



What is a structured interview with the State of Illinois?

A structured interview involves pre-determined questions, in a standardized order, that are meant to examine the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) or preferred qualifications (PQs) necessary for the role.

It's important to note that the interview is process-driven and may be very different from what you are used to. It may seem cold as there is no time for rapport building and notes are taken during your interview, which can cause awkward silences. Do NOT be intimidated! You'll be evaluated on what you bring to the table and not on whether or not you have the same alma mater.

The three types of questions for structured interviews:

Structured interviews in the workplace typically feature job-specific, behavioral and situational questions. They help our agency assess whether candidates have the technical skills, education, experience and personality traits to excel in the vacant position and workplace culture.

- **Job-specific questions** ask candidates about the duties and responsibilities related to the open position.
- **Behavioral questions** ask candidates to share their professional experiences.
- **Situational questions** ask candidates to imagine what they would do if they faced different scenarios working for an agency.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TIPS:

1. Study the job description or job posting: The KSAs and PQs listed on the job description are the foundation of a structured interview. Interview questions are derived from the job description needed for the role and ultimately help the agency predict the best candidate for the job.
2. Make a list of 3-5 major projects you worked on (in your career or at school) and link the KSAs and PQs: Structured interviews are typically composed of behavioral and/or situational questions. You will need to give examples when responding to the interview questions and it is important to prepare in advance. Think about some projects that you feel confident talking about. Then, next to each project, write down the KSAs or PQs that you displayed while working on it. You may be unable to anticipate what you'll be asked in the interview but having a set of anecdotes and their respective KSAs or PQs ready will help you respond with confidence.
3. Draft 1-2 sample questions per KSA or PQ and structure the response: Create interview questions to help you prepare for what's to come. Your sample questions may not be asked, but it will help you think critically about your responses and help you practice structuring your responses.

4. Use the STAR method when answering the interview questions: To structure your responses, use the STAR method:
 - S – Situation: Set the scene and explain a specific event or situation you were in. Be sure to provide enough information for the interviewer to understand.
 - T – Task: Describe your goal or responsibility in that situation.
 - A – Action: Explain the steps YOU took to address the situation. Make sure to be descriptive about your contributions and use the word “I”.
 - R – Results: Share the outcome of your actions. Explain what happened, the impact you made, and/or what you learned. Do not be shy about boasting about your accomplishments.
5. Role-play: Practice interviewing with a friend or loved one. It’s one thing to see things on paper and very different to verbally say it. Practice, practice, practice. The more you articulate your responses, the more natural you’ll sound and the more confident you’ll be when the time comes to face the interviewer(s). Role-playing is also important to familiarize yourself with your body language and catch any problems ahead of time (e.g., shaking legs, touching hair, using filler words).
6. Answer each question fully: You don’t know what you’re going to be asked next, so treat each question individually. Make sure you give the best possible answer to whatever it is you’ve been asked, as there might not be another chance to provide any additional relevant information. The interviewer CANNOT clarify, explain, or return to a question. If you have never performed the duties in the question, respond with how you *would* perform the duties should you obtain the role. Some response is better than no response at all.
7. Assume we know nothing about your background: We do NOT use your application materials when we rate your response to the interview questions.
8. Use examples: While it might not always be possible, provide evidence of a particular skill or competency by linking it back to your actual experience whenever you can. You will score higher marks if you can demonstrate using a particular skill or competency in a real-life example.
9. Don’t waffle: To make it easier for the interviewer to score your response, keep your answers concise and to the point, and resist the temptation to waffle or include information that isn’t relevant.
10. List Achievements: When responding to the interview questions, focus on the specific things that you have done, even in cases where you worked as part of a group/team. Avoid using the word “we”; instead, use the word “I”, and focus on the specific tasks or parts of an assignment/project that you handled yourself. Many candidates are reluctant to brag or “toot their own horn” during interviews, for fear of coming across as arrogant or prideful; however, remember that the interview raters expect you to talk about your accomplishments and to sell yourself; YOU are the only person who can show the interview raters that you are ready for this job.