

# How to conduct interviews for potential appraisal and selection

**For students**

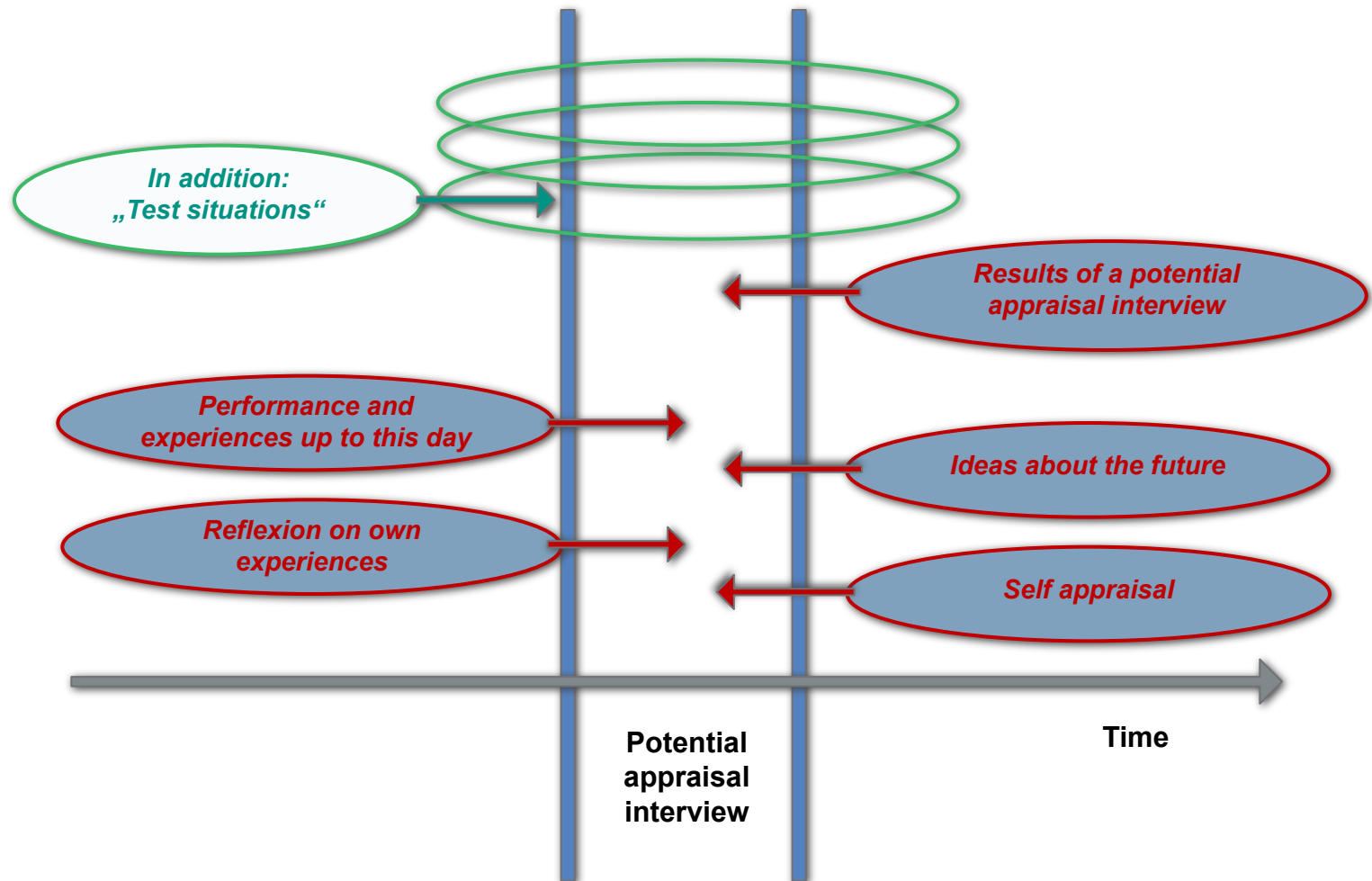


**Prof. Dr. Günter Trost**  
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## Overview

- Application and forms of interviews
- Characteristics of interviews
- What kind of information does it provide?
- What can be done to increase the reliability and validity of the interview?
- Some more details about the interview
- Frequently made mistakes ... and how to avoid them
- The interview as a walk into the past and the future
- Checklist for the evaluation of interview results
- Types of interview questions
- Some final recommendations

# Potential appraisal



# Fields of interview application

- **Organizational / industrial psychology:**  
used for selection, placement, potential analysis, performance appraisal, personnel development, as “exit interview”
- **Educational psychology:**  
used by school psychologists for supporting students with learning or other problems;  
in selection procedures for admission to higher levels of education
- **Clinical psychology:**  
used in the context of counseling and therapy
- In other areas of psychology, such as forensic psychology ...

