

A Word About Diversity

Interviewers must always be aware of the value of building a **diverse workforce** and must guard against the natural tendency to favor candidates who are similar to themselves. Such a hiring strategy can stifle the introduction of diverse points of view and undermine service to a diverse client population. As institutional gatekeepers with decision-making power, we must continually think about the need for fairness in the selection process and the necessity for change in our areas.

For most organizations, **diversity involves creating an inclusive organization where the differences of all people are respected, valued and utilized towards achieving common goals.** Differences people bring to the work environment include race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, geographic background, education, economic background and thinking and communication styles. See our [Non-Discrimination Statement](#).

Selecting diverse candidates to fill vacancies introduces the potential for change; challenges us to change our perceptions and be more open, flexible, and inclusive. Diversity can enrich and strengthen our organizations. Diversity has many benefits: differing perspectives can generate new ideas, improve communication and innovation, and propel organizational growth and development.

ESF is strongly committed to recruit, select, develop, and promote employees based on individual merit. We continually seek to build and maintain a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of our world. **All** selection processes, including **interviews**, must be based on fairness, open competition and a commitment to diversity.

As you rate each candidate, please keep in mind these tips on how to Avoid Rating Errors

- Focus on only one question (behavior or competency) rating factor at a time.
- Keep the rating independent of any other factors.
- Record exactly what is observed in the interview.
- Focus on comparing candidate responses with scale benchmarks, and rate solely on that comparison.
- **Do not compare the candidates between interviews; this step will be taken after all interviews are completed.**

Dr. Malika Carter, Chief Diversity Officer

Common Interview Pitfalls (Source: State of Oklahoma)

It is important that individual interviewers and those participating on an interview panel become aware of these common personal behaviors and strive to avoid them:

<p>Halo Effect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forming an overall favorable impression of a candidate based upon his/her responses to only one or two questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfairness to the First Up Research by Robert Half International has shown that the first person interviewed is least likely to get the job. Use the same objective criteria for all candidates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leniency Effect or Stringency Effect The tendency to give all candidates a high or low rating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking Too Much (80/20 rule) The tendency of the interviewer(s) to talk more than the candidate. <i>Your goal is to solicit information about the candidate.</i> As a rule, the interviewer(s) should talk no more than 20% of the time; the candidate should talk at least 80% of the time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Tendency Effect The tendency to rate all candidates in the middle of the rating scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rescuing Often, there will be periods of silence from a candidate. Interviewer(s) are tempted to “rescue” the candidate by filling the silence with conversation or trying to answer the question for the candidate. In reality, the candidate may be using the silence to gather his thoughts and frame his answer. Be patient and resist the urge to talk.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm Body Syndrome The tendency to hire someone, anyone, as soon as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Bias The tendency to allow non job-related prejudices and attitudes about cultural stereotypes, lifestyles, personalities, appearances, or other irrelevant perceptions to affect the rating of candidate responses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversell The tendency to enhance the realities of the job to snag a well-qualified candidate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attractive Person Bias The tendency to select attractive people regardless of qualifications.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendship Factor The tendency to rely heavily upon personal references of your friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Similarity Bias The tendency to rate individuals with interests, background, or experiences that are similar to the interviewer’s more favorably than other applicants.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memory Fade Recollection of the first candidate and the rest seem like a blur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good Interview Bias The tendency to hire someone who can express themselves well or interview well.

ESF Interview Questions – Sample and Unlawful

The Human Resources Office should review the committee interview questions to ensure they are job relevant and lawful.

Part One – Sample Interview Questions

Part Two – Unlawful Interview Questions – What you may NOT ask

Part Three - Pre-employment Inquiries and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Part One - Sample Interview Questions

Sample questions are provided to help committees determine if the candidates have the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the work. When conducting a job search at the College, the search committee should devise a list of questions that will be asked of all candidates. A patterned interview with every candidate allows the search committee to make the best comparisons, ensures that each candidate is treated fairly, and minimizes unconscious biases. Although most of the questions asked of each applicant will be the same, each applicant is different and it is acceptable to ask different questions of the applicants when necessary.

Several court decisions* have ruled that interview questions must be clearly job-related. These decisions relate the importance of a job analysis for all selection devices, especially job interviews. Also, federal government guidelines consider the employment interview to be an employee selection device just as a written test is a selection device. Therefore, it is very important to document your job analysis, record the sources of all job information, and when and how the information was obtained. Do this even if you are developing information for your own interviews.

* *EEOC v. Rath Packing* (1986), *King v. TWA* (1984), *Harless v. Duck* (1980), *Reynolds v. Sheet Metal Workers* (1980), *Weiner v. County of Oakland* (1976)

Employers may legally ask questions that are job-related. The committee should also develop questions for job specific technical competencies to ensure the applicant has the level of knowledge sought. If the committee needs assistance in creating questions, contact the Human Resources Office.

