat the scoring process until the tie is broken.

## Differential Weighting

If a decision is made to use differential weighting, you may want to identify those questions which address critical competencies and put them first on the interview form. If candidates fail to meet acceptable rating standards on these questions, close the interview. These candidates would be rejected. This only works when a thorough job analysis has been performed; these questions must be very job-related and not ask for competencies the incumbent would be expected to learn later on the job. Again, this shows the importance of a good job analysis and development of good questions based upon the job analysis.

## Documentation Retention

(Source State of Oklahoma)

As mentioned before, it is essential to document during the interview. Take a few minutes after the interview to refine your notes and make final ratings. **(See Appendix F)**

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 for **two years, unless legal action has been taken, then the documents must be retained until two years after exhaustion of all legal remedies.**

For external and internal candidates *not* selected, agencies should 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 the hiring or personnel action are pending.

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
- Credentials and experience that qualifies interviewer
- Interview scores of the candidates
- Training provided to the interviewers as well as their background in selection interviewing
- Interview format, interview guides, rating scales and criteria, and other

materials used by interviewers (Outerbridge, 1994)

## **Reference Checks** (Source State of Vermont)

Before any offer of employment is extended, the hiring supervisor should conduct a reference check on the final candidate(s). Candidates should be notified that a reference check will be done and that the information will be used in making the final hiring decision. The candidate should sign an authorization/release form prior to conducting any reference check. **(See Appendix G, Sample Release Forms from WVDOP Policy 9, Securing and Providing Employment Reference Information)**

The hiring supervisor is often between a "rock and a hard place" when it comes to reference checks. In many cases, it is difficult to get any information from former employers. Phone reference checking is usually quicker and sometimes yields more candid information. To facilitate a uniform structured approach and create an easy means of record keeping, it is a good idea to use a standard reference form. It should include: your name, date, name of applicant, position applied for, name, title and organization of the reference, and the questions you will ask about the applicant. **(See Appendix G, Sample Reference Request Form from WVDOP Policy 9, Securing and Providing Employment Reference Information)**

**If you get no other response, determine whether the previous employer would rehire the applicant you are considering.**

## **Criminal Background Check (Fingerprint Card)**

Jobs with a higher degree of unsupervised contact with an employer's clients, especially minor children or other vulnerable populations; or jobs where money or credit cards or blank checks are handled; and jobs in law enforcement require stringent background checks. You are required by law to perform a criminal record search before hiring any applicant for a job that requires entry into either client's homes (such as social workers); entrustment of customers or clients into the custody of employees; (such as child-care workers, mental health facility workers, correctional officers, teachers or counselors); or handling a weapon (law enforcement officer).

Background checks must always be tailored to the specific job requirements. Whenever an applicant lists a felony criminal conviction on the employment application, follow up with the applicant to determine the nature and dates of the conviction and conduct a criminal record search to confirm this information. Do not assume that if the applicant is honest enough to list a conviction that he or she has divulged the actual crime(s).

If the results of a criminal background check reveal a criminal record (conviction), consult with legal counsel before hiring or rejecting the applicant to determine the candidate's fitness for the job in question, in light of the conviction.

## **Assessing Candidate's Work Style Preferences and Compatibility**

Have you ever wondered why some people you hire become long-term employees while others are circulating résumés after just a couple of months? Maybe it's not just the people. Maybe it's

a conflict between their **work personality** and work environment preferences and those of your agency/unit. Every organization has a distinct work environment. Likewise, every applicant has a distinct work personality. They want a job they can enjoy and feel passionate about.

When hiring, it's important to keep your agency's work environment in mind. If the agency expects a certain type of behavior and the candidate's work style is vastly different, he will be frustrated on the job, will clash with others and will eventually leave the agency or be terminated. **In order to gauge compatibility, you must be honest about what your department/unit really expects.** Keep in mind that none of the candidates may perfectly match with your department's work environment. It is possible that a candidate is seeking employment because his current work environment is incompatible with his work style preferences.



Find a job you'll love  
and you will never  
work another day  
in your life.

