



Structured Interview Training

Workshop Presented by the
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
June 2010



Training Objectives

- Section 1: Overview of Structured Interviews
- Section 2: Developing a Structured Interview
- Section 3: Conducting a Structured Interview
- Section 4: Evaluating a Structured Interview
- Section 5: Tips for Effective Interviewing



Section 1: Overview of Structured Interviews



What Is a Structured Interview?

- An assessment method designed to measure job-related competencies of candidates by systematically inquiring about their behavior in past experiences and/or their proposed behavior in hypothetical situations
- Uses a standardized questioning and scoring process across all candidates

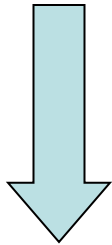


Key Standardized Features

- All questions are developed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) based on job-related competencies
- All candidates are asked the same predetermined questions in the same order
- A panel of trained interviewers takes detailed notes on candidates' responses
- All responses are evaluated using the same rating scale and standards for acceptable answers

Why Are Structure and Standardization so Important?

- Validity
- Reliability
- Fairness
- Practicality



- Allows the structured interview to meet legal and professional standards for an assessment method



Section 2: Developing a Structured Interview

Eight Key Steps

- 1) Review Job Analysis Material
- 2) Determine the Competencies to be Assessed
- 3) Develop the Interview Questions
- 4) Develop the Probe Questions
- 5) Develop the Rating Scale
- 6) Pilot Test the Questions and Interview Process
- 7) Develop an Interviewer's Guide
- 8) Document the Development Process



1) Review Job Analysis Material

- Review the job tasks and responsibilities
- Review the competencies necessary to perform the tasks and responsibilities
- Identify the competencies that are required upon entry
- Obtain confirmation from SMEs
- If a job analysis does not exist, one will need to be conducted



2) Determine the Competencies to be Assessed

- Structured interviews are more “high touch” than other assessment methods, making them great for assessing “soft” competencies such as:
 - Teamwork
 - Oral Communication
 - Interpersonal Skills
 - Conflict Management
 - Influencing/Negotiating
- Structured interviews typically assess 4-6 competencies unless the job is unique or at a high level

3) Develop Interview Questions

Tips for Writing Interview Questions:

- Reflective of the job and tied to competencies identified through the job analysis
- Open-ended
- Clear and concise
- At an appropriate reading level
- Free of jargon
- Written with superlative adjectives (e.g., most, last, worst, least, best)
- Potentially provide a context for the question

Develop Interview Questions

Tips for Writing Interview Questions Continued:

- Use the STAR Model
- Interview questions should elicit three important pieces of information from the candidate:
 - **Situation or Task:** Describes the context or background for the event or the tasks involved
 - **Action:** Describes exactly what was done or what would be done
 - **Result:** Describes the consequence of the candidate's actions



Develop Interview Questions

- Behavioral
 - Draw from candidate's actual behavior during past experiences which demonstrate job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, or competencies
 - The underlying premise is that the best predictor of future behavior on the job is past behavior under similar circumstances
- Situational
 - Present realistic job scenarios or dilemmas and ask how applicants *would* respond
 - The underlying premise is that people's intentions are closely tied to their actual behavior



Develop Interview Questions

- Convene a panel of 6-7 SMEs
- SMEs familiarize themselves with:
 - The competencies being assessed and their definitions
 - Some tasks associated with the competencies
 - The “Tips for Writing Interview Questions” (Slides 11-12)



Develop Interview Questions: Behavioral Questions

- SMEs brainstorm experience-based questions that relate to the competencies and associated tasks of interest
- Convert into questions
- A second group of SMEs should read the questions and identify the competency that they believe the incident best illustrates



Develop Interview Questions: Example Behavioral Question

- **Example Competency: Interpersonal Skills**
Shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness to others; develops and maintains effective relationships with others; may include effectively dealing with individuals who are difficult, hostile, or distressed; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and different situations; is sensitive to cultural diversity, race, gender, disabilities, and other individual differences.
- **Example Question:**
Describe a situation in which you dealt with individuals who were difficult, hostile, or distressed. Who was involved, what specific actions did you take, and what were the results?

