

# mastering the art of interviewing and selection

## a manager's guide to getting the interview and selection process right

### Why is the interview and selection process so important?

As a line manager it's your responsibility to get the interview and selection process right and to positively represent your organisation as an employer of choice.

A well-managed interview and selection process means that you're more likely to select the best person for the role and for the organisation.

The interview is the most commonly used selection technique and, if used appropriately, is one of the most powerful predictors of work performance of potential employees.

The interview provides you the opportunity to:

- meet the potential employee;
- gauge the applicant's ability to meet the requirements of the current role, and possible future tasks, through a variety of interviewing techniques; and
- determine whether the applicant has the right personal attributes to fit your organisation and team.

Interviews, when combined with other assessment activities such as work sample or job knowledge testing, psychometric (attitude and cognitive) testing, and a rigorous reference checking process, provide you with a comprehensive assessment of an applicant's ability to do the role and their fit within your organisation.

### What does this document cover?

This document is a guide for any line manager who has to recruit staff. It complements the State Services Authority's (SSA) *Best Practice Recruitment and Selection Toolkit* and *24 Recruitment Myths and Facts* (both available at [www.ssa.vic.gov.au](http://www.ssa.vic.gov.au)).

This document comprises the following:

1. [Preparing for the interview](#)
2. [Conducting the interview](#)
3. [Other assessment techniques](#)
4. [Reference checking](#)
5. [Rating an applicant overall](#)
6. [Making the choice](#)

*This document is a guide only. It does **not** replace departmental or agency policy.*

You are responsible for ensuring the selection process is as strong as possible to reduce the potential risk of a poor recruitment decision.

When preparing for the selection process consider the following tasks: who should be involved in the process; preparing for and conducting interviews; and the use of other assessment techniques such as work sample/job knowledge testing and cognitive testing.

It is good practice to use a consistent rating methodology

for applicants. This usually involves developing a rating scale and weightings for each of the key selection criteria.

You should also consider whether a second or third interview will be required, particularly for senior roles, and who should be involved in those interviews.

Templates to assist you in the selection process are included in the *Best Practice Recruitment and Selection Toolkit* available on the SSA website ([www.ssa.vic.gov.au](http://www.ssa.vic.gov.au)).

## Who should be on the selection and interview panel?

As the line manager, you play a lead role on the selection and interview panel. Why? You have the in-depth knowledge of the role you're recruiting for and are best placed to identify strong candidates because of your involvement in the job analysis and

design process (see *Getting Recruitment Right*, SSA 2011).

When forming the selection panel, ensure you have panel members with the necessary knowledge of the role and work environment and interviewing skills. This can include other senior managers or team members.

## 2

## 1. Preparing for the interview

A structured interview which uses behavioural interview questions, is the most effective way to assess candidate capabilities and find the right person for the job.

### What is a structured interview?

A structured interview involves:

- using your key selection criteria, developed during the job analysis process, as the basis for your interview questions;
- asking each applicant job-related questions;
- using a rating scale to score responses; and
- interviewers individually summing their ratings.

A structured interview provides a fair and documented process which helps you to make a final selection decision.

### What are behavioural interview questions?

These questions allow an applicant to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and attributes through examples of past

behaviour. This technique is based on the assumption that past behaviour predicts future behaviour.

When using this type of questioning, ask an applicant to provide their response in a STAR (**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult) format. This will allow you to easily record and score the applicant's response against the key selection criteria.

Interview questions should be behaviourally-oriented, or a combination of behavioural, follow-up, theoretical, open ended and closed questions. You should base your questions on the key selection criteria developed within the job analysis and position description process.

Remember to go over the questions with the panel prior to the interview to ensure everyone agrees on the questions, who will be asking them and what you are looking for in responses from the candidate.