During the job interview, ask structured questions that will help you determine whether or not the candidate is a good work style to work environment match. Here are two examples:

**1. What work hours do you typically maintain? What hours work best for you?**

If the candidate professes to like regular hours such as 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and your work environment expects employees to work earlier than 9 a.m. or later than 5 p.m., perhaps it isn't a good match.

**2. Tell me about jobs you have had and what you liked and did not like about the work environment or work style of the organization.**

The candidate may respond that she enjoys working with people and prefers to work on projects in a team environment, but not in a lead role. She tells you that she likes brainstorming with others and then partnering with someone to work on the project.

Your work environment requires both team work and working alone. The work also requires that people be individually accountable for their projects, and to eventually assume the team leader role for one or more teams.

Depending upon the attributes of the other candidates, you may decide to hire her and provide leadership training and/or mentoring. Or, if you discover a candidate who has worked in a similar environment to your agency's, you may decide not to hire the aforementioned one.

Granted, a candidate may give you an answer he thinks you want to hear. So phrase questions in a way that doesn't give away the answer. Better yet, ask the candidate to describe how he would and/or has handled a situation, allowing more insight into individual preferences.

A candidate may decide not to work for a state agency when his work style and work environment preferences do not match the agency's. This can **only** happen if both of you are honest about the work environment, expectations, and preferences. The candidate who declines the position for work style reasons is doing both you and him/herself a favor.

## **A Word About Diversity**

State agency interviewers must always be aware of the value of building a **diverse workforce**. Interviewers must guard against the natural tendency to favor candidates who are similar to themselves. Such a hiring strategy can stifle the introduction of diverse points of view and undermine service to a diverse client population. As managers, we must continually think about the need for fairness in the selection process and the necessity for change in our agencies. For most organizations, **diversity involves creating an inclusive organization where the differences of all people are respected, valued and utilized towards achieving common goals.** Differences people bring to the work environment include race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, geographic background, education, economic background and thinking and communication styles. Selecting diverse candidates to fill vacancies introduces the potential for change; challenges us to change our perceptions and be more open, flexible, and inclusive. Diversity can enrich and strengthen our organizations. Diversity has many benefits: differing perspectives can generate new ideas, improve communication and innovation, and propel organizational growth and development.

The State of West Virginia is strongly committed to recruit, select, develop, and promote employees based on individual merit. We continually seek to build and maintain a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of our state. **All** selection processes, including **interviews**, must be based on fairness, open competition and a commitment to diversity.



### **Final Candidate Selection Considerations**

As interviewers, we need to consider these factors in making the final selection:

- the final scores of the candidates determined by the structured behavioral interview
- the results of reference checking for the candidates
- compatibility of the candidate's work style and work environment preferences with the agency's work environment and expectations

Once references have been checked, it is a matter of evaluating all your information and making a final decision. There is no easy recipe for making a hiring decision. The interviewer or interview panel must use the data gathered and use sound judgment:

- Be certain that your decision to hire is based entirely on **job-related** information
- Have a **good reason** for hiring the person you select (not a bad reason for not hiring someone else)
- Be prepared to explain and defend how you came to your decision

Rarely do the results of your interview process lead you to the one "perfect" candidate. Invariably it comes down to a tough choice between two (or more) people with different strengths. The cardinal rule is to have a good (job-related) reason for hiring the person you select. Don't be caught in the trap of explaining to a rejected candidate why you didn't hire him or her.

## Evaluating the Interview Process

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 it on trusted supervisors and incumbents. They may be able to provide constructive criticism about details that might have been overlooked by the interview panel. The panel may suggest desired improvements.

### Three Compelling Reasons to Adopt a Structured Behavioral Interviewing Program:

1. **Validity and Reliability.** Properly conducted behavioral interviews more accurately predict a candidate's potential for success.

The questions are designed to evaluate competencies that **have been shown through a job analysis** to be required for successful job performance.

Interviewers follow a structured format, including standardized questions and objective rating scales. This increases reliability and consistency.

2. **Reduced Legal Risk.** Behavioral interviews may prevent discrimination and legal challenges.

