Structured Interviewing:

How to design and conduct structured interviews for an appointment process

Assessment Oversight and the Personnel Psychology Centre

Canada

About This Guide

The purpose of this Structured Interviewing Guide is to provide an overview of a methodology for the development and administration of structured interviews. It provides fundamental information as well as advice to help hiring managers and Human Resources (HR) specialists get the most out of structured interviews. This Guide will help hiring organizations in the federal public service to realize the full potential of structured interviews and support merit-based appointments. The Guide is intended for anyone who develops, conducts or evaluates structured interviews. This audience may include managers, human resources (HR) practitioners, internal and external consultants, applicants and others who are interested in learning more about the structured interview process.

The content of the Guide was gathered following a review of the academic and professional literature, best practices research from the private and public sectors and consultations with various stakeholders with expertise in designing and conducting structured interviews.

The Guide consists of six sections that describe the features of a structured interview and outline the process before, during and after the interview. Each section consists of several subheadings and hyperlinks for quick reference and includes practical tips for HR practitioners. The appendices feature useful tools such as sample interview booklets, a "Train-the-Trainer" presentation, a summary checklist and a feedback questionnaire to assess applicant reactions to the interview.

IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO THE READER

The methodology presented in this Guide can be adapted according to the needs of the organization and to suit the context in which the structured interviews will be used. If you have any questions about the Assessment Policy, please consult the PSC's Website at:

http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/plcy-pltq/frame-cadre/policy-politique/assessment-evaluation-eng.htm

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Overview

Employment interviews are one of the most widely used and influential assessment tools in the appointment process. Of all the factors that impact interview effectiveness, their structure has emerged as the most critical. It is well-established that structured interviews are better than unstructured ones at predicting on-the-job performance. In addition, the information obtained from a structured interview tends to be more accurate and reliable, less subject to bias and more legally defensible. Using a more structured approach improves the likelihood that hiring decisions will be based on merit.

Realizing the full potential of a structured interview requires paying careful attention to each stage of the interview process, from preparation through to development, implementation, and evaluation. Following the suggested practices in this Guide will facilitate this task and ensure that hiring managers and Human Resources (HR) practitioners fully benefit from the time and effort they invest in this valuable assessment tool.

The Guide is divided into the following six sections:

1. **The structured interview**: This section includes general information on the structured interview and its advantages, the risks associated with an unstructured interview, relevant legal issues, and an overview of the structured interview process.

2. **Before the interview**: This section provides practical tips on how to design interview booklets, including how to identify the qualifications to be assessed and how to develop interview questions. It also addresses important activities such as inviting applicants, arranging for assessment accommodation, if required, and preparing the interview board.

3. **During the interview**: This section provides step-by-step guidance on how to conduct an interview, such as initiating and closing the interview, asking effective interview questions, and note-taking techniques.

4. **After the interview**: This section offers guidance on how to accurately assess applicant responses and avoid common assessment errors, how to integrate interview results with other information to support the selection and informal discussion processes and how to provide feedback to applicants.

5. **Evaluating the interview process**: This section discusses the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of the interview. Included are tips on how to modify the interview process to ensure that it continues to meet organizational requirements, especially if it is used on an ongoing basis.

6. **Additional sources of information**: This section lists additional resources such as current research and best practices regarding structured interviewing.

What is a structured interview?

Interviews may be placed on a continuum, from unstructured to structured. At one end of the continuum, an unstructured interview is completely unplanned – questions are asked spontaneously, vary across candidates, and responses are not evaluated in any consistent manner. At the other end, the highly structured interview includes questions that are based on a thorough analysis of job requirements and the merit criteria required to perform the work. All candidates are asked the same questions and their responses are assessed in a standardized manner against job-relevant criteria using a predetermined rating scheme. These features help to establish a clear link between performance at the interview and performance on the job and minimize the impact of personal bias on the assessment process.

The following table presents the characteristics of structured versus unstructured interviews, in terms of development, administration, evaluation, and interviewer training.

UNSTRUCTURED	STRUCTURED
Development	
• Very little, if any, planning is conducted • The factors evaluated by the interview board are implicit and vary across applicants • Questioning is spontaneous and not necessarily job-related	• Careful planning of interview objectives and their role in the appointment process • Interview questions are predetermined and linked to job relevant criteria (e.g., knowledge, skills and abilities)
Administration	
• Questions vary from one interview to the next for the same job • Little, if any, control over type or amount of information collected across applicants • Extraneous information can influence the direction of the interview • Note-taking can be sketchy, disorganized or nonexistent	• Each applicant is asked the same questions • Questions and follow-up questions are controlled • Irrelevant information is disregarded • Detailed notes are taken
Evaluation	
• No system, guide or basis for evaluating interview responses	• Pre-developed, behavioural basis for evaluating interview responses
Interviewer Training	
• No formal training or instruction	• Training and preparation provided in conducting interviews

Benefits of structured interviews

Structured interviews provide a number of advantages over unstructured ones, including:

- **Enhanced objectivity and equal opportunity**. By asking the same questions and assessing responses according to the same job-relevant criteria, candidates have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications and to be assessed fairly. In addition, the use of an interview board rather than one individual assessor increases objectivity since consensus on a final evaluation must be reached.

- **Accuracy and prediction**. Since questions are linked to job-related competencies, a candidate's responses are more likely to predict their on-the-job performance. Research has shown that structured interviews are up to twice as effective at predicting job performance as unstructured ones[1-2].

- **Greater legal defensibility**. When structured interviews are developed and administered according to professional guidelines, they are more likely to be legally defensible. To date, the following three components have been found to be most closely scrutinized by the courts when using an interview:

  1. The consistency of applying the interview across applicants;
  2. The job-relatedness of the interview questions; and
  3. The extent to which the interview process was designed to be objective.

  Given the enhanced accuracy, consistency, and procedural rigour of a structured interview relative to a more informal process, the gathered information is more likely to comply with the requirements of relevant legislation.

Risks associated with unstructured interviews

Research has consistently shown that unstructured interviews can lead to poor hiring decisions because they are more vulnerable to:

- **Bias and inequity:** People are often unaware of their own biases and how these biases unconsciously influence their decisions. Research has shown that attributes such as physical attractiveness[3], similarity of the applicant to the interviewer[4], gender[5] and race[6] can inappropriately influence an interview board's assessment. Personal beliefs and values may also influence the unstructured interview process so that different questions may be asked of different people, or the same answer provided by different applicants may be interpreted differently.

- **Inaccuracy and low prediction:** Research has consistently shown that unstructured interviews are relatively ineffective at predicting job performance[7-8]. This finding is largely attributed to the use of questions that are not necessarily based on qualifications required to perform the work. Since the assessment criteria are unclear, interview board members may inaccurately and inadvertently judge applicants on irrelevant factors. Also, unstructured interviews make it easier for applicants to give answers they think the interview board is looking for, rather than

answers that provide accurate information on how they will perform once on the job.

- **Legal vulnerability:** Unstructured interviews are more likely than structured ones to be challenged in court, based on grounds of illegal discrimination [9]. A review of 158 U.S. federal court cases involving hiring discrimination from 1978 to 1997 revealed that unstructured interviews were challenged in court more often than any other type of selection device[10]. Even more important is an examination of the outcomes of such legal challenges. Unstructured interviews were found to be discriminatory in 59% of these cases, whereas structured interviews were found **NOT** to be discriminatory in 100% of cases.

The structured interview process

The model presented in the figure below outlines the key activities that take place before, during, and after the structured interview. Each of these activities enhances the quality and legal defensibility of the obtained information. A brief description of the three main interview stages is provided below to illustrate how the proposed interview process unfolds. Sections two to five of this Guide provide more detailed information on how this model can be applied in the appointment process. The hiring manager, HR practitioner or others may carry out different tasks in the interview process. The interview board may be asked to perform some of these tasks before, during, and after the interview.

Before conducting interviews, a common understanding of the interview board's role and the purpose and scope of the interview should be determined. Issues such as the number of applicants to interview and where to position the interview in the appointment process are also discussed.

Key documents that form the basis of the structured interview and ensure its validity are then reviewed. These may include the job description, competency profile, and merit criteria that can help to identify the task requirements and qualifications needed to perform the job successfully. In this way, interview questions that relate directly to job performance may be developed.

Creating booklets for note-taking and assessing the applicant is useful. A note-taking booklet includes descriptions of the qualifications to be assessed and the questions that are linked to them. An assessment booklet is a form for rating applicants against job-relevant qualifications. The questions and rating criteria are the same for all candidates to ensure consistency of approach and comparability of information and results. Sample Interview Note-taking Booklet and Assessment Booklets, which can be tailored to an organization's specific appointment process, are provided in Appendices A and B.

The next task is to attend to administrative matters such as providing information to candidates prior to the interview, arranging for a location for interviews, inviting applicants to the interview, and arranging assessment accommodations as required. Before interviews are held, the interview board ensures it is well-prepared by undergoing

training on skillful interviewing, as required, and by reviewing all relevant steps involved in a structured interview.

During the interview, the board should provide a standard introduction to all applicants, including an explanation of the format of the interview, the questions to expect, and how the board will be recording responses. After asking an interview question, the board may need to probe a person's answer for greater detail or ask follow-up questions. This ensures that the board elicits as much information as it needs to fully understand and assess the applicant's qualifications. The board concludes the interview by thanking the person, outlining the next steps in the appointment process, and providing the candidate a final opportunity to ask any other questions.

After the interview, board members assess each person's performance against the qualifications required to perform the work, by reviewing the interview responses and reaching consensus on a single evaluation for each qualification assessed. These interview results are then integrated with those of other assessment tools, such as tests or reference checks, to reach a final assessment for all applicants. The hiring manager then selects the person who is the "right fit" for the job at hand. The *Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)* provides candidates with the opportunity for an informal discussion to discuss the reasons why they were not selected.

Once the appointment process is complete, the effectiveness of the structured interview should be evaluated, especially if it is intended for future use. By identifying the strengths and areas of improvement related to the interview content and process, the structured interview will continue to meet the organization's requirements.

The Structured Interview Process

Before the Interview

Assemble Interview Board

Clarify the Purpose and Scope

Position the Interview

Design Interview Booklets

Review Statement of Merit Criteria, Competency Profile and Job Description

Identify Qualifications to Assess

Develop Questions

Develop Assessment Criteria

Invite Applicants and Arrange Accommodations as Required

Interview Board Training

Administrative Requirements

During the Interview

Provide Introduction

Ask Questions

Take Notes

Ask Probing or Follow up Questions as Necessary

Take Notes

Conclude and Answer Applicant Questions

After the Interview

Assess Responses

Integrate Interview Results with other Assessment Tools Information

Select an Applicant

Give Feedback

Evaluate and Refine Interview

Adapted from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Washington D.C.

Legal context of employment interviews

The PSEA sets out the Public Service Commission's (PSC) authority to make appointments in the public service and to delegate this authority to deputy heads in federal government organizations. The PSC has developed the [Appointment](#) [Framework](#), including the [Assessment Policy](#), to guide its delegates in building their own staffing systems, while ensuring that merit, non-partisanship and the guiding values of access, fairness, representativeness, and transparency are respected.

Merit is served when a person to be appointed to a position meets the essential qualifications for the work to be performed, as established by the deputy head, including official language proficiency. In addition, managers may take into consideration other merit criteria such as asset qualifications, operational requirements, and present or future organizational needs. The [Assessment Policy](#) governs one of the essential steps in the appointment process, namely to assess applicants against the qualifications required for the position. The policy states that the assessment of qualifications must be designed and implemented without bias, political influence, or personal favouritism, and does not create systemic barriers. A well-structured interview is a robust assessment tool that can be used to achieve that purpose.

When properly conducted, the structured interview provides a wealth of information on job-relevant criteria, enabling fair and accurate assessment of qualifications and facilitating making appointment decisions based on merit. The [Assessment Policy](#) requires that a structured interview be conducted as part of the assessment process for all Executive-level appointments, unless an exception to this requirement is granted by the PSC. Also, when the EX appointment is for an acting over four months, the acceptable alternative to the structured interview and structured reference check is a narrative assessment that assesses all of the relevant merit criteria using concrete behavioural examples, including the [Key Leadership Competencies](#). The narrative assessment must be signed by the hiring manager or another manager who is sufficiently familiar with the applicant's performance and accomplishments to attest to the accuracy of the information provided.

Language of assessment: The PSEA requires that an examination or interview, when conducted for the purpose of assessing qualifications other than language proficiency, must be conducted in English, French, or both, at the option of the candidate. Failure to do so is one of the grounds for a complaint to the [Public Service Staffing Tribunal](#) [(PSST).](#) The Policy on [Official Languages in the Appointment Process](#) offers additional guidance on these requirements. However, an examination or interview, when conducted for the purpose of assessing the qualifications of the candidate in the knowledge and use of English or French or both, or of a third language, is to be conducted in that or those languages.

Assessment accommodation: The [*Employment Equity Act*](#) (EEA) requires employers to identify and eliminate barriers to the employment of designated groups, and to institute positive policies and practices and to make reasonable accommodation to ensure that representation is achieved in the workforce. Aligned with the EEA, the

Employment Equity in the Appointment Process Policy states those requirements that ensure that the public service reflects and respects our diverse society. Organizations must provide reasonable accommodation **through all stages of the appointment process**. The Assessment Policy also offers guidance on accommodation in the assessment process, through Testing in the Public Service, the Guide for Assessing Persons with Disabilities as well as the Guidelines for Fair Assessment in a Diverse Workplace. These publications are intended to help managers fulfill their obligations in the appointment process when assessing persons requiring assessment accommodation.

Prohibited grounds: The *Canadian Human Rights Act* defines prohibited grounds of discrimination. These include: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex (including pregnancy or childbirth), sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability, and conviction for which a pardon has been granted. Interview questions must avoid these prohibited topics both directly and indirectly. It is inappropriate to inquire about areas that are unrelated to actual job performance, such as hobbies, social activities, political beliefs, residence, medical status, and any past legal actions (including workers' compensation claims), and safety complaints. Outside of the structured interview format, casual conversation can be equally dangerous as it can easily stray into prohibited topics. Deviating from job-related topics can create the impression of an undisciplined process or that hiring will be based on issues that are not job-related. While there is no need to be artificially rigid, a businesslike focus on the task of interviewing the applicant is recommended.

The importance of documentation: Should an appointment decision be challenged, it is essential to document the processes followed and how decisions were made. Managers need to be able to explain their staffing decisions should there be complaints to the PSST. Therefore, when using a structured interview in an appointment process, it is recommended that the following information be kept on file:

- The merit criteria, as assessed by the interview board and how the criteria were defined, as well as their relative importance, if applicable.
- The structured interview questions, asked of all applicants.
- The assessment criteria, such as the effective behavioural indicators for the behavioural or situational questions or the correct responses to knowledge questions.
- The rating scale, including the numerical scores and narrative descriptors, if applicable.
- The detailed notes of the interview board members, for each response.
- The individual applicant's results and the rationale.
- How the results from the interview were integrated with other sources of information, in order to make appointment decisions.

Summary tips for practitioners

The following summary recommendations will enhance the effectiveness and legal defensibility of an employment interview[9]:

- Ensure that interview questions are job-related and based on the requirements of the target position.
- Avoid questions that are related to prohibited topics.
- Use standardized administration. This includes asking the same questions of all applicants.
- Enhance the objectivity of the assessment of applicants by having a well-defined and documented scoring system, and procedures.
- Provide training to ensure that board members know how to conduct fair and unbiased interviews.
- Use interview boards rather than individual interviewers. Diversity in board membership is also preferable.
- It is important to use the same board members for all applicants, whenever possible.

Assembling the interview board

An interview board is one that is comprised of two or more individuals. Research has shown that interviews conducted by a board are more valid than those conducted by only one interviewer[11]. An interview board can reduce the impact that personal biases may have on the selection of an employee. Multiple interviewers may also capture information that a single interviewer might overlook, thus ensuring a more balanced, and complete assessment of the applicant.

Effort should be made to have interview boards reflect the diverse backgrounds of the applicant pool. This diversity may help to put applicants at ease and make the outcome more acceptable to them. Research has shown that using diverse interviewing panels can reduce or eliminate rating biases due to race and similarity in attitudes between interviewees and interviewers[12-13]. The Objective Eye is a relevant resource to consult because it brings managers and designated group members together to discuss the possibility of participating on assessment boards.

To the extent possible, it is important that the same board members interview all applicants in a given appointment process in order to increase consistency and standardization of the assessment. Potential board members could include:

- the immediate supervisor of the open position, who is likely the most knowledgeable about the activities and responsibilities of the position;
- the division director;
- an HR representative; and/or
- a potential co-worker.

The hiring manager is responsible for selecting the members of the interview board and for ensuring that board members:

- understand the nature of the position and its merit criteria;
- are qualified, including being proficient in the required official language to communicate effectively and assess fairly;
- are aware of techniques to reduce bias; and
- are free from real or apparent conflicts of interest that may affect the outcome of the process.

A manager should also consider selecting interview board members who have been trained in, and are experienced with, the structured interview process.

Serving as a member of the interview board

Members of the interview board must carry out their responsibilities without bias, political influence or personal favouritism. All members must be familiar with the interview process and maintain objectivity when assessing applicants. They may also be involved with:

- developing the interview questions and answer keys;

- developing the interview process such as preparing the introduction, deciding on the number and sequence of questions, and the time limit for the interview;

- collecting and documenting assessment information; and

- providing feedback to applicants, such as informal discussion, as required.

It is recommended that one member of the interview board be assigned the role of lead interviewer. This person is responsible for the introduction, determining who will ask specific questions, asking some of the questions, and concluding the interview.

Clarifying the scope and objectives of the interview

The first step in designing a structured interview is to clarify its purpose and objectives, making it easier for the board to determine the type of information to collect, and the process that will be used to collect it. An advantage of the structured interview is that it can allow the employer to learn more about the applicant and vice versa.

From the employer's perspective, the interview can add considerable value to the appointment process by:

- filling information gaps in other assessment tools such as applicant forms or resumés;

- assessing qualifications that can be best measured via face-to-face interaction, such as interpersonal relations or oral communication; and

- giving the applicant the chance to demonstrate their qualifications "live" by responding to actual job situations.

