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STAR Interview Technique

Every hiring manager has one goal for the interview process: to find a solution to their team's challenges by finding the right new team member. They start by looking at your experience and technical skills, but they also need to assess your interpersonal skills.

Behavioural questions and the use of the STAR interview technique do just that.



What is the STAR interview technique, and how does it help both candidates and interviewers find the right fit? We talked with [Laura McGrath, Executive and Interview Coach](#) in Dublin, to learn how you can land your next job by telling the right story using the STAR interview technique.

What is the STAR Interview Technique?

The STAR interview technique is part of a strategy called behavioural-based interviewing. Behavioural interviews assess your past experience by asking you to provide specific examples of your skills, abilities, and competencies.

These interviews form a vital component of the hiring process, sometimes even more so than technical skills or years of experience. Many of today's employers believe in the mantra "hire the person, teach the skills." Predicting your future behaviour by assessing your past choices helps ensure that you're a culture fit for the organisation and you're worth training.

The STAR interviewing technique fits neatly into the category of behavioural interviewing by providing a neat format to answer behavioural questions. STAR is an acronym for: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

An interviewer will ask questions designed to allow you to provide a STAR answer. Some companies will tell you explicitly that they're looking for you to provide these answers (they might say, "brush up on the STAR technique before the meeting"). Even if they don't mention the use of the technique, it's helpful to frame your answers this way when answering behavioural questions about:

Ethics

Leadership

Critical evaluation

Communication

Relationship management

Cultural competency and effectiveness

By breaking down your behavioural interview answers with the STAR technique, you'll find it easier to provide answers useful to hiring managers simply by telling a linear story. Check out our [Virtual Interview Tips](#) article for plenty more practical advice to ace your next remote interview!

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Are You a Hiring Manager?

The STAR interview technique is a great way to assess a candidate's behavioural competencies and values by asking one simple question. The stories candidates tell you know only about how they behaved in the past, but whether they could motivate and lead teams in the future using evidence.

You're not limited to asking a one-off question. You can also dig in deeper to parts of the candidate's answer if you discover something interesting.

Using STAR interviews can also help you better distinguish between candidates with very similar technical competencies and work histories. Using the STAR model and analysing answers with the Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales can help you make smarter hiring decisions faster.

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STAR Technique Examples: Situation, Task, Action, Result

The STAR technique is a storytelling method for organising your answers. So how does it work?

Let's take a deeper look at each component:

STAR	Example
Situation	Give us the background information. What was the situation (or context) in your story?
Task	Tell them what you needed to do next. What task did you perform to solve the issue?
Action	Dive deeper into what happened next. How did you complete the task?
Result	Share your win. What was the result of your efforts?

Here's a quick example.

STAR Technique Example for Project Manager Interview

You're about to walk into an interview to [become a Project Manager](#) at a software company. Project Managers spend their time managing relationships, knocking down roadblocks, and motivating teams to meet goals and deadlines.

In the interview, the hiring manager asks: “Have you ever had to deal with a project with unrealistic timelines?”

To answer you'll describe your example using the STAR format. You might say:

Situation: In my current organisation, we were regularly short of staff on projects. However, our deadlines didn't reflect the availability of resources, which left our team vulnerable to consistently missing those deadlines. Missing deadlines negatively impacts team morale, and it can also impact our performance reviews.

Task: I needed to find out why management applied those deadlines, despite our lack of resources for completing the projects in my department. Once I understood the motivation for the deadline, I could find a solution and better protect the project team and the deadline.

Action: I set a meeting with the department leader to discuss the rationale for the deadlines they set. I learned that the deadlines were not the result of an identifiable business driver and weren't conditional on a business objective. As a result, I was able to work with the leader and use project management techniques to better manage the leader's expectations and improve the team's chance of success. We found that the time expectation wasn't in alignment with the cost and scope of the project. So, I was able to add more resources to the project to better balance the project requirements.

Result: After working with the leader to align time, scope, and cost, my team began hitting deadlines 87% of the time as compared to only 45% of the time prior to the solution. Additionally, engagement grew across the team. Anecdotally, team members were noticeably less stressed and better able to problem solve on their own, which will help them grow.

What are Some STAR Behavioural Interview Questions?

STAR interview questions can be general or tailored to the role or organisation you want to join.

A few examples of the format include:

Describe a time when you need to navigate a stressful situation.

Tell us about a time you set a goal and achieved it.

Share a story about a time when you went above and beyond to get a job done.

Give us an example of a time when you had to deal with conflict.

Walk us through a difficult decision you've made in the last year.

Has there been a time when you have motivated others?

How have you handled making a difficult or unpopular decision?

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How to Ace a STAR Interview

When the interviewer uses the STAR method, they want you to tell them a story with verifiable, concrete evidence. But they don't want a story you pieced together on the fly. As McGrath says, "The STAR technique is an evidence-based approach. They're looking for evidence that the candidate has the behaviours required for their own organisation."

The best STAR interview answers are:

Concise

Focused on the **Action**

Hyper-relevant to the position

And if your Action resulted in a measurable result with data, then you should make sure you share that, too.

