

***EMPLOYMENT  
INTERVIEW GUIDE***

## INTRODUCTION

This guide has been prepared to assist Air Force managers and supervisors in conducting employment interviews. The techniques and procedures included herein were selected for their flexibility and adaptability to a wide variety of positions. When used in conjunction with the job analysis process conducted by the civilian HR function, these methods will help ensure that job-related selection procedures are used as the basis for merit promotion decisions. If you have questions after reading this guide, the personnel management specialist assigned to your organization is available to provide you technical assistance in developing, conducting, and documenting employment interviews.

The Air Force has identified that a significant number of grievances, both formal and informal, are associated with the selection process. A large number of these grievances stem from the interview process. By asking managers to review and use the information contained in this booklet, we hope to significantly reduce the number of such complaints, document the validity of interview questions, and ensure the integrity of the entire interview process.

## INTERVIEWING BASICS

Interviews are an important yet vulnerable part of the selection process. As such, they are subject to validation requirements and must be properly conducted in an impartial, objective fashion. Questions asked of candidates must be strictly job-related. Some basic rules that should be observed during the interview process include the following:

- Only interview candidates who have been officially referred to you on an Air Force or Office of Personnel Management candidate referral certificate. Never interview or promise to interview individuals who have not been officially referred in this manner.
- All, some, or none of the referred candidates may be interviewed. After reviewing automated experience briefs or resumes, the manager may choose to interview only some of the candidates. This determination will be based on rational, defensible criteria, and the criteria should be recorded in the manager's notes and retained for future reference.
- All questions must be job-related and based on knowledges, skills, and abilities necessary for successful job performance.
- All candidates must be asked the same questions.

It is also critical that the interview be well planned in terms of the procedures for conducting the interview session, the information being sought, the behaviors and responses to be observed, and the evaluation standards to be applied.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are three main types of interviews:

The ***exchange of information*** is a very limited form of interview in which the manager and candidate discuss the duties of the position to be filled, work schedules, TDY requirements, and other factual matters. If you do not intend to ask questions of the candidates but feel the need to familiarize them with the nature of the position, the work setting, special operating equipment, or unique pressures, you may decide to conduct an informational exchange. You should be careful not to let this exchange lead to an *ad hoc* selection interview (discussed below) in which questions are asked relating to the candidates' qualifications for your position. Although permitted, face-to-face meetings are not usually necessary; information exchanges are most commonly conducted over the telephone.

The ***selection interview*** is usually a one-on-one meeting between the selecting official and the candidate. The primary purpose of the selection interview is to provide the manager with additional jobrelated information upon which to base a selection. It may be used to further evaluate candidates' qualifications as well as to exchange information about the position to be filled. The interview procedures in this guide focus on developing questions for and conducting selection interviews. The majority of interviews, in fact, are selection interviews used to make further distinctions among referred candidates.

The ***ranking interview*** is generally used by the civilian HR function in combination with other factors to determine the final ranking of candidates prior to referral to the selecting official. These types of interviews are rare in the Air Force and are best suited to professional, highly specialized, or cutting-edge technological positions. Ranking interviews are conducted by a panel of qualified subject matter experts at or above the grade of the position being filled. The selecting official is not a member of the panel, as he or she will make the final selection from the top ranked candidates. Interview results may not be given undue weight in determining the best qualified candidates. Personnel management specialists serve as advisors to the panel and may sit in during the interview process.

## DEVELOPING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions are sometimes developed as a combined effort of the supervisor / subject matter expert and the personnel management specialist during the job analysis, a process designed to establish an objective statement of position requirements against which employees are evaluated for merit promotion actions. In most cases, however, pre-existing interview questions will not be available and you will have to develop them before conducting your interviews. The position description will contain a list of required

knowledges, skills, and abilities that serve as a good basis for formulating your interview questions.

