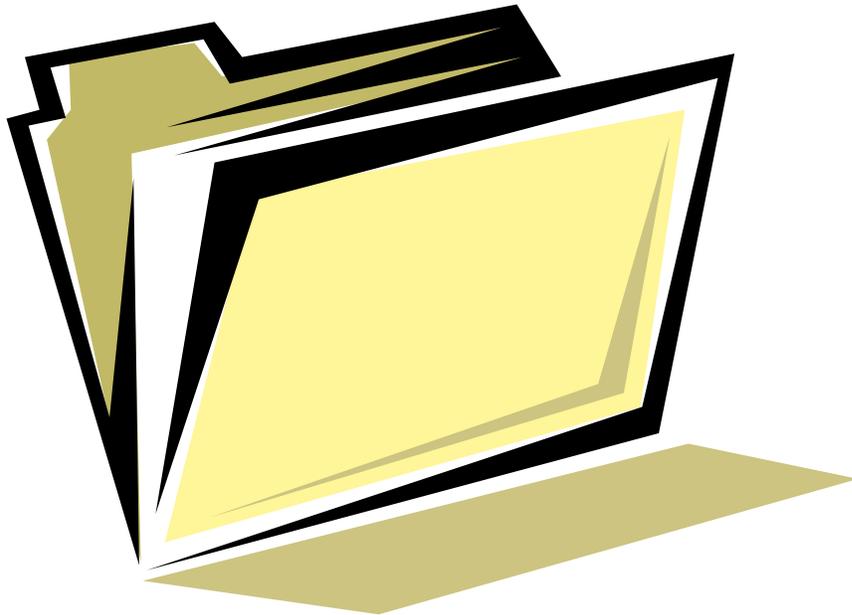


California State University,  
Fullerton

## **Interview Guide**



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Human Resources (HR Operations, Employee Training and Development, and Diversity and Equity Programs) is continuously participating in strategic planning and program assessment activities. As a result of customer feedback, this on-line interview training guide and question library was developed. It is designed to assist campus personnel in successfully performing one of the University's most important functions – the selection of highly qualified employees to support Cal State Fullerton's mission, goals and objectives.

Within this Interview Guide, you will find information such as:

- tips about the interview process,
- equal employment opportunity and the Americans with Disabilities Act issues pertaining to the selection process,
- interviewing do's and don'ts,
- pre-approved questions (generic, functional, and by classification).

## II. GOAL OF INTERVIEW

The goal of the interview is to:

- expand and clarify the information provided on the application and resume,
- collect additional job-related information which will supplement information on the application and resume, and
- determine the candidate's "fit" to the job.

"Fit" is defined by the skills and knowledge required to perform the duties of the position and the ability to work successfully within the organizational culture.

### III. PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Select interviewers for their ability to add value to the selection decision. Interviewers are stakeholders in the final outcome and should understand the job and its requirements and know the organization's hiring objectives.
- Prepare key questions that are:
  - linked to the selection criteria for the position;
  - about post job performance; and
  - open-ended and neutral.
- Be sure to ask follow-up questions that are candidate specific.
- Formulate an interview format in order to provide direction for the interview and make the most effective use of time.
- Allow time for an interview schedule that puts no pressure on you or the candidate. Prepare the candidate by providing information about parking, interview location, name and title of interviewer and length of appointment. Indicate that the full job description will be available before the interview, and also will be available in HR at any time prior to the interview.
- Arrange for quiet and privacy with no interruptions during the interview. It is just as important for the interviewer to make a good impression as it is for the candidate.

#### IV. SPECIAL REGULATIONS

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) places some special requirements on employers during the interview stage in addition to providing reasonable accommodation to applicants in the application, interview and employment processes. The law prohibits precluding an applicant from consideration if he or she can perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodation. Although disabilities are broadly defined, temporary conditions that do not interfere with major life activities are usually not covered.

Reasonable accommodation means that job functions must be identified as essential or marginal, and only essential functions and the skills, knowledge and abilities (SKA's) associated with them can be considered in the selection process. Consequently, interview questions should solicit responses based on the result or outcome rather than on the method used to arrive at the result.

## V. TYPES/CATEGORIES OF QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE ASKED

Well thought-out, key questions will elicit the maximum amount of useful information from a brief conversation with the candidate. The purpose of most questions is to open up a topic for conversation or to confirm information. You should select and/or develop questions for each of the selection criteria that was developed at the time the minimum qualifications were established and that was utilized when applications were paper screened. This section of the Interview Guide is organized to follow the order of the interview process.

