

## Interviewer Skills Training Course

**Courses in:**

Management  
Supervisory Management  
Project Management  
Communication  
Customer Care  
Sales  
Personal Development  
Human Resources  
Finance  
Administration

**Dublin (Head Office) 01-8610700**

**Cork 021-4279511**

**Belfast 0845-3005207**

**Galway 091-500250**

**Manchester (UK) 0845-3005207**

**Website: [PDLcourses.ie](http://PDLcourses.ie)**

**Email: [info@PDLcourses.ie](mailto:info@PDLcourses.ie)**

# Contents

<b>1 - Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 - The Job</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3 - The Person</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4 - Deciding On A Rating System</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5 - Seeking Applicants</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6 - Screening Applicants</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7 - Organising Interviews</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>8 - Preparing For Interview</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>9 - Question Types</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>10 - The Interview</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>11 - Body Language</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>12 - After the Interview</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>13 - Evaluating the Selection Process</b>	<b>29</b>



# 1 - Introduction

Organisations grow and change and as they do, there is a need to bring new people into the organisation. This process, known as selection, involves the task of finding and choosing people who are likely to succeed in a certain job or range of jobs. Clearly this involves some form of prediction and, as many have discovered, predicting the future is notoriously difficult and prone to inaccuracy. Our task in selection is to be as accurate as possible within the constraints of our resources.

Selection from the organisation's point of view involves finding people who will accept the job, who will perform well in that job and who will remain with the organisation for a reasonable length of time. A further objective might be that they are suitable for promotion at some stage in the future. From the candidate's viewpoint, selection involves finding a job with the organisation that fulfils the person's needs for money, security, challenge, etc. Selection is thus a two-way process which can only be considered successful if both the organisation and the candidate are reasonably happy with the outcome.

The selection process comprises a series of stages. Interviewing is a key element in this process but cannot be considered in isolation. An interview without the support of the whole selection process will almost certainly give a poor result. The practical outcome will be a person in the wrong job. This will pose problems for the organisation and for the person appointed. It will also impose considerable costs on the organisation.

These costs will include: inefficiency, lost managerial time correcting poor performance, lost training costs, staff turnover costs, loss of morale in work groups with poor performance, etc. We have all worked with someone who has been incorrectly selected into the organisation and have suffered the consequences.

Ironically, every single person within the organisation has been positively chosen to be there; they are not there by accident, somebody decided they were suitable. Therefore, the selection decision then, has a crucial impact on the success of the organisation in the near future and for a long time to come. This course describes a series of steps to make selection as objective a process as possible. This is probably the best chance we have of avoiding the worst selection decisions and being acceptably sure that we are making the right choices.



## Objectives

Our aim on this course is to provide the structure and skills necessary to select the right person with an acceptable level of accuracy. This involves knowing about the job to be filled and the type of person best suited to doing that job well. It also entails finding out whether a person has what is needed to do the job; assessing their suitability.

By the end of this course each person attending will be able to:

- Define the stages of the selection process
- Define a job to be filled
- Define the type of person suitable for that job
- Conduct interviews to determine suitability
- Make effective selection decisions



## 2 - The Job

### a) **Justify the job**

The need for a person should be justified within the organisation. This helps to prevent 'empire building' and also forces a reassessment of the job and its context. Is the job really necessary or can it be covered adequately by reorganising or reallocating other jobs?

### b) **Define the Job**

If the job is necessary, what does it entail? What are the duties and responsibilities attached to the job? It is essential to know the details of the job to select someone to do it. The normal method of doing this is through a Job Description.



## JOB DESCRIPTION

### Background

Job Title  
Function / division / department  
Reporting to (boss)  
Reported to by (staff)

### Nature of the Job

What are the main duties?  
What are the occasional duties?  
What responsibility is carried? - upwards, downwards, for materials, machinery, etc.  
What authority is exercised?  
Who are the main contacts?  
What is communicated and how?

### Difficulties

What are the main sources of difficulty in the job?  
What aspects of the job are likely to prove difficult?  
What mistakes are commonly made?

### Distastes

What aspects of the job are found to be distasteful?  
Are there any aspects of the job which people avoid doing?  
Is there anything in the job which prompts people to ask for a change?  
Have 'reasons for leaving' thrown any light on job satisfaction?