The following interview questions are listed by category: Education, Work Experience, and Competency Based (skills, behaviors, knowledge).

Education Questions

- What is the highest level of education you have attained?
- What were the high points and low points of your education?
- What were your most significant achievements?
- How have you applied what you learned in school?
- What was most rewarding?
- What did you like best/least?

- How did your education influence your career choice? (If the course work taken does not support the current job objective, ask the candidate why he/she is interested in the position if it is unrelated to previous schooling.)

Sometimes you can save time by obtaining this information from the application or resume. Don't waste valuable interview time allowing the applicant to merely repeat facts stated in the application or resume.

Work Experience Questions

While the detailed questioning of employment history should focus on recent employment, ask the applicant to summarize all work history to ensure it is accurately presented.

- Describe a typical workday/typical responsibilities and time spent in these areas. What are the most and least enjoyable aspects of the job?
- What were the most significant challenges you faced and how did you handle them?
- What were your greatest accomplishments?
- What were the most significant mistakes you made, and how did you handle those?
- What special skills and knowledge do you need to perform your duties?
- What type of special training or experience have you had that makes you a good candidate for the position?
- Why have you left your previous jobs or why are you looking to leave? (Note: Don't accept the typical response of better opportunity or greater challenge. Probe and ask what specifically motivated the person to start looking for another opportunity. What is specifically dissatisfying or missing from the current situation?)
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this job?
- Please describe the scope of your experience relevant to the position.
- Tell us about your work with students, faculty, department chairs, deans, or other persons that are relevant to the position.

Key Competency Questions

Teaching Skills Philosophy

- Describe your teaching philosophy. Provide an example of how you have implemented the philosophy within the classroom.
- Provide an example of a time when you adapted your style to deal with a diverse student population.
- Describe a teaching technique you found to be effective. Contrast that with a technique you found ineffective. Provide a specific example.
- What technology do you use to enhance your teaching?
- How do you integrate multicultural perspectives into your teaching?

Student Focus

- Describe a recent positive interaction with a student. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Describe a recent negative interaction with a student. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- What types of information do you keep on your students and how do you get this information?
- What have you done to build the trust and respect of your students?

- Tell me about a time when you provided poor service to a student.
- Have you ever tried to go beyond the expectations of a student? What motivated you to do this? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when a student came to you with a request or concern, and you managed the situation from beginning to end. What steps did you take to respond to the situation? Who did you involve? How did you know closure was reached and the student was properly taken care of?

Interpersonal Skills

- How do you build relationships with others?
- Describe an experience you have had dealing with a difficult person in the past year and how you handled the situation.
- Describe a situation where you persuaded others to go along with an idea you felt strongly about? What was the outcome?
- Describe a coworker or administrator from your past that you enjoyed working with. Why did you enjoy the working relationship?
- Tell me about a coworker or coworkers you had difficulty interacting with. Describe a situation. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a person who had more authority over you that you found difficult. Describe a specific situation and how you felt and what you did.
- Tell me about a person who had authority over you that you enjoyed working with. What qualities did that person possess that you admired?
- Sometimes in both our personal and professional lives, people need words of encouragement. Tell me about a time that you were able to provide that to someone and make a difference. What motivated you to help? How did the person react? What was the outcome?

Dealing with Change

- Tell us about a time when you worked for a department experiencing a lot of change. How did you deal with it?
- Has an administrator provided you with too much or too little detailed instruction regarding a task? If so, provide a specific example. What did you do?
- Tell us about a time you had to make a quick decision about something significant. What was the experience like?
- Tell us about a time you dealt with a new situation or problem that was unlike those you have experienced before.

Teamwork

- What don't you like about being part of a team or group? What do you like about being a part of a team?
- Have you ever worked with someone who didn't carry his or her weight and how did you handle it?
- Do you feel you have gotten the credit you deserved for your work when you have worked on a team? Explain.
- Tell us about a time you were working with a group of people to complete a task and the outcome was positive. What were you working on? What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Tell us about a time you were working with a group of people to complete a task and the outcome was negative. What were you working on? What was your role? What was the outcome?

Action Oriented/Takes Initiative

- Tell us about a project that you initiated. Describe the project. What was your involvement in completing the project? What was the outcome?
- What would you like to have done more of in your last job? What held you back?
- Tell us about suggestions you have made on the job to improve the way things worked? What was the result?
Tell us about a time when you reached out for additional responsibility.
- Give two examples of things you've done in your previous jobs that demonstrate your willingness to work hard.
- Have you ever gone ahead with something without getting approval? Tell us about it.
Tell us about a time when you identified an opportunity and did something about it even though you knew it would be very difficult or unpopular.

