



Behavioral and competency based interviews

Behavioural/competency-based interviews are based on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour, and aim to discover how you acted in specific situations. The interviewer will typically ask for examples of when and how you demonstrated particular behaviours. Each position you apply for will have a particular mix of skills, competencies and qualities that are deemed necessary for job success. Interview questions are developed to assess these areas. All candidates are usually asked the same questions and notes are taken in order to evaluate each person's responses.

The key competencies inherent in every role can be used for all forms of assessment, including appraisals, training needs analysis and, of course, selection. They can encompass:

- Individual competencies – your personal attributes e.g. flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk-taking, personal integrity, responsibility and self-management
- Managerial competencies – taking charge of other people: leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, corporate sensitivity, project management, delegation and decision-making
- Analytical competencies – the elements of decision making e.g. innovation, analytical skills, problem solving, practical learning and detail consciousness
- Interpersonal competencies – dealing effectively with people e.g. communication, persuasiveness, negotiation skills, personal awareness, teamwork, openness and listening
- Motivational competencies – the things that drive you e.g. resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative, quality focus and productivity.

PREPARATION

- Review the job details and identify the skills and characteristics likely to be assessed
- Identify the life experiences that you will refer to in the interview that demonstrate how you meet the job's requirements. You will need to use these to frame particular responses
- Recall particular projects you worked on, or responsibilities you had that you are especially proud of, and reflect on the significant aspects of these. You may be able to draw several aspects of job success from the same situation
- Competency focused, well-structured answers are extremely powerful and will make a positive impression on the interviewer
- Practise using the STAR technique as a means of structuring your answers
- The examples that you draw upon can come from all aspects of your life, e.g. your studies; work experience; voluntary work and extra-curricular activities.

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STAR

The STAR technique can be used to effectively answer behavioural questions. In each case, you need to listen carefully to the question and consider an appropriate response, providing a suitable amount of detail. You may be asked follow-up questions based on your answers.

- Situation:** Describe a situation or problem you have encountered that relates to the question. This represents about 10% of the answer and 'sets the scene'
- Task:** Outline the tasks that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem. This represents about 20% of the answer and centres on your contribution
- Action:** Describe the actions you took, the skills you used and any obstacles that you had to overcome. If the question relates to your part in a team situation, be sure to include both what you did individually, and what the team did as a whole. This represents about 40% of the answer.
- Result:** Highlight outcomes and results achieved. This may be a grade you achieved, a significant change you influenced, a commendation for an employer, what you learned, or how the situation changed your thinking. Verbalising the result is easy to leave out, but possibly the most important part of your answer, representing about 30%.

Ideally the first two aspects of this approach will require less time, and can be provided in a few sentences. The more important aspects are the action and the result, so we recommend you spend more time on this part of the answer.

WHY IS STAR SO EFFECTIVE?

- STAR provides a useful framework for both you and the interviewer, and in some cases you may be asked to answer the question in this manner
- Even if this is not requested, it pays to use this approach to ensure you convey positive information about your ability to do the job
- Based on your responses, the interviewer acquires useful information that will help him/her determine your likely response to certain work-related situations
- Interviewers are able to determine a likely 'fit' between you and the organisations needs
- STAR allows you to tell a compelling story about yourself and your competencies, in a way that doesn't have to be overly self-promoting
- Your role is to provide relevant examples and stories of times when you responded **well**. There is no need to offer any negative information about yourself to the interviewer. Even if you are asked about situations that had an undesirable outcome, your 'result' can still include the useful lessons you gained, and how you feel you'd tackle things differently next time.



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SAMPLE BEHAVIOURAL/COMPETENCY-BASED QUESTIONS

Influencing or persuading others:

- Tell us about a time when you were able to change someone's viewpoint significantly.
- Describe a situation where you helped improve working relationships. What did you do?

Judgement/Decision-making:

- Give me an example of a good decision you made in the last 6 months. What were the alternatives? How did you reach your decision?

Teamwork:

- Tell me about a time where your skills and qualities made a significant contribution to a team?

Communication:

- Tell me about a time when you worked with people from a culture unlike your own. What did you do to overcome any perceived barriers to communication?

Adaptability/Resilience:

- Tell me about a time when your work or an idea was criticized. How did you handle it?

SEE ALSO:

- Interview preparation – please refer to the separate handout on this topic.
- Interview questions – please refer to the separate handout on this topic.

For further information on behavioural/competency-based interviewing and other interview techniques, please refer to the Career and Employment Service: <http://careers.massey.ac.nz>