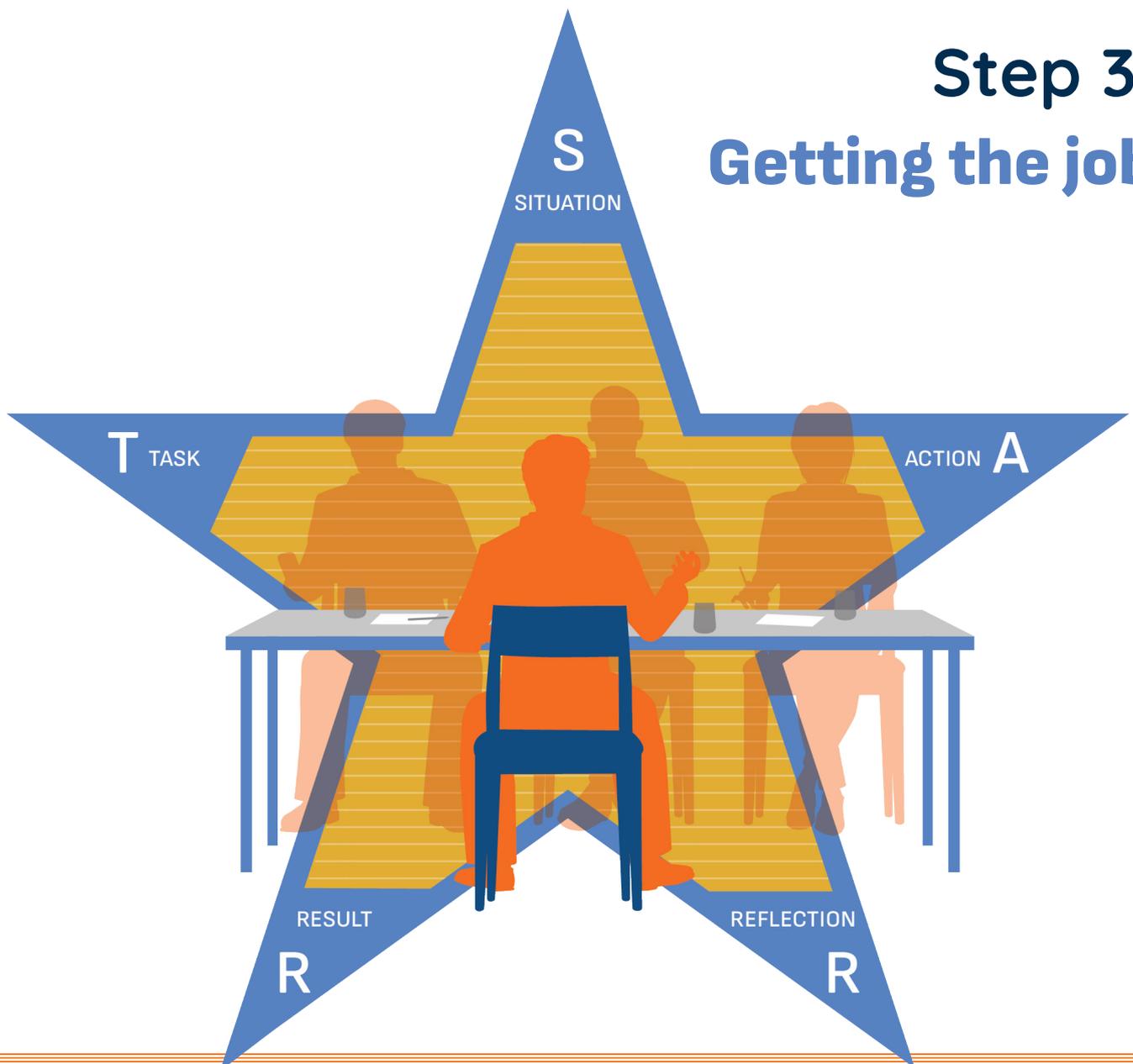


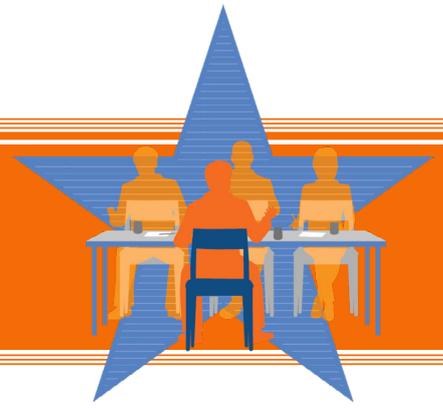
JOB SEEKING SKILLS

Step 3: Getting the job



13: Competency-based interviews

Competency-based interviews



A competency-based interview is a specific type of job interview, often used by large companies and organisations. This is a very structured interview designed to test your skills and competencies.

Employers using this type of interview usually ask every applicant exactly the same set of questions, each focussing on a skill or competency required for the job. This helps to make sure the interview is fair. They may ask you follow-up questions to get more detailed information.

What's a competency?

- A competency is the ability to use a skill effectively, like being able to communicate well with others.
- Employers often use competencies to describe how they want their employees to perform or behave on the job.

How do competency-based interviews work?

- In a strengths-based interview the interviewer might ask you “**What skills can you bring to the job?**” or “**What are your main strengths?**”.
- In a competency-based interview the interviewer will ask you to talk about times and situations in your day to day life when you've actually used the skills they are looking for.

- **Skills like:**
 - organising your own workload
 - customer care
 - planning ahead
 - problem solving
 - managing your time effectively
 - taking responsibility for your work
 - making decisions; or
 - working as part of a team.





For example, if they want to know about your time management skills they might say “Tell us about a time when you’ve had to complete a project or task to a tight deadline.”

They expect you to:

- think of an example from your previous experience at work or from life in general
- tell them what the situation was, what you had to do, how you did it and what happened as a result.

They are looking for evidence that you have been able to complete tasks on time. This should give them some idea of how well you’ll be able to manage your time in the future.



