

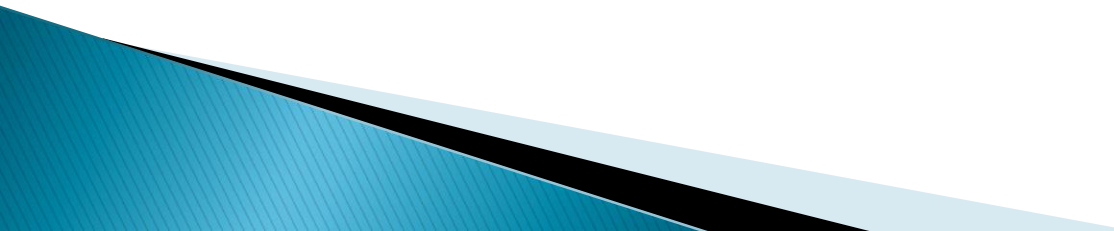


# Understanding Interview Anxiety: Causes, Coping, Consequences

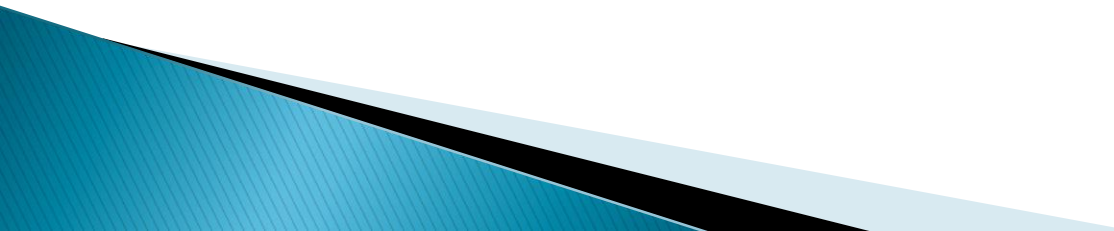
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Department of Psychology, University of Guelph

Silvia Bonaccio, PhD  
Telfer School of Management, University of Ottawa

# Outline

- ▶ Job interviews
  - ▶ Interview anxiety
    - Dimensions and causes of interview anxiety
    - Experience of anxiety
  - ▶ Consequences of interview anxiety on
    - Interview performance
    - Prediction of job performance
  - ▶ Coping
    - What can we do to help interviewees?
- 

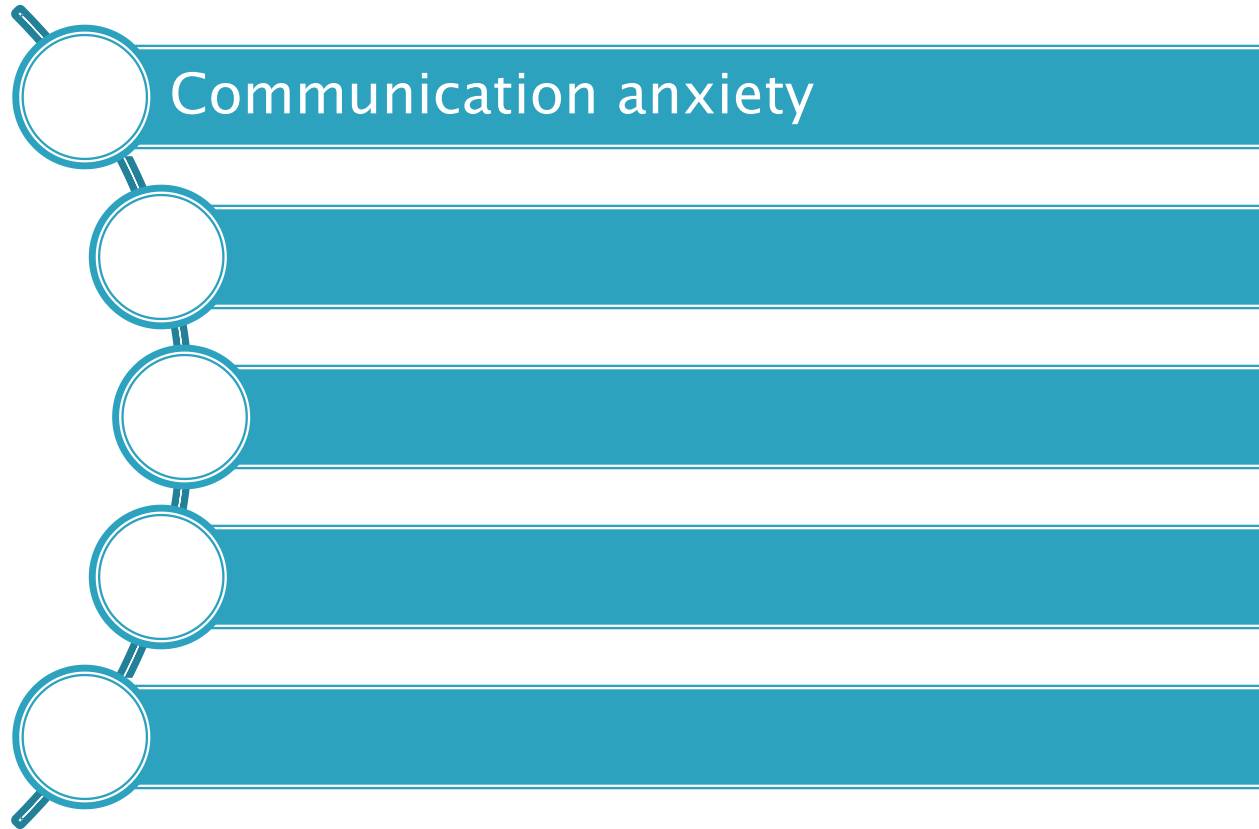
# Job interviews

- ▶ The most common employee selection method
  - ▶ Rare for someone to be hired without an interview
  - ▶ Liked by hiring managers
  - ▶ But...not liked by all candidates
- 

