

- Put the applicant at ease. The lower the tension, the more meaningful most of the communication will be. A handshake and friendly smile are a good start.
- Stick to your plan. Follow your list of interview questions and have a time limit for the session. Make sure to ask the prepared core questions of all candidates.
- Listen. Encourage the applicant to do most of the talking, and resist the urge to elaborate on your point of view.
- Complete all of the interviews before evaluating. Avoid indicating how you feel about any responses or other candidates.
- Provide the applicant opportunities to ask questions.
- Disclose basic information that the applicant is sure to weigh if offered the job such as work schedule and location, fringe benefits, responsibility for tools, and when you will be making your decision.
- Rather than committing to a specific wage during the interview, retain flexibility by telling a range of possible pay for the position.
- Take the applicant on a tour of the operation, either before or after the sit-down discussion.

No interview agenda would fit all circumstances, but below is an example of the flow and time frame for interviews at one ranch. Total time for the session is 35 to 50 minutes.

Although job-specific inquiries are the core of a structured interview, some generic questions may fit well into the flow of the conversation and bring out valuable information about the applicant. A list of 20 questions is offered on page 98.

Checking References

Asking former employers or supervisors about applicants can be of some use, though it is usually limited unless capitalizing on trust within an existing relationship. References have gotten more and more bland, as potential informants become sensitive to the increasing frequency of libel and slander suits brought by former employees. Even when a reference holds nothing back, the information provided may not be relevant to an applicant's prospects as an employee in a different job under different conditions.

Information provided by a reference may not be entirely accurate for various reasons besides fear of lawsuit. Friends of an applicant are likely to speak well of him, foes ill. People reached at a former place of employment simply may not have known the applicant or even have access to records that would confirm items like job title and duration. And previous employers have been known to give inferior employees a good reference just to get them to leave.



Twenty questions that could add to any job interview

Getting started

1. Your application (or resumé) looks interesting. Would you bring me up-to-date on your background relevant to possible employment here?

Applicant's view of how job and self fit

2. What is your understanding about the nature of this job?
3. What abilities do you feel are most crucial for success in this job?
4. What parts of this job do you think would be most enjoyable for you?
5. What parts of this job would be least enjoyable?
6. How well does your background prepare you for this job?
7. Where, in what areas of this job, would you need or appreciate additional supervision, training, or patience from us?

More about the applicant's situation and future, not specific to this job

8. What other kinds of jobs are you considering at this time?
9. What do you see as particular strong points in your character or personality?
10. What limitations or weak points may you need to overcome?
11. If someone who knew you very well wanted to describe you as accurately and completely as possible in one minute, what would he or she say?
12. At this point in your life (career), what goals are you aiming for?
13. If you could create your ideal job, what would it be? How would you spend your time?

Previous job experience

14. What have you been particularly praised for or recognized for on other jobs?
15. And what have you been criticized for?
16. In previous jobs, what suggestions have you made that improved the way things were done?
17. What would you say is your proudest accomplishment and your greatest disappointment in your work career so far?

In conclusion, the big picture

18. What other information that we have missed or didn't cover would you want us to know?
19. To sum up, why do you believe you should be hired for this job?
20. And why should you not be hired for this job?

The best use of references is to verify “hard,” objective information first provided as written biographical data (i.e., application or resume) or in the interview. It is useful to know whether statements made or written by the applicant are true; most former employers do not hesitate to disclose the title, responsibilities, and period of employment, plus sometimes the former employee’s reason for leaving.

As in other communications, it is a good idea to listen for the tone as much as the words during a reference check. Is the person enthusiastic in speaking of the employee or is there guarded caution? What did the reference *not* say. “She gave me no problems,” means something different than “She did her job well.” It may take some clairvoyance to decode the real message of such comments as “You’ll be very lucky to get him to work for you,” and “I can recommend her with no qualifications whatsoever.”

If the reference check is by telephone, stating your identity, your purpose, and your appreciation makes for a good start:

Hello. My name is {name}, and I operate {or work for} the {business name}. {Applicant name} has applied for a position as a {job title} in my business. He/she has told me that you know about his/her work. Would you give me a few minutes to discuss his/her employment at your place, and is this a convenient time? Thanks very much.



Making and Communicating the Decision

With all the planning and information gathering involved, employee selection can be quite a project. In most cases it deserves to be, but how extensive any given process should be and how many sources of information to use depend on the job and business circumstances. A decision about a ranch supervisor deserves more investment than a summer helper. No matter what level of job to be filled, however, it is wise practice to avoid relying entirely on information from a single source (e.g., an interview or personal reference).

After whatever combination of paper screening, testing, interviewing, and reference checking is used, decision time arrives. If some considerations about an applicant have not been built into the assessment process, they can be factored in at this point. For example:

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