



Interview Tips: The STAR Technique

A strategy for answering graduate interview questions



An interview is an opportunity for an employer to get to know you and assess whether you are right for the role, and equally a chance for you to learn more about the business, the team, and the job itself. Many interviewers, particularly for graduate roles, ask behavioural or competency-based questions: ones that start with phrases like “Tell me about a time when...” or “Describe a situation where...”. The STAR technique is the clearest way to structure your answers to these questions.

What Is the STAR Technique?

STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result. It gives your answer a clear four-part structure, so you cover everything an interviewer is listening for without wandering off track or leaving out the parts that actually demonstrate your skills.

- Situation: what was the situation, and when did it happen?
- Task: what was the task, and what was your specific responsibility?
- Action: what did you actually do to complete the task or meet the challenge?
- Result: what was the end result? This is where you emphasise your accomplishments and what you learned.

Related Step Guides

This guide covers one technique for answering competency-based questions. For the wider interview process and other formats, see our other Step guides:

- Interview Hints and Tips, for essential advice to help you perform your best on the day
- Interview Tips: What to Wear, for dress code by sector and video interviews
- Interview Tips: Telephone Interviews, for phone-specific preparation and etiquette
- Interview Tips: Video Interviews, for live and pre-recorded video interview formats
- Interview Question Tips, for answers to the most common interview questions
- Interview Tips: Assessment Centres, for what to expect and how to stand out on assessment days
- Psychometric Tests Hints and Tips, for confidence in aptitude and personality tests

Why Employers Use the STAR Technique

Competency-based questions help employers understand how you have demonstrated key skills in real situations, how you approach challenges, and whether your behaviour aligns with the way the company works. They are far more interested in real examples than general statements like “I am a good team player,” because a specific story is much harder to fake and much easier to judge fairly.

Common categories that behavioural questions tend to fall into include teamwork, problem solving, initiative and leadership, interpersonal skills, and working under pressure. For graduate roles, teamwork and the ability to learn quickly come up particularly often.

A Worked Example

Question: Tell me about a time you organised or contributed to an event.

Situation: During my Year 10 work experience, I helped to advertise a charity event that the business was organising.

Task: I was responsible for producing marketing materials to attract people in the local area to the event.

Action: I used IT packages, including Publisher, to produce leaflets and posters to make people aware of the event and encourage them to attend.

Result: On the day, we had over 200 attendees, who helped us raise more than £100 for our chosen charity.

This experience helped me develop my IT skills and learn more about how marketing can be used to attract visitors and customers. I also developed my organisational and time management skills by meeting my deadlines to produce the advertisements before the event, and improved my teamworking ability by working with colleagues to successfully host the event.

Top Tip

Do not stop your answer at the outcome. The Result section is where most answers fall short, because candidates say what happened and then stop. Add a sentence on what you learned, or what you would do differently next time, and you turn a description of an event into evidence that you reflect on your own work. Interviewers are listening for that sentence, and most candidates never say it.

What If I Don't Have Much Work Experience?

If you are a graduate or student without a long work history, you can still build strong STAR answers. Use examples from university projects, volunteering, internships, part-time work, or even personal challenges. The value of the technique lies in showing how you behave in real situations, not in where those situations happened.

- Leading a group assignment at university can demonstrate leadership and organisation.
- Volunteering can show initiative, communication, and problem solving.
- A part-time job, even one unrelated to your target career, can still show reliability, teamwork, or handling pressure.

Can I Use AI to Prepare My STAR Answers?

Yes, and it can be a genuinely useful preparation tool. AI can help you turn a rough memory of an experience into a clearer structure, suggest which of your examples best fits a particular skill, or help you practise tightening up a story that runs too long.

Keep The Story Yours

Use AI to organise and sharpen a real experience, not to invent one. Interviewers can usually tell the difference between a story with authentic, specific detail and one that sounds generic or slightly too polished. If you cannot answer a natural follow-up question about your own example, it is a sign the story needs to be more genuinely yours before the interview.

Preparing Your STAR Stories

- Review the job description and identify the key skills and challenges the role is likely to test.
- Prepare four or five STAR stories that between them cover a good range of skills, such as teamwork, problem solving, and working under pressure.
- Write each story down using the four-part structure, then practise saying it out loud rather than just reading it back.
- Be quantitative wherever you can. Numbers and concrete outcomes make a story far more memorable and credible.
- Keep each story concise. Interviewers are listening for a clear, complete answer, not a long, detailed account.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Not answering the question at all. If nothing comes to mind immediately, it is better to say so honestly and talk through how you would approach the situation, rather than inventing a story on the spot.
- Being under-prepared. Interviewers can usually tell when an answer is being built from scratch in real time, and it often comes across as less clear and less confident.
- Sounding overly rehearsed. Memorising a story word for word can come across as robotic. Know the key points and let the delivery stay natural.
- Choosing an example with a poor outcome, or one that reflects badly on a former employer or colleague.
- Giving an answer that does not actually relate to the question asked, just because it is a story you had prepared.
- Over-exaggerating your role. Say “I” rather than “we” when describing your own actions, but stay honest about what you actually did.

Do and Avoid

DO	AVOID
Prepare four or five STAR stories covering different skills	Walking in with only one story and hoping it fits every question
Use real examples from work, study, or volunteering	Inventing or exaggerating a story on the spot
Quantify your results wherever possible	Leaving your result vague or forgetting to mention it at all
Say “I” when describing your own actions	Describing only what “we” did as a team
Use AI to help structure and sharpen a real story	Using AI to invent an example you cannot speak to naturally
Practise your stories out loud before the interview	Memorising them word for word and reciting them like a script

Checklist Before Your Interview

- ☐ Reviewed the job description and identified likely competency areas
- ☐ Prepared four or five STAR stories covering a range of skills
- ☐ Written each story using the Situation, Task, Action, Result structure
- ☐ Practised saying each story out loud, not just reading it back
- ☐ Added specific numbers or outcomes to each story where possible
- ☐ Checked each story is honest, relevant, and ends on a positive result



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