

INTERVIEWS

Prepare a set of questions and/or prompts for the candidates that will help you discern among the candidates you interview. Keep in mind that “a poor candidate can answer a poor question very well” (Cullinan, 2017).

Each question should be carefully developed to give you more in-depth information about how the candidate excels in the criteria you listed in the job description. Avoid general questions that lead to general and generic answers. General answers are open to implicit biases by committee members. Interview questions are an excellent tool with which to gather examples and evidence of how the candidate’s experience and talent will benefit the department/unit and the institution.

Essential Questions (as your committee constructs interview questions):

- How are these interview questions related to the criteria set in the job description?
- Are the questions specific, and will they provide the information we seek to gain?
- Are our questions in the right order, and are they specific and clear?
- Are the questions designed in a way that makes them equitable to all candidates?
- Are the questions designed in a way that will help reveal the experiences and expertise of each candidate regarding issues of diversity, equity and inclusion?
- For each of the proposed questions, is the committee clear on what constitutes an excellent answer? A good answer? A poor answer? (The committee will need to spend some time discussing the questions and the quality of potential answers).

Best Practices for Constructing Questions:

The committee should spend some time generating questions for the interview phase and developing an evaluation rubric in advance.

- a. See Step Resources for examples of interview questions that address qualifications pertaining to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- b. See Step Resources for a guide on legal vs. discriminatory interview questions.

Interview questions should be directly connected to the required and desired qualifications for the position. The questions should be designed to give a more in-depth perspective as to the candidate’s experience and ability to meet the qualifications.

Create questions that prompt candidates to provide specific information such as examples, concrete evidence, clear outcomes, etc. of the topic or criteria you are asking about. Try to obtain information that can be clearly evaluated using a predesigned rubric of what constitutes a good or an excellent answer.

Consider what evidence you still need in order to determine whether the candidate meets the required and preferred qualifications after the application review stage. Each candidate will likely have different evidence gaps. Make sure you are asking questions that will help gather the appropriate evidence for each candidate.

For example, the committee might need evidence pertaining to teaching experience for candidate A. For candidate B, the committee might need evidence pertaining to advising experience. If both candidates move on to the interview stage, make sure you are asking questions that help you gather evidence and gain clarity regarding teaching **AND** advising. Avoid writing questions that will produce evidence for only a subset of the candidates to be interviewed.

Best Practices for Conducting the Interview:

Identify for the candidate the equity advocate, and communicate to the candidate that they are welcome to reach out to the equity advocate if they have questions or concerns.

Be mindful of *who* asks the diversity-related questions in the interview. If the committee lacks diverse representation, then having someone from an underrepresented group ask the diversity question can tokenize your colleague and communicate to the candidate a lack of commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Ensure that the same questions are asked of every candidate.

Provide the list of prepared questions and prompts to each candidate before the interview. This communicates that we are seeking a thoughtful response, not just a first reaction (Cullinan, et. al, 2019).

Determine the questions you want to ask, then decide on the length of the interview with the search committee. Give adequate time for strong answers to develop. This step should not be done in the reverse order and is often overlooked. That is, one should not first decide how long the interview should be and then design the questions. The content of the interview is more critical than fitting the interview into a pre-determined time frame.

The committee should do a quick practice run on asking the questions. This will help the committee hear how the questions sound and give them time to make any adjustments in advance before the candidates get the finalized questions.

If there is a need for contemporaneous questions or exercises, then make sure this is communicated in advance to the candidate along with what the questions are designed to demonstrate in terms of the qualifications for the position. These questions are also to be submitted in advance to the office of human resources.

For example, perhaps the work will involve spontaneous conversations about some controversial topic. You might tell interviewing candidates that this is a part of the job and that they should prepare to answer some questions like those they are likely to experience. Give the candidates what they need to prepare so that they are in a work-like situation.

Another example: If the job that one is hiring for does not require being able to spontaneously describe one's own theological commitments, then it is recommended to give the candidate the question in advance so that they can prepare and provide their best answer.

If the questions are well-structured, specific, complete, and given in advance; then there is usually little need for follow-up questions. Follow-up questions are discouraged since they lead to non-equitable treatment of candidates and the responses can activate unconscious biases. Moreover, it can potentially lead to inequitable treatment since some candidates may be given more opportunities to demonstrate their qualifications.

The committee members will be given an interview scoring guide for each candidate. Each question should be printed on one page, and the rest of the page should provide a quantitative way of evaluating and scoring the answer based on the rubric. The page should also include space for the committee members to write extensive notes to be used during the discussion of the candidates. Create the expectation that every member should take notes to avoid making decisions based on memory of candidate responses. All important information should be in the notes.

Important Note: Pay attention to your non-verbal communication (e.g., looking at a phone, tone of communication and eye contact) as this can say a lot about your interest in a candidate.