For the applicant, the interview is an opportunity to learn more about the job and the organization, and to begin to develop realistic expectations about both. Treating the interview as a two-way exchange can also have a positive influence on the perception of the hiring organization. For instance, research has shown that perceptions of the interview process and the interpersonal skills of the interview board members, as well as their skills in listening, recruiting, and conveying information about the organization and the target job, affect the applicant's evaluation of the interview board members as well as the organization[14-15].

It is therefore important to strike a balance between meeting the needs of the employer and the applicant, while using the interview to obtain the necessary information to determine the "right fit" for the position.

Positioning the interview in the appointment process

Two important questions that need to be addressed at the early stages of planning are how many applicants will be interviewed and at what stage in the appointment process will the interview be conducted?

Whether all applicants or only those that meet the required qualifications should be interviewed depends on a number of factors. These include the size of the applicant pool, the other types of assessment tools used in the appointment process and the resources available.

When dealing with large applicant pools, the order in which assessment tools are administered can have a significant impact on the cost of the selection process. One way to minimize time and costs is to first eliminate applicants with insufficient qualifications, using relatively inexpensive selection methods such as automated screening on training, experience, and education. As a result, the organization can use more expensive selection tools such as the interview, on a smaller number of highly qualified people.

On the other hand, when dealing with a smaller applicant pool, it may be appropriate to assess critical qualifications in a preliminary interview. For example, early stages of the process may focus on assessing essential job qualifications. Follow-up interviews can then be conducted with the reduced number of applicants, to explore their asset qualifications, or vice versa.

Designing the Interview Note-taking Booklet

Once the job requirements have been reviewed (i.e. Statement of Merit Criteria, competency profile and job description), an Interview Note-taking Booklet may be designed. To do so, the interview board will need to identify the qualifications to assess and develop questions that tap into these factors.

The following information about the interview process should be included in the booklet:
- The applicant's name or identification number, board members' names, and the date of the interview;
- The introductory greeting;
- Questions in the order in which they will be asked;
- Reserved spaces for note-taking; and
- Information concluding the interview.

Appendix A provides a sample Interview Note-taking Booklet that can be adapted to specific appointment processes. Each interview board member should have an Interview Booklet for each applicant being assessed.

Identifying the qualifications to be assessed

When developing interview questions, the board must decide which qualifications from the Statement of Merit Criteria will be assessed. To maximize the validity of the appointment process, the interview should build on information from other assessment tools. The following questions may assist in determining which kinds of qualifications to assess in an interview:

- Which qualifications can be accurately assessed using an interview - for example, flexibility and personal initiative?

- Which qualifications would be better assessed in a face-to-face situation - for example, oral communication or interpersonal skills?

- Are there any qualifications that are partially assessed or not assessed at all by other means in the process?

Personality attributes (e.g. responsibility, dependability, initiative, and persistence) and applied social skills (e.g. interpersonal relations, oral communication, persuasiveness, team focus, and the ability to work with people) are the qualifications most often assessed in interviews[16]. These qualities provide employers with an idea of how potential employees are likely to act on the job and how well they can interact with others.

The [Key Leadership Competencies](#) can also be used as a basis for the structured interview and provide a good indication of how applicants would perform on the job. Values and Ethics, Strategic Thinking, Engagement, and Management Excellence, relate to qualifications such as oral communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, initiative, and behavioural flexibility, which can be assessed effectively through structured interviews[17].

An interview, however, may not be the best tool to assess certain qualifications. For example, although job knowledge can be accurately assessed in an interview, if there are many questions requiring detailed answers, the use of written tests may be more cost-effective. Similarly, mental ability may also be better assessed through the use of standardized, written tests rather than an interview. Ultimately, the job requirements, organizational needs and the available assessment tools, should dictate whether qualifications should be assessed through an interview, another type of assessment tool, or a combination of tools.

Number of qualifications assessed: Experts advise limiting the number of qualifications assessed in an interview, as research shows that evaluations are more

valid when assessors focus on a limited number of factors[18]. Trying to assess too many factors in too little time may yield superficial data of limited value, resulting in an ineffective assessment[19]. The recommendation is for a maximum of seven qualifications to be assessed in an interview[20]. The remaining qualifications in the Statement of Merit Criteria would be assessed by other means such as written tests, simulations, or reference checks, ensuring that individuals are fully assessed before making the appointment decision.

Developing interview questions

Once the qualifications to be covered in the interview have been determined, the next step is to develop questions that assess these qualifications. Interviews can cover a range of qualifications from work experience, training and education, to specific job qualifications such as knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal attributes. Competency-based questions should be formulated to target specific behaviours related to the qualifications and work to be performed. These behavioural indicators allow for a more accurate and objective assessment of the applicant.

When developing competency-based interview questions, board members may wish to ask themselves the following questions:

1. What is the difference between employees who are strong in a particular qualification and those who are not?

2. In what situations is the qualification demonstrated?

3. What is the impact of different courses of action? What makes a particular action or response effective? What makes it ineffective?

Types of interview questions

Three of the most common and effective types of interview questions are situational, behavioural, and job knowledge questions. Although each of these formats can be independently effective, a more comprehensive assessment can be achieved by combining different types of questions for a given qualification. Each of these methods is described in greater detail below.

Situational questions: These questions present applicants with a hypothetical situation relevant to the position. These situations are typical of what applicants are likely to encounter on the job. Applicants are asked to describe what they would do in such a situation, taking into consideration available resources and the context of the job. This type of question is based on the premise that people's intentions are predictive of their future behaviour. The applicant's answers are evaluated against established criteria, discussed later in this section.

Situational interviews have been found to be highly valid and resistant to assessor error such as contrast error, and race or gender bias, also discussed later in this section[21-22]. They have been found to apply across a variety of jobs and qualifications. One advantage of situational questions is that applicants respond to a hypothetical situation rather than describing experiences from their past, thus not placing anyone at a disadvantage. Responses tend to be directly comparable and are easier to rate reliably by multiple interviewers[23].

For situational interview questions to be most effective, examples of job-specific events and actual behaviours should be collected from subject matter experts such as supervisors or job incumbents. These examples represent exceptionally good or poor performance on the qualification being assessed, and provide the hypothetical situations that will be presented in the interview question. As situational questions are derived from actual examples of job performance, the job-relevance of these questions is ensured. Research has demonstrated that most interviewees tend to prefer situational questions over behavioural questions, because they are less memory-dependent and more relevant to the target job[24].

Examples of Situational Questions to Assess Teamwork

1. Suppose you had an idea for a change in procedure to enhance work quality, but some members of your work team were against any type of change.

   - What would you do in this situation? Why?
   - What factors would you consider?
   - Who would you involve?

2. Consider a situation where you and a co-worker are working on a project together. You both agreed on how the work was to be divided up. However, your co-worker fails to do their share of the work.

   What would you do?

Behavioural questions: Behavioural questions ask applicants to describe a previous work or life event that is relevant to the position. They are usually about a time when they had to demonstrate a particular qualification that is important for the job. These questions are suitable for most types of positions and are recommended when applicants have relevant experience, and it is more informative to know their past behaviours rather than their intentions.

As with situational questions, behavioural questions are developed using on-the-job events collected from subject matter experts. Research has found behavioural interviews to be highly valid in predicting job performance[25]. Behavioural questions are usually straightforward and easy to develop, based on the qualifications identified in the Statement of Merit Criteria. They reflect the behaviour that applicants would engage in under similar circumstances. Because responses are open to verification through

follow-up questions, it is risky for applicants to provide inaccurate or untruthful answers to behavioural questions.

When asking behavioural questions, ascertain the following:

1) The particulars of the situation, task, problems or context;
2) The actions that the applicant took in response to the situation; and

3) The achieved results or the impact of the actions taken.

Example of Behavioural Questions to Assess:

Financial Management
Tell us about a time when you were required to make a difficult budget decision:
- How did you go about analyzing the issue and making a decision?
- What was the result of your decision?

Teamwork
What was the biggest difference of opinion you ever had with a co-worker?
- What did you do to try to resolve it?
- What was the outcome?

Here are examples of both situational and behavioural questions that evaluate a qualification, and related effective behaviours:

Developing Questions to Assess "Ability to Plan"

What does it mean to "plan" in the context of the position? What would be some specific activities of good and bad planners? What are the levels of complexity, the time constraints and any obstacles or challenges that are usually encountered? What is the impact of different planning actions or behaviours? Are different approaches to planning equally effective?

Definition
Establishes a systematic course of action for self and others, to ensure accomplishment of specific objectives. Sets priorities, goals and timelines to achieve maximum productivity and to ensure objectives are met on time.

Effective behavioural indicators
- Sets priorities with an appropriate sense of what is most important;
- Keeps detailed records of activities related to the accomplishment of stated objectives;
- Plans with an appropriate and realistic sense of the time demands involved;
- Knows status of one's own work at all times; and
- Creates action plans for achieving performance expectations.

Example of a Behavioural Interview Question

Describe how you managed your work schedule the last time you had competing deadlines to meet.
What steps did you take to make certain that you would manage your time most effectively?
What was the result?
What feedback did you receive?

Example of a Situational Interview Question

What would you do if you were solely responsible for managing a large scale project with very tight deadlines? What steps would you take to ensure you met all your deadlines on time?

Job knowledge questions: These questions typically assess the technical or professional knowledge required to perform the duties of the position. With these questions, applicants are asked to demonstrate their knowledge in specific areas such as basic accounting principles, computer programming, financial management, policy, or legislation, etc.

Job knowledge has been successfully evaluated in interviews[26]. Assessing job knowledge in an interview is particularly useful when the position for which you are hiring requires the verbalization of technical information and work procedures. For example, in advisory or consulting jobs, most of the requests for service are verbal. It may also be possible to provide accommodation for persons with disabilities, and assess job knowledge in the interview instead of in a written knowledge test.

Assessing job knowledge in the interview would not be recommended if there are a large number of job knowledge questions, especially if the answers are fairly short and routine. In such cases, a written test would be more efficient and usually less expensive to administer and score. It would also not be appropriate in situations where the questions deal with complex behaviours such as diagnosing defects, operating equipment or manipulating data or information. In these situations, job simulations or written knowledge tests are usually more appropriate.

When developing job knowledge questions, the challenge is in deciding how much knowledge one should be expected to have versus what can be learned later on in the job. Such questions should assess knowledge of information that is essential or important to the overall performance of the job and not knowledge that is difficult but only peripheral to the job at hand. Knowledge questions should not ask about material that is easily learned on the job or that would be taught as part of a training program for the job.

When assessing job knowledge in an interview, it is a good practice to inform applicants in advance that knowledge will be assessed, as additional preparation may be required.

Job simulations: In simulations, applicants are asked to perform a task that they would be required to do on the job. Although simulations have not traditionally been considered as interview questions, they are often used by managers for this purpose. For example, an applicant could be provided with a budget sheet and asked questions related to the work required to do the job.

As with the other types of interview questions, the simulation should also be standardized. Applicants should be given instructions and a brief scenario, either verbally or in writing, and the same questions must be asked of every applicant. An assessment guide for all applicants needs to be prepared to ensure consistency of the assessment.

However, some caution is warranted with this type of interview question. First, the scenario and the questions need to be job-related and based on the qualifications required to do the job. Second, simulations should not take up a large part of the interview, but be used to supplement applicant information obtained from the other types of interview questions. Third, the artificiality of this type of exercise may make some applicants uncomfortable.

Example of a Job Simulation

HR technicians are required to administer written exams. This includes reading exam instructions to the applicants. Please read these exam instructions to us as if you were reading them to a large group of applicants.

Questions to avoid:

Any questions that may discriminate against applicants on the basis of any of the following grounds are prohibited: race, national or ethic origin, colour, religion, age, sex (including pregnancy or childbirth), sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability, and conviction for which a person has been granted pardon.

Interview questions should always be job-related.

Probing questions:

Applicants' responses will vary in length and level of detail. This variability is acceptable as long as enough information is obtained to assess each qualification fairly and accurately. However, there may be a need to request additional examples or more specific information to more fully understand the applicant's answer. Asking probing or follow-up questions is a necessary component of the interview because it helps to ensure that sufficient data is obtained for all qualifications being assessed.

The following example illustrates how probing questions can clarify the applicant's role in a specific situation.

> Applicant: "We designed a forty-story building complete with a four-story underground garage and glassed-in mezzanine."
>
> Interviewer: "*What was your specific role in the project?*"
>
> Applicant: "I assisted the architects by making multiple copies of the plans using a blue line machine and by running errands."

Probing questions are generally acceptable in a structured interview, but they should not result in the introduction of new topics or issues, since the structured interview is intended to ask the same questions of each applicant. Otherwise, some applicants may be inadvertently advantaged, while others, disadvantaged. It is also important not to reveal effective behavioural indicators through probing questions.

The recommended approach is to develop discretionary probing questions at the same time as structured interview questions. These discretionary, standardized probes should ensure that enough details of the situation, the applicant's behaviour in the situation and the outcome of the behaviour are being described. Probing questions can also be used to help applicants focus on specific incidents when they are responding with generalizations.

Listed below is a series of sample probing questions that can help to elicit specific details about the who, when, where, what, why and how of the applicant's responses. This list is followed by a summary of "do's" and "don'ts" to consider when designing interview questions.

Sample Probing Questions

Who:
- Who else was involved?
- Who else helped you with this situation?

When:
- How long ago did this happen?
- When did all this take place?

Where:
- Where did this take place?

What:
- What was the [situation/issue/problem]?
- What were the [results/outcomes]?
- What actions did you decide to take, and when?
- What was your role?
- What part did you play in making the decision to _____?
- What did you say, or do that [did/didn't] work?
- What was the message you were trying to convey?
- What were you trying to convince or persuade them of?
- What techniques did you use to keep yourself and your work organized?
- What did you do when your work started to get behind?
- What was the deadline?
- What actions did you take to ensure you met the deadline?

Why:
- Why was this situation a particular challenge?
- Why was this person difficult?
- Why did you take that approach?
- Why was it important to meet the deadline?

How:
- How did you develop this idea?
- How did you convince your supervisor to adopt it?
- How did it help the organization?
- How did you prepare for it? How did you size up the situation?

Source: BC Public Service Agency

Do's and don'ts when designing interview questions:

Do	Don't
• Use language that is clear, straightforward and concise. Phrase questions in the proper working language of the job. • Develop questions that are open-ended and call for more than a simple "yes" or "no" or a statement of facts. Ensure that questions contain only one issue or topic at a time for each qualification being assessed. • Develop questions that call for job knowledge or present a job-related problem or situation. Ensure questions are realistic, practical and deal with important aspects of the job. • Ensure questions distinguish among applicant qualification levels and differentiate between applicants who will be good performers on the job vs. those who will not. • Require that the applicant's answers describe actual behaviour (behavioural questions) or what they would do in a particular situation (situational questions). • Have your questions reviewed by subject matter experts such as managers or consultants who are knowledgeable about the job, or job incumbents who are successful in the targeted position. • Have questions reviewed by an employment equity board or by people from diverse cultural backgrounds to ensure that they are inclusive and do not contain words or expressions that could be offensive or create barriers.	• Use complex language, government-specific terminology or language that requires culture-specific knowledge that is not work-related. • Make questions so specific that applicants who have not experienced particular situations are unable to answer the question. • Develop leading questions that suggest an answer to the applicant. • Develop questions that involve moral judgments unrelated to work or discriminate on the prohibited grounds. • Develop questions that may seem threatening to applicants or could make them feel uncomfortable.

Number of questions: Although it is generally recommended that more than one question be asked for each qualification assessed, there is no rule for the exact number. While some experts recommend asking more than one question per qualification, others suggest at least three questions per qualification[27]. However, the exact number of questions is a function of:

1. The breadth of the qualification to assess and its importance in successful job performance; and

2. The overall number of assessed qualifications, the type of questions asked and the amount of interview time available.

If, for example, a given qualification entails many different behavioural indicators, it may take more questions to collect enough information to assess that qualification adequately than if there were only a few behavioural indicators. Ultimately, information should be collected until the topic is exhausted or until the interview board judges that enough information was gathered to perform an accurate assessment.

Time constraints should also be considered. An interview of over 90 minutes can be exhausting for both applicants and board members. In contrast, an interview of only 30 minutes may render rather superficial assessments. It is recommended that interviews be 45-60 minutes, with a maximum of 90 minutes in length.

The number of questions covered within the allotted interview time will also be a function of the types of questions asked. Typically, it should allow three minutes for a knowledge question, and up to ten minutes for a situational or behavioural question. These time constraints reinforce the recommendation that one should aim to assess a relatively small number of qualifications in an interview, ideally no more than seven.

Organizing interview questions: When asking more than one question per qualification, it is recommended that the questions be grouped so that the interview board can ask all the questions assessing a qualification before moving on to another one. This facilitates the analysis and assessment process for interview board members, since all of the information on a given qualification will have been considered together.

Other decisions will also need to be made by the board regarding the interview format and process, such as whether applicants should be given time on-site to prepare for the interview. Generally, it is good practice to give time for applicants to prepare on-site. It is reasonable to allow roughly 30 minutes for applicants to review the questions and prepare their responses. Board members should also decide in advance which questions each person will ask applicants. It is essential to conduct the interview in the same way for each applicant.

Developing an Assessment Booklet

Board members need to decide in advance how they are going to assess interview responses in a fair and accurate manner. One way to ensure the same assessment

criteria are applied consistently is to develop an Assessment Booklet for evaluating applicants' performances. When designing such booklets, it is important to consider the kinds of actions, responses, and behaviours that are effective and relevant for each qualification assessed. The use of a rating scale can enable a more precise assessment against the qualifications to determine the "right fit" for the position and by minimizing subjective bias.

Qualifications can be rated against a variety of scale types. The simplest scale provides only "meets/does not meet" choices. This type of scale could be used when assessing only one applicant for an acting appointment. Alternatively, the appointment process may require an expanded rating scale to make meaningful distinctions between applicants and determine the "right fit" for the job.