### Compensation

What aspects of the job are especially satisfying?  
What aspects of the job bring a sense of real achievement?

Other items which are sometimes included in the job description are: salary, terms and conditions, prospects and training.

Although the job description is an essential aid for selection, it should not be drawn up in a bureaucratic manner which leads to a lack of flexibility for the job holder. Job descriptions also need to be updated regularly to reflect what the job holder actually does - not what the boss thinks he/she does!



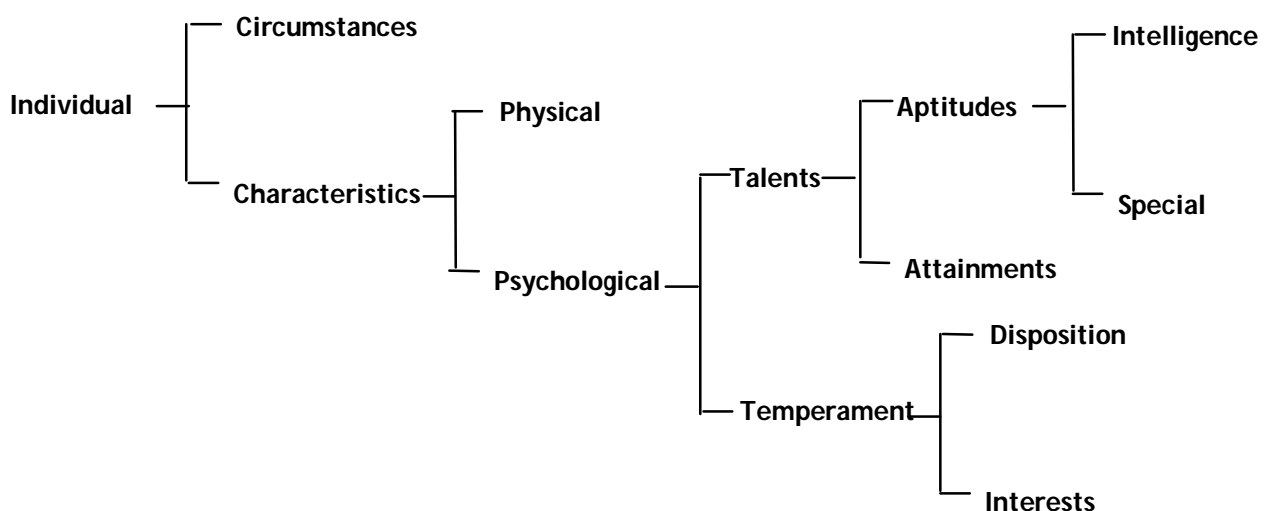
### 3 - The Person

The person specification is an extension of the job description. It not only tells you about the job but also provides a blueprint of the 'ideal' person to do that job, by detailing the personal attributes and qualities associated with successful performance on the job.

This profile needs to be placed in a systematic framework to ensure consistency and reliability. There are a number of different frameworks but the one used here is known as the Seven Point Plan.

The plan starts by acknowledging that each individual is a mixture of this/her genetic background and the environment in which he/she live and has lived. The person's general circumstances form his/her background and include things like current salary, family circumstances, distance from work, etc.

The individual's personal characteristics divide into physical and psychological attributes. The physical covers health, stamina, appearance, etc. The psychological splits into two main areas: the capacities or talents of the individual; and inclinations or temperament. How this leads to the Seven Point Plan is shown below.



This framework helps us to define what the 'ideal' person for the job would be like and then to design the selection process to find that person or someone acceptably close to the ideal. Note that only those factors which have a bearing on the job will be of interest to us.

## **The Seven Points are:**

### **1 Circumstances**

Circumstances covers current and past situations in the candidate's life. These include: family background, current salary, where s/he lives, current job, marital status, etc. Many of these items will have no bearing on the job and are therefore outside the selection process. Many of them cannot be explored in the selection process due to anti-discrimination legislation.

### **2 Physical**

What physical attributes are required to do the job? This includes health, age, speech, stamina, eyesight, hearing, etc. It also includes appearance, dress, bearing, etc.

### **3 Attainments**

What skills and achievements are necessary for someone to do this job well? What type of education and to what level? This includes exams passed, qualifications attained and work or other experience. What sort of skills are needed and to what extent? Other achievements may also be desirable as showing aspects of character e.g. if we are looking for someone with natural leadership qualities, it would clearly be desirable if they had held positions of leadership at some stage.

