

Rapid Guide to Interviewing



Triangle South Workforce Area & JobLink Career Centers offer a full array of services to assist your business to find quality candidates, from entry level to skilled workers. We can help you find applicants through no-fee screening, hiring and recruitment services, including:

- ▶ Online Resume Search
- ▶ Employer Job Fairs
- ▶ Screening Applications
- ▶ Assessment of Job Skills and Aptitude
- ▶ Scheduling Applicants
- ▶ Available Interview Facilities
- ▶ Training Programs
- ▶ Incumbent Worker Funding
- ▶ On the Job Training Funding
- ▶ Tax and Hiring Incentives
- ▶ Labor Market Information

Must Do's For A Successful Interview

- ▶ Before the interview, scan the applicant's resume and cover letter for qualifications and discussion points.
- ▶ Select 10 - 15 questions from the interview questions in this guide and modify them to fit your needs.
- ▶ Make a good first impression: Direct eye contact, firm handshake, smile, use their name, and make them feel at ease.
- ▶ Focus on watching each applicant's body language, then make clear, specific notes only after they have finished their answer.
- ▶ Look for openness, confidence, and enthusiasm.
- ▶ Ask open-ended questions and get clarification on any unclear responses.
- ▶ Listen for clear responses showing achievement, understanding, and results directly related to the required job skills.
- ▶ Represent yourself and the organization professionally. The applicant is also interviewing you.
- ▶ Keep the interview on pace and on track for a fair comparison against other applicants.
- ▶ Assess how the applicant will fit into culture, ethics, and team orientation of the company.
- ▶ Make sure you adhere to the guidance offered on the "Rules to Follow" page of this book.
- ▶ Close the interview by giving the applicant a chance to ask any questions they have not already asked you.
- ▶ Note your final impressions before seeing the next applicant.

Analyzing The Resume

Characteristics of a good resume:

- ▶ Layout that is neat, organized, and consistent with no spelling or typing errors.
- ▶ Positive direction and speed of career advancement. Are they moving up?
- ▶ Problem/action/result statements showing quantifiable results.
- ▶ Appropriate education and certifications.

A good cover letter will:

- ▶ Not be a canned, generic letter.
- ▶ Show knowledge of your company and industry with terms meaningful to the position.
- ▶ Be error free.
- ▶ Have an action-oriented tone requesting an interview.
- ▶ Discuss how the applicant will be able to help meet your specific needs, problems, and challenges.



Tips:

- ▶ Refer to the applicant's work history and past accomplishments as primary initial evaluation criteria.
- ▶ Note the average amount of time in each job and get explanations for periods of unemployment. Turnover is expensive. You don't want a "job hopper".
- ▶ Make notes on items to discuss during the interview, especially anything unclear.
- ▶ Verify that the applicant meets the minimum qualifications before taking them any further.
- ▶ The day before scheduled interviews, all applicants should be called to confirm their appointments.

Preparing for the Interview

Tips on Being Ready to Interview:

- ▶ Your goal is to determine the interviewee's ability to do the job and how they will fit within the organization. Qualify the applicant by reviewing and becoming familiar with their resume, asking open-ended questions for validation, and noting your impression of their responses.
- ▶ Have a list of questions ready with space after each for your notes and quickly review before you greet the applicant.
- ▶ Be flexible and design your questions so that each question builds on the previous one.
- ▶ Know the required qualifications for the position.
- ▶ Allow ample time for the interview, to make notes afterward, and to avoid interruptions.
- ▶ Be sure interview area is prepared, clean, and presentable.
- ▶ Keep notes on other applicants and confidential company information away from the applicant's view.
- ▶ Have any company materials you want to provide to applicants ready and available.
- ▶ Try to balance the amount of time you listen to the applicant with the amount of time you speak.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions unique to this individual.
- ▶ Remember the applicant is also interviewing you. Dress professionally and be well prepared and organized.



Interview Structure

Suggested Interview Sequence:

- ▶ Introduction - get to know the applicant and provide general information regarding the position and company.
- ▶ Question and answer - review the applicant's qualifications.
- ▶ Investigation - assess the interviewee's ability to perform the required tasks.
- ▶ Evaluation - review applicant's personality and character to determine if they will be a good fit within your company
- ▶ Closing - answer applicant's questions and talk about next steps.

Tips:

- ▶ The first 15 seconds of the interview are very important to both you and the applicant. Make an effort to present yourself well and be conscious of the impression the applicant makes on you.
- ▶ Ask open-ended questions that start with the words “who”, “what”, “when”, or “how”, and provide positive feedback to encourage further discussion.
- ▶ Make sure you keep the pace of the interview on track so you can gather all of the information you need during the time allocated.
- ▶ Ask all applicants similar questions to obtain an objective evaluation.



