

# Competency Based Interviews



Competency based questions are very common in interviews allowing the interviewer to compare all candidates with a set scale they mark towards. A lot of candidates find the idea of competency based interviews daunting but with a little preparation in advance they give you the chance to really show how you would be a good fit for the job.

## What are competencies?

They are a mixture of knowledge, skills, motivation and personal characteristics that make us unique. Competency questions will allow you to show the skills and the background knowledge necessary for you to perform a particular task effectively, together with the motivation and personality to show where you would sit within a team.

## Why are they used?

Our individual attributes and behaviours make us unique, they influence the way we react and respond to events in our lives and thus how we perform at work. Interviewers use competency based questions so they can easily compare candidates on how they match the job requirements.

## What is a competency based interview?

During a competency based interview each candidate is asked the same broad questions which are designed to obtain information about the match between the candidate's competencies and those required for the job. The aim of these questions is to draw out from each candidate their ability to perform in the job using their past experiences.

## The STAR Technique

One of the most common approaches to competency based interviews is the STAR technique. Using this technique you can prepare for any competency based questions an interviewer might ask you.

## When do you need STAR?

Ever been asked the question 'Tell me about a time you did...?' at an interview? Chances are that you were being asked a competency question. Competency questions are generally used to find out how candidates would react to real world situations, by asking for specific examples. In order to keep your answers on track and to avoid just rambling try to break down your answer into 'STAR' to ensure you cover all elements of what an interviewer is looking for.

## How do I use STAR?

To use STAR effectively, all elements of your answer need to work. Here's how to approach each letter and ensure everything ties together coherently:



### Situation

- Provide context & **BACKGROUND**.
- "Our customers complained..."



### Task

- Describe problems & **CHALLENGES**.
- "We faced supply chain shortage..."



### Action

- Explain **WHAT YOU DID** & how.
- "We solved..."
- "I calculated..."



### Results

- State **BENEFITS**, savings, rewards, recognitions etc.
- "The impact of..."



### S – Situation

This is your chance to ‘set the scene’, make sure to include plenty of background and context around the example you are using. Try and be specific, and include names and dates wherever appropriate to help add credibility.

#### Example Answer

At Company Name, I was responsible for running all their events. These events were usually spread out over a quarter but it just so happened that last year three of our events were scheduled within a week of each other and they couldn't be rescheduled.



### T – Task

Use this to build on the background and add more information. How did the situation relate specifically to you? And what were the major tasks you needed to undertake to resolve it? Include how important or difficult any issues were to overcome.

#### Example Answer

These events were key to the company so it was really important that each one was as best as it could be. This meant that I had a really tight timeframe to turn around a lot of organisation and work.



### A – Approach

This is the key to your whole answer – what did you actually do to help the situation? Explain how you turned the situation around to ensure a successful outcome. This can be tricky if you worked in a team so don't be tempted to take all the credit. The crucial thing here is to identify exactly which skills the interviewer is looking for and reinforce how you used those skills throughout your answer.

#### Example Answer

When I first realised these events were so close to each other I had a bit of a panic but after sitting down with my manager we broke down everything that needed doing for each event and discussed how I could delegate some of the less crucial work to others in the team. This way I was free to deal with the actual key organisation while the more day to day admin was dealt with by others. I arranged to have weekly catch ups with others who were working on the project with me which meant if there were any problems I was quickly made aware of them.



### R – Result

Finally, time for you to shout about how well you did. What was the outcome? Everyone loves a happy ending, and interviewers are no different but make sure your answers are quantifiable not just ‘it was really successful’. Bear in mind the interviewer is interested in finding about you and what you have achieved, not about your team, project or manager's achievements. It is important that you talk about you and your achievements/contribution.

#### Example Answer

Although it was a really busy few months leading up to the events the extra planning and input from the whole team meant all the events went without a hitch. We even had a record attendance at the final event resulting in over 12,000 Twitter impressions and the event hashtag trended locally on Twitter.

## Final Thoughts

A competency-based interview is a chance for you to tell your story, to really emphasise where you've shone in the past and why that means you are the perfect candidate for this job. Although you won't know exactly what the interviewer is likely to ask you can prepare by pulling together some concrete, quantifiable details of previous successful projects you worked on which could fit a range of situations. Don't be afraid to include a bit of adversity or failure, it humanises you and helps convince the listener of your sincerity. Even if your interview doesn't specify that it will be competency based revising the STAR technique and having specific examples to hand will help you to answer a wide variety of questions and ensure you get the information you want across to the interviewer.

For more information about how to prepare for a competency based interview ask your recruitment consultant:

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