Hiring and interview guide
Updated January 2022

This article is a compilation of current thinking on effective outreach and hiring practices, with an eye to building more diverse teams. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but to address some key concepts that a company can build on based on its specific needs.

1. THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Keep it simple. Simpler job descriptions help bring in more candidates and, potentially, more diverse candidates.

> Studies show that while men are likely to apply to jobs for which they meet only 60% of the qualifications, women are much more likely to hesitate unless they meet 100% of the listed requirements. So stick to "must-haves." That said, it's a good idea to cut down your long lists not matter what—one study found that the average jobseeker spends just 49.7 seconds reviewing a listing before deciding it's not a fit.
>
> *5 Must-Do's for Writing Inclusive Job Descriptions*

> The cream of the crop is gone from the job market in just 10 days. However, there's an abundance of great people – you just have to know where to look. About 85% of all the workforce are passive candidates. This means they're not going out of their way to apply for jobs, but they wouldn't mind switching teams if they get the right offer. Passive candidates are put off by lengthy applications, forms, and CVs.
>
> *11 Recruitment Strategies to Attract Top Talent in 2021*

Avoid language that may turn candidates off. Some suggestions:

- Seek the feedback and perspective of current employees to prevent unconscious bias
- Replace gender specific pronouns such as he or she with you or they
- Eliminate gender-coded terms such as ninja, rock star, competitive, patient, guru or nurturing, to name a few
- Avoid lengthy job descriptions that stray from the core fundamentals of the role in which you're hiring
- Use sites such as Textio and Gender Decoder to identify bias and harmful language
- Ensure job ads are jargon-free and easy to read with simple terms, especially for people with dyslexia or autism

> *https://www.forbes.com/sites/heidilynnekurter/2021/01/20/hiring-managers-here-are-4-useful-tips-to-create-more-inclusive-job-descriptions/?sh=7df4c6213586*

Call out commitment to diversity. This makes a more powerful statement than standard "equal opportunity employer" language. Example:

> ***Viacom*** *is an equal opportunity employer. Viacom recruits, employs, trains, compensates and promotes regardless of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, veteran status, and*

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other protected status as required by applicable law. At Viacom, we have a clear vision: to be the place where a [diverse mix of talented people want to come, to stay and do their best work](). We pride ourselves on bringing the best entertainment to our audiences around the world, and we know our company runs on the hard work and dedication of our passionate and creative employees. Viacom's dedication to promoting diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion is clearly reflected in all of our content and across all of our brands. Diversity is more than a commitment at Viacom—it is the foundation of what we do. We are fully focused on equality and believe deeply in diversity of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, national origin and all the other fascinating characteristics that make us different.

https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/job-descriptions/2018/5-must-dos-for-writing-inclusive-job-descriptions

Additionally, it can be helpful to call out **inclusive benefits** like parental leave and childcare subsidies.

Build a performance-based job description.

Revisiting job descriptions is more than altering the language, it's also evaluating the skills and requirements of the position. J.P. Gaston, co-founder, producer and podcast host of [The Biz Dojo](), reminds employers that "every requirement line in your job description is another line of exclusion." One example is, listing "English as a first language" as a requirement when "must be fluent in English" would suffice. Another example is requiring a college degree for a role that doesn't necessarily require college-level skills when equivalent experience would be adequate.

Hosea Chang, chief operating officer at [Hayden Los Angeles](), said, "if you ask for skills, experiences, degrees, and levels of seniority that aren't necessary for success, you'll be reducing your candidate pool and missing out on talented people that would excel in the position you need to fill. He added, instead "focus on performance objectives and what a person needs to be able to do and achieve.

Hiring Managers, Here Are 4 Useful Tips To Create More Inclusive Job Descriptions

2. OUTREACH FOR DIVERSITY

Posting options.

Advertising. Reach out to Hispanic and Black Chambers of Commerce. Advertise in minority media, e.g. Telemundo, Spanish-language radio and newspapers.

