



# HUMAN ↗ RESOURCES

*at FAO*

## Competency-Based Interviewing

A guide for interview panel members



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**





# Competency-Based Interviewing

A guide for interview panel members





## Acknowledgements

FAO is grateful to the UNAIDS Secretariat, which has kindly permitted FAO to use and adapt the UNAIDS *"Competency-based interviewing. A guide for selection panel members"* for the production of this booklet.

This document is the property of FAO and is intended for internal use only. Although the information is not confidential, some of the content may be proprietary or privileged. You are therefore requested not to disclose, distribute or copy it by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – to any third party without the prior written permission of FAO.

Copyright © FAO, Rome, 2014

All rights reserved



# CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT THE APPROACH</b>	<b>1</b>
How it works: Looking for evidence	4
Assessing competencies	6
Assessing technical skills	8
 <b>PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW</b>	 <b>9</b>
Creating a competency-based interview question	10
Knowing which questions to ask	11
Balancing achievements and adversity questions	12
Sample question mix 1	13
Sample question mix 2	15
Open and closed questions	17
Questions to avoid	18
 <b>CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW</b>	 <b>21</b>
Presenting yourself	22
Put the candidate at ease	23
Staying on track	24
Problem solving	26
Taking notes	28
 <b>EVALUATING THE RESPONSES</b>	 <b>29</b>
Personal Interview evaluation template	30
Evaluating responses	31
 <b>SAMPLE QUESTIONS</b>	 <b>33</b>





# ABOUT THE APPROACH





# WHAT IS COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWING?

Competency-based interviewing, is also referred to as behavioral-based interviewing. The premise is that your past performance in the workplace will predict your future performance.

## WHAT IS YOUR MAIN GOAL IN CONDUCTING A COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEW?

Given this premise, as a member of the interview panel, you have a specific aim when conducting a competency-based interview, which is to gather evidence that will enable you to understand and assess the candidate's past behavior.

Past performance is the best predictor of future performance

**Understand**  
past behaviour



**Predict**  
future behaviour

## HOW DOES COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWING DIFFER FROM OTHER FORMS?

In more traditional forms of interviewing, the interviewers ask questions that are relevant to what they are looking for, but without any specific aim in mind other than getting an overall impression of the candidate. With this form of interviewing, questions are meant to gather general information but do not seek evidence of any specific competencies or experience. The candidate is assessed on the general impression he or she leaves and is subjective.

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWING?

Competency-based interviews are significantly more objective and predictive, with numerous studies confirming that it is at least 55% predictive, compared to 10% for traditional interviews. This means that competency-based interviews give panel members much more sound evidence of how the candidate will actually perform in the job they are applying for.

60%		
50%		
40%		
30%		
20%		
10%		
0%		
	Traditional	Competency-based





# HOW IT WORKS: LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE

In any response from a candidate, you, as a member of the interview panel, are looking for evidence that the candidate has demonstrated the required competency in the past, to a level of mastery that he or she will need to demonstrate in the future.

The evidence you are looking for can best be assessed if a candidate provides a response that includes the main components outlined below, known as S.T.A.R. for short. STAR stands for Situation/Task, Action and Result.

## THE BASIC QUESTION STRUCTURE AND SEQUENCE

Question sequence	What you are looking for	Sample questions
<b>Situation/task</b> A specific instance in which the candidate has demonstrated the competency	Ask the candidate to provide an example of a situation he or she was in, or a task that needed to be accomplished. What you are looking for is a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what a candidate did in the past.	Describe a specific situation when you... Tell me about a time when you... In the past, have you ever....
<b>Action</b> What the candidate did to demonstrate the competency	This is the evidence you are looking for—what the candidate did, how he or she handled the situation. To make sure you get adequate inputs, you may need to use the probing questions at the right.	What did <b>you</b> do? How did <b>you</b> approach it? What was <b>your</b> role?
<b>Result</b> What results were achieved	Find out from the candidate what results he or she achieved, what was accomplished, and what the candidate learned from the experience.	What was the outcome? What did you learn? Have you applied what you learned?

This approach provides a useful question structure to the members of the interview panel. It can be equally helpful to candidates in terms of helping them to prepare for the interview.



# ASSESSING COMPETENCIES

Competencies are the sets of behavior that facilitate effective performance of work tasks. They best capture the 'softer' side of how individuals go about their work effectively and help us to get the right person for the job by focusing not only on qualifications and experience, but on demonstrated skills and behaviors.

