



# UNIT-3 Interviewing Techniques

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Apply methods of finding, selecting, and keeping the best people using behavioral description interviewing techniques.

## Unit 3

### Interviewing Techniques

#### Preparing for the Interview

##### Preparation Checklist

##### Preparing for the Interview

Employment interviews are very much like appraisal interviews in that preparation is extremely important. Some items of preparation:

- Before the interview, develop a question guide/interview guide. Everyone who is conducting the interview should be familiar with the guide.
- Give yourself enough time between appointments.
- Have a room conducive to an informal interview.

REMEMBER: The interviewer is the company in the candidate's mind.

##### Before the Interview

- Go to get the person.
- Shake hands.
- Show them where to put their coat.
- Tell them which chair is theirs.

##### The Interview Format

##### Establish rapport.

This is the warm and fuzzy part, but be careful what you say. Give a little bit of information about the company and a little bit about the position.

##### Discussion about the job.

Include technical aspects, performance aspects, and fit.

##### Close out the interview.

Include the following points:

- More about job and company.
- What happens next?
- Permission to check references.
- Conclude and stop talking. (Otherwise it's as if the interview continues.)



During World War II, large-scale decisions had to be made about putting soldiers to work. The time honored military tradition of saying, “You, go there” didn’t work any longer. However, when the same applicants were interviewed by several classification officers, they couldn’t agree on where to rank the applicant. In one case, an applicant was ranked first by one officer and fifty-seventh by another. When several interviewers can’t agree on ranking, we can reliably say that there are issues with the ranking system, and with the people conducting the ranking.

The stress interview got the spotlight because of an American flying ace, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, who had a number of interesting little tests for applicants. He would have the interviewee’s chair nailed to the floor, and then watch the applicant try to obey his command to move the chair a little closer. He also would direct them to a closed door when the interview was over. The door opened into a closet and he would evaluate their reaction. Stress interviews today include things like having a meal together and the interviewer waits until the candidate has a mouthful of food before asking a question, an interviewer who offers an oversized stuffed chair, or a chair that is suited for a child.

Of course we know today that stress interviews really only tell us how a candidate would react under a certain kind of stress, not how proficient they are in their day-to-day work performance.

As early as 1942, intelligence testers were advocating using a structured set of interview questions so that each candidate could be given equal consideration. However, the traditional fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants type of interview kept coming to the fore, even though it had an accuracy rating of anywhere from 14% to about 50% .

Over the years, structured interviews have been gaining more and more favor with organizations. Structure improves accuracy and validity and makes the selection process more defensible. It is important to note that today’s research indicates that structured interviews based on job requirements (which combine competency based questions, behavioral type questions, and critical incidents) give organizations an accuracy rating that is far, far higher than ever before.

## An Objective Interview

### The Five Criteria

There are five criteria for today's objective interviews.

- Structured interviews
- Based on job requirements
- Ask the same questions (stems) to each candidate
- Combine competency-based questions, behavioral-type questions, and critical incidents
- Take notes

We know that the structured interview, where every candidate has the opportunity to answer the same questions, is more objective and defensible.

We recognize the validity of behavior-based questions because the best predictor of future performance is past performance.

Well-prepared critical incidents (stories of real events that ask for specific behaviors) identify performance behaviors and have about an 85% accuracy rating.

However, interviewing is not a science. Our job is to eliminate as many opportunities for error as possible. Know what the job entails, follow these recommendations for interviewing, and combine the interview with other testing for the best shot at getting a good candidate.

### **The Right Stuff**

The truth is that the vast majority of hiring managers don't know what it takes to hire the right candidate. They have very little knowledge of proper hiring techniques. This lack of knowledge isn't beneficial to the manager and it isn't beneficial to the candidate. A hiring manager may decide someone isn't the right person for the job simply because that manager didn't ask the right questions, asked ambiguous questions, or asked all the wrong questions.

Many perfect candidates for jobs walk out the door, never to return, for no other reason than a recruiter's ineptness or inexperience.

The three biggest problems are:

- The recruiter doesn't know the applicant's qualifications or specifics of the job.
- The recruiter makes a poor impression that gets transferred to the company.
- The recruiter has no plan in place for a structured interview.

