

# How to Create a Structured Interview Process



Presented by

**SPARK HIRE** 

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## How to create a structured interview process

When you joined your company's hiring efforts, you accepted the challenge to find top talent and quickly evaluate their ability to thrive as part of your company's team. You've prepared for this moment by fine-tuning various stages of your hiring process.

You have set outreach templates and steps in place to source the best candidates. The onboarding process always follows a strict system to ensure new hires feel connected and confident as they settle into their roles.

But you've neglected the interview.

Sure, you have specific steps that guide you through the process. But interviews often lack the detailed structure established in other stages of hiring. This critical part of your hiring process is too often left to chance:

There's a *chance* you'll connect with a candidate and strike up a lively conversation.

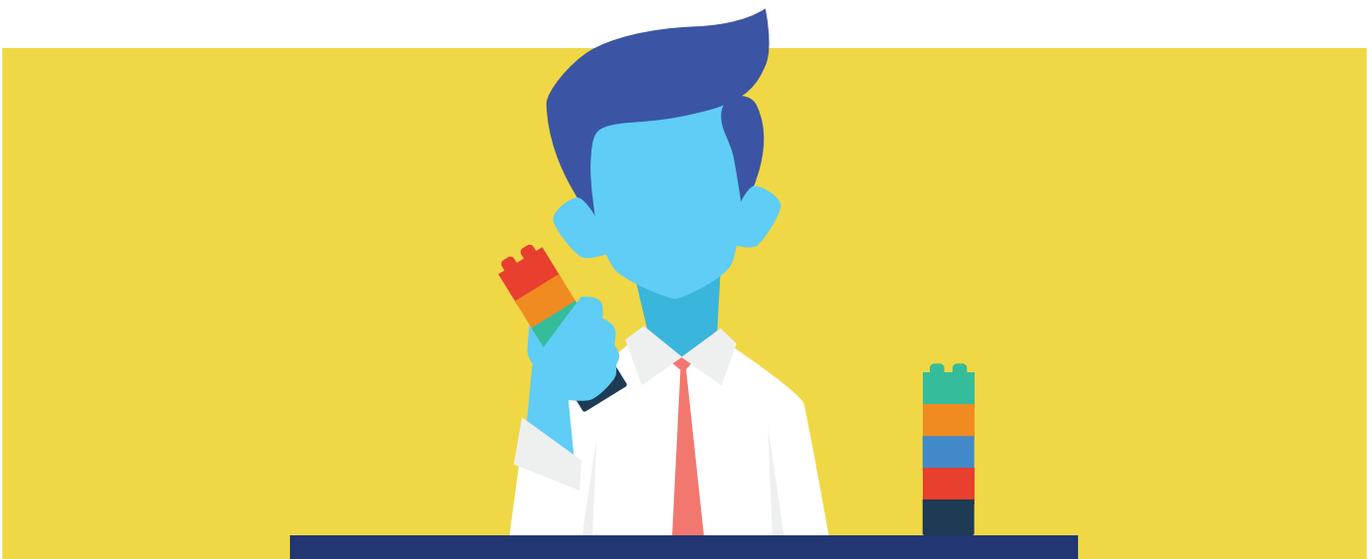
There's a *chance* you'll misevaluate a candidate.

There's a *chance* you'll find a candidate who aligns perfectly with your open role.

There's a *chance* you'll accidentally ask questions that result in bias or non-compliance.

Of course, these are not necessarily chances you want to take. That's why it's important to give interviews the same attention and structure you create in every other step of the hiring process.

Structured interviews provide a fixed format so every qualified candidate is offered the same opportunity and shares a similar, positive experience. Internally, structured interviews create a hiring environment that streamlines processes for the entire hiring team, ensuring candidate assessments are efficient and accurate.





## Benefits of structured interviews

- Easy to replicate
- Allow HR pros to easily and fairly evaluate candidates
- Get the hiring team on the same page
- Improve the candidate experience
- Reduce interview process time
- Increase compliance and decrease interviewer fallibility



## Keep the process simple and consistent

The hiring process generally follows a straightforward series of steps. Structured interviews are designed to decrease the challenges you face throughout the hiring process. It's generally a good idea to create an outline of your process. While the structure will remain the same, you may have to pay more attention to one step over another depending on the role you're looking to fill -- especially when creating structured interview questions.





