

November 2018

By: Marissa Post & Megan Smith

## Hey, Hiring Managers! Need Some Structure in Your Life?

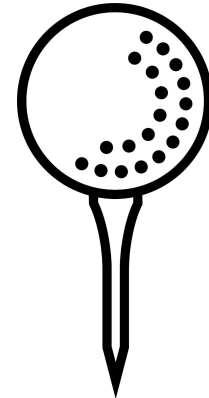


**“If I shrank you to the size of a nickel and put you in a blender, how would you escape?”**

**Why Google nixed their brainteasing, unstructured interviews--and why your company should too!**

---

**You** may remember the above brainteaser from the shenanigans in *The Internship*, where Billy (Vince Vaughn) and Nick (Owen Wilson) somehow talked their way into a prestigious internship with Google despite having no background in technology. Since the film, Google has become infamous for their whacky interview questions such as “How many golf balls would fit inside a 747 airplane?”



Google’s take on interviewing reveals an attitude that many companies and recruiters have toward selecting candidates: that their company knows “the secret formula,” and that they can trust their gut feeling when choosing amongst candidates.

However, as Google learned through their performance metrics, the unstructured approach wasn’t actually panning out<sup>1</sup>. Just like the research shows, brainteasing, non-job-related questions and unstructured procedures do not predict who will be a top performer at work. Now, Google has invested in developing structured interview procedures to best predict who will be the best Googlers. And if that’s not enough to convince you to make a switch, keep reading to see three of the top reasons to use structured interviewing practices!

## But first, what’s a structured interview?

Put simply, a structured interview is one that follows a standard procedure: Each candidate receives the same agenda for interview day, is asked the same questions, is given the same amount of time to answer each question, and is scored using the same rubric and procedures. More specifically, we will be discussing *behaviorally-based* structured interviews, or questions that ask the candidate to share information that is tied to past behaviors or achievements.

This is different from an unstructured interview, where hiring managers are given interview questions that are not job-related or may be given total freedom to draft their questions independently from other recruiters and hiring managers. Hiring standards are not established or consistent because each candidate may be given a slightly (or largely) different interview. Using these procedures, it is common for a hiring manager to make a final decision based on a “gut feeling,” a first impression, or based solely on their experience on the job or in the company.

---

Google switched. But should I?

## 1. Hire the strongest candidates.

Any organization has the goal of hiring the strongest candidate, right? Well, the perfect start would be adopting a structured interviewing technique. Research shows that these types of interviews ensure that the most important candidate characteristics are elicited<sup>2</sup>, leading you to easily determine your best candidate.

There are certain actions hiring managers can take in order to ensure they are seeking out and accurately distinguishing between high and low performing candidates. Although the process may be structured, it does not mean that probing or follow-up questions should be avoided. In fact, these clarifying questions allow for candidates to reveal key information that may otherwise remain unknown<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, a standardized interviewing process allows interviewers to easily make distinctions between candidates since each interviewee had essentially the same experience. It is almost impossible to compare Candidate A who was asked to share about himself, to Candidate B who was asked about her greatest weakness. Staying consistent within candidates will allow for better judgment when determining which of your five candidates gave the strongest interview. After all, you can't compare apples to oranges!

## 2. Reduce discrimination.

Oftentimes, employers don't even realize that their selection methods are plagued with different types of biases. Unintentional or not, the discrimination of certain candidates, in any way, can get your organization into some big legal trouble.

Yes, the simple fact that your interviewing questions are not standardized across all candidates may bring about unintended discrimination. Studies also show that these unstructured interviews are often inaccurate and unreliable when predicting job success<sup>3</sup>. Conducting interviews in a structured, consistent manner, specifically focusing on those factors that prove to have a direct effect on job performance and success, will not only properly standardize your process, but also significantly reduce the chance of any biases or discrimination cases to occur<sup>3</sup>.

---

Additionally, not only do structured interviews have twice the level of validity than do unstructured interviews<sup>4</sup> (meaning it is highly correlated to the job performance), they also have higher levels of face validity. This means that the candidate is more likely to view the interviewing process as fair and objective as opposed to unfair and discriminatory. This reinforces the importance of ensuring positive candidate perceptions!

### 3. Nail the candidate experience.

A common misconception regarding structured interviewing is that it strips away the uniqueness of the company's culture during the selection process, making it sterile and scripted. It makes sense that in a job market where job-seekers have more room to be picky, that they are more likely to pursue the company that treats them like a human during the selection process.

That said, we're here to tell you that structured interviewing and personalizing the candidate experience are not mutually exclusive! Rather, it provides a structured framework to encapsulate your company's branding message and deliver it to each and every candidate that walks through your doors or logs on for an interview. When developing a structured interview, a company can identify key features of their company culture and work styles, and match behaviorally-based questions, tone, and communication to your company's style and assesses the candidate for knowledge, skills, and abilities that match your company's needs.

Further, when an interview structure is clearly delineated for hiring managers, they benefit from receiving the resources and expectations for the interviews they conduct, and they can be held to a specific standard. Ultimately, this ensures that every candidate, regardless of if they join your workforce, leaves with the same positive messaging surrounding your company and its products and services.

### Ready to get to work?

To get started on transforming your company's interview practices, check out this [guide](#) from Google re:Work or this [template](#) from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

---

## We'd love to help!

UCF Performance Solutions is the University of Central Florida's applied research group who seeks to improve productivity and performance for organizations and strengthen the quality of work life for employees. Performance Solutions accomplishes this with the latest technology and research, providing a fresh perspective on business procedures with UCF's faculty and graduate students in the Industrial and Organizational Psychology Program leading the way. We are eager to team up with your organization to help improve and maintain employee health and safety by preventing work-related injuries and illnesses and promoting well-being in the workplace. Check out our [website](#) to discover more, or contact us by email at [performancesolutions@ucf.edu](mailto:performancesolutions@ucf.edu).



---

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Guide: Using Structured Interviews. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/hiring-use-structured-interviewing/steps/introduction/>
- <sup>2</sup>What is I-O? (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.siop.org/workplace/employment-testing/interviews.aspx>
- <sup>3</sup>Knight, R. (2018, April 23). 7 Practical Ways to Reduce Bias in Your Hiring Process. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/7-practical-ways-to-reduce-bias-in-your-hiring-process.aspx>
- <sup>4</sup>Wiesner, W. H., & Cronshaw, S. F. (1988). A meta-analytic investigation of the impact of interview format and degree of structure on the validity of the employment interview\*. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 61(4), 275-290. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8325.1988.tb00467.x