### **The Human Factor**

There are a few other factors we should be aware of as well (human factors that we all can fall victim to, but which we can usually control if we are aware of them). We are talking about these now because while they are most prevalent in the interview itself, these tendencies rear their head long before the interview. We can even see them as we rate resumes.

### **Leniency/Stringency**

This is a tendency to rate candidates too harshly (so that none of them will ever be able to meet your demanding criteria) or being too easy on them (so that all of them pass with flying colors). Think of how you rate employees who belong to a poorly performing team: do they all rate poorly by association? Also, sometimes we compare employees to ourselves.

### **Halo/Horn Effect**

This tendency has been researched extensively. This is a tendency to rate someone high on all factors (the halo) or low (the horns) because of a global impression you are hanging onto. Likewise, compatibility is the tendency to rate people who are like us higher than their performance indicates. We also tend to rate people who do well in conversation, who are attractive, or well educated, or attended

the same school we did, as higher than their performance justifies. Sometimes we also do this when we give a lot of weight to someone's credentials, even though they may not have done anything for us yet.

### **Error of Central Tendency**

This is our tendency to give average marks to most candidates. Have you ever watched figure skating, dance, or vocal competitions? You have seen many of the judges cluster their marks toward the center or average. (Of course, you have also seen all the other tendencies as well from these judges.)

### **Types of Techniques**

For employers, interviewing techniques run the gamut from being an art to being a science. Upon review of HR journals and research, we can find references to a variety of techniques meant to test the mettle of candidates and interviewers, including stress interviews, situational interviews, and behavioral interviews.

Whichever techniques you choose, you need to keep in mind that they have all been developed to help you decide who the best candidate is for the opening you have. You'll need to consider the type of job, which questions will be most useful for you, and which ones help you get the most information you can in the time available.

The scientific part of interviewing requires that you gather a profile on each candidate you want to interview, and that this information includes details that can readily be compared across candidates. Sometimes it may seem that quantification is more important than qualifications in the hiring process. This is partly based on the economics of the hiring process, because advertising, screening, interviewing, and testing costs add up quickly. In addition, lawsuits against employers for wrongful dismissal and other employment related causes have increased dramatically. Making the best decision you can at the time of hiring can save you lots of grief in the future.

In traditional interviews, we ask questions like:

- Where do you want to be in five years?
- What kind of supervisor do you like?
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?

These aren't wrong or bad questions, but the answers just aren't as valuable as other information we could collect if we asked slightly different questions.

### **Basics of Behavioral Interviewing**

Behavioral interviewing was researched and developed in the 1980's by Tom Janz, Lowell Hellervik, and David Gilmore. (Their seminal work, *Behavior Description Interviewing*, was published in 1986.) The approach uses behavioral questions as a way to understand how a candidate will actually perform on the job, working with the principle that the best indication of future behavior is past behavior.

Behavioral interviewing is based on this model:



To facilitate a behavioral interview, the interviewer must have a thorough understanding of the skills needed for successful job performance in a particular job. Those competencies are then broken down into the knowledge, skills, and abilities which must be assessed during the interview process. While this type of question development and the interview itself will take longer than a traditional interview, the depth of answers gives a much better prediction of how the candidate has reacted to certain situations. While people certainly learn from their mistakes and success, and make adjustments to their behavior accordingly, this type of question does tell us what they will likely do in similar circumstances.

One of the reasons that interviewers like behavioral questions is that the candidate must give thought to the answers, and draw their responses from actual examples. This leads us to think that behavioral interviews are probably more honest than traditional interviews, and that candidates are not able to rehearse their answers. However, there is so much material available for candidates today that it is very reasonable to expect that they have given some time and attention to preparing answers for behavioral questions. Many career counselors encourage candidates to approach an interview like any other meeting, and to bring a copy of their resume and notes that they can refer to during the interview, too.

## Purpose of Behavioral Interviewing

### About Behavioral Interviewing

The behavioral interviewing tools will ensure that the selection process is:

- Objective
- Consistent and transparent
- Based on the competencies and proficiency level of the job
- A good predictor of performance

When asking questions about past behaviors, we also get to know a candidate's personal preferences, attitudes, and behaviors. This helps us make decisions about job suitability, since people may have the skills and knowledge to do a job, but not have the inclination to do it.

