

Sample Interview Guide

Step 1: Break the Ice

Start the interview with some small talk to put the applicant at ease. (Be careful not to engage in conversation that may inadvertently lead to questions that could be considered discriminatory, such as questions relating to the applicant's marital status or place of birth.)

Thank the applicant for coming and let him or her know how much time has been allotted for the interview. Ask the applicant a few basic questions, such as:

“How did you hear about this job opening?”

“What made you decide to apply for this position?”

“What do you know about our company?”

Then, give the applicant an overview of what the interview will cover, and let him or her know there will be a chance to ask any questions at the end of the interview. For example:

“Before we start, let me give you an idea of what I’d like to cover today. I’d like to talk to you about your experience and educational background. It’s the best way to determine whether or not we have an opportunity here that is suited to your interests and talents. Please feel free to talk about your schooling, interests, hobbies, or anything else that you think would help demonstrate your qualifications for the position.”



Look for the applicant’s manner, self-expression, responsiveness, confidence, etc.

Step 2: Work Experience

The extent to which you’ll discuss the applicant’s past employment will depend on how long he or she has been in the workforce and the nature of the relevant job, among other things. If the applicant is a recent college graduate or otherwise has a brief work history, cover the basics and move on to Step 3 (Educational Experience). Some employers may wish to focus on whether the candidate has specific experience in the functions of the relevant job, while others may wish to focus on the candidate’s skills and what the candidate can do in the future.

Ask the applicant to briefly describe his or her current position, including duties and responsibilities, likes and dislikes, and of course, why he or she is looking for a new job. Do the same for his or her prior jobs as well. Remember to ask open-ended follow-up questions in order to get as much information as possible. For example, instead of asking the applicant if he or she is a team player, try something like: “Tell me about a time you went out of your way to help a co-worker with a problem.”



Look for such traits as adaptability, productivity, motivation and relevance of work experience.

Step 3: Educational Experience

This step of the interview will also depend on the applicant's level of education and how recently he or she graduated high school or college. For a professional with 10 years of work experience, you may only want to discuss his or her education briefly. For a recent grad, you'll want to dig a little deeper, especially since he or she may have little relevant work experience.

Some examples of questions you may want to ask such an applicant include:

“Tell me about your educational experience and training. What subjects did you particularly enjoy? How did you decide on your course of study?”

“Did you participate in any extracurricular activities?”

“Did you work or undertake an internship during school?”



Look for relevance and sufficiency of schooling for the position under consideration, intellectual abilities, level of accomplishments, motivation, leadership qualities, etc.

Step 4: Activities and Interests

This is your chance to get to know the applicant on a more personal level. Ask about professional organizations to which he or she may belong, or outside activities which he or she may pursue and the like. An applicant who has many outside interests may be more well-rounded and able to balance his or her work and personal life. On the other hand, a series of interests that are constantly dropped for new ones may show a “flightiness” that could extend into the applicant's on-the-job performance.



Look for enthusiasm, maturity and judgment, diversity of interests, etc. A candidate's outside activities, particularly a demonstration of real “passion” for one endeavor or another, may show you some areas of strength or skill that are not immediately evident from work experience.

Step 5: Strengths and Weaknesses

At this stage in the interview, you are looking for the applicant to give you a self-assessment — hopefully one that is honest and accurate. Try questions like:

“Considering your experience, education, and interests, what do you see as your major strengths? How would you use your strengths to contribute to our organization?”



Look for talents, skills, self-confidence, motivation, etc.

“Everyone has some room for improvement. In what areas do you feel you would benefit from improvement, and what have you done to facilitate improvement?”



Look for honesty, problem-solving and willingness to improve.

Step 6: Discuss Basic Information

First, determine if you are still interested in the applicant. If not, you can move on to Step 7 (Conclusion). However, if he or she is still in the running, now's the time to give a brief overview of the company and the position.

Cover such areas as:

- Company history
- The position's duties and relationships within the company
- Benefits, etc.

Step 7: Conclusion

It's time to wrap up the interview. Express your appreciation for the applicant's time, and ask if he or she has any questions for you. The kinds of questions an applicant asks can actually tell you quite a bit about him or her. For example, applicants who ask questions strictly about money and benefits may not be as interested in the job itself. Look for applicants who ask specific questions about the job and the company, the corporate culture, etc. Ideally, the candidate will ask questions demonstrating a desire to learn how he or she can contribute to the organization.

After you've answered the applicant's questions, thank him or her and explain when you expect to be making a decision. Walk the applicant to the door and be sure to give him or her your business card so he or she can contact you with any further questions.