



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* NORTH CAROLINA  
*at* CHAPEL HILL

# Behavior-Based Interviewing

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Office of Human Resources

Department of Training & Talent Development

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## Interviewing and the Law

There are many important legal guidelines to follow when preparing for an interview. It is important to be prepared, to only ask questions related to the position, and to structure your interview so that all interviews are similar and you do not ask unrelated or illegal questions. Even the well-planned interview can be legally questioned. Consequently, it is very important for each interviewer to attempt to conduct a reliable and valid interview, and to communicate effectively the skills required for the job. Certain questions not related to the job are likely to result in discrimination charges from unsuccessful candidates.

Questions should not be asked about the following categories:

- Sex
- Race
- Color
- Religion
- National Origin
- Disability
- Family
- Child care
- Marital status
- Clubs
- Social organizations
- Age

Arrests (you may ask about felony convictions)

The following chart helps interviewers distinguish legal from illegal inquiries when seeking information during the interview process. Any question not job related may be unlawful if the information obtained is used in a discriminating manner.

Subject	DO NOT ASK	YOU MAY ASK
Sex	Are you male or female?	None.
Residence	Do you rent or own? Give names and relationships of persons living with you.	What is your present address?
Race/Color	What is your race? What color is your hair, eyes or skin?	None
Age	What is your date of birth? How old are you?	If hired, can you provide proof you are at least 18 years of age?
National Origin	What is your ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage, or nationality? What is your native language? What is the nationality of your spouse?	What languages do you speak or write fluently? (Do not ask unless strictly job related.)

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# Behavior Based Interviewing



## Introduction

### What Is Behavior Based Interviewing? (BBI)

1. Behavior based interviewing focuses the interview on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities that are job related. The interviewer prepares and poses questions to applicants/candidates about past work behaviors, experiences, and performance and the applicants'/candidates' responses will provide the interviewer with an understanding of how the applicants/candidates would react or respond in similar situations in the future performance of their duties.
2. This approach to interviewing is based on the belief that past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance. The interviewer may consider work experience, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, school projects, and personal experiences as examples of past behavior.
3. BBI provides both the interviewer and the applicant/candidate the advantage of judging whether there is a match between the applicant's/candidate's qualifications and the employer's needs.
4. BBI is an improvement over the traditional interviewing style that is often based on general impressions and personality traits of the applicant/candidate (a gut feeling).
5. BBI questions are usually open-ended and designed to encourage discussion and description - not simply a yes or no answer by the applicant.

**Examples of Traditional Questions  
(Closed-ended Yes/No answers)**

1. Did you like your last job?
2. Was your supervisor helpful to you?
3. Did you use problem solving methods?
4. Can you write well?
5. Do you know how to use a computer?
6. Are you loyal to the organization?
7. Are you goal oriented?

**Examples of BBI Style Questions  
(Open-ended encourages  
discussion/description)**

1. Tell me about your last job.
2. Give me an example of a time you disagreed with your supervisor.
3. Describe a time when you were faced with a problem that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
4. Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation you have completed.
5. Describe your use of the computer in your work.
6. Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you disagreed.
7. Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and how you went about reaching that goal.



## Why Use The BBI Interviewing Method?

1. BBI brings consistency and fairness to hiring, and promotion decisions.
2. BBI interview sessions are consistent. Each candidate is asked the same series of questions. These questions are targeted to the work history and behaviors in various settings to elicit information about real-life situations and are specifically related to the job. By structuring the interviews in this way, the applicants are fairly and consistently evaluated and judged on their responses to the SAME questions.
3. BBI increases the chances of success in selecting the “best” person for the job while helping to reduce employee turnover and dissatisfaction.
4. BBI helps improve overall productivity, morale and organizational success through selection of the best job applicants.
5. BBI is an interview method that is based on more than a “gut” feeling and on more than simply worker claimed personality traits such as "I'm dependable" or "I'm a hard worker" or even "You can count on me.”
6. BBI utilizes the principle that the way a person handled specific job situations in the past is the best predictor of how he/she will handle similar job situations in the future.
7. BBI can best assess the applicant's skills in required competency areas and the applicant's potential for future competency success and development.
8. BBI is a critical step toward building a work force that reflects the University's mission, vision, values, and goals.

