Preparing for your interview

A practical guide to interview and competency-based questions

Congratulations on securing an interview! Reaching this stage means the employer already sees potential in your application.

Whether your interview is taking place online or in person, this guide has been put together by TPP Recruitment to help you prepare, present yourself confidently and get the most out of the interview process.

With that in mind, here are some simple steps you can take to give yourself the best possible chance of success.

Understanding the role

Review the job description and person specification carefully.

Consider:

- Which skills and experience are essential for the role?
- How does your background demonstrate these requirements?
- What achievements can you use as evidence?

Prepare examples that showcase your:

- Technical knowledge and expertise
- Problem-solving skills
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Leadership and management experience
- Adaptability and resilience
- Communication and stakeholder management

Where possible, include measurable outcomes, for example:

- "Increased customer satisfaction scores by 15%"
- "Reduced processing time by two days"
- "Exceeded annual targets by 20%"

Researching the organisation

Employers expect candidates to demonstrate knowledge of their organisation.

Research:

- Their website
- Recent news and press releases
- Social media channels
- Current projects, campaigns or strategic priorities
- Industry developments and challenges

Consider:

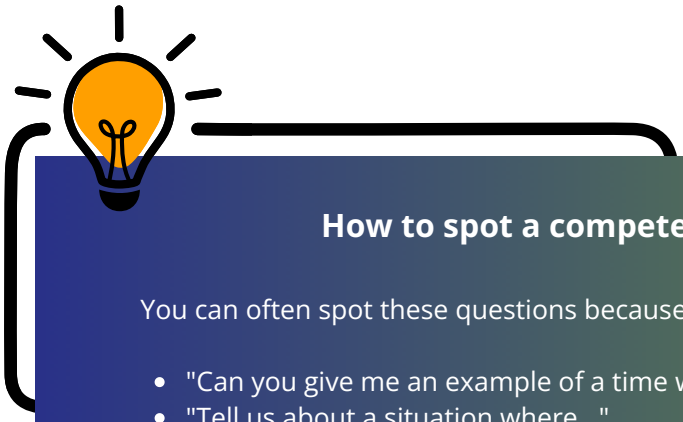
- What are the organisation's values?
- What are their strategic objectives?
- Why does this role matter to them?

Competency-based interviews

Many organisations use competency-based interviews (sometimes called behavioural interviews).

These interviews are based on the principle that past behaviour is one of the best indicators of future performance.

Interviewers use questions designed to explore how you have handled situations in the past and how your experience relates to the competencies required for the role.



How to spot a competency-based question

You can often spot these questions because they begin with phrases such as:

- "Can you give me an example of a time when..."
- "Tell us about a situation where..."
- "Describe a time when..."

Identifying what competencies may be assessed

One of the best ways to prepare for a competency-based interview is to review the person specification carefully. The competencies assessed at interview are often taken directly from the essential criteria.

For example, if the person specification refers to leadership, communication, stakeholder management or problem-solving, you should expect questions designed to explore your experience in these areas.

Highlight key competencies and prepare one or two examples for each using the STAR technique.

Person specification requirement	Likely competency	Possible interview question
Ability to manage multiple projects and deadlines	Planning and organisation	Tell us about a time when you successfully managed competing priorities.
Excellent stakeholder management skills	Communication and influencing	Describe a situation where you had to manage a difficult stakeholder relationship.
Experience leading teams	Leadership	Tell us about a time when you led a team through a challenge.
Ability to identify and implement improvements	Problem-solving and initiative	Give an example of a process improvement you introduced.



What are interviewers looking for?

Interviewers want to understand:

- What you personally did
- Why you took that approach
- The outcome you achieved
- What you learned from the experience

Use “I” more than “we”

Even if your example involved a team, be clear about your own role. Interviewers need to understand what you personally did, the decisions you made and the impact of your contribution.

This is one of the most common reasons candidates undersell their experience, so do not be afraid to talk confidently about your own achievements.

Good examples can come from:

- Current employment
- Previous roles
- Voluntary work
- Education
- Community activities

Using the STAR technique

The STAR model is a simple and effective way to structure competency-based answers.



Situation	Task	Action	Result
Briefly explain the context. Aim for one or two sentences.	Describe your responsibility or objective. Usually one sentence is enough.	Explain exactly what you did. This is the main part. Focus on decisions and actions you took and reasons for that approach.	Outline the outcome and impact. Where possible, quantify the result and explain what you learned from the experience.



A useful STAR tip

Spend less time setting the scene and more time explaining your actions. The most important part of your answer is usually what you did, why you did it and what happened as a result.