Your Turn!

Develop Behavioral Interview Questions

- Select competencies/associated tasks from a job analysis / position description / job opportunity announcement
- Write a behavioral question for each competency
- Refer to the STAR model and the “Tips for Writing Interview Questions” (Slides 11-12)
- Example shell for a behavioral question:

Describe a time when you [Insert a specific task that illustrates a job-related competency]. What was the situation, what actions did you take, and what was the result/reaction/outcome?

Link to Competencies

- Groups of 3-4
- Share the questions that you wrote
- Listeners link questions to competencies





Develop Interview Questions: Situational Questions

- Select competencies/associated tasks from a job analysis / position description / job opportunity announcement
- Write critical incidents, or examples of effective and ineffective behaviors or situations you have witnessed on the job which reflect the competencies and associated tasks
- A second group of SMEs reads the behaviors and identifies the competency that they believe the incident best illustrates
- Rewrite the retained critical incidents in the form of hypothetical situational questions



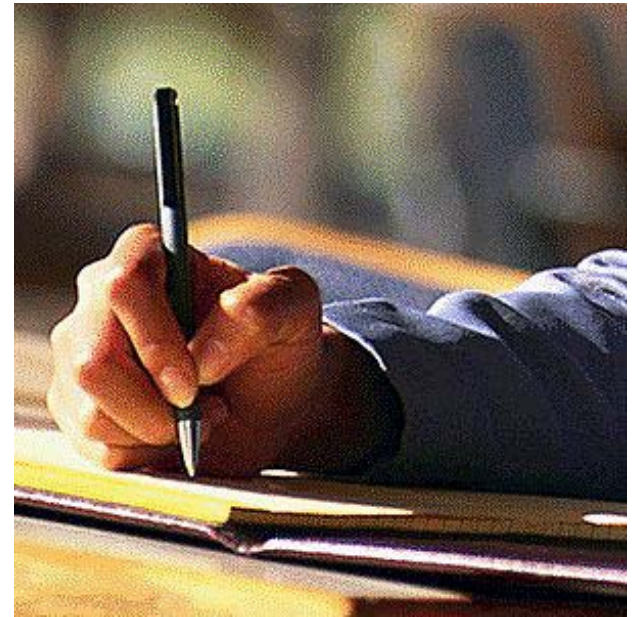
Develop Interview Questions: Example Situational Question

- **Competency:**
Interpersonal Skills
- **Behavior:**
“Coworker Kathy” dealt calmly and professionally with a very distressed client who did not receive her check on time.
- **Question:**
A very angry client walks up to your desk. She says she was told your office sent her an overdue check 5 days ago. She claims she has not received the check. She says she has bills to pay, and no one will help her. How would you handle this situation?

Your Turn!

Write Critical Incidents

- Select competencies and associated tasks from your materials
- Brainstorm effective and ineffective behaviors that illustrate each of the competencies
- Address elements of the STAR model



Link to Competencies

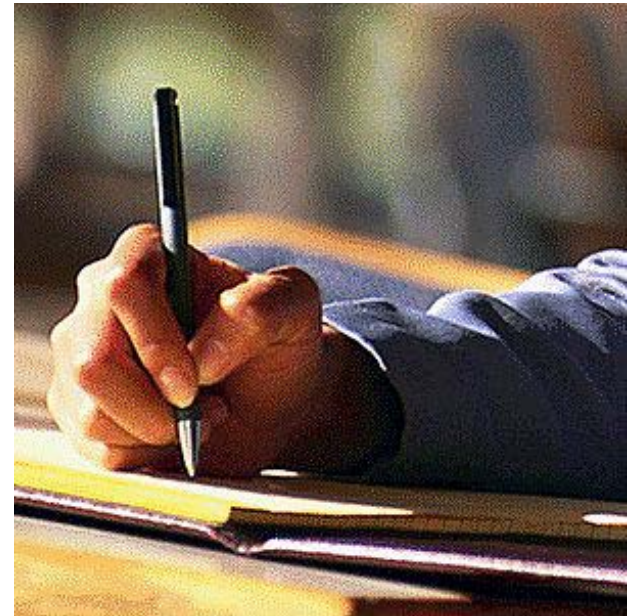
- Groups of 3-4
- Share the effective and ineffective behaviors that you wrote
- Listeners link behaviors to competencies



Your Turn!

