

Five key questions that standardise the job interview



By [Kirsten Halcrow](#)

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There are five key standard questions for recruitment managers to gain the best understanding of job candidates and to weed out those who are unacceptable risks. Asking standard questions has several advantages. They allow for a consistent process so that all applicants are subjected to the same questions and take the pressure off interviewers because questions are written out for them and can indicate that these standard company policy questions are asked of everyone.

One of the goals of an interviewer is to help foster an environment where a potential employee understands and accepts the goals and direction of the organisation. In order to assist in the process, there are five suggested, critical interview questions every employer or hiring manager should be trained to ask.

Of course, an employer would not want to get the interviewer off on the wrong foot with questions aimed at past criminal conduct or negative employment experiences. Every interview, however, does have a 'housekeeping' portion where the following questions are appropriate.

The questions are:

1. Our company has a standard policy of conducting background checks on all applicants before an offer is made or finalised. You have already signed a consent form. Do you have any concerns about that?

This is a general question about screening. Since the applicant has signed a consent form, there is a powerful incentive to be honest and reveal any issues.

2. We also check for criminal records for all finalists. Do you have any concerns about that?

This question goes from the general to the specific. Be sure to ask the question in a form that is legally permissible. Again, make sure the applicant understands that he or she has signed a release and this is standard company policy.

3. When we talk to your past employers, what do you think they will say?

Note the question says: "when we contact your past employers", indicating that they will be contacted. This general question again provides a powerful incentive to be very accurate.

4. Will your past employers tell us that there was an issue with (e.g., tardiness, meeting job requirements, etc.)?

This question goes again to a specific area. Ask detailed questions about matters that are expressly relevant to the job opening that you are trying to fill.

5. Tell me about any unexplained gaps in your employment history.

If there are any unexplained employment gaps, it is imperative to ask about them.

'Lie detector'

Since applicants have signed consent forms and believe you are doing checks, applicants have a powerful incentive to be truthful. These questions are the equivalent of a 'New Age lie detector test'.

Very few employers administer actual lie detector tests as this is quite a costly process. These questions, however, serve a valuable function by providing a strong motivation to applicants to be self-revealing.

It also takes advantage of the natural human trait to want to have some control over what others say about you. If an applicant believes that an employer may hear negative information from a past employer, the applicant may want to be able to set the record straight (at least in the applicant's mind) before the employer has the chance to hear negative information from someone else.

Good applicants will shrug them off and applicants with something to hide may reveal vital information. The latter may react in a number of different ways. Some applicants may tough it out during the first question. But since the questions are designed to go from the general to the specific, by the second question, an applicant may well begin to express concerns or react in some way that raises a red flag. An applicant may object to the questions by asking if the questions invade their privacy rights.

If an applicant raises such an objection, then simply indicates that these are standard job-related questions asked of all applicants.

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