

McCarthy**Adams**   
Recruitment Specialists

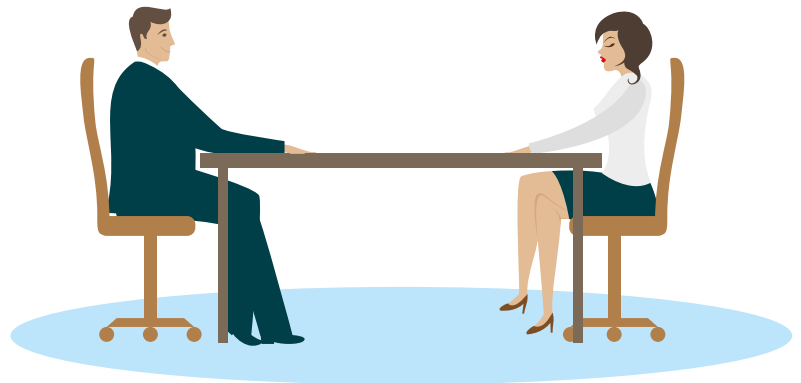
Guide

Competency based interview

# Competency based interview

## Interview format

Competency based interviews, or behavioural interviews as they are also known, are questions based on your past work experiences.



The interview format is very structured and usually involves two interviewers with one of them taking notes whilst the other asks the questions. All candidates are asked the same questions, which directly relate to the essential skills needed in the role. You are often provided with a list of competencies on the job spec beforehand, although if not, there are several key areas that are frequently covered, as listed on the next page.

The interview style can be more formal than other interviews, although it can also be a very positive process as you can almost prepare your answers before the interview takes place, hence hopefully increasing your chances of success. One good tip is to also take notes in with you of prepared examples of the key areas, which you can refer to during the interview. These prompts not only show you have researched the role and are keen to impress, but can also help to calm the nerves when you have a lot of information you want to remember.

Finally, during your interview you are scored on each key skills area on how detailed and relevant your examples are in relation to the particular question and skill traits the client is looking for.

## What to expect

Typical questions in a competency based interview start with "Please give me an example of when..." or "Please describe an occasion when..." or "Can you think of a time when..." The interviewers are looking for a specific and detailed example about what you did in situation or what you would do in a hypothetical situation.

Therefore your answers should also cover the following key areas, with the acronym below to help you remember:

S . T . A . R . A

# Competency based interview

**S** **Situation** - describe the situation you were in (i.e. a colleague was struggling with his performance) demonstrating you understand the question and competency required.

**T** **Task** - tell them what you decided to do, i.e. sat down with the colleague to discuss how you could help them.

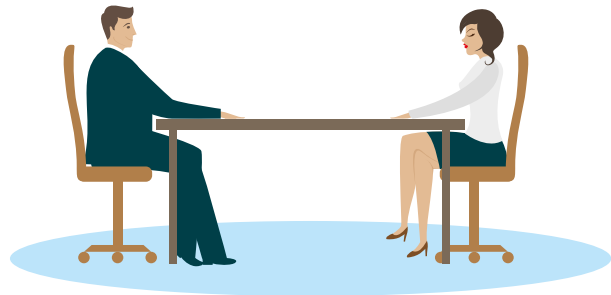
**A** **Action** - describe what you actually did, i.e. gave them examples of how you had improved your performance.

**R** **Result** - tell them what happened due to your actions - improved performance and also perhaps whether you would do anything differently if you were to face the situation again.

**A** **Ask** - ask if you have given enough detail regarding the question or if they need any further information

# Competency based interview

## Competency based tips



3

- Examples need to be specific, recent, work-related, and relate evidence of achievements.
- Be prepared for silences when your answers are being recorded, don't feel pressurised into waffling.
- Ask 'is that enough information for you?' if in doubt. When gathering evidence they may well stop you when they have enough. This doesn't mean you gave the wrong answer, could be the opposite, you hit the nail on the head.
- Do not expect any feedback from the interviewer in relation to the answers given as they are unlikely to give you any encouragement or body language that tells you how you have done.
- You must make sure when answering the questions that the answers are based on your experiences and not "the groups/teams experience". Use 'I' when answering and not 'we'.

