

# Frequently Asked Questions: Internship Training Directors - Conducting Interviews

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## Conducting Interviews

### 1. Are there any guidelines regarding appropriate vs. inappropriate interview questions?

It is particularly important that you take the time to educate your training staff about how to conduct themselves during an interview. We strongly recommend that you distribute the information on this page, as relevant to your site, to members of your staff/faculty (including interns and postdoctoral fellows) who participate in interviews. APPIC also recommends that you distribute copies of the APPIC Match Policies to those who conduct internship interviews, with a special emphasis on Match Policy #7, to ensure that interviewers follow those rules as well.

APPIC receives complaints each year from applicants who believe they have been asked inappropriate questions, and we have discovered that this often occurs when the staff/faculty or interns/postdocs who conduct interviews are unaware of the legal, ethical, and practical issues involved. We have found that some violations of Match Policies are caused by interns at a site who may not realize that the Match Policies apply to all of their conversations with applicants.

Here are two resources that you might find helpful:

- This 2015 article from the journal, "Training and Education in Professional Psychology" discusses appropriate and inappropriate interview questions and explores the experiences of students who interviewed at doctoral programs and internships:

["So what are you?": Inappropriate Interview Questions for Psychology Doctoral and Internship Applicants](#)

Thanks to Mike Parent, Dana Weiser, Andrea McCourt, and the APA Journals Department for making this copyrighted article available to the education and training community.

- The following article was published a number of years ago in the APPIC Newsletter and addresses appropriate and inappropriate interview questions.

#### **Questions During Interviews, Revisited by Mona Koppel Mitnick, Esq.**

As Match season approaches, the issue once more arises about the types of questions site interviewers may ask applicants. Or, conversely, what questions either violate applicants' legal rights or infringe upon their privacy.

The issue is a recurring concern among intern applicants. Improper or inappropriate personal questions to applicants/interviewees also should be of concern to Training Directors and their staffs because such questions, ultimately, could have legal consequences. Even questions that are not inherently illegal may raise the spectre of an illegal motive or action. This article is another attempt to provide guidance, both to interviewers and interviewees about permissible and non-permissible (or non-recommended) questions.

A general rule for interviewers is to ask only questions directly relevant to the applicant's qualifications; or to the internship position and duties. When in doubt, don't ask!

In particular, improper or inappropriate areas of questioning relate to areas in which applicants presumably have some interest in protecting their privacy, e.g., their physical or mental status or health; their marital, familial, or other close personal relationships; religion, etc. Generally, it is inappropriate - and possibly even illegal - to ask questions in these areas unless they directly relate to the internship or the applicant raises the issue first.

As I stated in my previous article:

- Generally, you may ask questions about an applicant/interviewee's education, language proficiency (if directly relevant to the requirements of the position), training and experience in psychology/mental health areas, past practice and placement, career interests and goals, professional memberships, and any other subjects directly related to the internship and the psychology profession. Ask the same basic questions of all applicants/interviewees insofar as possible.
- Conversely, you may not ask personal questions before hiring (i.e., either on an application or during an interview) unless, either, they relate to bona fide qualifications; or the applicant first raises such issues him/herself. For example, you should not ask questions about a candidate's marital or family status, religion, or physical conditions or limitations. An exception to this rule is that Federal government agencies, states and municipalities, and many state universities generally require an employee to be a U.S. citizen. They also may require some explanation of any criminal record other than misdemeanors. While it is not always clear whether an intern is an employee or a student, such questions may be permissible when the internship center is a government agency or government-affiliated entity.

Notwithstanding the above guidance:

- [E]ven impermissible questions sometimes may become permissible if the applicant first raises the issue. For example, if an applicant/ interviewee asks questions about the hours of work and mentions family responsibilities or his/her religion and requests accommodations in work hours; or asks about the physical demands of the position and mentions physical limitations, the interviewer may follow up on such questions.
- Other questions, which may be impermissible on an application or during an

interview, may become permissible after the intern is hired. For example, proof of age and marital or parental/relationship status may become relevant, after hiring, for tax, insurance, and emergency contact purposes. Photographs also may be required after hiring for identification cards. Some questions are almost never permissible. For example, you should never ask questions about sexual preference or whether someone has a particular disease, such as AIDS.

Interviewers, however, continue to ask inappropriate or improper questions. While they may view these questions as establishing rapport with, or expressing personal concern about, the applicants, many applicants take offense at such questions. The following were samples of interview questions recently submitted to APPIC by unhappy applicants:

- In what ways do you think your older age will make it hard for you to fit in with the other interns?
- Do you have a partner/spouse and, if that person won't move, can you manage being parted from that person?
- Who will care for your children?
- Who is your therapist, and what specific issues have you worked on?
- Will a nose ring (an indicia of religion on someone from India) be problematic?

