



Concordia
UNIVERSITY • SAINT PAUL

Guidelines for Interviewers

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Overview & General Guidelines

There will be times when you will have the opportunity to participate in the interviewing process to select a Concordia University-St Paul employee. Interviewing groups collect information and reactions as input for the decision makers; interviewing groups do not vote on candidates. During the process, resumes are reviewed to determine the basic qualifications of a particular candidate. Interviews are designed to produce objective, job-related information about a candidate's ability to successfully perform the requirements of the position in question. *The Search Committee Handbook: A Guide to Recruiting Administrators* by Theodore J. Marchese states, "The most productive interviews will be structured, planned in advance, and executed with discipline." Brief pre-interview discussions can help clarify purposes for best use of scheduled time.

Here are some general guidelines interviewers can follow to ensure fairness and efficiency during the interviewing process:

- **Study the requirements of the job before the interview itself**
Know the job-related qualifications such as special education, training or experience. Be thoroughly familiar with the job description before talking with applicants.
- **Prepare your questions ahead of time**
This provides uniformity and continuity to the interview process. Candidates can then be evaluated against each other based on their responses to the same basic questions. Also, the tendency to forget an area will be avoided. This does not mean that only the listed questions should be asked. Obviously other questions (probing and clarifying questions) will come up in the normal course of the interview.
- **Develop open-ended questions**
If the candidate can answer a question with "yes" or "no" rewrite the question. Open-ended questions allow for the interview conversation to evolve beyond the "script." Also, open-ended questions allow the applicant to give a fuller answer.
- **Questions should be related to the specifics of the position**
Questions should be related to the specifics of the position and the candidates experience or qualifications for the position. Ask yourself if this information is necessary to judge this individual's competence and ability to perform the requirements of this particular job. Does this question tend to have a disproportionate effect in screening out minorities and females? Ask only questions that are actually related to the job and be able to prove that they are necessary to determine the applicant's suitability for the particular position.
- **Know what you are looking for as answers to your questions**
Write questions that are answerable.
- **Check your questions off as you use them**
Doing this step will help ensure that you cover all the topics and obtain all the information you've targeted as important.
- **Get the interview off to a good start by putting the applicant at ease**
Helping the applicant to relax will allow for a better interview experience.
- **Develop effective listening skills**
During group questioning, the candidate should do 75%-80% of the talking.
- **The first skill of all interviewers is to listen**
Don't interrupt or talk down to the applicant. Use everyday language and ask only one question at a time.
- **Test the applicants listening skills**
Ask a two- or three-part question during the latter part of the interview; observe how the person responds.
- **Listen carefully and jot down notes**

- **End the interview politely**
If you are certain that both you and the applicant haven't left any questions unanswered, you or the facilitator are ready to close the interview.
- **Tell applicant when you (if appropriate) will be back in touch with them**
Also let applicant know you will be conducting interviews with other people before making a decision.
- **Evaluate applicant as soon as you can after the interview**
If time permits, it's a good idea to fill in your notes at the conclusion of each interview while the information and impressions are still fresh in your mind.

Avoiding Employment Questions which may Lead to Illegal Discrimination

Equal employment laws require us to select the best qualified employee without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, age, gender, marital status, or status with regard to public assistance or disability.

As Concordia University is a private, faith-affiliated institution, giving preference in hiring according to religion may be acceptable in limited circumstances (primarily faculty) but this exemption from illegal discrimination laws does not typically apply. (This exemption should be determined at the time the position is created. If in doubt about this exemption, contact the Director of Human Resources before your interview!)

If discriminatory questions are used in pre-employment interviewing, the burden of proof that the questions are not being used to discriminate rests with the employer.

The following questions provide information that is usually irrelevant and could lead to illegal discrimination practices in hiring. They do not help the University assess whether the candidate can do the job. An applicant who is asked these questions may likely have the basis to file a complaint under civil rights legislation. Do not ask these questions!

- **What is your age or date of birth?**
Minnesota law prohibits discrimination on the basis of individuals over the age of majority.
- **Have you been arrested or convicted of a crime?**
An employer probably has the right to exclude persons who have been convicted of certain offenses from consideration for certain jobs. **The best practice is to obtain conviction information through the use of a background check.** As all applicants who are being interviewed should be filling out the background check release, any evidence of conviction will be discovered during the background check. University policy specifies that the existence of a criminal record does not automatically constitute an automatic bar to employment.
- **Are you available for Saturday or Sunday work?**
An employer must be able to show such work as essential to the business, since the question discriminates against applicants of religions that prohibit Saturday or Sunday work.
- **What is your national origin?**
This is an illegal question.
- **How many children do you have? What are their ages? Have you made child care arrangements?**
This question insinuates absenteeism and tardiness and discriminates against women, often expected to be responsible for child rearing.
- **What is your credit record? Do you own a home, furniture, or a car?**
Because minority persons on the average are poorer than non-minorities, consideration of these factors has an adverse effect on minorities. In the event that your position is one that where money is handled on a regular basis and clean credit is a requirement of the job, a credit check will be performed as part of the background check and evaluated by Human Resources according to current University policy.
- **Has a fidelity bond ever been refused to you?**
In the past an applicant might have been denied a bond for discriminatory reasons.
- **What is your garnishment record?**
This question could be found to have disparate impact on some groups. For example, courts have found that minorities suffer wage garnishments substantially more often than non-minorities, and that wage garnishments do not affect a worker's ability to effectively perform assigned work.
- **What is your maiden name? What is your marital status? Are you widowed, divorced, or separated?**
Such a question could be used for a discriminatory purpose. For example, a woman's maiden name might be used as an indication of her religion or national origin. This item also constitutes an inquiry into marital status which is illegal under Minnesota law.
- **What is your height and weight?**

