

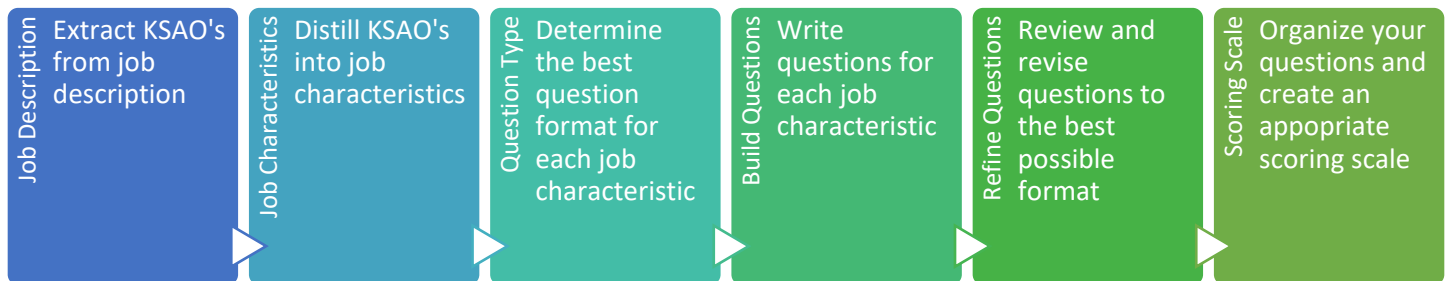


Interview Question & Scoring Development Guide

Purpose:

For many supervisors, choosing the right student can be a daunting task. Interviewing and selecting applicants can be an especially difficult part of the job selection process and, when done incorrectly, can be time-consuming ultimately fruitless. However, developing insightful and useful job interview questions and scoring protocols can make a huge difference in identifying promising candidates as well as adding much-needed structure to expedite the process. Done correctly, interviews provide a valuable, time-effective system to find the best possible student-employees for your position.

This guide seeks to assist you in optimizing your interviewing efforts by creating a framework you can utilize in developing interview & assessment tools. This is accomplished via the steps outlined in this diagram.



In the document below, you will find a helpful guide on how to create the most useful questions possible as well as some best practices to help the process run smoother. If you have yet to create your job description, you may find it useful to review the “WS Supervisor JobX Training”, located on the same webpage as this resource, for help in writing the best possible job description. Creating a thorough, thoughtful job description will make the following process much easier.

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KSAO's and Characteristics

The best place to start when developing Job Interview Questions is with a well-written job description. If you took the time to think through your job description before posting, you already have a thorough list of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other factors (KSAO's) a successful candidate will need to possess. This job description can then be converted into a list of characteristics on which you will base your interview questions.

As an example, let's say that your job description has the following KSAO's:

- Knowledge
 - Student must have a basic understanding of laboratory equipment or learn this information by working with other laboratory members.
- Skills
 - Excellent organizational skills
 - Basic skills with ProMed research tool and Microsoft Excel or willingness to learn
- Abilities
 - Student must be able to stand at a workbench and lab sink for extended periods of time
- Other
 - Must be willing to wear proper safety equipment at all times
 - Student must have a Laboratory Safety certificate or be willing to complete the 4-hour safety training before beginning full duties

From this KSAO list, you might develop the following list of characteristics:

- Knowledge
 - Lab knowledge OR communication and learning skills
- Skills
 - Organization
 - Research skills OR communication and learning skills
 - Software skills OR communication and learning skills
- Abilities
 - Physical endurance
- Other
 - Safety conscious

Once you have this list, you'll simply need to develop a method to assess the applicant's viability based on these criteria. To do this, you'll need to build questions, but questions can be focused and phrased in an endless variety of different ways. Before constructing your interview questions, you'll want to think about the best type of question and phrasing.



Building Questions

Interview questions can be grouped into four types: Common & Character Questions, Experience Questions, Predictive Questions, or Follow-Up Questions. Most interviews utilize a mix of these types as each is suited to providing information on different aspects of a candidate. An overview of each question type, a list of the characteristics it commonly reveals, and several examples can be found in each section below.

Common and Character Questions

These questions fit most candidates and job types and can serve as a warm-up and/or provide insight into the candidate. These questions can be insightful in learning more about the individual's personality and characteristics as well as gauging whether they are a good fit for the position and your team. While experienced applicants usually have an answer prepared before the interview, many WS students have limited or no experience with formal interviews making this a non-issue.

