

In most cases, the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Of course people learn, but implementing learnings and changing behavior are different from knowledge acquisition. To help you better understand how someone will perform in a role, this guide contains a list of competency-based learning from experience interview questions.

What are competencies?

Competencies are the soft skills that influence how we think and behave. They are often more difficult to learn or modify than hard skills. Competencies are neither good or bad independently but are rather more or less important for success in a given role with specific responsibilities. As with most skills, competencies can also be over-used, moving from a strength to a weakness.

List of competencies included in this guide:

- Adaptability
- Building Relationships
- Calm Under Pressure
- Collaboration
- Courage
- Curiosity
- Detail Oriented
- Learning Orientation
- Patience
- Perseverance
- Prioritization
- Proactive
- Time Management

<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Adaptability: Ability to quickly adjust course, modify behaviors, or otherwise change to suit different conditions or in response to new learnings.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you had to change course in the middle of a project.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when your team or organization</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizes that when something changes, there may be a need to adjust course. ● Responds quickly to the need to change. ● Doesn't fight the change or begrudge the need for change. ● Willing to modify own beliefs when new information arises. ● Able to quickly shift actions and plans toward the new direction. ● Role models new behaviors to their colleagues. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What does it mean to be flexible at work?</p> <p>What are signs that someone is adaptable?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do not hold on to the past. ● Willingness to change course. ● Don't get flustered when something shifts. ● Easily pick up on new ways of working. ● Adjust their style to meet the circumstances. ● Willingness to let go easily. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when something in your work context changed and you didn't respond fast enough.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