In your role as a member of the interview panel, the FAO Competency Framework is an important tool to focus on the competencies you will be looking for.

## HOW TO USE THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK IN COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWING

The Competency Framework is an essential source document for you in preparing for an interview. It provides:

- A definition of the competency
- An explanation of why it is important
- A listing of concrete ways in which it can be demonstrated in the workplace.

Please refer to the competency framework booklet for the details.

All three sections of the Competency Framework - Values, Core Competencies and Leadership Competencies - should be reflected in the question structure the interview panel develops.



### Values

Commitment to FAO	Respect for all	Integrity and transparency
-------------------	-----------------	----------------------------

The demonstration of all three Values is a fundamental requirement for every staff member in all ways described in the Competency Framework.

The members of the interview panel will in principle not want to separately assess the FAO values because it is expected that every staff member will demonstrate them. The interview panel should only consider as noteworthy an obvious lack of values in response to other questions.

### Core competencies

Results focus	Teamwork	Communication	Building effective relationships	Knowledge sharing and continuous improvement
---------------	----------	---------------	----------------------------------	--

The assessment of Core Competencies, as defined by the Job Profile, should always be part of an interview for positions up to and including the P4 level. Not all of the above competencies need to be assessed in any given interview. However, the interview panel may want to give priority consideration to **Results Focus** and **Building Effective Relationships** as these provide the opportunity to assess both the 'harder' and the 'softer' side of an individual performance.

### Leadership competencies

Results focus	Leading, engaging and empowering others	Communication	Partnering and advocating	Knowledge sharing and continuous improvement	Strategic thinking
---------------	---	---------------	---------------------------	--	--------------------

For positions of P5 and above, the selection of the specific Leadership Competencies to include in the interview will depend upon the Job Profile. However, because of its special link to leadership effectiveness, the interview panel will want to give special consideration to **Leading, Engaging and Empowering Others** in the mix of questions to be addressed to a candidate.

# ASSESSING TECHNICAL SKILLS

Asking competency-based questions about Technical Skills provides the interview panel with the opportunity to assess the technical skills in a manner that is consistent with the principles of competency-based interviewing. Stated differently, they allow the panel to assess whether the technical skills have been demonstrated by the candidate in the past.

Technical Skills will vary from position to position, although there is one universally applicable competency, Applying Expertise that can be assessed in any interview.

Applying Expertise Definition	Behavioral Indicators
This competency is about applying the technical skills, knowledge and experience to one's work.	Can be 'generic' (consistently apply knowledge at work) or job specific (e.g. apply knowledge of Plant Production)

Beyond Applying Expertise, which, as we have seen above, has universal applicability for assessing technical expertise, other Technical skills can be inferred from the Duties and Responsibilities portion of the Vacancy Announcement as illustrated below.

Duties and Responsibilities	Technical Skills
Act as the lead focal point and principal policy adviser	Provision of policy advice
Plan and implement programmes	Programme planning and implementation
Draft responses to routine correspondence	Drafting of correspondence



Competency-based interview questions lend themselves very well to finding out more about someone's specific areas of expertise as well. Using the examples from above, a competency-based interview question for Technical Skills for a specific area of expertise could be:

Technical skill	Competency-based interview question	Follow-up questions
Provision of policy advice Ozone depleting substances	Tell us about a time when you successfully provided policy advice to reduce the use of ozone depleting substances.	Describe your role? What were the challenges you faced? How did you measure your success? What lesson learned from this experience?
Programme planning and implementation	Describe your role?	What did you do in order to create the plan? And to implement the programme? What were the outcomes of the programme? If you were asked to do this work again, what would you do differently?
Drafting of correspondence	Drafting of correspondence	What was the situation? Can you tell us what your role was? What outcome were you aiming to achieve? How did you go about it? How successful were you in achieving the planned outcome?





# PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW



# CREATING A COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTION

The competency interview questions are derived from the list of competencies and technical skills identified in the Vacancy Announcement.

Let's take the example of the **Results Focus competency**.

The interview panel has three options, as outlined below.

