

# **Competency-Based Qualification Standard**

## **Information Technology Management Series, 2210**

### **Frequently Asked Questions and Answers**

#### **Competency-Based Qualification Standard – Questions & Answers**

##### **1. What is a Qualification Standard?**

Qualification standards are intended to identify applicants who are likely to perform successfully on the job, and to screen out those who are unlikely to do so. These standards describe the minimum requirements (for example, educational, medical, age, experience, etc.) for each occupational series.

The standards are not designed to rank candidates, identify the best qualified applicants for particular positions, or otherwise substitute for a careful analysis of the applicant's knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies.

In accordance with [5 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) 338](#), Federal agencies use the provisions outlined in OPM's General Schedule (GS) Qualifications Operating Manual for appointment to white collar occupations in the competitive service of the Federal Government. Currently, many qualification standards permit applicants to qualify for assessment based on education/training, experience, or a combination of the two.

Through the job analysis process, Federal agencies analyze work and apply OPM qualifications standards to determine the education, training, experience and/or other requirements (e.g., licensure, certification) that an applicant must possess in order to be admitted to the assessment process, and, if successful, be considered for a position or occupation (5 U.S.C. 5112, 5 U.S.C. 5105, and 5 U.S.C. 5102(a)(5)(b)).

##### **2. What is a Competency-Based Qualification Standard?**

A Competency-Based Qualification Standard identifies the required competencies and proficiency levels for a position. These competencies may be general (e.g., Problem Solving) or technical (specific to a job series). Applicants must demonstrate the required proficiency level in each competency to qualify.

##### **3. What is a competency?**

OPM defines a competency as a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully. Competencies specify the “how” of performing job

tasks, or what the person needs to do the job successfully.<sup>1</sup> Competencies represent a whole-person approach to assessing individuals. Competency-based assessments test whether applicants meet the standards of performance required for a given job.

#### 4. How are general and technical competencies defined and used?

- **General competencies** are broadly applicable across many occupations and have predefined proficiency levels set by OPM.
- **Technical competencies** are specific to a job series or position and must be defined by the agency, including the required proficiency level, based on job analysis.

#### 5. What are the proficiency levels and how are they used?

Proficiency levels are defined stages that categorize an individual's skill, knowledge, or ability in a specific area. These levels provide a common framework for assessing capabilities, guiding development, setting expectations, and informing decisions in hiring, training, and career advancement.

There are **five proficiency levels**, ranging from:

<b>Proficiency Level</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Level 1 – Awareness	Basic familiarity with the competency
Level 2 – Basic	Can perform simple tasks with guidance
Level 3 – Intermediate	Can perform tasks independently
Level 4 – Advanced	Can lead or mentor others
Level 5 – Expert	Recognized authority in the competency

Applicants must meet or exceed the required level for each competency. Failure to do so results in disqualification.

---

<sup>1</sup> Reference: Shippman, J. S., Ash, R. A., Carr, L., Hesketh, B., Pearlman, K., Battista, M., Eyde, L. D., Kehoe, J., Prien, E. P., & Sanchez, J. I. (2000). The practice of competency modeling. *Personnel Psychology*, 53, 703-740.

## **6. How do agencies determine which competencies to use?**

Agencies must conduct a [job analysis](#) to identify the competencies required for a position. They must supplement the standard with additional competencies as needed, provided they are supported by the analysis.

A job analysis is a systematic procedure for gathering, documenting, and analyzing information about the content, context, and requirements of the job. It demonstrates that there is a clear relationship between the tasks performed on the job and the KSAs/competencies required to perform the tasks.

Job analysis data should be used to develop effective recruitment, selection, performance management, and career development methodologies.

Job analysis is a foundation for identifying and/or developing assessment tools such as occupational questionnaires, structured interviews, and job knowledge tests. The information (tasks and competencies) gathered during a job analysis can also be applied to other employment practices such as performance appraisals, promotions, and employee development.

## **7. How do I determine which competencies are needed for the position?**

A job analysis identifies the job tasks, roles, and responsibilities of the incumbent performing the job, as well as the competencies required for performance, the resources used during performance, and the context (or environment) in which performance occurs. As such, a job analysis demonstrates the clear connection between job tasks and the competencies necessary to perform those tasks.