Questions you may be asked



Leadership and influencing

- Describe a situation where you influenced a positive outcome, even if you did not have formal authority.
- Tell us about a time when you took the lead on a piece of work or initiative.



Teamwork and collaboration

- Tell us about a time you worked successfully with others to achieve an objective.
- Describe a time when team members had different views. How did you help move things forward?



Communication

- Tell us about a time when you explained a complex issue in a clear and accessible way.
- Describe a situation where effective communication helped achieve a positive outcome.



Problem-solving and continuous improvement

- Describe a time when you identified an opportunity to improve a process, service or way of working.
- Tell us about a time when things did not go to plan. What did you do?



Working with different perspectives

- Tell us about a time when you worked with someone who had a different viewpoint or approach from your own.
- Tell us about a time when you helped resolve a misunderstanding or difference of opinion.

Questions you may be asked (cont.)



Decision making

- Describe a situation where you had to make a judgement based on limited information.
- How have you balanced risks and opportunities when making decisions?



Organisation and managing workload

- Describe a situation where you had to balance competing priorities or expectations.
- Tell us about a time when you delivered results under pressure.



Questions about development and learning

Many employers now prefer a strengths-based approach rather than asking candidates to identify weaknesses.

Examples include:

- Tell us about something new you have learned recently and how you applied it.
- Describe a time when you received feedback and used it to improve.
- Which aspects of work do you find most challenging?
- What skill are you currently working to strengthen?
- What have you learned from a setback or mistake?

This approach creates a more positive and inclusive interview experience while still enabling you to demonstrate self-awareness, learning and growth.



Top interview tip

It's perfectly acceptable to take a few moments to think before answering a question. A thoughtful response is always better than rushing into an answer.

Questions you may want to ask

Interviews are a two-way process. Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates preparation and genuine interest.



About the role

- What would success look like in the first six months?
- What are the biggest priorities for the person joining this role?



About the team

- What are the biggest challenges facing the team?
- What makes someone successful within this team?



About learning and development

- What training and development opportunities are available?
- How do you support career progression?



About the organisation

- What do you enjoy most about working at this organisation?
- How would you describe the organisational culture?



Closing questions

- Is there anything from today's conversation that you would like me to expand on?
- Is there anything you would like me to clarify before we finish?

These questions can provide valuable feedback and allow you to address any concerns before the interview concludes.

Reasonable adjustments

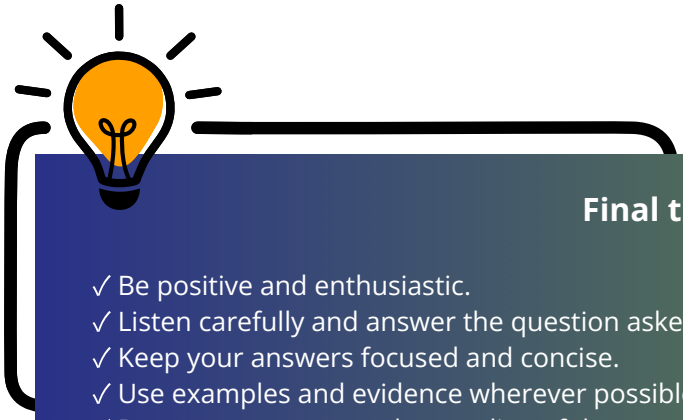
If you need any adjustments during the interview process, please let your TPP Recruitment Consultant know as early as possible. This may include accessible formats, additional time for assessments, captioning, interview questions in advance where appropriate or other support that helps you perform at your best.

Asking for adjustments is a normal part of making recruitment fair, accessible and inclusive.

Using AI to help you prepare

AI tools can be useful for generating practice questions, helping you structure examples using the STAR technique and improving the clarity of your notes. However, your answers should always be based on your own experience and written in your own words. Do not rely on AI to create examples that are not accurate or genuinely yours.

The most effective interviews are those where candidates speak authentically about their own experiences and achievements.



Final tips

✓ Be positive and enthusiastic.
✓ Listen carefully and answer the question asked.
✓ Keep your answers focused and concise.
✓ Use examples and evidence wherever possible.
✓ Demonstrate your understanding of the organisation.
✓ Show genuine interest in the role.
✓ Be mindful of your body language and tone.
✓ Remember that interviewers want you to succeed and are looking for evidence that you can do the job.

Interviews are an opportunity to showcase your skills, experience and potential. Preparation, research and practising examples using the STAR technique can significantly improve your confidence and performance.

Good luck with your interview! Your TPP Recruitment Consultant is always available to provide guidance, support and help you prepare.