

Examples of competency based interview questions

Competency-based interview questions vary widely between sectors and depending on the level of responsibility to which you are applying. The type of competencies against which you will be assessed also depends on the actual post and the company who is interviewing you.

You will find below a spectrum of competency-based interview questions, ordered by competency. The list is by no means complete but will give you an idea of what you can expect to be asked.

Interview Competency - Adaptability

Adjusts to changing environments whilst maintaining effectiveness

- Which change of job did you find the most difficult to make?
- Tell us about the biggest change that you have had to deal with. How did you cope with it?

Interview Competency - Compliance

Conforms to company policies and procedures

- How do you ensure compliance with policies in your area of responsibility?
- Tell us about a time when you went against company policy? Why did you do it and how did you handle it?

Interview Competency - Communication

Communicates effectively, listens sensitively, adapts communication to audience and fosters effective communication with others

Verbal

- Tell us about a situation where your communication skills made a difference to a situation?
- Describe a time when you had to win someone over, who was reluctant or unresponsive.
- Describe a situation where you had to explain something complex to a colleague or a client. Which problems did you encounter and how did you deal with them?
- What is the worst communication situation that you have experienced?
- How do you prepare for an important meeting?
- Tell us about a situation when you failed to communicate appropriately.
- Demonstrate how you vary your communication approach according to the audience that you are addressing.
- Describe a situation when you had to communicate a message to someone, knowing that you were right and that they were wrong and reluctant to accept your point of view.

Listening

- Give us an example where your listening skills proved crucial to an outcome.
- Tell us about a time when you were asked to summarise complex points.
- Tell us about a time when you had trouble remaining focussed on your audience. How did you handle this?
- What place does empathy play in your work? Give an example where you needed to show empathy?
- Describe a situation where you had to deal with an angry customer.

Written

- What type of writing have you done? Give examples? What makes you think that you are good at it?
- How do you feel writing a report differs from preparing an oral presentation?
- What positive and negative feedback have you received about your writing skills? Give an example where one of your reports was criticised.
- How do you plan the writing of a report?

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Interview Competency - Conflict management

Encourages creative tension and differences of opinions. Anticipates and takes steps to prevent counter-productive confrontations. Manages and resolves conflicts and disagreements in a constructive manner.

- Tell us about a time when you felt that conflict or differences were a positive driving force in your organisation. How did you handle the conflict to optimise its benefit?
- Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a conflict within your team.
- Tell us about a situation where conflict led to a negative outcome. How did you handle the situation and what did you learn from it?
- Give us an example where you were unable to deal with a difficult member of your team.

Interview Competency - Creativity and Innovation

Develops new insights into situations; questions conventional approaches; encourages new ideas and innovations; designs and implements new or cutting edge programs/processes.

- Tell us about a project or situation where you felt that the conventional approach would not be suitable. How did you derive and manage a new approach? Which challenges did you face and how did you address them?
- Tell us about a situation where you trusted your team to derive a new approach to an old problem. How did you manage the process?
- Tell us about a time when you had to convince a senior colleague that change was necessary. What made you think that your new approach would be better suited?

Interview Competency - Decisiveness

Makes well-informed, effective, and timely decisions, even when data are limited or solutions produce unpleasant consequences; perceives the impact and implications of decisions.

- What big decision did you make recently? How did you go about it?
- How did you reach the decision that you wanted to change job?
- Give an example of a time when you had to delay a decision to reflect on the situation. What did you need to do this?
- What is the decision that you have put off the longest? Why?
- When is the last time that you have refused to make a decision?
- Tell us about a situation where you made a decision that involuntarily impacted negatively on others. How did you make that decision and how did you handle its consequences?
- Tell us about a decision that you made, which you knew would be unpopular with a group of people. How did you handle the decision-making process and how did you manage expectations?
- Tell us about a situation where you made a decision too quickly and got it wrong. Why did you take that decision?

Interview Competency - Delegation

Able to make full and best use of subordinate, providing appropriate support

- What type of responsibilities do you delegate? Give examples of projects where you made best use of delegation.
- Give an example of a project or task that you felt compelled to complete on your own. What stopped you from delegating?
- Give an example of a situation where you reluctantly delegated to a colleague. How did you feel about it?
- Give an example where you delegated a task to the wrong person? How did you make that decision at the time, what happened and what did you learn from it?
- How do you cope with having to go away from the office for long periods of time (e.g. holidays)? Explain how you would delegate responsibilities based on your current situation.

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Interview Competency - External awareness

Understands and keeps up-to-date on local, national, and international policies and trends that affect the organization and shape stakeholders' views; is aware of the organisation's impact on the external environment.

- Describe through examples drawn from your experience how you measure and take account of the impact of your decisions on external parties.
- Give an examples where you underestimated the impact of your decisions on stakeholders external to your organisation.

Interview Competency - Flexibility

Modifies his or her approach to achieve a goal. Is open to change and new information; rapidly adapts to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles.

- Describe a situation where you had to change your approach half-way through a project or task following new input into the project.
- Describe a situation where you started off thinking that your approach was the best, but needed to alter your course during the implementation.
- Describe a situation where one of your projects suffered a setback due to an unexpected change in circumstances.
- Describe a situation where you were asked to do something that you had never attempted previously.
- Give us an example of a situation where your initial approach failed and you had to change tack.
- Describe your strongest and your weakest colleagues. How do you cope with such diversity of personalities?
- If we gave you a new project to manage, how would you decide how to approach it?

