


# 14 INTERVIEWING\*



As soon as someone mentions the word “interview,” reactions often range from dread to panic. You might imagine the agonies of a father interviewing his daughter’s date—or perhaps the future son-in-law, a scenario explored in the film comedy *Meet the Parents* (2000), starring Ben Stiller and Robert DeNiro. Chances are that your thoughts turn toward an artificial, tension-filled situation that involves being selected to embark on the career of your dreams or rejected because of a single careless or incorrect answer. Before you feel the perspiration start to bead on your forehead, you should realize that the employment interview actually is only one example of an interview. The employment interview jumps to mind because at some point virtually everyone experiences it, and it tends to be a high-stakes communication setting. Many other situations call for interviews, and you might be surprised to learn that some interview situations (although not the employment interview) actually can involve life and death.

This chapter will help you understand and master the techniques of interviewing in virtually any situation. The skills involved in conducting an interview (acting as the interviewer) and undergoing an interview (acting as the interviewee) generalize to all contexts and types of interviews. Employment interviews represent one variety of a very large category of interviews known as information gathering interviews.

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## DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF INTERVIEWING

### What is an Interview?

To understand interviewing, we first must define the interview process. Interviews occur in many different contexts, but all interviews share several common characteristics. An **interview** involves

- a structured conversation
- with a specific person or group of people
- conducted in a question-and-answer format

The structure of interviews can occur anywhere along a continuum from totally unstructured (spontaneous conversation) to entirely structured (standardized, scripted surveys).

least structure    low structure    medium structure    high structure    most structure

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example: sportscaster interviews a star player immediately after a winning game</li> <li>• Only basic interview agenda is stable</li> <li>• Questions and organization vary according to where the conversation goes</li> <li>• Useful for: adapting to the respondent's agenda and preferences, encouraging freedom and creativity from interviewer and respondent</li> <li>• Risks: potential for being caught off guard or unprepared, difficult to interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example: a news or talk show host such as Barbara Walters interviews a guest</li> <li>• Question topics and general organization planned in advance, exact wording of questions varies</li> <li>• Choice and type of questions varies depending on interviewee</li> <li>• Useful for: adapting to respondent without sacrificing interviewer agenda, maximizing ability of questioner and respondent to accomplish objectives, allowing respondent and interviewer to use research</li> <li>• Risks: requires skill to balance improvisation with accomplishing objectives, may sound stiff and artificial if too structured</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example: the same course evaluation surveys administered for all courses in a department</li> <li>• Uniform sequence and exact text of questions</li> <li>• Interviewer asks exactly the same questions to every respondent</li> <li>• Useful for: comparing answers among respondents, looking for patterns among answers, avoiding variance among interviewers (who can work from a prepared script), standardized scientific surveys</li> <li>• Risks: limits interviewer and respondent creativity, interview cannot adapt to manage direction of specific people or circumstances</li> </ul>
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FIGURE 14.1: THE CONTINUUM OF INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

- functioning to gather information
- to accomplish a planned objective.

Each of these characteristics deserves more detailed consideration.

**A structured conversation** First, let's examine the structural nature of interviews. Depending on the circumstances, interviews may range from very highly structured (identically worded questions asked to everyone) or have very little structure (questions and answers flow in a stream of consciousness). Figure 10.1 illustrates this range of structure.

Generally a totally unstructured interview is a bad idea. The reason is that you must depend totally on spontaneous reactions and probably will overlook something. Why would you want to suffer the pressure of having to face an entirely unknown communication situation? “An unstructured interview almost certainly means that items will be missed, forgotten or ignored as ‘not being important or relevant’” (Joint Information Systems Committee infoNet, 2004).

Don’t confuse spontaneity with lack of preparation. An effective interview does require some ad libbing, replying on the spot to unexpected comments or questions. A major organization of professional writers offers this insight: “Asking *spontaneous questions*—that is, questions that occur to you on the spot in response to the interviewee’s comments—allows you to demonstrate that you are curious about what the interviewee has to say. When you let go a little in your interview and give it the feeling of a discussion, the interviewee will probably be more willing to share” (Writers@Work, 2004). The properly planned interview makes it clear where such digressions are appropriate. For example, an interviewer might give cues such as: “Let’s cover a few things that aren’t on the official agenda,” or “I hadn’t planned to mention this, but since you just brought up the subject. . . .” As the interviewee, if you prepare properly, you should be able to offer insightful additional comments based on your background research.

Next comes the conversation aspect. What makes a good conversation? Usually the best conversations happen when you feel entirely comfortable with someone. You feel that you can trust the other person and can share all sorts of information. Likewise, a successful interview depends on a cooperative relationship among the participants. In other words, for an interview to flow smoothly and be enjoyable, a *positive relationship* must develop between interviewer and interviewee. Think about a talk show

host such as Oprah Winfrey or Jay Leno. Occasionally the guest and host interact so well that the show gets immediate positive reactions from the audience. This chemistry between the interview participants shows that the guest and host feel comfortable enough to go beyond superficial formalities and share detailed ideas and stories.

A major ingredient of the relational component of interviewing involves *genuine concern for the other person*. If interviewer and interviewee approach an interview as an adversarial situation, trying to outmaneuver, deceive, or put down the other person, chances are that at least one person will leave the situation feeling angry, upset, or disgusted. Although the situation that generates an interview might be unpleasant (such as a violation of corporate policy that leads to a disciplinary interview), the people involved in the interview always deserve courtesy and respect. This principle is an outgrowth of our basic rule for communication critiques in chapter 2: focus on the performance, not the person. An interrogation of a prisoner fails to qualify as an interview. The questioner wants only to use the prisoner to get information and fails to value the prisoner’s worth as an individual.

More specifically, the conversational aspect of interviewing requires *turn-taking*. Interviewers and interviewees must respond to each other so that the conversation can continue. Since attention focuses on the person being interviewed, the interviewee should talk most of the time. As a general guideline, the interviewee ordinarily should speak about 80% of the time, a figure supported by employee recruiters for the United States government (Federal Aviation Administration, 2004). A monologue, where one person does not allow the other to get a word in edgewise, does not qualify as an interview. A corporate recruiter who talks endlessly about the virtues of her company without soliciting input from the interviewee is giving a promotional speech, not

an interview. If you have the role of the interviewer, make sure your counterpart has every opportunity to answer your questions fully. If you are being interviewed, don't interrupt the interviewer (thus disrupting the conversational turn-taking) but remember that you have the right to answer all questions posed to you.

***With a Specific Person or Group of People*** Despite its relationship to conversations, an interview is far more targeted than ordinary chit-chat. Many casual conversations may not progress beyond simple platitudes such as: "How are things going?" "Is the job going well?" "How's the family?" Such conversational banter does serve a purpose because it is so generic; you can use the comments almost anywhere when speaking to anyone. Not so with interviews. There is no such thing as a generic interview. All interviews are targeted toward a precise audience. Even the most highly structured surveys are designed to elicit responses from certain demographic groups.

If you are an interviewer, you will tailor questions to the person you will interview. For example, if you are interviewing applicants for a job, you will tend to emphasize particular questions based on what you discover on each applicant's résumé. If you are being interviewed for a job, then you should adapt your comments, questions, and emphasis based on what you have researched about the organization and the position. Because each interview requires taking into account the objectives, needs, and background of the other person, you never conduct the same interview twice. If you believe that you can ask the same questions to everyone or have the same answers for every interview, then you need to prepare more carefully to maximize your effectiveness in each situation.

***Conducted in a Question-and-Answer Format*** Interviews differ substantially from ordinary conversations because

interviews elicit information by questions and answers. The question-and-answer format results in a clear division of labor. The interviewer should control the overall organization of the interview by the structure and order of questions. As an interviewee, recognize your role in providing answers that are relevant, honest, and thorough. Effective questions allow the respondent to disclose the maximum amount of information relevant to the interviewer's objective. Many interviews include a period of role reversal, where the interviewee asks questions to the interviewer. This role reversal is a normal part of employment interviews, but the interviewer guides the format and time allowed.

***Functioning to Gather Information***

All interviews share a fundamental function—they seek information of some sort. Sharing of information goes two ways, benefiting interviewer and interviewee. Something (preferably many things) revealed in the interview should be new and previously unknown to the interviewer and to the audience.

As an interviewer, try to make every question count in the interview by asking only those questions that could generate informative answers. When you ask questions with obvious answers (e.g., "Do you think you are competent at your job?"), not only do you get an obvious answer, but you have taken valuable time from questions that might generate better quality information. If so, then try substituting a question that goes beyond what you already should know or what we should predict as an answer. Generally, if you can predict the respondent's answer accurately, the question should have delved deeper. This point explains why interviews with someone you know quite well, such as a close friend or relative, often turn out poorly: chances are that you already have discovered most of what you need to know.

The same guidelines hold if you are being interviewed. Before you decide to include a question or offer an answer, consider whether it covers something that you should have discovered through your research and preparation. Interviewers seek more than platitudes. If asked about your greatest strengths, empty phrases such as “I’m good with people” signify that you need to consider more precise responses that stress your individual qualities. Interviewees should gain information from an interview that could affect their attitudes and behaviors, such as whether to switch jobs, how to cope with a challenge, or how much they like the interviewer. Interviews can help give information to people and they can also help people gain information they need.

**To Accomplish a Planned Objective**

Although we often engage in conversation simply to maintain contact or for personal satisfaction, all interviews are to some extent task-oriented. Every interview is strategic because interviewer and interviewee want to accomplish something. Ideally the interview meets both their goals, but quite often the interviewer and interviewee enter an interview with very different aims. Imagine the situations illustrated in

Figure 14.2. How could the interview reconcile these different objectives?

Although our hypothetical interviews emphasize different objectives for the interview, these differences do not necessarily cause irreconcilable conflict. If you interview me for a job, we have different goals going into the interview. You want to hire the best candidate; I want to prove I am the best candidate and to enter a rewarding career. Hopefully both of us get what we want after you hire me!

**Interview Contexts**

Interviews can take place under many circumstances. The following contexts provide some of the more typical situations where interviews occur. The principles and guidelines for these kinds of interviews can be applied in other situations, although here we concentrate on the special demands of each setting.