Body Language

Your Body Language:

- ▶ Mirror your interviewee's body language to establish a good rapport.
- ▶ Welcome the applicant with direct eye contact, a firm handshake, smile, and use their name.
- ▶ Minimize note taking to observe their body language and maintain eye contact.
- ▶ Consider minimizing barriers between you and the applicant (your desk, for example).
- ▶ Face the applicant directly and minimize hand gestures to avoid creating distractions.
- ▶ Show your interest through active listening.

Applicant's Body Language:

- ▶ Look for direct eye contact, firm handshake, friendly smile, and use of your name.
- ▶ Look for a calm appearance with minimal hand movements.
- ▶ Facial responses while answering questions can signal confidence, confusion, or uncertainty.
- ▶ Notice breathing, voice, tone, and speech rate.
- ▶ Fidgeting, looking away, or similar gestures may indicate an inability to handle stress effectively.
- ▶ Touching the nose when answering a question may indicate deception.
- ▶ Crossed arms may indicate resistance or discomfort.
- ▶ If the applicant pulls back after you ask a question, you may want to probe more deeply to understand the reaction.
- ▶ Poor body posture (slouching) may indicate a lack of confidence.

The First Four Minutes

What am I looking for in the applicant's response?

- ▶ Strengths that match your organization's needs.
- ▶ Well thought out, honest responses.
- ▶ Good communication skills.
- ▶ Ability to get along well with others.



What signals a potential problem?

- ▶ Long, detailed answers unrelated to career progress or the question posed.
- ▶ Laundry lists of generic attributes such as "hardworking", "loyal", "perfectionist", etc.
- ▶ Inability to provide examples of previous task-related experience.
- ▶ No knowledge or research on your company shows lack of preparation.
- ▶ Problems with previous manager or co-workers suggests poor people skills or a difficult personality.

Getting the most from an applicant's answer:

- ▶ Qualify responses with follow up questions and ask for specific successes and failures.
- ▶ Open-ended questions starting with "What", "How", "When", and "Tell me about" lead to answers that better assess the applicant.
- ▶ Take the time to write notes that you can understand later.
- ▶ Don't rush to break the silence - see how the applicant handles the pressure.

Rules To Follow

Illegal Questions

You and the company may face serious legal and financial repercussions if you ask the wrong questions. DO NOT ASK any questions regarding race, age, marital status, religious preference, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or political affiliations. In general, only inquire about job requirements and work-related capabilities.

Examples of questions to avoid:

- ▶ When did you graduate from high school?
- ▶ How long have you been married?
- ▶ Where were you born?
- ▶ What are your childcare arrangements?
- ▶ Do you have physical disabilities that will prevent you from performing this job?
- ▶ How tall are you?
- ▶ What church do you attend?
- ▶ Do you own your car?
- ▶ What is your native language?
- ▶ What does your spouse do for a living?
- ▶ What type of military discharge did you receive?
- ▶ Do you own your home or rent?
- ▶ How old are you?
- ▶ How many children do you have?
- ▶ What is your Social Security number?



Measuring Motivation

Assess the applicant's internal and external motivation. Try to determine whether the applicant is self-driven or needs constant reinforcement.

Tips:

- ▶ Look for motivation that fits the company culture.
- ▶ Keep the existing team dynamics in mind and consider how the applicant compares.
- ▶ Listen for answers indicating a positive disposition.
- ▶ Look for specific, measurable examples of accomplishments.
- ▶ Continue to observe body language, mannerisms.
- ▶ Look for indications of clear short-term and long-term goals. Be aware that unrealistic goals may signal future dissatisfaction.
- ▶ Assess the applicant's interest in the possibility of advancement.
- ▶ Internal motivation may show that they will find a way to perform regardless of barriers.
- ▶ External factors such as money OR canned responses may signal a lack of introspection.



Measuring Motivation

Suggested Questions:

- ▶ What are your goals for the next five years?
- ▶ What activities have you done outside of work that are related to your career?
- ▶ Which is more important to you, the pay or the job?
- ▶ What does job security mean to you?
- ▶ What motivates you to put forth your best effort?
- ▶ Give me an example of a time when a project really excited you.

Good answers:

- ▶ Illustrate self-reliance and leadership.
- ▶ Include detailed, targeted responses directly answering the questions.
- ▶ Indicate desire to always perform well.
- ▶ Show ability to work as part of a team.

