



**You must read this booklet before  
completing your application form**

# **Guidance on writing competency statements for a job application**

# How to complete the competency statements for your application

## The application form

The application form you have been asked to complete contains a number of sections in which you are expected to give important personal details, e.g. a summary of your work history, educational qualifications etc.

There is also space for you to give evidence showing that you have the knowledge, skills, abilities and other personal qualities needed to do the job. These are referred to as *competencies*.

In the space or spaces provided on the application form you will need to explain, in your own words, how, when and where you have put these competencies into practice. That is, *you must describe the actions that you took*.

It is not enough to have shown that you have relevant experience. You must show evidence that you have experience of putting into use the particular skills, knowledge, abilities and personal qualities that are needed for the post for which you are applying.

You will have been given a list of the competencies appropriate to the post. Each competency will have been broken down into a number of statements describing what the competency consists of. Take some time now to read through this list of competencies and see how each one is described.

## What is a competency?

As you will have seen from the list of competencies that you have been provided with, a competency is a set of actions that someone must be capable of carrying out in order to perform well in some aspect of a job.

### Example:

#### **Delivering a Customer Focused Service**

- Develops and delivers a customer-led service by:

#### **Responding to customer needs**

Seeks to understand customer requirements and deliver services that are responsive to diverse customer needs.

#### **Providing excellent customer service**

Meets customer needs through excellent customer service.

## **How do I prove that I am capable of showing these competencies by filling in a form?**

When completing the form you are asked to describe a particular situation or situations from the past where you displayed all or most of the activities making up a particular competency or set of competencies. By describing what you did, how you did it, why you did it and the affect this had you show the assessors who will be marking the form that you understand what is required and that you are capable of doing it.

By quoting examples of why and how you demonstrated the skills, knowledge and other qualities in the past you show that you have the potential to apply them in a new job in the future.

It is not sufficient proof to say that you have had relevant experience, you must show evidence of making a success of that experience by describing how you acted in particular situations and what the effect of those actions was.

Traditional application forms and CVs require you to list your experiences (such as qualifications, training or jobs which you have had) and sometimes to list your achievements. They don't ask you describe *how you achieved success*.

An application form that requires you to describe the way that you behaved in certain situations and the effect that this had gives assessors the opportunity to judge the extent to which you are capable of applying the same behaviours in a new job.

## **How will the competency statements be marked?**

In order to understand how best to do justice to your abilities it is important to know how your competency statements will be assessed.

### **Describing the situation**

Firstly the assessor needs to know what the situation was when you carried out the relevant activities i.e. you need to set the scene.

#### **Example:**

"I was a member of a team of four shop assistants selling stationery in a large department store. The supervisor had asked me to organise a special promotion of a new range of products. I had to do this while continuing to do my normal job in a busy section of the store. I had one week to prepare for the event".

This allows the assessor, at a glance, to place the activities in a particular setting and to know what was expected of you.

The assessor will not give you any marks for this part of your statement so keep it a brief and to the point. You will lose marks however if you don't set the scene clearly.

This is not the whole picture however. In the rest of the statement you also need to explain what resources you had to use and what responsibilities you took on in order to complete the task.

### **Describing the outcome**

At the end of the statement you will need to explain what the outcome of your actions was and why they were successful. If it wasn't as successful as it could have been, explain what you could have done to make it more so. You may get extra points for this if it shows additional evidence of being able to carry out relevant activities.

#### **Example:**

"During the two-week period of the promotion we increased our sales by more than double the usual total, mainly due to the way I had promoted the new products to the customers. Customers said they enjoyed sampling the products and the supervisor recommended a bonus for my work. **On reflection however I think it would have been even more successful if I had consulted customers about what they wanted from the types of products**".

The last sentence shows some additional evidence of the need to understand customer requirements and deliver services that are responsive to customer needs. If this is an activity that the assessors are looking for then that they will take it into account when awarding marks.

Again, though you should keep your descriptions of the outcome brief. Most of the marks are awarded for what you did and how and why you did it not for what happened as a result, although the assessor still needs to know this. In other words you need to show what led to the particular outcome and what your part in it was.

Now we come to the most important part of your statement.