Properly designed and administered interview programs comply with federal statutes, government regulations, and guidelines regarding fair employment and labor practices.

Candidates perceive that behavioral interview questions are fair and more readily see the job-relatedness (relevancy) of interview questions.

Interviewer biases based on prejudices relating to ethnicity, gender, and other irrelevant factors are less likely to influence hiring decisions. The standardized interview questions and the objective rating procedures keep the interview focused on important job-related competencies.

3. **Structured behavioral interviews can help an agency increase the size and depth of its applicant pool.**

A behavioral interview can help managers evaluate candidates who have little or no traditional work experience. This can be especially useful in a tight job market when employers must become creative to fill open positions. Candidates are not limited by job experiences when answering behavioral interview questions. For example, most people have had opportunities in their lives, regardless of their work history, to demonstrate important competencies such as initiative, teamwork, communication, and flexibility.

## CONCLUSION

This resource is designed to assist hiring authorities of the State agencies of West Virginia in conducting more effective and legally sound interviews. A completely structured interview using behavioral questions and a trained panel of interviewers 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 West Virginia Division of Personnel recommends the use of as many of the components of a structured interview as possible. Remember, you are not just selecting someone to fill a vacancy; you are managing your agency's human capital for the future.

Using these interview tools should reduce the interviewer's frustration, legal risks, and staff turnover. We encourage you to apply some of these techniques in your next interview. You will be amazed at how much more confident you will be. Your hiring decisions may yield better quality employees, increased workforce diversity, and long-term organizational performance improvement.

We realize this resource contains a great deal of information. If you have questions or need assistance in any critical hiring situation please contact the Division of Personnel at 558-3950, ext. 511 .

It's up to you.



Take the Quiz

Tryout your new structured interviewing knowledge by taking the **Quiz**.

It's short, fun and thought provoking. See this DOP Web site link:

<http://www.state.wv.us/admin/personnel/emprel/toolbox/quiz/interview.htm>.

## APPENDIX A

### Checklist for Developing a Structured Interview

- **Gather available job information.** (specifications, position descriptions, posting, performance standards, sample work products, job materials, etc.)
- **Conduct job analysis.** Review job information. Consult with other job experts, supervisors, experienced workers on critical job behaviors and competencies.
- **List Important Job Competencies and Job Behaviors.** List those that distinguish better from average workers.
- **Write open-ended situational and behavioral questions.** Questions should elicit facts and force the candidate to describe his or her accomplishments. (Recall STAR method)
- **Prepare benchmark responses.** Define 3 rating scale levels (Best, Satisfactory, Unacceptable). How would you expect an excellent or poor candidate respond?
- **Review and revise questions and benchmarks.** Do the questions require candidates to describe past behaviors? Try out questions on non-candidate workers. **Finalize.**
- **Select a panel.** If more than one interviewer is used, select panel members that are familiar with the work and representative of race, sex, national origin, and other diverse workforce factors.
- **Train interviewers.** Include: job requirements, questions, benchmarks, rating scales, conducting the interview, and rater error. Also train in legal compliance and discrimination prevention. If a single interviewer is used, training may consist of a review of the above items.
- **Schedule interviews.** Determine time and place. Allow ½ to 1 hour with 15 minutes between to complete rater notes and score interview. Time needed will vary with job complexity and level. Do not allow interruptions during the interviews.
- **Consistently document all candidates' responses.** Use a Rating Form. Take good notes. In panel interviews, monitor and discuss any large inconsistencies in ratings.
- **Administer the process consistently to all candidates.** Every candidate must be asked all questions and receive equal treatment.
- **Document all decisions.** Can you defend the ratings and selection? We recommend that all formal rating records be kept for two years.
- **Select the “best” candidate.** Score the candidates' interviews. You have just conducted the most job-related and fairest interview assessment possible.
- **Evaluate the process.** Document any planned enhancements for future interviews.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Additional Examples Of Behavioral And Follow-up Questions**

#### **Behavioral Questions**

Below are questions designed to learn about an applicant's behavior for various **Knowledge, Skills, Abilities (KSAs)** and for various types of jobs. The questions address different work experience levels. Some are more appropriate for the recent college graduate who has little or no experience while others work better for candidates who have work experience.

