Criteria

The Definitive Guide to Structured Interviewing

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Interviews are one of the most common methods for evaluating job candidates. For many employers, the job interview plays an extremely pivotal role in deciding who to hire. In other words, the stakes of a job interview are very high.

Yet many organizations may be missing out on the true value of the interviewing process because they continue to conduct *unstructured* interviews. Extensive research[1] has demonstrated that **structured interviews offer two times more predictive power than *unstructured* interviews**. That's because unstructured interviews leave too much room for gut-level reactions and unconscious bias,[2] leading to less predictive hiring decisions and less successful outcomes.

One study suggested that 30% of interviewers have made up their mind about a candidate's suitability in the first five minutes of an interview.[3] Another study suggested that impressions made in the first 10 seconds of an interview could impact an interview's outcome.[4] These first impressions and judgments are all too often based on subjective observations that are not at all job-related and can be predominantly inaccurate. A candidate who is charismatic and charming, for example, is often more likely to get an offer than the person who has all the skills but doesn't make a good first impression.

Structured Interviews vs. Unstructured Interviews

Structured interviews
Structured interviews ask all candidates applying for a role the same questions, in the same order, by the same interviewers, with each answer evaluated against predetermined criteria.

Unstructured interviews
Unstructured interviews are more like free-flowing conversations with little to no structure. There is often no specific set of predetermined questions.

1   Sackett, P. R., Zhang, C., Berry, C. M., & Lievens, F. (2021). Revisiting meta-analytic estimates of validity in personnel selection: Addressing systematic overcorrection for restriction of range. Journal of Applied Psychology. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000994
Levashina, J., Hartwell, C. J., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2014). The structured employment interview: Narrative and quantitative review of the research literature. Personnel Psychology, 67(1), 241–293. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12052
2   Sharon Segrest Purkiss, Pamela L. Perrewe, Treena L. Gillespie, Bronston T. Mayes, and Gerald R. Ferris, 2006. Implicit sources of bias in employment interview judgments and decisions. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 101(2), p. 152-167.
3   Rachel E. Frieder, Chad H. Van Iddekinge, and Patrick H. Raymark. "How Quickly Do Interviewers Reach Decisions? An Examination of Interviewers' Decision-Making Time Across Applicants," Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology.
4   https://www.wired.com/2015/04/hire-like-google/

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While unstructured interviews have been found to be among the worst predictors of job performance, the good news is that the same research shows that structured interviews are an excellent predictor of job performance. An overwhelming amount of research consistently found strong evidence for the superiority of structured interviews compared to unstructured interviews.[5]

Structured interviews offer **two times more predictive** power than unstructured interviews, providing employers with more reliable insights into a candidate's ability to do the job. In fact, it's been found to be the **single best predictor** of job performance.

Given the evidence against unstructured interviews, why does this evaluation method remain prevalent and the evaluation tool of choice when hiring? In part, it may be because organizations still lack an understanding of what makes an interview "structured." They may think they already do structured interviews, but very few do them with rigor.

Top 5 predictors of a new hire's performance:

→ **1. Structured interviews**
    2. Job knowledge tests
    3. Empirically keyed biodata
    4. Work sample tests
    5. Cognitive ability tests
        ...
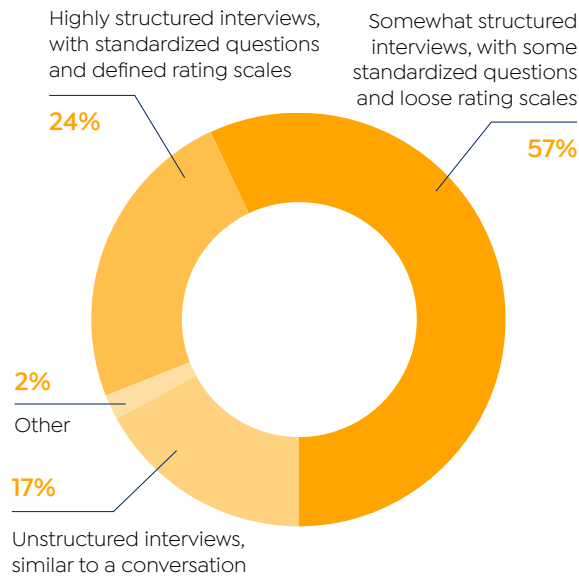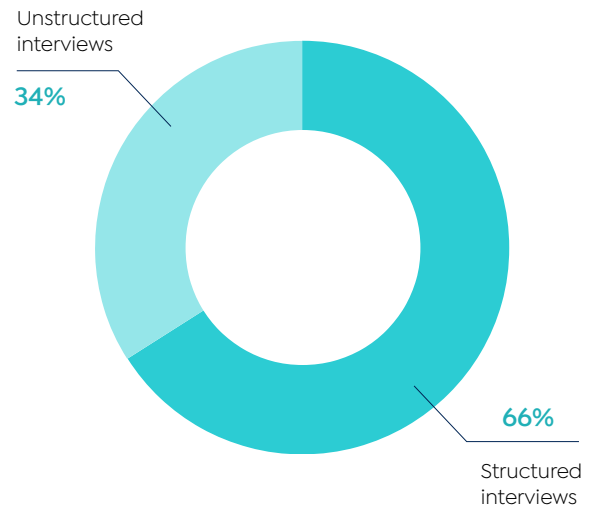→ **18. Unstructured interviews**

Source: Sackett et al., 2021

5   Levashina, J., Hartwell, C. J., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2014). The structured employment interview: Narrative and quantitative review of the research literature. Personnel Psychology, 67(1), 241–293. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12052

Our Hiring Benchmarking Report[6] found only about one-quarter of hiring professionals conduct structured interviews. More alarming is that one-third of hiring professionals surveyed believe that unstructured interviews lead to better hiring decisions, despite the evidence that unstructured interviews are a highly unreliable form of assessment.

