

Interview Guide for Supervisors/Managers

Department of Homeland Security

Office of the CIO



Table of Contents

- Introduction
- Preparing for Interviews
- Recommended Steps
- Interview Do's and Don'ts
- Interview Pitfalls
- Interview Questions
- Selecting Interview Questions





Introduction

- The **Employment Interview** is an exchange of information between the candidate and the selecting official/recommending panel. It provides the candidate with the opportunity to sell himself or herself, and management with the opportunity to sell the position and the Organization.

- The importance of selecting the “**BEST**” for a position cannot be over emphasized. Multiple factors are needed to properly evaluate qualified candidates. These factors must be “**job related**” and defensible. Consideration should be given to work experience, education and training, performance appraisal, and awards. In the interview, the candidate may expand upon information provided in the application/resume, and provide management with the deciding factor in the selection process.

- The purpose of the guide is to assist OCIO Officials in selecting the best qualified individuals for federal positions by providing information and recommendations which, if followed, will result in valid and effective interviews. For additional information and assistance, contact your Human Resource Manager.

Preparing for Interviews

It is important for a good interviewer to be prepared. To prepare for interviews:

1. Arrange for an appropriate interview site, which is comfortable, well lit, and private (with no interruptions).
2. Carefully review the position description and qualification requirements to identify critical “job related” factors.
3. Select/develop interview questions that are related to the position and “job related” factors. Recommended types of questions are those which:
 - ✓ **Elicit information on past experience and training related to on-the-job performance; and**
 - ✓ **Ask candidates how they would respond to hypothetical situations likely to be encountered on the job.**
4. Allocate sufficient time for each interview.





Recommended Steps

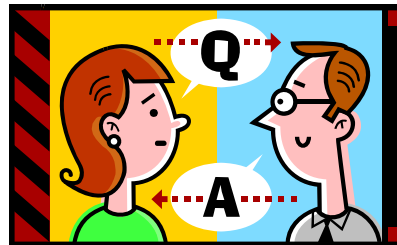
In conducting your interviews, it is recommended that you follow these five sequential steps:

1. **Introduction and Welcome** – Establish rapport with the applicant and explain the purpose of the interview.
2. **Obtain Relevant Information** – Use your job-related questions.
3. **Discuss the Position** – Provide full information about the duties and responsibilities of the position including possible travel or overtime requirements.
4. **Respond to the Applicant's Questions**
5. **End the Interview** – Express appreciation to the applicant for his/her time, and inform the applicant of:
 - ✓ When the selection will be made; and
 - ✓ How the applicant will be notified of the decision.

Interview Do's

DO!!!! Ask questions relating to applicants:

- ✓ Qualifications
- ✓ Experience
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Job-related activities
- ✓ Career goals and objectives
- ✓ Plans for further self-development
- ✓ Availability for travel, overtime, specific work schedules





Interview Don'ts

DON'T!!! Ask illegal questions relating to applicants:

- **Age**
 - What are your retirement plans?
 - Do you think you are too old to accept an entry level position?
- **Children/child care**
 - How many children do you have? Are they healthy?
 - Do you have a child care problem?
 - What are your family plans?
- **Marital status**
 - Is your spouse subject to transfer anytime?
 - Are you married? What does your husband/spouse do?
 - How long do you expect your spouse to be stationed here?
- **Political affiliation**
 - Who did you vote for in the last election?
- **Race or national origin**
 - Are you, your spouse, or parents naturalized native born US citizens? What date did you acquire citizenship?
 - What is your nationality, lineage, national origin or descent?
 - What date did you arrive in the US? What port of entry?
 - How long have you been a resident?
 - What languages do you commonly use?
- **Religion**
 - **YOU MAY NOT ASK ANYTHING ABOUT RELIGION!!!!**
- Any other area which is not specifically related to the evaluation criteria for the position.



Interview Pitfalls

- While the interview can be a helpful tool in the selection process, its limitations should be recognized. In the “artificial” interview setting, it is difficult to discern such important performance traits as reliability, problem solving capability, learning potential, work performance aptitude, work habits, judgment, and motivation. These traits are more accurately assessed through review of materials contained in the selection package such as performance ratings, applicant training and awards, supervisory appraisals, etc.