A sample rating scale: In order to assess applicants fairly, board members should use a common rating scheme and scoring procedure for each applicant. This standardized approach improves the accuracy of judgements made by board members and helps in later comparisons among applicants. Below is an example of a combined (verbal and numerical) rating scale:

Does not meet the qualification		Meets the qualification		
1 Very Poor. Unacceptable.	2 Poor. Below average.	3 Moderate. Good. Acceptable. Satisfactory. Average.	4 Strong. Above average.	5 Very Strong. Excellent.

Ratings provided for each qualification should be accompanied by a brief rationale as to why the rating was given, based on the behavioural evidence provided. For instance, a rating may be justified by noting that "the applicant made up for poor project planning by taking the initiative to ensure the project was completed on time."

Behaviourally-anchored scales: When developing rating scales, one useful format is to distinguish different points on the rating scale using specific behaviours. This precision will help to ensure that all share a common understanding of what a given qualification means and what kinds of behaviours represent weak, moderate and strong performance on related interview questions. In order to create appropriate behavioural anchors for the scale, it is important to review documents such as the Statement of Merit Criteria, the competency profile and the job description.

The number of points on a rating scale can vary, usually from three to seven. When rating qualifications, a five-point scale is typically suitable. The scale may also vary in the breadth and level of detail provided in the behavioural description. For instance, the figure below provides a basic description of the expected responses for an applicant to receive a score of 1, 3 or 5 for situational and behavioural questions.

Situational question: Suppose you had an idea for a change in procedure to enhance work quality but some members of your work team were against any type of change. What would you do? What factors would you consider? Why?
Who would you involve?

Rating scheme:
(5) Excellent answer: Explain the change and try to show the benefits. Discuss it openly in a meeting.

(3) Good answer: Ask them why they are against change. Try to convince them.

(1) Unacceptable answer: Tell the supervisor.

Behavioural question: What was the biggest difference of opinion you ever had with a co-worker? How did you resolve it? What was the outcome?

Rating scheme:
(5) Excellent answer: My co-worker and I looked into the situation, found the problem and resolved the difference. We had an honest conversation.

(3) Good answer: Compromised. Resolved the problem by taking turns, or I explained the problem (my side) carefully.

(1) Unacceptable answer: I got mad and told the co-worker off, or we got the supervisor to resolve the problem, or I never have differences with anyone.

Alternatively, greater precision can be gained by incorporating more detailed behaviours into the rating scale. This does not mean simply "cutting and pasting" the behavioural indicators for the qualification being measured. Rather, it entails outlining specific answers to the questions that define the different proficiency levels.

Detailed Behavioural Scale Assessing Interpersonal Skills

Definition: shows understanding, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern; develops and maintains relationships; may deal with people who are difficult, hostile, distressed; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and situations; is sensitive to individual differences.

Behavioural question: Describe a situation in which you had to deal with people who were upset about a problem.

Probes:
•   What events led up to this situation?
•   Who was involved?
•   What specific actions did you take? What was the outcome or result?

Benchmark Level	Level Definition	Level Examples
5	Establishes and maintains ongoing working relationships with management, other employees, internal or external stakeholders or clients. Remains courteous when discussing information or eliciting highly sensitive or controversial information from people who are reluctant to give it. Effectively handles situations involving a high degree of tension or discomfort involving people who are demonstrating a high degree of hostility or distress.	• Presents controversial findings tactfully to irate organization senior management officials regarding shortcomings of a newly installed computer system, software programs, and associated equipment.
4		• Mediates disputes concerning system design/architecture, the nature and capacity of data management systems, system resources allocations or other equally controversial/sensitive matters.
3	Cooperates and works well with management, other employees or clients on short-term assignments. Remains courteous when discussing information or eliciting moderately sensitive or controversial information from people who are hesitant to give it. Effectively handles situations involving a moderate degree of tension or discomfort involving people who are demonstrating a moderate degree of hostility or distress.	• Courteously and tactfully delivers effective instruction to frustrated customers. • Provides technical advice to customers and the public on various types of IT such as communication or security systems, data management procedures or analysis, software engineering or Web development.
2		• Familiarizes new employees with administrative procedures and office systems.
1	Cooperates and works well with management, other employees or clients during brief interactions. Remains courteous when discussing information or eliciting non-sensitive or non-controversial information from people who are willing to give it. Effectively handles situations involving little or no tension, discomfort, hostility or distress.	• Responds courteously to clients' general inquiries. • Greets and assists visitors attending a meeting within own organization.

Source: United States Office of Personnel Management

In the absence of detailed behaviours to define a rating scale, an alternative option is to provide a generic description of performance for each point on the scale. An example is provided below.

Ratings	Qualifier	Generic Description
5	Strong. Excellent. Exceptional. Much more than acceptable.	Extremely effective performance. Significantly above criteria for successful job performance. Meets all major/essential/core criteria or acceptable equivalents and several additional criteria. The behaviour is very well-developed and demonstrated with a high degree of consistency, impact and depth. This behaviour is demonstrated even under challenging circumstances. There are no gaps in the demonstration of the behaviour. Surpassed expectations. Reserved for the exemplary set of skills that yield a particularly sophisticated approach to handling the situation.
4	Very good. Full performance of behaviours. Above average.	More than adequate for effective performance. Generally exceeds criteria relative to quality and quantity of behaviour required for successful job performance. Meets most of the major/essential/core criteria or acceptable equivalents and several of the minor/additional criteria. The behaviour is also very well-developed although there may be an occasional gap in consistency, impact and depth. No major deficiencies exist in the areas assessed. Consistently demonstrated better-than-average level of performance. Describes/demonstrates the full range of skills appropriate for handling the situation and the desired result, or outcome is obtained.
3	Moderate. Good. Acceptable. Satisfactory. Average.	Should be adequate for effective performance. Meets criteria relative to quality and quantity of behaviour required for successful job performance. Some of the major and minor criteria were met; some deficiencies exist in the areas assessed but none is of major concern. The behaviour is demonstrated to a moderate degree with some gaps in consistency, impact and depth. Describes/demonstrates a sufficient range of skills for handling the situation and the desired outcome is obtained.
2	Weak. Below average.	Insufficient for performance requirements. Generally does not meet criteria relative to quality and quantity of behaviour required for successful job performance (e.g., meets half or less of the criteria). There are many gaps in the demonstration of the behaviour. Does not describe/demonstrate a sufficient range of skills appropriate for handling of the situation, or describes plausible but inappropriate behaviours for handling the situation or the desired result or outcome is not obtained.
1	Unacceptable. Poor. Much less than acceptable.	Significantly below criteria required for successful job performance. Few or no criteria met. There are significant gaps in the demonstration of the behaviour. A major problem exists. No answer or inappropriate answer. Describes/demonstrates counterproductive behaviours that have negative outcomes or consequences (i.e., make the situation worse).

Source: British Columbia Public Service Agency, Manager's HR Toolkit

An example of an Assessment Booklet that can be tailored to any appointment process is available in Appendix B.

Inviting applicants to the interview

Prior to the interview, each applicant should be given information on its format. It should be made clear that the interview will be structured with an interview board and specify the types of questions that will be asked, the qualifications assessed and the amount of time allotted for the interview.

Prior to the interview, information about the organization and the position to be staffed may be sent to applicants. Additional information such as dress code, pay range, benefits and working conditions, as well as any specific requirements such as shift work, may also be covered ahead of time. In so doing, the structured interview questions will be the main focus during the allotted time, ensuring that applicants have ample time to answer.

All applicants should be informed of the interview format, the qualifications to be assessed and the expected duration so that applicants can make an informed request for accommodation.

Arranging assessment accommodation

Whether an applicant will require accommodation should also be ascertained prior to the interview. Deputy heads have a duty to accommodate applicants in the appointment process and to remove barriers to employment. It is important to remind applicants in a timely fashion of their right to request accommodation and to ensure that the necessary arrangements are made.

If you have any questions or for further information on establishing appropriate accommodation, please refer to the *Guide for Assessing Persons with Disabilities*.

Example of Accommodation

In one appointment process, it was decided that applicants are to receive the interview questions in writing prior to the interview; however, one of the applicants is visually impaired.

To accommodate an applicant with visual limitations, it might be appropriate to transfer the questions to an electronic document that can be read on a screen or with voice software. Alternatively, a reader might also be an appropriate accommodation.

Training the interview board

Research indicates that skilful interviewing requires training and feedback[28-29]. It is important that all members of the interview board be properly trained on how to conduct

structured interviews and how to assess applicants to ensure fairness in the staffing process.

Board member preparation should cover the following topics:

- How to build rapport with applicants;
- Effective questioning;
- The importance of taking good notes and how to do so;
- The assessment criteria and procedures;
- Assessor biases, common assessment errors and how to minimize them; and
- How to arrive at a final board rating.

For more details on training, a "Train-the-Trainer" presentation is provided in Appendix D.

Administrative arrangements

It is important to create and follow an interview schedule to ensure a smooth interview process. If the allotted time for interviews is inadequate, the process will fall behind schedule. Delays can have a negative effect on applicants and board members which may affect the assessment process. It may also convey a negative image of the organization.

The person in charge of scheduling will need to know the expected duration of the interview to ensure ample interviewing time. Pre-testing your interview to ensure that an adequate amount of time is allocated is useful for this purpose. When conducting back-to-back interviews, it is also good practice to allow for 15 minutes between interviews so that they do not overlap even if they run over time and also to permit board members to take breaks.

To the extent possible, the reserved interview room should be well-lit and free from noise and other distractions. The atmosphere should be calm so as not to intimidate applicants. Water, pens/pencils and paper should be offered. The seating arrangements can also have an impact on the interview atmosphere. It is preferable to position applicants and board members around a small table or at the corner of a larger table rather than to have the applicants sit at one side of a large table with the board members all seated along the other side.

Prior to the first interview, board members should go through the Interview Booklet to review the process and assign the role of lead interviewer to one member. The Interview Booklet contributes to the standardization of the interview process.

Summary tips for practitioners

Developing interview questions:

- Base situational and behavioural questions on events that have occurred in the position to be filled. The more that questions are based on what really happens on the job, the better they will be at predicting job performance.

- Balance the interview towards the positive. Plan to ask questions focussing on applicants' successes first. Applicants may then be more forthcoming discussing situations where they were not as successful.

- Ensure that you design your questions so the applicant will know that you want them to describe the particulars of the situation, task, problems, or context, the actions taken (or not), and the result or impact.

- For knowledge questions, identify the specific facts, concepts, techniques or regulations that are crucial. Take into account the relative importance of each of these knowledge areas, in deciding how many questions you will require.

- Make sure that your questions are clear and unambiguous. Have them reviewed by someone who was not involved in their development.

Developing and using rating scales:

- Be clear on the expected, effective answers that meet or do not meet qualifications.

- Choose the words or phrases for the points on a scale and their accompanying definitions that are most appropriate for the qualification being assessed and the selection tool being used.

- Don't get overly detailed. These are key indicators only. An exhaustive list of all possible criteria is not required.

Arranging assessment accommodation:

- Ensure that all applicants are informed of the interview format, the qualifications to be assessed, the expected duration and their right to request accommodation.

- To avoid undue delays, contact applicants who request accommodation as soon as possible.

- Maintain an open dialogue with applicants in order to understand their needs.

- Establish appropriate accommodation according to the *Guide for Assessing Persons with Disabilities* and the *Guidelines for Fair Assessment in a Diverse Workplace*.

Even the well-conceived interview is only as effective as its administration process. An interviewer's skill in areas such as establishing rapport, probing, managing applicant reactions and effective note-taking have a considerable impact on the validity and fairness of the interview process. In addition, board members serve as organizational "ambassadors" and their treatment of applicants sends a powerful message about the culture, priorities and concerns of the organization they represent. In this way, an applicant's experience in the interview can impact on the organization's ability to attract talent. The purpose of this section is to provide step-by-step guidance on how to conduct a structured interview in a professional and effective manner.

The arrival of the applicant

The interview board should ensure the following preparation prior to the arrival of the applicant:
- ƒ Board members should meet at least 15 minutes before the first applicant arrives to discuss the interview format and to ensure that all necessary materials are available.
- ƒ Each board member should have a copy of the Interview Note-taking Booklet, as well as the Interview Assessment Booklet, for each applicant.

The following arrangements should also be made:
- ƒ Applicants should be provided with water and pens/pencils and paper for the interview.
- ƒ If applicants are allotted time to prepare prior the interview, they should be placed in a private room, given a copy of the interview questions (without divulging the behaviours that are targeted in each question), and given the following instructions:

> "Here are the questions. You have _____ minutes to prepare for the interview. You will then meet with the interview board."

- ƒ Applicants should be allowed to bring the interview questions and their notes to the interview, so they can refer to them throughout.

Beginning the interview

It is important to start the interview in a relatively informal and friendly manner to help put the applicant at ease. This is a particularly important step since interviews can be stressful for some applicants. Establishing and maintaining rapport with applicants

contributes to the validity of the interview by reducing their anxiety and allows them to feel comfortable and to give honest and candid responses.

The lead interviewer should begin by welcoming the applicant, thanking them for attending, and introducing the other board members. As part of the introduction, the lead interviewer should:

- Provide welcoming remarks, such as an explanation of the goal of the interview and the role of the interview board. Reiterate the language in which the interview will be conducted (at the choice of the applicant) and their right to receive accommodation, if needed.
- Describe how the interview will unfold and indicate how long it will take, including an explanation that the interview questions are based on job-relevant qualifications and that all applicants in the process will be asked the same questions.
- State that the board members will be taking turns asking questions, will be taking notes and will provide an opportunity for applicants to ask questions at the conclusion of the formal interview questions.
- Give a clear signal that the interview is about to begin.

Board members may use the following statement as a guideline for presenting interview questions to the applicant (this applies whether questions are given in advance of the interview or not):

> "The interview will consist of _____ questions (situational and/or behavioural and/or knowledge questions, as applicable).
>
> The behavioural questions ask about a time in your life when you have dealt with a certain type of situation. When answering these questions, it is important that you provide enough background information to allow us to understand the situation. Be as specific as possible about your role in the events - what you did, how and why you did it, and what the outcome of the situation was. The situational questions ask you what you would do if you were placed in a hypothetical situation. Knowledge questions ask about the technical or basic knowledge required to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position.
>
> Before responding to any of the questions, feel free to take a few moments to collect your thoughts and think about your answer.
>
> Where necessary or appropriate, you may use the same situation or example to answer more than one question. Throughout your responses, we may interject from time to time with follow-up questions to gather additional information.
>
> We will be taking notes throughout the interview as we want to capture in full the content of your responses as much as possible. You will have approximately __ minutes to answer each question. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Some applicants may not be accustomed to board members taking notes. Therefore, it is important that applicants understand that this note-taking is to ensure full credit is given to them for the knowledge, skills and abilities demonstrated during the interview.

Asking the interview questions

During the interview, board members should focus on asking the interview questions, listening to applicants' responses, asking follow-up questions when necessary, and taking detailed notes. The assessment of applicants' responses should not occur during the interview; they should be assessed immediately afterward.

Below are some important points for the interview board to consider when asking questions:
- ∫ Make sure applicants have a copy of the interview questions and ask them to follow along.
- ∫ Be sure to read each question aloud slowly and clearly.
- ∫ Do not divulge the specific behavioural indicators being assessed by any question since this would serve to "lead" the applicant's response and may give an unfair advantage.

Asking probing questions: It is important to obtain as much detail as possible regarding the applicant's behaviours - what the applicant would do in the case of the situational questions, and what the applicant actually did in the case of the behavioural event questions. In addition to the "what", it is important to focus on the "how" and "why" of the behaviours described. For behavioural questions, it is also important to understand the general background of the situation, the applicant's role in it, and the outcome.

When asking probing questions, the board must ensure it sticks to predetermined questions and not introduce new questions or reveal the behavioural indicators. Examples of probing questions can be found in Section Two.

Controlling the interview

While it is important to gather all relevant information, board members need to manage the flow of the interview and set time limits. Some applicants may spend a considerable amount of time answering each question or provide irrelevant information. If this occurs, time may expire before all qualifications are addressed and all of the needed information is extracted. Although the interview is designed for the applicant to do most of the talking, the board may need to intervene with a brief comment to bring responses back to a relevant topic or to a conclusion.

Examples of How to Intervene
- "What was the outcome?"   - "What was your contribution?"

> - "What is the main point of this illustration?"
> - "I appreciate you providing that information, but now we need to move on to our next question."

Managing applicant reactions

A well-conducted interview will project the image of a professional organization, which will be favourably viewed by most individuals, particularly those who are not successful but who may consider re-applying for employment in the future. In addition, unsuccessful applicants will be less likely to challenge a process they perceive to be rigorous and equitable. To that end, managing the applicant's reactions, should they feel embarrassed or experience some other difficulty during the interview, is essential.

For instance, should applicants mention negative aspects about a situation or about themselves, the interviewer can empathize with the applicant and then suggest that they move on to another aspect of the question. For example, "I understand that it was a difficult situation. Could you tell me about…?"

Should an applicant avoid a question or an aspect of a question, the interviewer can acknowledge the applicant's difficulty, then politely invite the applicant to address that aspect of the question. For example, "I understand it may be difficult to find an example, but we would really be interested in knowing about a situation where you…".

If an applicant persists in not answering a question, the interviewer should not insist. The interviewer may proceed with another question and indicate that the board may want to return to the unanswered one later. For example, "I understand. If you agree, we can come back to this question later in the interview. In the meantime, could you tell me about…?". Prior to ending the interview, the interviewer can return to the unanswered question by politely inviting the applicant to address this aspect: "Before we end the interview, could we come back to question three and could you describe to us a situation where…?".

Note-taking

A proper assessment includes taking notes for each applicant's responses throughout the interview. Note-taking serves two purposes: to help capture and recall the content of the interview and assess applicants' responses accurately, and also to create records to reconstruct the interview process or support an employment decision based on the interview[30]. Human memory is imperfect and selective. Without notes, it is possible to selectively recall an applicant's strengths and weaknesses, or be unable to recall an applicant's responses at all.

To capture all relevant information, board members should attempt to take notes steadily over the course of the interview. Notes should reflect what the applicant says, rather than how it is said. There are two exceptions in which brief descriptive notes are recommended:

ƒ If the interview is used to assess a qualification such as oral communication, where both content and delivery are relevant; or

ƒ If an applicant's behaviour raises questions about their qualifications or suitability. For example, notes should be taken to document an applicant's inordinately long time to respond to questions or to describe an inappropriate interaction.

