

Introduction to Competency Based Interviews

Competency based interviews are now part and parcel of the interviewing process within the scientific and technical industries. They enable the client to give a more structured interview through focusing each question on one or more specific skills. Your answer is then matched against pre-determined criteria and marked accordingly.

Whilst line managers tend to focus on technical questions focusing on the particular role you are applying for, competency questioning is a tool widely used by HR. It allows them to compare you against current staff and other interviewees.

You will be asked questions relating to your behaviour in specific situations, which you will then need to back up with evidence. The interviewer may then dig further into the examples you give by asking more specific questions.

A lot of companies use their own Core Values as the competencies they interview against. It's a good idea to look at the company website to find out what their values are and prepare answers accordingly once invited for an interview.

The list of competencies that can be tested varies on not only the company but the role you apply for. Here are some examples of the more common skills and competencies you may come across;

Communication
Organisation
Ability to Learn

Team work
Flexibility
Leadership

Decisiveness
Delegation
Analytical Thinking

The STAR method

The star method helps you to give your answers to any interview question in a structured manner, allowing you to demonstrate that you do in fact have the competency / skill they are looking for.

The acronym STAR stands for

- ★ Situation
- ★ Task
- ★ Action
- ★ Result

The star method is easy to remember and is designed to enable you to provide a meaningful and complete answer. Here's how it works;

Situation / Task

You need to set the context by describing the situation / task that needed to be accomplished / completed. Be concise and informative, concentrating on information that is useful to the story. Try and strip out any extra information so that you don't start waffling.

Action

The most important section! You need to demonstrate and highlight the skills and personal attributes that the question is testing by explaining what you did in the situation / task you were found in.

Explain what you did, how you did it and why you did it, going into the necessary detail needed so that the interviewers fully understand what you mean.

Remember to talk about yourself, not the rest of the team. You may have worked within a team to complete the task but what was your role! This is your chance to sell yourself and skills you can bring to the employer's team.

You can steer clear of technical information (unless it is a technical question of course). If the interviewer wants more detail on this they will question you further.

Result

This is the most crucial part of your answer as it allows you to explain what eventually happened – which surprisingly, a lot of people in interview situations forget to do. You can use this opportunity to describe what you accomplished and what you learnt in that situation.

Interviewers want to know that you are using a variety of generic skills to achieve your objectives. You must therefore show in your answers that you are taking specific actions because you are trying to achieve a specific objective – showing that you have the knowledge and experience to choose the appropriate skills rather than finding the result by chance.