What type of interviews do you conduct?

Highly structured interviews, with standardized questions and defined rating scales
24%

Somewhat structured interviews, with some standardized questions and loose rating scales
57%

2%
Other

17%
Unstructured interviews, similar to a conversation

Which do you think leads to a better hiring decision?

Unstructured interviews
34%

66%
Structured interviews

Many interviewers still prefer unstructured interviews because they feel more natural and authentic, and that these free-flowing conversation-like interviews give them a better chance to get to know their candidate based on their intuition. While we may have learned to "trust our gut" growing up, unfortunately the evidence tells us unstructured interviews are where biases most easily show up.

A better way to interview

The science is clear: structured interviews are better for hiring. But many organizations still aren't conducting structured interviews because it can feel daunting to get started. Criteria's I/O Psychology team has crafted this guide to help employers develop structured interviewing processes that are reliable, valid, and capable of providing stronger signals of actual on-the-job performance. It offers our best thinking about the most effective structuring interviewing practices, based on a combination of our I/O Psychology expertise and well-established research.

Use this guide as an opportunity to evaluate your own current interviewing practices and to help evolve your hiring strategy to ensure it gives you the best chance of identifying the best talent. After all, bad hiring decisions are expensive, while hiring good people is key to securing a competitive advantage.

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6   2022 Hiring Benchmarking Report https://www.criteriacorp.com/resources/research/hiring-benchmark-report-2022

1 What makes an interview structured?

Structured interviewing simply means asking all candidates the same questions, in the same order, by the same interviewers, with each answer evaluated against predetermined criteria using an anchored rating scale.

While unstructured interviews are free-flowing, conversational, and have no or minimal fixed format, structured interviews typically involve two dimensions:

1. A common set of **standardized interview questions** measuring job-related qualities
2. All candidates are evaluated against a **standardized scoring system**

Research indicates the more structure we can add to job interviews, the more reliable they become at predicting job performance.[7] To understand what makes an interview structured, it's helpful to break down the general elements of a structured interview.

Structured interview components

☑ They're based on a thorough job analysis.

Structured interviews are underpinned by a thorough job analysis. An in-depth job analysis helps construct a holistic picture of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes required to perform well in a role. Getting clarity and alignment on "what good looks like" in a job guides managers in identifying the best talent for a role.

☑ They only include job-related questions.

The interview questions are linked to job-relevant criteria based on the job analysis. It's good practice to use a mix of situational and behavioral questions that will give you insight into whether a candidate has the competencies for the role.

☑ All candidates for a given role are asked the same questions, in the same order.

During a structured interview, all candidates applying for a role are asked the same predetermined set of questions, in the same order. This keeps the interview standardized and focused on job-related factors.

☑ Interviewers direct the discussion and control off-topic information.

Biases occur when interviewers gather and evaluate non-job-related information about applicants. To minimize bias, an effort should be made to limit small talk, prompting, and follow-up questions. Candidates should be allowed to ask questions only after the main interview questions have been completed.

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7   Levashina, J., Hartwell, C. J., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2014). The structured employment interview: Narrative and quantitative review of the research literature. Personnel Psychology, 67(1), 241–293. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12052

☑ They use clear and consistent criteria for evaluating candidates.

Interviews can easily become subjective to interviewers' unconscious biases, personal preferences, and initial impression of candidates. That's why it's important to create a scoring system to objectively describe a candidate's abilities relative to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes required to drive success in the role. Sticking to the assessment criteria helps ensure you reach an evidence-based decision.

☑ Interviewers take detailed notes and score each response before moving to the next question.

To add objectivity and validity to the evaluation process, interviewers take detailed notes and score each response before moving to the next question.

☑ They consider using multiple interviewers.

By involving multiple interviewers and evaluators in the process, you can reduce personal preferences and bias and increase the reliability of the evaluation.

☑ They equip interviewers with the skills to follow the structured interview.

Interviewers are trained and equipped to conduct the structured interview. It's important for them to understand the hiring objectives, various forms of bias, and the assessment criteria to ensure each candidate is assessed objectively and consistently.

Unstructured Interviews	vs.	Structured Interviews
A free-flowing conversation between the interviewers and the candidate.		Interviewer directs the discussion.
Interviewer may engage in rapport-building conversation at the start of the interview to "break the ice."		"Small talk" and candidate questions are put on hold until the interviewers' assessments are complete.
Interviewers have the freedom to ask the questions they prefer to ask.		Pre-defined questions are prepared based on a job analysis.
Interviewers can vary the questions from candidate to candidate.		Every candidate is asked the same questions, in the same order.
Interviewer may be looking for a good culture fit.		Interviewer is looking for competencies necessary to succeed in the role.
Interview questions may cover strengths, weaknesses, work experience, hobbies, and interests.		Interviewers asks behavioral or situational questions that require the candidate to draw upon their experiences to convey competencies.
Interviewers may vary for each candidate.		The interviewers involved in the interview are consistent across candidates.
What constitutes a good response may be up to each interviewer's opinion and impression.		Interviewers score each response against an anchored rating scale. Interview guides help each interviewer to score responses objectively against pre-determined criteria.