## Craft the perfect structured questions

Structured interview questions give you control over various factors impacting hiring decisions and outcomes. For example, decision-makers who may not be aware of all compliance rules now have an exact guide to follow.

More importantly, collaborating on structured interview questions puts everyone on the same page. To begin, separate questions into two distinct categories -- role-specific and general.

### General interview questions

You may already use general interview questions to assess candidate fit beyond role requirements. These questions dig into a candidate's personality traits, expectations, and needs to determine alignment with the company's culture and values.

Consistency enables your team to stick to the task at hand. Without consistency, these questions often lead to time-consuming tangents. What starts as an effort to assess a candidate's cultural fit has the potential to derail an entire interview.

Crafting general interview questions that focus on understanding the same key indicators of success allows everyone to quickly determine if a candidate will excel on your team. When considering the best questions to use for this element of the structured interview, consider questions that answer the following concerns:

- Do they share the same vision?
- Will they push the company's mission forward?
- Will they be satisfied as part of this team for the long term?

Those who don't fit well culturally will struggle to feel satisfied in their role over time, even if their skills perfectly align with the role's responsibilities. That is why talent acquisition respondents (46.3 percent) in our most recent [research](#) go so far as to say they would only hire overqualified talent if they'd be happy and fulfilled in the role.

Here are a few standard general interview questions that help assess for fit:

- What part of our company mission do you connect with?

(continued)

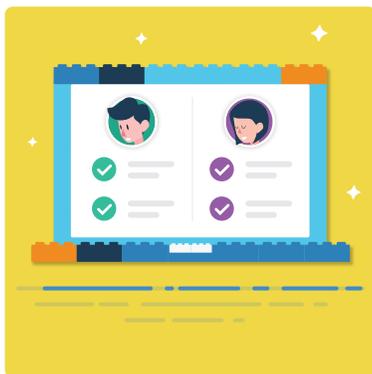
- Why do you want this job?
- What is something in your current role that you don't excel at?
- What are you passionate about?
- If you're faced with a task that you don't know how to complete, what do you do?
- What is your greatest achievement?
- What's your ideal job?
- What type of work environment do you prefer?
- Share a time you disagreed with management's decision. How did you handle it?
- What are your hobbies outside of work?
- Please describe your relationship with current colleagues.

Rather than explore the specific role requirements, these questions give insight into the candidate's innate qualities, personal preferences, behavioral patterns, and professional work ethic.

The structured interview process is most successful when your team agrees on both the questions and the responses. Once you've composed a list of general interview questions with the help of the team, gather everyone to discuss answers that indicate a top candidate.



Ask current employees to briefly answer the general interview questions. Use their responses to identify key indicators of personality traits, work ethic, values, and innate qualities that are most likely to fit with your current team and align with your company values. The best answers from potential hires should parallel those of successful current employees.



## Role-specific questions

The process you went through to determine the exact requirements of a role shouldn't end in the bullet points of a job description. Carry that structure straight into your interview process.

Have employees submit one to three of their own unique questions. Ask them what would be most important to assess in regards to the skills that make them successful in their roles. Then, present these questions to hiring managers for

feedback. Craft role-specific questions from the job details provided by employees and managers.

Role-specific questions vary depending on the job. Here's what you need to keep in mind as you craft these role-specific questions:

- Use behavioral and situational questions
- Be specific and to the point
- Avoid questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no” response
- Ask questions based on the role's hard skills
- Questions should relate directly back to skills and experiences listed in the job description (this also helps avoid discriminatory/bias-encouraging interview questions)

Of course, role-specific questions should get you closer to determining if a candidate's skills and previous experiences prepared them to be successful in your role. However, you also want to be open to potential.

