# A Step by Step Interview Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed to assist the selection panel members with conducting interviews.

This guide should be used in conjunction with the Right Job, Right Person! Recruitment and Selection Framework, in particular Stage 3 - Select.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Once the selection team has decided on the capabilities to be assessed at interview (using the Capability Cards Stage 1 - Appendix A) and has developed and decided on the interview questions to be asked or any work sample tests to be undertaken (see A Step by Step Guide to which Selection Options you should Use for your Advertised Vacancy), it is important that time and effort is put into thinking about the best way to conduct the interview. With this in mind the selection team should develop the interview guide. The interview guide provides the team with a structured way of gathering specific and relevant information about the applicant’s capabilities. See the Interview Guide Template for the suggested interview guide format. Please note that this template is only a suggested format and should be changed or modified to meet the individual selection process.

Have I paid attention to the language of the criterion?

For example, assessing a selection criterion which demonstrates “well developed written communication skills” requires the applicant to focus on actual experiences which show the extent of their skills in this area. However, if the criterion was phrased “knowledge of effective written communication skills and techniques”, this would require different examples which do not necessarily rely on the applicant describing their actual performance in the workplace.

Structure of the Document:

Layout
Where appropriate, dot points should be used, rather than using long paragraphs of text. This ensures that the statement is as easy as possible for the selection team to read.

Length
Conciseness is important in a document of this type. About 250 words is generally an appropriate length for each criterion. However, this may depend upon factors such as the role being applied for.

Presentation
You should ensure that:
- there are no errors anywhere in the document;
- the document is formatted neatly; and
- the sentences are grammatically correct and concise.
INTRODUCE THE SESSION

1. Welcome the applicant and offer them refreshment.
2. Introduce the rest of the selection team and explain your collective roles in the recruitment and selection process.
3. Clarify how much time is available and explain the next stages of the process.
4. Introduce the idea of structured interviewing using behaviourally based questions.

Key Points to Cover Include:
- You will focus on specific capabilities which are critical for success in the role.
- You will ask them several questions designed to provide you with the information you need to make an informed decision about their suitability.
- All applicants will be asked the questions that appear in the interview guide. However, you will also probe in different directions, depending upon the answers that applicants provide.
- You have read their application form and they can draw upon examples from previous work experience or education relevant to the role.
- You will need to keep them focused and may cut their replies short at times when you have enough information.

5. Highlight the capability areas to be covered.
6. Say that you will be taking notes and provide them with a pen and paper in case they wish to do the same.
7. Say that you will tell them more about the role and the organisation at the end. (It is useful to do this at the end rather than the beginning as the information presented before the questions can confuse applicants or result in them trying to pre-empt what they think the interviewer wants to hear.)
8. Add that there will also be time for them to ask questions before you close.
9. Ask if they have any specific questions about the process or the interview itself.

ASKING THE QUESTIONS

Your Opening Questions:

Asking an open question about the applicant’s current work or educational activities helps to break the ice. It also allows applicants to start talking and focus their thinking about the interview and role. A typical example would be:

“Tell us about the main responsibilities in your current role (or most recent role)”

This may give some useful background information for later questions, but be prepared to ask the applicant to summarise if they start to give too much detail.

Using Behaviourally Based Questions:

Next, work through the questions for each capability (selection criteria) in turn. As you ask the questions:
• Find out what opportunities the applicant has had to gain skills related to the capability.
• Encourage the applicant to identify examples of past or present work experience (or education if more appropriate).
• Gain as much specific evidence as possible.
• Ask at least two questions for each capability.
• Probe the answers provided, using the suggested probing questions listed.
• Recap, and summarise each capability, but do not evaluate the behaviours. For example, avoid making remarks such as “That was a good idea ...”
• Remain objective. Decisions must be made on the basis of concrete evidence, rather than simply the opinions of the interviewer.
• Ask if there is anything that the applicant would like to add when you feel you have explored several aspects of a capability.

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

After all of the capabilities have been covered you should provide an opportunity for the applicant to add any further points. For example: “I feel that we have covered the areas that we wanted to ask you about. Is there anything else you feel is relevant that you would like to add?” Be open to this information.

Following this:
• Describe the role and your organisation.
• Invite and answer any questions that the applicant may have.
• Determine if the applicant has any further questions.
• Thank them for coming along and sharing their information.
• Repeat the information about the next steps in the selection process – for example clarify referee contact details and time scales for your decision.
• After the applicant has left, write up your notes as soon as possible.

4 INTERVIEW NOTE-TAKING AND EVALUATING THE APPLICANT’S RESPONSES

Introduction

It is extremely difficult for an interviewer to accurately remember everything that an interviewee says during a structured behavioural interview. If the interviewer relies solely on their memory, points will almost certainly be forgotten or distorted. In order to limit this risk, note-taking during the interview is strongly recommended. For the suggested format for note-taking during the interview see the Interview Questions and Notes Template. Please note that this template is only a suggested format and should be changed or modified to meet the individual selection process.

This will enable the interviewer to check that they have elicited all the information they require against the predetermined interview plan, and to check their understanding with the interviewee. In addition, gaps in written information are much more visible (and therefore difficult to ignore), than gaps in information which is stored solely in the interviewer’s mind. An accurate record of the interview is also
useful evidence of the objectiveness of decisions, should an applicant challenge the selection process.

**Note-Taking**

- Suspend your judgement of the applicant’s responses until after the interview has finished. All you need to do is write down the key words relating to what was said and what examples the applicant gave to support their claims. Your notes must be accurate, factual and directly related to the role.
- Immediately after the interview has finished, jot down any final points and observations while the evidence is fresh in your mind. You will be amazed at how quickly you can forget significant details, particularly when you are interviewing several people for the same role. Once this process is complete, you are in a position to undertake the final write-up of the interview against the capabilities/selection criteria for the role. To do this you now need to evaluate the responses.

Next, read through your notes and decide which evidence best supports each capability. Fill in a summary of your evidence under your chosen capability heading. When evaluating:

- look for more than one piece of evidence for each capability. You should do this by asking at least two questions which tap into specific capabilities;
- look for trends and support evidence; and
- attempt to reconcile conflicting evidence.

Clear descriptions of the capabilities, the selection criteria and numerical ratings (if applicable) encourage interviewers to evaluate specific aspects of an interviewee’s performance, rather than making generalised judgements of “I liked that person”. Ratings should be completed after the interview for each applicant, together with written evidence to support the rating. A useful five point rating scale is included in this kit. In each instance you can rate the applicants’ responses on each capability using the scale.

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**RESOURCES**

- Right Job, Right Person! Recruitment and Selection Framework Stage 3 - Select
- Capability Cards
- A Step by Step Guide to which Selection Options you should Use for your Advertised Vacancy