<b>Question based on the Definition</b>	<b>Definition:</b> This competency is taking accountability for the delivery of agreed results in service of FAO's strategic framework
	<b>Competency-based question:</b> Please describe a time when you took accountability for the delivery of agreed results.
<b>Question based on Single Indicator</b>	<b>Behavioral indicator:</b> Manages time and resources efficiently
	<b>Competency-based question:</b> Can you tell us about a situation when you had to manage resources efficiently to achieve an expected result within a specified deadline?
<b>Question based on Several Indicators</b>	<b>Behavioral indicators:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop an understanding of client needs</li><li>• Contribute to work planning, alerting those involved of potential obstacles</li><li>• Manages time and resources efficiently</li></ul>
	<b>Competency-based question:</b> Describe a situation where you had to plan and manage resources to achieve a challenging goal for your clients within a specified deadline?



# KNOWING WHICH QUESTIONS TO ASK

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

Step	What to do	Detailed action
1	Review the vacancy announcement	Review the entire vacancy announcement, with particular attention to the required <b>Technical Skills and Competencies</b>
2	Consult the <b>Competency Framework</b>	Based on the vacancy announcement, identify the competencies that are most important to be assessed.
3	Select a mix of competencies and technical skills	<b>For all jobs:</b> Select 3-4 important <b>Technical Skills</b> Select 3-4 competencies from either the <b>Core or Leadership Competencies</b> .
4	Draft Technical Skill competency-based questions	Draft three to four questions, including <b>Applying Expertise</b>
5	Draft Core or Leadership competency-based questions	Draft three to four questions on competency based questions.

## PRE-PANEL DISCUSSION

All questions should be prepared in advance and reviewed as part of the pre-interview panel discussion. At this time, the interview panel will agree to a single set of questions that will be addressed to all candidates and who should ask the question.

# BALANCING ACHIEVEMENTS AND ADVERSITY QUESTIONS

## BALANCING QUESTIONS

In preparing your list of questions, aim to balance questions that deliberately seek evidence about candidate achievements - results, innovation, team leadership - with questions that seek evidence about challenges or difficulties encountered.

It is important for you, as a member of the interview panel, to provide the candidate with ample opportunity to provide evidence of significant achievements and results, and how these were achieved. Sometimes, of course, a candidate may select to talk about a situation where, as a result of facing adversity, he or she was able to achieve a significant result. In case this does not happen, given the reality of organizational life, you should also intentionally seek evidence on how the candidate has faced adversity. Note that any competency lends itself to either type of question.

Competency	Achievement oriented question	Adversity oriented question
Communication	Describe a situation in the past when you were able to influence someone who was difficult to persuade to agree with your way of thinking on an important issue.	Describe a time when you were not able to influence someone who was difficult to persuade to agree with your way of thinking on an important issue.
Teamwork	Give us a specific example when you were able to proactively resolve a conflict within a team before it escalated.	Give us an example of a time when you were not able to satisfactorily resolve conflict with a member of your team.
Results focus	Tell us about a time when you used the resources assigned to you in the most cost effective way.	Describe a situation where you felt it was justifiable not to adhere to organizational rules and regulations.

# SAMPLE QUESTION MIX 1

TITLE: ASSISTANT, G5 LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

## Technical skills (depending on vacancy announcements)

1. Applying expertise (for example, of administrative procedures)
2. Coordinating and leading office support services

## Core competencies

1. Results Focus
2. Teamwork

## POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

<b>Applying expertise</b>	<p>Give us an example of a time when you have applied your knowledge of administrative procedures to solve a significant problem to the organization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did you become aware of the problem?</li><li>• What was the benefit to your organization of resolving the problem?</li><li>• How did you share your knowledge of how to address the problem with others?</li></ul>
<b>Coordinating support services</b>	<p>Give us an example of a time when you have coordinated support services to achieve a significant result.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What was the benefit to your organization of this example?</li><li>• What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?</li><li>• What are your lessons learned from this experience?</li></ul>
<b>Results focus</b>	<p>In your current position, what is the most significant result you have achieved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What made it significant?</li><li>• What challenges did you face? How did you overcome them?</li><li>• What was the outcome? What did you learn from it?</li></ul>
<b>Teamwork</b>	<p>Tell us about a time when it was difficult for you to be supportive of a team member based on differences in your work styles or work habits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did you handle the situation?</li><li>• With the benefit of hindsight, would you handle the situation differently?</li></ul>

Competency-Based Interviewing / Preparing for the interview | 13



# SAMPLE QUESTION MIX 2

TITLE: SENIOR ANIMAL HEALTH OFFICER, P5 LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

