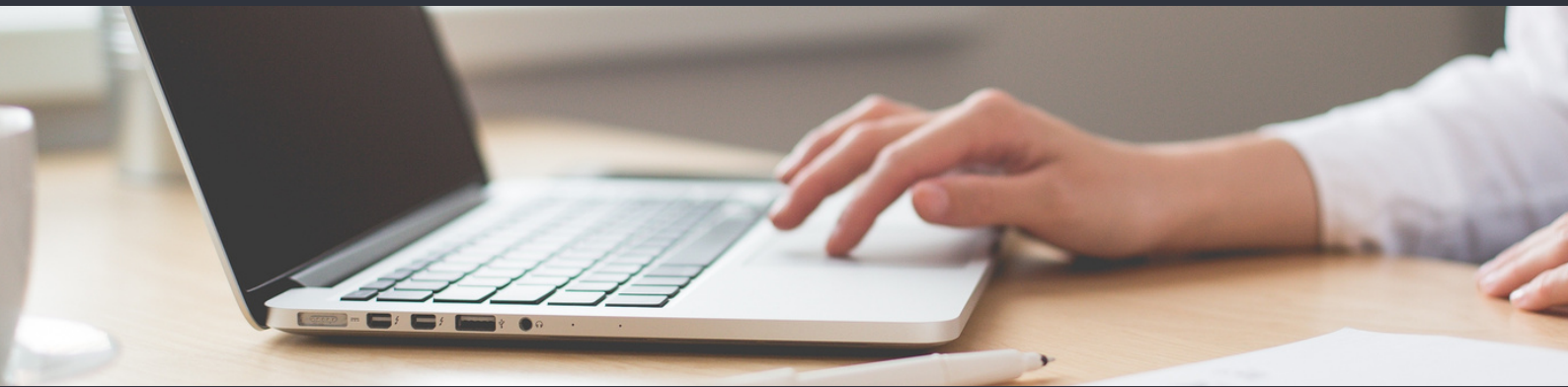


Competency-based interviews (CBI) are geared toward the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. Accordingly, the interviewer's goal is to obtain specific examples of when and how you demonstrated particular behaviours, by asking you to give examples of past experiences.

Competency interview questions are designed to probe specific skills, competencies and characteristics that you employed within a particular set of circumstances (the examples you choose to use).

Jobs can be described in terms of key competencies. This means that competencies can be used as forms of assessment and selection. Whilst each interview may vary in terms of the questions asked / competencies reviewed, there are general themes that are usually covered across all CBI's.



PREPARING FOR A CBI

You will need to prepare a suite of competency-based examples that you can utilise and align to particular questions. These examples should showcase your different competencies and behaviours.

Q - HOW DO I KNOW WHICH COMPETENCIES TO PREPARE FOR AND WHAT EXAMPLES SHOULD I USE?

Often competencies or 'required skills & attributes' are listed on a job description – this should be your first port of call. If they are not referenced explicitly, the job description and role content will give indicators as to the competencies that are required in the role, therefore giving a steer as to the competencies that will be covered within the interview. For instance, competencies that apply to a Finance Business Partner role are likely to be things like Communication, Decision Making and Influencing. Also, sometimes competencies are linked to a company's values and these can also give hints as to the line of questioning you'll receive.



Q - WHAT TYPE OF COMPETENCIES COULD BE ASSESSED IN THE INTERVIEW?

- Individual competencies - your attributes: flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk taking, personal integrity etc
- Analytical competencies - the elements of decision making: innovation, analytical skills, problem solving, practical learning and attention to detail etc
- Interpersonal competencies - communication, impact, influencing, personal awareness, teamwork and openness etc
- Motivational competencies - resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative and a focus on quality etc
- Managerial competencies (role / level specific): leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, empathy, project management and results driven



Q – CAN I USE NON-WORK RELATED EXAMPLES AND DO THEY HAVE TO BE RECENT?

The key is to use your best examples. If they happen to be a few years ago and/or in a non-work setting, that's absolutely fine. The caveat being that, as the hiring company would be looking for you to demonstrate your competencies in a work-environment context if they hire you, clearly you want to use relevant examples that convey said competencies, so invariably work-environment examples are the best way to do that.

Q – HOW SHOULD I STRUCTURE MY ANSWERS AND EXAMPLES?

The STAR model will provide a structure to your answers and covers things like: What was the situation? Why had it happened? What did you do? How was the situation resolved?

S = Situation – What were the circumstances? What was the challenge? Why is this answer relevant to the question?

T = Task – What was the task at hand? Put simply, what had to be done?

A = Actions – What actions (thought processes and practical steps) did you take and consider to achieve the 'Task'?

R = Results – What was the outcome? What were the tangible outputs / lasting benefits and learnings?

Q – WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS I SHOULD BEAR IN MIND WHEN FORMING AND DELIVERING MY EXAMPLES?

