

J Supplement Interview Protocol & Rubric Overview

International Students and Scholars Office – Boston University

Description: *English language experts at Boston University created this interview protocol and rubric to assist BU host departments who are looking for options to comply with the English language proficiency requirement for J-1 exchange visitors. It provides a framework for interviewing prospective scholars to assess their English for the purpose of taking on teaching or research positions at the university. It consists of a series of questions, from simple to more complex, that a scholar in any field should be able to answer. A rubric is provided so that several aspects of language can be evaluated and a recommendation about the candidate can be made.*

Process: One or more faculty/staff members interview the candidate, either in person, by videoconference (Zoom, Facetime, etc.), or by telephone. Having one person ask the questions and another listen to and rate the responses yields better results than having only one person try to conduct the interview and do the evaluation at the same time. The interview is divided into three sections with questions of increasing complexity. Each section takes 2-3 minutes, with the entire interview lasting about 10 minutes. All sections have a list of suggested questions, but interviewers may choose which ones they would like to ask each candidate.

Questions: In *Section 1*, the interviewer asks simple questions on familiar topics to put the candidate at ease. The interviewer reads the questions one by one and gives the candidate time to answer them. Sample topics are work, study, family, food, holidays, friends, hobbies, festivals, sports, schooling, and transportation. This section should 2-3 minutes long.

In *Section 2*, the interviewer gives the candidate a topic that the candidate needs to speak about it for 1-2 minutes. Before speaking, the candidate can think for a moment about what he/she would like to say on the topic. The task is to talk about a personal experience such as a memorable day or a significant person. This is followed by a couple of questions to which the candidate gives short answers. This section should be 2-3 minutes long and provides a transition to *Section 3*.

In *Section 3*, candidate and interviewer will have a discussion relating to one or two of the subject areas of *Section 2*. The candidate will be asked to produce more linguistic complexity, such as give an opinion, evaluate a situation, justify a position, or make a prediction. The interviewer has a list of questions but can respond freely to the candidate's answers, making this part more like a normal conversation. This section should be 2-3 minutes long, and it ends the interview.

Timing: The approximate time for each section is given, but a lower-level speaker may not be able to say much because of linguistic limitations, whereas an advanced speaker may be able to speak at greater length. If a candidate cannot answer, the interviewer can rephrase the question or simply ask another one. If a candidate goes on for too long, the interviewer can simply say “Thank you” and ask the next question.

Interview Protocol

Introduction

The interview begins with a greeting and small talk to put the candidate at ease. The greeting may be varied to suit different situations. Here are two examples:

- **Good morning/afternoon/evening, Professor Huang. How are you today? ... How are things going at your university? ... It was good of you to take the time to participate in this interview. As you know, its purpose is to assess your English language skills, so let's get started.**
- **Hello, Parminder/Ms. Kaur. How are you today? ... How are things going in your lab? ... Thank you for setting aside the time for this interview. As you know, its purpose is to assess your English language skills, so let's get started.**

Section 1 *(Time limit: 2-3 minutes)*

Choose 3-4 questions, depending on how long it takes to answer them. Begin by saying:

First of all, I'd like to ask you a few questions about daily life.

- 1. Can you tell me about your studies/your work? (Choose one or the other.)**
- 2. Can you tell me about your university? (If applicable)**
- 3. Can you tell me about your city or town? (You can say the name if you know it.)**
- 4. Can you tell me what kind of transportation is common in your city or town?**
- 5. Can you tell me what you do in your free time?**
- 6. Can you tell me about a sport that you like to watch or practice?**
- 7. Can you tell me about a holiday that is celebrated in your country?**
- 8. Can you tell me about a trip that you took recently?**
- 9. Can you tell me about how you learned English?**
- 10. Can you tell me about any TV programs or movies that you watch in English?**

Section 2 *(Time limit: 2-3 minutes)*

Choose two topics with a few follow-up questions, depending on how long it takes to answer them. Begin by saying:

Now let's talk about a few other topics. You can take a moment to think about what you're going to say.

1. Majors: *(Long answer of 1-2 minutes; ask the other 2 questions if appropriate.)*

Can you tell me why you chose your major and how that choice has influenced your life?

- Have you ever regretted choosing that major?
- Have you ever wanted to study a completely different subject?

2. Teachers: *(Long answer of 1-2 minutes; ask the other 2 questions if appropriate.)*

Can you tell me about a teacher, professor, or mentor who had a great influence on you?

- Do you still see this person?
- What is he/she doing now?

