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Navigating AI interviews with a stutter

Experiences and perspectives from people who stutter in China and the US

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WHAT ARE AI INTERVIEWS?

Automated systems that interview job candidates with no human interviewer involved

WHERE THEY SIT IN THE HIRING PIPELINE

Early-stage screening
Often replace humans in first-round interviews, from retail and factory jobs to Fortune 100 roles

Basic questions
Background, past work, behavioral questions, motivation, personality, from the CV or a template

Opaque evaluation
Screening and scoring may be built in, but how is rarely visible to candidates

WHAT ARE AI INTERVIEWS?

Common formats

Recording

One-way video or audio answers to a fixed question set. Often timed (3–5 min) with a few retakes.

Conversational

A voice agent, sometimes with an avatar, that asks follow-up questions based on your answers.

Text chat

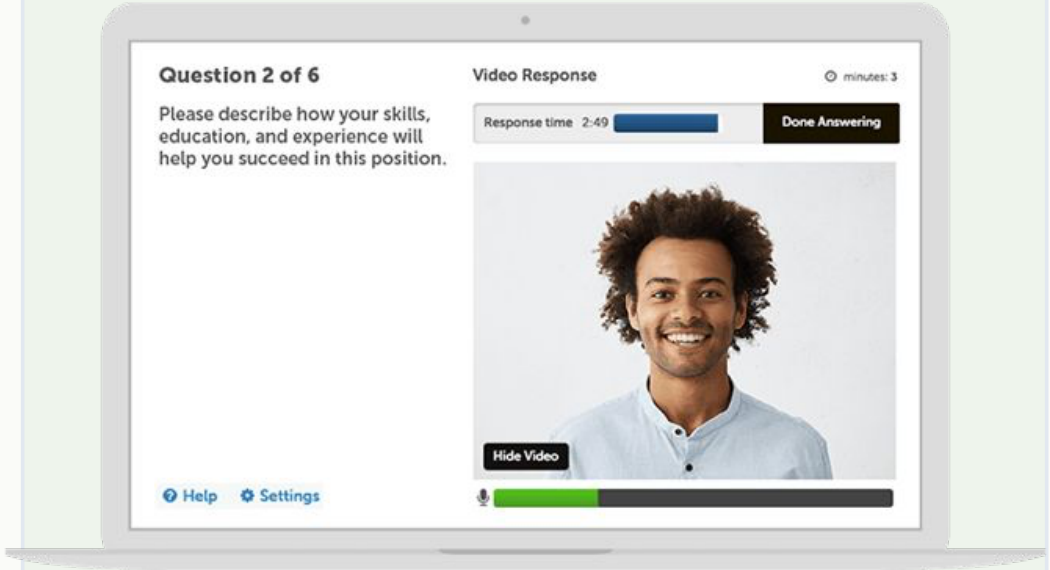
Q&A in a chatbox, sometimes alongside coding or skills assessments.

FEATURES THAT VARY ACROSS SYSTEMS

- Captions and transcripts
- Interviewer avatars
- Time limits and countdowns
- Retakes
- Text or voice answers