**In the context of selection procedures, the interview is the most frequently applied diagn. instrument worldwide.**

# Forms of interviews

## According to the number of persons involved:

- **One-on-one interview:** One interviewer, one interviewee
- **Panel interview:** More than one interviewer, one interviewee
- **Multiple interview:** One interviewer, more than one interviewee  
More than one interviewer, more than one interviewee

## According to the degree of structure:

- **Completely unstructured interview (“free” interview)**
- **Structured interview**
- **Standardized interview**

## According to the kind of contact:

- **Face-to face interview**
- **Telephone interview**
- **Video-based interview**

## Two kinds of information the interview provides (1)

- (a) The interviewee's report on his/her behaviour**
- (b) Your observations on the interviewee's behaviour during the interview itself**

## Two kinds of information the interview provides (2)

### **(a) The interviewee's report on his/her behaviour**

- What he/she has done in the past.
- How he/she typically reacts in certain situations.
- What he/she would do in certain future situations.

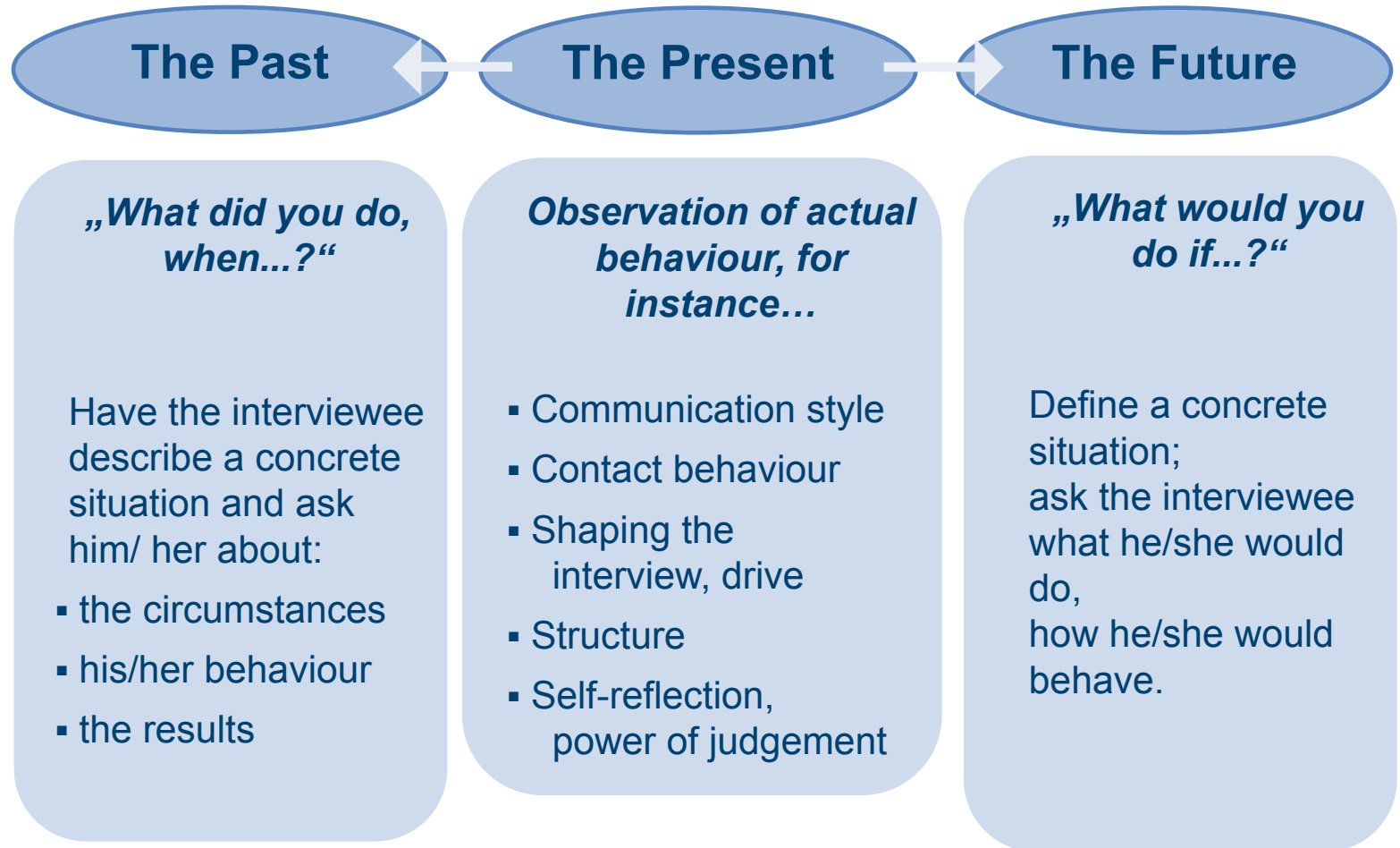
## Two kinds of information the interview provides (3)