Develop Situational Questions

- Convert critical incidents into hypothetical scenarios or dilemmas with situational questions
- Be creative yet realistic with hypothetical scenarios, dilemmas
- Refer to the “Tips for Writing Interview Questions” (Slides 11-12)





4) Develop Probe Questions

- It may be necessary to use probe questions to guide the candidate in providing the three important pieces of information necessary to accurately assess their response
- Decide beforehand whether or not probe questions will be allowed
- Make a list of acceptable probe questions for every competency interview question



Develop Probe Questions


- Do not use leading probes that convey the answers
- Do narrow in on the candidate's specific roles and actions
 - Seek clarification when candidates say "we did..." or "our group..."
 - Seek clarification when candidates are vague
- Do not challenge by word or expression any statements made by the candidate
- Do ask open-ended questions unless looking for a yes/no response



Example Probes for Behavioral Questions

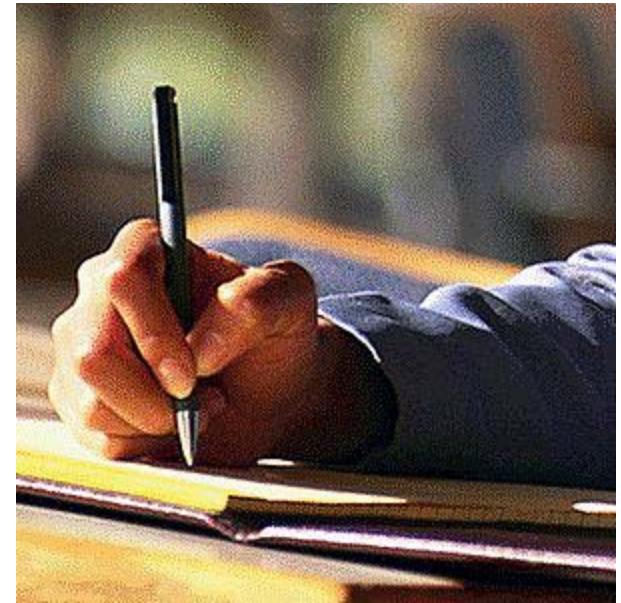
- Situation/Task probes
 - Who was involved?
 - What factors led up to this situation?
- Action probes
 - How did you respond?
 - What was your role?
- Result probes
 - What was the outcome?
 - Is there anything you would have done differently?

Example Probes for Situational Questions

- 
- Situation/Task probes
 - Why do you believe this situation occurred?
 - What do you consider to be the most critical issues in this situation?
 - Action probes
 - What is the first thing you would say or do?
 - What factors would affect your course of action?
 - What other actions could you take?
 - Result probes
 - How do you think your action would be received?
 - What do you consider as benefits of your action?

Your Turn!

Create probe questions
for the behavioral and
situational questions
that you developed



5) Develop Rating Scales

Decide on one proficiency level range for all competencies

- Typically between 3 and 7 levels
- Label at least 3 levels (e.g., unsatisfactory, satisfactory, superior)



Develop a Rating Scale for Behavioral Questions

- Determine behavioral examples for each proficiency level
- Convene the SMEs who developed the behavioral questions
 - SMEs individually determine how actual employees at each proficiency level would respond
 - SMEs discuss these example responses and reach consensus on the most representative responses for each proficiency level
 - Use these behavioral response examples as a general guide to match the candidate's response with a proficiency level



