

Understanding the Purpose of an Interview

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(A concise guide for students, job seekers, and anyone preparing to conduct or participate in an interview)

1. Core Definition

Term	Meaning
Interview	A structured conversation where one party (the interviewer) asks questions to gather information, assess abilities, or evaluate fit, while the other party (the interviewee) provides responses.
Purpose	The underlying reason for holding the interview – what the organizer hopes to achieve.

2. Primary Purposes (Why Interviews Are Conducted)

Context	Specific Goal	Typical Outcomes
Employment / Hiring	• Verify résumé claims • Assess technical and soft skills • Gauge cultural fit and motivation	• Job offer or rejection • Salary negotiation basis
Academic / Research	• Collect qualitative data • Explore experiences, opinions, or behaviors • Validate hypotheses	• Transcripts for analysis • Publication or thesis material
Media / Journalism	• Obtain firsthand accounts • Clarify facts and provide context • Humanize a story	• News article, broadcast segment, podcast
Admissions (schools, programs)	• Evaluate applicant's potential and fit • Understand extracurricular impact	• Acceptance, waitlist, or denial

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Context	Specific Goal	Typical Outcomes
Performance Review (internal)	• Provide feedback on past work • Set future goals and development plans	• Updated performance rating, training plan
Legal / Investigative	• Gather testimony or evidence • Establish timelines and credibility	• Police report, court testimony, investigative file
Customer / User Research	• Identify pain points and needs • Test concepts or prototypes	• Product roadmap adjustments, UX improvements

3. What an Interview Seeks to Reveal

Category	Sample Questions	What the Interviewer Learns
Knowledge & Expertise	“Can you explain how X works?”	Depth of technical understanding
Problem-Solving Ability	“Describe a time you faced Y and how you resolved it.”	Analytical thinking, creativity, resilience
Behavior & Soft Skills	“How do you handle conflict in a team?”	Communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence
Motivation & Values	“Why are you interested in this role/company?”	Alignment with mission, long-term interest
Cultural Fit	“What type of work environment helps you thrive?”	Compatibility with organizational culture
Future Potential	“Where do you see yourself in five years?”	Ambition, career trajectory, growth mindset

4. Interview Formats & Their Impact on Purpose

Format	Typical Use	How It Shapes the Purpose
Structured (same questions for all candidates)	Hiring, research surveys	Maximizes comparability, reduces bias
Semi-structured (core questions + probes)	Academic research, media	Balances consistency with depth

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Format	Typical Use	How It Shapes the Purpose
Unstructured (conversation style)	Exploratory research, informal networking	Encourages spontaneity, uncovers unexpected insights
Panel (multiple interviewers)	Senior-level hiring, academic admissions	Provides diverse perspectives, reduces single-interviewer bias
Group interview (multiple interviewees together)	Assessment centers, sales hiring	Observes interaction dynamics, teamwork
Remote / video	Global hiring, remote research	Expands reach, tests digital communication skills
Behavioral / competency-based	Hiring, performance reviews	