

# Designing a Competency-Based Assessment Strategy Aligned to the Job Analysis

**A modern framework for agencies implementing OPM's skills-based hiring initiative and the new competency-based classification and qualification standards.**

Agencies can modernize and accelerate hiring by grounding assessment strategies in competencies identified through job analysis, not credentials or self-reported experience. Strong collaboration across Human Resources, Hiring Managers, and Assessment Experts ensures that all decisions are rooted in job-related evidence and aligned with mission needs.

This integrated competency-based model ensures:

- The series and grade reflect required knowledge and skills (classification)
- Applicants are screened based on required competencies and proficiency levels (qualifications)
- Assessments validly measure those competencies using appropriate tools (assessment strategy)

Aligning classification, qualifications, and assessments creates a defensible, skills-based process that improves workforce capability and strengthens hiring outcomes.

## Step 1 — Start with Competencies: Conduct a Modern Job Analysis

Job analysis is the foundation of competency-based hiring. Agencies should:

- Identify essential tasks and job responsibilities
- Map tasks to the competencies needed to perform them
- Determine which competencies are essential on Day One
- Translate legacy specialized experience into behavior-based, skill-based requirements
- Document how each competency links to observable job performance

### Hiring Manager Actions

- Confirm tasks, duties, and responsibilities driving successful performance
- Confirm Day One competencies and performance expectations
- Help convert specialized experience statements into observable skills or work activities
- Provide real examples of strong vs. minimal performance

### Human Resources Actions

- Ensure the job analysis process is completed consistently and in accordance with established best practices
- Oversee coordination among SMEs, HR, Assessment Experts, and Hiring Manager
- Validate competency selection to ensure they represent minimum requirements
- Ensure documentation meets compliance, audit, and record-retention standards

### Assessment Expert Actions

- Translate job analysis results into technical assessment specifications
- Confirm the job-relatedness of all competencies and associated assessment methods
- Ensure competency definitions reflect observable, measurable behaviors

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## Step 2 — Understand Your Hiring Environment

Effective assessment strategies must reflect operational realities, including budget, timelines, applicant volume, and technical expertise.

### Hiring Manager Actions

- Share hiring urgency, workload, and mission needs
- Identify whether re-skilling or cross-series hiring is anticipated
- Provide volume expectations to calibrate assessment load

### Human Resources Actions

- Evaluate hiring timelines, staffing needs, and available HR resources
- Determine feasibility of shared assessments across positions or series
- Ensure hiring plans incorporate assessment development early
- Allocate HR resources appropriately to support assessment activities

### Assessment Expert Actions

- Recommend feasible assessment tools based on constraints and hiring goals
- Advise on sequencing, resource demands, and technical requirements
- Identify risks (e.g., applicant burden, legal defensibility) early in planning

## Step 3 — Select Competency-Based Assessment Tools

Priority should be given to high-quality, skills-focused assessments:

- Work samples, simulations, technical exercises
- Structured interviews with anchored rating scales
- Applied knowledge or skill tests
- Situational judgment tests
- Cognitive or ability tests, when appropriate
- Writing samples, coding challenges

Agencies may use OPM's USA Hire, develop their own assessments, or procure external assessment solutions.

Self-assessments may only be used for minimum qualification and eligibility determinations.

### Hiring Manager Actions

- Collaborate with HR to select tools that reveal real skills
- Develop realistic examples, tasks, or scenarios
- Confirm every tool is explicitly linked to competencies

### Human Resources Actions

- Ensure tool selection complies with OPM policy and hiring regulations
- Approve use of agency-developed vs. vendor-provided assessments
- Ensure rating tools and processes remain consistent across similar roles
- Oversee documentation of assessment rationale

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## Step 3 — Select Competency-Based Assessment Tools *(continued)*

### Assessment Expert Actions

- Design or refine assessments to ensure validity and effectiveness
- Conduct content validation or SME reviews
- Document assessment-to-competency linkages and scoring rules

## Step 4 — Build a Competency-Aligned Assessment Process

A defensible assessment process is structured and transparent.

Agencies should:

- Establish scoring methods (weighted, pass/fail, cumulative)
- Use a multiple hurdle structure beginning with low burden screens based on hiring needs
- Train SMEs on scoring and competency definitions
- Document how assessments support impartial qualification decisions

### Hiring Manager Actions

- Help determine appropriate scoring methods
- Participate as SMEs in structured scoring
- Document qualification-based decisions

### Human Resources Actions

- Ensure SME training is completed and documented
- Oversee implementation to ensure fairness and consistency
- Ensure lawful, compliant, and equitable execution of all hurdles
- Monitor process integrity and make adjustments when needed

### Assessment Expert Actions

- Develop scoring rubrics, behavioral anchors, and rating guidance
- Train SMEs and HR on consistent scoring practices
- Set cut scores, as needed, using professional methods and available data
- Facilitate SME judgment panels and document rationale
- Monitor scoring reliability, identify drift, and adjust as needed

## Step 5 — Evaluate and Refine

Competency-based assessment requires ongoing monitoring.

Agencies should:

- Evaluate the ability of tools to identify candidates with required competencies
- Monitor fairness and impact
- Review alignment with skills-based hiring goals
- Update tools as competencies or mission needs evolve

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## Step 5 – Evaluate and Refine *(continued)*

### Hiring Manager Actions

- Provide performance outcome feedback
- Report fairness or effectiveness concerns
- Identify evolving skill needs

### Human Resources Actions

- Lead periodic reviews of assessment effectiveness
- Ensure compliance with record-retention and reporting requirements
- Coordinate updates with Assessment Experts and technical SMEs
- Guide policy-level decisions on scaling or standardizing tools

### Assessment Expert Actions

- Conduct statistical reviews and impact analyses
- Recommend refinements to improve predictive accuracy
- Ensure updates remain job-relevant and competency-aligned

## Why This Matters

A competency-based model enables agencies to:

- Apply updated qualification and classification standards consistently
- Improve job-skill alignment and eliminate reliance on educational proxies
- Offer candidates fair, transparent opportunities to demonstrate ability
- Strengthen assessment defensibility and workforce quality

## Key Reminders

- Job analysis remains the anchor for all classification, qualification and assessment decisions
- Confirm the applicability of Governmentwide job analysis information (e.g., competencies) and supplement as needed with agency-specific job analysis
- Multi-hurdle structures promote fairness and efficiency
- SMEs, HR, and Assessment Experts are essential to high-quality hiring
- Transparency, fairness, support skills-based hiring goals