# What is Interview Anxiety?

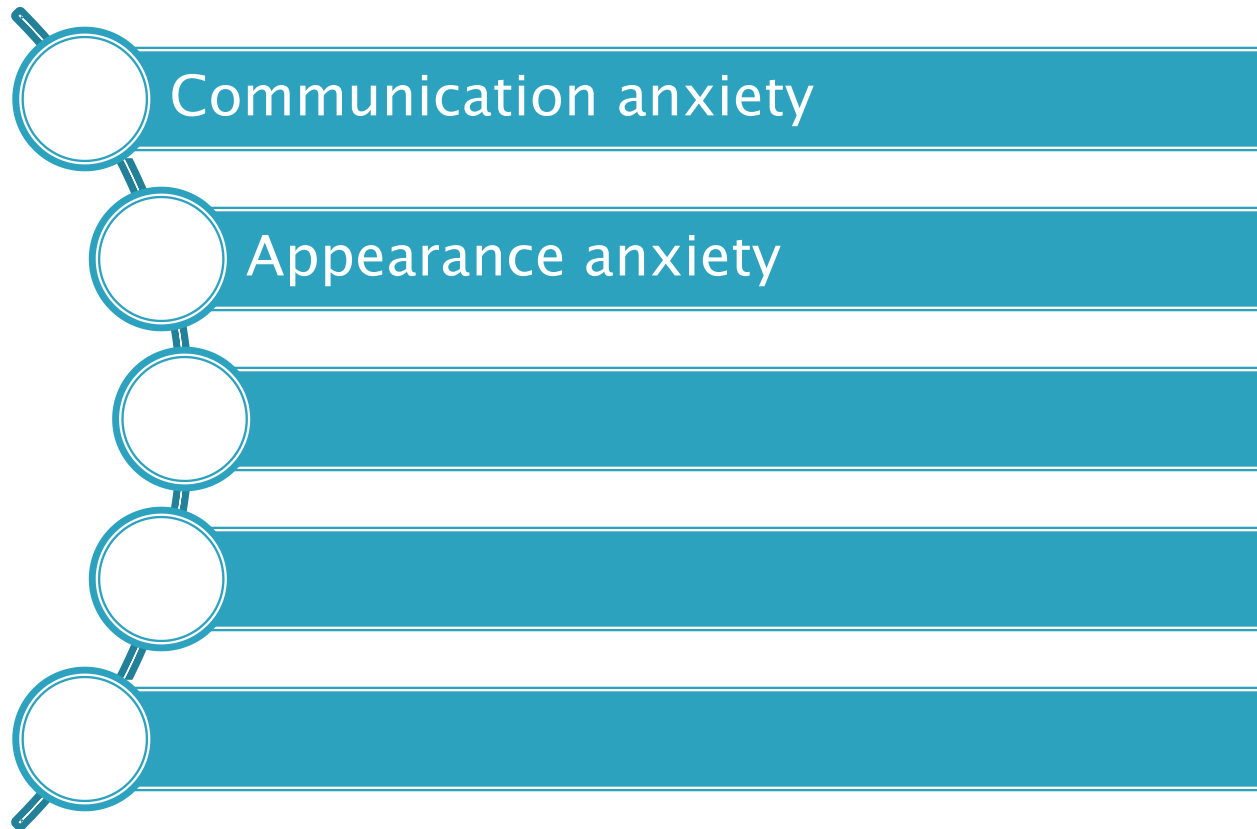
- ▶ “Feelings of **nervousness** or **apprehension** that are relatively stable within job applicants across employment interview situations” (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004, p. 616)
- ▶ **Situation Specific Trait**
  - Like test anxiety, math anxiety, sports anxiety, etc.

# Interview Anxiety



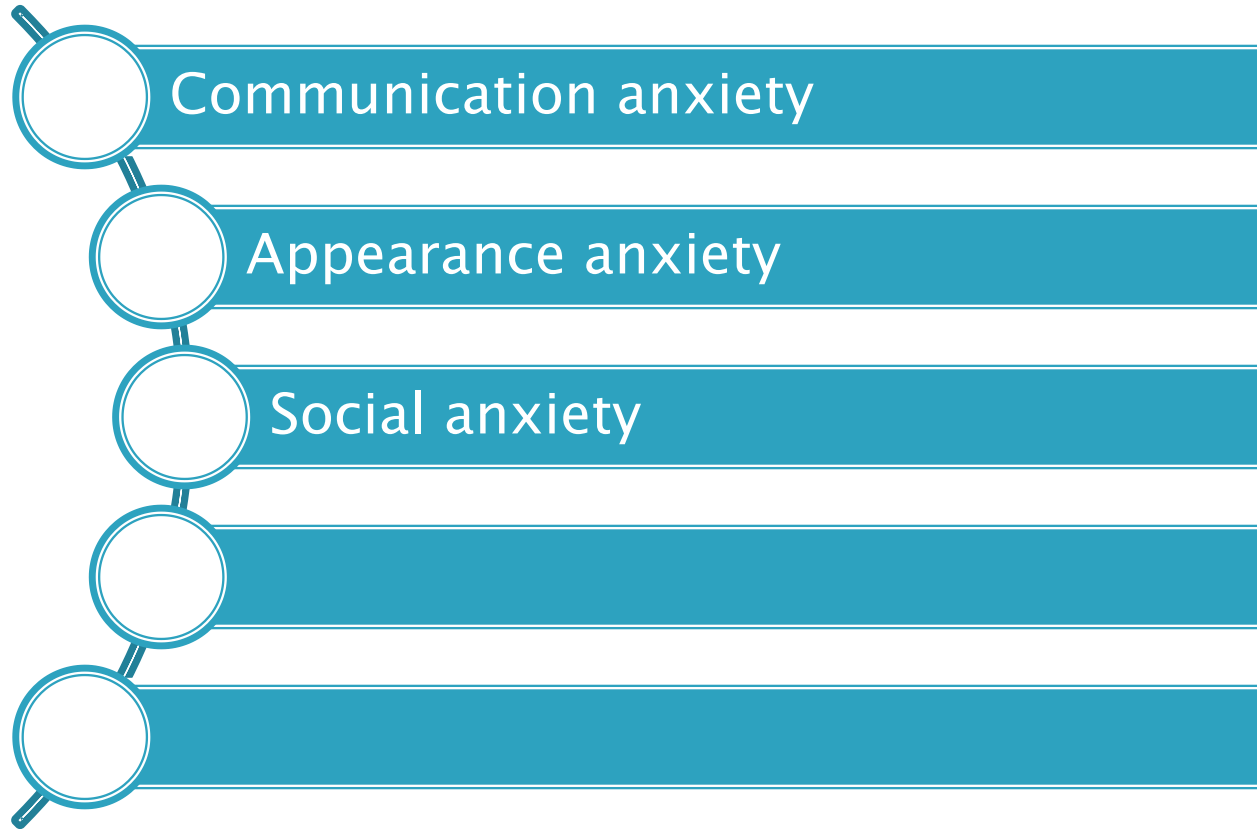
(McCarthy & Goffin, 2004)

