

The STAR Method

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing.

Situation: Describe the situation you were in to give context for the story (*During my Sophomore year at UW Madison...*)

Task: Describe the task you were given or needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event (*...I was assigned to a group to work on improving campus sustainability practices. There were 5 of us on the team and one student and I really butted heads...*)

Action: Describe the actions you took to address the situation or task with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on YOU. What specific steps did you take and what was your contribution? Be careful that you don't describe what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what you actually did. Use the word "I," not "we" when describing actions (*...she and I had different ideas about how to proceed and she frequently denigrated my ideas in front of the rest of the group members. Finally, I took her aside and talked about how we could work together better. We both explained our different perspectives and agreed on how to move forward...*)

Result: Describe the outcome of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results. (*...ultimately she and I not only worked through our differences, we created a new campaign that resulted in a sharp decrease in food waste in the dining halls and the donation of excess food to homeless shelters*).

Make sure that you follow all parts of the STAR method. Be as specific as possible at all times, without rambling or including too much information. Oftentimes students must be prompted to include their results, so try to include that without being asked. Also, eliminate any examples that do not paint you in a positive light. However, keep in mind that some examples that have a negative result (such as "lost the game") can highlight your strengths in the face of adversity.

Example Scenario

Situation/Task: You might recount a time when communication within your work group had broken down and needed to improve.

Action: To resolve the problem, you organized informal lunch meetings for people to discuss relevant issues.

Result: Morale then improved, as did the lines of communication. Using the STAR process is a powerful way for you to frame your experiences and accomplishments for the interviewer.

Examples of Behavioral Questions:

- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get across an important point.
- Give me an example of a time you had to make a difficult decision.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.

- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.

Behavioral Interviewing Skills using the STAR Method

Situation/Task

Describe the situation or the task you were given.

Action

What did you do, what took place?

Result

What was the outcome, what did you learn?
