



# Structured Interviews

Presented by the  
U.S. Office of Personnel Management

# Training Objectives

- Section 1: Overview of Structured Interviews
- Section 2: Developing a Structured Interview
- Section 3: Conducting a Structured Interview
- Section 4: Evaluating a Structured Interview
- Section 5: Tips for Effective Interviewing





# Section 1: Overview of Structured Interviews

# What Is a Structured Interview?

- An assessment method designed to measure job-related competencies by systematically inquiring about a candidate's behavior:
  - In past experiences and
  - In proposed hypothetical situations
- Uses a standardized questioning and scoring process for all candidates

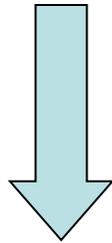


# Key Standardized Features

- All questions are developed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) based on job-related competencies
- All candidates are asked the same predetermined questions and in the same order
- A panel of trained interviewers takes detailed notes on candidates' responses
- All responses are evaluated using the same rating scale and standards for acceptable answers

# Why Are Structure and Standardization so Important?

- Validity
- Reliability
- Fairness
- Practicality



- Allows the structured interview to meet legal and professional standards for an assessment method



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## Section 2: Developing a Structured Interview

# Eight Key Steps

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- 1) Review Job Analysis Material
  - 2) Determine the Competencies to be Assessed
  - 3) Develop the Interview Questions
  - 4) Develop the Probe Questions
  - 5) Develop the Rating Scale
  - 6) Pilot Test the Questions and Interview Process
  - 7) Develop an Interviewer's Guide
  - 8) Document the Development Process

# 1) Review Job Analysis Material

- Review the job tasks and responsibilities
- Review the competencies necessary to perform the tasks and responsibilities
- Identify the competencies that are required upon entry
- Obtain confirmation from SMEs
- Conduct a job analysis if one does not exist



## 2) Determine the Competencies to be Assessed

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- A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a close-up, slightly blurred view of the American flag, focusing on the stars and stripes.
- Structured interviews are well-suited for assessing competencies such as:
    - Teamwork
    - Oral Communication
    - Interpersonal Skills
    - Conflict Management
    - Influencing/Negotiating
  - Structured interviews typically assess 4-6 competencies unless the job is unique or at a particularly high level

### 3) Develop Interview Questions

#### Tips for Writing Interview Questions:

- Reflective of the job and tied to competencies identified through the job analysis
- Open-ended
- Clear and concise
- At an appropriate reading level
- Free of jargon
- Written with superlative adjectives (e.g., most, last, worst, least, best)
- Potentially provide a context for the interview questions

### 3) Develop Interview Questions

#### Tips for Writing Interview Questions Continued:

- Use the STAR Model
- Interview questions should elicit three important pieces of information from the candidate:
  - **Situation or Task:** Describes the context or background for the event of the tasks involved
  - **Action:** Describes exactly what was done or what would be done
  - **Result:** Describes the consequence of the candidate's actions

### 3) Develop Interview Questions

- Behavioral Questions
  - Draw from a candidate's actual behavior during past experiences (which demonstrate job-related competencies)
  - Based on the premise that the best predictor of future behavior on the job is past behavior under similar circumstances
- Situational
  - Present realistic job scenarios or dilemmas and ask how applicants *would* respond
  - Based on the premise that people's intentions are closely tied to their actual behavior

### 3) Develop Interview Questions

- Convene a panel of SMEs
- SMEs familiarize themselves with:
  - The competencies being assessed and their definitions
  - Some tasks associated with the competencies
  - The “Tips for Writing Interview Questions” (Slides 11-12)



# Develop Interview Questions: Behavioral Questions

- SMEs brainstorm experience-based scenarios that relate to the selected competencies and tasks
- Convert scenarios to questions
- A second group of SMEs should read the questions and identify the competency they believe fits best



# Develop Interview Questions: Example Behavioral Question

- **Example Competency: Interpersonal Skills**

Shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others; develops and maintains effective relationships with others; may include effectively dealing with individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and different situations; is sensitive to cultural diversity, race, gender, disabilities, and other individual differences.

- **Example Question:**

Describe a situation in which you dealt with individuals who were difficult, hostile, or distressed. Who was involved, what specific actions did you take, and what were the results?

# Develop Interview Questions: Situational Questions

- Select competencies/associated tasks from a job analysis/position description/job opportunity announcement
- Write critical incidents, or examples of effective and ineffective behaviors or situations you have witnessed on the job which reflect the competencies and associated tasks
- A second group of SMEs reads the behaviors and identifies the competency that they believe the incident best illustrates
- Rewrite the retained critical incidents in the form of hypothetical situational questions

# Develop Interview Questions: Example Situational Question

- Competency:  
Interpersonal Skills
- Behavior:  
“Coworker Kathy” dealt calmly and professionally with a very distressed client who did not receive her check on time.
- Question:  
A very angry client walks up to your desk. She says she was told your office sent her an overdue check 5 days ago. She claims she has not received the check. She says she has bills to pay, and no one will help her. How would you handle this situation?

