

Airline Interview



The psychological final discussion in
pilot and ATCO recruitment testing



Foreword

Almost without exception, airlines around the world have made psychological interviews with candidates part of the selection process for operating their fleets. The scientifically proven methodology of a modern airline interview provides very objective results on questions regarding personality and aptitude testing. This book has been compiled to familiarise you with the theory of the airline interview. In the second section, the consequences of the interview methodology required for successful participation are examined.

The interview is not a question-and-answer game, but a complex investigation, which can be individually tailored to the participant within the framework of the methodology used. Response behaviour that reflects the interviewer's questions can be learnt. The careful examination of the objectives of the interview makes it easier for future applicants to structure their answers according to the methodology of the interview. However, recruitment staff can quickly detect answers that have been learnt by heart. It is therefore not beneficial for the applicant to learn rehearsed conversation and argument techniques.

After a few introductory words, this book will introduce you to the interview methodology used by the continental European airlines for selecting airline pilots. The first section of the book deals with the theoretical approach behind using the interview as a diagnostic tool. This foray into the didactics is the necessary groundwork for us to look at the interview from the applicant's perspective in the second

section. Get to know the background of the interview with this book. Interview questions, conversation setup and situations vary. Each interview therefore requires both careful theoretical and company-specific preparation.

Your behaviour in the conversation and a coherent overall picture from both the interview and the rest of the recruitment process are just as important as your answers. In the second section, you will find instructions for avoiding mistakes that are frequently made during the selection process and the interview. This section also handles questions that are often raised by applicants. To aid understanding, the individual points are also illustrated using common and specific interview situations.

In this book, you will also find both academic and practical information on the background and design of the European airline interviews. The structure should help your preparation by allowing you to quickly look up individual questions. We wish you a successful preparation for your interview and hope that this book paves the way for your interview.

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1 Introduction

Internet forums have replaced technical books as the primary source of information about the process and content of selection procedures in the aviation industry. A regularly updated book cannot keep up with the currentness of an internet forum. Progress reports published on internet forums regarding the selection process give future applicants a good overview of the tests and are also a way for applicants to discuss their experiences.

However, internet forums cannot replace structured and thorough preparation for the aptitude test and interview. A specialist book on preparing for the interview should therefore not be seen to be in competition with the information found on internet forums, but should focus on providing additional knowledge. The two subchapters in this introduction provide a relatively high density of information and form the foundation for the main sections. The topics of this introductory chapter may seem highly theoretical at first glance, but are essential for your preparation for the interview, and ultimately for successful participation in the selection process. So please read through the following pages very carefully before turning to the sections of the book that focus on practical issues.

1.1 The function and meaning of interviews in the selection process

Every company carries out a selection process in one way or another before hiring a new employee. Depending on the size of the company and the significance of the job, this can be limited to an internal candidate selection process. However, most application processes include at least one interview beforehand, in which the employee in charge of HR gets a personal impression of the applicant and their suitability for the open position.

In recent years, large corporations have implemented systematically organised recruitment procedures to select suitable candidates. European and, in particular, German airlines have been at the forefront of this development. Individual airlines began carrying out systematic suitability tests before hiring new pilots as early as the 1960s. Becoming a commercial airline pilot requires more than just the safe handling of an aircraft and sound theoretical expertise. The well-known airlines consider only those who are trained or soon to be trained, whose *operational* and *cognitive abilities* suggest high aviation potential and whose *personality profile* allows them to work in daily flight operations to be suitable candidates.

Today, aviation potential is largely determined using computer-aided test methods. These test methods make very precise statements about the training of psychomotoric and cognitive systems, the ability to work under stress or multiple stresses, and the degree of the participant's situational attention. The use of abstract, computer-based diagnostic procedures creates the same prerequisites for all

applicants. The high level of objectivity in these tasks largely eliminates subjective assessment errors, such as those that can occur in examinations conducted by a doctor or psychologist.

However, statements about an applicant's personality characteristics derived from computer-based tests are limited. Certain suitability-relevant personality traits - such as communication and team skills - can be examined in procedures in which two or more applicants have to solve a problem together (see, for example, Dyadic Co-Operation Test, D. Stelling / DLR, 1999); however, these tests are conducted under psychological supervision. Creating an aptitude-related personality profile is therefore ultimately tied to the individual examination of the candidate. The personal interview is the method used to examine this in the selection process.