To maximize the usefulness of notes, they should be:

- Based on careful observations of behaviours and facts related to the qualifications being assessed.
- As complete and as close to verbatim as possible, in order to recall the applicant's responses.
- An accurate record of what the applicant said or did, not the interviewer's inferences or judgements.

Closing the interview

An explicit conclusion should be provided at the end of the interview. Keeping in mind that the interview is a recruitment tool, the lead interviewer should effectively conclude the interview by:

- Providing a clear signal of the end of the interview.
- Providing an opportunity for the applicant to ask questions.
- Explaining the next steps in the appointment process and the approximate time frame.
- Collecting the interview questions and notes from the applicant before he or she leaves the interview room.
- Offering closing remarks, thanking the applicant for participating in the interview, answering any general questions and escorting the applicant out of the room.

The interview questions and related documents, as well as the applicant's responses and other information, are protected materials and should be handled and stored according to departmental/agency guidelines.

Summary tips for practitioners

- Consider having one interview board member greet and brief the applicant in a private area outside of the interview room. The applicant then has an opportunity to ask any questions in a more relaxed setting.

- Consider allowing applicants to answer the questions in the order they would prefer;
- it may assist in making them more comfortable with the process.

- Stick to the structured interview format. Providing introductions, asking questions, probing or asking follow-up questions and closing the interview should be done the same way for all applicants.

- When asking questions, look for "I", as you want to know what the applicant did, even when working in a group. Look as well for clear actions and specific situations.

- Watch for "we, our, the team", vague actions, typical or general situations (for behavioural questions) and probe or redirect as needed.

- Be flexible about the degree and amount of probing, restating, rephrasing, paraphrasing and revisiting questions, since initial responses vary among applicants. Some applicants may need little or no prompting, while others may need more. The key here is to ensure that each applicant has had a fair opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications; this does not mean that you have to stick to a rigid script.

- Take detailed behavioural notes on answers, observations, and concrete facts – not judgements.

- Do not assess the responses during the interview.

After the interview, the board is ready to arrive at ratings on the job qualifications for each applicant. To accomplish this task, board members will need their completed Interview Note-taking Booklet and the Interview Assessment Booklet, which include the rating scheme in relation to the qualifications assessed (see Appendices A and B for examples of these booklets).

The results obtained from interviews should be carefully evaluated in order to accurately assess the qualifications required and to minimize personal bias. This evaluation involves a sequence of key steps beginning with individual assessments by members of the interview board, followed by an assessment based on a group consensus. The integration of the interview results, along with other obtained information concludes the appointment process. In addition, the interview board may be involved in informal discussion or in providing feedback to the applicant. In this section, guidance is offered on each of these key components.

Assigning independent ratings

It is recommended that board members assign independent ratings for each applicant shortly after their interview, in order to better remember the applicant's performance and not to be influenced by the opinions of other members. Each of the interview questions is typically designed to assess one main qualification. However, if more than one question is asked for a qualification, each board member will need to review the applicant's responses across questions and come up with a single rating for that qualification.

Board members may observe that an applicant's response to a question targeting one qualification also provides behavioural evidence for another. If this is the case, all of the behavioural evidence provided should be used, even if it appears in responses to questions targeting other qualifications. As a result, the information provided by the applicant is used optimally.

Using the rating scale: Board members may choose from a variety of rating scales when evaluating job qualifications (see Section Two - Developing an Assessment Booklet). Whichever scale is applied, evaluations must be based on the behavioural evidence collected for each qualification. This evaluation will require a thorough understanding of the qualification definitions and behavioural indicators prior to assigning any ratings. With this information, the board should be in a position to assess each applicant's responses according to:

- The scope of behaviours and extent to which the behavioural indicators for a qualification were demonstrated in an applicant's responses (e.g. quantity and consistency); and

- The depth to which the observed behaviours were demonstrated during the interview (e.g. degree of complexity, soundness and precision).

Arriving at the final board assessment

With one member of the board chairing the discussion, consensus is reached on the assessment of the applicant's performance. Reaching consensus as a group has been found to be more valid than other methods [31-32]. Assessment by consensus causes interviewers to explain their ratings to their peers, resulting in more accurate evaluations. The fact that board members agree on the rating given and that they have all seen the applicant demonstrate the behaviours both contribute to the rigour of the process. The board has to justify the rating based on concrete observations.

To reach consensus, going through the following seven steps is recommended. Note that the interview board must assign a single group evaluation for each qualification.

Step 1- All members of the board review the definition of the first qualification to be assessed and its behavioural indicators.

Step 2- Board members independently review their notes and determine which of the behavioural indicators associated with the qualification under review were demonstrated in the interview. They should record examples of the applicant's demonstration of the behavioural indicators that reflect the scope and depth of their performance across the interview.

Step 3- Each board member independently assesses the applicant on the qualification, using an appropriate rating scale.

Step 4- The board members then discuss their individual assessments of the qualification and determine a group evaluation for the applicant. This discussion continues until a consensus is reached.

Step 5- The chair ensures that the final consensus evaluation is recorded. The rationale for the evaluation is also recorded; examples of the behaviours that the applicant demonstrated and the scope and depth to which the behaviours were demonstrated, should be provided.

Step 6- Having reached consensus on the first qualification, the board then proceeds to assess the remaining qualifications, in turn.

Step 7- The final consensus assessment, along with notes for the rationale, and interview board notes, are kept in the applicant's file.

Common assessment errors

The PSC Assessment Policy requires that deputy heads and their delegates ensure that "the assessment is designed and implemented without bias, political influence or

personal favoritism and does not create systemic barriers". Therefore, in their evaluations, members of the board must make every effort possible to minimize the potential for assessment errors and personal biases. Although assessment involves judgment, there are ways to minimize this subjectivity and to maximize objectivity throughout the process.

The success and value of the interview relies on the quality of the assessment process. Assessment errors occur when an assessor's evaluation is influenced by something other than the information provided by the applicant during the interview.

Here is a list of common assessment errors, with suggestions on how to minimize these errors. It is intended to help board members recognize and guard against them when assessing applicants, thereby maximizing accuracy, consistency, and fairness.

First impressions: This is the tendency to let a first impression influence the assessment of the applicant's responses. Interviewers must be aware that they may unconsciously judge an applicant positively or negatively from the outset, which may result in them assessing the applicant according to their own beliefs, rather than according to the applicant's true performance on the qualifications being assessed.

Leniency and stringency: These errors involve the general tendencies for the interviewer to consistently assess applicants high (leniency effect) or low (stringency effect). Board members need to be aware that they might have a different understanding of the requirement for the job, and the qualifications assessed and that they need to be fair in assessing applicants.

Central tendency: In this case, interviewers may be reluctant to rate applicants high or low, and end up rating all applicants as average. The middle points on the rating scale are used, while avoiding the extreme points.

"Halo" and "horn" effects: These errors involve the tendency to allow one good (halo) or bad (horn) response to influence the evaluation of all other responses of an applicant. Board members need to monitor themselves when they are so impressed by an applicant on one qualification that they attribute positive qualities for all other criteria assessed, regardless of the evidence. Conversely, when an applicant does poorly in one area, they may be under-rated in others.

Contrast effect: This is the tendency to assess an applicant in comparison to the performance of a previous applicant instead of using the rating scale and expected behaviours. Board members have to be aware that they might encounter applicants who will stand out, positively or negatively, and that subsequent applicants may be under or over-assessed as a result. In such cases, board members must not compare applicants, but focus on evaluating each applicant on the qualifications being assessed.

Fatigue: As assessors become fatigued during a lengthy interviewing process, they can become less consistent or less stringent in their note-taking, listening, or application of the assessment criteria.

Stereotypes: This error occurs when an interviewer's own personal biases and preconceptions of a good employee influence the evaluation. Stereotyping is often based on demographics such as sex, race, ethnicity, or age, but can also involve other variables such as degree of education, politics, or interests. Board members must be aware that their personal beliefs and perceptions of what is needed for the job may impact their evaluations of applicants.

Similar-to-me: This error occurs when an applicant is given more favourable evaluations than warranted because of a similarity to the interviewer in some way (e.g. race, sex, age, attitudes or background). The reverse, dissimilar-to-me, can also occur where an applicant is given less favourable evaluations than warranted, because of perceived differences.

Integrating interview results with other information

Interviews are not usually the only source of information about an applicant. Customarily, there is the applicant's résumé, which will include information about previous work experience and educational background. Information may also be collected through additional assessment instruments or methods such as work samples, simulations, assessment centres, written tests, career achievement records or reference checks. When collecting information from various sources, it is important to combine the information systematically in order to arrive at a final appointment decision. Otherwise, even when using valid selection instruments, combining the information haphazardly may result in poor, inconsistent decision-making.

If several methods are used to assess a qualification, it is advisable to collect the relevant information from all sources and to then make one overall assessment. This approach involves combining information from different sources to evaluate applicants and then determining which ones meet the qualifications. For example, all the information gathered in an interview with respect to a given qualification can be combined with relevant information elicited from a reference check. This information can then be integrated into a single overall evaluation, determining whether or not the applicant meets or does not meet that qualification.

Informal discussion

Under the PSEA, informal discussion provides one mechanism through which applicants who are eliminated from consideration for an appointment may discuss the reasons for the decision with the hiring manager. For instance, applicants may request feedback from a hiring manager on their performance in a structured interview. Should an applicant request feedback, consideration needs to be given as to what information will be shared and how feedback will be given. For information on the informal discussion process, please refer to the Policy on Informal Discussion and the Guide to Implementing the Informal Discussion Policy.

Applicants should be able to discuss any information pertaining to their candidacy that would help them understand the decision for elimination. Participants in an informal discussion would normally have access to any personal information gathered in the appointment process. This information could include any factors that were taken into account, including the merit criteria used, how the assessment was carried out and the evaluation of that person. The information provided should relate only to the applicant who is no longer being considered for appointment. Personal information about other applicants must not be disclosed in the informal discussion.

Consideration must also be given to protecting proprietary information, such as standardized tests and structured interviews. Any disclosure of information would have to respect the *Privacy Act*, the *Access to Information Act* and the *Public Service Employment Regulations* (PSER) established by the PSC concerning the disclosure of information obtained during the course of investigation. Any request for access to or copies of the structured interview and how it is scored could be refused if it could compromise the integrity of the assessment or provide an unfair advantage. It is important to discuss any such request with a Human Resources (HR) advisor before the informal discussion takes place.

Providing applicant feedback

If an applicant requests feedback on their performance in a structured interview once all the interviews have been completed, and if the interview questions will not be used again, then any information on the applicant's performance may be shared. This information could include any of the following:

- Documents submitted by the applicant;

- The interview questions;

- Interviewers' notes;

- The qualifications and behavioural indicators assessed;

- The assessment criteria; and

- The results of the assessment of the applicant's qualifications.

However, if interviews are ongoing or the questions are to be used again, the interview may qualify as a standardized test. A standardized test is a systematic procedure for assessing an individual's behaviour in order to evaluate job-relevant qualifications. The procedure is systematic in five areas: development, content, administration, scoring, and communication of results. The content of the test is the same for all test-takers. The test is administered according to standard instructions and procedures and is scored according to a set protocol. Standardized test information should not be disclosed if doing so will affect the validity or the continued use of the test or if it will provide an unfair advantage to any applicants.

As per the PSER, "the Commission shall not disclose a standardized test, or information concerning a standardized test, owned by an organization or the Commission or that is

commercially available, if obtained in the course of an investigation under the Act, unless it can be disclosed, with or without conditions set by the Commission, in a manner that will not affect the validity or continued use of the standardized test or will not affect the results of such a test by giving an unfair advantage to any person." This statement does not necessarily mean that standardized tests are exempt from disclosure, but essentially requires that any disclosure must take place only under conditions that ensure that the disclosure will not affect the validity or continued use of the test.

In this situation, any feedback provided to applicants should be done without reference to the protected content of the interview (e.g. the behavioural indicators assessed or the Interview Assessment Booklet). It is best to outline the qualifications assessed and to speak in general terms about the applicant's performance on the qualifications. Do not discuss the specifics of the interview questions, the applicant's responses to specific questions or the assessment of their responses to the questions.

Summary tips for practitioners

Assigning independent ratings
- Assign independent ratings immediately after the interview.
- Assess the qualifications separately.
- Consistently and continually apply your assessment procedures for all applicants. If you realize that your assessments have changed along the way, review previous assessments in light of the new information and adjust accordingly.
- Apply the rating scale as intended, by using its full range.
- Be aware of, and minimize, common errors and biases that may influence your judgement.
- Consider the quality of the provided information, especially if you suspect that the applicant is not being entirely frank or if there is inconsistent information.
- Try not to place undue weight on isolated incidents. Rather, look for overall patterns in the evidence. Also consider the possibility that the applicant's performance may have been influenced by situational factors.

Arriving at the final board assessment
- Discuss the assessment as a group and question each other's individual assessments.
- Consistently base your assessments on information related to the job qualifications and assessed behavioural indicators.
- Sometimes, evidence of personal conflicts between a board member and an applicant can affect how information is perceived. If you become aware of such conflicts, weigh that information carefully and evaluate the likelihood of such conflicts recurring.

Integrating information from multiple sources
- Ensure that the pattern of evidence and behaviour is consistent across assessment methods (e.g. application, résumé, interview, reference check).
- If negative information is uncovered, consider the source and verify the accuracy with other sources of information before making a decision about the applicant.
- If information is conflicting, continue checking until you are satisfied that a pattern is evident.

Giving feedback

- Review the documentation regarding the person who was eliminated from consideration.
- Explain the decision relative to the candidate's application and provide information that will assist the person in understanding the decision.
- Stay focussed on what is relevant to the discussion: the requirements of the position, the merit criteria, how you assessed the qualifications, and why the person was eliminated.

- Listen to the person and provide an opportunity for them to explain any concerns and present any supporting information.
- Maintain a non-defensive and non-confrontational manner throughout the discussion.
- Seek assistance if the issue is beyond what you are comfortable dealing with or if the discussion goes beyond the decision to eliminate the person from the appointment process.
- Demonstrate a willingness to review a decision if an error was made.
- Resolve issues, or at the very least, ensure that there is an understanding of the decision.
- Consider deferring a contentious discussion to allow time to reflect and to address the issue at a later time, with assistance if necessary.

SECTION 5: EVALUATING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Once you have completed an appointment process, it is important to review and evaluate the structured interview process and its outcomes to identify strengths and areas for improvement. This review is especially important if it will be used for future assessments. By evaluating the interview process, you can determine how it may need to be adapted to ensure that it continues to fulfill your organization's requirements, thereby resulting in effective hiring decisions.

Questions to ask

The following is a list of questions to help evaluate your structured interview:

- Is the interview successful at predicting success on the job?
- Do the interview questions make useful job-related distinctions among applicants?
- How are applicantsperforming on the interview? Are different groups performing differently?
- How do applicants perceive the interview (e.g. job relevance, fairness)?
- How influential are the results of the interview in the final hiring decision?
- Are interviewers comfortable with the interview questions and process?
- Are interviewers applying the rating scales consistently?

Asking these questions and acting on the answers will help to ensure that the structured interview remains relevant, useful, and legally defensible.

Evaluating applicant and interviewer reactions

As part of the review, you may want to collect applicant and interviewer reactions to the structured interview. For example, a survey can be used to assess applicants' reactions following the interview. Such a survey can assess applicants' perceptions of the service they received (e.g. the professionalism of the interview board), the content of the interview questions, the interview process, and the perceived fairness of the process.

An applicant reaction survey, with a rating scale, may be designed so that the collected data can be analyzed and interpreted easily. The meaning of each point on the scale must be clear to ensure you collect accurate data. You may wish to include a neutral response option on your rating scale. You may also need to include a "don't know" response option if there is a chance respondents might select a neutral response when they really don't know the answer. An example of an Applicant Reaction Questionnaire is provided in Appendix E.

Conducting a validation study

The process outlined previously is not intended to be a formal validation of the structured interview. A validation study is a rigorous statistical analysis of the interview and its outcomes in order to demonstrate that it measures job-related criteria and predicts job performance. A validation study can also assess the success and failure rates of an organization's hiring decisions. Furthermore, by scientifically identifying the factors that predict job success and eliminating those that do not, validation studies can help improve organizational decision-making.

Formal validation may not be feasible or cost-effective for low-volume jobs. However, organizations should seriously consider validating their structured interviews for high-volume jobs where the cost of validation will be more than justified by the increased validity and defensibility of the interview. In fact, HR practitioners are increasingly realizing the need for validation studies, because linking interview results to job performance promotes both merit and equity in the hiring process.

Validating a structured interview involves analyzing the relationship between scores on the structured interview, and outcome measures such as job and training performance and job tenure. Therefore, conducting a validation study of a structured interview requires that information be collected on some or all of these outcome measures.

SECTION 6: ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The PSC's Personnel Psychology Centre is a valuable resource to consider when designing and conducting structured interviews.

To learn more about best practices in structured interviewing, please consult the Websites of the following professional associations:

◆ Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO) is an internationally recognized membership association for HR practitioners. With over 16,000 members in 28 chapters in Ontario and around the world, HRPAO offers a range of HR information resources, professional development and networking opportunities.

◆ La Société Québécoise de Psychologie du Travail et des Organisations (SQPTO) is the principal collective of psychologists in Québec, who practice organizational psychology, including areas of staffing and personnel assessment. The SQPTO is a valuable source of information about the latest trends in work psychology and other related areas.

◆ The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is the membership organization for private-sector HR specialists. SHRM is a key source of information about trends in hiring practices outside the public sector.

◆ L'Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines agrées et des conseillers en relations industrielles agrées du Québec (ORHRI) is a source of highly-relevant reference material in the areas of HR management and industrial relations in Québec. The ORHRI promotes the development of HR professionals by offering information and educational services, a training program, online reference tools and an HR publication.

◆ The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) is the primary membership organization for psychologists who specialize in personnel selection. SIOP is a good source of information about the most recent research on the validity of assessment tools and techniques.