Assertiveness

- Tell us about your efforts to "sell" a new idea to your supervisor. How did you get what you wanted?
- Tell us about a time when you received poor service and how you handled it.
- Tell us about a time when you disagreed with your manager and how you resolved it?

Planning/Priority/Time Management

- How do you determine what you will do for the day?
- What do you do to ensure you accomplish your goals that go beyond the day to day routine?
How do you stay focused on priorities?
- What are your top three priorities at work right now?
How do you stay organized? What tools or techniques have you used?
- Tell us about a project where you demonstrated the use of organizational skills.
- Tell us about what kind of decisions you would make without consulting your administrator.
- Tell us about a time when you experienced an unanticipated interruption. How did it affect your day? How did you prioritize things? How did things work out?
- Tell us about a time that you had to manage multiple tasks simultaneously. Describe the situation. What did you do?

Problem Solving

- How much time do you spend solving problems? What type of problems? Name a problem that has come up recently and how you solved it. Did you involve anyone else in helping you solve the problem? How did the situation turn out?
- Tell us about a problem that you couldn't solve. What was the situation? What would you have done differently?
- What was the worst decision you made in the past year?
- Describe the way you handled a specific problem involving people.
- What is the biggest error in judgment you have made in a previous job?

Creativity

- Where do your ideas typically come from (past experiences, other ideas that you build on, or do they just pop into your head)? Explain.
- Would you describe yourself as creative? In what ways?
- What have you done recently that was creative? Tell us about a specific situation.
- What is the most creative idea you have had?

Communication

- How often do people ask you to proofread their work and what kinds of mistakes do you typically find?
- Do you write quickly or does it take some time?
- What have you done to improve your verbal communication skills?
- Tell us about someone you worked with who seemed to have difficulty understanding what you would say.
- Tell us about a significant misunderstanding you had with someone regarding something you said. How did it happen and how did it get resolved?
- Have others described you as a talker or as a person of few words?
- I'd like to talk about the ways in which you keep your manager updated. How often do you communicate with your manager/supervisor? What forms of communication do you use?

Attitude/Professionalism

- Have you ever been passed over for a promotion or another opportunity that you felt you deserved? Explain.
- Tell us about a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it.
- Tell us about the last time you lost your temper at work.
- There are times when we are all under a great deal of pressure at work. Tell us about the last time you were under a great deal of pressure. What was the situation and what did you do? What was your greatest challenge in dealing with the situation?
- Describe what your supervisors were like to work with.
- Describe a time in the past year when you were faced with a situation where you had no knowledge or expertise.
- Do you feel you have always received the credit you deserved? Tell me about it.
- What do you think about and do when asked to do things that are not in your job description or part of your job, especially when you think someone else should be responsible?
- When was the last time you were disappointed at work? Describe the situation? What did you do?
- Tell us about the last time you were frustrated at work. Describe the situation. What did you do?
- Tell us about the last time you had fun at work. Describe the situation.

Interest/Motivators

- Describe your ideal job.
- What do you want from your next job that you are not getting now?
- What motivates you to do your best work?
- What is the most disappointing aspect of your job?
- What do you hope to be doing 5 years from now? How do you plan to get there?
- Please tell us why you are interested in this position?
- Please share your perception of the scope of this position and how you see yourself fitting the position requirements.

Personal/Professional Development

- What are the most important lessons you have learned in your career and how have you applied this knowledge?
- What have you done about your own professional development in the last 5 years?
- How do you stay current in your field?

- Have you ever received constructive or negative feedback? What was the feedback? Did you do anything differently as a result of the feedback? What was the outcome?
- What is the most useful criticism you ever received, and who was it from?
- Tell me about a time in your personal or professional development that required you to persevere in spite of roadblocks or challenges. How did you stay committed? What was the end result? What did you learn from the situation?
- What are your areas of greatest competence? What areas of professional development have you been working on? Note: For every strength there is a possible shortcoming. For example: action oriented people may be quick to lose their patience with others, detail oriented people may be slow to complete assignments, etc.) What would your supervisor say about your performance if called as a reference including areas for development?

Inclusion, Diversity & Equity

- Why do you consider diversity and inclusion an important factor for the workplace?
- Can you explain to us your experience working with diverse groups?
- Is there an example of how you have demonstrated a commitment to diversity in a prior situation?
- Tell us about a time in which you altered your style in order to work effectively with those that are different from you.
- What steps would you take to create a climate that is supportive and respectful and that values differing perspectives and experiences? How would you measure the success of this objective?

