

Supervisory Guide to Selection Interviews

Procedures for Selecting Officials United States Air Force Academy, CO

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. This pamphlet is designed to assist selecting officials when conducting interviews of candidates. It applies whether the position being filled is clerical, technical, professional, skilled or unskilled, or supervisory. This guidance will help ensure job-related procedures are the basis for employment decisions.

1.2. “Why all the fuss about interviews?” The interview, when used, is the most vulnerable part of the selection process. It is subject to validation requirements. Therefore, interviews must be job-related, objective, and well documented. As an integral part of the selection process, the information gained in an interview is crucial in candidate assessment. It allows you to determine how the candidate’s experience, education and training relate to the position you are filling. Interview questions and selection criteria should be prepared in advance of interviews and should be forwarded to your servicing staffing specialist for review to ensure they are job related and that no inappropriate questions are asked. Because interviews are designed to assess the candidate’s experience in relation to the work to be done, it is imperative that interview questions be related to the job to be filled.

1.3. If your selection is questioned, you must be able to clearly defend your decisions. Therefore, interviews must be well documented. At this time interview documentation must be maintained for an indefinite period of time. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face (personal interview) or via the telephone. If candidates are in the commuting area, personal interviews are recommended. However, if repeated attempts to contact a candidate are unsuccessful, you should document your attempts and the interview of that candidate is excused. The candidate should be considered based on written data made available to you, i.e., employee’s career brief, etc.

Chapter 2

DEVELOPING SOUND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

2.1. Interviewing is a competitive process. Preparing interview questions and getting them approved in advance of interviewing will guarantee that all of your candidates get the same opportunity. The same interview questions must be used for all candidates and must be constructed in a manner that will garner the greatest insight into a candidate’s qualifications for your position(s). When developing your questions, you must specifically relate to the knowledges, skills and abilities outlined in your Core Document (Position Description) that are necessary to successfully complete the tasks of your position. Your questions should not be written to evoke a “reaction,” but should allow the candidate to communicate their skills and experience and convey their ambition and enthusiasm. They should be thought provoking and stimulate a sound, detailed response. Avoid questions that require yes/no answers. Formulate questions that will require the candidate to relate past experiences and/or education in a specific situation. Your goal is to find out what the candidate knows and what they can do - or have the potential

to do. Remember this process will result in making one (usually) person very happy – and disappointing the others. Many people make a better personal first impression than they do on paper.

2.2. It may be easier to start this process by determining what you are looking for first, and then determine what appropriate questions will elicit that information. You should review the position description/core personnel document and determine knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required to perform the job. Some KSAs can be learned after the employee is assigned to a position. Those are KSAs that are not reasonable to expect a candidate to bring to the position. For example, it may not be reasonable to expect a candidate to have knowledge of certain organizations at the USAF Academy or of local procedures relating to administering a specific program. However, it would be reasonable to expect a candidate to be able to type or take dictation, be able to analyze financial information, prepare a budget, etc.

2.3. You must be careful how you word your questions. You want to use questions that will draw from a candidate the information needed to determine if they have the KSAs your position requires (e.g. You are looking for a person who can make decisions under stringent circumstances. Your question may be – Have you had any experiences that required you to respond to short deadlines? If so, in detail, please discuss the circumstance and how you handled it.). Your questions should solicit answers that indicate if the candidate possesses KSAs you are looking for. For example, “ability to give oral presentations to large groups” may be one area to be examined in the interview. A good interview question might be: "What experience have you had in giving and/or preparing oral presentations to large groups and under what conditions? In scoring this response you could distinguish your point values based on the size of the group addressed, if audiences addressed were hostile, and to what extent the candidate participated in preparing the presentation. This type of question is objective and it does not "lead" the candidate to an answer. Rather, it requires the candidate to present examples from their experiences. Incorrect questions for this KSA would be: "Do you have trouble speaking before large groups?" or "Can you speak well?" Your servicing staffing specialist will review your questions prior to your interviews and will assist you in question development, if needed.

2.4. Prior to conducting interviews it is also recommended that you review and assess each candidate’s records. Review information on the candidate’s background and experience. This step can be accomplished after the interview. However, you will be better prepared for the interview when you are aware of the information concerning the candidate.

