

THE STAR METHOD

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing.

Situation: Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. 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. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.

Task: What goal were you working toward?

Action: 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 behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

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. However, keep in mind that some examples that have a negative result (such as "lost the game") can highlight your strengths in the face of adversity.

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 also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a School of Business Administration professor who discussed 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.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors 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 favorable).
- 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 behavioral 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.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- 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 coworker.
- 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.
- Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).

TYPES OF BEHAVIORAL/SITUATIONAL Interview Questions

Teamwork

For questions like these, you want a story that illustrates your ability to work with others under challenging circumstances. Think team conflict, difficult project constraints, or clashing personalities. Talk about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.

- Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that?
- Describe a time when you struggled to build a relationship with someone important. How did you eventually overcome that?
- We all make mistakes we wish we could take back. Tell me about a time you wish you'd handled a situation differently with a colleague.
- Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn't very responsive. What did you do?

Client-facing Skills

If the role you're interviewing for works with clients, definitely be ready for one of these. Find an example of a time where you successfully represented your company or team and delivered exceptional customer service.

- Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a client. How did you go about doing so?
- Give me an example of a time when you did not meet a client's expectation. What happened, and how did you attempt to rectify the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you made sure a customer was pleased with your service.
- Describe a time when you had to interact with a difficult client. What was the situation, and how did you handle it?
- When you're working with a large number of customers, it's tricky to deliver excellent service to them all. How do you go about prioritizing your customers' needs?

Ability to Adapt

Times of turmoil are finally good for something! Think of a recent work crisis you successfully navigated. Even if your navigation didn't feel successful at the time, find a lesson or silver lining you took from the situation.

- Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure. What was going on, and how did you get through it?
- Describe a time when your team or company was undergoing some change. How did that impact you, and how did you adapt?
- Tell me about the first job you've ever had. What did you do to learn the ropes?

- Give me an example of a time when you had to think on your feet in order to delicately extricate yourself from a difficult or awkward situation.
- Tell me about a time you failed. How did you deal with the situation?

Time Management Skills

In other words, get ready to talk about a time you juggled multiple responsibilities, organized it all (perfectly), and completed everything before the deadline.

- Tell me about a time you had to be very strategic in order to meet all your top priorities.
- Describe a long-term project that you managed. How did you keep everything moving along in a timely manner?
- Sometimes it's just not possible to get everything on your to-do list done. Tell me about a time your responsibilities got a little overwhelming. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself. How did you go about ensuring that you would meet your objective?
- Give me an example of a time you managed numerous responsibilities. How did you handle that?

Communication Skills

You probably won't have any trouble thinking of a story for communication questions, since it's not only part of most jobs; it's part of everyday life. However, the thing to remember here is to also talk about your thought process or preparation.

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully persuade someone to see things your way at work.
- Describe a time when you were the resident technical expert. What did you do to make sure everyone was able to understand you?
- Tell me about a time when you had to rely on written communication to get your ideas across to your team.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to explain something fairly complex to a frustrated client. How did you handle this delicate situation?
- Tell me about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it was a hit.

Teamwork

- Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that?

Answer:

Situation (S):

There was a new implementation of a web application frontend that the team was working to implement. This coworker was a bit atypical in that they were very introverted and not very approachable with different idea and new thoughts other than theirs. I had already had a frictional interaction with this coworker previously.

Task (T):

The current application worked but it was pretty dated. The aesthetics, and responsiveness of the site needed to be updated. Myself and the lead developer were tasked to work on this project and formulate and implement the solution.

Action (A):

I had extensive history with graphic design, text usage and view layout. My coworker was a good developer but was not as well verse on graphics, layouts and color usage of web design. From there, we decided to both come up with up color schemes and present to each other our thoughts and ideas.

Result (R):

We ultimately decided to present my idea to the team and it was eventually accepted i mplemented as the layout moving forward for the project.

Client-facing Skills

- Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a client. How did you go about doing so?

Answer:

Situation (S):

We had a new client in another state and we were developing a new application for them.

Task (T):

We needed to make sure that we were really started this project on the right foot with discussing their requirements, and general initial questions were satisfactorily answered.

Action (A):

In the near two days that I spent with the client, I was able to discuss the project and answer questions as well as go over mockups and confirm that we definitely understood their requests and needs.

Result (R):

This resulted in a smooth start to the project. We were able to start this project meet initial deadlines as expected.

Ability to Adapt

- Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure. What was going on, and how did you get through it?

Situation (S) & Task (T):

I was the Asst. Director of Florida Operations. In preparation for Spring Training, there are a lot of meetings and cross collaboration from different departments that were many details and task must be worked out and prepared because there is not time for mistake - even small ones. Prepping for Spring Training is a huge task.

Action (A):

As we had done many times previously, we heard several meetings taking meticulous notes and delivering information to other groups so that they had the information that they needed in order to plan and sign off of collaborative situations.

Result (R):

The finished product was a good success. As with many large scaled projects, even with the best planning, there are always issue, unforeseen issue that development but with any good plan, you have to be able to adapt and that what we did.

Time Management Skills

- Tell me about a time you had to be very strategic in order to meet all your top priorities.

Situation (S):

Before the MLB regular season opening day, there's always a number of projects that are in the works for the new season. In many cases, we'd like to have them available to staff and player by opening day so that they have access to all the resources they can on a consistent bases and so that we are not limiting their ability to study and prepare for facing their opponents.

Task (T):

We needed to finish and deliver 3 major feature upgrades that were in the development for most of the off-season. There were a couple of setbacks with data model changes and snags with third party software implementation that made the timeline slip a bit.

Action (A):

It was imperative that we put in the additional time and really hone in on all tasks and do our best development. In many cases, for me, the higher the stakes and slower and more deliberate are my actions. At that point, it is really important to work slower, more deliberate and focused so that you are not making mistakes and wasting time having to comb through hundreds of lines of code for the error or mistake.

Result (R):

As it turns out, we were able to make our deadline on two of the three new applications and were able to deliver the third within a week of the season opening. This was a major feat but sometimes pressure reveals some of your greatest strengths.

Communication Skills

- Tell me about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it was a hit.

Situation (S) & Task (T):

We had lots of data available from MLB and but there was currently no implemented solution to aggregate and display the data. We needed a solution for giving easy access to this data to the front office executives and other staff and coaches.

Action (A):

It was my responsibility to make a presentation to the Assistant GM and department heads to display what this iOS application could do and how it would work with a basic and simple proof of concept application. I had learned from previous software meetings with this group that I could not expect them to bridge the gap on how the technology would work and feel in use. They needed to see it in action. This is what sealed the deal.

Result (R):

This application was developed by our in-house development staff and was in production for many years. We added additional features and maintained the app regularly over the years.