

Competency Based Interviews

Your **Quick Guide** Including
Sample Questions and Answers





Publishers Note

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing from the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

Anson Reed Ltd,
167-169 Great Portland Street
London
W1W 5PF

© Anson Reed Limited and InterviewGold.com

The publisher makes no representation, express or implied, with regard to accuracy of the information in this book and cannot accept any legal responsibility for any error or omissions that may be made.

Competency Based Interviewing is now widely regarded as the most popular technique for employers to use. In fact, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recently reported that 78% of interviews are now Competency Based.

They are reported to give more accurate hiring decisions however for many candidates they can be a real challenge. In this guide I provide you with advice along with some sample answers. Use these as a tool when formulating your answers with your own real-life examples.



The Basics

Competency based interviews (CBI) are sometimes called structural interviews, behaviour interviews, or evidence-based interviews. Whatever the terminology, the common aim is to use specifically targeted competency questions to discover whether or not an applicant matches the requirements of the position.

In your competency based interview, the employer will explore particular skills, behaviours or competencies, as they are formally called. While traditional interviews involve random open questioning, these interviews are more systematic, with each question targeting a specific competency. The questions themselves are phrased in a very specific way designed to elicit how you behaved during a particular situation.

In preparing for a CBI the interviewer will build a list of questions relating to each of the required competencies. In some interviews, you will be asked just one question per competency while others may explore using 2 or more questions per competency with additional probing questions.

These will draw out the information necessary to establish whether a candidate will be likely to fulfil the needs of the job. This system concentrates on the actual capabilities of a job candidate rather than being open to the individual and possibly arbitrary opinion of a single interviewer who may have a personal bias based more on gut feeling than substantive fact.

“Competency Based Interviewing removes the risk of personal bias and makes the hiring process fairer.”

The History

Since the mid 1980s competency frameworks have been recognised as extremely important in the context of staff recruitment. The competency framework sets out the specific skills required for adequate and effective performance in a job.

The use of competencies was seen as a way to standardise the measurement of performance and to help with training and improving the skills of existing staff in an organisation, and then became even more important as an aid to staff recruitment.

The benefits include a more accurate selection of candidates, and a better performing workforce. Competency based interviewing helps to standardise the process and remove personal bias from the more traditional type of interview process.



Competencies Explained

Put simply, competencies are the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to deliver a successful performance in a job. There can be anything from six core competencies and upwards required in most roles and these will be detailed in the employer's Competency Framework. Competencies are often categorised as follows*:

| Core Competencies | Personal Competencies | Managerial Competencies |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Achieving Results | Adaptability and Flexibility | Conflict Management |
| Analytical Thinking | Determination and Drive | Developing / Empowering |
| Attention to Detail | (Resilience) | Others |
| Building Relationships | Empathy and Sensitivity | Financial Management |
| Communication | Initiative | Leadership |
| Coping with Pressure | Interpersonal | Operational Management |
| Creativity (Conceptual | Motivation / Commitment | Project and Change |
| Thinking) | Professional integrity | Management |
| Customer Focus | Respect for Diversity | Strategic Thinking / Vision |
| Decision Making / | Self Confidence and | |
| Judgement | Assertiveness | |
| Negotiation | Vigilance and Situational | |
| Organisational Awareness | Awareness | |
| Persuading and Influencing | | |
| Planning and Organising | | |
| Problem Solving | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Team Working (Collaboration) Technological and IT Awareness | | |
|--|--|--|

* [When you join InterviewGold, you will get questions and expert STAR answers covering over 32 different competencies and behaviours](#)

Civil Service Behaviours

The UK Civil Service is using a relatively new framework for recruiting called Success Profiles.

Despite the change, competencies continue to form a major part of the Success Profiles system and there are now **9 core behaviours** some of which you will be examined on depending on the role and level you are applying at.

These are as follows:

- Changing and Improving
- Communicating and Influencing
- Delivering at Pace
- Developing Self and Others
- Leadership
- Making Effective Decisions
- Managing a Quality Service
- Seeing the Big Picture
- Working Together

If preparing a Civil Service application or interview, you must have a strong, detailed example to talk about, one which shows your effectiveness with the relevant behaviour.

Your answer must also show required strengths and it will be scored both on these and the correct positive behaviours they will look for.

[Click her to learn how you can get detailed STAR answers covering all of the 9 Civil Service behaviours. Both 250 word answers for application and longer more detailed for interview.](#)

Competency based interview Questions

It might feel like a conversational encounter, but competency based interviews are in fact extremely structured. Each candidate is usually asked the same questions in the same order and with the same amount of time and prompting. This keeps the interview process fair to all candidates.

Answers are noted and then scored.

The exact questions asked will vary and are targeted at those competencies seen as essential to the role you are applying for. Competency questions require you to provide specific examples of how you dealt with a situation and usually start with:

- Tell me about a time when you....
- Give an example of a situation where....
- Describe a scenario....

“You can often work out the questions by studying the job description and person specification.”

Probing or Follow On Questions

A word about probing questions: Be prepared for probing or follow on questions exploring your answer in more detail. These are designed to find out what you were thinking, what your motivations were and what process you followed.