### **Most of the marks will be awarded for the description of what you did**

The assessor will award marks for those activities that meet the broad descriptors of each competency. You do not have to describe activities which meet each and every one of the bullet points under the descriptors. **Avoid describing activities that are not relevant.**

You will not be awarded any points for describing what others did, although you should describe how your actions affected other relevant people such as other team members, customers etc. where this will reinforce the evidence for the effectiveness of your actions.

**You should use your own words:** simply using the description of the competencies will not do.

## Summary

1. Briefly describe the setting and what was expected of you
2. Say what *you* did not what others did
3. Describe the outcome and impact of your actions on others and on the situation
4. Say how you could have improved on what you did
5. Give evidence that is relevant to the broad descriptors of the competency
6. Do not spend time and space describing activities that are not relevant to the competency
7. Use your own words to describe the activities

## Additional guidance

You could receive extra points if you show that you know why the actions that you took were affective.

### Example:

"By consulting the rest of the team on my views and by asking for their ideas I gained their commitment and together we produced a much more effective outcome than I could have done alone".

Look again at the activities that make up the competencies that you have been asked to provide evidence for. Which of them refers to actions, which of them refer to mental activities (e.g. problem solving or generating ideas) and which refer to taking a particular attitude or approach?

### Examples of relevant attitudes and approaches:

1. "Supporting implementation of change"
2. "Treating customers fairly"

Try to make sure that you provide evidence of how you approach the task and your attitude towards it where it is relevant to do so.

## How do I go about writing my statements?

Assessors will be looking for statements that are short and to the point. Part of the skill which is required for completing these forms is to express yourself clearly in as few words as possible while covering all necessary points.

You will not be able to get it right first time so do an initial draft and study it.

Have you included everything that you need to?

Have you included anything that is not relevant or repeated yourself?

How can you rewrite your statement so that it fits the space provided without losing any necessary information?

You may lose points if you exceed the required length.

Perhaps you can use bullet points if there are too many words or, if it is appropriate, use note form for parts of the statement.

Make sure you use your own words. By using your own words to describe what you did you show that you understand what is required rather than just using the words used in the description of the competencies which you have been provided with.

Use "I" and active verbs:

**Examples:**

"I decided to...."

"I took responsibility for...."

"I suggested that we...."

"I presented the ideas to the manager"

etc.

**Not:**

"It was decided" or "a decision was made" etc.

**Do:**

Describe your thoughts, actions and feelings rather than just describing what happened.

Describe the impact that your actions had on the situation and on others e.g.:

"The other team members took up my ideas"

"the manager agreed to use my plan"

"the procedure that I put in place saved the team over £2000"

## Summary

A competency statement should:

- describe a carefully selected example from your previous experience which gives you plenty of opportunity to express the required activities making up the competency
- set the scene and context for your action
- be short and to the point
- include evidence that is relevant to the broad descriptors of the competency be in your own words
- be well written, clear, grammatical and properly spelt
- describe what you did, thought and felt and why
- describe the impact of your actions on others and on the situation
- make clear what your responsibilities and objectives were and what resources you used where relevant
- show that you know why your actions were effective and/or how you could have improved on what you did
- describe the outcome(s) of your actions

## Some final words of advice

Give yourself plenty of time. If you leave it until the last minute you are unlikely to do yourself justice or achieve success.

Make sure that you give plenty of evidence and do not assume that the assessor will give you marks simply because of your past achievements and experiences: that is not the purpose of the exercise. The assessor will only award marks for evidence of what you did, however impressive your past achievements are.

Evidence can come from situations that are not part of paid employment (such as voluntary work, work in the home and all relevant leisure activities or learning situations). However, there will be specific requirements attached to the particular post for which you are applying:

For example:

"you should give evidence from your experiences within the last five years"

Or:

"At least 2 of the competencies should consist of evidence from relevant paid employment" etc.

Make sure that you take note of any such restrictions on the situations which you may quote from.

Do not assume that the assessor has any knowledge of the situations or jobs which you refer to. Spell out the situation and job demands and **do not use jargon or specialist terms**.

Completing competency statements is a skill that takes practice. You will not get it right first time, so be prepared to work at it before producing your final version.

**Good luck!**