# Interview Anxiety



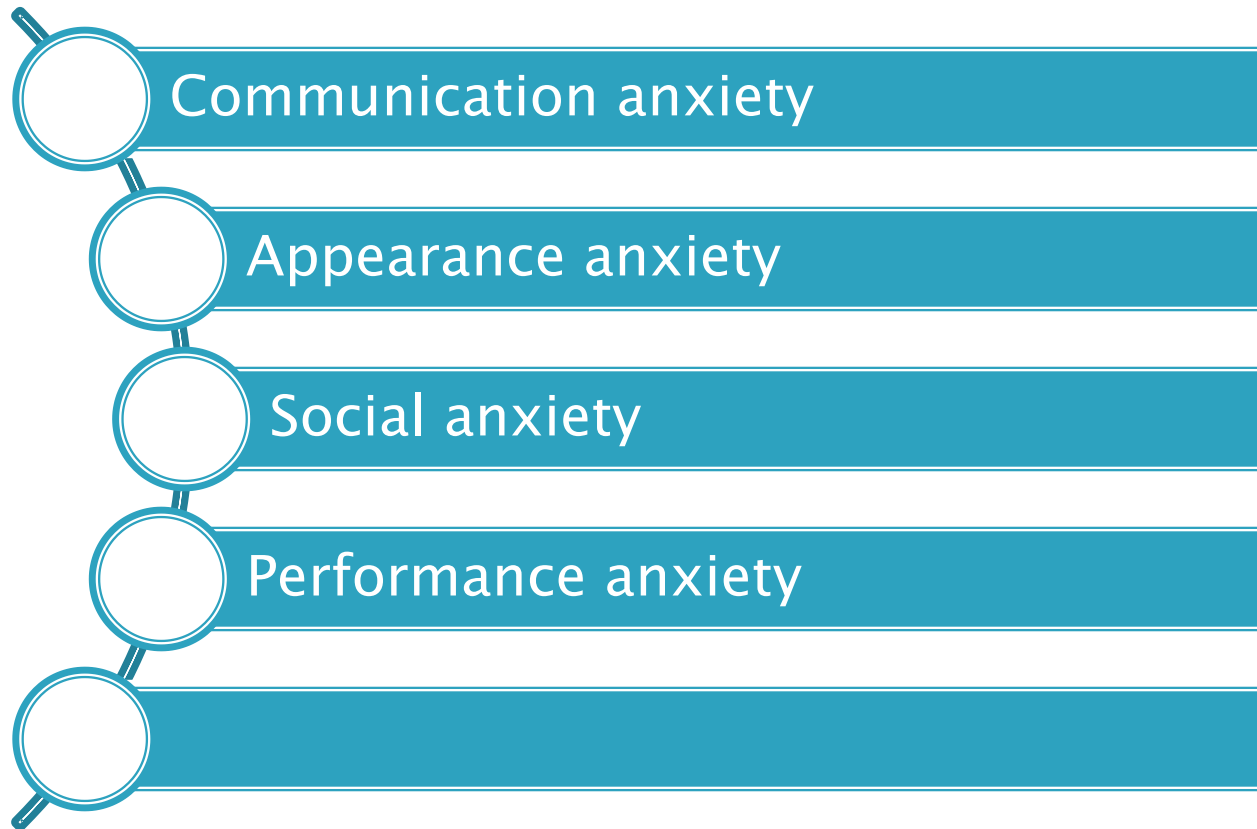
(McCarthy & Goffin, 2004)

# Interview Anxiety



(McCarthy & Goffin, 2004)

