

Investigation Interview Preparation

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Introduction

Interviews are key to any investigation. For that reason, it's essential that you plan carefully, create a welcoming atmosphere and ask the right questions. In particular, it is important to review the initial complaint and create a list of case-specific questions to be addressed during the interviews. Proper planning ensures that investigation interviews run smoothly and generate useful information.

Interview Preparation

Before getting down to business and interviewing complainants, subjects and witnesses, consider the following factors:

Interview Location

Choose a location where the interviewee will feel comfortable to speak frankly and honestly. An off-site conference room would be ideal; conversely, a cubicle next to the interviewee's supervisor obviously would not be a good location.

The environment in which the interview is conducted can play a significant role in shaping the outcome of the interview. The right location can help to put the interviewee at his or her ease, thereby increasing the opportunity for candid, forthright responses. Confidentiality may be compromised when interviews take place within the workplace, as other employees may recognize connections among those coming in and out of a particular office. In some cases it may be necessary to choose a different location for each interview in order to ensure the comfort of your interviewees.

Get the Facts

Before you begin planning the interview itself, you should take some time to assemble all available case-related information. Some of this information will come from the initial complaint. You should also be well-versed in all relevant laws, workplace policies and procedures. Familiarity with company policies can make it easier for investigators to explain the need for the investigation to both the complainant and the subject.

Prepare Questions

Once the facts have been collected and reviewed, plan ahead by drafting a series of general questions related to the case at hand. Although every investigation interview is unique, each interview typically includes a number of standard questions. To save time, develop a template that includes these commonly asked questions. You can then refer to the template during each interview.

Thinking about your questions prior to the interview will help to ensure that information is collected the first time, thus eliminating the need for follow-up discussions. Of course, as the interview progresses you will most likely think of additional questions. Hence it is generally unrealistic – if not impossible – to prepare all of your questions prior to the interview.



Documenting the Interview

Once the facts have been collected and reviewed, plan ahead by drafting a series of general questions related to the case at hand. Although every investigation interview is unique, each interview typically includes a number of standard questions. To save time, develop a template that includes these commonly asked questions. You can then refer to the template during each interview.

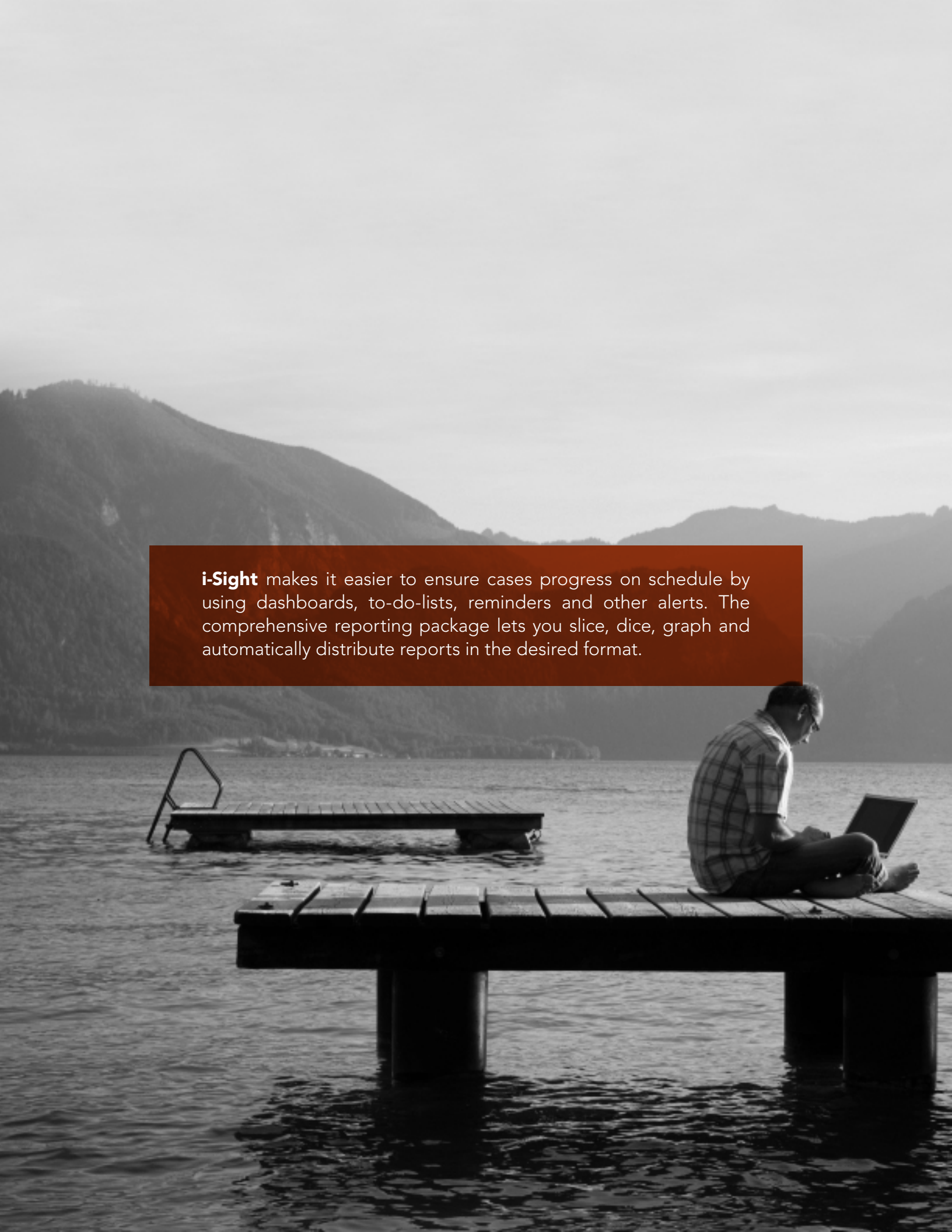
Cover Basics Before You Begin

Investigators should begin every interview with a brief introduction that explains the reason for the interview and includes all appropriate disclosures. Normally, the investigator will arrange for a witness to be present to take notes and corroborate evidence. This person's role should be explained at the outset to put the interviewee at ease. In your opening remarks, it is important to be honest about the purpose of the interview while at the same time respecting the need for confidentiality. For example, an investigator might begin an interview by explaining that the company is investigating certain complaints about unfair treatment towards minorities.

Inform the interviewee that you will make every effort to protect his or her privacy. Explain that information provided to you during the interview will be shared with others only if absolutely necessary. Interviewees should understand that confidentiality will be virtually impossible to maintain in the event that a lawsuit arises and the case proceeds to court; if that happens, additional parties will require copies of all statements and case-related documents.

It is important to make these statements before commencing the interview, as they will likely answer many of the questions the interviewee has on his or her mind. It is also a good idea to ask complainants, subjects and witnesses if they have any questions of their own. Addressing these issues up front, as opposed to dealing with them at the end of the interview, will encourage greater cooperation, which in turn will improve the quality of the interview and the effectiveness of the overall investigation. Here again, your objective is to create an environment in which the interviewee feels free to speak openly and honestly, providing as much detail as possible in his or her responses.

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