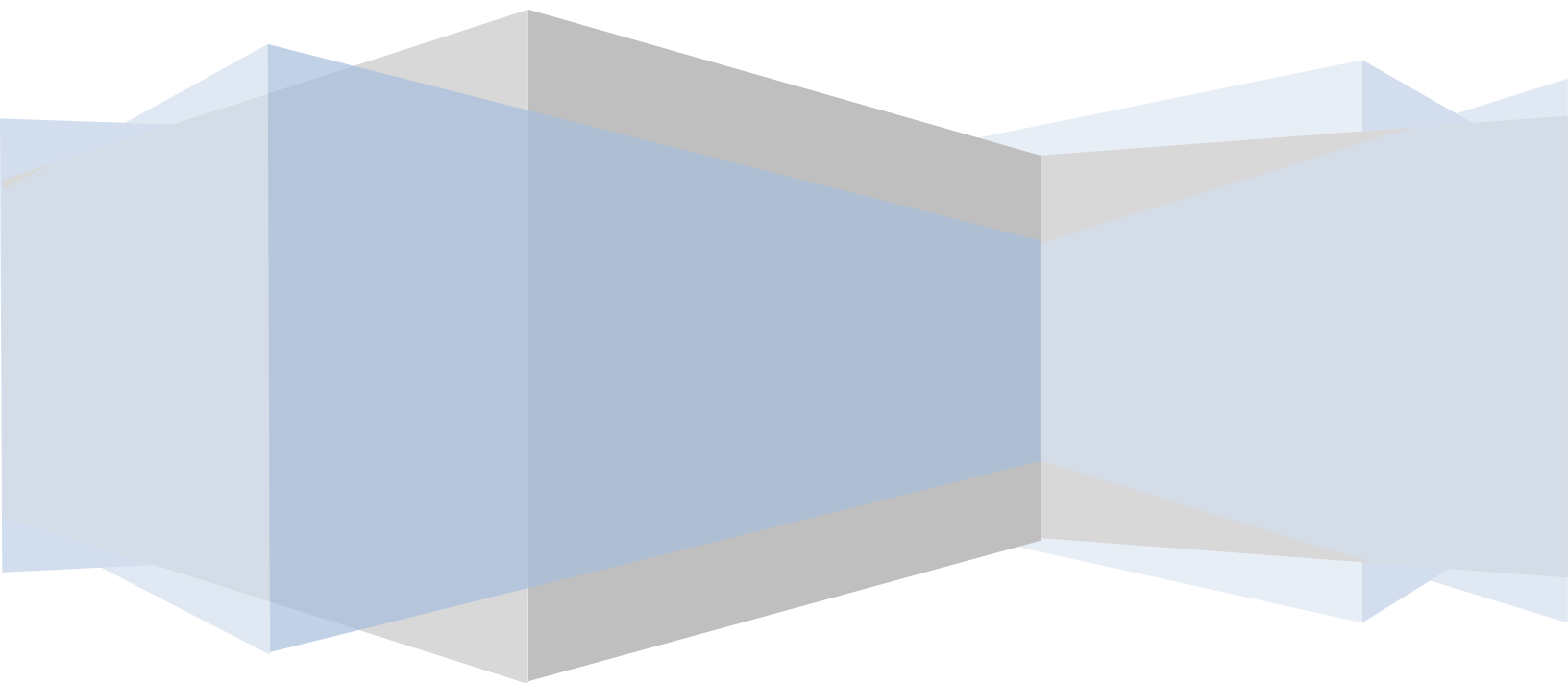


Auburn University  
Department of Human Resources

# **SUPERVISORS' EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT**



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>PREEMPLOYMENT SELECTION PROCESS</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW PLAN</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>TOPICS TO AVOID</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
<b>REFERENCE CHECKS VS. BACKGROUND CHECKS</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>EXAMPLE REFERENCE CHECK FORMS</b>	<b>Page 12</b>
<b>SAMPLE OFFER LETTERS</b>	<b>Page 15</b>

## **PREEMPLOYMENT SELECTION PROCESS**

### **REVIEW THE JOB**

1. Review the job description, which identifies the key elements of the job.
2. Identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that prospective applicants should possess to perform the job.
3. Establish selection criteria based upon the education and past experience necessary to perform in the job along with the required knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Also identify additional desired education, experience, and KSA's to enable you to screen your applicants and determine which ones you wish to call in for face-to-face interviews.

