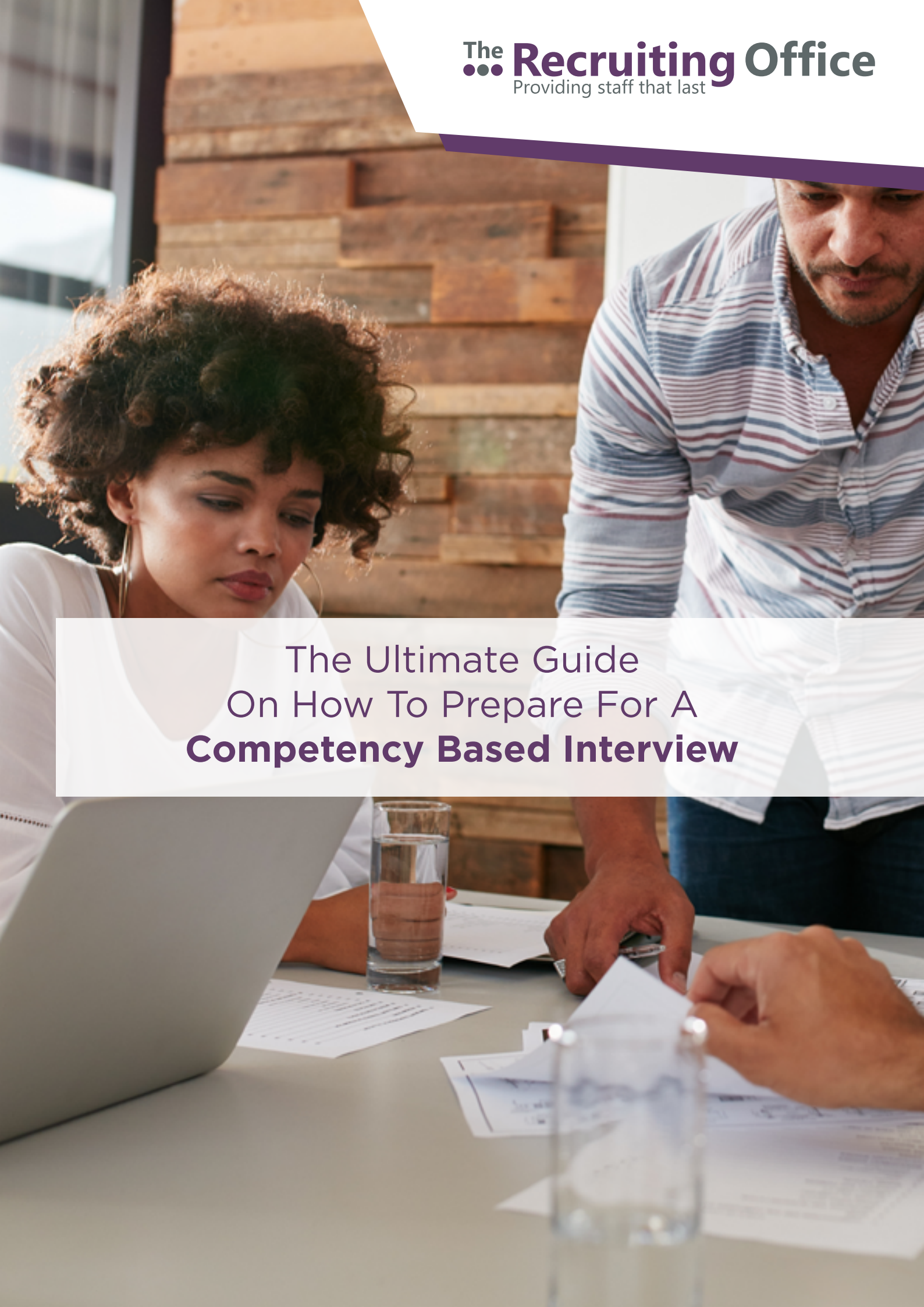
The Recruiting Office
Providing staff that last



The Ultimate Guide On How To Prepare For A **Competency Based Interview**

Introduction

A job interview can be a nerve-wracking ex best of times.

Finding the perfect role through using a specialist recruitment company like ourselves is one thing, then excelling at the interview process is something else; especially when organisations consistently use competency based interviews. Today's employers are searching for effective ways to improve their recruitment procedures, increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the overall hiring process. The more accurate their search for a candidate is, the more likely they are to find the perfect fit for their corporate culture first-time around.

