

# Guide to Acceptable Interview Questions

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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.

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

Subject	What May Be Asked	What May NOT Be Asked
<b>Name</b>	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.	Maiden name of a married woman. Inquiries about the name that would seek to elicit information about the candidate's ancestry or descent.
<b>Age</b>	Discussion should be kept to questions about the applicant's career stage.	Inquiry into the date of birth or age of an applicant.
<b>Gender</b>	No questions.	Inquiry into an applicant's maiden name or any question that pertains to only one sex.
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	No questions.	Inquiry into applicant's sexuality.
<b>Religion</b>	No questions.	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.
<b>Birthplace</b>	No questions.	Birthplace of applicant. Birthplace of applicant's parents, spouse, or other close relatives.
<b>Relatives</b>	Names of applicant's relatives already employed by Harvard.	Names, addresses, ages, number, or other information concerning applicant's children or other relatives not employed by Harvard.

Subject	What May Be Asked	What May NOT Be Asked
<b>National Origin</b>	An employer may require an employee to produce documentation that evidences his or her identity and employment eligibility under federal immigration laws.	Inquiry into the applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage, or nationality; nationality of parents or spouse; applicant's native language.
<b>Citizenship</b>	"Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?"	Any inquiries about citizenship or whether the applicant intends to become a U.S. citizen.
<b>Language</b>	What languages do you read fluently? Write fluently? Speak fluently?	Inquiries into how applicant acquired the ability to read, write, or speak a foreign language.
<b>Disability</b>	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.	<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 workers' compensation.</p> <p>Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever been hospitalized/treated for medical or mental health conditions.</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>
<b>Marital Status</b>	No questions.	Are you married? Where does your spouse work? What are the ages of your children, if any? What was your maiden name?

<b>Subject</b>	<b>What May Be Asked</b>	<b>What May NOT Be Asked</b>
<b>Address</b>	Applicant's place of residence.	Do you rent or own your home? How long at each particular address?
<b>Notice of Case of Emergency</b>	Name and address of person to be noticed in case of an accident or emergency.	n/a
<b>Height, Weight, Strength</b>	Questions regarding height, weight, or strength may be asked only if the employer can prove these requirements are necessary to do the job.	n/a
<b>Photograph</b>	No questions.	An employer cannot ask for a photograph to accompany an application.
<b>Military</b>	Applicant's work experience, including names, addresses of previous employers, dates of employment, reasons for leaving.	Inquiry into an applicant's general military experience or type of discharge.
<b>Criminal Record</b>	Inquiry into actual convictions (not arrests) that relate reasonably to fitness to perform a particular job.	Inquiry relating to arrests. Any inquiry or check into a person's arrest, court, or conviction record if not substantially related to functions and responsibilities of the prospective employment.
<b>Education</b>	Inquiry into the academic, vocational, or professional education of an applicant for employment.	Questions about education designed to determine how old the applicant is.
<b>Experience</b>	Inquiry into work experience. Inquiry into countries the applicant has visited. Inquiry into references.	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.
<b>Organizations</b>	Are you a member of any professional societies or organizations? (Exclude organizations the name or character of which indicates the race, creed, color, or national origin of its members.)	Inquiry into applicant's membership in nonprofessional organizations (e.g., clubs, lodges, etc.)