LinkedIn: According to a [survey by ADP,]() LinkedIn is the most effective diversity recruitment and sourcing tool . There are millions of groups on LinkedIn for almost every profession. Your recruiters can join, develop long-term relationships with active group members, and post relevant openings or company updates. For instance, Kaiser Permanente has its recruiters join diverse groups on LinkedIn, like female professionals, Latinos, and African Americans. LinkedIn also provides [specific tips for diversity sourcing]().

https://www.rakuna.co/blog/posts/diversity-recruiting-strategy-best-practices/

This article lists organizations that support people of color in STEM, such as the National Society of Black Engineers, SACNAS (Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science) and AISES (American Indian Science and Engineering Society.

11 Professional Organizations That Support People of Color in STEM

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Additional diverse job boards to consider:
- Hire Autism
- Black Career Network
- Diversity Working
- Recruit Disability
- Pink Jobs (highly skilled LGBTQ candidates)
- We Work Remotely
- Career Contessa (ambitious and highly engaged female talent)
- Female Executive Search (C-Suite female candidates)
- 70 Million Jobs (candidates with criminal records)
- Hire Purpose (military spouses, veterans and service members)

Hiring Managers, Here Are 4 Useful Tips To Create More Inclusive Job Descriptions

Existing employee social media networks. Encourage employees, to share job listings via social media, particularly to any networks that may reach more diverse candidates.

State and local organizations. In Colorado, the Minority Business Office is a statewide organization that is part of the Office of Economic Development and International Trade. The MBO also has a list of diverse chambers, business councils, and other organizations that connect with minority, women, and veteran-owned businesses.

Longer-term connections. Over time, having a strong relationship with educational organizations can help build a pool of potential employees. Start with one or two organizations that are a good fit educationally, geographically, or whatever criteria matter most to your company

Build strategic alliances. This site has a wide range of suggestions for organizations to build strategic alliances with, including Historically Black College and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, minority student professional organizations, diversity-focused virtual career fairs (including veterans and people with disabilities).

13 Novel Strategies for Your Next D&I Recruiting Program

Membership organizations include MLT and Jopwell, two platforms that support the advancement of diverse students and professionals.

Increase the pool.

Research featured in the Harvard Business Review found that when the final candidate pool has one minority candidate, he or she has virtually zero chances of getting hired. However, a "two in the pool effect" represents a promising method for overcoming unconscious biases and increasing diversity in the workplace. If there are at least two female candidates in the final candidate pool, the odds of hiring a **female candidate** are **79X** greater. If there are least two minority candidates in the final candidate pool, the odds of hiring a **minority candidate** are **194X** greater.

https://ideal.com/workplace-diversity/

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3. EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWS

Evidence for interview/job success link is limited.

Google's Senior Vice President of People Operations Laszlo Bock:
"Years ago, we did a study to determine whether anyone at Google is particularly good at hiring. We looked at tens of thousands of interviews, and everyone who had done the interviews and what they scored the candidate, and how that person ultimately performed in their job. We found zero relationship." The only thing that works are behavioral interviews, Bock says, where there's a consistent set of questions that ask people what they did in specific situations.

https://www.businessinsider.com/how-google-hires-people-2013-6

Cortina, Goldstein et. al. (2000) find that highly structured interviews add some signal on top of testing cognitive ability + conscientiousness, but that unstructured interviews are almost useless.

https://erikbern.com/2018/05/02/interviewing-is-a-noisy-prediction-problem.html

Consider an upfront writing or skills screening.