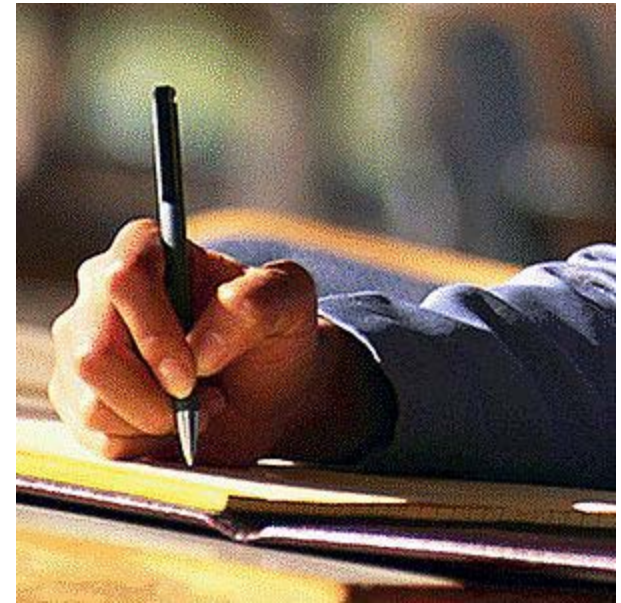
Develop a Rating Scale for Situational Questions

- Determine how someone at each proficiency level might behave in each hypothetical scenario
- Convene the SMEs who developed the situational questions
 - SMEs individually determine how actual employees at each proficiency level might respond to the scenarios
 - SMEs discuss these example responses and reach consensus on the most representative responses for each proficiency level
 - Use the hypothetical response examples as a general guide to match the candidate's response with a proficiency level

Your Turn!

Develop Rating Scales

- Groups of 3-4
- Develop example responses representing scores of “1”, “3”, and “5” for one behavioral and one situational question that each of you has developed



Final Steps of Interview Development

6) Pilot test the questions and interview process

- Determine how many interviewers will be on each panel
- Determine how final ratings will be determined (e.g., consensus, majority, average)

7) Develop an Interviewer's Guide

- General Instructions about the Interview Process
- Definitions of Competencies Being Assessed
- Questions and Rating Scales with Example Responses
- Example Probes for Each Question
- General Interviewing Tips and Practices to Avoid

8) Document the Development Process

Maintain interview development records, including:

- Descriptions (e.g., name, job title, level of expertise) of all participants, including SMEs
- Interview development materials (e.g., reference materials, previous manuals)
- A description of the development of the interview, including the job analysis and the question and rating scale development process



Section 3: Conducting a Structured Interview



The Interviewer's Impact

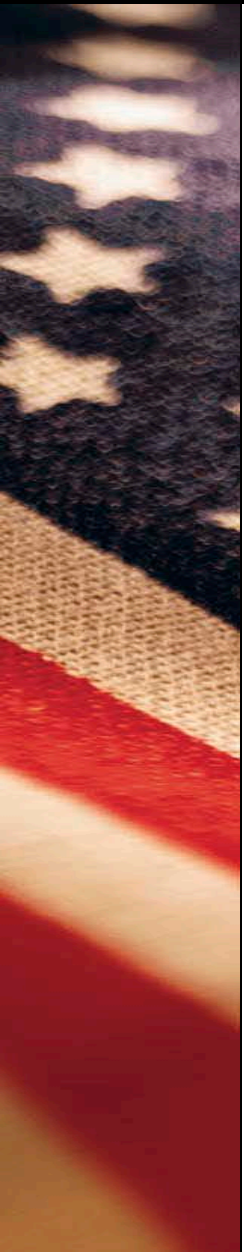
Interviewers must:

- Create a comfortable atmosphere for candidates
- Be good and unbiased listeners
- Take comprehensive notes
- Remain objective and fair during evaluations
- Treat all candidates the same and provide all candidates the same opportunities to excel



Interviewing is a Two-Way Street

- While you are evaluating candidates, they will also be evaluating you
- Be organized and prepared for every interview
- Look and act cordial, interested, and professional





Preparing: Interviewer Responsibilities

- One interviewer will serve as the chairperson, responsible for logistical arrangements and administrative functions
- Prior to the interviews, all interviewers should have and review:
 - Interviewer's Guide
 - Forms with competencies, definitions, and questions
 - Individual rating forms with example responses
 - Consensus rating form, if applicable



