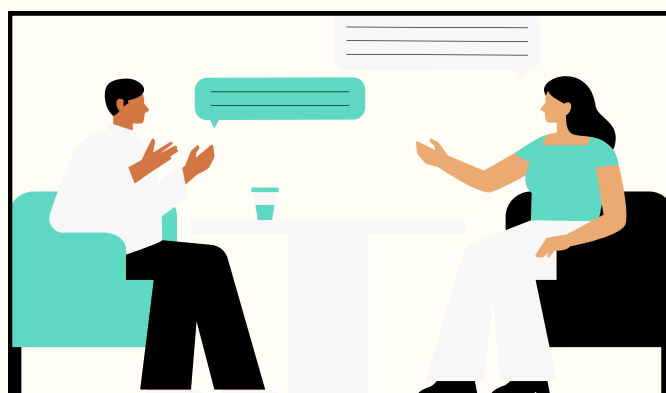


# Candidate Guide to Competency-Based Interviews

## What is a competency-based interview and why do we use it?

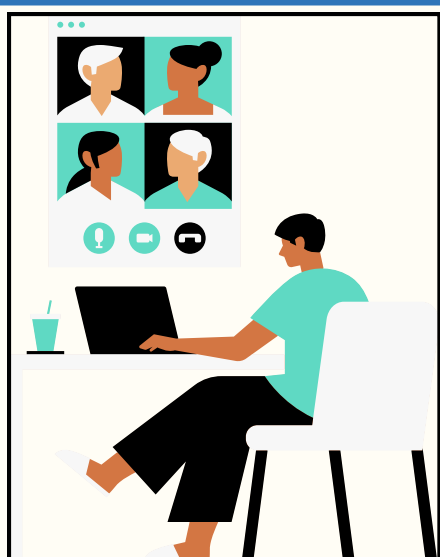


The Council of Europe aims to identify and select the best candidates for its roles to ensure that the most talented individuals can uphold human rights, democracy, and the rule of law across Europe. To achieve this, we use the Competency-Based Interview (CBI) methodology.

In this approach the focus is on key competencies required for the respective role and assessing how candidates have demonstrated them in the past. Competencies encompass the skills, abilities, motivations, and knowledge necessary for effective job performance.

Benefits of Competency-Based Interviews:

- **Fair and objective:** Interviewers follow a standardized guide to assess candidates against the required key competencies. CBIs reduce the likelihood of unconscious bias as they focus on real examples rather than hypothetical scenarios.
- **Consistency:** They ensure all candidates are assessed on the same competencies. The specific competencies assessed in the interview will vary depending on the role and its requirements. To ensure transparency, the competencies being evaluated will align with those listed in the job vacancy.
- **Predictive:** The approach is based on the principle that past behaviour is one of the best indicators of future behaviour. Research has shown that competency-based interviews are highly effective in predicting job performance.



## How are competency-based interviews conducted?

A competency-based interview is semi-structured and consists of questions relating to specific competencies. Interviewers will ask you to provide examples from your past experiences that demonstrate your abilities in these areas. All candidates applying for the same role are asked about the same competencies.

Questions typically begin with phrases like:

- "Tell me about a time when..."
- "Give me an example of..."

Follow-up questions may be asked to gather more detailed information.

For example, for the competency "Teamwork and Cooperation", a question could be: "Could you describe a situation where you helped your colleagues finish urgent work they couldn't complete?"

Possible follow-up questions:

- What role did you play in the team?
- What difficulties or conflicts did you encounter? How did you address them?
- What feedback did you receive?
- What did you learn from this experience, and how have you applied it since?

The goal of these follow-up questions is to dig deeper into the candidate's experience and gain a more detailed understanding of their behaviour, problem-solving abilities, and overall approach to challenges. Interviewers are looking for clear, detailed answers that provide insight into how you approach challenges and achieve results.

## How to prepare for a competency-based interview?



Now that you understand the structure of a competency-based interview, here are some **tips** to help you prepare:

1. Understand the competencies: Competencies assessed correspond to those in the vacancy note. Review it and make sure you understand what is required for the role. While we cannot tell you the exact competencies we will assess, you can reflect on your experience and think of relevant situations from your past roles that demonstrate the qualities we are looking for. It's crucial that the examples you provide are clear, tangible, and highlight the strategy, actions, and outcomes involved.
2. Practice the STAR method: We strongly encourage you to use the STAR method when preparing your responses:

What **STAR** stands for:

- **Situation:** The context or challenge you faced.
- **Task:** The responsibility or task you were assigned.
- **Action:** The actions you took to address the situation.
- **Result:** The outcome of your actions and what you learned from the experience.