### (b) Your observations on the interviewee's behaviour during the interview itself

- Can the person solve a problem you confront him/her with (analytical thinking)?
- How active is the person in the interview, steering the interview, asking questions etc. (initiative, drive)?
- Does the interviewee take a clear stand and defends his/her position even if you attack this position (standing, perseverance, self-confidence)?
- How does the person express him-/herself, maintains good eye contact, contribute to a pleasant conversation atmosphere (communication skills)?
- How does the person manage to convince you of his/her views on given topics (argumentation skills, power of persuasion)?
- How fast and how well does the interviewee adapt to changing topics and perspectives of the conversation (flexibility in thinking)?
- To what extent has the person relevant information ready (specific knowledge)?



# The interview as a walk through time



# Strengths and weaknesses of the interview

## Strengths:

- Outmost flexibility
- Covers virtually all areas that are of interest in a selection process (however, does not cover all of those areas equally well)
- Very popular both among those who conduct the selection process AND applicants

## Weaknesses:

- Limited objectivity / reliability
- Limited validity
- Low “economy”: high investment of interviewers’ time
- Susceptibility to faking and training

# Objectivity / reliability of interviews as compared with other diagnostic instruments

## Objectivity:

low (unstructured) to medium (structured interviews)

Example:

Inter-rater reliability of structured interviews: 0.50

Re-test reliability: unknown

## Aptitude tests:

Objectivity:	100 %
Reliability:	
internal consistency:	> 0.90
re-test reliability:	> 0.70

## Predictive validity of interviews as compared with other diagnostic instruments

Selection tool	Correlation coefficient
<i>Unstructured interviews</i>	<i>0.14</i>
<i>Structured interviews</i>	<i>0.31</i>
Personality tests	0.20
Biographical inventories	0.35
Assessment Centers	0.37
Intelligence tests	0.51

## Which opportunities does the interview offer in order to get information on a person's potential?

- 1.** You ask questions and evaluate the answers.
- 2.** An important part of the information you are after you gain from direct observation of the interviewee's behaviour throughout the interview
- 3.** You insert „work probes“ in the interview (multi-method approach)

## What can be done to increase the reliability and validity of the interview?

- Clearly defined criteria
- Behaviour orientation
- Separation of observation and interpretation/assessment
- Using a biographical questionnaire beforehand
- Prescribing initial key interview questions
- Preparation of an interview
- Taking notes
- Interviewer training

## Some more details about the interview

- It is the diagnostic instrument that has the **highest “social acceptance“**  
(except for the stress interview / cross-examination)
- Applicants believe that the interview offers them the **highest chance of having an influence** on the results
- **More than one interviewer** enhance the quality of an interview
- **Structured interviews** are more valid and reliable than unstructured ones. But too much standardisation lowers the acceptance on the part of the interviewees.

## Some mistakes that are frequently made in the interview ...

### ... in handling the interview:

- Only **superficial questions** without following up on the answers
- **Unfavourable wording** of the questions: closed questions, suggestive questions, too long-winded questions ...
- The **interviewer talks more** than the interviewee.

### ... when it comes to processing the information and drawing conclusions:

- The interviewer takes **no notes or too little notes**.
- Effects of **sympathy/antipathy or prejudices** are in place.
- **Premature judgements**



