



A GUIDE TO COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWS

These are also known as skills-based, behavioural, criteria or structured interviews and work on the principle that: 'Past performance is the best predictor of future performance'. Competency based interviews are where the interviewers have clearly identified the skills required to carry out the job for which you are applying and will ask specific questions about the skills involved.

The aims of the competency based interview are:

- 1) To obtain information about how you have previously demonstrated the key competencies for the post through specific questions
- 2) To explore the examples further to obtain a clear understanding of the situation, what you did, your contribution and the outcome.

The questions call for examples of situations where you have used the relevant skill. The question would be along the lines of "Describe a situation where you used your communication skills to achieve a particular outcome against all odds"

What is a competency?

A competency is a specific quality, knowledge, skill or behaviour that you should have to be successful in a particular job or role. In demonstrating your competencies you will be showing the skills and the background knowledge necessary for you to perform a particular task effectively, together with the motivation or drive to make things happen.

Typical competencies could be:

Negotiation	Communication	Diplomacy	Calm under pressure
Handling difficult situations	Time management	Decision making	Problem solving
Planning and organisation	Persuasiveness	Teamwork	

What should I expect in the interview?

They will tend to focus on past situations and your behaviour in those situations. Questions are likely to start with: "Please give me an example when. . ." or "Please describe an occasion" etc.

The interviewer will be concerned with pinning you down in terms of your previous actions in the skill areas they are assessing. It is important to understand that a behavioural question is very different from a theoretical one, which many interviewers often ask. It uses words like "did", "having done" or "currently doing" and will involve you talking about a specific past experience. For example they could assess this competence by asking you the question "What would you do if you had someone working for you who was confrontational?" – A theoretical question. But an interviewer trained in competency-based interviewing would word the question as "When was the last time you had to deal with an aggressive or uncooperative member of staff? What did you do?"

What will the interviewers be looking for?

The interviewer will be seeking examples of past behaviour that provide him/her with concrete evidence that you have the necessary competencies to succeed in the job. They will be looking for specific examples about exactly what you did in such situations, not what the team's role as a whole was, or what you would do in a hypothetical situation. You can choose to use relevant examples from your current job, a previous role, or a situation outside of work altogether. You will be asked to discuss the example in some detail.

Preparing for a Competency-Based Interview

- Ensure you have a copy of the job description clearly defining the key competencies for the role
- Think clearly about the key competencies needed for the job
- Take some time to reflect on your experience and the evidence that you have included in the application form and its relevance to the job, whether it be from employment, academic or from another source, for example, from vacation or part-time work; university clubs and societies; voluntary work; study at school or university; holidays and travel or personal and family experiences.
- Think about examples, either past experiences or projects, which you can use in the interview situation to illustrate each competency.
- Think about some additional examples that demonstrate the key competencies.
- Think about how you would describe your contribution to your most important achievements
- Think positively about why this role appeals to you and why you think you should be considered for this role and be prepared to talk about this during the interview.

A possible starting point is to think about your past achievements:

- The things that you have done that you are most proud of
- Situations you feel that you have handled particularly well
- Ways in which you have contributed to the success of the business as a whole.

As the interview will be focused on past specific examples, it would be advisable to think about possible examples that you could use.

- Consider your role in the situation
- Were there any potential barriers or pitfalls?
- How did you overcome them?
- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- Is there anything that you have learned?

Use the STAR format

Compose a paragraph or so for each situation, outlining what happened, how you approached it and what the outcome was. The "STAR" format should help you to structure these outlines:

S –	Situation	what was the situation in which you found yourself?
T –	Task	what was the specific task which you had to achieve?
A –	Action	what action did you take?
R –	Result	what was the outcome of your action?

The focus should be on you even if the situation involved a group, interviewers will want to know what was your specific role in achieving the desired result. Once you have done this, select the examples which you feel are the best illustrations of the required competence.

Here are some general tips:

DON'T give general examples
DO give specific examples