

How to Develop and Use Behaviour-Based Interview Questions

At McMaster, we strongly support the use of Behaviour-Based Interview Questions. Based on the premise that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour in a similar situation, these interview questions ask candidates to describe a specific example in detail.

Behaviour-based questions do not allow the candidate to speculate on how they would handle a situation, or to provide you with a textbook answer. Although interviews of this nature can take time, there is a reason why they have become standard practice: they allow you to more accurately assess candidates' abilities.

To develop effective behaviour-based interview questions, follow these steps:

1. **Review the job description.** The starting point for effective interview questions is an effective, accurate, and current job description. Read the description carefully, pulling out the major skills, abilities, qualifications, and experience required.
2. **List the major capabilities of the job.** List the core capabilities of the job or McMaster's Core Leadership Capabilities and how they are specifically required in this position.

For example: Communication

- the incumbent will be required to persuade others to cooperate with certain procedures.
- the incumbent will be required to communicate frequently with individuals for whom English is not their first language.
- the incumbent will be required to develop regular communication newsletters to all stakeholders of a particular project.

3. **List the desired behaviour for each capability.** This list will become the criteria against which you will rate each candidate's response.

For example: Communication

- Actively listens
- Seeks to understand others' point of view
- Adjusts communication style appropriately for audience
- Seeks feedback
- Seeks confirmation of understanding
- Communicates with respect
- Treats everyone as a customer
- Chooses the appropriate medium to deliver a message
- Communicates clearly, regularly

4. **Brainstorm.** Develop behaviour-based questions for the key capabilities and qualifications for your vacant position. Contact Human Resources Services for assistance. Come up with a couple of different ways to ask a behaviour-based question that will enable the candidate to provide details and demonstrate their past experience. The questions should not mention the desired behaviour – this is what you want the candidate to articulate through the response.

For example: “Tell us about a time when you were misunderstood”. **OR**
“Tell us about the most difficult message you’ve had to deliver at work”.

5. **List some potential probing questions.** Ask those probing questions only as needed throughout the interview, to help candidates provide complete answers.

For example:

- Who was your audience?
- How did you realize you had been misunderstood?
- What did you do?
- What was the result?
- Would you do anything differently next time?

6. **Answer the questions you have written.** This ensures that the questions you have developed will accurately measure the desired capabilities. Ask a couple of your peers to review the questions as well, to ensure they are clear and direct.
7. **Review questions and criteria with the selection committee.** Before the interview date, meet with your selection committee to review the questions you have developed, as well as the desired behaviours. It is important that all members of the committee understand how each question is being scored.
8. **Determine the weighting of each question.** Allocate percentage weighting to each question in proportion to their importance as criteria for selecting the best candidate. (Optional)

The following are **TIPS** to help you get the best results while using behaviour-based interview questions:

- Give the candidate permission to take their time in thinking of the best example
- Ask for the extremes (the most, the least, the best, the worst)
- Ask a simple and direct question, probe only as necessary
- Avoid giving the answer in the question (or leading the candidate with probing questions)
- Listen for the answer to your questions - you should hear the components of “STAR” (see below for more information)
- Encourage the candidate to provide a specific example
- Rephrase or repeat the question if necessary

The STAR format is a structured manner of responding to a behavior-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation that is being described.

(S) Situation	What was the situation?
(T) Task	What was the candidate required to achieve?
(A) Action	What did the candidate do? NOTE: the candidate needs to describe the action taken and their role even if they are discussing a group project or effort.
(R) Results	What was the outcome of the candidate's actions? Were the objectives met? What was learned from the experience and how has the learning been used since?