2.5. There are a number of areas to avoid when preparing interview questions. Some of these areas are:

2.5.1. Do not formulate hypothetical cases and ask the candidate to provide possible solutions. This is considered a test and is inappropriate.

2.5.1.1. For example, typically found in supervisory positions is the KSA the "ability to delegate work." Good interview questions would state: "I have two interrelated questions to ask. What experience do you have in delegating work? What was the workload?" Do not ask: "What would you do in the following situation: You have 1,000 cartons of widgets to deliver...your clerk is on leave; how do you get the cartons delivered?" This type of question is not objective and there are no right answers.

2.5.2. Do not ask questions that have an obvious answer and provide no means for distinguishing among candidates.

2.5.2.1. The question "Do you like working with people?" has an obvious response. A question such as "What experience have you had that would show you can effectively deal with the public?" would be more appropriate.

2.5.3. Some questions have been included in so many interviews that candidates may expect them.

2.5.3.1. An example of this type of question would be "Why do you want this job?" There is no right answer. Candidates tend to have prepared answers for these kinds of questions aimed at what they think you want to hear. This type of question adds nothing to the interview.

2.5.4. The vocabulary you use in interview questions should be geared to the level of the candidates.

2.5.5. Specialized terminology, organizational abbreviations, etc, may confuse and/or intimidate a candidate and should be avoided.

2.5.6. Do not ask questions that require several responses. They are confusing to both the candidate and you. In most cases, questions should be asked one at a time. If two or more questions are related, they may be asked if prefaced by a statement such as, "This is the first of a two-part question," or "I have two interrelated questions to ask."

2.5.7. Do not ask questions which suggest a desired answer. They do not elicit an objective response and, therefore, should be avoided in an interview.

2.5.8. There are many topics that are illegal to discuss in an interview. Table 4.1 is attached to help you avoid these areas.

Chapter 3

SELECTION CRITERIA

3.1. You must be able to **justify your selections**. Therefore, you should develop your selection criteria prior to the interview. The criteria should outline how you intend to rate the candidate's responses to your interview questions. This process should be as objective as possible; thus, it is recommended that you create a scoring process to rate the candidate's responses. When using this method the response to each question is rated in degrees. The following may be of assistance in developing questions and anchors for use in the selection criteria. Contact the servicing human resources specialist (placement) for further assistance.

3.2. Anchors are needed to differentiate among interview candidates. Each question should normally have three to five anchors. Each anchor distinguishes among the quality of candidate responses. Assign the largest amount of points to the top anchor, as that anchor reflects the ideal response. Each subsequent anchor will be assigned fewer points. The last anchor reflects a response for a minimally acceptable candidate.

3.2.1. In assessing points, the highest response may be "15" points, the next response "10" points and the last response "5" points. How point values are assessed to the anchors is totally up to the interviewer. Should an individual's response fall between point values, for example, between a "5" and "10" point response, a value between those point values, e.g., "7," may be assigned. However, some notes should be made to support the variance. In establishing anchors, provide enough flexibility between anchors so that each interviewee will be able to meet at least one of the anchor criteria. There will be times when a candidate may not have the required experience to meet any of the anchors and, therefore, should be assessed "0" points for that question. However, these instances should be rare, as the candidates referred have met the qualification requirements based on data contained in their Official Personnel Folders (OPFs). If the candidate was determined to be qualified for the job based on education alone, there could be consistent "0" anchor ratings.

3.2.2. In developing anchors, be careful of being over restrictive. Avoid requiring Air Force experience, as that may only be supported in rare cases. In addition, avoid using recency of experience or time requirements, because these requirements are rarely supportable. If a situation exists which justifies requiring or ranking recent experience versus less recent experience, the screening or ranking would normally occur prior to referral of the candidate to the selecting supervisor. Remember, just because someone has done a job for ten years does not mean that he/she would be a better candidate than an individual who has done the job for only two years. It only means that person has done the job longer.

3.2.3. An example requirement for a job may be to prepare and make presentations to large groups. The question regarding this skill may be: "Have you had experience preparing and/or making presentations to groups? If so, what kinds of groups and did you prepare the presentations?"