<p>Prompts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the situation or context. 2. What actions did you take? Why? 3. What other approaches did you consider? Why didn't you choose these? 4. What was the result? 5. What did you learn from this experience? 	<p>Additional Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tell me more about that. ● What about that experience was challenging / easy for you? Why? ● Do you still believe it was the right decision? Why or why not? ● Did you consider.... Why not?
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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Building Relationships: Invests in developing healthy relationships with colleagues, customers and/or vendors. Navigates differences with respect and in ways that strengthen the relationship.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you developed a relationship with colleagues, customers, or vendors that were very different from yourself.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you worked with people you didn't like.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Asks about the other person's life, interests, family, etc. ● Looks for common ground and shared experiences. ● Recognizes and appreciates differences. Is able to connect with a variety of people. ● Shows interest in the thinking of others. ● Expresses gratitude and appreciation when deserved. ● Does not see relationships as transactional. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>Walk me through your process for building relationships with new colleagues / customers / vendors?</p> <p>What makes building relationships challenging?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include activities such as: make time to get to know people, share about yourself, start from a place of trust, be positive, say thank you, listen to others, be helpful, admit mistakes. ● Challenges may include distance, varying sense of privacy, lack of time, strong differences, some people lack interest in building relationships. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you failed to develop an important relationship.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you over-invested in a single relationship and it came back to haunt you.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Calm Under Pressure: Ability to stay calm, think clearly and act appropriately when the situation is intense. Able to manage stress to avoid overload or burnout.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when things were really intense at work.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you were running up against a deadline and things didn't look good.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you were under a lot of pressure to deliver.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks clearly and strategically despite the pressure. Doesn't become paralyzed or make poor decisions. • Able to prioritize given the intensity or severity of a problem. • Able to handle multiple problems or tasks at once. • Does not become emotionally unstable when criticized, attacked or provoked. • Maintains a calm presence in difficult circumstances. • Finds ways to prevent or reduce stress that do not add pressure to others. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What practices do you have to help manage your stress levels?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a link between practices like exercise, meditation, eating healthy, getting enough sleep with stress reduction. • Utilize approaches like taking a walk, taking a break, deep breathing, debriefing with a trusted partner (usually not a colleague), to help stay calm in the moment. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you imploded or lost it because the pressure was too much to handle.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you made a poor decision under pressure.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admits to making a mistake, not blame others • Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why • Distills learnings • Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Collaboration: Ability to work effectively with others to achieve a common goal. Shares information, contributes thinking and delivers assignments, so everyone can work effectively. Has a team-oriented mindset.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you worked as part of high-performing team.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you had to work with people you didn't get along with to accomplish a common goal.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you were a real team player.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lived up to their promises. ● Developed trust with colleagues and their manager. ● Did their best to help the team succeed. Put the goal before their own needs. ● Recognized that the team's work is interdependent and their role in that. ● Tried their best / tried different ways to work with others rather than retreating into their own domain. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What does it mean to be team oriented?</p> <p>What are the keys to successful collaboration?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trusting relationships where people share ideas and give feedback. ● People do what they say they'll do when it's due. ● People share information freely. ● The team has a positive attitude or atmosphere. ● The team's success is more important than individual success. ● People support each other, step up to help. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you could have been a better team member.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you didn't share information with your team members.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Courage: Has the strength to act in alignment with one’s beliefs. Willing to do what is best or right regardless of fear, discomfort or difficulty.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you gave bad news or negative critical feedback to a colleague.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you disagreed strongly with an approach or direction a project or team was headed.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision that you knew would be upsetting to people.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acknowledges the difficulty, fear or discomfort present in the situation. ● Identifies what needs to be done in order to get to the best outcome. ● Shares thoughtfully so their message is heard but doesn’t sugar-coat or side-step the issue. ● Is willing to make the tough choice. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What are signs of courage in the workplace?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Willing to speak up when you disagree. ● Gives honest, constructive feedback to colleagues. ● Shares ideas and thinking even when unsure it’s welcome. ● Takes appropriate risks. ● Advocates for self and others. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you disagreed strongly but didn’t speak up.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you avoided or ignored a difficult situation.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Curiosity: Desire to know or learn something useful. Wonders and takes action on those wonderings in order to solve problems or advance the work.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you got an assignment you didn't fully understand.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you uncovered some important insight that had a critical impact on the project.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizes a need for more information. ● Asks questions, does research to gain more information. ● Questions assumptions or past decisions. ● Seeks to understand why in addition to what and how. ● Desires to know more than is initially presented. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What does curiosity mean to you?</p> <p>What are signs or behaviors of someone who is curious?</p> <p>Under what conditions is curiosity helpful or hurtful?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Defines curiosity along the lines of wanting to know more in order to advance the work. Not only for the sake of knowing. ● Identify behaviors like asking questions, doing research, learning from others, continuing to learn. ● Recognize when curiosity is overused because it doesn't advance the work and instead leads to wasted time or effort and slows things down. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you should have asked more questions.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when your curiosity led you down the wrong path.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Detail Oriented: Ensures work and information are complete and accurate. Tracks follow-through of self and others.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you caught an important detail that others had missed.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you had lots of details to keep track of.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Checks the accuracy of own and others' work. ● Develops and uses systems to organize and keep track of information or work progress. ● Carefully reviews and checks the accuracy of information before sharing. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What processes, practices or tools do you use to keep track of details?</p> <p>What does it mean to be detail oriented?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifies attributes like pays attention to the small things, details matter, ensures accuracy and completeness. ● Uses tools like checklists, spreadsheets, templates or apps. ● Has practices of checking and double-checking or verifying. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you missed a detail.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when someone caught an error in your work.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Learning Orientation: Desire to move from theory into action. Ability to design experiments that surface useful data, insights, or validation. Regularly reflects on what's been learned from prior actions.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you tested an approach before going all in?</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you were uncomfortable moving forward in a big way?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognized there were a few key pieces of information that would validate or enable better decisions. ● Identified specific metrics of success before running the experiment. (Not a 'lets see what we learn' approach.) ● Designed a low cost, short timeframe experiment to test for specific information. ● Translates data or results to strategies and approaches. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>Walk me through your process to design an experiment or test prior to launching a big effort.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify the critical "death threats" or assumptions of what must be true in order for the project to succeed. ● Design an experiment to test those specific items. ● The design is as close to the project as possible while being low cost and fast. ● Has a method for capturing data, analyzing and interpreting the results. ● Use the information to make decisions regarding further experimentation and action. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you should have experimented before moving forward?</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you made assumptions that turned out to be wrong.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Patience: The capacity to tolerate or accept slowness or a delay without complaint, irritation or restlessness when it serves the greater good. Appreciation for the effects of time.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you slowed down or were patient with someone or something.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you delayed making a decision.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acknowledge the problems that come from “ready, fire, aim” and moving before you’re ready. ● Timing wasn’t urgent. Taking additional time would make the project or person more likely to succeed. ● <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>When is patience importance at work? When is it not helpful?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Patience is usually good: When learning, incomplete information that can be gathered, change is involved, reduces anxiety. ● Patience is usually not good: when avoiding a challenge, information is missing but can’t easily be gained, timing is urgent or critical to success, losing momentum will cause more problems. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you rushed to a decision but should have moved slower?</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you were too patient and missed an opportunity?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Perseverance: Continued effort to move forward or achieve a goal in spite of challenges, obstacles or opposition.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you hit a roadblock that made accomplishing the work extremely difficult.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you kept going despite a major setback.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Determination to achieve the goal. Doesn't easily give up. ● Willingness to work through difficulty and discomfort. ● Do what it takes mindset. ● Focus on what needs to be done and why it's important. ● Ask for help or involve others. Don't position themselves as in it alone. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>Is giving up ever OK or is it always better to persevere to the end?</p> <p>How do you differentiate between when to move past a challenge and when to change course?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generally better to persevere when: setbacks are minor, its emotional or stressful but not overwhelming, challenges are related to growth or stretching, the goal is critical, the goal is in sight. ● Generally better to shift course when: there is diminishing ROI, the outcome or goal is no longer relevant, resources are no longer available, resources would be better spent elsewhere, the strategies or tactics consistently don't deliver results. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you kept pushing forward but should have stopped.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you decided not to push forward past an obstacle.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Prioritization: Ability to dynamically adjust what's most important and urgent. Spends time and energy on the critical items for success.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you had too much work on your plate and not enough time to do it all.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you had to make trade offs within a project.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thoughtful reasoning guided their choices. ● Didn't try to make it all happen, resulting in a lack of quality or failure. ● Recognize differences between what is essential, important, and nice to have. ● Asks for help from their manager when needing to make trade offs or priorities were unclear. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What factors do you consider when prioritizing among tasks?</p> <p>What is effective prioritization?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Considers urgency, importance, resources available in the moment and resources needed for the task (e.g. need an hour of uninterrupted time), impact of a task on other tasks or other people. ● Effective prioritization includes dynamic decision-making, making tough choices when needed, focusing on long-term not just short term. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you prioritized the wrong thing.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Proactive: Takes action before being asked, prior to problems arising. Thinks and acts one step ahead.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you anticipated a need or issue.</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you acted before being asked.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thinks ahead of the current moment to anticipate needs or problems. ● Acts before being asked to. Is not only responsive. ● Raises potential issues before they become real problems. ● Does more than is normally required or expected of them in that situation. ● Self-starter, is comfortable acting without instruction. ● Develops skills or acquires resource that will be helpful in the future. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>What are the benefits of being proactive?</p> <p>What are the downsides to being proactive?</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Benefits: stop problems before they begin, save time and resources, makes other people's jobs easier, be prepared ● Downsides: could waste time and effort, take the wrong course of action, interrupt other people's work, stop others from stepping in <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you were proactive and it backfired.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes:</p>