This means that careful applicant selection can lead to a more efficient and effective interview process, employing the right candidate first time, which can result in improved team morale, and a stronger skilled and motivated group of employees. Competency-based interviews, otherwise known as "situational" or "behavioural" interviews, are an increasingly popular solution for companies in search of efficient recruitment strategies.

Unfortunately, if you are not prepared for a competency-based interview, you could easily miss out on the role you have set your sights on.

Here, we will offer a comprehensive guide to everything you need to know about the competency-based recruitment process so that you can nail that next interview.

In this guide, we share a step by step approach from:

- Practice and Preparation
- Example scenarios to use
- Body language
- .... and even what to wear

This report is based on our own experience of what our candidates have experienced over the last 30 years.

What is a Competency Based Interview?

A **“competency-based interview” or “CBI”,** is a style of interviewing designed to give an HR manager and company greater insight into how well you demonstrate the “key competencies” required in the role you have applied for. Employers are looking for you to demonstrate your skills, knowledge, and attitude towards your work.

In other words, it is about looking beyond the results and grades on your C.V and instead examining how you have responded to real-life situations.

While traditional job interviews might focus on asking questions about your previous industry experience and what you would do in certain situations if you were to succeed and be offered the role. Competency-based questions ask you to present examples of how you have used specific skills and knowledge to for example:

- Complete projects.
- Meet deadlines.
- Overcome challenges.
- Work collaboratively.

This style of interview is particularly valuable for companies in search of critical skills and characteristics in new employees.

It is about looking beyond the results and grades on your C.V.

The Benefits of CBIs for Employers

Competency-based interviews are not simply a way for hiring managers to "filter out" prospective employees who've learned how to respond correctly to standard interview questions. They help employers to refine and improve the recruitment process, by choosing candidates based not just on their education, but also the unique characteristics and skills that match each role.

Some of the main advantages of CBIs for employers include:

The ability to reduce bias: While a lot of today's companies know that **diversity can contribute towards a more efficient workforce,** many are also susceptible to the practice of consistently hiring the same people, from the same backgrounds, to avoid disruption to company culture.

Competency-based scoring and interviewing allows recruitment professionals to reduce bias, and focus on identifying employees that have fundamental skills while sharing essential behaviours, and attitudes, rather than demographics and backgrounds.

The chance to simplify the hiring process: The search for the ideal candidate can be a complicated and time-consuming task of hiring managers. Tracking the right potential applicants, conducting interviews, and following up with each possible employee is a significant investment of resources and time.

However, structured interviews are up to **81% more accurate** when it comes to choosing the ideal candidate. By structuring the hiring process with competency-based questions, companies can streamline the hiring experience, saving both time and money.

Improve candidate feedback: One of the most important things a business can do to attract key talent to their doors is to make sure that they give potential hires the best possible candidate experience.

Whether an applicant receives an offer or not, feedback is essential. In fact, **94% of candidates** say they would appreciate feedback after their interview. Competency-based interviews allow HR and recruiting managers to provide informative feedback that supports the company's decisions.

Reduce employee turnover: By using competency-based recruitment and selection processes, businesses can benefit from a significantly lower attrition rate. After all, once a company has evaluated the requirements of the open position and identified the competencies most relevant to the role, they can focus on finding a candidate that's the perfect fit for the job.

The Benefits of CBIs for Candidates

Importantly, competency based interviews are also beneficial for candidates. In a world where employees are always searching for a better cultural fit from their workplace, CBIs can help applicants to determine whether they are a good match for the job at hand, or whether they might be better suited to another position.

Additionally, competency based interviews help to ensure candidates do not fall victim to the temptation of saying what they think the prospective employer wants to hear just to get the job.

It is not unusual for applicants to exaggerate their skills, experiences, and results to increase their chances of an offer, only to discover that they are out of their depth and struggling in their new position as a result.

For candidates, competency based interviews can:

- Outline clear expectations as to what a role entails, and what the employee will be expected to do during their time within the company.

- Help team members understand the fundamental values of the organisation that they will be working for. This allows a candidate to be sure that these values match their own and to confirm in their own mind that this is the company for them.

