

# HOW TO **PREPARE**

reo+group

**Competency Based Interview**

---

# COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWING & BEHAVIOURAL STYLE INTERVIEWING

## WHAT IS A COMPETENCY?

A competency is the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. It is an underlying characteristic of an individual that has been shown to predict outstanding performance.

## WHAT IS COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWING (CBI)?

CBI assesses "behaviour". The term "behaviour" is used to describe a person's past actions and accomplishments, as well as their reactions and actions in situations.

Many HR practitioners consider CBI to be the most proven and accurate interview based selection system available based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past behaviour and performance in a similar situation.



# TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW VS. BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW

**Traditional interview:** The interviewee will be asked a series of questions which typically have straight forward answers such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "Describe a typical work week."

**Behavioral interview:** The employer's questions will be designed to gather evidence of whether the candidate has the specific skills they require for the role. The interviewer will want to know how the interviewee handled a past situation, rather than what they might do in the future.

# HAS CBI REPLACED THE TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW?

Competency based interviewing does not replace the traditional interview, it is simply a way of making it more effective.

A review and evaluation of the candidate's resume, references, past experience, social interaction, as well as your own personal judgement will remain important aspects of any interview.

However, incorporating questions that probe job-related competencies based on actual and proven behaviour can only add to the accuracy of selection and help capture information that is essential to recruiting the right person.

## CBI HELPS TO MINIMISE BIAS FOR A FAIRER ASSESSMENT

The Competency Based Interview (CBI) process was developed as a response to equal opportunity issues in the context of a litigious

society. Human resources specialists, mainly from major corporations most vulnerable to these issues, looked for means to demonstrate that candidates were judged:

- on the same criteria
- only on their true ability to do the job
- on impartial criteria

CBI answered these questions focusing only on job-related information that reflects a candidate's demonstrable abilities. It eliminates inconsistent selection criteria and minimises the impact of individual biases and assumptions.

# ESTABLISHING JOB FIT

CBI has a clear focus on establishing 'job fit', matching the candidate and the job not only in terms of 'can do' but also in terms of 'will do'. The steps below outline the process.

## ESTABLISH THE REQUIRED COMPETENCIES

Job fit can only be assessed if there is a clear understanding not only of the job functions but also of the competencies needed for superior or, at least, effective performance.

These competencies are generally obtained through a process of job analysis, which examines critical incidents that have occurred and is indicative of success or failure in a job.

## DISTINGUISH BETWEEN ESSENTIAL AND DESIRABLE COMPETENCIES

As a basis for recruitment a distinction is made between competencies that are 'essential' (those required to effectively perform immediately in the position) and those that are 'desirable' (may be developed over time although could distinguish between close candidates for the position).

## GATHER EVIDENCE OF BEHAVIOUR

The primary objective of the interviewer is to gather significant behavioural examples from the candidate's past experience that relate to the targeted competencies. This will allow an effective evaluation of the candidate's ability to perform.

## LOOK FOR CONTRARY EVIDENCE

To establish a pattern of behaviour it is important to search for possible contrary evidence in order to accurately assess the candidate's true level of competency.

## ENSURE BEHAVIOUR IS RELEVANT

Effective interviewers will concentrate on relevant behaviour by controlling discussion on job related topics that pinpoint performance against targeted competencies.





# CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

The CBI is divided into three sections, all-crucial to the interview process. Candidates are asked to describe their behaviour according to:

- the situation in which it occurred
- the action they took
- the outcome

A simple way to remember this is the SAO process.



# THE SAO PROCESS:

SITUATION:

ACTION:

OUTCOME:

## SITUATION

The candidate is asked to detail a situation in which they have been called upon to exhibit a certain kind of behaviour.

## ACTION

Here the candidate details how they set about handling the situation. It's important that you probe to find out about the full process undertaken.

## OUTCOME

Candidates must demonstrate specifically why they feel the outcome was successful. They ideally include independent feedback by someone other than themselves. If a "vague" answer is received, probe beneath the answer.

# SOME EXAMPLES



## SOME WAYS IN WHICH WE COMMENCE A CBI QUESTION INCLUDE:

- “Describe a time when.....”
- “Give an example of a time when.....”
- “Describe the most.....”
- “Tell me about a situation when..... “

## SPECIFIC SAO BREAKDOWN MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

### Situation

“Tell me about a situation when  
you had to deliver some  
unwelcome news.”