3.2.4. Rating Criteria:

- 3.2.4.1. 15 Points - Candidate prepared & presented presentations to large groups
- 3.2.4.2. 10 Points - Candidate prepared & presented presentations to small groups
- 3.2.4.3. 5 Points - Candidate presented presentations to large groups
- 3.2.4.4. 0 Points - Candidate has not prepared or presented briefings

3.2.5. Listed below are some additional examples of beginning phrases that may be used to develop anchors:

3.2.5.1. Example 1:

- 3.2.5.1.1. 15 Points - Candidate has a thorough understanding
- 3.2.5.1.2. 10 Points - Candidate has a moderate understanding
- 3.2.5.1.3. 5 Points - Candidate has a limited understanding
- 3.2.5.1.4. 0 Points - Candidate has no understanding

3.2.5.2. Example 2:

- 3.2.5.2.1. 15 Points - Candidate demonstrates a high degree of ability
- 3.2.5.2.2. 10 Points - Candidate demonstrates an acceptable degree of ability
- 3.2.5.2.3. 5 Points - Candidate demonstrates a marginal ability
- 3.2.5.2.4. 0 Points - Candidate does not demonstrate ability

3.2.5.3. Example 3:

- 3.2.5.3.1. 15 Points - Candidate has significant experience
- 3.2.5.3.2. 10 Points - Candidate has some experience
- 3.2.5.3.3. 5 Points - Candidate has no direct experience
- 3.2.5.3.4. 0 Points - Candidate has no experience

3.2.6. As the interviewer you can decide if points will be assigned just as indicated or if intervening numbers can be used. This decision should be made before the first interview is conducted. Be careful not to make assumptions about a candidate's behavior, appearance or style of communication. Your assumption may be erroneous and result in a poor hiring decision. First impressions are very powerful and natural; however, left unchecked they can misguide the assessment of candidates in the selection process and result in stereotyping.

3.2.7. Common Rating Errors:

3.2.7.1. Even skilled interviewers are prone to certain interviewing pitfalls. They commit inherent interviewing errors because of underlying biases. Allowing inherent prejudices to bias decisions have legal implications when these tendencies cause unfair discrimination against protected classes. The following guidance is provided to assist interviewers in identifying and avoiding common errors made while rating candidates:

3.2.7.2. Halo effect is the tendency of an interviewer to generalize an overall impression of a candidate, job related or otherwise, on an individual KSA. The halo effect applies to either positive or negative information. If a candidate displays any trait which the interviewer personally ranks as important, it may influence all the other factors whether they relate to the influencing trait or not. Common stereotypes are examples of the halo effect. For example, an assumption by the interviewer that certain nationalities are more disciplined, more verbal, or more able to quickly adapt to new work situations may affect the evaluation of a candidate's performance on KSAs. The halo effect is the most common interviewer error, and it is potentially the most legally damaging.

3.2.7.3. Contrast error occurs when an interviewer's rating of one candidate is influenced positively or negatively by comparison to the immediately preceding candidate's performance. This error may result in a lower rating for a candidate who immediately follows a strong candidate, or a higher rating for a candidate who immediately follows a weak candidate. This type of error has more impact on the middle group of applicants than on the very high or very low performers. Whenever possible, behavioral examples should be given depicting levels of performance to ensure candidates are rated against objective criteria rather than against each other.

3.2.7.4. Leniency or strictness error indicates the tendency of the interviewer to form uniformly high or low opinions of candidates. Most of these types of opinions fall at one end of the scale or the other.

3.2.7.5. Central tendency occurs when the interviewer limits opinions to the middle range, with none at the higher or lower end of the scale.

3.2.7.6. **Note:** Leniency, strictness and central tendency errors occur when interviewing criteria are not adequately defined.