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2 Why use structured interviewing?
They lead to better hires.

Good interviews are predictive.[8] The primary objective of the job interview process is to identify whether a candidate will perform successfully in the role, and structured interviewing is one of the best tools for identifying the strongest candidates.

It's well documented that structured interviews are better at predicting actual on-the-job performance and offer twice the predictive validity over unstructured interviews. The predictability of these interviews is derived from the structure. Research has confirmed this claim, demonstrating that structure improves interviewer judgments, and that adding structure to the interview process enhances the reliability and validity of interview evaluations.
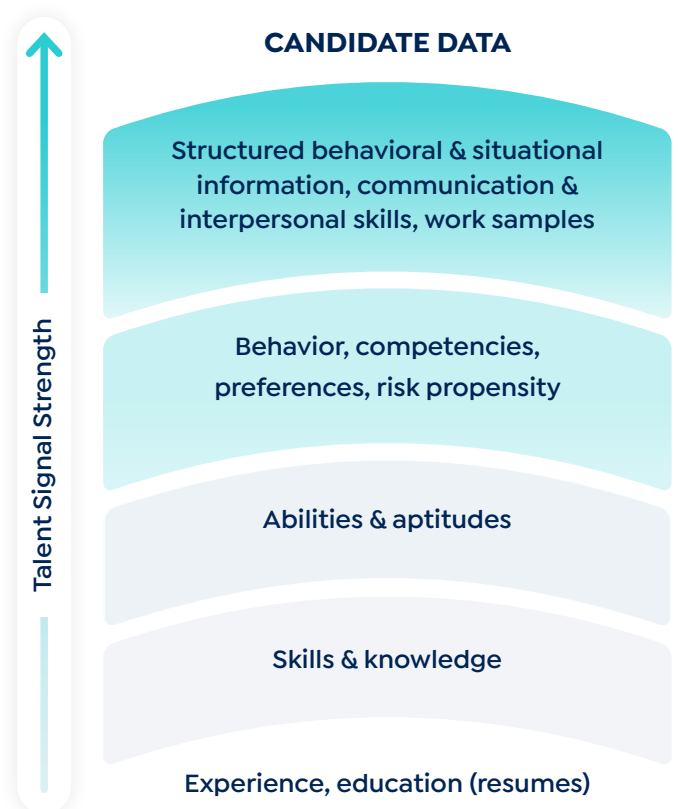
A more recent meta-analysis arrived at the conclusion that it is the single best predictor of job performance, outperforming other assessment methods such as cognitive ability and personality assessments, and even work sample tests.[9] And while powerful in its own right, when combined with other validated assessments, it offers employers an even stronger signal of actual on-the-job performance.

Structured interviews and the compounding talent signal

The more objective and accurate data you can gather on candidates, the more robust and informed hiring decisions you can make.

Structured interviews give employers an unbeatable edge with access to behavioral and situational data that is highly predictive of performance. But the interview is just one component of the recruitment process. When structured interviews are combined with other selection methods such as validated tests of cognitive ability, behavior, and skills and knowledge, employers get a "compounding talent signal" - a clear and reliable signal that the candidate will perform well in the role.

By employing multiple assessment methods that collect multiple data points on each candidate, employers get a stronger talent signal that guides their hiring decisions and increases their odds of identifying a high performer.

CANDIDATE DATA

Talent Signal Strength

Structured behavioral & situational information, communication & interpersonal skills, work samples

Behavior, competencies, preferences, risk propensity

Abilities & aptitudes

Skills & knowledge

Experience, education (resumes)

8   Bernstein, Ethan, and Amy Ross. "Note on Structured Interviewing." Harvard Business School Background Note 420-032, August 2019. (Revised March 2020.)

9   Sackett, P. R., Zhang, C., Berry, C. M., & Lievens, F. (2021). Revisiting meta-analytic estimates of validity in personnel selection: Addressing systematic overcorrection for restriction of range. Journal of Applied Psychology. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000994

They're fair, objective, and legally defensible

Structured interviews lead to a fairer and more equitable hiring process. By creating a standardized list of questions and evaluation method, you limit the influence of extraneous information, such as age, gender, disability, or race. It leaves little room for personal preferences and unconscious biases as you're less likely to subconsciously favor one candidate over another for their likability, their preferred sports team, or simply because you could imagine having fun working with them.

Biases are something that every single person on the planet has, because they're human and they have a brain. We tend to make quick assessments or judgments when we see or interact with people – most of it happens unconsciously based on our background, cultural environment, and personal experiences. It's fast, automatic and, as the name suggests, unconscious.

Scientists have shown that every single brain has over 100 biases built in. Table 1 highlights some of the more harmful biases, including ones that lead us to prefer people who are like us over those who are dissimilar. And while there may seem to be an upside to hiring people you like, because you are more likely to get along with them and work well together – it is not a sustainable or predictive method of identifying successful employees.

Instead, managers using structured interviews can rely on objective data points, through having clear criteria and a standardized rating system, to make an informed, evidence-based decision.

Google uses the scientifically proven structured interviewing process to find top talent

Google exclusively relies on structured interviewing to find the best people to employ. According to Google's own internal research, the outcomes from using a structured interview process has been very positive.

What results is Google's hiring team seeing?