This can help weed out candidates quickly. It may be a good use of online hiring tools such as HireVue to ensure a consistent process.
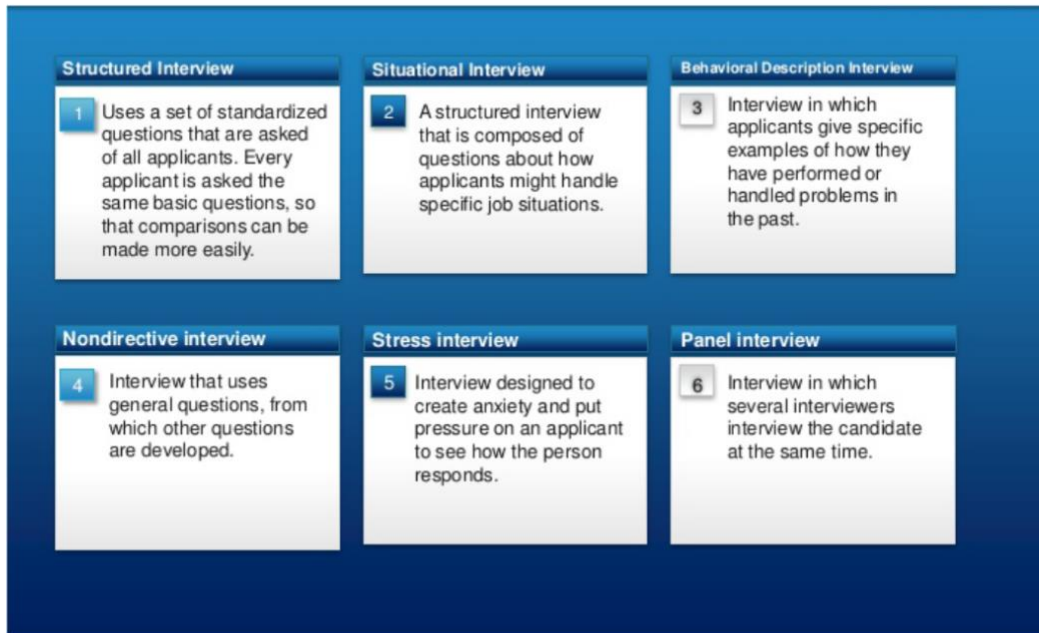
Currently, most companies will do this during the latter part of the recruitment process. But evidence suggests that **beginning with a short skills test not only improves diversity recruiting, it also reduces both time and costs.** This performance-based hiring approach levels the playing field as it works as a 'blind hiring' method that gives everyone an equal chance.

Hundred5 (provides these services)

Types of interviews.

The graphic below gives a good overview of different interview techniques. These techniques are not mutually exclusive. The only one that is recommended **against** by most professionals is the nondirective or unstructured interview, as it can reinforce biases and make it difficult to compare candidates.

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Types of Interviews

Structured Interview	Situational Interview	Behavioral Description Interview
1 Uses a set of standardized questions that are asked of all applicants. Every applicant is asked the same basic questions, so that comparisons can be made more easily.	2 A structured interview that is composed of questions about how applicants might handle specific job situations.	3 Interview in which applicants give specific examples of how they have performed or handled problems in the past.
Nondirective interview	**Stress interview**	**Panel interview**
4 Interview that uses general questions, from which other questions are developed.	5 Interview designed to create anxiety and put pressure on an applicant to see how the person responds.	6 Interview in which several interviewers interview the candidate at the same time.

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Jennifer Hopp, SPHR, SHRM-CP Human Resources Administrator American Board of Anesthesiology

Structured interview: Recommended by most professionals to reduce bias of all types and give an apples-to-apples comparison.

Situational interview: Helpful to include problem-solving questions to see how candidates think on their feet and how much they have prepared and/or know about the field.

Behavioral interview: Requesting examples of when candidates have solved specific questions helps ground the more hypothetical situational questions.

Stress interview: While a stressed-out candidate may not do their best, it can be advisable to use some techniques to strategically keep candidates a little off-balance, as discussed below.

