

The Structured Interview

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WHAT IS A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW?

Employment interviews are among the most widely used components of the selection process. A significant amount of research indicates that the “structure” imposed on the interview plays a key role in determining whether they result in successful hires.

Interviews can be completely unstructured or unplanned with questions asked spontaneously, varying across candidates, and responses not evaluated in any systematic manner.

In contrast, structured interviews consist of pre-determined, job-relevant questions that are posed to all candidates, with responses evaluated in a systematic manner often using a pre-determined rating criteria. The standardized features of the structured interview provide all applicants with equal opportunity to demonstrate their ability to effectively perform the job.

BENEFITS OF STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Impose Structure/Standardization: Structure is important because it ensures the interviewers ask each applicant the same questions, follow proper procedures for asking follow-up questions, and score applicants' responses using predetermined criteria. This uniform approach helps to accurately quantify and compare the quality and thoroughness of applicants' responses.

Ensure Objectivity: The goal is to ensure all applicants are measured against the same standards. Using pre-determined scoring criteria serves to minimize the impact of an interviewer's first impressions or bias.

Establish Alignment: Interview questions are crafted in a way that reflect the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other qualities (KSAOs) that are important for effective job performance. This helps to ensure a clear link between performance in the interview and perform on the job – or high quality hires.

WHAT IS A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW:

A Checklist



Interview Questions Closely Aligned with Job

Benefits:

- Reduces bias by eliminating subjective questions
- Increases the predictive validity for future job performance
- Increases content validity
- Increases legal defensibility
- Increases both actual and perceived fairness



All Candidates are Asked the Same Questions

Benefits:

- Reduces bias as all candidates are given the same opportunity to communicate their qualifications
- More legally defensible
- Increases both actual and perceived fairness



Pre-Determined Rating Scales are Used

Benefits:

- Increases the accuracy of interviewers by providing specific guidance on what constitutes high / low scores
- Quantifies subjective data
- Enhances the ability to compare candidates



Use Multiple Interviewers (Interview Panels)

Benefits:

- Reduces personal bias by capturing multiple perspectives
- Allows participation from multiple departments and / or multiple levels of the organization



Train Interviewers

Benefits:

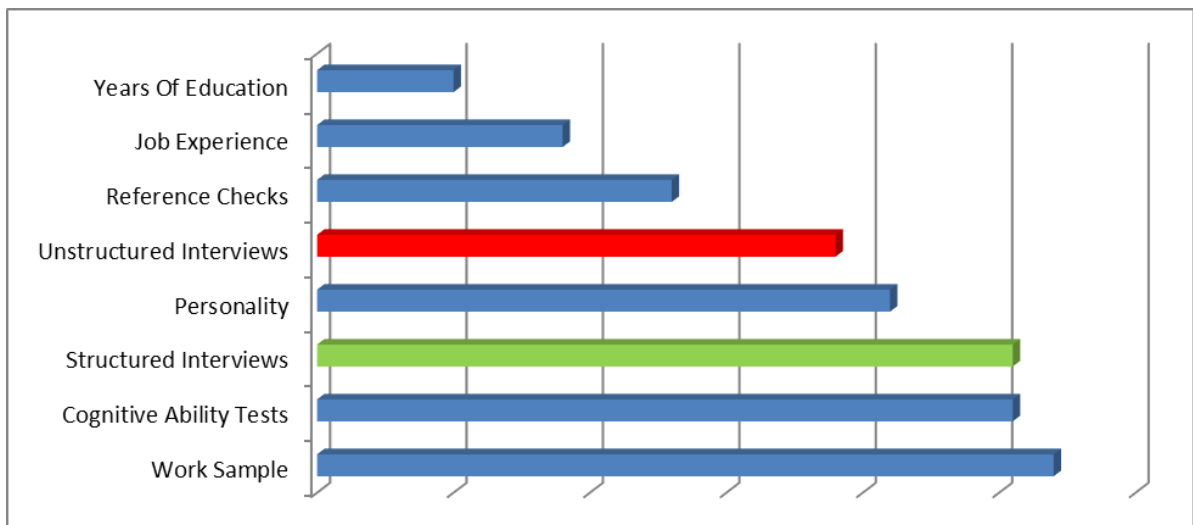
- Ensures interviewers are knowledgeable about the position requirements
- Effective questioning is used
- Answers are properly documented
- Rating scales are properly applied

STEPS TO FOLLOW

Adding structured interviews to your hiring process delivers a clear validity advantage (see figure 1, next page) that will enhance the quality of your hires. In this document, we will show you how to develop a structured interview process through the following steps.

