



## Interpretive Guide for Interviews

The Interpretive Guide for Interviews provides information about how to interpret applicant responses, based on our experience. The Interpretive Guide includes sample responses. For questions designed to assess risk, the Interpretive Guidelines describe a lower risk and a higher risk response, with an example of each. For questions designed to assess skills, the Guidelines describe what would constitute a positive and a negative response.

### 1. Tell me why you are interested in this position.

*This question may be used to assess the extent to which an applicant desires to work with consumer to fulfill his or her own needs, rather than the needs of the consumer.*

**Lower risk response:** The applicant describes what he has to offer and the qualities he has that will make him good with consumer.

*For example: "I believe that if you give young people a solid foundation, that it can sustain them throughout their lives. I've always been really good at listening to kids and making them feel understood. I think I can use this skill to help them make good choices about life."*

**Higher risk response:** 1) The applicant describes how consumer fulfill her needs or validate her sense of competence or well-being. 2) The applicant is unconcerned about what the duties of the position are, as long as it involves working with consumer.

*For example: "When I'm surrounded by children, I know I am right where I belong. With adults you never know what their motives are, but with kids, their motives are pure. They are so loving they just make me feel good."*

### 2. With what group of Youth would you prefer to work with? Why?

*This question may be used to assess the extent to which an applicant has an age or gender or disability preference.*

**Lower risk response:** The applicant is not concerned with the gender, age or other particular traits. Or the applicant prefers a specific gender or age because of practical reasons.

*For example: "I would like to teach CCD in the third-grade class, because my daughter is in third grade."*

**Higher risk response:** The applicant prefers a specific gender, age, or other particular traits.

*For example: "I would like to work with the kids who are 8 or 9 years old. That is such a fun age. And I do great with the boys. I think it would be good for you to assign me to that group."*

### 3. Tell me about some of your hobbies or volunteer work.

*This question may be used to assess whether an applicant might be excessively interested and involved with consumer. Particularly note any hobbies, activities or volunteer work which was not identified on the application.*

**Lower risk response:** The applicant describes involvement with adult peers and shows interest in activities with friends or family members.

*For example: "I like ceramics and pottery. About two years ago my sister and I took a crafts class together and we just really enjoyed it. So we found a community workshop where you can bring your own clay and use their wheels*

**Higher risk response:** The applicant is involved in numerous activities involving consumer, particularly one-to-one activities involving little monitoring.

*For example: "Well, I like to work out...so I've got a couple of kids I'm training on the weight machines at the gym downtown two nights a week. I think it's really good for them. I also coach a consumer team two nights a week,*



*and ovens to make your own pots. There are three of us now that meet every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon."*

*volunteer as a big brother with two consumer, and teach fourth grade Sunday school at my church."*

*Or "In my last job, I really didn't have much time for hobbies, but about four friends and I did meet for lunch about once a month. We used to laugh that eating was our hobby."*

**4. Tell me about a time in your life when you had to quickly learn how to do something. What did you have to learn? How did you learn it? Did you use the new information?**

*This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Essential Skill: Trainability.*

**Positive:** Was the applicant motivated to learn quickly and willing to work hard to make changes?

**Negative:** Did the applicant have trouble understanding the new material or was the applicant unwilling to make extra effort to learn quickly?

*For example: "In my last job, I had to learn how to run a new computer program, so I attended the training classes they offered, and then I worked at home in the evenings to try to sharpen my skills. Now I can do just about anything with that program."*

*For example: "Well, I have a way of sort of knowing things naturally. I don't need a lot of training or teaching. I usually just figure things out on my own."*

**5. Often in school or work, we're expected to adhere to policies that don't really make sense to us. Tell me about a time when you had to stick to a rule, even though it didn't seem reasonable. How did you handle that situation?**

*This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Essential Skill: Policy Adherence.*

**Positive:** Was the applicant open to understanding the policy and willing to adhere to a policy that was inconvenient? Did the applicant work to get a truly unreasonable policy changed by working through the system, rather than simply ignoring it?

**Negative:** Was the applicant unwilling to learn the rationale for the rule? Did the applicant disregard the policy without attempting to get it modified?

*For example: "I worked in a school program for kids with disabilities. We had this one boy who wore a leg brace, and the teacher always wanted me to walk with him when he was going to lunch. I didn't see the point in that, because he was so capable of walking by himself, and other children needed more help. But sure enough, in an accident at his home, he fell and broke his leg. I was really glad that we had watched him so closely at school."*

*For example: "You know it seems to me that every situation is different. Instead of having a lot of silly rules, we ought to just handle the kids individually. This one place I worked insisted that we not tickle the kids, not even when we were just playing with them. That is so ridiculous to me because kids need a lot of love and attention that they don't always get at home."*

**6. Tell me about a time when a consumer really tried your patience. Specifically tell me what happened. How did you respond to that situation?**

*This question may be used to assess the applicant's level of the Essential Skill: Patience.*



**Positive:** Did the applicant maintain their composure even when others attempted to provoke him/her into anger? Was the applicant able to maintain boundaries with consumer and recognize that the situation is not personal?

For example: *“My mother-in-law has Alzheimer’s Disease, and she gets things on her mind and just won’t let them go. She asks the same questions over and over, and no amount of explaining satisfies her; she just becomes more and more agitated. So we’ve learned just to agree with her and assure her that we’re doing as she asked. We just say, ‘Yes, yes, you’re right; I know; we’ll do that right away.’”*

**Negative:** Was the applicant provoked into an emotional display of frustration or anger? Does the applicant take interactions with consumer personally and deal with them on a child-like or immature level?

