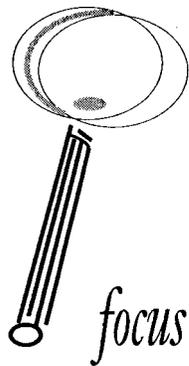


# 1

## Interviewing Basics



### Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the objectives for 12 different types of business-related interviews.
- Prepare for every type of interview.
- Describe the five stages of an interview.

### INTRODUCTION

Whether you're an HR professional or a non-HR practitioner whose job requires interaction with applicants and employees, this course will help you determine those situations that are best handled via interviews, as well as identify those skills needed to achieve interviewing success. We'll begin with some interviewing basics, such as identifying 12 types of interviews, how to prepare for them, and what distinguishes their different stages. Then we'll examine some of the legal implications of interviewing, identify different questioning techniques, and learn how to get the most out of every interview. Finally, after closely examining 12 specific applicant-related, employee-related, and assessment interviews, we'll look at techniques for dealing effectively with different interviewee types.

During a typical day in any business setting there are numerous work-related issues directly concerning employees. These include hiring the most productive workers, coaching employees so that they feel challenged, providing employees with positive feedback and constructive criticism, settling grievance complaints, and resolving disciplinary problems. Did you know that these and many other employee-related situations are best handled

through effective interviewing, and that ineffective interviewing can actually intensify existing problems and possibly result in new problems? It's true: Effective interviewing skills can make any work environment a more productive, motivating place in which to work.

While there are many different types of interviews, each with its own specific objective, all interviews share one common goal: to acquire information as it relates to a specific end and then to use that information to make a decision. Information is acquired during an interview via a question-and-answer format, thus distinguishing it from a meeting or a casual conversation.

Let's look at some of the situations that call for an interview during an average workday. Consider this hectic yet typical day for Samantha Allenby, the HR director for a mid-sized firm. Her e-mail includes a request for a meeting from a marketing department employee with a complaint about the company's policy on personal days. Clicking on her personal information manager, she notes her schedule for the day: two appointments with applicants interested in the accountant's opening, and a three-way meeting with the public relations manager and a customer service representative to review the employee's excessive absenteeism. In addition, she needs to call about references on three candidates under consideration for the compensation analyst's position, and she anticipates a number of calls in response to the advertisement she placed for a secretary in administration.

On this particular day, then, Samantha will probably conduct ten or more interviews: She will interview the marketing employee about his grievance, the accounting applicants, the manager and employee with the disciplinary problem, former employers about references, and candidates for the secretarial position. That's quite a heavy schedule, but manageable if Samantha applies sound interviewing skills.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

If you were to track someone from the time they expressed an interest in working for a company through their termination, you would observe numerous interviewing opportunities. Consider Jordan Saunders, a senior in college, interested in the field of information technology. He sees a notice posted on the campus career bulletin board advising students that representatives from several companies are going to visit the school next week to talk to those interested in working for them (campus interviews). Jordan meets with recruiters from several firms, who question him in general about his accomplishments and aspirations (screening interviews). Three of these recruiters set up appointments back at their respective companies to continue questioning him in depth (employment interviews). Following these interviews, Jordan learns that both his school and the local office where he works part-time have been contacted and questioned about his grades and work performance, respectively (reference-check interviews). Jordan accepts the job offer extended by one of the companies and reports for work. Periodically, his manager briefly reviews what is expected of him, highlights his

accomplishments, and offers assistance whenever Jordan needs help (coaching interview).

Several months later, Jordan's train schedule changes, causing him to consistently arrive 30 minutes later than usual for work. To compensate, he stays 30 minutes later each day. His manager, however, wants him to report to work at his previous time and asks Jordan to explore possible alternative means of transportation. He adds that continued lateness could result in disciplinary action (counseling interview). Jordan feels his manager is being unreasonable and complains to human resources (grievance interview). The HR representative listens to Jordan, asks some questions, and makes several suggestions. Jordan, however, still doesn't see why he can't just stay 30 minutes later each day and continues to arrive late. He also grows increasingly dissatisfied with his work. Soon he is formally warned and then written up (disciplinary interview). When it is time for his performance evaluation, his manager chastises Jordan once again for being habitually late, but also compliments much of Jordan's work to date, offers some suggestions for improvement, and works with Jordan on specific, measurable goals (performance-evaluation interview). But Jordan is unhappy. When he sees a posting for a job offering more pay with greater responsibilities in another division, he applies (change-in-status interview). He is told that he lacks some required skills, however, and is rejected.

Jordan's level of dissatisfaction increases; he continues to arrive late, begins making mistakes, and misses deadlines. Finally, he is fired (termination interview). Before leaving, the director of HR talks with Jordan about his employment, including his expectations, how he viewed his salary and benefits, and what, if anything could have occurred to make things turn out differently (exit interview). Jordan leaves the company after experiencing 12 different types of interviews in just 18 months.



### Think About It . . .

An important step in conducting a particular type of interview is to consider what you hope to accomplish. Think of specific interviews you've experienced, either as an interviewer or an interviewee, and briefly note both the desired and actual outcomes.

INTERVIEW TYPE	INTERVIEWER/ INTERVIEWEE	DESIRED OUTCOME	ACTUAL OUTCOME
<i>Screening</i>			
<i>Campus</i>			
<i>Employment</i>			
<i>Reference-Check</i>			
<i>Coaching</i>			

Think About It . . . continued on next page.

## Think About It . . . continued from previous page.

INTERVIEW TYPE	INTERVIEWER/ INTERVIEWEE	DESIRED OUTCOME	ACTUAL OUTCOME
<i>Counseling</i>			
<i>Grievance</i>			
<i>Disciplinary</i>			
<i>Performance-Evaluation</i>			
<i>Change-in-Status</i>			
<i>Termination</i>			
<i>Exit</i>			

### Different Interviews and Their Objectives

Throughout this course we will examine the 12 types of interviews that typically occur in most business settings. Each of these 12 interview types has a specific objective (Exhibit 1-1). Familiarizing yourself with these objectives just prior to conducting a particular type of interview is the first step in conducting effective interviews.