As mentioned above, while these questions may not be inherently illegal, they may suggest to some applicants improper motivation by the interviewer: The question about being older may make the applicant suspect that being older is a disadvantage, creating a possible allegation of age discrimination. The question about child care may make the applicant suspect that being married or involved in a relationship, or having children will place him/her at a disadvantage. Of course, the question would become a permissible one if the applicant first raised the issue of the hours and concern about child care.

The question about the name of the therapist and the specific issues worked on relate to an area in which an applicant may be presumed to have a significant privacy interest, so that he/she is unwilling to disclose that information. The applicant may feel pressured to disclose the information and may believe that, if he/she refuses to do so, he will be at a disadvantage in the selection process.

**Note:** *The information in this article merely is intended to provide practical guidance. It is not intended to be definitive or to be relied on without first consulting your legal counsel.*

## 2. Are there any guidelines regarding interviewing applicants with disabilities?

The APA Public Interest Directorate provides the following resources for Training Directors:

- ["Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Internship Positions"](#)
- ["The ADA and Internships: Your Responsibilities as Internship and Postdoctoral Agency Directors"](#)
- ["Providing Reasonable Accommodations to Individuals with Disabilities in Internship Sites and Postdoctoral Internship Positions"](#)

The APA Public Interest Directorate also provides an online "Resource Guide for Psychology Graduate Students with Disabilities (2nd Edition)" (<https://www.apa.org/pi/disability/resources/publications/resource-guide>) which includes two helpful articles from the student perspective. The following articles may be viewed by clicking on the links provided on that web page:

- "The Internship Match Process and Suggestions for Applicants with Disabilities"
- "Factors to Consider in Psychology Practicum and Internship Interviews"

3. Are there any guidelines about requesting photographs of applicants as part of the interview process?

The following article is reprinted from the APPIC Newsletter:

### **Requesting Photographs as a Part of the Internship or Post-doc Application and Selection Process**

**Joyce Illfelder-Kaye, Ph.D.**

**Mona Koppel Mitnick, Esq**

The question of whether it is reasonable and appropriate for sites to request photos of applicants at different stages in the internship and post-doctoral application/interview process has been raised repeatedly. Some sites might want to request photos along with the application, while other sites want to photograph applicants once they are on-site for an interview.

Historically APPIC has recommended that sites not request photos as a part of the internship or post-doc application. This has been a recommendation rather than an APPIC policy. Requesting photos as a part of the application may raise the specter of discrimination. As a result, we believe the most prudent course of action is not to request a photo with an application.

Recently, some applicants who had been photographed by sites during interviews have provided feedback about that experience on the APPIC survey. One student contacted the APPIC Board to express concern and inquired as to whether or not this was an acceptable practice. The possible legal implications of requesting a photo at the time of the interview are the same as they are at the application stage. While the legal implications appear to be the same, the APPIC Board has not previously considered this issue and has not made specific recommendations. We would like to review the pros and cons of this practice and make some specific recommendations for sites that do choose to take such photographs.

Ostensibly, the photos are being taken to jog the memories of the people doing the interviews, so that once the selection meeting comes along, the applicant will more easily spring to mind. As someone who typically interviews over 30 applicants a year, I can fully appreciate the need for memory jogs. In fact, I fully trust that this is the purpose, and that for many it serves this purpose quite effectively. Advocates of this approach also say

photos are no more personal or intrusive than other information solicited during the application/interview process.

It does seem important to point out that in spite of the honorable intent of requesting photos at an interview, it may not be perceived this way by all applicants, and the purpose of this column is to sensitize the reader to the perspectives of at least some applicants and to recommend some strategies, if sites choose to include photographs as a part of their interviews.

From the perspective of applicants, who represent any sort of visible diversity, and who are sensitized to this issue, the request for photographs may raise the specter of discrimination if the site later rejects the applicant. Some applicants view the request for photos as similar to asking an impermissible personal question, such as ethnicity, race, or age.

The request for photos may suggest to some applicants that the selection process is not objective; that it is not based solely on the applicant's qualifications but, rather, on some subjective assessment of the applicant's appearance, skin color, ethnicity, or age. Finally, some applicants view the request for photos as an invasion of their privacy, or as something that they are simply uncomfortable with. Even if a site presents the taking of a photograph as "optional," an applicant may not feel comfortable declining for fear of being perceived negatively by the site.

If in spite of these concerns on the part of some applicants, sites find the utility of photos compelling and choose to continue to request them, we recommend that sites make this clear in advance in all public information they provide about their program. Sites can inform applicants that a photo is a part of their selection and/or interview process in their APPIC Directory information, on their internship website or in their brochure, and again when invitations for on-site interviews are made. An explanation for why the photos are requested or taken on site could be included as well, and might help to alleviate some applicants' concerns. In this way applicants who are particularly uncomfortable with this process can choose not to apply, and those who do apply will not be caught off guard or surprised by the procedure when on site.