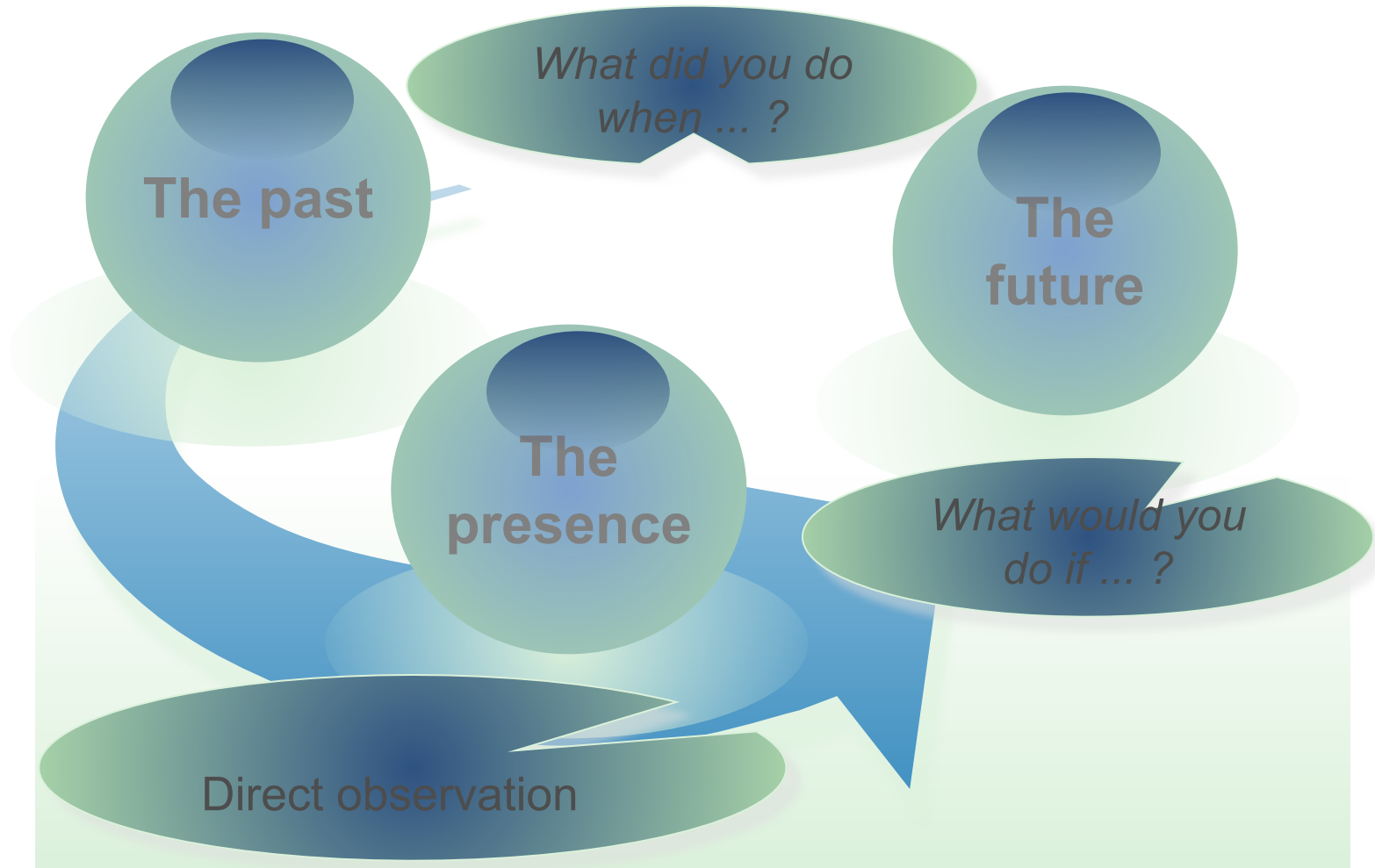
## ... and how to avoid them

- Clearly defined criteria: Deriving the questions from the requirements of the respective position
- Interviewer training
- Structuring the interview
- Behaviour orientation: „Anchoring“ the rating at the concrete behaviour as it is observable during the interview
- Separating the collection of information (observation) from the evaluation of the employee (interpretation)
- Using a biographical questionnaire beforehand (collecting facts)
- Prescribing initial key interview questions
- Continuously taking notes

## What should be considered before conducting a potential appraisal interview?

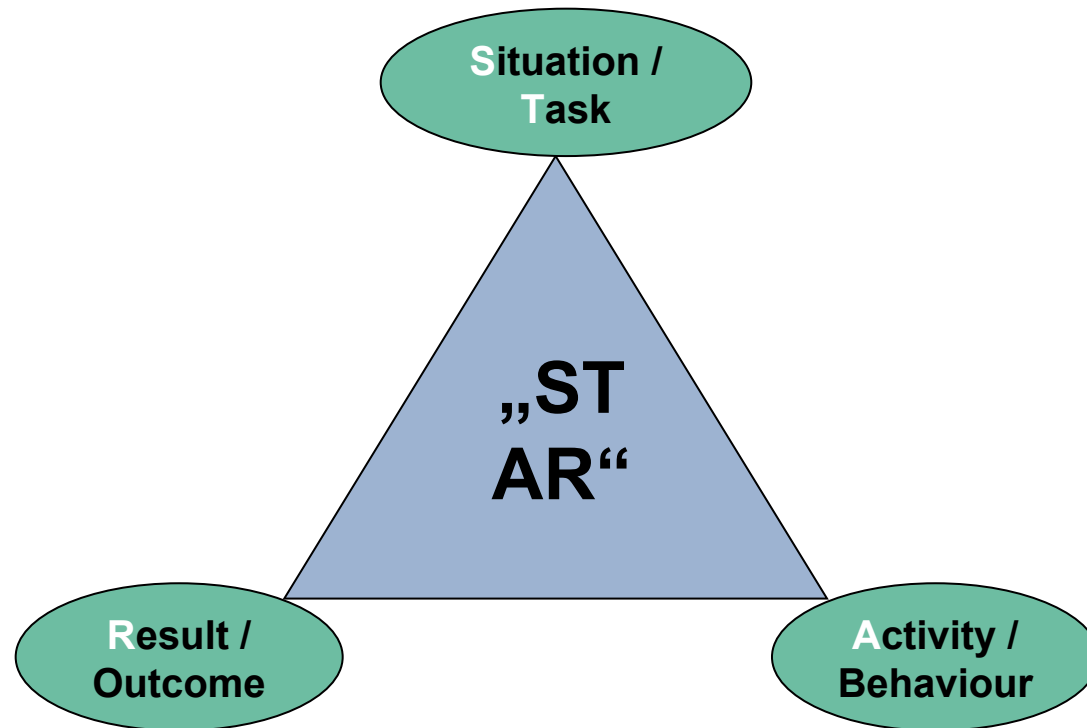
- Recapitulating: What are the specific requirements of the position in question? What are the competencies needed?
- What exactly do I already know about this employee with respect to these competencies?
- What kind of information do I still need?
- Careful preparation of each individual interview is a MUST.

