

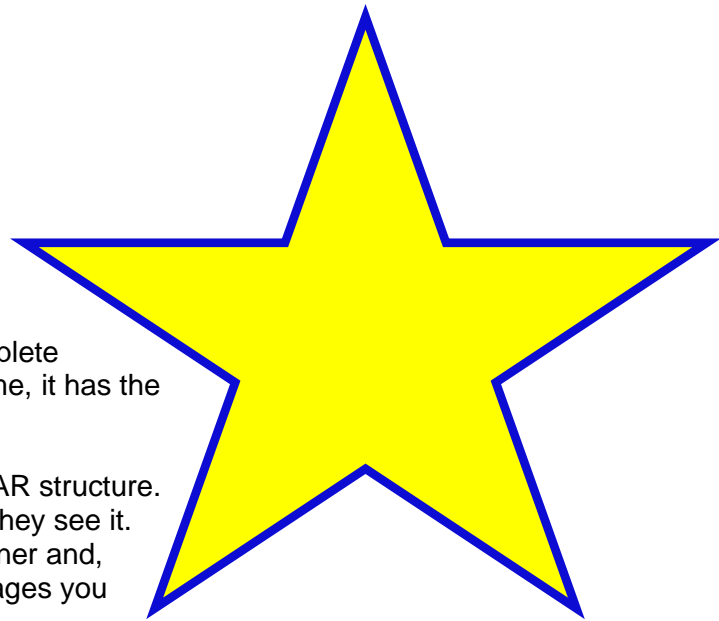
THE STAR METHOD

The acronym **STAR** stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

It is a universally recognised communication technique designed to enable you to provide a meaningful and complete answer to questions asking for examples. At the same time, it has the advantage of being simple enough to be applied easily.

Many interviewers will have been trained in using the STAR structure. Even if they have not, they will recognise its value when they see it. The information will be given to them in a structured manner and, as a result, they will become more receptive to the messages you are trying to communicate.



SITUATION

- With the STAR approach you need to set the context. Describe the situation that you were confronted with. Make it concise and informative, concentrating solely on what is useful to the story.
- You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand

TASK

- What goal were you working toward?
- What exactly was it you needed to accomplish?
- For example, if the question is asking you to describe a situation where you had to deal with a difficult person, explain how you came to meet that person and why they were being difficult.
- If the question is asking for an example of teamwork, explain the task that you had to undertake as a team.

ACTION

This is the most important section of the STAR approach as it is where you will need to demonstrate and highlight the skills and personal attributes that the question is testing. Now that you have set the context of your story, you need to explain what you did. In doing so, you will need to remember the following:

- Be personal, i.e. talk about you, not the rest of the team.
- Go into some detail. Do not assume that they will guess what you mean.
- Steer clear of technical information, unless it is crucial to your story.
- Explain what you did, how you did it, and why you did it.

What you did and how you did it

The interviewers will want to know how you reacted to the situation. This is where you can start selling some important skills.

For example, you may want to describe how you used the team to achieve a particular objective and how you used your communication skills to keep everyone updated on progress etc.

Why you did it

For example, when discussing a situation where you had to deal with conflict, many candidates would simply say: "I told my colleague to calm down and explained to him what the problem was". However, it would not provide a good idea of what drove you to act in this manner. How did you ask him to calm down? How did you explain the nature of the problem? By highlighting the reasons behind your action, you would make a greater impact.

For example:

"I could sense that my colleague was irritated and I asked him gently to tell me what he felt the problem was. By allowing him to vent his feelings and his anger, I gave him the opportunity to calm down. I then explained to him my own point of view on the matter, emphasising how important it was that we found a solution that suited us both."

This revised answer helps the interviewers understand what drove your actions and reinforces the feeling that you are calculating the consequences of your actions, thus retaining full control of the situation. It provides much more information about you as an individual and is another reason why the STAR approach is so useful.

Remember, describe the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on **you**. What specific steps did **you** take and what was **your** particular contribution?

Be careful that you don't describe what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what **you** actually did. Use the word "I," not "we" when describing actions

RESULT

- Describe the outcome of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behaviour. What happened? How did the event end?
- Also, use the opportunity to describe what you accomplished and what you learnt in that situation. This helps you make the answer personal and enables you to highlight further skills.
- Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.
- This is probably the most crucial part of your answer. Interviewers want to know that you are using a variety of generic skills in order to achieve your objectives. Therefore you must be able to demonstrate in your answer that you are taking specific actions because you are trying to achieve a specific objective and not simply by chance.

Make sure that you follow all parts of the STAR method. Be as specific as possible at all times, without rambling or including too much information. Oftentimes students have to be prompted to include their results, so try to include that without being asked. Also, eliminate any examples that do not paint you in a positive light.

SAMPLE STAR RESPONSE:

Situation (S): Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, *The Review*, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

Task (T): My goal was to generate new ideas, materials and incentives that would result in at least a 15% increase in advertisers from the year before.

Action (A): I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of *The Review* circulation with other ad media in the area. I then organised a special training session for the account executives to provide guidance and training on using other competitive selling strategies.

Result (R): We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent over the same period last year.



- **RESEARCH THE COMPANY**
Find out as much as you can about the company
- **EXPLAIN YOUR EXAMPLES IN DETAIL**
Use the S.T.A.R. method to answer questions*
- **LOOK YOUR BEST**
Your clothes should be neat and appropriate for the working environment
You should be well-groomed
No heavy perfume or cologne
Modest jewelry
- **BE PREPARED**
Bring a copy of your resume, references, samples of work if appropriate
- **ARRIVE EARLY**
Make sure you know how to get to the interview and arrive 10 minutes early

***The S.T.A.R. Method:**

Situation
Explain the situation

Task
Explain your task or role

Action
What action did you take?

Results
What resulted from your action?

Commonly asked interview questions:

- ✦ *Tell me a little about yourself.*
- ✦ *What are your strengths?*
- ✦ *What are your weaknesses?*
- ✦ *Why do you want to work here?*
- ✦ *Tell me about your most recent job.*
- ✦ *Why did you leave your last job?*

- **BODY LANGUAGE**
Look the interviewer in the eye, but don't stare
Sit up straight and act alert
Don't chew gum or smoke
Smile when appropriate
- **BE ENTHUSIASTIC**
Show genuine interest in the job
- **USE DISCRETION**
Be honest in your answers but steer away from troublesome areas
- **ASK QUESTIONS**
Ask questions that will help you decide if the position is suitable for you
- **SUBJECTS TO AVOID:**
Don't mention financial or personal problems
Don't talk about what was wrong with previous employers
Don't mention salary or benefits
- **REMEMBER TO THANK YOUR INTERVIEWER!**

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW

- Recall recent situations that show favourable behaviours or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked
- Be sure each story has a beginning, middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, including the task at hand, your action, and the outcome or result
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favourable).
- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life

SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Practice using the STAR Method on these common behavioural interviewing questions:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa)
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year
- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low)