However, many applicants view the interview as being of less importance. This is due to the fact that most European airlines only carry out the interview at a later stage of the selection process. On average, only 10 to 30 percent of all participants in a selection process reach the interview stage, depending on the airline. After having already successfully gone through pre-selection, some of the remaining applicants are under the impression that the interview is only carried out for the sake of it. This, however, is a misconception. On the contrary, the interview centres around the behaviour of the applicant toward their competitors and test leaders in group discussions. The individual aptitude test is so expensive for the airlines to carry out that only applicants who meet the basic requirements take part in it. Trained pilots expect the interviews to focus on their theoretical aviation and air traffic knowledge. The *technical interview* is a regular part of the interview for applicants with a commercial pilot

licence; however, the primary objective of the interview is still to build up a meaningful personality profile.

The question therefore arises as to why airlines, with their already elaborate selection procedures, attach such importance to the final interview and base their final decision upon the results. Safety considerations play an important role. An airline must ensure that their pilots work well under normal operating conditions, but that they can also operate in crisis and conflict situations and alleviate critical situations within the team.

Personality-related requirements to be met by a commercial aircraft pilot in a multi-crew aircraft are stipulated in the European JAR-FCL 1 and 3 approval guidelines. A commercial pilot must demonstrate specific decision-making skills, handle stress and conflict situations well and have good social skills. Ultimately, the interview allows for *behaviour prediction* which helps the airline to decide whether the applicant meets the personality-related aviation regulation requirements. However, the interview also allows the airline to make statements about the applicant's *motivation* and their *ability to integrate* into the company's culture. Recruiting cockpit staff is an investment decision for every airline - costs for training and development are considerable and must only be invested in candidates who will continue to benefit the company in the future.

1.2 Interview and CRM training

European airlines use the interview as part of their selection process for assessing behavioural predictions. While the United States aviation industry commonly integrates the selection process into a probationary period and this therefore takes place *on the job*, the European network companies primarily trust the results of thorough applicant screenings. This state of affairs has decisive consequences for the scope and depth of the suitability tests.

As part of the aptitude tests, the interview is a means of *personnel selection*. However, airline companies also supplement their pilots' careers with courses on *personnel development*. Upgrading the professional qualifications of cockpit staff is no longer limited to teaching them new legal regulations or training them in the flight simulator. Personality-related abilities have also become the focus of the development of commercial aircraft operators and come under the somewhat cumbersome general term *Crew Resource Management (CRM)*.

In the early years of commercial aviation, aircraft accidents were mainly caused by technical defects. This is no longer the case. Evaluations of aviation accidents have shown that human error now leads to more serious accidents than aircraft defects. Even in the event of technical problems during the flight, the correct or incorrect behaviour of the flight crew often determines whether or not a disaster can still be averted. The special significance of the *human factor* in flight operations has been taken into account by aviation authorities, research facilities and

airlines since the eighties with a common definition of the personality-related suitability features of aircraft pilots. The first scientific approaches that were used for this work date back to the sixties.

Since the beginning of the nineties, CRM training courses applied in practice have been constantly optimised. This is despite the fact that the character and personality-related qualifications of flight staff – for example, under the slogan, *Airmanship* – have been recognised as being important criteria for safety since the early days of air travel. However, the high degree of standardisation of the models, which can be seen in the comparison of the relevant aviation regulations (in Europe JAR-OPS 1 section O), is characteristic today. Today, targeted psychological training is also integrated into the ATPL training in line with JAR-FCL under *Human Performance and Limitations Theory* (HPL).

Personality-related characteristics which are taken into account during the selection, training and development of flight staff can be classified into three main categories:

- Cognitive performance
- Interpersonal skills
- Consistency of performance

These general concepts form the triangle in personality-related pilot selection and the further development of cockpit staff in the 21st century.

Cognitive performance

The *cognitive performance* field encompasses the investigative dimensions of *situational attention* and *planning and decision-making ability*.