

“Psychology Works” Resources: Preparing for an Interview

What to expect from an interview

A job interview is a social interaction between two or more individuals, (1) interviewer(s), and (2) a job applicant. Before an interview, it is likely that the interviewer and the job applicant know very little about each other. They have likely never met before, and the majority of the information would have come from the applicant’s resume, a pre-interview test results, or some initial correspondence via email or telephone.

As such, the interview process is a tool to gather additional information so both parties can make an informed decision about whether they want to continue or start an employment relationship.

For example, the interviewer is trying to assess two key “elements of fit”:

- (1) Person-job fit: based on skills and experience**, is the applicant qualified to perform the duties of the position?
- (2) Person-organization fit: based on personality and values**, will the applicant be a good fit with the company’s values, culture and preferences or interest?

At the same time, the applicant is trying to understand whether they will feel comfortable in that job/position and happy working for that organization, so they are also assessing the organization as a potential partner for this employment relationship. To promote themselves as a great place to work, the organization may highlight positive aspects about the job, the working conditions, and other organizational benefits during the interview.

During an interview, there is often some embellishment on both sides. For a job applicant, there is an incentive to put your best foot forward, which can lead to exaggeration or dishonesty about your skills or experience. In the same way, some organizations may embellish about the position, organization or benefits in order to recruit the best potential candidate.

Finally, there is a time element on all of this. There is a lot of information being shared in usually less than an hour. So, there are cognitive demands on both sides to do a lot of things in a very limited amount of time.

Interviews can vary in a number of different ways, including format, interviewer(s), and medium:

Format			
Type	Brief Description	Pros	Cons
One-to-One	One internal interviewer from the hiring organization	Most common type of interview, making the format more predictable	Singular perspective/assessment; more potential for bias
Panel	Multiple interviewers from the hiring organization	More diverse perspectives/less bias, can share tasks and responsibilities among interviewers	More cognitively demanding for applicants to interact with multiple interviewers
Group	Multiple applicants interviewing at the same time with one or more interviewers (e.g. for large organizations)	Cheaper for the hiring organization; chance to "check" the competition for applicants	May be more stressful for the applicant; fewer opportunities to put "your best foot forward" when being assessed alongside other applicants
Serial	Back-to-back interviews at the same organization but with different interviewers	Opportunity to gather different perspectives for the hiring organizations. Chance to meet with more people to assess the company for the applicant	Cognitively demanding for the applicant; can be confusing as to who/what you said in each interview; requires a lot of preparation

Interviewer(s)			
Type	Brief Description	Pros	Cons
Supervisors/Colleagues	Future supervisor or potential colleagues	Opportunity to highlight in-depth expertise and background (e.g. use of jargon and/or technical terms)	Not always interview experts, which can lead to interview being conducted in a very unstandardized way or introduce different types of bias
HR Professionals/ I/O Psychology Consultants	External professionals with expertise in interviewing/HR processes	Expertise in how to conduct and/or design fair and appropriate interview assessments; more structured, less bias	Not experts in the job/subject matter, so language needs to be adapted (avoiding jargon and/or technical terms)

Medium			
Type	Brief Description	Pros	Cons

In-person	Face-to-face meetings between interviewer and candidate	More room to clarify/expand on answers; opportunity to develop rapport and give-off a great impression using non-verbal cues	Heightened pressure/interview anxiety; difficulties with scheduling and more costly
Phone	Interview over the phone	May mitigate some interview anxiety; eliminates geographic distance	Less time to "sell yourself"; difficulties building rapport, zero non-verbal element
Synchronous Video	Live/video-conference interview	Similar to in-person, but more flexible and cheaper/easier to schedule	Risk of technical issues, poor internet connection, limited non-verbal elements
Asynchronous Video	Recorded video format	Most flexible option (can complete where and when you want). Very standardized and thus fair by default	Risk of technical issues, no interaction with an interviewer (so no verbal or non-verbal feedback), no opportunity to probe or follow-up

What kinds of questions can be asked?