# The interview as a „walk into the past and the future“



# Questions about the past: What did you do when ...?

The „behavioural triangle“



## Questions about future behaviour: What would you do if ...? (Situational questions)

- Appropriate approach when your interviewee has not yet been in situations that are important or typical for his / her professional future (e.g., when he / she has not yet had leadership responsibility)
- As you cannot inquire into past behaviour related to the competency in question, you may ask about **ideas for future behaviour**:  
*„What would you do if ...?“*  
*„Imagine you are confronted with the following problem: ....;  
how would you go about?“*  
*„Where do you see yourself in three / five years?“*
- Let your interviewee describe his / her ideas of acting in the given situation as concretely as possible. Ask **clarifying question** if needed!

## Questions about future behaviour: What would you do if ...? (Situational questions)

When you use such questions, please bear in mind:



Choose situations that will **actually occur** and that are **critical**.



Determine beforehand which behaviour is **appropriate** in the given situation.



With these questions you find out about the interviewee's **intentions and ideas** for action. You cannot be sure that the person will **really act that way when the situation occurs**. But: At least the interviewee can show that he / she has a **concrete conception** of what would be the appropriate action.

## **Between the past and the future: Direct observations during the interview**

**By means of direct observation of the interviewee's behaviour throughout the interview you learn a lot about that person's ...**

- communication skills
- contact behaviour, empathy
- initiative and drive
- analytical skills, reasoning skills

## „Work samples“

- Describing target, content and outcome of a **project**  
(The virtual audience can be customers, the Board, experts, colleagues who are not familiar with the topic)
- „**Case study / scenario**“:  
Interviewer outlines an actual problem, possibly with the aid of some documents; he/she asks for an approach to solve the problem.  
(Example: ideas on how to prepare and carry out an employee survey)
- **Interpreting given data sets:** e.g., statistics, a business report, a brief report in a magazine)
- **Short presentation** on an actual (strategic) problem or a project the interviewee has been / is involved in
- Explaining a **complex issue**
- **Spontaneous speech**, e.g. as part of a tv or newspaper interview
- **Role play:** talk to an employee, a customer, a supplier etc.
- ...



## Types of questions

- ▶ Open questions
- ▶ Closed questions
- ▶ Alternative questions
- ▶ Reflective questions
- ▶ Leading questions
- .....
- .....
- .....



## Types of questions

- ◀ Open questions
- ◀ Closed questions
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- ◀ Reflective questions
- ◀ Leading questions
- .....
- .....
- .....

### Open questions ...

- ... mostly begin with a W.
- ... activate the interviewee.
- ... foster a flow of speaking.
- ... leave the interview partner wide space regarding form and content of the answer.
- ... provide a lot of information.
- ... are experienced as a minimum of steering.

