EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

Why is it important to get it right?

Without an effective selection system, UNSW risks:

- Increased costs
- Low morale
- Disrupted customer service
- Unexpected resignations that require leaders to focus on filling the position rather than coaching team members and contributing to organisational initiatives.

THE ELEMENTS OF A STAR

When you gather examples of behaviour in an interview, you want to make sure you’re getting the whole story - the situation in which the candidate acted, what he or she did, and the results of these actions. An easy way to remember to get the whole story is to use the word STAR to describe a complete behavioural example.

The Situation or Task facing the candidate = Why?

The Actions the candidate took = What was done and how was it done?

The Results or changes caused by these actions = Effect of action?

SHORTLISTING

The first step is for Selection Committee members to assess the applications to determine who will be invited to interview. Applicants qualifications, skills and experience are compared against the selection criteria and the most suitable candidates will be shortlisted.

There is no minimum or maximum number of applicants that must be shortlisted, this is at the discretion of the Selection Committee, though it is usually recommended that no more than 5 or 6 candidates are invited to interview.
PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

The Selection Committee should prepare a set of questions that assess the applicants against the selection criteria specified in the position description. These questions:

- Should evaluate the skills, experience and knowledge required of the applicant
- be relevant to the position
- Should NOT address inappropriate issues such as age, disability, marital status, political/religious affiliations etc.
- Should avoid a line of questioning which places undue emphasis on local knowledge or experience
- Probing is allowed

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You can significantly increase the effectiveness of your interviews by using behavioural and competency based techniques. Research suggests that it increases the predicative validity of your interview to 50-55%, up from 10% when you rely on a CV and a general interview.

This interview format involves assessing skills, attributes and behaviour through behaviour based questions. These types of questions ask for specific examples of a candidate's behaviour in situations similar to those they will face in the new position.

These questions are usually worded in a way that will elicit specific examples of what the person has done in the past. For example, they often start with a statement like: ‘Tell me about a time when...’ or ‘Can you describe a situation where...’

Behaviour based questions allow you to assess candidates more objectively, based on specifics rather than 'gut' feelings or personal impressions.

Remember to probe using open question techniques that make it hard for the candidate to simply answer yes or no. This will provide you with more detailed information. For example:

- Tell me why you choose that method of communication?
- Talk me through the decision making process.
- What strategies did you use to get the project back on track?

WRITING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The selection committee writes the interview questions as a team. The questions you prepare should:

- be based on the selection criteria – those specific capabilities (knowledge, skills and abilities) needed to do the job
- test applicant’s capabilities (knowledge, skills and abilities) and how these could be used in the job. There is strong evidence that the best indication of a person’s ability to perform is provided through examples of their previous job performance. Choose behavioural based questions where you ask about situations or the type of work involved in the job. Ask applicants to give examples of similar work or situations from their own experience, for example how they approached them, how they solved problems
be carefully planned and structured. To test how well each person meets the selection criteria, your panel should prepare questions in advance, with one or more questions for each criteria.

be consistent. As much as possible, the main questions should be asked in the same way for each applicant. This gives you a fair basis for comparing responses of different applicants. It’s ok to repeat or rephrase a question if necessary, or to ask follow up questions to help the panel clarify the applicant’s response. The main point to remember is that you give all applicants a fair chance to demonstrate their capabilities to the panel.

Interview questions can include:

- open questions, designed to encourage an expansive answer
- closed questions, designed for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer
- hypothetical questions, which set up a possible situation or problem and ask the applicant for a possible course of action
- probing questions, designed to bring out more detail. These will be different for each applicant, and may be asked by any member of the selection panel.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD AVOID ASKING

- leading questions — these questions suggest the expected answer
- multiple questions — these questions have two or more distinct parts requiring an answer, and they should be asked separately
- long questions — some questions have so much background and scene-setting that it is hard for the applicant to work out what the question is
- trick questions and using stress tactics — these questions are designed to mislead the applicant. They create a poor impression of the university
- questions which ask for knowledge that only internal applicants would have
- questions about applicants’ private lives or personal responsibilities.

