

Interview Questions Do's & Don'ts

It is recommended that a list of questions be developed prior to scheduling any interviews and that all applicants for the same position be asked the same questions (i.e., judged by the same standard). This method reduces institutional and individual liability, provided the questions are legal. An EO&D representative may be called to participate in or assist in any faculty search and/or recruitment process as a consultant and/or to monitor compliance.

Name

Appropriate: "Is there any other name used for work or school that we should know in order to check on your work and education record? If yes, please provide a list." This is best asked at point of serious consideration.

Inappropriate: Inquiries about the name that would indicate applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin or descent. Inquiries into previous name of applicant where it has been changed by court order, marriage, or otherwise.

Marital and Family Status

Appropriate: Whether applicant can meet specified work schedules is the only acceptable inquiry.

Inappropriate: Any inquiries indicating whether an applicant is married, single, divorced, engaged, dating, etc.

Age

Appropriate: Only applies in relation to hiring a minor. Not relevant at UT Houston.

You can ask:

- When the applicant graduated from high school.
- For dates of employment in each job held.
- Young people for proof that they are over the minimum age required for working papers.
- Applicant if they are under 18.

Inappropriate: Requirement that applicant produce proof of age in the form of birth certificate or baptismal record.

You cannot ask:

- For date of birth.
- Applicant their age.
- Use terms such as boy, girl, young or designate a preference for a specific age group (if it excludes persons over 40 years of age) when advertising job opportunities.

Citizenship

Appropriate: Statement that if hired, applicant may be required to submit proof of citizenship is acceptable, only if previously required in the position description and if approved through Human Resources or EO/AA office. Upon hire, all students, staff and faculty will be required to provide proof of eligibility to work in U.S., as required by the INS.

Inappropriate: “Of what country are you a citizen?” Whether applicant or his/her parents or spouse are naturalized or native born U.S. citizens. Date when applicant or parents or spouse acquired U.S. citizenship. Requirement that applicant produce his naturalization papers. Naturalization plans.

Disabilities

Appropriate: If applicant indicates that he/she is reasonably able to perform the essential functions of the job and is qualified, there should be no inquiry regarding disabilities.

Inappropriate: General inquiries (i.e., “Do you have any disabilities?”), which would tend to divulge disabilities or health conditions.

If applicant indicates he/she requires an accommodation to perform job duties and may be otherwise qualified, ask what accommodation is necessary and inform him/her that the request will be taken into consideration. Immediately after the interview, notify the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity.

Ancestry or National Origin

Appropriate: Languages applicant reads, speaks or writes fluently, if job related only. Must be included in position description if required.

You can ask:

- What languages do you speak fluently?
- Do you have the legal right to work in the United States and for what period of time? (You may ask for proof of this).
- Name and address of the person to be notified in case of emergency (You may ask after job offer).

Inappropriate: Inquiries into Applicant’s lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, birthplace, or mother Tongue. National origin of applicant’s parents or spouse.

You cannot ask:

- What country are you a citizen of?
- Are you a naturalized or a native born citizen?
- The applicant to produce their naturalization papers.
- About the applicant’s lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent parentage or nationality.
- What language the applicant commonly uses.
- The name of any relative, such as parents, spouse, or minor children.

Education

Appropriate: Applicant's academic credentials, vocational, or professional education. School attended. Inquiry into language skills such as reading, speaking, and writing foreign Languages, if job related only.

Inappropriate: Inquiry concerning racial or religious affiliation of a school. How foreign language ability was acquired is not permissible.

Experience

Appropriate: Applicant's work experience.

Conviction, Arrest and Court Record

Appropriate: Inquiry into actual convictions. Note: If conviction record is declared, this is not automatically a reason for rejecting the applicant. This should be discussed with the EO/AA Officer.

Inappropriate: Any inquiry relating to arrests. Ask or check into a person's arrest, court, or conviction record if not a bona fide qualification.

Relatives

Appropriate: Where required by Regents Rules, names of applicant's relatives already employed by UT Houston or the UT System.

Inappropriate: Name or address of any relative of adult applicant.

Sex

Appropriate: No inquiry is acceptable at UT Houston.

You cannot ask:

- Do you have children? If so, how old are they?
- Are you married, single, widowed, divorced?
- What does your spouse do for a living?
- Who lives in your household?

Inappropriate Sex of the applicant. Any other inquiry that would indicate sex. Sex is not a bona fide occupational qualification at UT Houston.

You cannot ask: *All Female applicants:*

- About their thoughts on career vs. marriage.
- About their husband's job or career plans.
- What was your maiden name?
- If they can type, unless typing is a requirement of the job.
- What kind of childcare arrangements do you have?
- Are you planning to have a family?
- What kind of birth control methods do you use?