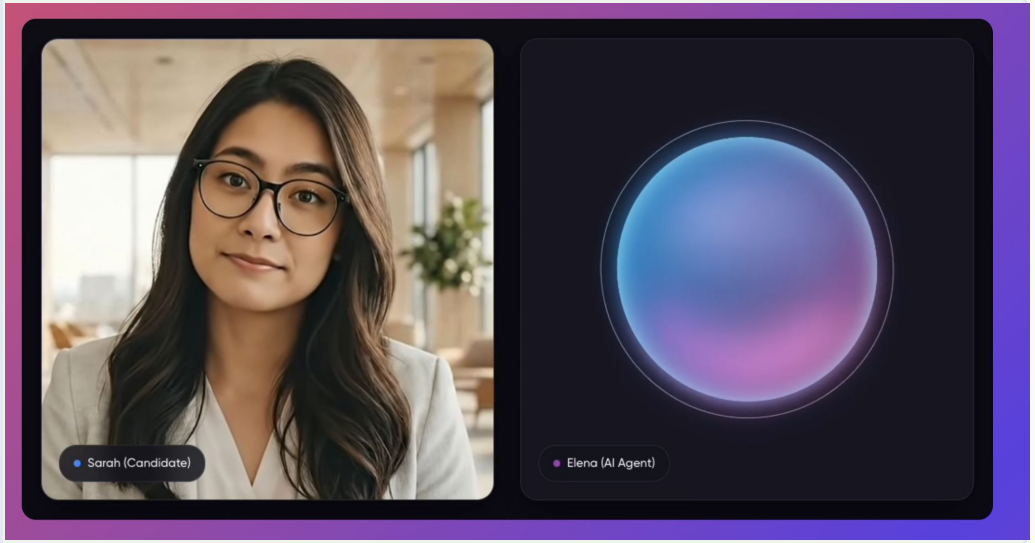
Major AI Interview Systems-in-Use

Recording-based



Asynchronous voice or video response recording with **standardized prompts** and **strict countdown timers**. Candidates can have **multiple attempts**.

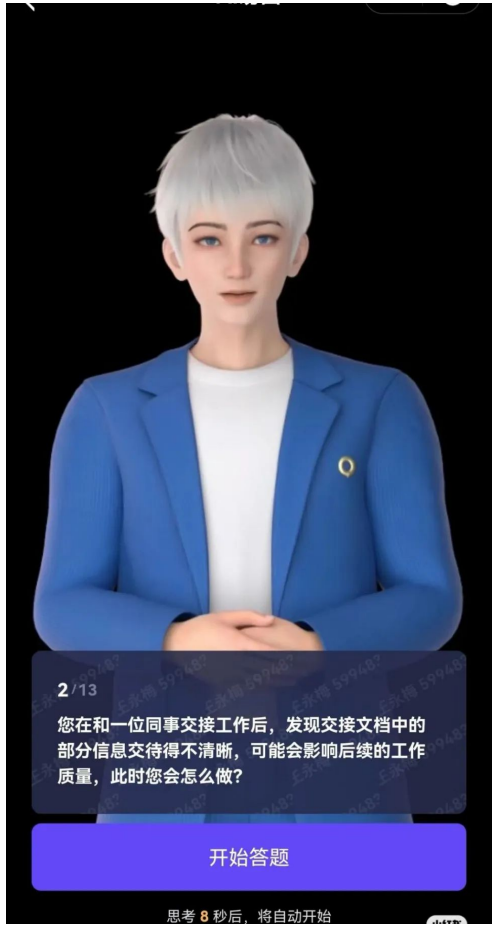
Conversational



Real-time, two-way interactive interview conducted by AI voice or text agents.

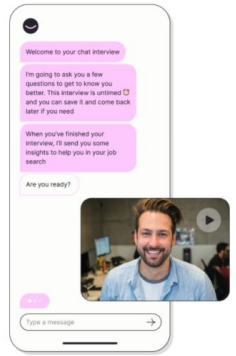
Different Modalities and Avatar Designs

Virtual avatar



Human-like avatar

Text agent



MOTIVATION

AI interviewers are already mainstream

70M+

video interviews hosted by HireVue by 2025, serving 60%+ of the Fortune 100

85%+

of medium and large Chinese enterprises used AI recruiting tools in the Spring 2026 hiring season

42%

of US job candidates had been required to complete an automated test or interview (American Foundation for the Blind, 2026)

MARCH 2025 The American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) files discrimination complaints against HireVue and Intuit after a deaf employee of Intuit was required to complete an automated video interview for a promotion.

MOTIVATION

People who stutter face systematic barriers in interviews

Stigma in hiring

- >70% of PWS (n=232, US) say stuttering lowers chances of hiring or promotion
- Self stigma may affect interview performance
- Disfluency could be misread as low confidence, incompetence or dishonesty

Speech AI built for fluency

- Speech AI is trained mostly on fluent speech
- PWS are frequently cut off, misunderstood or mis-transcribed
- Impact on PWS in the hiring context: unknown

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What we set out to understand

RQ1 How do people who stutter experience and perceive current AI and human interviewers?

RQ2 How to make the interviewing and hiring process more inclusive for people who stutter?