**Job Interviews**

Traditionally the job interview entailed employers looking at a prospective employee and deciding whether they would hire them or not. This is no longer true. In job

Interview Situation	Interviewer/Objective	Interviewee/Objective
Just before baseball season begins	Sportscaster: Get advice for little league players on hitting more home runs	Barry Bonds: Defend against accusations of steroid abuse
A new movie premier	You: Just want to meet Julia Roberts in person	Julia Roberts: Wants to promote her new film
Job interview as a presidential aide	President: Wants someone who will follow instructions exactly	You: Want to use this job as stepping stone to become president someday
Your best friend just found out his/her spouse was unfaithful	You: Calm your friend, reassure that s/he can rely on you	Your friend: Gain an ally to inflict terrible revenge on the spouse

FIGURE 14.2: VARIETIES OF INTERVIEW OBJECTIVES

interviews employers and job candidates meet to decide mutually whether they are a good fit for *each other*. The employer interviews the candidate, but equally important, the job applicant has an opportunity to interview the company management and decide whether the job situation is right.

The very first step in preparing for this kind of interview is *research*. This research needs to focus on two areas: the interviewer/interviewee, and the actual subject of the interview. An example would be how you want to find out more about a certain profession. First, you may choose to find out who you are interviewing, their position with the company, and their background (education, job history, etc.). After that, you would want to research the profession, and discover points about it such as the education required, the skills that one might be expected to have or to develop, or if there is a current need for applicants for those jobs. If you are the interviewer, research can also aid your credibility with the interviewees. If you are asking well-formed and intelligent questions, they will probably take you seriously and respond with well-formed responses.

### **Health Contexts**

In health care settings, interviews literally can make the difference between life and death. At the scene of an accident or a disaster, or in an emergency room, health care professionals rank casualties to decide the order of treatment and transportation (Barnes, 2003). This process of sorting patients so that those who have the most critical needs receive care first is known as *triage*. The critical decision of whom to treat when relies on interviews. The health care provider must get specific, accurate information quickly. You might have noticed that a health care worker tends to ask questions that yield precise answers. You do not hear, “How badly does it hurt?” because a minor ache to one person may qualify as excruciating pain to someone else. Health professionals

are trained to standardize scales of pain by asking questions such as: “On a scale of one to ten with ten being the worst, how badly does it hurt?” I was asked exactly this question in a recent appointment with my doctor. If I answered “Pretty bad,” it would not help gauge how urgent my condition was. Similarly, it is more productive for someone to point where the pain is instead of offering a verbal description subject to misinterpretation. Interview skills are crucial in health care situations to ensure that people get the right treatment in a timely way.

If you ever are prescribed medication or if a health professional will administer any medication to you, make absolutely sure you have been questioned about the following matters:

- What allergies do you have (to medications or to anything else)?
- What medications (prescription or over-the-counter) do you take?
- Are there any medications you cannot take?

An interview that includes these questions and others may save your life. Medical studies show that adverse drug reactions kill at least 100,000 and injure more than two million Americans each year (Lazarou, Pomeranz, & Corey, 1998). How many of these casualties might be prevented by quick interviews that would spot drug insensitivities and interactions?

### **Athletic Contexts**

If you or someone you know is associated with athletics, that person could unexpectedly become an interviewee. Anything ranging from a stellar play, a winning season, a terrible season, a coaching change, to a drug scandal could bring sports reporters with their questions. Whether you are a player, coach, trainer, or even a relative of an athlete, it could pay to anticipate how to deal with interviewers.

A nine-page guideline for National Football League players suggested several helpful strategies, including the following guidelines:

- Keep answers as short as possible to fit broadcast time constraints.
- Keep the message positive to maintain a close connection with the fans, whose interests always come first.
- Transform negative or provocative statements by interviewers into upbeat answers that do not assign blame.
- Focus on the present. Do not try to predict future events or relive things that happened in the past. You cannot predict the future or change the past. (Avoiding fumbles, 1992)

Let's add one more item to the list: Accept responsibility. Even in team sports, each player is responsible for his or her actions and choices.

## DEVELOPING THE INTERVIEW

To help you conduct the best possible interview under any circumstance, remember the preliminary steps of **PREP**:

- **P**reparation by contacting the necessary people and learning from model interviews;
- **R**esearch to give you background information and lend confidence;
- **E**nvironmental issues that allow you to interview in a comfortable atmosphere;
- **P**ractice tips that will hone your interview skills.

### Preparation

If you are in the position of interviewing someone, select and confirm your choice of interviewee as far in advance as possible.

Make an appointment for the interview with plenty of advance notice. These recommendations help protect you in case your interviewee cancels or reschedules, or if you have a technological failure that forces you to redo the interview. Confirm your interview appointment a few days beforehand so the interviewee remembers the engagement.

When you contact your interviewee, explain who you are, the purpose of the interview, and its basic format (time allotted, presence of any recording devices, etc.). When you make the appointment, carefully determine the best place and time for you and for the interviewee. Many promising interviews have sunk because they were conducted amid distracting noises, poor acoustics, or other avoidable conditions. If you plan to record the interview, *always* test the exact equipment you will use so you don't have to cope with unexpected technical difficulties.

An excellent way to prepare for conducting interviews or for being interviewed is to observe the techniques of experts. Fortunately it is fairly easy to find model interviews that can guide your preparation. Several radio and television shows illustrate excellent interview techniques. Skilled television interviewers such as Barbara Walters and Larry King can show you how to gain detailed information. Their guests also demonstrate how to answer questions. One of the finest examples of interview techniques is *Fresh Air*, an interview program hosted by Terry Gross that airs on National Public Radio. She interviews the widest imaginable range of guests, so you can get a feel for how to adapt your interview techniques to different objectives and personalities.

### Research

There are several ways to incorporate research into the interview. You can include research about the topic of the interview,

research about events you want to discuss (e.g., current or historical events that might generate questions), and research about the context of the interview (e.g., the career area). Background research will enable you to avoid obvious answers or unnecessary questions, move quicker into more detailed and lesser known information, and save a lot of time by not getting bogged down in preliminaries. Demonstrating your research about the other person or the situation (such as the employer in a job selection interview) also shows that you care enough about this individual to do your homework and prepare thoroughly.

Research about your interviewee or interviewer could include written literature (pamphlets, books, articles), interviews with people who know the subject matter or the other person (friends, co-workers, or family members), web pages created by or about the interviewee, etc. You also might be able to access someone's résumé or find biographical tidbits by searching for the person's name on the Internet. Remember that although you are seeking detailed information, you should respect the other person's privacy. Stick with material that is relevant to your objectives and that the person would feel comfortable discussing. Thorough research adds to your credibility by showing you have prepared carefully for interacting with this particular person on this topic.

## Environment

Determining an appropriate setting is vital for a successful interview. As the interviewer, you will need to decide about the ability to conduct the interview where you and the other party will not be distracted. For example, if you are in an environment where either party will receive phone calls or "pop-in" visits from colleagues or friends, you may wish to find an office or a room where you can have some privacy. The bottom line is that you need to find a place where both parties (interviewer and

interviewee) are comfortable and relatively free from distractions. Often the interviewer will need to adapt a bit more to the interviewee's preferences, since a comfortable interviewee will be willing to give more extensive and straightforward answers.

## Practice

Most important, *practice your interview!* The only way you will become a better interviewer or interviewee is to embrace the experience of interviewing. You should practice with another person playing the role of your counterpart so you get used to the interplay between interviewee and interviewer. An ideal partner would be someone who is an experienced participant in interviews. Using a classmate in this course could also prove helpful, since both of you are practicing for the same assignment. Give your practice partner enough background information to allow a realistic interaction.

It is wise to practice with several different people playing the role of your interview partner. Varying your practice partners can generate ideas for adding or editing questions and can help you prepare possible answers. If you have done thorough background research and practiced extensively with several people as the interviewee, you should feel very confident as you enter the actual interview situation. One of the greatest fears students express about interviewing is being confronted with unexpected questions or answers. If you practice with different people, you will build confidence by adapting to their various conversational habits and communicative styles.

## STRUCTURING THE INTERVIEW

Now that you have conducted your research and arranged the time and place, the interview can proceed. This is where things can

get a bit tricky for people who have never had to participate in an interview. Let's focus on the main parts of the interview structure, so that you know how things need to progress when it is your turn. The interview, just like a speech, is split into three main parts: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.

## Introduction

The introduction has two major goals: establishing rapport and providing orientation. The introduction begins when the interviewer and interviewee greet each other, which brings us to the first action of the interview: **establish rapport**. You need to make a connection with the other party. People usually introduce themselves and shake hands to break the ice. A few important points need to be mentioned here. First, introduce yourself as you would like to be addressed. If your name is Matt, but you are more comfortable with people calling you Biffy, then introduce yourself as "Biffy Walker."

Second, nonverbal gestures usually accompany verbal introductions. Use the appropriate gesture based on the cultural environment. In the United States, we overwhelmingly use a handshake when meeting other people. Make sure it is firm, but not painful. A limp handshake tends to be interpreted as a lack of confidence. It is also considered polite to look the other person in the eye when greeting him or her.

You should also be aware of the other person's cultural background, as they may not be aware of the social customs of your culture. For example, if you greet former Kansas Senator and 1996 Republican Presidential nominee Bob Dole, he will offer his left hand due to the paralysis of his right arm. Carefully note any physical characteristics someone might have that will require adjusting your greeting and interaction. A deaf person who reads lips, for instance, may stare intently at a speaker's face. Instead of becoming nervous or uncomfortable

in such situations, research your interview partner as thoroughly as possible. Practice your greeting and interaction style so that you can adapt comfortably to whatever cultural or physical differences you encounter.