Panel interview: Recommended to obtain diverse feedback, have observers while others ask questions. Three interviewers is generally a good number to avoid overwhelming the candidate. Interviewers may include the prospective boss, that person's supervisor, an HR professional and/or staff who will work directly with the candidate. Multiple interviews can be used to get additional information and/or a broader range of interviewer input.

Preparing the candidate.

It's a good idea to reduce upfront stress on the candidate. Make sure they know where to find you, where to park, and who will be on the interview panel. Some HR executives also recommend providing candidates with an overview of topics to be covered, so they know how best to prepare. Others prefer to see how candidates think on their feet, and don't recommend sharing interview topics up front, or suggest sharing topics only at a high level.

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Preparing the interviewing team.
In addition to the basics, such as having the job description, the candidate resume, and the list of questions to be used, it's helpful for interviewers to have two types of preparatory information:
1. An understanding of the types of **biases** that could influence their preferences and
2. Clarity around types of interview questions, style, and how to intentionally use **a variety of interview styles.**

These are both discussed below.

A checklist can be helpful in clarifying what to prepare and what to include in an interview process.

Other notes:
- Plan on 4-6 questions for 30 minutes, 8-12 questions for 60 minutes.
- Do not make notes regarding the candidate's age, gender, national origin, race, color, sexual orientation, etc.
- In the interview or test, give feedback in a way that resembles the intensity of feedback that's part of the workplace culture. More difficult job interviews have been associated with higher employee satisfaction.
- It's also important to make sure that if multiple interviews are being conducted, each group takes time to review the previous interview stages and build the next set of questions based on what's been learned and what questions remain outstanding. This also helps maintain consistency in the process.
- **Don't talk too much.** The candidate should be talking 80-90% of the time.

Types of bias
While this is not an exhaustive list of potential biases that interviewers may experience, considering these topics will be helpful both in creating more impartial interviews and, in the longer term, in building a culture of inclusivity and self-awareness.

Implicit bias. Much has been written about the challenge of implicit and/or unconscious bias. This short self-test from Harvard provides thought-provoking feedback that can be helpful and can be used for a team discussion.

Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for and interpret information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses. The risk is that you then may give an interview candidate hints or the benefit of the doubt in a way that's no longer impartial.

Recency bias occurs when an interviewer or hiring manager is more affected by the most recent candidates in the interview process.

Primacy bias occurs when an interviewer or hiring manager makes a decision based on information from earlier candidates.

In short and complex interviews, interviewers tend to make their decisions based on the most recent candidates (recency). In contrast, when an interview is particularly long, interviewers become mentally tired and rely on their first impressions to make a decision (primacy). To avoid these types of bias, it can be helpful to record interviews, have each person take substantial notes and review them together, and/or create a rating system for core competencies.

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Jason Berkowitz, currently Business Development Executive of IBM Global Process Services, says "Don't use the interview to try to validate a good or bad snap judgement [of a candidate]. Hiring managers should actually try to disprove their initial impression. If you like someone off the bat, look for reasons they aren't right for the job. If you dislike someone, look for reasons why they are right for the job".

https://www.socialtalent.com/blog/recruitment/7-interview-mistakes-every-employer-makes

A trick to make more neutral judgments is to ask: *what would I have to see in order for me to change my mind about this candidate?* If I start out super excited about a candidate, and they nail three questions in a row, then I try to bring out devil's advocate: maybe this person lacks something else? And I switch to some completely different topic. Conversely if someone doesn't do well, think of a hypothetical question where they might win you back. Always try to poke holes in your own judgment.

Interviewing is a noisy prediction problem

Interview questions.

Assuming that the interview will be structured and steer toward questions that will help you assess a candidate's likely performance, the interview should emphasize problem-solving questions, both situational ("What would you do to deal with X?") and behavioral ("When did you solve X problem?"). The sample questions below also address cultural fit and emotional intelligence.

