

Competency Based Interviews

You've got an interview, excellent! So what can you expect? What format will the interview take and how can you be sure you are ready for any questions you might be asked? Will the interview involve competency based questions? And if so, how can you prepare? And importantly what are competency based questions?

What are they?

Competencies are the skills, knowledge and behavioural aspects a candidate will put into the role. These type of questions provide the candidate with the opportunity to show they have the experience and the skills to carry out the job successfully.

How do you spot a competency question? These types of questions often begin with the phrases: “Describe a time when...’ or ‘Give me an example of a situation where...’

Why ask them?

Competency based questions are designed to give the candidate the opportunity to talk. The aim is to tell the employer about real life challenges, what they were, how you overcame them and what was learnt from them. By being able to understand how a candidate deals with certain situations, task or people, employers can gain an insight into a candidate’s potential future performance.

What sort of competencies?

Depending on the competencies needed for the role, candidates could be asked about experiences relating to several different types of competencies. Key competencies could include a candidate’s knowledge and experience on a topic related to the role, technical skills or behaviours.

So how do you answer them?

Competency based questions will always call upon an example of past experience. So think back and refer to your CV.

It helps to know what competencies the employer is looking for. Speak to your recruiter they will be a valuable source of insight. Really look at the job requirements, pay attention to keywords – what skills might the employer focus on? If you can figure out the sort of competency based questions you might be asked you can try and match the competency to your experience and be able to adapt examples and recall an anecdote confidently. It's important to sound confident but not scripted in your recall and remember they will want to see your personality too!

Take time to organise your answer.....

How do you organise your answer?

To avoid giving an unstructured answer it may be beneficial to consider using the **STAR** technique. Avoid getting flustered and missing out key details by following the format below.

Situation – Set the scene and context

Task – What was the challenge?

Action – What did you do to overcome the challenge?

Result – Highlight a positive outcome and how your actions contributed to this

Relevance is key; is the experience you are recalling of relevance to the job you are interviewing for? Demonstrate your unique selling points and remember always be prepared.

Example competency questions

Keep reading for some sample competency based interview questions. As noted previously it is worth making a list of the skills and attitudes you think are important for the job for which you are interviewing so you can assess which type of question is likely to be asked in your interview.

For each skill use the STAR technique and write down the **Situation, Task, Action and Result** to provide a consistent and coherent response to the interview question.

Problem solving

- When have you worked as part of a team to complete a difficult or time sensitive task?
- Describe a time when you solved a difficult problem at work?
- Describe a situation where you recognised a particular problem as an opportunity?

Conflict resolution

- Describe a situation where you had to do something you objected to? How did you handle this?
- Describe a situation where you had to motivate a difficult person / dealt with conflict in the work place?

Decision Making

- When have you made a mistake at work? What did you do to address/rectify it?
- Can you tell us about a time you had to make a decision people were against and how you overcame their concerns?
- What has been the most difficult decision you've had to make at work and how did you arrive at your decision?

Flexibility/Open to change

- Can you give an example of when you have supported change at an organization?
- Give an example of a time you took onboard constructive feedback from a colleague?
- Give an example of change in the work place and how you handled this?

Communication

- Tell me about a time your communication skills improved a situation?
- Describe a time you failed to communicate appropriately. What would you have done differently?

Creativity

- Tell me about a time you 'thought outside of the box' and how did you do it and why?

Time management

- Can you give us some examples of how you prioritize projects and tasks with regards to your time and resources?
- Tell us about a time you successfully managed several different tasks/projects simultaneously?

Leadership and team work

- What has been your most stressful professional negotiation to date? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a project you have led from beginning to end and how you did you monitor progress?
- Describe a time when you had to deal with an underperforming team member

Commitment to development and career motivation

- Talk me through a professional goal you set but did not reach?
- When have you learnt a new skill that helped you perform better in your role?