

City of Glasgow College

Trade Union Education Centre

S.T.A.R.

Competency-based interviews -the "STAR" approach

The acronym **STAR** stands for

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result.

It is a universally recognised communication technique designed to enable you to provide a meaningful and complete answer to questions asking for examples. At the same time, it has the advantage of being simple enough to be applied easily.

Many interviewers will have been trained in using the STAR structure. Even if they have not, they will recognise its value when they see it. The information will be given to them in a structured manner and, as a result, they will become more receptive to the messages you are trying to communicate.

Step 1 – Situation and Task

Describe the situation that you were confronted with or the task that needed to be accomplished. With the STAR approach you need to set the context. Make it concise and informative, concentrating solely on what is useful to the story. For example, if the question is asking you to describe a situation where you had to deal with a difficult person, explain how you came to meet that person and why they were being difficult. If the question is asking for an example of teamwork, explain the task that you had to undertake as a team.

Step 2 – Action

This is the most important section of the STAR approach as it is where you will need to demonstrate and highlight the skills and personal attributes that the question is testing. Now that you have set the context of your story, you need to explain what you did. In doing so, you will need to remember the following:

- Be personal, i.e. talk about you, not the rest of the team.
- Go into some detail. Do not assume that they will guess what you mean.
- Steer clear of technical information, unless it is crucial to your story.
- Explain what you did, how you did it, and why you did it.

What you did and how you did it

The interviewers will want to know how you reacted to the situation. This is where you can start selling some important skills. For example, you may want to describe how you used the team to achieve a particular objective and how you used your communication skills to keep everyone updated on progress etc.

Why you did it

For example; when discussing a situation where you had to deal with conflict, many candidates would simply say: "I told my colleague to calm down and explained to him what the problem was". However, it would not provide a good idea of what drove you to act in this manner. How did you ask him to calm down? How did you explain the nature of the problem? By highlighting the reasons behind your action, you would make a greater impact. For example:

"I could sense that my colleague was irritated and I asked him gently to tell me what he felt the problem was. By allowing him to vent his feelings and his anger, I gave him the opportunity to calm down. I then explained to him my own point of view on the matter, emphasising how important it was that we found a solution that suited us both."

This revised answer helps the interviewers understand what drove your actions and reinforces the feeling that you are calculating the consequences of your actions, thus retaining full control of the situation. It provides much more information about you as an individual and is another reason why the STAR approach is so useful.

Step 3 – Result

Explain what happened eventually – how it all ended. Also, use the opportunity to describe what you accomplished and what you learnt in that situation. This helps you make the answer personal and enables you to highlight further skills.

This is probably the most crucial part of your answer. Interviewers want to know that you are using a variety of generic skills in order to achieve your objectives. Therefore you must be able to demonstrate in your answer that you are taking specific actions because you are trying to achieve a specific objective and not simply by chance

Here are three examples of how to answer popular behavioural interview questions using the STAR method:

- **Share an example of a time when you faced a difficult problem at work. How did you solve this problem?**

I was working as a retail manager at a department store during prom season. A customer purchased a dress online and had it delivered to the store. One of my associates accidentally put the dress out on the floor, where another customer immediately purchased it. Before calling the customer to let her know about the mistake, I located the same dress at another store location nearby. I ordered it to be pressed and delivered to her home the morning of prom, along with a gift card to thank her for her understanding. The customer was so thankful, she wrote us a five-star review on several review sites.”

Describe a time when you were under a lot of pressure at work. How did you react?

“In my previous job as an account executive, one of my co-workers quit immediately after signing the biggest client our firm had ever taken on. Although I was already managing a full load of accounts, I was assigned this new client as well. I knew the stakes were high and if we lost this deal, then we wouldn’t hit our quarterly goal. I made myself completely available to the client and took calls on evenings and weekends until the project was delivered. The client was so impressed with my dedication, they immediately signed an annual contract that netted our company \$5 million.”

Tell me about a mistake you’ve made. How did you handle it?

“I was working as an intern for an events company, and I was responsible for ordering the floral arrangements for a private event hosted by a high profile client. Unfortunately, I mixed up the information from another event, and the flowers were delivered to the wrong venue on the other side of town. I admitted my mistake to my boss, took an early lunch break, drove to the other venue, picked up the flowers and delivered them to the appropriate venue an hour before the event. The client never knew about my mix-up, and my boss was very grateful.”

When it comes to behavioural interviews, the STAR response technique will help you craft responses that are compelling and succinct while thoroughly answering the interviewer’s question. Just make sure your answers are honest and share only positive outcomes. Consider writing your stories down and practice saying them out loud, editing to make them short and clear where necessary. While questions may vary, having at least three to five experiences to draw from will ensure you’re able to deliver a confident response no matter what the interviewer asks.