Sample questions

Develop interview questions by compiling a list of required attributes. Look at your top performers. What do they have in common? How are they resourceful? What did they accomplish prior to working at your organization? What roles did they hold? Those answers will help you create criteria and enable you to construct relevant questions.

https://hbr.org/2015/01/how-to-conduct-an-effective-job-interview

Invite job candidates to write a one-page solution to a problem that involves a diversity challenge at work. You will get different perspectives, ideas, answers and you can see someone trying help solve a problem. Encourage people to solve problems with others in writing. It will give you an unusual idea into their ability to work with diverse backgrounds. *Forbes*

Ask the candidate how s/he learns and for his/her thoughts on where your industry is going. "No one can predict the future, but you want someone who is thinking about it every day."

Explain a problem your team struggles with and ask the candidate to walk you through how she would solve it. Or describe a process your company uses, and ask her to identify inefficiencies. Go back to your list of desired attributes. If you're looking for an executive who will need to influence a large number of people over whom he won't have formal power, ask: "Have you ever been in a situation where you had to persuade other people who were not your direct reports to do something? How did you do it? And what were the consequences?"

https://hbr.org/2015/01/how-to-conduct-an-effective-job-interview

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When you picture your best qualities, what are they and when did you live them in the workplace? This question is a great way to assess how self-aware your candidate is, and it can be an indicator of emotional intelligence or EQ. *https://hbr.org/2013/05/separating-the-winners-from-th*

Think back to a time when you worked with a person, or group of people, who prioritized and rewarded team success over individual success. Give me a specific example of when this caused an issue for you and how you managed it. *Fast Company*

Performance-based questions
Once you put your list of performance objectives in priority order ask the candidate this question, **"Can you describe your most significant career accomplishment related to (top priority)?** Spend about 15 minutes on this question, gaining insight into the results achieved, the competencies and skills used, the environment and culture, and the process used to achieve the results. Then ask this same question again for all of the other performance objectives. This will determine fit with the job and if you plot the accomplishments over time the trend line reveals consistency, growth and potential." (Behavioral question)

The second question is entirely different. It goes something like this:
"One of the biggest challenges in this job is (provide short description). If you were to get the job, how would you go about solving it?"
For the widget example, the question might be, "We have a big scrap problem. Can you walk me through how you would figure out the root cause and put together a solution?" Asked properly this question uncovers a critical ability of all top performers: job-related problem-solving skills. The best candidates I've met in my 35 years in executive search all have the ability to anticipate the needs of the job before starting it. They can figure out very quickly what's wrong or what's necessary to accomplish a task, what they need to do to implement a solution, and what resources they need to do it. Even better, they "see" the problem, the solution, and the steps needed to get there. They also know what they don't know and are confident enough to tell you how they'll get this information. (Situational question)
https://www.inc.com/lou-adler/these-two-interview-questions-accurately-predict-job-success.html

Additional sample interview questions:
- What's an example of a situation where you solved a problem in a satisfying way?
- What's an optimal work day for you—best mix of research, analysis, meetings, networking and outreach?
- What would be most and least interesting to you about what we're doing?
- What ideas do you have for improving our approach to this project?
- When you're in a team, what role do you usually play? (Can prompt with "leader, step in if needed, gadfly/questioner," etc.)
- What would you do if I asked you to do something that you thought should be done differently?
- What might be challenging about our rather fluid organizational structure?

Questions to shake things up
Rather than ask, "Where do you want to be in five years?" ask **"What don't you want to be doing five years from now?"** Applicants will be ready to speak in positive terms about their careers and where they see them going. Asking them where they *don't* want to go can reveal far more, because

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they're rarely prepared with an answer. Being unprepared forces them to think on their feet, and that can go a long way toward showing you how they think.

Rather than ask, "What are your top two or three weaknesses?" ask "**Quickly name some reasons why I should not hire you.**" While this question is still probing for weaknesses, practically no one is prepared for the question in that form, so it makes people pause and think.