#### *Screening interviews*

Screening interviews are intended to determine preliminary job suitability and establish continued interest in a job, both on the part of the interviewer and the candidate. You may conduct screening interviews either by telephone with candidates who have expressed an interest in a specific opening, or face-to-face, as with "walk-ins"-candidates who literally walk in to a company without an appointment, interested in exploring job opportunities-or candidates at job fairs, open houses, schools, or other places where you have to see a number of candidates in a short period of time. The later type of screening interview focuses more on the candidate's general job suitability than on their qualifications for a specific opening. Under no circumstances should screening interviews be viewed as a sufficient basis for extending a job offer.

#### *Campus interviews*

Campus interviews are conducted by recruiters who, in addition to looking for specific skills, are especially interested in finding students with potential who want to join their company for a career and not just a job. Once preliminary skills and mutual interest is established, campus recruiters schedule in-depth interviews to be held back at the company at a later date. As with screening interviews, campus interviews should not be used as the sole basis for offering someone a job.

#### *Employment interviews*

Employment interviews focus on matching people with jobs. Interviewers should look for candidates who possess job-related qualifications, including



## Exhibit 1-1

### Different Interviews and Their Objectives

<i>Type of Interview</i>	<i>Objective</i>
<i>Screening</i>	Determine preliminary job suitability. Establish continued interest.
<i>Campus</i>	Determine preliminary job suitability. Establish continued interest. Find students with potential and interest in careers.
<i>Employment</i>	Match people with jobs in terms of prior work experience, formal education, skills, abilities, and interests.
<i>Reference-Check</i>	Confirm the employment interview. Reveal additional information.
<i>Coaching</i>	Identify an employee's interests and aspirations. Compliment accomplishments. Offer assistance. Make suggestions for improvement.
<i>Counseling</i>	Address specific work-performance problems or policy infractions. Develop a plan to get the employee back on course.
<i>Grievance</i>	Allow employees to express their concerns about company policies, procedures, or practices.
<i>Disciplinary</i>	Verbally warn or write-up employees about specific work-performance problems or policy infractions.
<i>Performance-Evaluation</i>	Summarize the employee's on-the-job performance. Address success in meeting previously established goals. Set new goals. Discuss the employee's job or career aspirations.
<i>Change-in-Status</i>	Update the data file on the employee's skills, knowledge, and job interests. Determine a match between the employee's abilities and the job's requirements and responsibilities.
<i>Termination</i>	Review details relating to termination.
<i>Exit</i>	Learn about how a terminating employee viewed his or her employment with the organization.

prior work experience and formal education; relevant skills and abilities; and a demonstrated interest in the type of work they are applying for. Employment interviews are often conducted in stages: an HR representative conducts a general job-suitability interview; the manager asks detailed, job-specific questions; and the department head focuses on broader, goals-centered issues.

*Reference-check interviews*

Reference-check interviews are usually reserved for candidates under serious consideration. They are intended to confirm what an interviewer learned during the employment interview and may reveal additional information that will support the extension of a job offer. The process includes talking with and possibly acquiring written information from former employers as well as verifying education credentials. Most professionals agree that personal references rarely have any merit, since the candidate will obviously list only those people likely to provide rave reviews.

*Coaching interviews*

Coaching interviews are essentially developmental in nature. Managers usually conduct coaching interviews to identify an employee's interests and aspirations, compliment recent accomplishments, offer assistance with a project or deadline, or make suggestions for improvement. Occasionally, coaching interviews address a specific on-the-job problem and as such act as a prelude to a counseling interview. Coaching interviews are informal and may occur at any time.

*Counseling interviews*

Counseling interviews are formal sessions that address specific work-performance problems, such as excessive absenteeism, failure to complete assignments, or a violation of company policies and procedures. Together, the employee and his or her manager go over the particulars and develop a plan that should help the employee get back on course. A time line with specific objectives is usually established, with additional counseling interviews scheduled at frequent intervals. Counseling interviews often negate the need for disciplinary action.

*Grievance interviews*

Grievance interviews allow employees to express their concerns about some company policy, procedure, or practice. The HR representative should encourage employees to express their views during these sessions and try to work out a plan that will resolve any conflicts.

*Disciplinary interviews*

Disciplinary interviews are formal sessions during which an employee is officially warned about a specific work-performance or policy infraction. If the warning remains unheeded and the infraction reoccurs, a written warning is usually issued. After several additional written warnings and possibly suspension, the employee could ultimately be terminated.

*Performance-evaluation interviews*

Performance-evaluation interviews should accomplish four key objectives: to summarize the employee's on-the-job performance from the time of the last review, job change, or hire; to address how successful the employee has been in meeting mutually agreed upon goals or job expectations; to set new goals; and to discuss the employee's job or career aspirations. These formal inter-

views are generally conducted on an annual basis and any time there is a change in job status.

#### *Change-in-status interviews*

Change-in-status interviews generally refer to promotions but can also pertain to lateral transfers and demotions. The purpose of these interviews is twofold: to update the data file on the employee's skills, knowledge, and job interests, and to determine whether there is a match between the employee's abilities and the job's requirements and responsibilities. Change-in-status interviews differ from employment interviews in that the applicants already work for the company. As such, a great deal is already known about the applicants in terms of their overall work habits and abilities, but not necessarily in relation to how well they are likely to perform the new job. Consequently, employees interested in changing jobs internally should always be interviewed.

#### *Termination interviews*

Termination interviews obviously concern employees who are being let go. The purpose of the interview, however, goes beyond telling someone that they are being terminated. It includes reviewing termination-related specifics, such as determining the employee's last day of work, identifying items to be turned in, reaching an understanding about how reference checks will be handled, and offering assistance to help the employee find another job.

#### *Exit interviews*

Exit interviews are intended to reveal information about how a terminating employee viewed various aspects of his or her employment with the organization, such as the working conditions, employer-employee relations, and policies and practices. This information can be especially useful when hiring in the future, revising policies and procedures, and examining morale or productivity problems in a particular department.