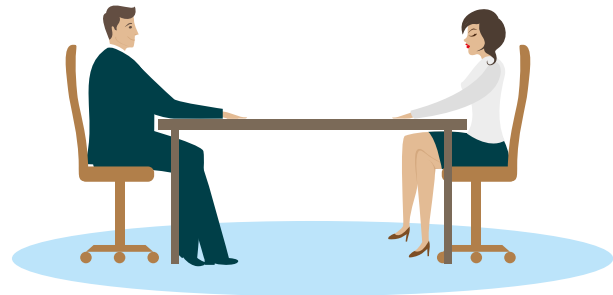
## Key competencies

Typical key areas covered at competency based interviews include:

- Achieving excellence/going the extra mile
- Influencing others /decision making
- Communication skills both written and verbal
- Problem solving and overcoming objections
- Striving for a common goal/working within a team
- Showing initiative /inspiring others/pushing your boundaries
- Gathering Information often whilst working to strict deadlines & targets & maintaining accuracy
- Building Trust and Understanding

# Competency based interview

## Example questions:



Tell me about a piece of work or project that you were given complete responsibility for?

- How did you manage it?
- What was the result?

Describe a time when you instigated an improvement to a process ?

- What prompted you to take that action?
- How did your colleagues react to your suggestions?
- What was the outcome?

What are your personal goals?

Can you describe a time when you failed to reach a goal?

Describe a difficult situation involving customers where it was important for you to gain support?

- What was your approach?
- What was the result?

Tell me about a time when you were able to gain the support of others for your point of view?

- What was your approach?
- What was the end result?

Describe a time when you were in conflict with others?

- What did you do about it?
- What was the outcome?

Describe a time when you have had to encourage other people to achieve goals?

- What was your approach?
- What was the result?

Tell me about a time when working in a team you were able to influence the outcome?

- What was your approach?
- What was the end result?

# Competency based interview

When the going gets tough the tough get going is a well-known phrase - Can you think of a time when this related to your circumstances?

- What did you do about it?
- What was the outcome?

What two things are you hoping will be better at our company than where you are at present?

What is the hardest and easiest part of your present job?

Tell me about a situation where you had to get information by asking a lot of questions of several people?

- Why was this necessary?
- What was your approach?
- How did you know when you had enough information?

Tell me about a problem that you have needed to solve where it was important to give careful thought to the outcome.

- Why was this so?
- How did you approach this issue?
- What was the outcome?

Tell me about a time when you had to take a risk?

- How did you weigh up the options?
- What was the outcome?
- In hindsight what would you have done differently?

How do you react to change - Is all change for the better?

- Can you give me an example in your career where you dealt with significant change?
- What disturbs you about change?

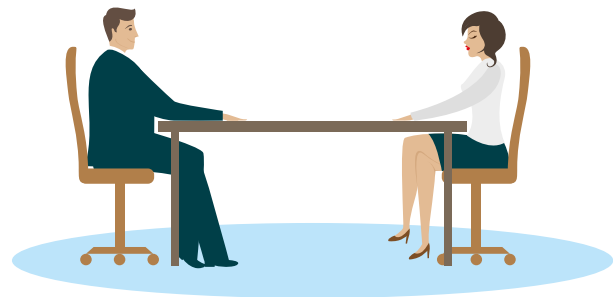
How do you measure your own success?

What do you do if you identify a personal skills gap?

Can you give me an example of you undertaking new learning using your own initiative?

- What learning methods did you use?

Have you ever performed the role of a coach?



# Competency based interview

How would you describe your coaching style?

What skills would you like to develop further?

- How do you intend to achieve this?
- How will you know how you are doing?

Give me an example when you have encouraged a team approach to a task or project?

How did those involved react?

- What was the result?

Tell me about a time when you had a problem requiring the help of someone in another department or office?

- What was the problem?
- What action did you take?
- What happened?

Have you ever faced an awkward customer?

- What was the customer complaint?
- How did you gather information about the complaint?
- How did you manage the customers expectations?
- What action did you take to solve the complaint?
- What did you learn from the situation?

Have you ever had to make a difficult decision?

What was the difficult decision?

- What information did you have to gather to come to the decision?
- What difficulties did you face?
- Was this the only solution?
- Was it the right decision and what did you learn from the process ?

Don't worry, you are very unlikely to be asked all these questions and although this is not a definitive list it covers most of the key areas. The same principles can be applied to all questions.

## Good luck!