Another point in establishing rapport is making the other party feel comfortable. Just as a speech should establish common ground with the audience, the interview should build a bond between respondent and interviewer. An interview is basically a structured conversation, and conversations flow better when the participants make each other feel comfortable. When the other party feels comfortable around you, answers will generally be more forthcoming and questions will be adapted more carefully to suit you. Moving too quickly to substantive questions can make the interviewee feel apprehensive, and shy interviewees might tend to "clam up" by not answering questions thoroughly. How can rapport grow in an interview? You can build rapport in any of these three ways:

1. *Make small talk*. Usually you can ask simple, non-threatening questions or offer statements that usually evoke a response, such as "How was your flight/drive in last night/this morning?" or "I hope you were able to find our offices without any trouble." These don't really have much to do with the interview focus, but they do allow for polite conversation after the introductions and before the questions. The limitation of making small talk is that it relies on only the most superficial connections between people. Everyone experiences the weather, but using this as your primary rapport-builder does not connect people to each other as individuals because it is overused and tends to sound artificial and strained. After all, how much can you open up when someone says, "It sure was cold this morning, wasn't it?" You

could ask that question to anyone, so it does not show you are reaching out to someone personally. On the other hand, small talk can provide easy entry to more substantive questions and conversations.

2. *Make a comment about something you notice during the interview.*

A remark about the setting (“Oh, I see you like purple”) or something you see in the surroundings (such as a decorative theme in someone’s office) can demonstrate that you are observant and attentive to the other person. Be careful with this technique, however, because you only want to show you are observant to establish common ground and not pass judgment.

Poor example:

“I see you must be a New York Yankees fan. I’m a Boston Red Sox fan.”

Better example:

“Since you have a framed jersey from every member of the New York Yankees, you must be a Yankees fan. I’m a big baseball fan, too.”

The poor example focuses on difference. Anything you notice in the interview should establish some common ground by helping reveal similarities between you and the other parties. The more carefully you research your interview counterpart, the more confidently you can identify shared interests and tastes.

3. *Establish common ground based on solid knowledge you have gained from research.*

The best rapport-builders are questions or comments that stem from genuine common ground between interviewer and interviewee. The more you know

about your counterpart, the more able you can kindle a spark of recognition and connection that will make the interview more enjoyable.

Examples:

- I also graduated from Jesse James Junior College. Have you met any other alumni in the area?
- Since you used to play for the team, I have to ask you whether you think the Armadillos will win the division this year.
- I notice that you worked as a chicken plucker. Did you have to get up as early in the morning as I did when I had that job?

The means to establish rapport don’t have to be elaborate or take a long time. The primary focus of the meeting is to gather information regarding a specific topic, not to engage in small talk. Engage in a small amount of small talk, but stick to your objective as the primary focus of the interview.

The second main action in the introduction is **orientation**. Think of the orientation as a preview statement in a speech. This is a very small part of the interview, but can be very important in alleviating anxieties in the interviewee. The interview only needs to tell about the crux of the interview, the areas that will be covered, and about how long it will take. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation includes an explicit, honest orientation as part of its code for journalistic ethics: “The interviewer should inform the interviewee before the interview about the purpose for which it will be used. The interviewee should also be given some indication of the probable length of the interview to be included in the program . . .” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Radio Canada, 2004).

The orientation stage is also a good time to verify permission to use audio or video recording equipment if you plan to utilize them to help you recall information in the interview. Be direct and let the interviewee

know your purpose for using the recording device. Most people will not object to the use of a recorder, but be prepared if they do. To be safe, you should have obtained permission to record the interview when you set up the interview appointment. If your interviewee refuses, you will need to take more notes, as they will be your only method to recall any of the information in the interview with a moderately high degree of accuracy. If a person does express concerns regarding a recording device, you may be best served by agreeing not to use it and let the matter drop (which may mean you need to interview someone else if you must record the interview). You will also need to tell interviewees if you will offer time for them to ask any questions they may have for you.

## Body

Before embarking on structuring your interview, first decide what your goals are for doing the interview. Make sure those goals are clear enough to serve as a guide for your questions. Organizing an interview is a rather individual matter, but the questions do need to cluster around specific topic areas. Consider the major areas relevant to your interview objectives. You should list those categories in some systematic order and then begin to structure your specific questions and place them in a logical

sequence within those areas. Take into account issues such as:

- How does the organizational pattern I chose help my interviewee to follow the progress of my ideas?
- Why are my points in this order instead of in some other sequence?

You also could examine your research to see whether the information naturally gravitates toward a particular organizational pattern (such as a chronological sequence of events).

Almost every interview proceeds under time constraints, so every question needs to be chosen carefully to elicit the best response. Make sure all questions relate in some way to the objectives you want to accomplish. For each question, ask yourself: “Does this question help me advance toward my goal for the interview?” Keep several relevant questions in reserve in case you have extra time.

If you are being interviewed, answers also need to be organized. Anticipate the major lines of inquiry. You can predict many questions accurately if you know the purpose of the interview and practice with several people asking a wide range of questions. Every answer you offer should support your agenda for the interview. You should arrive at the interview prepared to offer specific examples related to major topics. Any stories you include (for instance, a history of your career with a previous employer) should be brief, have clear relevance, and lead to an explicit conclusion.

Component		Techniques
Establish rapport	Greeting	Handshake, smile, verbal acknowledgment
	Build common ground	Small talk, specific observation, comment on verified connection with other person
Orientation		State objective, format, and time limits

 FIGURE 14.3: INTERVIEW INTRODUCTIONS

Example:

“I began working at Foxco Farms ten years ago as a beet beater. I was promoted three times in my first four years, eventually reaching the level of Chief Artichoker. This consistent advancement shows I can succeed and maintain my success in agricultural manufacturing.”

## Conclusion

When the time is up, or when the interviewer has the needed information, the interview needs closure. The three main functions of the conclusion are to make sure that there are “no loose ends,” to provide a summary of the interview, and to give the two parties a cue that the interview may be over, but not necessarily the relationship.

The first part of the conclusion should ensure that all of the main points have been covered. Moving into the conclusion, interviewers may review notes to make sure they have not missed any important questions or left anything unclear as they look back at the body of the interview. The interviewer should review the main areas of questions in the order they were covered, without repeating entire sections of the interview.

Example:

“Mr. Fife, we have covered three main areas of your life in our interview. We discussed your illustrious career in law enforcement, your public service in Mayberry, and the challenges you face as a sex symbol.”

The second part of the conclusion needs to address any questions that the interviewee may have. Even though some interviewees may not have any questions, a good interviewer should be ready to address concerns from the other party. These concerns may include personal questions about the interviewer (e.g., “How did you become interested in this subject?”), or concerns the interviewee may have regarding how the information will be used. Typically,


the latter concerns should be covered before the interview takes place, but sometimes interviewees may need reassurance of confidentiality.

The final part of the conclusion focuses on maintaining the relationship, so that if the interviewer needs to ask for more information, the interviewee will be more apt to respond favorably. This may take only a simple request from the interviewer (e.g., “May I call you if something else comes up that I need to ask you about?”), but it can also be more difficult if the interview experience has not been pleasant. In any case, both parties must contribute to making the interview, at a minimum, a painless process.

It is very important that the interviewer *express verbal appreciation and send a thank you letter to the interviewee*. This gesture used to be considered optional, but now it is more of an expectation. The formality of the letter should be similar to the formality of the interview and the relationship you have with the interviewee. Sometimes you will need to write a very formal sounding letter on company or personal stationery. Other times will call for a card with a handwritten note. The most important thing to remember about this gesture is that you want to convey your appreciation, so do it very soon after the interview and do it every time you interview. An explicit thank you also gives the interviewee an important advantage in job selection interviews. I know of more than one job search where the candidate who sent the thank-you notes got the job offer because it showed more courtesy and respect compared to other interviewees.

A final responsibility of an interviewer is to make sure the interviewee knows what will happen to the interview material. How will it be used? What should the interviewee expect next? The actions that result from the interview are sometimes referred to as “follow up,” as shown in figure 14.4.

Component	Purpose	How to Do It
Review/ Summary	Assures intended main points were covered, achieves sense of closure	Recap main topics of discussion in the order covered
Questions from interviewee	Clarifies or elaborate points, fills any gaps in coverage	Interviewer asks for questions; interviewee poses precise questions related to interview objectives
Thank you	Shows you value the other person	Verbal appreciation in interview PLUS written thank you note sent promptly afterward
Follow up	Answers: What comes next?	Explain how interview will be used (Further interviews? Transcript turned in for class? Future decisions or actions based on interview?)

 FIGURE 14.4: INTERVIEW CONCLUSIONS

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

We now examine some specific kinds of interviews you will encounter in your academic, personal, and professional life. Each of these types of interview makes special demands on the participants, so you can take specific steps to prepare for these interview situations.

### Selection Interviews

**Selection, or screening, interviews** are what most college students prepare for during their junior and senior year. Selection interviews help organizational members choose people for certain positions, or to narrow a field of applicants (Stewart & Cash, 2003). These kinds of interviews are typically used when trying to fill a position or identify potentially desirable employees.

As an interviewer, there are a few important points to remember. First, you need to be formal. You may be the only representative of this organization that this person will ever meet. Even though you may realize

that some interviewees stand no chance to work for your organization, they could still be potential clients someday, so be on your best professional behavior. Second, stick to the interview. While it is important to establish rapport, don't let it consume your mission: to evaluate the potential of the interviewee. Ask the questions you have created for them, because their expectation is probably going to be to answer question after question about their past professional experience, their education, their goals, etc. Third, end the interview on a good note. Even though you may think this person is not your top choice for the opening, they may be your only choice if your applicant pool is small, or not of high quality. Elvira may rank fifth out of five applicants, but she may also be the only viable choice if the top four have accepted jobs elsewhere.

Consider the importance of this kind of interview as the interviewee. There are many web sites, articles, and books written on how to perform well in a selection interview. Some very helpful resources appear on the major online job boards such

as monster.com and careerbuilder.com. The main points that you need to remember are:

- You need to prepare ahead of time by researching;
- From the time you walk into the interview until the time you leave, you are being evaluated;
- You need to be yourself.

Researching the organization you are interviewing with is an important step in the interview process. By researching the organization, you can determine if it is a place where you would like to work, if the products or services they market are ones you would want to be linked with, and where you may end up working and living someday. Research also may help you make a solid impression on your interviewer. By knowing the organization well, you can create an impressive perception in the mind of your interviewer.