Interview Competency - Independence

Acts based on his/her convictions and not systematically the accepted wisdom

- When did you depart from the "party line" to accomplish your goal?
- Which decisions do you feel able to make on your own and which do you require senior support to make?
- Describe a situation where you had a disagreement or an argument with a superior. How did you handle it?
- When do you feel that it is justified for you to go against accepted principles or policy?
- Which constraints are imposed on you in your current job and how do you deal with these?
- When did you make a decision that wasn't yours to make?
- Describe a project or situation where you took a project to completion despite important opposition.
- When have you gone beyond the limits of your authority in making a decision?

Interview Competency - Influencing

Ability to convince others to own expressed point of view, gain agreement and acceptance of plans, activities or products.

- Describe a situation where you were able to influence others on an important issue. What approaches or strategies did you use?
- Describe a situation where you needed to influence different stakeholders who had different agendas. What approaches or strategies did you use?
- Tell us about an idea that you manage to sell to your superior, which represented a challenge.
- What is your worst selling experience?
- Describe the project or idea that you were most satisfied to sell to your management.
- Describe a time where you failed to sell an idea that you knew was the right one.

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Interview Competency - Integrity

Ability to maintain job related, social, organisational and ethical norms.

- When have you had to lie to achieve your aims? Why did you do so? How do you feel you could have achieved the same aim in a different way?
- Tell me about a time when you showed integrity and professionalism.
- Tell us about a time when someone asked you something that you objected to. How did you handle the situation?
- Have you ever been asked to do something illegal, immoral or against your principles? What did you do?
- What would you do if your boss asked you to do something illegal?
- Tell us about a situation where you had to remind a colleague of the meaning of "integrity".

Interview Competency - Leadership

Acts as a role model. Anticipates and plans for change. Communicates a vision to a team.

- Tell us about a situation where you had to get a team to improve its performance. What were the problems and how did you address them?
- Describe a change where you had to drive a team through change. How did you achieve this?
- Describe a situation where you needed to inspire a team. What challenges did you meet and how did you achieve your objectives?
- Tell us about a situation where you faced reluctance from your team to accept the direction that you were setting.
- Describe a project or situation where you had to use different leadership styles to reach your goal.
- Tell me about a time when you were less successful as a leader than you would have wanted to be

Interview Competency - Leveraging diversity

Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and individual differences are valued and leveraged to achieve the vision and mission of the organisation.

- Give an example of a situation or project where a positive outcome depended on the work of people from a wide range of backgrounds and ideas
- Tell us about a time when you included someone in your team or a project because you felt they would bring something different to the team.

Interview Competency - Organisational awareness

Demonstrates an understanding of underlying organisational issues

- Describe a project where you needed to involve input from other departments. How did you identify that need and how did you ensure buy-in from the appropriate leaders and managers?
- Describe a time when you failed to engage at the right level in your organisation. Why did you do that and how did you handle the situation?

Interview Competency - Risk taking

Takes calculated risks, weighing up pros and cons appropriately

- Tell us about risks that you have taken in your professional or personal life? How did you go about making your decision?
- What is the biggest risk that you have taken? How did you handle the process?
- Please describe one of your current or recently completed projects, setting out the risks involved. How did you make decisions? How do you know that you made the correct decisions?
- What risks do you see in moving to this new post?

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Interview Competency - Resilience and tenacity

Deals effectively with pressure; remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity. Recovers quickly from setbacks. Stays with a problem/line of thinking until a solution is reached or no longer reasonably attainable.

- Tell us about a situation where things deteriorated quickly. How did you react to recover from that situation?
- Tell us about a project where you achieved success despite the odds being stacked against you. How did you ensure that you pulled through?
- Tell us about your biggest failure. How did you recover and what have you learnt from that incident?
- Give us an example of a situation where you knew that a project or task would place you under great pressure. How did you plan your approach and remain motivated?
- How do you deal with stress?
- Give us an example of a situation where you worked under pressure.
- Under what conditions do you work best and worst?
- Which recent project or situation has caused you the most stress? How did you deal with it?
- What did you last lose your temper?
- When is the last time that you were upset with yourself?
- What makes you frustrated or impatient at work?
- What is the biggest challenge that you have faced in your career. How did you overcome it?
- Tell us about a time when you wanted to push one of your ideas successfully despite strong opposition.
- Which course or topics have you found most difficult? How did you address the challenge?

Interview Competency - Sensitivity to others

Aware of other people and environment and own impact on these. Takes into account other people's feelings and /needs.

- What problems has one of your staff or colleagues brought to you recently? How did you assist them?
- Tell us about an unpopular decision that you made recently? What thought process did you follow before making it? How did your colleagues/clients react and how did you deal with their reaction?
- How do you deal with "time wasters"? Give a recent example.
- When is that last time that you had an argument with a colleague?
- When did you last upset someone?
- What steps do you take to understand your colleagues' personalities? Give an example where you found it hard to adjust to one particular colleague.

Interview Competency - Teamwork

Contributes fully to the team effort and plays an integral part in the smooth running of teams without necessarily taking the lead

- Describe a situation in which you were a member of team. What did you do to positively contribute to it?
- Tell us about a situation where you played an important role in a project as a member of the team (not as a leader)
- How do you ensure that every member of the team is allowed to participate?
- Give us an example where you worked in a dysfunctional team. Why was it dysfunctional and how did you attempt to change things?
- Give an example of a time when you had to deal with a conflict within your team? What did you do to help resolve the situation?
- How do you build relationships with other members of your team?
- How do you bring difficult colleagues on board? Give us an example where you had to do this.