

Human Resources

Interview

Key Points For Interviewing Success

- Be familiar with equal employment guidelines and rulings on [pre-employment inquiries](#).
 - Conduct the interview in a comfortable setting.
 - Provide an overview of the job responsibilities.
 - Schedule adequate, uninterrupted time for the interview and appropriate space to assure confidentiality. Keep to the allotted time.
 - Put the applicant at ease.
 - Remember to "sell" the organization.
 - Prepare job-related questions for interview and review applicant materials before the interview.
 - Get specific with questioning to probe deeper into the initial responses.
 - Maintain eye contact.
 - Allow for silence.
 - Maintain control of the interview while encouraging the applicant to do most of the talking.
 - Make a good impression; they will be evaluating you too. Be aware of your body language as well as the applicant's.
 - Dispel your first impressions.
 - Answer questions and explain next steps (timeline etc.).
 - Listen attentively and take notes during the interview (may want to use a prepared [assessment sheet](#) (pdf) or scoring grid).
 - Allow time for evaluation of applicant (in relation to pre-determined objective criteria) after each interview.
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Application Screening Tips

How do I begin?

Begin by grouping candidates into the following 3 categories:

1. Highly qualified
2. Qualified
3. Unqualified (doesn't meet minimum requirements)

Which aspect of the position descriptions do I use to screen the applications?

Use a current position description that includes:

- a. tasks and responsibilities
- b. a list of minimum competencies and requirements for the position.

What process of screening will best protect our organization from legal challenge?

Develop objective criteria for rating applicants by using the minimum competencies, education and skills noted on the position description.

What process of screening will yield the best applicants?

Review all material submitted and check for consistency of information (responsibilities vs. wages, etc.)

How can we be certain that we really use the same objective criteria to screen each applicant?

Create a rating sheet that can be attached to each application. See [Sample Assessment Sheets](#) (pdf)

How formal do we need to be with the screening process?

Rate each application using the objective criteria you have developed.

How can we be sure that we remember the rating of each application?

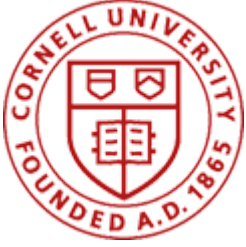
Note the rating and rationale on each applicant's rating sheet.

Which applicants do we interview?

Rank the applications by score. Interview those with highest score.

How many applicants should we interview?

Plan to interview and check the references of at least 3-6 applicants.



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Interviewer Biases

It is important for interviewers to understand and avoid biases that can affect the outcome of the interview. The following are some examples of interviewer bias:

Stereotyping

Forming generalized opinions about how people of a given sex, religion, or race appear, think, act, feel, or respond.

Inconsistency in questioning

Asking different questions of applicants.

First impression error

Interviewer makes snap judgments and lets his/her first impression (positive or negative) cloud the entire interview.

Negative emphasis

Rejecting an applicants on the basis of a small amount of negative information.

Halo/horn effect

The interviewer allows one strong point that he/she values highly to overshadow all other information.

Cultural noise

The failure to recognize responses of an applicant that are socially acceptable rather than factual.

Nonverbal bias

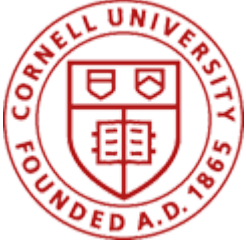
Undue emphasis is placed on nonverbal clues that are unrelated to job performance.

Contrast effect

Strong applicants interviewed after weak ones may appear more qualified than they actually are because of the contrast.

Similar-to-me error

Picking applicants based on personal characteristics that they share with the interviewer rather than job-related criteria.



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Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews help you to make a general assessment of applicants' suitability in a short timeframe. This enables you to narrow the applicant pool to the top applicants who will be invited for on-campus interviews. They are also useful in searches that have resulted in long-distance applicants who you would not want to incur the expenses of an on-campus interview without some certainty that their qualifications fit the requirements of your position vacancy.

