

# Preparing to Interview Others

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Before you write a job advertisement, you must conduct some preliminary research. The recruitment process can be complex and costly, both in terms of time devoted to the selection process and money spent on advertising. Thorough preparation may minimize the time and money you spend. Also, by preparing in advance, you're better able to avoid potential legal issues.

Below you'll find a breakdown of the steps you should take to prepare, as well as a list of mistakes to avoid.

## What You Need to Know

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### Why recruit a new staff member?

Businesses recruit new employees for many reasons. It is important to know, at the beginning, how the new employee will fit into the organization as a whole.

You may be developing a new product, your business may expand to accommodate growing customer demand, or may just need to replace someone who has left—in all of these scenarios make sure that the recruitment does not conflict with your business strategy and objectives.

## What to Do

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### Generate a Job Description and Person Specification

These two documents are an essential starting point for recruiting. You will use them throughout the selection and interviewing process. They may be used later on as criteria for assessing the new recruit's work performance.

The job description outlines the main duties and responsibilities that the position entails on a regular basis. Not too lengthy or complicated, it should provide a detailed outline of the employee's daily tasks. Don't forget to also explain how these functions fit into the greater schema of the business.

It is important to have a complete job description before you advertise a position, as applicants may look for this level of detail before they submit their application.

The person specification outlines the desired employee in terms of qualifications, experience, skills, and knowledge. To write this, you must analyze the tasks you have identified for the job description, and compare them against the skills and qualifications of the successful candidate.

Don't set such high or specific standards that few candidates can meet them. Instead, try to write an essential list of qualifications, qualities or aptitudes, as well as a second list of desirable ones.

## Compose the Advertisement

How the vacancy is advertised, including wording, design, and placement, plays a role on the type of candidate you attract.

Keep it simple when writing the advertisement: stick to the job description and summarize the key points of the person specification. Include your contact details, as well as details on what the candidates are supposed to submit. In addition to requesting a résumé and cover letter, you may also ask for a work sample.

## Decide How to Advertise

Options for where to publish the advertisement include:

- **Newspapers.** Expensive, but they can attract a wide group of people.
- **Trade press.** Useful if you are trying to recruit someone with specific qualifications and experience.
- **Employment agencies.** Again, these are expensive but they will help you select the most capable candidates and reduce some of the initial paperwork.
- **Internet.** As more people rely on the Internet for their job searches, this can be a convenient and inexpensive option.
- **Universities and colleges.** This is a good way of attracting graduates, but these candidates are likely lacking the work experience that you require.

## Prepare Your Correspondence With Applicants

It is a good idea to prepare a set letter to send out to all applicants. Keep it short and simple, thank them for their application and provide a deadline by which they will be informed if they have been selected for the interview.

If you wish, you can avoid having to contact unsuccessful applicants by writing something like: "If you do not hear from us within the next three weeks then unfortunately we are unable to accept your application at this time."

## Put Together a Shortlist

As with the interview, it is best to compile your shortlist based on the opinions of several people. Second opinions are always useful when determining how well an applicant reflects the job description and person specification, particularly when it comes to assessing candidates' "softer" skills and aptitudes.

Only consider job-related criteria when creating a shortlist. It's unethical for personal categories such as age, marital status, or gender, to influence your decision. See the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Web site for guidelines.

## Formulate Interview Questions

You must have a list of standard questions for all candidates. In addition to referring back to the job description and person specification, these questions should relate to the candidates' experience, qualifications and skills. Feel free to ask probing questions about how the candidates' personal qualities and aptitudes make them well-suited for the position, but avoid personal questions about their lives.

It is also a good idea to prepare specific questions for individual candidates. You can inquire about gaps in the candidates' résumés, or any skills or qualifications that are required in the job description, but which they do not seem to have.

At this stage, it is also a good idea to prepare an interview rating form to be filled out after each interview. You can list both the essential and desirable job criteria and rank candidates with a score out of 10. After filling them out, you can use these forms to refresh your memory on each interviewee's skills and attributes.

## Get Ready for the Interviews

Before starting the interview process, figure out the time slots for each candidate and contact all candidates to confirm their attendance. In addition, set aside a private room for the interviews and check that you have everything, including:

- candidates' application forms or résumés
- a list of questions and an interview rating form
- copies of the job description and person specification
- pen and paper
- water, coffee, and other refreshments

You may need to make adjustments to accommodate an interviewee who has a disability or other special requirement. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Web site gives an overview.

## What to Avoid

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### **You Don't Provide Clear Instructions**

When you contact candidates to set up an interview, make sure to give them clear instructions. It is a good idea to follow up a phone call or e-mail with the following information:

- interview time confirmation
- how long the interview is likely to last
- Your business' address, how to get there, and who they should ask for on arrival
- what candidates should bring to the interview
- whether candidates will be reimbursed for travel expenses
- a brochure, Web site link, or other relevant information about your business

### **You Don't Allow Enough Time**

Allocate at least an hour for each interview, with at least 20 minutes between appointments. Running out of time and being interrupted by the next appointment are very distracting for both the interviewer and the candidate.

Similarly, you should make sure you have set aside a private, quiet room for the interviews, where you will not be disturbed by phone calls or other interruptions.

## Where to Learn More

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### **Web Sites:**

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

Federal Labor Relations Authority: [www.flra.gov/er](http://www.flra.gov/er)

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: [www.eeoc.gov/types/ada.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/types/ada.html)

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