- While the interview can serve to clarify and elicit further job-related information, it should be used as only one part of a comprehensive evaluation process.

- An interview can inadvertently be the source of numerous illegal violations. For an interview to be defensible, it must be properly developed and conducted, passing the test of:
 1. Being specifically job-related; and
 2. Filling a true business need.



Interview Pitfalls Con't

A casual, unplanned, unsystematic interview can lead to such common interviewing errors as:

- ❑ Failure to establish rapport with the candidate. The interview never gets off the ground - resulting in no substantive discussion about the applicant and his/her qualifications.
- ❑ Failure to have a strategy. Lack of an interview system or an understanding of what information needs to be elicited can lead to an inappropriate and counterproductive interview – perhaps resulting in the inadvertent violation of EEO regulations.
- ❑ Briefness of interview. An interview that is too brief is usually superficial, yielding little valuable information about the candidate.
- ❑ Overemphasis on initial impression. First impressions are not necessarily true indications of typical behavior. Avoid making final decisions early in the interview before you have gathered appropriate information.
- ❑ Unconscious biases of preferences. Don't allow one specific trait or characteristic to influence your overall evaluation of a candidate. Common areas of unconscious bias include sex, age, race, physical handicap, physical characteristics (weight, height, etc.), and dress.
- ❑ Excessive talking. When the interviewer does most of the talking, little can be learned about the applicant.
- ❑ Reliance on intuition. Conclusions based on intuition are irrational and invalid. Only a complete understanding of what an applicant has done in the past will help to predict what he or she will do in the future.

Questions for Better Interviews

- A. ALL-PURPOSE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**
- B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SUPERVISORY POSITIONS**
- C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TECHNICAL POSITIONS**
- D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CLERICAL, SECRETARIAL, AND ASSISTANT POSITIONS**





A. All Purpose Interview Questions

- Tell me about your present job.
 - What do you like best about it?
 - What do you like least?
 - What frustrates you?
 - What have you learned on this job?
 - Where do you rank your present job with other jobs you've held? Why?

- How have you changed the content of your job from when you first assumed it (e.g.: expanded its scope, improved its contribution to the organization, etc.)?

- What are some of the things in a job that are important to you?

- In general, what type of work have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?

- Within a work environment, what are your strengths? Your weakness?

- For what things have your superiors complimented you?

- What are some problems you encountered on the job? How did you solve these problems?

- What are some of your more important accomplishments?
 - What are the reasons you were successful in achieving these accomplishments?
 - Were there any unusual difficulties you had to overcome to achieve these accomplishments?

- What are some important decisions or recommendations you were called upon to make?
 - What decisions are easiest for you to make? Which are more difficult?
 - How has your previous work experience helped you to improve your decision-making abilities?
 - Cite an important decision that you would make differently if you could do it over again.



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- Do you prefer working with others or working independently? Why?
- Considering your relationships with co-workers, customers, supervisors, etc.:
 - Cite an example of how you have been effective in relating with others.
 - Cite an example of how you might not have been particularly effective. What might you do differently next time in that situation?
- How do you prioritize your work?
- How well do you work under pressure?
 - Cite an example of a pressure situation you faced on the job.
 - How did you handle it?
- What motivates you?
- What computers/software packages have you worked with:
 - For what purposes?
 - What computer training have you had?
- What was your most difficult assignment?
- What was your most rewarding assignment?
- What are your short-term goals?
- What are your long-term goals?
 - Have your long-term goals changed in recent years? If so, how?
 - What are you doing to achieve your long-term objectives?



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- What have you done about your career development in the last few years?
- What kind of supervisor gets the best performance out of you?
- Describe your relationship with your supervisor.
- Regarding the vacant position:
 - Why are you interested in the position?
 - What in your background particularly qualifies you for this job?
 - Why do you think you would be good in this position?
 - Are there any reasons why you might not be able to perform the duties of this position? If so, explain.
- How do you feel about:
 - Working overtime?
 - Working on a particular work schedule?
 - Travel?
 - Explain to applicant what specific requirements will be: amounts of travel/OT; notice; etc.
- Describe a situation where someone directly contradicted your opinion in a meeting or in front of a supervisor and how you handled it.
 - How did you feel?
 - How did you manage your feelings?
 - What ultimately happened as a result of this encounter?
- Tell us about experiences where you have dealt with an organization's CIO or the CIO's office staff.
 - How have you nurtured effective working relationships with others in the IT community?
 - What impact have these working relationships had on your ability to be more effective on the job?



