

Preparing Effective Interview Questions



In general, the majority of the questions asked in any type of interview should be open-ended questions that require an explanation. In a behavior-based interview, most of these open-ended questions ask about past performance. Even behavioral interviews, however, are not limited to discussing the past. When it is necessary to gather other information, such as verifying salary or determining a candidate's level of interest, a different type of question is often more appropriate.

Past behavior is the best indicator of future performance.

The following information serves as a reference when preparing interview questions.

Rapport Building Questions

- Purpose: To break the ice and to put the candidate at ease.
- When to Use: At the start of the interview.
- Sample Question: "Did you have any problems finding our office?"

Fact-Finding Questions

- Purpose: To find out basic facts and to determine minimum qualifications.
- When to Use: In a phone screen prior to the interview or at the beginning of the interview if not covered in the phone screen.
- Sample Questions: "Are you still at XYZ Organization?" "When did you leave?" "How many people did you supervise?" "What are your salary requirements?"

Past-Performance (also called Behavior-Based) Questions

- Purpose: To provide the basis for determining ability to do the job. Best indicator of future performance.
- When to Use: During the core of the interview.
- Sample Questions: "Please talk about a specific time when you had to deal with a difficult customer." "Give me an example of a job, task, or hobby that demonstrates your basic mechanical skills."



One of the main objectives of an employment interview is to determine whether the candidate can do the job. Proper planning before the interview assures that interview questions are designed to help the interviewer meet this objective.

The first step in planning for an interview is to identify the skills and characteristics needed for the job. The next step is to develop interview questions that ask the candidate for specific examples that demonstrate the needed skills and characteristics. By preparing questions that ask for actual events that happened in the candidate's past, the interviewer can rate the candidate's actual experience and skills against the needs of the job. This type of interviewing approach is called behavioral interviewing because it focuses on past behavior.

Probing Questions

- Purpose: To obtain more specific or focused information on technical or behavioral skills.
- When to Use: During the core of the interview as follow-up to a question about past performance.
- Sample Questions: "What was your role in the situation?" "How did the outcome benefit the organization?"

Closing Questions

- Purpose: To determine the interest level. To answer questions.
- When to Use: At the end of the interview.
- Sample Questions: "Do you have any questions for me?" "On a scale of zero to 10, how interested are you in this position?" "What else do you need to know about this job?"

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Preparing the right interview questions in advance will help employers gather the information needed to make an informed hiring decision.

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