Below is some additional reading material on structured interviews:

◆ Eder, R.W., & Harris, M.M. (1999). *The Employment Interview Handbook*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

◆ Gatewood, R.D, & Field, H.S. (2001). *Human Resource Selection*. Harcourt College Publishers, Fort Worth. See Chapter 12 "The Selection Interview", page 521-566.

◆ Pettersen, N.J. et Durivage, A. (2006). *L'entrevue structurée :pour améliorer la sélection du personnel*. Québec. Presses de l'Université du Québec.

◆ U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (2003). *The Federal Selection Interview: Unrealized Potential*.

◆ British Columbia Public Service Agency (2007). Managers' HR Toolkit.

Any Feedback?

A key objective of the Assessment Oversight Division of the PSC is to provide system-wide, merit-sensitive assessment tools, as well as guidance and advice related to personnel assessment in the public service. We would like your feedback on this Guide. If you have any suggestions as to how the document can be improved to reflect the needs of hiring organizations in the federal public service, please send these comments to:

CFP.DEP-PDD.PSC@cfp-psc.gc.ca

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Note-taking Booklet

This template, designed to assess the [Key Leadership Competencies](#) available on the Canada Public Service Agency Website, may be adapted to suit any occupational group or level and the specific needs of your organization. Adapt or replace the competencies and choose the type and number of questions that are best suited to the position being staffed. For instance, specific situational and behavioural questions will need to be determined based on the occupational level and competencies being assessed.

INTERVIEW NOTE-TAKING BOOKLET

Position Title, Group and Level: Assistant Deputy Minister

Selection Process Number: _____

Applicant's Name/ID #: _____

Date: _____

Interview Board Members

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Opening the interview – 3-5 minutes
Lead interviewer

Opening remarks - points to be covered:

- Begin the interview by welcoming and thanking the applicant for attending and introduce the other board members.

- Put the applicant at ease by engaging in a moment of informal "small talk".

- "As you know, we are here to interview you as part of the appointment process ….."

- "You have already been given a copy of the questions and 30 minutes for preparation."

- "You will have 60 minutes maximum for this interview."

- "Providing detailed responses is important."

- "You may take notes if you like. We will collect the notes at the end of the interview. You will not be assessed based on your notes."

- "We will ask questions in turn."

- "We will be taking notes throughout the interview, so we may not be able to maintain eye contact with you, but we are listening."

- "You may ask us to repeat the questions, but we must respect the 60-minute interview duration."

- "Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Key Leadership Competencies Definitions

Values & Ethics
Integrity & Respect
Public service (PS) leaders serve Canadians, ensuring integrity in personal and organizational practices, and respect people and PS principles, including democratic, professional, ethical, and people values. They build respectful, bilingual, diverse and inclusive workplaces where decisions and transactions are transparent and fair. They hold themselves, their employees and their organizations accountable for their actions.

Strategic Thinking
Analysis & Ideas
PS leaders advise and plan based on analysis of issues and trends and how these link to the responsibilities, capabilities, and potential of their organization. They scan an ever-changing, complex environment in anticipation of emerging crises and opportunities. They develop well-informed advice and strategies that are sensitive to the various needs of multiple stakeholders and partners, reflect the strategic direction of the PS and position the organization for success.

Engagement
People, Organizations, Partners
PS leaders engage people, organizations and partners in developing goals, executing plans and delivering results. They lay the groundwork by building coalitions with key players. They mobilize teams, building momentum to get things done by communicating clearly and consistently, investing time and energy to engage the whole organization. They use their negotiation skills and adaptability to encourage recognition of joint concerns and collaboration and to influence the success of outcomes. They follow and lead across boundaries to engage broad-based stakeholders, partners and constituencies in a shared agenda and strategy.

Management Excellence
Action Management, People Management, Financial Management
PS leaders deliver results by maximizing organizational effectiveness and sustainability. They ensure that people have the support and tools they need, and that the workforce as a whole has the capacity and diversity to meet current and longer-term organizational objectives. They align people, work, and systems with the business strategy to harmonize how they work and what they do. They implement rigorous and comprehensive human and financial resources accountability systems consistent with the Management Accountability Framework (MAF). They ensure that the integrity and management of information and knowledge are a responsibility at all levels, and a key factor in the design and execution of all policies and programs.

Question #1 (Engagement) – 8-10 minutes
Lead interviewer

Behavioural question:

Sub-questions:
- What was the situation?
- Who or what was involved?
- What did you say or do and why?
- What was the outcome?

Notes (continue on back of page if necessary):

Question #2 (Action Management and Strategic Thinking) – 8-10 minutes
Interviewer 2

Situational question:

Sub-questions:
- What would you do in this situation (being as specific as possible) and why?
- What factors would you consider?
- Who would you involve?

Notes (continue on back of page if necessary):

Question #3 (People Management) – 8-10 minutes
Interviewer 3

Behavioural question:

Sub-questions:
- What was the situation?
- Who or what was involved?
- What did you say or do and why?
- What was the outcome?

Notes (continue on back of page if necessary):

Question #4 (Financial Management) – 8-10 minutes
Interviewer 2

Situational question:

Sub-questions:
- What would you do in this situation (being as specific as possible) and why?
- What factors would you consider?
- Who would you involve?

Notes (continue on back of page if necessary):

Question #5 (Values & Ethics) – 8-10 minutes
Interviewer 3

Behavioural question:

Sub-questions:
- What was the situation?
- Who or what was involved?
- What did you say or do and why?
- What was the outcome?

Notes (continue on back of page if necessary):

Closing the interview – 3-5 minutes
Lead interviewer

Closing remarks - points to be covered:

- Thank the applicant for participating in the structured interview.

- Ask if they have any questions regarding the interview or the process.

- Inform the applicant of the next steps of the process.

Collect all interview material, including any notes taken by the applicant. Remind applicant that the interview questions are protected material and should not be discussed with others.

Appendix B: Sample Interview Assessment Booklet

This template, designed for the position of Assistant Deputy Minister, may be adapted to suit any occupational group or level and the specific assessment needs of your organization. Among the different proposed parts, choose those that are best suited to the position that you are assessing. For instance, the behavioural indicators for the Key Leadership Competencies can be replaced by the appropriate level of leadership by copying and pasting the behaviours for each competency from the [Key Leadership Competencies](#) Website. For other specific groups or levels, both the competencies and behaviours can be replaced.

Note that this Assessment Booklet corresponds to the Note-taking Booklet presented in Appendix A, for the related qualifications and questions.

INTERVIEW ASSESSMENT BOOKLET

Position Title, Group and Level: Assistant Deputy Minister

Selection Process Number: _____

Applicant's Name/ID #: _____

Date: _____

Interview Board Members

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Assessment

To assess the applicant's qualifications, the interview board members will need the following:

- Notes taken during the interview in the Interview Note-taking Booklet.

- This Interview Assessment Booklet, which includes the competencies and behavioural indicators assessed during the interview.

After each interview, interview board members first assign an independent rating for the first qualification assessed, for each applicant. The board then engages in a discussion to determine a final consensus rating for that qualification and proceeds in the same manner with the other qualifications, one at a time. The following seven steps are recommended to assist the board in reaching a single consensus rating for each of the competencies:

Step 1: All members of the board review the definition of the first qualification to be assessed and its behavioural indicators.

Step 2: The board members independently review their notes and determine which of the behavioural indicators associated with the qualification under review were demonstrated in the interview. Board members should record examples of the applicant's demonstration of the behavioural indicators.

Step 3: Each board member independently rates the applicant on the first qualification.

Step 4: The board members then discuss their individual ratings for that qualification, with the goal of determining a single group rating for the applicant. This discussion continues until a consensus is reached.

Step 5: The lead interviewer ensures that the final consensus rating is recorded on the Final Rating Form. The rationale for the rating in terms of the behaviours that the applicant did or did not demonstrate is also recorded.

Step 6: Having reached consensus on the first qualification, the board then proceeds to rate the remaining competencies in turn.

Step 7: The final group ratings and notes for the rationale are documented in the applicant's file, along with the Interview Note-taking Booklets.

Assigning a rating

Each interview question is designed to assess one or more qualifications. However, during the interview, interviewers may observe that an applicant's response to a

question targeting one qualification also provides behavioural evidence for another. When deriving their qualification ratings, interview board members should use all the behavioural evidence provided by the applicant, even if the evidence appears in responses to questions targeting other competencies.

Each qualification will be assessed using the following rating scale:

Does not meet the qualification		Meets the qualification		
Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

The purpose of the rating scale is to assess:

- The demonstration of the scope of the behaviours that constitute the qualification; and
- The demonstration of the depth to which the behaviours were demonstrated during the interview.

The scope of the behaviours refers to how many of the behaviours for the given competencies were evident in the applicant's responses.

The depth of the observed behaviours refers to how they were demonstrated. It may be evaluated by the degree of complexity, soundness and precision with which the behaviours were demonstrated by the applicant.

Here are some tips for the board to consider when evaluating the quality and breadth of the information that has been gathered from the structured interview:

- Try not to place undue weight on isolated incidents. Rather, look for overall patterns in the evidence. Also, consider the possibility that the applicant's performance may have been influenced by situational factors.

- Consider the quality of the provided information, especially if you suspect that the applicant is not being entirely frank or if there is inconsistent information.

- Ensure that responses are weighted in the same way for all applicants.

- Document the behavioural examples that were gathered during the interview.

- Be aware of rater biases and common rater errors, such as central tendency (see Common Assessment Errors).

Key Leadership Competencies Definitions

Values & Ethics
Integrity & Respect

Public service (PS) leaders serve Canadians, ensuring integrity in personal and organizational practices, and respect people and PS principles, including democratic, professional, ethical and people values. They build respectful, bilingual, diverse, and inclusive workplaces where decisions and transactions are transparent and fair. They hold themselves, their employees, and their organizations accountable for their actions.

Strategic Thinking
Analysis & Ideas

PS leaders advise and plan based on analysis of issues and trends and how these link to the responsibilities, capabilities, and potential of their organization. They scan an ever-changing, complex environment in anticipation of emerging crises and opportunities. They develop well-informed advice and strategies that are sensitive to the various needs of multiple stakeholders and partners, reflect the strategic direction of the PS, and position the organization for success.

Engagement
People, Organizations, and Partners

PS leaders engage people, organizations, and partners, in developing goals, executing plans, and delivering results. They lay the groundwork by building coalitions with key players. They mobilize teams, building momentum to get things done by communicating clearly and consistently, investing time and energy to engage the whole organization. They use their negotiation skills and adaptability to encourage recognition of joint concerns and collaboration and to influence the success of outcomes. They follow and lead across boundaries to engage broad-based stakeholders, partners and constituencies in a shared agenda and strategy.

Management Excellence
Action Management, People Management, and Financial Management

PS leaders deliver results by maximizing organizational effectiveness and sustainability. They ensure that people have the support and tools they need, and that the workforce as a whole has the capacity and diversity to meet current and longer-term organizational objectives. They align people, work, and systems, with the business strategy to harmonize how they work and what they do. They implement rigorous and comprehensive human and financial resources accountability systems, consistent with the MAF. They ensure that the integrity and management of information and knowledge are a responsibility at all levels and a key factor in the design and execution of all policies and programs.

Values and Ethics- *Integrity and Respect*

Behavioural indicators (choose the indicators specific to the position):

Demonstrates Values and Ethics, including the Code, in personal behaviour

Integrates Values and Ethics, including the Code, into branch practices

Reflects a commitment to citizens and clients in own and branch activities

Provides fearless advice and acts with the courage of their convictions

Builds departmental/agency values into branch policies and programs

Builds and promotes a bilingual, diverse, inclusive branch, based on official language and employment equity policies

Builds and promotes a safe, healthy, respectful branch, free of harassment and discrimination

Models transparency and fairness

Interview question(s): #5

Independent Rating

Does not meet the qualification			Meets the qualification	
Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Consensus Rating

Interviewer 1	*Interviewer 2*	*Interviewer 3*	**Consensus Rating**
/5	/5	/5	/5

Examples/Comments

Strategic Thinking- *Analysis*

Behavioural indicators (choose the indicators specific to the position):

Frames questions and analyses with a thorough understanding of legislation and the ADM role

Seeks DM, government, national, regional, global and technical perspectives on sector issues

Recognizes critical or sensitive issues and makes links to priorities

Distinguishes between critical and trivial factors in making judgments

Analyzes setbacks and seeks honest feedback to learn from mistakes

Interview question(s): #2

Independent Rating

Does not meet the qualification			**Meets the qualifications**	
Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Consensus Rating

Interviewer 1	*Interviewer 2*	*Interviewer 3*	**Consensus Rating**
/5	/5	/5	/5

Examples/Comments

Strategic Thinking- *Ideas*

Behavioural indicators (choose the indicators specific to the position):

Provides quality judgment and policy advice to the DM

Contributes to the elaboration of the collective/DM vision

Articulates the vision in terms of own mandate

Develops innovative solutions to non-traditional problems

Develops strategies to manage the scope and pace of change

Develops strategies that are effective in the short and longer term

Encourages constructive questioning of policies

Envisions possibilities without detailed information

Exercises sound professional judgment based on analysis and consultation, as needed

Teaches and learns from others

Interview question(s): #2

Independent Rating

Does not meet the qualification			Meets the qualification	
Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Consensus Rating

Interviewer 1	*Interviewer 2*	*Interviewer 3*	**Consensus Rating**
/5	/5	/5	/5

Examples/Comments

ENGAGEMENT — *People, Organizations, Partners*

Behavioural indicators (choose the indicators specific to the position):

Cultivates effective relationships and networks with central agencies, other organizations, clients, citizens, unions, central and regional employees and other levels of government

Provides communication links up, down and throughout the organization and networks

Communicates with, and encourages, candour and clarity

Communicates and interprets external contexts to position branch, team and individual contributions

Demonstrates and elicits trust by seeking and providing honest and constructive feedback

Actively listens to and understands impact on others

Influences outcomes by negotiating win-win solutions and compromise and resolving conflict

Tailors approach to context, e.g., collaborative for consensus building, directive in crisis

Inspires a commitment to excellence by demonstrating passionate personal commitment

Works with the departmental/agency and PS-wide ADM community to deliver on shared objectives

Creates an open, positive environment to stimulate open discussion

Interview question(s): #1

Independent Rating

Does not meet the qualification			Meets the qualification	
Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Consensus Rating

Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3	**Consensus Rating**
/5	/5	/5	/5

Examples/Comments

Management Excellence— *Action Management*

Behavioural indicators (choose the indicators specific to the position):

Leads change that maximizes results in the branch, organizationally and in the sector

Acts as a steward for the entire department/agency, not just their own branch

Identifies and communicates priorities, milestones, timelines, performance measures, clear accountabilities and performance agreements for DGs

Designs and manages a strategic risk management framework

Coordinates national and regional priorities, planning and performance

Aligns priorities and resources

Follows through on the branch business plan from planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating through to reporting

Integrates comptrollership, MAF, federal legislation, regulations and policies into branch practices

Fulfils obligations of branch management accountabilities

Integrates HR, finance, IT, IM and communications issues into planning and actions

Revises goals and plans to reflect changing priorities or conditions Commits

to a course of action, if required, despite incomplete information Makes

decisions, initiates urgent actions and remains calm in crisis situations

Recognizes and acknowledges errors and makes corrections

Interview question(s): #2

Independent Rating

Does not meet the qualification			**Meets the qualification**	
Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Consensus Rating

Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3	**Consensus Rating**
/5	/5	/5	/5

Examples/Comments

| |
| |

Management Excellence— *People Management*

Behavioural indicators (choose the indicators specific to the position):

Develops HR strategy for succession planning

Creates expert teams to address specific or crisis issues

Sets clear expectations, monitors, evaluates, rewards and develops performance

Recognizes people's accomplishments and best efforts

Gives honest feedback, encourages learning and manages non-performance

Deals with HR problems decisively and effectively

Recognizes the importance of and supports the DG community

Balances complementary strengths in teams

Builds leadership throughout the branch

Guides and develops people through appraisals, career planning and development

Consults with support services prior to changing HR protocols

Implements rigorous HR systems and fulfils obligations of HRM accountabilities

Interview question(s): #3

Independent Rating

Does not meet the qualification　　　　　　　　　　**Meets the qualification**

Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Consensus Rating

Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3	**Consensus Rating**
/5	/5	/5	/5

Examples/Comments

Management Excellence— *Financial Management*

Behavioural indicators (choose the indicators specific to the position):

Allocates resources transparently and establishes a culture of ongoing reallocation

Aligns business drivers with financial management regime

Promotes innovative approaches to deal with fiscal restraint

Integrates comptrollership processes and promotes due diligence

Reviews and reacts to the results of audits and evaluations

Continuously monitors performance and seeks efficiencies

Fulfils obligations of accountabilities for branch financial management

Provides objective, credible and timely reporting to the DM

Consults with support services prior to changing financial protocols

Interview question(s): #4

Independent Rating

Does not meet the qualification			Meets the qualification	
Very Poor/ Unacceptable	Poor/Below Average	Moderate/Average	Strong/Above Average	Very Strong/Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Consensus Rating

Interviewer 1	Interviewer 2	Interviewer 3	**Consensus Rating**
/5	/5	/5	/5

Examples/Comments

FINAL RATING SUMMARY

Applicant:		
Date:		
Interview board	**Name**	**Signature**
Interviewer 1:		
Interviewer 2:		
Interviewer 3:		

		Results	
Competencies	**Consensus rating**	**Meets**	**Does not meet**
Values and Ethics	**/5**	☐	☐
Strategic Thinking- Analysis	**/5**	☐	☐
Strategic Thinking- Ideas	**/5**	☐	☐
Engagement	**/5**	☐	☐
Management Excellence- *Action Management*	**/5**	☐	☐
Management Excellence- *People Management*	**/5**	☐	☐
Management Excellence- *Financial Management*	**/5**	☐	☐

Appendix C: Summary Checklist
Structured Interviewing in the Appointment Process

Before the interview

- Determine the composition of the interview board:

    o To the extent possible, ensure consistency of board members for all interviews;

    o Ensure that they are qualified and free from real or apparent conflicts of interest or biases that may affect the outcome of the process;

    o Determine whether an assessment expert would add precision and efficiency; and

    o Consider representation from employment equity groups.