Conducting a job analysis involves collecting information from job experts. The term subject matter expert (SME) is properly applied to anyone who has direct, up-to-date experience of a job and is familiar with all its tasks. The person might currently hold the job or supervise the job. SMEs help identify the job's critical tasks, roles, and responsibilities and the competencies needed for successful performance. Critical incidents (i.e., examples of particularly effective or ineffective work behaviors) are also developed in some cases to describe essential job functions.

Documentation of the job analysis process and the linkages between job tasks, competencies, and selection tool content are essential to ensure an assessment strategy meets legal and professional guidelines. Please refer to Appendix D on conducting a job

analysis in OPM's [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook](#) and [Job Analysis](#) on OPM's Assessment and Selection website for more information.

### **8. Are all competencies rated as important to job performance appropriate for selection purposes?**

When assessing the appropriateness of an employee selection procedure, it is important to distinguish between competencies that are needed upon entry to the job and those that are acquired after selection, either through on-the-job experience or training. Only those competencies that applicants are expected to possess the first day on the job are appropriate to use for selection purposes.

Conversely, those competencies that employees will be expected to learn on the job should not be the subject of an employee selection requirement. Competencies not considered essential on the first day of the job – even those that eventually will be critical for job performance – can unfairly eliminate otherwise qualified applicants.

Please see Appendix D in the [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook](#) for more information regarding competency importance and ratings.

### **9. Am I required to conduct a job analysis each time a position comes open?**

No, you do not need to conduct a new job analysis each time you fill a position. However, if the position is unlike any other position in your agency or if the nature of the position is such that its requirements are likely to change with relative frequency (e.g., information technology positions), you should review the position at least annually to ensure that your selection tools are still valid (and, for positions with requirements that change less frequently, you should still review the position as appropriate). After performing the review through HR and hiring manager collaboration, you can determine whether a new or updated job analysis is needed.

For more information regarding job analysis, please visit [OPM's Assessment and Selection](#) website and the [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook](#).

### **10. What types of assessments can be used to evaluate competencies?**

Agencies may use a variety of assessments, including:

- Structured interviews
- Work samples
- Ability tests

- Skills-based assessments

These assessments can be used both for qualification and rating purposes.

### **11. What happens if an applicant does not meet one of the required competencies?**

If an applicant fails to meet the required proficiency level on the validated competencies based on job analysis, the applicant may be considered ineligible for further consideration. Agencies will determine their assessment strategy for hiring, including the appropriate qualification factors and the step in the hiring process applicants are determined to be disqualified.

### **12. Can applicants qualify through multiple means?**

Yes. In accordance with the principles in the [General Schedule Operating Manual](#), Applicants may qualify based on:

- **Licensure, certification, or registration**
- **A substantial record of experience, achievement, or publications**
- **A combination of experience or training**

Agencies must verify such qualifications through a holistic review by at least two qualified professionals.

### **13. Are waivers from OPM required for the use of alternative qualifications?**

No. Agencies may independently determine minimum qualifications using alternative criteria, as long as legal requirements are not waived. Agencies must document their actions accordingly.

### **14. How does this standard apply to supervisory or managerial positions?**

For supervisory roles, agencies must use the [Supervisory Qualification Guide](#) in conjunction with the Individual Occupational Requirements (IORs).

### **15. Where can I find more information about the IT Management Competency Framework and Classification Standards?**

- **IT FWCI Competency Framework:** <https://www.opm.gov/chcoc/latest-memos/federal-workforce-competency-initiative-general-and-technical-competencies-and-competency-frameworks-for-information-technology-management-2210.pdf>

- **Classification Standard for IT Management (2210 series):** [issuance-of-the-competency-based-position-classification-standard-for-the-information-technology-management-series-2210.pdf](#)

#### **16. What documentation must agencies maintain when using this standard?**

Agencies must maintain **job analysis documentation** that substantiates the selection of required competencies and proficiency levels. This ensures compliance with [5 CFR 300.103](#) and supports defensible hiring decisions.

#### **17. Can agencies customize the competencies used in a qualification standard?**

Yes. Agencies can **supplement** the established competencies with additional general or technical competencies based on the results of valid [job analysis](#). However, they must include job related competencies supported by a job analysis as described in the competency based qualifications standard.