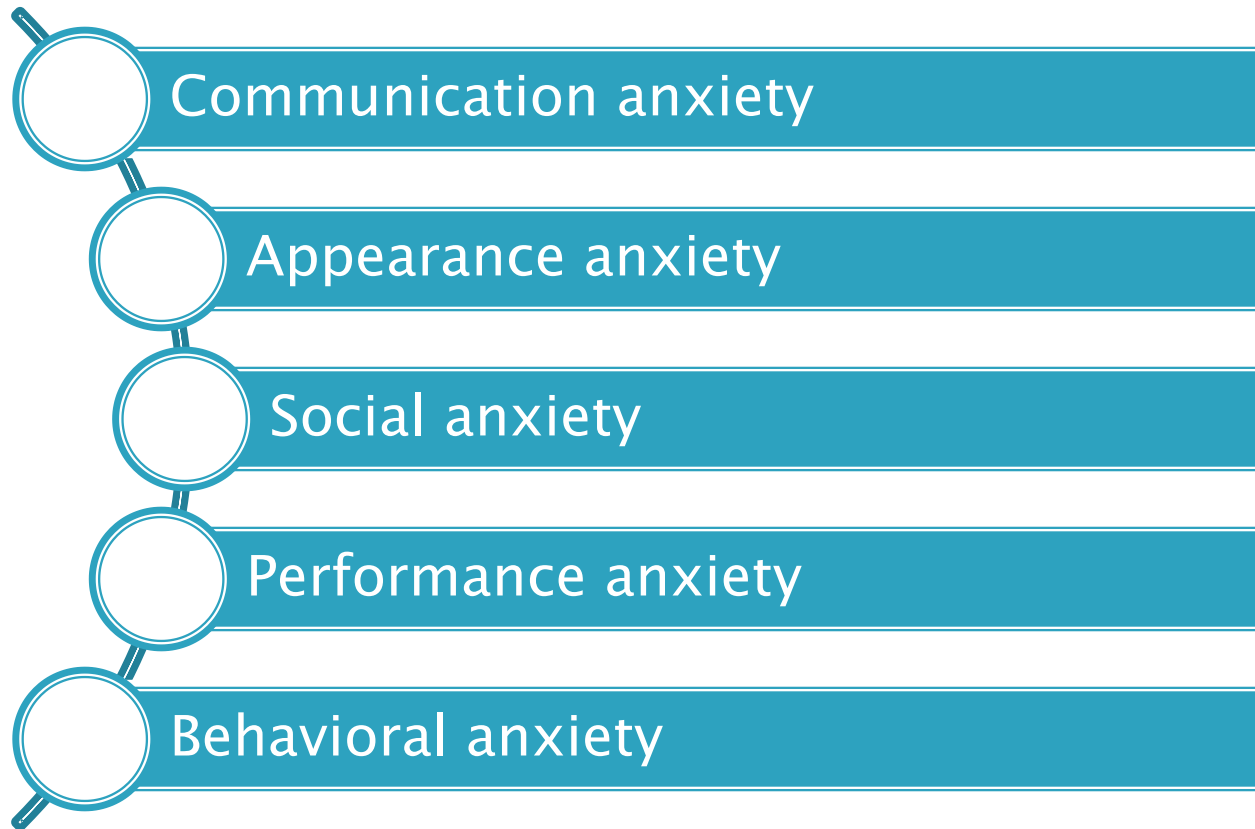
# Interview Anxiety



(McCarthy & Goffin, 2004)

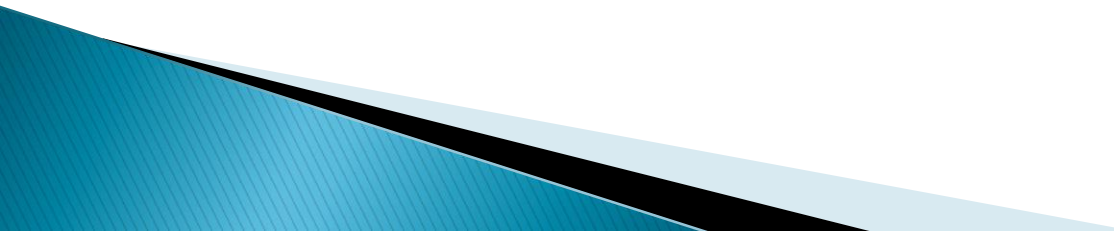


# Interview Anxiety

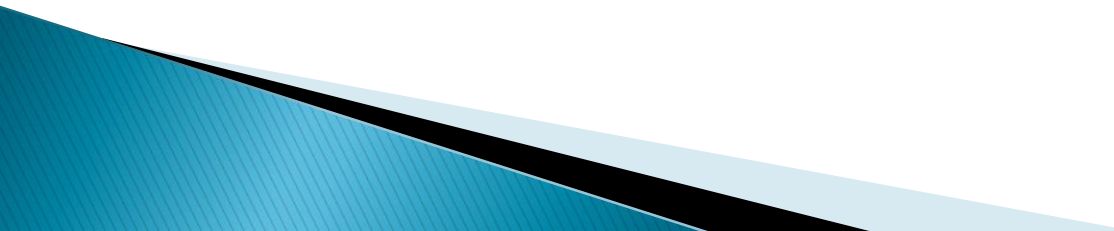


(McCarthy & Goffin, 2004)