These questions are a good tool for determining personal characteristics such as character, personality, motivation, and goals.

Example questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What about your background makes you the best candidate for this position?
- What is your biggest strength and your biggest weakness?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- On a team, what role did you usually fill?
- What do you hope to gain from this position?

Experience Questions

These questions are intended to reveal the applicant's previous performance in related roles. As the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, these questions can provide great insight into how a candidate would perform in your position. While students may not have direct experience to the job at hand, questions can be constructed so as to reveal how an applicant has reacted in a similar situation.

These questions are good tool for predicting future actions, as such, they are a great measure for ability, knowledge, and fit.

Example questions:

- Tell me about a time you succeeded in your work and to what you attribute this outcome?
- Tell me about a time you failed to achieve a goals why you believe you did not succeed?
- In a previous experience, what new task did you have the most trouble learning and why?
- What did you like most and least about your last job?
- Give me an example of a time that you felt excited about your work.



Predictive Questions

These questions are intended to reveal the applicant's predicted performance in future experiences. While Experience Questions are a better performance indicator as they are based in actual behavior, it is simply not possible to make every question based on an applicant's previous job experience, especially for students with limited work history. In cases where the student may not have experienced scenarios related to your job, Predictive Questions allow you to gauge what a student might do in a given scenario. Keep in mind that candidates often respond with what the best possible version of themselves might do as opposed to the actions they would actually take in the outlined situation.

These questions are best for revealing how an applicant views problems, processes information, and thinks critically regarding options.

Example questions:

- If you are offered this position, what do you think you'll have the most difficulty with?
- You've previously worked with peers but this position requires you to work mostly with faculty and staff. How will you need to alter your work style in order to be successful?
- This position has some duties that require strong attention to detail and others tasks that are focused on accomplishing tasks quickly. Which task would you prefer to spend time doing and why?
- If you had a more experienced coworker who was completing a task incorrectly, what would you do?

Follow-Up Questions

These questions are intended to provide additional answers to lingering topics previously covered in the interview, clarify a given answer, or gain additional information from an interviewee's response. While most of these questions will arise naturally as the interviewer seeks to uncover more information, some follow-up questions may be pre-planned as part of a multi-step question. You may either utilize a follow-up question directly after an applicant's response or wait until later in the interview to circle back to the topic.

These questions are best for clarifying a candidate's response, determining how they respond to changes in flow, making candidates think critically about their own processes, or making the candidate think in discrete segments.

Example questions:

- Original Question: What is your greatest weakness?
 - Follow Up: What have you done to improve this characteristic?
- Original Question: How would you handle an upset customer?
 - Follow Up: What would you do if the customer still would not calm down?
- Original Question: What about this job most interests you?
 - Response: I think the job duties could help me achieve my long term goals?
 - Follow Up: What are your long term goals and how would this job help you achieve them?
- Original Question: What did you enjoy most about your last position?
 - Response: I enjoyed working with people the most.
 - Follow Up: Given that this position involves minimal with people, what do you think you'll enjoy most about this position?



Writing Questions

Once you've reviewed the question types, it's time to craft your questions. Start by reviewing your list of job characteristics from earlier and considering what type of question would be best suited for each using the information discussed in the previous section. In some cases, job characteristics can fit multiple question types. While you'll generally want to use the question type that best fits the information at hand, asking multiple questions about the same job characteristic can be a reasonable approach, especially if the characteristic is central to the job.

To provide you with a reference case, the job characteristics from the original example have been extracted and placed in the chart below. You'll also find quick reasons for each placement in the bottom role. In the example below, "safety conscious" has been placed in all four categories to demonstrate how one characteristic can be used under multiple question types.

