

Situation Task Action Result

Top Tip!

For each skill on the Job Description, write down examples of when you have used these. Use **STAR** as bullet points for each skill.

COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS

A common questioning style at interviews is what is known as competency-based questions. These questions are particularly evident within areas of the Civil Service but are also used by other employers. Competency-based questions are where the interviewer would ask the interviewee to give an example of when they have used a particular skill, drawing on their previous experience. Sometimes they will give guidance as to what they are specifically looking for, but this is not always the case. They are designed to test one or more skills and are normally be marked against pre-determined criteria. By reading the job description thoroughly, you will have

already started to identify the skills that they might ask about at interview.

Skill: Customer Service.

Example: “Tell me about a time when you have been able to resolve a customer complaint.”

The interviewer is looking for the interviewee to describe an occasion when they have been able to do this, but it is important that they get some of the background as well as the outcome. Structuring the answer will help the interviewee to cover all the important aspects, as well as staying on track. A great way to structure these answers is to use the acronym below.

S.T.A.R. is a commonly used method for answering competency-based questions and is widely recognised. Let us have a look at each of the elements in more detail.

Using the example question given earlier, you can start to bullet point your response as part of your interview preparation.

“Tell me about a time when you have been able to resolve a customer complaint.”

Situation

- This is where you build up a picture, describing the scene and giving any relevant background information.

Task

- What were you aiming to achieve?
- Be specific so that the interviewer knows exactly what your role was.

Action

- How did you use that particular skill and any others that may be relevant?
- Why did you choose to take the action that you did?
- Focus on what you did, not the wider team, take credit for your actions.

Result

- What was the outcome?
- Ensure that the outcome is a positive one.
- Even if the question relates to when things haven’t gone to plan. What changed as a result? What did you learn?

- I was working as a manager for a national parking company.
- A local resident of one of our sites complained about a large tree impacting on their TV reception.

- I would speak to that specific resident to get full details as well as other residents living nearby.
- I would carry out an investigation to establish the facts.

- I spent a couple of hours talking to local residents, noting that this was a long-term issue.
- On checking the CRM, I was able to evidence that there had been a variety of complaints going back 5 years.
- Via our facilities management team, I arranged for the tree to be removed.

- A greater degree of trust was established between residents and the company.
- Two letters of thanks from local residents were forwarded to my area Operations Manager, who nominated me for an Employee of the Month award.

By bullet pointing key information and writing it down, you will have already started to think about the answers to the questions that you may get asked. Although you would not respond to the question in bullet point format, you will be helped by having prepared and practiced your answers several times. Be descriptive and insightful when giving your answers.

Example 1: “I spoke with local residents and they all stated that they had issues with their TV reception, and it was likely to be caused by the tree”.

Example 2: “I spent a couple of hours in the local area, chatting with as many of the residents living close to the tree as I could. The message from them was clear, that the tree had been causing TV reception issues for several years. Several were able to provide evidence that they had previously complained to my company and one had a written statement from a Television Engineer stating that the tree was causing disruption. I took copies of all the evidence, photographs of the general area, and contact details to

keep the residents updated”.
Example 2 gives a much clearer picture of the situation, your actions, and the process you followed.

Job Applications

Competency-based questioning is also common within application forms. They will be space provided to write the example, sometimes with guidance around the number of words or characters you are permitted. Avoid breaching this guidance as it will not reflect well and, in some cases, may be automatically filtered out via computer software.

Approach your answers in the same manner, using the **S.T.A.R.** method. It is always a good idea to have someone else read these to check for spelling, grammar and whether it makes sense.

In either interviews or applications, do not limit your examples to just your most recent role. Use examples from previous roles, volunteering or even your home life.

Top Tip!

Do not be afraid to take notes into your interview and refer to them when needed. However, it is polite to inform the interviewer(s).



Skill:

Situation:

Task:

Action:

Result:

Group Interviews

A group interview is when an employee, or more than one employee, interviews a group of candidates at the same time. Amongst many other advantages, this type of interview can save them time and money.

There may be one or more positions available, and they may be looking at who is best suited to different roles with the organisation.

These types of interview are most common in.

- Retail.
- Travel and hospitality.
- Food service.

They allow the interviewer(s) an opportunity to not only assess the suitability of candidates, but also

see how the interviewee both interacts and works with others.

Throughout the interview, they will be able to gauge who might fit in best with their companies' culture and how well each of them can operate under stress.