# Why do people get anxious?

- ▶ Anxious personality
  - ▶ Lack of preparation
  - ▶ Situation itself
- 

**How do interviewees describe their anxiety?**



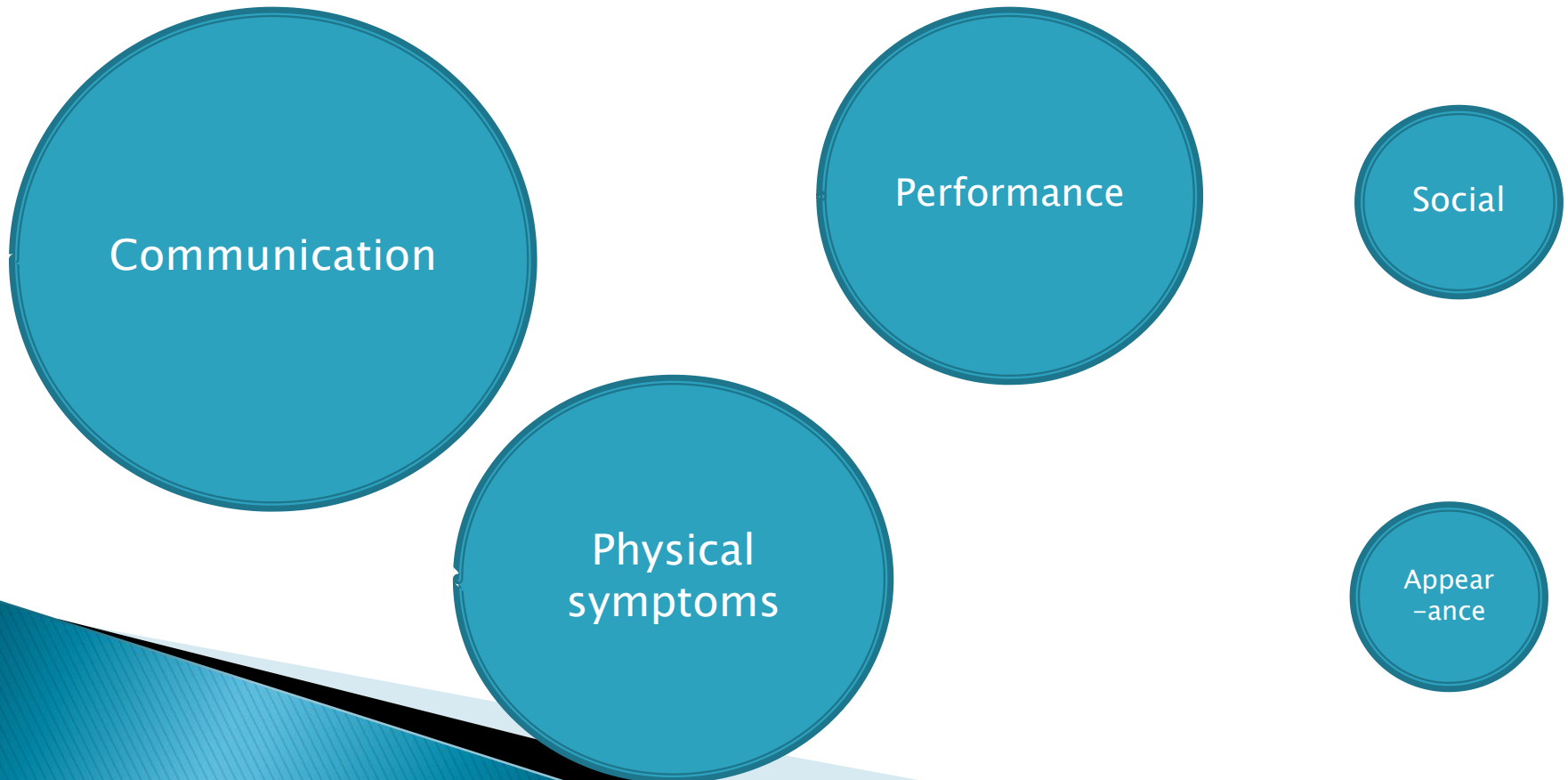
# Anxiety...in people's own words

104 interviewees described their anxiety.



# Anxiety...in people's own words

- ▶ Coded open-ended answers for themes
- ▶ Most common themes



# Anxiety...in people's own words



Communication  
-Content/Recall

“Anxiety about trying to find a good example to address the question asked. Would I think of the best example? Would I be able to describe it so that interviewer understood situation.”

“I would struggle to find strong examples to address the situational questions.”

“I could not collect my thoughts enough to answer clearly or provide an appropriate example, which stressed me out.”

# Anxiety...in people's own words



Communication  
-Formulation

“Mentally found myself searching for words and struggling to complete a sentence or thought.”


“This is grueling. I'm drawing a blank. Mental block. Rambling. I wanted it to be over early on.”

“I felt unable to communicate clearly- I could not form the thoughts properly- Raced through.”

“lot lots of umm”



# Anxiety...in people's own words



Communication  
-Voice quality

“I felt I was stuttering not being able to express my experiences or answer questions.”

“My voice went hoarse.”

“My voice was shaky.”

“I feel less able to speak in an even tone the way I normally in conversation.”

“I stuttered and use the word "so" to fill in dead air.”



# Anxiety...in people's own words

“Heart was racing, sweaty palms and underarms.”

“I was fidgeting and my heart was beating faster than normal.”

“My insides were very jittery, hands were sweating.”

“Held my breath. Didn't breathe as I normally do.”

“I felt a bit sick to my stomach.”



Physical  
symptoms

“My hands are cold.”

# Anxiety...in people's own words

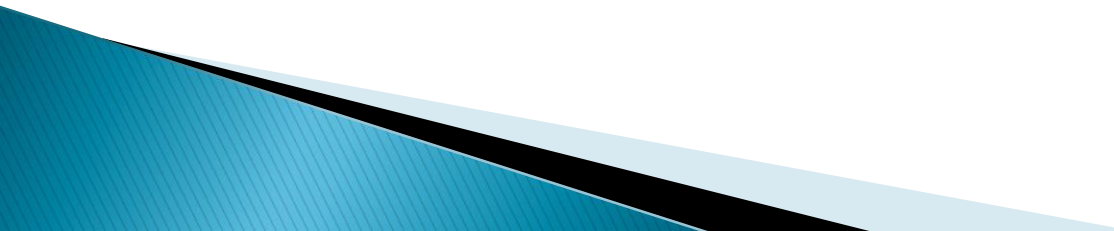
“I get sidetracked by wondering thoughts irrelevant to the interview”



Performance  
-Interfering  
thoughts

“A lot of negative thoughts come out to my mind.”

“Too much going through my head, could not stay on track.”



# Anxiety...in people's own words

“Started judging my performance and finding it below average.”

