



Building competence, not just confidence

A practical fact sheet for trainers and assessors

What is the difference between competence and confidence?

Competence

In the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, competence refers to the 'consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace' (NCVER, 2021). This includes completing job-related tasks, managing day-to-day activities, responding appropriately to problems and working effectively with others.

Confidence

In a workplace setting, confidence refers to a person's belief that they can meet organisational expectations and complete their work tasks and activities effectively.

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Why looks can be deceiving

A common trap in training and workplace verification is the 'they seem fine' judgement. A worker may speak confidently, move quickly, know the language of the job or appear comfortable around equipment. Although that can create a false sense of being already competent.

The regulatory guidance is clear. Assessment must include practical application, and judgement of competence must be based on a range of relevant evidence captured over time to ensure consistent application.

This matters in mining and automotive settings because both rely on more than surface confidence. In mining, a worker may sound experienced during a pre-start conversation but still miss a critical control, fail to escalate a hazard or skip a required step in an isolation process. In automotive work, a technician may speak with authority about a service job yet still perform checks in the wrong order, miss a fault, or leave weak documentation on a job card.



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What does robust competence look like?

Robust competence should not be seen as a 'one and done' performance. It means the evidence collected demonstrates that the person can perform the task to the standard in a way that is safe, consistent and transferable to real work. This includes:

- preparing for the task correctly
- following the right sequence
- using tools, equipment and controls safely
- responding appropriately to problems or non-routine events
- communicating clearly
- recording or reporting accurately
- repeating the required standard over time
- working without relying on constant prompting or supervision.

In mining, that might mean a worker can complete a pre-start inspection, identify a defect, follow the reporting process and explain what action is required before work continues. In automotive, it might mean a worker can complete a service or inspection task from setup through to documentation, correctly identify issues, and complete the work to the workshop standard.

Why is it important to verify competence?

Within training and assessment, the confirmation of competence is critical, as it helps protect the integrity of outcomes and establishes a baseline of skills and knowledge on which employers can rely. As such, judgements should be made on fact, not feeling, and competency should be verified, not assumed.

This is especially important when the task is safety-critical, the learner is new to the role, a process has changed, or they are moving to different equipment.



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Rules of evidence in action

Within the Australian VET system, assessors are required to apply the Rules of Evidence. This involves:

- checking validity – Are you assessing the worker's actual ability or their capacity to explain what they would do? (i.e. have you ensured the evidence aligns with the unit of competency being assessed and/or is an accurate demonstration of the skills required?)
- checking authenticity – Can you prove that they 'own' the performance and the evidence was captured in an environment that mimics the conditions of a real setting?
- checking currency – When was the last time you saw them do the task? Do you know if they can still do it now?
- checking sufficiency – Do you have enough evidence to support their claim for competence? (i.e. have you assessed them more than once, in more than one way, over a period of time?)

Tips for success

- Observe real performance wherever possible.
- Use more than one piece of evidence.
- Look at the whole task, not just the visible practical step.
- Be careful with prompting learners and honestly record how much support is needed.
- Follow up after training through observation, toolbox talks and informal discussion.
- Use plain language in instructions, checklists and feedback.

Key message

Good trainers build confidence, but they verify competence. In mining and automotive settings, where work affects safety, quality, and compliance, it is not enough for someone to look capable or sound experienced. They need to demonstrate the task in practice, with enough current and authentic evidence to support a sound judgement. In short, competence must be shown, observed and confirmed.



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