According to the research done by Tom Janz, Lowell Hellervik, and David Gilmore as they developed the method in the 1980's, behavioral interviewing has a rating of about 55-65% accuracy (in that it is predictive of future job performance), whereas traditional questions are only about 10% effective. These figures have also been supported in many subsequent studies.

We know that some people will lie (or at least exaggerate) in an interview, and behavioral interviewing reduces their ability to use lies in their answers. Although not entirely perfect, behavioral interviewing

uses specific past behaviors to predict future behaviors, instead of relying on what a candidate says they **will** do in a certain situation, or has written on their resume. This interview style helps you to identify strengths and weaknesses by looking for patterns in behavior. The **Behavioral Based Interview (BBI)** or **Behavioral Description Interview (BDI)** process also indirectly communicates some of the job expectations and minimizes first day surprises.

### Sample Questions

Some examples of behavior-type questions include:

- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a specific type of problem.
- Tell me about a time where you had to make a difficult ethical decision.
- Can you recall an instance where you had to be the leader of a team?
- Can you describe one decision that you regret? What did you learn from the experience?

Two other types of questions will help you here. **Achievement oriented** questions ask your candidates to quantify what they have done in the past. **Holistic questions** reach beyond performance to values.

### Supporting Tools

Of course, there are other factors that you may need to evaluate. How would you find out if a person can do the job or has the competence (skills, abilities, and knowledge) to do the job?

- Look at qualifications
- Consider testing
- Bring in work samples
- Perform reference checks

Don't believe that 20 years of experience will necessarily give you a competent person. They could have doing the same thing poorly for 20 years! Experience doesn't equal excellence.

## Asking Questions

First of all, let's just review the two types of interview questions, because one important component of the BDI is asking the right questions.

### Types of Questions

There are two kinds of questions: open and closed.

Closed questions close down an interview. Open questions give us more information, solicit opinions, and generally open the conversation up to further discussion. For most of our interview with candidates, we will want to focus on open questions.

Even if you ask open questions, there is no guarantee you will get all the information you need. Sometimes you have to probe for even more information.

## Probing Techniques

### Ask an open question.

Some good questions include:

- “Can you describe that more clearly?”
- “Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?”
- “What do you think we should do?”

You’ll soon recognize that if you ask too many of these questions, your conversation partner will feel like they are under interrogation, so use them carefully.

### Pause.

Many of us feel uncomfortable when silence overtakes a conversation, and we will fill the silence by expanding on what was said previously.

### Use reflective or mirroring questions.

For example, if the candidate says “I’m looking for work that is more challenging,” you may respond by just reflecting back to them, “Challenging?” Then pause. Usually, the other person will provide you with an expanded answer without you asking more questions. These kinds of statements also serve to focus or clarify and summarize without interrupting the flow of the conversation. They demonstrate your intent to understand the speaker’s thoughts and feelings.

### Paraphrase.

Reflect what has just been said in your own words: “So if I understand you correctly, you...” This technique shows that you want to understand your conversation partner and that you want to be accurate. It also allows the sender to hear back what they have said from someone else’s point of view.

### Use summary questions.

Summary questions are a helpful way of probing and winding up the conversation at the same time. “You have spoken to your colleague about his foul language in the office, you have tried to ignore it, and you remain concerned about the impact his swearing has on our visitors and staff. None of these techniques have worked to reduce the amount of swearing and now you are asking me to intervene. Have I got it right?”

Here is another example: when we asked a candidate what her favorite part of her current job is, she said, “Teamwork.”

Rather than come back with yet another question, you might just say “Teamwork...” in a reflective tone of voice, and pause again. Usually, the other person will recognize that reflection as a clue to expand or provide you with additional information.

Summary statements or paraphrases sum up what has been said, and will show that you have listened and absorbed what’s being said. Don’t use them to take over the dialogue.

The summary is the stronger cue that the conversation is winding down on that topic. However, if necessary or appropriate, you can follow this up with a fact-finding question (usually a closed question), such as, “Did you want to say more about the issue?”, or, “Do you have any other comments?”

## Provocative Statements

### Sample Statements

- I really hate my job.
- I think this city is too hot.
- I really dislike cooking.
- You’re not very good at your job.
- I don’t like the way you speak to me.
- I think the report you wrote is terrible.
- Your new hair cut isn’t flattering.
- I wish I didn’t have to go to that meeting tomorrow.