Question Type	Common & Character	Experience	Predictive	Follow-Up
Job Characteristic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization Physical endurance Safety conscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication & Learning skills Research skills Safety conscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lab knowledge Safety conscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lab knowledge Software Skills Safety conscious
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational abilities are personal characteristics Questioning whether a person can physically perform required tasks is a standard question Most people will have a basic understanding of everyday safety protocols and be conscious of steps to take. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a student, the applicant will have needed to communicate with and learn from others before now College students will have been required to complete research through basic classwork All college students should have encountered situations requiring a basic safety consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is unlikely a student applicant will have completed the same laboratory procedures you are asking about, but you can gauge their capacity and potential actions via a theoretical construct Likewise, students may not have the situation-specific safety knowledge relevant to your workspace, but could draw on other experiences to predict their actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For most students, it is unlikely they've completed the same type of research, but you can determine the student's exposure level to laboratory research through a multi-part question The same may be true for software. A series of questions to determine the applicant's knowledge and attitude towards safety may be the most revealing method



Common & Character

- Organization
 - What strategy or strategies do you use to make sure you're able to complete assigned tasks?
- Physical endurance
 - After reviewing the job description, do you believe you are physically and mentally capable of performing all listed job duties with, if needed, reasonable accommodations?
- Safety conscious
 - Would you describe yourself as more of a risk-seeker or risk-averse and why?

Experience

- Communication & Learning Skills
 - Can you tell me about a time where you had to learn a new skill from a coworker?
- Research skills
 - When completing a research project for a class, what is your process for finding and compiling information?
- Safety conscious
 - When you've worked with chemicals in the past (either in a class, lab, work, or at home), what precautions have you taken?

Predictive

- Lab knowledge
 - What information concerning day-to-day operations in our lab do you think you'll need to know?
- Safety conscious
 - Our office deals with some chemicals that could burn you if they made contact with your skin. What precautions do you think you would take to prevent this type of accident from occurring?

Follow-Up

- Lab knowledge
 - Question: What do you know about PCR?
 - Follow up: What steps would you take to learn more about the process?
- Software skills
 - Question: What type of research software are you familiar with?
 - Follow up: What could you do to improve your skills in this area?
 - 2nd follow up: How would you apply that technique to this job?
- Safety conscious
 - What types of personal protective equipment have you used in the past?
 - Follow up: What additional equipment do you think you would need for this position?



Refining Question Characteristics

Once you've selected a type of question for the job characteristic at hand and constructed a question, you'll want to review the question to see if it can be improved. Often times the first phrasing can be improved by a quick review and update. When analyzing your questions for potential improvements, keep in mind that exceptional questions have the following 5 traits:

Neutral

It is very easy for people to inadvertently construct questions which contain hints as to the correct or expected answer. However, interviews are meant to uncover an applicant's actual, unbiased response so as to provide the interviewer with a realistic evaluation of the candidate. To that end, you'll want to make certain that your questions are as neutral as possible.

- Bad Example: You're free to work from 9-12 every morning, right?
- Better Question: What times are you able to work during a typical week?

Open-Ended

Questions that leave the candidate more possible responses are likely to provide you with more information. Using questions that start with words and phrases such as "tell me about a time", "describe", "why", or "what" are more likely to provide you with insight into the candidate and their fit for the position than questions with a limited set of response options such as a yes/no question.

- Bad Example: Did you enjoy your previous job?
- Better Question: What did you enjoy most about your previous job and why?

Non-Threatening

While interviewers rarely intend to create threatening questions, some inquiries unintentionally end up being intimidating to students. In these cases, students often tense up and provide heavily edited or incomplete responses rather than the full, honest, & insightful answers they might otherwise provide. Where possible, try to make sure the interview questions are structured so that they do not make students anxious about the position. This will enable you to better judge whether the student is right for your position.

- Bad Example: Why haven't you decided to get a job in the past?
- Better Question: Tell me about your past decision-making process regarding whether to obtain a job.

Experiential Instead of Hypothetical

As previously stated, the best indicator of future performance is past performance. However, college students sometimes lack the necessary past experience to provide an answer based on perfectly relevant past actions. In these cases, it can be easy to use hypothetical, predictive questions. Unfortunately, where experiential questions show a candidate as they really are, hypothetical questions often show candidates as they want themselves to be. Instead of using hypothetical questions, consider trying to generalize the question to a relatable point that the student has experienced.

- Experiential Question: What was your biggest failure in your last job and how did you respond?
- Candidate Response: I've never been employed before.
 - Hypothetical Example: What would you do if you failed at a task in this job?
 - Experiential Example: Think about a time you didn't succeed at a given task. Why did this occur and how did you respond?



