



# SCHOLARS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

*PROFESSIONAL TRACK - Mentee*

## Session 4: Interview Part 1

Welcome to Session 4, which is to be covered in Week 7 & 8. This session focuses on helping you prepare effectively for job interviews.

### Recap

Review progress from the previous session on Networking on LinkedIn and share any tasks you completed. Bring up any questions or challenges you faced so far.

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## Activity 1: Understanding Different Interview Formats

### Objective

Gain a clear understanding of different interview formats and question types to prepare effectively and boost confidence for job interviews.

### 1. Overview of Interview Formats

Interviews can take various forms, depending on the role and company. Here's a breakdown of the most common formats and tips for each:

#### 1. Behavioral interviews

- **Purpose** - Assess past behavior as a predictor of future performance.
- **Key Strategy** - Use the **STAR Method** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure answers.
- **Example Question**  
*"Tell me about a time when you faced a difficult deadline and how you managed it."*
- **Tip:** Focus on specific examples, not generalizations. Prepare 4–5 STAR stories in advance. STAR is discussed in the next section.

#### 2. Technical interviews

- **Purpose** - Evaluate job-specific technical skills through coding tasks, problem-solving, or knowledge assessments.
- **Common areas tested** (these areas are from Computer Science perspective, may be completely different in your field)



# SCHOLARS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

## PROFESSIONAL TRACK - Mentee

- Coding (e.g., Python, Java)
- Algorithms and data structures
- System design
- **Example question**  
*"Write a function to detect a cycle in a linked list."*
- **Tip:** Practice using platforms like **LeetCode**, **HackerRank**, and **Codewars** to build confidence.
- 3. **Panel interviews**
  - **Purpose** - Interview with multiple interviewers to assess communication, teamwork, and adaptability.
  - **Example question**  
*"How do you handle competing priorities across multiple projects?"*
  - **Tip:** Make eye contact and engage **each panel member** while answering questions.
- 4. **Phone/Video interviews**
  - **Purpose** - Used for initial screening or remote hiring processes.
  - **Focus areas** - Communication skills, professionalism, and clarity.
  - **Tip:**
    - Test your tech setup beforehand.
    - Choose a quiet, professional setting.
    - Keep a copy of your resume and notes handy.

## 2. Common Interview Question Types

Prepare for these **three main question categories** used in interviews:

### a. Behavioral Questions

Behavioral questions assess past experiences to evaluate your problem-solving ability, leadership, and teamwork skills.

**Key strategy:** Apply the **STAR Method** to answer questions clearly and effectively.

- **S - Situation:** Describe the context.
- **T - Task:** Explain the goal or challenge.
- **A - Action:** Detail the steps you took.
- **R - Result:** Share the outcome and lessons learned.



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### Examples

#### i) Teamwork and collaboration

- *"Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team to achieve a goal."*
- *"Describe a situation where you had to manage a conflict within your team."*

#### ii) Problem-solving and analytical skills

- *"Give me an example of a challenging problem you faced and how you resolved it."*
- *"Describe a time when you had to analyze information and make a decision quickly."*

#### iii) Leadership and initiative

- *"Tell me about a time when you led a project and what the outcome was."*
- *"Describe a situation where you took initiative to improve a process."*

### b. Technical Questions

Technical questions test your ability to solve problems and apply industry-specific knowledge.

Note: Below examples are given from a Computer Science perspective and may be different from your field.

#### Examples by category

##### 1. Coding and programming

- *"Write a function to reverse a string."*
- *"Find the largest number in an unsorted array."*

##### 2. Algorithms and data structures:

- *"Explain the difference between BFS and DFS."*
- *"What is the time complexity of quicksort?"*

##### 3. System design and architecture

- *"Design an e-commerce checkout system."*
- *"How would you scale a real-time chat application?"*



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**Tip:** Practice coding and algorithms using platforms like:

- **LeetCode:** <https://leetcode.com>
- **HackerRank:** <https://www.hackerrank.com>
- **GeeksforGeeks:** <https://www.geeksforgeeks.org>

### c. Situational Questions

Situational questions evaluate how you might handle hypothetical challenges in the future.

#### Examples

##### 1. Conflict resolution

- *"What would you do if a team member wasn't contributing their share to a group project?"*
- *"How would you handle disagreement with your manager's approach to a task?"*

##### 2. Problem-solving

- *"What steps would you take if you were given an ambiguous project brief?"*
- *"How would you handle missing a project deadline due to unforeseen issues?"*

**Tip:** Apply the **STAR Method** even for situational questions—describe how you would address the situation step-by-step.

### 3. Action plan for interview practice

#### 1. Self-assessment

- Review sample questions and draft answers using the STAR Method.
- Record yourself answering questions to improve clarity and confidence.

#### 2. Mock interviews

- Schedule a mock interview with your mentor or a peer for practice.
- Focus on verbal communication, tone, and timing.

#### 3. Research the employer

- Study the company culture, mission, and recent news to tailor your answers.
- Prepare company-specific questions to ask at the end of the interview.

#### 4. Practice tool



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- Use Pramp (<https://www.pramp.com>) for mock coding interviews.
  - Try Interviewing.io (<https://interviewing.io>) for technical practice.
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## Activity 2: Mastering the STAR Method

### Objective

Learn how to effectively use the **STAR Method** to structure responses to behavioral interview questions, showcasing problem-solving skills, leadership, and achievements.