- Determine if all applicants will be interviewed or only those who are screened in based on predetermined qualifications.

- Determine the positioning of the interview in the appointment process.

- Design an Interview Booklet:

    o Identify and define, in behavioural terms, the qualifications to be assessed based on the Statement of Merit Criteria;

    o Determine the types of interview questions to be developed, such as situational or behavioural, depending on collected events or challenges that happen on the job; and

    o Develop the structured interview questions:

        ƒ Ensure all questions are job-related;
        ƒ Avoid all prohibited or inappropriate topics;
        ƒ Ensure questions require applicants to describe their own previous or hypothetical behaviours in their responses; and
        ƒ Ensure all questions are fair, free from bias and do not create any barriers.

    o Develop questions specifically for each qualification being assessed (although one question may assess more than one qualification);

    o Determine the number of questions to be asked in the interview – keeping time constraints in mind – and the order in which they will be asked;

    o Develop standardized probing/follow-up questions to ensure all necessary details are elicited ; and

    o Pre-test the interview questions to determine how much time will be needed, whether the questions are clear and to assess the intended qualifications.

- Develop assessment criteria:
    - o Consider the effective and ineffective behaviours (i.e., the good and the bad answers to the questions);
    - o Determine if a rating scale will be used. If so, the type of scale and the number of points on the scale must also be determined; and
    - o For each qualification, provide verbal descriptors of behaviours that define various points on the rating scale (e.g., Very Strong, Strong, Moderate, Poor, Very Poor) to anchor each point on the scale.
- Develop the interview process:
    - o Introduction, instructions, time limit and conclusion; and
    - o Decide whether the applicants will be given time to prepare prior to the interview.
- Train all board members – ensure they are familiar with:
    - o The major duties and responsibilities of the position to staff;
    - o The qualification definitions and behavioural indicators to be assessed;
    - o The Guidelines for a Fair Assessment in a Diverse Workplace and the Guide for Assessing Persons with Disabilities;
    - o How to build rapport with the applicants, ask questions, control the interview and assess applicants' performance on the qualifications;
    - o The importance of taking good notes and how to do so;
    - o The proper assessment procedure;
    - o Assessor biases and common assessment errors and how to avoid them; and
    - o How to arrive at a final board assessment and integrate results with other information.
- Contact the applicant prior to the interview:
    - o Provide the applicant with information on the format of the interview, the types of questions that will be asked and the qualifications that will be assessed;
    - o Remind the applicant of his or her right to receive accommodation and determine what is required, if anything; and
    - o Notify the applicant of the interview date and time and the expected duration of the interview.
- Ensure that the interview room will be well-lit and free from distractions.
- Ensure all necessary materials are ready for the interview and ensure accommodation is in place, if applicable.
- Ensure board members meet at least 15 minutes before the first applicant arrives, to discuss the interview format, if not already determined, appoint a lead interviewer and determine which board members will ask what questions.

During the interview

⌒ Ensure water, pens/pencils and paper are available to the applicant.

⌒ If applicants are allotted time to prepare, provide them with a copy of the interview questions and instructions, including the time allowed to prepare, in a private room (supervised or not, depending on the nature of the questions).

⌒ The lead interviewer should greet the applicant, thank them for coming and introduce the members of the interview board, and:

- Provide the applicant with a detailed explanation of the interview process;

- Ask the first interview question, including any necessary probes;

- Inform the applicant of the next steps in the appointment process; and,

- Thank the applicant, collect the questions and any notes and escort the applicant out of the room.

⌒ All interviewers should:

- Not divulge the specific behavioural indicators being assessed by any question, but respond to reasonable requests for clarification;

- Take detailed notes of the applicant's responses throughout the interview.

- Record only what the applicant said or did;

- Ensure time limits are respected;

- When necessary, intervene to bring the applicant back on topic or to a conclusion; and

- Allow the applicant to ask clarifying questions, while still respecting time limits.

After the interview

‰ Immediately assess the applicant's responses.

‰ All members of the board review definition of the first qualification to be assessed and its behavioural indicators.

‰ The board members independently review their notes and determine which of the behavioural indicators associated with the qualification were demonstrated in the interview. They record examples of the applicant's demonstration of the behavioural indicators.

‰ Each board member then independently assesses the applicant on the first qualification:

- o Use all the behavioural evidence provided by the applicant, even if it appears in responses to questions targeting other qualifications;

- o Try not to place undue weight on isolated incidents;

- o Look for overall patterns in the evidence;

- o Ensure that responses are weighted in the same way for all applicants; and
- o Be mindful of assessor biases and common assessor errors and take precautions to reduce their effect on assessments.
- ‰ Board members discuss their individual assessments of a qualification and determine a group assessment for the applicant. This discussion continues until a consensus is reached.
- ‰ The consensus evaluation is recorded along with a rationale for the assessment in terms of the specific behaviours that the applicant demonstrated.
- ‰ Proceed to assess the remaining qualifications, in turn.
- ‰ In the applicant's file, document the final group assessments and notes for the rationale.
- ‰ Once everyone has been assessed, integrate interview results with other tools and ensure that the pattern of evidence and behaviour is consistent:
  - o If negative information is uncovered, consider its source and, to the extent possible, verify its accuracy with other sources of assessment information before making a decision about the applicant and
  - o If information is conflicting, continue checking until you are satisfied that a pattern is evident.
- ‰ Determine whether applicants meet the qualifications and select the "right fit" for the job.
- ‰ Ensure the entire appointment process has been documented from the beginning through to the appointment of a person. Be sure to include the reasons for the appointment decision.

- ‰ Make arrangements to provide feedback to applicants, if required. Feedback may be provided through informal discussion:
  - o Obtain the appointment process file and review the documentation regarding the person who was eliminated from consideration;
  - o Review the [PSC Policy on Informal Discussion](#);
  - o Review the [PSC Guide to Implementing the Informal Discussion Policy](#);
  - o Determine the official language to be used in the informal discussion and whether any accommodation is required; and
  - o If necessary, consult with other persons involved in the appointment process (e.g. other assessment board members, the HR advisor, etc.)
- ‰ Review the documentation regarding the person who was eliminated from consideration.
- ‰ Explain the appointment decision and provide information that will assist the person in understanding the decision.

‰ Stay focussed on what is relevant to the discussion: the requirements of the position, the merit criteria, how you assessed the qualifications and why the person was eliminated.

‰ Listen to the person and provide them opportunity to explain any concerns and present any supporting information.

‰ Maintain a non-defensive and non-confrontational manner throughout the discussion.

‰ Seek assistance if the issue is beyond what you are comfortable dealing with or if the discussion goes beyond the decision to eliminate the person from the appointment process.

‰ Demonstrate a willingness to review a decision if an error was made.

‰ Consider deferring a contentious or heated discussion in order to allow time to reflect and to address the issue at a later time and with assistance, if necessary.

Appendix D: Applicant Reaction Questionnaire

We would appreciate you taking a few minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses and personal comments are an important source of information for monitoring and improving our service.

Completion of the questionnaire is voluntary. Your individual responses will be treated as confidential. Any reports based on this information will be in aggregate form only. Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

For each question, please circle the number that best corresponds to your response.

In your opinion, to what extent:	Not at all	To some extent	To an average extent	To a considerable extent	To a great extent
Administration of the interview process					
1. Were you satisfied with your experience in the assessment process?	0	1	2	3	4
2. Did the interview board carry out their duties with sensitivity?	0	1	2	3	4
3. Did the interview board carry out their duties with efficiency?	0	1	2	3	4
4. Was the interview administered efficiently?	0	1	2	3	4
5. Were you served in your official language of choice?	0	1	2	3	4
6. Did you have sufficient time to prepare for the interview?	0	1	2	3	4
Realism, utility and validity of the interview					
7. Did you find the interview questions realistic?	0	1	2	3	4
8. Is your performance during the interview reflective of your ability?	0	1	2	3	4
9. Did the interview questions require you to deal with issues and challenges currently faced by individuals at the level being evaluated in this assessment process?	0	1	2	3	4
10. Did the questions provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate the qualifications being assessed?	0	1	2	3	4
The assessment process					
11. Did the interview contribute to ensuring merit in the assessment process?	0	1	2	3	4
12. Did the interview contribute to ensuring fairness in the assessment process?	0	1	2	3	4
13. Did the interview contribute to ensuring objectivity in the assessment process?	0	1	2	3	4
14. Did the interview contribute to ensuring transparency in the assessment process?	0	1	2	3	4

Perceived fairness of the interview

In your opinion, to what extent do you believe that you:	Not at all	To some extent	To an average extent	To a considerable extent	To a great extent	Don't know
15. Were provided with an equal opportunity to demonstrate the qualifications being evaluated	0	1	2	3	4	DK

Are you …	Yes	No
16. A visible minority?	Y	N
17. Aboriginal?	Y	N
18. A person with a disability?	Y	N
19. A woman?	Y	N
20. An applicant from outside the federal public service?	Y	N

Additional comments and suggestions for improvement

Difficulty of interview:

Duration of interview:

Adequacy of preparatory material:

Other:

Structured Interviewing:

Interview Board Guide

How to conduct structured interviews in the appointment process

Assessment Oversight and Personnel Psychology Centre

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Employment interviews are one of the most widely used and influential assessment tools in the appointment process. They are a significant source of information on which to base fair and accurate hiring decisions. Therefore, it is critical that interview boards use the structured interview effectively to ensure that hiring decisions are based on merit as defined by the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA).

This document provides interview board members with instructions on how to conduct structured interviews. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of the information gathered while strengthening the fairness and defensibility of this part of the assessment process.

The Guide consists of the following four main sections:

Section 1: The Structured interview. This section provides information on the characteristics of a structured interview, a description of the different types of structured interview questions and an overview of the interview process.

Section 2: Conducting the interview. This section presents an overview of the structured interviewing process. It includes recommended procedures in the administration of the structured interview, from preparation through to closing. In this section, the reader will learn essential interviewing strategies such as putting applicants at ease, asking questions and note-taking.

Section 3: Assessing the qualifications. This section provides specific instructions for assessing qualifications, including an overview of how to assess and apply the criteria that are used and an example of a qualification-based rating scale.

Section 4: Avoiding common assessment errors. This section describes common assessment errors and gives guidance on how to minimize them.

We strongly recommend that the practices outlined in this Guide be followed by all interview board members to help ensure a fair and equitable interview process. In addition, the interested reader may wish to review Structured Interviewing: How to Design and Conduct Structured Interviews in the Appointment Process for more information on developing and conducting structured interviews.

Structured versus unstructured interviews

Structured interviews consist of a series of job-related questions that are consistently asked of all applicants in order to staff a particular job. The responses are then subject to a rigorous assessment by the interview board members, based on predetermined criteria related to the assessed qualifications.

Research shows that structured interviews are more effective than unstructured ones for predicting on-the-job performance.

Structured interviews are:

- **Job-related.** The carefully planned, structured interview focuses on an applicant's ability to perform the qualifications for the job, as outlined in the Statement of Merit Criteria. Questions are based on job-relevant qualifications and are designed to elicit job-related responses that provide a more accurate prediction of future job performance.

- **Standardized administration.** Each applicant is asked the same questions. Prompting/follow-up questions are controlled. Extraneous information is eliminated and detailed notes are taken. This consistency in approach helps to ensure that all applicants are treated equally and that comparable information is obtained for each applicant.

- **Focussed on behaviour.** There is a pre-developed, behavioural basis for evaluating interview responses. By focussing on job-related behaviours, the process becomes more objective and errors in judgement are minimized.

Unstructured interviews are more likely to be less accurate and reliable, are more subject to bias and may expose employers to complaints and legal challenges.

Types of interview questions

There are different types of questions that are suitable for a structured interview. These include situational, behavioural and job knowledge questions.

Situational questions
Situational questions present applicants with a hypothetical situation relevant to the position and ask how they would respond.

The situational interview question is based on the premise that people's intentions are predictive of their future behaviour. The applicant is asked to respond by indicating how

they would handle the issue presented in the question, given the resources and the job context outlined.

Example situational question to assess teamwork: Suppose you had an idea for a change in procedures that would enhance work quality but some of your team members were against this change.   What would you do in this situation? What factors would you consider? Who would you involve?

Behavioural questions

Applicants are asked to describe a previous work or life event that is relevant to the job in question. It is usually about a time when they had to demonstrate a particular qualification that is key for the job.

The underlying assumption of behavioural questions is that the best predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Thus, their purpose is to evaluate the applicant's past behaviour for evidence that the relevant qualifications have been demonstrated. Behavioural questions are usually straightforward.

When asking behavioural questions, ascertain the following:

   1) The particulars of the situation, task, problems or context.

   2) The actions that the applicant took in response to the situation.

   3) The achieved results or the impact of the actions taken (or not taken).

Sample behavioural question to assess creativity: Tell me about a time when you proposed an innovative solution to a difficult problem. What was the situation? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?

Job knowledge questions

These questions deal with the technical or basic knowledge required to perform the duties of the position. With these questions, applicants are asked to describe or demonstrate their knowledge.

Assessing job knowledge in an interview is recommended when the position requires the verbalization of technical information or work procedures. It is recommended that job knowledge questions assess applicants' knowledge of information that is important to the overall performance of the job and not knowledge that is only peripheral to the job at hand.
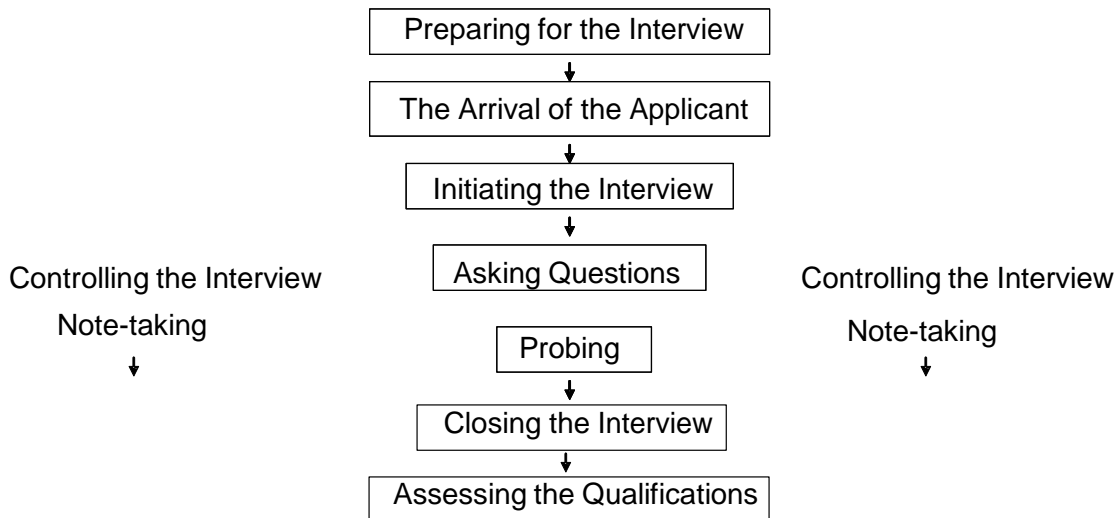
Sample of a job knowledge question: Description: How has the new *Public Service Employment Act* changed the hiring process in the public service?   Demonstration: How would you go about designing interview questions that ensure the assessment of applicants is based on merit?

Overview of the interview process

The interview process includes the following steps:

```
            ┌─────────────────────────────┐
            │ Preparing for the Interview │
            └─────────────────────────────┘
                          ↓
            ┌─────────────────────────────┐
            │ The Arrival of the Applicant│
            └─────────────────────────────┘
                          ↓
             ┌──────────────────────────┐
             │  Initiating the Interview│
             └──────────────────────────┘
                          ↓
              ┌──────────────────────┐
              │   Asking Questions   │
              └──────────────────────┘
                          ↓
                 ┌─────────────┐
                 │   Probing   │
                 └─────────────┘
                          ↓
              ┌──────────────────────┐
              │ Closing the Interview│
              └──────────────────────┘
                          ↓
            ┌──────────────────────────────┐
            │ Assessing the Qualifications │
            └──────────────────────────────┘
```

Controlling the Interview   Controlling the Interview

Note-taking   Note-taking

↓   ↓

Preparing for the interview includes: reviewing all available information regarding the position, the Statement of Merit Criteria and the questions that will be asked and determining who is going to do what and in what order. It also involves making sure that the required material, such as interview booklets and assessment guides, are ready and ensuring that the interview room is adequate and that the applicant will receive the necessary instructions upon arrival. The interview protocol must be followed if applicants are to be given time to prepare for the questions prior to the interview.

The main portion of the interview begins with a warm-up period during which the lead interviewer sets the applicant at ease and establishes a rapport. This part of the interview is important because it ensures that the applicant has the best opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications.

During the interview, the lead interviewer should be responsible for the following:
- opening the interview;
- asking a certain number of the predetermined questions; and
- closing the interview.

Each board member may be in charge of asking specific questions. Each question is to be read aloud, as is each follow-up question, as required.

All interviews should follow the same precise timing for providing instructions, preparation time, the "warm-up" portion of the interview and the interview questions themselves. All board members should be taking notes throughout the interview.

Once the interview is finished, board members are to assess the applicant's responses and reach consensus on a final evaluation on each qualification. These evaluations must be documented.

SECTION 2: CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

The importance of the interview board

A board interview is one that is administered by two or more individuals, usually the hiring manager and other people who are knowledgeable about the job. Using more than one interviewer is preferred for the following reasons:

- An interview board can reduce the impact that personal biases may have on the selection decision;

- Multiple interviewers may capture information that a single interviewer might miss or overlook, thus ensuring a more balanced, complete picture of the applicant; and

- Additional interviewers can bring demographic diversity to the interview board, which can make applicants more comfortable during the interview process and more accepting of the outcome.

To the extent possible, it is important to use the same interviewers for all applicants in a given appointment process. This practice increases consistency and standardization of the assessment.

The members of an interview board must:

- Be familiar with the structured interview process and the merit criteria that will be assessed;
- Objectively assess applicants and treat them all equally;
- Be free from real or apparent conflicts of interest that may affect the outcome of the process;
- Be qualified in the language of the applicant's choice, in order for effective communication;
- Collect, integrate and document assessment information; and
- Provide feedback to the applicants and/or participate in informal discussions, as required.

