



INSIGHT



Guide to Conducting Remote Interviews



A good interview process allows a team to gather relevant evidence to determine which candidates have the necessary skills for a role. A well-designed process should also allow candidates to move reasonably quickly through a clear sequence of steps that feels personal to them. Being unable to meet candidates in person doesn't mean you can't learn everything you need to know about whether they will be a strong hire for your team, but specific adjustments will be necessary if you move to an entirely remote interview process.

In this guide, we've compiled advice based on Insight's own experience operating a 100% remote interview process for our Fellows programs, as well as best practices amassed from working with hundreds of hiring teams, ranging from small startups to Fortune 500 enterprises. These tips will help you build a remote interviewing process that fits your needs and enables you to make sound decisions as you grow your team.

Re-evaluating your Current Interview Process

If you're thinking about adapting your in-person interviews to be conducted remotely, use this moment of transition as a chance to take a good, hard look at your current interview process.

- Is it really designed to gather the information you need?
- Does it provide candidates with clear expectations and instructions at every stage?
- Does it place artificial or unnecessary barriers in people's way?

We will focus on **three key areas to consider** as you adapt to a remote interviewing process:

- 1 | How to ensure an evidence-based decision making process
- 2 | How to confront the logistical challenges of remote interviews
- 3 | How to conduct interviews via phone and video conferencing effectively

Part I. Ensuring evidence-based decision making

To hire well, you need to understand the skills required for a particular role and build an interview system that allows you to evaluate those specific skills. You also need to base those evaluations on **evidence** rather than just the quality of the conversation during interviews. It's nearly always a mistake to make a hire based solely off of likability. While we all want to work with people we like (note that we are emphatically *not* arguing for hiring talented jerks), we should also be gathering evidence that they'll be able to do the work required for the role. When you aren't bringing candidates on-site, there are several good approaches to take for collecting this evidence.

Get examples of past work

A strong predictor of future work is what people have accomplished in the past. Ask to see examples of previous work. You can do this before you even interview them by asking applicants to include a writing sample or provide a portfolio. This has an added time-saving benefit for candidates, making your process more accommodating for those with preexisting full-time responsibilities.



During interviews, you can ask candidates to walk you through a system they designed or some code they wrote. It's important to be clear about what you're looking for in these types of evidence, both with yourself and with the candidates. For example, if you explain that you want to evaluate familiarity with statistical methods, then your interviewee may select a different piece of work to share than if you explain that you want to see how comfortable they are with specific tools. When we invite applicants to

interview for one of our Insight Fellows programs, they're given different instructions depending on the program they are interviewing for.

If the work you're evaluating was collaborative, ask for specifics on what the candidate did themselves:

- "What parts of this did you contribute?"
- "How did you divide up the work with your colleagues?"
- "What did you learn from your collaborators in doing this work together?"

By following this line of questioning, you'll not only be probing for their specific knowledge and skills, but will often also learn more about how they work with others.

Assign challenges

You may also consider asking candidates to complete new work, with parameters set by you, as part of your process. Lots of data teams we work with at Insight do this with take-home data or coding challenges.

If it is a small challenge, meant to learn more about how they get things done, it may be more appropriate to set up an enforceable time limit, or co-work through the problem with them. If the work is something that could be eventually put to some use, you should pay people for their work. Consider whether you can leverage short, paid contracts in your hiring pipeline.

Take advantage of references

How can you get a sense of what it's like to work with someone day-to-day if you never meet them in person? It's nearly impossible to know this based on a few short meetings, or even multiple day-long on-site interviews. A more reliable source is references. When interviewing remotely, you'll want to make sure you complete solid reference calls for every hire.



As with all other steps, you'll want to take a structured approach to your reference calls. Start by ensuring the person you're talking to understands the role you're hiring for. Even if the job title is identical, there may be significant differences in the responsibilities for those positions at your organization. Take the time to share the important qualities and skills you're looking for, either ahead of time in writing, or as the first point you make in your call.

From there, be sure to plan out your questions and, again, focus on gathering evidence. Avoid vague or totally open-ended questions like, "Tell me about Genevieve" or "What was it like working with Genevieve?" Instead, go for questions that aren't closed (i.e. not yes/no) but will solicit evidence:

- "What's it like to work with Genevieve when she is juggling a lot of different tasks at once?"
- "What challenges do you see for Genevieve in the role I described?"
- "What suggestions do you have for me, if I'm Genevieve's manager, to help her do her best work?"

Part II. Confronting the logistical challenges of remote interviews

The key to building a remote interview process that will work for candidates as well as for your team is **standardization**. Delivering a consistent candidate experience is how Insight is able to smoothly conduct thousands of interviews each year across a distributed team with dozens of individual interviewers. Standardization will also allow you to address common logistical issues encountered during remote interviews. Lastly, by ensuring you set clear expectations with every candidate, a standard process will provide fairness and allow interviewers to focus on evaluating people rather than their wifi quality.