### **4 General Intelligence**

The level of intelligence required is crucial to any job. A certain ability and alertness is essential to any job but other areas may also be important e.g. how quickly the person picks up new ideas, how the/she thinks (rationally, creatively), how well he/she transfers theory into practice, etc. It is tempting to over-specify intelligence by defining every job as requiring people who are highly intelligent. This, however, is a mistake. Most jobs do not require high levels of intelligence; many jobs don't even require average intelligence. To put someone of high intelligence into a mundane and undemanding job is to ask them to be unhappy in the job and to leave fairly quickly.



## 5 Special Aptitudes

Aptitudes - skills or talents - need to be considered separately from intelligence. It is possible to be stupid in the general sense of that word, but to have a highly-developed but specialised talent. For selection purposes, the most likely aptitudes to be needed are: understanding mechanical principles, judging spatial relationships, making and manipulating objects, artistic ability, skill with figures and verbal fluency.

## 6 Disposition

There are something like 18,000 terms in the English language which can be used to describe one aspect or another of a person's disposition. This is where most difficulties arise as we try to describe the personality of the ideal candidate. There are so many different words yet most of these are imprecise and immeasurable. The concept of disposition can be reduced to four headings:

- **Acceptability to other people.** This is clearly important for any job which involves dealing with the public. The person would need to be polite, friendly, etc.
- **Influence on other people.** This would apply to any job where there is an element of persuasion or negotiation, e.g. sales, managers, etc.
- **Self-reliance.** The ability to work on one's own initiative without close supervision.
- **Dependability.** For jobs which have an element of risk, the person needs to be reliable and dependable. This would include all jobs which handle cash.

The key to defining the disposition required for a job is to describe the disposition in terms of 'people doing things' other than abstract qualities. No one has ever seen a disposition. The only thing that can be observed is the actions that people take as a result of having a certain disposition.

## 7 Interests

There are very few jobs for which a particular interest is a requirement. The priesthood might be an exception! However, a person's interests do reflect his/her character and so can be useful in selection. Does the job need someone who is intellectual, practical, physically active, social, artistic? A person's interests will help to confirm these attributes.



Using the headings from the **Seven Point Plan**, we are now in a position to extract from the job description a profile of the person we require. For each point we can now list the attributes required under three headings:

- **Essential** is for those attributes which the job holder must have. Someone who does not have an essential attribute is not going to get the job.
- **Desirable** is for those attributes which it would be useful for the job holder to have. Be realistic about what is really desirable, otherwise everyone in the organisation will need a PhD in order to do his/her job.
- **Contra Indicator** is an undesirable attribute, a negative.



## 4 - Decide on a Rating System

Having defined what we are looking for in a candidate, we must now decide on a way of rating the candidates against these criteria. A five point scale is frequently used, for example:

- 5 - Completely meets this criterion**
- 4 - Mostly meets this criterion**
- 3 - Just about acceptable on this criterion**
- 2 - Below the minimum requirement.**
- 1 - Unsuitable on this criterion.**

The candidate will be rated on each of the desirable, essential and contra-indicators in the Seven Point Plan with contra-indicators scoring negatively.

The criteria will not all have the same importance and, therefore, should carry different weights in our decision process. A simple multiplier (e.g. "essential" items score double) can work well, or a more complex weighting, with allowance for importance and frequency, can be used.

The reason we are going to all this trouble before we look at any candidates is to set up a rational and objective system for selection. By defining the job and the person to fit it and by deciding beforehand how we are going to assess each candidate, we are hoping to eliminate much of the bias inherent in selection.



## 5 Seek Applicants

Now, for the first time, we are in a position to look for candidates. Up to now we have concentrated exclusively on the job and what it requires; we have been able to ignore the people who will be involved in the selection process. Selection, however, is a two-way decision process. The organisation has to decide who to select, and the candidate has to decide whether to accept the organisation and its job. From here on, all stages of the selection process must be designed and implemented with a view to their impact on potential employees, the candidates.

Having defined the job and how we are going to rate the candidates, we need to attract a pool of suitable candidates from which to choose. There are many sources of potential employees, some more costly than others. These include:

- Internal sources, either from employees or their family and friends
- Word of mouth via employees
- Past applications on file. (Only use the more recent ones.)
- Schools and colleges for graduates or school leavers
- Government agencies like FÁS
- Advertising, locally, nationally, or internationally
- Employment agencies

They are arranged in order of increasing cost, though not necessarily in order of increasing quality. Professional and trade journals can be a very good source of candidates for specialist posts.