Part Two - Interview Questions – What you may NOT ask

Questions That Indicate Illegal Discrimination (Sources: State of Oklahoma and Curzon, 1995)

The topics that are off limits in most employment interviews include religion, national origin, race, marital status, parental status, age, disability, sex, political affiliation, military status, criminal records, and other personal information such as financial/credit history. There are some exceptions, such as law enforcement positions, but those exceptions are beyond the scope of this resource.

DO NOT ASK questions related to personal information, including, but not limited to the following:

Personal Information:

- Preferred salutation (e.g. Mrs., Ms.), maiden name
- Foreign address, whether rents or owns, who candidate resides with
- Birthplace, country of origin, citizenship, where parents came from
- Race, creed, color, ethnicity
- Height, weight
- Age, birthdate
- Gender, Sexual Orientation, gender of partner
- Relatives, Marital Status, Information about spouse or children, child-care arrangements
- How long candidate plans to stay on the job: anticipated leaves (e.g. maternity)
- Family Planning (e.g. birth control)
- Domestic violence victim status

Personal Beliefs

- Religious affiliation or beliefs, religious holidays/observances
- Political Beliefs
- Organizations (e.g. clubs, societies, or other organizations that would indicate race, political beliefs, etc.) unless volunteered by candidate as related to job they are applying for

Health

- Genetic predisposition to diseases, family diseases or health status
- Health problems: use of sick leave or health insurance
- Institutional Confinement
- Pregnancy
- Disability: do not ask if candidate can perform specific functions, or if the candidate has any physical or mental impairments which would interfere with ability to perform the job
- Workers compensation history, disability income

Background

- *Salary – Pursuant to Executive Order 161, no State entity, as defined by the Executive Order, is permitted to ask, or mandate, in any form, that an applicant for employment provide his or her current compensation, or any prior compensation history*
- Credit record
- Military record or status
- Criminal offenses, arrest record
- Asking to see photo ID, license, etc.

Education

- Native language
- How candidate acquired the ability to read, write or speak a foreign language
- Nationality, racial or religious affiliation of a school

Final Word on Unlawful Questions

During the course of an interview, many candidates will innocently divulge personal information which the interviewer(s) cannot legally address. Some of this information can be quite intriguing. Even so, the interviewer(s) should **never** encourage such disclosure or comment on the information. While such voluntary disclosures do not invalidate the interview, the interviewer(s) should cordially ignore all non-job related information and immediately redirect the interviewee back to the prepared questions. For example, an interviewee tells you she just had twins. Don't ask her how she manages to work and take care of two babies. If she is not chosen for the position, the candidate may allege discrimination based on your seemingly innocent comment. To minimize liability, interviewers should receive legal issues training prior to conducting interviews.

Part Three - Pre-employment Inquiries and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Employers must avoid questions about disabilities that would be considered unacceptable and/or illegal.

Acceptable Inquiries

- “This job requires an employee to prepare written reports containing detailed factual summaries and analyses. The reports must frequently be prepared within tight time frames. Can you perform this function with or without reasonable accommodation?”
- Employer may state to an applicant, “This job requires an employee to deliver class content during a 2 ½ lecture. Can you perform this function with or without reasonable accommodation?”
- Inquiries that are job-related and which are not likely to elicit information about a disability.

Unacceptable Inquiries

- “Do you ever get ill from stress?” and “Have you ever been unable to ‘cope’ with work-related stress?”
- “Would you need a reasonable accommodation to perform this job?” (Unless the applicant’s disability is obvious or otherwise known to the interviewer because of the applicant’s voluntary disclosure and the interviewer legitimately believes that the applicant will need a reasonable accommodation to perform the essential functions of the job.)
- “How much alcohol do you drink?”
- At the pre-offer stage, asking if an applicant can perform a major life activity is prohibited if it is likely to elicit information about a disability, unless the question is specifically about the ability to perform job functions. Thus, questions such as “can you walk” or “can you stand” would not be allowed.
- “How many days were you sick last year?” or “How many separate episodes of sickness did you have last year?”
- An employer may not ask questions concerning prior job-related injuries or past worker’s compensation claims.
- “What medications are you currently taking?” or “Have you ever taken AZT?”
- “Have you ever received counseling or medical treatment for mental illness?”

CONCLUSION

This resource is designed to assist hiring ESF authorities in conducting more effective and legally sound interviews. Remember, you are not just selecting someone to fill a vacancy; you are managing ESF’s human capital for the future.

Using these interview tools should reduce the interviewer’s frustration, legal risks, and staff turnover. We encourage you to apply some of these techniques in your next interview. You will be amazed at how much more confident you will be. Your hiring decisions may yield better quality employees, increased workforce diversity, and long-term organizational performance improvement.

We realize this resource contains a great deal of information. If you have questions or need assistance in any critical hiring situation please contact the ESF Human Resources Office.