1. Document the Process
2. Conduct a Job Analysis
3. Develop Interview Questions
4. Develop Follow-Up (Probe) Questions
5. Define Your Rating Scale
6. Develop an Interview Guide
7. Train the Interviewers

FIGURE 1: VALIDITY OF HIRING METHODS (SCHMIDT & HUNTER)



HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESS?

1

Document the Development Process

As you go through the process of developing your structured interview, take some time to document it so that you have it available for constructing future interviews. In your documentation, keep track of everything relevant to the process including:

1. Names, job titles and expertise of all involved in process – include SMEs
2. Any resources used in developing interview questions
3. A description and process map for how the structured interview was developed

Conduct a Job Analysis

2

The first and arguably most important step in developing your structured interview is conducting a job analysis. At this stage, your goal is two-fold:

1. Determine what knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) are necessary for the job in question
2. Identify the specific key competencies needed to be successful in the role

WHAT IS A COMPETENCY?

A competency encompasses any quality that contributes to successful job performance or, put simply, how a job gets done.

Core competencies are those that organizations identify as contributing most to achieving strategic results.

Develop an exhaustive list of competencies and then take a critical approach to narrowing the list down to only those core competencies that are most important for success in the role.

- 4-6 competencies are ideal for designing a structured interview

These *core competencies* should provide the foundation for your structured interview questions.

RETAIL POSITION

Sample Core Competencies

Competency	Description
Client/ Customer Focus	Demonstrating a service-oriented approach, remaining open to feedback, and maintaining positive, trusting, productive relationships in order to meet the needs and expectations of internal and external customers.
Persuasiveness	The ability to sell others on ideas, approaches, products, and services.
Communication	Keeping direct reports and leaders informed about decisions, events, and developments that affect them.
Listening Skills	A willingness to take the time to listen to others' questions and concerns, and to hear their points of view on workplace issues.
Independence	The ability to be self-starting and work independently of others when necessary.

Source: SIGMA Competency Model

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESS?

(CONTINUED)

3

Develop Interview Questions

Now that you have your core competencies and a clear understanding of the job, you are in an excellent position to develop relevant structured interview questions.

Situational vs Behavioural Questions

Your interview questions should include a mix of:

- i. Behavioural Interview Questions that draw from a candidates past experiences, and
- ii. Situational Interview Questions that ask candidates how they would respond in realistic situations

To DEVELOP BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS:

To develop **behavioral** questions:

- a) Have SMEs brainstorm experience-based scenarios that relate to competencies and tasks that are job-relevant. For example, a sample competency for the role might be:
 - **Conflict Management:** The ability to mediate and resolve conflicts and disagreements in a manner best for all parties involved.
- b) Convert scenarios to questions.

“Describe a situation in which you dealt with a hostile individual. Who was involved, what specific actions did you take, and what were the results?”

To DEVELOP SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS:

To develop **situational** questions:

- a) Detail critical incidents that have occurred in the past for the job in question.

Joseph dealt calmly and professionally with a very distressed co-worker who did not receive their check in time.

- b) Identify the competency that the incident best illustrates (**Conflict Management**).
- c) Rewrite the incident in the form of a hypothetical situational question.

"A very angry co-worker walks up to your desk. She says she was told your office sent her paycheck 5 days ago. She claims she did not receive the check. She says she has bills to pay and no one will help her. How would you handle the situation?"

ASK / DON'T ASK

Topic	Do NOT ask:	Instead, ask:
Age	• How old are you?	• Do you meet the age requirement to work for this company?
	• How long do you think it will be before you retire?	• What are your long-term career goals? Where do you see yourself in 3 years or 5 years?
Gender	• Do not ask questions inquiring about gender or those that imply limitations or special treatment because of gender	
Marital Status	• What does your spouse do for a living? Can he/she be transferred? • What is your maiden name?	• Are you able to travel or relocate for this position?
Family Status	• Do you have children? Do you plan to? • Could you arrange for child care if required to work overtime or travel on short notice? • If you become pregnant, do you plan to continue working after maternity leave?	• Are you able to work overtime and/or travel on short notice? • What are your long-term career goals or plans?
Sexual Orientation	• Do not ask questions inquiring about sexual orientation or those that imply limitations or special treatment because of sexual orientation	

ASK / DON'T ASK (CONTINUED)

Topic	Do NOT ask:	Instead, ask:
Nationality or Ethnic Origin	• Are you a citizen of this country? • Where were you born? • How long have you been a resident of this region or country?	• Are you legally permitted to work in this country?
Language	• What is your first language?	• In what languages are you proficient? • Are you able to understand, speak, read, and write the language(s) necessary for the job?
Religion	• What religion are you affiliated with? • Are you able to work on a specific religious holiday? • Are you affiliated with a club or organization?	• Are you available to work the required days? • Are you able to work the required schedule? • Are you affiliated with any relevant professional or trade groups?
Disabilities	• Do you have a disability? • Have you ever received psychiatric care or treatment for psychological problems? • Have you ever received worker's compensation?	• Are you able to perform the specific job requirements? • Are you able to safely perform the job as required?