#### **18. How does this standard support agency flexibility?**

The standard allows agencies to:

- Tailor technical competencies to specific missions or roles
- Choose from multiple assessment methods
- Consider alternative qualifications (e.g., licensure, certification, experience)  
This flexibility supports strategic workforce planning and mission alignment.

#### **19. How does this standard differ from traditional qualification standards?**

Traditional standards often rely heavily on education and years of experience. In contrast, competency-based standards focus on what an individual can do—their demonstrated knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies—regardless of how they acquired them.

#### **20. What is the role of Human Resources in applying this standard?**

HR professionals are responsible for:

- Ensuring [job analyses](#) are conducted
- Verifying applicant qualifications
- Coordinating assessments
- Documenting decisions and maintaining compliance with OPM guidance

## **21. How are Individual Occupational Requirements (IORs) used with this standard?**

Many occupations or positions that are covered by a group coverage qualification standard also have Individual Occupation Requirements (IOR). Some series are covered by a separate stand-alone individual qualification standard.

IORs define specific requirements (for example: educational, medical, age, experience, etc.) for a particular occupational series.

IORs should be used in conjunction with the appropriate qualification standard for the specific occupational series. For example, an agency may plan to recruit for a Supervisory Computer Scientist position. In this situation, the agency should use the qualification standard for the [1550 occupational series](#) (IOR which includes specific minimum college level course work requirements) in conjunction with the [Group Coverage Qualification Standard for Professional and Scientific Positions](#) and [Supervisory Qualification Guide](#).

When using this particular standard, the occupational specific IOR must be applied **in conjunction with** the [Group Coverage Qualification Standard for Administrative and Management Positions](#). The [Supervisory Qualification Guide](#) would also be used as applicable.

## **22. What is the difference between a competency and a KSA?**

While often used interchangeably, **competencies** are broader and include knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics. **KSAs** (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) are components of competencies and are typically used in job analysis and assessment development.

## **23. Can agencies require specific credentials for a position?**

Yes, agencies may require **licenses, certifications, or registrations** when they are essential for satisfactory job performance as substantiated by job analysis. However, agencies must avoid overemphasizing credentials if experience or other qualifications are acceptable under the standard.

## **24. What happens if an applicant has exceptional qualifications but doesn't meet a specific requirement?**

Agencies may conduct a **holistic review** of the applicant's background. If the applicant demonstrates full-performance level accomplishments and their qualifications are

verified by at least two professionals (Human Resources and Technical Subject Matter Expert), they may still be considered qualified.

**25. What is the most significant change proposed for the qualification requirements for the IT 2210 occupational series?**

The most significant change is the transition from using two separate standards (Information Technology (IT) Management Series 2210 ([Alternative A](#)) and Information Technology (IT) Management Series 2210 ([Alternative B](#)) to a single, integrated qualification standard that incorporates competency-based requirements with defined proficiency levels (Individual Occupational Requirements (IORs).

Under the proposed standard, applicants must now demonstrate that they meet minimum proficiency levels for the general and technical competencies identified for the position. These requirements are in addition to any applicable specialized experience (or education which may be used as a proxy for specialized experience) requirements.

This change aligns with the Federal government's move toward skills-based hiring and ensures that qualification determinations are based not only on background, but also on an applicant's ability to perform the work, as demonstrated through validated assessments of job-relevant competencies.

**26. What other changes are there?**

Specific requirements for the GS-5 and 7 levels have been omitted. These trainee levels represented exceptionally low number of employee and usage across agencies accounting for approximately 2% of positions in this series. Standards normally describe typical grades encountered for the work covered identified in the occupational study.

**27. Does the removal of grades 5 and 7 preclude the use of those grades in the occupation?**

OPM Classification and Qualification Standards do not alter the authority of agency managers and supervisors to organize programs and work processes; to establish, modify, and abolish positions; to assign duties and responsibilities to employees; and to direct and supervise the accomplishment of their assigned missions. The omission

from the standard in no way precludes agencies from properly classifying positions and qualifying applicants for positions at levels above or below the grade range specifically described standards. Such grades and respective minimum qualifications are determined by extending the criteria as needed to meet specific job situations.

