



Behavior Description Interviewing

Department of Human Resources



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INTRODUCTION

This reference guide was developed to help familiarize candidates and managers at the Government of Nunavut with an interview technique called “Behavior Description Interviewing”. This technique is used with other selection and assessment tools to evaluate candidates’ competencies and experience in order to identify the most qualified person for a position.

Behavior Description Interviewing is based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. This technique is used to find out what the applicant actually did in the past similar situations.

Behavior Description Interviewing may be used in combination with other assessment tools such as specialized knowledge tests and technical skills tests to assess candidates’ qualifications.

THE Behavior Description Interviewing vs. THE TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

The Behavior Description Interview approach uses a structured pattern of questions designed to elicit and probe a candidate’s past behaviors in similar situations; it focuses on the position requirements.

What is different about Behavior Description Interviewing? The essential differences between the traditional interview and the behavior-based interview as follows:

Traditional interview: Candidates are asked to project what they might or would do in a given hypothetical situation: “What would you do if you received a complaint regarding one of your employees?” They are also asked a series of questions that typically have straightforward answers: “What are your strength and weaknesses?”; “What major challenges and problems did you face?”

Behavior Description Interviewing: Candidates are asked to describe actions they have taken or behaviors they have demonstrated in similar past situations and to provide concrete examples.

Behavior Description Interview questions would be more probing and more specific than traditional interview questions: “Give an example of an instance when you used logic to solve a problem” or “Give an example of a project you managed and tell me how you achieved it”. The selection committee (or interviewers) may also prompt using targeted questions to grasp a clear understanding of what the candidate did (why and how).

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

To prepare for a behavioral-based interview, you should carefully read the notice of job opportunity, the job description and any other information available to you.

Research the work arena, work environment, and goals or objectives of the service to determine if you have what it takes to be successful in the job. Having knowledge about a potential employer may give you a competitive edge over other job seekers.

Review your resume to ensure that you are aware of all the information it contains. Seeing your achievements in print will jog your memory. While you are being interviewed, it is important to highlight your experience and competencies as described.

Compare your experience with each of the prerequisites and competencies identified in the notice of job advertisement and determine where, when and how you have applied them in the past.

Compile relevant examples that illustrate situations linked to the position requirements where you have successfully solved problems or performed exceptionally well. Also, prepare examples where you have dealt with difficult or challenging situations. Examples should be specific and detailed.

We suggest using the STAR approach to answer behavior-based interview questions. This approach may serve as a guideline for preparing your examples. The acronym STAR stands for the following:

Situation	Briefly describe a recent scope of the project or mandate or circumstance, as well as your major role and goal – where, when, with whom.
Tasks	Describe important tasks, activities, work or functions you performed frequently in the scope of the situation – what you did.
Actions	Describe important actions you took and behaviors you demonstrated – How you accomplished the tasks, project, activities, work or functions; How you did it. (Should be 50% of your answer)
Results	Describe the results or outcome – Briefly explain why you achieved this outcome. Don't forget to highlight lessons learned, if applicable.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

When responding to Behavior Description questions, you can provide examples from any life experience, full-time jobs, volunteer work, and educational activities or even hobbies and leisure time. However, the examples should be relevant to the position for which you are being interviewed.

The Behavior Description Interviewing is not designed to elicit your opinion or your feelings or to find out how you would respond using theoretical or future-oriented responses. The questions are designed primarily to obtain examples of **how you accomplished your work** in the past.

Listen to the questions carefully and let the interviewers know if you are unclear about what is being asked; you may request clarification if needed. Be clear and provide sufficient details when you respond. Most importantly, be honest.

Remember to structure your answers using one of the behavior-based methods, such as the STAR approach.

Here are some examples of behavior-based questions and probing questions related to two competencies that you may be asked during an interview:

COMPETENCY	ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS	SELF-MANAGEMENT
General interview questions:	Give us an example of a situation where you successfully managed a number of tasks, projects or files simultaneously while carrying out ongoing activities. Describe the methods and techniques you used to manage this workload.	Tell us about the most difficult conflict situation you have faced at work and how you handled the situation.
Probing questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was the situation?• How did you manage these projects or tasks?• Did the methods and techniques used differ from those you usually use to organize your workload?• How did you set priorities?• How did you manage the deadlines?• What was the outcome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What was the problem? Who was involved?• What was your reaction?• What did you do to resolve the situation?• How was the situation resolved?• What did you learn?• What have you done since or what are you doing now to prevent/minimize conflict situations?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

The interviewers will verify your references, including situations you described during the interview. Be prepared to provide the names of former supervisors or individuals who have observed your behavior in the workplace in these particular situations and who can confirm your work performance. It is your responsibility to ask these people for permission to provide their names as references.

Consider each interview as a learning opportunity. Regardless of the outcome, you can gain valuable experience that will help you improve your interview skills.

TIPS

Before the interview:

- Make sure you have a clear understanding of the prerequisites of the job.
- Review your background and qualifications in relation to the job and write down your relevant experience for each of the prerequisites.
- Rehearse how you will describe your experience, competencies and accomplishments using the STAR approach or other methods.

During the interview:

- Write down your thoughts and take time to formulate your answers before you speak.
- BE specific, concise and clear about the situation you are describing.
- Be prepared to provide examples of situations that did not turn out as you had planned.
- Do not assume that the interviewers are aware of the situation you are referring to (especially if you know one of the selection committee members.)
- Ask for clarification when needed.