

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO **STRUCTURED** INTERVIEWS



Most people are lousy at interviewing

Empirically speaking, we just are not great at interviewing. Decisions about candidates based on unstructured interviews has almost zero correlation with job success.

There is as simple (although not necessarily easy) way to improve interviewing: **implementing a structured interview process**. Structured interviews have been shown to increase predictive validity by **100%** (and much more, according to some studies).

Structured Interviews increase:

Validity - Measures things that are needed on job.

Reliability - Provides more precision and less error.

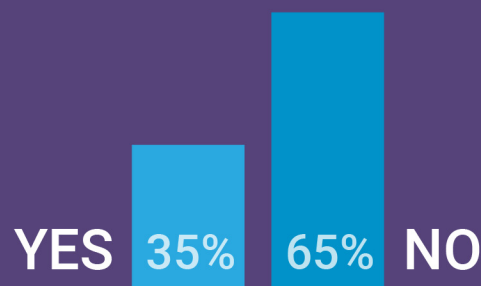
Fairness - Reduces bias and creates level playing field.

Efficiency - Gives a clean, repeatable process that people get used to.

Yet when we surveyed 750+ people about their hiring practices and asked about whether they used structured interviews, here's what they said:

POLL

Does your company use a structured interview process where you have a rubric for scoring job candidates on different factors?



Obviously, we're missing out on an opportunity to improve the way we hire.



What is a structured interview process?

Let's first nail down exactly what a structured interview process is. Truth be told, "structured" can be a squishy word in this context (a bit ironic). But a structured interview process is intended to create a consistent way to interview and assess candidates through:

- ✓ **An agreed understanding of the candidate requirements.**
- ✓ **Standard questions**
- ✓ **Standard ratings**
- ✓ **Standard training**
- ✓ **Standard process**

Here are the hallmarks of a strong, structured interviews process:

- ✓ **Every candidate gets the same questions.**
- ✓ **There are clear and meaningful rating scales for interviewers.**
- ✓ **The ratings are usually added up to give a score (not always).**
- ✓ **Users are all trained on how to use the interview and be a good interviewer.**



The 7 Steps

Here are the 7 steps that will get us to a clean, efficient structured interviewing process:

1. Establish a hiring team
2. Analyze the job
3. Write the questions
4. Build rating scales
5. Train users
6. Standardize the setting and process
7. Review and improve



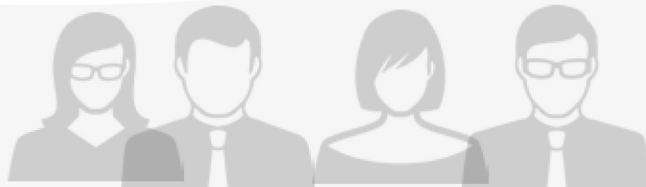


Step 1: Establish the hiring team

There are very few cases where hiring should be left to just one person. Tap into the collective wisdom of your organization to define the job, assess the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behavioral drives needed, and then assess candidates.

As a team, you should:

- Build questions that will tease out the information you need from the candidate.
- Establish rating scales to help evaluate candidate in different areas.
- Assign different areas of exploration to different team members (e.g. Bob evaluates the candidate for their ability to build processes, while Jane evaluates them for accounting knowledge).





Step 2: Analyze the job

A **Job Analysis** is a systematic evaluation of the:

Tasks

Responsibilities

Competencies

Knowledge

Experiences

Personal Characteristics

Behavioral and cognitive job targeting can be an exceedingly helpful tool in forcing the right discussions here.

Once you've done a good job analysis, you're in a good spot to write the job description and job ad, decide on selection tools and decide on interview questions.



Job targeting in the PI software takes just minutes to determine behavioral and cognitive requirements of an open position.




Step 3: Write the questions

Creating a consistent set of questions is critical when it comes to structured interviews. This lets you have “apple to apple” comparisons.


Structured interviews questions come in different styles:

	Experience	Soft Skills
Generic	How would you rate your skill at programming with Python?	What is your approach to leading others?
Behavioral	Tell me about a time when you used Python to build something new.	Tell me about a time when you had to lead a team of top performers
Situational	If you had to use learn another programming language, how would you do it?	If you found out one of your employees was stealing from the company, what would you do?

One thing that many interviewers are guilty of doing, and is a big no-no, is asking questions in a confirmatory manner. Here’s an example:

 **“So Jane, Acme Company is a really fast-paced place, and I want to make sure the person we hire will do well in that kind of environment. Do you work well in fast-paced environments?”**

Here’s a much better (non-confirmatory) way of asking it:

 **“Jane, different people have different work styles. Some people thrive in chaotic, fast-paced situations, and some people do much better in a more structured, organized environment. Tell me a bit about your workstyle and what kind environment works best for you.”**



We also recommend using **the STAR Model** to write questions:

Situation: What was the situation the candidate was in?

“Tell me about a time...”

Task: What was the task the candidate needed to accomplish?

“Where you were faced with a difficult customer...”

Acton: What were the actions the candidate took to accomplish this task?

“What did you do and...”

Results: What were the results of these actions?

“How did it turn out?”

