

Competency- based interviews and the STAR technique

Introduction

The competency-based interview does what it says on the tin: it is designed to test your competence. This type of interview is also known as a structured, behavioural, or situational interview.

They are commonly used when previous experience in an industry is not seen as essential. Some of the competencies employers are looking out for in this type of interview include teamwork, responsibility, communication skills, decision-making, leadership, problem-solving, organisational skills, and goal orientation.

The interviewer is looking for practical examples of key competencies that can either be demonstrated from previous roles or throughout your life. The questions typically start with phrases like "Can you tell me a time when..." or "Give an example of when you...". These types of questions can be challenging without preparation, so study the job description well and then plan some answers using the STAR technique.



Contents

→ The STAR technique

→ Using STAR to answer common competency-based interview questions

→ Tell me about a time you supported a member of your team who was struggling?

→ Give an example of a time you've had to improvise to achieve your goal

→ Give me an example of something you've tried in your job that hasn't worked. How did you learn from it?

→ Tell me about a time you've worked to/missed a deadline

The STAR technique

The STAR technique will help guide you into planning effective answers to a range of competency-based questions.

STAR is an acronym standing for situation, task, action, result.



Here is how you can use each word to structure an answer:

S

Situation

Set the scene and give the interviewer some context about the situation you are about to describe. Cover where, when, how and why

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T

Task

Outline your part in the situation and what you needed to do.

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A

Action

Describe your thought process and steps you took to achieve what was required. Be sure to highlight any challenges or moments where you needed to change your approach, while emphasising the skills your interviewer wants to hear about.

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R

Result

Your story must have a happy/successful ending. The best endings will have a quantifiable impact on your organisation, such as making a large sale worth X amount of money.

Using STAR to answer common competency-based interview questions

While competency-based questions will vary depending on the role you are interviewing for, there are some which apply to most roles. Below is an outline of how to use the STAR technique to create answers to these questions.

Tell me about a time you supported a member of your team who was struggling?

Situation

My job comes with a fair amount of analysis on a day-to-day basis, which means I'm confident using software like Excel. One of my newer colleagues did not have much experience and was having a tough time with their reporting.

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Task

Given my knowledge, I offered to help a few days after work to get him up to speed.

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Action

I was able to show him a few Excel tips and tricks, as well as demonstrating the reporting format preferred by our company.

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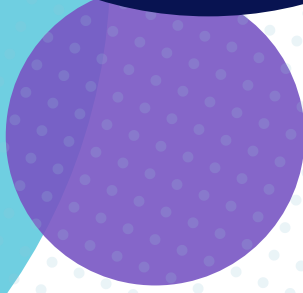
Result

Not only was my colleague now able to report with confidence in the future, but that set of results exceeded company expectations and KPIs, earning the entire team a bonus.





Give an example of a time you've had to improvise to achieve your goal.



Situation

My previous company often hosted client conferences, which were an important revenue driver for the business. For each event we booked a master of ceremonies (MC) to introduce speakers and keep things entertaining. At a conference last year, to my horror, our scheduled MC came down with food poisoning the night before the event.

Task

We were too close to the event to find a replacement, so as the event manager, it fell to me to fill in. I was incredibly nervous.

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Action

I was able to compose myself and have a practice backstage, plus having watched numerous MCs in the past I knew what I needed to do. This allowed me to fill in seamlessly.

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Result

The event created sales worth £78,000, with my contribution helping to keep everybody on track. Plus, I had some great feedback, and my presenting skills improved as a result.



Give me
an example of
something you've
tried in your job
that hasn't
worked.

How did
you learn
from it?

Situation

In my last customer service role, some clients were put off by year-long contracts, so we came up with an idea to test month-by-month payment plans.

Task

As a team we all came up with the messaging and promotions to help sell the new monthly contracts to clients.

Action

This involved a lot of effort examining customer feedback on the yearly contracts and what to emphasise to customers when speaking to them.

Result

Unfortunately, people did not tend to stick around long enough for it to be cost-effective for the business. But as a direct result, we learned that it is best to stick to long-term contracts, even if it meant there were fewer, with quality better than quantity.

**Tell me
about a time
you've worked
to/missed a
deadline.**

Situation

In my previous job, I was responsible for representing the firm at trade shows. In my second year there, three events were scheduled within a month of each other.

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Task

Although I like a challenge, I soon realised that preparing all three to a high standard was going to be impossible – I had to prioritise. I agreed with my manager that I would focus on the two most relevant events.

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Action

I prepared properly for both by undertaking research on the types of attendees to expect and other exhibitors who would be competing with the brand. As a result, both went well and I was able to have meaningful conversations with lots of attendees.

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Result

I managed to bring several leads back to our sales department.

If you require any more interview advice, please contact your specialist consultant.