In addition, interview board members might be asked to develop questions, answer keys and parts of the interview process such as the standardized introduction and conclusion, the time limit and sequence of questions.

Preparing for the interview

Here are a some recommendations that will help the interview board prepare for the interview:

1. Know the major duties and responsibilities of the job, as well as the definitions of the qualifications and assessed behavioural indicators.

2. Receive adequate training and be familiar with this Guide. For considerations such as employment equity, consult the Guidelines on Fair Assessment.

3. Assign one member of the interview board to the role of lead interviewer.

4. Determine the order of the questions as well as who is expected to ask each one. Ensure a relatively equal division of questions among the board members.

5. Ensure that any required accommodation for applicants with disabilities has been made. For more information, consult the Guide for Assessing Persons with Disabilities.

6. Know the interview schedule. Ensure that enough time has been allotted to greet the applicant, conduct the interview, thank the applicant, complete notes and assess the qualifications and allow for a break, if required, before proceeding to the next applicant.

7. Arrive plenty of time in advance to ensure that all preparations have been made. These preparations include, but are not limited to, ensuring that the room is well-lit and free from noise and other distractions, water, pens/pencils and paper are provided, etc.

The arrival of the applicant

Once the applicant arrives, the lead interviewer:

− Greets the applicant.

− Gives the applicant a copy of the interview questions and leaves the applicant to prepare, if applicable.

− If applicants are given time to prepare, they should be permitted to bring the interview questions and their notes to the interview so that they can refer to them throughout.

Each board member should have an Interview Note-taking Booklet and an Interview Assessment Booklet for each applicant.

The Interview Note-taking Booklet contains detailed information about the interview process, including:

- the applicant's name or identification number;
- the board members' names;

- the date of the interview;

- the information relevant to the introduction;

- the structured interview questions;

- reserved spaces for note-taking; and

- information regarding the conclusion of the interview.

The Interview Assessment Booklet contains the assessed qualifications and behavioural indicators, as well as rating scales (if applicable), and is used to record the assessment of the applicants.

Initiating the interview

As with any selection interview, it is important to begin the interview in an informal and friendly manner to help put the applicant at ease. This is a particularly important step since an interview can be a stressful experience for some applicants. This informal dialogue may make the applicant more amenable to being open, frank and transparent in providing personal information.

The lead interviewer should begin by welcoming the applicant, thanking them for attending and introducing the other board members. Then, an introduction to the structured interview should be provided, covering the following points:

– Welcoming remarks;

– The goal of the interview;

– The role of the interview board;

– How the interview will unfold and an approximate duration;

– That the board members will take turns asking questions and all will take notes. Even though they may not be making eye contact, they are listening;

– That the applicant will have the opportunity to ask questions at the completion of the formal interview questions; and

– A clear signal that the interview is about to begin.

A script that outlines the points to be covered when initiating the interview is included in the Interview Note-taking Booklet.

Asking questions

Here are some important points to consider when asking questions to applicants:

−   Make sure applicants have their copy of the interview questions and ask them to follow along;

−   Be sure to read each question aloud to the applicant slowly and clearly;

−   To the extent possible, ask each board member to ask the same questions, in the same order, to all applicants in a given appointment process; and

−   Respond to reasonable requests for clarification of a question. Do not divulge the specific behavioural indicators being assessed by any question since doing so could lead the applicant's response, thus giving an unfair advantage.

Probing

The board may need to request additional examples or more specific details to more fully understand the applicant's answers. Asking probing or follow-up questions is a necessary component of the interview as doing so helps to ensure that sufficient data is obtained for all qualifications being assessed. However, do not introduce new topics or issues when probing because the structured interview is intended to ask the same questions of each applicant. Probing questions should be standardized; otherwise you may inadvertently give an advantage to some applicants, while disadvantaging others. Do not to reveal the behavioural indicators of interest to the applicant through probing questions.

To ensure standardization for each question, read the question and the follow-up questions verbatim as they are written in the Interview Booklet.

Applicant responses are likely to vary in length and level of detail, which is acceptable as long as enough information to assess each qualification fairly and accurately is obtained. However, if any of the scenarios listed below occur, the suggested probing questions may be used to ensure that sufficient information is obtained or to get the applicant back on track.

SUGGESTED PROBES

Applicant		Board
Asks for clarification on a question.	ℐ	Repeat the question, no explanation or paraphrasing.
Wanders to irrelevant topics or takes too long to make a point.	ℐ	"Sorry to interrupt, in the interest of finishing the interview within the allotted time, we need to move to the next question."
Is silent for more than 15 seconds after a question has been asked.	ℐ	"I realize that it is sometimes difficult to come up with an answer. Most people take some time to think about their responses. Don't worry about it and take the time you need."
Responses are too brief and there is still plenty of time left at the end of the interview.	ℐ	"Do you have anything to add to your responses to any question?"
Describes what he or she did in similar situations in the past for a situational question.	ℐ	"Please tell us what you would do given the hypothetical situation provided in the question."
Speaks in generalities (e.g., "usually, I approach it by…").	ℐ	"What did you do specifically?"
Speaks in the present tense for a behavioural question.	ℐ	"Please describe a specific example that happened to you in the past."
Speaks more about a team (e.g., uses "we" instead of "I").	ℐ	"What was your individual role in this situation?"
Expresses opinions or provides a theoretical response, rather than behaviours (e.g., "I think it's important to listen to my staff.").	ℐ	"Tell us about a particular situation when you did this."
Jumps to the end of the story (the result).	ℐ	"Tell us what you did to achieve this result."

Controlling the interview

While it is important to ensure that you have the information that you need from the applicant's responses, time limits must also be considered. Some applicants may be quite verbose. If this is the case, time may expire before all qualifications are addressed and the board will not have extracted all of the necessary information to evaluate the applicant. It is essential, therefore, to control the flow of the interview.

Although the interview is designed to allow the applicant to do most of the talking, the board members must judge whether or not the applicant is providing information relevant to the qualifications. When the applicant is providing redundant or irrelevant information, there may be a need to interrupt the individual to help bring their response to a conclusion.

Note-taking

Taking detailed and comprehensive notes is an extremely important element of the interview process for two reasons:

1. Notes help the board capture and recall the content of the interview and accurately assess the applicant's responses. Without notes, there may be a tendency to selectively recall the applicant's strengths and weaknesses, or be unable to recall the responses at all.

2. Notes create a record to reconstruct the interview process or defend an appointment decision.

A number of essential steps can be taken to maximize the utility of notes. Specifically, notes should be:

− As complete and as close to verbatim as possible;

− An accurate record of what the applicant said or did; and

− Free from the board members' inferences or judgements.

Since some applicants may not be accustomed to note-taking during an interview, it is important to explain the reason for taking notes. That is, you want the interview board to be able to remember, and give full credit to, all of the knowledge, skills, and abilities demonstrated during the interview.

Closing the interview

It is recommended that an explicit conclusion be provided at the end of the interview. A number of points may be covered by the lead interviewer to bring the meeting to an end. Specifically, the lead interviewer should:

− Provide a clear signal of the end of the interview;

− Provide an opportunity for the applicant to ask questions and for the board to respond;

− Explain the next steps in the appointment process and the approximate time frame;

− Collect the interview questions and notes from the applicant;

− Remind the applicant not to discuss the interview questions with anyone; and

− Thank the applicant for participating in the interview and escort them out of the room.

The interview questions and related documents, as well as the applicant's responses, are protected materials and should be handled and stored according to departmental/agency guidelines.

Section 3: ASSESSING THE QUALIFICATIONS

After each interview, it is recommended that the board assess the qualifications of the applicant prior to moving on to the next interview. Board members then have an opportunity to discuss the observations they made during the interview and to arrive at a consensus regarding each applicant's performance.

It is important to ensure that there is sufficient time allotted to assess qualifications between each interview. This interval may last up to one hour depending on the number of questions asked and the number of qualifications being assessed. It is recommended that one board member lead the assessment process.

For this exercise, the interview board members will need the following:

− Notes taken during the interview in the Interview Note-taking Booklet.

− The Interview Assessment Booklet, which includes the qualifications and effective behavioural indicators or expected answers.

Each of the interview questions is designed to assess one or more qualifications. However, during the interview, it may be observed that an applicant's response to a question targeting one qualification also provides behavioural evidence for another one. When making their assessments, interview board members should use all of the behavioural evidence provided by the applicant, even if it appears in responses to questions targeting other qualifications.

Each qualification may be assessed using a rating scale. For example:

ENGAGEMENT
Effective behavioural indicators

• Solicits input from and listens to staff, partners, and stakeholders
• Communicates vision and division plans with clarity and commitment
• Establishes regular and comprehensive exchanges of ideas

Doesn't meet the qualification		Meets the qualification		
1 Very weak. Unacceptable.	2 Weak. Below average.	3 Moderate. Good. Acceptable. Satisfactory. Average.	4 Strong Above average.	5 Very Strong. Excellent.

The purpose of the rating scale is to assess the demonstration of:

- the scope of the behaviours that constitute the qualification; and
- the depth to which the behaviours were demonstrated during the interview.

The scope of the behaviours is the primary consideration and refers to how many of the behaviours for a given qualification were evident in the applicant's responses.

The depth of the observed behaviours refers to how these behaviours were demonstrated. It may be evaluated by the degree of complexity, soundness and precision with which the behaviours were demonstrated in the applicant's responses.

The interview board must agree and assign a single assessment for each qualification. The following seven steps are recommended to assist the board in reaching consensus:

Step 1: All members of the board review the definition of the first qualification to be assessed and its behavioural indicators.

Step 2: For the first qualification, the board members independently review their notes and determine which of the behavioural indicators associated with the qualification under review were demonstrated by the applicant. Board members should record examples of the applicant's demonstration of the behavioural indicators that reflect the scope and depth with which they were demonstrated..

Step 3: Each board member independently assesses the applicant on the first qualification.

Step 4: The board members then discuss their individual assessments of that qualification and determine a single group evaluation for the applicant. This discussion continues until a consensus is reached.

Step 5: The final consensus assessment is recorded. The rationale for the evaluation is also recorded in terms of examples of the behaviours that the applicant demonstrated, along with the scope and depth to which the behaviours were demonstrated.

Step 6: Having reached consensus on the first qualification, the board then proceeds to assess the remaining qualifications in turn.

Step 7: The final group assessments and notes for the rationale along with the interview board notes are kept in the applicant's file.

SECTION 4: COMMON ASSESSMENT ERRORS

Assessment is a difficult and delicate process, yet the success and value of the interview relies on the quality of this process. The following is a list of common assessment errors with suggestions on how to minimize them. This list is intended to help board members recognize and guard against these errors when assessing applicants, thereby maximizing the accuracy, consistency and fairness of their assessments.

First impressions: This is the tendency to let a first impression influence the assessment of the applicant's responses. Interviewers must be aware that they may unconsciously judge an applicant positively or negatively from the outset, which may result in an assessment of the applicant according to their own beliefs rather than according to the applicant's true performance on the qualifications being assessed.

Leniency and stringency: These errors involve the general tendencies to assess applicants consistently high (leniency effect) or low (stringency effect). Board members need to be aware that they might have a different understanding of the requirements for the job and the assessed qualifications, but also that they need to be fair in assessing applicants. The result is that the interviewer consistently assesses all applicants either higher or lower than warranted.

Central tendency: This is the tendency to use only the middle points on a rating scale and avoiding the extreme points. Interviewers may be reluctant to rate applicants high or low and, therefore, end up rating all applicants as average and not differentiating among them.

"Halo" and "horn" effects: These errors involve the tendency to allow one good (halo) or bad (horn) characteristic of an applicant or qualification influence the evaluation of all other qualifications. Board members need to monitor themselves when they are so impressed by an applicant on one qualification so that they do not attribute positive qualities for all other criteria regardless of the evidence provided. Conversely, when an applicant does poorly in one area, they may be under-rated in other assessed areas.

Contrast effect: This is the tendency to assess an applicant in comparison to the performance of a previous applicant instead of using the assessment guide. Board members have to be aware that they might encounter applicants who will stand out, positively or negatively, and that subsequent applicants may be under- or over-assessed as a result. In this situation, board members must not compare the applicants. Instead, they should focus on evaluating each applicant relative to the assessment criteria.

Fatigue: This is the tendency for assessors, as they become fatigued during a lengthy interviewing process, to become less consistent or less stringent in their note-taking, listening or application of the assessment criteria.

Stereotypes: This is an error that occurs when an interviewer's own personal biases and preconceptions of a good employee influence their evaluation. Stereotyping is often based on demographics such as sex, race, ethnicity or age, but can also involve other variables such as degree of education, politics or interests. Board members must be aware that their personal beliefs and perceptions of what is needed for the job may affect their evaluation of applicants, even those who are equally qualified for the job.

Similar-to-me: This error occurs when an applicant is given more favorable evaluations than warranted because of a similarity with the interviewer in some way (e.g., race, sex, age, attitudes or background). The reverse, dissimilar-to-me, can also occur where an applicant is given less favorable evaluations than warranted due to a difference in one or more of these areas.

Tips for interview board

- Avoid judgment during the listening and note-taking stage of the assessment.

- Document the information that was gathered during the interview and use it as the basis to assess applicants on the qualifications.

- When using a rating scale, use it as intended (for example, do not use half points) and use the full range of the scale.

- Consistently and continually apply your assessment procedure across all applicants. If you realize that your assessments have changed along the way, review previous assessments in light of the new information and adjust accordingly.

- Assess the qualifications separately, one at a time.

- Have the decisiveness to allocate a particular rating when warranted.

- Be aware that errors may influence your judgement.

For more information

The PSC's Personnel Psychology Centre is a valuable professional resource to consult for designing and conducting structured interviews. To find out more about best practices on structured interviewing, please consult the document "*Structured Interviewing: How to Design and Conduct Structured Interviews in an Appointment Process*" containing:

- Additional resources
- Annexes:

    o Template of Interview Note-taking Booklet

    o Template of Interview Assessment Booklet

    o Checklist for the structured interview in an appointment process

    o Train-the-trainer PowerPoint Presentation

Comments?

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Designing and Conducting Structured Interviews:
An Overview

Train-the-Traineur Presentation

Personnel Psychology Centre and Assessment Oversight

Canada

Table of Contents

Competency-Based Interviewing

Appointments in the Public Service

- The Public Service Commission's Appointment Framework states that appointments to the public service must uphold the core values of **merit** and **non- partisanship** and the guiding values of staffing: access, fairness, representativeness and transparency.

- Merit is served when selected applicants meet the **essential qualifications** of the job, including language proficiency. In addition, managers may take into consideration other merit criteria such as asset qualifications, operational

- requirements and future or present organizational needs.

- The assessment processes and methods used to evaluate applicants must effectively assess the essential qualifications and other merit criteria identified.

- One method of assessment is the **STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**:

  - Serves as a robust assessment tool

  - Can be used to evaluate applicants' essential and asset qualifications

Competency-Based Assessment

■ The structured interview can be used to assess the qualifications required to perform a job.

■ Qualifications or competencies are:

  – Characteristics of the individual including knowledge, abilities and skills that:

    • Underlie effective performance of work

    • Are linked to the organization's objectives and issues

  – Labelled, defined in narrative description and translated into behavioural indicators.

■ A competency profile is a set of qualifications needed to be proficient in a particular job.

Behavioural Indicators

- Behavioural indicators (BIs) translate the definition of a qualification into operational or concrete examples of what persons who possess the qualification actually do or how they behave.

- BIs must be:

  - Specific: reflect the specific context of the job

  - Observable: readily observable and objective, not assumed or inferred by an observer (no judgment)

  - Measurable: rateable either by frequency, clear criteria of effectiveness, etc.

Example Qualification Definition and Behavioural Indicators

Values and Ethics – Serving Through Integrity and Respect

Public service (PS) leaders serve Canadians, ensuring integrity in personal and organizational practices and respect people and PS principles, including democratic, professional, ethical and people values. They build respectful, bilingual, diverse and inclusive workplaces where decisions and transactions are transparent and fair. They hold themselves, their employees and their organizations accountable for their actions. The expectations regarding Values and Ethics for Directors could be described as follows:

Behavioural indicators

- Demonstrates Values and Ethics, including the Code, in personal behaviour

- Integrates Values and Ethics, including the Code, into division practices

- Reflects a commitment to citizens and clients in own and division activities

The Structured Interview

- An interview is a meeting between the board consisting of two or more persons and an applicant seeking appointment to a job.

- A structured interview consists of a series of job-related questions that are consistently applied across all applicants for a particular job and are subjected to a systematic assessment protocol.

- In comparison, unstructured interviews are somewhat random in nature. Applicants may get different sets of questions and be assessed by different criteria.

Interview Characteristics

Unstructured

- No systematic analysis of job requirements

- Applicants are asked different questions in a disorganized manner

- The questions are not always job-related

- Answers are not scored in a systematic way

- The interview board doesn't formally prepare

Structured

- Based on a thorough understanding and articulation of job requirements

- All candidates are asked the same questions, in the same order

- Questions are job-related and competency-based

- Answers are scored in a systematic way

- The interview board is trained in how to conduct structured interviews

Why use Structured Interviews?

- **Job-related**: The focus is on the extent to which applicants demonstrate the essential and asset qualifications required for successful performance on the job. The questions are based on a thorough understanding and articulation of the requirements of the job.

- **Standardized**: The same questions are asked of all applicants. Consistency in approach helps ensure that applicants are treated equally and that comparable information is gathered for each applicant. Also, responses are systematically evaluated against established criteria.

- **Focused on behaviours**: more objective

- **Valid and reliable:** in contrast to unstructured interviews

- **Legally defensible**: enhanced accuracy, consistency, and procedural rigour

Designing a
Structured Interview

Designing a Structured Interview

- Step 1: Review job analysis and Statement of Merit Criteria

  - Identify the qualifications to be assessed and their behavioural indicators (BIs)

- Step 2: Develop questions

  - Identify activities or challenges on the job, choose among behavioural, situational or knowledge questions, including standardized probing questions

- Step 3: Develop the assessment criteria

  - Identify the expected responses and how to assess them

1. Review Job Analysis and Statement of Merit Criteria

▪ The process of identifying the essential functions and duties of the position and the qualifications needed to perform the work.