Competencies and Proficiency levels for position at these levels would be directly determined by [job analysis](#).

## **28. Where can agencies find additional guidance on applying qualification standards, including competency-based requirements?**

Agencies should refer to the [General Schedule Operating Manual](#) and OPM's official website for foundational guidance, flexibilities, and updates related to qualification standards. This includes detailed information on implementing Competency-Based Qualification Requirements, which emphasize the identification and assessment of specific competencies and proficiency levels necessary for successful job performance.

Additional resources include:

- OPM's Competency Frameworks for general and technical competencies
- Competency-Based Assessment Guidance for selecting and validating assessment tools
- Individual Occupational Requirements (IORs) that must be used in conjunction with group coverage standards
- Supervisory Qualification Guide for positions with leadership responsibilities

These resources support agencies in designing and applying qualification standards that are flexible, performance-focused, and aligned with mission-critical needs.

## **29. How do Executive Orders 13932 and 14170, the Merit Hiring Plan, and the Chance to Compete Act support competency-based and skills-based hiring in the Federal government?**

These key policies and initiatives collectively advance a governmentwide shift toward skills-based, competency-driven hiring practices:

- [Executive Order 13932](#) (2020) initiated reforms to reduce reliance on educational credentials and promote the use of valid, competency-based assessments to evaluate candidates' ability to perform the job.

- [Executive Order 14170](#) (2024) builds on this foundation by requiring agencies to adopt a **Merit Hiring Plan** that institutionalizes skills-first hiring, expands the use of competency-based qualification standards, and modernizes talent management practices.
- The [Merit Hiring Plan](#), mandated by EO 14170, ensures that hiring decisions are based on merit system principles, using job-relevant competencies and proficiency levels to assess applicants fairly and effectively.
- The [Chance to Compete Act](#) (2024) codifies many of these reforms into law. It requires agencies to use skills-based assessments, encourages the involvement of subject matter experts (SMEs) in evaluating candidates, and promotes the use of structured interviews, work samples, and other valid tools to assess qualifications.

Together, these efforts reinforce the use of Competency-Based Qualification Requirements to ensure that Federal hiring is:

- Merit-based
- Performance-focused
- Aligned with mission needs

They empower agencies to identify and hire the most qualified candidates based on **what they can do**, not just where they've been educated or how long they've worked.

### **30. How does Executive Order 13932 change how applicants are determined to be qualified for positions—and how do the Chance to Compete Act and the Merit Hiring Plan support this shift?**

[Executive Order \(EO\) 13932](#), *Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates*, directs Federal agencies to move away from overreliance on educational credentials and self-reported experience, and instead adopt skills- and competency-based hiring practices. The EO emphasizes that applicants should be evaluated based on their ability to perform the duties of the position, as demonstrated through valid, job-relevant assessments.

Under [5 CFR Part 338](#), agencies continue to use the provisions outlined in OPM's General Schedule Qualifications Operating Manual for appointments to white-collar positions in the competitive service. These standards allow applicants to qualify

based on the entirety of their backgrounds and experiences. EO 13932 encourages agencies to:

- Use structured interviews, work samples, simulations, and other validated assessments to evaluate applicants' competencies;
- Limit the use of minimum education requirements to only when legally or operationally necessary (e.g., for scientific or professional positions);
- Reduce reliance on self-assessments and resumes alone when determining qualifications.

This shift is further reinforced by the [Chance to Compete Act of 2024](#), which codifies key elements of EO 13932 by requiring agencies to:

- Implement skills-based assessments for competitive service hiring;
- Involve subject matter experts (SMEs) in evaluating candidates;
- Promote the use of merit-based, validated hiring practices that focus on demonstrated ability.

Additionally, [Executive Order 14170](#) and the governmentwide [Merit Hiring Plan](#) require agencies to institutionalize these reforms by:

- Aligning hiring practices with merit system principles;
- Expanding the use of competency-based qualification standards;
- Ensuring that hiring decisions are based on job-relevant skills and performance potential.

Together, these policies support a modern, merit-based, and performance-focused Federal hiring system.

