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Section 4

Good Practices for Interviewing

The search and recruitment process for hiring new faculty and staff plays a critical role in shaping not only departments but the profession as whole. This process is central to increasing diversity in philosophy, both in its teachers and in its students.

It is beyond the scope of the current document to develop guidelines for the search and recruitment process as a whole, though we should mention that there is a wealth of information about good practices for fairness and effectiveness in advertising a position, creating a candidate pool, drawing up a short list, interviewing and deliberating about candidates, and making and negotiating offers. Among these guides are the following:

- The APA Handbook on Placement Practices, which includes guidelines for best practices of placing and hiring departments
- Best Practices in Hiring Faculty and Staff, prepared by the National Association of College and University Attorneys
- Best Practices for Conducting Faculty Searches, prepared by the Harvard University office for Faculty Development and Diversity
- The ADVANCE project, a website hosted by the University of Michigan, which contains research and guidelines for good practices in enhancing fairness and diversity

The following discussion of good practices in interviewing is intended to outline documented techniques or practices that tend to result in better outcomes in recruitment than other practices. Some institutions may have developed their own set of recommended practices that better fit their situation and that are based on the same considerations of fairness that ground these recommendations. The recommendations may be reasonably modified to fit local circumstances. Departments should ensure that all participants in any stage of the search and recruitment process are aware from the outset of the APA’s Statement on Non-Discrimination and of any applicable college or university policies or reporting requirements. Some institutions require faculty participating in search and recruitment to attend training sessions, and departments should be aware of such requirements in advance of forming search committees and should notify relevant faculty.

The process

The process standardly consists of two rounds of interviews. In the past, the first-round interviews usually took place at a professional meeting, generally the Eastern Division meeting of the APA in late December (now early January). However, this seems to be rapidly changing. Now many departments opt to use internet-based technology in conducting first-round interviews (see Appendix A of this section). Such

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2 This section was primarily drafted by the Subcommittee on Interviewing Best Practices, chaired by Julia Driver, with additional information, including the entirety of Appendices C and D, provided by the Best Practices Task Force.
interviews pose less of a financial burden to the candidate. There is also some concern regarding poor treatment of candidates, particularly female candidates, in convention interview venues.

After the first-round interviews, departments will select a smaller “short list” of candidates. These candidates receive second-round interviews on campus. At the second stage, a smaller number of candidates is selected from the interview pool to visit the interviewing campus.

Some departments opt to eliminate the first round. Many researchers have expressed skepticism regarding the usefulness of unstructured interviews in hiring as well as concerns regarding bias impacts, and this has led some departments to skip the standard first stage and invite a smaller group of candidates directly to the campus interview (see Appendix B of this section).

The following chart outlines some pros and cons for three types of interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APA In-Person Interview</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• People feel more confident making judgments about a person—especially their collegiality and their classroom presence—in an in-person interview.</td>
<td>• This higher confidence can also make the in-person meeting too salient in assessing the qualities of the candidates—to the detriment of other, more predictive criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Departments find it convenient to bundle all interviews at one location.</td>
<td>• Such interviews can impose a considerable financial burden on interviewees. At least half of all interviews are now done by video conference. Thus, candidates who get an interview at the APA are often making an expensive trip ($1,000–$1,500) for just one or two interviews. Travel can also impose larger burdens on candidates with children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Conference (e.g., Skype)</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cheaper and more convenient for most candidates—especially those in the UK/Europe/Antipodes, and anyone else far from where the APA Eastern Division Meeting is held.</td>
<td>• Prone to technical glitches and poor audio/video connections, which can be distracting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cheaper and more convenient for interviewing departments.</td>
<td>• It can be harder for interviewers to get a good sense of the person, and the interview may feel “canned” to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For first-round interviews, video conferencing may make possible fuller faculty participation, lessen applicant anxiety, and mitigate some of the interpersonal effects that can lead to bias in in-person interviews.</td>
<td>• Video-conferencing can also favor some candidates who have access to superior technical facilities or who, for whatever reason, come across more effectively in a video format. Interviewers should be aware of these effects and consider whether such differential performance is job-related and relevant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phone Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Free and easy to arrange and set up.</td>
<td>• Interviewees often find it difficult to distinguish between the voices of different interviewers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Less subject to technical difficulties.</td>
<td>• Interviewees are less comfortable talking to people without visual non-verbal cues that allow them to see how interviewers are reacting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first stage

The charge to the committee developing these guidelines was to consider interviewing practices rather than overall hiring practices. However, it should be noted that, prior to the first stage interviews, the hiring department has a responsibility to properly advertise a position (regarding advertisement of positions, see the APA Statement on the Job Market Calendar) and to fairly and thoroughly read application files, applying criteria consistently. These same considerations of fairness and consistency carry through to the interview process itself.

