How to use the STAR interview method to land a job

If you've ever found yourself giving a long-winded, rambling interview answer, then you will absolutely benefit from learning the STAR interview method. It's been around for years and it's one of the best tricks to effectively deliver a concise and compelling interview answer.

In this article, you'll learn how you can prepare in advance for almost any interview question and deliver STAR interview answers that truly showcase your skills and abilities.

What is the STAR Method?

The STAR interview method is a fool-proof way to answer behavioural interview questions. Not only will it help you deliver a concise, memorable interview answer. It's also easy for any interviewer, new or experienced, to follow.

- Have you ever been asked:
- Tell me about a time you had to…
- Give me an example of how you…
- Describe how you have…
- What have you done when…

If you dread being asked one of these types of questions, you aren't alone. Some of these questions may have forced you to recall situations on the spot and then you ramble through your answer. The answer you gave may have been a top-of-mind response and probably not your best example. This happens to all of us. But it doesn't have to. You can prepare answers to these questions in advance.

Why do Recruiters Ask STAR Interview Questions?

Because they want to hear how you've solved problems or fixed things in the past. There's a saying that your past performance is an indicator of future behaviour. While this may not be 100% true, it is one of the best resources an interviewer has. During your answer, the interviewer is listening for the steps you took and whether you were successful or what you learned from that experience.

STAR is an acronym that describes how to structure interview answers.

S stands for the situation. This is where you provide a very high-level overview of your role and what was going on.

T stands for the task you were assigned or took the initiative to solve. In other words, describe in one sentence what made the situation a challenge.

A stands for the actions you took. Step by step, walk through what you did.

And finally, **R** stands for results. These are the outcomes of the actions you took to resolve the situation and challenge.

A good answer using the STAR method is concise, with just enough detail, and has a quantifiable result.

What Each Section Means

So let's break down each section of STAR.

The **situation** helps the listener understand the context, or why the story is relevant. It explains what was going on so they can follow along with the rest of your story. It is just 1 – 2 sentences long.

The **task** explains what you were asked to do or the obstacle or the challenge you were faced with. Again, this is short. Probably just one sentence.

The **actions** you took should make up the bulk of your story. Explain, step by step, what YOU did. And keep in mind that even though you may have been part of a team, you had a specific role. Highlight what YOU did as part of the team.

Finally, the **results** are the outcomes of actions. You want to include what happened, or in some cases, what didn't happen, as a result of the actions you took. No story is complete without including the results. In fact, that's what the interviewer is waiting for.

There are other acronyms used instead of STAR. You may hear PAR (problem, action, result), SCAR (situation, challenge, action result), or SAR (situation, action, result). No matter what interview technique you use, the end results keep you on track.

The stories don't have to be extraordinary. Here's a simple achievement broken down into the STAR format:

Situation/Task: While working on a time-sensitive client project, I found the printer was jammed.

Actions: I first reloaded the paper bins and followed the printer's error instructions

Results: Within minutes, the printer was back online. Not only was my report in the queue but so were several other jobs. The final client report was proofed and delivered ahead of schedule. I was able to deliver the other print jobs to their owners, keeping all workflow on track.

This STAR could be used to answer a variety of questions such as:

"Tell me about a time you solved a problem?"
Or
"Can you give me an example of a time you worked well under pressure?"
 Or
"Tell me about a time you went above and beyond?"

Not only is the STAR method helpful in conveying your hard skills, it also helps the interviewer understand your soft skills and values.

In other words, what do they now know about you based on your story? That you are the kind of person who pitches in and helps others.

You see, the brain is hardwired to listen to stories. An interviewer is much more likely to remember a specific story than a hypothetical situation or a list of skills. That's why you want to always use a story to back up your answer.

How to Use this Technique

These STAR interview questions are less likely to be asked during a phone screening interview. Early in the interview process, recruiters want to verify information on your resume and evaluate basic qualifications. You're more likely to experience behavioural interviews during an in-person or video interview.

The technical term for this type of questioning is a behavioural interview. The questions are designed to evaluate your behaviours and skills. You can tell you are being asked a behavioural question because it starts with

"Tell me about a time when..." or
"Give me an example of ..."

In fact, interviewers who have received interview training, know how to listen for different elements of the STAR answer. However, since everyone has not received interview training, it's good to know that even to the untrained ear, STAR interview answers are easy to follow.

Build Your STAR Interview Answers

You can begin building your STAR interview answers right now. It's as simple as recalling some of your past successes. In fact, some of these successes may already be on your resume.

Keep in mind: You want to use specific examples, not general examples, to help the interviewer appreciate what you did, and how you did it.

Every single day you've had some sort of success or accomplishment. Sometimes they were major, other times they seem like just part of your job.

Brainstorm

Use these questions to help you brainstorm your achievements.

Did you identify and solve a problem?
Did you save time and/or money?
Have you improved productivity?
Have you ever streamlined operations?
Did you devise new strategies?
Did you minimize customer complaints?
Were you able to provide a service that did not exist before?
Did you develop an idea that was used or presented?
Did you help others achieve their goals?
What were you proud of doing at work?
What did you do better than others around you?
Were you ever recognized (formally or informally) for work that you did?
Did you ever go above and beyond what was required of you?
Were you ever selected to be a part of a team or train others?
Did you ever go above and beyond what was required of you?
Were you ever selected to be a part of a team or train others?

What If I'm Not Asked STAR Interview Questions?

Even if you aren't asked one of those behavioural interview questions, you can still use the STAR method to formulate your answer and enrich it.

Let's say you're asked a question like "why do you think you would be good at this job?" In this example, you would list 2-3 of your top qualifications for a job and then use a STAR interview answer to back up those qualifications you mentioned.

Tips for Using The STAR Method

- Invest time preparing STAR for each interview you are invited to
- Practice your answers out loud (and keep practicing until you nail each one)
- Use the most accurate and descriptive words to describe the actions you took
- Time your answer and try to keep it within 60-90 seconds
- Try writing your STAR interview answers in bullet points so it will be easier to remember and practice
- Select stories from your most current work experience first.
- Avoid using filler words like kind of, um, or basically.

Hannah Morgan is a career sherpa, guiding new job seekers through the treacherous terrain of job search.