Applications can come in a huge variety of formats and it may be helpful, at later stages of the process, to try to standardise the incoming applications. CV's can be anything from one to ten pages and will not all contain the same information nor be presented in a consistent way; indeed much of the information offered may not be relevant to the job at all. Standard application forms give you the chance to specify the information you require, as well as the order and format in which you want it.



## 6 - Screen Applicants

Having got people to apply, we need to conduct an initial screening to eliminate those candidates who are clearly unsuitable for this job. This is a purely mechanical task and involves going through the applications and comparing them against the person specification.

Those who do not have the 'essential' attributes are eliminated. The remaining applications can then be rated using the rating scheme already decided. Some thought needs to be given to this screening process. It can be fairly daunting to process a large number of applications.

Firstly, a very clear person specification will be needed so the essential criteria are known.

Secondly, some sort of screening sheet will be needed to help record the ratings.

Thirdly, this rating sheet needs to describe the different ratings and what they mean.

### Testing Applicants

It is possible to test for some of the attributes e.g. health, colour vision, manual dexterity, speed and accuracy, intelligence, etc. This may be very worthwhile expenditure if the attribute is critical and a wrong decision would be very detrimental.

The most valuable tests are those which simulate a piece of the job itself; these are known as work samples.

Firstly, they are more realistic than classroom or pen and paper tests. Secondly, they give candidates a taste of the job. This allows the candidates to assess for themselves whether they are good at the job and also whether they like the job. Those candidates who do not want the job then remove themselves from contention.



Work sample tests are expensive to set up, but simple versions can be easily organised.

The work experience that many students do is effectively a work sample. Provided it is properly supervised and assessed, it serves very well to test some of the attributes the person will need for the job.

The other major area of testing is personal and interpersonal attributes e.g. psychological testing, team profiling, management exercises. These are designed to test for attributes which are not easily detected in other assessments. Though widely used as aids in making selection decisions, the evidence regarding their accuracy in predicting job behaviour is far from impressive.

There is no test for completely general application and it is necessary to undertake a detailed study of the position for which the candidate is going to be tested. A test is only useful if one knows exactly what one is testing and what minimum score is needed for the job. This kind of testing is also expensive to administer and interpret and usually requires the services of a consultant or psychologist.



## 7 - Organising Interviews

At this stage, we have rated our applicants against some (or many) of the criteria defined in the person specification. We now pick those we want to interview; normally those with the highest scores on our ratings as well as one or two "idiosyncratic" choices. These are people who have a very different set of attributes from the bulk of the candidates but who might prove suitable. They are included to provide some contrast. Interviewing 20 recently qualified graduates can be very daunting because they are all so similar in background and attributes. Inclusion of a candidate who went to college at night after travelling around the world can be helpful for comparing candidates. He/she may also be the best person for the job!

The interview is one of the key points at which the candidates appraise the organisation. Is it the sort of place in which they want to work? The way in which the interview is organised has a large bearing on this appraisal. Make sure that:

- Candidates are contacted in plenty of time and that the notification makes the right impression
- A suitable venue is booked and set up
- All those involved are informed and prepared
- Security and reception are informed and ready for candidates e.g. name badges
- The interviewers are scheduled and prepared
- The whole process projects an image of a well-run organisation in which the candidates would want to work

There are a number of possibilities for layout of the interview room. The traditional method of having the interviewee face the interviewer(s) across a table or desk is rather formal. The desk acts as a barrier and it can be quite difficult to build up any rapport with the candidate. A round table or the corner of a table can be less formal and probably more productive in getting information. Side by side, or with no table, may be too informal and may make the interviewer and interviewee feel uncomfortable.

Pressure layouts like having someone observe the candidate from behind, having the interviewers behind a table on a raised platform, or having interviewers on either side of the interviewee, are not advisable unless the ability to handle extreme personal pressure is a requirement for the job.



## 8 - Prepare for Interview

The interviewer(s) need to be prepared for each candidate.

This involves going over their application in detail and planning out a series of questions. The purpose of the questions is to fill in areas of the person specification which have not been answered by the application or to verify items in the application.