For example: *“Oh, yeah. I’ve worked with difficult kids before. With those tough guy types, you’ve just got to show them that you’re tougher than they are to keep them in their place. Otherwise, they’ll just run all over you. This one kid had made up a nickname for me to make fun of me. Well, I just came right back with a nickname for him and got all the other kids to call him that, which settled him down quite a bit.”*

## 7. Describe the two most frustrating situations you have encountered when interacting with supervisors and/or coworkers. What happened and how did you handle it?

*This question may be used to assess the applicant’s ability to handle stress and work with adults despite frustration.*

**Lower risk response:** The applicant can continue problem-solving despite frustrating circumstances. The applicant seeks help from others, stays calm and eventually finds solutions.

For example: *“Well, I know one for sure. It was my supervisor. When I worked for the childcare center I told you about, my supervisor would talk about my work performance with everyone but me. Oh, it was just awful! It was aggravating but I asked for a meeting so we could discuss my performance and work on improving our communication. The other was a person I supervised who was often late to submit work and it was riddled with mistakes. I met with the employee to explain why the tardiness and sloppy work were problematic and worked with them to improve future projects.”*

**Higher risk response:** The applicant either denies ever encountering a frustrating situation or describes an incident in which he or she quickly lost patience and used poor judgment.

For example: *“Frustrating? Gosh I can’t really say that I can think of a situation I found particularly frustrating. I guess some people do get a little put out with their supervisor, but I can’t say that’s ever happened to me.”* Or, *“Well, I get along with everyone, but I had one employee who was lazy. She was a mean one, and I’d just about had it with her. One day in a team meeting I raised my voice at her and let her know her work was not satisfactory! Now that I think about it I probably wouldn’t do that again, but she made me so mad, I just couldn’t help it. Anyway, I’ll bet she thought twice before submitting sloppy work again.”*

## 8. Have you ever been accused of inappropriate conduct with a consumer or coworker?

*This question may be used to evaluate the applicant’s history of inappropriate behavior with a consumer or coworker. A direct question is an extremely useful tool if you look closely at the responses.*

**Lower risk response:** The applicant may be surprised by the question but is not indignant. The applicant provides

**Higher risk response:** The applicant is angered by the question, indignant at being asked, and/or evasive in the



a direct, non-evasive response.

For example: “No, I haven’t.”

response.

For example: “I can’t believe you would ask me such a thing! What kind of a person do you think I am? I really don’t appreciate your implication!”

**9. Tell me about a time when you were able to make a difference in a consumer’s life. What did you do, and how did it influence the consumer? Where is the consumer now?**

*This question may be used to assess the applicant’s level of the Essential Skill: Boundaries.*

**Positive:** Did the applicant demonstrate warmth, compassion, confidentiality and concern without developing a personal relationship?

**Negative:** Did the applicant get overly involved in the life of a consumer?

For example: “I worked with this teenager one time that nobody liked. She was sort of rude with everybody. I didn’t like her, either, but I found myself sitting next to her at lunch one day, and I just decided I’d try to talk with her. When she talked with me, I realized how insecure she was about herself. She was new there, and she could tell that people didn’t like her. Once I understood, I helped her get to know some of the kids. They saw that I was friendly with her, they started visiting with her, too. Then she actually became nicer, too.”

For example: “Well, about three years ago I was working in a shelter for homeless consumer. There was one kid there who just wanted to go to school and make something of his life. I got to know him and after a while I told him that if he was ready to work hard and make good grades, he could come and live with me. And he did. I became the father he never had. That’s just me. When there’s a special kid out there, I find him.”

**10. Tell me about a time when someone commended you for your good judgment and common sense. What was the situation and how did you handle it?**

*This question may be used to assess the applicant’s level of the Essential Skill: Judgment.*

**Positive:** Did the applicant receive praise for coping with and resolving a genuinely difficult situation? Did s/he use careful analysis and sound judgment?

**Negative:** Was the applicant praised for merely completing the solutions generated by others and following through with directions?

For example: “One time a child became really upset one day before lunch. I remembered that she had Diabetes, and I thought she might just need to eat something. Sure enough, we were able to get her to drink some orange juice, and within minutes she calmed down. Then we realized that she hadn’t even known what she was doing, because she needed to eat. My supervisor was impressed that I thought about why she was acting that way instead of just reacting to it.”

For example: “A couple of years ago, a kid fell on the playground and cut his knee. It scared me to see how badly he was hurt, but I kept my head about me and sat there with him until the nursing assistant came to help. I think I did a good job under stress.”

**11. Tell me about a time when someone you worked with broke the rules or did something that made you or someone else feel uncomfortable. How did you respond?**

*This question may be used to assess the applicant’s level of the Essential Skill: Policy Adherence.*



# CAL POLY

**Lower risk response:** The applicant provides a direct, non-evasive response that gives specifics about the incident.

For example: *“At my last school I noticed a teacher was allowing students to hang out in his classroom after school with no stated purpose. It wasn’t alarming but we learned in our annual training that we weren’t supposed to do that. I talked to the teacher and let our supervisor know that we’d had a discussion about it.”*

**Higher risk response:** The applicant has never experienced this or is evasive in the response.

For example: *“Not that I can think of. I really try to focus on myself and making sure I’m meeting expectations. I don’t get involved in other people’s business or tattle on coworkers.”*