- Let a candidate demonstrate, using evidence from previous and current roles, that they have the knowledge, skills, attitude, and desire to succeed in the position they are applying for.

What Candidates Should Know about Competency Based Interviews

Although **competency based interviews** have been around for several years now, many individuals will be less familiar with the structure and types of questions asked in this style of interview. The best way to prepare for a competency-based experience is to know exactly what you can expect.

Typically, competency based interviews include a range of questions that help your potential employer understand how you might respond to a situation. The response you outline will determine whether you appear to have the core competency your hiring manager is looking for.

Sometimes, competency based interviews will also include questions that explore how much a candidate knows about the company or the industry. Usually, these questions are asked to determine **how committed** the applicant is to their prospective new role.

The competencies that an employer will test for will vary from one position to another.

The competencies that an employer will test for will vary from one position to another. However, some of the most common core competencies include:

- Communication
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Delegation
- Flexibility
- Organisation
- Motivation
- Decision Making

The Competency Based Interview Structure

The questions you are asked in a competency-based interview means you will need to refer to experiences you have had in your current and previous roles. Hobbies and voluntary work can help you to demonstrate your use of particular skills.

For instance, if you were asked for an example of your ability to work in a team, the question might sound like “describe a recent situation when you have been invited to work in a team”.

Most competency based questions will begin in a similar way, such as:

- Tell us about a time...
- Describe for us a situation...
- Give an example of...
- How would you respond to...

The interviewer might also follow up with additional questions designed to clarify some of the points you have made, or give you a chance to expand on your answer if you have not demonstrated your ability to use the skill the prospective employer is looking for.

Take the time to brainstorm experiences that you can use as examples in your interview. Additionally, remember that it is usually acceptable to ask your interviewer for a few moments to think about your answer before you respond.

How to Ace Your Competency Based Interview

To make sure that you have the best chances of success in your competency based interview; Be well-prepared. Just as you might plan for traditional interviews by asking your friends and family members to quiz you about common questions, find out which competencies your potential employer is looking for in advance and plan your answers carefully, think about the most appropriate examples that will demonstrate your unique skills.

The easiest way to check what competencies will be assessed is to refer to the job description. Make a note of any critical skills or characteristics that are listed. For instance, if the job description states that the employer is looking for someone who "works well in a team", you will know that teamwork is one of their core competencies.

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Researching the company before your interview will also help you to demonstrate the competencies of "motivation" and "commitment". If you can show your hiring manager or interviewer that you took the initiative to visit the company website, researching their products and services.

You may even call and talk to someone on the team you could be joining or learn more about what the business values and looks for in employees. It is a great way to show you are dedicated to getting the role.

If you struggle to find the information that you need online, remember that you can always call your recruitment company for advice, or reach out to the company itself.

Preparing for Competency Based Questions

The job specification is one of the best places to get more information about which competencies you might be tested on during an interview. Look at the “person specification”, or “person spec” segment for more information on the skills, abilities, and characteristics that the business is looking for.

While the type of question you are asked during the interview will depend primarily on the role and industry you are applying for, all of the questions posed will be designed to allow you to demonstrate your specific skills, knowledge and attitudes and how they might relate to your new position in a particular business.

To show your competencies, you can draw from your current and previous roles, personal life, voluntary work or academic experiences if you are in the early stages of your career.

Here are some examples of the questions that you might be asked to demonstrate different skills:

- Verbal skills: *Tell us about a situation where your communication skills resolved a problem.*
- Listening skills: *Outline how your listening skills have helped contribute to a critical business outcome.*
- Conflict management: *Tell us about a time when you felt that conflict was a problem in your organisation, and how you managed this conflict to get the best results.*
- Creativity: *Describe a project or situation where you felt that a conventional approach would not be suitable. How did you use your creativity, and what were the results?*

- Decisiveness: *What would you say the most critical decision you have made recently has been? How did you go about making that decision?*

- Delegation: *Tell us how have you made use of delegation in the past?*

- Flexibility: *Describe a situation where you had to change your plan halfway through a project.*

- Leadership: *Tell us about a situation where you had to use your skills to get a team to improve their performance. What were the problems you had to address?*

- Teamwork: *Describe a situation where you acted as a member of a team. What was the outcome of the group project and how did you contribute to it?*

The key to ensuring the best outcome of your competency based interview is to make sure that you prepare your answers in advance. Take the time to sit down with the list of competencies that you have recorded; thanks to your research into the company, and ask yourself how you can demonstrate those competencies through past experiences.