#### **Event Planning**

Describe situations when you organized meetings, banquets, conferences (specify types of event) on short notice. What were the results? How did you feel? What would you do differently?

#### **Creativity**

Describe the most creative work-related project you have done. What was the outcome?

#### **Customer Service**

Describe one recent success you had in dealing with an unhappy (fill in the blank-client, vendor, patient, external customer, etc.). How did you accomplish this? What was the key to your success?

#### **Courage**

Describe the most unpopular stand you have taken. What was the result? How did you feel?

#### **Flexibility - With Management**

Describe a time when you had to respond quickly to a vague and unreasonable assignment. What did you do? What was the outcome?

Describe a situation when you had to take on new tasks or roles. What did you do? What were the results? How did you feel?

Describe a time when you were pulled off a project before you could complete it and assigned to another project. What did you do? How did you feel?

#### **Flexibility - With Coworker**

Describe a time when it was necessary for you to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of a coworker. What did you do? What motivated you to change? What was the outcome?

#### **Negotiation**

Describe a time when you were assigned a task that was much more appropriate for a coworker to perform. What did you do? What were the results?

#### **Time Management**

Describe a time when you began a new job and there was no training provided and no time to be trained. What did you do to become proficient in the job? How did you feel about this situation?

## **APPENDIX B (Continued)**

### **Behavioral Questions**

#### **Gaining Cooperation**

Tell us about some situations when you have had to get cooperation from (fill in the blank-coworkers, team members, supervisors, etc.). What did you do? How would you describe the outcomes?

#### **Technical Communication**

Describe some of the strategies and techniques you have used to communicate technical information to a wide variety of people with differing experience and education levels. What were the outcomes?

#### **Leadership Skills - Difficult Employees**

Describe the types of employees you find most difficult to manage. What actions have you taken to improve your management skills in dealing with them? What were the outcomes?

#### **Leadership Skills - Complex Training**

Describe a situation when you have trained employees in complex procedures. How did you do it? What were the results? What did you learn from this?

#### **Work Environment/Style Preferences**

Describe the characteristics of the best boss you have worked for. How was this rewarding for you?

Describe the best job you've ever had. What factors made it the "best" for you?

Describe the types of situations, people, and work assignments which energize you. How do you stay energized when you must work under opposite conditions?

#### **Analytical Skills**

Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures. What was the outcome?

#### **Quick Thinking**

Describe a time when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation. What did you do and how did it work?

#### **Self-management**

Describe a difficult situation when you had to maintain a positive attitude. How did you accomplish this?

#### **Public Relations**

Describe a time when you had to deal with the media, taxpayers, and legislators regarding a controversial agency action. What was the outcome?

**APPENDIX B (Continued)**  
**Acceptable Probes / Follow-up Questions**

What steps did you take?  
What action did you take?  
What happened after that?  
What did you say?  
How did he/she react?  
How did you handle that?  
What was your reaction?  
How did you feel about that?  
What was the outcome/result?  
Were you happy with that outcome/result?  
What do you wish you had done differently?  
What did you learn from that?  
How did you resolve that?  
What was the outcome of that?  
Why did you decide to do that?  
What was your logic?  
What was your reasoning?  
Where were you when this happened?  
What time was it?  
Who else was involved?  
Tell me more about your interaction with that person.  
What was your role?  
What obstacles did you face?  
What were you thinking at that point?  
Lead me through your decision process.  
How did you prepare for that?

**Note:** Use a follow-up only when you need additional job related information, need to clarify the information given by the candidate, or think the candidate misunderstood the question.

## APPENDIX C ADA Compliance Guide

Excerpt from ADA Enforcement Guidance: Preemployment Disability-Related Questions and Medical Examinations Issued by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 10/10/95 The entire publication may be found at the EEOC web site in both html and pdf formats.