If a hiring department has decided that it will be conducting interviews at a professional meeting, that department should make sure in scheduling interviews with candidates that enough time is provided for candidates to arrange for transportation and accommodation. Interviews must be accessible for candidates with disabilities, e.g., departments must make efforts to ensure that the interview location is accessible. The interviews themselves must not be conducted in a hotel room used for sleeping. See the APA Statement on Hotel Room Interviews. Interviews must conform to other APA policies such as this one.

Members of the hiring committee should be well prepared for the interviews. Each member of the department’s hiring committee should have a packet on each candidate containing the same information. This information may include, among other things, the candidate’s CV, writing sample, and perhaps a sheet listing highlights from the candidate’s dossier.

How much time a department schedules for interviews will depend upon various considerations, particularly how many candidates the department has decided to interview. In fairness to the candidates being interviewed, departments should be as sensitive as possible to limiting the number of interviews to what can reasonably be accomplished.

Most departments schedule 60 to 90 minutes per interview, which allows the department to talk to the candidate for at least 45 minutes, and allows for the members of the department to have enough time to both briefly discuss the interview once the candidate has left and to prepare for the next candidate. There should also be time allocated for the interviewee to ask questions.

Members of the hiring committee should confine themselves to asking only questions that are pertinent to the candidate’s qualifications for the job. Indeed, it is strongly recommended that interviewing committees discuss in advance what questions will be asked of candidates and in what order. Insofar as possible, the interviewing committee should then attempt to adhere to this list, and to ensure that all candidates will be given the same opportunity to respond to these questions. Research supports the idea that following a structured format in interviewing can be instrumental in providing equal treatment and overcoming various kinds of bias in assessing candidates. (See also Section 5 on countering implicit bias.) Structured
Interviews do not require that all the questions be identical, since in the normal interview there will certainly be questions that need to be tailored to the specifics of a candidate’s research interests, past teaching experience, and so forth. But structuring the interview to the extent that is reasonable has the advantages of making the interview experience for the candidates as fair and consistent as possible, providing the committee with a uniform range of information about candidates, and helping preclude the possibility that some questions will be overlooked or that inappropriate questions will be asked. Members of interviewing and hiring committees should familiarize themselves with guidelines concerning acceptable questions to candidates (see Appendix C of this section) and should be aware that some questions that may be appropriate after an offer has been made (e.g., inquiring about possible family responsibilities that may affect the potential hiree’s ability to accept an offer) are not appropriate beforehand.

Individual departments will have their own objectives in mind in conducting an interview. Some may focus more on research, others more on teaching. One example of how to conduct an interview is the following: (1) the interviewing department opens the interview with a description of how the interview will proceed; (2) someone on the committee summarizes the candidate’s writing sample and asks an opening question about the candidate’s research, then opens the interview up for discussion of research; (3) a committee member then asks how the candidate will contribute to the teaching needs of the department, as indicated in the advertisement for the job; (4) a committee member then asks if the candidate has any questions about the job; and (5) the candidate is given information about a contact person who is available for follow-up questions, and who will be in contact with the candidate about the job.

Interviewing practices should be discussed in advance, in awareness of relevant guidelines. The APA’s Statement on Non-Discrimination, for example, states the following:

> The American Philosophical Association rejects as unethical all forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, political convictions, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identification or age, whether in graduate admissions, appointments, retention, promotion and tenure, manuscript evaluation, salary determination, or other professional activities in which APA members characteristically participate.

Throughout the initial interview process, members of the hiring committee are to maintain the highest standards of professionalism and refrain from behavior that may distract or intimidate the candidate. There have been reports of deeply disturbing behavior negatively impacting job candidates at the APA Eastern Division meeting, behavior that is unprofessional, particularly during the receptions (sometimes colloquially known as “smokers”).