Structured interviews are better at indicating who will do well on the job
Results show that structured interviews are more predictive of job performance than unstructured interviews when comparing interview scores to the performance scores of those hires across functions and levels.

Interviewers are happier and saving time
Using pre-made, high-quality questions, guides, and rubrics saves on average 40 minutes per interview. Googlers conducting structured interviews reported that they felt more prepared when interviewing the candidate.

Structured interviews make candidates happier
The team has seen an uptick in candidate satisfaction in feedback scores for structured interview candidates. Interestingly, scores indicated an especially big difference in candidate satisfaction rates when comparing rejected candidates. Rejected candidates who had a structured interview were 35% happier than those who did not have a structured interview.

Source: Google re:Work structured interviewing guide

In a structured interview, the interviewers are focused on the skills and competencies required to succeed in the role through the surfacing of objective information linked to job-related factors. Use of anchored rating scales in the evaluation process encourages evaluators to listen closely to interview responses and critically evaluate the competencies that the questions are assessing. This standardized rating system helps hiring teams to make more objective comparisons between candidates.

TABLE 1

21 Harmful Biases That Can Influence How We Hire

1 Blind Spot Bias/Negative Realism

This is one of the most difficult biases to overcome: when we think our perception of reality is objective and accurate and not influenced by biases. This bias also leads us to believe that everyone else should share our point of view and beliefs.

2 Stereotypes

One of the more well-known types of bias, this is when we form over-simplified opinions about a person or group that doesn't take individual differences into account, often based on gender, ethnicity, age, or weight.

3 Superiority Bias

Unskilled people tend to overestimate their abilities or desirable qualities, and underestimate their shortfalls and undesirable qualities, relative to other people. In other words, when we don't know much about a particular topic, we're quite likely to believe that our judgment is less biased and more acute than other people's. This bias is also known as illusory superiority or the Dunning-Kruger Effect.

4 Contrast Bias

This happens when we form an opinion based on the standard of what came previously. For example, we might interview an absolutely stellar candidate in the morning. When we interview our next candidate in the afternoon, we're likely to assess her by comparing her to the stellar candidate from the morning.

5 Confirmation Bias

We interpret new information we receive in a way that confirms our original beliefs and tend to ignore information that contradicts them. For example, we might think that someone who has the same qualification as us will be an excellent candidate for a job, so we're more inclined to look on them favorably during an interview and disregard anything that suggests otherwise.

6 Anchoring Bias

The classic example of anchoring bias is price negotiations: the first price quoted or offered will set the range for (or anchors) the rest of the negotiations. In other words, we let the first piece of information we have, or a prior belief, set the benchmark or range for the rest of the process.

7 Framing

We can draw different conclusions about the same piece of information depending on how, or by whom, it's presented. The media, advertisers, and politicians use this tactic frequently to persuade people to change their minds about an issue.

8 Halo/Horns Effect

This is a sub-type of the confirmation bias and refers to having a positive (or negative) first impression of someone or something, which then leads us to interpret subsequent events positively (or negatively).

9 In-Group vs Out-Group Bias

We tend to prefer people who belong to the same group as us, with a shared interest, identity, or characteristic. For example, if we love collecting stamps in our spare time, then we're likely to think favorably about a job applicant who is also a keen philatelist.

10 Group Attribution Error

We believe that the characteristics of one person represent the whole group. So, for example, if the only female engineer we've ever worked with is very efficient and well-organized, we might think that all female engineers will have the same characteristics.

11 Availability Heuristic

Often, we believe that things we can recall easily are more frequent or important than they really are. We tend to take mental short-cuts and make decisions based on the information that comes to mind most easily.

12 Gamblers' Fallacy

This occurs when we think that future probabilities are altered by past events – such as believing we're more likely to get heads on a coin toss if the past five events have landed on tails. So we might also be inclined to believe that because our last two hires into the Marketing department were top performers, the next person we hire into that team will be one as well.

13 Recency Bias

We usually assign more weight or value to recent events or information rather than earlier events. For example, if the last person you hired without formal qualifications in his field – we'll call him Sanjay - turned out to be a star performer, you might focus on his performance, rather than the five people before him who didn't perform well at all.

14 Actor Observer Bias

We often think that the way other people behave is based on their personality, rather than situational influences. So, for example, if Mei is attending a work sample interview for a sales role and stumbles during her presentation, we could assume that this is because she's not a confident presenter. In fact, Mei could've been up all night with a sick child, or need more information about your product before she presents confidently.

15 Pro-Innovation Bias

Sometimes, if we strongly believe in a particular innovation, we believe that everyone should adopt it as it is, without taking the time to analyze any possible shortfalls or limitations. For example, you might decide you need to hire a data scientist to predict which candidates will perform better if you hire them, without analyzing the alternatives, or what kind of ROI you could expect from the exercise.

16 Affect Heuristic

This is when our current emotions impact our decisions. Let's say Michael gets into a minor car crash in the morning, and then has to go and interview a candidate while feeling flustered and angry. Affect heuristic makes it so that if you are having a bad day, you may also have a "bad feeling" about a candidate, even if it has nothing to do with their qualifications for the job.

17 Bandwagon Effect

We're often influenced by the choice of the majority, even if it goes against our own judgment. As more people accept a belief or point of view, the more likely we are to accept it as well. So if most people who've interviewed a candidate want to make an offer, you're more likely to agree with them despite your reservations.

