

Borrowing from other disciplines

In writing this course, we reviewed advice and materials from the legal profession. Believe it or not, many of the techniques used to prepare witnesses to testify at trial apply to effective interviewing.

We'll cover the following



- Answer the question that was asked
- Get confirmation
- Avoid talking in absolutes
- Control the pace
- Why we use video

Answer the question that was asked

The person interviewing you has a job to do. It is their responsibility to assess your fit for the organization in the time allowed. They may have specific questions they need to ask or specific characteristics to assess. They have an agenda and it's best to let them lead.

If a candidate takes too much time answering, elaborates in ways that aren't helpful, or gives a response that isn't related to the question, it interferes with the interviewer's plan. The interviewer may become concerned about managing time or annoyed that they aren't getting the input they need.

Be concise first and elaborate later if asked to say more. Witnesses are told to be sure they understand the question being asked, and then give the shortest truthful answer they can give. They are trained to listen all the way to the end of the question before beginning a response. Doing this will help you avoid jumping in with an answer to the question you thought they were asking, and being wrong.

Answer the question that was asked and only the question that was asked. The interviewer may have a logical series of questions planned. A response that

moves in a tangent can interfere with assessing what really matters. Don't

keep talking because you have other things that you think will make you sound good. Answer the question that was asked.

The testimony of a witness should be factual, without exaggeration or hyperbole. This applies to candidates too! Using simple language and avoiding jargon will serve you and your listener best. "Blowing them away" with acronyms and technical lingo can backfire. The interviewer wants you to demonstrate that you can talk to any team member in the organization, not just those with specialized expertise.

Pro Tip: Practice explaining your experiences, without acronyms and jargon, to someone outside your field and be sure they understand.

Get confirmation

If you are unsure of the question, ask for it to be repeated. You might also say:

- I'm not following the question, can you ask it in another way?
- Can you tell me a bit more about what you want?
- Do you mean.....?

You can also begin your response and ask for confirmation that your response is what they had in mind.

- I can give you an example of a time I missed a deadline, is that what you're asking?
- I can tell you about my experience leading a remote team, is that a good example?

The interviewer will likely give you more guidance if you are missing the mark.

Don't talk over someone in the interview. If an interviewer or panelist starts talking during your response, stop talking for a moment. They are likely trying to give guidance or manage expectations. Before you resume, ask, "shall I continue?"

Avoid talking in absolutes

Witnesses are advised to avoid saying things like “never” or “always”. Such phrases are too precise and can trigger skepticism. Instead, express your preferences, intentions, and actions in a natural way that gives you some room for things out of your control. Here are some ideas:

- I’m always on time → I prefer being on time whenever possible.
- I’m never insensitive → I work hard to give feedback in a constructive way that considers personal feelings.
- That’s everything that happened → Those are the examples I can recall right now.

Control the pace

Witnesses are encouraged to take their time if they feel like the questions are coming too fast. They are told they can slow the pace by taking a sip of water, adjusting their glasses, shifting their posture, taking a deep breath, or asking for the question to be repeated. In an interview, you can use these techniques to set a consistent pace for questions and responses. You don’t have to wait until you need a moment. You can take a moment each time. This shows confidence and sets a relaxed and natural conversational pace.

Why we use video

Video is used for witness preparation and many other types of professional speaking development. Video is the fastest cure for distracting tics. Most people have them, but few are aware of them. For example, you might fidget, bite your nails, play with a ring on your finger, or repeatedly touch your face. You might string together thoughts with phrases like, “you know”, “ok”, or “like”. These are unconscious and a reaction to the stress of being scrutinized. You are probably unaware of these or assume that they will go away when you answer “for real” in an interview.

The intention of this course is to help you spot tics and remedy them. One of the most effective mechanisms is video. In the coming sections there will be opportunities for you use video while you practice. We encourage you to replay these recorded practice sessions. You will be astonished how quickly you correct distracting behaviors.

Now that you have more insight, let's look at how you can use an interview opportunity to observe an organization's culture.