Interviewers and other members of the department are strongly discouraged from conducting pre- or post-interview “interviews” before or at the convention. Good practices for mitigating bias in interviewing include treating interviewees alike, as much as possible, and informal interviews by their nature introduce disparities among applicants. Furthermore, the physical environment of various gathering places or receptions at the convention can create barriers for members of the community with disabilities—for example, not everyone can negotiate a reception ballroom with the same ease, or speak or hear over the noise, etc.
The campus visit

After the first round of interviews, the department hiring committee generally decides to invite a short list of candidates to campus for visits to continue the interviewing process. Each candidate should receive information on arranging for transportation and accommodation. Ideally, hiring departments should pay the travel expenses for candidates’ campus visit and should attempt to arrange the purchase of tickets and accommodation in such a way that the candidates will not have to bear the cost of travel temporarily, while awaiting reimbursement. When a hiring department does not have funds to pay for candidate travel for campus visits, they should make this clear in advance and assist candidates in whatever other ways they can with travel and lodging. It is a good practice for hiring departments to inform invitees in advance of how many candidates they expect to invite, and what the likely timetable is for interviews and decision-making.

Itinerary: A detailed itinerary and contact information should be provided to candidates in advance of campus visits, and planning should incorporate breaks to allow the candidate ample time to meet personal needs and prepare for each stage of the interview. Interviewing departments should ensure that all visit-related events are fully accessible to individuals with mobility impairments, and departments should be prepared to provide large-print materials or recordings of printed materials for candidates with vision impairments.

Informational packet: It is strongly recommended to provide candidates with a packet of materials containing information about the department and the college or university, especially information about tenure or rehiring timelines and review processes, leave for research or for family or medical needs, healthcare and retirement benefits, housing, and dual-career hiring policies and resources. Candidates may be, or feel they are, at a disadvantage if they must request such information themselves.

Job talk and teaching demonstration: Two of the central features of most on-campus interviews are the teaching demonstration and the “job talk.”

If a teaching demonstration is to be required, candidates should be informed of this as early as possible, and given a description of the nature of the class—e.g., the level and format of the course (introduction, intermediate, or advanced; lecture, seminar, or discussion), a syllabus (if the demonstration is part of an ongoing course), and information about the likely audience for the demonstration. Candidates should be consulted in advance about any technical needs they might have in teaching the demonstration class.

Since the form of the candidate’s research presentation or “job talk” tends to vary depending on the institution and its practices, candidates should be informed as early as possible about departmental practices in connection with such talks (e.g., whether a copy of the talk is expected in advance, what the audience for the talk is likely to be, how time is typically divided between presentation and discussion, what norms there may be about handling questions and answers, and so on). And again, inviting departments should be sure to check with candidates in advance about what technical support they might need.

Similar treatment: While other components of the campus visit may vary according to the nature of the position or the interests of the candidates, in general departments should attempt to treat each candidate for a position in approximately the same manner. This applies to the initial communications with
candidates, inviting them to visit, and also to the opportunities afforded candidates while they are on campus, e.g., in meeting with faculty, students, or administrators. Prior to campus visits, department faculty, students, and staff should be reminded of the importance of treating candidates for a given position in comparable ways. Just as similarity in structure is important for helping to ensure consistency in information-gathering by the department and the candidate during initial candidate interviews, it continues to be important through the campus visit. For example, faculty members who meet with one candidate should be encouraged to meet with the other candidates as well.

**Dual-career families:** Dual-career families are becoming increasingly common in academia, and questions about dual careers are likely to arise during a campus visit. Norms regarding dual careers are evolving. However, it is clear at present that any initiative in providing information to departments about potential dual-careers issues lies with the candidate—departments may not ask candidates any questions about dual careers or other forms of family responsibility or needs for accessibility until after an official offer has been made. Departments can provide candidates with information about campus resources for accommodating dual careers, family responsibilities, or accessibility, but they must provide all candidates with the same information. Chairs should be sure that they are in a position to answer questions about such policies or resources with up-to-date information. For example, a candidate who anticipates that he or she would find it difficult to accept an offer without some arrangement for a spouse or partner may consider making this information known early enough in the recruitment process to provide the department with time to seek to make relevant arrangements, but this is a delicate issue and candidates should seek advice before doing so.

For further discussion of dual careers, along with model guidelines for institutions, see the Clayman Institute’s [Dual-Career Research Report](#).

**After the campus visit**

Before a campus visit is over, the candidate should be informed of how the departmental search and deliberation will proceed from that point forward and whom to contact in the event of further questions or developments. Candidates should also have a clear idea of who will be contacting them with information about the status of the search. Ideally, one person—normally, the department chair—should be responsible for all official communication with the candidate.