The interview may involve one or more activity including.

- Interview questions.
- Topics to discuss, often around current affairs or thought-provoking subjects.
- A task to complete.

There are some additional things that you can do to prepare for your group interview, which we have put into a handy Top Tips Guide.



Prepare

- Research good quality newspapers, reputable websites, and current affairs.
- Get an understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing that industry
- Learn about the products and services of competitors.
- Go for quality over quantity.
- Research interviewers. Greet them and other interviewees in the same manner.

Act

- The interviewers are trying to see if you fit into their organisation, so they need to see the real you.
- Talk to other interviewees during breaks, this will help you to relax.
- Give your real opinions during discussions. Back this up with logic, facts, and the respect of taking on board the opinions of others.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Be friendly and show confidence.

Respect

- Listen to the opinions and value their contribution of others, even if you disagree.
- Challenge more dominant or over-powering members of the group using a calm manner and diplomacy.
- Encourage quieter, less confident members to get involved.
- Do not dominate tasks or discussions.
- If you are an appointed leader, seek volunteers and look for utilising the strengths of individuals.

Interview Preparation

Before

Always remember to confirm your attendance by email or telephone. This can prevent wasting their time or yours.	
Book time off work, childcare or make any other arrangement that are required.	
Start collating all your paperwork and documentation. Create a separate file for these on your device, as well as printing off copies to take with you.	
Confirm what type of interview it will be and what resources you will have access to where required.	
Print off the confirmation of your interview including address, contact details and timings.	
Research the company and role. LinkedIn, social media, written media, companies house, review sites and Health & Safety Executive are great starting places. Consider published reports, competitors, services, contracts, mission statements and recent awards.	
Plan clothing and dry cleaning where needed. Do your clothes fit? Are they appropriate for the role? Look smart, feel smart, act smart.	
Aim for the highest standards. Haircut/style (where needed), shave, beard trim, neck shave, clean/polished shoes, fingernails, etc.	
Plan your journey. Bus/train times, traffic, parking availability or costs, Google maps and try to have a plan B.	
Review the application, CV, cover letter, job description, person specification and advert. This will act as a reminder of what they are looking for and how you meet this.	
Prepare answers to questions that you may get asked based on the skills and competencies required for the role. Use the S.T.A.R. technique and write them down in bullet point format.	
Practice your answers out loud so that you become familiar with them. Where possible arrange a practice/mock interview with someone who you trust.	
Prepare your questions to ask them. By having around 5/6 prepared, you will still have 2/3 to ask them even if some get answered naturally during the interview.	
Avoid alcohol and spicy food the night before, where possible.	

During

Check any delays on the roads, buses, or trains, making any alternative arrangements if needed.	
Have a sensible breakfast.	
Ask someone to check your clothing when you are dressed.	
Remember to take any paperwork and contact details.	
Be professional from leaving home. You might meet someone from the organisation along the way.	
Arrive in plenty of time to avoid being late or hurried.	
Switch off phone or place on silent.	
When waiting for the interview, take an interest in company literature or notice boards.	
Engage with company employees in a positive manner, regardless of position.	
Shake hands with and acknowledge all members of the interview panel.	
Use a glass of water to create natural pauses between being asked the question and answering it.	
Engage with all interview panel members when answering questions.	
Maintain good eye contact, posture and a positive attitude.	

After

The interview does not end until you are away from the premises, stay professional until then.	
Congratulate yourself on getting an interview. Something about you told them that they'd like to meet you to find out more.	
Write some notes about how the interview went. What went well? What could be improved next time?	
Remember to take any paperwork and contact details.	
Send an email of thank you.	
Be patient around timescales they have given to inform candidates of the outcome. Once these dates pass, politely enquire about an update.	
Seek interview feedback regardless of the outcome.	
Keep searching and applying for other roles until there is an official job offer.	
Stay positive.	

Interview Types

Face to Face:

This is the most common interview type that is used and has been around for a lot of years. It may take the form of a 1-to-1 or panel interview and is usually within the potential employer’s facilities. Displaying confident and positive body language is important, whilst it is usually a good idea to shake the hands of all who are present when you first enter the room and as you are leaving. **Associated jobs:** All roles and companies, regardless of size or resources.