**See web sites for an exhaustive list of disability related questions for legal guidance and compliance. Examples include what can and cannot be asked regarding drug use, performance tests, reasonable accommodation, and much, much more.**

<http://www.eeoc.gov/>

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/compliance.html>

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/guidance.html>

### **Sample Guidance:**

#### **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.”

## **APPENDIX D**

### **ADA And Disability Assistance Organizations**

The following agencies provide information and technical assistance regarding employment of people with disabilities..

#### **West Virginia Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator**

W. V. Department of Administration  
Penney Hall  
Capitol Complex  
Building 1, Room 127E  
Charleston, WV 25305  
Phone: (304) 558-1783      Fax: (304) 558-2999  
Email: Phall@wvadmin.gov

#### **West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services**

State Capitol Complex  
P.O. Box 50890  
Charleston, WV 25305-0890  
Phone: (304) 766-4601  
Internet: <http://www.wvdrs.org/>

#### **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**

**West Virginia University** (in collaboration with the  
U. S. D. O. L. Office of Disability and Employment Policy)  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Phone: (800) 526-7234  
TDD: (800) 526-7234  
Fax: (304) 293-5407  
Email: [jan@jan.icdi.wvu.edu](mailto:jan@jan.icdi.wvu.edu)  
Internet: <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>

#### **The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/compliance.html>  
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission  
1801 L Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20507  
Phone: (202) 663-4900  
TTY: (202) 663-4494

You can be automatically connected to your nearest Field Office by calling:

Phone: 1-800-669-4000  
TTY: 1-800-669-6820

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Tips For Interviewing Disabled Candidates**

Occasionally, you may encounter candidates who have obvious disabilities, such as being in a wheel chair, and other candidates whose disabilities are less obvious. Interviewers often are unsure about how to interact with these candidates. The following tips may help:

#### **DO Prior to the interview:**

- Ask **all** candidates if they need reasonable accommodation to participate in the interview. If so, what type?
- If the person requests accommodation (such as sign language interpreter, materials in Braille, etc.) make arrangements.
- Inform candidates of the handicap accessibility of your facility. If your facility is not handicap accessible, make arrangements to have the interview in a setting that is, or use common sense to make adjustments. For example, if your facility does not have an elevator and interviews are usually held in the second floor conference room, use a first floor office. Ensure that an interview facility is accessible to people with disabilities.
- Inform applicants of any special parking available.
- Allow applicants at least a full day to prepare for your interview.

#### **During the interview:**

- Identify the essential functions of the job.
- Make eye contact with interviewees.
- Greet the applicant as you would any other applicant. If the applicant is unable to shake hands, do not attempt to do so.
- Talk directly to the applicant—not to an interpreter or a personal assistant.
- After the initial greeting, sit down so that a person who uses a wheelchair can easily make eye contact.
- Ask about the person's ability to perform the job with or without reasonable accommodation.

#### **DON'T**

- Lean on an applicant's wheelchair.
- Shout or raise your voice to a person who is hearing impaired.
- Touch or talk to a seeing-eye dog or an assistant animal.
- Ask about a person's disability history.
- Ask about prior workers' compensation claims.
- Ask how the person became disabled.
- Ask how a person is going to get to work.
- Ask for a medical exam, unless all candidates are required to have a medical exam that is essential to the job function.

**APPENDIX F**  
**Sample Candidate Evaluation Form**

**Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Position Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Panel:** \_\_\_ Y \_\_\_ N  
**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**5, 3, 1 (5 is highest)**

<b>KSA and/or Question (List)*</b>	<b>Comments: (Be specific; support your rating)</b>	<b>Initial Rating</b>	<b>Final Rating</b>
Question 1			
Question 2			
Question 3			
Question 4			
Question 5			
Question 6			
Question 7			
Question 8			
Question 9			
<b>Average of Candidate's Ratings</b>			

**Initial Rating** (As scored by individual rater)

**Final Rating** (After panel discussion & consensus)

\* Evaluation forms can vary in format. You could rate each question, or rate each competency from which the questions are derived. In that case, the questions could be on a separate sheet.