### **Examples:**

- *What kind of experience have you made with team work?*
- *What are, in your view, the chances of project X to be successful?*
- *What is important to in your vocational / professional career?*



## Types of questions

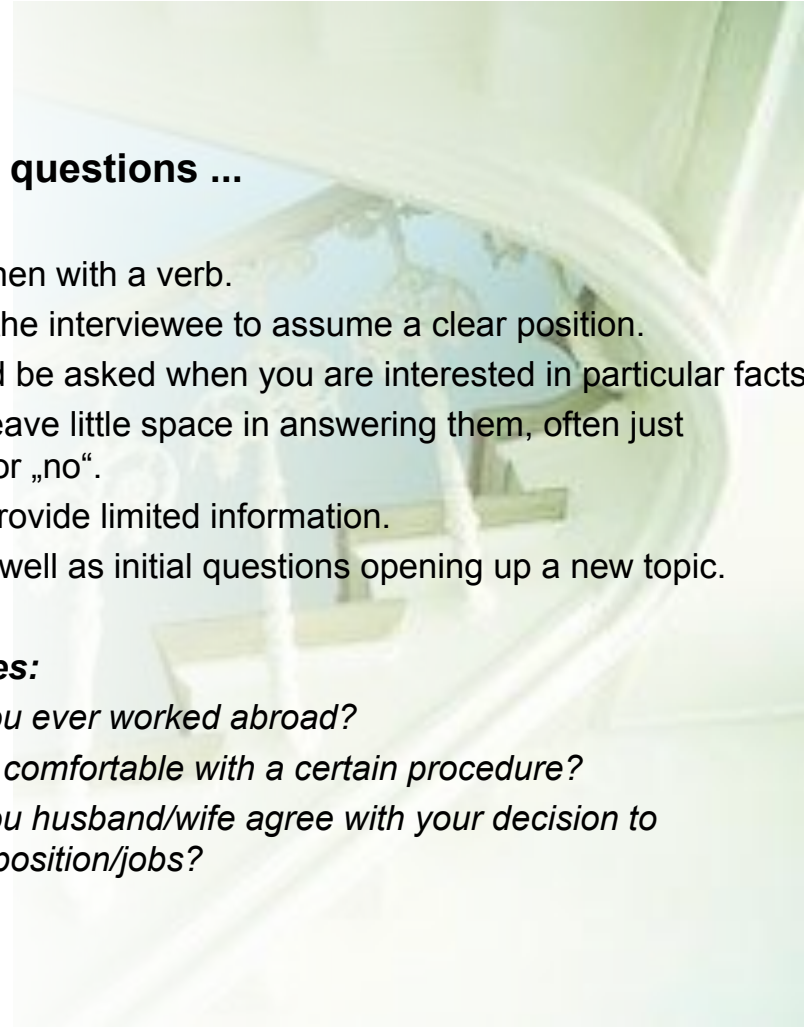
- ◀ Open questions
- ◀ **Closed questions**
- ◀ Alternative questions
- ◀ Reflective questions
- ◀ Leading questions
- .....
- .....
- .....

### **Closed questions ...**

- ... beginnen with a verb.
- ... force the interviewee to assume a clear position.
- ... should be asked when you are interested in particular facts.
- ... only leave little space in answering them, often just „yes“ or „no“.
- ... only provide limited information.
- ... serve well as initial questions opening up a new topic.

### **Examples:**

- *Have you ever worked abroad?*
- *Are you comfortable with a certain procedure?*
- *Does your husband/wife agree with your decision to switch position/jobs?*



# Types of questions

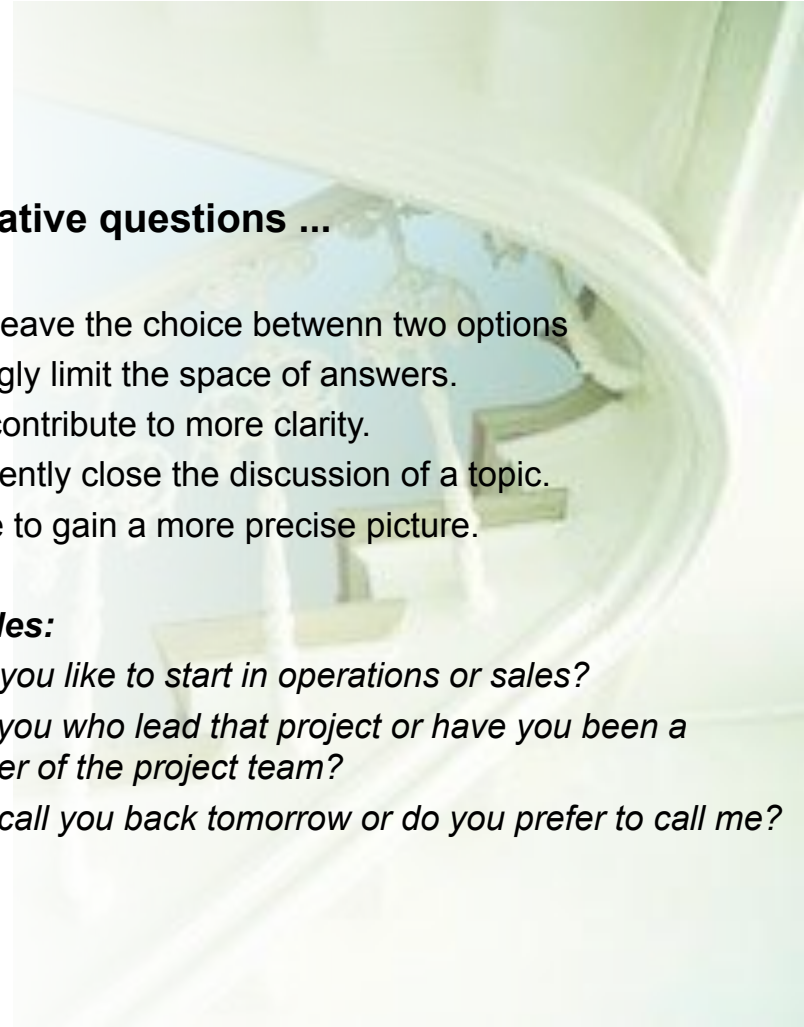
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- ◀ Closed questions
- ◀ **Alternative questions**
- ◀ Reflective questions
- ◀ Leading questions
- .....
- .....
- .....