## **A** pply What You Learn . . .

What techniques would you use to achieve the objectives for each type of interview?

INTERVIEW TYPE	OBJECTIVE	TECHNIQUES
<i>Screening</i>	Establish continued interest.	
<i>Campus</i>	Find students with potential career goals.	
<i>Employment</i>	Match people with jobs.	
<i>Reference-Check</i>	Confirm the employment interview.	
	Reveal additional information.	

**Apply What You Learn . . . continued on next page.**

**Apply What You Learn . . .** continued from previous page.

<b>INTERVIEW TYPE</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>TECHNIQUES</b>
<i>Coaching</i>	Identify an employee's interests/goals.	
	Compliment accomplishments.	
	Offer assistance.	
	Make suggestions for improvement.	
<i>Counseling</i>	Address work-performance issues.	
	Develop an action plan.	
<i>Grievance</i>	Allow employees to express concerns.	
<i>Disciplinary</i>	Warn or write-up employees.	
<i>Performance-Evaluation</i>	Summarize on-the-job performance.	
	Address success in meeting goals.	
	Set new goals.	
	Discuss employee's aspirations.	
<i>Change-in-Status</i>	Update employee's data file.	
	Match employee's abilities with requirements.	
<i>Termination</i>	Review details relating to termination.	
<i>Exit</i>	Learn about a terminating employee's views.	

**PREPARATION**

A commonly held but erroneous belief is that interviewing does not require any degree of preparation. The perception is that a typical interview consists of two or more people sitting down together, talking. As they talk, one person—the interviewer—asks questions and the other—the applicant or employee—answers the questions. Such an impression is based largely on observations of interviews conducted by seasoned interviewers, who certainly can make interviews seem like effortless conversation. It is, however, inaccurate, because these interviewers have put a great deal of work behind this casual front by completing four important preparatory steps: reviewing relevant paperwork, blocking sufficient time, planning an appropriate environment, and planning basic questions.

**Review Relevant Paperwork**

Effective interviewers recognize the importance of reviewing all relevant paperwork prior to meeting with an applicant or employee (Exhibit 1-2).

**xhibit 1–2****Relevant Paperwork**

<i>Type of Interview</i>	<i>Paperwork</i>
<i>Screening</i>	Applicant's resume Job description
<i>Campus</i>	Brochure or CD-ROM describing the company List of available and anticipated openings Student's resume
<i>Employment</i>	Job description Applicant's completed application form Applicant's resume Information relating to salary and benefits
<i>Reference-Check</i>	Job description Applicant's completed application form Applicant's resume Interview notes Reference-check form (optional)
<i>Coaching</i>	Paperwork relating to a specific project or task
<i>Counseling</i>	Policy, procedure, or practice violated Action plan
<i>Grievance</i>	Policy, procedure, or practice grieved
<i>Disciplinary</i>	Documentation Policy, procedure, or practice violated
<i>Performance-Evaluation</i>	Completed performance-evaluation form
<i>Change-in-Status</i>	Job-posting form Employee's file
<i>Termination</i>	Documentation Information relative to severance pay, benefits, etc.
<i>Exit</i>	Exit interview form

They know that doing so saves time by enabling them to pinpoint areas warranting discussion during the interview. It is also more likely that they will be in control of the interview.

When Samantha Allenby realized that she would probably conduct as many as 10 interviews in one day, she quickly set about identifying the paperwork she would need for each interview. In order to interview the employee from marketing who has a complaint about the company's policy on personal days, Samantha reviewed that policy. Before interviewing the two accountant applicants, she read each person's completed application form and resume, the job description for the opening, and information relating to salary and benefits.

The meeting with the public relations manager and the customer service representative to review the employee's excessive absenteeism was going to be a challenge. The employee had been one of the department's top performers until recently, and Samantha suspected something serious must be happening to cause someone to be absent as often as she was. The manager, however, was unsympathetic and felt determined to make this meeting the first step in the disciplinary process. Since Samantha felt it would be more productive if the session were treated like a counseling session, in addition to pulling out a copy of the company's absenteeism policy, she drafted a plan of action to share with both the manager and the employee. This way, the session would more likely result in a productive dialogue and yield positive results.

To prepare for her reference checks, Samantha located the job description for the compensation analyst opening. Then she put each candidate's completed application form, resume, and related interview notes in a separate folder. She also made three copies of her reference check form and placed one inside of each folder.

Finally, in anticipation of a number of calls in response to the advertisement she placed for a secretary in administration, Samantha familiarized herself with the job description.

Samantha now felt she could approach her day of interviews with a greater knowledge base and a higher level of self-confidence.



### Think About It . . .

As an interviewer, list the paperwork you typically refer to as you prepare for each type of interview.

INTERVIEW TYPE	RELEVANT PAPERWORK
<i>Screening</i>	
<i>Campus</i>	
<i>Employment</i>	
<i>Reference-Check</i>	
<i>Coaching</i>	
<i>Counseling</i>	
<i>Grievance</i>	
<i>Disciplinary</i>	
<i>Performance-Evaluation</i>	

INTERVIEW TYPE	RELEVANT PAPERWORK
<i>Change in Status</i>	
<i>Termination</i>	
<i>Exit</i>	

As an interviewee, how do you think you would react if you were an interviewee in a situation where an interviewer did not have the necessary paperwork?

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What image might you have of that person?

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Of the organization?

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Would it influence your decision to work there?

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### **Block Sufficient Time**

When determining how much time to allot for each interview, think about the entire process, not just the portion devoted to the face-to-face meeting. You need time before the interview to review the relevant paperwork and to plan key questions; during the interview for both you and the individual to talk; and after the interview to write up your notes, reflect on what took place, and set up additional appointments, if called for. In the case of an employment interview, you may also need time for testing and checking references.

