

Interview questions

Asking the right interview questions will:

- Confirm the candidate's education, training, and experience listed in the resume
- Provide information about the candidate's past performance and accomplishments
- Indicate the candidate's compatibility with the culture of your organization (for example, work pace, work style)
- Offer insights into the reasons behind the candidate's desire to change jobs
- Responses to key questions should be probed further and confirmed through subsequent reference checks.

Questions not to ask

You must avoid asking discriminatory questions as outlined in Human Rights legislation. Questions to avoid include, but are not limited to:

- What year did you graduate from high school or post-secondary school?
- Where were you born?
- Where did you learn a foreign language?
- What are your child care arrangements?
- What are your religious practices?
- How many days did you miss because of illness last year?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Are you planning to have children anytime soon?
- Are you responsible for parental care?
- Do you have senior parents or another family member that depends on you?

Behavioral questions

Behavioral interviewing techniques probe beyond superficial answers. They require candidates to assess themselves and recall examples of behavior. Most behavioral questions are formed as either self-appraisal queries or situational queries, as shown in the examples below:

Self-appraisal query: If you had the choice of working in a job with peaks and valleys in the workload or a job with a steady volume of work, which would you choose and why?

Past situational query: Tell me about a time when you had to make a critical decision in your supervisor's absence. How did you handle it?

Situational questions

A situational question presents a hypothetical situation to the interviewee and asks how s/he would respond to it.

Future situational query: Give the candidate a scenario of a current or past problem that your organization has had to address. (The problem should be related to the position being staffed.) Ask the candidate to describe how they would handle the situation or resolve the problem.

Good practice

For behavioral or situational questions, prepare sample answers in advance of the interview. Identify the types of responses you are looking for and rank them from excellent to fair. Use this guide to rank the interviewee's responses.

Open-ended questions

These questions require an explanation from the candidate. Open-ended questions begin with words such as "what," "why," "how," "describe," and "explain." For example:

- What is the greatest asset you will bring to this job?
- What is the most important thing you do at your current job.
- Describe the last time you had a short deadline and explain how you handled it.
- How have you had to adapt to your job's changing needs?

Neutral questions

Neutral questions do not reveal a bias toward an acceptable or correct answer.

For example: If you had to choose between one extreme or the other, would you want a supervisor who leaves you alone to get your work done and only wants to hear from you if there's a problem, or would you prefer someone who meets with you regularly to help you focus on your goals for the day or week?

Yes or no questions

Use questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" to confirm information you already have. In general, use these types of questions sparingly because they don't add new information.

For example: Were you with XYZ organization 10 years before you relocated to Red Deer?

Follow-up questions

After a candidate answers a question, follow up with another question that probes their attitudes or delves further into the issue.

For example, you may start with a broad question: "What are your responsibilities as the administrative assistant?" A candidate may respond with a list of duties such as: answer phones, type, keep the calendar, arrange travel, and file documents. Although this information confirms the resume, it does not give information about the relationship with the supervisor, consequences of actions, or pride in work output. To get this kind of information, ask follow-up questions, such as: What aspects of your job are most crucial? How many hours a week do you find you need to work to get your job done?

Other questions

- What challenges do you think you'll face in this job?
- What concerns you about this job?
- What is your long-term career plan?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like this?
- How long will it take before you can contribute to this organization?
- Why are you seeking a new job?
- If you are offered this job, what factors will influence whether you accept it or not?
- This position will require developing and implementing some changes to our way of doing things. How will you help make the transitions smooth?
- If I were to call up your previous boss, what would they tell me is your strongest quality and why?
- Describe a situation in the past where you had to resolve a difficult situation with a colleague and explain how you went about it?
- Tell me what you did in your last/current job?
- Why do you wish to leave that position or why did you leave that position?
- Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

A national organization agreed to post this policy on www.hrcouncil.ca as part of the HR Toolkit. Sample policies are provided for reference only. Always consult current legislation in your jurisdiction to create policies and procedures for your organization