### A. **Opening Questions**

The interview can be a stressful experience. In order to make applicants feel more at ease, the use of “ice breaker” questions is encouraged. In addition, it is helpful to engage the candidate in a brief “housekeeping” discussion so that he/she may become comfortable with the interviewers and the physical surroundings before the formal interview begins. For example, interviewers can ask if the candidate had any difficulty reaching the campus or parking.

Interviewers should introduce themselves and explain why they are participating in the interview and should provide an overview of the process. In transitioning into the formal interview process, interviewers can begin with one or more background questions.

#### Background Information

Examples: Confirm that the applicant has read the job description and then ask one or more questions of the following type:

- “*Why are you interested in this position?*”
- “*Based on your understanding of this position, what related skills, knowledge and abilities would you bring to the position?*”
- “*How does this position fit within your personal goals or career plan?*”

### B. **Categories of Interview Questions.**

#### 1. Behavioral Questions

These questions ask for examples of current or past performance, based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Phrase questions in the present or past tense, but not the future tense.

Examples: • “*Describe an occasion where you misjudged a situation. How did you handle it?*”

- *"Tell us of some times when you were not very pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?"*
- *"Tell us about some situations in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes in organizational or department priorities. What was the impact of the change on you?"*
- *"What are your standards of success in your job? What have you done to meet these standards?"*
- *"Have you taken any steps to improve your skills or performance? Please give examples."*

## 2. Open-ended Questions

These questions encourage the candidate to demonstrate communication skills. Open-ended questions begin with: what, how, why, describe, explain, or tell me.

- Examples:
- *"Describe your job-related experience."*
  - *"What do you enjoy most about your current position?"*
  - *"What did you like least about positions you have held in the past?"*
  - *"What strengths would you bring to this position?"*
  - *"What do you consider your weaknesses relative to this position?"*
  - *"What do you believe to be the most important attributes for a person in this position?"*

## 3. Closed-Ended (Yes/No) Questions

These questions are used to elicit a specific response or verify information already possessed by the interviewer. Their use should be limited because they result in minimal conversation and they do not customarily generate new information. Questions of this type often begin with: are, have, do, will, did, can, and could. Generally speaking, it is wise to follow up with an open-ended question.

Examples: • *“Have you ever had budget management responsibility?”*

After the candidate responds, follow up with a question such as:

- *“Tell us about extent of your budget authority and responsibility in your previous positions.”*

#### 4. Neutral Questions

These questions do not reveal or suggest the correct response. They encourage the candidate to express his or her own ideas as well as to provide unedited information. Neutral questions can encourage honesty and candor.

Example: • *“What, in your view, is more important—speed or accuracy?” “Why do you feel this way?”*

#### 5. Hypothetical Questions

These questions ask the candidate to respond to new or unfamiliar situations and provide insight to the candidate’s ability to analyze and solve problems.

Example: • *“Assume you are the supervisor and your best employee starts to come in late several times a week. What would you do?”*

#### 6. Skill-based Questions

Skill-based questions should be related to the skills necessary to ensure success in the position. That objective can be accomplished by linking questions to the selection criteria.

Section VII of this Guide provides a library of pre-approved questions—listed alphabetically by classification. Interview questions, contained in the Library, were developed in relation to selection criteria for specific classifications. Interviewers may select pre-approved questions from this library and may develop their own questions for requirements that are unique to the current vacancy. *Newly developed questions must be approved by Human Resources prior to the interview.* To assist in the development of specialized questions, the following suggestions are provided for your consideration:

a. Customer Service

Positions with heavy public contact require some information about how the candidate has reacted and responded to similar situations in the past. Design questions that will encourage the candidate to relate actual experiences.

- Examples
- *“If we were to do a customer survey, how would your customers rate you in terms of your courtesy and your effectiveness in helping them?”*  
*“Give some examples to support your belief.”*
  - *“Please provide an example from a current or previous position where you initiated an improvement in a particular area or procedure. How did this result in improved customer service?”*
  - *“Have you ever had a feeling of frustration and impatience when dealing with others? What was the situation? How did you handle it?”*
  - *“Tell us about some of the people who take up your time with problems. How do you handle these situations?”*
  - *“How have you gone about developing rapport with others? Please give examples.”*

b. Organizational Skills/Work Procedures

These questions are designed to encourage the applicant to provide detailed examples of previous work experiences in which he/she has utilized organizational skills and developed work procedures to solve a problem, streamline a process, or improve an existing practice.