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- Provide an example of an interaction that you have had with senior-level officials or industry leaders.
 - What was the context of the interaction?
 - How did you ensure success in building the relationship?
 - What strategies do you employ to persuade senior level people when you need their support?

- Is the salary range we have set for this position within your acceptable range?

- Why are you currently searching for a new position?

- What are the top three duties in the job you now have or in your most recent job?

- What are some typical decisions that you make and how do you make them? Provide examples.

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

- Describe for me your ideal organization.

- Describe what you would say if asked to talk about yourself in a group of people.

- If someone told you that you had made an error, describe how you would react and what you would say in your defense.



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- If someone asked you for assistance with a matter that is outside the parameters of your job description, what would you do?
- Describe what you would classify as a crisis.
- You are angry about an unfair decision. How do you react?
- Suppose you are in a situation where deadlines and priorities change frequently and rapidly. How would you handle it?
- How do you know when you are stressed? What do you do to de-stress?
- Tell me about a time when you were a part of a great team. What was your part in making the team effective?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker. How did you handle the situation?
- How do you think your co-workers would respond if you were absent from work?
- Can you tell me about a time during your previous employment when you suggested a better way to perform a process?
- Tell me about a personal or career goal that you have accomplished and why that was important to you.
- Give an example of a time when you were trying to meet a deadline, you were interrupted, and did not make the deadline. How did you respond?



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- What strengths did you rely on in your last position to make you successful in your work?
- What do you do when you know you are right and your boss disagrees with you? Give me an example of when this has happened in your career.
- Tell me about a situation you wish that you had handled differently based on the outcome.
 - What was the situation?
 - What would you change (or will you change) when faced with a similar situation?
- Describe a time when you performed a task outside your perceived responsibilities.
 - What was the task?
 - Why did you perceive it to be outside your responsibilities?
 - What was the outcome?
- If you observed a co-worker who made inappropriate sexual or racial remarks to another employee, and it was obvious to you that the situation was creating an uncomfortable environment, what would you do?
- What are your strengths?
- What would your last boss say about you?
- Describe how you like to be managed, and the best relationship you've had with a previous boss.
- If I asked your previous/current co-workers about you what would they say?



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- Describe what you see as your strengths related to this job/position. Describe what you see as your weaknesses related to this job/position.
- Explain the phrase “work ethic” and describe yours.
- What kind of people do you find it most difficult to work with? For example, assume you are in a situation where you have to deal with a person very different from yourself and you are finding it difficult. What would you do?
- What methods do you use to make decisions? When do you find it most difficult to make a decision?
- Describe a difficult time you have had dealing with an employee, customer, or co-worker. Why was it difficult? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
- How would your co-workers describe your work style or work habits?
- What do you do when others resist or reject your ideas or actions?
- What do you think are the best and worst parts of working in a team environment? How do you handle it?
- Under what kinds of conditions do you learn best?
- How would your past employers describe your response to hectic or stressful situations?



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- If I asked several of your co-workers about your greatest strength as a team member, what would they tell me?
- What was the most creative thing you did in your last job?
- What is your interpretation of “success?”
- Describe an ideal work environment or “the perfect job.”
- In what way(s) do you express your personality in the workplace?
- Could you share with us a recent accomplishment of which you are most proud?
- What would you have liked to do more of in your last position? What held you back?
- Tell us a bit about your work background, and then give us a description of how you think it relates to our current opening.
- What are your qualifications in your area of expertise, i.e., what skills do you have that make you the best candidate for this position? Include any special training you have had (on-the-job, college, continuing education, seminars, reading, etc.) and related work experience.
- Why have you applied for this position?
- What skill set do you think you would bring to this position?