## 4) Develop Probe Questions

- It may be necessary to use probe questions to guide the candidate in providing the three important pieces of information necessary to accurately assess their response
- Decide beforehand whether or not probe questions will be allowed
- Make a list of acceptable probe questions for every competency interview question



# Develop Probe Questions

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- Do not use leading probes that convey the answers
  - Do narrow in on the candidate's specific roles and actions
    - Seek clarification when candidates say “we did...” or “our group...”
    - Seek clarification when candidates are vague
  - Do not challenge by word or expression any statements made by the candidate
  - Do ask open-ended questions unless looking for a yes/no response

# Example Probes for Behavioral Questions

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- Situation/Task probes
    - Who was involved?
    - What factors led up to this situation?
  - Action probes
    - How did you respond?
    - What was your role?
  - Result probes
    - What was the outcome?
    - Is there anything you would have done differently?

# Example Probes for Situational Questions

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- A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a close-up, slightly blurred view of the American flag, focusing on the stars and stripes.
- Situation/Task probes
    - Why do you believe this situation occurred?
    - What do you consider to be the most critical issues in this situation?
  - Action probes
    - What is the first thing you would say or do?
    - What factors would affect your course of action?
    - What other actions could you take?
  - Result probes
    - How do you think your action would be received?
    - What do you consider as benefits of your action?

## 5) Develop Rating Scales

Decide on one proficiency level range for all competencies

- Typically between 3 and 7 levels
- Label at least 3 levels (e.g., unsatisfactory, satisfactory, superior)



# Develop a Rating Scale for Behavioral Questions

- Determine behavioral examples for each proficiency level
- Convene the SMEs who developed the behavioral questions
  - SMEs individually determine how employees at each proficiency level would respond
  - SMEs discuss these example responses and reach consensus on the most representative responses for each proficiency level
  - Use these behavioral response examples as a general guide to match the candidate's response with a proficiency level

# Develop a Rating Scale for Situational Questions

- Determine how someone at each proficiency level might behave in each hypothetical scenario
- Convene the SMEs who developed the situational questions
  - SMEs individually determine how employees at each proficiency level might respond to the scenarios
  - SMEs discuss these example responses and reach consensus on the most representative responses for each proficiency level
  - Use the hypothetical response examples as a general guide to match the candidate's response with a proficiency level

# Final Steps of Interview Development

## 6) Pilot test the questions and interview process

- Determine how many interviewers will be on each panel
- Determine how final ratings will be determined (e.g., consensus, majority, average)

## 7) Develop an Interviewer's Guide

- General Instructions about the Interview Process
- Definitions of Competencies Being Assessed
- Questions and Rating Scales with Example Responses
- Example Probes for Each Question
- General Interviewing Tips and Practices to Avoid

## 8) Document the Development Process

Maintain interview development records, including:

- Descriptions (e.g., name, job title, level of expertise) of all participants, including SMEs
- Interview development materials (e.g., reference materials, previous manuals)
- A description of the development of the interview, including the job analysis and the question and rating scale development process

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## Section 3: Conducting a Structured Interview

# The Interviewer's Impact

Interviewers must:

- Create a comfortable atmosphere for candidates
- Be good and unbiased listeners
- Take comprehensive notes
- Remain objective and fair during evaluations
- Treat all candidates the same
- Provide all candidates the same opportunities to excel



# Interviewing is a Two-Way Street

- While you are evaluating candidates, they will also be evaluating you
- Be organized and prepared for every interview
- Look and act cordial, interested, and professional



# Preparing: Interviewer Responsibilities

- One interviewer serves as the chairperson, responsible for logistical arrangements and administrative functions
- Prior to the interviews, all interviewers should have and review:
  - Interviewer's Guide
  - Forms with competencies, definitions, and questions
  - Individual rating forms with example responses
  - Consensus rating form, if applicable

# Preparing: Interview Timeline

- All candidates should be considered for the same amount of time. Consider the following in determining anticipated interview length:
  - Introductions and instructions
  - Responses to each question
  - An informal discussion about the position and for the candidate to ask questions
  - Evaluating each candidate, including individual and consensus ratings

# Preparing: Interview Setting

- Ensure the interview location is quiet, comfortable, non-threatening, and easily accessible
- Room and facilities must be accessible to candidates with disabilities in accordance with regulations set forth by the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Candidates waiting to be interviewed should not be allowed to converse with those who have already been interviewed