The structure of the phone interview consists of:

- A series of questions about the applicant's employment history, qualifications and expectations
- An opportunity to "sell" your organization and position vacancy to the top applicants

The questions during a phone interview fall into three categories:

1. Employer and job specifics
2. Applicant success profile
3. Assessment of the applicant's expectations

Telephone Interview Questions

Note: All of these questions may not be appropriate for the position that you are filling. Based on the position requirements, select those that give you the information most relevant to the position vacancy.

Employer and Job Specifics

- Demographics: If you are unfamiliar with the applicant's employer, inquire about the size and nature of the employer, including such things as the employer's "niche" or specialty, the number of employees, revenues, how long in business, etc. This helps to determine if the applicant has worked in a similar environment.
- Supervisory responsibilities: Specifically ask about numbers and titles of direct

reports. Who does the applicant report to (e.g. title)?

- Technical systems: Find out about the software environment that the applicant has worked in.

Applicant Success Profile

- Progression indicators: Find out what jobs led to the current job at this employer, including transfers as well as promotions. This may give insight into how the person manages their career. How has applicant stayed current in their job? Coursework, special assignments, lateral transfers?
- Management style: How does the applicant prefer to be managed? (e.g. structure/feedback/direction vs independence and autonomy). What is his/her management style? (e.g. consensus building, participative supervisory style vs centralized, autocratic style of supervision)
- Reason for leaving: Qualify the reason for the applicant leaving their position. The reason for leaving may help you to understand what drives the applicant. Probe the common answer "need to grow". This can mean a wide variety of things including disappointment in a lack of recognition for skills and accomplishments.
- Career opportunities with current employer: What would be your next logical move in progression at your present employer? What would have to change at your present position for you to continue to work there?

Assessment of Applicant's Expectations

The purpose of these questions are to help you consider if the position you have available will satisfy the applicant based on their reasons for leaving their employer.

- Assess values and long term goals: What would be three criteria for selecting your next employer? What would be three criteria for selecting your next position? Note: Most people are motivated by recognition, challenge & fulfilling work, not money. If a higher salary is all they state that they want, beware, and probe further.
- Pace: What is comfortable for them? Moderate, controllable, predictable or fast paced, deadline pressure or hyper paced.
- Minimum salary: Make sure that you ask what they expect. You may want to have a salary range ready to help focus them. "Not to limit you or commit you to a certain dollar figure, what's the minimum salary you'd consider right to accept another position?"

Promote Your Organization and Position Vacancy

If you are still interested in the applicant, cover the following;

- Description of your department, key projects, what the department is recognized for,

etc.

- Description of how this position fits into the department and supports the department's mission and goals
- Opportunities for advancement or growth
- General comment on benefits (e.g. full benefits package)
- Description of local community for out-of-towners
- Provide website where applicant can learn more about your department, Cornell, and the community (if applicable)

Wrap up Statement

"Thank you for your time today and the information that you shared with me. We have a few more applicants to speak to over the phone before we set up in-person interviews. Allow me to get back to you by [give a date] to let you know if we are in a position to invite you in for an interview."



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In-Person Interviews

Scheduling & preparation:

- Assemble a team to conduct the interviews and make hiring recommendations.
- Allot the same amount of time for each interview.
- Conduct the interview in a comfortable and confidential setting.
- Schedule interviews at least 45 minutes apart to allow time to complete notes and allow applicants to come and go without overlap.
- Send out a letter confirming the time, date and location of the interview (include parking and directions). In addition, include any other relevant information (recruitment packet, position description, etc.).
- Have employment applications available for those being interviewed to complete (if not previously completed).
- Keep interview within the allotted time.
- Maintain eye contact, and allow for silence. Remember that the applicant is also evaluating you; take care to make a positive impression.
- Have a set of the questions and an [assessment sheet](#) (pdf) printed out for each applicant. Leave spaces between the questions so the interview team can record the data during the interview.
- Allow time for evaluation of applicant after each interview.