Insofar as possible, contact with candidates should follow the broad guideline of seeking to be consistent across candidates. It is understood that candidates may wish to contact individual members of the department in order to follow up on research suggestions or to ask questions that that given faculty member may be best suited to answer. Faculty should be aware of the “ground rules” for such contact and should be aware of the questions it is inappropriate to ask of a candidate prior to making a job offer (see [Appendix C of this section](#)). Faculty who might wish to initiate post-interview contact with a candidate should normally discuss the advisability of initiating such contact with the official contact person. Regardless of who initiates post-interview contact, information gained during these post-interview conversations should be considered private and should not be introduced into the hiring process without the express consent of the candidate and clearance with the official contact person.

Departments should keep candidates apprised of the progress of a search and should inform candidates promptly if they have been eliminated from the search. Once the department has made an offer and the offer has been accepted, all candidates should be informed that the search is over.
Offers of employment
(The following is adapted from the APA Statement on Offers of Employment. See also the APA Statement on the Job Market Calendar.)

**Deadlines for responses to offers:** The circumstances under which offers are made are so varied that no rule will cover all cases, but norms of professional courtesy suggest some helpful advice. Employer and prospective employee should be respectful of one another's legitimate concerns. Employers are properly concerned about planning for the contingency of making another offer in a timely fashion if one is turned down. Prospective employees are properly concerned to make important career decisions in the light of fairly complete information about which offers they are actually going to receive. In some cases, such concerns may set employer and prospective employee at cross-purposes unless professional courtesy is exercised by both parties.

Ideally, at the time an offer is made, employer and prospective employee should discuss their concerns with the aim of arriving at a mutually agreeable deadline for response. In normal circumstances a prospective employee should have at least two weeks for consideration of a written offer from a properly authorized administrative officer, and responses to offers of positions whose duties begin in the following fall should not be required before February 1.

When an employer is unable to honor these conditions, the prospective employee should be given an explanation of the special circumstances that warrant insistence on an earlier decision. By the same token, a prospective employee should not delay unnecessarily in responding to an offer once it has been made. When a prospective employee requests more time to consider an offer than the employer is inclined to give, a candid statement of the reasons for the request is in order.

**Oral offers and acceptances:** There are at least two distinct types of situation that cause difficulties with oral offers and acceptances. The ideals of professional courtesy suggest advice for dealing with them. One is the case in which a prospective employee received what appears to be an oral job offer and on that account forgoes other opportunities only to learn later that the prospective employer has no job to offer because, for instance, a position does not receive final administrative approval. In order to prevent misunderstandings on this score, the prospective employer should make it very clear to the prospective employee whether a formal offer is being extended or not. If a prospective employer is only in a position to say that a formal offer will be forthcoming provided a departmental recommendation received administrative approval and to predict such approval, the prospective employee should be told explicitly that this is the situation.

Another kind of difficulty arises when a formal offer is orally made and accepted and the prospective employee later receives and accepts another offer. Such cases can present both legal and moral problems. It is worth bearing in mind that **there are circumstances in which oral contracts are legally binding.** In addition, oral acceptance of a formal offer, like making a serious promise, generates a strong *prima facie* obligation to take the job thus accepted, and weighty reasons are needed to justify not doing so.
Section 4, Appendix A
Guidelines for Interviews via Internet Meeting Software and Telephone

The costs associated with in-person convention interviews has led some departments to conduct first-round interviews using video conferencing services such as Skype, GoToMeeting, and InterCall, or via telephone. The following are guidelines for conducting such interviews.

Departments, colleges, and universities should avoid using these technologies to treat some candidates differently relative to other candidates. Such interviews should be scheduled in a way that treats all candidates for the job fairly and consistently. Of course, some departments may need to schedule internet-based interviews only after it becomes clear that their first round of in-person interviews has been unsuccessful. However, departments should keep in mind how the evaluation of a candidate’s interview performance may be negatively affected by technical problems with the software and internet connection. This should be of special concern when some candidates are interviewed in-person, and others using internet-based technology or the telephone.

One recommendation to mitigate potential unfairness in the process is for the interviewing department to either give candidates the option of how they want to interview, or to commit to interviewing all candidates in the same manner.

Internet-based and telephone interviews should adhere to the guidelines for in-person interviews where practicable. This includes taking measures to ensure accessibility for candidates with disabilities. In the case of internet-based and phone interviews, this may involve making use of specialized equipment.