### **DEVELOP THE INTERVIEW PLAN**

1. There are three basic tenets to consider when deciding what questions you need to ask during an interview. First, be certain you are only asking for information which can be tied back to the job duties and qualifications. Second, determine how you are going to compare, rate, or rank the information you gather from your interviews. And finally, make certain you do not ask for information that has no bearing on the applicant's ability to perform the job and/or might be perceived as being discriminatory based upon some protected class status.
2. Develop questions based on each major task and responsibility in the position description and on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to do the job. Include scenario, best/worst questions that require more than a simple "yes/no" answer. All interviewees with similar backgrounds should be asked the same questions so that responses can be consistently assessed.
3. The selection process must treat all applicants fairly and be legally defensible. Interviewers asking inappropriate questions, making promises they have no authority to keep, and making off-the-cuff remarks which may be considered as improper reflect badly on the University and might result in legal liability for both the University and the interviewer. If multiple interviewers are involved, it is best to meet with the applicant as a group. That way all interviewers hear the same responses from each applicant, and the hiring official can have better control of the process and steer the questioning away from any inappropriate areas.
4. Determine how long the interviews should take, and if possible schedule the interviews morning/afternoon or on consecutive days to allow for better comparisons of applicants. Ensure that the interview will not be interrupted. Confirm the date, time, and location with the applicants; and make arrangements for parking. Let them know how long they should expect to be on campus.
5. Thoroughly review each applicant's application and resume'. Make notes to follow-up on any gaps in employment or any information that seems vague or needs clarification.

### **INTERVIEW THE CANDIDATES**

1. The purposes of an interview are to gather job-related information, provide information to the applicant about the job and the University, treat all similarly qualified applicants consistently without

regard to protected class status, present the University as a desirable place to work, and create adequate documentation to justify the selection decision.

2. Establish rapport by acting as a host to the applicant. Welcome the applicant and express appreciation for their interest in your position.
3. Let the applicant know what to expect in the interview - what the sequence will be, the names and roles of all interviewers, etc.
4. Ask questions about past performance/experience that should be predictive of future performance in your position. The applicant should do most of the talking. Ask job-related, open-ended questions. Ask follow-up questions as appropriate. Adopt a conversational style to avoid making the interview seem like an interrogation. Do not be afraid of gaps in the conversation if an applicant seems to have difficulty providing a response. Allow sufficient time for the applicant to provide an answer, or try rephrasing the question in a different way. Do not be distracted by your own note-taking. Jot down key words, and then return to your notes immediately following the interview to more completely record the information gathered. Be careful not to document information that may later be perceived as discriminatory.
5. Describe the job in more detail and how it fits into the mission of your department. Give the applicant the opportunity to ask questions. Common questions will be about the pay and the time frame for making the decision. Regarding pay, tell the applicant that Human Resources sets all starting salaries and that the salary will be somewhere within the salary range that was posted on the position announcement. If they have not provided on their application the minimum salary they would consider acceptable, you may ask them for this information during the interview. Regarding the time frame, let the applicant know if you have other interviews scheduled and that no official offer can be made until Human Resources gives its approval.
6. Inform the applicant that references will be checked. In preparation for this, it is recommended that you print each interviewed applicant's application from the online employment system and request the applicant to sign the Agreement at the end of the application in case it is required by past employers/others you may contact during the reference checking activity.
7. Conclude the interview by thanking the applicant for their time and letting them know when they can hear back from you. Generally it takes about 10 days/2 weeks from the time the department notifies HR of their Finalist candidate and all approvals being given to extend an offer, provided the department enters required information into the online employment system in a timely manner and the justifications provided are sound.

#### **POST-INTERVIEW ACTIVITIES**

1. Assess the information gathered in the interviews to determine which candidate best matches the selection criteria established for the screening process. Use only information that is job-related.
2. Check references. Reference checks can actually be conducted at any time during the screening process, and may be used to help determine who is invited for interview. However, at the very minimum reference checks are expected to be conducted on the Finalist candidate. Reference checks should verify the accuracy of the information provided by the applicant, determine the similarity between past work experiences and the job you are filling, and ascertain personal characteristics such as dependability, attendance, work ethic, etc. Be reminded that no information can be requested during a

reference check that is inappropriate to request from the applicants themselves, such as family situations, medical history, etc. If such information is offered, you must ignore it. Human Resources will verify educational credentials and conduct a criminal history check on the Finalist candidate before providing a salary referral.

