

OPM's Federal Workforce Competency Initiative (FWCI) Framework and Handbook for Information Management, 2210 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Purpose & Audience

Who should use this document?

Agency HR specialists, staffing teams, classifiers, assessment professionals (Industrial/Organizational Psychologist/Psychometricians), hiring managers, subject matter experts, and HR/tech leaders who must align IT (2210) hiring, qualifications, and workforce strategies with FWCI and skills-based hiring requirements. It consolidates what FWCI is, why it matters, and how to use it in day-to-day HR operations with policy grounding and scenarios that reflect actual HR workflows.

SECTION 1 – FWCI Foundations

Q1. What is FWCI and why does it matter for HR?

The FWCI is OPM's governmentwide effort to update and standardize general and technical competencies across Federal occupations. For the IT Management (2210) series, the Framework provides validated competency models (general and technical) organized by clusters of work and career bands. It is designed to inform classification and qualifications, enable legally compliant job analyses, and support rigorous, job-relevant assessments central to skills-based hiring.

Application. FWCI gives HR a common, evidence-based language for the skills agencies actually need in IT roles today. Instead of defaulting to degrees or tenure, HR and hiring managers can anchor hiring decisions to what candidates can do, that is, their competencies, with valid assessments. This aligns with Executive Orders, the Chance to Compete Act, and the Merit Hiring Plan that prioritize assessments over credentials when possible.

Scenario. You're staffing a GS-12 Systems Administrator (2210). Rather than asking for a specific degree, your job analysis selects technical competencies like Operating Systems, Configuration Management, and Security, as well as general competencies like Problem Solving and Technology Application. You then choose assessment methods that measure those competencies directly (e.g., structured interview, job simulation, work sample), documenting how they map to the FWCI framework.

Q2. How do Executive Order 13932, Executive Order 14170, the Chance to Compete Act, and the Merit Hiring Plan collectively support OPM's decision to complete the FWCI IT 2210 study?

OPM completed the FWCI IT 2210 study because a unified set of governmentwide hiring mandates (e.g., EO 13932, EO 14170, the Chance to Compete Act, and the Merit Hiring Plan) collectively require the Federal Government to move decisively toward skills-based, merit-driven, assessment-anchored hiring.

The EO 14170 and the Chance to Compete Act both direct the Federal Government to implement merit-based reforms, eliminate reliance on inflated credentials, and require the use of structured and technical assessments in hiring. The Merit Hiring Plan includes work under EO 13932, which focuses on shifting hiring away from minimum education requirements and toward valid, competency-based assessments. Together, these policies require an integrated approach to modernization by aligning classification, qualifications, and assessment practices around validated, jobrelevant- competencies.

The FWCI IT 2210 study delivers exactly this foundation. By updating the technical and general competencies for the IT Management series and validating them with governmentwide data, OPM provides agencies the structure necessary to implement the requirements found in all four authorities, especially the Merit Hiring Plan, which emphasizes eliminating non-merit practices, using technical assessments, and strengthening structured hiring processes. It further requires agencies to evaluate applicants based on demonstrated competencies, not legacy proxies such as degrees or job titles.

The FWCI IT 2210 study is part of the broader governmentwide shift toward skills-based hiring, serving as a pilot for future occupational series reforms and ensuring compliance with EO 13932, EO 14170, the Chance to Compete Act, and the Merit Hiring Plan.

In short: OPM completed the FWCI IT 2210 study because all four authorities converge on the same requirement, modernizing Federal hiring by grounding it in validated, job-relevant competencies. The study is the technical backbone that enables agencies to comply.

Scenario for HR Practitioners

Imagine you are an HR specialist preparing a hiring action for a GS-13 IT Cybersecurity Specialist. Under the old model, a bachelor's degree and self-assessment questionnaire could be used. But today, the policy landscape has changed:

- EO 13932 restricts reliance on degrees unless legally required and directs agencies to use competency-based assessments.
- EO 14170 requires hiring processes to be merit-based, structured, and free of non-merit practices.
- The Chance to Compete Act requires job-related assessments that are valid and reliable and reinforces skills-based hiring.
- The Merit Hiring Plan prohibits inflated credential requirements, requires agencies to reduce time-to-hire, and mandates the use of valid assessments.

In this scenario, you open the FWCI IT 2210 Framework developed specifically to support these mandates. Using job analysis, you confirm the applicability of Information Systems & Network Security, Risk Management, Security Models, and Technology Awareness from the updated competency model. Next step, you design the hiring process using, for example, a structured interview, a technical exercise, and scoring rubrics that measure these competencies. Your vacancy announcement removes unnecessary degree requirements, and your assessment plan demonstrates complete alignment with the Act, the Executive Orders, and the Merit Hiring Plan. This is precisely the type of compliance and modernization that OPM designed the FWCI IT 2210 study to enable.