(1) Traditional / Popular

- *Examples:* "what is your main weakness?" what is your main strength? where do you see yourself in 5 years? why should we hire you?"
- Relatively easy to prepare because they are quite generic (a quick "google" to find most common questions should do the trick!)
- Can be considered as poor/sub-optimal interviewing techniques

(2) Knowledge-based

- *Examples:* "what is the best technique to deal with..."
- Focused on job-specific questions, such as tools, techniques, methods, concepts, etc.
- As an expert in the field, you should have the background and expertise to answer these types of questions quite easily

(3) Past-behavioural

- *Example:* "tell us about a time when you've dealt with/experienced....?"
- Based on actual behaviour – asked to reflect on what you have done in the past, ideally in a workplace or school-based context, to demonstrate whether you possess job-relevant skills or abilities

- Aims to assess if you have specific skill(s) such as leadership, communication, problem solving, time management and stress management – the question is often matched to the type of skill they are trying to assess.
- Can be considered as a “best practice” for interviewing

(4) Situational

- *Example:* “imagine that you are working in...?”
- Based on intentions – aims to assess similar skills as past-behavioural questions by asking how you would handle a specific, hypothetical workplace situation/issue
- May include some kind of dilemma or challenge you to decide between two or more potential alternatives to solve a problem
- Usually includes a lot of details to create a specific context, including what the problem is, what your resourcing constraints are, etc.
- Can be considered as a “best practice” for interviewing

(5) Brainteasers

- *Example:* “why are manhole covers round? how many ping pong balls can you put in a Boeing 747?”
- Not looking for the right answer, but instead, aims to assess your cognitive/problem-solving processing: how do you react to this weird situation where you have a bit of pressure on you? What kind of logic do you follow?
- Can be considered as poor/sub-optimal interviewing techniques

How to prepare for an interview

(1) Try to identify the “selection criteria”

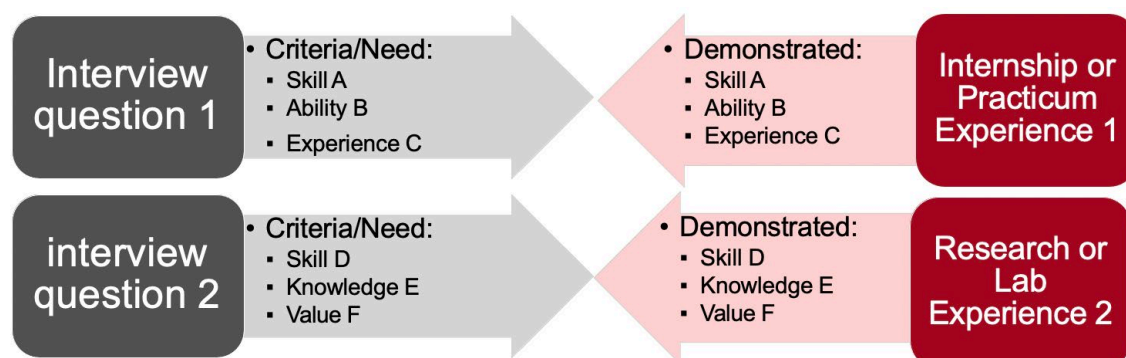
- Selection criteria is what the company is looking for - what are the skills, abilities experiences qualifications that they want to assess in this interview?

How and where?

- In the *job ad* → Role description and required qualifications, skills, or experience
- On the *company (career) website* → Culture, values, etc.
- Reaching out to *connections* within the organization
- Using online job descriptions
 - O*NET (<https://www.onetonline.org/>)
 - NOC (<https://noc.esdc.gc.ca/>)

(2) Demonstrate how you can match the selection criteria

- Identify potential questions and find a relevant experience



(3) Use the STAR technique

When asked to describe a past experience or emphasize qualifications

- Situation** – What was the context, when did it happen, what problem did you face?
- Task** – What was your role, position, or responsibilities (e.g., leadership)?
- Action** – How did you react, what action did you take, what decision did you make?
- Result** – What was the result or outcome for you, your team, or your organization?

(4) Use honest impression management tactics

What does that mean?