Avoid common errors:

Errors such as [interviewer biases](#) reduce interview accuracy.

- Provide materials to each interviewer concerning [legal guidelines](#).
- Include supervisor on interview team, as well as peer level and subordinate positions if possible.
- Inform interviewee that your organization is using a team-based interview to improve the validity of the process. Let them know the names of the interview team members and their relation to the position.
- Instruct the applicants to provide transcripts, licenses and certificates before the interview.
- Utilize same interview structure and questions to ensure that applicants have an equal

opportunity to demonstrate their competence.

Interview questions:

- See [sample Skills for Success questions](#) (pdf) for ideas.
- Develop the interview questions based on the tasks and behavioral competencies described in the current position description.
- Check with your [local HR representative](#) or the Recruitment and Employment to make sure all of your questions are legal and/or based on bona fide requirements of the position. See also [HR Law and Policies](#) .
- Ask specific questions, and use follow-up questions for clarification and more detail.
- Avoid questions that can be answered by "Yes" or "No".
- For entry level positions, use "what if" questions that describe a situation an applicant might confront as part of the position and ask for the applicant's response to the situation. Use more complex "what if" questions for more advanced positions.
- Have team members take turns asking questions. Team members who aren't asking questions can record responses.

Evaluating results:

- Prepare objective criteria to use in scoring responses to each question to avoid basing ranking on hunches.
 - Make sure that the team completes the evaluation of each applicant at the close of that interview and prepare a master record of responses to questions and scoring. This record will be compared against like records for the other applicants.
 - When all of the interviews are completed, the team should compare the records of all of the interviews and rank them by score. The top ranked applicant gets the offer.
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INTERVIEWING APPLICANTS FOR SKILLS FOR SUCCESS (LONG VERSION)

Skills for Success

Skills/Examples of Behavior	Interview Questions
<p>Inclusiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Shows respect for differences in backgrounds, lifestyles, viewpoints, and needs, with regard to ethnicity, gender, creed, and sexual orientationPromotes cooperation and a welcoming environment for allWorks to understand the perspectives brought by all individualsPursues knowledge of diversity and inclusiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What does the term diversity mean to you as it applies to the workplace?2. What have you done to make diversity accepted in your workplace? Give some examples.3. How has your company handled diversity issues in the workplace? How do you support this effort? Give an example.4. What are some of your best practices for creating and managing a diverse work group? When have you applied them?5. Describe a time when you had to treat individuals in your work group differently. Why? What were the outcomes?6. Tell me about a time that you had to deal with cultural differences. What did you do? Should you have done something differently and why?7. What have you done to foster an inclusive work environment? What were the benefits for the work environment? Give an example.8. Describe a discussion you initiated with an individual to learn about any diversity barriers they perceived in the organization. What was the result?9. Give some examples of what you have done to increase diversity awareness in your group.
<p>Adaptability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Is flexible, open and receptive to new ideas and approachesAdapts to changing priorities, situations and demandsHandles multiple tasks and prioritiesModifies one's preferred way of doing things	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Tell me about a time when you had to change your priorities because of a change in circumstances or plans. How did you handle it and what was the result?2. Think of an organizational change you went through -- how did it affect your work routines? What did you learn from it?3. Give me an example of how you quickly adapted to a change in your work area when others were resisting it and holding on to "the old way." What actions did you take to help bring others on board?4. Describe a time when you and/or your team faced an unexpected challenge. How did you meet it? What was the outcome?5. What signals tell you that a situation has some implications or hidden agendas that

could make it difficult to handle? Provide a specific example. Describe the action you took.