Considering all that must be done, just how much time should you set aside for each interview? Generally, the stages prior to and following the face-to-face meeting require from 5 to 15 minutes each. Time for the actual interviews vary, according to the objectives and scope of a particular type of interview (Exhibit 1-3).

While these time frames represent guidelines only, you should rarely take less than the minimum amount of time noted or go beyond the maximum amount of time recommended. Here's why: If you were to spend less than 20 minutes talking with a student during a campus interview, it is unlikely that you would find out enough about his or her level of interest, career objectives, or basic qualifications. Talking more than 30 minutes, on the other hand, probably means you either began to delve into details about that student's job suitability (that should occur back at the office at a later date during

**Exhibit 1–3****Interview Time Frames (excludes time needed before and after the interview)**

<i>Type of Interview</i>	<i>Approximate Amount of Time</i>
<i>Screening</i>	10–20 minutes
<i>Campus</i>	20–30 minutes
<i>Employment</i>	Nonexempt: 30–45 minutes (generally clerical and nonprofessional workers) Exempt: 60–90 minutes (generally managers and professional workers)
<i>Reference-Check</i>	Nonexempt: 15–20 minutes Exempt: 20–30 minutes
<i>Coaching</i>	20–30 minutes
<i>Counseling</i>	30–45 minutes
<i>Grievance</i>	30–45 minutes
<i>Disciplinary</i>	30–45 minutes
<i>Performance-Evaluation</i>	45–60 minutes
<i>Change-in-Status</i>	Nonexempt: 20–30 minutes Exempt: 30–45 minutes
<i>Termination</i>	30–45 minutes
<i>Exit</i>	30–45 minutes

the in-depth interview), went off on some tangent, or allowed the interviewee to take control of the interview.

The latter can occur, for example, when applicants are anxious about lacking certain qualifications and want to divert the interviewer's attention from the topic at hand. In these instances interviewees will talk a blue streak about irrelevant matters, discuss objects such as books or pictures in the interviewer's office, or ask the interviewer numerous questions. You can guard against this happening by reminding yourself of the interview objectives, by noting the approximate amount of time remaining, and by identifying how much information has been covered thus far and just what remains to be discussed. Then you can say, "We seem to have strayed from our reason for this interview; since we don't have that much time remaining why don't we get back to...."

Another way of maintaining control of the interview is to try interviewing only during the time of day you are at your peak—that is, when you are most alert—and avoiding scheduling more than six to eight interviews in one workday. This will enable you to focus more clearly on the interview and remain in the driver's seat. Of course, this is not always possible, as we saw with Samantha, who faced a full day of interviews with 10 or more people. If

you do have a number of interviews scheduled back-to-back, try at least to take a five-minute break between them. Use the time to take a short walk, get a drink of water, stretch, make a few short phone calls, or do other work. The break will help you feel more in control of your interview schedule and allow you to focus more clearly on your next interviewee.

If an interviewee shows up late, thereby throwing off your schedule, you may have to reschedule the appointment for another date or have another interviewer take over some of your interviews.

**A****Apply What You Learn . . .**

What could you do in each of the following interview situations to help ensure that you will remain in control or will be able to cover everything needed in the allotted amount of time?

An applicant calls in response to your ad for a secretary and insists on describing, in detail, the eight-week computer class she recently completed (screening interview).

An applicant for a customer service representative opening seems intent on discussing the plants on your desk (nonexempt employment interview).

An employee who has come to see you about what he considers a unfair policy asks numerous questions concerning how long the policy has been in practice, whether others have complained about it, and why the company needs it (grievance interview).

An employee shows up 20 minutes late for an interview to discuss his excessive tardiness (counseling interview).

**Plan an Appropriate Environment**

There are three keys to establishing an appropriate interview environment: privacy, a minimum number of distractions, and comfort.

The importance of privacy cannot be overstressed. If applicants and employees are expected to talk freely, they must be assured that what they are saying cannot be overheard by others. This is particularly important when discussing sensitive matters, such as why a person was fired from his or her last job. Consider what happened to Dorothy. After she was let go from her job, Dorothy went to an employment agency to find work. She was ushered into a large, open area where eight desks were lined up in two rows. Dorothy sat at one of the desks and proceeded to answer the questions asked of her. She was aware of the fact that another applicant was being interviewed at the desk directly across from her, but tried to concentrate on her interviewer. As she described what led to her termination, she became increasingly aware that the interviewer across the aisle had stopped talking with his applicant and was, instead, leaning in to hear what Dorothy had to say. What's worse, he actually interrupted his applicant to ask Dorothy a question! Both Dorothy and the other applicant were chagrined and left, vowing to avoid any interview setting that lacked privacy.

While not everyone has a private office, we all have access to privacy. While this may mean using a conference room or borrowing someone else's office when it is not being used, such options may be preferable if your own office has partial partitions instead of full floor-to-ceiling walls. Sounds can easily carry over and around partitions; depending on their height, people can also easily peer over the top.

Try to ensure a minimum number of distractions. More obvious distractions include your telephone ringing, people walking in during the interview, or papers requiring attention left exposed on top of your desk. A more subtle distraction, but one that can interfere as much as a ringing telephone, is the interviewer's own thoughts. Thinking about all the work that needs to be done may not only prevent you from focusing fully on the interviewee but may even result in resentment for keeping you from it. To guard against this, remind yourself just prior to the interview that interviewing is an important part of your work. It might also help if you cleared off your desk before the person entered.

Make certain, too, that the interviewee is comfortable. It is a simple fact that if the interviewee feels comfortable, you will be assured of a more productive interview. Comfort level is not determined by how much furniture there is in your office, or whether you have a scenic view. It is your level of preparation and general approach to the interview that largely determine the comfort level of the other person. Look at what happened to Richard. The worse interview he ever went on was conducted in the most luxurious office he had ever seen. The room was larger than his living room at home and even had more furniture. This ideal scene was completed by a fireplace, grandfather clock, and a panoramic view of the city. While the setting was picture-perfect, the interview was anything but. The interviewer had not read Richard's resume, was unfamiliar with the job opening, and did not know what questions to ask. In addition, he was clearly in a hurry and grew increasingly impatient as the interview wore on.