The goal of the advice in this section is aimed at reducing the amount of time your team spends scheduling, reducing stress for interviewees, and establishing clear interview outcomes to streamline decision making. Instead of creating extra overhead, a remote interview process can save you time and allow you to invest those savings into the part that counts most: finding and recruiting the best candidates for the role.

Scheduling

Remote interviews can be plagued by technical problems: poor connectivity, incorrect/missing web links, time zone confusion, candidates failing to install proper tools, and hardware issues with microphones, cameras, or speakers. These lead to missed interviews, last-minute rescheduling, and ultimately a lot of wasted time.

The best candidates won't always be in your city, state, or country, and not everyone in your candidate pool will have the flexibility to attend multiple onsite interviews. Offering flexible scheduling can improve accessibility for candidates who may otherwise have trouble scheduling an in-person interview, and reducing overall barriers to interviewing will allow you to tap into new, potentially transformative, talent sources.



To create a successful remote interview process, ensure that your scheduling system is easy to follow (for candidates as well as your team). Look for ways to automate processes as much as possible. At Insight, we use a combination of Clara (an AI-enabled full service scheduling tool) and Google Calendars to support our massive interviewing process. We like these tools because they are relatively easy to set up and integrate seamlessly with our Applicant Tracking System (ATS), Greenhouse.

Calendar blocking (i.e. establishing regular, consistent interview times) allows you to be more efficient with your team's time. Instead of scheduling interviews at random times, putting everyone on the same time blocks means it's easier to accommodate candidate interviews that need to be rescheduled.

Candidate Communication

When corresponding with candidates, we encourage you to streamline things and keep the number of points of contact to a minimum. This reduces confusion and ensures a consistent experience. If multiple team members are communicating with candidates, make sure you build out solid email templates to keep information consistent and reliable.

Your email template inviting candidates to interview should prepare them for the remote experience. If a candidate doesn't have correct instructions, then trying to evaluate them becomes a pointless exercise. Instead, set candidates up for success by providing clear guidance on how to prepare. Clearly communicate the structure of your process to candidates, especially if they will be using new tools to connect with you. They can still be expected to

complete the required work, but you'll have removed the risky assumption that everyone knows what to prepare for in advance of the interview.

There are basic elements that candidates will need to know ahead of time:

- ❑ **Share who is involved:** Who will they be meeting, and which departments or teams are they from?
- ❑ **Explain the format:** Will you just want to talk (audio only) or are you planning on using video as well? Will you want them to share their screen at any point? What tools will they need? What should they prepare?
- ❑ **Set the tone:** For Insight, this means sharing that the interview will be casual, so there's no need to dress up.
- ❑ **Explain timing details:** For example, 10 minute intro, 20 minute demo, etc.
- ❑ **Recap interview timelines:** Where are they in the process? When will they hear back?

Your email invitation may end up being lengthy, but sharing more information upfront gives candidates a resource to refer back to later. This ensures all applicants receive the same clear messaging and eliminates potential uncertainty about the interview format.

By keeping candidates informed about what to expect, you will be better able to evaluate them on what you want to see: the candidate's relevant skills and experience. If you surprise them, you'll only learn how they respond to surprises. While that may be an important skill, especially if your workplace is chaotic and the ability to handle change is essential for the role, most of us are better off giving candidates as much information as possible.

Video Dos & Don'ts

For video interviews, we prefer Zoom because of its overall ease of use and call quality (video, audio, screen share etc.). It's also got some good built-in accessibility features like closed captioning and automated transcripts.

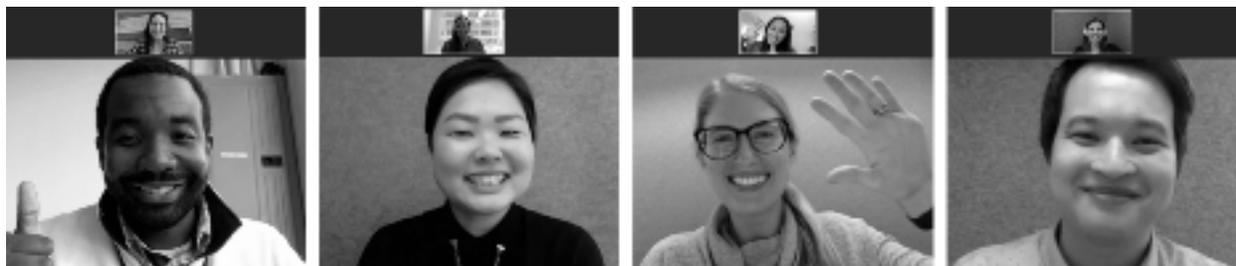


Set yourself up in a quiet, well-lit location with a good internet connection, and take some time to test your microphone setup in advance. Try calling a friend or colleague to make sure you can be clearly understood. Also ahead of time, make sure to close any applications or browser tabs that are not needed for the interview. Zoom can consume a lot of your computer's processing power, so it's best not to have lots of other applications running.