Chapter 4

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

4.1. There are three basic types of interviews:

- 4.1.1. Information Exchange
- 4.1.2. Individual Selection Interview
- 4.1.3. Panel Selection Interview

4.2. Information Exchange:

4.2.1. An information exchange interview is conducted simply to share basic information about the position to be filled. This type of interview is usually used to determine interest in the position to be filled. It is limited to discussions of the job duties, work schedules, temporary change of duty requirements and other factual matters relating to the position to be filled. In these situations it is most

common to conduct the “exchange of information” over the telephone or in other wholly informal situations. Most likely, face-to-face situations are not necessary and are often improperly constructed -resulting in an actual selection interview. No questions relating to the position to be filled, how a candidate’s experience relates to the position to be filled or specific details regarding a candidate’s education and how it relates to the position to be filled should be asked during an information exchange interview. This type of interview is the least used type and its use/need should be well documented. This type of interview is not scored.

4.3. Individual Selection Interview:

4.3.1. The individual selection interview is a one-on-one meeting between you, as the selecting official, and a candidate. It is an opportunity for the selecting official to gain job-related information about a candidate upon which a selection can be made. The selection interview is not an opportunity to “look over” or “test” candidates.

4.3.2. Individual selection interview should be conducted using the following guidelines:

4.3.2.1. Shake hands and make the candidate comfortable.

4.3.2.2. Introduce yourself, the interviewer, and tell a little about yourself.

4.3.2.3. State each question clearly and clarify questions, if needed.

4.3.2.4. Stick to your prepared and approved questions (this is the best way to avoid inappropriate questions).

4.3.2.5. Listen carefully and if a response is unclear, ask the candidate for clarification.

4.3.2.6. Try not to interrupt the candidate.

4.3.2.7. Do not test or grill the candidate.

4.3.2.8. At the conclusion of the interview ask the candidate if he/she has any questions.

4.3.2.9. Indicate when the candidate will know the results of the interview.

4.3.2.10. Shake hands again at the conclusion of the interview and thank the candidate for their time.

4.3.2.11. Make additional notes, if needed, while the candidate’s remarks/responses are fresh in your mind.

4.3.2.12. When interviewing multiple candidates, stick to your interview schedule to assure that each candidate is given an equal amount of time. (If an interview ends before the designated time, that is appropriate; however, you should not allow one candidate more time than the other candidates. If a candidate’s responses are long and may cause them to go over their designated time, you will need to make them aware when their time is up.)

4.3.2.13. Accurately document the interview. (To facilitate an “audit trail” you must maintain this documentation, along with any other pertinent information regarding your selection, indefinitely.)

4.4. Panel Selection Interview:

4.4.1. The panel selection interview is a one-on-one meeting between a candidate and two or more interview panel members. It is recommended that you, as the selecting official, be a member of the interview panel. However, there are instances when the actual selecting official is not on the panel, which selects your candidate (e.g. internship/trainee and career program panels). Under certain circumstances the composition of the panel may be dictated by the make-up of the candidate pool. Like the individual

selection interview, the panel selection interview is an opportunity for the selecting official to gain job-related information about a candidate upon which a selection can be made. The panel selection interview is not an opportunity to “look over” or “test” candidates.

4.4.2. Panel selection interviews should be conducted using the following guidelines:

4.4.3. Shake hands and make the candidate comfortable (Because there are multiple interviewers in a panel interview, these interviews are often viewed as intimidating. For the best results, you will want to insure that each candidate is as comfortable as possible.)

4.4.4. Each interviewer should introduce himself/herself and tell a little about themselves.

4.4.5. Establish who will ask which questions prior to the start of the interview (i.e. will the panelist rotate asking the questions or will one panelist ask the first two questions and the next panelist the next two, etc.).

4.4.6. State each question clearly and clarify questions, if needed.

4.4.7. Stick to your prepared and approved questions (this is the best way to avoid inappropriate questions).

4.4.8. Listen carefully and if a response is unclear, ask the candidate for clarification – regardless of who originally asked the question.

4.4.9. Try not to interrupt the candidate.

4.4.10. Do not test or grill the candidate.

4.4.11. At the conclusion of the interview ask the candidate if he/she has any questions.

4.4.12. Indicate when the candidate will know the results of the interview.

4.4.13. Each panelist should shake hands again with the candidate at the conclusion of the interview and thank the candidate for their time.