The key principle behind all interview questions is that they must relate to the job; they are looking for information about the attributes which are in the person specification. Any other question is superfluous.

The questions in an interview are like a rally in tennis. The opening question represents the service; the return is the reply and the next shot (determined by the return) is the probing or supplementary question; and so on. When preparing the interview questions, it is not possible or desirable to prepare every single question you are going to ask. That would be far too restrictive and would lead to a very poor interview.

What you do need to prepare are the opening questions.

The best way of doing this is to write a list of the things you wish to know, information you want to get from the candidate.

Arrange the items in this list into groups or topics. Then for each topic, design a starter question to open the topic which will be followed by additional questions until you have obtained the information you were seeking.

It is useful to put these questions and a statement of what you are trying to find out into some format which you will find easy to use during the interview.

Who or what the candidates are is of no interest to us. Throughout the interviewing process, we are only interested in finding out what the person can do or is likely to do. All our questioning should be designed to find this out. When designing opening questions, there are two broad approaches you can use:



- **Experience** "Tell me about when you..." This first approach relies on the candidates having used the skills needed for this job at some time in their past. The questioning technique is to ask them to describe how they used these skills. Most people are very happy to talk about what they have done and are also very honest about it; it is fairly easy to detect those who are making it up. It is useful, if there is time, to ask them about their use of these skills in two contexts: when they were successful and unsuccessful. This gives further information about their response to failure, persistence and ability to learn from mistakes; all of which are applicable to most jobs.
- **Fantasy** "What would you do if..." This question is more prone to untruthful or fanciful answers than the experience question but will have to be used if the candidate has not had the experience to demonstrate a specific skill. Before using this approach, it is worth considering if they have had the opportunity to use the skill in question in a non-work or social setting. The skills and behaviour remain the same, regardless of the context.

Having prepared your starter questions, you will have to ask, unprepared, a series of follow-up questions until you have elicited all the information you want. There are a number of types of questions which are useful for this.



## 9 - Question Types

### A - Open Questions

The purpose of open questions is to allow the candidates to answer in whatever manner they choose, to encourage them to talk. They can be used to establish rapport, to explore broad background information and to open any topic in the interview.

Kipling described them thus:

*I keep six honest serving men  
(They taught me all I knew)  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who*

By their nature, open questions have a very broad range of possible answers. That is their strength and their weakness. They encourage people to talk but do not give much direction as to how they should be answered; we do not have control of the answer. Therefore, open questions will almost always need to be followed by narrower question types to direct the candidate to the answer we are seeking.

### B - Probing

They are used to encourage the candidate to keep talking on a particular topic, to seek further information, to explore specific details, to clarify and to regain control of the interview.

Listening noises like "Umm " and "Oh" together with appropriate facial expression will encourage the candidate to keep talking on that topic. So will "And then...?", "That's interesting...?" (i.e. tell me more). Repetition of one or two key words will have the same effect, as will repeating a reply as a further question, "You worked for Bloggs Ltd...?" Silence, with an appropriate facial expression e.g. raised eyebrows, will do the same. You can also ask straight questions like "Why?," "Why not?", "How do you mean?", "What makes you say that?"

A summary can demonstrate understanding, clarify information already given and regain control of the conversation. "So what you are saying is...?"



## **C - Closed Questions**

These are used to establish specific facts and information - and generally have only two answers, yes or no. They, thus, have a halting effect on the flow of the conversation and should only be used where necessary to get an answer which is not otherwise forthcoming. "Are you...?" "Do you ...?" "Have you...?"  
Other kind of closed questions could start with "How many...?" "How long...?"

## **D - Link Questions**

An interview should be as close as possible to a conversation. A series of open and closed questions can be very artificial. Therefore, link questions can be useful in making the transition from one type of question to another: e.g. "You mentioned just now that ... How did this affect your work?"

## **E - Questions to Avoid**

Do not use counter-productive questions. The aim is to get the candidate to talk, not to suggest right answers, or to embarrass, confuse, mislead or discourage them.

Leading questions suggest the answer the interviewer wants to hear e.g. "You don't really think that ... do you?" "I take it you believe that....?"

Multiple questions leave the candidate uncertain which question to answer, and questions which are too long may totally confuse. Rhetorical questions i.e. those that don't expect an answer, are not going to get you much information.

