



The TAS Recruitment Guide to Competency Questions

Competency Based Interviewing is one of the most commonly used techniques for assessing candidates. It is designed to essentially level the playing field, ensuring all candidates are assessed equally, to a set of standard factors, and only on skills that are essential to the role being interviewed for.

Competency Questions will usually be based on either key competencies required to carry out the role effectively, or on behaviours that the company deem important and that might form part of their values.

The questions will usually be Experience based, as opposed to Knowledge based, and will often really on the candidate describing a specific Scenario. The questions will be structured to assess the candidates' ability to meet the required competency, based on how they dealt with a particular situation.

Typical Competencies Assessed

- **Communication**
- **Customer Service**
- **Organisational Effectiveness**
- **Teamwork**
- **Conflict Management**
- **Initiative**
- **Results**
- **Resilience**
- **Leadership**

Example Questions

Questions will usually begin with a phrase like;

- **Give me an example of**
- **Tell me about a time that you**

"Give me an example of a time that you demonstrated excellent Customer Service"

"Tell me about a time that you went the extra mile for a customer"

"Tell me about a time that you had to explain complex information to others"

"Give me an example of when you have had to work to multiple deadlines"

"Tell me about a time that you have had to reorganise your daily workload"

"Describe a time that you had to learn a new system/process"

"Tell me about a time that you worked as part of a team to achieve a common goal"

"Give me an example of a time when you have dealt with a difficult customer or complaint"

"Tell me about a time that you have had to give bad news to someone"

"Describe a time that you saw an opportunity to make an improvement"

"Tell me about a time that one of your ideas was implemented"

"Describe an occasion when you were not able to deliver what a customer wanted"

"Give me an example when your opinion or idea was at odds with the entire group"

"Tell me about your biggest success"



“Describe a time when you delivered against all the odds”

“Give me an example of when you’ve had to manage a difficult team member”

“Tell me about a time that you have helped develop another person”

This is by no means an exhaustive list, there are literally 1000’s of questions that could be asked, but these should give you a good feel for the sort of things that might be thrown at you.

A Smart Reply

When giving a reply, it should usually be structured as follows;

- **What happened?**
- **What did you do?**
- **Why did you do this?**
- **What was the outcome?**

A Few Tips...

It’s not necessarily easy to prepare for a Competency Interview, as there are so many questions that get asked. However they do tend to follow a fairly standard pattern, and the questions above should get you thinking along the right lines. Here’s a few more tips to help;

- Use specific examples. It might be tempting to try and make something up on the spot, but interviewers will see through that. Also if you regularly demonstrate a competency, or frequently experience one of the scenarios, it can be tempting to be vague. Don’t. Give a specific example as you will only be selling yourself short.
- Keep a ‘response library’. If you’re interviewing for several roles, you might well get asked the same questions. So just focus on a few examples and perfect those answers, rather than trying to think of loads of new ones. This will make your answers feel a lot more natural and genuine.
- Start thinking of answers now. You will encounter these scenarios every day. So start looking for them and working them into suitable interview answers.
- Make sure your answers are relevant. Really listen to the question being asked and make sure that you are demonstrating the skills they are looking for in your response.
- Make sure your answer doesn’t sell you short. If your contribution to the scenario discussed was minimal, or worse, negative, then it’s probably not the best example to use. Give an answer that really showcases your skills.
- Keep your answers to about 5 minutes or so long. Any longer than that and there’s a chance that the example you’re using is just way too complicated. Or that you are boring.
- You don’t have to use scenarios from a work environment. Particularly if you are just starting out in your career. It’s ok to use some examples from your education or even social/sporting clubs that you might be a part of.
- Make sure you follow up each question by asking if you have given the interviewer the information they require.

We hope this helps – as we said earlier, this is not an exhaustive list, but should help you along the way to being competent at competency questions!



BONUS GUIDE - Strengths & Weaknesses

Ok, so not really part of the Competency Interview, but one last area that's worth mentioning is the Strengths and Weakness question.

This will often get asked, and can trip some people over. So let's go through it quickly.

Strengths – This one is fairly easy. We can all find something that we are good at to talk about. Just make sure to keep it relevant and maybe back up with an example.

If you are one of these people that suffers from a chronic lack of self-confidence, then it might be an idea to ask a friend or family member what they think you are good at, and work on this as an answer.

Weaknesses – This is the tricky one! Most people will probably end up being too hard on themselves (apart from that small group of people that will genuinely try and tell you that they have no weaknesses. These people exist – we've met them). You can try and give one of two types of answer;

1 – The Fake Weakness

This is a weakness that isn't really a weakness such as;

- I'm a perfectionist
- I have trouble saying 'no' when it comes to taking on extra work
- I'm too self-critical
- I can be competitive

These aren't really weaknesses, and can quite easily be turned into strengths. Just make sure that when giving one of these examples you actually explain how this particular behaviour turned out to have a positive impact, and not be detrimental to colleagues or the company.

2 – The Overcome Weakness

This is more of a genuine weakness, but you can demonstrate that firstly you recognise it, and secondly you are doing something about it. Such as;

"I used to be really bad at Excel"

But

"I then took the initiative to do a course and improve my skills, and even though now it's not my strongest point, I'm much better"



Another example;

"I really struggle with criticism"

But

"I have learned that this is not personal, and try not to take it that way. Instead I look at how the criticism can improve my performance."

We all have examples of these that we can give, and these will make you seem like more of a genuine and humble person.

On a final note – try not to give out and out negative weaknesses with no follow up. Things like;

"I am just terrible with numbers. Flat out terrible."

"I have a massive issue with authority"

"I like to steal"

Are all unlikely to land you a job.

So, that's it.

That's Interviews, Competency Questions and Strengths & Weaknesses all covered.

We can do no more for you. Go out into the world, and may all your interviews be successful.

And remember;

You've Got This!