18 Commitment Bias

Once we've incurred expense or invested in something, we're less inclined to let it go, despite evidence to the contrary. For example, if we've flown Ariko in from overseas to meet the CEO – who also had to fly in from another state; paid for his accommodation, spent hours interviewing him, we're more inclined to offer him the job than go back to the drawing board and start looking for another candidate.

19 Outcome Bias

We can often judge a decision based on the eventual outcome, rather than the process we used to reach that decision at the time (particularly if the process was sub-par). So, if we hired Rita based on an employee referral and didn't put her through our usual recruitment process, but she's a top performer, we might judge the decision as a sound one, even though our process was flawed.

20 Social Comparison Bias

We might be inclined to dislike or want to compete with someone we perceive as mentally or physically better than us. So, when hiring, we could favor people who we think are not as good as us, so we don't feel threatened or overshadowed by them.

21 Egocentric Bias

This is one to look out for in candidates: the tendency for people to claim that they were solely or primarily responsible for an outcome that was actually the result of a joint activity. Often candidates will imply that they had more involvement in past initiatives than they actually did, so it pays to probe further and uncover who else was involved and what exactly their role was.

They create better experiences

Adding structure to your recruitment process creates positive experiences for everyone involved. Candidates feel like they are being treated fairly during interviews since all applicants are screened in the exact same way. Internal stakeholders are more unified in their expectations and the hiring decisions become easier to make and more effective.

As highlighted earlier, even rejected candidates who experienced a structured interview were 35% happier than those who did not have a structured interview, according to research into Google's own hiring practices.

They're highly useful for internal talent mobility

Forward-thinking organizations today are tapping into internal talent pools to fill talent gaps. Often, great candidates can be hidden in plain sight when recruitment efforts are focused externally. On the other hand, internal applicants can often be given preference over external candidates because they bring institutional knowledge.

Hiring internally comes with significant benefits, but they also pose different challenges. When we work with someone on a frequent basis, we build up an impression of them in our minds that solidifies over time. It's often even harder to remove bias when considering internal candidates, which makes it more challenging for the manager to judge them based on the skills and competencies that are relevant for the open role.

When hiring, the goal is to identify the best person for the role, and it's important to be as objective as possible when evaluating internal and external candidates. A clear, transparent, and fair process can mitigate any risk of losing internal applicants all together if they don't feel they are being considered equally.

Through a structured hiring process where every internal and external applicant is asked the same interview questions and evaluated against the same criteria, you demonstrate to your employees that you bring objectivity and fairness to the process.

They're efficient

While a thorough job analysis with thoughtful question design might be time-consuming upfront, standardized screening is a highly repeatable and scalable process that can be used for all future positions. Since you have predefined what to ask every candidate in a structured interview, you don't need to think about the questions to ask each time another interview is conducted.

When you leverage asynchronous, one-way video interviewing technology to conduct structured interviews, you create even greater efficiencies. Imagine you want to screen 100 candidates for a role. It may take dozens of talent acquisition professionals to conduct these interviews by phone. But if you're using one-way video interviewing technology, you only need to record your questions once to send to all 100 candidates. This can lead to a very efficient and cost-effective recruitment process, and one that also ensures each candidate receives the same consistent interviewing experience.

3 Overcoming objections with structured interviews.

Despite the overwhelming benefits of adding structure to interviews, organizations are still lagging in their adoption of a truly structured interview process. Our Hiring Benchmarking Report shows that not everyone is convinced that structured interviews are better for hiring, with one-third of the respondents of our study believing unstructured interviews lead to better hiring decisions.

While the science behind structured interviewing is clear, we still encounter a number of common, and quite understandable, objections to conducting structured interviews. Here are some of the most common ones:

Objection: Structured interviews feel impersonal.

Response: There's still a lot of room to be human in a structured interview.

A common objection among hiring managers is that structured interviews are too formal, feel impersonal, and are not conducive to rapport-building. But structured interviews can still be candidate-friendly and don't have to be rigid and uncomfortable.

Remember it is still appropriate to share information about your organization and to impress the candidate with details about the role. Look for ways to incorporate a personable feel at different touchpoints throughout the interview. Using language that reflects and promotes your corporate values and sharing information about your team culture can go a long way to show candidates why your organization is a great place to work.

Even communicating the structure and expectations of the interview beforehand can help reduce the awkwardness and ensure the candidate is informed about the process and not left wondering whether the interview is going poorly.

Objection: There's no room to answer questions.

Response: Questions can still be asked at the end of the interview, after the evaluation has been completed.

Giving candidates the opportunity to ask questions is part of providing a positive interview experience. In a structured interview, you can still leave ample time at the end — after evaluations have been completed – for informal discussions and to address any questions that may arise from candidates during their interactions with your interviewers.

Objection: It's harder to get a sense of a candidate's personality.

Response: *Structured interview questions can be geared towards specific personality traits that have been determined to be job relevant.*

Using situational and behavioral questions in a structured interview can still provide deep insight into a candidate's personality traits. An interview question like, "Describe a time you had to get started on a task that you were avoiding. What made you avoid the task? What made you decide to start it?," can reveal a candidate's behavioral tendency to work diligently and complete tasks on time, even when facing challenges or obstacles.

There are also scientifically validated personality assessments that can provide deep insight into a candidate's personality traits and work preferences. An added advantage of using personality assessments with structured interviews is the incremental validity gained by using multiple selection methods that predict job performance.

