

Competency Questions Bank

A bank of competency-based interview questions grouped by the areas graduate recruiters assess most. Work through them with the STAR method and you'll walk into interviews far more prepared.

How to answer competency questions

Nearly every competency question wants a real example. The STAR method keeps your answer clear:

Use the STAR method — Situation, Task, Action, Result. Structure your answer around these four steps.

Pick a real example — university group project, part-time job, volunteering, or sports team all work well.

Focus on your contribution — what specifically did you do? Use "I" not "we" to show your role.

Keep it concise — aim for 90–120 seconds. Practise aloud until it feels natural, not rehearsed.

Practise with a friend — ask someone to throw you follow-up questions to build your confidence.

The questions, by category

40 questions across 8 areas. Pick a few from each and rehearse them out loud.

Teamwork & collaboration

- Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team to achieve a goal.
- Describe a time you had to work with someone you found difficult. How did you handle it?
- Give an example of when you helped a team member who was struggling.
- Tell me about a time you had to compromise to reach a team decision.
- Describe a situation where your team faced conflict. What did you do?

Leadership & influencing

- Tell me about a time you led a group to deliver something.
- Describe a situation where you had to influence someone without having authority over them.
- Give an example of when you motivated others towards a goal.
- Tell me about a time you had to make an unpopular decision.
- Describe when you took responsibility for a mistake made by your team.

Problem-solving & critical thinking

- Describe a complex problem you identified and solved.
- Tell me about a time you had to make a decision with incomplete information.
- Give an example of when you spotted a better way of doing something.
- Describe a time you used data or analysis to reach a conclusion.
- Tell me about a problem that didn't have an obvious answer. How did you approach it?

Communication

- Tell me about a time you explained a complex idea to someone with no background in it.
- Describe a situation where your communication made a real difference.
- Give an example of when you had to deliver difficult or unwelcome news.
- Tell me about a time you presented to a group and won them over.
- Describe how you adapted your communication style for a different audience.

Resilience & handling setbacks

- Tell me about a time you failed or made a mistake. What did you learn?
- Describe a situation where you faced a major setback. How did you recover?
- Give an example of when you worked well under pressure.
- Tell me about a time things didn't go to plan. What did you do?
- Describe a period of heavy workload. How did you cope?

Planning, organisation & time management

- Describe a time you managed several tasks with competing deadlines.
- Tell me about a project you planned from start to finish.
- Give an example of how you prioritised when everything felt urgent.
- Tell me about a time you improved an organised process.
- Describe how you kept a long project on track.

Initiative & drive

- Describe a time you took action before being asked.
- Tell me about a time you went above and beyond what was expected.
- Give an example of when you set yourself a challenging goal and reached it.
- Tell me about a time you spotted and seized an opportunity.
- Describe when you pushed for something you believed in.

Commercial awareness

- What do you think our main challenges are right now?
- How does our industry make money, and where could it grow?
- Tell me about a business trend affecting this sector.
- Why do you want to work in this industry specifically?
- Describe a commercial decision you made or observed, and what you learned from it.

Which questions do recruiters ask most?

You don't need to guess what employers look for. These figures come from large UK graduate-recruitment surveys.

47% of UK graduate employers use competency or behavioural-based interviews as part of their selection process. — *Institute of Student Employers — Student Recruitment Survey 2025*

Over 90% of FTSE 100 employers use structured, competency-based questioning in selection. —

Institute of Student Employers research

The competencies assessed most often for early-career hires are communication, teamwork, critical thinking, self-awareness and resilience. — *Institute of Student Employers, 2025*

In 2025, 54% of employers said graduates fell short on self-awareness and 46% on resilience — both worth preparing for deliberately. — *Institute of Student Employers, 2025*

Sources

Institute of Student Employers — Student Recruitment Survey 2025: <https://ise.org.uk>

Sharma (2009), Top psychological competencies essential for a graduate fresher (IIBP):

<https://iibp.org.in/anveshan/top-psychological-competencies-essential-for-a-graduate-fresher/>