When not based on a bona fide occupational qualification, this question has the effect of excluding above-average percentages of women and members of certain ethnic groups.

- **What is the lowest salary you will accept?**

Women generally have held poorer paying jobs than men and have been paid less than men for the same work. As a result of such past practices, a woman might be willing to work for less pay than a man would find acceptable. It is unlawful, however, to pay a woman less than a man who is performing work of comparable skill, effort and responsibility.

- **Do you have any handicaps?**

Federal law, as well as Minnesota law prohibits an employer from requiring a person to provide information about a disability prior to an offer of employment. In certain instances the law requires the employer to provide reasonable accommodation to the known disability of a qualified disabled person unless to do so can be shown to cause undue hardship on the employer.

- **Additional potentially discriminatory questions**

What is your eye and hair color? What is your gender? What is your spouse's name or work? Can you provide a photograph of yourself?

Source: "Minnesota: Guidelines for Preventing Discrimination in Hiring" from the *State Fair Employment Practices Series* published by The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.

Confidentiality in the Interview Process

The use of discretion and confidentiality in working with resumes and candidates is extremely important.

Names of candidates are privileged information for search or interviewing, review and comment during the selection process. Never discuss candidates with anyone other than designated search or interviewing committee members. Revealing who is interviewing for a job to non-committee members or interested parties may result in unintended negative consequences for the applicant.

Discretion is paramount!

Guidelines for Committee Style Interviews

Interviewing Committees should always select a chair to lead the interview. Doing so provides the following advantages:

- Keeping the interview on track; protecting time for prearranged questions
- Allowing time for the applicant to fully answer a question without interruption
- Preventing the same question from being asked twice
- Increasing the candidate's comfort (many people find it intimidating to answer questions in front of a group – a group leader will help the candidate)

Sample Interview Questions

Questions should be open-ended and begin with these types of words or phrases

“Please explain...”

“Describe...”

“Tell us about...”

“Please define...”

“How, why, when, where...”

“What do you see as...”

“Please comment on...”

“From your viewpoint, what are...”

“How do/would you go about...”

The following sample questions can be drawn upon when preparing for an interview. You will notice that in many instances, the same question is being asked several different ways. Only use the questions that relate to the job in question because some questions may not be appropriate. Job-relatedness is the key in conducting an interview.

Sample Questions Relating to Work Experiences

This group of questions deals specifically with work experiences. Past performance has been shown to be a good indicator of potential success in the new job, so these can be very important questions for the applicant to answer.

Following is an example of a question that helps the candidate to overview their work experiences:

“Briefly describe your previous work experiences relevant to this position.”

This question shows job experience with specific skills or tasks:

“Describe your experience working with...”

Following is a question that shows thinking skills. A candidate must give a thoughtful answer. If s/he can't, then s/he probably isn't able to think beyond the basic mechanics of the job:

“What do/did you like best about your present/last job?”

This question can give a clue regarding analytical skills, sensitivity and judgment:

“If you could have made improvements in your present/last job, what would they have been?”

This question shows general attitude about work. Be wary of candidates who answer the question by bad mouthing their current employer:

“Why do you wish to leave your present/last job?”

This question could give you an idea if the candidate likes challenges. The reasons for why the job was interesting are more important than the answer of what the job was:

“What has been the most interesting job or project so far in your career? Why was it interesting?”

This is the question asked instead of “Are you willing to work extra hours when the situation calls for it? How cooperative? Willing to go the extra mile? Well organized? Able to cope with pressure? Team spirit?”

“Describe a work-related emergency for which you had to reschedule your time.”

This set of questions reveals how the applicant may supervise others:

“What activities have you been in charge of organizing, setting up and running?”

“How do you feel about giving directions to others and monitoring their work?”

“Describe your philosophy of supervising.”

“What steps do you usually take with an ineffective department head you supervise?”

A candidate who has trouble answering the following question could lack compassion. This question can help give an idea of how they would deal with co-workers and subordinates and what their general expectations are for performance levels of associates or subordinates:

“Describe the best person who ever worked with you or for you.”

Sample Self-Assessment Questions

How articulate is candidate? How do they see themselves? Even though this question is asked on every job interview, candidates often have difficulty with it. How poised are they? Fidgety or thoughtful pondering before answering? Is the applicant satisfied, comfortable with themselves? Over-achiever? Under-achiever?

