

Informal Interviews

How to create and implement neuro-inclusive Informal Interviews.



About Informal Interviews

Informal Interviews are casual conversations between an interviewer and a candidate. Unlike structured interviews, these are designed to assess a candidate's personality, interests, and alignment with the company values rather than focusing solely on technical or job-specific skills. Discussions can range from personal interests to the candidate's career goals, often creating a more relaxed and open dialogue.

Benefits

The benefits may include:

- The informal nature can create a more relaxed environment.
- Create friendly connection that can make the candidate more open and communicative.
- Allows a deeper understanding of the candidate's personality, interests, and potential value alignment within the company.
- Can be used as a way to shortlist candidates.
- Assesses value alignment and emotional intelligence.
- Suitable industries for where alignment with the organisation's mission and values is highly valued.



Ideal for:

Start-ups and creative industries.

Applicable for:

Customer-facing roles.



Example: Marketing industry

A start-up founder conducting an informal chat with a candidate for a marketing coordinator role might ask about the candidate's favourite campaigns, hobbies, or recent books they've enjoyed. The conversation could naturally progress to discussing how the candidate approaches creative problem-solving. This approach helps the founder gauge the candidate's personality, creativity, and potential fit within the start-up's collaborative and dynamic environment.

Create and implement neuro-inclusive Informal Interviews

Considerations and solutions

There are considerations to address to ensure the assessment is neuro-inclusive. These include:

Considerations

Unstructured:

The unstructured nature can lead to missing key discussion points.

Reliance on interpersonal skills:

There is a greater reliance on interpersonal skills, which may not align with the strengths of all neurodivergent individuals, particularly autistic candidates.

Ensuring unbiased evaluation:

The casual nature of the interaction can sometimes lead to unconscious biases affecting the assessment.

Maintain professionalism and balance:

May lead to oversharing or discussions on irrelevant topics, and there's a risk of the discussion veering too far from professional topics.

Solutions

Interviewers should use prompts to guide the conversation to cover job-relevant topics.

Adjust the interview format to include structured elements that can help showcase a candidate's skills more effectively.

Train interviewers on bias awareness and ensure evaluations are based on predefined criteria that directly relate to job performance.

Both parties should maintain a professional demeanour, focusing on topics related to the candidate's role or aspirations, while ensuring the conversation aligns with the job's requirements yet retains its relaxed tone.

Create and implement neuro-inclusive Informal Interviews

Informal Interviews can provide a relaxed environment, making it easier for some candidates to show their personality and alignment with the company values. By incorporating neuro-inclusive practices, employers can make these interviews supportive for neurodivergent candidates

Pre-interview preparation

Informal interviews may lack the structure neurodivergent candidates often prefer, leading to stress or uncertainty about expectations. Additionally, candidates may focus heavily on certain areas while overlooking others, or many over share personal interests, which can make it difficult for the interviewer to gain a comprehensive understanding of their skills and attributes.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Neurodivergent awareness training

Ensure all interviewers understand common neurodivergent characteristics and how they may impact in the context of the informal interview.

Detailed interview information

Share clear details about the interview process in advance, including:

- The time, duration, and location (or virtual platform details)
 - A photograph of the person conducting the interview
 - The casual nature of the interview
 - General topics of discussion, such as personal interests, career goals, or aspirations
 - Contact details of a support person from the organisation to answer any questions.
-

Accommodations and adjustments

Encourage candidates to request specific accommodations, such as when the interview takes place, avoiding peak-hour times or adjustable lighting during interviews.

Set expectations

Clearly explain the purpose of the informal interview, such as exploring value alignment or getting to know the candidate's personality.

Interview questions in advance

Provide information on general topics of discussion, such as interests, career goals, or aspirations.

Create and implement neuro-inclusive Informal Interviews

Preparing the interview environment

A casual setting can introduce unexpected variables, such as noise or distractions, that may distract candidates during the informal interview.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Select an appropriate location

Choose a quiet and comfortable venue for the meeting. If considering cafes or public places, opt for locations that are quieter or times of day when they are less busy. Avoid busy or noisy spaces such as bustling cafes or open-plan office.

Provide venue details

Share specifics about the venue in advance, including:

- Accessibility features
- Parking or transport options
- Seating arrangements or the layout of the space.



Ask the candidate:

"How can we make the interview more comfortable for you?"

Create a welcoming atmosphere

Maintain professionalism while fostering a relaxed tone.



Create and implement neuro-inclusive Informal Interviews

During the interview

Informal Interviews rely heavily on unstructured conversation, which may not be a strength for some neurodivergent candidates, such as autistic candidates who often prefer clear communication.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Add structure

While informal, provide a brief outline of topics to be discussed, so the candidate feels prepared.