Trick and ambiguous questions will probably only serve to confuse and embarrass the candidate e.g. "Do you drink?"

Note that these question types should not be used on most candidates. However, if the person specification includes the handling of difficult questions e.g. press officer, or the need to remain calm under personal pressure, there may be a place for some of these kind of questions.



## F - Questions and the Law

The law currently forbids any practice in employment which would discriminate on the basis of sex. This precludes you from asking any questions of a woman which you would not ask of a man, or vice versa. This would include "Are you pregnant?" "Do you intend to start a family soon?", etc.

The new Equality Bill will, when passed, make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of a whole range of characteristics including: sex, marital status, age, parental status, sexual orientation, ethnic grouping.

However, none of this should have any impact on a good interviewer. The only questions we should be asking are to elicit information from the person specification; in other words, will this person be able to do the job well? Any other questions are unnecessary.

If in doubt, ask yourself if the information from this question about the job or not. If not, do not ask it; it is none of your business and could be illegal.

At this stage, the interviewer(s) have defined the topics for the interview and prepared the starter questions. Note that the starter questions may not be the same for each candidate and the follow-up questions certainly will not be. Each interviewer should also make sure that the time for the interviews is organised in his/her diary. It is not realistic to expect to be able to do good interviews while being interrupted.



## 10 - The Interview

The interview is an opportunity to impress candidates as well as to assess them. On the day of the interview, everything must be done to ensure that the occasion gives an impression of a well-run organisation that people would like to work in. This is covered in organising the interview above.

### Opening the Interview

The interview should start on time and should open with introductions. Remember that you have the advantage of a written reminder of the candidate's name while he/she is nervous, meeting you for the first time and with nothing to help recall your name. Find opportunities to repeat your name in the first few minutes of the interview or use a name card to help the candidate.

The initial job of the interviewer is to establish a rapport which will enable the candidate to communicate comfortably and easily. There are a number of aspects to this rapport:

- Small talk to relax the candidate. This should be done in a way which is natural for the interviewer, the same way you would do it in a chance encounter on a bus or in a pub.
- Do not judge too quickly. Research shows that we make up our minds about people with frightening rapidity. Within one minute we have made an impression; within four minutes, our impression is enduring and difficult to change. As an interviewer, this would suggest that interviews should only last for four minutes! Keep an open mind as long for as possible.
- Use good body language. Your impressions of a person are reflected in your body language and tend to make those impressions self-fulfilling.
- Once you feel the candidate has settled down, you can gradually move into the interview itself. One way is to explain what is going to happen: who they will see, whether there will be a test, etc. This can be followed by explaining your role as interviewer.



## Interview Structure

While an interview should resemble a conversation, it should be a planned and directed conversation. It should not ramble all over the place with no discernible plan. You have to plan how you wish to cover the topics and impose that plan onto the interview. There are three approaches to structuring an interview:

- **Biographical** Taking the person through his/her application in chronological order and working up to the present. This is particularly suitable for school leavers and graduates since all their experience is potentially valid for the job and the chronological sequence makes sense.
- **Reverse Biographical** The same as biographical, but in reverse order, starting with the current position and working backwards as far as is useful. This is more appropriate for older candidates for whom the early experiences may no longer be valid for selection. For example, the schooling of a 40 year old is unlikely to be of any great interest to an employer, whereas the current job is.
- **Seven Point Plan** Another approach is to use the headings of the Seven Point Plan, starting with circumstances, physical, etc. This can work very well but is difficult to keep on track. There will be a tendency for the different topics to get mixed in the course of conversation. This itself is not important but it can be difficult for the interviewer to be sure that everything has been covered.

## Questioning

The various types of questions have been dealt with above. Each topic is started by you with an open starter questions, e.g. "Tell me about your current job." As the candidate answers, further questions will be needed. Ideally these should be as open as possible, but if the candidate is not giving the information you want, use closed questions. The important thing is not to give up until you have the information you are seeking. The ideal is that the candidate does most of the talking while you guide the conversation gently by using the various question types. This means you can spend your time listening and taking note of the answers. Be alert for information about different topics on your interview plan.



