

# Stress Interviews

How to create and implement neuro-inclusive Stress Interviews.



## About Stress Interviews

Stress Interviews are not your everyday interview technique. They involve putting candidates through unconventional scenarios—like solving peculiar puzzles, engaging in role-play to navigate tricky situations, or describing a room as if to someone who cannot see- in an interview. This distinct approach aims to push applicants to think quickly and display hard-to-measure qualities such as creativity, mental agility, innovation, and the ability to solve problems on the spot.

### Benefits

The benefits may include:

- Helps identify unconventional thinkers.
- Tests problem-solving, critical thinking adaptability and resilience during stressful or ambiguous situations.



#### Ideal for:

Emergency response coordinators, cybersecurity analysts, and journalists.

#### Applicable for:

Public services, technology, and media.

## Considerations and solutions

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

### Considerations

#### Potential for unpreparedness:

Candidates may feel caught off guard, testing their stress response rather than relevant job skills.

#### Narrow focus:

Overemphasis on stress-handling may neglect other essential competencies.

#### Task clarity and response time:

Stress scenarios can be confusing.

#### Skills-Based evaluation:

Tasks should reflect the role's actual requirements.

#### Transparency and preparation:

Unexpected scenarios can heighten anxiety.

#### Flexible interview formats and settings:

Unfamiliar environments may add extra stress.

### Solutions

Provide clear instructions and ample time for tasks to minimise unnecessary anxiety.

Balance stress-testing with a skills-based evaluation aligned with job requirements.

Clearly explain each task's purpose and provide time for candidates to think and respond.

Design tasks that directly test skills needed for success in the position.

Inform candidates about the format in advance, including accommodations for individual needs.

Offer choices such as virtual or in-person interviews and allow candidates to select a time and setting where they feel most comfortable.

## Create and implement neuro-inclusive Stress Interviews

### Example: Cyber security

A cybersecurity analyst might be asked to respond to a simulated hacking scenario during a stress interview, showcasing their ability to think critically and adapt in real time.



Stress Interviews are a unique tool to assess creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability under pressure. However, they can pose challenges for candidates if not thoughtfully designed. By incorporating neuro-inclusive practices, employers can create a fairer and more effective process.

### Pre-interview preparation

Stress Interviews often involve unconventional scenarios that might catch candidates off guard. For neurodivergent individuals, this unpredictability can be particularly overwhelming, while for others it may be an area they excel in. Clear communication and preparation are essential to foster confidence and enable candidates to perform at their best.

#### Neuro-inclusive strategies

##### Neurodivergent awareness training

Educate interviewers about common neurodivergent characteristics to ensure a supportive, non-bias approach is used.

##### Detailed interview information

For Face-to-face Stress Interviews, provide comprehensive details about the interview process well in advance. This should include:

- The interview schedule, including start and end times
- Access details (location, parking, public transport, signing-in procedures)
- Venue details, including sensory information and breakout spaces
- Names, roles, and photographs of facilitators
- Dress code recommendations
- Necessary documents to bring
- Contact details of a support person from the organisation to answer any questions.

##### Accommodations and adjustments

Encourage candidates to request specific accommodations, such as:

- Seating preferences to minimise sensory distractions
- The use of sensory items
- If possible, the time of day that the interview takes place.

##### Practice scenarios in advance

Offer example questions or stress scenarios so candidates know what to expect.

## Create and implement neuro-inclusive Stress Interviews

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### Preparing the interview environment

The interview environment can significantly affect a candidate's performance. Unfamiliar settings, sensory distractions, or unnecessary noise can exacerbate stress for neurodivergent individuals.

#### **Neuro-inclusive strategies**

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##### **Workplace visit**

For Face-to-Face Stress Interviews, offer candidates an opportunity to tour the workplace prior to the interview. This visit can help candidates familiarise themselves with the setting, reducing anxiety and allowing them to identify accommodations they may need.

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##### **Sensory-friendly settings**

- Minimise loud and continuous noises. **(For example, humming from coffee machines)**
- Arrange seating in a semi-circle or U-shape to reduce feelings of being surrounded
- Ensure consistent, non-flickering lighting
- Avoid strong smells from perfumes, kitchens, or nearby restrooms
- Provide simple décor and communicate any potential sensory stimuli in advance
- Provide a range of seating options for candidates and encourage them to move furniture around to where it makes them feel comfortable
- For Virtual Interviews, ensure platforms are simple to use and provide technical support.

A sensory friendly setting will support the candidates to feel comfortable and to do their best.

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##### **Clear instructions**

Allow candidates to take breaks between tasks to reset and refocus.

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##### **Flexibility in format**

Offer virtual options for candidates who might be more comfortable completing scenarios remotely in a location that suits them.

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### During the interview

The Stress Interview process can feel intense for any candidate. A neuro-inclusive approach ensures that all individuals have the opportunity to showcase their abilities without being overwhelmed.

#### **Neuro-inclusive strategies**

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##### **Welcome preparation**

Meet candidates at the door to create a welcoming first impression and reduce initial anxiety. Avoid expectations around engaging in small talk and allow for processing time.

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##### **Work environment tour**

If conducting the interview onsite, begin with a brief tour of the workplace, even if the candidate has previously visited. This serves as an icebreaker and helps candidates better understand the role and context.