When using **STAR**, remember to:

- Use examples that are meaningful to you, privileging (if possible) similar situations you have experienced at CoE or in an international organisation with a similar context and activities;
- Keep your examples concise and to the point;
- Make sure to focus on your individual contribution and actions;
- Try to answer in a conversational manner so you don't sound rehearsed;
- Be prepared for follow-up questions based on the examples you give.

Here's an example of how to apply the **STAR method**:

**Question:** *Tell me about a time when you had to demonstrate "Teamwork and Cooperation"*

**Situation:**

*"As part of the legal team in Unit X at the Council of Europe, we were tasked with preparing a crucial legal analysis for a human rights case tied to an urgent international treaty negotiation. Two of my colleagues were falling behind on their sections due to a heavy workload and a complex legal issue. With the submission deadline quickly approaching, missing it could delay the entire negotiation process."*

**Task:**

*"My responsibility was to ensure the timely completion of the legal analysis, ensuring it met the Council's legal standards. I also needed to support my colleagues in finishing their sections while maintaining the overall quality of the work."*

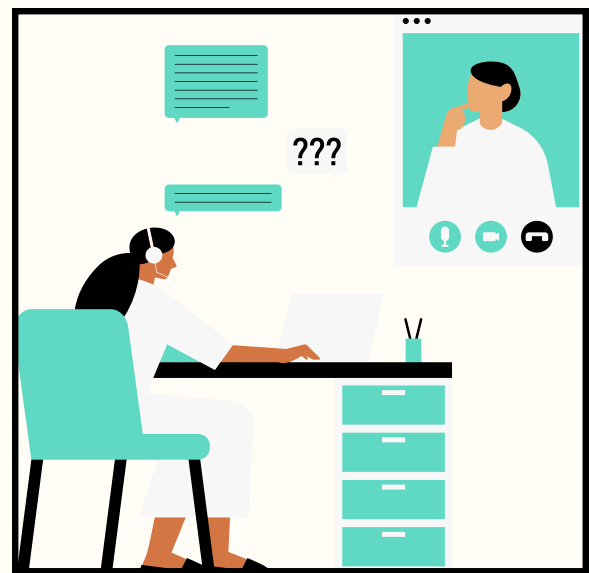
**Action:**

*"I reached out to my colleagues to understand the specific challenges they were facing. To help, I took over some of their legal research on precedents and drafted key legal arguments for their sections. I also facilitated regular check-ins with the team to monitor progress and ensure alignment with the deadlines. Additionally, I reviewed their completed sections to ensure consistency and coherence throughout the analysis."*

**Result:**

*"We completed the legal analysis on time, and it was submitted ahead of the deadline. The analysis contributed significantly to the treaty negotiation and was recognized for its thoroughness. My colleagues appreciated the support, and this experience enhanced my ability to collaborate effectively under tight deadlines."*

## Tips for a Competency-Based Interview



Here are some additional **tips** to help you succeed in a competency-based interview:

**Be yourself:** Act naturally and let the interviewers get to know the real you.

**Be honest:** If you don't have a perfect example, explain a similar situation where you showed relevant skills.

**Stay calm:** Take your time to collect your thoughts before responding. It's okay to pause.

**Ask questions:** Interviews are a two-way conversation, so feel free to ask any questions you have.

- **Clarify if needed:** If you're unsure about a question, ask the interviewer to clarify.
- **Check your answer:** If you're uncertain whether you've answered the question fully, check with the interviewer at the end of your response.

**Don't worry about eye contact:** The interviewer will likely be taking notes during the interview, which might affect their eye contact, but this doesn't mean you're not doing well.

**Be specific:** Provide concrete examples rather than generalised statement.

**Use relevant examples:** When answering questions, prioritise examples from your experience at the CoE or in similar international organisations if possible. These environments are unique, and sharing experiences from such contexts will make your responses more pertinent and impactful.

**Manage your time:** Be mindful of how long you take to answer each question. Try to give enough detail, but also keep your responses concise and to the point, ensuring you cover all key elements without rambling.

**Finally, good luck with your interview!**