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<p>Competency:</p>	<p>Time Management: Ability to use one's time effectively or productively.</p>
<p>Experience Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you had a lot to get done and not a lot of time.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organized the work before doing it. ● Set time boundaries. ● Minimize interruptions (email, colleagues in the office, etc) ● Look for what can be off-loaded. ● <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Conceptual Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about any of the time management tools or approaches you use in your daily work.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can describe time management approaches or techniques such as time boxing (limiting the time spent on an activity), GETgo (stopping at good enough to go instead of perfect), using a task management tool to track what needs to be done, checking email at specific times during the day, making a plan for each day's activities, adding tasks to their calendar, setting a timer, avoid multi-tasking, reflecting on each day at the end, uses technology to automate some actions. <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Learning Questions:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you mismanaged your time.</p>	<p>Look Fors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Admits to making a mistake, not blame others ● Identifies where their thinking or behavior went wrong and why ● Distills learnings ● Applies learning to a new situation <p>Notes</p>

<p>Prompts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the situation or context. 2. What actions did you take? Why? 3. What other approaches did you consider? Why didn't you choose these? 4. What was the result? 5. What did you learn from this experience? 	<p>Additional Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tell me more about that. ● What about that experience was challenging / easy for you? Why? ● Do you still believe it was the right decision? Why or why not? ● Did you consider.... Why not?
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