If you are prepared, come across as friendly, and appear genuinely interested in what the person has to say, the interview surroundings are not going to matter a great deal. Of course if you can offer the interviewee a choice of

seats, that's fine. If, however, space is limited and there is only one chair in addition to yours, that's all right too. Note that while there is no one proper relationship between your seat and the interviewee's, many interviewers prefer to sit behind a desk with the interviewee on the other side. In this regard, the desk serves the dual function of providing a writing surface and offering a comfortable distance between interviewer and interviewee.

## **A** pply What You Learn . . .

Where will you conduct your interviews from now on? Identify several spaces at work that would be suitable for interviews.

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What will you do to ensure privacy?

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How will you minimize distractions?

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What seating arrangement are you most comfortable with?

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### **Plan Basic Questions**

A handful of questions prepared in advance should serve as the basis for any type of interview. When planning basic questions keep your interview objective in mind and use relevant paperwork as your primary source. For example, in preparing for an employment interview, review the job description to identify the required skills for a given job. Then proceed to formulate the questions you will need to ask in order to determine whether the applicants possess these skills and are capable of performing the required duties. Hypothetical, situations can also be developed and presented to candidates, enabling them to demonstrate their potential. Of course all of your questions should comply with equal employment opportunity legislation (see Chapter 2).

Be careful not to list too many questions or become very specific during this stage. If you have an extensive list of detailed questions, you may have a tendency to read from that list during the interview. This will result in a stiff, formalized session, which could make the interviewee feel ill at ease. In addition, with a lengthy list of questions, you may feel compelled to cover the entire list and thus end up being redundant. Again, this can result in making the interviewee feel uncomfortable and wonder whether you are really listening.

Limit yourself to preparing about a half-dozen broad-based questions. Once you get into the interview, the other questions that need to be asked will follow as offshoots of the interviewee's answers. For example, in preparing for an employment interview, you could plan on asking, "Would you please describe your activities during a typical day at your current job?" As you listen to the applicant's response, note any areas mentioned that you want to pursue further. Suppose you asked this question of an applicant currently working as a customer service representative. She answers, "Well, let's see. Each day is really kind of different since I deal with customers and you never know what they're going to call about; but basically, my job is to handle the customer hot line, research any questions, and process complaints."

Her response, while general and somewhat limited, still gives you four key areas to probe: Her job requires dealing with a variety of people and situations; she "handles" a customer hot line; she "researches" questions; and she "processes complaints." During the face-to-face interview, you can take each of these areas and ask a series of detailed questions. Her answers should ultimately provide you with a clear picture of the level and scope of her current responsibilities.



### **Think About It . . .**

Think about the type of interview you conduct most often. Write down six broad-based questions you could prepare before meeting with the applicant or employee to serve as the foundation for that interview.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4.

5.

6.

## INTERVIEW STAGES

For maximum effectiveness, all interviews should consist of five stages: rapport-building, introductory, core, confirmation, and closing. Each has a specific purpose and should take up an approximate percentage of the interview (Exhibit 1-4).

### Rapport-Building

This stage represents a scant but important 2 percent of the interview. Its dual purpose is to put applicants or employees at ease, thereby encouraging them to communicate openly, and to identify the format for the rest of the interview.

Begin with icebreaking comments or questions that have no real bearing on the purpose of the meeting. Benign subjects, such as the weather or traffic, generally do nicely in helping interviewees relax. It doesn't take much effort simple



### Exhibit 1-4

#### Interview Stages

<i>Stage of the Interview</i>	<i>Primary Purpose</i>	<i>% of Time</i>
<i>Rapport-Building</i>	Put the interviewee at ease.	2%
<i>Introductory</i>	Begin the assessment process.	3%
<i>Core</i>	Gather detailed information.	85%
<i>Confirmation</i>	Verify information acquired thus far.	5%
<i>Closing</i>	Ensure coverage of all relevant topics.	5%

statements like "I'm glad the construction on the expressway didn't keep you from coming in this morning," or "Can you believe how warm the weather's been so far this winter?" can accomplish a great deal. In fact, weather and commuting are considered by many professional interviewers to be among the safest areas to discuss during this stage of the interview. That's because, by their very nature, these topics are unlikely to generate any sort of an emotional response, compel anyone to take sides, or turn into a discussion of any depth.

Just how much time should be spent on icebreakers depends on how comfortable the interviewee appears to be. Typically, 15 to 30 seconds is sufficient. While some individuals require a little longer, under no circumstances should this stage of the interview continue for more than two minutes. Applicants or employees who are still uneasy after this amount of time will probably not respond to additional small talk. The best thing to do in this instance is to move on to the next step.



### Apply What You Learn . . .

Identify an icebreaker you have heard as an interviewee.

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How successful was the icebreaker at putting you at ease? Explain.

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How long did the icebreaker last?

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Write two additional icebreakers of your own, one relating to weather and the other relating to commuting.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

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Once these icebreaking statements are made, you can proceed to identifying the format of the interview. Interviewees obviously know what kind of interview is about to take place, but they don't know what to expect beyond that. Outlining what the next hour or so will consist of alerts interviewees to the direction of the interview as well as key areas of focus.

For example, during one of Jordan Saunder's employment interviews, the HR director said, "It's nice to see you again. I know your campus interview was a bit rushed; I'm glad you were able to come in this morning so we can discuss the information technology opening we have here at Valdart, Ltd., in greater depth. I'd like to begin by asking you some questions about your college courses as they relate to information technology, any work you've done on a part-time basis in this field, and where you see yourself headed. Then I can tell you about our company in general and the IT division in particular. After that I'll be glad to answer any questions you might have, including those concerning benefits and what happens after we're through here."

This format let Jordan know from the outset that he could expect to answer questions about his background and future aspirations. He knew, too, that he would learn about the company and the job, have a chance to ask questions, and find out what would happen after the interview was over.

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## **A** pply What You Learn . . .

