

Competency Based Interviews

Introduction

As part of the selection process, some employers use a “competency based” interviewing technique. These interviews can feel rather different to the “conventional” interviews that you may have had in the past. This guidance note will help you to prepare for your interview by explaining:

- A. What a “competency based” interview is
- B. Why some employers use them and offers some suggestions about how to prepare for them.

What are “Competency Based” interviews and why some employers use them?

A “competency based” interview is designed to assess your capability against the elements of the Person Specification for the job for which you are applying. Usually it will focus on specific essential parts of the job i.e. the skills, knowledge, motivation and behaviours that are important for the job.

You will normally be asked to choose and describe a situation at work which demonstrates the “competencies” (or abilities) being sought. e.g. if the delivery of results were important to the job, you might be asked to “describe a situation when you had ambitious deadlines to meet and where people or events kept getting in the way”. The interviewer might follow this up with a question about how you tackled the task, what you did or said and with what results.

From this example, it can be seen that “competency based” interviews:

- A. Focus on your experience, motivation for the job and behaviours
- B. Focus on relevant experience
- C. Usually ask you to give an overview of a situation, followed by a more detailed probing question

Because your answers reflect your achievements and experiences, “competency based” interviews, when used as part of a selection process, provide reliable information about your ability in certain essential areas of the job.

If you are unused to them, they may feel “tougher” than “traditional” interviews because you are constantly being asked what your specific contribution to a situation was (very often we talk about what “we” did and fail to differentiate between our own contribution and that of other people) and because you have to jog your memory about what actually happened.

Preparation For A “Competency Based” Interview

There are a number of things that you can do to prepare yourself:

- A. Study the job description and person specification provided and identify the requirements for the job.
- B. Think back over the last 12-18 months. Think of 2 or 3 situations where you have demonstrated a high level of achievement against some (or all) of the essential elements of the job. Avoid using examples that occurred over 12-18 months ago – it is unlikely that you will remember them in sufficient detail to give a full answer.
- C. Occasionally, the best examples you can think of may relate to your activities outside of work. If your present job does not give you much opportunity to display an essential ability that is being sought, then think which (if any) of your other activities do.

In preparing your examples, think about each situation:

- A. How did it arise
- B. What were the key stages
- C. What was your personal contribution
- D. What was the overall result
- E. What did you learn from it
- F. Look at the job description to see what types of situations you might be faced with in the job. Study and use this information to prepare.