STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Interview Guide and Evaluation Materials for Structured Interviews

United States Office of Personnel Management

Employment Service

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July, 2000

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STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Instructions for Interviewing Applicants

Introduction

This brief guide outlines the rationale for using a structured interview and the procedures for conducting the interview and evaluation applicants.

Much of the success of a structured interview depends upon the skill of the people involved in conducting the interview. Individual interviewers must apply the same process to each evaluation and base the evaluations made on the evidence of behaviors reported and observed in the interview session. This guide provides interviewers with the knowledge needed to use the structured interview to its best advantage.

Validity and Job-Relatedness

This selection process measures various job-related competencies as they are operationally defined. This interview is content valid in that it uses operationally defined competencies identified by a comprehensive job analysis as important for successful job performance. As used here, the approach meets all of the requirements for content validity as described in the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (UGESP) (1978).

Development of the Interview

For many of the competencies identified as important for selection into professional occupations, a structured panel interview is judged to provide a valid, reliable, fair, and practical evaluation methodology. The first step in the development of this structured interview is to determine which competencies are to be assessed. To do this, researchers at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) examined empirical data drawn from OPM's extensive analyses of the competencies necessary for success across a wide range of occupations within the Federal Government.

Conducting the Interview

General Guidelines

Three personnel should conduct the interview, preferably. Interviewers have an obligation to listen and attend to the interview proceedings, to take clear and understandable notes about the exchange, and to record a final numerical evaluation for each applicant on each competency and overall for the entire interview. During the interview, every attempt should be made to maintain objectivity, and to provide the opportunity for the applicant to do his or her best.

Remember that all applicants who are to be interviewed must be given an equal opportunity to be rated. Also, keep in mind that applicants will be observing the interviewers during the interview. They will form impressions on the panel's attitude, competence, fairness, and thoroughness. Theses impressions may impact their decisions about the job acceptance after the interview. The responsibility for the tone of the interview rests with the interviewers; their behavior will affect each applicant's opinions of the Federal government and the particular organization into which they might be hired.

Assembling the Interview Panel

The interview panel should be made up of at least one senior manager and another professional, both of whom are familiar with the content and goals of the examination. The senior person is referred to as the "panel chairperson." This person should oversee the administrative and logistical arrangements involved in conducting the interviewers and lead the interview process.

Preparing for the Interview

The panel chairperson is responsible for making the necessary arrangements for conducting the interview. Interviews should be scheduled to ensure ample space and time for a private, uninterrupted, 60-minute interview via a conference call or in person, plus 15 minutes to answer the applicant's questions and 15 minutes to rate the interview. We estimate each competency should be given 10 minutes for a full answer. Thus, a full interview should have 4-8 competencies represented. The panel chairperson should also prepare an interview schedule and distribute it to the other interviewers, obtain copies of the evaluation materials from the appropriate interview coordinator (i.e., OPM or agency staff person responsible for coordinating the interview), share copies of all examination materials with the interview participants (as described below). Also, when possible, the panel members should have a copy of the applicant's resume to review prior to the interview. The chairperson should provide the other panel members with the necessary materials a minimum of at least two days before the interview in order to allow the members of the panel to prepare for the interview.

Interview Materials

The interview materials should be considered "test secure" and should not be shared with others inside or outside the organization. The panel chair and the OPM or agency interview coordinator are responsible for the security of these materials. Adequate precautions must be taken to preserve the confidential nature of these materials. Interview materials should be distributed only to those individuals directly involved in the interview of a particular applicant. These individuals are the only authorized parties for evaluation and using these interview materials; they are responsible for preventing the interview materials, particularly the questions and rating sheets, from being compromised or made available to uninvolved parties.

All interview materials and rating sheets must be locked in a secure place when not actually being used by authorized persons. No unauthorized person may be allowed to handle or to see the structured interview questions or completed evaluation-rating sheets. The panel chair and the interview coordinator must account for all copies of the interview booklets and evaluation forms. Interview materials must be attended at all times. <u>Count all interview materials twice before distributing them to interviewers and when they are returned</u>.

Interviewing the Applicants: Instructions to the Chairperson

The chairperson plays a critical role in the interview process. He or she must:

- give all interviewers the necessary materials well ahead of time,
- ensure the interview is properly conducted,
- maintain security of interview materials (see Appendix A), and
- return interview materials to the appropriate coordinator.

In conducting the interview, each interviewer should have the following materials:

- this evaluation booklet containing instructions for conducting the interview,
- copies of the competency definitions, interview questions, standard interview probes for each question, and evaluation standards for each question (see Appendix !),
- a copy of each applicant's resume', and,
- a copy of the instructions sheet that should be provided candidates (see Appendix B).

The panel chairperson should also have a Panel Consensus Evaluation Form and Overall Evaluation Decision Form for each scheduled applicant.