## **Alternative questions ...**

- ... only leave the choice between two options
- ... strongly limit the space of answers.
- ... can contribute to more clarity.
- ... frequently close the discussion of a topic.
- ... serve to gain a more precise picture.

### **Examples:**

- *Would you like to start in operations or sales?*
- *Was it you who lead that project or have you been a member of the project team?*
- *Shall I call you back tomorrow or do you prefer to call me?*



# Types of questions

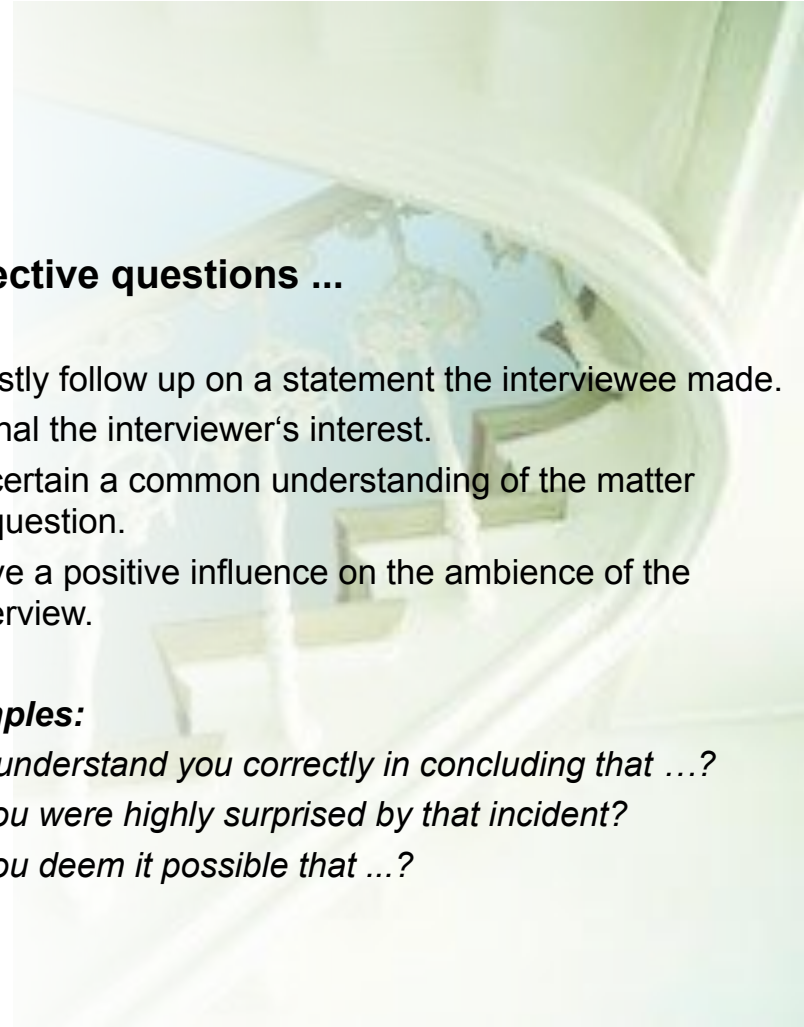
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- ◀ Closed questions
- ◀ Alternative questions
- ◀ **Reflective questions**
- ◀ Leading questions
- .....
- .....
- .....

## **Reflective questions ...**

- ... mostly follow up on a statement the interviewee made.
- ... signal the interviewer's interest.
- ... ascertain a common understanding of the matter in question.
- ... have a positive influence on the ambience of the interview.

