

On-the-job Interviews

How to create and implement neuro-inclusive On-the-job Interviews.



About On-the-job Interviews

On-the-job Interviews, also known as working interviews, offer a unique opportunity for employers to assess a candidate's practical skills and suitability for a specific role. During these interviews, candidates are tasked with performing actual work tasks, allowing both parties to gauge how well the applicant can handle the job's day-to-day responsibilities.

Benefits

The benefits may include:

- Ideal for roles requiring specific skills or competencies, on-the-job interviews enable candidates to demonstrate their abilities.
- Allows candidates to experience the workplace environment, offering a glimpse into what working there might be like.
- Ideal for assessing practical, hands-on, technical skills, creativity and adaptability to real-world scenarios.
- Valuable in industries requiring hands-on skills and practical expertise.



Ideal for:

Trades, manufacturing, healthcare, medical services, creative fields, customer service, retail, and software development roles.



Considerations and solutions

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

Considerations

Reduce pressure:

Candidates may feel stressed or overwhelmed by being observed during tasks.

Resource intensive:

On-the-job interviews can require significant time and resources.

Solutions

Create a supportive environment by explaining expectations, offering breaks, and encouraging open communication to reduce anxiety.

Plan interviews strategically, using structured evaluation criteria and involving only necessary personnel to maximise efficiency.

Create and implement neuro-inclusive On-the-job Interviews

Example: Technology industry

A tech company is seeking a front-end web developer with strong JavaScript and CSS skills. The company arranges an on-the-job interview where candidates complete a short-term project over two days. The project involves implementing a new feature on a mock website using a provided set of specifications.



In addition to assessing candidates' skills in real-world scenarios, On-the-job Interviews give candidates a first-hand experience of the workplace. When tailored with neuro-inclusive strategies, these interviews create a supportive and equitable environment, allowing all candidates, including neurodivergent individuals to perform at the best of their ability.

Pre-interview preparation

Preparation is essential to creating an environment where neurodivergent candidates can perform at their best. Providing clear details and discussing accommodations upfront helps remove barriers.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Provide details

Share comprehensive details in advance, including:

- The schedule, including start and end times
- Access details (location, parking, public transport, signing-in procedures)
- Venue details, including sensory information and breakout spaces
- Interviewer names, roles, and photographs
- Dress code recommendations
- Necessary documents to bring
- Description of the task
- If there is a break space available
- Contact details of a dedicated support person from the organisation to answer questions.

Accommodations and supports

Proactively ask candidates about specific accommodations and supports they may need, such as:

- Adjustable lighting
- Flexibility in task formats
- Sensory adjustments, or sensory tools to assist
- A support person or job coach.

Provide task details in advance

When appropriate, share task details beforehand, ensuring candidates know what to expect. For example, behavioural questions or complex assignments may be provided in advance unless quick thinking is a key assessment criterion.

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Preparing the interview environment

The physical and sensory aspects of the interview setting can significantly impact neurodivergent candidates. A comfortable, predictable environment helps mitigate anxiety and sensory overload.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Workplace tour

Offer candidates an opportunity to tour the workspace before the interview. This familiarisation can reduce stress and allow candidates to identify potential accommodations.

Sensory-friendly environments

- Minimise loud, continuous noise
(For example, humming from coffee machines)
- Avoid sudden loud noises, like doors slamming
- Ensure consistent, non-flickering lighting
- Avoid strong smells from perfumes, kitchens, or nearby restrooms
- Give a variety of seating options and allow them to adjust their physical setup as needed.

A sensory friendly setting can support the candidate to feel comfortable and to do their best.

Break spaces

Identify a quiet area or sensory space where candidates can take breaks if needed.

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During the interview

Creating a neuro-inclusive process ensures candidates can focus on demonstrating their skills without unnecessary stress or barriers.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Be predictable

Maintain a schedule and routine. Notify candidates in advance of changes to reduce anxiety.

Be flexible

Allow candidates to complete tasks in their preferred format.

For example, hands-on demonstrations or giving verbal explanations.

Be clear and direct

Use direct questions focused on the role's objectives. Avoid idioms or complex language.

