

5. COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEW

A competency-based interview uses questions which aim to find out how the candidate has utilised specific skills in their previous working experiences and how they approach problems, tasks and challenges.

By answering these questions they will let the interviewer know what skills and behaviours they possess and at what level they are operating. This is measured against the core and technical competencies required for the job (and organisation) and recorded on an interview record sheet (see template below).

Asking questions that specifically target skills or competencies listed in the job description gives the interviewer a methodical way to assess the candidate's likely ability to perform in the role.

It is an excellent way for a future employer to understand the experiences a candidate brings with them and not just qualifications.

Remember

- All candidates **must** be asked the same predetermined questions
- All answers **must** be scored immediately after the interview
- At least one of the interviewers **must** be present at all interviews

STARS technique

The most common approach to conducting a competency-based interview is to use the STARS technique.

STARS stands for Situation/Task, Actions, Results and Summarise.

Candidates are asked to:

- Describe a specific, challenging work-related **Situation** or **Task**
- Describe the **Actions** taken to resolve the situation or complete the task
- Describe the **Results** of their actions

Interviewer's guidance

Situation and/or Task: Begin by asking a broad, open question about a specific situation or task, e.g. 'Describe a challenging, work-related situation or task where you ...'

Actions: Try to understand the specific actions the candidate took to deal with the situation or task. This is the most important part of the answer. For example, 'What specific actions did you take to resolve the situation? Tell me what you did to ensure the necessary structures were in place'.

Results: Finish by asking the candidate what results they achieved in the end. It may also be appropriate to ask what lessons the candidate learnt. This is the follow-up question, they don't have to be the same for each candidate but they must relate directly back to the answer given.

Summarise: If you are in any doubt as to what the candidate said, it is a good idea to summarise briefly what the candidate told you. This allows you to check that you understood the candidate correctly.

Tips:

- Asking follow-up questions, such as ‘what did you learn from this experience?’ or ‘how would you approach the same issue now?’ can illustrate the candidate’s ability to learn from their mistakes and adapt to changes and challenges.
- Inform the candidate it will be a competency-based interview beforehand. This will allow them time to reflect on their past experiences and select their most appropriate examples to display their skills, behaviours and overall abilities.
- **Keep it simple** or managers won’t use it! Ten questions should be enough if follow-up questions are used.

Rating answers:

Answers should be rated according to the level of competency required for the role.

Interviewers should consider together what level of competency is needed (based on the job description and knowledge of the role) and what sort of answer would ‘exceed’ rather than ‘meet’ the required level of competency. This will help interviewers to give the same ratings to similar answers.

After an answer, consider how the example given reflects a behaviour that meets expectations for this role or whether it would fall short of what is expected, and rate accordingly.

Occasionally, the rating system can be changed for very important competencies, so more points are awarded to a particular competency. This is known as ‘weighting’ and is acceptable, so long as every interview is weighted in the same way.

Template competency-based interview record sheet

Competency-based interview record				
Position applied for:		Candidate name:		
Interview panel:		Date:		
Rating system – extent to which answer displays evidence of fulfilling competency	3 Exceeds	2 Met	1 Partly met	0 Not met
Introduction question: <insert question> , e.g. What motivated you to apply for this position?				Score
(mark according to how well-researched and convincing the response 0 ‘not at all’, up to 3 for ‘very’)				/3
Competency-based questions				
<Insert competency domain and specific behaviour/skill> e.g. Achieves results: Maintains focus on delivery of timely and appropriate results using available resources				
Question 1: <insert question>				Score
				/3
<Insert competency domain and specific behaviour/skill> ee.g. Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships: Contributes positively in the team to achieve programme objectives				
Question 2: <insert question>				Score
				/3
<Insert competency domain and specific behaviour/skill> ee.g. Managing in a pressured and changing environment: Adapts calmly to changing situations and constraints				

Question 3: <insert question>	Score
	/3
<Insert competency domain and specific behaviour/skill> ee.g. Applying humanitarian standards and principles: Demonstrates an understanding of coordination mechanisms	
Question 4: <insert question>	Score
	/3
<Insert competency domain and specific behaviour/skill> e.g. Operating safely and securely at all times: Identifies and communicates risks and threats and mitigates these for self and organisation	
Question 5: <insert question>	Score
	/3
<Insert competency domain and specific behaviour/skill> e.g. Demonstrating leadership: Demonstrates understanding of skills and how they complement those of others to build team effectiveness	
Question 6: <insert question>	Score
	/3

Technical Questions	
Question 7: <insert question>	Score
	/3
Question 8: <insert question>	Score
	/3
Question 9: <insert question>	Score
	/3
Performance summary	
Score total	/30