ASK / DON'T ASK (CONTINUED)

Topic	Do NOT ask:	Instead, ask:
Medical Information	• Do you or have you ever had any health problems, illnesses, or operations? • Do you smoke, drink, or use drugs?	• Are you able to perform the requirements of the job? • Have you ever been disciplined for violating company policy?
Height and Weight	• How tall are you? • How much do you weigh?	• Are you able to perform the physical requirements of the job?
Pardoned Convictions	• Have you ever been convicted of a crime? • Have you ever been arrested? • Do you have a criminal record?	• Laws prohibiting questions about arrest and conviction records vary by state and by country (U.S. and Canada). It is generally not appropriate to ask about arrest and criminal records, but if bonding is a job requirement, then ask if the applicant is eligible. When criminal record checks or background checks are warranted for the position, employers are required to advise the applicant in writing that a background check will be conducted, obtain the applicant's written authorization, and notify the applicant that the check will not automatically result in disqualification from employment.
Military Service	• Have you been honorably discharged from the military? • Do you currently serve in the military?	• Tell me how your previous experience in the military can facilitate your performance in the current position. • Do you expect to be away from work for an extended period of time?

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESS?

(CONTINUED)

4

Develop Follow-Up (Probe) Questions

Ideally, structured interview questions should elicit answers from candidates that:

- provide context (**S**ituation or **T**ask)
- describe the **A**ction taken
- explain the **R**esult

When our interview questions fail to result in an ideal **STAR** model answer, we need to have probe questions planned and ready.

DEVELOP PROBE QUESTIONS

(continued)

STAR MODEL	
S ituation or T ask	Context or background for the event or tasks involved
A ction taken	Describes exactly what was done or what would be done
R esults achieved	Describes the consequence of the candidate's actions

As part of interview planning, it is critical to formally determine whether or not probe questions will be used before you begin the interview process. There should be no middle ground here, as the objective is to ensure a standardized process for all candidates. It is not advisable to attempt to “figure it out as you go,” as this will undermine the standardization of any structured interview process.

Assuming you have decided to utilize probes in your interview process, it is important to make a list of acceptable probes for each question and strictly adhere to the list for every candidate.

When developing your probe questions, keep the following in mind:

DO	DON'T
Probe to better understand the candidate's specific roles and actions when candidate uses terms like "we did..." or "our group accomplished..."	Use leading probes that convey answers
Use open-ended probe questions unless looking for a Yes / No response	Challenge any statements made by the candidate

DEVELOP PROBE QUESTIONS

(continued)

DEVELOP PROBE QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

	Situation / Task	Action	Result
Behavioral Probes	✓ Who Was Involved? ✓ What factors led to this situation?	✓ How did you respond? ✓ What was your role?	✓ What was the outcome? ✓ Is there anything you would have done differently?
Situational Probes	✓ Why do you believe this situation occurred? ✓ What do you consider to be the most important issue in this situation?	✓ What is the first thing you would say or do? ✓ What factors would affect your course of action? ✓ What other actions could you take?	✓ How do you think your action / decision would be received by others? ✓ What would success look like?

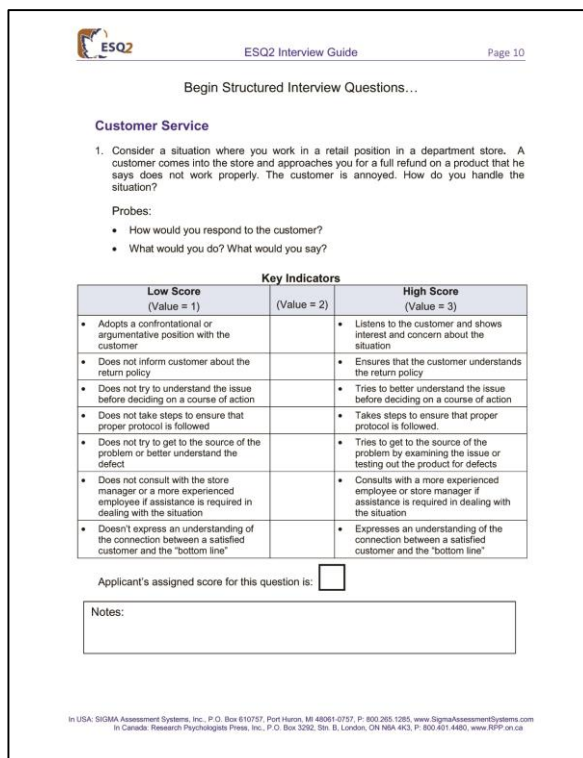
How Do you Develop a Structured Interview Process?