### Action

“How did you go about  
breaking the news?”

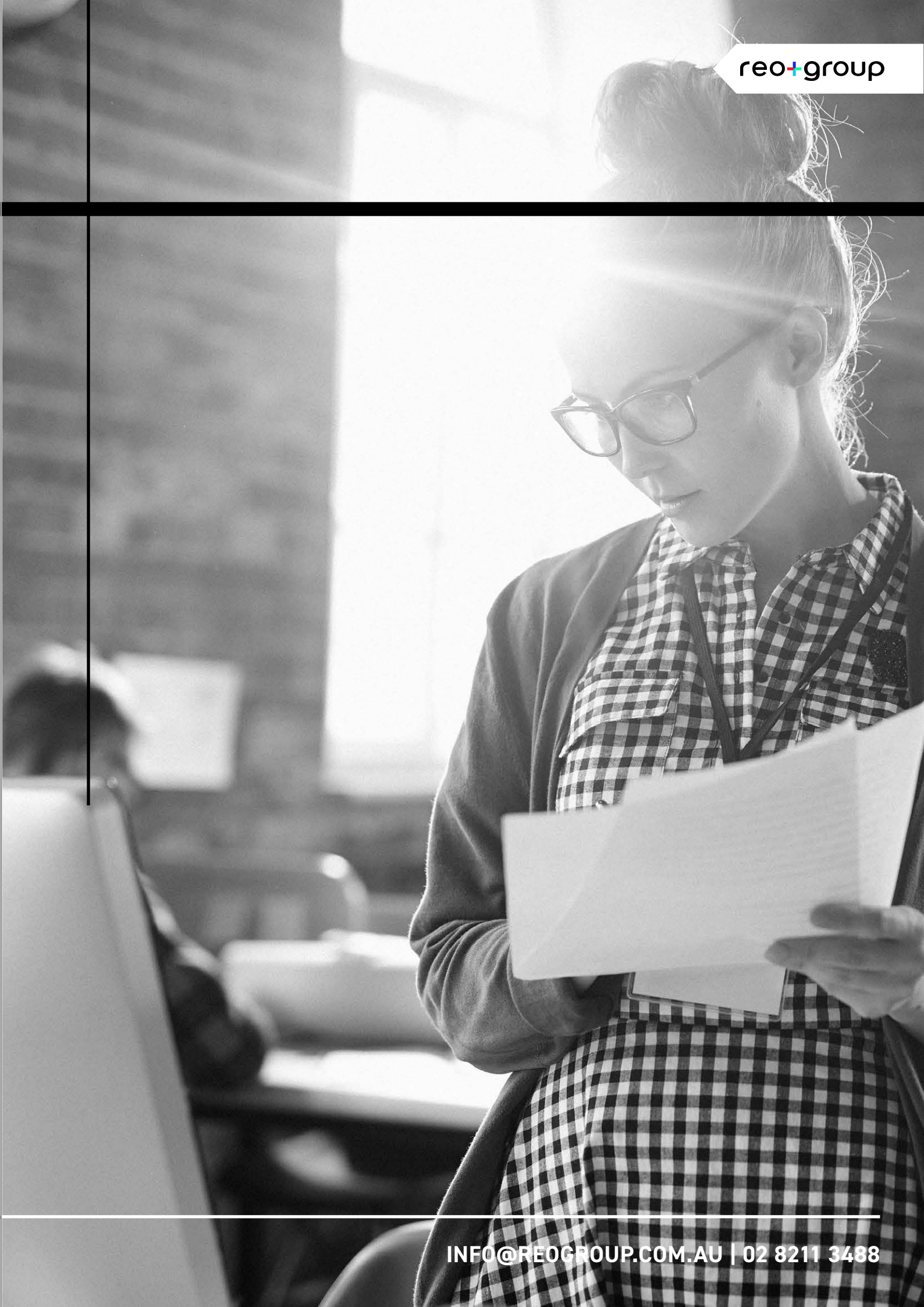
### Outcome

“What was the result?  
How did they take it?”

### Probing

It may be necessary to probe with  
additional, relevant questions at all  
stages of the process. For example,  
you might ask:

- “What were you thinking  
at that point?”
- “Tell me more about your  
meeting with that person?”
- “Lead me through your  
decision-making process?”