BACKGROUND

China + United States: two representatives contexts

	China	United States
AI in hiring	AI replacing humans in first-round screening across industries, from retail to factory work	83% of employers and 99% of the Fortune 500 use some automated hiring tool
AI regulation	Since Aug 2023, algorithms may not discriminate by age, gender or health	NYC Local Law 144 AI hiring bias audits; Illinois AI Video Interview Act
Disability law	Classification system: speech disability = significant impairment of speech production	ADA: reasonable accommodations unless they impose undue hardship
Stuttering stigma	More negative attitudes, fewer support services; employers less likely to hire PWD	Comparatively lower stigma; more room to request accommodations

METHODS

18 semi-structured interviews

18

people who stutter

10 China **8** United States

Who

9 women, 9 men. Stuttering severity ranging from mild to severe. Interviewing for roles from entry-level to senior.

AI Interview Systems

Recording answers to a fixed set of questions (n=11) and conversational systems with follow-ups (n=12).

How

1-hour remote interviews, Jul–Aug 2026, via Zoom or Tencent Meeting; reflexive thematic analysis.

Recruitment

PWS group chats, stuttering support groups, personal network on LinkedIn

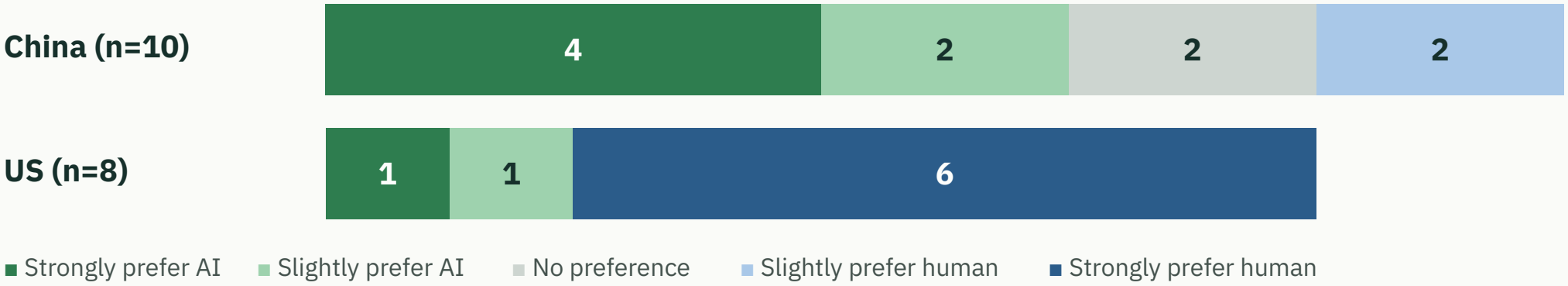
FINDINGS

Split preferences towards AI v.s. human interviewer

This runs against the predominantly negative views of AI interviews reported among job applicants, especially those with disabilities.

PARTICIPANTS

8 prefer AI, 8 prefer humans, 2 have no preference



WHY SOME PWS PREFER AI INTERVIEWS · #1

Less pressure, more fluency

“I didn’t imagine that I could be so fluent in an interview. I said everything I wanted, even things I hadn’t prepared for … only when I interview with an AI I can show my full potential.”

— P1, China, strongly prefers AI

“I only get nervous around people, likely because I’m afraid of being judged by them.”

P8, China, slightly prefer human

“No one is watching me.”

P6, China, slightly prefer human

“I care about their [interviewer’s] feelings. But I don’t care about machines.”

P7, China, slightly prefer AI

WHY SOME PWS PREFER AI INTERVIEWS · #1

Haunted by past negative listener reactions

> *“My brain and my body are too smart. If it’s a real person … No matter how hard I convince myself that I’m safe … My brain knows what is danger.”*
>
> **— P10, China, strongly prefer AI**

“I was cut off and asked to leave before I finished speaking. ”

P5, China, slightly prefer AI

“[The recruiter] immediately said there was no need to proceed right after my self-introduction”

P6, China, slightly prefer human

“My body remembers those reactions when I am in front of a person.”

P1, China, strongly prefer AI

WHY SOME PWS PREFER AI INTERVIEWS · #2

Less bias — under a text-only mental model

The assumption of objectivity

AI is believed to transcribe speech or extracts keywords, leaving stuttering out of the picture.

"[AI] was only to collect my response for analysis. Even there were some blocks, [AI] probably would not include them."

P9, China, no preference

Humans seen as subjective

First impressions stick; impatience, fatigue, and personalities.