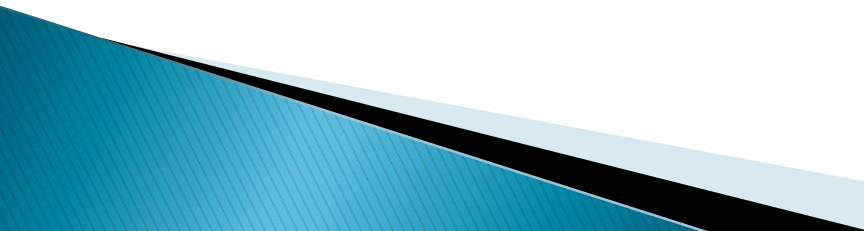


Performance  
-Self-  
judgment

“My thoughts wandered to my incompetence at answering questions and anxiety in general.”

“I was worried I was using the wrong example.”

“I felt very nervous the interviewer would see me as intellectually below normal, for this university type.”



# Consequences of interview anxiety

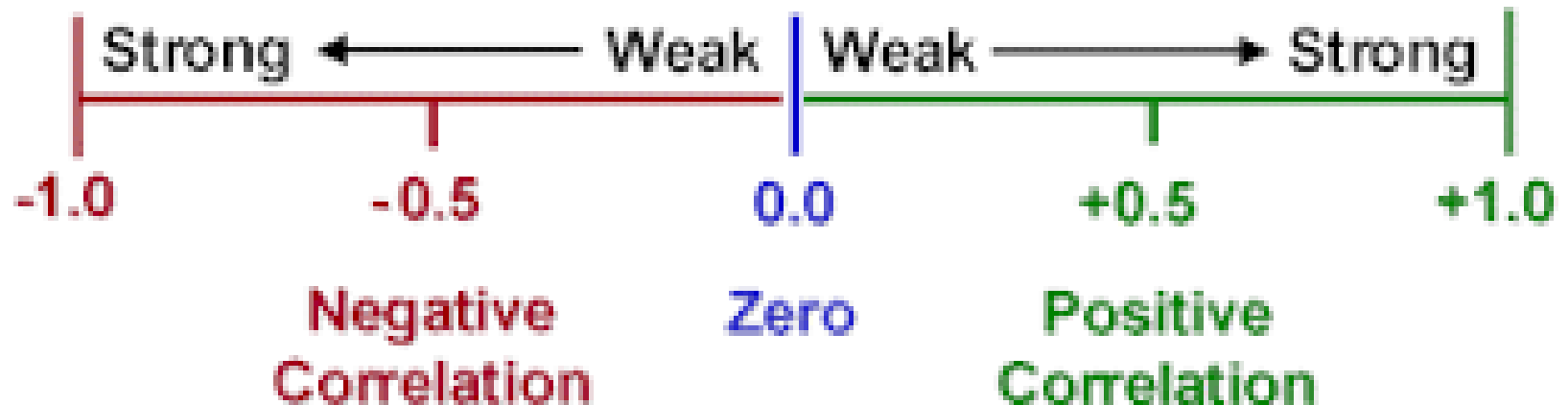
# Interview Anxiety and Interview Performance

- ▶ We compiled the results of 30 different studies on interview anxiety:
  - Self-reported interview anxiety
  - Interviewer-rated interview performance

Powell, D. M., Stanley, D. J., & Brown, K. N. (2018). Meta-analysis of the relation between interview anxiety and interview performance. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*.

# Quick side note – Correlation

**Correlation Coefficient**  
Shows Strength & Direction of Correlation

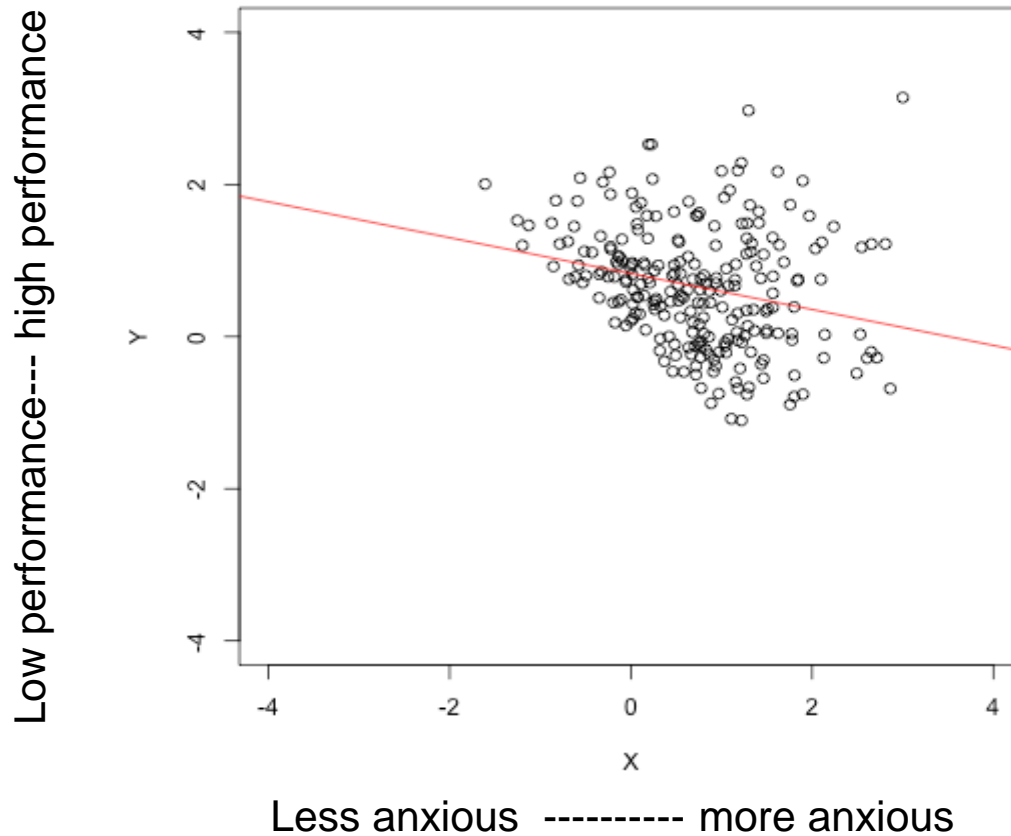


# Interview Anxiety and Interview Performance

- ▶ We compiled the results of 30 different studies on interview anxiety:
  - Self-reported interview anxiety
  - Interviewer-rated interview performance
- ▶ The average correlation between anxiety and interview performance was  $-.19$