Group:

It may be that there is just one vacancy or several, but this is a great way to interview several people at the same time, whilst also assessing their interactions, teamwork, leadership, and other skills. The group may be given tasks to complete or take part in a discussion. It may be a good idea to watch the news and read some good quality newspapers prior to the interview as discussions can sometimes be based around current affairs. When carrying out group exercises try to encourage quieter members to become involved and give positive encouragement. They will be looking at how you work within a team and communicate

with others. They may even have a member of staff discretely taking part as an interviewee. **Associated jobs:** Retail, hospitality, travel, entertainment, sales, and arts.

Telephone:

This is often used as the first stage of an interview prior to one of the other types. It is professional and courteous for a company to arrange a date and time to conduct this, rather than calling you without prior notification. This should be approached in the same manner as any other interview, which helps to get into the right mindset. If possible, stand up when talking as this is likely to project your voice, ensuring that you come across in a more clear and confident manner. Position yourself in a quiet place with a good connection, ensuring that you have plenty of battery on

your phone and like all interviews having water at hand is a good idea.

Associated jobs: All but particularly telesales, call centres, reception staff or roles advertised via a recruiter before being forwarded to the company.

Top Tip!

You can use Post-It Notes placed around the laptop screen to remember key information. Just do not cover the camera!

Live video:

There has been a recent surge in the number of these interviews, to the point that they have become common. Position yourself in a quiet place with a good internet connection and carry out any registration or tests well in advance of the interview. Place your device in a position that ensures your camera is level with your eyes. If you are using a laptop, this may require you to raise it higher than the desk/table. Your dress and approach must be the same as if it were a face-to-face interview. Ensure that you also wear appropriate clothing on your bottom half as you may have to stand up to get some paperwork and do not want to embarrass yourself! **Associated jobs:** As video technology has become more accessible, these are becoming increasingly common across all roles and company sizes.

Recorded Video:

These are very similar to the live video interview, except that it is recorded and only the interviewee takes part. This would usually involve the interviewee receiving a link that they need to follow to make the recording and a deadline of which to have completed it by. The questions may appear on the screen during the recording or may have been provided prior. They will usually inform you of how long you are given to answer each question, and in some cases, they will allow a practice before attempting each question. In terms of preparation and practice, approach this in a similar manner to the live video interview. **Associated jobs:** Any medium to large companies with the resources to use pre-recorded video technology.

Practical:

When attending a practical interview, the interviewee will be given a task to perform. They are assessed as to their level of competence, as well as other factors like health & safety. It is always a good idea to brush up on your practical skills beforehand, especially if you have now carried out these tasks before. **Associated jobs:** Motor trade, engineering, coaching, warehousing, retail, and practical roles.

Presentation:

These interviews are intended to assess the level of competence to deliver presentations effectively. It may involve delivering a training session or presenting information, findings, plans, etc. The presentation may be delivered to a small panel or large group, depending on the role and company. The interviewee will usually receive a brief as to exactly what is required, resources available and the time allowed. Always stay within the allocated time and when possible inform the organiser of what resources you require. **Associated jobs:** Teaching, training, management, sales or where the role will involve delivering presentations on a regular basis.

Trial:

When used correctly and for the right reasons, these are a great way for an employer to assess whether the interviewee is capable of the work required. A trial interview would usually involve the interviewee working part of a shift and it is important to establish if there is any remuneration prior to the shift commencing. **Associated jobs:** Hospitality & catering, sports, coaching and health/social care.

Volunteer:
Volunteers are often being assessed for any potential paid employment that may arise. Showing a good attitude, strong work ethics and a desire to learn will reflect well and put them in a good position when opportunities appear. Although the roles will need to be advertised, with recruitment procedures followed, the organisation will already be aware of the interviewee’s skills and attitude. **Associated jobs:** Charity sector, animal care and schools.

Staged:

Some jobs will require the interviewee to take part in more than one interview or interview type. These stages may be during the same day, during that is often described as an “Assessment Day”, or they may be split over several days/weeks. **Associated jobs:** Public/emergency services and higher management.

Speed Dating:

This type of interview involves several members of the company, each with one question to ask. The interviewee attends the first station and answers the question in a set time. Once this time is finished there will be a signal to move onto the next station to be asked the next question. The decision about who to employ is made across a far greater number of team members, regardless of role or seniority. **Associated jobs:** Any role where there the successful candidate will have to network or work extensively within a team, particularly away from the workplace.

Top Tip!

Even if PowerPoint is available, print all your slides as a back-up, just in case technology fails.