

Competency Based Interviews Guidance for Interviewees

What are Competencies?

Competency based frameworks are made up of 'key competencies' with associated behavioral indicators. The headings are a description of the things we need to do well for the business to succeed and the associated behavioral indicators provide us with the how. Most jobs will have 4 – 5 key competencies which are critical to the role.

Completing Application Forms

The application form is the first step in applying for a post. They are intended to give you the opportunity to describe how you have demonstrated your competence for the post. Focus your evidence on the key competencies from the job description. When answering the questions on each competency:

- keep to the point, answer with relevant information and keep to the space provided;
- complete the sections in your own words. Do not lift phrases directly from the competence framework;
- give examples that relate to the things **you** actually did – be precise about **your** contribution;
- think about what needed to be done, what part you played and what the outcome/result was.

During the interview questions will be structured around the information that you give in the application form. It will also be helpful to think of some additional examples of when you have demonstrated the competence that you can refer to during the interview.

What is a Competency Based interview?

The aims of a competency based interview are:

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

Preparing for the interview

Preparation is the key to performing well at any interview. Below are some tips on interview preparation:

- Ensure you have a copy of the job description clearly defining the key competencies for the role
- Take some time to reflect on your experience and the evidence that you have included in the application and its relevance to the role. 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

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role and be prepared to express this during the interview.

- Prepare some questions *you might* want to ask during the interview. Remember that an interview is a two-way street.

Here are examples of questions you might ask at the close of the interview:

- What would a normal day in this role look like?
- What support for my development is on offer?
- What sort of people have done well in this team?
- What is your vision for the future? What are the plans, if any, for growth or expansion?
- How well do you think I match the requirements of the role?
- What is the next step in the process?

Interview Structure

Competency based interviews are the most common style of interviewing. They are also known as behavioural interviewing which means you should draw on past experience and describe specific examples of incidents that demonstrate your competence in a particular area. The most effective way of answering these questions is to use the **'STAR'** technique:

Situation – briefly describe the background to the situation

Task – specifically describe your responsibility

Action – describe what you did

Result – describe the outcome of your actions.

Here is how you might respond to a competency-based question that is testing the competence working together:

Question:

“Working together is very important in our organisation. Can you describe a time when you have demonstrated being a good team player?”

Answer:

“I have a number of examples I could share with you. In one instance, when I was working as a financial analyst at ABC Company, the sales team were putting together a bid for a large piece of work and the analyst that normally helps them was on leave. I offered to help them and worked hard to ensure they had all the information they needed. They took on my suggestions regarding pricing and also some creative ideas I had on formatting the proposal. As it turned out we won the bid and I was promoted as a result.”

You may be required to provide between one and three real-life examples to validate one particular competence.

Here are some examples of how competence based questions are phrased:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way?
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills?

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- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree?
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker?
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem?
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision?

Examples of Key Competency Areas:

- Team Working & Interpersonal Skills (Soft Skills)
- Organisation & Planning
- Problem Solving – overcoming obstacles, suggesting solutions
- Coping with Stressful Situations
- Initiative
- Persuasion / Influencing
- Handling Customer Complaints
- Learning from mistakes
- Creativity
- Leadership

Summary

- Think of the core skills and “competencies” to do with the job –eg- man management, technical skills, team working, organisation, time management, customer-facing skills etc.
- Think of examples of situations where you have successfully demonstrated these skills and core competencies, or situations where these skills have been “tested”.
- For example, think of an example of a situation where you demonstrated team-working skills or examples of situations where you overcame problems.
- Think of 3 examples for each core competency / behavior. Doing so will help you to tackle the open-ended and non-specific questions that can often throw candidates during interviews.
- Permanent interviews, in particular, tend to be more about “soft skills”. Think of example situations in relation to topics such as: -
 - o Turning things around.
 - o Gaining buy-in from team members.
 - o Team leading / team working.
 - o Making unpopular decisions.
 - o Coping with adversity.

Finally, enjoy the process as a new position could be just around the corner!

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