4.4.14. Make additional notes, if needed, while the candidate’s remarks/responses are fresh in your mind.

4.4.15. Discuss your scoring of the candidate.

4.4.16. When interviewing multiple candidates, stick to your interview schedule to assure that each candidate is given an equal amount of time (If an interview ends before the designated time that is appropriate however, you should not allow one candidate more time than the other candidates. If a candidate’s responses are long and may cause them to go over their designated time, you will need to make them aware when their time is up.)

Table 4.1 Legal/Illegal Interview Subjects

Subject	Illegal	Legal If Job Related
AGE	You may not ask any question that directly or indirectly relates to an applicant's age. Example: "Do you remember the 1940 election?"	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject. The Civilian Personnel Office (CPO) may verify age, if necessary, to ensure legally set minimum age limits are met.
CITIZENSHIP	You may not ask any question that directly or indirectly relates to an applicant's citizenship. Example: Are you a citizen of the United States? Are your parents/spouses a US citizen? When did you acquire US citizenship? Are you/spouse/parent native born or naturalized?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject. The CPO may verify citizenship requirements, if they exist for the job being filled.
NATIONAL ORIGIN	None of the following questions (or similar questions) may be asked: What is your national origin? What language is spoken in your home? What is your native language?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject.
RACE/COLOR	You may not ask any question that directly or indirectly relates to race or color.	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject.
RELIGION	You may not ask any question that directly or indirectly relates to religion such as: What church do you attend? What religious holidays do you observe?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject.
SEX	You may not ask any question which inquires as to one's gender. For example: What are your plans regarding having children in the near future? Do you mind having a male/female supervisor? Can you work with a group of men/women?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject.
MARITAL STATUS/FAMILY	None of the following questions (or similar questions) can be asked: Are you married? Divorced? Widowed? With whom do you live? Do your children live with you? What ages are your children? Are your husband/wife in the military?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject. The CPO may verify if other family members work at the installation to fulfill OPM requirements.
EDUCATION	Do not ask any questions that relate to nationality, racial, or religious affiliation of a school or the candidates' education level in general, if not related to the job being filled.	You may ask questions concerning a candidate's academic, vocation, or professional education as long as it pertains to KSAs related to the position being filled.

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Subject	Illegal	Legal If Job Related
ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION	Do not ask any questions that relate to organizational affiliations. Example: What organizations, societies or clubs do you belong to?	You may ask questions related to this subject if they are related to the job being filled and how the candidate's participation in the organization may fulfill the KSAs.
POLICE RECORD	Do not ask any questions that relate to police/arrest records. Example: Have you ever been arrested?	If the job being filled has special requirements (i.e., bonding), you may ask a question such as: In order to fill this job, you must be bonded. Will this pose a problem for you?
WORK SCHEDULE/ TRAVEL	Do not ask any questions that relate to childcare, ages of children or other non job-related areas.	If the job being filled has special requirements (i.e., travel, overtime, unusual hours, etc.) these conditions may be stated. For example: In this job you would have to travel 1 week in every month. Does this present a problem for you?
MILITARY DISCHARGE	Do not ask any questions that relate to military discharge. Example: Were you honorably discharged from military service?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject. The CPO may verify this information if there is a requirement to do so.
ECONOMIC STATUS	Do not ask any questions that relate to economic status. Example: Do you have a good credit rating? Do you have any trouble with bills/collection agencies?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject.
SECURITY CLEARANCE	Do not ask any questions that relate to ability to attain/retain security clearances. Example: Do you have/have you ever had a secret/top secret/other security clearance?	If the job to be filled requires a certain type of security clearance, this condition may be stated. For example: "This job requires a top secret clearance. Does this requirement present any problem?"
PERSONAL PLANS	Do not ask any questions that relate to a candidate's personal plans. Example: Do you have plans to live in this area long?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject.
PARTICIPATION IN CERTAIN ACTIVITIES	Do not ask any questions that relate to participation in certain activities. Example: Do you plan to take savings bonds/ contribute to the Combined Federal Campaign/ join the coffee club/ join the Air Force Association?	There is no legal question you can ask regarding this subject.
MISCELLANEOUS	You should not ask any question that is not job related or necessary for determining a candidate's possession of required KSAs.	You may notify the candidate that statements, misstatements or omissions of significant facts may be cause for non-selection.