Candidates who check all the personality trait or ‘attitude’ boxes you're looking for in an ideal candidate but don't exactly fit the specifics of the role shouldn't be discounted for other roles in the company. Especially if another opportunity is available. For example, nearly one in five respondents in our recent report said they'd hire overqualified talent if an advanced position was opening up for the candidate to quickly move into.

The top indicators of potential your team should evaluate for include:

- A high capacity for learning
- Resilience
- Strategic thinking
- Flexibility
- Emotional intelligence
- Drive and motivation

Even if you choose not to hire a top candidate, keep them in your talent pipeline by incorporating them into your [talent community](#), sharing company information, and upcoming role openings.



*Bonus:* For more tips on crafting the perfect interview questions, dive into your free [eBook](#).



## Prioritize the interview evaluation criteria

Interview evaluation criteria differ from company to company. And that's OK! For example, in our report, 33.6 percent of talent acquisition pros put more emphasis on candidate potential when assessing overqualified candidates. Another 20.9 percent focus on candidates' career goals.

Because priorities vary from role to role, it's critical you set specific evaluation criteria for each open position. Determining the importance of different criteria to your team ensures all decision-makers weigh candidate responses consistently.

First, evaluate what both employees and hiring decision-makers view as the most important factors qualifying a candidate. Ask them to rank a set of criteria on a scale from most to least important. If an issue of major differences over prioritization occurs, open the floor for discussion.

For example, if employees believe hiring candidates who are willing to collaborate is most important but hiring managers say employees with ample experience is a top qualifier, discuss the reasons behind both. Getting everyone on the same page before interviews begin prevents issues later in the hiring process, or worse, during onboarding or over an employee's tenure.

This process saves time and improves accuracy as each candidate is evaluated on the same scale. Examples of interview criteria you can ask your team to prioritize include:

- Communication skills
- Experiences -- work, volunteer, extracurricular, hobbies, etc.
- Learning ability
- Technical proficiency
- Overall demeanor/attitude
- Cultural fit
- Willingness to learn
- Ability to collaborate



## Collaborate on the right rating scale

Setting the rating scale for candidate assessments isn't a one-person job. Your entire hiring team should get involved. Adding a rating scale everyone understands and agrees on to your structured interview process quickly improves how effectively your team assesses candidates. It also streamlines collaboration during the evaluation and decision-making stages.

One way you can structure your rating scale is ranking candidates on a five (or more) point rating system. For example, one is the determinant for scoring poorly on a question, three is average, and five is excellent. Determine with your team what number is satisfactory allowing a candidate through to the next round or unsatisfactory, removing the candidate from your process.



*Bonus:* Start planning your rating scale with the help of this [candidate evaluation](#) form by SHRM.

Sticking to a numbers system makes assessments fair, fast, and simple. Your hiring team can quickly rank candidates and focus their time on only the most qualified talent. Additionally, all candidates are reviewed on the same system, removing unconscious bias from the interview process.

You may find some questions complicate this system. For instance, you ask candidates applying for a sales role to list common customer objections and how to respond to them. Some candidates may name two objections while others could list five. A pass/fail rating scale is more effective in these instances. Your team may decide candidates who give you X acceptable responses “pass” that question.

Measure how accurate your scale is by running mock interviews with your current team. This tests the efficiency and effectiveness of your rating scale for each question before getting candidates involved.



## Set all the gears in motion

The Journal of Applied Psychology revealed in their study “[Why Are Structured Interviews so Rarely Used in Personnel Selection?](#)” one of the reasons structured methods are underutilized is “a highly standardized procedure could be seen as reducing the task into a boring, monotonous exercise, whereas an unstructured interview could offer challenges and autonomy.”

We argue that it actually *improves* the candidate experience. With the right tools, you can integrate both fun and compliance into structured interviews.

**One-way interviews** are the perfect example of a unique way to enhance structured interviews for both candidates and your team. All candidates have the same interview experience. They receive the same questions in the same order with the same set deadline and other predetermined parameters.