Objection: It's hard work! They take a lot of time and effort to design and conduct.

Response: *The payoff is worth it in the form of better quality of hire.*

It's fair to say an investment in time and effort is required to building a rigorous, structured process. But when structured interviews can double your accuracy in predicting job performance and reduce the costly and painful mistake of a poor hire, the investment is well worth the outcome.

Consider the costs of a poor hire. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates the cost of a bad hire is 30% of the individual's annual salary. In addition to the significant financial cost, poor hiring decisions can delay critical agendas, reduce morale, and increase turnover amongst existing employees.

Once a structured process is in place, it's a very repeatable and scalable process as the questions and evaluation criteria are pre-defined and used consistently across all candidates for that role. Google has long ago discovered the benefits of structured interviewing and they estimate a savings of 40 minutes per interview, just by using predetermined questions, interview guides, and evaluation rubrics.[10]

10   https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/hiring-use-structured-interviewing/steps/read-googles-internal-research/

4

How to plan and conduct structured interviews.

By now, the business case for embracing structured interviews in any hiring process should be obvious. Only when organizations approach hiring from a rigorous and objective point of view will they stand a good chance of hiring the right talent and avoiding the wrong ones. But getting started can be difficult.

A best practice, structured interview process looks something like this: structured, consistent, objective, and designed to reduce bias at every step of the process. Let's look at each step with best practices in mind.

The structured interview: A step-by-step guide

Steps	Best Practices
1. Align on "what good looks like"	Conduct a thorough job analysis Define the specific requirements and objectives of the role Specify what knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes are required to perform effectively in the role Build upfront consensus on what good looks like about job requirements and expectations
2. Formulate the interview questions	Develop interview questions that are job-relevant and are based on the job analysis Combine the use of situational and behavioral questions to help capture multiple dimensions of a job
3. Define the evaluation criteria	Create a 5-point anchored rating scale to yield accurate results Provide detailed descriptors for each point on the rating scale to help evaluators know what a good and poor answer looks like
4. Select interviewers and build confidence	Use multiple interviewers to reduce individual bias and preferences Brief interviewers so they understand the structured process, the competencies to be assessed, and are calibrated on their ratings Train interviewers on the best practices, good interviewing technique, and how to avoid bias

5.	Consider the candidate experience	Give candidates insight into the role and organization Inform candidates about the structured interviewing process and set the expectations Provide the opportunity for candidates to ask questions after the interview has concluded
6.	Conduct the structured interview	Ask all candidates applying for a role the same questions, in the same order, by the same interviewers Take detailed notes for reference Control off-topic information by limiting small talk, prompting, and follow-up questions
7.	Evaluate responses in real-time	Rate each response using the anchored rating scale before moving to the next question
8.	Consolidate the results and make an evidence-based decision	Submit individual evaluations before meeting to discuss a candidate Aggregate the individual evaluations to obtain a final score to help make a data-driven decision
9.	Audit and review your interviewing process for improvements	Regularly audit and review your interviewing practices Measure the success of your interview process by reviewing key metrics

Step 1: Align on "What good looks like"

For most organizations, structured interviews begin with an understanding of the requirements and objectives of the role. When recruiting candidates, we're predicting what their performance will be on the job – so it's important to articulate what we are looking for in first the place, and to make sure that everyone involved in the interview process has a shared understanding of what constitutes success in that role.

Performing a thorough job analysis helps define the requirements of the role and articulates what good performance looks like. This step in the process should cover:

✓ What are the specific demands of the job?

✓ How will this role align with the organization's overall goals and objectives?

✓ What kind of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes are required to effectively perform in the job?

✓ What competencies are essential for this role and what are desirable?

✓ What are the most important outcomes or contributions needed from this role?

✗ Criteria

Often, job descriptions and performance review criteria can serve as a starting point to a job analysis, but one may also choose to use more rigorous methods that include interviewing current or past employees who have performed in the role, interviewing their peers and their manager, using questionnaires, job shadowing, and reviewing similar job descriptions from other organizations including competitors.

As part of the job analysis, some organizations find it helpful to use or develop a competency framework to identify the competencies that are required to effectively perform in a role. Hiring to a competency framework brings additional transparency and defensibility to the way you assess for these competencies later in the hiring process.

Once you have clearly defined the role from the job analysis, it's important to identify the most important job requirements and competencies to be assessed in the interview. When designing structured interviews, it's best to stick to a few key competencies, rather than try to measure everything all at once. You should leverage the job analysis here – what stands out? Does the role require leadership skills? Interpersonal communication? A high tolerance for stressful environments? Think about the most important qualities your ideal candidate will possess.

Here's an example of how you can define the competencies for a Sales Manager role using Criteria's Competency Framework.

Directing and coordinating
Leading others

This competency describes a person's likely effectiveness at leading, directing, and coordinating others. Those who score high on directing and coordinating are likely to have the capacity to delegate, organize, and manage work among people.

Investigating, analyzing, and evaluating
Thinking and deciding

The Investigating, analyzing, and evaluating competency describes a person's likely capacity to critically evaluate, analyze information or data.

Managing conflict
Working with others

The Managing conflict competency describes someone's capacity for managing, calming, and settling disagreements. People with high scores are likely to effectively seek others' perspectives to find solutions to arguments and remain calm in conflict-laden situations.

Business acumen
Thinking and deciding

The Business acumen competency describes a person's knowledge and insight into commercial, economic, and other business matters.