3. Human Resources will provide the salary referral and instruct you to work with your departmental hiring manager to enter information into the University's online employment system. This information will be subject to review, and additional information may be requested.

4. Once all approvals are given, you may extend the official offer of employment. Form offer letters are provided within this toolkit.

# SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW PLAN

## Establishing Rapport

1. Mention a current event of general interest.
2. Ask the candidate about a hobby or other interest listed on the resume or application.
3. Relate something humorous that happened to you in the last few days.
4. Extend a warm greeting when ushering the candidate in the room
5. Express appreciation to the candidate for his/her interest in working for your organization.

## Setting the Agenda

1. Give an overview of the items to be discussed.

EXAMPLE: "The purpose of this interview today is to discuss your qualifications relative to the position we are filling and also to give you an opportunity to learn more about the job and our organization."

2. Let the candidate know that he/she will have an opportunity to ask questions.
3. Inform the candidate of any activities planned, such as a departmental tour.

## Gathering Predictive Information

### Education and Training:

1. In what ways did your education prepare you for this position?
2. What was your major field of study? Why did you select it?
3. What other training have you had that prepared you for this position?
4. What was your best subject in school? Worst? Your favorite and why?
5. Do you have plans to further your education?

**Work History:**

1. Would you describe your duties and responsibilities in your current (or most recent) job? Other jobs?
2. How would you describe a typical work day?
3. What were some of your major accomplishments in the job?
4. What were some of the problems or setbacks you experienced in the job? How did you attempt to handle them?
5. What jobs have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
6. Why are you leaving your present employer?
7. In what ways is your previous work experience applicable to the job for which you are applying?

**Background Information (working conditions, organizing skills, other related skills)**

1. What is your attitude toward job-related travel? How much would you be willing to do if related to the job?
2. What were your most important goals and objectives for the past year? How successful were you in achieving them?
3. In what type of work environment are you most comfortable?
4. Describe for me those situations from your most recent work experience which produced the highest levels of stress for you. How did you cope with them? What was the final result?
5. What type of management style do you prefer from your supervisor?
6. Describe the most difficult person with whom you have ever worked. How did you handle him or her? What were the results?
7. What steps do you generally follow in making a decision?

**Personal Characteristics (motivation, work ethic, character):**

1. What factors in a job are most important to your job satisfaction?
2. Give some examples of actions that you have initiated which were of benefit to your previous employer. What were the results?
3. What are some examples of the types of things you have done on your job which made you proud?
4. What causes you to be disappointed in your own performance?
5. Tell me about the most recent mistake you made on your job and how you handled it?
6. Why do you think the University should hire you?
7. What types of criticism are leveled at you most often?

8. How do you think your co-workers would describe you?
9. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our department?

**Describe the Job and the Organization**

1. Give examples of the work to be performed (a job description listing the essential functions may be given to the applicant), and ask the applicant if he/she can perform the duties.
2. Explain the personal characteristics necessary to perform the job.
3. Describe the working conditions (hours, travel, requirements, environmental conditions) under which the job must be performed and ask the applicant if he/she can meet these requirements.
4. Explain any physical requirements, such as lifting, necessary to perform the job and ask the applicant if these requirements can be met.
5. Discuss salary and benefits offered by the company.
6. Give information about organizational structure, opportunities for advancement, and training and development programs.

**Clarifying Information**

1. Answer Questions
2. Allow applicant to expand on any areas he/she feels necessary.
3. Fill in any gaps in information obtained.

**Concluding the Interview**

1. Thank the applicant for taking the time to interview.
2. Make sure the applicant knows what to expect next and how the selection process will progress.

## **TOPICS TO AVOID**

- \*Arrest records
- \*Less-than honorable military discharge
- \*Gender and marital status
- \*Maiden name
- \*Number of children
- \*Ages of children
- \*Number of preschool children
- \*Spouse's name
- \*Spouse's income
- \*Form of birth control
- \*Family plans
- \*Child care arrangements
- \*Lawsuits or legal complaints
- \*Ownership of home or rental status
- \*Length of residence
- \*Ownership of car
- \*Form of transportation to work
- \*Loans
- \*Wage assignments or garnishments
- \*Bankruptcy
- \*Credit cards
- \*Insurance claims
- \*Judgments
- \*National origin
- \*Mother's maiden name
- \*Citizenship
- \*Place of birth
- \*Other languages spoken (unless job-related)
- \*Proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing English (unless job-related)
- \*Disabilities or handicaps
- \*Prior illnesses or accidents
- \*Hospitalizations
- \*Current or prior medication or treatment
- \*Workers' compensation claims
- \*Weight
- \*Age
- \*Date of high school graduation
- \*Religion
- \*Church affiliation
- \*Social organizations