Prior to the interview, the chairperson should review the interview procedures with the other interviewers, make certain that interviews have sufficient copies of al interviewer materials, and decide which interviewers will ask which questions.

- Call the applicant at the proper time for a telephone interview. For both a telephone interview and an in-person interview, start the interview at the scheduled time. For an in-person interview, use a quiet, well-lit area; the interview panel should be able to sit comfortable together across from the person being interviewed.
- Introduce yourself and other panelists by first and last name - not title, and have the applicant introduce him/herself.
- Try to make the applicant feel as comfortable as possible.

Interviewing the Applicants: Instructions to the Interviewers

Interviewers should:

- read his or her share of the interview questions,
- listen to, and take notes on each applicant's responses,
- take notes to document what the individual says during the interview as it relates to each competency, and
- keep the notes as part of the permanent record of the interview. (It is permissible to have an audio tape recording of the session, but only provided that **all** participants, including the person being interviewed, are aware of and have agreed to the taping. This tape record can assist in evaluating the applicant when there are disagreements among the interviewers. It also provides an excellent record of the interview if it is challenged.)

After each question is read to the applicant, the interviewers should carefully listen to the applicant's responses and take notes. Because these notes are essential for determining and documenting fair and accurate ratings, interviewers should take thorough and comprehensive notes. Additional sheets for notes should be attached, as necessary.

Ask the follow-up probing questions listed after each question to allow applicants the opportunity to complete or clarify their answers.

Opening the Interview

The panel chair should open the interview by reading the following statements to the applicant. These instructions are similar to the ones that should have been given to the applicant in advance or in the examining room (see Appendix B):

We'd like to spend the next hour getting to know more about you. During this time we will be asking you questions about your past experiences and qualifications and how you have dealt with various situations. You will have 10 minutes to answer each competency. After about 60 minutes, we will take some time to answer any questions you might have about the examining process.

During the interview, we will ask some questions about how you've dealt with various situations in the past. These questions have been designed to assess the competencies needed to succeed in a professional position with the Federal government. The interview questions are not targeted for a specific position. Because the examination program is designed to cover multiple positions and because many applicants are applying, the interview is designed to measure some of the core competencies important for professional work with the Federal government. Specifically, your past experiences in the following competencies will be assessed: ***(Agencies should insert their chosen competencies here.)***

All applicants will be asked the same questions and will be evaluated against the same criteria. After you have given your response, interviewers may ask you follow-up questions to clarify any points in you answer.

In answering the questions, you may describe work, family, or social situations and how you handled them. We'd like you to tell us what you did in each situation, even if it was a team effort.

In response to each question, you should be as specific and detailed as possible in describing the situation or problem, what you actually did and when (approximate dates), what you thought about, wanted, or felt, how was involved, what you contribution was, and what the outcome or result of your actions were. We are interested in your estimate of the proportion or percentage of this out come or result that was directly attributable to you and the proportion attributable to other people. If you do not give an estimate of your contribution, we will assume that you are claiming total credit for this achievement.

Once we have finished with all the questions, we will have an opportunity to talk informally about the specifics of the prospective position, the professional employment in the Federal government, and working for the government in general.

Do you have any questions about the interview procedures?

After answering any questions from the applicant, begin the interview. Be sure to limit the structured interview portions to about 60 minutes and leave sufficient time for an informal discussion.

Agencies can change the protocol according to their specific needs. Agencies need to be aware that the protocol should be sent to the candidate before the interview, and this needs to be consistent across all applicants. The following aspects of the announcement need to be included in any protocol:

- *The length of the interview*
- *The behavioral nature of the interviews ("We'll be asking about specific previous experiences you've had involving the competencies").*
- *The questions are designed to assess their ability to successfully perform on the job.*
- *The fact that questions regarding the structure of the interview can be asked before the interview, but questions during the interview are off limits.*
- *The actual competencies being assessed.*
- *The question will be the same for all applicants and the criteria will be the same for all applicants.*
- *Follow up or probe questions might be asked to clarify the candidates' answers.*
- *Examples can be drawn from work, family, or social situations as long as they relate tot he competency being addressed.*
- *Remind candidate of need to address the situation they were in, the action they took, and the outcome of that action.*
- *What proportion of the candidates contribution was responsible for the outcome of the situation.*
- *Remind the candidate of the need to focus on individual contributions.*
- *Finally, remind the candidate that after the interview, they'll have an opportunity to gain more information about the position, the agency, and the government more informally.*
- *Before you start, remember to ask the candidate "Do you have any questions about the interview procedures?"*

Concluding the Interview

After the interview, thank the applicant for the interview and ask if he/she has any questions about the examining process, Federal employment, or the particular occupation applied for. This is your opportunity to generate interest in your agency, you organization, and Federal employment. Leave enough time to answer the applicant's questions, and to let him/her know when he/she can expect to hear back from you or your agency.