As with in-person meetings, it is important to remain engaged at all times, so leave your camera on during the entire interview. It can be confusing for candidates if you turn it off, and they don't appreciate it. (Are you okay? Do they still have your attention? Has someone else entered the room?). While it is important to keep your camera on, you may want to mute your microphone. If

you are not in a totally quiet environment, background noise can throw the candidate off and may make it harder for you both to communicate.

Pay close attention to your body language. Even though you aren't sitting with a candidate in person, your physical movements on screen can be distracting. Try to stay in the middle of your camera's view, not off to the side, and look into the camera. If you are using a camera external to your laptop, ensure that your camera is at eye-level instead of looking up at you from below or looking down at the top of your head.



Remote interviews are not an excuse to be late, nor is it appropriate to multitask (like eat your lunch or do other work at the same time). Remember that candidates can definitely tell when you aren't engaged. You should also remember to wear professional attire, even when conducting interviews while working from home. You may need to get up unexpectedly (a knock at the door, a drink spills), so make sure your lower half is as camera-ready as your top half.

Evaluation

Remote interviews can make it easier to ensure a structured process and maintain consistency across interviews with different candidates. But in order to do so, you'll need to develop a solid rubric, i.e. a guide for evaluating candidates, and some type of shared scoring system for your team. This can be a ranked scale from 1 to 10 or a simple pass/fail threshold. But no matter the system, everyone on your team should be trained in how to measure the relevant skills you are looking for, and translate their observations into your system. Scorecards are a nice way to do this and some applicant tracking systems offer built-in scorecard tools. At Insight, we've used Greenhouse as our ATS for several years and their scorecards offer an excellent and customizable system.

Keep your rubric or scorecard handy during the interview. This may actually be easier to do when you're not interviewing in person, since you can more easily refer to notes discreetly (either on your computer or on paper) during a video or phone call. Remote interviews also offer an opportunity to create a script and stick to it. When building out an interview script, you'll want to think about the questions but also pay attention to how long you expect the answers to be. Trying out your questions ahead of time, in a few practice sessions with willing colleagues, will

help you estimate how much time you expect to spend on each question in a real interview. Each interview will of course be different, but having a script with key times identified will help you make sure you cover everything necessary and dig in with the appropriate level of detail.



Remote interviewing can also help you stick to other interview best practices, like writing down your notes or filling out a scorecard *immediately* after the interview. Instead of walking the candidate out, returning to your office, etc., you'll already be right at your desk and ready to record all your reactions and observations into your tracking system. Since candidates also value speed in an interview process, anything you can do to move more efficiently will pay

dividends down the road.

Part III. Effectively conducting interviews via phone or video conference

Conducting interviews by phone or video will require you to adjust your process in several ways in order to **overcome some of the communication barriers and built-in awkwardness** that are inherent to these formats.

Build trust over video

In a remote interview, it is important to establish trust as quickly as possible. Start by introducing yourself and briefly outlining the interview structure, while putting the candidate at ease. We think a friendly approach works best: “Hi Lily, I’m Genevieve, VP of Product at Insight. It’s really nice to connect with you; thanks for making time to meet with me today. I thought I could start by giving you a short overview of what we’ll talk about so that you know what to expect from our conversation. How does that sound to you?”

Our team often finds that the work of emoting, smiling, and building a connection over a screen can be even more exhausting than in-person interviewing, since you may need to exaggerate your facial expressions to be seen and understood. Don’t go overboard, but do use clear signals like a “thumbs up” or clear nodding to show agreement.



For introductions and transitions, find phrasing that feels natural to you. For example, if you know you’ll transition your interviews from a general overview to a more technical focus, practice a line that does this smoothly, and you can deploy easily. Something like, “It’s been great to

hear a bit more detail about your previous work. Now I'd like to switch topics and review your familiarity with statistics." This will give the candidate a clear signal that you want to change topics without making them feel like they've derailed the interview.

Keep the interview moving

Allowing a candidate to go down a rabbit hole or continue answering a question when you are lost or bored doesn't do them any favors. The kindest (and most productive) thing you can do is to interrupt and ask them to clarify, start over, or move on to the next topic. As the interviewer, it's your responsibility to make the best use of your time together. When interviewing remotely, you will need to be more forceful in your interruptions than you would be in person. But you can still keep them at ease with positive language and a smile.

