

Using the STAR technique to answer job interview questions

By using this step-by-step method you will be able to answer each question in a systematic manner, without forgetting the important stuff. Here we take a look at every stage of the STAR interview method.



Which questions need a STAR response?

The questions will usually start along the lines of “tell me about a time when you...” This will be followed by one or more of the competencies listed on the job specification, so it is important to be familiar with these so that you can prepare. Asking about soft skills such as teamwork, negotiation and communication are common in most job interviews.

A lot of the questions will require you to think about past work experiences you’ve had. If you don’t have any previous work experience, you can still talk about extra-curricular activities or school projects you have been involved in, as an example of how you have demonstrated a skill or competency.

The answer to these questions will usually be between a minute and three minutes long.

★ SITUATION

Start by setting the scene, giving a context and background to the situation. So if you're asked a question about time management, your reply would need to include the details of the project/task you were working on, who you were working with, when it happened and where you were.

★ TASK

Give specific information about your exact role in the situation. You need to make sure that the interviewer knows what you were individually tasked with, rather than the rest of the team.

★ ACTION

This is the most important part of the STAR technique, because it allows you to highlight what your response was. Remember, you need to talk about what you specifically did, so using 'I' rather than 'we' is important – otherwise you won't be showing off the necessary skills the employer is looking for.

Be sure to share a lot of detail, the interviewer will not be familiar with your history, although remember to avoid any acronyms and institutional language.

What you're trying to get across here is how you assessed and decided what was the appropriate response to the situation, and how you got the other team members involved – which in turn is a great way to demonstrate your communication skills.

For example, if you are asked about a time when you showed good organisational skills, you could talk about how you created a plan for a group task or project which helped your whole team stick to their deadlines.

★ RESULT

The result should be a positive one, and ideally one that can be quantified. Examples include completing tasks more quickly or to a higher quality, the resulting grade or outcome you achieved, an increase in sales by 15% or saving the team 5 hours a week. The interviewer will also want to know what you learnt from that situation, and if there was anything you'd do differently the next time you were faced with that situation.

The STAR technique enables you to showcase your relevant experience with the interviewer in a methodical manner. We recommend doing some in-depth preparation before the interview so that you can have some great examples to quote.