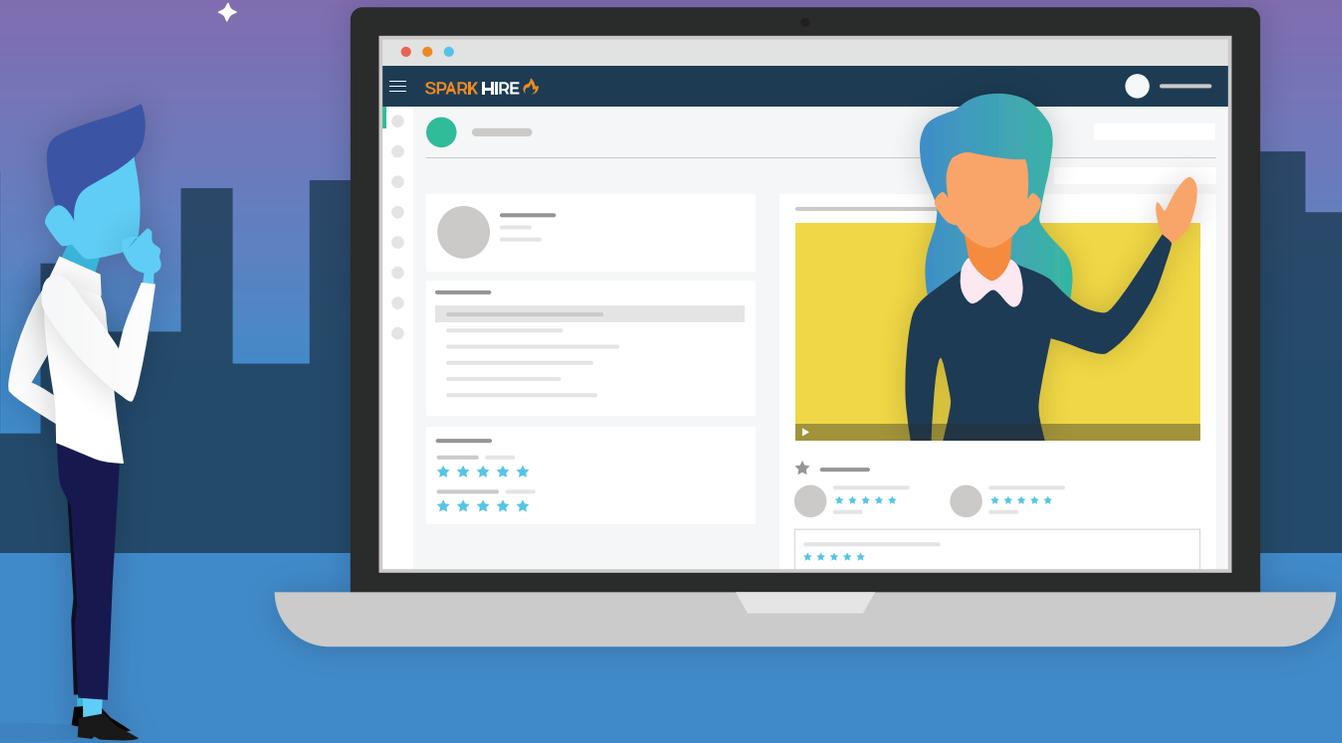
As a bonus, they get the opportunity to interview on their own time from anywhere. And your team is able to easily review these one-way interviews and collaborate. This speeds up and streamlines the evaluation process.

No matter what tools you're using to interview candidates, there are a few key points to remember when creating a compliant structured interview:

- Use additional forms of assessment prior to interviewing, such as work samples and personality or skills tests
- The interview should be the final stage of evaluation before reference checks
- Stick to the script -- even for follow-up questions
- Don't evaluate candidates on the spot
- Take detailed notes of their responses
- Avoid noting attributes that aren't job-related
- Create checklists and guides for each hiring manager to follow the structured format

Just like any part of the hiring process, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating a structured interview. Each department and team could have its own list of what's most important by the time you're through. However, your structured interview process will empower your team to hire candidates that excel in their roles and as part of your company over and over. And unlike passing trends, positive, consistent results impact your hiring process for the long-term.

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