**The STAR Technique:**

Competency questions make up a large part of most job interviews and from a company’s point of view they allow an objective assessment of a candidate’s experience, and the qualities that make them suitable for the job. Thankfully there’s a tried and tested technique that will help you to answer these tricky situations.



**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 those competencies that have been 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 is especially popular for graduate job interviews.

A lot of the questions will require you to think about past work experiences you’ve had. For those who are applying for internships, apprenticeships or have no previous work experience, you can still talk about extra-curricular activities, what you achieved while being a member of a university society, or school projects you have been involved in, as an example.

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

* **Situation**

This is about 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 you were working on, who you were working with, when it happened and where you were.

* **Task**

This is more specific to your exact role in the situation. You need to make sure that the interviewer knows what you were 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 team actions – 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 dealing with a difficult personality on your team you would talk about how you decided to take a certain course of action to avoid making the situation worse or upsetting the individual.

* **Result**

The result should be a positive one, and ideally one that can be quantified. Examples include repeat business, 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.

1. **Tell Me About Yourself?**

This is usually the first question asked in an interview as it lets the interviewer know a little bit about you.

It is important that you deliver a confident answer to this, so it is advised that you rehearse before the interview.

Make sure that you identify areas that reflect the job you are being interviewed for and show your enthusiasm, this can display to the interviewer how you are well suited to the job. Also try and include some of the achievements you feel are important.

1. **What Are Your Key Strengths/Skills?**

When answering this question, it is important that you respond to relevant skills and strengths that make you suited to the job.

Doing research beforehand can help prepare an answer to this question. By studying the job advert and person specification, it can help you think about the requirements that make you relevant and appropriate for the job role.

1. **What Are Your Weaknesses?**

Try not to be too critical when answering this question. Instead, pick one of your weaknesses and try to turn it into a positive.

For example, you could be a perfectionist, which means that you sometimes take longer on tasks, but you make sure that they are completed to a high quality. It is important to make a negative into a positive as it doesn’t make you appear overly critical and shows you can reflect on your own performance.

1. **Why Did You Leave Your Last Job?**

Whatever the situation was from your previous job, you should always answer this question with a positive and enthusiastic response. If the reason for leaving your last job was redundancy, then you should talk about how your company had to restructure, instead of focusing on your own personal situation.

Under no circumstances should you criticise your previous employer, as this will appear unprofessional.

1. **Why Do You Want This Job?**

Answer this question with a response that highlights why you would be a good candidate for the job and how enthusiastic you are about it.

Ensure that you show an interest in the job sector and understand the company and their ethos, and show how your skills match their requirements.

1. **Give Me An Example Of A Difficult Situation/Task At Work And How You Dealt With It**

This is often asked so that you can express situations in which you used problem-solving and communication skills to help resolve the situation. It is suggested that you identify a situation that you assisted in settling through showing emotional intelligence.

1. **Tell Me About An Achievement You Are Proud Of**

This question gives you the opportunity to show how past achievements will benefit the business. It is suggested that you only include personal achievements if they are highly impressive or prestigious. Otherwise try and identify a time where you achieved a good sale or something relevant to the job role.

1. **What Are Your Career Goals?**

The reason for this question being asked is because the employer wants to understand how long you intend to stay for. Reassure them by explaining how the job role fits your career plan, as this will display your long-term commitment to the company.

1. **What Are Your Expectations Of The Salary?**

The salary is typically discussed when the job is offered, so, if possible, try and avoid bringing this up in the interview. However, if the interviewer asks this question just give a real but wide salary range that you are happy to negotiate and emphasise that you feel the salary will not be an issue if you decide to work with each together.

You could also give examples of previous pay and benefits; by saying “in my last role my salary was” “the benefits/bonuses included meant my pay reached….” this helps the interviewer see the scale to which they can negotiate on too.

1. **What Do You Know About The Organisation?**

It is critical that you show you have done some prior research on the company before the interview. Looking into areas such as the company structure, finances, customers, products and services, competitors and market trends as these are the key areas.

You need to show you have a thorough understanding of what the company is about and how they work. If not, it will look like you have no interest in working for the company.