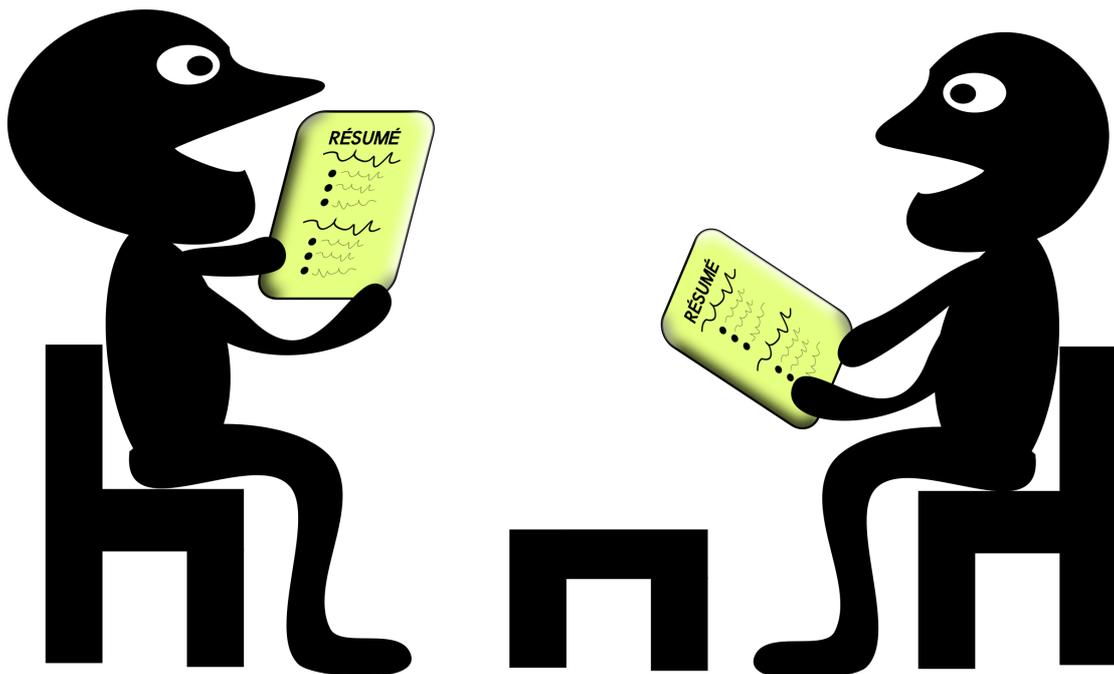


City of Glasgow College

Trade Union Education

Competency-based interview



One of the most common interview methods, competency-based interviews are popular with recruiters as they enable employers to compare candidate's life-for-like. Find out how to prepare for this type of interview

What is a competency-based interview?

Competency-based interviews (also known as structured, behavioural or situational interviews) are designed to test one or more skills or competencies. The interviewer has a list of set questions (each focusing on a specific skill), and your answers will be compared to pre-determined criteria and marked accordingly.

Competency interviews work on the principle that past behaviour is the best indicator of future performance. They can be used by employers across all sectors but are particularly favoured by large graduate recruiters, who may use them as part of an assessment centre.

They differ to normal or unstructured interviews, which tend to be more informal. In unstructured interviews recruiters often ask a set of random, open-ended questions relevant to the job, such as 'what can you do for the company?' to get an overall impression of who you are. A competency-based interview is more systematic and each question targets a skill needed for the job.

Key competencies regularly sought after by employers include:

- adaptability
- communication
- commercial awareness
- conflict resolution
- decisiveness
- independence
- flexibility
- leadership
- problem solving
- organisation
- teamwork.

Competency-based interview questions

Questions asked during a competency based interview aim to test a variety of skills and you'll need to answer in the context of actual events. Which skills are tested will depend largely on the job you're interviewing for and the sector you'll be working in.

Expect questions opening with 'Tell us about a time when you...', 'Give an example of...' or 'Describe how you...'

Competency questions you may be asked at interview include:

- Describe a situation in which you led a team
- Give an example of a time you handled conflict in the workplace
- How do you maintain good working relationships with your colleagues?
- Tell me about a big decision you've made recently. How did you go about it?
- What has been your biggest achievement to date?
- Describe a project where you had to use different leadership styles to reach your goal
- Tell me about a time when your communication skills improved a situation
- How do you cope in adversity?
- Give me an example of a challenge you faced in the workplace and tell me how you overcame it
- Tell me about a time when you showed integrity and professionalism
- How do you influence people in a situation with conflicting agendas?
- Give an example of a situation where you solved a problem in a creative way
- Tell me about a time that you made a decision and then changed your mind
- Describe a situation where you were asked to do something that you'd never attempted previously
- Tell me about a time when you achieved success even when the odds were stacked against you.

How to answer competency questions

Using the STAR (situation, task, action and result) method to structure your answers is a useful way to communicate important points clearly and concisely. For every answer you give identify the:

- **Situation/task** - Describe the task that needed to be completed or the situation you were confronted with. For example 'I led a group of colleagues in a team presentation to potential clients'.
- **Action** - Explain what you did and how and why you did it. For example 'We presented to around 20 big industry players in the hope of winning their business. I delegated sections of the presentation to each team member and we discussed our ideas in a series of meetings. After extensive research and practise sessions our group presentation went off without a hitch'.
- **Result** - Describe the outcome of your actions. For example 'As a result of this hard work and team effort we won the business of 15 clients'.

Where possible try to relate your answers to the role that you're interviewing for. While your responses to the interview questions are pre-prepared try to avoid sounding like you're reading from a script.

Don't attempt to wing it by thinking on your feet; the quality of your answers will suffer. Also avoid embellishing the truth at all costs. Any lies or invented examples can be easily checked.

Preparing for a competency-based interview

The key to providing successful answers to competency questions is preparation, and the good news is, competency-based interviews are relatively easy to prepare for. Firstly, it's essential that you read and understand the job advert. Next, from the job description or person specification pick out the main competencies that the employer is looking for and think of examples of when and how you've demonstrated each of these. Try to draw upon a variety of experiences from your studies, previous employment or any work experience you've undertaken.

Familiarise yourself with the STAR approach to answering questions and practise your responses with a friend or family member. You could also make an appointment with your university careers service to practise your technique at a mock competency interview.