

How to Use the STAR Interview Response Method

Are job interviews challenging for you? Do you struggle to give concise answers to interview questions? Are you unsure how to share your accomplishments during an interview without sounding boastful? What's the best way to let the interviewer know that you're the right candidate for the job?

The STAR interview response method can help make the process easier. Using this method of answering interview questions allows you to share concrete examples of how you successfully handled situations at work to show that you possess the experience and skills required for the job you're interviewing for.

Read below for a detailed description of the STAR interview response technique and examples of how to best use it.

Key Takeaways

- STAR stands for situation, task, action, result.
- Each concept in the STAR acronym is a step that candidates can use to respond to interview questions.
- By following all four steps, applicants can provide comprehensive answers to interview questions.

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result

STAR stands for **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult. Using this strategy is particularly helpful in response to competency-focused questions, which typically start with phrases such as, "Describe a time when..." or, "Share an example of a situation where...."

What Is the STAR Interview Response Method?

The STAR interview response method is a way of answering behavioral interview questions. Behavioral interview questions are questions about how you have behaved in the past. Specifically, they are about how you have handled certain work situations.²

Employers using this technique analyze jobs and define the skills and qualities that high-level performers have exhibited in that job. Since past performance

can be a good predictor of the future, interviewers ask these questions to determine whether candidates have the skills and experiences required to excel in the job.

For example, employers might be looking for proof of problem-solving skills, analytical ability, creativity, perseverance through failure, writing skills, presentation skills, teamwork orientation, persuasive skills, quantitative skills, or accuracy.

Examples of behavioral interview questions include the following:

- Tell me about an occasion when you had to complete a task under a tight deadline?
- Have you ever gone above and beyond the call of duty?
- What do you do when a team member refuses to complete his or her quota of the work?

Some interviewers structure their questions using the STAR technique. However, job seekers can also use the STAR interview method to prepare for behavioral interview questions.

STAR Key Concepts

STAR is an acronym for four key concepts. Each concept is a step the job candidate can take when answering a behavioral interview question. By following all four steps, the job candidate will provide a comprehensive answer. The four steps referenced in the acronym are the following:³

Situation: Describe the context within which you performed a job or faced a challenge at work. For example, perhaps you were working on a group project, or you had a conflict with a co-worker. This situation can be drawn from a work experience, a volunteer position, or any other relevant event. Be as specific as possible.

Task: Next, describe your responsibility in that situation. Perhaps you had to help your group complete a project within a tight deadline, resolve a conflict with a co-worker, or hit a sales target.

Action: You then describe how you completed the task or endeavored to meet the challenge. Focus on what you did rather than what your team, boss, or coworker did.

Note

Instead of saying, "We did XYZ," say, "I did XYZ.")

Result: Finally, explain the outcomes or results generated by the action taken. It may be helpful to emphasize what you accomplished or what you learned.

How To Prepare for an Interview Using STAR

Since you won't know in advance what interviewing techniques your interviewer will be using, you'll benefit from preparing several scenarios from the jobs you've held.

Make a list of the job qualifications. First, make a list of the skills and/or experiences that are required for the job you're applying for. It may help to look at the job listing and similar job listings for indications of the required or preferred skills/qualities. You can then match your qualifications to those listed in the posting.

Create a list of examples. Then, consider specific examples of occasions when you displayed those skills. For each example, name the *situation, task, action, and result*.

Match your skills to the job. Whatever examples you select, make sure they are as closely related to the job you're interviewing for as possible.

Prepare a response. For each example, prepare a brief response:⁴

- Describe the **situation** (2-3 sentences).
- Explain your **task** (1-2 sentences).
- Describe the **action** you took (2-3 sentences).
- Share your **result** (2-3 sentences).

Note

You can also take a look at common behavioral interview questions and try answering each of them using the STAR technique.

Examples of Interview Questions and Answers Using STAR

Tell me about a time you had to complete a task within a tight deadline.
Describe the situation and explain how you handled it.

Example Answer

While I typically like to plan out my work in stages and complete it piece by piece, I can also achieve high-quality work results under tight deadlines. Once, at a former company, an employee left days before the deadline of one of his projects. I was asked to assume responsibility for it, with only a few days to learn about and complete the project. I created a task force and delegated work, and we all completed the assignment with a day to spare. In fact, I believe I thrive when working under tight deadlines.

What do you do when a team member doesn't complete their share of the work?

Example Answer

When there are team conflicts or issues, I always try my best to step up as team leader if needed. I think my communication skills make me an effective leader and moderator. For example, one time, when I was working on a team project, two of the team members got embroiled in an argument, both refusing to complete their assignments. They were both dissatisfied with their workloads, so I arranged a team meeting in which we reallocated all the assignments among the team members. This made everyone happier and more productive, and our project was a success.

Tell me about a time you showed initiative on the job.

Example Answer

Last winter, I was acting as an account coordinator, supporting the account executive for a major client at an ad agency. The account executive had an accident and was sidelined three weeks before a major campaign pitch.

I volunteered to fill in and orchestrate the presentation by coordinating the input of the creative and media teams. I called an emergency meeting and facilitated a discussion about ad scenarios, media plans, and the roles of various team members in relation to the presentation.

I was able to achieve a consensus on two priority ad concepts that we had to pitch and on related media strategies. I drew up a minute-by-minute plan of how we would present the pitch. Based on our discussions, the plan was warmly received by the team. The client loved our plan and adopted the campaign. I was promoted to account executive six months later.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How can you share examples of your achievements during a job interview?

One of the best ways to share your accomplishments with an interviewer is by telling a story. When answering questions, share a description of what you did and how you achieved a positive outcome. This way, you're showing the interviewer what you're able to do rather than just telling them you can do the job.

What can you do when you can't think of an answer to an interview question?

When you're asked a challenging question, use the STAR interview technique to respond. Think of something you did at work related to the question, then explain how you handled the situation and what the outcome was.

Best of luck!

*you're
the
best*