Poor answers:

- ▶ Express lack of direction.
- ▶ Expose no specific progress in career.
- ▶ Disclose unrealistic ambitions.
- ▶ Reveal personal goals that do not match company needs.



Measuring Persuasive Ability

Assessing the applicant's ability to work as a team player, express ideas and suggestions, and persuade others is imperative.

Tips:

- ▶ Persuasive applicants provide answers containing:
 - A need - why current state is ineffective.
 - A proposed solution.
 - A plan to implement the solution.
 - A VISION of post implementation.
- ▶ Look for a positive and upbeat demeanor.
- ▶ Strong vocabulary shows breadth of ability.
- ▶ Determine if applicant is considered a leader by friends and peers.



Question Examples:

- ▶ Tell me a time when you had to persuade someone to accept an idea or proposal.
- ▶ Why do you want this job?
- ▶ Why should we hire you?
- ▶ Tell me about a time when you took a negative outcome and made it positive.

Good Answers:

- ▶ Demonstrate creativity and illustrate unique talents and abilities.
- ▶ Show mastery of influence methods (reason, reward exchange, pressure, etc).
- ▶ Display a natural empathy toward others.

Poor Answers:

- ▶ Suggest an overactive ego.
- ▶ Show a lack of concern for others and may expose goal achievement at any cost.
- ▶ Show coercion or intimidation.

Measuring Attitude and Ethics

Analyzing the applicant's demeanor and ability to handle typical daily frustrations.

Tips:

- ▶ Pay attention to the significance of the issues in relation to the applicant's attitude.
- ▶ Observe non-verbal expressions during response.
- ▶ Look for patterns of behavior.
- ▶ Watch for applicant responses that place blame on external factors – the “victim” syndrome.
- ▶ Note the level of creativity an applicant displays in solving problems.
- ▶ Look for a positive, solution-oriented, and successful mindset.
- ▶ Watch for signs of fear and self-limiting statements, like "I've never..." and "I can't..."
- ▶ Identify responses showing behaviors that promote positive well being.
- ▶ Ethical applicants will provide honest answers. Dishonest applicants will stumble, look for cues from you on how to respond, or give the answer they think you expect.
- ▶ Look for an applicant that is consistent and not afraid to answer honestly and directly, even if that displays some deficiencies.



Measuring Attitude and Ethics

Question Examples:

- ▶ What job values are most important to you?
- ▶ How did you get along with your last boss?
- ▶ How do you feel about doing routine work?
- ▶ How do you think a friend or coworker who knows you would describe you?
- ▶ Tell me about a difficult situation where it was a challenge for you to keep a positive attitude.
- ▶ Tell me about a time when a team member wasn't pulling their weight and how you handled it.
- ▶ How do rules for doing business change in good times and when things are not going so well?
- ▶ If your boss asked a question you did not know the answer to, but should, what would you do?

Good answers:

- ▶ Demonstrate flexibility.
- ▶ Illustrate consistent enthusiasm.
- ▶ Indicate a willingness to accept responsibility.
- ▶ Show assertiveness.
- ▶ Display commitment to solving problems instead of building excuses.

Poor answers:

- ▶ Identify repeated patterns of conflict.
- ▶ Expose tendency to blame others.
- ▶ Show inability to accept failures.
- ▶ Reveal inability to adapt.

Measuring Initiative

Now you will assess an applicant's leadership qualities and abilities, team involvement, and task completion.

Tips:

- ▶ Pay attention to the applicant's ability to answer questions with clarity.
- ▶ Observe the level of enthusiasm in the answer.
- ▶ Notice whether the applicant is able to come up with answers easily and quickly.
- ▶ Watch out for overly delayed response.
- ▶ Look for an applicant that can "pick the right battle."
- ▶ Look for applicants motivated by both internal and external rewards.
- ▶ Listen for answers that are detail-oriented.
- ▶ Take note when an answer indicates a desire to grow and learn professionally.



Measuring Initiative

Question Examples:

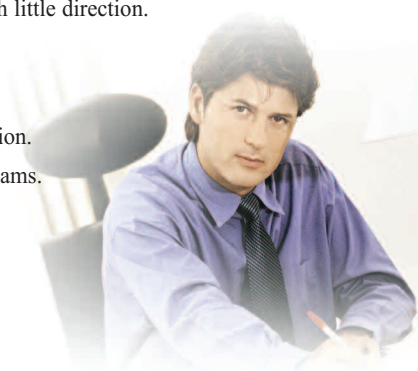
- ▶ What are your proudest career accomplishments?
- ▶ Do you prefer direction or autonomy at work?
- ▶ Tell me about a project you led from start to finish and the results.
- ▶ How have you built enthusiasm in others?
- ▶ What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
- ▶ Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem with no rules or guidelines in place.