Organizing the Interview Flow

Once you've constructed your questions, the next step is putting them in a logical flow for the interview. While you might deviate from this order based on actual candidate responses, it's helpful to have a plan going into the interview. As for the actual order, you should consider how your questions fit together and flow. Grouping all of the predictive questions or all of the questions about a single job characteristic together often makes the interview feel clunky and repetitive. Additionally, if the applicant begins to sense a theme to the questions, they may stop giving honest feedback and try to game the system.

It's also helpful to remember that the actual questions are only one component of an interview. Greetings, introductions, applicant questions, and other segments are all standard parts of the process. Provided below is additional information on each of these sections.

Introduction

You should always start an interview by introducing yourself and briefly reviewing the position. This allows you to provide details that might not have fit on the job description and items which may have changed since the job was posted.

Standard Questions

Most interviews start with standard questions about the candidate. This allows applicants to share information about themselves that didn't fit on the resume, provides an opportunity to highlight their qualifications, and can calm the candidate by allowing them to speak about themselves (an area in which they are the expert). These questions also provide the interviewer a chance to gauge the student's communication skills and draw some conclusions about the student's personality.

Unplanned Questions

Leave time after planned questions for any additional inquiries you may think of during the interview. Often a candidate's answer may necessitate you following up for clarification or more information. Additionally, something the candidate mentioned may spark a previously unexpected avenue of conversation. Learning the candidate has project management or data analysis experience could lead to a refinement of the role to better fit your needs and the applicant's skills. You should explore these areas if and when they arise.

Candidate Questions

Most interviewers save time at the end of the interview for the candidate to ask questions. This allows the applicant to gain clarification or additional knowledge that wasn't available through the job description. These questions can also be quite revealing to the interviewer in displaying what is important to the candidate, their areas of interest, critical thinking, etc. Perhaps just as important, interviewers should pay attention to topics the candidate doesn't ask about as this could be an indicator of what is unimportant or uninteresting to the applicant.

Thanks and Next Steps

It is always a good idea to conclude the interview by thanking the candidate and providing a timeline of the next steps, an expected hiring decision date, and a start date (which can be no earlier than the 1st day of class).



Example Interview Plan

Introduction

- Introduce self and relation to the position
- Talk briefly about job, provide a quick overview of the position

Standard Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What are your biggest strengths and weaknesses?
- What will you bring to this position that other candidates will not?

Planned Questions

- **Physical endurance:** After reviewing the job description, do you believe you are physically and mentally capable of performing all listed job duties with, if needed, reasonable accommodations?
- **Safety conscious:** Would you describe yourself as a risk-seeker or risk-averse? Why?
- **Communication & Learning Skills:** Can you tell me about a time where you had to learn a new skill from a coworker?
- **Safety conscious:** When you've worked with chemicals in the past (either in a class, lab, work, or at home), what precautions have you taken?
- **Research skills:** When completing a research project for a class, what is your process for finding and compiling information?
- **Organization:** What strategy or strategies do you use to make sure you're able to complete assigned tasks?
- **Lab knowledge:** What information concerning day-to-day operations in our lab do you think you'll need to know?
- **Lab knowledge:** Question: What do you know about PCR?
 - **Follow up:** What steps would you take to learn more about the process?
- **Safety conscious:** Our office deals with some chemicals that could burn you if they made contact with your skin. What precautions do you think you would take to prevent an accident from occurring?
- **Safety conscious:** What types of personal protective equipment have you used in the past?
 - **Follow up:** What additional equipment do you think you would need for this position?
- **Software skills:** Question: What type of research software are you familiar with?
 - **Follow up:** What could you do to improve your skills in this area?
 - **2nd follow up:** How would you apply that technique to this job?

Unplanned Questions

- Reserve time for questions that arise as a natural part of the interview process

Candidate Questions

- Reserve time for questions from the candidate

Thanks and Goodbye

- Inform candidate that interviews are being completed this week, selected candidates will be notified by Wednesday, and new WS employees can begin work on the 1st day of classes provided that all HR documentation has been completed and a certification is provided showing the student completed WS training.



Scoring

The purpose of conducting an interview is locate a qualified candidate to fill the position. If you successfully complete all steps up to this point but do not have a good scoring system, the best candidate can still slip through your fingers due to an imperfect evaluation. To ensure you’re selecting the candidate with the best fit, we suggest using a protocol based on the following steps:

1. Determine what characteristics you’ll be evaluating the candidate on.
2. Group similar characteristics, if applicable.
3. Determine the importance of each group and assign a weight to reflect it (e.g. assign percentages).
4. Select a scoring scale that makes sense to you (e.g. 1-5)
5. Create a scoring formula by combining steps 3 & 4.