Maintain a copy of your interview questions and each candidate's responses to your questions along with other required selection documentation (e.g., a signed copy of the referral certificate) for a reasonable amount of time after your selection, normally one year. If not all candidates were interviewed, annotate the names of those not interviewed and the justification for not interviewing them. Interview questions are subject to review should the selection be questioned at a later date. Therefore, the jobrelatedness of the questions must be verifiable, and it must be documented that the same questions were asked of all candidates.

If you choose to use a point system to rate candidates' responses to your questions, be sure your method is well-documented and justifiable and that your ratings are consistent with your predetermined criteria. For example, candidates for a warehousing job might be asked how many months' experience they have in operating a forklift. You may have a predetermined "weight" for different responses, such as 0 points for no such experience, 5 points for 6-12 months experience, and 10 points for more than 12 months experience.

## PROHIBITED TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

It is very important that you not violate equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws and regulations in the interview process. Since many discrimination charges stem from improperly conducted interviews, you should be aware of questions and topics of discussion to avoid. Listed below and on the following pages are areas to avoid, and examples of permissible and impermissible questions:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Illegal</u>	<u>Legal</u>
Age	Any questions which tend to identify applicants who are 40-64 years of age. Example: "Do you remember the 1952 election?"	None. The civilian personnel flight (CPF) will verify age, if necessary to ensure legally determined minimum age limits.
Race/Color	Any comment or question which directly or indirectly relates to race or color.	None.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Illegal</u>	<u>Legal</u>
Citizenship	“Are you a citizen of the United States? Are your parents/spouse US citizens? When did you acquire US citizenship? Are you, your spouse, and/or your parents native-born or naturalized?”	None. The HR office will verify citizenship.
National Origin	“What is your national origin? What language is spoken in your home? What is your native language?”	None.
Religion	“What church do you attend? What religious holidays do you observe?”	None.
Work Schedule/Travel	Any questions related to child care, ages of children, or other nonjobrelated areas.	If the job to be filled has special requirements, such as travel, overtime work or unusual hours, these conditions may be stated. Example: "In this job, you would have to travel one week in every month. Does this present a problem?"
Military Discharge	“Were you honorably discharged from military service?”	None. HR office may verify this if there is a requirement to do so.
Economic Status	“Do you have a good credit rating? Do you have any trouble with bills/collection agencies?”	None.
Security	“Do you have a secret, top secret, or other security clearance?”	If the job to be filled requires a certain type of security clearance, this condition may be stated. Example: "This job requires a top secret clearance. Does this requirement present any problem?"

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Illegal</u>	<u>Legal</u>
Personal Plans	“How long do you plan to live in this area?”	None.
Sex	Any inquiry related to gender. “Do you plan on having children in the future? Do you mind having a female supervisor? Can you work with a group of men?”	None.
Marital/Family	“Are you married? Do your children live with you? What ages are your children? Is your wife/husband in the military?”	None. The HR office may verify if other family members work at the installation to fulfill OPM requirements.
Education	Any question specifically asking the nationality, racial, or religious affiliation of a school. Any question asking for education level in general, not specifically related to the job to be filled.	Questions related to the job to be filled and pertaining to how the applicant's academic, vocational, or professional education may fulfill the required KSAs.
Organizational Affiliation	“To what organizations, societies or clubs do you belong?” Do not ask about affiliation with those whose name or character indicates race, religion, creed, color, national origin, or ancestry of its members.	Questions related to the job to be filled and how the candidate's participation in the organization may fulfill the required KSAs (e.g., professional organizations).
Participation in Certain Activities	“Do you plan to purchase savings bonds? Contribute to the Combined Federal Campaign? Join the coffee Club? Join the Air Force Association?”	None.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Illegal</u>	<u>Legal</u>
Police Record	Have you ever been arrested?	If the job to be filled has special requirements, such as bonding or security clearances, the following may be stated: "In order to fill this job, you must be bonded or and/obtain a security clearance. Does this requirement present any problem?"
Miscellaneous	Any inquiry that is not job-related or necessary for determining a candidate's possession of KSAs.	Statement or notice that any misstatements or omissions of significant facts may be cause for non-selection.