- Talk about yourself and use 'I' over 'we' where appropriate. The interviewers are interviewing you, not your current employer or team so it's important you refer to your specific impact and involvement, notably at the key milestones of the example.
- Be specific – if you are asked for an example of 'a time' you need to give a specific example that relates to a particular time/instance. Be careful not to talk generally or hypothetically.
- Be mindful of time. Rarely would a competency example last more than a few minutes. A lot of insight and description can be given in 3 to 4 minutes of talking.
- Ensure you have understood the questions – allowing you to align your best example to the sought competency. If you have not understood, ask the interviewer to clarify or repeat.
- Compose yourself. If you can't immediately think of an answer, don't feel pressured to start talking. Explain to the interviewer that you have understood the question but you're going to take 20-30 seconds to formulate your answers. Failing that, ask them to come back to that particular question. Demonstrating control and composure within an interview setting is an excellent way to convey your stakeholder management skills.



EXAMPLE COMPETENCY INTERVIEW QUESTION

Give an example of a time when you had to influence a difficult senior stakeholder?

Note: some interviewers will ask sub-questions as part of the main question such as “what were the main challenges?”, “what were the considerations you made at the time?”, “what did you learn?”

Note: As a general rule, when describing your example, its important to use both the ‘how’ and the ‘why’.

HOW

The practical steps of what you did and/or how something was achieved. This should form the basis of every example

WHY

Why you chose to or had to do it that way. This conveys judgement and decision making and you bring this into your example by describing your thought process. You talk about the ‘why’ at the ‘A=Actions’ stage of the STAR format.

POSSIBLE ANSWER (IN STAR FORMAT)

Situation:

- I was an Audit Senior working on a global FMCG client. The client was longstanding with my employer and it’s a notoriously complex audit.
- During the course of the audit, it became clear there was split-opinion on how we, as an audit team, had audited/agreed with how our client had valued one of their company’s assets.
- My point of contact at the client made it clear to me they were not happy with our valuation and wanted to challenge our assumption.

Task:

- At this stage I realised I would need to present a case to highlight our thought process and workings, with a view to encouraging them to our way of thinking and ultimately explain how I/we had reached this valuation.

Actions:

- I considered the best approach to influence the client and looked at the various options I might have of doing this.
- I asked my colleagues who had preceded me on the audit and also my senior manager what their opinions were of how I could achieve the task – what was their experience of similar things on this audit previously, and what was their experience of dealing with this difficult stakeholder.
- Having considered my next steps and having canvassed opinion, it was apparent that the FD at of the client was a methodical individual who always asked his teams to convey how they had reached a decision/conclusion.
- I therefore created a mini-presentation over a few slides that compared the accounting standard, the business context and practical example that we were dealing with (as part of this I included a tangible example from another similar scale audit/example I had worked on) – before doing this I triple-checked my own work and had a senior colleague review it also to ensure I was confident in what I was proposing.
 - Note – you can give more ‘example specific’ detail at this point if you wish
- Having worked out the best time to speak to the FD, by proactively liaising with the PA, I arranged time in their diary, I talked them through my workings and explained openly and in a neutral, non-combative tone how I reached this conclusion. Having had very recent training in this accounting standard/treatment, I was able to talk confidently, concisely and knowledgably.
 - Note – you can give more ‘example specific’ detail at this point if you wish
- I also asked them to highlight why they felt our assumption was incorrect and also if they could see the logic and method in what I had done.

Result:

- After I presented our case, our point of contact at the client understood our logic and after some further dialogue about the merits of our valuation, and how it fitted into the bigger picture of the overall audit outcome, all parties mutually agreed to use the valuation method I/the team had presented.
- The audit was concluded on time and within budget and strong relations were maintained.



EXAMPLES OF COMPETENCY QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when you had to identify the underlying causes to a problem, how you evaluated what had gone wrong and how you generated the solution?
- Give an example of how you provided service to a client/stakeholder beyond their expectations. How did you identify the need? How did you respond?
- Describe a time when you led and had to motivated others, to achieve a goal.
- Tell me about a time you have received constructive feedback – what was it, why did you receive it and did you agree with it?
- Tell me about a time when you had competing priorities? What was your approach to dealing with said priorities, ensuring you met deadlines/expectations?
- Tell me about a time when you had to change your point of view or your plans to take into account new information or changing priorities?
- Tell me about a time when you had to make an important, time-pressured decision?
- Describe the things you consider and the steps you take in assessing the viability of a new idea, plan or initiative?
- Describe a situation in which you were a member (not a leader) of a team, and a conflict arose within the team. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you set and achieved a goal?
- Describe a time when you improved the way things were typically done, how you communicated/sold the change and how you brought others with you?
- Describe a time when you identified you needed training and/or you didn't feel equipped to perform a task?
- Tell me about a time when you were able to change someone's viewpoint?
- Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something that you disagreed with?

EXAMPLES OF COMPETENCY QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something you had never done before. How did you react? What did you learn?
- Describe a situation in which you embraced a new system, process or technology at work that was a major departure from the way things had been done up to that point?
- Recall a time when you were assigned a task outside of your job description. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about the biggest change you have had to deal with? How did you adapt to that change?
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your outcomes?
- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How did you handle interactions with that person?
- Tell me about a time when you were communicating with someone and they did not understand you. What did you do?
- Tell me about the last time something significant didn't go according to plan at work. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you led by example. What did you do and how did others react?
- Recall a time when your manager was unavailable when a problem arose. How did you handle the situation? Who did you consult with?
- Tell me about a project that you planned. How did you organize and schedule the tasks?
- Describe a time when you felt stressed or overwhelmed. How did you handle it?
- Give an example of a time when you delegated an important task successfully?