## Technical skills (depending on the vacancy announcement)

1. Applying expertise (of animal health)
2. Planning and implementing a programme (for the development of animal health)
3. Providing policy advice to achieve an important organizational goal

## Leadership competencies

1. Partnering and advocating
2. Leading, engaging and empowering others



## POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

<b>Applying expertise</b>	<p>Give us an example of a time when you have applied a best practice in animal health in your work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did you become aware of its being considered best practice?</li><li>• What was the benefit to your organization of the application of this principle?</li><li>• How do you stay informed of best practices in your area?</li></ul>
<b>Programme planning</b>	<p>Describe a key programme to promote animal health that you have planned and implemented.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What challenges did you face? How did you overcome them?</li><li>• What was the contribution of the programme to animal health?</li><li>• In hindsight, what would you do differently if you had to do it over?</li></ul>
<b>Partnering and Advocating</b>	<p>Identify a time when you developed or contributed to the development of a partnership that contributed to achieving important outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why was the development of partnership important in the situation?</li><li>• How did you go about identifying the partner in question?</li><li>• What steps did you take to develop the partnership?</li><li>• What did you learn about yourself in the process?</li></ul>
<b>Leading, Engaging and Empowering Others</b>	<p>Identify a time when you had to motivate and inspire a team to achieve a result.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What approach did you use to motivate the team?</li><li>• To what extent were you successful in your attempt?</li><li>• What was the impact of your efforts on the performance of the team?</li></ul>



# OPEN AND CLOSED QUESTIONS

In a competency-based interview, the great majority of questions should be open-ended or 'open' questions, with only a few 'closed' questions, as needed to clarify points of fact.

<b>Open Questions</b> The most valuable type of question for a competency-based interview	<p>This type of question is the one that you will use most frequently in a competency-based interview. It cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no", or with a specific piece of information. This type of question gives the candidate scope to respond as he or she feels is appropriate.</p>
	<p>Your lead (or first) question for any competency will generally be an open-ended question phrased as a statement which requires a response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe a situation when you faced a major problem you had to resolve.</li><li>• Give us a specific example that would best illustrate your team leadership skills.</li></ul>
	<p>Follow-up or probing questions will generally be open-ended questions phrased as actual questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did your actions help the team or its members in overcoming any challenges?</li><li>• What did you personally contribute to this outcome?</li><li>• How were you feeling at the time?</li><li>• Why did you decide to take this action?</li></ul>
<b>Closed questions</b> This type of question should only be used when it is essential to clarify a point of fact.	<p>A closed question can normally be answered using a simple 'yes' or 'no', or a specific simple piece of information.</p> <p>Was this the result you set out to achieve?</p> <p>Did you complete this project within the allowable budget?</p> <p>Were you able to complete the assignment within the deadline?</p>

When preparing the interview questions, remember to keep them short and simple. Long questions, or questions asking for several kinds of information, will confuse candidates.

# QUESTIONS TO AVOID

The following types of questions should not be used during a competency-based interview.

<b>Leading questions</b>	<p>This type of question should not be used because it suggests a response, either positive or negative, to a candidate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You consulted your supervisor prior to taking this course of action, didn't you?</li><li>• Weren't you aware that this was in direct contravention of organizational policy?</li><li>• You do believe in respect for diversity, don't you?</li></ul>
<b>Hypothetical questions</b>	<p>These questions encourage a candidate to describe what he/she would do if faced with a particular situation. They should be avoided because they do not ask the candidate about past behavior.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How would you manage an under-performing staff member?</li><li>• How would you handle a conflict between two staff members reporting to you?</li><li>• What do you think would be the most significant challenge in the job you are?</li></ul>
<b>Comparative Questions</b>	<p>This type of question should be avoided because it encourages the candidate to compare differences in past experiences, rather than to describe past behavior.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Which would you say was the most stressful experience you have had?</li><li>• How do the responsibilities in your current job compare to those you have had in the past?</li></ul>



### Questions that Invade privacy

Avoid any question that invades the privacy of a candidate or any staff member of the organization.

- Are you married? Do you have children? Are you pregnant? Do you plan on having children?
- Who do you plan to have watching your children while you work? Is your spouse employed, and if so, where? What does your spouse think of your taking the job?
- What are your religious practices?
- How many days did you miss because of illness last year? Do you have any disabilities?