Interviewing institutions and individual interviewers

- Arrange internet-based and phone interviews in the same formal manner you would arrange an in-person interview.
  - Allow enough time between your invitation and the actual interview for the candidate to arrange appropriate facilities and technological assistance.
  - Arrange for technological assistance at your institution. Interviews should be conducted in a professional manner with as few difficulties as possible. Remember that the candidate may be nervous. Inadequate connectivity or lack of technological assistance should something go wrong heightens their anxiety.
  - Tell the candidate approximately how long the interview will last.
- Provide the candidate with your contact information in case a problem with the connection arises.
- Arrange an appropriate location and technological assistance for the interview.
  - Universities often have a room designated for internet-based interviews. The location should be free of distractions and have a secure, wired connection.
- Test the space and the connection.
- Make sure a back-up telephone is available in case there is a problem with the connection.
- Make sure all interviewers are adequately informed about the limitations of the technology. If use of the equipment is not clear, tell them how they ought to speak and direct their voices, where they ought to look, etc. Also let the interviewers know what the candidate can see, what the candidate can hear, and any other information that may be appropriate.
- If the space for the interview is a classroom, additional microphones might be needed.

- Allow ample time immediately before and after the scheduled interview.
  - Time before the interview allows you to check that the technology is working appropriately.
  - The APA recommends that interviewers arrive to the interview location at least thirty minutes before the scheduled interview.
  - At the end of the interview, ensure that all connections to the candidate have been cut before discussing any impressions.

- Ask questions with the same animation as an in-person interview but perhaps more slowly. Keep in mind that there may be a lag depending on the technology being used.
  - Speak clearly and loudly. You will need to project your voice. This is especially true if there are multiple people using the same connection.
  - In telephone interviews with multiple interviewers, identify yourself each time you ask a question. This may also be necessary with internet-based interviews, depending on the video arrangement.
  - Allow for pauses.

**Job candidate**

- Plan to take the internet connection or phone call in a room designated by your university for this purpose. Contact Career Services, Graduate Placement, or the IT department for assistance.
  - Ask the interviewers how long you should expect the conversation to last so that you may schedule the appropriate facilities.
  - If no room is designated for interviews, ask for one. An office that is quiet and nicely decorated would be ideal. If you do not have access to an appropriate space on campus, arrange such a space at your home or the home of a colleague.
  - The space should be free of distraction. Think especially about the material that forms the backdrop of your internet interview. Avoid overly busy or cluttered spaces. Think also about what artwork or posters might reveal about you as a job candidate.
  - For an internet-based interview, make sure the connection is secure and strong. Use a wired connection if possible; wireless internet connections are less reliable. Check the webcam and microphone well in advance of the interview as well.
For telephone interviews, try to use a landline that has better sound quality and is more reliable than a cell phone. If you must use a cell phone, make sure it has ample battery life and the reception is excellent.

- Prepare for an internet-based or phone interview in the same manner you would prepare for an in-person interview.
  - Prepare for the interview.
  - Know the college or university as well as the department that will be interviewing you.
  - Anticipate what sorts of questions they might ask.
  - Compile a list of possible questions that you could ask them if time permits; have these questions in mind for the actual interview. Try to avoid having a written list of questions, however.
  - Be able to describe your current and future research in a succinct manner for a generalist audience.
  - Have your application materials and supplementary materials ready-at-hand in a neat file (just to the side of the screen for internet interviews). Ideally, you should be well enough prepared that you will not need to refer to these materials during the interview, but in the event a question arises about the content of the application file, it might be a good idea to have those materials on hand. Avoid clutter surrounding the computer.
  - Dress appropriately as for an in-person interview. This is helpful for telephone interviews as well as it puts you in a professional mindset. Keep in mind that bright colors are often skewed in computer imaging. Solid colors and dark colors tend to display more consistently.

- Practice for an internet or phone interview.
  - Ask your placement officer or graduate director to arrange a mock interview.
  - It can be disconcerting for interviewers if the candidate appears to not be looking at them during the interview. However, it is also an advantage for the candidate to be able to see the interviewers during the interview so as to better gauge reactions. To these ends, the candidate can reduce the size of the Skype, or other software, screen in which the interviewers are visible and move that as close to the camera location as possible. In that way the candidate can see the interviewers while looking at the camera.
  - Experiment with angles of your screen that will allow you to look most natural and to see the interviewers most clearly without looking down.
  - Check connection, webcam, and microphone at the location and with the equipment you will be using during your actual interview.
  - Note that, in some cases, a headset may be useful.