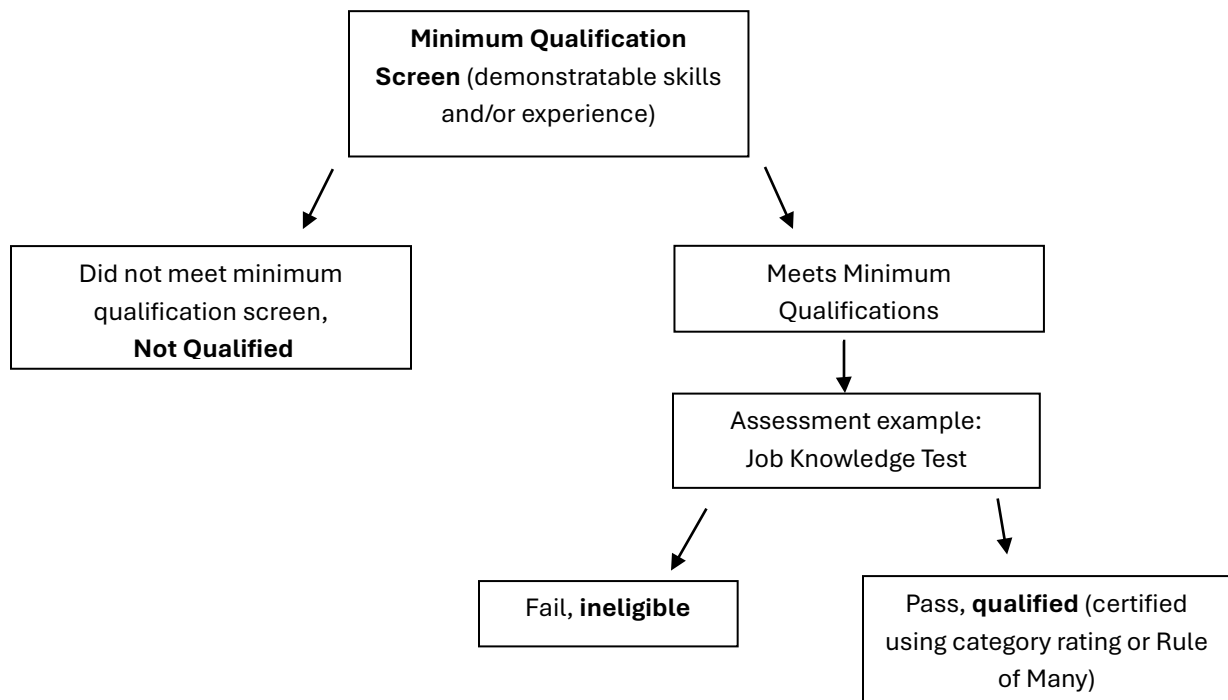
### **31. What is the difference between minimum qualifications and assessments?**

Pursuant to [5 U.S.C. 3301](#) and [3302](#), the purpose of minimum qualifications is merely to determine who should be admitted to or rated in examinations or assessments. Applicants are then expected to achieve a passing grade on the assessment in order to be rated and ranked.

Applicants who satisfy minimum qualification requirements are not automatically entitled to a qualifying score of 70 or more points, out of 100, in an assessment process that uses a numerical rating procedure, nor are they entitled to placement in a quality category under a category rating process. Screening on minimum qualifications is not the same as assessing applicants on the competencies necessary to perform the job. Screening minimum qualifications on an occupational questionnaire is important, but

a “deeper dive” is required in order to address the actual competencies that have been rated as critical for the job, and to evaluate who is genuinely qualified to perform the particular position (i.e., those who achieve a passing grade on the assessment) and then to assess their relative levels of qualification beyond the passing level.

Here is an example.



Please see the definition for minimum qualifications and assessments in the [GS Qualifications Operating Manual](#) and the use of passing scores with additional examples in Chapter 5 of the [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook](#).

### 32. Are there general tips to implement skills-based hiring in your organization?

- Identify skills based on work roles
- Map out essential skills based on your work roles
- Align skills with agency mission and needs
- Use strategic planning and management activities
- Integrate both general and technical competencies into your hiring practices for qualifying and assessing talent
- Use holistic approaches for hiring based on skills-based practices
- Consider multiple sources for attracting and hiring talent