



# The Ultimate Guide on How to Prepare for a Competency-Based Interview

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Finding the role you want by using a **specialist recruitment** company like ourselves is one thing, then excelling at the interview process is something else; especially when organisations are increasingly using competency-based interviews.

Today's employers are searching for effective ways to improve their recruitment procedures, increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the overall hiring process. The more accurate their search for a candidate is, the more likely they are to find the right fit for their company culture first-time around.

This means that careful applicant selection can lead to a more efficient and effective interview process, employing the right candidate first time, which can result in improved team morale, and a stronger skilled and motivated group of employees.

Competency-based interviews, otherwise known as “situational” or “behavioural” interviews, are an increasingly popular solution for companies and businesses throughout the UK.

Unfortunately, if you are not prepared for a competency-based interview, you could easily miss out on that role in a company that can move your career forward.

Here is a comprehensive guide to everything you need to know about the competency-based recruitment process so that you can stand out in your next interview.

In this guide, we share a step by step approach, which includes:

- Practice and preparation
- Example scenarios to use
- Effective Body language
- .... and even what to wear

This report is based on our own experience of how our successful candidates have secured the role they want.

Best regards,  
Rhys Williams



## What is a Competency-Based Interview?

A **“competency-based interview”** or **“CBI”**, is a style of interviewing designed to give a hiring, HR manager and company greater insight into how well you demonstrate the “key competencies” required in the specific role you have applied for. Employers are looking for you to demonstrate your skills, knowledge, and attitude towards your work.

In other words, it’s about looking beyond the results on your CV and instead examining how you have responded to real-life situations that might occur daily in your role.

Functional and skill experience is one thing, and the competencies an individual uses to deliver their skills within their role is critical.

In the manufacturing sector, classic competencies you can expect to be questioned about are:

- Leadership
- Teamworking
- Communication
- Attention to detail
- Problem-solving

Depending on the specifics of the role you are applying for, you might also need to demonstrate other competencies such as critical thinking, reliability, and flexibility, especially around taking on board new skills.

This style of interview is particularly valuable for companies in search of critical skills and characteristics in new employees.

## The Benefits of Competency-Based Interviews for Employers

Some of the main advantages of competency-based interviews for employers include:

**The ability to reduce bias:** While a lot of today's companies know that **diversity can contribute towards a more efficient workforce**, many are also susceptible to the practice of consistently hiring the same people, from the same backgrounds, out of habit.

Competency-based scoring and interviewing allows hiring managers to reduce bias, and focus on identifying employees that have fundamental skills while sharing essential behaviours, and attitudes, rather than only demographics and backgrounds.

**The chance to simplify the hiring process:** The search for the ideal candidate can be a time-consuming task of hiring managers. Tracking the right potential applicants, conducting interviews, and following up with each possible employee is a significant investment of resources and time.

However, structured interviews are far more accurate when it comes to choosing the ideal candidate. By structuring the hiring process with competency-based questions, companies can streamline the hiring experience, saving both time and money.

**Improve candidate feedback:** Whether an applicant receives an offer or not, feedback is essential; **94% of candidates** say they would appreciate feedback after their interview. Competency-based interviews allow HR and recruiting managers and specialist recruiters involved in the process to provide informative feedback that supports the company's decisions.

**Reduce employee turnover:** By using competency-based recruitment and selection processes, businesses can benefit from a significantly lower attrition rate. After all, once a company has evaluated the requirements of the open position and identified the competencies most relevant to the role, they can focus on finding a candidate who demonstrates the competencies required.

# The Benefits of Competency-Based Interviews for Candidates

In a world where employees are always searching for a better cultural fit from their workplace, competency-based interviews can help applicants to determine whether they are a good match for the job at hand, or whether they might be better suited to a position in a different company.

Additionally, competency-based interviews help to ensure that candidates do not fall victim to the temptation of saying what they think the prospective employer wants to hear to get the job.

It is not unusual for applicants to exaggerate their skills, experiences, and results to increase their chances of an offer, only to discover that they are out of their depth and struggling in their new position as a result.

For candidates, competency-based interviews can:

- Outline clear expectations as to what a role entails, and what the employee will be expected to do during their time within the company.
- Help team members understand the fundamental values of the organisation that they will be working for. This allows a candidate to be sure that these values match their own and to confirm in their mind that this is the company for them.
- Let a candidate demonstrate, using evidence from previous and current roles, that they have the knowledge, skills, attitude, and desire to succeed in the position they are applying for.

Although **competency-based interviews** have been around for years, many people are still less familiar with the structure and types of questions asked in this style of interview. The best way to prepare for a competency-based experience is to know exactly what to expect.

Typically, competency-based interviews include a range of questions that help your potential employer understand how you might respond to a situation. The response you outline will determine whether you appear to have the core competency the hiring manager is looking for.

Sometimes, competency-based interviews will also include questions that explore how much a candidate knows about the company or the manufacturing industry as a whole. Usually, these questions are asked to determine **how committed** the applicant is to their prospective new role.