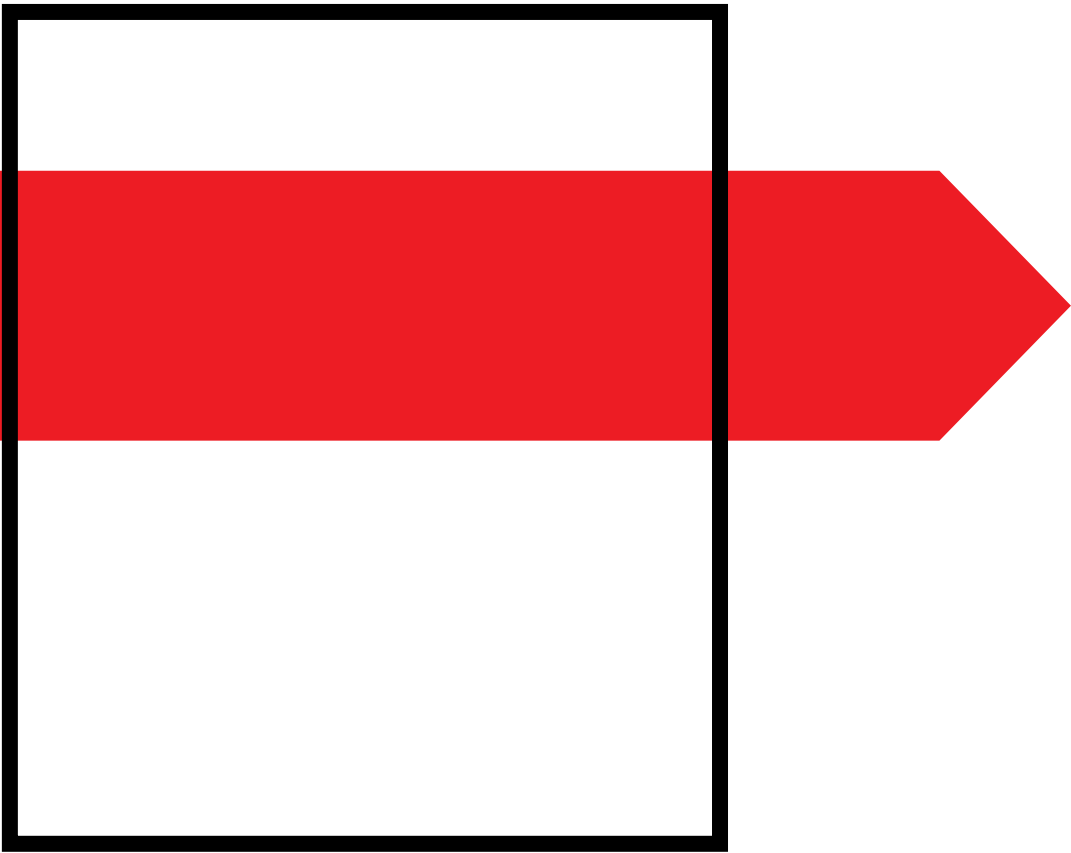




# QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

CBI – Question Example (Given me an example of where you have used your own initiative to improve a process, what did you do and what was the outcome).

SITUATION	ACTION	OUTCOME
Detail what the situation was that you faced  Detail why this was such an issue	Describe specifically the actions that you took to address this situation. This might be 5-10 steps	Detail what the result was of your actions and how it fixed the situation.  Make this answer dollars, time and people focused



## COMPETENCIES TESTED IN AN INTERVIEW

### Self-Motivated and Self Directed

- Tell me about two situations where you worked on important projects /business initiatives without supervision. How did you perform in those situations?
- Tell me about two situations where you acted independently in addressing pressing business problems or capitalised on urgent business situations.

### Enthusiasm

- Tell me about two situations where you worked at a fast pace for sustained periods of time. How did you adjust to the increased pace?
- What three professional activities do you find energising about your current position? What two professional activities seem to drain you? Explain why for each of these responses.

### Persistence and Determination

- Tell me about two major challenges you've faced in your life. How did you address each of these challenges? What did you learn from these experiences?
- Tell me about two projects or business initiatives you have worked on in which you encountered major obstacles. How did you respond?