– Interview questions based on a job analysis and Statement of Merit Criteria will, by definition, be job-related.

▪ Job analysis can also identify the characteristics that distinguish excellent, average, and below-average employees.

– Interview questions designed from this information will be useful in differentiating among applicants.

2. Develop Questions

Types of questions

- **Behavioural questions**: Applicants are asked to describe past events or experiences.

- **Situational questions**: Applicants are asked what they would do in a hypothetical situation.

- **Knowledge questions**: Applicants are asked to demonstrate knowledge or a skill required to successfully perform the duties of the job.

Behavioural Questions

- The premise of this type of question is that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour.

- This type of question is usually phrased as: "Tell us about a time when …"

- Responses sought include detailed descriptions of:

    - The situation or task

    - What the applicant actually did - the actions taken

    - The outcome

Example of a Behavioural Question

Example to assess strategic thinking

Question: Tell us about a time when you proposed an innovative solution to a difficult problem.

- – What was the situation?
- – How did you handle it?
- – What was the outcome?

Situational Questions

- Applicants are asked what they would do in a hypothetical, job-related situation. The premise of this type of question is that stated intentions predict future behaviour.

- This type of question is usually phrased as: "What would you do if …?"

- Responses sought:

  - Detailed descriptions of what the candidate would do

  - Evidence of the kinds of behaviours the candidate would demonstrate in the presented situation

Example of a Situational Question

Example - to assess teamwork

What would you do if you intended to change procedures to enhance the quality of work but some of your team members were against this change.

- What would you do in this situation?

- What factors would you consider?

- Who would you involve?

Knowledge Questions

- Applicants are presented with questions related to the technical or basic knowledge required to perform the job and are asked to   demonstrate their knowledge.

- Useful in situations where the position for which you are hiring requires the verbalization of technical information or work procedures.

- Responses sought:

    – Detailed descriptions of the applicant's knowledge of information that is important to overall performance on the job

Example of a Knowledge Question

Example to assess knowledge of the hiring process within the public service

How would you go about designing a process that ensures that the assessment of applicants is based on merit?

Question Development

- A good source to consult for questions is the people who work in positions similar to the one you are staffing.

  - Ask people to write out real-life scenarios that have happened to them and that permitted them to show the qualifications in question.

- These scenarios can then be written as situational or behavioural questions.

- Develop probing and follow-up questions that will be used to redirect the applicants' responses, as required.

Sample Follow-up Questions

Behavioural Questions

- What was the context and the situation?

- Who was involved?

- What specifically did you do?

- What was the outcome?

Situational Questions

- How would you accomplish that?

- Why would you do that?

- When would you do that?

- Who would you involve?

Question Development, Cont'd

- Ensure that questions provide opportunities for applicants to demonstrate the behaviours being assessed.

- May require more than one question to "cover" all of the behaviours associated with a qualification.

- One question can assess more than one qualification.

Appropriate Interview Questions

■ Interview questions should be kept to job-related topics and should avoid **prohibited topics** such as:

– Race	– National or ethnic origin
– Colour	– Religion
– Age	– Disability
– Sexual orientation	– Marital status
– Family status	
– Conviction (when a pardon has been granted)	
– Sex (including pregnancy and childbirth)	

■ It is inappropriate to inquire about areas that are unrelated to actual job performance such as:

– Hobbies	– Social activities
– Political beliefs	– Residence
– Medical status	– Past legal actions

Exercise

Instructions: Read each item as though you were conducting an interview. Ask yourself, "May I ask this question?" Check those you feel are not appropriate.

☐ 1. How many children do you have?

☐ 2. Do you plan to start a family soon?

☐ 3. This job frequently requires overtime work. Would this be a problem for you?

☐ 4. What language do you speak at home?

☐ 5. Were you born in this country?

☐ 6. Are you a Canadian citizen?

☐ 7. Do you live with relatives?

☐ 8. What health problems do you have?

☐ 9. Are you capable of performing the essential responsibilities of the job?

☐ 10. Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

☐ 11. What clubs or organizations do you belong to?

☐ 12. Have you ever had trouble obtaining credit?

☐ 13. That's an unusual name. What nationality is it?

☐ 14. Do you own your own home or are you renting?

☐ 15. Are you married?

☐ 16. This job requires a lot of heavy lifting. Do you think you can do it?

☐ 17. What is your church affiliation?

Exercise

Identify which questions would provide fair, meritorious assessment:

‰ What are your strengths and weaknesses?

‰ Handling conflict is a part of any manager's job. What was the most challenging conflict situation that you faced and how you did you handle it?

‰ Suppose you went to the North Pole for 6 dark months of solitude. You would have all the provisions necessary to sustain life, but could take only 3 books with you. What would you take and why?

‰ Suppose you had an idea for a change in work procedures that would enhance efficiency, but some of our team members were against this change. What would you do?

‰ Give me 3 reasons why manhole covers are round?

‰ Sometimes a supervisor is not in the office but a decision has to be made to complete a task. Tell me about an important decision that you had to make under these circumstances?

‰ If you had the opportunity to do the last 10 years of your career over again, what would you do differently?

Exercise – Answers

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

  – This question is unlikely to provide any information related to the qualifications required to perform a job. It is a favourite question of most interviewers. Most applicants are prepared and coached to respond by picking a strength that they think the interviewer values and talking about it in semi-negative terms.

- Handling conflict is a part of any manager's job. What was the most challenging conflict situation that you faced and how you did you handle it?

  – This question would be fair and meritorious for management positions that entail dealing with conflict. It assesses how an applicant would approach and deal with conflict situations.

- Suppose you went to the North Pole for 6 dark months of solitude. You would have all the provisions necessary to sustain life, but could take only 3 books with you. What would you take and why?

  – Many interviewers have a "magic question" they like to ask. The assumption is that this will provide information on the applicant's psyche, personality, and/or general attitude towards life. However, such a question will not provide any work-related information or any information on the qualifications required to do the job.

Exercise – Answers, Cont'd

- Suppose you had an idea for a change in work procedures that would enhance efficiency, but some of your team members were against this change. What would you do?

    – This question would be fair and meritorious for positions that entail teamwork. It assesses how an applicant would approach and deal with difficult team situations that are likely to arise on the job.

- Give me 3 reasons why manhole covers are round?

    – Some interviewers like this type of "off-the-wall question" which they believe assesses how applicants "think on their feet" and/or their analytical skills. However, this type of question is not job-related nor does it provide any information on the ability or job-related qualifications of an applicant.

- Sometimes a supervisor is not in the office but a decision has to be made to complete a task. Tell me about an important decision that you had to make under these circumstances?

    – This question would be fair and meritorious for positions that entail decision-making. It assesses how an applicant would make decisions in difficult situations that are likely to arise on the job.

Exercise – Answers, Cont'd

- If you had the opportunity to do the last 10 years of your career over again, what would you do differently?

  – Interviewers sometimes like this type of question as they believe it will provide insight into how an applicant feels about their chosen career. However, this type of question is not job-related.

Competency Assessment

- The interview should focus on several aspects of the job, while giving the person the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to respond to relevant incidents.

- However, no more than 7 qualifications should be assessed in an interview.

    – Otherwise, trying to assess more qualifications may lead to superficial evaluation

- Verify, using a qualification by question grid, that your interview covers all of the qualifications that you intended to assess.

3. Developing the Assessment Criteria

■ The expected responses or behavioural indicators and the way the answers will be assessed have to be predetermined and applied consistently during the process.

■ Using a rating scale:

– Standardizes the assessment process

– Maximizes the consistency of evaluation across applicants

– Leads to valid assessment of qualifications, and fair, equitable assessment for all applicants

Rating Scale Development

■ Each qualification to be assessed using the pre-established rating scale - with clear criteria

■ The rating scale should assess the **scope** and **depth** of the behaviours observed

■ To define the points on the rating scale:

  – Consider the kinds of actions, responses and efficient behaviours that are relevant to the qualifications being assessed

  – Identify examples of behaviours that differentiate different levels of effectiveness, ranging from ineffective to superior. The scale must clearly differentiate among applicants exhibiting weak, moderate and strong instances of the qualification being assessed

Sample Rating Scale

STRATEGIC THINKING – ANALYSIS				
Behavioural Indicators: 1. Coordinates information from multiple projects to form a comprehensive perspective 2. Identifies interdependencies across unit projects 3. Analyzes setbacks and seeks honest feedback to learn from mistakes				
Doesn't meet the requirements		**Meets the requirements**		
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Very weak Unacceptable	Weak Under average	Moderate Good. Acceptable. Satisfactory Average	Strong Above average	Very Strong Excellent

Interview Protocol

- It should be decided whether applicants will have time to prepare with the interview questions on-site before meeting with the board members. The amount of time given must be the same for each applicant.

- It takes generally 10 minutes to answer each question. The interview shouldn't last more than an hour and half; therefore, the number of questions should be limited.

- Decide who is going to lead the interview, provide a standardized introduction and conclusion.

- Decide the order in which the questions will be asked and who is going to ask what questions.

- The interview schedule should allow for breaks and time to assess candidates' qualifications between interviews.

Conducting a Structured Interview

Conducting a Structured Interview

1. Preparation

2. Arrival of the applicant and initiating the interview

3. Asking the questions

4. Controlling the interview

5. Note-taking

6. Closing the interview

7. Assessing the qualifications

1. Preparing for the Interview

■ Each member of the interview board should be thoroughly familiar with:

– The major duties of the position to be staffed

– The related qualification definitions and behaviours

– Interview schedule

– Assessment of persons with disabilities : http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/ppc/disability/disability_preface_e.htm

– Fair assessment : http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/ppc/removing_barriers_message_e.htm

Preparing for the Interview, Cont'd

- Each interview board member should have a copy of the following :

    – Interview Note-taking Booklet

    – Interview Assessment Booklet

- Each interview board member should be clear on their roles and on which question(s) they will be asking during the interview.

2. Arrival of Applicant

- Members of the interview board should arrive in plenty of time to prepare and set up prior to the applicant's arrival.

- When applicants arrive for the interview, they should be greeted by a member of the board or a person familiar with the interview protocol.

- If time is allocated to prepare with the interview questions before meeting the board:

  - The instructions for preparing as well as the interview questions should be provided to the applicant. The instructions for preparing can be provided orally to the applicant. A standard script that outlines the points to be covered should be prepared.

  - The applicant should be permitted to bring the interview questions and notes to the interview so as to refer to them throughout.

- The applicant should be provided with water, pencils/pens and paper for the interview.

Initiating the Interview

Suggestions for the lead interviewer to help put applicants at ease:

- Introduce self, welcoming remarks, thank the applicant for attending.

- Introduce members of the board.

- A few moments of informal conversation*.
  - For example, asking applicants "Did you have any trouble finding the place?"

* Informal conversation should not infringe on prohibited topics or non-work related activities.

3. Asking Interview Questions

- Ask each question slowly and clearly.

- Read each question **verbatim**.

- Ask all questions in order.

- Ask follow-up/probing questions as required.

Asking Interview Questions, Cont'd

- The structured interview uses a highly standardized format. All applicants should be given the same instructions and asked the same set of questions in the same order.

- Applicants' responses will vary in length and level of detail. This is acceptable as long as the interviewers obtain enough information to assess each qualification fairly and accurately.

Asking Interview Questions, Cont'd

■ Interviewers should use standardized probes to ensure that sufficient information is obtained or to get the applicant back on track.

- – Example of a standardized probe:
  "Specifically, what did <u>you</u> do?"

■ The same follow-up questions should be used to avoid inconsistency and to control for inappropriate probing (e.g., leading questions, paraphrasing, yes-no questions, over- probing, etc.) so that no applicant is advantaged or disadvantaged.

- – In instances where an applicant has provided all required information, it might not be necessary to ask a follow-up question.

4. Controlling the Interview

- Use standardized probes

- Get the whole story

- Keep track of the time

- Control the flow of the interview

5. Note-Taking

- All interviewers take notes – important for reliability.

- Make sure to capture the following in your notes:

    - Situation

    - Timing (i.e., when)

    - Actions taken

    - Results

- As close to <u>verbatim</u> as possible.

- Based on careful observations of behaviours related to the qualifications being assessed.

Note-Taking, Cont'd

- The notes should be an accurate record of what the applicant said or did, not the interviewer's inferences or judgements.

  - Record only what the applicant says, not your opinion or feelings about what they say

- Two-stage process:

  - Collect the data (i.e., verbatim notes) during the interview

  - Evaluate the data after the interview

- Interview notes are accessible to applicants, should they request them.

6. Closing the Interview

The lead interviewer should:

- Give information concerning the next steps in the appointment process.

- Give the applicant an opportunity to ask questions.

- Collect all materials (questions, notes).

- Thank the applicant and escort them out of the room.

7. Assessment of Qualifications

- Do not assess until after the interview; it is important to separate observation from evaluation.

- After the interview, the interview board members are ready to assess the qualifications for the applicant. One board member is to be the chair of the process.

Assessment of Qualifications, Cont'd

- The interview board members will need the following:

  - Notes taken during the interview in the Interview Note-taking Booklet

  - Interview Assessment Booklet, which includes the qualifications and behavioural indicators assessed during the interview

- Evaluating applicant responses based on:

  - qualifications/behaviours being assessed

  - Evidence - what the applicant demonstrated

  - **Scope** and **depth** of demonstrated behaviours

Assessment of Qualifications, Cont'd

- The SCOPE of the behaviours that constitute the qualification:

    – **How many** behavioural indicators for a given qualification are evident in the candidate's responses.

    – **To what extent** most or all of the behaviours for a given qualification were demonstrated.

- The DEPTH to which they were demonstrated during the interview:

    – **How** these behaviours were demonstrated.

    – Evaluated by the degree of ***complexity, soundness and precision*** with which the behaviour is demonstrated in the candidate's responses.

Assessment of Qualifications, Cont'd

- When assessing the qualifications, use all of the behavioural evidence provided, even if it appears in responses to questions targeting other qualifications.

- Document evaluation decisions

    – Provide rationale for decisions, making explicit links to established behavioural indicators/criteria and the behaviours demonstrated by the candidate.

The Evaluation Process

Step 1: All members of the board review the definition of the first qualification to be assessed and its behavioural indicators.

Step 2: Each member reviews their interview notes individually.

Step 3: Each member assesses the qualification independently.

Step 4: A group discussion on the assessment starts, to reach consensus on the rating of the qualification.

Step 5: The final group assessment with the rationale is recorded.

Step 6: The remaining qualifications are assessed in turn.

Step 7: The final group assessments and notes providing the rationale are placed in the applicant's file.

Assessment Errors

- The process of assessment is a difficult and delicate job, yet the success and value of the interview hinges on the quality of these ratings.

- **Assessment errors** occur when an assessor's evaluation is influenced by other factors than the information provided by the applicant during the interview.

Common Assessment Errors

- **First Impressions:** Unconsciously, you may judge an applicant positively or negatively from the outset, resulting in an assessment of the applicant according to your own beliefs rather than according to the qualifications required for the job and their true performance.

- **Leniency and Stringency:** These are the general tendencies to assess applicants consistently high (leniency effect) or low (stringency effect). The understanding of the requirements for the job and the qualifications assessed may differ from one assessor to another. The assessment needs to be fair to all applicants. The result of this error is that the assessment of applicants is either higher or lower than warranted.

- **Central Tendency:** This is the tendency to use only the middle points of the rating scale, while avoiding the extreme points. You may be reluctant to rate applicants high or low and, therefore, rate all applicants as average, not differentiating among them.

- **"Halo" and "Horn" Effects:** These errors involve the tendency to allow one good (halo) or bad (horn) characteristic or qualification influence the evaluation of all other qualifications of an applicant. Board members need to monitor themselves when they are so impressed by an applicant on one qualification so that they do not attribute positive qualities for all other criteria regardless of the evidence provided. Conversely, when an applicant does poorly in one area, they may be under-rated in other assessed areas.

Common Assessment Errors, Cont'd

- **Contrast Effect:** This is the tendency to assess an applicant relative to the performance of a previous applicant instead of using the assessment guide. You have to be aware that you might encounter applicants who will stand out, positively or negatively, and that subsequent applicants may be under- or over-assessed as a result.

- **Fatigue:** This is the tendency among board members to become fatigued during a lengthy interviewing process and to become less consistent or less stringent in their note-taking, listening or application of the assessment criteria.

- **Stereotypes:** This is an error that occurs when your own personal biases and preconceptions of a good employee influence your evaluations. Stereotyping is often based on demographics such as sex, race, ethnicity or age, but can also involve other variables such as degree of education, politics or interests. You must be aware that personal beliefs and perceptions of what is needed for the job may affect evaluations of applicants.

- **Similar-to-me:** This error occurs when an applicant is given more favourable evaluations than warranted because they are similar to the interviewer in some way (e.g., race, sex, age, attitudes or background). The reverse, dissimilar-to-me, can also occur where an applicant is given less favourable evaluations than warranted because of perceived differences.

Tips to Minimize Assessment Errors

◻ Train all interviewers on how to assess applicants.

◻ Document the information that was gathered during the interview and use it as the basis to assess applicants on the qualifications.

◻ Consistently and continually apply your assessment procedure across all applicants. After all applicants have been interviewed, review your assessments for each question to ensure consistent treatment of responses.

◻ When using a rating scale, use it as intended – use the full range of the scale.

◻ Have the decisiveness to allocate a particular rating when warranted by the rating scale.

◻ Be flexible in accepting correct responses from applicants and, in doing so, keep in mind all applicants' previous responses.

◻ Try not to place undue weight on isolated incidents.

◻ Consistently justify your assessment by the job requirements, the assessed qualifications and behavioural indicators and the notes that you have taken on the applicant's performance.

◻ Discuss the assessment as a group and question each other's individual assessments.

Useful Resources

- Structured Interviewing: How to Design and Conduct Structured Interviews for an Appointment Process

    – An exhaustive guide for HR practioners and managers wanting to use a structured interview to assess applicants in an appointment process

- Structured Interviewing: Interview Board Guide

    – The reference for board members conducting structured interviews in an appointment process.

- Personnel Psychology Centre

    – A valuable resource on structured interviews.