- Present your skills, abilities, and experiences in a true but positive light
- Emphasize how your beliefs, core values, or personality align with the interviewer's or the organization's
- Take responsibility of your past errors or failures, but explain what happened, and describe how you learned from these experiences (e.g. providing contexting, such as COVID-19)

(5) Apply effective coping strategies to manage interview anxiety

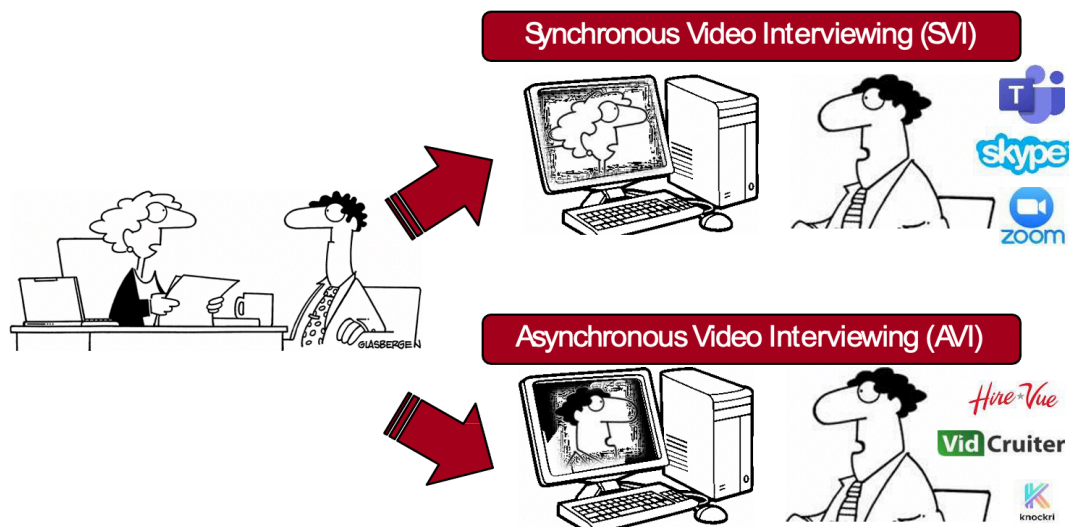
Use...

- ... emotion-oriented coping strategies (e.g., share your anxiety with others, like friends, family members, partners, colleagues)
- ... or problem-oriented coping strategies (e.g., practice, use breathing techniques)

Adapting to video interviews

As more and more businesses shift to a remote or hybrid working format, a lot of interviews are moving from in-person to video or technology mediated.

Video interviews come in two key formats: (1) synchronous video interviews (SVIs) using tools (e.g. zoom, skype), or (3) asynchronous video interviews (AVIs) using a platform where you actually are invited to go online and answers questions without any live interaction, and then those answers are watched later on by an interviewer.



SVIs	AVIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live interaction • Similar to in-person • Can be facing a panel of interviewers • Somewhat flexible (location) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not live (recorded only) • Talking to your camera only → largely novel experience • Multiple raters possible or automatic (AI-based) scoring • Very flexible (location + time) • Preparation or re-recording opportunities

Tips for video interviews

- Use the same 5 tips as with traditional interviews
- But also...
 1. Check your tech (computer, webcam, sound/mic, internet)

2. Find the right time and place (quiet, natural light, book enough time, etc.)
3. Consider your background (no distraction or bias-inducing content)
4. Use options available to you (preparation time, re-recording)
5. Practice even more!

For more information:

More on the psychology of interviewing from Dr. Nicholas Roulin: "The Psychology of Job Interviews." (2017). Taylor & Francis.

https://www.google.ca/books/edition/The_Psychology_of_Job_Interviews/RS6EDgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0

More on video interviewing: <https://theconversation.com/how-to-land-a-job-when-companies-have-shifted-to-virtual-hiring-144997>

An article on virtual hiring: <https://theconversation.com/how-to-land-a-job-when-companies-have-shifted-to-virtual-hiring-144997>

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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the *Psychology Works* Fact Sheets: factsheets@cpa.ca

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