The rest of this section expands on this 5-step protocol.

1. Determine Evaluation Criteria

Identify the criteria on which you’ll be judging individuals. In doing so, you are trying to compile a list of the essential characteristics needed to be successful in the role. These should always include your job characteristics you’ve already identified during the question-writing phase of the process. You may need to also consider including additional factors that are important or integral to the position, but are not explicitly stated as part of the job description. These characteristics might include, for example, the candidate’s ability to work with your existing team, punctuality, and/or the ability to stay in the position for multiple semesters.

Continuing the example from our job posting, we would start with the established list of job characteristics and add other critical success factors required by the job:

<i>Job Characteristics</i>	<i>Other Critical Success Factors</i>
Organization Physical endurance Safety conscious Communication & Learning skills Research skills Lab knowledge Software Skills	Team Fit Retention for multiple semesters



2. Group Criteria

Once your criteria are determined, you should consider grouping characteristics to simplify scoring. This is especially helpful if you have multiple, similar traits on your list (e.g. punctuality and reliability). You can also group by importance, time spent on the task, or any other system that meets your needs and makes sense to you. It is also perfectly acceptable to group some characteristics and leave others ungrouped. Once you've finished the process, you should be left with 3 to 10 groups of job characteristics on which you'll be basing your decision.

Continuing our example, we could either stick with the 9 current criteria as individual factors or arrange them into a smaller number of groups. Two such arrangement might be as follows:

Group	Job Characteristics & Other Critical Success Factors
Teachable factors	Research skills Software Skills Lab knowledge Communication & Learning skills
Personal factors	Organization Physical endurance Safety conscious Retention for multiple semesters
Team	Team Fit

Group	Job Characteristics & Other Critical Success Factors
Critical Factors	Safety conscious Physical endurance Communication & Learning skills Team Fit
Non-Critical Factors	Organization Research skills Lab knowledge
Additional Factors	Software Skills Retention for multiple semesters



3. Weight Each Group

The next step involves determining exactly how important each of the groups are to your overall candidate rating and assigning a weight value. Your judgement will be essential in determining exactly how important each group is to the applicant’s ability to be successful.

For many supervisors the easiest method is to weight the groups in percentages. However, as long as the scoring is accurate and logical to the supervisor, the exact methodology is unimportant. Continuing our example, we might derive the following weighting system using a percentage scale:

Weight	Group
65%	Critical Factors
25%	Non-Critical Factors
10%	Additional Factors

4. Creating a Scoring System for Each Group

After weighting each group, you’ll need a system for evaluating the applicant’s ability in each area based on their interview performance. Another way to think of this is that each group has a maximum number of points (weight) and the score will determine what portion of those points a candidate earns.

Many different scoring systems exist, but we recommend using a 5-point system known as a Likert Scale. The scale always uses the same numerical values, but the words and numbers used to characterize each segments of the scale can vary based on your needs. All versions can be equally valid, so feel free to use the tools that seems the most logical to you and best fits your needs. Here are some of the more common versions of the Likert Scale used in evaluating interviews.

Numerical Value	1	2	3	4	5
Fit Scale	Unsatisfactory	Improvement Needed	Satisfactory	Very Good	Outstanding
Qualification Scale	Not Qualified	Somewhat Not Qualified	Qualified	Somewhat Well Qualified	Well Qualified
Competency Scale	Not competent	Marginal Skills	Adequate Skills	Good Skills	Superior Skills
Low-High Scale	Low	Low-Moderate	Moderate	High-Moderate	High
Meets Need Scale	Does Not Meet	Potential To Meet	Meets	Potential to Exceed	Exceeds
Qualitative Characteristic Scale	Poor	Moderate	Average	Great	Excellent



5. Create a Scoring Formula

Finally, you'll want to put the segments of your interview scoring system together to create a scoring formula. By combining the weight and score to evaluate a factor, you can develop a scoring guide to use with each candidate. After completing the interview, simply select the appropriate candidate score for each group. Then, you can combine the weight and score to calculate a final candidate value which can then be used to compare all applicants on an even, fair basis and ensure you select the most qualified individual. For examples of an incomplete and completed scorecard, please see the tables below.