Good answers:

- ▶ Show consistent progression across career.
- ▶ Show steady progress toward clear goals.
- ▶ Illustrate follow-through in projects.
- ▶ Show pattern of looking for opportunities and taking them.
- ▶ Show ability to work with little direction.

Poor answers:

- ▶ Convey apathy.
- ▶ Indicate a need for direction.
- ▶ Expose dependence on teams.
- ▶ Indicate lack of goals and achievement.



Assessing Management / Organization Skills

You will want to vary these questions depending on the position level. These questions will help you analyze whether the applicant is detail-oriented and completes projects efficiently.

Tips:

- ▶ Look for answers that show an understanding of a systematic approach to problem solving.
- ▶ Listen for answers that indicate the applicant's time management methods.
- ▶ Make note of how the applicant has handled stressful situations.
- ▶ Listen for answers that convey the ability to understand, apply, and perform in accordance with the goals of the company.

Question Examples:

- ▶ Discuss a time when you worked under extreme stress.
- ▶ Describe a time when you had to handle multiple responsibilities.
- ▶ Tell me about a time when you had to use creative problem solving.
- ▶ How do you teach employees new skills?



Assessing Management / Organization Skills

Additional Questions for Management Positions:

- ▶ Explain your management style.
- ▶ Discuss a time when you had to deal with a marginal employee. How did you discipline that employee? What was the result?
- ▶ What positions have you held in charitable, trade, and professional organizations?
- ▶ What are you seeking from this position that you are not receiving in your current position?

Good answers:

- ▶ Indicate ability to think on their feet.
- ▶ Identify process-oriented thinking.
- ▶ Show a concern for following proper procedures.
- ▶ Illustrate a concern for others.

Poor answers:

- ▶ Expose haphazard thinking.
- ▶ Uncover dissatisfaction with protocol.
- ▶ Illustrate bottom line thinking only.
- ▶ Show frustration with daily duties.



The Last Four Minutes

This is one last chance for you to qualify the applicant. It is also your opportunity to “close” a quality applicant, so remember to use positive body language—direct eye contact, a warm smile, a firm handshake, and use their name.

Tips:

- ▶ At the end of the interview, prompt the applicant to ask any questions that have not already been answered.
- ▶ After the interview, make notes immediately. Include your first impression and instinctive feeling so that you will remember the applicant.
- ▶ Ask your receptionist and/or other staff members who have had contact with the applicant for their feedback. Often, applicants will be more relaxed with other staff members, and you may get more insight into the applicant’s demeanor.

If you are interested in the applicant:

- ▶ Find out when the applicant is available to begin.
- ▶ Verify that they are not tied down by any other obligations, such as non-compete agreements.
- ▶ Confirm whether the applicant is still genuinely interested in the position.
- ▶ Make sure the applicant understands you are interested in moving forward and taking the next steps. Ask the applicant for their timeframe in making a decision; do they have any other offers on the table, or are they ready to start work?
- ▶ Ask for and double-check all references.

Choosing The Finalists

As the applicant answers questions, keep in mind the qualities you seek. Make an evaluation form that lists qualities of the ideal applicant. Objectively assess each applicant against this evaluation.

Positive Characteristics

- ▶ Hardworking
- ▶ Quality-oriented
- ▶ Innovative
- ▶ High integrity
- ▶ Communicates effectively
- ▶ Strong teamwork skills
- ▶ Motivates self and others
- ▶ Results oriented
- ▶ Emotional stability

Negative Characteristics

- ▶ Poor attitude
- ▶ Blames others
- ▶ Unpredictable
- ▶ One man show
- ▶ Lazy
- ▶ Lacks confidence
- ▶ Egotistical
- ▶ Apathetic
- ▶ Lacks focus

The qualities you are looking for depend on the job description and company culture.

- ▶ Will the employee work alone or as part of a team?
- ▶ Does the applicant fit your corporate culture?
- ▶ What skills did previous employees that were successful in the position possess?
- ▶ Does your company do pre-assessment testing to validate traits and qualities?
- ▶ How does this applicant compare with other applicants in being a benefit to your organization?

Steps To The Final Decision

When making a choice between applicants, the decision is usually made using a combination of instinct and character analysis.