Q3. How does FWCI define “competency”?

A competency is a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics required for successful job performance. Competencies and KSAs serve the same function in job analysis. FWCI distinguishes general competencies (broad, e.g., teamwork, problem solving) from technical competencies (occupation-specific, e.g., network engineering, systems testing).

Application. Think of competencies as the “currency” HR uses to translate job requirements into assessable, observable criteria. They are the bridge between mission needs and defensible hiring decisions.

Q4. What Is Skills-Based Hiring?

Skills-based hiring is a hiring approach that focuses on what candidates can do or their demonstrated knowledge, skills, and abilities, rather than where or how they learned those skills. Instead of relying heavily on degrees, job titles, or time-in-grade, skills-based hiring evaluates applicants using competency-based, job-relevant assessments such as structured interviews, work samples, simulations, or other demonstrations of ability.

Skills-based hiring “helps hiring managers focus on what candidates know how to do, not where they learned it. It values all relevant skills for the role at hand, whether they are learned in the classroom, on the job, or on one’s own.”

EO 13932 directs agencies to “increase the use of valid, competency-based assessments as an alternative to the reliance on education credentials,” underscoring the shift toward capability over credential.

The Rule of Many and Skills-Based Hiring further reinforces that skills-based hiring requires agencies to assess demonstrated competencies and job-relevant skills through job-related tools such as practical exercises, job simulations, or comprehensive structured assessments.

The goal is straightforward:

Enable hiring managers to identify candidates who can perform the actual work, broaden access to qualified applicants, and support fair, merit-based hiring decisions aligned with strategic workforce needs.

Scenario: Skills-Based Hiring in Practice

Imagine you work in an agency HR department that is planning future hiring actions for a GS-12 IT Customer Support Specialist.

Old approach: You wait until you're ready to post the job opportunity announcement to determine your hiring strategy. The hiring manager asks for a bachelor's degree in IT and wants to rely on a self-assessment questionnaire. This often leads to over-inflated candidate ratings and screens out qualified individuals who developed their technical skills through hands-on experience, military service, apprenticeships, or industry certifications.

Skills-based hiring approach: You begin by determining the applicability of the FWCI governmentwide competency information or if specialized skills are needed, and identify the competencies needed for the job (e.g., Operating Systems, Service Incident Management, Customer Service, and Problem Solving). Using the skills-based hiring guidance described in the Rule of Many and Skills Based Hiring, you design a process that includes:

- A practical customer-service simulation where candidates respond to a mock IT ticket
- A structured interview with standardized, job-related questions
- A short diagnostic exercise requiring candidates to troubleshoot a system issue

The result?

Now, when your agency's managers are ready to hire, you implement the strategy you designed. You remove unnecessary degree requirements from the process. Three of your top candidates come from non-traditional backgrounds: one is a veteran with help-desk experience, one completed industry certifications, and one learned through on-the-job experience. All demonstrate the ability to perform the essential tasks through competency-based assessments.

This approach strengthens merit, expands opportunity, and ensures the selecting official chooses the candidate best able to perform the job, not merely the one with the most traditional résumé.

SECTION 2 — What's in the 2210 Framework?

Q5. What competencies are included for 2210?

The FWCI study confirms 31 general competencies and 79 technical competencies for the 2210 IT Management series, validated governmentwide.

Application. The general set captures the core capabilities all IT professionals need (e.g., Integrity/Honesty, Attention to Detail, Teamwork, Technology Application), while the technical

set is organized to reflect modern IT work (e.g., Cloud Services, Security Incident Management, Data Architecture).

Scenario. Your job analysis determines the Customer Support positions perform tasks such as regular troubleshooting, ticket triage, and incident escalation. To perform these tasks, employees need technical competencies such as Service Incident Management, Information Systems & Network Security, and Operating Systems, plus general competencies like Customer Service and Oral Communication. Based on this information, assessments would be procured or developed to build the assessment plan to match.

Q6. How is IT work structured? What are the FWCI clusters?

FWCI organizes IT work into three clusters:

- **IT Operations and Security:** involves the planning, installation, operation, and maintenance of hardware and software systems, as well as ensuring the security and integrity of systems, networks, and data. It includes functions such as system administration, network services, customer support, and information security. Employees in this cluster establish and sustain the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of systems, networks, and data through the development and implementation of security programs, policies, procedures, and tools.
- **IT Development and Analysis:** focuses on the design, development, testing, and implementation of new and improved information systems. This includes application software development, systems analysis, data management, and internet/web services. Employees in this cluster perform needs analyses, consult with customers to identify specific system needs, develop overall functional and systems requirements, conduct business process reengineering, and prepare business cases for the application of IT solutions.
- **IT Strategy and Planning:** encompasses strategic planning, policy development, and enterprise architecture. This involves aligning IT strategies with organizational goals and objectives, setting the overall direction and vision for IT within the organization. Employees in this cluster develop and maintain strategic plans, assess policy needs, provide policy guidance, prepare IT budgets, manage IT investment portfolios, and conduct audits of IT programs and projects.