\*\*If weighting is used, note formula here or attach separate sheet.

## APPENDIX F (Continued)

### Sample Interview Question Guide/Form

**This shows an example form with one question per page and response benchmarks.**

Candidate's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewer's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Panel: \_\_\_\_ Y \_\_\_\_ N  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Competency: Ability to take charge of a project, initiate actions, demonstrate responsibility.

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

Notes \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

To score place a check next to the rating scale value

- \_\_\_\_ 5) Superior  
 Responsible for initiating and completing several major projects or developments.  
 Candidate describes how projects were accomplished and the results.
- \_\_\_\_ 3) Satisfactory  
 Responsible for initiating and completing a few major projects or developments.  
 Candidate describes how projects were accomplished and the results.
- \_\_\_\_ 1) Unsatisfactory  
 Worked on projects, but had no part in their initiation or responsibility for their completion.  
 Candidate describes how projects were accomplished and the results.

If question is weighted, describe how or indicate formula used:

**APPENDIX G**  
**Sample Reference Release**

TO: (Name of former employer/educational institution, etc.)  
(Mailing address)  
ATTENTION:

BY: (Applicant's name)

I am being considered for employment with the **(Department/Division name)**, State of West Virginia. As a condition for further employment consideration, I have consented to an initial screening conducted by them.

The **(Department/Division name)** may request all information it deems relevant to my eligibility to hold such a position from the above named person or firm which has been given by me as a reference. Further, I authorize the listed reference to disclose to the **(Department/Division name)** the appropriate responses to the attached questions. I authorize all former employers, educational institutions, governmental entities, or persons to release all legally permissible information in their possession which may be related to me to the **(Department/Division name)**.

I hereby waive any privilege of confidentiality with respect to any such information.

A photocopy of this authorization shall be considered as effective and valid as the original and shall remain on file at the **(Department/Division name)**. Please provide the requested information within 10 days of the date of this letter so that I may receive further consideration for which I am applying.

**SIGNATURE** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX G (Continued)**  
**Sample Reference Request**

TO: {Name/Company}  
 {Mailing Address}  
 {Attention: }

RE: {Name of Applicant}

The individual named above has applied for employment with the **{Department/Division name}** as a **{job title/position classification}** and has given your name/company as a contact for an employment reference.

**1. How are you acquainted with the applicant?**

\_\_\_\_\_ As a current or former employer (Please complete parts 2 and 4).

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please complete parts 3 and 4).

**2. If supervisor or employer, please provide the following information.**

a. Dates of employment: FROM \_\_\_\_\_ TO \_\_\_\_\_

b. Position for which initially employed: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Last position held: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Description of job duties and responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

e. Reason individual left your employment:

To accept other employment

Dismissed

Resigned

Other (please specify)

Resigned under threat of disciplinary action \_\_\_\_\_

f. Is individual still employed: YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

g. Please have completed by immediate supervisor if (s)he is still employed, or by personnel office, if supervisor is no longer with company.

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Quality of work	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Quantity of work	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Attendance & punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
_____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
_____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Please comment on any rating of "Poor," and feel free to comment on any area rated better than "Average." Comments may be made on a separate sheet or on the reverse side of this letter.

h. Would you re-employ: YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_  
 If no, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Other: Academic/Volunteer/Work Reference**

a. Dates you have known applicant: FROM \_\_\_\_\_ TO \_\_\_\_\_

b. How were you associated with the applicant (teacher, volunteer coordinator)?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

c. Based on the association you have had with the applicant, please describe the characteristics of the applicant which, in your opinion, you think would help him/her succeed in this position or would be an asset to this agency should an employment offer be made.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

d. Please complete the following if you have had sufficient opportunity to observe and evaluate the applicant.

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Quality of work	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Quantity of work	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Attendance & punctuality	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Conduct	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
_____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
_____	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

**4. Completed by:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone Number : \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED INFORMATION TO:**

- {Department/Division Name}
- {Mailing Address}
- {Attention: }

To ensure confidentiality, you may use the enclosed pre-addressed envelope.

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