Preparing: Interview Timeline

- All candidates should be considered for the same amount of time. Consider the following in determining anticipated interview length:
 - Introductions and instructions
 - Responses to each question
 - An informal discussion about the position and for the candidate to ask questions
 - Evaluating each candidate, including individual and consensus ratings



Preparing: Interview Setting

- Ensure the interview location is quiet, comfortable, non-threatening, and easily accessible
- Room and facilities must be accessible to candidates with disabilities in accordance with regulations set forth by the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Candidates waiting to be interviewed should not be allowed to converse with those who have already been interviewed



Conducting the Interview: Candidate Arrival

Upon arrival of the candidate, the chairperson:

- Greets the candidate
- Leads the candidate to the designated interview location
- Initiates introductions
- Explains the interview process; this may include a written description
- Asks the candidate if he/she has any questions
- Formally begins the interview



Conducting the Interview: Questioning

- Interviewers ask only their assigned questions, in order
- Probes may be used if necessary to clarify a response, get a candidate back on track, or obtain additional information
- Make sure that your style of questioning, body language, and probes do not convey socially desirable responses



Conducting the Interview: Questioning

- Interviewers should never ask questions about or make comments about a candidate's:
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Race
 - National origin
 - Religion
 - Marital or familial status
 - Disabilities or health status
 - Or any other job-irrelevant factor



Conducting the Interview: Taking Notes

- Interviewers should focus on taking detailed notes of candidates' responses and making eye contact
- In the event of an appeal, notes can be reviewed and may serve as the basis for upholding or overturning a rating



Conducting the Interview: Taking Notes

- Notes should:
 - Summarize the content and delivery of actual responses
 - Be professional and non-judgmental
 - Be of sufficient quality and quantity to justify your ratings
- Notes should NOT:
 - Be evaluative statements about the candidate, his/her responses, or his/her personality
 - Refer to demographic characteristics of the candidate

Your Turn!

- Groups of 2
- Take turns asking the questions you developed
- Take notes on the other person's responses
- Make another group of 2, and repeat





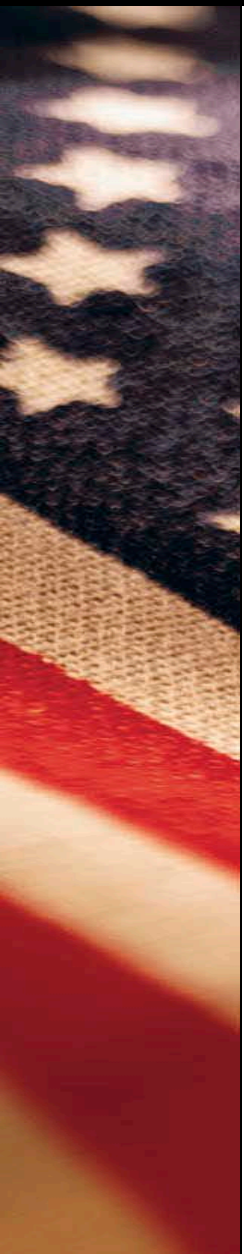
Conducting the Interview: Maintaining Control

- The chairperson makes sure the interview stays on topic and within time constraints
- The chairperson may need to make polite and tactful interruptions:
 - To control the pace of the interview
 - If a candidate is talking too much
 - If a candidate goes off topic



Conducting the Interview: Wrap-Up

- After the candidate has answered all of the questions, the chairperson concludes the interview by:
 - Thanking the candidate
 - Asking the candidate to keep the details confidential
 - Explaining the next steps in the hiring process