## ATTRIBUTES OF GOOD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Good interview questions have the following attributes:

- They are prepared in writing and approved before you conduct your interviews.
- They are objective.
- They provide evidence of directly-related knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required to perform the job.
- They are concerned with experience or training. Ask for detailed information about particular phases of the candidate's experience or training if necessary; request that the individual expand upon his or her response if you need clarification.
- They allow the candidate to provide sufficient information.
- They contain appropriate vocabulary. Avoid specialized terminology, acronyms, or organizational abbreviations in questions.
- They are straightforward and not designed to trick the respondent.
- They are asked one at a time; a question asking about multiple items or requiring several responses are confusing for both the applicant and the interviewer.

- They are not be answerable with a “yes” or “no” response.
- They do not have obvious answers.
- They do not deal with sensitive subjects.
- They do not constitute a test. Never ask an applicant to prove his or her skill by administering a test, and do not ask hypothetical questions such as “What would you do if . . . .?”

Questions meeting the above criteria will provide usable, substantive information on which to base a selection decision.

It cannot be emphasized enough that each interview question should be related to a particular KSA required in the job. These KSAs are derived from the job analysis process, the position description, and/or position classification guidance. The following are examples of valid, KSA-based interview questions for an office automation clerk position:

- What experience have you had in typing documents, tables, and spreadsheets using automated software programs?
- What particular software programs have you used?
- Describe experience in which you ensured the correctness of punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and format in correspondence, messages, or reports.
- Describe your experience in maintaining publications and regulations such as posting changes or requesting updates.
- What experience have you had in establishing and maintaining a filing system?

Again, do not ask test questions. Examples of good interview questions for a supervisory position include: “What experience have you had in delegating work and appraising performance? What percent of your time was spent performing these duties, and how many subordinates were you responsible for in this role?” Do not ask: “What would you do if you were required to deliver 1,000 cartons of widgets to Big Blue AFB in two days while your sole supply clerk was out on extended leave? How would you get the cartons delivered?” These types of question are not objective, have no “right” answers, and may not meet validity requirements specified in the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (29 CFR Part 1607).

For KSA-derived questions involving interpersonal relations, do not ask questions that will trigger an automatic or socially acceptable response (e.g., “Do you like working with people?”).



## PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

The following considerations will provide for a productive interview:

- Allow interviewed candidates to review the position description/core document for your vacancy, and to do so **before** the interview commences. This saves time for you, and avoids the appearance of administering a speed reading test. You may also choose to provide the position description to interviewed candidates prior to the interview date, but be sure to treat all candidates equally. If one interviewed candidate is provided the position description a day prior to the interview, then all interviewed candidates should be afforded the same courtesy.
- Use the same interview method with all candidates (e.g., in person or by telephone). However, if a candidate is unable to meet with you in person because they live in a different commuting area, it's okay to interview them by phone.
- Allow the same amount of time for each interview session.
- Ask the same questions, in the same order, of all interviewed candidates.
- Allow yourself time between interviews to record ratings and complete notes.
- Put the candidate at ease.
- Establish a friendly but business-like atmosphere.
- Welcome the candidate, thank him or her for participating, and relay pertinent information about position duties, the work environment, performance requirements, etc.
- Make sure the seating arrangement allows the candidate to feel comfortable.
- Use an interview room that is free from interruptions and distractions.
- Obtain sufficient information with each question; ask follow-up questions when a candidate's initial response is vague or inadequate.
- Conclude the interview by summarizing what will happen next in the selection process (i.e., a telephone call from the Air Force Personnel Center or servicing civilian personnel office to notify the candidate that he or she has been selected, or written notification from the interviewer that the candidate has been non-selected).
- You are encouraged to notify all interviewed candidates of their non-selection in a reasonable amount of time, normally 5-10 days. Candidates may ultimately learn of

their non-selection through an online inquiry or electronic notification, but this may not occur for several weeks.

