

How to be a good interviewer:

TalkWise Worksheet

Good interviewing is not an action but an inter-action. It involves more than one person. It also involves more than simply asking pertinent questions and listening carefully to the answers. It is primarily about obtaining good quality information about the interviewee and ultimately evaluating that information in relation to relevant criteria.

It's not enough to assume that you'll recognise a good candidate when you hear one, or to say that it's the interviewee's responsibility to be articulate and to sell themselves. It's part of our job as interviewers to make it easier for the candidate to be articulate, to recall their past experiences and to overcome the inevitable apprehension associated with being assessed.

This worksheet is designed to help you expand the range of voices you use while interviewing, with a view to being both a questioner and a facilitator, to get the best out of your interviewees.

Familiarise yourself with the three key points for good interviewing, then reflect honestly on the questions before moving on.

1. The purpose of any interview is to obtain good quality information. It is important to know what you are looking for, which should be explicitly articulated beforehand in the form of a role description. A clear sense of direction is also crucial, to identify the requirements and standards that are going to be acceptable for the job. Without these two voices, any interviewer will find it hard to be clear, precise and purposeful with their questions, and any interviewee will subsequently find it harder to be relevant with their answers.
2. An interview is a progressive process of searching and describing that requires the active involvement of both interviewer and interviewee. Good interviewing is a collaborative process, a joint exploration into the candidate's past experience, capabilities and characteristics in search of relevant information. It's always a search process, because unless and until they're told, interviewees don't know what interviewers are looking for. It's a search for both a sufficient quantity and a sufficient quality of information to enable a sound decision to be made. Interviewer and interviewee each has a distinctive part to play in this *search-and-describe* process, but they both want it to do the candidate justice.
3. The interviewer has a responsibility to facilitate the process; the interviewee should be encouraged to contribute to the facilitation. Both interviewer and interviewee therefore share the responsibility for making an interview work. And in practice, because the individual interviewer is likely to do far more interviews than the individual interviewee, it's the interviewer who has the bigger share of that responsibility.

Reflection questions

- When undertaking a recruitment, how clear are you about what you are looking for, and about the standards you expect?
- When interviewing, how actively do you engage in searching for enough quality information?
- When interviewing, to what extent do you move beyond just questioning into facilitating the process?

Shaping an interview

All conversations, especially exploratory ones, have an unpredictable, emergent quality. You can never be certain where they're going to go. But **interviews are relatively structured by comparison with most conversations**. The table below provides a general summary of the shape of a good interview, outlining which voices to use, when and how. It's illustrated with particular reference to a job interview, but the principles apply to all interviews.

	Interviewer	Sounds like	Interviewee	Sounds like
BEFORE	Articulate	an informative role description	Articulate	an informative, clearly presented cv
	Direct	explicit, specific, relevant selection criteria		
DURING	Direct	<i>'Let me explain the process I'm intending to use for this interview...'</i> <i>'Just ask, if you need me to clarify any of my questions'</i>		
	Inquire	<i>'Tell me please about a time when you...'</i>	Articulate	detailed, factual account of self in relation to specific past experiences
	Probe	<i>'And what did you think/feel/do, when that happened?'</i>	Inquire	<i>Can I check whether my answers are giving you the sort of information you need?'</i> <i>'Do you want me to elaborate on that?'</i>
	Challenge	<i>'I'd like you to be more specific please about what you actually did on that occasion?'</i>	Probe	<i>'Do you mean in terms of...?'</i>
	Diagnose (inner voice)	<i>'This seems to connect to what he's already said about..., so does that suggest a related question that it would be useful to ask?'</i>	Diagnose (Inner voice)	<i>There's one of the criteria mentioned in the cv that I don't seem to have been asked about yet'</i>
	Inquire	<i>Do you have any questions or points that we haven't yet covered that you'd like to put to us?'</i>	Advocate	<i>I'd like to tell you about...'</i> <i>I'm particularly interested in...'</i>
	Articulate	So here's where we are in the overall interviewing process...'		
AFTER	Evaluate	systematic, objective assessment of the candidate against the specified criteria	Inquire	<i>Do you have any particular feedback for me about my interview?'</i>
	Advocate	<i>Here's my view of this candidate, and why...'</i>		

Now, use the table below to think through what you might actually say during an upcoming interview. Make a note of questions and prompts relevant for each voice.

Voice	Sounds like
Direct	
Inquire	
Probe	
Challenge	
Diagnose (inner voice)	
Inquire	
Articulate	