### What is the STAR Method?

The **STAR Method** is a structured approach to answering **behavioral interview questions** by providing specific examples from past experiences. It helps you clearly communicate your qualifications and demonstrate how you've handled challenges.

### STAR stands for

- **S** - Situation: Set the context.
- **T** - Task: Explain your role or responsibility.
- **A** - Action: Describe the steps you took.
- **R** - Result: Highlight the outcome and impact.

## 1. Breaking Down the STAR Method

### a. Situation – Set the scene

Provide a brief overview of the context or challenge you faced. Keep it specific and relevant.

#### Example

*"In my previous role as a project manager, we were tasked with delivering a new client portal in 6 weeks. Halfway through the project, a key developer left unexpectedly, risking a delay."*

**Pro Tip:** Focus on providing enough background to help the interviewer understand the situation without going into unnecessary detail.



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### b. Task – Define your role

Explain your specific responsibilities in the situation. Highlight your role in addressing the challenge.

#### Example

*"As the project manager, it was my responsibility to keep the project on track, reorganize tasks, and ensure seamless communication with the client to manage expectations."*

**Pro Tip:** Use action-oriented language to emphasize ownership and accountability.

### c. Action – Highlight what you did

Describe the steps you took to resolve the issue or achieve the goal. Focus on **what YOU did** rather than the team.

#### Example

*"I immediately held a team meeting to reassign tasks, prioritized the most critical features, and negotiated an extension for less urgent deliverables. I also hired a freelance developer to fill the gap temporarily and conducted regular check-ins to monitor progress."*

**Pro Tip:** Highlight skills such as problem-solving, leadership, and communication.

### d. Result – Share the outcome

Explain the results of your actions. Whenever possible, **quantify the impact** to demonstrate success.

#### Example

*"As a result, we delivered the project on time, earning positive feedback from the client and securing an additional contract worth \$50,000. My ability to lead under pressure also earned me a promotion to Senior Project Manager."*



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**Pro Tip:** Tie your results back to the original goal and emphasize how your actions made a measurable impact.

## 2. Practice with Examples

### Example 1: Conflict Resolution

**Question:** *"Tell me about a time you faced a conflict within your team."*

**Answer using STAR method**

- **S:** "While leading a team on a marketing project, two members disagreed over the design approach, causing delays."
- **T:** "I was responsible for resolving the conflict and ensuring the project met its deadline."
- **A:** "I held a meeting with both members to listen to their concerns, facilitated a brainstorming session, and proposed a compromise that combined their ideas."
- **R:** "This resolved the conflict, and we completed the project two days early. The client praised the final design, and both team members felt valued."

### Example 2: Taking Initiative

**Question:** *"Describe a situation where you identified an opportunity to improve a process."*

**Answer using STAR method**

- **S:** "At my previous company, I noticed that the manual data entry process was error-prone and slowed down project timelines."
- **T:** "I decided to research automation tools that could streamline the process."
- **A:** "I proposed and implemented a new automated system, trained the team, and tested its effectiveness."
- **R:** "This reduced errors by 30% and improved data processing speed by 50%, saving the team 10 hours per week."

## 3. Tips for using STAR effectively

1. **Match your story to the role** - Choose examples that highlight skills relevant to the job description.



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2. **Keep It Concise** - Stick to 2–3 sentences per STAR component to keep your answers clear and engaging.
  3. **Quantify results** - Use numbers, percentages, or timeframes to make outcomes more impactful.
  4. **Practice aloud** - Rehearse your answers to improve delivery and confidence.
  5. **Prepare multiple examples** - Have 3–5 stories ready to cover key skills like leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving.
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## 4. Tasks to Complete Before the Next Session

1. Prepare and practice answers for at least 5 behavioral and 5 technical questions.
  2. Complete one mock interview with a peer or an online mock interview site and request feedback.
  3. Research and identify **3 companies** you are interested in and learn about their hiring processes.
  4. Identify 3 STAR examples
    - Write down 3 experiences where you demonstrated key skills.
    - Structure each response using the STAR format.
  5. Practice Out Loud
    - Rehearse your STAR answers with a mentor or peer.
    - Ask for feedback and refine responses.
  6. Prepare for Common Questions
    - Review behavioral questions provided in **Activity 1** and create STAR-based answers for 5–7 of them.
  7. Mock Interview Exercise
    - Practice delivering STAR answers in a timed mock interview setting to improve clarity and confidence.
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## Additional Resources

- STAR interview guide (MindTools) - [MindTools STAR Method](#)
- Mock interview tools
  - Pramp - <https://www.pramp.com>
  - Interviewing.io - <https://interviewing.io>
- Sample behavioral questions





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- The Muse Behavioral Questions list -  
<https://www.themuse.com/advice/30-behavioral-interview-questions-you-should-be-ready-to-answer>

Interview Guide:

[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tsitati-mayenga\\_repost-share-ugcPost-7282326901275164672-Q5OY?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tsitati-mayenga_repost-share-ugcPost-7282326901275164672-Q5OY?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

Ace Your Job Interview:

[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/george-stern\\_the-secret-to-acing-your-job-interview-activity-7282381715321303041-yTqe?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/george-stern_the-secret-to-acing-your-job-interview-activity-7282381715321303041-yTqe?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

## Preparation for Session 5

**Focus Area:** Interview Part 2

Prepare to discuss professional presentation and post-interview follow-up skills.

## Feedback Form

Please fill out the feedback forms at the end of your meeting, the feedback will help us improve the program.

- [Mentee Feedback Form](#)