

A Guide to Competency Based Interviews

Introduction

The objective of a competency based interview (also known as “targeted selection”) is to obtain information on technical and behavioural competencies – or in other words, the knowledge, skills and abilities that a candidate has. Competency-based interviewing works on the principle that past behaviour predicts future behaviour. It is a systematic, fair, customisable, proven, legally defensible process that has been used for many years.

Getting Started

As you prepare for an interview, you may realise that you first need to be clearer about what is important to you in a job, what skills you have and prefer to use, and whether this is the right job for you so

- Review the Key Responsibilities and Accountabilities for the job
- Review how your Key Capabilities and Experience fit

Preparing for the Interview

You will be asked to recall past job-related experiences in the context of the specific capabilities or competencies that are required for the job. When you are recalling these experiences, the interviewer is looking for a specific situation or task, the actions that you took and the results you achieved. This format, known as STAR, is the basis of all competency-based interviewing. STAR is:-

- the **S**ituation or **T**ask that you encountered
- the **A**ctions you took in light of the situation
- the **R**esults of your actions

Refer to the job description to remind you of the capabilities and competencies required as you will be questioned about some or all of these. In order to prepare for this section of the interview, for each capability/competency:-

- Identify two job-related STARs from the last two years to illustrate that you have the capability/competency.
- Stay focused on **you** – say what you did not what “John” or “we” did.
- Plan to take about five minutes to describe each STAR, focussing on key points.

Hints

- Avoid making vague statements that may sound good but provide no specific information about what **you** did, such as “the project team created a plan...”
- Avoid making theoretical statements such as “I would do...” or “I always...” as these provide no information about what you actually did.

The Interview

Most interviewers will use the following format:-

- Key Background Review – you may be asked specific questions about your educational background and work history, including your current role.
- Competency Questions – where you are asked to relate prior job-related experiences to allow the interviewer to assess your strength in a number of specific capabilities/competencies.

Aim to:-

- Listen carefully to the question
- Take a second or two to compose your thoughts before you answer
- Ask for clarification if you need to – be sure you really understand what the interviewer is asking.
- Speak succinctly and clearly, minimise jargon, eliminate slang.
- Try to phrase your responses in STARs, and keep them brief
- Try to vary your examples – though it is okay (and sometimes efficient) to use the same example to illustrate different competencies.

Your Turn – to ask any relevant questions