

JobSage

How to Lead Inclusive Interviews





Objectives

We hope that this guide helps you:

- Discover how to lead effective interviews
- Recognize and interrupt common biases
- Be part of an inclusive process that will attract top candidates to your company





Your Goals as an Interviewer

Your company has asked you to interview prospective employees. Congrats! It's a sign they trust and value your opinion and it's not a role to take lightly. **As an interviewer, you do your best when you:**

- Gain the information you need in order to provide meaningful feedback to the hiring team
- Avoid any questions or behaviors that are illegal or not aligned with your company values
- Help ensure all candidates feel good about your company, whether or not they receive an offer





Common Interview Biases

Interviewing isn't easy. We all have biases that affect us everyday, and it's hard to turn off those biases when it comes to hiring new people for your company. Below are some of the most common biases that occur in interviews. Knowing them doesn't guarantee you won't repeat them, but it can help to remind yourself of these biases before interviews in order to overcome them.

- **Halo / Horn Effect**
 - Occurs when we allow one major strength or weakness to affect your overall feedback or decision
 - **For example:** This candidate went to Harvard, so they must be a better choice than this candidate who went to community college.
- **Grouphink**
 - Allowing the opinions of others, whether good or bad, to affect your feedback or decision
 - **For example:** I liked Candidate B, but it seemed like the other interviewers didn't, so I'll keep quiet.
- **First Impression Error**
 - Allowing an initial judgment, whether good or bad, to affect your feedback or decision.
 - **For example:** This person dressed well for the interview, so they must be a better choice than the candidate who dressed less well.



Questions to Avoid

Some interview questions can be illegal, depending on the state or country in which you're interviewing. Others, while not illegal, are just unnecessary ways to introduce bias or the perception of bias into the process. Below are just a few common questions that people ask without realizing they might be against the law or working against your company's diversity and inclusion goals. Keep in mind that there are countless more questions that you might innocently ask but that should be avoided.

- **Obviously illegal:**

- Direct questions about a candidate's race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, or other protected class
- Protected classes include, at a minimum, race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, or gender identity), national origin, age (40 or older), disability and genetic information (including family medical history)

- **Not as obviously illegal:**

- "I detect an accent. Where are you from?" (could imply bias around national origin)
- "That's a beautiful ring. Are you and your fiance thinking of having kids?" (could imply bias around sex)
- "When did you graduate from college?" (could imply bias around age)
- "Are you authorized to work in the US?" (could imply bias around national origin)
- "What part of town do you live in?" (could imply bias around race, religion, or national origin)



Structured Interviewing

Structured interviewing is the most proven way to overcome common interview biases and identify the best candidate for the role. This method also helps you avoid asking a question that could get you into trouble—legally or socially.

In short, structured interviewing is a way to interview candidates that ensures that each interviewee is asked the same questions, ideally in the same order. This, in turn, ensures that candidates' answers can be reliably aggregated and that comparisons between different candidates can be made with confidence. When you think *structured*, you probably think of a spreadsheet or similar tool—and that's exactly what this entails. Structured interviewing allows you to track the exact questions you're going to ask each candidate, what you're looking for in an answer before you begin asking, and how each candidate responds.

Again, this is the most proven way to overcome common interview biases and identify the best candidate for your team's roles.

Structured interviewing helps you:

- Gain actionable insights
- Avoid illegal questions
- Leave candidates feeling good

Essentially, it helps you achieve all of the goals you have as an interviewer.



Conducting the Interview

You understand your goals, are aware of biases and questions to avoid, and have your structured interview questions prepared. Now it's time for the interview! The following general timeline is for the standard 30 minute interview. Of course, adjust if your company has longer interviews or multiple interviewers per interview.

Introduction (approximately 2 minutes)

- Ask if candidate needs a drink or restroom break
- Sit directly across from candidate
- Introduce yourself and explain your role at the company
- Explain that you might be taking notes so you can provide effective post-interview feedback

Your Questions (15-20 minutes)

- Be natural, but stick to the questions you and the hiring team agreed to in advance for the role
- Truly engage with the candidate (listen to their answers, make eye contact, nod, etc.)
- If their answer is unclear, feel free to ask one or two follow up questions but move on if they're really struggling
- Take notes so you remember their answers later

Candidate's Questions (5 minutes)

- Ask candidate if they have any questions about the role, team, or company
- Give honest answers that will give the candidate a strong but realistic sense of what to expect if they join the team

Wrapping Up

- Highlight the reasons you like working at your company
- Try to tie how their skills and interests would fit in well at your company, so they can envision themselves working here
- Thank the candidate for their time
- If it feels appropriate, give them your work email address to send follow up questions





After the Interview

After you are done interviewing the candidate:

- Act quickly! Share interview feedback with your recruiting team or hiring manager as soon as possible while it's still fresh in your mind. This helps ensure your feedback relies on the interview itself and not any biases you might fall back on days after the interview.
- Provide actual examples from the interview. (This is where note taking comes in handy!)
- Don't get distracted by personality or "fit." Stay focused on how well the candidate performed based on the agreed-upon attributes of success.





Practice Round

Countering Interview Bias

Scenario 1

Trying to break a tie between two candidates, a member of the hiring team advocates for a candidate with a college degree over a candidate who performed better but lacks a degree.

This can happen because of the halo effect. Someone sees “Harvard” on a resume and it creates a halo around the candidate where the interviewer can only see positive things.

What could you say if you found yourself in this situation? You might point out that, because of socioeconomic determinants of college graduation rates, this bias toward selecting candidates with college degrees unintentionally becomes a bias toward people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Because of socioeconomic differences in the US, that bias works against non-white candidates.



Practice Round

Countering Interview Bias

Scenario 2

A colleague suggests rejecting a candidate with a visible disability because he's "not a good culture fit" even though he outperformed the other candidates on the agreed-upon metrics.

This can happen because of the first impression error. Unfortunately, we are socialized through media and general society to think people with visible disabilities are lacking in certain areas. If we allow a first impression of someone to bias our thinking, we might overlook the best candidate simply because they arrived in a wheelchair.

What could you say if you found yourself in this situation?



Practice Round

Countering Interview Bias

Scenario 3

Your fellow interviewers complain that a candidate bragged too much. You thought the candidate was confident, but you are beginning to question your opinion.

This can happen because of groupthink. You perceive a situation one way but then feel pressure to change your mind when you realize the rest of the group perceived it differently. However, particularly in this situation, your fellow interviewers might be basing their opinion on a bias, conscious or not, in which confident women or people of color are perceived as aggressive or arrogant.

What could you say if you found yourself in this situation?



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