Some of the most common competencies include:

- Critical Thinking
- Communication
- Attention to detail
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Knowledge of the Supply Chain
- Delegation
- Flexibility
- Organisation
- Report Writing
- Motivation
- Decision Making

## The Competency-Based Interview Structure

The questions you will be asked in a competency-based interview means you will need to refer to the experiences you have had in your current and previous roles. Hobbies and voluntary work can help you to demonstrate your use of particular skills; though ideally stick to examples from your current role.

For instance, if you are asked for an example of your ability to be flexible and an example was how you work with new materials, the question might sound like “describe a recent situation when you were tasked with working with a material you have never worked with before”.

*Take the time to brainstorm experiences that you can use as examples in your interview*

Most competency-based questions will begin in a similar way, such as:

- Tell us about a time...
- Describe for us a situation...
- Give an example of...
- How would you respond to...

The interviewer might also follow up with additional questions designed to clarify some of the points you have made, or give you a chance to expand on your answer if you have not demonstrated your ability to use the skill the prospective employer is looking for.

Take the time to brainstorm experiences that you can use as examples in your interview. Additionally, remember that it is usually acceptable to ask your interviewer for a few moments to think about your answer before you respond.

## How to Perform Well in Your Interview

To make sure that you have the best chances of success in your interview, be well-prepared. Find out which competencies the potential employer is looking for in advance and plan your answers carefully; think about the most appropriate examples that will demonstrate your unique skills.

The first way should be to **contact your recruitment consultant**. They will have helped hundreds of people in your position before and critically they will also know the company in question, their style approach and what are the ‘must-have’ competencies that the hiring manager is looking for.

Next, check what competencies will be assessed by referring to the job description. Make a note of any critical skills or characteristics that are listed. For instance, if the job description states that the employer is looking for someone who “works well in a team”, you will know that teamwork is one of their core competencies.

Researching the company and the whole sector before your interview will also help you to demonstrate the competencies of “motivation” and “commitment”. If you can show your hiring manager or interviewer that you took the initiative to visit their company website, researched their products and services and that you also know the latest manufacturing trends will make you a standout candidate.

## Preparing for Competency-Based Questions

Your recruitment consultant and job description are the best places to get more information about which competencies you might be tested on during an interview.

While the type of question you are asked during the interview will depend primarily on the specific role you are applying for, all of the questions posed will be designed to allow you to demonstrate your particular skills, competencies knowledge and attitudes and how they might relate to your new position within the organisation.

To show your competencies, you can draw from your current and previous roles, or if you are in the early stages of your career, your personal life, voluntary work or academic experiences.

Here are some examples of the questions that you might be asked to demonstrate different skills:

- *Verbal skills: Tell us about a situation where your communication skills resolved a problem.*
- *Creativity: Describe a project or situation where you felt that a conventional approach would not be suitable. How did you use your creativity, and what were the results?*
- *Decisiveness: What would you say the most critical manufacturing decision you have made recently has been? How did you go about making that decision?*
- *Delegation: How would you determine how specific responsibilities in your new role should be delegated? How have you made use of delegation in the past?*
- *Flexibility: Describe a situation where you had to change your plan halfway through a project.*
- *Leadership: Tell us about a situation where you had to use your skills to get a production team to improve their performance. What were the problems you had to address?*
- *Teamwork: Describe a situation where you acted as a member of a team. What was the outcome of the group project, and how did you contribute to it?*



The key to ensuring the best outcome of your competency-based interview is to make sure that you prepare your answers in advance. Take the time to sit down with the list of competencies that you have recorded. Then review all the various projects and initiatives you have been involved with and plan out how you can use these as solid examples to demonstrate what the hiring manager is looking for.

Make sure that you don't "make something up". Your prospective employer will see through this. Ensure your responses are precise and accurate, which means that interviewers will quickly be able to get an understanding of what you are capable of delivering for their team.

## Using the STAR Approach

One of the best ways to make sure that you are well-prepared for the interview is to familiarise yourself with the "STAR" model for answering questions. Recruitment experts frequently recommend the STAR model as the best way for candidates to communicate points about themselves in a way that's clear, concise, and transparent.

**The STAR approach** asks you to identify four critical parts of your response:

- S: Situation
- T: Task
- A: Action
- R: Result

This will help you to formulate your answer into a quick, concise response that addresses all your key messages and ideas. For most people, the STAR formula can be a solution that helps them to avoid going off on a tangent with their answers or losing the interest of their interviewers.

Here's an example: the candidate is applying for a production engineering role.

The interviewer's question is: "Tell me about the time that you were asked to reduce the waste in the production line."

Answering this question with the STAR model might look something like this:

**Situation:** Set the context for the story.

"My team and I were asked to establish new practices to reduce the amount of waste created throughout our production line, thus minimising cost and saving the plant revenue".

**Task:** What was required of you.

"It was my responsibility to collate the research and impact of the current amount of waste we were producing and identify ways in which this could be reduced."