“In general, how would you describe yourself?”

“What are your outstanding qualities?”

“In which areas do you feel you would like to develop or improve yourself?”

“What special strengths do you feel you possess that you could bring to this job?”

“If you came to Concordia, where do you think you would make your best contribution?”

“What do you consider to have been the major accomplishment of your career thus far?”

“What were some of the setbacks and disappointments you experienced or things that turned out less well?”

“How did you cope with the disappointments you experienced?”

“If you had to do it all over again, what changes would you make in your life and career?”

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

These questions show style in response to conflict at work:

“Describe the types of conflict you’ve encountered in your work life. How did you go about resolving a situation involving conflict?”

“Have you ever been in a situation where you had to resolve a conflict with client/co-worker/supervisor/subordinate? How did you resolve it?”

“What strategies do you use when you perceive that conflict is developing in your organization?”

These questions show how an applicant uses resources at work:

“How does working in an environment of scarcity affect your performance?”

“What techniques do you use to maximize available resources?”

This question shows how the job fits into an applicants perceived career path:

“In what way does the position of XXX fit in with your career goals and objectives?”

“Describe your long- and short-range career goals and objectives.”

“In what way have all of your work experiences prepared you for a position of this type?”

These questions show how the applicant will work with co-workers:

“Describe your style of leadership/management.”

“How do you feel about taking directions from others and having them monitor your work?”

“Have you ever been known to be overly enthusiastic in pursuing an activity? What were co-workers’ responses?”

“How do you feel about others pressuring you for deadlines? How have you reacted to such situations?”

“How do you react to others when improvements are suggested for your work?”

“How would you rate your people skills?”

“How would your managers/subordinates/co-workers describe your people skills?”

This question gives clues to threshold for frustration:

“What types of people annoy you? How do you deal with them?”

These questions reveal work style:

“Can you work productively without frequent exchanges with or input from others?”

“How does working without standard procedures appeal to you?”

“Where would you place yourself on a continuum from being a conceptual thinker to being an analytical thinker?”

“Where would you place yourself on a continuum from strategic planner at one end to pragmatic tactician at the other? Why?”

“As you consider your most effective management style, place yourself on a continuum with managing ideas and concepts at one end and managing other people and their ideas at the other: Where would you place yourself? Why?”

“We all have our own way of getting things done, particularly when managing people. Someone once said that it all comes down to two basic styles: telling or selling. On a continuum, with telling at one end and selling at the other, how would you say you work with others to get results? Why?”

“In a work setting, what is stressful or upsetting to you? How do you handle stressful work situations?”

Process of Goal-setting Techniques, Style, Attainment of Goals, Method of Praise, Recognition and Criticism.

These questions show you an applicant will initiate/react to change:

“What is the ideal way to change a situation? How would you make this happen?”

“How do you attain the goals you set for yourself and your staff?”

These questions will show how an applicant will make decisions:

“What steps do you take when you are in the process of making an important decision? Less important decision?”

“How would you describe your decision-making style?”

“What is foremost in your mind when making decisions?”

“What has been your most successful decision? How did you make it? Why was it successful?”

Sample Questions Specifically Relating to Concordia University’s Mission or Liberal Arts Education

These questions are tailored specifically to the environment at Concordia:

“Looking to the future, what changes and developments do you anticipate in private, liberal arts, church-related educational institutions?”

“Describe what a liberal arts education is and what it means to you.”

“Concordia is a church-related college. How comfortable are you with the church-relatedness of the College and how would you describe church relatedness to a non-Concordia person?”

“Why does working at Concordia University-St. Paul appeal to you?”

“As you see it, what would be the advantages to you if you came to Concordia University-St. Paul?”

Sample Situation-Based Questions

The following questions are examples of questions that reveal combinations of creative thinking, decision making, interpersonal relations, work style and judgment. Typically answers to these questions involve multiple levels of thought processing:

“What if you were in a situation where you had several important tasks to do and little time to handle them all? How would you select which task(s) to do?”

“Imagine a situation where you find yourself without the specific technical knowledge to perform a task essential to a project? What would you do?”

“Suppose you were asked to develop a proposal/set up a project/introduce a new idea for which there was no organizational precedent to follow? How would you proceed?”

“If you had your choice, which would you prefer: a job with a few big, solid long-term projects to concentrate on or one with many projects and shifting priorities? Why?”

“Would you prefer to be in a situation where you were creating new markets or one where you were developing old ones?”

“How would you respond to another’s special request that was for personal reasons? How would you grant the request? How would you explain to others who were not able to do the same thing? How would you handle denying the request?”

Wrap-up Questions

These questions are practical and logistical questions that should always be asked at the end of the interview.

“If an offer were extended to you, when would you be able to begin working at Concordia University-St. Paul?”

“Is there anything else you would like to add that perhaps we haven’t discussed yet that might be relevant to the job or to help us as we evaluate your background and experiences?”