Evaluating the Applicant

Completing the Individual Overall Evaluation Form

Immediately after each applicant finishes the interview, interviewers must make their individual ratings for each competency.

To complete each rating sheet, provide the information requested at the top of each form. Then, evaluate the applicant on the first competency. For example, to rate the interviewee on Customer Service, you should:

1. refer to you notes,
2. study the definition and benchmarks for Customer Service,

3. decide what level of performance was represented by the applicant's answer (from 1 = Low to 5 = Outstanding) by comparing the applicant's response to the benchmarks on the rating sheet and sign the sheet,
4. place this number in the space marked "Final Evaluation" at the bottom of the Competency Rating Form, and
5. sign the bottom of the form in the space marked "Signature".

Repeat this process for each competency, with one exception: to rate the applicant on Oral Communication, consider the applicant's responses to **all** question, then apply the appropriate benchmarks. (Oral Communication has not been separately evaluated by set stimulus questions because of time constraints. However, if it is considered to be necessary to ask questions, a stimulus question and probes are provided. Be sure that al applicants on a certificate area asked the question and probes, if they are used for any one applicant.)

Completing the Panel Consensus Evaluation Form

After all interviewers have completed their individual ratings of the applicant, the panel chairperson will collect the Individual Evaluation Forms and ensure that they have been completed correctly and signed. The panel chair will then combine interview's' individual ratings into an overall group rating on each of the competencies. If all individual rating are within one point of one another (e.g., 1, 1,2 or 3,3,4) then the group rating is simply the majority score of the individual ratings (e.g., 1 and 3 for the above ratings).

On the other hand, if interviwers' judgments differ by more than one point (e.g., 3, 4, 5; OR 1, 2, 3) a closer agreement must be obtained; that is, the interviewers must reach consensus, or agreement to within one point of each other. This consensus process should involve more than a simple compromise solution such as averaging individual ratings that differ by two or more points. Instead, each interviewer should present his or her rationale for the rating selected, including notes taken during the interview, and then discuss with the panel their point of view.

These discussions continue until consensus has been reached, i.e., all ratings differ from each other by no more than one point. Any change to the individual ratings should be documented and the interviewers should initial his/her final overall individual rating. The panel chairperson will then sum these new individual ratings to calculate the group rating which is reported on the Panel Consensus Evaluation Form. Lastly, the panel chair will ask each interviewer to examine and sign the Consensus Evaluation Form.

Completing the Selection Decision Form

When requesting for operational use, an overall evaluation based upon the Group Consensus Ratings may be determined. The Panel Chair should record the Group Consensus Ratings for each competency in the spaces provided on the rating form.

The Panel chair should then enter the final evaluation at the bottom of the page. All panel members should sign the form in the space provided. The final competency scores and the final total score can be used by the selecting officials for rating and ranking and to select a person for a particular position.

Final Recommendation

A numerical score is given by the panel for each competency measured and for the overall interview. These scores can be used at the discretion of the selecting official in her/her decision as to which applicant to select for employment. The higher the score for an individual competency, the more assured the selecting official can be that the applicant has effectively demonstrated the possession of the competency. Likewise, the overall score for the total interview provides an assessment score for this total process. The structured interview materials serve as documentation for the recommendation made and should provide support for any further action on an individual's application.

(As indicated earlier, this interview has been designed to provide the selecting official with information related to a set of job-related competencies that her/she may use in making his/her final selection decision from a certificate of best-qualified applicants. However, this interview can be used in establishing the certificate of best-qualified applicants. When this latter process is used, all applicants must be given the opportunity to take part in the structured interview by telephone or in person. The final points can be adjusted, as needed, by using a transmutation table to come up with the desired spread of rating points. Also, rather than averaging all of the competencies to provide a score of 1 to 5, the organization may wish to add the final points for all the competencies together and transmute this total score to a useful rating value.)

All materials should be returned to the interview coordinator after the interview has been conducted and a recommendation made. Again, it is very important that the panel chair collects all the interview rating sheets and any notes taken to maintain the security of the evaluation materials.

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APPENDIX A

EVALUATION FORMS

In using these forms, please keep in mind the following points.

Applicants are asked a question concerning each competency, except for Oral Communication. The question is structured so that it does not give socially desirable clues as to the type of answer that should be given. In fact, there are no correct or incorrect answers. If the applicant does not provide enough information concerning the competency to allow it to be scored, the interviewers then ask probing questions. The general probes can be used with each competency. The interviewers may also use other probes as necessary to obtain information to rate the competency. (If other probes are used, the interview panel should attempt to stay away from questions relating to "why" person did something; further, the panel should stay away from probes that would invade the applicant's personal privacy or inquire into topics that are inappropriate such as martial status, disabilities, race, etc.) In general, these specific probes ask the following:

1. What did you do?
2. What did you think about or want? (Note: This question is an attempt to elicit from the applicant whether he/she had empathy with customers, clients, or organizations or was mainly concerned about his/her own personal welfare.)
3. When did this happen?
4. Who was involved?
5. What was you contribution?
6. What was the result or outcome? (Note: This is the most important probe since it allows the interviewer to determine the impact or lack of impact of the applicant's actions.)