Here are some examples of how you can redirect a candidate who has gotten off-track in an interview:

- If you're confused: "I'm sorry to interrupt, but I think I missed something and I want to be sure I understand. Could you go back to [the point you want to clarify]?"
- If they're giving a long answer to a short question: "Can I interrupt? Thanks for sharing that, but I want to make sure we leave enough time for all the things we have to cover."
- If they're getting sidetracked and you haven't gotten an answer yet: "Before we go on, I think we're getting too into the details/off-track and I want to go back to my original question, [then restate original question]."

Dealing with a poor connection

An interview is often a stressful moment for both the candidate and the interviewer. A poor connection will only exacerbate things. If you find yourself trying to conduct a video interview or screen share with a very poor connection, try shutting off the video and continuing with voice only. If that's not enough, suggest calling by phone and continuing. If the candidate is showing some of their work, you might ask them to send screenshots by email while you are on the phone. You don't want to judge the candidate by the quality of their internet connection, which



can lead to bias against those with fewer resources or anyone living in areas with less reliable service.

If the connection continues to be a problem, or the person is getting really flustered by technical issues, suggest rescheduling, if possible. Coming from the interviewer, this suggestion can help the candidate feel confident that they'll get the chance to put their best foot forward.

Adapting for remote “on-sites”

When transitioning your onsite interviews to remote and asking candidates to complete a series of back-to-back interviews, build in more breaks and be sure to check in with the person you are interviewing more than you usually might. The candidate may need to get a glass of water, use the bathroom, or walk around, and they may be hesitant to ask.

If you are adapting a pre-existing onsite process, re-think any pieces that rely on a whiteboard. Adapt or consider cutting these elements in favor of other approaches. There are a lot of free and paid tools available that can allow you to reproduce a traditional in-person whiteboard interview over video. CoderPad is a popular platform for conducting technical interviews that allows candidates to share code with you via a web browser application. It allows you to write (and even run!) code in a variety of languages. For whiteboard interviews that are less about code but involve diagramming things out, Zoom has a built-in whiteboard function (which works well if you're on a tablet), but something as simple as a Google drawing works really well. No matter what tools you select, be sure to test them thoroughly with your team first!

Conclusion

Interviewing well, like any other skill, is something everyone can get better at doing if they practice. As you iterate on your remote interviewing process, take note of what works and what doesn't. Standardize specific interview questions that consistently give you good signal across your interviewing team, and cut those that don't. Pay attention to places where candidates tend to get confused and look for ways to clarify your instructions to them.

Even if you don't have to switch your entire team over to conducting interviews remotely, getting them to practice will help make them more resilient to unexpected disruptions. And because remote interviewing options will allow you to widen your talent funnel to candidates living outside of your country and time zone, or those with responsibilities that limit their availability for in-person interviews, it should improve your team's ability to hire the very best people.

Are you interested in hiring data professionals or partnering with Insight? Would you like to stay in touch and receive more content like this? **Reach out at partner@insightfellows.com** to learn how Insight can connect you with the best talent in data and tech today, or **[sign up for our monthly newsletter](#)** filled with the latest resources, tips, and advice on how to find and hire the best talent for specialized roles in data and tech.

We wish you all the best with your upcoming searches!
- The Insight Team

Checklist for Conducting Remote Interviews

This checklist will help you ensure clear, focused communication with candidates, both before and during your interviews.

Candidate communication pre-interview

Create an email invitation template preparing candidates for the interview, with clear guidance on how best to prepare in advance:

- Share who is involved:** Who will they be meeting, and which departments or teams are they from?
- Explain the format:** Will you just want to talk (audio only) or are you planning on using video as well? Will you want them to share their screen at any point? What tools will they need? What should they prepare?
- Set the tone:** Will the interview be casual or more formal in nature?
- Explain timing details:** For example, 10 minute intro, 20 minute demo, etc.
- Recap interview timelines:** Where are they in the process? When will they hear back?

Make the most of your time with candidates

Video Interview Dos & Don'ts

- Do** start with a friendly introduction and brief outline of the interview structure
- Do** use clear signals to build a connection (e.g. smiling, “thumbs up”, clear nodding to show agreement), without going overboard
- Do** perform a test call with a colleague prior to the actual interview
- Do** set up your call space in a quiet, well-lit location with strong wifi
- Do** close all non-essential browser tabs before starting the call
- Do** keep the camera ON at all times and ensure that it's at eye level
- Do** wear professional attire (from head to toe)
- Do** be aware of your body language
- Don't** be late for the scheduled Zoom call
- Don't** multitask during the interview (e.g. eating lunch, or doing other work)
- Do** create a script & stick to it
- Do** actively redirect candidates if they've gone off-track in an interview
- Do** keep your interview scorecard handy during the interview to record notes
- Don't** wait to fill out the scorecard, do it immediately after the interview