Incomplete

Weight	Group	Job Characteristics & Other Critical Success Factors	Score					Rating
			Not Qualified	Somewhat Not Qualified	Qualified	Somewhat Well Qualified	Well Qualified	
65%	Critical Factors	Safety conscious Physical endurance Communication & Learning skills Team Fit	1	2	3	4	5	
25%	Non-Critical Factors	Organization Research skills Lab knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	
10%	Additional Factors	Software Skills Retention for multiple semesters	1	2	3	4	5	
Final Candidate Value								

Complete

Weight	Group	Job Characteristics & Other Critical Success Factors	Score					Rating
			Not Qualified	Somewhat Not Qualified	Qualified	Somewhat Well Qualified	Well Qualified	
65%	Critical Factors	Safety conscious Physical endurance Communication & Learning skills Team Fit	1	2	3	4	5	0.65*4= 2.6
25%	Non-Critical Factors	Organization Research skills Lab knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	0.25*3 = 0.75
10%	Additional Factors	Software Skills Retention for multiple semesters	1	2	3	4	5	0.1*4= 0.4
Final Candidate Value								3.75

An easy-to-use, customizable template of this system is available on the JobX Supervisor Resources Site



Best Practices

Keep a Bank of Questions

WS student interviews are highly variable in nature, so it might benefit you to maintain a bank of questions (including several follow-up questions). This will allow you to adapt your interview based on the previous experience of the student as well as their interests, aptitude, and skills.

Two-Way Street

Remember that the job interview works both ways. While you attempt to learn how well the applicant fits the needs of the position, the applicant is learning whether they would be a good fit for the job, the associated duties, and working on your team. This is an opportunity for both parties to see if the position is a mutually-beneficial opportunity.

Unrelated Questions

“If you could be any kind of tree, what kind would you be and why?” While questions of this nature may reveal an applicant’s creativity, these inquiries are usually frowned upon by Human Resources due to a lack of job relatedness. Today, use of questions such as these are considered unprofessional and the results lacking in usefulness. Instead, try to focus on questions related to the position and candidate; these questions will provide much more useful information.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Keep in mind that some of our students are differently abled and may not be able to complete the jobs as originally intended. Under the ADA, hiring agents cannot discriminate against applicants if the applicant can accomplish the task with reasonable accommodations.

For example, consider a student who is in a wheelchair and may not be able to reach materials in high shelves. By relocating the necessary materials to a lower shelf, you’ve made the position ADA compliant and given the student an opportunity they would not have otherwise had.

When interviewing, it is perfectly acceptable to ask the candidate whether they would be able to perform all published job duties with or without a reasonable accommodation. However, you cannot ask the candidate if they have a disability (see the next section).

For assistance with reasonable accommodations please visit the UNC Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office at <http://eoc.unc.edu/>. If you need additional assistance with this topic, please speak with your departmental Human Resources representative.

Protected Category Questions

UNC prohibits interviewers from asking questions based on an applicant’s status in a protected category. Therefore, questions of this type should be avoided, or, if they seem job-related, rephrased so as to not impinge on an applicant’s protected status. For example, asking a candidate whether their children might interfere with their ability to work evenings is strictly prohibited; however, asking whether the applicant would be able to work evenings is a job-related and acceptable question. For more information please visit our [Interview Question Do’s and Don’ts page](#).

Public Knowledge

Keep in mind that all notes and materials generated by this process are subject to request, meaning that internal stakeholders (HR, EOC, etc.) or the public (through FOIA) might request these records. Make sure that your hiring practice and records are clear and rooted in the job.



Do

- Plan your interview questions and strategy ahead of time
- Base your interview questions on the KSAO's needed to successfully perform the job
- Optimize your interview questions
- Use a variety of question types with the best possible wording
- Develop your scoring criteria before conducting interviews
- Score each candidate immediately post interview
- Grade applicants based on their ability to perform the job
- Evaluate all relevant qualities
- Customize scoring to fit your needs
- Include other informed stakeholders in the process, where appropriate



Don't

- Start the interview process with a plan
- Interview without prepared, job-based questions
- Interview only on past work experience
- Wait until all interviews are completed to score candidates
- Compare candidates on an arbitrary or undefined scale
- Compare candidates solely on non-job-related criteria
- Pick a candidate just because they are liked
- Hire without evaluating candidates
- Hire an unqualified candidate
- Rely on uninformed opinions