### Some common interview questions

| Types of interview questions  | Example   |
|---|---|
| <b>Behavioural questions</b> seek examples of past behaviour.   | <i>Tell me about a situation when you have had to work in a team.<br/>Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a complicated problem.</i>   |
| <b>Follow up questions</b> probe the candidate for further information.   | <i>What was your specific role within the team?<br/>How did you resolve that problem?<br/>What was the outcome?</i>   |
| <b>Theoretical questions</b> ask candidates what they would do in a situation.  | <i>You're alone in the office when the Minister's office calls seeking information on something you are unfamiliar with. What do you do?</i>  |
| <b>Open-ended questions</b> allow the applicant to provide a full answer to a question, avoiding yes or no responses.   | <i>What kind of research methodologies did your last role require?<br/>Why are you interested in this role or organisation?<br/>What are the priorities or public deliverables affecting this organisation?<br/>What do you think are some of the challenges this organisation faces in delivering its services to the community?</i> |
| <b>Closed questions</b> lead to a simple yes or no response.<br><i>Use this type of question sparingly. It is best used for clarifying information provided by the candidate.</i> | <i>Does your research experience include quantitative methods?<br/>Can you do pivot tables in Microsoft Excel?</i>  |

## 2. Conducting the interview

### Opening the interview

It's your responsibility to provide an open, respectful and safe interview environment, where applicants are more likely to actively participate and share in-depth information.

Start the interview by spending a few moments introducing each of the panel members and explaining why they're part of the panel. Provide information about the interview process, such as:

- The panel will take notes to record the interview.
- The panel will ask behaviour-oriented questions in which the applicant will provide examples from their past experiences.
- Some questions may be difficult and that you are

prepared to give the applicant extra time to answer these questions. They can also skip questions and come back to them later without penalty.

You should also ask the applicant if they have any questions before getting started.

At this stage, it's a good idea to ask any questions you or the panel may have regarding the applicant's CV. These questions may relate to gaps in employment, organisational information, or any vague claims in the application.

This initial stage should take a maximum of 10 minutes. Remember the interview is about the candidate, not the entire history of your organisation.

### Keep things moving in the right direction

There are a number of ways you can manage the interview and keep answers focused on relevant information. Gentle cues can be used to direct an applicant to specific areas of information.

This often involves using their name to gain their attention followed by the specific area you wish to discuss.

For example:

- "Paul, excuse me for interrupting, but you mentioned a monthly report you produced for the CEO. Can you tell me more about that?"
- "The example you have just provided was just the kind of response we need. Can you structure your response to

the next question in the same way?"

- "Sally, I am conscious of time and you have provided us with some great examples. Do you mind if we move on to the next area?"
- "Paul, you keep providing examples of how the team managed a particular project. What specific role or task did you manage?"

It is important that you respond to an applicant's responses in an encouraging way. It may also be necessary to provide some reassurance, especially if they are providing negative information about a particular situation; for example, assuring them that their responses will remain confidential.

### Closing the interview

In closing the interview it's important to ask the applicant if they have anything they would like to add.

Bear in mind that the applicant is also assessing you and your organisation. Before closing the interview give the applicant an opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the role, your organisation, the team they may be working with, salary and leave provisions, starting dates, etc.

When closing the interview provide the applicant information

on the next steps in the process, including whether a second or even a third interview may be required before a decision is made and the approximate time frames for making a selection decision.

It is critical to give the applicant reasonable and realistic time frames. **But remember: strong applicants don't hang around for very long.**

Don't forget to thank the candidate for coming in and for responding to the interview questions.

## 3. Other assessment techniques

You should consider using other assessment techniques, in combination with an interview, to ensure the right appointment.

### Work sample / job knowledge assessment

Work sample tests assess an individual's ability to actually perform the role. These tests are based on practice rather than knowledge based, for example: writing, reading a profit and loss statement, analysis of text or brief development.

Job knowledge tests help to measure critical knowledge or skill areas needed to perform in a role, e.g. IT programming, accounting principles and professional/occupational skills.

