

Competency-Based Qualifications Standard

What is a Competency-Based Qualifications Standard?

A Competency Based Qualification Standard defines the required competencies and proficiency levels an applicant must demonstrate to qualify for a federal position. These competencies may be general (e.g., Problem Solving) or technical (specific to the occupation). To qualify, applicants must meet the required proficiency level for every required competency.

Competencies represent measurable patterns of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics needed to perform the work successfully capturing the “how” of the job, not just the tasks.

This model supports skills-first hiring, aligns with the Merit Hiring Plan, and modernizes qualifications policy by shifting away from rigid education-only requirements toward validated, job-related competencies.

Competency-Based Qualifications Standard Process Guidance

STEP 1 – Start with the Competency Based Qualifications Standard & Conduct Job Analysis

- Review the applicable OPM qualification standard (Individual Occupational Requirements (IORs) + competencies).
- Conduct or review a job analysis to verify required competencies, tasks, and proficiency levels (required by 5 CFR 300.103).
- Confirm which competencies are essential on day one.

Output: Validated list of required competencies and proficiency levels.

STEP 2 – Identify Additional Requirements

- Add selective factors only when essential and not learnable quickly (must be supported by job analysis).
- Add quality ranking factors when helpful but not essential.
- Confirm any added requirement is directly tied to job tasks and not duplicative.

Output: Additional job-related requirements (if any).

STEP 3 – Establish Minimum Qualification Criteria

- Apply the occupation’s IORs, if applicable.
- Apply any required education or experience criteria from the standard.
- Identify mission-essential credentials only if job analysis proves they are required.
- Document alternative qualification pathways, such as:
 - Licensure/certification
 - Substantial experience or achievements
 - Combination of experience and training(All allowed under the GS Qualification policies and noted in competency-based standards.)

Output: Additional job-related requirements (if any).

STEP 4 – Determine Assessment Methods

- Select assessment tools that measure the required competencies and proficiency levels, such as: Structured interviews, Work samples, Job knowledge/ability tests, Situational judgment tests, SME-reviewed resume/portfolio evaluations, and other valid methods based on assessment strategy.
- Ensure compliance with 5 CFR 300, the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, and the Uniform Guidelines.

Output: Assessment strategy aligned to competencies.

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Competency-Based Qualifications Standard Process Guidance *(continued)*

STEP 5 – Screen Applicants for Minimum Qualifications

- Screen applicants for:
 - Required competencies and proficiency levels
 - Required experience and qualifications
- Agencies may adjust or add general and technical competencies and proficiency levels to reflect mission-specific needs supported by job analysis
- Selective factors are optional if supported by a job analysis
- Applicants who fail any required competency or selective factor are ineligible.

Output: Eligible applicant pool established.

STEP 6 – Conduct Skills-Based Assessments

- Use validated methods to assess applicants' ability to perform job tasks.
- Apply proficiency levels aligned with hiring strategy, supported by job analysis.

Output: Applicants placed into quality categories based on demonstrated skills.

STEP 7 – Refer Candidates for Technical Assessment

- Refer only applicants who:
 - Meet minimum qualifications
 - Meet required proficiency levels
 - Pass skills-based assessments
- Hiring managers prepare to select candidates based on competencies and demonstrated ability, not tenure or degrees.

Output: Selections grounded in skills, merit, and job-related criteria.

STEP 8 – Document All Minimum Qualifications Decisions

- Maintain job analysis documentation (required under 5 CFR 300.103).
- Retain qualification determinations and assessment results per the required retention record schedules.
- Ensure documentation aligns with OPM's qualification and assessment policy.

Output: Full, defensible hiring record.