Race or Color

Appropriate: No inquiry is acceptable at UT Houston

Inappropriate: Applicant's race, color of applicant's skin, eyes, hair, etc., or other questions directly or indirectly indicating race or color. Applicant's height or weight.

Address or Duration of Residence

Appropriate: Applicant's address, if required for clarification purposes.

Inappropriate: Specific inquiry into foreign addresses which would indicate national origin. Names or relationship of persons with whom applicant resides. Whether applicant owns or rents home.

Birthplace

Appropriate: Upon hire can you submit proof that you are legally eligible to work in U.S.?

Inappropriate: Birthplace of applicant. Birthplace of applicant's parents, spouse, or other relatives. Requirement that applicant submit a birth certification, naturalization or baptismal record before employment. Any other inquiry to indicate or identify nationality or customs.

Military

Appropriate: Type of education and experience in service as it relates to a particular job.

Inappropriate: Type of discharge. Any political discussion on military intervention.

Photograph

Appropriate: May only be required after hiring for identification purposes.

Inappropriate: Request photograph before hiring. Requirement that applicant affix a photograph to her/his application.

Notice in Case of Emergency

Appropriate: Names of persons to be notified in case of accident or emergency. May be asked only after hire.

Credit Rating

Appropriate: No questions are appropriate.

Inappropriate: Any questions concerning credit rating, charge accounts, etc.

References

Appropriate: : “By whom were you referred for a position here?” Names of persons willing to provide professional and/or character references for applicant.

Inappropriate Require the submission of a religious reference. Request reference from applicant’s pastor.

Organizations and Religion

Appropriate: Inquiry into professional, or job-related organizations of which an applicant is a member, providing the name or character of the organization does not reveal the race, religion, color, or ancestry of the membership. What offices are held, if any? Simultaneously mention that the applicant should not name any organizations that may disclose race, religion, national origin or disability if this question is asked.

You can ask:

- What days or hours would you be unable or unwilling to work?

Inappropriate: The names of organizations to which the applicant belongs, if such information would indicate through character or name, the race, religion, color, or ancestry of the membership should not be asked.

You cannot ask:

- What is your religion?
- Are you able to work on Saturdays and/or Sundays because employers are inquired to make “reasonable accommodation” for an employee’s religious observance or practice so long as it does not cause “undue hardship” on the conduct of the employer’s to make it almost impossible to claim.
- What church do you attend?
- Do you believe in prayer in school?

Miscellaneous

Appropriate: Notice to applicants that any misstatement or omissions of acts in the application may be cause for dismissal.

Questions You May Ask:

Questions related to past jobs:

- What was your boss's title and what was your boss's function?
- Tell me about the people you hired in your last job. How long did they stay with you, and how did they work out?
- What is the most important accomplishment, achievement or innovation you brought to your present (past) job?
- Exactly what were you responsible for in your old job?
- Describe a typical day on the job?
- Did you ever initiate any changes in the way the work was performed?
- What kind of problems did you encounter on your job? How did you solve these problems?
- What did you like most about your job?
- What did you like least about your job?
- Was your work ever criticized? If so, in what way? Did you improve?
- What was your reason for leaving?
- What kind of a company was () to work for?
- If you could change anything you wanted to about that company, what would it be?
- Of all of your previous jobs, which one did you like the best? The least?

Questions related to motivation:

- Why did you select this type of work?
- What do you want to be doing three years from now?
- What do you want to be doing ten years from now?
- What do you want to be earning two years from now?
- What do you hope to gain from an organization like ours?

Questions related to stability:

- I notice that you are/were working for (). Why did you decide to work there?
- What was your original career objective?
- How have your original career plans changed over the years?

Questions related to resourcefulness:

- When you ran into a problem you couldn't solve, whom did you go to?
- How did you change the scope of your previous job?
- What was the most difficult work problem you have ever encountered and how did you solve it?

Ability to work under direction of others:

- How well do you think your supervisor does his/her job?
- What did your supervisor compliment you for? What did he/she criticize you for?
- How much of your work was done on your own? As a part of a team?
- Which aspect did you enjoy more and why?
- How would you supervise people if you were the supervisor?

Personal beliefs and self-evaluation:

- What do you feel are your outstanding qualities?
- What are your two weakest points as an employee?
- If you had a problem or a complaint on your previous job, how did you handle it?
- Do you think that by handling it in this way that it was successfully resolved?
- Why did you like or dislike this process?

Special questions:

- Did you get annual wage increases? How much? Did you know ahead of time how much they would be?
- What kind of job security did you have? Did people ever get unjustly fired? If so, what could they do about it?
- What method was used to determine the pay rate for a job?
- Were your benefits “spelled out” in writing? How?

Aptitude and Cognition:

- How did you go about making an important decision?
- What are some of the things your company might have done to be more successful?
- Why do you think we should hire you?
- Where do you think the power lies in your company?
- What characteristics might differentiate you from other candidates?