If the function requires knowledge of a candidate's personal status in relation to mission travel, (although this should be in very rare instances), the same question must be asked of all candidates. For further information, please consult Human Resources.







# CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW





# PRESENTING YOURSELF

As a member of the interview panel, you represent FAO and how you present yourself has an important impact on the outcome of the interview. This is especially important in FAO as the majority of interviews are done by video conference. The following are some suggestions to help you be at your best.

## BE PREPARED

Make sure that you come to the interview well prepared. This means that you:

- Have ensured that the candidate meets the minimum requirements for the position
- Are familiar with the candidate's Personal Profile Form and current job
- Have participated in a pre-panel discussion to finalize a list of questions
- Have reviewed the Job Profile for the position in question
- Have ensured a good mix of questions
- Are aware of which question(s) you will be expected to ask
- Have ensured that the questions are appropriate to the responsibility level of the position.
- Have prepared follow-up or probing questions



# PUT THE CANDIDATE AT EASE

Even candidates who have had many interviews find the thought of a job interview stressful— as it impact their career. Perhaps just as important for many is the feeling that their self worth is at stake. Every candidate would like to do well in the interview. So what can you do to create a comfortable environment?

- Greet the candidate warmly
- Make sure that he or she feels welcome and is comfortably seated
- Make sure to introduce yourself (and other panelists) to the candidate
- Explain the goal of the interview and the process that you will be using
- Indicate to the candidate the likely length of the interview
- Explain that you will be taking notes in order to have a record of what was said
- Explain what the candidate should do if a question is unclear, or if the candidate would like to have it repeated.

## **BODY LANGUAGE**

Maintain neutral, professional body language at all times during the interview.

Do not in any way indicate whether you thought a response was 'good' or 'bad'. Simply record what the candidate says and move on to the next question.



# STAYING ON TRACK

The most important challenge you are likely to face during the interview is to keep the candidate on track, allowing you to collect as much evidence as possible of how the candidate has demonstrated the required competencies in the past. Do this by preparing follow-up or probing questions.

## **FOCUS ON WHAT SEEMS SIGNIFICANT**

After you have asked your lead question asking the candidate to describe a particular situation, follow up with questions on specific aspects of that situation. Ask questions like:

- Tell me more about how you were involved
- You mentioned...tell me more about that
- What was your role in...?
- What part of the project did you lead?

## **KEEP THE CANDIDATE FOCUSED ON ACTUAL PAST EVENTS**

Keep your follow-up questions brief, specific, and in the past tense.

- What did you do then?
- What were you thinking when that happened?
- What did you say?
- What led up to that decision?



### **KEEP THE CANDIDATE FOCUSED ON HIS OR HER ROLE IN THOSE SITUATIONS**

If the candidate talks about 'we', ask 'What was your role?'

If the candidate is talking about generalities, or going into too much detail, redirect the candidate to specifics by saying something like, 'What did you do in this situation?'

Acknowledge reluctance of speaking about themselves, but emphasize that the candidate's role is important.

### **PROBE FOR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS BEHIND ACTIONS**

Questions about thoughts, feelings and reactions can provide information about what a candidate values or how he or she is motivated, and will assist you in evaluating behaviors expected in connection with specific competencies.

- How did you reach that conclusion?
- How did you know what to do in that situation?
- What was your reaction to that?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- How did you feel during the process?
- What did you find satisfying/frustrating about that?

### **INTERRUPT IF NECESSARY**

Don't be afraid to interrupt a candidate. Remember, you want the candidate to have an opportunity to present themselves well, so stopping them when they are talking about something that is not relevant will help them focus.

# PROBLEM SOLVING

In addition to needing to keep the candidate on track, you are likely to encounter a number of other challenges during a competency-based interview. You may find it helpful to use the following approaches.