## REFERENCE CHECKS VS. BACKGROUND CHECKS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The media has recently given a lot of attention to the issue of employer-conducted “background checks” and some of the unfortunate circumstances that have occurred when these are not conducted prior to bringing someone into the work place. Frequently these articles will use the terms “background checks” and “reference checks” interchangeably.

Here at Auburn University these two terms have distinctly different definitions. When we use the term “background check” we are referring to the routine checks that Human Resources requests from a consumer reporting agency prior to giving approval to proceed with the selection process. These checks generally include:

Social Security Trace Report	County-by-County Criminal History
Federal Criminal History	Academic Verifications
Driving Record (as required)	Professional License (as required)

In addition, we also utilize the FBI Sex Offender site which provides links to state sex offender registries.

These standard background checks do not replace the necessity for reference checks to be conducted at the departmental level on candidates prior to extending an offer of employment. This is a critically important part of the selection process, and no hiring decision should be made until the hiring authority or the search committee conducts such checks.

The following are some useful tips or best practices for conducting reference checks:

–Candidates should be informed that references will be thoroughly checked and this may include contacting references other than those specifically listed. Interviewers may wish to ask if there is anyone the candidate does not want contacted. If so, respect that - but follow up with the question, “If I did call them, what do you think they would say?”

–Remember that it is unlikely that the candidate is going to provide the name of a reference that is going to say anything unfavorable. References checked should include all past supervisors, department heads, colleagues, or anyone still available who can speak to the candidate’s job performance, professional reputation, and interpersonal relationship skills.

–United Educators, the University’s liability insurer, recommends sending a standard written request for a written reference (enclosing a position description for which the candidate has applied). Absent a written request, United Educators suggests that at the very least a standard checklist of questions should be used to solicit telephone references.

–United Educators also recommends that the same person do the reference checks on the candidates for any given position. This will help insure consistency not only in the types of questions being asked, but also in the interpretation of the answers given. The person doing the reference checking needs to be someone who is very familiar with the type of position that is being filled as well as the environment in which the work will be conducted.

–Be mindful that you cannot ask any questions during a reference check that you legally cannot ask of the candidate. Questions concerning family status, age, religion, medical conditions, etc., are

strictly off-limits. Questions should focus on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for being successful in the position.

–References should always be asked if they would rehire this person or want to work with them again in the future. If the references refuse to answer, be sure to ask them if their refusal is because of a policy restriction, state statute, or they would simply prefer not to respond. If the answer is the latter, then you may wish to reassess your selection decision.

Do not be surprised if you are only able to obtain basic information from past employers, such as position held and dates of employment. Even if this is all the information you can get, record that you made the contact and the information gathered. Doing so could protect you from any future allegations of negligent hiring.

For more detailed and specific guidance on checking references or any of the other issues associated with hiring, we recommend that supervisors and search committee members attend the Human Resources Development courses “How to Interview” for supervisors. During this session, participants are provided reference materials developed by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR). In addition to information regarding background and reference checks, checklists, and sample forms, other topics covered in the session include best practices in the selection process, screening and interviewing applicants, and legal issues associated with hiring.

## **EXAMPLE REFERENCE CHECK FORMS**

Reference checks may be requested in writing or over the phone. Many employers will not provide any information without a signed release from the applicant, so make sure you get that from your applicant at the conclusion of the interview.

Here are two examples of reference-checking guidelines. The first is formatted to be used to request information in writing and may be more suitable for Administrative/Professional jobs. This form may be faxed or mailed along with a cover letter and copy of the applicant's signed Agreement from the application. The second is formatted to be used to request information over the phone and may be more suited for University Staff positions. You will also want to ask more specific position-related skills questions (for example, experience with Excel; customer relations; specific experience questions, etc.) Feel free to pick and choose from either of the inquiries to gather the information you believe is necessary to make a sound selection decision.

## REFERENCE REQUEST

Applicant's Name:  
Reference's Name:  
Date:

Mr/Ms. ----- is a candidate for the position of ----- at Auburn University and has authorized us to check references. All information received will be handled confidentially.