Just as preparing for the interview is important, so is the interview itself. At any time when an organizational member can observe your behavior, you are being evaluated. Don't drop your guard, because it may create a bad impression in the mind of a future peer within the company, or may keep you from getting the job at all.

Finally, be yourself. The organization wants to know exactly what type of person you will be when you are hired. Creating false impressions is not recommended, because your true personality will eventually come out some time, and it may catch others completely off guard. Additionally, by being yourself in an interview, you don't have to worry about trying to say what other people want to hear. Most organizations don't appreciate scripted, unoriginal answers to these kinds of interview questions.

Now comes the advice about questions and answers. Although virtually any kind of question might pop up in a selection interview, interviewers actually only seek a

few very specific categories of information. The problem is that interviewers can't ask the questions they *really* want to ask because everyone would answer the same way. If someone asks, "Are you qualified for this job?" who would answer "No"? As an interviewee, you need to hone your skill in finding and answering **the question behind the question**. Interviewers seek to discover the following types of information in a selection interview:

- *Credentials*: Education, professional training, and character to do the job
- *Competence*: High probability of succeeding at the job; track record of success; sound method of preparing for and approaching tasks
- *Communication*: Professional, appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and written presentation skills; careful listener
- *Attitude and work ethic*: Willing to do what it takes to get the job done well; embraces challenges; cares about others
- *Fit*: Well suited to the organization's values, methods, goals, and (most important) current personnel

That's it! Many employers might ask unusual or elaborate questions, but fundamentally everyone must obtain these four kinds of information. Depending on the organization's priorities, these topics may be weighted in various ways, but they still constitute what the interviewer needs to know. Most experienced interviewers will tell you that the final category, fit, tends to play the crucial role when the hiring decision is difficult. I have served on many search committees that selected a slightly less qualified candidate because that person fit better with the combination of colleagues they would be joining. Moral: relationships matter in job selection. Knowing the question behind the question allows you to understand what the interviewer is seeking and how you can provide that information. As Figure 14.5

<b>Questions You Hear</b>	<b>Questions Behind the Question</b>	<b>Category of Information Sought</b>
What is the most difficult situation you have faced?	Do you maintain a positive outlook in the face of adversity?	Attitude/work ethic
How do you communicate bad news to someone you supervise?	Are you diplomatic and sensitive to others?	Communication
What would you do if you caught another employee engaging in unethical behavior?	Will you stand up to wrongdoing or encourage it? Will you go through appropriate channels?	Fit (with values and procedures of organization); Credentials (honesty)
What do you know about our organization?	Do you know enough about us to know this job is for you? Do you care enough to find out about us?	Competence (prepares carefully)
What are your greatest accomplishments?	Do your priorities match ours?	Credentials, Fit (with organizational priorities)

Now try your hand at the following exercise.

## SKILLBUILDER: DIFFICULT SELECTION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<b>Difficult Questions</b>	<b>Questions Behind the Question</b>	<b>Answer Should Say...</b>
What is your greatest strength/weakness?	Can you assess yourself honestly and objectively? Can you improve?	
What are your future plans?	Can you set clear, ambitious, but realistic goals?	
What is the most recent book you read?* (or cultural event you attended, vacation you took)	Do you balance work with personal enrichment? Do you expand your horizons?	
Why should we hire you instead of someone else?	Can you stand out from the crowd? What's special about you?	
How would you resolve a conflict among co-workers?	Can you confront problems objectively? Do you have a clear method for solving problems?	

\*This question actually has arisen during televised Presidential debates.

Skillbuilder questions consolidated from careerbuilder.com, monster.com, careercity.com.



FIGURE 14.5: THE QUESTION BEHIND THE QUESTION

demonstrates, the question behind the question reveals how to construct a fitting answer.

Now try your hand at formulating appropriate answers to some of the selection interview questions widely identified by career consultants and recruiters as the most difficult questions job candidates encounter. Figure 14.5 includes several other items that appear widely on “most difficult question” lists.

Both the interviewer and the interviewee in selection interviews need to know what kinds of questions are appropriate. More than any other type of interview, selection interviews must follow specific legal and ethical guidelines. Hiring practices, including selection interview tactics, are governed in the United States by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or EEOC for short (<http://www.eeoc.gov/>). Generally any questions that relate to **bona fide occupational qualifications (BFOQs)** are permissible. A BFOQ is any information relevant to legitimate requirements for performing the duties of a job. Questions dealing with the following topics risk being inappropriate or illegal because they could be the basis for discriminatory hiring (University at Albany, 2003):

- Age
- Marital status
- Race or Color
- Birthplace or National origin
- Religion
- Type of military discharge
- Arrest record (convictions of crimes are legitimate question areas)
- Physical characteristics unrelated to job performance

The list is neither comprehensive nor an authoritative legal guide, but it gives some idea of the permissible territory for screening interviews. Many of these areas

become legitimate after hiring, such as marital status to determine appropriate insurance options. During a selection interview, however, it is best to avoid any question that might deflect attention away from the candidate’s qualifications to perform the job.

## Performance Appraisal and Disciplinary Interviews

A **performance appraisal** interview evaluates how well someone is doing a task over certain periods of time. The basic purpose of the interview is to show members of organizations what they are doing well and what areas need improvement. They typically evolve into conversations rather than strict question and answer sessions, which allows the interviewee to respond to the supervisor’s observations and evaluations. Actually, any feedback you get on the assignments you complete in a class qualifies as a type of performance appraisal. At some point in your professional career, your work will be evaluated by your supervisors. These interviews can be integral to receiving a raise, a promotion, or additional benefits. The interviews are conducted by various methods depending on the organization. It is important to be aware of the appraisal method used by the organization, so you can adapt to its policies and standards. In fact, an excellent question to ask if you are a candidate for a job is how the employer evaluates the quality of performance in the position you seek.

These kinds of interviews are designed to provide members of an organization with the information that the organization has compiled about them and any ratings or summative evaluation that they wish to share. They are periodic in nature: some organizations use them twice a year for everyone, or once a year for veteran employees, or even once a month for newcomers. The schedule to do these interviews varies depending on the organization.

A **disciplinary interview** is similar to performance appraisal, but focuses more on a negative behavior that an employee exhibits. These are typically formal, and are designed to inform the person that their behavior is undesirable and needs correction. The supervisor will usually create an action plan to help the interviewee prevent the behavior from occurring in the future. There may be a conversation about this plan, but there doesn't have to be. The main point of these interviews is to provide a formal opportunity to exchange information about a certain behavior or incident. Both parties in the interview provide their perspectives, but the superior has the final authority to schedule the interview to progress in an appropriate manner.

Both the interviewer and interviewee need to be mindful of a couple of issues concerning disciplinary interviews. First, don't panic when they arise. Most of the time, you'll know in advance if any negative issues will be brought up. Even if it is a disciplinary interview, you could stand a good chance not to be sanctioned and might even learn from the experience. Second, if you are conducting either a performance appraisal or disciplinary interview, you need to focus only on the undesirable behavior without attacking the person or undermining their value to the organization (Blanchard & Johnson, 1983). Always reinforce the positive by working toward a plan for redressing the issue and improving the situation.

## Counseling Interviews

"A friend in need is a friend indeed." That saying could have been written about **counseling interviews**, which are designed to help someone cope with a personal crisis by openly expressing emotions and potentially exploring behavioral options. You might find yourself conducting a counseling interview if a friend turns to you for support during a traumatic event such as terminating a re-

lationship, contemplating a career change, or considering adoption of a child. The need for counseling interviews can arise from any situation, not simply from tragedies, that causes us to reach out to other people for support. If you seek such support from someone else, then in effect you participate in a counseling interview as the interviewee.

Professional counselors recognize that effective counseling interviews empower the interviewee to regain control of the situation and restore confident, functional living. A skilled counseling interviewer prioritizes *listening* above everything. Both parties must consider the interview a safe place to express feelings openly and fully (Burns, 1999). In counseling settings, whether informal or professional, candid sharing of feelings needs to occur before any specific action plan can develop. Most people benefit from counseling because they become empowered, not because the counselor simply tells them what to do. Notice how Carl Rogers, one of the foremost psychotherapists of the twentieth century, uses paraphrasing to elicit information from a client identified as J.

J. . . . I find it difficult to protect myself outwardly. But inwardly I think I have built up a shell; so that I don't, it's like nobody really sees who I am any more.

C.R. So you don't say No and you do a lot of caring things but somehow inside you say No. You build a shell that . . . mmm.

J. Yes, it's sort of a, it's like a sort of a wall around me . . . .

C.R. A wall.

J. . . . emotionally. So that nobody sees what I really feel. I see what they feel, I give to them, they drain me dry, but nobody sees me, nobody listens to me.

C.R. Nobody listens to you but that's partly because you put up a wall so that they can't see you or listen to you, is that it?

J. I guess so, yes.  
(Carl Rogers Demonstration  
Interview, 1985)

Any focus on what someone should do (giving and asking for advice) happens only *after* a supportive emotional climate builds sufficient confidence and self-reflection to act appropriately.

If you confront a situation in your own or someone else's life that you do not feel capable of resolving, seek professional assistance from trained counselors. A few years ago a student in this course met with me privately to explain her excessive absences stemmed from "personal problems." After some probing interview questions, she told me that she had been diagnosed as clinically depressed. I offered some additional flexibility on assignments and encouraged the student to speak with me individually whenever she started feeling overwhelmed. Unfortunately every time I saw her, she looked worse—more unkempt with deepening dark circles under her bloodshot eyes. I realized that this student needed more help than I could offer, so I referred her to a counseling psychologist where she was able to begin recovery.

## Exit Interviews

The purpose of the exit interview is to gain insight and information from a person who is leaving the organization. Exit interviews are diagnostic because they help an organization determine its own strengths and weaknesses based on feedback from people who have been part of the organizational structure. For example, our academic department conducts exit interviews of transfers and graduating seniors. Why do we need this information? Any organization can benefit from knowing why people leave. If a recurrent pattern emerges, the organization can take corrective action. If students conduct a mass exodus from a department due to the behaviors of a

particular instructor, then the instructor can be consulted and a plan for improvement can develop. The responses an interviewer receives in an exit interview ultimately will vary, based on a person's work and their perspectives about the organization. Many interviewees use this opportunity to rail on a colleague they dislike or a supervisor who allegedly mistreated them. The exit interview gives them the opportunity to get things off of their chest, so be ready for anything.