All questions should be:

- Reflective of the competencies, skills, etc. from the job target
- Be in line with the responsibilities of the job
- Be open-ended
- Be clear and concise
- Free of jargon

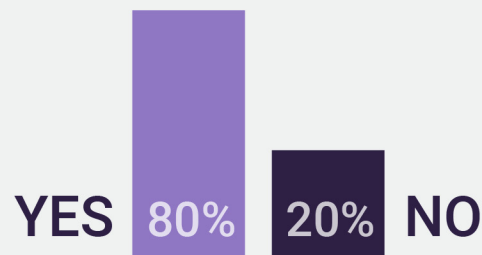


Step 4: Build rating scales

Structured interviews call for a structured and standardized way to assess people. This is where rating scales come in. This is all about removing bias. And guess what? In our survey of 750 people involved in hiring, 81% said their hiring team members had biases they weren't aware of.

POLL

Do you think people who make hiring decisions have biases they're not aware of?



There are basically 2 ways to do hiring scales: the easy way and the hard way. And as you might imagine, the hard way is a bit better in the long run.

The easy way

The first option is a generic rating scale for the hiring team members. This is what ratings for one question rating scale might look like:

**“Tell me about a time you failed at a project
How did you try to avoid failure? What did that
experience teach you?”**

- 1 Poor/Far Below Expectations
- 2 Below Average/Below Expectations
- 3 Average/Meets Expectations
- 4 Above Average/Above Expectations
- 5 Excellent/Exceeds Expectations

The hard (better) way

The better way to do this—the way that takes more work upfront—requires us to give forethought to what characteristics of the candidates' answers line up with different ratings. We call these behaviorally anchored ratings.

Here's what that rating scale might look like for the same question:

- 1 Could not recall failing
- 2 Minimized failure and blamed others.
- 3 Accepted failure, but did not show evidence of learning from it.
- 4 Took responsibility for failure and used lessons to be successful in future.
- 5 Owned the responsibility, used lessons to be successful as well as using it to coach others.





Step 5: Train users

While structured interviews are great, they're only as good as the training that accompanies them. Everyone on the interviewing team needs to understand why you're doing structured interviews and how to do them well.

Here are some of the key things the hiring team needs to be trained on:

Basic interviewing skills: Interviewers should know some of the basics, like how to prepare for the interview, how to open the interview, how to actively listen, how to effectively probe further, key legal aspects of interviews to avoid, etc.

How to use structured interviews: The structured interview is a tool but it will be most effective in trained hands. Make sure that interviewers understand how to use the structured interview, how to ask the questions, how they should make their ratings, and what they do with the information once it is done.

Note-taking: Notes can be a terrific source of information to discuss difference between candidates who scored similarly on the interview. But when and in what format should an interviewer take notes? Will the information need to be read by others or is it just there to help the interviewer recall details? The interviewing team should have answers to these questions.

Interviewer nonverbal behavior: Even with the best intentions, a structured interview can go in the wrong direction if the interviewer isn't paying attention to his her nonverbal behavior. It is good to help them understand how they should sit (posture), where they should look, whether they should nod their head, smile, etc.

Bias-awareness training: One of the strengths of structured interviews is how they help to remove subjective bias. But, they can't remove it completely. Training interviewers on some of the more common ones may help them to catch their own biases before it influences interview ratings.





Step 6: Standardize the setting and process

Warning: this is where things might start to feel a bit rigid. But if you truly want to create a great structured interviewing process, you want to eliminate as many inconsistencies as you possibly can.

In a nutshell, remove any variables you can think of:

- Have all interviews in a quiet, non-threatening place.
- Make the seating arrangements the same for all candidates.
- Make the situation accessible to candidates with disabilities.
- Have the candidate meet with multiple people during the interview process.
We recommend at least 3 people during the interview/assessing process.
Depending upon the role, you can have 6 to 8 people involved in the process.
- Give all interviewers enough time to prepare.
- Give each interviewer (or interview team) the same amount of time per interview
- If you're pairing up interviewers, use the same pairings.
- Document your ratings immediately after the interview. Get those ratings in while they're fresh on everyone's mind.



Step 7: Review and improve

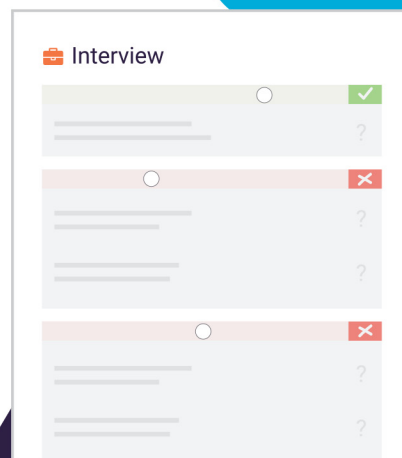
Like business in general, structured interviews should be the subject of continuous improvement. There's no "set it and forget it" when it comes to hiring well.

You'll likely find...

- Some interview items may not work well.
- Rating scales could be improved.
- There are gaps in the training.

Figure out where the cracks in the process are and make adjustments.

Your reward will be better people in your organization, which makes the effort worthwhile!





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