

Interviewer best practices

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In today's hiring climate, it's more important than ever to be successful at:

1. Attracting talent
2. Cultivating a long-term pipeline of candidates

At Google, we found that the interview (and interviewers in particular) is the biggest driver of a candidate's overall satisfaction with the hiring process, and their interview experience can make or break a decision to accept an offer.

One of the hardest things to do during the interview process is to strike the right balance between assessing the candidate's skills with challenging questions and encouraging the candidate that the company is the right place for them to start or continue a career. For the company, you want to demonstrate the scope of the work and the mission of your company. For candidates, they want to feel like your company is seeking their talent, and that they can make an impact and a home once they join. It's important to remember that candidates are evaluating you as much as you are them.

When interviewing a candidate, there's a lot to remember, but we generally break it down into two categories:

- Questions
- Behavior

Tips for asking questions

Questions should probe based on the attribute you're trying to assess. In general, we try to do the following:

- Open with a behavioral question or “tell me about a time when...” question about the candidate’s experience. This gets them to talk about something they know, and will calm them down before diving into anything related to hypothetical, or more specifically, general knowledge or coding questions.
- Make it clear what we’re looking for when asking the question. A common complaint from candidates is that they weren’t sure what the interviewer wanted from an answer or how much time they should spend trying to figure it out.
- Be flexible. Understand when a candidate is failing and either give a hint to get their thoughts moving or guide the conversation to a different question. If the candidate is taking too long on a single question, gently switch topics. Here’s a good example of this: “To be mindful of time, why don’t we move on to a different topic? We can revisit this if you would like at the end.”
- Overall, be in charge of the time. Leave time for candidate questions and try not to go over, as it will create a lag time for all subsequent interviewers.
- Avoid questions that prompt candidates to reveal information about a protected status:

✗	“Which country are you from?”
✗	“Are you available to work on religious holidays?”
✗	“Do you have a work permit?”
✗	“How did you learn that foreign language?”
✗	Candidate: “What are the best schools in this area?” Interviewer: “How old are your kids?”

Tips for interviewer behavior

An interviewer's attitude is essential to providing a great experience. Interviewers might do hundreds of interviews, but for the candidate this might be their first (and only) interview experience at your company.

During an interview, we think the best way to make the candidate feel comfortable is to be comfortable around them. Here's an interview and candidate experience breakdown, based on a 30, 45, or 60 minute interview.

Interview step	Timing (based on 30, 45 and 60 min interviews)	Actions to take
Introduction	2/5/7 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show up on time • Ask if candidate needs a drink, snack, or restroom break • Sit 90° from candidate and try to grab a view of the door • Introduce yourself and your team • Preface interview with a mention about your note-taking behavior
Questions	20/32/40 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open with a behavioral/experience-based question • Ask questions! • Keep the interview conversational • Frame your questions so candidates know what you're looking for • Be flexible about probing further, moving on, or switching topics • Be aware of your time • Engage with the candidate (make eye contact, nod, etc.)
Candidate questions	5/5/8 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be humble (throughout the interview as well) • Give honest answers, and give the candidate a sense of the role/team
Thank and sell	3/3/5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight the reasons you like working at your company • Try to tie how their skills and interests would fit in well at Google (they need to be able to imagine working here) • Thank the candidate for their time

How to avoid the most common traps

Here is some advice based on the most common themes we see from candidate feedback.

- **Show up on time.** Being late throws off the candidate's confidence, might take away from other interviewers' time, and shows a general lack of respect.
- **Don't start right into the questions!** Candidates and interviewers both often mention this as a negative experience.
- **Make eye contact.** A common complaint from candidates is that the interviewer was buried in note taking. Take thorough notes, but conversational interviews require a high level of interaction.
- **Be humble.** Another common piece of feedback is that interviewers seem like gatekeepers, judging a candidate in a high-pressure situation. No matter the candidate's performance, they should feel like they answered a challenging but role-related question, and that you are working with them to assess their skill, not showing off your own.
- **Reassure the candidate.** Don't let a candidate believe they are failing. Not all candidates will be successful in their interview, but it does not help them to feel like they don't have any chance at success.
 - **Nod or engage with the candidate as they talk through their answer.** Not only does this encourage them, but it shows that you are actively listening to their ideas.
 - **Avoid saying things like "I was actually looking for this answer..." or "you should have thought about the problem this way" – it doesn't help the candidate to know that they failed, and you likely have to move on anyway.**