
Competency-based interview questions

Hiring managers and recruiters can use a list of competency-based interview questions to better assess candidates' skills. As part of a structured [interview process](#), competency interview questions help to reach a more objective hiring decision.

Why use competency-based interview questions

Competency-based interview questions challenge candidates to draw from real-life examples to explain how they use their competencies on the job. This [technique](#) can help interviewers better evaluate candidates' skills.

A competency-based interview tests candidates for specific skills like:

- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Communication
- [Adaptability](#)
- Risk-taking

With competency-based interview questions, the hiring team goes beyond candidate qualifications. Recruiters and hiring managers gauge a candidate's way of thinking and their approach to role-specific problems. Depending on the role, candidates with creative solutions could stand out from candidates with similar skills. For entry-level positions, these questions can help identify candidates with a desire to learn, even if they lack experience.

Competency-based interview techniques help set [hiring criteria to avoid bias](#). Different interviewers (e.g. recruiter, hiring manager and CEO) can identify strong and weak points for each candidate, [prioritize](#) the most important criteria and make an objective decision. Here's a list of competency-based interview questions to consider as part of a [structured interview process](#):

Examples of competency-based interview questions

- Tell me about a time you went the extra mile for your job. How did you do it?
- What was the last training you attended? How did you use your new knowledge in practice?
- Tell me about the most significant project you worked on. How did you manage it, from start to finish?
- How did you increase revenue at companies you worked for?
- Tell me about a time you were successful in driving positive change. How did you do it?
- Describe a time when a manager approached you with a problem they couldn't solve.

What did you do?

How to use competency interview questions

- Interviewers should be prepared. First, write down core competencies that align with your company, as well as qualities related to the open role. By listing these competencies, you can ensure you're asking the right questions to staff your company with the best employees.
- It's best to consult a hiring manager for more technical interview questions, like "Describe a successful project you managed from start to finish." Recruiters can ask more generic questions, like "Tell me about a time you went against a company policy."
- You can use competency-based interview questions in more than one stage of the hiring process. Prioritize skills essential for your open role and use the appropriate questions to screen candidates from an early phase. You could also include competency-based questions in your application form or as a written assignment. This way, you'll have a few good talking points in a face-to-face interview, later.
- If you structure an interview with a series of competency-based questions, it's best to prepare your candidates. Let them know what the process will look like, and the type of questions you might ask. This way, they'll have time to think some good examples and you'll have an informative discussion.
- Ask follow-up questions to make sure you get sincere answers from your candidates. For example, when they describe a project they completed successfully, ask them to give you some quantitative results or more details, like "Who else was in that team? How long did it take you to complete the project?"

Red flags

- **Quick, generic answers to get off the hook.** The point of competency-based interview questions is to reveal real-life examples that showcase the candidate's skills. If a candidate can't describe specific situations and, instead, says something generic, like "I am collaborative," they're probably trying to avoid answering the question.
- **Contradictory answers.** A candidate may claim they have great organizational skills. But if they describe one or more situations where they were racing against the clock to meet deadlines, they may not be answering honestly. Opt for candidates who show a steady behavior: someone who thrives under pressure and strict deadlines or someone who has excellent time management skills and performs well in an organized environment.
- **Self-centered answers.** It's natural for candidates to promote their strengths during interviews. But, if they don't give credit to external factors (e.g. a motivating manager, a hard-working team or a supportive company culture) as reasons for success, they may have issues collaborating with others.