You could always ask friends and a trusted colleague to help you brainstorm if you are having trouble finding a range of examples that will be relevant to the job you are being interviewed for.

Make sure that you don't "make something up". Your prospective employer will see through this. Ensure your responses are precise and accurate, which means that interviewers will quickly be able to get an understanding of what you are capable of delivering for their team.

Ask yourself how you can demonstrate those competencies through past experiences.

Using the STAR Approach

One of the best ways to make sure that you are well-prepared for the competency-based interview experience is to familiarise yourself with the "STAR" model for answering questions.

Recruitment experts frequently recommend the STAR model as the best way for candidates to communicate points about themselves in a way that's clear, concise, and transparent.

The STAR approach asks you to identify four critical parts of your response:

- S: Situation
- T: Task
- A: Action
- R: Result

This will help you to formulate your answer into a quick, concise response that addresses all your key messages and ideas. For most people, the STAR formula can be a solution that helps them to avoid going off on a tangent with their answers or losing the interest of their interviewers.

Here's an example: the candidate is applying for a social media managers role.

The interviewer's question is: "Tell me about a time that you were asked to prepare a prospective client pitch within a short deadline."

Answering this question with the STAR model might look something like this:

Situation: set the context for the story.

"Tell me about a time that you were asked to prepare a prospective client pitch within a short deadline."

"We were asked to prepare a pitch for a new social media campaign to deal with some adverse publicity the client company had received. The company's existing agency had been unable to contain the issue. The presentation was to the prospective client's board of eight, and we had 24 hours to design a campaign and prepare the presentation.

Task: what was required of you.

"It was my responsibility to collate the research and impact of the client's situation and how their market was responding and to do this quickly to allow the creative team to design a campaign."

Activity: what you did.

"I analysed data on their share of voice, executed a media search and summarised and collated a short report on the main issues raised in the media. I also examined the companies' social media presence before this issue occurred and identified three specific strategies that had generated excellent results in the previous 12 months for the company. I then presented my findings to my director and creative team with recommendations of what required addressing and how they may link past successes to a new campaign.

Result: how well the situation played out.

"The presentation was made on time, and while the creative team still had some detail to work through, the new social media campaign was warmly received.

The plan was implemented within the next 48 hours. Within 24 hours the number of negative comments about our client decreased by 25%, and within 48 hours it had halved. In the following days, the client started to see positive engagement return and sales of the product affected stopped declining and plateaued. Within one week, sales had begun to increase. Two months later they were back to the same level as before the 'issue' occurred."

Key points: it is important to speak in specific rather than general terms and quantify your success. In this example, we mentioned percentage declines, increases and time frames.

From a listener's perspective, this makes the story interesting, and they are more able to gauge your success. Nameless people and unquantified achievements make the answer less convincing.

Plan to Make the Right Impression

Planning for your competency based interview does not just mean making sure that you take the time to learn as much as you can about the company before your interview. It is like any other interview in the sense that it allows you to make that all-important first impression on a potential employer.

When you first meet, your employer will often make a snap judgement on you based on how you carry yourself, how you present yourself, and even how you dress.

According to numerous studies, referred to in the **Wall Street Journal** and Scientific American, over 70% of hiring managers would be reluctant to offer a job to a candidate who turns up to an interview wearing the wrong 'attire'. The same research shows that 22% of hiring managers had already rejected an applicant based entirely on the way they presented themselves in an interview.

Although you may think that a competency-based interview would be less focused on your appearance than a traditional interview, the truth is that appearances still count.

If you are not sure what kind of approach your chosen company takes towards business dress, talk to your recruitment consultant who will have a thorough understanding of the employer in question.

It is like any other interview in the sense that it allows you to make that all-important first impression on a potential employer.

Additionally look at the company's social media and website pages for insights based on photos of key employees and if in any further doubt, stick to the general rule that all interviews are conducted in formal attire.

For men that usually means 'suited and booted' and for women, suits or dresses that are professional in nature, solid in colour, and not too revealing. Ties are often expected of men, and its suggested women wear appropriate jewellery.