Interviewers may also ask you how you would behave in an imaginary or hypothetical situation.

For example, “Imagine your alarm clock hasn’t gone off and you’ve overslept. You’re going to be late for work. How would you deal with this situation?”

Some organisations let you see the interview questions five minutes or so before the interview. This gives you some time to think of examples of how you’ve used your skills in the past.

Note: Interviewers may also ask you one or two other questions. For example, they are likely to ask what you know about the organisation, or ask why you applied for the job.

So, you must still do your research and find out as much as you can about the organisation and the job before going for interview.



How will I know what competencies are required for the job?

- Employers using competency-based interviews normally have a 'competency framework'. This is a guide for employees, setting out what they should be good at and how they should approach their work. Each role has its own set of competencies. Thankfully, you don't need the whole framework.
- The competencies you need for a particular job will often be set out in the job specification or job profile. This sets out the tasks and responsibilities of the job. You can often download this from the organisation's website or request a job application pack.



Make sure you have information on the competencies well before your interview.

One or preferably two weeks would be ideal.

You will need time to think about:

- questions they might ask
- times and situations where you have used the skills they want
- how to describe what you did in a way that will highlight your skills.



How can I spot a competency-based question?

Competency-based questions often aren't questions at all.

They often start with phrases that invite you to tell a story, for example:

- Tell us about a time when you...
- Give us an example of when you...
- Describe a time when...
- Describe a situation when...
- How do you deal with a situation where...?