### Psychometric assessment

This usually involves assessing a combination of personality, cognitive ability, work style and motivation. Cognitive ability is sometimes referred to as general mental ability, and is

viewed as the most important predictor of work performance. Testing for cognitive ability shows an individual's capacity to gain job knowledge. The higher an individual rates on the testing, the better and faster they are at acquiring job knowledge and processing complex information quickly and accurately.

It's important to note that all psychometric assessments should be administered and interpreted by a qualified professional (i.e. a psychologist or an accredited human resources professional).

Using a combination of these assessment techniques and an interview can significantly enhance the selection process and increase the likelihood of a successful appointment.

If you do decide to use another assessment technique as part of the process, ensure you advise applicants in advance. **No one likes surprises at an interview.**

## 4. Reference checking

Reference checking is a powerful tool for gaining an accurate impression of an applicant's ability to perform in a role.

You should always conduct reference checks in the same way you would a structured, behaviour oriented interview.

Referee questions should be specific and job related and you should include questions related to behaviours, such as an applicant's ability to motivate and lead, work within

a team, actively participate and empathise with others.

Don't be afraid to probe for more information or to ask the referee whether the applicant performance issues or has had has been the subject of any grievances.

If you can gather accurate and balanced information (that addresses both positives and negatives) from several previous employers, colleagues and stakeholders, you will greatly increase your chances of avoiding costly mistakes and appointing people who will perform well.

## 5. Rating an applicant overall

Once the interviewing, testing and the reference checks have been completed, it's time to start rating the applicant's overall performance throughout the selection process.

Using a numerically based rating system throughout the recruitment and selection process helps to determine the best applicants for the role.

The example of a template (below) that can be used to combine the scores on each selection method and arrive at an overall score for an applicant is provided within the *Best Practice Recruitment and Selection Toolkit* available on the SSA website ([www.ssa.vic.gov.au](http://www.ssa.vic.gov.au)).

| Applicant Name: Mary Smith            |  |                                  |                                  |                        |                      |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--|
|                                       | KSC 1                                  | KSC 2                            | KSC 3                            | KSC 4                  | KSC 5                | Comments   |
| Assessment Technique                  | Demonstrated ability to manage budgets | Knowledge of financial modelling | Relevant tertiary qualifications | Flexible and adaptable | Ability to negotiate | Below are summarised examples only   |
| Application form                      |  |                                  | 4/5                              |                        |                      | Mary has a relevant background and has produced evidence of requisite qualifications.  |
| Interview                             |  | 4/5                              |                                  | 4/5                    | 4/5                  | Mary demonstrated her knowledge of financial modelling through her response to the relevant behavioural interview questions. She also demonstrated through her response that she is adaptable. |
| Cognitive and numerical testing       | 3/5                                    | 4/5                              |                                  | 4/5                    | 4/5                  | Mary's assessment results were in the above average range, therefore demonstrating numerical reasoning abilities.  |
| Reference checks                      | 4/5                                    | 4/5                              | 4/5                              | 3/5                    | 4/5                  | Mary's referees responses verified her abilities across all KSCs and enthusiastically endorsed her as a valuable employee.   |
| Overall score (average of KSC scores) |  |                                  |                                  |                        |                      | Overall, Mary presented as a high calibre applicant who should be seriously considered for this role.  |
| Development areas                     |  |                                  |                                  |                        |                      |  |

## 6. Making the choice

Once a preferred applicant has been identified, move to the negotiation and offer stage. This doesn't mean that the appointment has been finalised or that you cease to be in selection mode.

This stage may uncover areas of concern not evident before. Some things you should look for are: an applicant's expectations not matching the role being offered, for

example, wanting to cut certain accountabilities, or an applicant behaving unreasonably during negotiations, such as trying to renegotiate employment policies clearly articulated at interview.

If these situations occur you may need to undertake further assessment of an applicant's suitability for the role and your organisation.

## SSA publications that may be of interest:

- Best Practice Recruitment and Selection Toolkit
- Getting Recruitment Right
- 24 Recruitment Myths and Facts
- 21 Secondment Myths and Facts
- Victorian Public Employment Capability Framework Guide and Card Set

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