

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES

The overall purpose of Interview Questions and Assignments is to determine if the candidates are suitable for the position. It is important to assess Technical Suitability AND Personal Suitability

Definitions

Technical Suitability

A candidate is considered technically suitable for the position if he/she has the skills, education, training and technical knowledge required to perform the job.

Responses to Technical Suitability questions tell you if candidates CAN do the job.

Personal Suitability

A candidate is considered to be personally suitable for the position if he/she has the motivation, work habits, and job related people skills and attitudes required to successfully perform the job duties.

Responses to Personal Suitability questions tell you if the applicant WILL do the job.

Assessing Suitability

Really good questions will assess both technical and personal suitability - this is especially true if you are skilled at probing.

Three types of questions that can be used to assess suitability are described in detail below. Examples and the advantages and disadvantages of each type are provided.

A. Behavioral Based Questions

A.1 Description

Behavioral Based Questions ask a person for a specific example of a behavior or skill from their own experience. The initial question is usually followed by a series of follow-up questions which probe for further information and clarification.

Behavioral Based Questioning can feel like a conversation, although the interviewer should keep their part of the conversation to more questions.

Responses to Behavioral Based Questions tell you how a candidate has responded to particular situations or problems in the past. The theory behind behavioral questions is that “the best predictor of whether a person will demonstrate a competency in a job is evidence that the person has demonstrated that competency effectively in a previous situation”.

Therefore, responses to Behavioral Based Questions should tell you how a person WILL respond in a similar situation

A.2 Example

“Tell us about a time when you were involved in staffing a vacant position. What was your role? Who else was involved? What position were you staffing? What did you do?...”

A.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Behavioral Based Questions

Advantages	Disadvantages
Assess both technical and personal suitability.	Not all Selection Committee members may be comfortable or skilled in the technique of Behavioral Based Questioning.
The technique focuses on real examples from the candidate's experience, so candidates are less able to quote a textbook answer.	Timeframe for interviews may be more unpredictable – you can't predict what example a candidate will provide, how many follow-up questions need to be asked or how long it will take to respond.

B. Fact Gathering Questions

B.1 Descriptions

These tend to be relatively simple and straightforward. They are less like a conversation and more like a test with a question followed by an answer.

If the answer is not clear, a follow-up question may be asked to get greater clarity. However, care needs to be taken to ensure the follow up doesn't steer the candidate in a particular direction.

Responses to Basic Fact Gathering Questions will tell you if the person possesses the knowledge or skills required to perform the job duties.

B.2 Example

"Please describe the Legislative Initiatives Process"

B.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Fact Gathering Questions

Advantages	Disadvantages
Assess technical suitability	Does not assess personal suitability
Clear, quick and easy way to assess knowledge.	Less useful in assessing whether or not an applicant possesses the skills required for the job. For example, a candidate may be able to describe a problem solving process. This only indicates that they have knowledge of a problem solving process, NOT that they have good problem solving skills.

C. Situational Based Questions

C.1 Description

In a situational question, the candidate is asked to describe a situation and how they would handle it. Some follow-up questions may be asked to help clarify the information provided.

Responses to Situational Based Questions tell you what a candidate THINKS is the best way to respond to a particular situation or problem. It tells you what someone thinks they SHOULD do, which is NOT necessarily what they WOULD do if/when faced with the particular situation.

C.2 Example

“If you were the Staffing Officer responsible for staffing a competition, what types of things/major activities would you do?”

C.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Situational Based Questions

Advantages	Disadvantages
Assess technical suitability and, to a certain extent, personal suitability	Too easy for candidates to “tell you what you want to hear”. If you only ask situational based questions to determine personal suitability, you may end up with an employee who knows the right thing to do or say, but doesn’t behave that way in the workplace.
Easy to come up with questions about specific situations and to identify the “ideal” expected responses	Easy for candidates to anticipate questions in certain areas and provide you with that “ideal” answer.

Finding the Right Mix

Because different types of questions get at different aspects of suitability, you sometimes need to ask a two or three-part question and combine the different types of questions in order to obtain a full picture of each candidate’s suitability.

Generally, a behavioral-based question will assess both personal and technical suitability as the behavioral based question involves the use of multiple questions and probing. Situational questions and fact gathering questions often need to be used together or in combination with a behavioral based question and/or probing in order to obtain a full picture of each candidate’s suitability.

Examples of Combining Questions

Situational Question

“ If you had a problem, how would you go about solving it?”

As this question does not assess Personal Suitability, probing or a follow up behavioral-based question is required, for example:

“Please describe a situation where you used this approach to solve a problem. What was the problem? Who was involved? What role did you play? What was the end result?...”

Fact Gathering Question

“Describe the Legislative Initiatives Process”.

As this question does not assess Personal Suitability, probing or a follow up behavioural-based question is required, for example:

“Describe a Legislative Initiative that you were involved with. What was your role? Who else was involved? Who was consulted? What was the outcome? What did you learn? What might you do differently next time?”