According to interview expert Laura McGrath, the key to success is all about how you frame your answer.

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Why Framing Your Answer Will Win You the Job

Thinking carefully about how you present your answer is as important as the answer itself. As McGrath says, "You don't want to get lost in the details of the story. The hiring manager is trying to find out whether you have certain qualities. They don't want to hear about the day-to-day details of an event. About 75-80% of your STAR answer should stay focused on the Action you took."

However, you should also go further than focusing on actions and behaviours as they applied in the past. While the hiring manager wants to know about past experience, they want a better sense of how you'll perform on their team. McGrath encourages all clients she coaches to "think about the company and the challenges they're facing. Join the dots for the hiring manager and let them know that the skills you've demonstrated in your answer will allow you to deliver on key strategic objectives for them."

Your ability to help the hiring manager see you in the new job is what McGrath describes as "the icing on the cake."

McGrath says, "If the values of the prospective employee and the values of the employers align, then everything else can be aligned."

I'm Short on Experience — How Do I Answer Behavioural Questions?

For many people, the STAR technique can feel intimidating, especially if you're early in your career or making a career transition. Your STAR answer won't necessarily correlate to a monumental result or impact on the organisation. That's perfectly fine!

Your answer needs to reflect your experience. And just because you're not in a powerful position in the organisation, doesn't mean you're not in a powerful situation with a customer or a colleague. Think carefully about the time you've used your skills for teamwork, problem solving, conflict, or leadership, and go from there.

Did they ask a question where you can't relate your experience? Use a simple technique to answer: I haven't been in that position, but if I found myself in that situation then I would..." and complete the STAR framework.

Prepare with a STAR Method Worksheet or Powerpoint

These interviews are important to hiring managers, so it's helpful to run through some potential scenarios prior to the interview.

McGrath says the best starting point is to speak to someone in the organisation if you can. "Get real time information regarding the role, or speak with someone in the sector," McGrath says. "You'll then gather the evidence you need to put together more compelling examples, and give the hiring manager the evidence they're looking for in return."

A start interview worksheet can simply be a table like the one we provided above. Here are a few more STAR method interview worksheets in PDF form:

<https://studentaffairs.vancouver.wsu.edu/files/inserted-files/STAR%20Interviewing%20Practice%20Sheet.pdf>

https://ilitchbusiness.wayne.edu/career-planning/pdf/star_interviewing_practice_worksheet.pdf

<https://studentaffairs.fresnostate.edu/careers/documents/student-pages/star-worksheet.pdf>

Other Interview Techniques

What other interview techniques could you run into during your interview process?

Structured interviews

You'll typically answer a set of questions asked of every candidate around past experience and future goals and expectations. Behavioural interviews fall into the category of structured interviews.

Unstructured interviews

An unstructured interview will be more conversational and use some general questions. The format grants more opportunity for both sides to share their experience based on the direction of the conversation.

Situational interviews

These differ from behavioural interviews because they require you to solve a problem or present an approach rather than share evidence from a past experience. However, you can give specific examples of how you approached similar experiences in the past.

Technical interviews

A technical interview usually serves as an exam. You'll often find them in technical jobs, like IT or engineering.

Getting the job

Using the tips in this article, you will give yourself the best chance of success. Once you've had an interview, made an impression, and received an official job offer - what next? Find out [How to Accept a Job Offer](#) and take the next step in your career!

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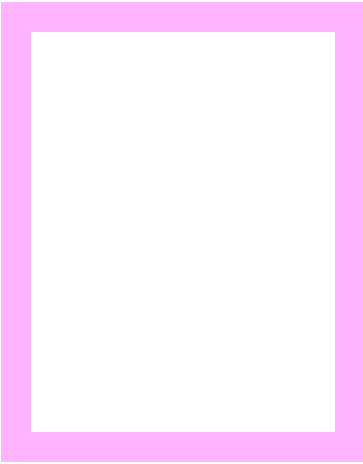
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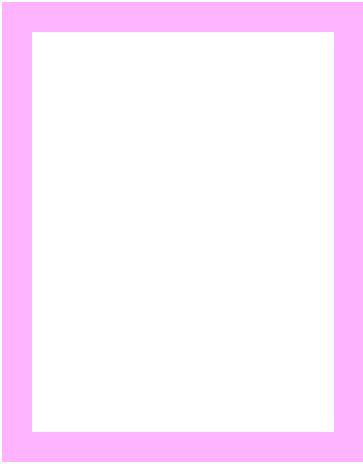
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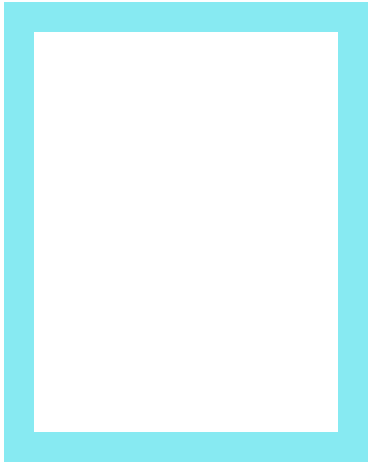
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