# Conducting the Interview: Candidate Arrival

Upon arrival of the candidate, the chairperson:

- Greets the candidate
- Leads the candidate to the designated interview location
- Initiates introductions
- Explains the interview process; this may include a written description
- Asks the candidate if he/she has any questions
- Formally begins the interview

# Conducting the Interview: Questioning

- Interviewers ask only their assigned questions, in order
- Probes may be used if necessary to clarify a response, get a candidate back on track, or obtain additional information
- Make sure that your style of questioning, body language, and probes do not convey socially desirable responses



# Conducting the Interview: Questioning

- Interviewers should never ask questions about or make comments about a candidate's:
  - Age
  - Sex
  - Race
  - National origin
  - Religion
  - Marital or familial status
  - Disabilities or health status
  - Or any other job-irrelevant factor



# Conducting the Interview: Taking Notes

- Interviewers should focus on taking detailed notes of candidates' responses and making eye contact
- In the event of an appeal, notes can be reviewed and may serve as the basis for upholding or overturning a rating



# Conducting the Interview: Taking Notes

- Notes should:
  - Summarize the content of actual responses
  - Be professional and non-judgmental
  - Be of sufficient quality and quantity to justify your ratings
- Notes should NOT:
  - Be evaluative statements about the candidate, his/her responses, or his/her personality
  - Refer to demographic characteristics of the candidate

# Conducting the Interview: Maintaining Control

- The chairperson ensures the interview stays on topic and within time constraints
- The chairperson may need to make polite and tactful interruptions:
  - To control the pace of the interview
  - If a candidate is talking too much
  - If a candidate goes off topic



# Conducting the Interview: Wrap-Up

- After the candidate has answered all of the questions, the chairperson concludes the interview by:
  - Thanking the candidate
  - Asking the candidate to keep the details confidential
  - Explaining the next steps in the hiring process



A close-up, vertical view of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The stars are in the upper left, and the stripes are in the lower right. The image is slightly blurred, giving it a soft, artistic feel.

## Section 4: Evaluating a Structured Interview

# Making Individual Ratings

- Immediately following the interview, interviewers should read their notes to one another on the candidate's responses
- Interviewers then individually rate the candidate's responses for each question/competency combination, one at a time, by:
  - Reviewing the competency definition and associated question
  - Reviewing the example responses for each proficiency level
  - Reviewing notes for each question
  - Choosing the most appropriate rating
  - Signing and dating the rating form

# Making Consensus Ratings (If Applicable)

- After all interviewers have made individual ratings for every interview question, the chairperson facilitates consensus:
  - Interviewers transfer ratings onto the consensus form
  - Interviewers examine whether consensus exists, based on criteria previously established
  - If consensus doesn't exist, interviewers must engage in a consensus discussion



# Making Consensus Ratings (If Applicable)

## Consensus Discussion:

- Interviewers provide a rationale for their ratings using their notes
- The panel discusses the information until reaching the required level of consensus



# Rating Wrap-Up

- Interviewers should initial any changes to ratings
- Interviewers should sign and date all forms
- The chairperson collects all rating forms and sensitive materials and keeps them in a secure place
- The chairperson will provide all materials to the designated point of contact



## Section 5: Tips for Effective Interviewing

# Things to Avoid

- Relying on first impressions
- Focusing on superficial factors
- Candidate-order effects
- Non-verbal behaviors



# Things to Avoid

- Rater bias
  - Interviewers should refrain from considering any non-performance related factors when making judgments
- “Similar to me”
  - Giving higher than deserved ratings to candidates who appear similar to you
- “Halo” effect
  - Allowing ratings of performance in one competency to influence ratings for other competencies

# Things to Avoid

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- Leniency/Strictness
    - A tendency to give high/low ratings to all candidates, irrespective of their actual performance
  - Central tendency
    - A tendency to rate all competencies at the middle of the rating scale (for example, giving all “3s” on a 5-point scale)

# Rating Made Easy

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- A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a close-up of the American flag, focusing on the stars and stripes.
- Know the competencies being assessed, the questions, and the rating scale with example responses
  - Focus on the candidate's responses (not on the candidate)
  - Take detailed notes on the responses (not on the candidate)
  - Compare the candidate's responses to the example responses for each proficiency level
  - Objectively rate the candidate

# Interview Rapport

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- A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a close-up, slightly blurred view of the American flag, focusing on the stars and stripes.
- Ensure a positive atmosphere
    - Helps candidate feel relaxed and at ease
    - Encourages applicants to reveal more
    - Promotes a positive image of the organization
  - Build a positive atmosphere by:
    - Greeting, introductions, and professionalism
    - Using candidates' names (correctly)
    - Treating candidates with respect
    - Making eye contact
    - Thanking candidates for coming

# Thank You!

Contact Information:

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