Interview styles.
Following the advice below can help your interviewers be more self-aware of their comfort zones and ways to get out of them to get better insights into the candidate. It's a good idea to have a conversation before the interview to talk through what will make the most sense for your interview team.

While carefully crafted questions can go a long way toward revealing the person behind the mask, so to speak, questions don't tell the whole tale. The interview process itself can be just as important. It may sound cruel, but we suggest that interviewers shake up what candidates expect out of the interview, and employ techniques to alternately bore, energize, confuse, comfort, and confront applicants.

Tell a joke to loosen things up at one minute, then ask a highly probing question the next. Let a candidate speak at length for some questions, and interrupt at other times with follow-ups like "What do you mean by that exactly?" "How so?" "Could you give us an example of that?"

Taking this approach lets applicants know that their run-of-the-mill interview prep isn't going to work. It breaks them out of their scripts, and allows you to see who will step up or fold under pressure. The exact process can differ depending on the job and company, but it's important that it be methodical and consistently applied to each candidate. Only then can apples be compared to apples.

https://hbr.org/2013/05/separating-the-winners-from-th

Interviewing for organizational culture.
Think in terms of "culture add," rather than culture fit. Remember that each person you add will have some influence on how the culture develops.

The term "Culture Fit" can often be a mask for bias. If your company is employing the "beer test" line of thinking for determining culture fit (e.g., would you want to have a beer with the candidate?), you might be missing out on some incredible talent. This question is often investigating "is this candidate like me," a form of homophily bias. Instead, consider asking yourself these questions:
a) Do you feel the candidate's values align with ours?
b) Do you feel the candidate would *add* to the existing culture?

Does who this person is inherently complement your company's collective approach to work and collaboration?

https://www.greenhouse.io/blog/goodbye-culture-fit-hello-culture-add

Culture add questions
- Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team? Why?
- Describe the type of work environment in which you are most productive.

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- How do you prefer to get feedback from your manager: through formal performance reviews or daily/weekly meetings? Why?
- What do you hope to achieve during your first six months here?
- What would make you quit a job in the first month?
- What would you say or do to motivate your team during a challenging project?
- What's one thing you like about your current (or prior) job and you'd want here as well?
- Have you ever found a company policy unfair or inefficient? If so, what was the policy and why? What did you do or what would you do, in this case?
- Your manager assigns you a big task right before the end of the day. How would you reply?
- How would you change an institutional "this is how we always do it" attitude, if you felt there was a better approach?

https://resources.workable.com/cultural-fit-interview-questions

4. AUTOMATED TOOLS

Automation is being used to help source, screen, and interview candidates, with 75% of companies now using automated tools. Automation companies include Hirevue, Pymetrics, Paradox, Seekout, XOR and more, with tools ranging from blind resumes to video interviews to neuroscience games and personality testing.

Pro: Some of the benefits of automated screening are that it's possible to reach more candidates, look at more data points, and do it more systematically. They also offer convenience for candidates to answer questions on their own time. The screening companies offer numerous examples of companies that were able to increase their hiring diversity by using automated tools.

A study of 150 companies found that those that used a personality assessment in their hiring had more racially diverse workforces.

From Ideal, a company that provides this and other automated services.

There is also evidence that those with white sounding names are nearly 75% more likely to hear back on applications than those with an ethnic minority sounding name. Automatic resume screening and blind resumes can help reduce bias.

From Hundred5, a company that provides this and other automated services

Con: Bias is a risk in any automated hiring tool. For example, automation that's based on past hiring data can easily incorporate existing biases into algorithms. Algorithms can also group candidates by data such as zip codes, organizational memberships, or language. Tools that track facial expression or speech patterns may discriminate against groups that have different cultural facial expressions or use speech differently.

Hiring algorithms can also make mistakes: Automated hiring software is mistakenly rejecting millions of viable job candidates

And see also Pros and Cons of Using AI in Your Hiring Process.

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