5

Define your Rating Scale

One of the goals of your structured interview process should be to quantify each candidate's fit for the job and make it easier to compare the fit between candidates. With this in mind, it is important to decide on what rating scale to use.

Rating scales typically range from 3 to 7 points. A 3-point rating scale is a reasonable place to start as you should label at least 3 levels (unsatisfactory, satisfactory, superior) of performance and ideally have behavioral examples to anchor each scale point as seen below in our ESQ2 interview guide.



ESQ2 ESQ2 Interview Guide Page 10

Begin Structured Interview Questions...

Customer Service

1. Consider a situation where you work in a retail position in a department store. A customer comes into the store and approaches you for a full refund on a product that he says does not work properly. The customer is annoyed. How do you handle the situation?

Probes:

- How would you respond to the customer?
- What would you do? What would you say?

Low Score (Value = 1)	Key Indicators (Value = 2)	High Score (Value = 3)
• Adopts a confrontational or argumentative position with the customer		• Listens to the customer and shows interest and concern about the situation
• Does not inform customer about the return policy		• Ensures that the customer understands the return policy
• Does not try to understand the issue before deciding on a course of action		• Tries to better understand the issue before deciding on a course of action
• Does not take steps to ensure that proper protocol is followed		• Takes steps to ensure that proper protocol is followed
• Does not try to get to the source of the problem or better understand the defect		• Tries to get to the source of the problem by examining the issue or testing out the product for defects
• Does not consult with the store manager or a more experienced employee if assistance is required in dealing with the situation		• Consults with a more experienced employee or store manager if assistance is required in dealing with the situation
• Doesn't express an understanding of the connection between a satisfied customer and the "bottom line"		• Expresses an understanding of the connection between a satisfied customer and the "bottom line"

Applicant's assigned score for this question is:

Notes:

In USA: SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc., P.O. Box 610757, Port Huron, MI 48061-0757, P: 800.260.0285, www.SigmaAssessmentSystems.com
In Canada: Research Psychological Press, Inc., P.O. Box 3282, Stn. B, London, ON N6A 4K3, P: 800.801.4400, www.RPP.ca

As part of your rating scale discussion, it is important to discuss how scoring will be handled. For example, it is helpful to decide beforehand how many interviewers will be on the panel and how the final score will be determined based on each of the ratings provided. For example if you have 3 people on the panel, will the final score represent an average of the 3 ratings (recommended), or take another approach, such as reflect the majority.

Figure 1 – ESQ2 Interview Guide

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESS?

6

Develop an Interview Guide

If you've completed the previous steps, you are now equipped with the tools to implement a structured interview process.

The interview guide is somewhat like an instruction manual for implementing the structured interview process.

Your interview guide should include:

1. General instructions about the interview process and the steps involved. This can simply be a checklist of what is required to accomplish before, during, and after the interview.
2. Definitions of all competencies being evaluated as part of the structured interview.
3. Interview questions, rating scales, and scoring criteria, including:
 1. Examples of prototypical responses for each point on the rating scale illustrating what superior, mediocre, and poor responses would look like
 2. Example probes for each question
 3. General do's and don'ts

For an example, check out the interview guide we developed to support our Employee Screening Questionnaire – 2 (ESQ2). Click [Here](#) to download.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESS?

7

Train the Interviewers

Ill prepared interviewers can quickly undermine any interview process. It is important to train interviewers so that they are knowledgeable about the requirements of the job, how to use the interview guide, how to properly evaluate answers, and how to interpret the rating scales and scoring criteria.

Additionally, have a process in place to:

- Provide all interviewers with resumes, scheduling information, interview questions, and rating scales well ahead of time
- Decide who will ask which questions
- Protect time in each interviewer's calendar to properly prepare for the interview

A little preparation goes a long way in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of your process and giving candidates the best possible impression of your organization.

CONCLUSION

Spending the time to effectively develop a structured interview process is an incredibly worthwhile investment. Adding structure, objectivity, and job relevance to your interviews results in a fair hiring process where applicants have the best opportunity to demonstrate their fit for the job. This investment will also result in better hires that will add substantial value to your organization.

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