3. Leaders: *(Long answer of 1-2 minutes; ask the other 2 questions if appropriate.)*

Can you tell me about a leader in your field who has inspired you?

- Do you think he/she has inspired many other people?
- What has been his/her effect in your field?

4. Discoveries: *(Long answer of 1-2 minutes; ask the other 2 questions if appropriate.)*

Can you tell me about a discovery that has changed the course of human life?

- Do you think that discovery is still useful today?
- Will it continue to be useful in the future?

5. Devices: *(Long answer of 1-2 minutes; ask the following questions if appropriate.)*

Can you tell me about a technological device that you use a lot?

- Would you like to upgrade your device?
- Do you think you'll be able to get another one soon?

6. Research: *(Long answer of 1-2 minutes; ask the following questions if appropriate.)*

Can you tell me about an area of research that you think is very important?

- Do you think that this research will continue to be done?
- Do you think there will be another discovery or breakthrough in the near future?

Section 3 (Time limit: 2-3 minutes)

Continue with the same one or two topics as in Section 2, depending on how long it takes to answer them. Feel free to comment on what the candidate says in order to clarify and extend the conversation. Begin by saying:

Now I'd like to continue exploring the topics we just talked about in greater depth. Let's begin with...

(Second topic) Let's continue with...

1. Majors:

- What kind of majors do you think are most common in your country?
- Do you think it's better in that major for a student to study in your country or to go abroad?
- Do you think paying a lot of money for an education, like students do in the US, is worthwhile?

2. Teachers:

- Do many people in your country prepare to be teachers or professors? Why or why not?
- Do you think teachers or professors get a good salary? Why or why not?
- How could the government attract more people into the teaching profession?

3. Leaders:

- What are the characteristics of people who become leaders in any field?
- Do you think your country has enough good leaders in different fields? Why or why not?
- How can young people be prepared to be leaders in different fields in the future?

4. Discoveries:

- Do you think that almost anyone can make a discovery in his/her chosen field?
- What is necessary to make a discovery in the arts or science?
- Some say that discoveries are made "by standing on the shoulders of giants." Do you think this is true?

5. Devices:

- Can you estimate the percentage of people in your country that use this device?
- Do you think everyone is able to afford it? Why/Why not?
- Who should be responsible for making this device more affordable everyone?

6. Research:

- Do you think that enough funding is available for research in your country?
- Who funds research projects – the government, industry, or universities?
- Where could more money for research be found?

Conclusion

The interviewer can say something similar to this in order to bring the interview to an end:

Thank you for participating in this interview. I'm going to take some time to evaluate this conversation and will contact you soon. Nice talking to you... / Have a nice day... / Good-bye...

Continuation – *It's possible that personnel from a department or school may want to talk to the candidate further about his/her future research or teaching assignments. The conversation may continue after the speaking assessment in order to meet the needs of those departments or schools at the discretion of the interviewers.*

Interview Rubric

Components	Poor (1 pt)	Fair (2 pts)	Good (3 pts)	Very Good (4 pts)
Clarity Pts:	Most answers were unclear or incomprehensible.	Many answers were unclear or incomprehensible at times.	Some answers were unclear but many were comprehensible.	All answers were clear and comprehensible.
Fluency Pts:	Unable to respond to most questions.	Took some time to respond to questions with frequent pauses to formulate answers.	Was able to answer questions without many pauses.	Was able to communicate fluently and without hesitation or pauses.
Pronunciation Pts:	Pronunciation was generally incomprehensible.	Pronunciation made understanding difficult, but with effort, it was possible to guess what was said.	Pronunciation was somewhat comprehensible; without much effort, it was possible to understand what was said.	Pronunciation was comprehensible, and although accent was noticeable, it did not take away from understanding.
Comprehension Pts:	Unable to comprehend most questions; questions had to be repeated or simplified to elicit response.	Able to comprehend some questions; questions had to be repeated or simplified occasionally to elicit response.	Able to comprehend most questions; responses were appropriate for the most part.	Able to comprehend all questions and give appropriate responses.
Content Pts:	Did not give appropriate responses to questions asked.	Gave some answers that were limited or off-topic.	Gave answers that were, for the most part, complete and on topic.	Gave answers that were all complete and on-topic.
Total*: /20				

Please record score and comments on J-1 Supplement Form.

*BU English language experts recommend a minimum score of 12 for short-term and/or uncompensated positions and a minimum score of 16 for teaching and/or longer-term Postdoctoral level appointments.