Remember too that 'smell' and hence perfume or aftershave can create emotional responses; while at the same time being overpowering.

Spraying yourself with your favourite aftershave might give you a boost in confidence, however, what if it is the exact brand your interviewer's ex-husband wore; not ideal?

Ultimately, many companies believe that the way you dress for an interview helps to demonstrate your attitude towards the position. If you fail to take the time to dress like a professional for your interview, then there's a good chance that you will not act professionally on the job either.

Remember to Watch Your Body Language

There are plenty of different factors that can impact the way an interviewer or hiring manager perceives you when you are applying for your dream job. For instance, while an informal dress code might make you seem lazy and unprofessional, poor body language could cause you to appear bored, disrespectful, lacking in confidence with low self-esteem, or even untrustworthy in the eyes of your potential employer.

Statistics on the importance of body language vary, with some people claiming that our body language accounts for **50-65% of all**

communication, while others suggest that the number is closer to 80%. Either way, it is safe to say that everything from eye contact, to how you shake your interviewer's hand, could have a part to play in the success of your competency based interview.

Here are a few quick body language tips to be mindful of during the interview experience:

1. Be Careful When Shaking Hands
One of the first things you are likely to do in an interview scenario is shake the hand of the hiring manager. The handshake is a straightforward and shared form of introduction, but it can also be a way for your interviewer to gauge your personality.

Many hiring managers believe that a firm handshake communicates confidence and self-assurance. If you know yours can be on the soft side, practice your handshake before you go.

2. Watch Your Posture
The way that you walk into the interview room and how you sit or stand during the meeting is essential. Even if you are focused on thinking of which of your many examples to share when answering the hiring manager's competency-based questions, make sure that **you are not slouching**, or crossing your arms.

These actions can communicate a lack of confidence in what you are saying.

This may cause the interviewer to wonder how much of what you are saying is true. It can also communicate dis-interest in the role and company. Keep your posture straight with your shoulders back and your head up. A comfortable position for your hands is to have them on your lap when you are not using them to gesture.

3. Be Careful with Eye Contact
While you do not necessarily want to stare at your interviewers so hard that they end up feeling uncomfortable, you do want to

use enough eye contact to connect and build rapport. Good eye contact also shows the person you are talking with that you're deeply involved in the conversation.

If there are three or more people in your interview, avoid giving eye contact only to the individual who is asking the question. Instead, direct around 60% of your attention towards the person who asked the question, while sharing the remaining 40% of your eye contact with the other panel members.

4. Be Genuine
Make sure that you smile when possible to show your interviewer that you are genuinely pleased to be with them. Be yourself; the interviewer will notice if it looks like you are forcing yourself to act out of character. You can only keep up an act for so long.

Think About How You Use Your Voice

We have talked about using body language, and it is worth remembering that your words are important too. When it comes to earning the attention and respect of hiring managers, it is not just what you say that matters, but also how you say it.

Your vocal delivery can make a huge difference to the way that you are perceived. A strong, stable voice communicates competency and confidence, while a quiet stuttering voice conveys a lack of confidence and even anxiety.

Begin by listening carefully to the volume and pace of the person who's asking you the questions. Look to match their volume and speed more closely. Increase or slow down your own pace and volume so that you are at about a 75% match.

Forcing yourself to match their voice 100% will look and sound strange. It may also make the hiring manager believe that you're ridiculing them.

Make sure that you smile when possible to show your interviewer that you are genuinely pleased to be with them.

Other ways to ensure you have an employable voice include:

1. Handle Your Nerves As Best You Can
Nerves can cause your tone of voice to go up and down almost at random during the interview process. To ensure that you appear confident and relaxed, practice a few breathing exercises before you go into the interview room.

Additionally, remember that preparing for your competency based interview with the steps that we've outlined above will help you to feel more relaxed about the experience so that you can keep anxiety at bay.

2. Use the Right Volume
As mentioned above, match the volume of your voice to the volume your interviewer is using. While a whisper might be appropriate for some situations - it is not a good idea when you are trying to get your sought after next role. A clear voice with reasonable volume will help to show your authority and outline that you are confident about the subject matter. Too quiet, and you could be disregarded as being nervous and uncertain.

What If...

You might be asking yourself: "What if I don't know that part of the interview is going to be competency based?"

