

BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCIES

for Canada's Substance
Use Workforce v. 2

Interview Tool for
Counselling



Canadian Centre
on Substance Use
and Addiction

Evidence. Engagement. Impact.



INTERVIEW TOOL FOR COUNSELLING


This document provides suggested interview questions for the **Counselling** job cluster and the relevant competency profile. The competency profiles and proficiency levels are examples only and may be tailored or adapted to specific organizational contexts and job descriptions. Review the *Guide to Behavioural Competency-based Interviewing* to supplement the tools included in this resource.

This tool provides a selection of sample interview questions focusing on behaviour for the Behavioural Competencies and proficiency levels relevant to the **Counselling** competency profile. It also includes the procedures for conducting the interview and evaluating candidate responses.

While this tool is a useful template for your interview process, it might not accurately represent the competencies required for the position for which you are interviewing. Before using it, review the suggested competency profile to determine if it is relevant. If not relevant, review the competencies to determine which competencies or proficiency levels you should change to give a more accurate representation. A brief overview of the steps involved in identifying the relevant Behavioural Competencies for a profile has been provided in the *Guide to Behavioural Competency-based Interviewing*.

A job competency profile includes only the critical competencies required for the job, not those that are “nice to have”—that is, not essential to performing the job successfully.

Preferably, each profile should have no more than 12 competencies.



After confirming the competencies and proficiency levels of the relevant competency profile, you must determine which competencies you will assess in the interview and which questions you will ask. Sample questions have been provided for the relevant proficiency level for the suggested profile. A generic interview bank has been provided in the *Generic Questions for the Behavioural Competencies* to assist you in selecting and adapting alternate questions if a different competency profile is used.

Avoid assessing all competencies by interview. It would take far too much time and some competencies are better assessed through other methods, such as reference checks, knowledge tests or simulations. For a one-hour interview, five to seven questions are a reasonable number to ask.

To determine which questions to ask, consider the relative importance of a competency to the position. Also, review competencies for overlap to determine if asking a question on one competency will provide information on another competency that can then be excluded.

You might choose to assess the same competency using more than one method if it is important for the position. For example, if Interpersonal Rapport is more important than other competencies, you may wish to assess it both in the interview and through a reference check. Alternatively, you could ask two questions on this competency instead of one in the interview.

Questions can be used for reference checking by adapting the text to ask about the candidate in the third person, rather than in the second person. For example:

- **Interview Question:** “Please provide an example of a time when you coordinated a large project” (*second person*)
- **Reference Question:** “Please provide an example of a time when Mark coordinated a large project” (*third person*)

Ensure that all performance evaluations are conducted in accordance with existing organizational policies and procedures.

Interviewing Tool for Positions Related to Counselling

Position Title: _____

Candidate Name: _____

Interviewer's Name:	Interviewer's Title:
Date of Interview:	Location of Interview:

Preparation Checklist

- Review résumé and candidate file information, paying particular attention to jobs/experiences and education/training most related to the target position.
- Review competencies required for the target position.
- Determine which competencies to focus on in the interview.

Suggested Competency Profile

Job Cluster	Example Job Titles
Counselling	Addictions Counsellor, Alcohol and Drug Counsellor, Substance Use Counsellor, Intake Counsellor, Therapist, Clinical Therapist, Recreation Therapist

Competency Required	Proficiency Levels
Adaptability and Flexibility	3
Analytical Thinking and Decision Making	3
Continuous Learning	2
Culturally Safe and Anti-oppressive Practice	3
Effective Communication	3
Ethical Conduct and Professionalism	2
Interpersonal Rapport	3
Person-directed Care	3
Self-care	3
Self-management	2
Teamwork and Cooperation	2



Conducting the Interview

1. Greet the candidate and introduce yourself, giving your name and position within the organization.
2. Confirm the job for which the candidate is being considered.
3. Explain the purpose of the interview: to gather specific information about the candidate's past experiences and accomplishments, particularly in the past two to three years; and to help the organization make a fair and informed decision on the most qualified candidate for the job.
4. Describe the interview plan:

The questions in the interview guide are designed to obtain information about the candidate's experience and accomplishments (do not have to be work-related) that relate to the competencies that are important for success in the job to be filled.

For each question, you must obtain one or more specific examples of the candidate's experience or accomplishments, ensuring that the candidate describes:

- The **Situation** or circumstances related to the example;
 - The **Actions** taken by the candidate to address the situation, along with the rationale for the action taken; and
 - The **Results** or outcome of the candidate's actions.
5. Ask follow-up questions as necessary to clarify or obtain additional information. Follow-up questions are provided below the main question.
 6. Take notes on the candidate's answers during the interview to have an accurate record of information about the candidate's experience and accomplishments to evaluate later.
 7. Provide an opportunity at the end of the interview for the candidate to ask questions.
 8. Clarify the next steps in the selection process.