For this very reason we caution against using sample answers or stock answers; with some carefully targeted probing questions you may be found out.

Here are some probing questions for the competency of Problem Solving:

- How was this problem affecting others?
- Why did you regard this problem as significant?
- What obstacles did you encounter when resolving this problem?
- What information did you use to resolve the problem?
- What resources did you call on to help?
- What did you learn from this situation?
- What would you have done differently?

Scoring Used in Competency Based Interviews

Decisions will be made based on evidence and this is why the examples you use should be selected carefully. They must demonstrate the positive behaviours required.

Organisations will score and assess in different ways and here is a sample scoring sheet used by a large UK employer.

| | Score |
|--|-------|
| Little or no evidence of positive behaviours High level of negative behaviours shown | 1 |
| Some evidence of positive behaviours Significant level of negative behaviours shown | 2 |
| Demonstrates similar amounts of positive evidence and negative evidence | 3 |
| Demonstrates positive evidence of competence Low level of negative behaviours shown | 4 |
| Demonstrates positive evidence of a high level of competence Few/no negative behaviours shown | 5 |
| Total Score Awarded | |

[Click here to get INSTANT ACCESS to competency based interview questions and brilliant STAR answers SPECIFIC TO YOUR JOB >>](#)

How to Answer

Most competency based and behaviour questions require you to give a real-life example of a past situation you have been involved in. This sounds straightforward however it is very easy to give a long rambling answer resulting in a low score.

Your response needs to be relevant and sufficiently detailed to show that you understand what is required, that you possess the core competency and can use it effectively.



The key to an effective and top scoring competency answer lies in its structure and there are two standard formulas we recommend using, the STAR or IPAR formulas.

Both are very similar and in summary:

| STAR | IPAR |
|---|---|
| S = Situation T = Task A = Action R = Result | I = Introduction P = Problem A = Action R = Result |

Feel free to use the STAR if you are familiar with it however the IPAR technique is favoured by us. The key difference is that IPAR starts with an **Introduction** which should summarise the success in a strong single sentence. For example:

“During the past 12 months, I devised, implemented and delivered a cost reduction programme resulting in savings of over 25% across the department.”

This is a powerful sales statement which will stay in the interviewer’s mind throughout. It sets the scene and grabs their attention and they will automatically want to hear more.

“Approach each answer as if you were recalling a story with a definite start, middle and end.”

Sample Answers Using IPAR Formula

Over the next pages you will find sample answers* using the STAR method.

These have been taken from the InterviewGold online training system. In the training, you will learn how to use the IPAR formula too, a great way to really sell your answers.

As with any sample answer we discourage their use directly in an interview. Instead, you should respond with examples based on your own individual experience. In this way you will be able to answer the probing and follow-on questions with ease.

* Please note these are generic examples however InterviewGold Online provides you with **template sample STAR answers which are specific to your role**. Use these templates alongside the powerful Answer Builder feature to create your own expertly crafted answers. Learn more here <https://www.interviewgold.com/competency-based-interview.html>

Q. Tell me about a time when you used your initiative to resolve a difficult situation?

| Competency: | Initiative |
|----------------------|---|
| Positive Behaviours: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is able to work independently and to complete tasks without constant or excessive supervision • Has the capacity to identify an opportunity to improve a process without being asked • Acts quickly to address a crisis situation drawing on appropriate resources and experience with similar situations • Identifies likelihood of a problem arising and takes action to minimise the impact • Continuously looks to maximize potential opportunities in the future by drawing on personal experience |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| S = Situation | I recently introduced a system which has reduced the time it takes to deal with customer complaints from 7 days to 2 days. |
| T = Task | Soon after I started with my current employer, I identified that we were receiving a lot of customer complaints via email and telephone. However we had not developed any structured method to handle these and on average it was taking the team 7 days to resolve a complaint. I realised this was a serious issue for us which |

| | |
|------------|--|
| | <p>could damage our reputation and relationship with our customers and result in a loss of revenue.</p> |
| A = Action | <p>I documented the existing process used to deal with complaints. I interviewed the complaints team, gathered their views on the process and how they thought it could be improved.</p> <p>I completed a workflow process map and identified where the delays were occurring and where most time was being spent.</p> <p>I then designed an improved process map and alongside this developed a business case clearly outlining the benefits of implementing this action.</p> <p>I investigated the causes of the complaints, examined the systems in use and cross referenced back to other Customer Relationship Management models and software I have used elsewhere.</p> <p>I presented my business case to my manager, outlining the causes of the delays and my proposed solutions. I demonstrated how the new processes would work and what the expected outcomes were.</p> <p>I achieved successful signoff and I implemented the new process successfully. Throughout I communicated with all stakeholders, overcame obstacles and stayed focussed on the end objective.</p> |
| R = Result | <p>I'm pleased to say that I delivered the new system on time and within budget and as a result, the team can now address 100% of complaints within 2 days. It's a great achievement and one which I am very proud of.</p> |

