

Creating Structured Interview Questions

A structured interview is an assessment method designed to measure job-related competencies of candidates by systematically inquiring about their behavior in past experiences and/or their proposed behavior in hypothetical situations.

Structured interviews ensure candidates have equal opportunities to provide information and are assessed accurately and consistently.

All candidates will be asked the same predetermined questions in the same order and all responses will be evaluated using the same rating scale and standards for acceptable answers.

SMEs should write one interview question per required competency. However, if a question covers two competencies, that is acceptable.

QUESTION TYPES

- **Past experience:** “Tell me about a time...”
- **Hypothetical situation:** “Imagine we have a problem with...”
- **Applicant’s viewpoint:** “What do you think about...”

BREADTH QUESTIONS

- The first interview tests the applicant’s ***breadth of experience*** across the competencies.

- Breadth questions tend to take 5-10 minutes for an applicant to answer.
- Breadth questions test if an applicant has experience, knowledge, or exposure to a general topic.
- Breadth: Limit follow up questions to basic probe questions (i.e., “What was your role?” or “Can you tell me more?”)

DEPTH QUESTIONS

- The second interview tests the applicant’s **depth of knowledge** across the competencies.
- Depth questions can take up to 10-15 minutes for an applicant to answer.
- Depth questions test how an applicant reacts and responds to changes in the presented situation.
- Depth: Mandated follow up questions that probe deeper (i.e., “Now imagine...” or “Tell me about a time you've experienced that hypothetical in real life.”).

Note: You are required to define "probe questions" for **breadth AND depth** in advance so everyone has the same opportunity.

EXAMPLE BREADTH QUESTION – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT COMPETENCY

Imagine you will be attending a chief executive briefing along with a number of senior leaders from your organization. These senior leaders have more experience and tenure in the organization than you have. In addition, they hold a view that is in conflict with yours. You need the chief executive to adopt

your view.

How would you prepare for this meeting?

EXAMPLE DEPTH QUESTION – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT COMPETENCY

(Same initial question): Imagine you will be attending a chief executive briefing along with a number of senior leaders from your organization. These senior leaders have more experience and tenure in the organization than you have. In addition, they hold a view that is in conflict with yours. You need the chief executive to adopt your view.

How would you prepare for this meeting?

Required follow-up questions:

Imagine the meeting does not result in the desired outcome.

What do you do next?

Imagine the meeting did result in the outcome you hoped for, but the other senior leaders left the meeting with remaining concerns.

Would you take any additional action with those stakeholders?

Tell us about a time when you experienced a situation where you needed to convince a chief executive of something despite the other leaders who did not feel the same way.

What was the outcome and what would you do differently next time?

QUESTIONS TO AVOID

Brain teasers or puzzles: These create stress for the applicant and don't test their skills.

Self-assessing strengths and weaknesses: These create disingenuous answers that don't relate to competencies.

Questions about five year plans and future goals: These don't test competencies and can reveal inappropriate information that introduces bias.

GOOD ANSWERS

SMEs should calibrate themselves for each question by jotting down a few bullet points for what a good answer could entail. However, the applicant's answers should match the described proficiency level.

Examples:

- applicant should mention researching the executive ahead of time for presentation style and bio
- applicant should mention pre-meetings with the other leaders to try to get their advanced buy-in
- applicant should mention bringing data to the meeting to encourage data driven decisions by the decision maker