Powell, D. M., Stanley, D. J., & Brown, K. N. (2018). Meta-analysis of the relation between interview anxiety and interview performance. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*.

Interview anxiety is negatively correlated with interview performance ( $r = -.19$ )



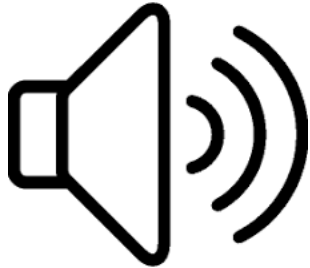


# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?

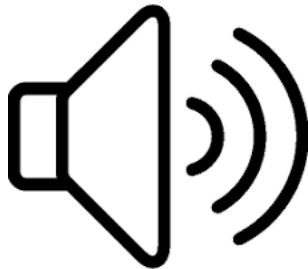


Miller, R. O., Gayfer, B. L., & Powell, D. M. (2018). Influence of Vocal and Verbal Cues on Ratings of Interview Anxiety and Interview Performance. *Personnel Assessment and Decisions*, 4(2), 3.

# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?



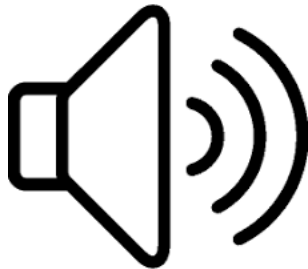
# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?



**Participants who heard the interview:  
Anxiety rated higher for the anxious candidate**



# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?

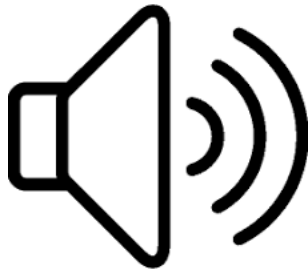


**Participants who heard the interview:**  
Anxiety rated higher for the anxious candidate



**Participants who read the interview:**  
Anxiety rated higher for the anxious candidate

# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?



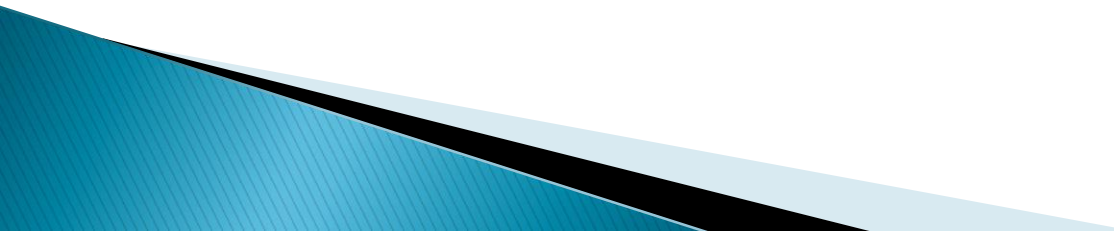
**Participants who heard the interview:**  
Anxiety rated higher for the anxious candidate




**Participants who read the interview:**  
Anxiety rated higher for the anxious candidate

Why?? What did they detect?

# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?

- ▶ In the audio condition, comments suggested that they were picking up voice quality,
  - ▶ “She didn’t use a confident tone or confident language, she spoke quietly.”
  - ▶ “I assume she was nervous/fearful given her very quiet tone.”
  - ▶ “Her voice was uneasy.”
- 

# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?

- ▶ In the text condition, their comments suggested that they were picking up on filler words, e.g.,
    - “Used ‘uhm’ and other words which comes off as anxious.”
    - “Interviewee used an excessive amount of filler words.”
  - ▶ So, we created a new text condition with the filler words cleaned out.
- 

# Can Interviewers Detect Anxiety?

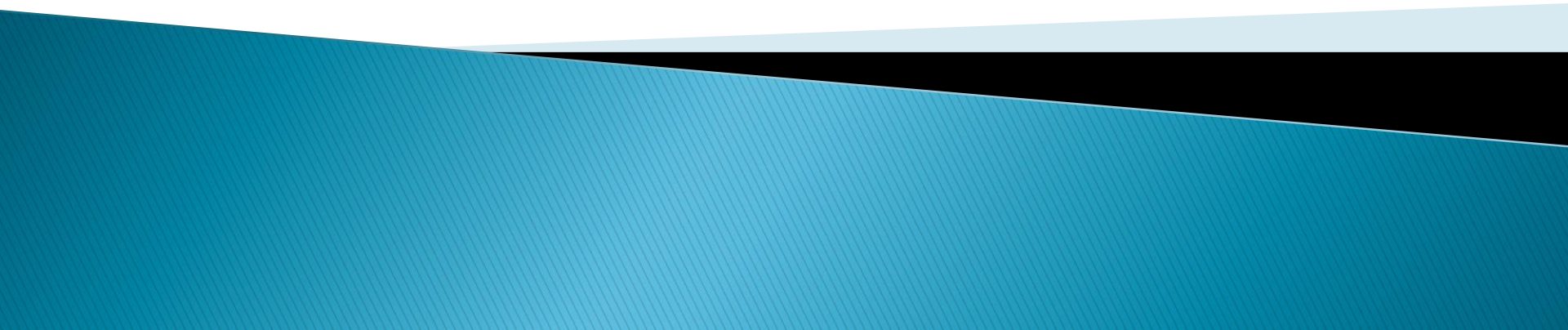
- ▶ Participants could detect differences between the high and low anxiety candidates in all three conditions!