Questions for Applicable Competencies at the Appropriate Level of Proficiency

The next several pages contain interview questions, one per page, with follow-up questions and space for you, the interviewer, to jot down notes. The follow-up questions are especially helpful because you can encourage the candidate to elaborate on their response to the initial question.



Question 1: Adaptability and Flexibility

Definition: Willingly adjust one's approach to meet the demands and needs of constantly changing conditions, situations and people, and to work effectively in difficult or ambiguous situations.

LEVEL 3 PROFICIENT

Question

Describe a time when you foresaw that a change was to be implemented and prepared yourself for it.

- What change did you foresee?
- What did you perceive to be the impact?
- How did you plan for the change?
- What was the outcome?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 2: Analytical Thinking and Decision Making

Definition: Gather, synthesize and evaluate information and evidence to determine possible alternatives and outcomes and make well-informed, timely decisions. Includes critical thinking and reasoning skills.

LEVEL 3 PROFICIENT

Question

Tell me about a time when you used evidence-based knowledge, past experience or consultation with others to determine a solution to a problem where no precedent existed.

- Describe the nature of the problem and why it required a creative solution.
- What factors did you consider in trying to understand the problem in greater depth?
- What knowledge, experience or consultation did you use to analyze the problem and why?
- What solution did you develop and how effective was it?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 3: Continuous Learning

Definition: Identify and pursue learning opportunities to enhance one's professional practice and development, and the delivery of high-quality programs and services.

LEVEL 2 DEVELOPING

Question

Please describe an example of a time when you made a point of keeping current in a particular area or subject that was evolving or changing.

- What was the situation?
- In what area were you trying to keep up to date?
- Describe the methods you used to keep updated.
- To what extent did you succeed in keeping updated?
- What impact, if any, did keeping up to date have?

Notes

Situation

Action

Results

Question 4: Culturally Safe and Anti-oppressive Practice

Definition: Provide inclusive, anti-oppressive, sex- and gender-sensitive, equitable and timely services to diverse populations, as defined by culture, age, sex, gender, language, ethnicity, socio-economic status, legal status, health, ability, sexual orientation, type and mode of substance use, continued substance use, concurrent conditions, etc. Challenge oppressive structures and unequal power relations, affirm and value the worth of all individuals, families, groups and communities, and protect the dignity of all with cultural awareness, competence, sensitivity, humility and cultural safety.

LEVEL 3 PROFICIENT

Question

Tell me about an experience where you provided assistance to an individual or family from a diverse background (e.g., culture, faiths, sexual orientation) and how your understanding of their circumstances enabled you to provide a service tailored specifically to their needs.

- Describe the situation, background and unique characteristics of the person or family.
- How did you assess the sensitivities of the situation?
- What practices, services or techniques did you employ to adapt to their needs?
- What was the outcome?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 5: Effective Communication

Definition: Articulate both verbally and in writing across a range of technologies in a manner that builds trust, respect and credibility, including in-person and technology-assisted communication (e.g., video conferencing, texting, social media). Checks with the audience to ensure the message is received and mutually understood. Includes active listening skills (attending, being silent, summarizing, paraphrasing, questioning and empathizing), communicating with gender sensitivity, cultural humility and congruent non-verbal communication.

LEVEL 3 PROFICIENT

Question

Describe a time when you had to adjust your communication for a diverse audience.

- What was the purpose of your communication?
- In what way was the audience diverse?
- How did you tailor your communication to achieve its purpose?
- How did you know that your audience understood what you were trying to communicate?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 6: Ethical Conduct and Professionalism

Definition: Provide professional services according to the principles and values of integrity, competence, accountability, respect and trust to safeguard both self and others. Includes the development of professionalism and ethical behaviour in self and others (individuals, groups, organizations, communities).

LEVEL 2 DEVELOPING

Question

Please describe an ethical dilemma you faced and how you resolved it.

- What was the ethical dilemma?
- How did you address it?
- What was the outcome?
- What has been the long-term effect?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 7: Interpersonal Rapport

Definition: Establish and maintain relationships based on mutual respect and trust, appropriate sensitivity and transparency, empathy and compassion with people using services, colleagues, professional associates and the greater community. Encompasses skills of tact, engagement and sensitivity in all encounters with others.

LEVEL 3 PROFICIENT

Question

Give an example of what you have done to encourage team members to learn from each other.

- Describe a time when your ability to communicate effectively in a highly sensitive situation helped to produce a successful outcome.
- What was the situation and what made it sensitive?
- What aspects of your communication did you focus on to help produce a positive outcome?
- What was the outcome?

Notes

Situation

Action

Results

Question 8: Person-directed Care

Definition: Support people to exercise choice in the services and supports they are seeking, and to practice self-determination in all aspects of their unique goal of well-being. For those who work with people seeking substance use services, this means supporting and empowering them to achieve their well-being goals through collaboration. The service provider acts as a bridge and navigator to supports, knowledge, information and services.