## Taking Notes

In even a short interview, you are not going to remember what the candidate said and, if you are doing several interviews, you will be totally muddled by the end. Therefore, you need to take some kind of notes as the interview progresses. The best way is to lay out your starter questions and the information you are seeking in a format which makes it easy for you to make very brief notes during the interview. These may be tick marks, question marks, single words or short phrases. It is useful to practise a personal shorthand which enables you to take notes without disrupting the interview. Make a note at the top of the page about the physical appearance of the candidate. Note some distinguishing feature which will help you remember them later e.g. spiky red hair, etc. A photograph is even better for this purpose and should be considered as part of the application process, particularly where appearance is important for the job. It is polite to tell the candidate that you are going to take notes and to tell them why.

## Ending the Interview

As you get towards the end of the interview, check that all the areas have been covered and that you have all the information you need. There is nothing wrong with pausing for a few moments in silence while you check through your notes; it is much better than discovering, after the candidate is gone, that you do not have a crucial item of information. Once you are finished, tell the candidate about the job. This can also be done at the beginning of the interview but the candidate is unlikely to take it in due to nerves. Encourage the candidate to ask questions, though this is very difficult for the candidate. He/she will find it hard to think clearly due to the pressure of the situation and may ask mundane or prepared questions.

He/she candidate is also making an assessment of you and the organisation. They may have decided the job is no longer of interest. Rather than waste any more time, check if the candidate is still interested. Assuming the/she is, explain what will happen next and when. Thank the candidate and show him/her out.



## Problems with Interviews

Interviewing is difficult. The interviewer is trying to predict the performance of another human being in a completely different context. The interviewee is nervous; and possibly so is the interviewer. A number of common problems arise:

- **Primacy and Recency:** When interviewing a number of candidates, it is very easy for them to all merge into one undifferentiated mass. The only ones we are likely to remember are the first candidate interviewed and the last. The best way to avoid this is to make good notes after each interview and include a personal description to help recall.
- **Halo Effect:** This is a happy and imaginative phrase to describe the tendency to assume that because a candidate is neat, clean, tidy and smiles readily while agreeing with all you say, he or she is also honest, intelligent, full of initiative, has powers of leadership and creative ideas. Confidence tricksters rely on this human failing of judging the whole person from only seeing a sample.
- **Self Identification:** "Anyone like me must be OK." This may be, but is the candidate suitable for the job in question? Again, sticking to the person specification helps but it is important to recognise that your attitude to a candidate will be detected and also that behaviour breeds behaviour.
- **Bias and Discrimination:** We are all biased. We like some sorts of people and dislike others for no apparent reason other than that we have learnt to. There is no place for bias in the selection process. Identify the types of people toward whom you are biased, positively and negatively, and be especially careful when interviewing them. Stick very closely to the person specification and try to minimise the effects of your attitude on the way you conduct the interview.
- **Gut Feeling:** "I know a good person when I see one, I don't need to do all this interviewing stuff." Unfortunately the research is unequivocal in stating that most of the time our judgements of other people are wrong and that we delude ourselves into thinking we are accurate. Use the person specification!



- **Nerves:** In an interview, both the interviewee and interviewer may be affected by nerves. Nervous tension affects people differently.

They may:

- Talk too much without stopping. This will ruin the interview if it is the interviewer who is so affected. If the candidate talks too much, it is up to the interviewer to control the conversation.
  - Become quiet. Some people find it very difficult to talk at all if they are nervous. It is up to the interviewer to set the tone of the interview in a way which relaxes the candidate. Mirroring body language can also help.
  - Fidget. Most of us have physical and verbal mannerisms which become more obvious when we are nervous. These are easily seen on video and can be avoided with practice. As a general rule, do not hold anything in your hands at an interview because you will start playing with it! If you are taking notes, you will obviously need a pen but do not use a biro that clicks.
  - Not think straight. Nerves affect our ability to concentrate and to absorb information. Much of what you say will not be remembered by your candidates if they are nervous. This may include your name, details of the job, etc. Make allowances by checking that they have understood or by repeating the information.
- **Poor Interviewing:** The most common reason for bad interviews is the interviewer.

Each of these can be improved by following the steps in this course and by remembering the purpose of the interview is to get enough information from the candidate to allow you to make sound selection decisions.



