

INTERVIEWING/SELECTION

2. Evaluate

Résumés and letters of application come in many shapes and sizes. If you insist on a standard application form, the information might be a little more structured. However, résumés can still be attached to the back of a standard form, and a cover letter can still be on the front.



In every style or format, your job as an interviewer is to carefully read all the information you are sent by an applicant. This is simply because this document is the applicant's way of presenting themselves in what they think is their best light. If this view doesn't impress you or match up to the job specification, you can save them and yourself wasted time by declining to interview them. However, before doing this, just make sure that you have read all of the information and haven't missed anything that might render your decision wrong.

For our purposes here, let's assume that the résumés being reviewed all meet the basic job criteria and are deemed "broadly" suitable for interview. As such, the interviewer's approach should now be to underline key points of interest, or probe further with questions. Using a highlighter pen and writing notes in the margins are also useful tricks.

Once this line-by-line review has been done, list what you feel to be the overall strengths and possible weaknesses in the person's application. Strengths should be confirmed for real substance at the interview, and any possible weak areas explored to test their relative impact on job performance.

It seems like common sense to carefully read a résumé before conducting an interview, but in a survey carried out by a large U.S. recruitment consultancy, line managers admitted to only reading a résumé for an external job applicant 70% of the time. Many interviewers apparently start the interview with this face-saving question:

"Could you just review for me the highlights of your career, in your own words."

(Even though the résumé is in his/her own words!)

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Much has been written about job competencies, suggesting that this is the major area of skills or knowledge that needs to be identified. A simple definition of a competency is:

“Core skills, abilities, or knowledge that an individual draws upon and uses in order to perform a task or a whole job effectively.”

In other words, competencies are attributes that help an individual to perform a job successfully. Examples include:

Numerically skilled	Ability to sell effectively	Thorough
Service-focused	Attention to detail	Articulate communicator
Team-orientated	Good listener	Effective problem-solver

Notice that competencies are expressed in positive terms and that they usually describe a natural or a learned skill (gained through formal training or informal experience). However, by breaking down the general skills and experience into these smaller competency blocks, we can more closely define the specific attributes that we are looking for, or at least prioritize some attributes over others.

Whether we select them from a pre-set list or develop them on-the-spot, we should list six or eight competencies that our prospective jobholder should possess if they are to be successful. We can also prioritize this list so that we know which of the attributes we must look for during the course of the interview. This list will vary enormously according to the type of role for which you are recruiting. However, whatever the job is, the trick of breaking down qualifications and experience into specific attributes is the same.

Once competencies have been identified and listed, the interviewer needs to carefully consider how these will be discovered or teased out in what might be quite a short period of time. Although we shall have more to say about framing the right questions later, it is obvious that prepared and researched questions are usually better than ones thought up on the spur of the moment.