LEVEL 3 PROFICIENT

Question

Tell me about a time when you worked collaboratively with an individual to resolve a complex issue or meet their needs.

- What was the issue and how did you respond?
- How did you go about helping the people using services?
- What was the outcome? What difference did your service make?
- What would you do differently next time?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 9: Self-care

Definition: Deliberately and continuously apply professional and personal principles of well-being. Intentionally support others to sustain optimal well-being, while maintaining physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health.

LEVEL 3 PROFICIENT

Question

Please describe a situation when you assisted a peer who had a problem with self-care.

- Describe the issues related to self-care that you were concerned about.
- How did you assist the person?
- What was the outcome?
- What has been the long-term effect of your assistance?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 10: Self-management

Definition: Appropriately manage one's emotions and strong feelings; maintain a calm and respectful composure under a broad range of challenging circumstances; and think clearly and stay focused under pressure. Encompasses self-regulation and mindfulness.

LEVEL 2 DEVELOPING

Question

Sometimes we need to navigate complex problems and maintain the necessary focus despite challenges. Tell me about a time when it was especially important for you to maintain focus and composure when navigating a complex situation.

- Describe the situation.
- What were your strategies for maintaining focus and composure?
- How successful were you at dealing with the complex problem or situation?
- How do you know you were successful?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Question 11: Teamwork and Cooperation

Definition: Work cooperatively and productively with others within and across organizational units to achieve common goals; demonstrate respect, cooperation, collaboration and consensus-building.

LEVEL 2 DEVELOPING

Question

Describe a time when you were working with a team and took on additional tasks to support the group's efforts.

- What was the situation?
- Why did you volunteer to take on those tasks?
- How was this received by others on the team?
- How were you able to complete these additional tasks?

Notes

Situation	Action	Results

Evaluating the Interview

All the energy and effort devoted to capturing good job-related information during the selection interview will be lost if this information is not evaluated consistently and appropriately for all candidates. This section provides guidance on how to evaluate information from the candidate gathered through the competency-based interview.

Each behavioural question is designed to elicit information relevant to a specific competency. However, human behaviour can be complex and the following situations can arise:

- A behaviourally based question is asked focusing on one competency area, but a candidate provides an example that relates to another area.
- A candidate provides examples that relate to more than one competency area.
- A candidate provides examples that relate to the required competencies during the introductory phases of the interview or during the close of the interview.

The whole interview should, therefore, be reviewed carefully for evidence of the competencies being assessed. One method for doing this is to circle each behavioural example and, if one demonstrates a competency other than the one intended by the question, note the competency demonstrated alongside the example. Then cross-reference this example in the section of the interview tool devoted to that competency.

Once all relevant information from the interview has been reviewed and correctly classified, the interviewer is in a position to understand and evaluate a candidate's past behaviour for each competency.

The next step is to assign a rating, or score, for each competency, using the rating scale below. The assigned score is based on the candidate's demonstration of the relevant behaviour indicators for the proficiency levels in the competency profile at the beginning of this tool. Refer as necessary to the *Behavioural Competencies for Canada's Substance Use Workforce* for an extended sample of appropriate behaviour indicators for each competency.

Record the score in the scoring grid on the next page. Add any particular comments needed to support the rating.

If there are multiple interviewers, each interviewer completes the scoring grid individually, without consulting the others. Upon completion of all scoring, the interviewers discuss the ratings they assigned and arrive at a consensus score for each competency.

Interview Rating Scale	
5	Well Above Standard (<i>significantly exceeds requirements</i>) Evidence of candidate's demonstration of the competency is exceptional and reflects superior ability to perform; all aspects of the competency are demonstrated to a high degree.
4	Above Standard (<i>exceeds requirements</i>) Evidence of candidate's demonstration of the competency is above average and reflects more than an adequate ability to perform; all or most aspects of the competency are demonstrated at an above-average level.
3	Meets Standard (<i>meets requirement</i>) Evidence of candidate's demonstration of the competency meets expectations and reflects an adequate ability to perform; candidate may have demonstrated minor weaknesses in some aspects of the competency, but none of major significance.
2	Below Standard (<i>falls below requirements</i>) Evidence of candidate's demonstration of the competency is inadequate in key respects.
1	Well Below Standard (<i>falls significantly below requirements</i>) Evidence of candidate's demonstration of the competency is far from adequate in all or most respects.



Scoring Grid

Competency	Interviewer Score	Rationale/Comments	Consensus Score
Adaptability and Flexibility			
Analytical Thinking and Decision Making			
Continuous Learning			
Culturally Safe and Anti-oppressive Practice			
Effective Communication			
Ethical Conduct and Professionalism			
Interpersonal Rapport			
Person-directed Care			
Self-care			
Self-management			
Teamwork and Cooperation			