

Guide to Unacceptable Interview Questions

It is essential for all members of a search committee to be aware of these guidelines and follow them in both spirit and letter. Avoid any direct or indirect questions that touch on material that may not be asked. This information about an applicant should never be discussed with regard to his or her candidacy for a position.

Subject	What May NOT be Asked	What May Be Asked
<i>Name</i>	Maiden name of a married woman. Inquiries about the name that would seek to elicit information about the candidate's ancestry or descent.	Whether the applicant has worked for the University under another name. Whether any other information, such as a nickname or initials, is needed to check the candidate's work and educational record.
<i>Age</i>	Inquiry into the date of birth or age of an applicant.	Discussion should be kept to questions about the applicant's career stage.
<i>Gender</i>	Inquiry into an applicant's maiden name or any question that pertains to only one sex.	No questions.
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Inquiry into an applicant's sexuality.	No questions.
<i>Religion</i>	Inquiry into an applicant's religious denomination, affiliation, church, parish, pastor, or religious holidays observed. Avoid any questions regarding organizations and/or affiliations that would identify religion.	No questions.
<i>Birthplace</i>	Birthplace of an applicant. Birthplace of applicant's parents, spouse, or other close relatives.	No questions.
<i>Relatives</i>	Names, addresses, ages, number, or other information concerning applicant's children or other relatives not employed by Harvard.	Name of an applicant's relatives already employed by Harvard.
<i>Citizenship</i>	Any inquiries about citizenship or whether the applicant intends to become a U.S. citizen	"Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?"
<i>Language</i>	Inquiries into how applicant acquired the ability to read, write, or speak a foreign language.	What languages do you read fluently? Write fluently? Speak fluently?

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<i>Disability</i>	<p>Inquiry into whether the applicant has a physical or mental disability/handicap or about the nature or severity of the disability/handicap.</p> <p>Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever been addicted to illegal drugs or treated for drug abuse/alcoholism.</p> <p>Inquiry into whether an applicant has AIDS.</p> <p>Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever received worker's compensation.</p> <p>Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever been absent from work due to illness.</p> <p>An employer may not inquire as to the nature, severity, treatment, or prognosis of an obvious handicap or disability or of a hidden disability or handicap voluntarily disclosed by the applicant.</p>	You can ask an applicant about his or her ability to perform job-related functions, as long as the questions are not phrased in terms, which would elicit whether the applicant has a disability.
<i>Marital Status</i>	Are you married? Where does your spouse work? What are the ages of your children, if any? What was your maiden name?	No questions.
<i>Address</i>	Do you rent or own your home? How long at each particular address?	Applicant's place of residence.
<i>Height, Weight, Strength</i>	n/a	Questions regarding height, weight, or strength may be asked only if the employer can prove these requirements are necessary to do the job.
<i>Photograph</i>	An employer cannot ask for a photograph to accompany an application.	No questions.
<i>Military</i>	Inquiry into the applicant's general military experience or type of discharge.	Applicant's work experience, including names, addresses of previous employers, dates of employment, reasons for leaving.
<i>Criminal Record</i>	Inquiry related to arrests, juvenile record, sealed court records, misdemeanors more than five years old. Any inquiry or check into a person's arrest, court or conviction record if not substantially related to functions and responsibilities of the	Have you ever been convicted of a felony? Within the past five years, have you been convicted of, or released from incarceration for, a

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	prospective employment.	misdemeanor which was not a first offense for drunkenness, simple assault, speeding, a minor traffic violation, an affray, or disturbing the peace?
<i>Education</i>	Questions about education designed to determine how old the applicant is.	Inquiry into the academic, vocational, or professional education of an applicant for employment.
<i>Experience</i>	Inquiry into the organizations of which the applicant for employment is a member, the nature, name or character of which would likely disclose the applicant's protected class status.	Inquiry into work experience. Inquiry into countries the applicant has visited. Inquiry into references.
<i>Organizations</i>	Inquiry into an applicant's membership in non-professional organizations (e.g., clubs, lodges, etc.)	Are you a member of any professional societies or organizations? (Exclude the organizations' name or character of which indicates race, creed, color, or national origin of its members.)

Sources: MIT Faculty Search Committee Handbook (2002), Harvard Office of Human Resources, Harvard Office of General Counsel.