## **How Behavior Based Interviewing Differs From the Traditional Interviewing Method**

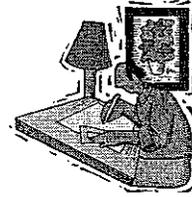
The traditional method of interviewing job applicants included asking questions that demonstrated the applicant's ability to communicate and to describe specific or related job skills and education. Although this method has served well for many years, it falls short in identifying the applicant's past work behavior and in predicting their future job behavior, performance, and success.

The Behavior Based Interviewing method (BBI) focuses on how the applicant has handled specific job situations in the past that are related to the current job opening. Knowing how an applicant handled past situations is the best predictor of how they will most likely handle similar situations in the future. Behaviors are difficult to change once established (habits) and tend to continue throughout the life of an individual. Behavior Based Interviewing provides clarity about the potential success of an applicant as well as consistency and fairness to promotion and hiring decisions.

## Developing Behavior Based Interviewing Questions

BBI questions are designed to elicit three factors:

- A specific situation relative to a job element
- An action taken
- The result or outcome of the action



### Developing Basic BBI Questions

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
<b>Start your question with a phrase that asks for specificity</b>	<b>Add a statement that relates to a specific job element</b>	<b>Expand the question to ask for actions</b>	<b>Finish the question by asking for outcomes or results</b>
Give a specific example	of how you dealt with a difficult person.	What did you do and say?	What was their response?
Tell about a time when	you had many work projects at the same time.	What steps did you take to get them all done?	What was the outcome?
Describe an instance when	you handled a stressful situation.	What verbal and non-verbal communication techniques did you use?	What was the outcome?

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## Sample Questions for Generic Job Elements

<b>Job Element</b>	<b>Question</b>
Teamwork	Describe a situation where others working with you disagreed with your ideas. What did you do? What was the outcome?
Application of Knowledge	Give an example of when you used your training in (area of knowledge) to a work situation. What was the outcome or result? What would you do differently if you had to do it again?
Work Standards	Describe a time when you were not satisfied with your work performance. What was the reason? What did you do about it?
Communication	Tell of a time when something you said was not understood in the manner you intended. How did you interpret the miscommunication? What did you do about the situation?
Organization	Give examples of how you determine priorities on a busy workday.
Prioritizing	Give an example of a time when you didn't prioritize well.
Customer Service	Tell of the most difficult customer service situation you ever had to handle. Tell what you did and said and what was the outcome?
Working with Supervisors	Tell about your experience with the best supervisor you ever had. What made them the best? What about a difficult situation with a supervisor?

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### Generic Questions About Possible Work Conditions

<b>Environment</b>	<b>Question – Start with statement about the work environment then add question</b>
High Stress Environment	The (area) is a high stress environment. Tell us your experience with working in a stressful environment. How did you handle the stress? How did you know when you reached a point of overload? What did you do at this point?
Overtime	This job requires occasional overtime. Tell us about a time when you had to work a significant amount of overtime. How did you cope with that?

## Getting Additional Details

Behavioral questions may include other phrases to elicit more detail:

- Who was involved in the situation?
- If you had to repeat your actions in a similar situation, would you do anything differently?
- What did you learn from this situation?
- How did others respond to your actions?
- How well do you think you did?

Sometimes behavioral questions are effective if phrased to elicit responses that describe unfavorable situations.

- Describe a situation where you were “in over your head.” What made you realize you were in trouble? What did you do? What did this teach you about the boundaries of your role?”

To ask for contrary evidence, first ask a question related to a job factor, for example, teamwork.

- Think of a time when you were instrumental in developing a team project. What was your role and what was the outcome?

Then ask another question that elicits contrary evidence.

- Think of a time when you were instrumental in developing a team project that did not succeed. What was your role? Why do you think the team project did not succeed?



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## **Resources**

Employment Consultants, UNC Office of Human Resources  
HR Connect: <http://hrconnect.unc.edu> (Find your department's consultant)

UNC Classification/Compensation and Employment Office  
<http://hr.unc.edu/classification-compensation/index.htm>

UNC EEO/ADA Office (Equal Employment Opportunity/American with Disabilities Act)  
<http://equalopportunity-ada.unc.edu/index.htm>

### **Other Classes Offered through Training & Development**

<https://itsapps.unc.edu/TrainDev/>

- Interviewing Skills for Supervisors – August 6, 2013 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- SPA Classification and Compensation Management
- SPA Hiring: From Posting Through Probation