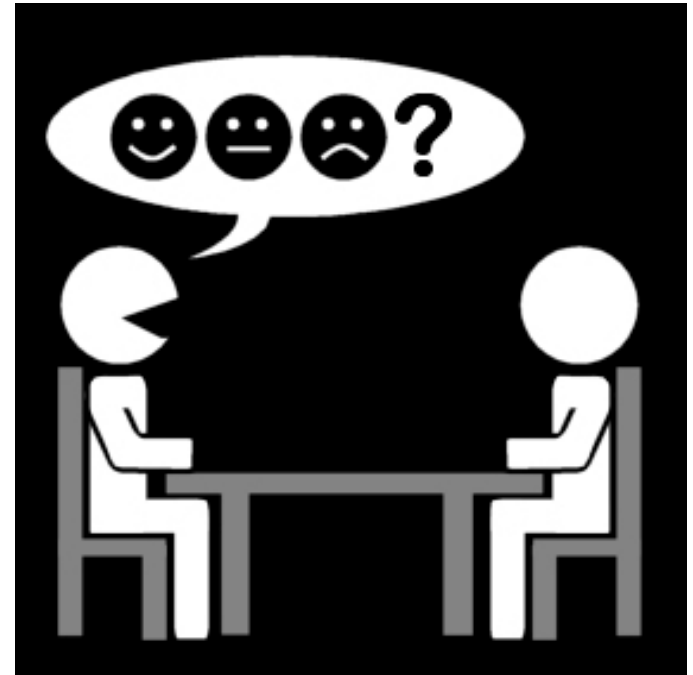
Section 4: Evaluating a Structured Interview

Making Individual Ratings

- Immediately following the interview, interviewers should read their notes to one another on the candidate's responses
- Interviewers then individually rate the candidate's responses for each question/competency combination, one at a time, by:
 - Reviewing the competency definition and associated question
 - Reviewing the example responses for each proficiency level
 - Reviewing notes for each question
 - Choosing the most appropriate rating
 - Signing and dating the rating form

Your Turn!

- Score the others' responses to the questions you asked
- Read the notes you took on their responses
- Compare notes to the example responses on the rating scales you made





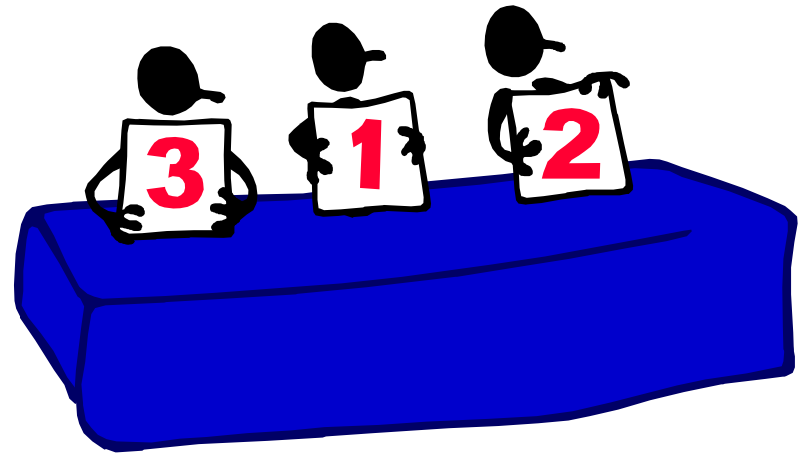
Making Consensus Ratings (If Applicable)

- After all interviewers have made individual ratings for every interview question, the chairperson facilitates consensus:
 - Interviewers transfer ratings onto the consensus form
 - Interviewers examine whether consensus exists, based on criteria previously established
 - If consensus doesn't exist, interviewers must engage in a consensus discussion

Making Consensus Ratings (If Applicable)

Consensus Discussion:

- Interviewers provide a rationale for their ratings using their notes
- The panel discusses the information until reaching the level of consensus required



Consensus Demonstration

- Volunteer asks a question
- A second volunteer answers the question
- We listen, take notes, and score the response
- We discuss and reach consensus



