GENERAL

doing interviews

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Introduction

In today's fast moving world, the skill of conducting an interview is more valuable than ever. Whether you're a hiring manager scouting talent, a journalist hunting for a story, a researcher gathering data, or an academic probing theories, the art of asking the right questions and listening actively can shape outcomes, influence decisions, and unlock new insights. Yet many people treat interviews as a mechanical task—just a series of questions and answers—without realizing the depth of preparation, psychology, and strategy that underpins a truly effective conversation.

This guide will walk you through every stage of the interview process, from understanding its purpose and types to mastering preparation, execution, evaluation, and follow up. By the end, you'll have a comprehensive toolkit that turns routine interviews into powerful tools for discovery, recruitment, and storytelling.

Understanding the Interview Process

What is an Interview?

An interview is a structured dialogue designed to extract information, assess competencies, or gather qualitative data. It is a two way exchange where the interviewer leads the conversation while the interviewee shares experiences, opinions, or evidence. The core goal is to elicit insights that are not readily available through other means.

Why Interviews Matter

Interviews bridge the gap between surface facts and deeper understanding. In recruitment, they help employers gauge cultural fit and problem solving ability. In journalism, they bring human stories to light. In research, they generate rich, contextual data that quantitative methods alone can't capture. The quality of an interview directly influences the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn.

Types of Interviews

- Structured Interviews – Pre defined questions and scoring rubrics ensure consistency across candidates.
- Unstructured Interviews – Conversational and flexible, ideal for exploratory research or creative fields.
- Semi Structured Interviews – A hybrid approach that blends a core set of questions with spontaneous follow ups.
- Panel Interviews – Multiple interviewers assess a candidate simultaneously, reducing individual bias.
- Phone or Video Interviews – Remote formats that save time and broaden the candidate pool.
- Group Interviews – Multiple candidates interact, useful for teamwork assessment.
- Case Interviews – Candidates solve business problems on the spot, common in consulting.

Choosing the right format depends on your objectives, time constraints, and the nature of the information you seek.

Preparing for Interviews

Research the Candidate or Interviewee

Preparation begins long before you sit across from your subject. Gather background information—resume details,

publication history, or prior work samples. For research interviews, review existing literature to identify gaps. For journalistic pieces, understand the subject's public persona and recent news. This context informs tailored questions and signals respect for the interviewee's time.

Crafting the Right Questions

Good questions are clear, open ended, and focused on the topic. Use the **S.O.A.P.** framework: Situation, Objective, Action, and Result. For example:

1. "Can you describe a recent project where you had to navigate a complex stakeholder environment?"
2. "What was your primary objective in that situation?"
3. "Which actions did you take to achieve it?"
4. "What was the outcome, and what did you learn?"

Avoid leading or loaded questions that might bias responses. Instead, ask neutrally and let the interviewee steer the conversation.

Logistics and Setup

Technical readiness is critical. Test audio and video equipment, confirm internet bandwidth, and choose a quiet location. If you're conducting a face to face interview, ensure the room is comfortable, with adequate lighting and minimal distractions. Prepare a backup plan—an alternative call number or a secondary venue—in case of unforeseen disruptions.

Conducting the Interview

Creating a Comfortable Environment

First impressions set the tone. Offer a warm greeting, provide water or coffee, and briefly explain the interview's purpose and duration. This builds rapport and lowers anxiety, leading to more candid answers.

Active Listening Techniques

Listening is as vital as questioning. Use verbal cues ("I see," "Interesting") and non verbal gestures (nodding) to show engagement. Paraphrase key points to confirm understanding. When the interviewee pauses, allow silence; it often prompts deeper reflection.

Managing Time Effectively

Allocate time blocks for each major topic and monitor the clock. If you're running behind, politely redirect the conversation to stay on track. Conversely, if you finish early, ask follow up questions that probe deeper into the interviewee's insights.

Evaluating Responses

Behavioral vs. Technical Questions

Behavioral questions uncover past actions and predict future performance. Technical questions assess specific knowledge or skill sets. Balance both to capture a holistic view. For instance, a technical question might ask, "Explain how you would implement a RESTful API," while a behavioral counterpart could be, "Tell me about a time you overcame a technical challenge under tight deadlines."

Scoring Systems

Develop a rubric with clear criteria—relevance, depth, clarity, and evidence. Assign numeric scores or use a simple

pass/fail scale. Consistent scoring reduces subjectivity and facilitates fair comparisons across candidates.

Bias Awareness

Unconscious bias can skew judgments. Use blind review techniques—remove identifying details when scoring—or rotate interviewers to dilute individual biases. Regularly reflect on your own assumptions and seek feedback from peers.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

- Interrupting – Allow the interviewee to finish thoughts; interruptions can signal disrespect.
- Over‑asking – A long list of questions can overwhelm; prioritize depth over breadth.
- Failing to Probe – Surface answers are often insufficient; ask follow‑ups like “Can you elaborate?”
- Ignoring Non‑Verbal Cues – Body language can reveal uncertainty or enthusiasm; adapt accordingly.
- Inadequate Documentation – Record notes or audio to capture nuances that may be forgotten later.

After the Interview

Follow‑Up Communication

Send a thank‑you email within 24 hours, summarizing key points and next steps. For hiring scenarios, outline the timeline for decision‑making. For research, express appreciation and indicate how you plan to use the data.

Decision Making and Feedback

Review notes, compare scores, and discuss with relevant stakeholders. If a candidate is not selected, provide constructive feedback if possible. Transparent communication builds trust and preserves future relationships.

Interviewing in Different Contexts

Job Interviews

Focus on competencies, cultural fit, and potential for growth. Use behavioral questions to assess past performance and situational questions to gauge problem‑solving in hypothetical scenarios.

Research Interviews

Aim for depth and authenticity. Build rapport quickly to encourage openness. Use probing questions and thematic analysis to identify patterns across participants.

Media Interviews

Clarity and brevity are key. Prepare talking points, anticipate tough questions, and rehearse concise answers. Maintain eye contact and control pacing to keep the audience engaged.

Academic Interviews

Probe theoretical understanding and research methodology. Encourage candidates to discuss their publications, grant proposals, and future research plans.

Tools and Resources for Interviewers

- Recording Software – Zoom, Teams, or dedicated interview platforms capture audio/video for review.
- Note‑Taking Apps – OneNote, Evernote, or Google Docs allow real‑time annotation.
- Rubric Builders – Tools like Google Forms or Typeform help create standardized scoring sheets.
- Bias‑Reduction Guides – HR literature and online courses provide strategies to mitigate bias.

- Question Banks – Platforms such as SHL or LinkedIn Learning offer curated interview questions tailored to roles.

Conclusion

Doing interviews is more than a procedural task; it's a dynamic conversation that uncovers insights, builds relationships, and informs critical decisions. By investing time in thorough preparation, engaging conduct, thoughtful evaluation, and respectful follow up, you transform each interview into a strategic asset. Whether you're hiring the next star employee, publishing a compelling profile, or gathering data for a groundbreaking study, mastering the art of interviews empowers you to navigate complexity with confidence and clarity.

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