- Examples:
- *“The Center for Insurance Studies has some critical areas that must be organized. You would be expected to evaluate the needs and set up procedures and files. Describe past responsibilities that demonstrate your ability to successfully manage this task.”*
  - *“In your opinion, which one of these ‘no-win’ situations is the lesser of two evils:*

*(1) Complete a project or task on time with errors because there was no time to recheck your work, or*

*(2) Complete a project accurately but miss the due date?"*

*"Please provide your rationale."*

- *"This position requires a high degree of accuracy and the ability to perform a wide variety of duties, with frequent interruptions and limited supervision. Please describe the methods you would utilize in order to succeed in this type of environment."*

c. Communication

In this area it is important to distinguish between how well the candidate communicates during the interview and how clearly the candidate explains his/her experience in communicating with constituencies they served in previous positions.

Examples:

- *"What different approaches do you use in talking to different audiences? How do you know you are getting your idea across?"*
- *"How have you gone about developing rapport with others? Please give examples."*

Written Communication

- *"What are some of the most difficult writing assignments you have been given or have taken on yourself? Please explain."*
- *"What kinds of writing have you done? Can you give us some examples? How did you approach it? Tell us about its content and the reactions you got."*

d. Clerical/Secretarial

These questions should touch on all the major areas of responsibility so that the interviewer will obtain a general sense of the candidate's background in each functional area.

- Examples:
- *“Tell us about your experience in setting up and monitoring budgets.”*  
  
*“What approach or methods did you use?”*
  - *“Please describe your experience purchasing and maintaining an inventory of supplies and equipment.” “What types of records did you maintain in this area?”*
  - *“Can you relate for us what experience you have had in making travel arrangements and in preparing travel requests and processing travel claims?”*
  - *“Tell us about your experience in working with the public, handling a variety of telephone calls and walk-in traffic at the same time?”*
  - *“Describe your experience with record keeping and filing systems, including databases.”*

e. Event Planning and Meeting Preparation

These functions are found more frequently in positions at all levels in the organization. Questions should be designed to elicit information about the specific types of events the hiring department has experienced or what the hiring department expects to experience in the future.

- Examples:
- *“Describe in detail the experience you have had in event planning and coordination for conferences, receptions, luncheons, and serving as the host for such functions.”*
  - *“Tell us about your experience in preparing agenda packets for meetings.”*

f. Supervision and Management

It is important to determine how a candidate for a supervisory or management position will fit into the work unit and whether his or her management style will likely meet with resistance from staff. Ask questions about past supervisory and management experience that require detailed responses from the candidates. If you have experienced a specific type of problem in the hiring department, present the problem as a hypothetical question to see how the candidate would handle the situation.

- Examples:
- *“What experience have you had in supervising or managing a staff?”*
  - *“What techniques have you used to deal with low staff morale, internal conflict and poor employee performance?”*
  - *“Describe the most difficult problem you encountered as a manager.” “How did you handle it?”*
  - *“What is your management philosophy?”*
  - *“How do you know when to delegate?”*
  - *“What do you do if the delegation of tasks and authority doesn’t work?”*

g. Computer and Technical Skills

Most of the computer-related and technical skill questions are classification specific. If you don’t already have questions in mind for this category, it might be helpful to review the Library of pre-approved questions for the classification level of the position you seek to fill. However, if you wish to develop your own technical questions, examples of some generic computer-related questions follow:

- Examples:
- *“What kind of computer systems have you worked with?”*
  - *“Tell us about your experience with computer hardware and software and various tasks you have accomplished on the computer with the software.”*
  - *“In what technical areas do you consider yourself proficient?”*

- *"In what areas do you feel you still need some development?"*
- *"What type of tasks do you enjoy carrying out on the computer? "*
- *"What types of things have you produced with a computer, such as brochures and newsletters?"*

### C. **Closing Questions and Statements**

Inclusion of several questions from this group will enable the interviewer to close the interview and provide "process" information to the applicant.

- Examples:
- *"Do you have any questions for us?"*
  - *"Is there anything you would like to tell us about yourself that we have not asked?"*
  - *"When would you be available to start work if you are offered the position?"*
  - *"What starting salary do you expect or require?"*
  - *"Thank you for your time and interest in the position. We will finish interviews by \_\_\_\_\_. We will check references before making a final decision. We anticipate getting back to candidates with our decision by \_\_\_\_\_."*

### D. **Reference Check Questions and Tasks**

All reference checks must be documented for the file. A form is provided by Human Resources for this purpose. The form is self-explanatory and contains all the required information. However, if you are able to obtain additional information, please include it on the form as well. Following are some of the tasks the interviewer should accomplish when conducting a reference check along with some questions the interviewer can ask the person providing the reference information:

- Examples:
- *"Confirm the dates of employment."*
  - *"Confirm the job title."*
  - *"Confirm salary."*

Ask:

- *“Is the person eligible for rehire? If not, why not?”*
- *“On the last performance evaluation, what was noted?”*  
*“If areas of deficiency were noted, ask what recommendations were given for improvement? “Were those improvements made?”*
- *“Since none of us is perfect at everything we do, can you describe what could be considered as areas for growth for this individual?”*
- *“Is there any one else who can provide information about this candidate?”*

Please submit all reference materials along with all other recruitment documents for inclusion in the official recruitment file.