- Perform to the best of your ability with confidence.
  - Make sure any cell phone not used in the interview is turned completely off. Do not distract yourself with the buzz of a text message.
o It is a good idea to have a back-up phone available in case there is a problem with the connection. Make sure you have relevant contact information for the interviewer.

o For internet-based interviews, close all other programs on your computer, especially email and email pop-ups.

o Remember to look at the camera. This is where practice really helps.

o Avoid any distractions.

o Be expressive.

o Keep responses succinct. Internet-based interviews and telephone interviews, even more than in-person interviews, invite distraction from all parties. You can help alleviate that if you answer the questions clearly and succinctly.

Placement officers and graduate programs

- Advocate for the students on the market with your university. If there is currently no designated space or support service for internet-based and telephone interviews, ask for it.

- Assist candidates with making arrangements for internet-based and telephone interviews.
  - Much of this could be done prior to the job market season. Provide information including these guidelines from the APA.
  - Coordinate mock interviews using the appropriate technology.

- Assess interview facilities and technology. Make improvements as appropriate.
Section 4, Appendix B
Research on Interviewing

Many departments no longer conduct first-round interviews in person at APA meetings. A great number of departments now begin with internet-based interviews, while some do not conduct first-round interviews at all, preferring instead to bring candidates directly to campus for on-campus visits.

Reasons for avoiding the divisional meetings in favor of internet-based interviews largely center on the costs of performing first-round interviews at the meetings. Institutions must cover the costs of faculty traveling to conduct the interviews, and interviewees—many of whom are graduate students—must cover the costs of their own travel to the meetings. It is especially problematic for graduate students when the job market is precarious, since many will end up spending a great deal of money for one or two interviews.

However, some departments feel that there is value in face-to-face interviews. They believe that they are better able to ascertain the teaching effectiveness of a candidate through an evaluation of in-person communication skills. Some also view the first round, face-to-face interview as an opportunity to “sell” their department more effectively to prospective colleagues. However, given the growing trend by more departments to rely on internet-based first-round interviews, departments should seriously weigh any benefits they believe they are achieving by using in-person interviews against the significant costs those interviews present to candidates.

Some departments have chosen to avoid first-round interviews altogether. Cost may be a factor, but, additionally, work in social psychology has cast doubt on the usefulness of first-round interviews. The “interview illusion” refers to the view that one can glean a great deal of useful information about a job candidate from a brief, unstructured, interview:

...the one-hour personal interview has virtually no validity for predicting job performance, yet people often feel convinced after such interviews that they have a good idea of the candidate’s attributes and how well the candidate would perform on the job. Indeed, such an inflated belief in the certainty of knowledge obtained in the interview may cause people to overturn completely (and wrongly) preconceptions of the candidate based on job recommendations that probably do have some validity. (Nisbett and Ross 1980, 72)

Their diagnosis is that the vividness of interview data swamps the dull, but more reliable data provided in the candidate’s dossier (Nisbett and Ross 1980, 290). One source of error is the tendency to place great weight on the behavior of others while discounting one’s own similar behavior:

Interviewers often feel confident relying on interviewee’s behavior in order to infer more stable internal states—such as passion, mental stability, or drive. In making such inferences, interviewers pay attention not only to interviewee’s carefully composed replies but also to their implicit or uncontrolled responses, such as nonverbal gestures, off-the-cuff remarks, or unintended slips of the tongue. The very unintentional and unmonitored responses that people view as meaningless in their own case, people often view as meaningful in the case of others. (Pronin 2009, 17-18)
Evidence is compelling that impressions from unstructured interviews are very poor predictors of successful performance. There is evidence that not only are unstructured interviews ineffective, they may actually harm the interviewer’s judgment (Dana et al. 2013). Much of this evidence, however, is gathered from interview settings not specific to academia.

Though unstructured interviews are fairly consistently viewed as providing poor evidence of job success, some researchers regard the structured interview as potentially useful (Macan 2009). What is meant by “structured” is not always clear, but the most common understanding involves making the interview procedure as uniform for candidates as possible.3 Candidates should be asked the same questions in the same order, for example.4 It is also possible the wording of the questions matters as well, and care should be taken to make sure that the questions are formatted the same way for all the candidates. There should be a consistent rating scale used in evaluating responses (Macan 2009, 206). There seems to be some evidence that highly structured interviews “can minimize or eliminate potential bias with respect to demographic similarity between applicants and interviewers” (McCarthy et al. 2010, 351). In the case of academic interviews, it may be difficult to be perfectly consistent between candidates, since research projects and teaching techniques will vary and require different follow-up questions between candidates. There are also interview formats that fall between the two extremes—in semi-structured interviews, the interview experience is kept as consistent as possible between candidates, but some allowance is made for questions that permit “probing” or following up on a given response.