Select two types of interviews other than an employment interview and identify a format for those interviews, as you would describe them to your interviewees.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Introductory**

This stage represents approximately 3 percent of the interview and is intended to accomplish two key objectives: to help still-nervous interviewees feel at ease and to allow interviewers to start the assessment process.

Introductory questions should be about topics, familiar to the interviewee so as not to create undue pressure and broad enough to generate additional questions by you. For example, after describing the format to Jordan, the HR director said, "Let's get started, then, with you telling me what got you interested in this field." Regardless of how nervous Jordan may have been, he had no trouble talking about his interest in information technology. As he began to relax, he articulated more and more information that acted as a springboard for the interviewer's subsequent questions. In addition, the interviewer was

able to begin assessing verbal and organizational skills and observe patterns of body language (Chapter 4).

Unfortunately, many interviewers make some classic mistakes during this introductory stage. For example, asking an applicant during a screening, campus, or employment interview to "Tell me about yourself" is one of the most counterproductive questions around. Variations on this for other interview situations include, "Tell me what kind of employee Jordan was when he worked for you" (reference-check interviews), and "Tell me how you felt about working here" (exit interviews). This question and its variations put applicants on the spot. Where should they begin? Do you want them to start with their most recent job? Should they describe their education? Should they offer a summarizing statement that encompasses everything about them? Perhaps they should identify their goals? No matter what they decide to say, they can't know for certain whether it's what you want to hear. At a point when you should be trying to make an applicant or employee feel more comfortable you are, instead, increasing their level of stress. The question could also yield information that you are not entitled to know, from an equal employment opportunity standpoint (Chapter 2). Suppose Jordan answered, "Well, let's see. I'm 22 years old, single, and when I'm not studying or working I do volunteer work over at my church, St. Anthony's." Jordan just volunteered three pieces of information you are not entitled to hear. Even if you don't follow up on illegal volunteered information, once you have heard it you may have a problem proving that you didn't factor it in to your decision to hire or not hire someone.

Another common error made during the introductory stage is to say, "I didn't get a chance to read your resume/file; why don't you bring me up to speed?"

This statement sends a negative message to the interviewee: "I couldn't be bothered taking the time to prepare for this meeting." It also puts pressure on the person about what to say.

A third mistake is to read the person's paperwork back to them. For example, one of Jordan's interviewers began by saying, "According to your resume you attended Strathmore High School and now you're going to Rushmont University. You're majoring in information technology, have a 3.1 average so far, and will be graduating in four months." Where's the question? The interviewer is merely telling the applicant what he already knows about himself!

The introductory stage usually lasts for from five to ten minutes.



### **Think About It . . .**

Think about a time when you were asked, "Why don't you tell me about yourself?"  
How did the question make you feel?

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How did you answer the question?

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What do you think the interviewer could have asked you instead?

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## Core

If you have prepared for the interview and made the transition from the rapport-building stage to the introductory stage, you are ready to move on to the crucial core stage. As the term implies, this is the most substantive segment, representing approximately 85 percent of the interview. It is here that you will gather the bulk of your information about the applicant or employee and examine it in relation to the objectives for the interview. This, in turn, will enable you to make decisions based on facts, instead of on intuitive feelings or bias.

To conduct this stage effectively, make sure that you include three key components: ask enough of the right questions, provide information, and answer questions.

### *Ask enough of the right questions*

With regard to applicant-related interviews—that is, screening, campus, employment, and reference-check interviews—pose questions that will reveal job suitability. You'll know that you've asked enough of the right questions if you can answer the following: Is it likely that this person will be able to apply his or her skills, abilities, knowledge, and work interests to the available position (screening, campus, employment, and reference-check interviews)? Are these skills and knowledge sufficient (employment interview)? Does this person exhibit potential for growth within your organization (campus, employment interviews)? Is this person interested in a job or a career (campus, employment interviews)? Is this person's style of working compatible with that of your organization (employment, reference-check interviews)? What are this person's strengths and areas requiring improvement (employment, reference-check interviews)? Will his or her strengths be an asset to this job (employment, reference-check interviews)? Will the areas requiring improvement be a hindrance (employment, reference-check interviews)? Do the goals of this person mesh with the goals of the organization (screening, campus, employment interviews)? Are his or her reasons for leaving previous jobs likely to reoccur in your organization (employment, reference-check interviews)?

During employee-related interviews—coaching, counseling, grievance, and disciplinary interviews—ask questions that will unveil conflicts, problems, or concerns, and that are likely to lead to a resolution. You've probably done

this if you can answer "yes" to the following questions: Have I clearly identified the employee's interests and aspirations (coaching interviews)? Have I taken the time to compliment the employee's accomplishments (coaching interviews)? Have I offered assistance and been available when the employee has needed help (coaching interviews)? Have I offered constructive suggestions for improvement (coaching interviews)? Have I addressed specific work-performance problems or policy infractions objectively (coaching interviews)? Have I worked with the employee to develop a plan of action to help him or her get back on track (coaching interviews)? Have I encouraged the employee to express his or her concerns about specific company policies, procedures, or practices (grievance interviews)? Have I taken progressive disciplinary action, beginning with a verbal warning (disciplinary interviews)? Is all of the relevant documentation in order (disciplinary interviews)?

With regard to assessment and change-in-status interviews-performance-evaluation, promotion/transfer/demotion, termination, and exit interviews-ask questions that will help you determine whether a change in jobs is in the best interest of the employee and the organization as a whole. You probably have done this if you can answer these questions: Can I accurately and fairly summarize the employee's on-the-job performance (performance-evaluation interviews)? Has the employee succeeded in meeting previously established goals (performance-evaluation interviews)? Has the employee been receptive to establishing new goals (performance-evaluation interviews)? Have I discussed the employee's job or career aspirations and identified ways he or she may attain these objectives (performance-evaluation interviews)? Am I up-to-date on the employee's skills, knowledge, and job interests (change-in-status interviews)? Can I determine a match between the employee's abilities and the requirements and responsibilities of a job other than the one he or she is currently performing (change-in-status interviews)? Have I thoroughly reviewed the details calling for an employee's involuntary termination (termination interviews)? Does the employee clearly understand the reasons for his or her involuntary termination (termination interviews)? Is all of the relevant documentation in order (termination interviews)? Have I given a terminating employee ample opportunity to explain his or her views concerning employment with our organization (exit interviews)? Do I clearly understand his or her views concerning employment with our organization (exit interviews)?