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##### **Room acclimatisation**

If conducting the interview on site, allow candidates time to get comfortable in the interview setting and address any potential distractions or causes of anxiety.

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##### **Encourage thinking aloud**

Allow candidates to explain their reasoning as they solve a problem, providing insights into their thought processes.

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##### **Allow flexibility in participation**

Allow candidates to contribute in different ways, such as through written notes or smaller breakout groups, to accommodate diverse communication styles.

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##### **Use clear, direct language**

Avoid idiomatic expressions or ambiguous instructions that could lead to misinterpretation. Use straightforward, literal language and avoid jargon throughout the interview.

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##### **Questions**

Break questions down, without asking more than one at a time. Outline tasks and allow for processing time between questions.

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##### **Multiple formats**

Ask candidates how they would prefer to receive the questions. **For example, if they would like the questions written, verbally, or both formats.**

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##### **Evaluate essential skills**

Focus on how candidates' approach and resolve problems, opposed to interpersonal skills.

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### After the interview

The post-interview period can be challenging for anyone due to uncertainties about outcomes. For neurodivergent individuals, this phase can be particularly difficult, as expectations about what happens next may not be intuitively understood. Employers can support neurodivergent candidates by being explicit and direct about the next steps. Providing clear information about timelines, outcomes, and expectations can alleviate anxiety, while transparent communication and constructive feedback can foster growth and a positive candidate experience.

#### **Neuro-inclusive strategies**

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##### **Clear timeframes**

Share clear timelines for decisions, how decisions will be communicated, and next steps.

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##### **Transparent feedback**

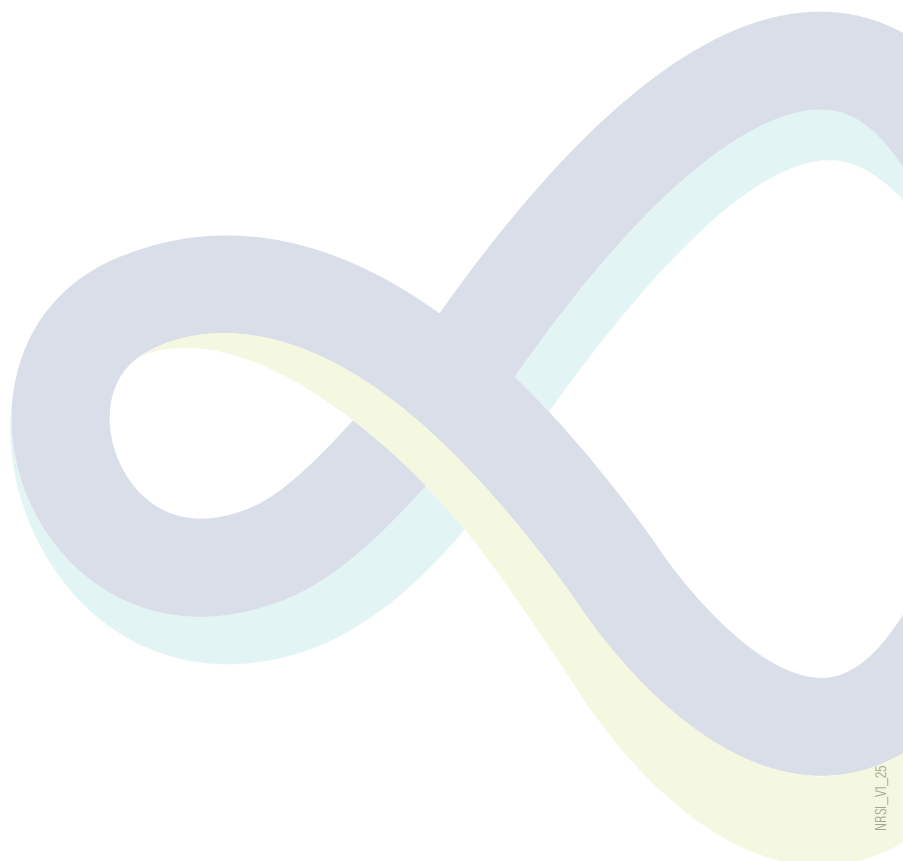
Offer detailed feedback on areas where the candidate performed well and where they could improve.

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##### **Process evaluation**

Collect feedback from candidates on their experience to improve future processes.

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## Example of a neuro-inclusive Stress Interview

### Scenario

An emergency response organisation is hiring for a disaster management coordinator.



Providing a clear breakdown of the tasks can reduce unnecessary anxiety.

### Actions taken

- Candidates are informed about the interview format in advance, including a breakdown of tasks such as creating a rapid-response plan for a hypothetical crisis.
- The organisation offers a virtual option for candidates preferring to complete scenarios in a familiar environment.
- Each task begins with a clear explanation of objectives, followed by sufficient time to develop solutions.
- Candidates can request accommodations, such as breaks between tasks, or presenting their plan in writing or in person.

### Outcome

This approach allows candidates to demonstrate their critical thinking and decision-making skills under pressure while reducing unnecessary stress.

Stress Interviews can be an effective method for assessing problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability. By making thoughtful adjustments and accommodations, employers ensure a more equitable and inclusive hiring process for all, allowing candidates to show their true attributes.

### 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](https://neuroinclusiverecruiting.org.au).