HELPFUL HINTS:

I. THE INTERVIEW SETTING

- a. Allow applicants time to read the core document/position description BEFORE the interview. This saves time for the selecting official and avoids any appearance of administering a speed reading test.
- b. Discuss any unusual working conditions or conditions of employment, e.g. shift work, on-call, excessive travel, etc., with the candidate BEFORE the actual interview. State these as conditions of employment.
- c. The same interview method should be used, if possible (person, telephone, etc.).
- d. Schedule the same amount of time for each interview.
- e. Allow yourself time between interviews to record ratings and complete notes.
- f. Establish a friendly but business-like atmosphere.
- g. Put the applicant at ease.
- h. Welcome the candidate and explain the interview process. Tell the applicant about the job, duties and performance requirements, place of work, etc.
- i. Don't use terms such as, "girl", "gal", "honey", "dear", "boy" or any other derogatory names when addressing the interviewee.
- j. Never indicate you have already made a selection before all interviews are completed.
- k. Do not make promises of promotion or other privileges that may not happen.
- l. Don't interview or promise to interview anyone who isn't listed on the referral certificate.
- m. Do not interview with a negative attitude.
- n. Do not solicit declinations from certain candidates.
- o. Do not assume an accent to be a liability.

II. THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- a. Have your questions prepared in advance and in writing.
- b. The same questions should be asked, in the same order, of all candidates.
- c. Only interview questions related to the knowledges, skills and abilities (KSAs) required to perform the duties of the position should be used in the interview **AND MUST BE REVIEWED/APPROVED BY YOUR SERVICING HUMAN RESOURCES SPECIALIST**. Questions should be concerned with experience or training and require some concrete type of answer from the applicant. Ask for detailed information about particular phases of the applicant's experience or training.
- d. Avoid asking leading questions or questions that can be answered yes or no.
- e. Do not use specialized terminology, acronyms, or organizational abbreviations in questions.
- f. Do not waste time asking questions on information already available through records or application review.
- g. Do not ask "test" questions-- and never ask an applicant to prove his/her skill by giving a test.
- h. Use a straightforward, honest approach--avoid trick questions.
- i. Don't ask hypothetical questions such as "What would you do if.....?"
- j. Allow enough time for the candidate to ask any questions relating to the job.

III. THE DOCUMENTATION

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a. Interviews must be well documented. Selecting officials must maintain this documentation INDEFINENTLY – See note.

NOTE: You must retain the career briefs, resumes, and any other documentation used in the selection process indefinitely until further notice. The Air Force (JACL) and attorneys at the Department of Justice are in the process of defending a class action lawsuit alleging discrimination based on race, sex and age. Since the potential for a worldwide class exists, HQ USAF/JA and HQ USAF/DP has directed all Air Force installations to retain any and all documents, papers, reports, e-mails, or other materials--hard copy, electronic, final copy and drafts--maintained by the personnel offices, management and supervisory officials.

b. Retain all questions and responses in the same area you keep other privacy act documents.

c. Record the number of candidates interviewed. If less than all the candidates were interviewed, annotate the names of those not interviewed and the justification for NOT interviewing.

d. If interviews are not conducted, document the selection package by writing "NO INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED" on the certificate.

IV. THE SELECTION

a. Avoid the “halo effect”. Don’t weigh your decision based on a single accomplishment, association with a particular group, the college attended, etc. Avoid stereotyping candidates.

b. Compare all candidates on the same basis. Review the total picture once you complete all interviews.

c. Talking with or questioning an applicant’s present or former supervisor is NOT considered an interview. You can gather information on the applicant through a review of records/application and/or discussion with former supervisors.

d. Remember that interview results are only a part of the overall evaluation process and must be used in conjunction with other evaluation criteria

V. IMPORTANT THINGS WHICH *SHOULD* INFLUENCE YOUR SELECTION:

a. Is this a good worker who will give a good day's work?

b. One who will work on the team?

c. One capable of growth?

d. During the interview, evaluate if the applicant will be compatible with the other employees in the organization and with the operation.

e. Evaluate whether the candidate will have potential for advancement.