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**A** pply What You Learn . . .

Think about an applicant-related interview in which you were the interviewer or interviewee. What are some of the questions that were asked?

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What additional questions would you ask in the future?

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Now do the same for an employee-related interview and a change-in-status interview.

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*Provide information*

Ascertaining information about the applicant or employee is only part of the interview; providing adequate, accurate information is also important. Just as interviewers must decide if candidates are appropriate for a job in the case of applicant-related and some employee-related interviews concerning job changes, candidates must decide whether the job and company are right for them. This is particularly true when unemployment is low and applicants can afford to be selective about job opportunities. In other types of interviews, such as counseling and disciplinary, providing information can help get employees back on course and prevent needless grievances or terminations.

Naturally, the information you provide will vary according to the type of interview (Exhibit 1-5). In each instance, try to anticipate what the interviewee is likely to both need and want to know. For example, when Jordan started coming in 30 minutes late he assumed he could make up the time at the end of the day. Neither his manager or any one in human resources ever told him he had to be in each day at a certain time, so he assumed that as long as he worked eight hours a day there would be no problem. When Jordan met with the HR representative about a job in another division, he was told that he lacked some required skills. Suggestions were not offered, however, as to how he could acquire these skills. Armed with specific information, Jordan could have focused on acquiring the skills needed so that he could reapply the next time a similar position became available.

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**A** pply What You Learn . . .

What information would you provide to an applicant applying for a lateral transfer within the company?

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## Exhibit 1-5

### Provide Information

<i>Type of Interview</i>	<i>Information to Provide</i>
<i>Screening</i>	Overview of duties and responsibilities Salary range Overview of benefits Brief description of work environment Hours of work
<i>Campus</i>	Overview of the organization Overview of duties and responsibilities Overview of growth opportunities Salary range Overview of benefits Brief description of work environment Hours of work
<i>Employment</i>	Detailed description of duties and responsibilities Growth opportunities Salary range Overview of benefits Detailed description of work environment Reporting relationships Overview of the organization Hours of work
<i>Reference-Check</i>	Provide information supplied by former employee: Reason for terminating Description of job duties Final salary Brief description of the available position
<i>Coaching</i>	Specific project, etc.; warranting recognition Specific suggestions for assistance or improvement
<i>Counseling</i>	Details surrounding work-performance problem Specific policy or procedure violated Specific suggestions for getting back on track
<i>Grievance</i>	Feedback as to validity of employee's complaint Available avenues employee can take
<i>Disciplinary</i>	Exact performance or policy infraction Details surrounding the infraction What will occur if there is no corrective action
<i>Performance-Evaluation</i>	Specifics concerning job performance Success in meeting previously established goals Suggestions for new goals Opportunities to achieve career goals

Exhibit continued on next page.

**Exhibit 1-5** continued from previous page.

<i>Type of Interview</i>	<i>Information to Provide</i>
<i>Change-in-Status</i>	Details concerning change in: Duties and responsibilities Hours of work Work environment Reporting relationships Salary Benefits
<i>Termination</i>	Specific reason for termination, if involuntary Severance/benefits termination package, if any How reference requests will be handled Eligibility for rehire
<i>Exit</i>	How the information you ascertain may be used Assurance that there will be no repercussions

*Answer questions*

In spite of all the information you provide during an interview, applicants and employees may still have questions. Job applicants, for instances, often have particular questions concerning salary increases, job posting, benefits, flexible work schedules, and vacation schedules. Encourage them to ask these and other questions, so that they leave with a clear understanding of what they will get if they are offered the job. The questions interviewees ask can also provide you with valuable information that may help with the decision-making process.

Consider this partial interview between Samantha and one of her applicants, Corrine Jacoby, for the accounting opening. Samantha had already provided information about the position, its responsibilities, and benefits. Thus far, she feels Corrine possesses the skills needed to do the job.

SAMANTHA: I'd like to pause now, and give you an opportunity to ask me any questions you may have.

CORRINE: Well, I was wondering about the hours of work. I know you said that they're nine to five, Monday through Friday. But I was wondering if there was flextime; I'm taking a course that begins at five across town over at Bradley University two days a week, and I was hoping I could begin at eight instead of nine on those days.

SAMANTHA: We don't have a formal flextime policy; however, I'm fairly certain that you'd be able to work something out with the manager in charge of accounting so you can continue to take your course. I'll look into it and let you know.

CORRINE: Great! I was also wondering about vacation. You said I'd be eligible for two weeks vacation after six months. The problem is we already have

reservations for Disney World in March. That's only five months from now. My family and I are supposed to be going for a week and we're really looking forward to it!

SAMANTHA: If we offer you the job you'd be allowed to take your vacation ahead of schedule since you already have plans.

CORRINE: Thanks! I don't want you to think all my questions are about taking time off-I also wanted to ask about one of the responsibilities for the job you mentioned before, about presenting projections to senior management. Are those projections made in writing or would I have to make a presentation? I get nervous when I have to make any sort of a speech.

SAMANTHA: I'd say about once every couple of months you'd have to prepare a summary and submit it to senior management. Sometimes they call for a meeting; in that case you'd be making a presentation.

CORRINE: Just one more question: How many personal days are there?

SAMANTHA: Employees are eligible for two personal days a year, but must work at least six months before they can take one.

CORRINE: Thanks. I don't have any more questions.



## Apply What You Learn . . .

Based on the questions Corrine asked, if you were Samantha, would you still feel Corrine is a good choice for the job? \_\_\_\_ Yes. \_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_ Possibly. Explain your answer.