As an interviewee, you need to remember the purpose of the exit interview from the organization's perspective. The supervisors want to know (in reference to the organization) what you liked, what you didn't like, what you would change, and how you might change it. People are generally truthful in these interviews, as any reason for them to hold back is probably not strong enough since there are few consequences to them for what they say. So if you are leaving the organization, be a straight-shooter. You can help the organization by telling the interviewer what you *really* think. If you are interviewing someone who is leaving, value their comments. Allow them the opportunity to "vent" if they need it. You may have to look beyond the emotions they share, and focus on the actual behaviors or events that they discuss.

One word of advice for exit interviewees: don't burn your bridges by using the exit interview to attack the organization its members. When discussing interpersonal relationships, we noted that relationships can end amicably. You never know when you might need to interact again with the organization you left. Keep your comments in the exit interview courteous but honest.

## Surveys

**Surveys** gather responses from several people to a standardized set of questions.

By collecting answers from many people to the same or similar questions, patterns and trends emerge that allow predictions and explanations. Manufacturers interview selected users of a new product to determine whether the product needs further refinement before marketing it to the general public. The early predictions of presidential election outcomes on voting day often come from exit polls, which survey voters at the polls to determine who they voted for and why.

Surveys are designed to be impersonal, gather a lot of information in a short time, and be cost-effective. Most surveys target specific groups of people, but they can be sent or distributed to the general public. Many people are surveyed in shopping malls, at large social events (e.g., concerts, professional sports games, county fairs), or on college campuses.

Surveys can be simple cards that you might fill out in less than a minute and deposit in a big collection box, or they can involve one-on-one interviewing between two people, which usually takes more time to complete. Both can be very effective, but may also have potential drawbacks as well. On one hand, a paper survey is generally inexpensive to create and distribute, but it may be limited in how much information it can retrieve. The space on a page may limit the ability of a respondent to explain an answer. A face-to-face survey interview usually provides the interviewer (or the sponsor of the interview) with a lot of specific information, but can be expensive to conduct because of the time involved. While one face-to-face interview is conducted, hundreds of people could respond to the same survey online. Some organizations conduct surveys over the phone because it is inexpensive, but this technique may frustrate or alienate those who are called, as they may see it as an invasion of privacy, especially if it is unexpected. To avoid this problem, some companies now offer incentives (such as discount coupons or credit vouchers) for

interviewees to call a toll-free number and respond to a survey. The bottom of every receipt from my local pharmacy includes such a toll-free number with a \$10,000 cash prize to one lucky survey respondent (so far, not me). Most surveys include a majority of closed questions or multiple choice questions. These types of questions take less time to answer, plus the results are easier to tabulate than trying to sort through essays and other elaborate comments.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

There are many types of interviews, but the types of questions fall into a limited number of categories. It is very important for both the interviewer and the interviewee to understand what type of question is being asked in an interview. Personnel consultants recognize that the skillful interviewer knows how to ask a wide range of questions (Lonsdale Systems, 2003). Knowledge about question types allows the interviewer to ask a variety of questions that will yield the maximum amount of appropriate information. This knowledge also allows the interviewee to know how to respond to each question appropriately. Some types of questions are designed to gather new information, while other types clarify or confirm information already shared in the interview.

### Open-ended and Close-ended Questions

The most basic classification of questions deals with how much latitude the interviewee has in responding. **Open-ended questions** offer the interviewee the chance to offer a long answer, with a wide variety of responses. The options for answering open-ended questions are almost limitless.

Examples of open-ended questions:

1. “What is your philosophy of education?”
2. “What are the two best reasons for hiring you?”

**Moderately close-ended questions** still offer the interviewee to provide a long answer, but the direction that answer takes is more focused as a result of the wording of the question.

Examples of moderately close-ended questions:

1. “What is your philosophy of public school education in an inner-city environment?”
2. “How are your supervisory skills superior to the average candidate for this position?”

**Close-ended questions** are very directed and offer a clear choice among a limited number of possible answers. Most often, we associate closed questions with yes/no choices, but they can take other forms.

Examples of close-ended questions:

1. “Do you have a CDL (commercial driver’s license)?”
2. “Do you prefer working alone or in groups?”
3. “Who benefited more from the North American Free Trade Agreement: Mexico or the United States?”

While open-ended and moderately close-ended questions can take the form of who, what, when, where, why, or how, close-ended questions essentially ask: “Which?” A good interview will have a blend of these three kinds of questions. Open-ended questions can allow the interviewee to provide information he or she feels is pertinent, but can also aid the interviewer in finding out new information. Moderately close-ended

questions can help the interviewee provide a focused and involved (long) answer while allowing the interviewer to maintain control of the interview and retrieve specific information. The difference between open-ended and moderately close-ended questions is a matter of degree, with open-ended offering more possibilities for answers.

Open-ended questions resemble essay questions on a test. They maximize creativity but the answers can ramble. Moderately close-ended questions are similar to multiple-choice test questions. The options are limited, so answers are restricted to the available choices—regardless of how appropriate or desirable they are. Close-ended questions parallel true/false items on a test. The questions may require a more elaborate answer, yet the respondent must force-fit replies to that format. Complexity and ambiguity are not permitted. Closed questions require a definite commitment to an answer, so too many of them may seem pushy or domineering (Writers@Work, 2004).

## Probes and Follow-ups

Any question designed to gain greater detail, to dig deeper into what the interviewee has to say, qualifies as a **probe**. These questions often are known as **follow-ups** if they extend a previous question. Probes and follow-ups elicit additional information that clarifies an area being discussed.

Example of a probe:

“On your résumé, you list that you had an internship with Guy Noir Detective Agency. Exactly what did you do in your internship?”

Example of a follow-up:

Scarlet: “Have you lived in Atlanta a long time?”

Rhett: “Yes, ma’am.”

Scarlet: “When did you move to Atlanta?”

Typically a follow-up is more specific than the question preceding it and allows the respondent to clarify an answer. Often a follow-up will elicit an example or definition of what the respondent said earlier. Some interviewers like to use behavioral or case-centered questions (described below) as follow-ups because they require answers that describe concrete situations and actions.

Generally, any of the following conditions call for probes and follow-ups:

1. When the interviewer has general background information that needs elaboration;
2. When the respondent gives a vague or evasive answer, or when the interviewer wants more specifics in the answer;
3. When the interview needs to be lengthened;
4. When the interviewer discovers important or new information that deserves discussion;
5. When a response includes material that is especially interesting and should be pursued further through additional questions.
6. When a response is unclear and needs to be restated or made more precise.
7. When the original question was unclear or misleading and the response was not along the lines the interviewer intended.

Effective use of probes makes the difference between an interview that sounds generic and an interview that is memorable for its unique information. Use and respond to probes judiciously. Although helpful, excessive probing can invite inappropriate self-disclosure. During cross-examination questioning in the courtroom, attorneys

may be warned not to “badger the witness.” Translation: excessive probing intimidates interviewees by forcing them to reveal too much—sometimes against their own better judgment. Probe after probe without any relief transforms an interview into an interrogation.

## Behavioral Questions

When a question begins with a phrase such as “Tell me about a time when . . .” or “Give me an example of . . .,” you are hearing a **behavioral** approach (Hirsch, 1999). Behavioral questions ask about specific past behaviors, presuming that past behavior predicts future performance (Vogt, 1998). This type of question has become very common in employment interviews, and for good reason. Candidate after candidate in employment interviews talks a great game. Interviewers keep hearing the same platitudes, such as, “I’m good at customer service.” Interviewers eventually caught on and started asking candidates to prove their claims by giving specific examples of the asserted skills. So the assertion “I’m good at customer service” might generate the behavioral follow-up: “Describe a situation that involved you helping a customer.” That kind of question quickly separates smooth talkers from effective employees.

### Examples (less behavioral):

1. “What was the worst part of your previous job?” [Steers answer toward a quick label, such as “Too much paperwork.”]
2. “How do you deal with conflict?” [Very abstract, invites general principles as an answer.]

### Examples (more behavioral):

1. “What measures did you take to cope with the most difficult situation you faced on your previous job?” [Concentrates on eliciting a specific story.]

2. Identify a conflict you encountered among members of your family. How did you resolve it? [Obtains concrete information about how respondent relates to others.]

Behavioral questions allow interviewers to get objective information about concrete action and not just vague claims. If you encounter behavioral questions—and that encounter is virtually a sure thing—you need structured answers with clear stories and examples. The **STAR approach** is widely recommended by professional consultants career services offices (Wharton College of Business, 2004). The STAR method also provides a handy way to organize any answer that requires you to tell a story to prove a point.

S = Situation: Briefly describe the circumstances and the challenge you faced.

T = Target: What did you want to accomplish? What was your goal?

A = Action: What did you do? Be specific: “I called the police in five minutes and they arrived in three more minutes,” not “I called the police as soon as I could and they got there quickly.”

R = Results: What was the outcome? What did you learn?

Behavioral questions and STAR answers can show that interviewees practice what they preach.

## Hypothetical Questions

**Hypothetical questions** ask for responses to imaginary, “what if” situations. Although the situations are fictitious, they encourage speculation on possible or likely states of affairs that could arise in the future. Hypothetical questions test the respondent’s capacity to role play and reveal strength of imagination. We also noted in chapter 3 that the ability to imagine ourselves in another person’s role underlies empathic listening.

### Examples of hypothetical questions:

1. “What would you do if a co-worker confided to you that her supervisor is sexually harassing her?”
2. “Suppose you just won \$100 million in the lottery. What would you do with the money?”
3. “Imagine you are president of the United States. What would be your first official action?”

Hypothetical questions can check how well the interviewee responds to new situations and information. They offer effective ways to see whether someone can think “outside the box” by confronting novel circumstances. Hypothetical questions are vital when a relevant issue lies in the future or when the respondent needs to anticipate future developments.