If the candidate...	You might want to try these approaches...
<b>Appears uncomfortable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start the interview with a warm-up question to help the candidate feel comfortable with the members of the interview panel.</li></ul>
<b>Selects what appears to be an insignificant situation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Politely interject to direct the candidate to a more pertinent example</li><li>• When he or she has finished, request an additional example that would illustrate the point</li></ul>
<b>Selects an 'old' (more than 5 years ago) example</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If the situation is about a team/interpersonal conflict, do not intervene, as these may only have occurred infrequently. At the end, make sure to ask, 'What did you learn from this?'</li><li>• If the situation is about a significant result, achievement or innovation, ask right away whether the candidate could identify a more recent example</li></ul>
<b>Does not select any examples from his or her current job</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If the candidate has been in the job for less than a year, and is very new to the UN/FAO, or has had an unclear assignment/job description for some time, do not intervene+</li><li>• If the candidate has been in the job for more than a year, and you are getting close to the end of your questions, when a candidate finishes describing a situation, ask if he or she could also identify a more recent example</li></ul>



<b>Does not mention any result / outcome of the situation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simply ask what the result was</li><li>• If it is not clear what the candidate's role was in achieving the result, make sure to ask, 'What was your role in achieving this result?'</li><li>• Consider asking, 'What did you learn from this?'</li><li>• If the candidate is really struggling to define a result, suggest he/she provide a different situation/example that does have a definable result or outcome</li></ul>
<b>Responds with a confusing answer, without a clear line of thought</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure you ask all the planned questions—those that would prompt a candidate to describe the SITUATION-ACTION-OUTCOME at what appears to be the most appropriate moment</li><li>• DO NOT, however, go so far as to attempt to help the candidate to provide a more coherent response</li></ul>
<b>Appears very 'rehearsed', very familiar with the methodology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This offers an excellent opportunity for you to make full use of probing questions, exploring in detail not only what the candidate did—the action he or she took—but also what he or she was thinking at the time and how he or she felt about it</li></ul>
<b>If the candidate repeatedly uses the same situation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask the candidate to select a different situation/example</li></ul>
<b>If the candidate does not answer the question</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intervene to help put the candidate on the right track. Repeat the question with a higher level of explanation of what you are looking for, but do not do this more than once.</li></ul>
<b>If the candidate has no response/ cannot think of a situation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allow the candidate adequate time to identify a situation. If none is forthcoming, try once to slightly coach the candidate. If there is still no response, you will have to rate the response as Weak-no evidence provided.</li></ul>

# TAKING NOTES

By recording, both what the candidate said and your observations of the interview, you create a solid foundation to evaluate the interview response. You can set up a side-by-side format for yourself or use the Personal Interview Evaluation Template that you will find in the next section, to practice interviewing and note taking.

**QUESTION: DESCRIBE A KEY INNOVATION YOU INTRODUCED IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION DESPITE SOME RISKS.**

What was said	Observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>the way I lead a team</i></li><li>• <i>team was dispirited</i></li><li>• <i>I got to know everybody, then had a retreat</i></li><li>• <i>developed a vision of what to do differently</i></li><li>• <i>made a contract with them- things we agreed to</i></li><li>• <i>achievement was a harmonious</i></li><li>• <i>and productive work environment- we're all happy</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Not sure this qualifies</i></li><li>• <i>as 'innovation'...?</i></li><li>• <i>Nothing innovative here</i></li><li>• <i>No mention of risk</i></li><li>• <i>Would have been better to hear about</i></li><li>• <i>the results that the team achieved</i></li></ul>

Referring to the example above (which is, in reality, just an extract of actual notes taken), you would probably give a low rating to the candidate on this particular question. By recording both what was said and your in-the-moment reactions, you would easily be able to justify this low rating. The observation about 'no mention of risk' is very important, as it a kind of observation that you might otherwise forget when it comes to evaluating a candidate.





# EVALUATING THE RESPONSES



# PERSONAL INTERVIEW EVALUATION TEMPLATE

Name of Candidate \_\_\_\_\_

Competency or Technical Skill \_\_\_\_\_

Question asked \_\_\_\_\_

	Observations/comments
Situation / task	
Actions taken	
Outcome/ results achieved	

Circle the appropriate rating (see next page for full definitions).

W	ND	C	E
Weak	Needs Development	Capable	Exceptional



# EVALUATING RESPONSES

## NO 'RIGHT' OR 'WRONG' ANSWERS

In competency-based interviewing, there are no right or wrong answers, only strong or weak ones in terms of the evidence a candidate has provided that he or she has demonstrated the competency in question in the past.

When reviewing the notes of the interviews, the following points will help you decide how to evaluate the responses:

- Was the answer complete? Did it contain the STAR elements: Situation/Task, Action, and Result?
- Was it a significant, relevant example that demonstrated the competency required?
- In the providing the answer, did the candidate demonstrate acceptance of responsibility, capacity for learning and for applying the lessons learned from the experience?