Application. The IT clusters reflect the evolution of IT work and provide a practical framework that agencies can apply when hiring for IT roles, clearly illustrating where responsibilities naturally overlap such as cloud and cybersecurity functions that span both Operations & Security and Strategy & Planning so agencies can better align positions with the competencies required.

Scenario. You're staffing a role that blends Development Operations (DevOps) and cyber tasks. You reference IT Operations & Security for security incident and compliance competencies and IT Development & Analysis for Continuous Integration/Continuous Deployment (CI/CD) and software testing. The job analysis documents both clusters and explains why the dual emphasis is mission-critical.

Q7. How do career bands work in FWCI?

FWCI uses four career bands aligned to GS grades: Entry (GS-5–7), Intermediate (GS-9–11), Journey (GS-12–13), Senior (GS-14–15). FWCI identifies which competencies are important by band, helping HR tailor job analyses, assessments and make workforce decisions to inform hiring and to meet agency missions.

Application. Bands simplify level distinctions for HR and agencies. For example, Accessibility may be critical at intermediate and journey levels where hands-on execution is common, but less prominent at senior levels focused on strategy and oversight.

Scenario. When updating a GS-14 policy role in IT Strategy & Planning, you emphasize competencies like Information Technology Program Management, Technology Awareness, and Requirements Analysis & Management, with assessments that measure strategic analysis and governance and not just hands-on technical tasks.

Q8. What's new in the 2210 technical competency set?

FWCI introduces 14 new technical competencies, including Cloud Administration, Cloud Engineering, Cloud Services, Continuous Integration/Continuous Deployment (CI/CD), Data Architecture, Migration & Modernization, Network Engineering, Security Models, Service Incident Management, User Interface/User Experience (UI/UX) Design, IT Continuity of Operations (COOP), IT Laws & Guidelines, Licenses & Subscriptions, and Information Technology Performance Monitoring (among others noted in the Handbook).

Application. These additions reflect modernization priorities such as cloud migration, secure architecture, automation pipelines, and usable, accessible digital services so hiring managers can hire for what agencies actually need now and in the future.

Scenario. A modernization initiative requires moving legacy systems to cloud platforms. Your job analysis identifies Migration & Modernization, Cloud Engineering, and Security Models, then you implement a work sample designed by assessment experts to evaluate hands-on cloud migration planning and risk mitigation.

SECTION 3 – Using FWCI in HR Operations

Q9. What is HR required to do before using competencies for hiring?

Agencies must perform a job analysis (per 5 CFR 300.103) to verify the general and technical competencies to apply to their specific position. When used for selection, competencies must

be used with the appropriate OPM Qualification Standards and assessments consistent with the Merit Hiring Plan.

Application. The job analysis is the legal foundation of your hiring action: it documents the critical competencies, tasks, and level of work; it ties directly to assessment selection and rating criteria; and it protects your action if challenged.

Scenario (Workflow).

- Review the FWCI governmentwide competency information.
- Map duties and/or tasks based on current position description to FWCI competencies by cluster and band/grade.
- Determine if the governmentwide data covers your occupation's mission needs or if specialized skills are needed.
- Update the position description as needed.
- Select assessment types that best measure those competencies (e.g., structured interview for Problem Solving, work sample for Operating Systems).
- Align assessment approaches with the Merit Hiring Plan.

Q10. Are minimum education requirements still allowed?

Consistent with 5 U.S.C. 3308, OPM is prohibited from prescribing minimum education requirements if work can be performed without education. Positive education requirements generally apply only in limited circumstances, most often within scientific, technical, or professional occupations. Agencies are encouraged to rely on skills- and competency-based assessments as mandated by EO 13932, the Chance to Compete Act, 14170, and the Hiring Plan rather than education.

Application. The policy direction is clear: agencies should use job-relevant assessments that demonstrate capability over formal degrees, unless statutory exceptions apply. This aims to open talent pipelines and keep hiring focused on merit.

Scenario. For a role requiring specialized cryptographic analysis, based on a comprehensive job analysis that identifies the specific competencies required for the role, you determine that these skills can be reliably measured through direct evaluation rather than formal education. In this scenario, assessments are required for determining the alignment of applicant skillsets with the work. For this role, you remove degree requirements, replacing them with a practical work sample and structured interview that measures the competencies.

Q11. How should HR select assessment methods?

Use assessments that validly measure the selected FWCI competencies for the job and comply with the Merit Hiring Plan. OPM's Assessment and Selection resources and the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook provide guidance on job analysis and assessment selection.