Ultimately, it is difficult to know for sure whether you are going to be taking part in a competency-based interview. Unless your interviewer tells you that this will be the situation in advance, the best thing you can do is ask your recruitment consultant first or contact the company ahead of time, and if all else fails, prepare anyway.

Preparing for a competency-based interview means that you can evidence your skills, knowledge, and capabilities without simply restating whatever is written on your CV. At the same time, the research that you will do to plan answers to competency-based questions will give you a better understanding of the company and the role that you are applying for - which is always an excellent way to impress a hiring manager.

As with any interview process, the outcome you experience will often be dependent on how much effort and time you put into being prepared. The more you work on ensuring that you make the best possible impression on the interviewer - regardless of what type of questions he or she asks you, the more likely you are to nail the experience and get the job you have been working hard towards when the opportunity arises.

Consider asking your friends and family to quiz you on a range of both competency based and traditional style interview questions, so that you feel confident regardless of what structure you are exposed to when you reach the next step in the hiring process.

Then Finally...

Ultimately, competency based interviews require an investment of time and effort from both the company in search of a new expert for their team and the candidate hoping for an opportunity to thrive inside of a new role.

Ready to get going?

Best wishes for your next interview
Neil & Adela

The Recruiting Office
Providing staff that last

About us

At The Recruiting Office we recognise how hard it can be for non HR staff to fit recruitment around their regular day to day duties and to ensure that job specifications, advertisements, selection and interview processes are without bias and are effective in identifying the best possible candidates.

We know how vital pro-active candidate sourcing can be in an increasingly candidate short market and we understand that many non recruitment professionals struggle to pro-actively identify and engage with suitable passive candidates.

And we know that modern businesses sometimes need to engage skilled personnel on a non permanent basis to support specific projects or changing business needs.

If you are experiencing issues or concerns with any aspect of the recruitment process - from writing job and person specifications to effective on boarding, from engaging with passive candidates to required document checks and when to undertake them - we can help!

At The Recruiting Office we have over 40 years experience of supporting Norfolk employers through every aspect of the recruitment process and our comprehensive, knowledgeable, compliant and ethical recruitment services really work!

For a no obligation discussion of the recruitment issues you are experiencing and the solutions we can offer - call us now on **01603 964816** or email **neil@therecruitingoffice.co.uk**

Your next actions

Connect with us in multiple ways

You can connect with either of us on multiple social media channels including LinkedIn and Facebook

https://www.linkedin.com/in/neil-scarborough-recruiter-for-all-your-norwich-and-norfolk-recruitment-needs/

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https://www.linkedin.com/company/5517696/admin/

Or call 01603 964816 or email Neil neil@therecruitingoffice.co.uk or Adela Adela@therecruitingoffice.co.uk to book a private recruitment strategy call.

Best wishes
Neil and Adela

P.S. Our recruitment services are without charge until/unless our successful candidate accepts your job offer and in the unlikely event they don't work out we offer a 100 day 100% refund guarantee!

Client Testimonials

"What makes The Recruiting Office our agency of choice is the ability Adela and Neil have to fully engage and understand our requirements. They understand that we are looking for people who want to be part of our brand. This is reflected in the quality of candidate they place in both temporary and permanent positions. This is a true partnership and one I believe will be long lasting and important in the success and growth of our depot."
Simon

"The Recruiting Office has found our company a succession of quality staff that are continuing to provide first class service to our customers in East Anglia. The professional and thoroughly well organised manner that The Recruiting Office operate make them a pleasure to do business with."
Graham

Candidate Testimonials

Just a quick email to say thank you for your help in getting me to interview. What makes The Recruiting Office different stand head and shoulders ahead of other agencies is the care and attention the staff put into understanding not only what the potential employer does and requires but also understanding not only the skill set of the potential employee but also their personality thus making the position/employee a match better. This coupled with your attention to detail and contact, updates, feed back and genuine interest in all aspects of the process makes for an outstanding business model.
Mark

"I would recommend to anyone looking for short or long term employment to use the services of the Recruiting Office.
The help and support I received was invaluable-from CV analysis to a better understanding of the current work market (after coming out of a long-term job) I was in a placement within a couple of days.
All consultants I dealt with were friendly, polite and professional.
My placement lead to permanent employment, however, I would not hesitate to use the services of The Recruiting Office again if my situation changed."
Charlotte