- Remember that interview results are only one part of the overall evaluation process. They should not be given undue weight, and must be used in conjunction with other evaluation criteria.

Be cognizant of nonverbal communication on the part of both yourself and the interviewee. The volume and tone of your voice, your facial expressions, and your body movements communicate much to the applicant, and vice versa. Applicants will respond more freely to a warm voice, to interviewers who look them in the eye, and to interviewers who actively listen to responses. Interviewers who slouch, look down or away, lean back in their chairs, fold their arms, doodle with a pen, or perform other distracting motions communicate disinterest, a lack of respect, or boredom.

## PRACTICES TO AVOID

- **Never** indicate that you have made a selection before all interviews are completed.
- Do not make promises of promotion or selection to any candidate.
- Do not interview or promise to interview any individual not listed on your referral certificate.
- Do not solicit a declination from any candidate.
- Do not assume an accent to be a liability.
- Avoid common rating errors (discussed below).
- Do not interview with a negative attitude.
- Don't use terms such as "girl," "boy," "gal," "honey," "dear," or any other derogatory names when addressing the interviewee.
- Do not waste time asking questions of a candidate when such information is already available through review of applications, resumes, or candidate records.

## COMMON RATING ERRORS

The following are common rating errors to avoid when evaluating interviewed candidates:

**Halo Effect:** the tendency to generalize either positively or negatively about a candidate's overall ranking or potential based upon a single attribute. Don't weigh your decision on a single accomplishment, association with a particular group, the college a candidate may have attended, etc.

**Stereotyping:** the tendency to attribute traits or characteristics to an individual based upon a preconceived notion of the sex, race, ethnic group, religion, creed, or other grouping to which the individual may belong. For example, assumptions that candidates may be more or less disciplined, verbally astute, or mechanically inclined based on their sex, race, or national origin prevent an impartial evaluation of candidates and are always inappropriate.

**Contrast Error:** occurs when the rating of one candidate is influenced positively or negatively in comparison with another candidate's performance, e.g., lower ratings for a candidate who immediately follows a strong candidate and high ratings for one who follows a weak candidate. Candidates are to be evaluated against objective criteria rather than against each other.

**Leniency or Harshness:** a tendency for some interviewers to form uniformly high or uniformly low opinions. When most ratings fall at either one end of the scale or the other, it can be an indication that an accurate, objective assessment was not achieved.

**Central Tendency:** similar to leniency/harshness error except the interviewer limits ratings to the middle range. These types of errors often occur if the interviewing criteria are not adequately defined.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWER SELFEVALUATION

To assess your interviewing skills, ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I refrain from making a judgment about the candidate during the first few minutes of the interview?
- Did I pause after the applicant finished a remark to give the candidate a chance to elaborate further or tie up loose ends?
- Did I repeat key parts of questions to allow the candidate to elaborate if their initial response was incomplete or in need of clarification?
- Did I ask one question at a time?

- Did I appear interested in the candidate and did I give him or her my full attention?
- Did I avoid expressing approval or disapproval of the candidates?
- Did I avoid indicating my own attitudes?
- Did I use language appropriate to the candidates?
- Did I talk the minimum amount necessary to gain substantive information?
- Did I control the direction of the interview?
- Did I obtain maximum information on all relevant points?
- Did I give the applicant an opportunity to ask questions?
- Did I cover the necessary points in closing the interview?

## CONCLUSION

We hope this guide has provided a valuable overview of the interview process and will enable you to make productive use of your time as well as that of your interviewees. Questions not covered in this guide will undoubtedly arise, so please do not hesitate to contact your servicing personnel management specialist if you are need of further information or assistance.