## VI. TYPES/CATEGORIES OF QUESTIONS THAT MAY NOT BE ASKED

Equal opportunity and nondiscrimination laws protect the rights of individuals and specific groups based on race, color, religion, marital status, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, disability (mental and physical) including HIV and AIDS, marital status, medical condition (cancer and genetic characteristics), status as a Vietnam-era veteran or special disabled veteran, age or citizenship (within the limits imposed by law).

Questions related to the characteristics listed above must not be asked in interviews. In addition, questions related to arrest records, personal finances, are not considered to be job-related.

According to the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing and the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the following are questions frequently asked which are not job-related and therefore these questions should not be asked.

### A. Lifestyle and Marital Status

- "How many children do you have at home?"*
- "What are the ages of your children?"*
- "Who will baby-sit your kids?"*
- "Do you plan to have children?"*
- "Are you currently using birth control?"*
- "What are your plans for marriage?"*
- "Are you currently living with your husband/wife?"*
- "Who do you live with?"*
- "How long have you been married/separated/divorced?"*
- "Do you still see your ex-husband/wife?"*
- "Is your present husband your children's father?"*
- "Is your family dependent upon you working?"*
- "Do you have to work?"*
- "How does your husband/wife feel about your working?"*
- "How does your husband/wife feel about your moving?"*
- "Are you active in any political organizations, local campaigns, or parties?"*

### B. Citizenship, National Origin, Race and Ethnicity

- "Are your parents citizens?"*
- "Where are your parents living?"*
- "How long have you been a citizen?"*
- "What is your native tongue/language?"*
- "What kind of name is that?"*
- "What is your ethnic background?"*
- "Were you born in this country?"*
- "When did you come to the United States?"*
- "What is your wife's or mother's maiden name?"*
- "What clubs, sororities, organizations, lodges do you belong to?"*

C. Age

*"When did you graduate from high school/college?"*

*"How old are you?"*

*"How far away are you from retirement?"*

D. Veterans Status

*"Were you in the military service?"*

*"Why were you not in the military service?"*

E. Religion

*"How do you spend your weekends/evenings?"*

*"Where do you go to church?"*

*"What is your religious preference?"*

F. Disability and Medical Condition

*"Do you consider yourself a healthy person?"*

*"Have you ever been hospitalized?"*

*"Is there any family history of mental instability?"*

*"What is your disability called?"*

*"Have you ever filed a Workers' Compensation claim?"*

G. Arrest Record

*"Have you ever been arrested?"*

*"Have you ever been in trouble with the law?"*

*"Have you ever been subpoenaed?"*

H. Credit and Financial Record

*"Have you ever had any property repossessed/foreclosed?"*

*"Do you own your own home?"*

*"Are you renting or buying?"*

*"Do you live in a house/apartment?"*

*"Do you own your own car?"*

*"How did you finance your education?"*

## VII. LIBRARY OF PRE-APPROVED QUESTIONS

A *Confidential Library* of pre-approved questions has been compiled for use by campus interviewers. These questions are made available to hiring departments by Human Resources at the time a search is initiated. The questions are not housed on Human Resources' WEB homepage--this prevents access to this confidential information by candidates.

The questions are designed to elicit sufficient information from candidates to enable the hiring department to effectively evaluate the skills, knowledge and abilities that are essential for success in the classification and position.

The following alphabetized listing (by classification) will be continuously expanded and updated:

- Administrative Support Coordinator I and II
- Administrator I through IV
- Analyst/Programmer
- Corporal
- Custodian
- Equipment Systems Specialist
- Extended Education Specialist I and II
- Graphic Artist I and II
- Groundsworker
- Health Educator
- Information Technology Consultant
- Instructional Support Technician I through IV
- Lead Custodian
- Lead Groundsworker
- Licensed Vocational Nurse
- Lieutenant
- Nurse Practitioner
- Nursery Technician I and II
- Parking Officer
- Physician
- Police Officer
- Police Officer Cadet
- Sergeant
- Student Services Professional I through IV
- Tree Trimmer I and II