

How to Handle, Prepare and Nail a Competency-Based Interview



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How employers evaluate candidates and examine their proficiency for a role has changed significantly in recent years. Not only are IT companies embracing new technologies, conducting video assessments and online interviews, but they're also exploring new strategies.

After all, according to one study, traditional interviews are prone to human error, making it difficult for hiring managers to find the “right fit” for any role.

Competency-based interviews offer business leaders an opportunity to examine the potential fit of each candidate by examining their previous experiences in relevant situations. If you can demonstrate the right **“competencies”** in the interview process, you improve your chances of a job offer and elevate your professional brand.



Understanding Competency-Based Interviews



Competency-based interviews are an increasingly common strategy in the IT environment. Interviewers use questions in these interviews to assess your abilities, skills, behaviours, and knowledge of the role you're applying for.

Typically, competency-based interviews ask candidates to demonstrate their competencies through storytelling. An interviewer might ask you to describe a time when you faced a challenge or achieved a goal related to the core interests of the business.

This interview method aims to improve a company's chances of hiring the right employee, reducing the cost and complexity of replacing an unsuitable candidate. After all, according to one report, the average cost of training and replacing a new employee can be over £15,000 per staff member

Competency-based interviews allow hiring managers and recruitment teams to assess both the hard and soft skills of an IT candidate and examine how well their abilities align with a role. According to one report, some of the top competencies employers look for include:

- ★ Leadership
- ★ The ability to work in a team
- ★ Communication skills
- ★ Strong work ethic
- ★ Flexibility/adaptability
- ★ Initiative
- ★ Analytical skills
- ★ Interpersonal skills

Preparing for Competency-Based Interviews



The key to acing virtually any interview is effective preparation. It's crucial to clearly understand what to expect from the interview process and practice delivering the appropriate responses to competency-based questions.

With the right preparation strategy, candidates can participate in mock interviews with mentors and peers that elevate their confidence and prepare them for everyday competency-based situations. To begin preparing for your next IT interview:

1. Research the Job Specification

First, it's essential to understand what your potential employer is looking for in a candidate. The easiest way to do this is to assess the job description provided by the company carefully.

Pay attention to competencies highlighted in the job description, such as excellent communication skills, the ability to work well with others, or analytical skills.

Aside from analysing the job description, you can consider asking your IT recruitment agency for insights into the employer's needs and check the information on the company's website for guidance.



Preparing for Competency-Based Interviews



2. Identifying Key Competencies

After evaluating the job description and learning as much as possible about the company you want to work with, list the core competencies you believe the employer values most.

For instance, if an IT company's job description notes that you'll be working regularly with other key members of staff, this indicates collaboration and communication will be key competencies.

Using the list you create, identify your abilities, characteristics, and skills and how to use them to show your competency in specific areas. This will help to prepare you for the next step.

3. Crafting STAR Stories

Now you know the competencies you need to demonstrate, it's time to start structuring potential responses to common competency-based questions. The best way to do this is to apply the "STAR" framework to your answers:

S: Situation: Outline your specific situation, role, and responsibilities.

T: Task: What did you need to accomplish? What were the project's goals, and which challenges did you have to overcome?

A: Action: What did you do to achieve your goals? How did you align your actions to the requirements of the situation?

R: Result: What was the outcome? How did you know you were successful? What did you learn from the experience?

Nailing the Competency-Based Interview

Even if you prepare carefully for your competency-based interview and participate in several “mock” interviews before the big day, you’ll likely feel anxious. Around **93% of candidates** say they feel nervous before a job interview, so it’s essential to be prepared for anxiety.

Practice reciting responses in front of a mirror before you speak to a hiring manager. Dress professionally, as this will help to convey a positive image and make you feel more confident.

Remember to focus on active listening during the interview itself, too. Paying attention to what your interviewer says, clarifying their questions (by repeating them back to them), and making eye contact will help you appear confident, professional, and enthusiastic.

When you’re answering competency-based questions:

- Watch your body language
- Align your answers to the job specification
- Demonstrate tangible results



Nailing the Competency-Based Interview

Watch Your Body Language

During any IT interview, it's worth remembering that your hiring manager will evaluate more than just your responses. Your body language and how you hold yourself during the conversation will make a difference to the impression you make.

Sit straight, keep your hands in your lap or on the desk (to avoid fidgeting), and regularly make eye contact with your interviewers. Smile, take your time when responding, and avoid nervous behaviours like looking at your watch or glancing around the room.

Align Your Answers to the Job Specification

Always make sure your answers align with the competencies outlined on the job description. Make a list of the key things your employer is looking for before you attend the interview and demonstrate a clear connection between your abilities and what your employer needs.

For instance, if the job description focuses on leadership, share examples of how you've acted as a leader in the past. Even if you don't have experience in an executive or high-level position, you may have helped guide a team, mentored another staff member, or shown leadership in other ways.



Demonstrate Tangible Results



Explaining what you achieved and what you learned from each experience is crucial in a competency-based interview. The more specific you can be when explaining your results, the better your impact on your interviewer.

For example, if your hiring manager says, “Tell us about a time when you overcame a challenge in the workplace”, you can respond by outlining a specific problem you faced relevant to the IT industry, and the business you want to work for.

Then, follow up by saying, “At the end of this project, I had increased the company's profits by 5% and learned how to improve my leadership abilities through transparent communication.”



Acing your Competency-Based Interview



Competency-based interviews can feel daunting initially, particularly if you're not used to “storytelling” in the interview process. However, they offer a fantastic way to demonstrate your skills, abilities, and competencies in a way that resonates with hiring managers.

The more time you spend learning about each company you apply to work with and practicing your competency-based answers, the more your confidence will grow.

Remember, you can always contact your IT recruitment company for advice and guidance. Many leading recruitment teams can offer insights into how to structure exceptional answers and define what your ideal employer is looking for.

Best Regards,
Rachel



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