Organizing and planning
Completing tasks

This competency describes a person's likely effectiveness at organizing or structuring their work and making long-term plans.

Selling
Working with others

This competency describes a person's capacity for selling products, services, or ideas. High scorers are likely to utilize a variety of effective sales techniques to sell to customers or clients.

Step 2: Formulate the interview questions

After identifying "what" is required for the role, the next step is to develop the interview questions. With a thorough job analysis completed and a well-defined list of competencies you are seeking for the role from the previous step, you can begin to craft your structured interview questions that best assess a candidate on each attribute.

All questions should be job-related, and a good practice is to include a mix of situational and behavioral questions to assess the desired competencies.

Behavioral questions elicit specific, concrete examples of a time in which the candidate was required to demonstrate the competency being measured. These questions ask the candidate to share something from the past that is related to a specific skill, behavior, or area of expertise related to the job. An example of this is:

- ✔ Tell me about a time when you doubted your ability to achieve your sales target. What was the situation?
- ✔ What was the outcome?

Situational questions are hypothetical and encourage the candidate to problem solve how they would react in a given scenario. For example, McKinsey & Company applies structure to their case interviews by giving candidates a specific business problem and asking them to respond in real time to different issues. Their case interviews follow a standardized format and use scripted information and questions.

An example of a situational question is:

- ✔ Imagine you had to change someone's mind to sell them a particular product or service. How would you go about doing this?

Situational questions tend to measure job knowledge and behavioral questions tend to measure job experience. Combining these two types of questions can help capture multiple dimensions of a job.

Considerations for developing questions:

- ✔ Use real-life scenarios that are relevant to the role you are hiring for
- ✔ Be clear and concise, and frame questions so candidates know what you're looking for
- ✔ Don't ask leading questions that point to a right answer
- ✔ Don't try to assess anything that isn't job related

Step 3: Define the evaluation criteria

The goal behind designing structured interviews is to get the most useful and predictive information out of the interaction with the least amount of bias. To achieve this in your interview, each answer should be evaluated against predetermined criteria. Typically, a five-point rating scale is sufficient to yield accurate results.

It is also highly beneficial to have each point on the rating scale "anchored" with a written definition, like a grading rubric. The descriptors for each scoring option should be chosen carefully to reflect information that the evaluator is able to observe during the interview. The purpose of the descriptors is to help interviewers most accurately assess poor versus excellent responses. By standardizing this scale, all evaluators can use the same criteria to assess each candidate, thereby

reducing bias and subjectivity in the process.

When using pre-recorded video interviews, these definitions should be incorporated into the evaluation screen whenever possible. This promotes the validity and reliability of the rating, as evaluators are less likely to assign an arbitrary score when they are provided with a written example of the type of answer that corresponds to each point on the scale.

Sample scoring rubric for a sales manager role

Specific, essential
Should be limited

Adequate number of scores to achieve
practical differentiation

Behaviorally anchored descriptors
for each score

Sample Competency	1	2	3	4	5
Directing & coordinating	Does not coordinate or assign tasks for others.	Communicates tasks and actions required.	Consistently directs and coordinate tasks for others.	Sets goals and actively directs others by assigning tasks to be completed.	Proactively sets goals that guide business strategy, and directs others in a motivating way that inspires them to achieve goals.
Business acumen	Little knowledge and insight into commercial, economic, and business matters.	Some knowledge and insight into commercial, economic, and business matters.	Keeps up to date with commercial, economic, and business matters that will impact success.	Uses commercial, economic and business insight to make decisions.	High level knowledge and insight into commercial, economic, and business matters. Applies knowledge in a range of contexts to achieve goals and ensure success.
Organizing & planning	Does not make plans or work in an organized manner.	Identifies the need for plans.	Uses organizational aids such as lists and reminders.	Makes plans and works in a structured and organized way.	Makes detailed plans factoring in resource requirements and considers contingency plans for potential future scenarios.
Selling	Lack of awareness of sales techniques and struggles to fill pipeline, hit goals, and meet sales targets.	Limited awareness of sales techniques. Occasionally meets goals and sales targets.	Employs effective sales techniques and consistently meets goals and sales targets.	Uses multiple sales techniques to consistently meet goals and sales targets.	Consistently meets and exceeds goals and sales targets and demonstrates high level sales skills and desire to close deals.

1 = Unsatisfactory   2 = Below average   3 = Average   4 = Above average   5 = Excellent

Step 4: Select interviewers and build confidence

The next step is to select the interviewers and ensure they are comfortable with the structured interviewing process. It's a good practice to consider the use of multiple interviewers to alleviate the effects of any one's personal preferences and bias in interviewing. If bias is a concern, consider including an employee who is removed from the role.

In building confidence with the process, provide training to ensure the interviewers are familiar with the structured process, understand the competencies to be assessed, and are well calibrated with their ratings.

At minimum, interviewers should have time to review the questions and rating scales prior to meeting with any candidates. In a perfect world, interviewers will receive training on best practices, as well as general tips for avoiding bias and rater error. Some organizations even opt to develop a comprehensive interview guide that includes the above items.

Step 5: Consider the candidate experience

It's important to remember your structured interviewing process impacts the candidate experience too. The benefit of using structured interviews is that they ensure every candidate has an equal opportunity to shine and that they're assessed accurately and consistently. But this doesn't mean the interview has to be impersonal.

