

Sales and retail assistants

General competency framework · Frontline / operational level · 5 competencies · approx. 75 minutes

How to use this guide

- Focus on these 5 competencies — the behaviours that matter most for this role — not a chronological career history.
- Ask every candidate the same core questions, then probe. Allow around 15 minutes per competency.
- Ask for real examples and use STAR — the Situation, the Task, the Action they took, and the Result.
- Stay neutral, capture what they say, and judge later. Gather evidence on one competency at a time.
- Rate each competency 1–5 against the positive and negative indicators, and note the evidence.

5 Outstanding 4 Good 3 Acceptable 2 Marginal 1 Poor

1. Customer Focus

Builds effective customer relationships to ensure needs and expectations are understood. Understands the importance of the customer to the business, seeking regular feedback whilst being prepared to say no when needed.

Why this matters for Sales and retail assistants: The Retailer Apprenticeship Standard's first knowledge area is 'customer base, brand and proposition'; the named skills include 'identify customer needs', 'communicate with customers', and 'handle complaints'. Customer engagement is the central purpose of the role.

Tell me about a time you went out of your way to help a customer or member of the public.

- What did they need?
- What did you do?
- How did they react?

Describe a time a customer was unhappy or difficult. How did you handle it?

- What was the problem?
- What did you do?
- What was the outcome?

How do you know when you've done a good job for a customer? Give me an example.

- What do you look or listen for?
- Tell me about a time you got it right.

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Treats customers as a nuisance; unhelpful		Friendly, helpful and professional with customers
Doesn't take responsibility for a customer's problem		Takes ownership of sorting out customer issues
Doesn't really listen to what the customer needs		Listens and checks what the customer actually needs
Promises things that can't be delivered		Only promises what can be done; honest with customers
Doesn't see why the customer matters		Understands the customer keeps the business going

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

2. Resilience

Remains calm and maintains a positive attitude when faced with difficult circumstances. Thrives under pressure, remaining focused despite distractions. Quickly recovers from setbacks.

Why this matters for Sales and retail assistants: Standing for full shifts, peak periods (Christmas, Sales, Black Friday), occasional difficult customers, repetitive interactions across hundreds of transactions per shift. The Standard's named behaviour 'positive can-do attitude' is sustained Resilience in practice.

Tell me about a really busy or stressful time at work. How did you cope?

- What made it hard?
- How did you keep going?

Describe a time something didn't go your way at work. How did you pick yourself back up?

- How did you feel?
- What did you do?

How do you keep calm when things get difficult or busy? Give me an example.

- What helps you stay level-headed?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Loses their cool when it gets busy		Stays calm and in control when busy or stressed
Lets setbacks knock them off course		Bounces back from setbacks
Gets negative when things go wrong		Keeps a positive attitude
Easily distracted under pressure		Stays focused under pressure
Struggles to keep going when it's hard		Keeps going when the going gets tough

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

3. Dependability

Conscientious and thorough in their approach to work, delivering what they promise to the necessary standard. Behaves in line with the organisation's values and ethical principles.

Why this matters for Sales and retail assistants: The Standard's named behaviours include 'takes ownership' and 'professional'. Cash and stock-handling integrity, accurate transaction processing, reliable shift attendance — all foundations of the role.

Tell me about a time you had a lot to get done on a shift. How did you make sure it was all done properly?

- How did you keep the standard up?
- What did you do if you were running short of time?

Describe a time you turned up and found things hadn't been done properly by someone before you. What did you do?

- How did you handle it?
- What was the result?

How do you make sure your work is always done to the right standard, even when no one's checking? Give an example.

- Have you ever been tempted to cut a corner? What did you do?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Cuts corners to get done quicker		Does the job properly, to the right standard
Unreliable; doesn't do what they said		Reliable — does what they say they will
Sloppy or careless in their work		Careful and thorough
Standard drops when no one is checking		Keeps standards up even when unsupervised
Bends the rules when it suits them		Sticks to the rules and does the right thing

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

4. Collaborative Working

Looks to understand others' perspectives and objectives. Respects different styles/approaches, whilst adapting their own style to enable them to work effectively with others.

Why this matters for Sales and retail assistants: The Standard's named behaviour 'team player' and skill 'work with colleagues' both centre coordinated floor working — shift handovers, busy-period support, knowledge sharing across the shop floor. Retail runs on the team, not the individual.

Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team to get a job done.

- What was your part in it?
- How did you work with the others?
- What was the result?

Describe a time you had to change how you did something to fit in with the team or someone else's way of working.

- What did you change?
- Why?
- How did it work out?

Tell me about a time there was a disagreement or bad feeling in your team. What did you do?

- What was it about?
- How did you help sort it out?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Only wants things done their own way		Listens to others' views and finds common ground
Doesn't pull their weight in the team		Does their share and helps the team succeed
Clashes with teammates or is unhelpful in a group		Works well with others, even under pressure
Won't change how they work to fit the team		Adapts how they work to fit in with others
Makes disagreements worse		Helps sort out disagreements calmly

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

5. Influencing and Persuading

Presents simple, impactful messages in a compelling manner. Changes their emphasis and approach to address resistance, focusing on the value their ideas will bring different stakeholders. Confidently negotiates effective outcomes.

Why this matters for Sales and retail assistants: The Skills England Retailer Apprenticeship Standard names 'sell effectively' and 'communicate with customers' as core skills, and the role spans the conversion journey from greeting through needs identification, demonstration, objection handling and close. Influencing & Persuading captures this — adapting messaging to address resistance, focusing on value to the customer. Replaces Drive for Results, which is real but not framework-named at L2 floor-staff level; targets matter but the Standard's named behaviours are attitude, ownership, professionalism, team and adaptability. Drive for Results would be the swap-in for specialist sales roles (commission-driven, B2B field sales, car sales) where target-hitting is the named differentiator.

Tell me about a time you had to talk someone round to your way of thinking.

- Who was it?
- What did you say?
- Did it work?

Describe a time you had to explain something clearly so someone understood it or did what was needed.

- What was it?
- How did you keep it simple?
- How did you know they'd got it?

Tell me about a time someone didn't agree with you at work. What did you do?

- How did you handle it?
- What happened in the end?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Can't get their point across clearly		Explains things simply and clearly
Gives up as soon as someone disagrees		Brings people round without falling out
Uses the same approach with everyone		Adjusts their approach to the person
Avoids or caves in during disagreements		Stands their ground politely and finds a way forward
Doesn't listen to the other side		Listens and works towards an outcome that suits both

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____