Application. Choose the assessment type to match the competency:

- Structured interviews for Reasoning, Decision Making, Customer Service
- Work samples/simulations for Operating Systems, Configuration Management, Service Incident Management
- Situational judgment tests for Planning & Evaluating, Teamwork
- Technical exercises for Cloud Services, Data Architecture, Security Models

Scenario. For a Network Services role, you build a simulation that asks candidates to diagnose a network outage (measuring Information Systems & Network Security, Service Incident Management, Risk Management) and follow up with a structured interview targeting Technology Awareness and Oral Communication.

Q12. Can we still use MOSAIC occupational models?

Yes. FWCI supports continued use of MOSAIC models and competency resources. Agencies must still conduct their own job analysis to verify appropriateness of general and technical competencies.

Application. MOSAIC remains a compatible reference point, especially for occupations adjacent to or within 2210 work; FWCI provides the newest governmentwide validation for IT competencies.

SECTION 4 – Occupational Profiles & Tasks

Q13. How do we apply occupational profiles in hiring?

The Handbook includes occupational profiles for roles (e.g., Customer Support, Information Security, Network Services, Operating Systems, Systems Administration, Applications & Software, Data Management, Systems Analysis, Internet/Web Services, Enterprise Architecture, Policy & Planning). Each profile lists important technical competencies and the top 20 tasks to guide job analyses and assessments. Based on the ecosystem of IT work these roles were supported. OPM will provide updated guidance on other essential roles as well when new data is available or issuance.

Application. Profiles translate the framework into concrete, day-to-day work. They help HR and hiring managers prioritize which tasks and competencies to measure for each specialization, avoiding generic or misaligned assessments.

Scenario. For Customer Support, you emphasize tasks like diagnosing hardware/software issues, escalating incidents, and documenting solutions. Your assessment plan includes a helpdesk ticket triage exercise and a writing sample to evaluate technical documentation and clear customer communication.

SECTION 5 – Nuances & Future-Focused Guidance

Q14. Why do some technical competencies vary by level (e.g., Accessibility)?

Variation reflects differences in role emphasis across career bands: intermediate/journey roles often execute hands-on technical work (e.g., Accessibility), while senior roles focus on strategy and oversight, where certain hands-on competencies may be less critical.

Application. Adjust competency emphasis to the level of work: don't over-assess hands-on execution for senior strategic roles, and don't under-assess it for positions where technical execution is central.

Q15. How does FWCI support workforce planning and modernization?

Agencies can use FWCI to identify mission-critical IT skills, perform gap analyses, plan upskilling/reskilling, and align talent with modernization priorities (e.g., cloud migration, cybersecurity).

Application. FWCI becomes your skills “map”: you can visualize where your workforce is strong (e.g., Operating Systems) and where demand is rising (e.g., Cloud Services, Data Architecture) so training, recruitment, and succession strategies target the right competencies.

Scenario. Your agency plans a multi-year shift to zero-trust architectures. You benchmark current staff against FWCI's Security Models, Identity Management, and Information Systems & Network Security, then develop targeted training and update hiring assessments to prioritize these competencies.

SECTION 6 – Implementation Checklist (HR Actions)

Quick Steps for HR Offices (Policy-Aligned):

- ✓ Review FWCI (2210) Framework & Handbook and relevant occupational profiles for your positions.
- ✓ Conduct/update job analysis to confirm applicable general and technical competencies at the correct career band.
- ✓ Update your Position Descriptions applying the newly released IT 2210 Competency-Based Classification and Qualifications Standards.
- ✓ Select valid assessments including assessment experts that directly measure those competencies; ensure consistency with the Merit Hiring Plan.
- ✓ Align qualifications with OPM Qualification Standards.
- ✓ Update vacancy announcements to emphasize skills and competencies rather than degrees.
- ✓ Train HR Specialists & Hiring Managers on competency selection, assessment choice, and documentation requirements.

- ✓ Leverage occupational profiles to prioritize tasks and finalize rating schedules, interview question banks, and simulations/work samples.
- ✓ Successfully assess and hire talent

SECTION 7 – Resources & References

- OPM Assessment & Selection – assessment types, validity, compliance: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/>
- OPM Delegated Examining Operations Handbook – job analysis & assessment guidance: https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/competitive-hiring/deo_handbook.pdf
- [OPM Designing an Assessment Strategy and Use of SME-Based Assessments](#): free, self-paced, online training available to all agencies
 - Course 1: Designing an Assessment Strategy: Fundamental Concepts, Processes and Applications
 - Course 2: Use of Hiring Assessments: A SME-Based Approach: Fundamental Concepts, Processes and Applications
- OPM Qualification Standards (GS) – required linkage for selection: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/>
- [OPM Structured Interview Guide](#) validated for common general and technical competencies
- [OPM Structured Resume Review Training](#) - Free, self-paced, web training on implementing structured resume reviews in any agency's hiring process