### Confidence and Self Assurance

- Describe two specific situations where you worked outside your comfort zone to achieve professional objectives. (Be specific) What was the outcome?
- Give me five adjectives you would use to describe yourself and specific professional situations where these adjectives applied. (Be specific)

### Adaptability to Change

- Discuss two times in your career when your job changed dramatically. (Be specific) How did you respond?
- Describe two situations when you were unexpectedly assigned to perform new duties with different expectations. (Be specific) How did you respond?

### Team Orientation

- Give me two examples of times you worked as a member of a team. (Be specific) What were the team goals? What were your responsibilities or roles on those teams?
- Tell me about two times you modified personal objectives in order to help your team. (Be specific)
- How did the team respond? Would you change your decisions?
- Have you ever been associated with a successful team? What dynamics helped make the team successful? What role did you play in the team's success?

### Ability to Exercise Authority, Take Ownership

- Have you ever had to go against general feelings or policies to accomplish a goal? Tell me about it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an uncertain situation.
- What are the occasions in which you feel that you must consult your manager before taking action?
- What kind of decisions do you make in your present job? Give me some examples of major decisions.
- Describe some recent work related problems and the actions you took to solve them.
- What are the most difficult decisions you have made over the last 6 months?
- What made them difficult?
- How have you gone about making important decisions affecting your career?
- Describe some decisions you made without all the pertinent information. Why did you make these decisions? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about the riskiest decision you have made. How long did it take you to gather the information to make the decision? How long after that to make the final decision? What were the results?

### Achievement / Drive

- All jobs have frustrations and problems. Describe some examples of specific job tasks or assignments that have been dissatisfying to you. Exactly why were they dissatisfying?
- Can you give me some examples of experiences in your current job that are most satisfying to you? Why are they so satisfying?
- What would be the best example of you giving a project or piece of work your absolute best effort and being disappointed by the outcome? What would you do differently next time?
- What steps have you taken in the last year to improve your own performance?
- Give me an example of when you worked the hardest and felt the greatest sense of achievement?
- Describe your involvement in a task or project that had to be done within an agreed time frame and be of an excellent work standard.
- What are you standards of success on your job? What have you done to meet these standards?
- Tell me about a time when you weren't very pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?
- What do you consider to be the most important contributions your department has made to the organisation? What was your role?
- In your position, how do you define doing a good job? How do you know when you succeed?
- How do you cope with unrealistic objectives? What are your feelings? What is your strategy?

### Analytical Thinking

- Describe the biggest problems you've faced in the last 6 months. How did you handle them?
- Describe any significant ideas that you have conceived in the past year. How did you know that they were needed and would work? Were they used? Did they work?
- Describe your most recent task/project. What was your involvement, how did you set about working on the project.
- Describe a specific task you found especially challenging. What was it about the task you found difficult? How did you overcome the difficulty? What was the result?

### Conceptual Thinking

- Describe a situation that required careful thought on your behalf?
- Describe how you went about identifying user needs on a particular project.

### Concern for Order

- Tell me about a time when a client/customer was not getting the service they deserved from you or your organisation.
- Describe a specific task you found especially difficult to accomplish. How did you overcome the difficulty?
- Tell me about a time when you had to modify a system to enhance its efficiency. How did you become aware of the inefficiencies? How did you take steps to correct it? What problems did you encounter and how were they solved? What was the outcome?

### Customer Service Orientation

- Describe a time that illustrates how you built a relationship with a client.
- How did you go about the process of identifying client requirements? What was your specific role?
- Sometimes we are not on the same wavelength as a customer. Describe a time a customer wanted something different from what you had in mind. What did they want? How did it differ from what you wanted?
- How did you overcome the differences? What was the result?
- What have you done in the last 6 months to foster effective customer relationships? How do you know if you are meeting your customer's needs?
- In your current job, can you give me some examples of where you have exceeded the expectations of your customers?
- Sometimes, customers have very unrealistic expectations. Can you describe a time when you have had to persuade a customer to rethink their expectations and help them consider alternatives? What was the outcome?

### Develop Others

- What have you done to develop the people in your current team?
- If you left/were promoted tomorrow, do you have a replacement? What did you do to help develop him/her?
- What are the major training and development needs of the people in your department? How did you identify them? What are you going to do about them?
- What techniques have you found most useful in developing subordinates? How did you implement them?
- To what extent did subordinates participate in decisions you made? Why?