## 11 - Body Language

Research has shown that less than half of the meaning we pick up in spoken conversation comes from the words themselves. More than half comes from the tone of voice and the non-verbal signals known as body language. For an interviewer, good body language involves:

**Eye Contact:** Look at the person when you are talking to him/her and when he/she is talking to you. It make the candidate feel that you are listening, and gives you the opportunity to get feedback about his/her response to the conversation. Eye contact does not mean staring at someone. Let your eyes scan the triangle on the person's face bounded by the eyebrows and the mouth.

Normally, do not hold the gaze for more than three seconds, particularly with people you do not know very well. Look, then break the gaze briefly. Any violation of this rule can generate a negative impression, even though the person receiving the message is unable to explain the reason for his/her feelings.

Always break eye contact downward, unless it is your deliberate intention to convey a lack of interest or to throw someone temporarily off balance.

**Handshake:** Keep your hand dry and apply a moderate pressure for around three to four seconds. Make eye contact, smile and break the eye contact downwards.

**Personal Space:** Be careful never to stand too close to someone. For most people that means never going closer than about one metre or so. Any encroachment is likely to be very uncomfortable for the person and he/she will usually respond by backing away from you. Note that the safe distance is strongly associated with culture and with an urban or rural background; rural people like more space. Once rapport has been achieved, you can safely stand a little closer, but be aware of any body movements which show that a person is uncomfortable, and back off accordingly.



**Seating:** Never stand when someone else is sitting, unless it is your intention to dominate or intimidate them. Avoid deep armchairs, since this will limit your ability to use your body language to send out signals. When chairs are moved, the rules for personal distance still apply, although you can get away with sitting slightly closer than if you were standing.

**Gestures:** Open gestures are more welcoming and encouraging, whereas closed gestures e.g. folded arms, are defensive and discourage the other person. These gestures can be communicated by arms and legs. Hand gestures also send signals. Putting your hands behind your head or 'steeping', in which the fingers are joined to look like a church, both send the message that you feel in control - which can be off-putting for the person you are talking to.

### **Reading other people's body language**

- Approach each encounter with an open mind. Avoid too many preconceptions about what you are going to see. We tend to make up our minds about people far too quickly, usually in less than four minutes.
- Do not pay too much attention to faces. While they can provide some silent clues, their "silence-speak" signals are most often concealed and easiest to fake.
- Detect anxiety by looking at feet and hands. Inner tensions can be relieved by small, subconsciously controlled movements.
- Liars betray themselves in several ways. Watch for fewer-than-normal gestures and increased actions such as rubbing of the hands, pulling or stroking of ears, nose or cheeks. The nose rub and eye touch are especially revealing. Deceptions involving hostility can be detected by aggressive movements of the hands, feet or mouth.
- Be careful when interpreting body language. The rules here are very general and apply to most people. However, they are strongly affected by culture and upbringing.

Assess your own body language by 'watching yourself', asking your friends or colleagues to observe you, or by seeing yourself on video. Even when you are saying nothing, you are sending messages and these are picked up at some level by the interviewees.



## 12 - After the Interview

As soon as the interview is over, record your assessment. Plan to have a short time between interviews to make a more complete record of the information you have collected, and your rating of the candidate against the criteria in the person specification. Many organisations design an interview recording sheet to help with this process. When all the interviews have been completed, compare the candidates. This should be based primarily on the weighted ratings, though a certain amount of subjectivity will inevitably remain.

Make the decision based on the information you have. If you need to verify information e.g. references, do so. It is advisable to check at least some of the more pertinent details before offering someone a job.

Send a letter of offer to the person you have chosen, outlining the terms and conditions under which he/she would be employed. Once the candidate signs and returns this, it becomes the formal contract of employment. Send regret letters to those who did not get the job, thanking them for turning up for the interview. You may wish to delay sending letters to the candidates who came second and third, just in case your first choice turns down the offer.



## 13 - Evaluating the Selection Process

As with any other process, it is important to evaluate how well the selection process is working. Unfortunately, the results do not become apparent until some time after we have made a selection decision. The criteria for evaluating selection include:

- Staff turnover - especially in the short term or at the end of any probationary period.
- Labour costs
- Absenteeism
- Timekeeping
- Errors in work
- Breakage's, scrap or waste
- Accidents at work
- Complaints from customers
- Promotions
- Disciplinary or grievance incidents
- Dismissals
- Number of suitable candidates applying for positions
- Proportion of candidates accepting job offers

Information might also be obtained from feedback from candidates, staff attitude surveys, performance appraisal schemes and exit interviews.