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- Tell me about your present or last job.
 - Why did you choose it?
 - Why did you/do you want to leave?
 - What was your primary contribution/achievement?
 - Biggest challenge?

- What are your short-term and long-term goals?

- In what areas would you like to develop further? What are your plans to do that?

- What do you think about SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures)?

- What are your career path interests?

- What do you know about DHS?

- Why should we hire you?

- If you were offered this position, when would you be available to start?


- After learning about this opportunity, what made you take the next step and apply for the job?

- If you are the successful applicant, how would you expect to be different after a year in this position?



All Purpose Interview Questions Con't

- Now that you have learned about our company and the position you are applying for, what hesitation or reluctance would you have in accepting this job if we offer it to you?
- Do you have any other special qualifications relating to this position that I should know about?
- What questions do you have for me?



B. Interview Questions for Supervisory Positions

- How do you view the job of a supervisor?
- How many people have you supervised/led: in your current job? In previous jobs?
- What types of positions have you supervised/led?
- Describe your supervisory responsibilities and the extent of your authority.
- Describe your leadership style?
- What do you like best about being a supervisor? What do you like least?
- What responsibility did you have in recruiting and selecting your staff?
 - What criteria did you use in making hiring decisions?
 - How many immediate subordinates have you selected in the past two years?
 - Regarding your selections, any surprises or disappointments? If so, explain.
- What types of problems have you faced in directing your subordinate employees?
 - How did you handle them?
 - What was the outcome?
- How would you handle a situation where one of your workers changes from a reliable, hardworking employee to a problem person?



Interview Questions for Supervisory Positions Con't

- Describe your method of motivating people.
 - Which approaches have worked best?
 - Which approaches have failed?
- How do you get the best work from your subordinates?
- What responsibility have you had in orienting and training new people?
- Some managers keep a very close check on their organization. Others use a loose rein. What pattern do you follow?
- How do you convey information to your people?
- How do you maintain discipline in your organization?
 - What types of discipline problems have you had to deal with?
 - How did you handle them?
- How is your group's morale?
 - On what do you base your opinion?
- Discuss your staff's record of turnover.
 - To what do you attribute this good/poor record?
- What planning processes have you found useful?
 - How do you go about them?
 - In what way do you feel you have improved in your planning abilities/methods?
- What systems and procedures have you developed to improve the efficiency of your organization?



Interview Questions for Supervisory Positions Con't

- How does your past experience bear on your qualifications for this position?
- What things do you think would contribute to your effectiveness as a supervisor?
- What things might interfere with your effectiveness as a supervisor?
- What are the two or three most important things you have learned as a supervisor?
- What would you recommend that would help this command to more effectively accomplish its mission?
- Describe the nature of work directed.
- Define professional behavior and/or conduct appropriate in the workplace.
- Why do you think a team of people may not work well together?
- Tell us about your management style - people, teamwork, direction?
- Describe an ideal supervisor.
- What is your own philosophy of management?
- How have you participated in planning processes?
- Is it more important to be a detail oriented person, or a big picture person? Explain.



Interview Questions for Supervisory Positions Con't

- Describe for me a time when you have come across questionable business practices; how did you handle the situation?
- A new policy is to be implemented organization-wide. You do not agree with this new policy. How do you discuss this policy with your staff?
- Describe for me a decision you made which would normally have been made by your supervisor? What was the outcome?
- Discuss and differentiate between remediation, corrective action, and discipline.
- Explain, step by step, how you have handled an employee who had performance problems.
- Why should employees seek to improve their knowledge and skill base?
 - How would you motivate them to do so?
- What coaching or mentoring experience have you had?
 - With groups or one-on-one?
 - How did you determine the appropriate way to coach/mentor and what were the results?
- Management requires both good writing and verbal skills for good communication. When it comes to giving information to employees that can be done either way, do you prefer to write a memo OR talk to the employee?
- When making a decision to fire an employee, do you find it easy because of the organization's needs OR difficult because of the employee's needs?