### Example:

“What would you do if you were a stock broker and a computer failure caused the markets to close for a month?”

Too many hypothetical questions can lead the interview into excessive speculation, so discussion trails off into tangents unrelated to the concrete goals of the interview. If the hypothetical questions are too far-fetched, they may shed little information about the respondent’s real experiences, talents, or ideas.

### Example:

Suppose you and I were guinea pigs living on Mars. How would we negotiate a trade agreement with China?

## Case Questions

Most often used in screening interviews for consultants, **case questions** require respondents to work through a specific problem or challenge to find a solution. Case questions usually are the most complicated

and challenging interview questions. Case questions generally extend beyond single questions. The challenging situation may be so complex that it requires an entire interview. Donald Trump's television program *The Apprentice* is one gigantic series of case interviews. The candidates are divided into teams to work through a business-related task.

You could hear about case interviews from academics, but let's hear from the people who use these interviews regularly. McKinsey and Company is a corporate management consultant founded in 1926, serving two-thirds of the *Fortune* |1000| companies. McKinsey swears by case interviews because

*Your abilities in dealing creatively with complex or ambiguous problems in unfamiliar businesses, in structuring your thinking, and in reaching sensible conclusions with the available facts in a short time are critical to being a successful consultant.*

—(McKinsey & Company, 2004)

What does McKinsey expect to hear in responses to case questions? Their advice spans several pages, but if you encounter a case scenario, the experts in case studies recommend that you take the following advice, which happens to spell **BADS**:

- **B**reak down the problem into its important components.
- **A**ddress the issues methodically. It is more important to show you have a logical approach than to arrive at a "correct" answer.
- **D**eal with all aspects of the issue, not just those most directly related to your most comfortable area.
- **S**how your work" by talking through your thought process. Communicate what you are considering at each step you take in the problem-solving process.

Case questions and their answers can get very detailed and demanding, but they "assess reasoning, critical thinking, and problem solving skills. They require methodical approaches to problems" (McGill University Career & Placement Center, 2004). A good way to prepare for case questions would be to apply the problem-solving method in chapter |00| to a variety of current "hot topics" in your field.

## Reinforcers

**Reinforcers** include not only questions, but brief comments and even sounds that encourage the interviewee to continue and to show your involvement in the conversation. When I listen to audio interviews, I seek signs of conversational involvement, including comments such as "I see," "Really?" "Are you serious?" and emotional responses such as laughter or other expressions of reactions to answers. These reinforcers signify your immersion in the conversation and indicate a high level of interest.

How important are reinforcers? Try this experiment: The next time a friend calls you on the telephone and talks a lot, offer absolutely no verbal commentary except when asked something directly. The resulting silence and absence of reinforcers will make your conversational partner wonder what's wrong. Similarly, if an interviewee gets no vocal feedback, it signals detachment from the conversation and may reduce the chance that you will get enthusiastic, thorough answers. Here are some examples of common verbal reinforcers communicators might use:

- Hmmmm. . . .
- Oh?
- Ah—I see
- Yes!
- Okay
- Really?

- Are you kidding me?
- Is that so?
- Extension of a comment made by the other party

Use a variety of reinforcers so your reactions demonstrate a range of response and don't get too repetitive. I remember one student who responded "OK" more than two dozen times in ten minutes. Remember that many reinforcers are nonverbal, such as nodding the head, shifting posture, smiling, and making direct eye contact. Reinforcers demonstrate your attentiveness as a listener.

## Mirror Questions

If you ever need to verify that you understood something correctly in an interview, you may need to use **mirror questions**. To clarify, answer, or question a preceding comment, a mirror repeats a portion of what you heard so you can confirm your understanding.

### Example (interviewer mirror):

Emeril: "What did you name the dish that won the Dubuque Gourmet Festival?"

Kelly: "So, I named my possum stew 'Roadkill Surprise'."

Emeril: "You named it 'Roadkill Surprise'?"

### Example (interviewee mirror):

Billee Jo: "What is your shoe size?"

Ellie Mae: "You want to know my shoe size?"

Billee Jo: "Yes, we want to make sure you can fill your predecessor's shoes."

Mirror questions can be effective because they use the exact words of your counterpart. Sometimes poorly phrased or inappropriate questions and comments can be corrected quickly if a mirror demonstrates how the remark must have sounded. Use mirror questions only when

you genuinely need to verify what someone said. A long sequence of mirror questions can stall an interview's progress and make you seem reluctant to proceed.

## Leading Questions

You're reading this chapter because you love this book, right? Don't you wish you could buy fifty copies of this book as gifts for all your friends? You just read two **leading questions**. Did you have any doubt how the author wanted you to answer? Of course not. Leading questions are biased; they pull the respondent toward a desired answer. Sometimes leading questions are obvious, aren't they? (That was another one!) The most evident leading questions may be nothing more than a statement with a question tacked onto the end. Sometimes leading questions are more subtle, relying on slanted language to bias the listener. Every election year, I receive a supposedly "objective" poll from both major political parties. The poll includes at least one question along the lines of: "Do you agree with the demented, perverse environmental destruction that Candidate X, a known pathological liar, supports?" When you observe strongly emotional language that supports only one viewpoint, you may have found a leading question. Some telltale signs that you have encountered a leading question are phrases such as:

"Isn't it true that . . ."

"As we all know . . ."

"Of course . . ."

"Wouldn't you agree that . . ."

". . . isn't that the case?"

Whether blatant or subtle, leading questions create problems because they do not encourage full, honest responses. Since good relationships are built on openness and honesty, leading questions can damage a healthy interview relationship.

Leading questions emerge in adversarial interviews when the interviewer is trying to manipulate the respondent into giving a particular statement. Cross-examinations in courtroom trials almost guarantee leading questions because attorneys are trying to get hostile witnesses to make damaging admissions. Keep your radar tuned to detect leading questions. Avoid asking them unless you feel confident they do not manipulate the interviewee. You don't mind if we move to the next section now, do you?

## Loaded Questions

Although they appear to offer a choice, **loaded questions** actually channel interviewee's response into alternatives that are equally desirable or (far more frequently) undesirable. Loaded questions trap the respondent in a dilemma, a choice that offers no viable options. Many who encounter loaded questions justifiably consider them trick questions because few options are embedded in the question and the respondent has no freedom to answer independently.

### Examples:

1. "How long did it take for you to realize your incompetence?" [requires admission of incompetence]
2. "Do you write this poorly for all your professors or do you just save your worst work for me?" [a question a professor actually used to ask his worst students—don't worry, he's deceased]
3. "Are you late to class because you stayed up drinking all night or because you're lazy?" [presents two unpleasant options]

If someone asks you a loaded question, you might refuse to respond. However, a better tactic is to turn it into a positive by rejecting the structure of the question and reframing it on your own terms. For example 3 above, you might respond by presenting a third,

more desirable option such as: "I was running on time but stopped to help an accident victim. It took a few minutes for the ambulance to arrive, but she's all right now." How would you revise the options offered by the other examples of loaded questions so that your answer works in your favor?

## Clearinghouse Questions

If you have ever dined at a restaurant, you probably heard a clearinghouse from your server at the end of the meal: "Will there be anything else?" As the name indicates, **clearinghouse questions** check to make sure everything has been covered. These questions wrap up the interview (or a segment of it) and summarize what has taken place. They essentially "clean up" or "clear the house" by checking to see whether anything is left to discuss at that point.

### Example:

"Well, you've asked several important questions about our company. Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

The clearinghouse clears up any items that remain unclear or that were undeveloped in the preceding portion of the interview. Think of a clearinghouse as a checkpoint where the interviewer determines whether everything necessary has been included. Ordinarily an interview should include a clearinghouse question at the end of the main body or as part of the conclusion. Longer interviews might include a clearinghouse after each main area of questions as well. If the interviewer is running short on time the clearinghouse can be close-ended, which invites a very brief answer.

### Examples of close-ended clearinghouse questions:

- "Do you have anything else to add?"
- "Have we covered everything in this area?"
- "Is there anything we have missed?"

Question Type	Answer Type
open-ended	elaborate
close-ended	specific, definite
probe	detailed
follow-up	definition, clarification, amplification
behavioral	concrete, sometimes narrative
hypothetical	creative
case	problem/solution or plan
mirror	reiteration

FIGURE 14.6: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND THE ANSWERS THEY GENERATE

If the interviewer has plenty of time, a more open-ended clearinghouse encourages more elaboration and extends the time of the interview.

Examples of open-ended clearinghouse questions:

- “What else would you like to add?”
- “What other things should we cover in this area?”
- “What more do we need to know about \_\_\_\_\_?”

Regardless of the specific wording, a clearinghouse takes the general form: “What else would you like to discuss that relates to our interview agenda?” This type of question is very useful for catching information that might have slipped through the cracks. Sometimes you also find that an interviewee’s answer to the clearinghouse helps provide a concise and effective closing by summarizing important ideas raised in the interview.

Each type of question tends to elicit a particular type of answer. While practicing your role as the interviewer or as the respondent, experiment with mixing the

question types to take advantage of what different sorts of questions can do. Consider some of the different types of questions and the sorts of answers they elicit, as illustrated in Figure 14.6.

Mixing question types not only takes advantage of the many sorts of responses an interviewee can give, but it also compensates for over-reliance on one type of question. For example, too many open-ended questions can lead to digressions and slow the pace of an interview.

## TROUBLESHOOTING THE INTERVIEW

After decades of assigning and listening to interviews in this course, instructors have found that students often encounter similar challenges when preparing to interview someone else or to be interviewed. Let’s review some common difficulties and how to prevent them or respond to them if they happen.

### The Reticent Interviewee

We might not realize it, but we might have played the role of the interviewee who barely makes an audible response. The interview grinds to a halt because the respondent answers in monosyllables. Does the following exchange sound familiar—perhaps like your own conversations with family after school?

Granny: “How was your day?”

Jethro: “Okay.”

Granny: “What did you do in school today?”

Jethro: “Nuthin’.”