6. Tell me about a tough work situation that you knew was coming -- how did you prepare and what was the outcome?
7. At work, we must all compromise to make things happen. Tell me about a time when you felt it necessary to compromise your own immediate priorities in order to be flexible and tolerant of another person's priorities. What affect did this have on you?
8. Describe a time when you had to deal with frequent job changes or unexpected events. Tell me what you did. What does this situation say about your ability to work in an ambiguous or unstructured environment?
9. When has it been necessary for you to tolerate an ambiguous situation at work? Give me details of the duration and intensity of the circumstance. What effect did this have on you?
10. Describe a work situation in which customers/clients changed their minds at the last minute. How did you handle it and what was the outcome?
11. Give me an example of significant changes you have had to make to your work style in order to maximize effectiveness. What was the most challenging or difficult and why?
12. At times, we are all required to deal with difficult people. An even more demanding factor is to be of service to a difficult person. When have you been successful with this type of situation at work? Tell me about a time when you were not successful and why.
13. Describe how you've utilized your creativity in your current job.

Self Development

- Enhances personal knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Anticipates and adapts to technological advances as needed
- Seeks opportunities for continuous learning
- Seeks and acts upon performance feedback

1. Tell me about the last discussion you had with your manager regarding your development. What was one of the development opportunities discussed and what have you done to follow up on it? What was the benefit?
2. What development activities have you pursued in the last three months? What have been some of the outcomes? What feedback have you received?
3. Describe the steps you have taken to obtain feedback on your development needs. Give an example.
4. Describe a coaching discussion you initiated with your manager or a peer in the last three months. What was the reason and what was the outcome?
5. Describe what you have done in the last six months to stay up-to-date in your field. Provide an example. What has been the benefit?
6. Tell me what you have done to build a network of people in your field from other companies. How have you used that network to help your development? Give an example.
7. Give an example of using a mistake as an opportunity for learning and/or development.
8. Have you taken any skills development courses recently? Why and what were they?
9. How does your current job relate to your career goals?
10. How do you keep informed about important changes in your field? What has been the benefit?
11. Describe a time when you had to develop the skills required for a job or role? How did you do it?

Communication

- Demonstrates the ability to express thoughts clearly, both orally and in writing
- Demonstrates effective listening skills
- Shares knowledge and information
- Asks questions and offers input for positive results

Oral

1. Tell me about a time when you had to explain something you knew well to someone who had difficulty understanding the subject. How did you do it and what was the outcome?
2. Describe a time when you were unsuccessful in getting your point across. Why? What was the outcome?
3. Describe a time when you were very effective in getting your point across and convinced others to change their position. What method did you use?
4. Describe a time when you picked up on non-verbal cues from your listener(s) that told you to change your communication approach. What was the outcome? What did you learn?
5. How do you go about assuring that your verbal and/or written messages are clearly understood? Give an example.
6. How do you avoid "verbal overkill"? How do you reduce messages to their essence without losing the main intent and content?
7. What types of experiences have you had in talking with customers or clients? Tell me about a time when you had to communicate under difficult circumstances. What was the outcome?
8. Describe a time when you used verbal skills to change an attitude, sell a product/idea, or influence others. What were some of the outcomes?
9. When do you write something and when do you handle it face to face? Give an example. What was the outcome?

Listening

1. Describe the characteristics of a good listener.
2. How good are your listening skills? How do you know? Provide an example.
3. Give an example of when you picked up some non-verbal cues. Were they positive or negative and how did they impact your actions?
4. Tell me about a time when you did not understand what someone was trying to communicate. What were the circumstances? How did you handle it?
5. Describe a time when you and someone else had different understandings of a conversation. How did you learn about the miscommunication? What did you do? What was the outcome?
6. Tell me about a time when an associate or team member rambled or talked excessively. How did you handle it?
7. Tell me about a time when you strongly disagreed with what was being said. What were the circumstances? What did you do?
8. Describe a time when listening to an important message was difficult because you were preoccupied or the speaker's communication was unclear. What did you do to grasp the key points?

9. Tell me about a time when you "spoke too soon" as a result of not listening. Why? What was the result?
10. How do you signal other people that you're listening to what they say? Provide an example.
11. How do you ensure that you accurately understand verbal information given to you? Give an example.
12. Think back to some instances when you misunderstood verbal information. Why did this happen? What did you do to correct the situation?