### Attention to Detail

- We've all had occasions when we were working on something that just "slipped through the cracks". Can you give me some examples of when this happened to you? What was the cause? What were the results?
- Describe your system for controlling errors in your work.
- Can you give me some examples of times when you found errors in your work? What were the causes? What were the results? How did you handle this?
- We've all had times when we just couldn't get everything done on time. When and why has this happened to you?

### Flexibility

- Describe a situation in which your initial attempt to gain someone's support and co-operation failed? Did you try again? What was your approach?
- Tell me about a situation in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes in organisational priorities. What was the impact of the change on you?
- Which bosses have you worked for most effectively and why?
- Tell me about a situation in your job where you had to abruptly change what you were doing. What did you do? How did it affect you?
- What kind of problems did you run into switching from position to position (contract work)?

### Information Seeking

- Describe a problem you have encountered at work in the last 6 months. How did you go about rectifying it? What was your involvement?
- Tell me about the most important decision you have made. How did you go about gathering information to help you make a decision?

### Initiative

- What changes have you tried to implement in your area of responsibility? What have you done to get them underway?
- Give me some examples of you doing more than required in your job.
- Tell me about some projects you generated on your own.
- Describe your involvement in a task or project that had to be done within an agreed time frame and be of an excellent work standard.
- Describe a situation in which you found the results were not up to budget/company expectation.
- What did you do to rectify the matter?

### Innovation

- What are some of the most imaginative things you have done in your present position?
- Can you think of a situation you had to handle in which old solutions did not work? What did you do to handle it?
- What did you do differently than your predecessors in this position?
- What kinds of problems have people recently called on you to solve? Tell me about your contribution to solving the problem.

Interpersonal Skills /  
Communication

- What are some of the biggest or most demanding groups you have made presentations to? How did you prepare for it? Tell me about your presentation style?
- Could you give me an example of a presentation you have made to a senior management or client group? Describe how the information was prepared and presented.
- What kinds of writing have you done? Can you give me some examples (this is a follow –up question)? How did you approach it, who was the audience and what sort of reaction did you get?
- Can you give me an example of a technical document that you have written for lay people? How long did this take you to complete.
- Describe how you documented your last project. How did you structure it? How long did it take?
- What was your involvement specifically? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about the time when you felt the greatest satisfaction from your documentation or from a report your manager commended you on. What were they impressed by? Why did you feel especially satisfied?

Persuasiveness and  
Negotiating Ability

- What are some of the best ideas you have ever sold to a superior/peer? What was your approach?
- Describe a major issue that you have had to fight for. How did you go about it? Why was it important to you?
- Give me an example of a situation where you have had an impact and been able to influence a group of people to do something.
- Describe your involvement in a task/project with a tight time frame and of high standard. What was your specific involvement? What was the outcome?

Team Work

- Tell me about some of the toughest groups that you have had to get co-operation from. What did you do?
- How often do you attend meetings with your peers? What role did you play in the last meeting?
- What are some of the most difficult one-on-one meetings that you have had with other members of your company? Why were they difficult?
- We’ve all had to deal with difficult people. Give me some examples of when this has happened to you? Why was it difficult? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a new policy or idea you recently implemented which was considerably different from the standard procedure. What approach did you take to get others to go along with the idea?
- Give me a situation where you have had to influence a group of people to do something? What did you do to get what you wanted from the group? What were the satisfactions and disappointments?

Tenacity

- What were the biggest problems you encountered in your previous job? How did you handle them? What was the outcome?
- Describe a situation in which you gave all, but failed.
- Describe your involvement in a task or project that had to be done in a specific time frame and be of excellent standard. How did you go about it? What was the outcome?
- Can you relate some experiences in which you felt you gained something because you persisted for a length of time?
- What are some of the biggest obstacles you have had to overcome to get where you are today?
- Can you relate some experiences in which you felt you persisted too long?
- How could the situation have been improved?

Tolerance for Stress

- What kinds of pressure do you feel in your job? How do you deal with them?
- What are the highest pressure situations you have experienced in recent years? How did you cope with them?
- Tell me about a time when you have had to deal with a very angry customer? What did you do?
- How often do you find it necessary to take work home? Why?
- What conditions are most frustrating you in your current role?
- How do you relax or get away from it all (relieve work tensions) after a hard day?



reo+group

Sydney | Paramatta | Adelaide  
[www.reogroup.com.au](http://www.reogroup.com.au) | ABN: 92 620 166 127