

A Quick Guide to Competency Based Interviewing

Introduction

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

Getting Started

As you begin to prepare for an interview, you may realize that you first need to gain more clarity 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.

1. Review the Key Responsibilities and Accountabilities for the job
2. Review your Key Capabilities and Experience

Preparing for the Interview

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

- the Situation or Task that you encountered
- the Actions you took in light of the situation
- the Results of your actions

Refer back to the job description to remind you of which capabilities (and competencies) are required for the job. 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 that occurred during the last two years that will demonstrate that you possess the capability/competency.
- Stay focused on you – say what you did not what “John” or “we” did.
- Plan to take five to ten minutes to relate each STAR, giving the highlights rather than every detail.

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 interviews will take the following format:-

1. Key Background Review – you may be asked specific questions about your educational background and work history, including your current role.
2. 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, minimize 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.

3. Your Turn – to ask any questions