Written

1. Describe the most difficult work related writing assignment you have ever had. How did you manage it? What was the outcome?
2. Describe a time when you had to adjust your written communication style to your audience. Specifically what did you do and how did it help?
3. Tell me about a recent written report or proposal you wrote. Describe the process or guidelines you followed in developing it.
4. Tell me about a time when you were asked to review and edit the written work of another person. What suggestions did you make? How was it received?
5. Tell me about a time when you had to convey technical information in a written form to a non-technical audience. How did you do it? What was the outcome?
6. Give two examples of when you have asked for feedback from others on your written work. Did you incorporate their suggestions? Why or why not?
7. What are the key activities that you do that involve writing? Which do you find most easy/difficult? Why are some of these activities more difficult than others?
8. What experience have you had writing letters, reports, and/or technical or sales manuals or brochures? Provide an example.
9. To what extent do you enjoy writing assignments? Why or why not?
10. In some jobs it is necessary to document work thoroughly in writing. For example, to meet guidelines or to train another person. Give me an example of your experiences in this area.
11. Tell me about the most complex information you have had to read in your job. How did it test your comprehension skills and technical knowledge? Be specific.
12. Describe your experiences in editing manuscripts, articles, documents or any other form of written communication. Be specific.
13. Give me an example, taken from your experience in report writing, preparation of proposals, presentations, technical manuals, etc., which illustrates the extent of your written communication skills.

Teamwork

- Builds working relationships to solve problems and achieve common goals
- Demonstrates sensitivity to the needs of others
- Offers assistance, support, and feedback to others
- Works effectively and cooperatively with others

1. Tell me about a time when you were working as part of a team and felt that you could achieve better or faster results on your own. How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
2. Tell me about a time when you were a part of a team that worked very well together. What did you do to foster the success of that team?
3. Describe a time when you were part of a team but were not clear about your role. What did you do about it and what was the outcome?
4. Tell me about a specific time when you experienced conflict with another team member. How did you handle it? What did you learn from the experience?
5. Describe a time when a project did not go well due to a lack of teamwork. To what did you attribute the lack of teamwork? What action did you take and what was the outcome?
6. Describe actions you have taken to encourage team members to feel comfortable sharing their opinions, even if they differ from your own. Give a specific example.
7. Give examples of what you have done to model collaboration and teamwork.
8. Describe a time when you helped a team member who joined the team later or in mid-stream. How did you bring this team member up to speed with the rest of the group? What was the outcome?
9. Tell me about a project for which you were responsible for that required getting outside help. What did you do and what was the outcome?
10. Describe a time when you shared your team's successes with others. Why?
11. To what extent do you consider yourself a "team player"? What does that mean to you?
12. Describe a time when team requirements came into conflict with your individual goals and objectives. How did you handle it and what was the outcome?
13. Tell me about a time when you had to work with a team member who was less experienced or knowledgeable than other team members. What effect did it have on you and the team? What did you do and what was the outcome?
14. Do you feel more motivated when working as a team member or when working as an individual contributor? Explain.
15. Tell me about a time when it was necessary to confront a negative attitude in your team. Specifically what actions did you take and what was the outcome? Now, tell me about a time when you were not successful.
16. Tell me about a time when you had your greatest success in building team spirit. What specific results did the team accomplish?
17. Describe your style of contributing to any team in which you work. What does the team look to you for? How creative are you at problem solving compared to the other members?