Tips:

- ▶ Rank your top three to five applicants in order of preference.
- ▶ Get input from other staff members, if possible, but don't ignore your initial instincts.
- ▶ When scheduling follow-up interviews, ask if anything has changed with the applicant's situation. Have they accepted another job? Are they still interested?
- ▶ Follow-up interviews should not focus on the same topics as previous interviews. However, you may cover some areas again quickly to check for consistency.
- ▶ Each interview with an applicant should progressively increase in detail and depth on the individual's strengths, weaknesses, personality, and goals.
- ▶ You are allowed to test applicants on specific capabilities, like computer skills or presentation skills, etc.
- ▶ Be sympathetic to unsuccessful applicants. Notify them as quickly as possible and provide any feedback that may help in their job search. These applicants may be able to refer someone else or fill another position in the future.



Making the Offer: The Art of Negotiation

In presenting your offer, avoid playing games with the applicant and getting into a counter offer situation with the applicant's present employer.

Tips:

- ▶ Do your homework. Research external factors such as market value for position, demand for qualifications, and economic/industry outlook.
- ▶ Avoid disclosing a salary figure to the applicant – allow the applicant to present a salary range first.
- ▶ Encourage the candidate to discuss the opportunity with their present employer PRIOR to your offer.
- ▶ Have an attorney review any employment contracts and the offer if necessary (for high value positions).
- ▶ Offer letters should include a deadline for acceptance, contact to report to, start date, and where to report.
- ▶ Make the initial offer verbally to assess reaction.
- ▶ Create an offer package. Consider salary, bonuses, benefits, work hours, and relocation (if applicable).
- ▶ Have a preset deadline for acceptance.
- ▶ Know your bottom line and when to walk away from the applicant. Also, consider the quality of your other applicants.

What to watch for in counter offers:

- ▶ Insignificant items used as leverage, like two extra days of vacation or a new job title, etc.
- ▶ Demands showing unwillingness to compromise.
- ▶ Irrational negotiating.
- ▶ A "money-only" oriented applicant.

Dealing with an Applicant in High Demand

Employee turnover is very expensive. Do not oversell the applicant on the company or job and risk them quitting due to dissatisfaction. Sell the company and the job appropriately.

Tips:

- ▶ Pre-close the applicant on their willingness to take an offer if one is presented.
- ▶ Have them sign a contract.
- ▶ While you wait for their notice period to expire, make regular contact with the applicant. Invite them come in to observe daily operations.
- ▶ Include them in non-confidential emails about projects they will be working on.
- ▶ Integrate the applicant into the team through introductions or even a team get-together.
- ▶ Offer any non-cash perks to leverage your offer.
- ▶ Reiterate your deadline.
- ▶ Preview projects they will work on, spur excitement in the job, and validate their abilities.
- ▶ If the applicant declines your offer, ask for a referral.
- ▶ Don't get into a negotiation match with a high demand applicant. Ask what it would take for them to accept an offer and then decide whether you are willing to offer it.
- ▶ Don't appear vulnerable, control the process. Let the applicant know you have other options.



Answering Questions

As an applicant asks questions, you will have an idea of their true interest. For a good applicant, this is your opportunity to sell the benefits of working for your company.

Tips:

- ▶ Be sure to give an honest indication of the company culture.
- ▶ Make sure job expectations are clearly communicated to the applicant.
- ▶ Probe into perceived areas of weakness to give them a chance to respond.

Standard Interviewee Questions:

- ▶ What type of assignments can I expect?
- ▶ What characteristics does a successful employee in your company possess?
- ▶ What training do you offer new employees?
- ▶ Tell me about your performance-review system.
- ▶ What is the next step in the hiring process?
- ▶ Why is this position available?
- ▶ Describe a typical day in the office.
- ▶ What are the goals of this department?
- ▶ What is your greatest need?



The Triangle South Workforce Development Board is here to assist you with finding quality applicants that will be an asset to your organization. To find out more, visit one of our JobLink Career Centers in the locations listed below:

Lee County:

Employment Security Commission (ESC)
1909 Lee Avenue, Sanford, NC 27330
Telephone: 919-775-2241
Contact: Edith Edmond

Harnett County:

Central Carolina Community College
1137 E. Cornelius Harnett Blvd., Lillington, NC 27546
Telephone: 910-814-4042
Contact: Charlotte Leach

Employment Security Commission
101 Hunt Valley Drive, Dunn, NC 28334
Telephone: 910-891-2915
Contact: David Taylor

Sampson County:

Employment Security Commission (ESC)
115 North Blvd., Clinton, NC 28328
Telephone: 910-592-5756
Contact: Peggy Hunt Davis

Chatham County: (opening September 2010)

Central Carolina Community College, 764 West Street
Pittsboro, NC 27312
Telephone: 919-542-6495



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