Panel Consensus Evaluation Form:

Instructions: Translate each Individual Evaluation for each competency onto this form. If all of the individual competency evaluations are within one rating scale point, enter the average of the evaluations in the column labeled Group Evaluation. If more than one point separates any two raters, a consensus discussion must occur with each party justifying his or her evaluation. The Panel Chair or his/her designee should take notes on the consensus discussion in the space provided. Any changes in evaluation should be initialed and a final evaluation entered for each competency.

Competency	Final Individual Evaluations			Group Evaluation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	
Interpersonal Skills				
Customer Service				
Arithmetic				
Technology Application				
Decision Making				
Oral Communication				
Total Score (Add the numbers)				

Consensus Discussion Notes:

Signature Panel Member 1:

Signature Panel Member 2:

Signature Panel Member 3:

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTION SHEET FOR CANDIDTATES
STRUCTURED INTERVIEW: INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

We'd like to spend an hour getting to know more about you. During this time we will be asking you questions about your past experiences and qualifications and how you have dealt with various situations. You will have 10 minutes to answer each competency. After about 60 minutes, we will take some time to answer any questions you might have about the examining process.

During the interview, we will ask you some questions about how you've dealt with various situations in the past. These questions have been designed to assess the skills and abilities needed to succeed in a professional position with the Federal government. Specifically, your past experiences in the following competencies will be assess: (Insert agency selected competencies here.)

All applicants will be asked the same lead questions and all will be evaluated against the same criteria. After you have given your response, interviewers may ask you follow-up questions to clarify any points in your answer. In answering the questions, you may describe work, family, or social situations and how you handled them. We'd like you to tell us what you did in each situation, even if it was team effort.

In response to each question, you should be as specific and detailed as possible in describing the situation or problem, what you actually did and when (approximate dates), what you thought about or wanted, who was involved, what your contribution was, and what the outcome or result of your actions were. We are interested in your estimate of the proportion or percentage of this outcome or result that was directly attributable to you and the proportion attributable to other people. I f you do not give an estimate of your contribution, we will assume that you are claiming total credit for this achievement.

Once we have finished with all the questions, we will have an opportunity to talk informally about the specifics of the prospective position, professional employment in the Federal government, and working for the government in general.

SELECTION DECISION FORM

Instructions: When requested for operational use, an overall evaluation based upon the Group Consensus Ratings may be determined. The Panel Chair should record the Group Consensus Ratings for each competency in the spaces provided below.

The Panel Chair should enter the final evaluation at the bottom of the page. All panel members should sign the form in the space provided. The final competency scores and the final total score can be used by the selecting officials to select a person for a particular position.

	Competency Cut Score	**Panel Consensus Ratings for Each Competency**	**Pass/Fail** Circle to indicate pass or fail:	
Interpersonal Skills	**3**		**P**	**F**
Customer Service	**3**		**P**	**F**
Technology Application	**4**		**P**	**F**
Arithmetic	**4**		**P**	**F**
TOTAL INTERVIEW SCORE:	**(14)**		**P**	**F**

Discussion Notes:

Final Evaluation and Recommendation:

Signature Panel Member 1:

Signature Panel Member 2:

Signature Panel Member 3:

APPENDIX C:
Recommended Schedule for Conducting the Interview

Time	Activity
8:00 am	Review procedures and panel members' roles.
8:30 am	Competitor # 1
8:30 am	Welcome the competitor and explain procedures.
8:40 am	Conduct structured interview. (About 1 hour)
9:40 am	Dismiss the competitor.
10:00 am	Panel members review notes and independently rate competitor's performance. Then, panelists discuss the competitor's performance, compare ratings and supporting observation; reach consensus about the competitor's performance; and prepare the group consensus rating.
10:20 am	Break/prepare for next session.
11:00 am	Competitor # 2 (Use detailed schedule outlined for Competitor #1.)
12:00 pm	**LUNCH**
1:00 pm	Competitor # 3 (Use detailed schedule outlined for Competitor #1.)
2:15 pm	Competitor # 4 (Use detailed schedule outlined for Competitor #1.)
3:30 pm	Competitor # 5 (Use detailed schedule outlined for Competitor #1.) Competitor # 6 (Use detailed schedule outlined for Competitor #1.)

* Note. Interviews for differing positions can be longer or shorter.