## THE EVALUATION SCALE

Candidates are evaluated on every individual competency, on a standardized scale, as indicated below.

<b>Exceptional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The candidate identified a meaningful situation that provided strong and consistent demonstration of the competency and/or technical skill in question.</li><li>• The candidate's action demonstrated a wide range of behaviors associated with the competency, even in an adverse situation.</li><li>• The outcome/results achieved were meaningful to the organization.</li></ul>
<b>Capable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The candidate provided solid positive evidence of having demonstrated the competency or technical/functional skill</li><li>• The candidate demonstrated several effective behaviors, with limited evidence of ineffective behaviors</li><li>• The outcome achieved was valuable to the organization</li></ul>
<b>Needs Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The candidate provided limited positive evidence of having demonstrated the competency and/or technical skill.</li><li>• The candidate's action demonstrated only minimal facets of the competency and/or technical skill; with a few ineffective behaviors.</li><li>• The outcome was of limited value to the organization.</li></ul>
<b>Weak</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The candidate provided no positive evidence of having demonstrated the competency and/or technical skill</li><li>• No effective behaviors were demonstrated.</li><li>• The outcome or results were not of value to the organization.</li></ul>





# SAMPLE QUESTIONS





## CORE COMPETENCIES

<b>Results focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe the most significant result you have achieved in your current position</li><li>• Give us an example of when you have set and achieved a challenging performance goal</li><li>• Tell us about a time when you identified an opportunity to improve current processes</li><li>• Describe a time when you initiated an important or key project/programme and ensured its implementation</li></ul>
<b>Teamwork</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Please provide us with an example of when you found it difficult to work in a team because of differences you had with other members and how you dealt with the situation.</li><li>• Tell us about a time when your contribution to a team allowed the team to achieve a significant results</li></ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe a time when it was important for you to clearly communicate an important message</li><li>• Describe a situation where you had to explain a complex procedure to a new staff member or someone who was not familiar with it</li><li>• Can you give an example of how you have had to persuade a difficult person to agree with your way of thinking on a substantive issue</li></ul>
<b>Building effective relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give us an example of when you had make significant efforts to improve an existing difficult relationship with a colleague</li><li>• Describe for us the most effective work relationship you have developed with a supervisor/a team member/ a colleague</li><li>• Describe a time when your ability to build effective relationships contributed to the development of an important partnership, internal or external to FAO</li></ul>
<b>Knowledge sharing and continuous improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give us an example of when you have, at your own initiative, taken action to enhance your knowledge of an important aspect of your work</li><li>• Describe a time when knowledge you have shared has enabled others to achieve results.</li></ul>





## LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

<b>Results focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe the most significant result you have achieved (in your current position)</li><li>• Give us an example of when you lead and facilitated work planning to achieve a significant result.</li></ul>
<b>Leading, engaging and empowering others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Please provide us with an example of when you provided a clear sense of purpose and direction to others, enabling them to contribute effectively to the achievement of results.</li><li>• Tell us about a time when you empowered others while at the same time holding them accountable for achieving results.</li><li>• Please provide an example of when you motivated and inspired a team to achieve results.</li></ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe a time when it was important for you to clearly communicate an important message to an audience</li><li>• Describe a situation where you encouraged others to share their views, listened to what they had to say, and adjusted your own thinking in response</li><li>• Can you give an example of a time when you had to persuade an important stakeholder to agree with FAO's perspective on a key substantive issue</li></ul>
<b>Partnering and advocating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give us an example of when you were able to forge an important partnership between FAO and an external stakeholder</li><li>• Describe for an example of when you approached a key negotiation with the explicit goal of achieving a win/win outcome</li><li>• Describe a time when you were able to advocate persuasively for FAO's vision and mandate</li></ul>
<b>Knowledge sharing and continuous improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give us an example of when you have, at your own initiative, taken action to enhance your knowledge of an important aspect of your work</li><li>• Describe a time when you have shared with others knowledge that has enabled them to perform more effectively in their jobs.</li><li>• Give us an example of a time when you have lead the process of improving or changing an important process</li></ul>
<b>Strategic thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide us with an example of when you were in a complex and confusing situation and had to decide on a clear path of action</li><li>• Give us an example of a time when you have involved others in the selection of the best course of action, guiding them to weigh impact of different options</li><li>• Describe a time when you had to make a difficult decision, one which was not necessarily supported by all key stakeholders in the situation</li></ul>















**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**