Before diving into the questions, it's a good idea to introduce yourself and provide some background on the role and the organization. Give candidates insight into the structured interview process so that they are aware the interview is designed to be fair and objective. Let them know they will be answering a series of pre-determined questions and that they'll have time to ask their own questions after the interview has concluded. This type of introduction also works well in a pre-recorded video interview, as it tends to put candidates at ease and improve overall candidate perceptions of the process.

Step 6: Conduct the structured interview

After providing candidates with an introduction, dive right into the structured questions. To maximize the benefits of a structured interview, every candidate should receive the same questions, from the same interviewer, in the same order. Keep a copy of the questions and the evaluation rubric on hand as a reference. Any deviation from the agreed-upon list of questions can skew the evaluations and increase the potential for unconscious bias.

It's also good practice to take clear and detailed notes during the interview. Note-taking keeps a record of the key points covered in the candidate's response and provides interviewers with a reference later. It can also help overcome recency bias (when one prefers the last person they interviewed because they remember the meeting better).

To minimize bias and keep the interview focused on job-related factors, an effort should be made to limit small talk, prompting, and follow-up questions. Candidates should be allowed to ask questions only after the main interview questions have been completed.

Step 7: Evaluate the response in real-time

During the interview, interviewers should take a few seconds to evaluate each response before moving on to the next question. Be sure to reference the anchored rating scales when doing so as this helps to counteract the dreaded "halo effect," in which a positive impression from one response can unduly influence our assessment of other unrelated factors. Treat each question and answer as its own mini interview.

Step 8: Consolidate the results and make an evidence-based decision

Once everyone has evaluated all candidates, the evaluators should submit their assessments before meeting to discuss a candidate. This is a key step as people have a natural tendency to be swayed by the opinions of their peers which can lead to less reliable evaluations. Similarly, in a video interview setting with multiple evaluators, you will want to hide other evaluators' ratings from each other.

Once the individual evaluations have been submitted, an aggregate score is calculated to help determine whether a candidate should move to the next stage of the hiring process. This process helps ensure your recruitment and selection is grounded in a solid evidence base.

Step 9: Audit and review your interviewing process for improvements

A great structured interview process will minimize but can never eliminate the chances of making hiring mistakes. It's important to regularly review and audit your processes and make the necessary adjustments to improve your hiring outcomes.

Data is one of the most valuable assets when auditing your structured hiring process. Your recruitment data reveals a lot about your process and what you can improve on. Since one of the goals of a structured interview is to predict the performance of a candidate, measuring the quality of hire is useful for tracking and evaluating the performance of your structured interviews. How are the new hires from your structured interview process stacking up? Are they performing as predicted from the structured interview?

Some metrics to consider when measuring quality of hire include job performance, retention rates, performance appraisal and 360-feedback scores, and interview-to-performance relationship. Other metrics to consider when auditing your interviewing process include diversity, time to hire, and candidate ratings.

5 Using technology to support structured interviews.

Structured interviewing technology such as asynchronous (on-demand) video interviewing and structured live interviewing tools have become a mainstream method for reducing bias, enhancing objectivity, and delivering a consistent and equitable hiring process that focuses on job-related competencies.

These tools have best practices built-in for creating a structured interview process that keeps the experience consistent from one candidate to another. With asynchronous video interviews, employers can pre-record interview questions and create standardized rating systems for each evaluator to follow.

The benefits of pre-recorded video interview questions

☑ Establish a more standardized interview process

By using pre-recorded interview questions where the same interviewer asks questions in the same way every time, you can ensure that each candidate has an identical interview experience.

In designing structured video interviews, there are additional elements you can keep consistent, such as:

- ✓ The time you give candidates to prepare a response
- ✓ The time you give candidates to deliver a response
- ✓ The opportunity to retake responses

Advanced video interviewing platforms give you control over all these factors to help you add more structure to your interviewing process. Some video interviewing tools allow you to incorporate work sample tests such as written assessments, role plays and presentations. Adding these assessments in a structured way helps you more accurately predict whether a candidate would be successful if hired.

To improve the reliability of structured interviews, these video interviewing tools often have bias reduction features that allow employers to remove personal information out of the hiring equation. Features such as masking personal details, turning off candidate video, and disguising voice, are all designed to reduce biases around ethnicity, appearance, and gender.

☑ Establish a consistent rating system

The presence of a standardized rating system is important to ensure objective decisions. Some structured interviewing platforms allow you to create your own company guides to evaluate candidates fairly and consistently based on your internal rubrics. Structured interviewing platforms also collate the scores from every evaluator and present an aggregate score, speeding up the evaluation and decision-making process.

⤬ Criteria

Final words

By adopting a structured interviewing process, you'll be able to increase the likelihood of finding candidates who will be successful in a role. Organizations can and must do better at putting structured hiring processes in place than they have up to now. Structured interviewing practices that reduce bias is the smart and the right thing to do, as they are both fairer to candidates and allow employers to identify the best talent.

Our hope is that by following the steps in this guide, organizations will be able to set the bar higher, re-evaluate their existing interviewing processes, and strive to make more objective and data-driven hiring decisions that reduce bias and drive better outcomes.

Criteria

Drive Talent Success with Criteria

Criteria is a talent success company that helps organizations make more objective, evidence-based talent decisions that both reduce bias and drive outcomes. Our world-leading tools include a comprehensive suite of rigorously validated assessments and decision-making tools that highlight the potential in every job candidate while providing an experience that candidates love.

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