What do we find out about that day at school? Nuthin’! An interview can run short if the interviewee is reluctant to elaborate. Running under time can be very risky, because it shows you needed to plan more carefully. An interview that runs short

indicates that not enough information was sought or gained, so the interview did not accomplish all it could. Much valuable information might never emerge unless the interviewer can encourage the interviewee to open up more.

The interviewer can take steps to maximize the usable information that arises from the interview. If you are the interviewer, you must maintain control of the interview's pacing, and it can slow to a painful crawl with cryptic answers of only a word or two. What should you do?

***Include Reserve Questions*** Aside from the questions you definitely plan to ask, have several back-up questions for each portion of the interview in case you have extra time. Consider color coding these questions in your notes or otherwise marking them so you can remember to use them only on an as-needed basis. That way, you run little risk of running short of material.

***Use More Open-ended Questions*** Since open-ended questions require more thorough responses than close-ended questions, you will find the additional time the respondent uses also gives you more information. The more information you get, the more you can develop additional questions from what you hear. Another benefit is that you find out much more about your interviewee because the open-ended questions generate more developed answers.

***Practice Adapting to Time Limits*** As you practice your interviews, ask your partner to role-play a very reluctant interviewee who gives only the briefest possible answers. You'll get practice in coping with the laconic respondent, so if you encounter someone who is not very talkative you'll be able to draw out that type of person.

***Use Probes More Frequently*** If you have time to spare in the interview, ask more

follow-up questions to dig deeper into the respondent's answers. The best probes ask for clarifications and extensions based on your careful listening to the answer. Consider what more we might want to know and ask probes to get to that information.

## The Long-Winded Interviewee

Sometimes you will be faced with interviewing someone who is so talkative and enthusiastic that she or he cannot stop talking. As a result, you find that the interview runs longer than scheduled, you cannot ask many of your most important questions, and the interview veers off into topics irrelevant to your objective and that you are not prepared to discuss. Remember, the interviewer ultimately shoulders the responsibility for keeping the interview running on time and on topic. What should you do?

***Prioritize Questions*** In the list of questions that you use while interviewing, mark or color code questions so you can identify at a glance which are most important. For example, you might highlight your absolutely necessary questions in yellow and mark your secondary or optional questions in blue. By having your questions prioritized this way, you can instantly omit the lower priority questions to adapt to tight time limits. Effective interviewers are able to adapt to time limitations and adjust their prepared script as necessary.

***Practice Adapting to Time Limits*** In your practice interviews, ask your partner to role-play a very long-winded interviewee. You will get practice in coping with the long-winded respondent, so if you encounter someone who is very talkative, you won't be caught off guard.

***Use More Close-ended Questions*** Practice and prepare close-ended versions of most of your questions in case the interviewee is very

talkative or the interview time gets short. Close-ended questions require definite, concise answers—sometimes only a few words. By moving in this direction, you will channel the interviewee toward shorter responses.

**Clarify Limits on Answers** Even if you stated the time constraints of the interview clearly in your introduction, some enthusiastic interviewees might not budget time wisely. If your interviewee goes on and on, you might add a polite request or reminder to help keep the interview running on time. Don't be afraid to assert yourself in this way. If done politely, it shows you know how to guide the interview courteously but firmly. Here are some examples of the sorts of things you might say:

1. "This is a wonderful conversation. It's too bad we have only 15 minutes for this interview. Hopefully we can cover everything in that time period and save more for further interactions."
2. "There is so much I want to find out about you that we can only cover the basics in 20 minutes. So let's try to cover all the ground we can in this sort time."
3. "I'm learning a lot in our interview. Of course, this is a class assignment that requires us to discuss a lot in only a short time. I'll try to focus my questions so we can keep each question and answer short but informative."
4. "I wish we had more time to expand on all these points. Unfortunately in these class assignments, time constraints are tight. So in our total of half an hour together, we'll need to move quickly. Perhaps we can continue our conversation beyond this interview."

Remember, you might have to issue more than one such reminder. Bear in mind that your direction of the interview should be

respectful, yet leave no doubt about the need to manage time.

## The Inappropriate Interviewer

The sad fact is that many interviewers have little or no formal training in the legal and ethical proprieties of interviewing. Even many personnel managers are not well versed in the practice of asking appropriate questions. This lack of background becomes more common in smaller organizations that do not hire specialists in human resources or recruitment. As a result, "it's fairly common for candidates to be asked illegal questions" (Washington, 1997). Depending on how much you want to join the organization, you have a range of responses.

**Confront the Questioner** If you don't mind offending the interviewer, and if you feel comfortable possibly burning bridges with the organization, you can identify the question as illegal. Before you choose this course of action, you must be certain that the question is indeed illegal and inappropriate; otherwise, you demonstrate poor preparation and alienate the interviewer. You might also mention the consequences of discriminatory questions, such as the possibility of reporting the organization to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (which does indeed file claims directly from the offended parties).

Sometimes inappropriate questions are asked out of ignorance or because they are part of a prepared list, so recognize that the questioner might not be at fault. Some interviewers might deliberately ask an illegal question to test your reaction and determine whether you will tolerate inappropriate behavior. Such circumstances are rare, but remain a possibility. A small genre of interviews, known as **stress interviews**, actually focuses on questions designed to provoke, upset, or disturb the interviewee to test emotional reactions under pressure. Many reality television shows use a similar

technique, subordinating the task the contestants perform to the misery and interpersonal conflicts among the performers.

**Avoid an Answer** One of our students took a job as a recruiter for an employment agency. She had a corporate client, a restaurant owner, who routinely asked applicants whether they were born-again Christians. She advised all applicants who interviewed with the restaurateur to refuse an answer so that eventually he would stop asking (nothing else seemed to work). If you decline to answer such a question, do so politely and mention very concisely the reason for your refusal.

Poor Response:

Interviewer: “Are you a homosexual?”

Respondent: “That’s an illegal question, and I will not answer. How dare you ask such a thing? What kind of a pervert are you?”

Better Responses:

1. “My sexual orientation, whatever that may be, has no relevance to my job qualifications.”
2. “I prefer to answer only questions that relate to the job itself.”

3. “Let’s focus on what skills I bring to your organization and leave personal issues aside.”

**Redirect the Question** Sometimes inappropriate or discriminatory questions reflect awkward or inept ways to gather legitimate information. Use the technique of discovering the question behind the question to decide the real issue at hand and respond to that. Suppose a graduate school recruiter wants to determine whether a female candidate will be fully committed to graduate studies. The recruiter asks: “Do you have children living at home?” The question is inappropriate and illegal. The candidate, however, can make the most of the situation by responding to the recruiter’s concern instead of answering the improper question. She might say: “Your question seems to express concern about how I could balance my personal and academic life. Bear in mind that I held two full-time jobs while being on the dean’s list every semester as an undergraduate, so I have a lot of experience in juggling demanding schedules.”

Notice that we do not recommend answering illegal or inappropriate questions directly. If you do answer such questions, you actually help perpetuate them. In effect you

If You Hear a Question About . . .	The Questioner May Really Want to Know . . .
Children, marital, or family obligations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Will you be absent too much?</li> <li>2. Are you stable, or will you be distracted by socializing?</li> <li>3. Will you be able to work overtime or irregular hours?</li> <li>4. How much will you be able to travel?</li> </ol>
Racial, religious, nationality, or sexual orientation issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Will you get along with people different from you?</li> <li>2. Will you feel comfortable in a diverse environment?</li> <li>3. Will you fit in with this organization’s population and culture?</li> </ol>
Age or disability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you meet the physical demands of the task?</li> <li>2. What accommodations will need to be made for you?</li> <li>3. How long will you stay with the organization?</li> </ol>

FIGURE 14.7: QUESTIONS BEHIND ILLEGAL OR INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

are saying: “Go ahead and keep asking inappropriate questions because you will get the information you want.” Offering such information allows organizations to use it to discriminate—and you aid and abet such behavior. If you do carefully analyze what the questioner actually wants to know, you can provide an answer that plays to your strengths and totally defuses the improper question. Figure 14.7 explains what some questions behind illegal questions may be if they are asked for non-discriminatory reasons.

**Use Humor** The United States Department of the Interior (2002) laments that “illegal question[s] continue to arise in job interviews, even for government work,” and identifies sexism as especially prevalent. The Department of the Interior suggests using gentle humor to diffuse the tension of an illegal question and bring the discussion back to legitimate topics.

Example

Interviewer: “So you’re Mordecai Finkelstein. Is that a Jewish name?”

Respondent: “I’m amazed you aren’t familiar with the long line of prominent Finkelstein monks! Haven’t you heard of Finkelstein City near the Vatican? Seriously, I can assure you that my professional experience fits closely with what your organization is seeking.”

Using humor always poses risks, but so does failing to respond to blatantly illegal questions. Sometimes interviewers may be able to laugh at their own insensitivity and thereby recognize the mistake.

## SPECIAL INTERVIEW FORMATS

### Panel Interviews

Increasingly, organizations are using group interviews. In a **panel interview**, one

### MORALITY MATTERS: DEALING WITH QUESTIONABLE QUESTIONS

[True story] A student recently got married. Her husband is in the military, and as a senior she is interviewing for jobs. She mentioned that the interviewers constantly ask her whether she is married and what her husband does for a living. Whenever she answers the question, the interviewers ask whether she will move if her husband gets reassigned to another location. The interviewers say that they are looking for a stable employee who will make a long-term commitment to the organization. How would you respond to these questions? Are they legal? How appropriate are they? What other questions might the interviewers ask to accomplish their objective?

person is interviewed by two or more people simultaneously. Occasionally a panel interview involves interviewers questioning several respondents simultaneously. Some of our students have attended job selection interviews where all the finalists for a position were assembled and questioned in the presence of each other. The panel interview has become more common because it is efficient. For example, a group can conduct interviews at one time rather than shuffling the interviewee from person to person. Some organizations, such as the United States Federal Aviation Administration, believe that a panel of interviewers actually improves the quality of interviews. Since they are being observed by other panelists, the interviewers become more accountable by staying on topic, minimizing personal

agendas, and keeping the questions legal (Federal Aviation Administration, 2004).