Rating Wrap-Up

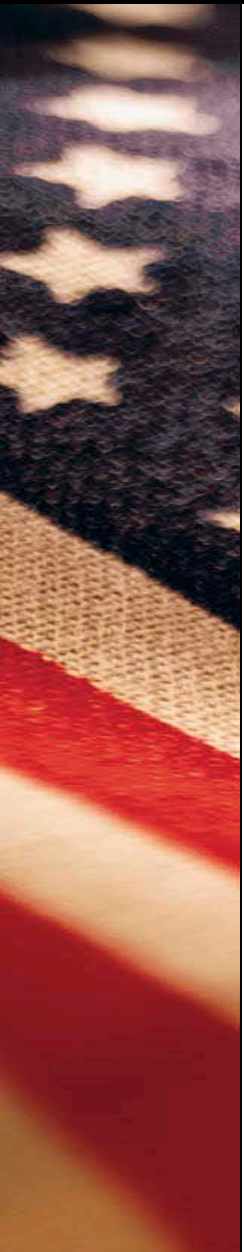
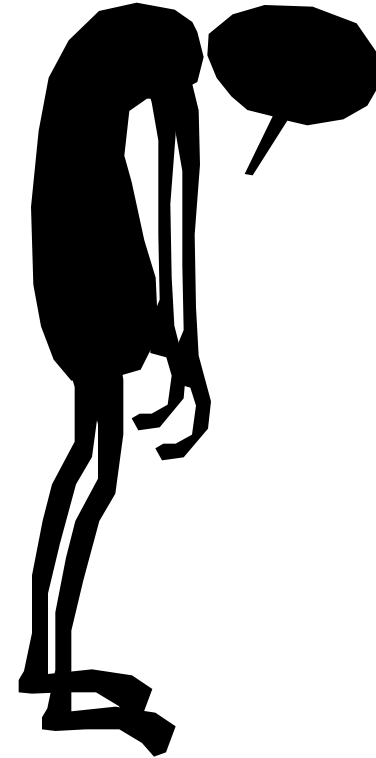
- Interviewers should initial any changes to ratings
- Interviewers should sign and date all forms
- The chairperson collects all rating forms and sensitive materials and keeps them in a secure place
- The chairperson will provide all materials to the designated point of contact



Section 5: Tips for Effective Interviewing

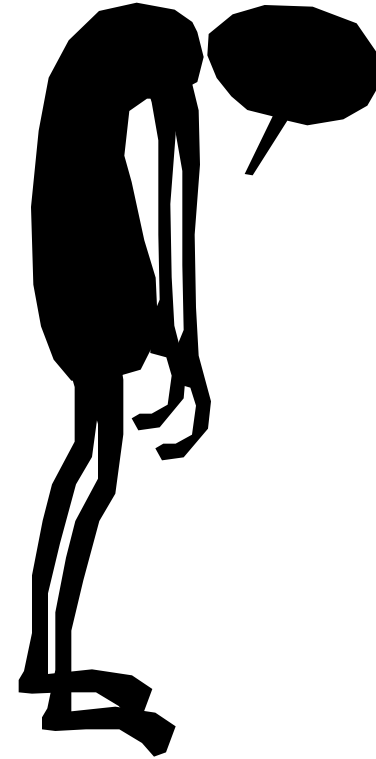
Things to Avoid

- Relying on first impressions
- Focusing on superficial factors
- Candidate-order effects
- Non-verbal behaviors



Things to Avoid

- Rater bias
- Similar to me
- Halo effect
- Leniency/Strictness
- Central tendency
- Irrelevant information
- Voting, trading, or bartering
- Polarizing





Rating Made Easy

- Know the competencies being assessed, the questions, and the rating scale with example responses
- Focus on the candidate's responses (not on the candidate)
- Take detailed notes on the responses (not on the candidate)
- Compare the candidate's responses to the example responses for each proficiency level
- Objectively rate the candidate



Interview Rapport

- Ensure a positive atmosphere
 - Helps candidate feel relaxed and at ease
 - Encourages applicants to reveal more
 - Promotes a positive image of the organization
- Build a positive atmosphere by:
 - Greeting, introductions, and professionalism
 - Using candidates' names (correctly)
 - Treating candidates with respect
 - Making eye contact
 - Thanking candidates for coming



Sources of Additional Information

- Personnel Assessment and Selection Resource Center
<http://apps.opm.gov/ADT>
- Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures
www.siop.org/_Principles/principles.pdf
- Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures
www.uniformguidelines.com/uniformguidelines.html
- Delegated Examining Operations Handbook (DEOH), Appendix G
www.opm.gov/deu/Handbook_2007/DEO_Handbook.pdf



Thank You!

Contact Information:

Classification and Assessment Policy Group

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