

Common Problems for Candidates Who Speak English as a Second Language

Usually people who speak English as a second language have difficulties during interviews for employment. This is mainly due to misunderstandings about the intent of the interviewer. When the interviewer perceives these difficulties negatively, the selection process, may be adversely influenced. The following list provides some common examples of disconnects which may occur during an interview for employment:

- Candidates may speak in generalities about their work experience, when you are looking for details. This should not be interpreted as an unwillingness to provide the information or that the person lacks the experience or skills to provide the information. Often, you will need to do additional probing to clarify and get the needed information.
- Candidates may hesitate over certain English words. In addition to adjusting to a second language, the candidates may be self-conscious about the fluency of their speech. Candidates will feel more comfortable when you set an appropriate environment utilizing active listening skills.
- Candidates may more readily provide personal information, depending upon their culture. It is very important that you ask specific, job-related questions. Using phrases like “Tell me about yourself” to initiate an interview, may signal candidates that you are asking about their personal affairs, and not job-related information. Clarification of your purpose(s) allows the candidates to provide the desired information.