As an interviewer in a panel setting, try to minimize overlap between your questions and those of other panelists. Listen carefully to exchanges between other panelists and the interviewee so that you can eliminate duplicate questions or pose follow-ups to previous panelist inquiries. The first time you address the interviewee, state your name and title or position. In a large panel, you might need to do this more than once to help the interviewee keep track of who asks what.

Undergoing a panel interview as an interviewee can be disorienting, because you need to maintain rapport with the entire panel while focusing on each panelist's questions individually. Keep track of who says what so that you do not find yourself giving redundant answers. Eye contact can help conversational flow in panel interviews. Look directly at the person who is asking each question, since that individual is addressing you directly. During your answer, establish eye contact with the entire panel so they know you want everyone to hear your response. Sometimes panels get a bit unruly, with several people talking at once. Remain patient and let the panel re-establish order. Respond only when you know no other panelists need to make comments.

## Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews can be challenging because you are deprived of any physical feedback such as facial expressions and eye contact that can indicate someone's reactions and attitudes. You therefore have a tougher time trying to "read" your counterpart's behavior and adapt to emotional signals. Despite this limitation, telephone interviews offer many opportunities because you can control many aspects of an interview situation that you could not control in a face-to-face setting.

The first requirement for effective telephone interviewing is to minimize all distractions. Remember that all sounds potentially could be communicated, so sequester yourself from auditory intrusions such as phones ringing, people entering with an obscene greeting, crazed dogs barking, and children screaming (all of which have occurred during interviews we have witnessed). Take the additional precaution of assuring that you are using the highest quality phone equipment you can access. Poor audio reception can impede understanding and, no matter why it happens, it makes a terrible impression if one party's communication suffers from static, low volume, or other annoyances. If using a cell phone, confirm that your battery is fully charged and that you have optimal reception (all the bars registering signal strength—yes, ALL of them—registering). If your phone has a volume control, it should be adjusted near maximum. Others always can hold the phone a little farther away if it's too loud, but no one will bring an amplifier to boost a weak signal.

A great advantage of phone interviews is that you can use and take as many notes as you like. Have your notes for prospective questions and answers organized beforehand, with everything easily accessible. You don't need to depend totally on your memory in a phone interview, but be careful when you use notes. Do not read material verbatim unless absolutely necessary (for example, to detail legal stipulations of employment). Your voice instantly tends to lapse into a sing-song quality, reducing your range and sounding artificial when reading a script. Actors train relentlessly to sound natural when reading. The rest of us can't read more than a few words without sounding like robots. Since an interview is a conversation and the only delivery tool you have in a phone conversation is your voice, marshal every resource to sound natural yet fully prepared. Some career consultants

suggest conducting a telephone interview while professionally dressed and assuming a formal posture to assure you are alert and treat the interview seriously (Matrix Resources, 2004).

Since you cannot identify others by sight during a telephone interview, make sure everyone identifies themselves clearly by title and name. The self-identification should include the name each person wants to be called. Confirm what each participant wants to be called before proceeding—a mistake in addressing someone (including mispronouncing a name or missing a title) can alienate a participant for the entire interview and even generate persistent ill will. This identification becomes crucial in panel interviews conducted via telephone, because each question or comment may be posed by a different person. When responding, verbally identify the person you are addressing.

Poor Example: “Somebody asked about reading the minds of reptiles. I’ve done that.”

Better Example: “Dr. Diddleysquat, I have had telepathic encounters with reptiles.”

## Teleconferencing

Conducting interviews or group meetings audio-visually over a distance is known as **teleconferencing**. Such interviews are interactive, but to varying degrees. Usually both parties can see and hear each other throughout the entire interview, which more closely approximates a face-to-face interview. In 1986 I interviewed successfully for a teaching position via interactive video, so the technique definitely is firmly embedded. You should expect more interviews to take place via teleconferencing. As the cost, logistics, and security concerns associated with long distance travel continue to cause concern, employers increasingly resort to teleconferencing when hiring (Rosemarin, 2001). The

addition of video helps overcome several limitations of the telephone interview, but it introduces new variables to consider.

Because camera and lighting quirks can affect the visual experience, keep your attire simple. Avoid thin stripes, complex patterns, small checks and plaids, which may tend to “swim” on the screen by giving the illusion that they are moving. I know this firsthand, having to re-record a video presentation after noticing that a beautiful red and white striped shirt seemed to be oscillating on the screen! Also, beware of any shiny or glittery objects that might reflect the artificially bright lights and cause glare on the screen.

A technical matter also deserves consideration. Often there is a delay between when someone speaks and when another hears it on the other end. You can observe this delay on live interviews conducted via satellite, such as the conversations with correspondents during Operation Iraqi Freedom. To adapt to the possibility of such a delay, wait about two seconds after you hear a question or comment to be sure that you don’t accidentally talk over the other person (Rosemarin, 2001). This moment of silence is also good advice for telephone interviews, since telephones—especially satellite phones and speakerphones—often have similar time delays. Verify that your counterpart has finished speaking before you begin.

As for delivery, teleconferences place special emphasis on effective eye contact. Treat the video camera or web cam as if it were the other person in the interview. If you look directly at the camera, it will appear to observers that you are looking directly at them. If you also have a monitor on your end, you might want to check your own appearance periodically by glancing quickly at your own image to make sure you haven’t moved off screen or are positioned incorrectly. Speaking of moving off screen, teleconferences definitely tend to


limit movement. Rapid or large movements (waving hands, pacing) tend to distort your image. We have seen communicators suddenly blur out of focus or vanish off camera because they thought they could be as mobile as they were in person. If the camera on your end is stationary (and most are, or have very limited mobility), you will need to remain relatively rooted to one spot. To compensate for this restricted movement, your voice and facial expressions need to be as animated as possible.


## HIGHLIGHTS


1. Interviews are structured conversations using questions and answers that gather information to accomplish a definite purpose.
2. In employment interviews, interviewer and applicant try to determine mutual fit for the job.
3. The PREP method emphasizes planning an interview by Preparing through contacts and positive role models, Researching, Environmental comfort, and Practicing carefully.
4. The introduction to an interview needs to establish rapport and orient others to the interview procedures.
5. The body of an interview should cluster questions in logical patterns.
6. The conclusion of an interview summarizes main content, checks for further questions, expresses appreciation, and lays the ground for following up.
7. Selection interviews include questions that determine the quality of interviewees. Aside from qualifications, these interviews seek character, suitability, and communication skills. Only questions about bona fide occupational qualifications (BFOQs) are legal to ask in employment interviews.
8. Performance appraisal interviews review the quality of work and develop plans for improvement. Disciplinary interviews deal with corrective actions for errors or problems.
9. Counseling interviews include advice or suggestions only after careful, active listening.
10. Exit interviews reveal why someone is leaving an organization so the organizational environment can be as satisfying as possible.
11. Surveys provide standardized questions whose responses can be analyzed systematically.
12. Open-ended questions maximize opportunities for response. Close-ended questions limit responses to definite options.
13. Probes seek detailed information that adds depth to an issue.
14. Behavioral questions focus on observable actions and concrete examples that can predict performance.
15. Hypothetical questions pose fictional situations for discussion, while case questions present a specific challenge that requires a solution.
16. Reinforcers encourage another person to keep talking or to elaborate on a comment.
17. Mirror questions repeat the essence of a comment to verify accuracy.
18. Leading questions basically push the respondent to answer in a certain way. Loaded questions trap the respondent into making an undesirable answer.


19. Clearinghouse questions check to see if all needed questions have been asked.
20. Problematic questions should be avoided tactfully or firmly rebuffed in ways that do not offend others.
21. Panel interviews, telephone interviews, and teleconferences require special adaptations to the format and medium.

## APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

 = Activities appropriate for service learning

 = Computer activities focusing on research and information management

 = Activities involving film or television

 = Activities involving music

1. In various sections of this course, students have conducted interviews in settings beyond the classroom. We have had student interviewers conduct their interviews in the following settings:
  - An interview with a store owner was conducted on the front porch of a store, only a few yards from a major highway.
  - In a professional's office after hours; the cleaning crew entered the room and vacuumed the floor during the interview.
  - In an interview of a professor, the interviewee received and answered six phone calls during the interview.
  - An interview of a teacher in her classroom was interrupted repeatedly by announcements over the public address system.



- The interviewee's brother was present during the interview and decided to volunteer answers to several of the interviewer's questions.

Imagine you are the student interviewer in each case. What would you say during or just before the interview to improve the situation? How could you have prevented the situation from arising in the first place? What might you say or do to alter the situation if you were caught in the midst of it?


2. The Relationship Exit Interview:
 

Imagine that you are conducting exit interviews with people who used to have personal relationships (friendship or romance) with you or someone you know.

  - A. What would you ask these people about the relationship?
  - B. What do you think these former partners would say about the other person immediately after the relationship ended?
  - C. How do you think the exit interview answers might change a year or more later?

Consider more generally, might the answers to exit interviews change over time? What factors might influence changes in responses to an exit interview?
3.  Go to an Internet job site such as monster.com, careerbuilder.com, jobs.com, jobs.net, etc. Find a list of the most difficult employment interview questions. Construct answers to several of these questions. Explain why your answers would be effective responses.
4.  If you will participate in service learning or a volunteer experience, gather some information to help you learn what to expect and how to succeed.

Interview a student who has completed a service learning activity for a course. Focus on getting advice that might help you make the most of your service experience. What did you learn from your interviews that you did not already know about service, volunteering, and about community organizations?

5.  Watch or listen to one of the following interview programs (check your local television and radio schedules):

- *Fresh Air* (National Public Radio)
- *Larry King Live* (CNN)
- *Inside the Actor's Studio* (Bravo)
- *Meet the Press* (NBC)

- *Face the Nation* (CBS)
- *Fox News Sunday* (Fox)

- A. How well did the interviewer conduct the interview? What principles from this chapter did you see being practiced? What other techniques did the interviewer use?
- B. How well did the interviewee do? What would you recommend the interviewee do differently and why?
- C. Select one question from the interview. State the question and the answer as they were given on the program. Now revise the question and the answer, explaining why your changes improved the question and the answer.

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