Interview Questions for Supervisory Positions Con't

- Managing requires motivating employees as well as accomplishing tasks. Do you find it more natural to point out what's wrong so employees can accomplish tasks competently OR to praise employees for their work and then point out what may need correcting?
- Managers need good information and managers need to make good decisions. Do you tend to gather information up to a deadline in order to make a better-informed decision OR gather just enough information to make a good decision quickly?
- Are you best at dealing with details and day-to-day operations OR with concepts, envisioning and future planning? Give an example.
- Tell me about your current position or most recent position and how you helped the organization accomplish its goals and mission.
- Have you ever had to champion an unpopular change? How did you handle it?



C. Interview Questions for Technical Positions

- What experience have you had in research and development of new equipment? Products? Processes?
- What has been your greatest technical achievement in your current position? In your career?
- How do you stay abreast of the changes that occur in your technical field?
- How do you approach and resolve a technical controversy?
- Describe your significant off-Center contacts in your functional area.
- How do you maintain good relationships with them to further your technical contributions?
- The person selected for this position will receive a specialized training plan requiring on-the-job training, short courses, correspondence courses, etc. (Specify as appropriate for position).
 - Are you willing to: Go on travel for training purposes? Work on correspondence courses at home on your own time?
 - In addition to the requirements of the training plan, what else could you do to improve your performance in this position?
- What types of equipment/systems/facilities have you worked on?
 - Where did you work on this equipment, etc.?
- Give some examples of the more difficult work you have done.
- Have you done any work on prototype equipment? If so, describe.



Interview Questions for Technical Positions

Con't

- What tools, instruments and/or equipment have you worked with?
 - Where have you used them?
 - On what type of work?
 - What type of training did you receive?

- What types of test equipment have you worked with?

- Give some examples of your work that required precise timing, accurate dimensions, precise fit, etc.

- Describe work you have done which required speed and accuracy of hand.

- What are some of the more common problems you encounter in your work?

- For _____ equipment, describe your experience in: (choose as appropriate) - Troubleshooting- Overhauling- Aligning- Testing- Modifying- Constructing- Preventive maintenance- Reconditioning- Calibrating- Repairing- Disassembling- Other- Assembling- Installing

- Tell how you've gained and used your knowledge of _____:
 - From the theoretical side (as in books).
 - From the practical side (as in "hands on" work experience).
 - How recently was this knowledge acquired? How recently was it last used?

- Where did you learn the skills of your trade? (On-the-job training, apprentice program, other training?)

- Give some examples of work you have done requiring up-to-date knowledge of trade practices.



Interview Questions for Technical Positions

Con't

- Tell how you gained your knowledge of shop practice (e.g.: conserving materials, using correct parts, keeping exact tolerances, handling different situations, "tricks of the trade", etc.).
- What experience have you had in planning, layout, and set up operations?
 - What was the size and scope of this work?
 - What were the more difficult types of planning, layout and set up you have done?
 - Describe the tools you used, calculations involved, tolerances, etc.
- What new methods of accomplishing your work have you suggested?
 - Were they tried?
 - If so, how successful were they?
- Cite an example where you had to meet a time schedule, deadline or emergency.
 - How did you handle it?
- What kinds of instructions have you had to follow in shop work, on jobs, or in the military?
- Describe your experience working with blueprints, diagrams, schematics, etc.
- How much help do you get from your supervisor in doing your work?
 - What work can you do by yourself, without the help of a supervisor?
 - Have you ever helped or guided others (helpers, junior workers, etc.)



Interview Questions for Technical Positions

Con't

- Describe work you did where you had to observe safety rules to avoid injuring yourself or others.
 - What dangers were involved?
 - What safety training have you had?
 - What is your safety record?
 - Tell about any accidents you have had in the last 5 years.

- Describe an IT strategic initiative in which you were involved.
 - What was your role?
 - What was the outcome of you efforts?
 - What did you learn from that experience?

- Describe a situation where you had to influence others to pursue a direction that they were initially resistant to follow.
 - How strong was the resistance?
 - What tactics did you use to influence those who did not share your perspective?
 - What was the outcome of the situation?

- Tell us about a policy setting project on which you have worked?
 - What was the project scope?
 - How were your leadership skills challenged?
 - How did you encourage collaboration?