<p>Service-Minded</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is approachable/ accessible to others ▪ Reaches out to be helpful in a timely and responsive manner ▪ Strives to satisfy one's external and/or internal customers ▪ Is diplomatic, courteous, and welcoming 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe your internal and external customers for me. What is your level of interaction with them? 2. What have you done to encourage others to maintain strong customer focus? Give me some examples. 3. How do you obtain and keep up-to-date information about customers? How do you use this information to meet your customers' needs? 4. Give me an example of when you had to form a relationship with a customer whom you really disliked in order to get your job done? What steps did you take and what was the outcome? 5. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer/client. What did you do? How effective were you? 6. Tell me about a time when you or your team improved a customer relationship. How did you recognize what improvements were needed? What was the outcome? 7. Tell me about a time when what was best for the customer was not best for the organization. How did you handle the situation and what was the result? 8. Tell me about a time when you were not effective in meeting the customer's needs. Why did you fall short and what steps did you take to correct the situation? 9. Describe a time when you were extremely successful in pleasing a customer. What made you successful? 10. Tell me about a customer who was very displeased with your service. What were the circumstances? What did you do about it? What was the result? 11. Describe a time when a customer demanded a product or service that you did not believe was the best match for their needs. How did you handle the situation and what was the outcome? 12. Tell me about a time when you worked to better understand the specific needs of a client group/customer.
<p>Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrates accountability in all work responsibilities ▪ Exercises sound and ethical judgment when acting on behalf of the university ▪ Exercises appropriate confidentiality in all aspects of work ▪ Shows commitment to work and to consequences of own actions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give me an example of how you go about informing your superiors when there has been a problem in your area that they need to know about. Describe your plan of action and the outcome. 2. What experiences have you had when others were unable or unwilling to keep their commitments? How did you handle the situation and what was the outcome? 3. How do you deal with others who refuse to accept responsibility for issues in their area, but always blame something/someone else? What effect has this had on you or your team's work? 4. Tell me about a time when you made a mistake or did not achieve what was expected. What action did you take and what was the outcome? 5. Tell me about a time when someone was not satisfied with your results. What caused this, how did you handle it, and what was the outcome? 6. Tell me about a time when someone else received credit for something you had done. What did you do and what effect did it have on you?

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Describe a time when you were very straightforward, said what needed to be said and did not back away from an uncomfortable issue. What was the outcome? 8. Describe a time when you were too direct and straightforward with a co-worker, resulting in a strained relationship. Were you able to clear things up and continue a working relationship? What was the impact on your relationship? 9. Describe a work situation in which you applied the philosophy that “discretion is the better part of valor.” What did you learn from this? What was the outcome? 10. Describe a time when someone continued to hold a grudge after you tried to resolve your work differences. What actions did you take to improve the relationship and what was the result? 11. Some situations require us to express ideas/opinions in a very tactful and careful way. Tell me about a time when you were successful with this skill. What was the outcome? 12. Sometimes it is important to disagree with others, particularly your boss, in order to keep a mistake from being made. Tell me about a time when you were willing to disagree with a boss, co-worker, peer or client in order to build a positive outcome. What was the result? 13. Describe a time when you had to sell an idea to upper management or to a client. What was your process? What was the result?
<p>Motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shows initiative, anticipates needs and takes actions ▪ Demonstrates innovation, creativity and informed risk-taking ▪ Engages in problem-solving; suggests ways to improve performance and be more efficient ▪ Strives to achieve university, unit, and individual goals 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What tools have you found most useful or effective in motivating your staff? Provide examples of how you specifically motivate each individual. 2. Tell me about a specific time when you were recognized for your efforts or accomplishments in a team or staff meeting. What were the circumstances? 3. Describe a time when you were not able to motivate your co-workers or team. Why? How did you handle it? 4. Describe specifically what you've done to create a team environment. What action do you take to gauge your team's morale? How do you ensure good moral is maintained? 5. Describe how you turned around the performance of a direct report who was not very motivated. What did you do and what was the outcome? 6. Tell me about the last time one of your direct reports received recognition from you in a group setting. What were the circumstances? 7. Describe a time when you were very enthusiastic or motivated about a project. How did you share this with your team or group? What were some of the specific things that motivated you? 8. What do you think is the best way of motivating people? Why? Provide an example. 9. What are de-motivators for you?