"Humans could be less interested in you when you stutter ... but AI will continue to learn about you"

P7, China, slightly prefers AI

But if it listened

Comfort depends on believing stuttering is NOT under surveillance.

"If I know AI would give me a lower rating because of stuttering, I could stutter more because I would be worried about that rating."

P6, China, slightly prefers human

WHY SOME PWS PREFER HUMAN INTERVIEWS · #1

Connection, responsiveness and recognition

“AI cannot show my strength as a person who stutters. The way I speak is slow, organized, with many pauses … However, AI will summarize everything.”

— P16, US, AI engineer, strongly prefers human

“The more interaction it is, just the more natural my speech is for me, and the more comfortable it is,”

P11, US, strongly prefers human

“It just felt very depersonalized.”

P13, US, strongly prefers human

“I need the response from the other side and I enjoy talking to people.”

P16, US, strongly prefers human

Interviews as mutual selection and practice

Cultural matching

Human interviewers are how candidates learn about the workplace — including "the acceptance of stuttering in the workplace" (P6).

"Interview is a mutual selection. I will be uncomfortable if I pass an AI interview but don't vibe with them when I join."

P16, US, strongly prefers human

Practice and courage

Even some who preferred AI (n=3) saw face-to-face interviews as where they built confidence to speak with stuttering.

"We can't rely on AI forever … You have to keep stuttering and you'll find it's not that scary."

P4, China, strongly prefers AI

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT SYSTEMS

Where today's AI interviewers fall short

Rigid time limits

"I have 5 seconds left to finish this word before this thing stops" — watching the clock tick (P17)

No way to repair

"I said A but it took it as B … and I have to answer the question based on B" (P8)

Interruptions and errors

LLMs follow up mid-block and catch only the start of words (P3); observed or anticipated transcription errors (P13, P10)

One modality, human-like avatars

Does not support multiple input channels such as audio and writing (P11); realistic avatars bring back human-interview nerves (P7)

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Toward stutter-friendly interviews

D1

Adapt to stuttering

Enough time to respond, not rigid limits

D2

Give candidates control

Check understanding; let candidates correct transcripts

D3

Make transcription transparent

Report transcription audit results

D4

Offer modality choices

Text or voice; option to turn off the avatar

D5

Provide emotional scaffolding

Encourage; offer hints when stuck; probe potential

D6

Help employers understand

Collect and summarize, don’t score; educate about stuttering

Many of these hold for human interviewers too.

DISCUSSION · 1

AI interviews as a possible accommodation

78%

of 70,000+ US applicants chose an AI interviewer over a human recruiter when given the choice (Jabarian and Henkel, 2026)

56% vs 46%

of neurodivergent vs neurotypical US adults expect fairer judgment from AI than from a human recruiter (“Neurodiversity at Work” Survey by Understood.org, 2026)

But benefits were limited to the in-the-moment experience and delivery, not interview outcomes or workplace fit.

AI interview as an option, not a default.

DISCUSSION · 2

Other factors that could shape the preferences

	China (n=10)	US (n=8)
Disclosure	Mostly (8/10) did not disclose	Mostly (6/8) disclosed proactively
Preference	Mostly (6/10) preferred AI	Mostly (6/8) preferred humans
Career stage	Younger; students and junior roles	More senior; more interview experience

Career stage

AI screens mostly entry-level roles, so junior job seekers face more pressure to adapt

Prior stigma

Preferring AI can be rational self-protection, e.g. P18 in the US

DISCUSSION · 3

Prepare for AI Interviews

1 **Learn the format and practice under its constraints.**
Before the interview, find out which kind of system it is (recording or conversational), how long you get per answer, and whether you can retake.

2 **Request accommodations, and be ready to repair misunderstandings.**
Many systems don’t adapt on their own, so ask the employer to configure the system to accommodate your needs, e.g. provide extra time, answer in text, or turn off the avatar. Be prepared to restate your points when the AI misunderstood.

3 **Practice interviews with AI, but don’t let AI be your only practice**
The lower pressure from speaking with an AI could be a good starting point, but interviews with other people are where you build the courage to stutter openly.

THANK YOU

Questions?
Ideas?
Similar experiences?

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Thanks to our 18 participants