- What strategies have you employed to keep up with the pace of change in our industry?
 - What have you read in the last six months that is related to our profession?
 - What strategies have you used for keeping up with changing government regulations and needs?
 - How do you share information and knowledge learned with others to aid in their professional development?



Interview Questions for Technical Positions

Con't

- Describe a time when you had to demonstrate your knowledge of policies, procedures, and regulations.
 - How did the situation arise?
 - What was the outcome?
 - How have you used Federal policies, procedures, and regulations to drive or promote IT-oriented changes in the past?

- Tell us about an experience where you served in a project lead or supervisory capacity for a horizontal and vertical system integration endeavor.
 - What was the nature of the project?
 - What were your biggest challenges and how did you resolve them?
 - What did you learn from the project?

- In your experience, what are the essential elements of an IT disaster recovery plan?

- Describe the types of network security features you have implemented or maintained in the past.

- When you have several users experiencing computer problems, how do you determine which users get help first?

- Describe your decision-making process when selecting which IT certifications to pursue.

- Of your certifications, which one(s) have you found most helpful when you encounter technical problems on the job?

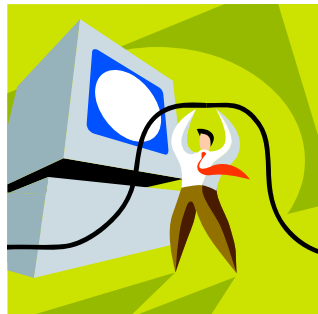
- What brands of hardware do you feel most comfortable dealing with?

- What software have you had the most success supporting?

Interview Questions for Technical Positions

Con't

- What characteristics do you feel are necessary for success as a technical support worker?
- Describe a past situation in which you provided excellent customer service to a user.
- Do you have any other specialized qualifications I should know about? If so, discuss.
- Do you have any additional questions about the position or the training requirements?





D. Interview Questions for Clerical, Secretarial, and Assistant Positions

- What are your current office responsibilities?
- In what administrative or management areas are you particularly interested?
 - What training or experience have you had in these areas?
- In your current job, what are your highest priorities?
- What is the pace of your current job?
 - What is the extent of your workload?
 - What types of pressure situations do you face? How often?
- What were some of the more unusual assignments you have been given?
 - What new skills/initiative did they require?
 - How successful were you in completing them?
- In your present job, what do you spend most of your time on?
- In what ways do you contribute to your organization's success?
- What responsibility do you have for dealing with other departments?
- What equipment or supplies have you purchased or recommended?
- With what computers/work processors are you familiar?
 - What software packages have you used?
 - Do you have any other computer experience or training?



Interview Questions for Clerical, Secretarial, and Assistant Positions Con't

- Cite some examples of experience you have had in arranging meetings/conferences. etc. involving coordination with several people.
 - What types of meetings/conferences were they?
 - How many and which people were involved?
 - What special problems did you encounter?

- Describe your experience in maintaining records.
 - What types of records?
 - For what purpose?
 - What computational skills were required?

- What types of filing systems have you used? Organized yourself?

- Describe your experience in assembling materials/reports from several different sources.

- Describe your experience in collecting and compiling data (statistical, financial, inventory, etc.)

- What experience have you had in making travel arrangements?

- What types of directives, instructions, manuals, etc. have you worked with? For what purposes?

- What new methods for accomplishing your work have you suggested?
 - Were they tried?
 - If so, how successful were they?

- Do you have any other special qualifications for this position which we haven't discussed? If so, describe.



Selecting Interview Questions

- Not all questions will be applicable to every situation.
- Choose questions that fit the position.
- When interviewing multiple candidates for a position, it is important to use the same criteria for evaluating each candidate so as to avoid legal problems.
 - The key is to be consistent and fair with all candidates (i.e., show no favoritism or discrimination).
 - Use an interviewing guideline of core criteria/qualifications that is applicable to all candidates for the position.
- Many of these questions do **not** have a “right” or “wrong” answer.
- After you have selected the questions that are appropriate to use, give some thought to the answers that make sense given your organization, culture and the priorities of the position.
- The applicant’s reasoning abilities and the thought process that leads to the answer may be as important as the answer itself.