



# How to master behavioural interview questions

## A National Careers Week and Australian career development perspective

Whether you are stepping into your first role after study, returning to work, changing careers, or seeking progression, interviews are a key part of career development. Across Australia, in government, private enterprise, community organisations and small business, one interview approach is especially common: **behavioural interview questions**.

These are the questions that begin with phrases like "*Tell me about a time when...*" or "*Give an example of...*". Rather than focusing on hypothetical situations, behavioural questions ask you to draw on real experiences from work, study, volunteering or community involvement.

Employers use this approach because past behaviour is one of the strongest indicators of future performance. Behavioural interviews allow them to understand how you think, how you interact with others, and how you respond to challenges. From a career development perspective, they also invite reflection, learning and self-awareness, all of which are central to building sustainable careers.

### Why behavioural interview questions matter

Behavioural questions help employers move beyond job titles and qualifications. They want insight into how you apply your skills in real situations, particularly in areas such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving, adaptability and resilience.

These capabilities are valued across the Australian labour market, regardless of industry or location. Employers are looking for evidence that you can work effectively with others, manage competing demands, respond constructively to change and learn from experience.

For candidates, behavioural questions provide an opportunity to explain the meaning behind your career journey. They allow you to demonstrate not only what you have done, but how you approach work and why you make certain decisions. This aligns strongly with Australian career development principles that emphasise reflective practice and lifelong learning.



### Common themes in behavioural interview questions

While the wording of questions will vary, most behavioural interviews explore a similar set of capability areas. Common themes include:

#### Teamwork and collaboration

Examples might involve working with diverse colleagues, resolving conflict, or contributing to a shared goal.

#### Adaptability and resilience

You may be asked to describe how you handled change, pressure, setbacks or uncertainty.

#### Time management and organisation

Questions often focus on managing multiple priorities, meeting deadlines or maintaining momentum on long-term projects.

#### Communication and influence

These questions explore how you explain ideas, manage conversations, or influence outcomes.

#### Initiative and motivation

Employers may ask about achievements you are proud of, challenges you took on, or moments where you stepped forward without being asked.

Preparing examples across these themes helps you respond confidently, even when questions are phrased differently on the day.

## Structuring strong answers using the STAR method

One of the most effective ways to answer behavioural questions is to use a simple structure such as **STAR**:

- **Situation** – briefly describe the context
- **Task** – explain what you were responsible for
- **Action** – outline what you did and why
- **Result** – describe the outcome and what you learned

This structure keeps your answer focused and ensures employers can clearly follow your thinking. Importantly, it places emphasis on your actions and reflections, not just the situation itself.

Even when outcomes were not perfect, strong answers demonstrate insight and learning. Employers value candidates who can reflect honestly on experience and show growth over time.

## Practical tips for Australian job seekers

### Prepare a small bank of stories

Think about experiences from work, education, volunteering or community involvement that demonstrate key skills. Having several examples ready makes it easier to adapt to different questions.

### Link your examples to the role

Review the job description and identify the capabilities the employer values. Choose stories that clearly demonstrate those skills in action.

### Emphasise learning and development

Career development is not about perfection. Employers want to see how you learn, adapt and improve.

### Practise without memorising

Practising aloud helps you sound confident and natural, without appearing scripted.

### Connect past experience to future contribution

Where possible, briefly explain how the skills you demonstrated will support your success in the role you are applying for.

## Behavioural interviews as part of lifelong career development

Behavioural interviews are not just assessment tools. They are opportunities to articulate your career story, demonstrate self-awareness and show how you navigate change. These are core elements of effective career development and are particularly relevant in a labour market shaped by ongoing transformation.

As National Careers Week highlights, career development is a lifelong process. Learning to reflect on your experiences, communicate your strengths and make informed transitions is just as important as securing a single role.

With preparation, structure and reflection, behavioural interviews become less intimidating and more empowering. They allow you to confidently share your experiences, demonstrate your capabilities and connect your past learning to future opportunities.