### **Examples:**

- *Do I understand you correctly in concluding that ...?*
- *So you were highly surprised by that incident?*
- *So you deem it possible that ...?*



# Types of questions

- ◀ Open questions
- ◀ Closed questions
- ◀ Alternative questions
- ◀ Reflective questions
- ◀ **Leading questions**

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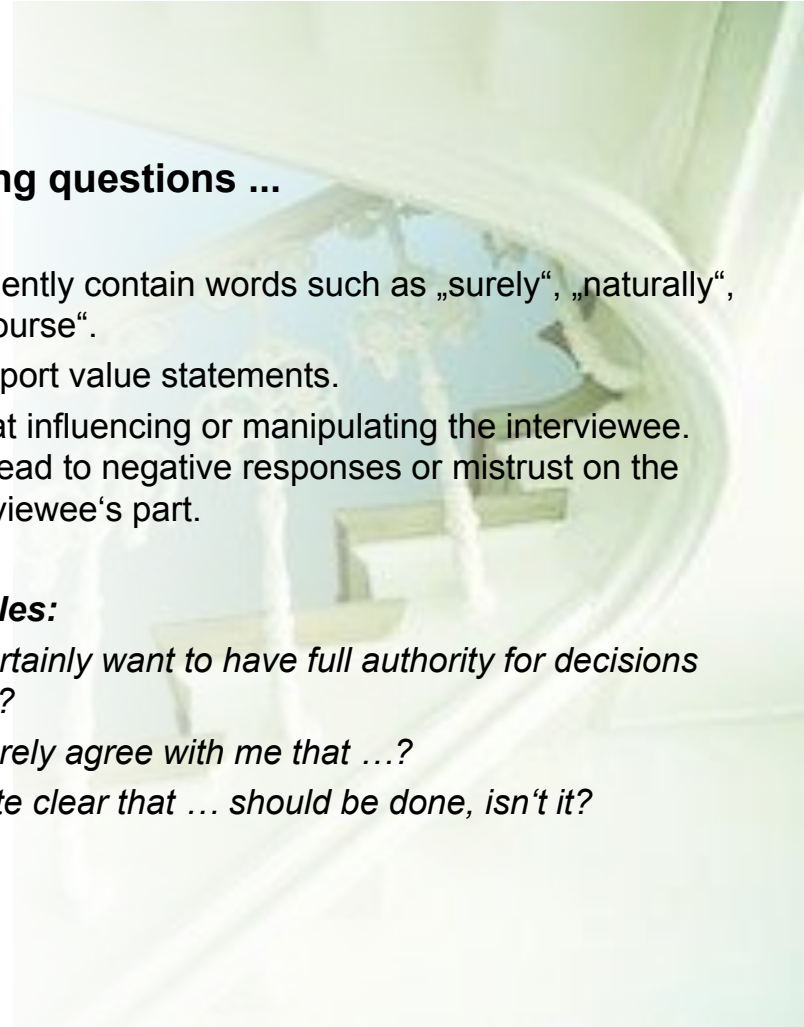
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## Leading questions ...

- ... frequently contain words such as „surely“, „naturally“, „of course“.
- ... transport value statements.
- ... aim at influencing or manipulating the interviewee.
- ... can lead to negative responses or mistrust on the interviewee's part.

### **Examples:**

- *You certainly want to have full authority for decisions on ...?*
- *You surely agree with me that ...?*
- *It's quite clear that ... should be done, isn't it?*



# Final recommendations on how to conduct interviews

- ***Make sure your dialogue partner is talking more than you are.*** Nonetheless, if you want to share an experience or give an advice which helps the participant to develop further you are welcome to do so.
- ***Ask open questions as often as possible.*** Do *not* say: “Do you take criticism well?” But rather: “Can you describe a situation in which you were subjected to some heavy criticism, how did the situation evolve and how did you react?”
- ***Listen carefully to the participant’s answers and build on them.***  
“You said that you want to improve your ability to delegate. What aspects of delegation do you mean more specifically? What have you already tried in order to improve this skill?”
- ***Be careful not to ask leading questions.***  
Do *not* say: “Do you want to reach a country board position because high salary and status are important to you?”  
But rather: “Why do you want to reach a higher management level in our organisation?”
- ***Make your questions simple, not long and complicated.***  
Do *not* say: “You just said that absent-mindedness is a weakness of yours. What makes you think that; I mean, in what kind of situations have you noticed that? And what effects does your absent-mindedness have? Or, to be more precise, have you harmed only yourself or were other people affected as well?”  
But rather: “You just said that absent-mindedness is a weakness of yours. Could you please outline a situation where you forgot or missed something important?”
- ***Do not forget to ask future-oriented questions –***  
rather than focussing mainly on what the participant has already done in the past.