### Your Statement

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### Probes

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## Sample Behavioral Description Interview Questions

### Structuring Your Questions

When we begin asking behavioral description questions, these are open questions, but there is a certain pattern to them.

The stem, or main, question seeks information on past situations, the action the candidate took in that situation, and what the outcome was. Additional probing statements give you more information about that situation, reaction, and outcome.

Let’s look at some sample behavioral description interview questions.

### **Attitude and Belief Questions**

**Do you consider yourself an enthusiastic person?**

- Tell me about a situation recently where you were really excited and enthusiastic.
- What were the circumstances?
- What was it that captured your enthusiasm?
- What impact did your enthusiasm have on results? How long did your enthusiasm last?

**Tell me about a situation where you felt it was important for you to take a stand that was openly critical of a boss or co-worker.**

- What was the situation?
- Why was it so important you say something?
- What reaction did you get?
- What impact did this have on you?

### **Self-Motivation Questions**

**Give me an example of an experience where you felt especially motivated.**

- What was the situation?
- What did you find so compelling?
- How long did your motivation last?
- Have you had this experience at other times?

**Tell me about a project where you had to work to your limit to get the job done.**

- What was the situation?
- How long did it last?
- In what way were you stretched?
- When did this happen?

### **Stability and Persistence Questions**

**Describe a recent goal or project at work where you experienced tremendous adversity, or where the results were elusive.**

- What was your goal?
- What roadblocks did you encounter?
- How did you respond?
- What was the outcome?

### **Maturity and Judgment Questions**

**Describe a difficult decision you have made on a previous job that required you to exercise judgment or discretion.**

- What was the situation?

- In what way did it require judgment or discretion?
- How did you go about making your decision?
- What did you ultimately decide?
- What did you learn from this experience?

## Developing Behavioral Description Interview Questions

Competency: \_\_\_\_\_

Stem	Probes

## The Critical Incident Technique

Sometimes when we are thinking of fit, the best way we can give someone a glimpse of our company is through a critical incident (also called a situational interview question). This is a bit more complex than the traditional “What if” questions we have all asked candidates at one time or another.

Critical incidents are stories of real events that describe effective or ineffective job behavior. They are valuable for several reasons.

First of all, they are data, not opinions. The data provided in a carefully gathered critical incident depends only on the memory and the observation skills of the person describing the incident.

Second, they can be gathered from a number of sources (including supervisors, team colleagues, and customers) to provide a different perspective of the position or of effective performance.

Third, critical incidents lead directly to behavior description questions for applicants with related job experience. For applicants without job related experience, these critical incidents provide the material to create other situations similar to those describe in a job-related incident, but they are more likely to draw on general situations candidates have experienced.

Situational or critical incident interview questions can also help communicate job expectations. They also rely on goal-setting theory. (In simple terms, goal-setting theory suggests that a person’s future behaviors are strongly influenced by his or her behavioral intentions or goals.)

Using this assumption, the purpose of the situational interview questions is to identify job candidates’ work-related behavioral intentions by presenting them with a series of incidents which might occur on the job, and for each one asking, “What would you do in this situation?”

Situational questions are best when they reflect real events that occur in the organization. The more closely they reflect what actually takes place, the more able the candidate is able to consider answers that actually predict future job performance.

Good critical incidents describe the situation as exactly and objectively as possible. They are not evaluative. They should not reveal the names of the people involved.

### Sample Critical Incident Questions

Here is an example of an effective critical incident for selecting a bookkeeper in a busy manufacturing company: “You are trying to do a cost analysis from all the various sections of the plant. People are very busy and don’t see the importance of this information, so they aren’t cooperating. What would you do?”

Other examples:

- One of your employees has misunderstood your instructions and incorrectly completed a task which you assigned to him. This has caused a severe problem in your work group. What would you do?
- You are currently supervising a group of five employees whose productivity is being affected by low morale and a negative attitude of two employees. One of these two employees is

leaving your team in a few months. What will you do to improve the productivity of your team?

**Test Your Knowledge**

**Creating a Critical Incident**

Write a critical incident or situational question based on incidents that could happen in your organization.

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**Further Reading:**

- ✓ *Successful Interviewing: Techniques for Hiring, Coaching, and Performance ...*, By Diane ARTHUR, (2000)
- ✓ *Interviewing Techniques*, By Carolyn Thompson, (2002)