

# Competency Based Interviews

## What are they?

Competency based interviews are different to standard interviews. Standard interviews are unstructured and conversational: the interviewer gets an idea of a candidate's experience and personality through the flow of general discussion. Competency based interviews are more structured and assess your ability to do something successfully and efficiently. Because they are more specific and allow an employer to assess several candidates using identical criteria, competency based interviews are becoming increasingly popular.



## Format

Your prospective employer will have a list of 'competencies' they feel are essential for the role. Throughout the interview they will pose specific questions that relate to these identified competencies. In reply to the questions, you will be asked to give examples of situations and events you have experienced in your work or personal life. These answers will demonstrate an aspect of your personality, or set of skills, that reflect the qualities necessary for success in the role.

## Preparation

1. Different roles and market areas will require different skill sets. Already you should have some knowledge of the skills the role requires, but to be more specific with your preparation make sure you study the job specification in detail. Write down a list of competencies you can decipher from the job description or you feel are relevant to the role. Common examples of competencies are:

- Teamwork
- Responsibility
- Commitment
- Leadership
- Decision making
- Organisation
- Problem solving

2. Spend time thinking about situations in your life that exemplify the characteristics on your list - these will form the basis of your answers. They can be work related, from school or university, or from your personal life (when using examples from your personal life make sure they are professional. Saying having children has improved your organisational abilities is fine, but saying that winning a drinking competition shows commitment and resilience is not). Write down two answers for each competency. Make sure that together all of your answers show a good range of your skill set.
3. Study the company website to get as much information as possible. Competency interviews often test your knowledge of this with questions such as; "Describe why you want to work for our company". You need to have enough information to talk about the strengths of the company as well as your personal opinions.
4. Keep these points in mind when preparing your example answers:
  - It's not necessary to describe situations when you have 'won the day' every time. You need a good overall picture of your skillset.
  - Don't make up answers.
  - Remember to talk about yourself ('I'). Don't focus on other team members or co-workers.
  - Stay on point: make your answers concise and specific to the competency.

[Common types of questions can be found here >](#)

[For IT related question examples click here >](#)

5. Use the STAR technique to check your examples by making sure they contain:

- S** Situation (the context/setting. Where? When? What?)
- T** Task (what was the goal)
- A** Action (what were your actions)
- R** Result (end result)

[More information on the STAR technique can be found here >](#)

## During the Interview

There's no need to be daunted by an interview if you have prepared properly. Instead think of it as an opportunity to showcase your skills and impress a prospective employer. Remember to take your time with your answers. Maintain good eye contact and think carefully about which of your examples is most relevant to the question.

[For more information and hints on competency based interviews, watch this short video >](#)