Q. Tell me about a recent situation where you worked particularly effectively in order to achieve a successful outcome.

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Competency: | Delivering at Pace (Achieving Results) |
| Positive Behaviours: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strives to be the best, continually delivering, measuring and improving • Sets goals and works to meet them with energy and drive • Remains persistent when obstacles are encountered • Stays focussed on the end objective • Completes tasks and duties to a high standard • Creates a climate that relentlessly strives for excellence • Takes responsibility for own actions and encourages others to be the best they can • Uses initiative to develop goals for self and takes independent action to achieve results |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| S = Situation | In my role as Marketing Manager for the Euro Hotels Group, I created and implemented a new Marketing plan that resulted in a 300% increase in room reservations. |
| T = Task | Soon after joining, I discovered that reservations were falling and I proposed a review of existing marketing activities. I am constantly looking for new and better ways to do something and I was pleased to take on this challenge. |
| A = Action | <p>Firstly, I completed a current state assessment, I requested feedback from our client database, and I analysed it for trends. I investigated what our competitors were doing and researched general market trends.</p> <p>From this and with knowledge from my past campaigns I created a detailed report which included a target goal which I calculated was achievable.</p> <p>I presented my recommendations to the Board, I demonstrated the risks of a continued drop-off in sales and I outlined how these would be reversed through adoption of my marketing ideas.</p> <p>The Board were initially sceptical however I persevered, I remained persistent and I persuaded them to give me sign off for implementation.</p> <p>I encouraged all the staff to buy-in to the long term benefits - we would keep our jobs and create a centre of excellence.</p> |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| | <p>I maintained a strong focus on the end objective when designing and implementing my new initiatives which included email marketing, weekend offers and specific Facebook and Twitter promotions.</p> |
| <p>R = Result</p> | <p>Within three months, bookings were up by over 50% and within a year I had increased bookings threefold. I was very pleased with the response not just in terms of the business but also the feedback I got from my manager which was excellent.</p> |

Q: Give me an example which demonstrates your ability to develop successful working relationships.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Competency: | Working Together / Building Relationships |
| Positive Behaviours: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifies the potential opportunities and consequences of proposed changes and explains the process, implications and rationale to those affected by it • Applies standard project management principles • Anticipates potential resistance to change and implements approaches that address resistance • Has the capacity to build, motivate and lead a team to deliver against pre-set objectives • Takes responsibility for progress and initiates corrective actions where necessary • Conducts effective planning and manages resources, risks and issues efficiently • Delivers change successfully to quality and cost constraints |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| S = Situation | Last year, while working as a Graduate Account Coordinator for an events company, I succeeded in building a strong relationship with a major client, extended the contract period by one year and increased revenue by 27%. |
| T = Task | On joining my employer, I contacted my client to introduce myself and to start the relationship building process. However, my client advised me he was cancelling his contract with us as my predecessor had failed to deliver as promised. I knew this would be a major loss and I successfully persuaded the client to meet me in person to review the situation. |
| A = Action | <p>On meeting with the client I highlighted my background and skills, I aimed to create a good rapport through building trust and agreeing shared objectives. Where I could, I admitted our faults and moved the conversation to looking forward rather than backwards.</p> <p>I defined joint and shared business objectives with my client and used my negotiating skills to secure consent to a revised Service Level Agreement.</p> <p>Back in the office I scheduled a meeting with my fellow Account Managers to gain their insight into the client and how we could best improve services at events. They suggested I set up an internal working party to address areas of concern that we and the client had as we got</p> |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| | <p>closer to the event date and I found this was really effective at building a collaborative relationship.</p> <p>The next event with the client went really well and at the post-event review meeting he agreed to extend the contract initially for a further three months.</p> <p>During that period, I continued to build our relationship, by meeting with the client on a weekly basis to review progress and provide regular team updates.</p> |
| <p>R = Result</p> | <p>After those three months, the client was so pleased with my performance that he extended the contract for a further year. I'm pleased to say that during that year he increased his expenditure with us by 27%.</p> |

Get More Competency Questions and Brilliant Answers



Imagine having instant access to a database of accurate competency based interview questions and expert answers at your fingertips all TAILORED TO YOUR JOB?

Well that's what you get with InterviewGold, the leading online interview skills training system.

When you join you will have unlimited access to questions, answers and advice teaching you how to excel in competency based and behaviour interviews.

With InterviewGold you will:

- Pass competency and behaviour interviews
- Know what to say with detailed sample STAR answers for your level
- Create your own winning answers in minutes
- Practice with blended mock interviews
- Record your answers by text or video
- Communicate with 100% confidence and win the job

InterviewGold online training is specific to your job and provides you with all you need to succeed both at application and interview.

[CLICK HERE TO GET INSTANT ACCESS TO INTERVIEWGOLD >>](#)

Thank you for reading and I wish you all the best for your interview.

Joe McDermott
CEO - www.InterviewGold.com

Email: support@asonreed.com
www.interviewgold.com and asonreed.com

Address: 167-169 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5PF

Copyright Anson Reed Ltd and InterviewGold
All rights reserved

The contents of this document may not be reproduced
without the express permission of the copyright holder.