- 1) In what capacity have you known the applicant? And for how long?
- 2) How would you describe Mr/Ms. -----'s work ethic?
- 3) How would you describe Mr/Ms. -----'s style of relating to people?
- 4) What are Mr/Ms. -----'s strongest job skills?
- 5) What would you consider to be their greatest weakness in their work performance?
- 6) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about Mr/Ms. -----'s work performance or behavior?

Thank you very much for your prompt response. I appreciate your time and candor

**TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK FORM**

**Applicant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reference:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contacted by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship to Applicant:** \_\_\_ Supervisor \_\_\_ Peer \_\_\_ Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Script: "(Applicant) has applied for the position of (position title) in the (Department) of Auburn University. They have given us permission to check their references. I am calling to inquire about your knowledge of this person's past work experience. All information received will be handled confidentially."*

What position(s) did the applicant hold, and what were their dates of employment? What were their primary responsibilities?

Was the work performed in a satisfactory manner? Would you consider their overall job performance to be below satisfactory or above satisfactory?

What would you consider to be their strong points?

What would you consider to be their weak points?

How do they respond to supervision?

Would you please comment on this person's:

Attendance

Dependability

Willingness to assume responsibility

Ability to follow instructions

Quality of work

Quantity of work

If given the opportunity, would you rehire this individual?

Is there any other job-related information you can provide?

## SAMPLE OFFER LETTERS

### CONTINUING TERM APPOINTMENTS

DATE

XXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear:

On behalf of Auburn University's Department of -----, we are pleased to extend an offer of appointment to you as a (job title). This offer includes an (annualized salary of \$----- paid on a monthly basis/hourly pay rate of \$----- paid on a bi-weekly basis); and your employment date will be (date). Please report to our offices located at ----- on that date at 7:45 a.m.

You will be receiving information regarding documentation you will need to bring with you on your first day of employment, along with notification regarding our New Employee Orientation session. Additionally, Auburn University has a comprehensive benefits package offering a variety of choices to meet individual needs. Information regarding these benefits will be covered in the orientation presentation.

In closing, I would like to personally welcome you to our institution; and I am looking forward to our professional association. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at -----

Sincerely,

Head

*This appointment is subject to Auburn University's policies and procedures. This offer does not constitute an expressed or implied contract of employment. Any provision contained herein may be modified and/or revoked without notice. Either party may terminate this employment relationship at any time for any reason or for no reason, in accordance with AU policies and procedures. Auburn University is an at-will employer; this document does not constitute a guarantee of continuing employment for any term.*

**LIMITED TERM APPOINTMENTS**

DATE

XXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear:

On behalf of Auburn University’s Department of -----, we are pleased to extend an offer of appointment to you as a (job title). This offer includes an (annualized salary of \$----- paid on a monthly basis/hourly pay rate of \$----- paid on a bi-weekly basis); and your employment date will be (date). Please report to our offices located at ----- on that date at 7:45 a.m.

This appointment is subject to Auburn University’s policies and procedures. As we discussed during your interview, this is a limited-term (administrative/professional, university staff) position. Continuation of the appointment will depend on the department’s assessment of the continued need for the position, your performance in the position, and continuation of funds. Currently, funding is expected to be available for this position through (date). (Provide any other additional information, such as whether funding is subject to renewal on an annual basis.) (OPTIONAL: Because this position is funded by external funds which may not be renewed, you will be required to use all accrued annual leave during the time for which funds are now currently available.)

In accordance with University policy, we will provide you at the minimum two weeks’ written notice should a decision be made to eliminate your position. If you have any questions about the conditions of your employment or the prospect of continued employment in the department, please come to see me.

Please sign this letter below indicating you understand and accept the terms of this offer of appointment and return the original to me by (date). We look forward to seeing you on (employment date).

Sincerely,

Head

I accept the position of (job title) and accept the conditions of this offer as stated above. This agreement does not constitute an expressed or implied contract of employment. Any provision contained herein may be modified and/or revoked without notice. Either party may terminate this Agreement at any time for any reason or for no reason, in accordance with AU policies and procedures. This Agreement is intended to be and shall be deemed to be an at-will employment Agreement and does not constitute a guarantee of continuing employment for any term.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Preemployment Selection Process was adapted from *Interview Guide for Supervisors*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, published by College and University Personnel Association; Washington, DC; Copyright 1998.

The “Topics to Avoid” information can be found on page 26 of this publication.