# What were they detecting in the cleaned text version?

- ▶ Other filler words
  - “She used informal words such as ‘like’.”
- ▶ Scattered Thoughts
  - “They also had problems recalling key memories which can also be a side affect of anxiety.”
- ▶ Lack of Response
  - “After the first couple of questions his/her answers were getting smaller and less detailed, and some questions he/she wasn’t even able to answer.”

# Does Interview Anxiety Predict Job Performance?



# Can you think of jobs for which interview anxiety would be diagnostic of future performance?

- ▶ Think–Pair–Share exercise
  - ▶ 3 minutes
- 

# Does Interview Anxiety Predict Job Performance?



# Does Interview Anxiety Predict Job Performance?



Or, is the anxiety specific to the interview?



# Does Interview Anxiety Predict Job Performance?

- ▶ We tested this question with 215 applicants (63% female;  $M_{age} = 18.88$  years) for Residence Assistant positions
- ▶ 114 were hired
- ▶ Job performance rated by
  - supervisors
  - students
- ▶ Job performance rated on
  - administrative (e.g., knowledge, written communication)
  - human relations (e.g., communication, leadership)

	Correlation with Interview Anxiety
<b>Job Performance Facet</b>	
<b>Supervisor-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	
Human Relations	
<b>Student-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	
Human Relations	

	Correlation with Interview Anxiety
<b>Job Performance Facet</b>	
<b>Supervisor-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	.05
Human Relations	
<b>Student-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	
Human Relations	

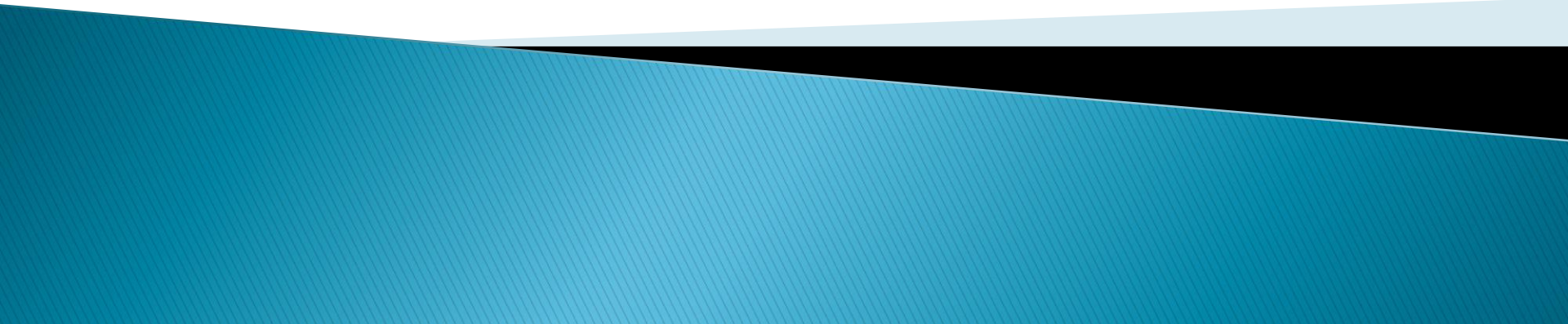


	Correlation with Interview Anxiety
<b>Job Performance Facet</b>	
<b>Supervisor-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	.05
Human Relations	.08
<b>Student-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	
Human Relations	

	Correlation with Interview Anxiety
<b>Job Performance Facet</b>	
<b>Supervisor-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	.05
Human Relations	.08
<b>Student-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	-.03
Human Relations	

	Correlation with Interview Anxiety
<b>Job Performance Facet</b>	
<b>Supervisor-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	.05
Human Relations	.08
<b>Student-rated</b>	
Administrative/Job Knowledge	-.03
Human Relations	.05

# Coping with Interview Anxiety

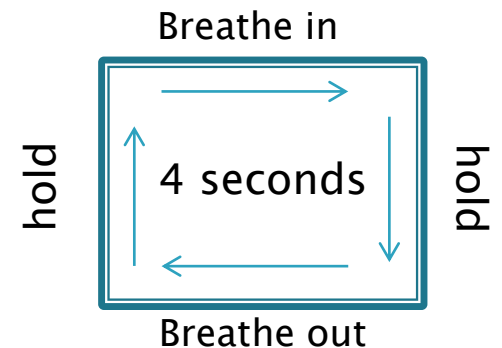


# Before the interview

- ▶ Help your clients reflect on the sources of their anxiety
- ▶ Communication
  - Remembering/formulating examples for situational questions
    - Anticipate situations (e.g., conflict resolution, leadership, time management).
    - Practice concise answers (STAR method)
    - Audio record answers and detect filler words
  - Voice quality: is shaky/hoarse voice linked to communication apprehension or physical aspects of anxiety?

# Before the interview

- ▶ Help your clients reflect on the sources of their anxiety
- ▶ Physical
  - Identify how anxiety is likely to be manifested and prepare for it
    - Sweating → wear concealing clothing
    - Irregular breathing → BOX breathing exercise



# During the interview

## ▶ Performance

### ◦ Interfering thoughts

- Pause and reflect before answering
- Privately acknowledge them

### ◦ Self-judgment

- Expect that some interviewers will be less demonstrative
- Think of interview questions separately
  - Start each question with renewed self-confidence

Questions?