ASKING PROBING QUESTIONS

Probe questions help you explore candidates’ experiences in-depth, giving you the information you need while giving them the opportunity to demonstrate competence in the target (competencies).

It’s not unusual to ask several probe questions to get one complete STAR and several probe questions to get enough STARs to evaluate a candidate in a specific competency. For these reasons, probing is a key interviewing skill.

Probe questions fall into one of three types:

**Behavioural** – Give complete examples of the candidate’s past behaviour

**Theoretical** - Produce theories, opinions or general actions

**Leading** – These result in answers that the candidate thinks you want to hear

Theoretical and leading questions waste your and candidate’s time.
SITUATIONS REQUIRING FOLLOW UP PROBING

Candidates respond to interview questions in one of three ways: with a partial STAR, a false STAR or a complete STAR. The following diagram illustrates how to follow up in each of these three situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHEN THE INTERVIEWER ASKS A:</th>
<th>AND THE CANDIDATE PROVIDES A:</th>
<th>THEN, THE INTERVIEWER:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural question</td>
<td>Partial STAR</td>
<td>Follows up to get a complete STAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>False STAR</td>
<td>Follows up to get a true STAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete STAR</td>
<td>Follows up to get a second STAR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partial STAR Examples of questions to ask to get complete parts of a STAR:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe what led up to that?</td>
<td>Exactly what did you do?</td>
<td>How did it work out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you give me a specific situation in which you used that approach?</td>
<td>How were your actions different here from...?</td>
<td>How did that affect .....?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the most memorable time when that happened?</td>
<td>How did you react? Describe specifically how you did that.</td>
<td>How were these outcomes directly related to what you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What caused you to...?</td>
<td>What was your part of the project and how did you handle it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did you...?</td>
<td>Walk me through the steps you took.....</td>
<td>What problems/successes resulted from...?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When was that?</td>
<td>What did you say to him/her?</td>
<td>How did you know what you did was effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the circumstances surrounding?</td>
<td>What did you do first... Second...?</td>
<td>What feedback have you received?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was the customer (co-worker, team member)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were you reacting to?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

When you are setting up the interview room, make sure that:

- there will be no distractions — for example noise, glare or incoming calls
- the room can be easily found
- there is an informal, relaxed atmosphere
- there is water and a fresh glass for applicants and panel members
- Selection Committee members have their mobile phones/emails etc switched off or on mute.
- there is an area where applicants can wait for the interview, preferably without having to meet other applicants.

You could consider giving applicants a copy of the questions or instructions before the interview/assessment. If you do this, give each applicant the same amount of time to look at these and prepare.

The Selection Committee should:

- Allow time beforehand to discuss and decide the order in which the questions will be asked and allocate specific questions to each committee member
- Identify any committee member with prior knowledge of any of the applicants
- Review the Confidentiality of Proceedings & Privacy guidelines and UNSW Equity and Diversity Policy with Selection Committee.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

During the interview, make sure that:

- The Presiding Member introduces the applicant to the panel. You could consider having a name tag for each member
- Display an open, welcoming attitude
- The Presiding Member explains the purpose and structure of the interview
- The Presiding Member may summarise the main points from the application
- Every panel member should take notes. It may be better if the person asking a question does not take notes, so that they can maintain eye contact with the applicant
- Keep to the agreed schedule
- At the end of the interview, the Presiding Member will ask the applicant if they would like to add anything or have any questions
- Ask for referees if the applicant hasn’t already provided them and/or confirm that it is ok to contact them
• If the applicant has not listed a current supervisor ask them to provide this to you. They may not be comfortable in doing so. Do NOT contact their current supervisor without their explicit permission (See GUIDE to Reference Checking)

• The Presiding Member should explain what will happen next and when the applicant can expect to hear from the panel

• The applicant should be thanked and shown the way out.