There is also concern over the role implicit bias plays in the evaluation of candidates. In a famous study involving 238 psychologists, the psychologists—118 were male, 120 were female—were asked to evaluate curricula vitae that had been randomly given either a male or female name. The male name received a better evaluation than the female name, though the CVs were otherwise identical (Steinpreis et al. 1999). In another study, applicants with “White-sounding” names received 50 percent more call-backs after a resume review than applicants with “African-American-sounding” names (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). To minimize the role implicit bias plays in reviewing job files, some recommend that files be anonymized prior to review. This may involve, for example, using a multi-step screening process: first review CVs, writing samples, teaching, and research statements that have been anonymized by personnel who are not involved in the evaluation process. Then, after the pool has been narrowed, letters of recommendation are read. The letters would come at the end of the process, since they tend to contain identifying information that would be extremely difficult to redact. The advantages are that gender and sometimes race will not be obvious from the names if the names are absent during the initial review process. One worry about first-round face-to-face interviews is that implicit bias would be allowed to enter into the hiring process again, after the initial review of files. Of course, this would be true as well at the on-campus interview stage, but there may still be value in eliminating as much as possible implicit bias in earlier stages. There is some evidence that biases can, to some extent, be mitigated by the passage of time. Ziva Kunda and Steven J. Spencer report that initially activated stereotypes can fade in as little as 15 minutes of exposure: “As time unfolds, one’s attention shifts from the person’s category membership to individuating information or to the demands of the task at hand” (Kunda and Spencer 2003, 528). Thus, there may be some value to the structured in-person interview if it is long enough for implicit bias to be mitigated, and most interviews are over 15 minutes long. However, they also report that stereotypes can

3 Macan’s review article goes over some of the different ways “structured” is understood in the research literature.
reassert themselves throughout an interaction. For example, in an interaction in which one needs “to determine one’s partner’s attributes or likely behavior,” a stereotype may be activated. They cite a set of studies in which the study participants engaged in structured interviews with a White or an Asian confederate. The interview consisted in “stereotype-irrelevant” questions:

> Following 10–15 min of such interaction, half of the participants were given the goal of forming an impression of their interaction partner’s personality and likely career choice. Controls were given, instead, the goal of elaborating on the contents of their discussion. As may be expected from the finding that stereotype activation can dissipate by the end of such a lengthy encounter (Kunda et al., 2002), controls interacting with an Asian confederate showed no activation of the Asian stereotype. In contrast, participants given the task of forming an impression of their Asian partner did activate the Asian stereotype. Most likely, they recruited the stereotype so as to inform their impressions of this person. (Kunda and Spencer 2003, 529)

This evidence indicates that care should be taken with interviews, and even with longer, on-campus, interviews, to ensure that stereotypes do not reenter the interview process.5

There are several worries about eliminating first-round interviews. The first worry is that without this extra exposure to a job candidate, problematic individuals will not be detected early enough in the hiring process to avoid the wasteful expenditure of resources involved in bringing to campus for an extended interview someone who is not a viable candidate. This would be especially problematic for departments with small recruiting budgets. Another worry is that job candidates will not get valuable information about how well they are faring on the job market. The number of first-round interviews can provide candidates with some information about how well their files are being perceived, even if the candidate does not get a job during that particular hiring cycle. One way departments could address this problem is by having a policy of informing candidates when they have made the long list. For example, the department might explicitly state that when they long-list candidates they will request additional materials (e.g., an additional writing sample). If this is known to be the procedure in lieu of interviews, a department could still convey the valuable information to the candidates.

**Sources**


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5 Kunda and Spencer discuss other ways in which stereotypes are accidentally reintroduced in interactions.


**Other resources**

The Implicit Bias & Philosophy Project website has several useful reading lists.