**Activity:** What you did.

"I analysed data on all the different variables starting with the materials we used up to researching new practices that had been successful in other companies. I used a combination of lowering the cost and simplifying the production line to meet the goal of waste reduction".

**Result:** How well the situation played out.

"The research I carried out identifying different suppliers for our materials worked well, as it identified some other areas in which the company could save money by switching to the cheaper supplier while still withholding the same quality. The simplification of the practices I also identified was implemented quickly and was adopted well by the whole team.

The result was that waste had been reduced by 21%, and the overall costs of the business have been reduced without compromising on quality."

**Key points:** It is essential to speak in specific rather than general terms and quantify your success. In this example, we mentioned percentage declines, increases and time frames.

From a listener's perspective, this makes the story interesting, and they are more able to gauge your success. Nameless people and unquantified achievements make the answer less convincing.

# Plan to Make the Right Impression

According to numerous studies, referred to in the **Wall Street Journal** over 70% of hiring managers would be reluctant to offer a job to a candidate who turns up to an interview wearing the wrong 'attire'. The same research shows that 22% of hiring managers had already rejected an applicant based entirely on the way they presented themselves in an interview.

Although you may think that a competency-based interview would be less focused on your appearance, the truth is that first impressions and your appearance still count.

It's a great way to demonstrate your attention to detail too.

If you are not sure what kind of approach your chosen company takes towards business dress, talk to your **recruitment consultant** who will have a thorough understanding of the employer in question.

Additionally, look at the company's social media and website pages for insights based on photos of key employees and if in any further doubt, stick to the general rule that all interviews are conducted in formal attire.

Ultimately, many companies believe that the way you dress for an interview helps to demonstrate your attitude towards the position. If you fail to take the time to dress like a professional for your interview, then there's a good chance that you will not act professionally on the job either.

## Remember to Watch Your Body Language

There are plenty of different factors that can impact the way an interviewer or hiring manager perceives you when you are applying for your next role. For instance, poor body language could cause you to appear bored, disrespectful, lacking in confidence with low self-esteem, or even untrustworthy in the eyes of your potential employer.

Statistics on the importance of body language vary, with some people claiming that our body language accounts for **50-65% of all communication**, while others suggest that the number is closer to 80%. Either way, it is safe to say that everything from eye contact, to how you shake your interviewer's hand, could have a part to play in the success of your competency-based interview.

Here are a few quick body language tips to be mindful of during the interview experience:

## 1. Be Careful When Shaking Hands

One of the first things you are likely to do in an interview scenario is to shake the hand of the hiring manager. The handshake is a straightforward and shared form of introduction, but it can also be a way for your interviewer to gauge your personality.

Many hiring managers believe that a firm handshake communicates confidence and self-assurance. If you know yours can be on the soft side, practice your handshake before you go.

## 2. Watch Your Posture

The way that you walk into the interview room and how you sit or stand during the meeting is essential.

Keep your posture straight with your shoulders back and your head up. A comfortable position for your hands is to have them on your lap when you are not using them to gesture.

## 3. Be Careful with Eye Contact

While you do not necessarily want to stare at your interviewers so hard that they end up feeling uncomfortable, you do want to use enough eye contact to connect and build rapport. Good eye contact also shows the person you are talking with that you're deeply involved in the conversation.

If there are three or more people in your interview, avoid giving eye contact only to the individual who is asking the question. Instead, direct around 60% of your attention towards the person who asked the question, while sharing the remaining 40% of your eye contact with the other panel members.

## 4. Be Genuine

Make sure that you smile when possible to show your interviewer that you are genuinely pleased to be with them. Be yourself; the interviewer will notice if it looks like you are forcing yourself to act out of character. You can only keep up an act for so long.

## What If...

Ultimately, it is difficult to know for sure whether you are going to be taking part in a competency-based interview. Unless your interviewer tells you that this will be the situation in advance, the best thing you can do is ask your **recruitment consultant** first or contact the company ahead of time, and if all else fails, prepare anyway.

However, there is a good chance that your interview will be centred around competency-based questions, as this is where the hiring manager is going to be able to gain the information they need about your soft and technical skills which could be crucial to you securing the role.



Preparing for a competency-based interview means that you can evidence your skills, knowledge, and capabilities without simply restating whatever is written on your CV. At the same time, the research that you will do to plan answers to competency-based questions will give you a better understanding of the company and the role that you are applying for - which is always an excellent way to impress a hiring manager.

As with any interview process, the outcome you experience will often be dependent on how much effort and time you put into being prepared. The more you work on ensuring that you make the best possible impression on the interviewer - regardless of what type of questions he or she asks you, the more likely you are to nail the experience and get the job you have been working hard towards when the opportunity arises.

## Then Finally...

Ultimately, competency-based interviews require an investment of time and effort from both the company in search of a new expert for their team and the candidate hoping for an opportunity to thrive inside of a new role.

Ready to get going?

Best regards,  
Rhys Williams

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