Support understanding

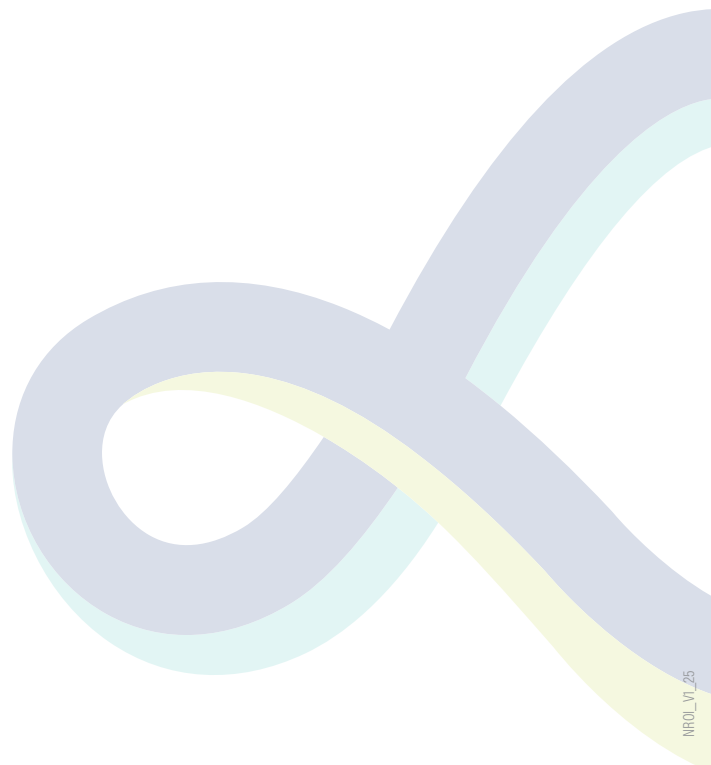
Inform candidates about who will observe them and their purpose. Limit the number of observers and maintain a respectful distance to reduce pressure.

Allow time to get comfortable

Provide candidates time to adjust to the environment before starting the interview.

Provide support

Offer to clarify or rephrase questions and allow candidates to bring notes for reference. Provide immediate feedback if candidates seem unsure of expectations.



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Post-interview follow-up

Providing clear feedback and next steps after the interview is essential for supporting neurodivergent candidates and improving the process overall.

Neuro-inclusive strategies

Feedback opportunities

- Share specific feedback on performance, highlighting strengths and areas for growth.
Avoid vague comments like "someone else was more suitable."
- Invite candidates to share their experience with the interview process and provide suggestions for improvement. Use this input to refine future processes.

Be transparent

Clearly communicate timelines for decisions and any follow-up expectations.

Example of a neuro-inclusive On-the-job Interviews

Scenario

A logistics company is hiring a team leader and conducts an On-the-job Interview to assess organisational and leadership skills.

Actions taken

- Environment preparation**
 - The interview is scheduled during off-peak hours to minimise noise and distractions.
 - The workspace is quiet, with natural lighting and ergonomic seating.
- Task execution**
 - The candidate is given clear, written instructions for a task requiring them to organise a mock workflow.
 - They are allowed to present their solution using diagrams, verbal explanations, or a written plan.
- Support provided**
 - The candidate is allowed extra time to complete the task and takes a scheduled break halfway through.

Outcome

These accommodations enable the candidate to focus on demonstrating their skills without distractions, allowing the employer to fairly evaluate their skills.



Create and implement neuro-inclusive On-the-job Interviews

Continuous improvement in test interview design

Regular reviews and staff training ensures that On-the-job Interviews remain effective, inclusive, and aligned with organisational goals.

Ongoing strategies for improvement

Training for interviewers

Ensure that all staff involved in the interview process receive training on neurodiversity awareness. Understanding the diverse needs and strengths of neurodivergent candidates to support candidates.

Regularly review and adapt

Continuously review and adapt interview processes based on feedback and emerging best practices in neuro-inclusion.

Neuro-inclusive On-the-job Interviews are a powerful way to assess candidates' real-world capabilities while fostering a fair and supportive recruitment process. By implementing these strategies, employers can ensure that every candidate can perform at their best, building a neurodiverse workforce.

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.