Section 4, Appendix C
Acceptable Interview Questions

It is essential for all members of a search committee to be aware of these guidelines and follow them in both spirit and letter. Avoid any direct or indirect questions that touch on material that may not be asked. This information about an applicant should never be discussed with regard to his or her candidacy for a position. Note that if one candidate is asked a question about criminal record, existence of conflicting responsibilities, or needs for accessibility, etc., the same question must be asked of all. Note also that this list of acceptable questions is generic and addressed to public institutions and institutions receiving government grants (it is drawn, with modifications, from the Harvard Faculty Development and Diversity guidelines). Exceptions exist in special cases—e.g., regarding whether religious institutions may ask questions about religious affiliation—though guidelines related to race, ethnicity, gender, disability, national origin, and age still apply (see the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission statement).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>What may be asked</th>
<th>What may NOT be asked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>• What a candidate's name is, and whether there are nicknames or initials needed to check the candidate's work and educational record.</td>
<td>• Maiden name of a married woman.</td>
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<td>• Inquiries about the name that would seek to elicit information about the candidate's ancestry or descent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>• If hired, can you offer proof that you are at least 18 years of age?</td>
<td>• How old are you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Questions about the applicant's career stage.</td>
<td>• What is your birthdate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex or Gender</td>
<td>• No questions.</td>
<td>• Are you male or female?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>• No questions.</td>
<td>• What is your sexual orientation? Are you gay?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>• No questions. (You may inquire about availability for weekend work.)</td>
<td>• What is your religion?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Which church do you attend?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What are your religious holidays?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>• No questions.</td>
<td>• What is your race?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>• No questions.</td>
<td>• Are you a U.S. citizen?</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Origin / Race</td>
<td>• No questions.</td>
<td>• Where were you born?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>• Can you show proof of your eligibility to work in the US?</td>
<td>• Are you fluent in any languages other than English? You may ask this question only as it relates to the job being sought.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Questions/Inquiries</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>• <strong>What languages do you read fluently? Write fluently? Speak fluently?</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Inquiries into how the applicant acquired the ability to read, write, or speak a foreign language.</td>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>• Inquiries into the academic, vocational, or professional education of an applicant for employment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Questions about education designed to determine how old the applicant is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>• Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accessibility measures? Show the applicant the position description so that he or she can give an informed answer.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Are you disabled?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What is the nature or severity of your disability?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Have you ever received workers’ compensation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Do you have AIDS?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Have you ever been treated for drug abuse or alcoholism?</td>
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<td>Marital / Family Status</td>
<td>• Do you have any responsibilities that conflict with the job attendance or travel requirements?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Are you married?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What is your spouse’s name?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What is your maiden name?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Do you have any children?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Are you pregnant?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What are your childcare arrangements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>• What is your address?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Do you own or rent your home?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Who resides with you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>• Applicant’s work experience, including names, addresses of previous employers, dates of employment, reasons for leaving.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Inquiry into an applicant’s type of discharge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminal record</td>
<td>• Have you ever been convicted of a crime? You must state that a conviction will be considered only as it relates to fitness to perform the job being sought.</td>
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<td>• Have you ever been arrested?</td>
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<td>Memberships</td>
<td>• Are you a member of any professional societies or organizations? Exclude inquiries into specific organizations the name or character of which indicates the race, creed, color, or national origin of its members.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Inquiry into applicant’s membership in nonprofessional organizations (e.g., clubs, lodges).</td>
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Section 4, Appendix D
Sample Candidate Evaluation Sheet

This evaluation sheet is offered as a general template; search committees should feel free to modify this for their own purposes. These questions are designed for Assistant/Associate Professor faculty searches; committees may want to modify some of the language used for non-ladder and tenured faculty searches.

Candidate’s Name: ____________________________________________________________

Please indicate which of the following are true for you (check all that apply):

☐ Read candidate’s CV ☐ Read candidate’s letters of recommendation
☐ Read candidate’s scholarship ☐ Attended candidate’s job talk
☐ Met with candidate ☐ Attended meal with candidate
☐ Other (explain): ____________________________________________________________

Please comment on the candidate’s scholarship (noting the basis of your assessment):
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please comment on the candidate’s teaching ability (noting the basis of your assessment):
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please rate the candidate on each of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Unable to judge</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potential for (evidence of) scholarly impact</td>
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<td>Potential for (evidence of) research productivity</td>
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<td>Potential for (evidence of) research funding</td>
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<td>Potential for (evidence of) collaboration</td>
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<td>Relationship to the department’s priorities</td>
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<td>Ability to make a positive contribution to department’s climate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential (demonstrated ability) to attract and supervise graduate students</td>
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<td>Potential (demonstrated ability) to teach and supervise undergraduates</td>
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<td>Potential (demonstrated ability) to attract, work with, and teach diverse students</td>
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<td>Potential (demonstrated ability) to be a conscientious department/community member</td>
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