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## Confirmation

The confirmation stage, representing about 5 percent of the interview, offers the interviewer an opportunity to verify what has been learned thus far about the applicant or employee. Sometimes, too, interviewers learn something new during this stage.

That's what happened when Douglas handed in his resignation from his job as a training specialist after two years. He told his manager, Jean, that he was leaving for a better job. During Douglas' exit interview Joel, the director of human resources, wanted to confirm why Douglas was leaving. Douglas repeated what he had told his manager: He wanted to pursue a better job opportunity. Then he shifted uneasily in his chair and continued, "But it's not that so much as... well, I just don't think I'd ever be allowed to grow here." Joel leaned toward Douglas and said, "Please explain what you mean." Douglas replied, "I've been here for two years. All I do is design course content and line up outside consultants to conduct our training

workshops. I want to actually conduct a workshop once in awhile. Every time I mention this to Jean she tells me I'm not ready. Well, I disagree. I am ready and that's why I'm leaving. And by the way, I'm not the only one who feels this way."

If Joel had not confirmed Douglas' reason for leaving he would never have uncovered the problem between Douglas and his manager. Perhaps other training specialists had similar concerns. Joel now had valuable information that could help him find out.

## Closing

Closing is the last stage, representing approximately 5 percent of the interview. At this point you can ensure coverage of all relevant areas and tell the interviewee what happens next.

To help you determine whether it is time to end an interview, ask yourself eight key questions:

Did I establish rapport at the beginning, to put the interviewee at ease? Did I identify the format of the interview, thereby alerting the interviewee to our key areas of focus? Did I begin with a question that pertained to a subject familiar to the interviewee? Was that question broad enough to generate additional questions? Did I ask enough of the right kinds of questions? Did I provide enough information, in terms of what the interviewee needed and wanted to know? Did I answer questions clearly and completely? Did I confirm what I learned during the interview?

If your answer to any of these questions is "no," do not end the interview. Instead, revisit areas that were not adequately covered or addressed. Don't worry about how the interviewee will react; it's better to be thorough. For example, consider how Samantha handled going back during her interview with Corrine. As she drew the interview to a close, Samantha went over her checklist of eight questions. When she got to the one about asking enough of the right kind of questions, Samantha realized that she had never asked Corrine why she had decided to become an accountant in the first place. She then said, "Corrine, I just need to back up for a moment and ask you what made you decide to become an accountant?" Corrine replied, "I sort of fell into it. I was in my second year of college and didn't know what I wanted to major in. This guy I was dating was an accounting major so I thought I'd give it a try. Turned out I was pretty good at it, so accounting became my major."

Before closing the interview, tell the interviewee what happens next. For example, tell a job applicant when he or she may expect to hear from you, whether it is likely that there will be additional interviews, and what to do if he or she has additional questions. Let's see how Samantha closed her interview with Corrine:

SAMANTHA: Corrine, as I'm sure you can imagine, there were a number of applicants interested in this job. Consequently, I'll be conducting interviews for the next two weeks or so. After that time I'll contact everyone by mail, either to inform them that there will be an additional interview with the department head, or to let them know that they were not

selected. If you have additional questions between now and the time you hear from me, please don't hesitate to call. Here's my card.

CORRINE: Thank you. I'll look forward to hearing from you.



### Think About It . . .

Based on what you've read, what is the value to you and your organization of making sure you cover all the relevant areas when conducting an interview?

What is the value to your applicant?



Effective interviewing skills can make any work environment a more productive place in which to work. While there are many types of interviews that typically occur in a business setting (screening, campus, employment, reference-check, coaching, counseling, grievance, disciplinary, performance-evaluation, change-in-status, termination, and exit), and each has its

own specific objective, all interviews share one common goal: to acquire information as it relates to a specific end, and then to use that information in making a decision.

Successful interviews begin with some important preparatory steps. After reviewing relevant paperwork, blocking sufficient time, planning an appropriate environment, and planning a handful of basic questions, you can proceed to the five stages of the actual interview. Begin by establishing rapport with some icebreakers, followed by establishing the format of the interview. Then ask some introductory questions about topics familiar to the interviewee. The core of the interview consists of asking enough of the right questions, providing information, and answering questions. Wind down with the confirmation stage to verify what you learned, and finally close by telling the person what happens next.

By following these interview basics, you will lay the foundation for effective interviewing and can progress to the next stage-legal concerns-with confidence.



## Review Questions

1. The stage of an interview that requires the greatest percentage of time and focus is called the: 1. (b)
  - (a) closing stage
  - (b) core stage
  - (c) confirmation stage
  - (d) rapport-building stage
  
2. Two common errors made during the introductory stage of applicant-related and some employee interviews are: 2. (c)
  - (a) talking about the weather and the interviewee's commute
  - (b) making small talk and reading the interviewee's paperwork back to them
  - (c) saying, "Tell me about yourself" and "I didn't get a chance to read your file"
  - (d) asking the interviewee whether he or she understands the purpose of the interview and saying, "Tell me about yourself"
  
3. The three most important ingredients for an appropriate interview environment are: 3. (a)
  - (a) privacy, minimal distractions, and comfort
  - (b) coffee, comfort, and distractions to see how the applicant handles stress
  - (c) privacy, comfort, and coffee
  - (d) comfort, minimal distractions, and witnesses

4. An important primary objective shared by counseling and disciplinary interviews is to: 4. (a)
- (a) address specific work-performance problems
  - (b) develop sufficient documentation to warrant termination
  - (c) arrange for a transfer or demotion
  - (d) refer the employee for professional help
5. Successful interviews begin with: 5. (b)
- (a) reviewing relevant paperwork, icebreakers, establishing the format, and telling the interviewee approximately how long the interview is expected to last
  - (b) reviewing relevant paperwork, blocking sufficient time, planning an appropriate environment, and planning a handful of basic questions
  - (c) blocking sufficient time, planning an appropriate environment, icebreakers, and establishing the format
  - (d) planning an appropriate environment, planning a handful of basic questions, blocking sufficient time, and answering questions