Encourage clarification

Let candidates know they can ask for clarification if a question feels unclear or open-ended.

Interview checklist

Give interviewers a checklist to focus on performance-relevant criteria and job qualifications.

Contingency planning

Be prepared to adjust the interview approach if unexpected needs or situations arise.

Keep questions simple and specific

Avoid vague or overly broad questions like "Tell me about yourself." Instead, ask targeted questions such as, "What do you enjoy most about collaborating with others?" and "What are some career goals you're passionate about?"

Allow processing time

Give candidates time to think and respond thoughtfully. Avoid rapid-fire or overly casual transitions that may cause confusion.

Minimise small talk pressure

Avoid excessive small talk, which can feel overwhelming or irrelevant. Focus on professional and meaningful topics while keeping a conversational tone.

Create and implement neuro-inclusive informal interviews

After the interview

Candidates may feel uncertain about next steps or unclear on how their performance was perceived in a less structured setting.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Communicate timelines

Clearly state when candidates can expect to hear back and what the next steps will be.

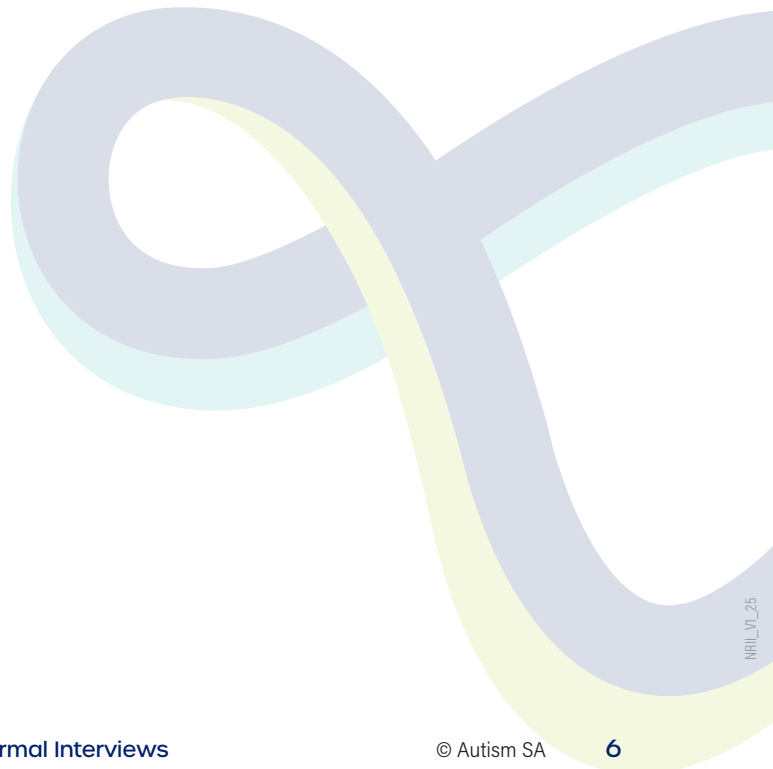
Provide constructive feedback

Share specific feedback highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

For example, "Your enthusiasm for team collaboration really stood out, and we'd love to explore how your skills align with our projects."

Evaluate with care

Use a checklist or criteria to ensure informal conversations do not rely solely on subjective impressions, reducing bias in candidate evaluations.



Example of a neuro-inclusive Informal Interview



Scenario

A start-up conducts an informal interview with a candidate for an animal care role.



Actions taken

Informing the candidate

The candidate is informed in advance that the meeting will be casual, with no formal dress code required.

Setting

The meeting with the candidate takes place in a quiet space with comfortable seating.

Interview flow

The interviewer begins by discussing shared professional interests, gradually introducing questions about the candidate's goals and experience in animal care.

Supportive measures

The candidate is encouraged to take notes and refer to them while responding.



Ensure the casual nature of the interview is communicated clearly while providing information about the objectives of the interview.



Outcome

The relaxed, yet structured setting enables the candidate to confidently express their passion and alignment with the company's mission, ensuring a supportive interview process.

By providing clear information upfront, choosing an appropriate environment, and structuring the conversation to accommodate different needs, the Informal Interview process becomes more accessible and equitable. Such practices not only help candidates to perform at their best but also ensure that the organisation benefits from a diverse range of talents, fostering a more inclusive workplace culture.

Learn more and access resources

To learn more about Neuro-inclusive Recruiting and how to create and maintain neuro-inclusive workplaces, scan the QR code or visit neuroinclusiverecruiting.org.au.