Preparing for a competency-based interview

- 1 Find out what skills and competencies the employer is looking for, and at what level. Make a list of them.
- 2 Against each competency, list one or two examples of times and situations when you used that skill or ability. For example, when you worked well in a team or group, or used your initiative to solve a problem.
- 3 Use examples based on your experience of using the skill in education, training, jobs, on work placements, or any activities or events you've taken part in.
- 4 The examples should show how well you can use the skill, or how you improved a skill in a difficult situation. So, maybe you failed to get a project in on time because of illness. But, you negotiated a new date and got it in by the new deadline. This gives you the chance to mention how quickly you were able to react to unexpected events, your ability to communicate, negotiate and solve the problem.
- 5 Use a different example or situation for each competency.
- 6 Think about which examples will give you the best chance of highlighting your skills.
- 7 Ask a friend to help you practise for the interview. Get them to ask you about times or situations when you've used the competencies. Your answers or stories about the situation need to be clear and concise.
- 8 Use the STARR technique to help you to structure your reply. (See the next section).



What's the best way to tackle a competency-based question?

Answering a competency-based question is a bit like telling a story. And, every good story needs a structure – a beginning, middle and end – to help people to understand what happened, and why it ended the way it did.

One good way to make sure your answers have a structure is to use the **STARR MODEL**.

STARR stands for:



Telling interviewers about a past event in this order helps you to give a clear description of what happened.

You can also use STARR to help you remember what to say next if your mind goes blank.

Read the example question and response on the next page to get a better idea of how the technique works.

STARR EXAMPLE

Question - "Tell us about a time when you had to complete a task to a tight deadline."



Start by setting the scene, describe the situation.

While I was working in an estate agency last year I was asked to help them update their client records. It hadn't been updated for a while because one of the staff was on maternity leave.



Describe what you had to do.

Keep this part fairly brief.

I was asked to use an Excel spreadsheet to update the client records. I was only there for a week and was helping out with other things as well.



Describe how you set about completing the task successfully

This is the most important bit as you are describing how you used your skills. Focus on what you did.

I asked the manager how the spreadsheet was set up and what information needed to be checked.

I had to check that the basic contact details were correct for clients looking for new homes in the last 6 months. I noticed that information was missing from some of the records, mainly the full postcode and UK dialling code. I checked this out online and updated those records first. Then I started phoning clients to confirm their contact details, updating and saving the data as I went along. I also added a new column, giving the date the record had last been updated. I completed the work on my last day with the firm.



Describe the outcome and how you know that it went well, including any feedback you received.

This lets you emphasise the positive outcome and describe how you determined it went well, such as any feedback.

I made sure all the clients' details were on the spreadsheet and correct. I even managed to make a few improvements to it.

The manager was delighted that I managed to complete the task on time and was able to send out to everyone on the list.

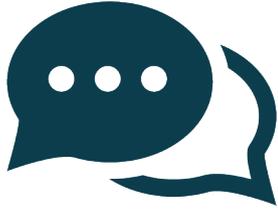


Describe what you learned during this experience.

This gives you the opportunity to talk about what you would do differently next time and how you could improve and achieve an even greater success.

Once I became familiar with using the spreadsheet, I became aware that if I made a couple of improvements to it, the task would be easier next time for the next person. I was really pleased that I was able to make changes that helped out.

This person's answer shows that they can:



- communicate well with others
- listen and follow instructions
- take responsibility for a task
- use their own initiative; and
- work to a deadline.

Video Tips



Watch this short video to recap on the information and tips on using the STARR technique.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fW97Mjk8lO0>

SUMMARY

Remember to keep your answers:

- structured** – have a clear introduction (set the scene of the situation), middle (the description of how you used the particular skill or quality) and end (what the outcome of the situation was, and how might you do things differently next time)
- relevant** – always make sure that the examples you give are relevant to each competency
- objective** – keep your answers matter-of-fact, for example, if you are describing how you dealt with a difficult situation, don't describe your emotional responses
- recent** – try and use examples that are as recent as possible.



Activity 1: Competency-based interview quiz

Complete [Activity 1 worksheet](#) - Competency-based interview quiz to check your knowledge of the points covered in this section.



Activity 2: Writing responses and role play

Complete [Activity 2 worksheet](#). Once completed, ask a friend or family member to help you practise your answers.

Now you have looked at competency-based interviews,
you can move on to

[14: Screening interviews](#)

Or [click here](#) to return to the main screen.