

Using the STAR Technique

What Does STAR(R) Stand For?

STAR represents the stages needed to answer a typical interview question. This format is particularly useful when answering competency based interview questions where you need to demonstrate particular competencies such as teamwork, communication, leadership and initiative. The star(r) technique gives a tangible, descriptive way of showing your impact within a business; it is an incredibly effective way of demonstrating your abilities and performance in a role and is a critical tool in being successful in an interview.

What are the stages of STAR?

Situation

You will first need to **describe a situation** that you were in at the time of the experience you are using.

This may be an experience from your previous employment, university or extra-curricular activities. The situation must be relevant to the competency you are demonstrating, and must demonstrate relevancy to the post you are applying to. You must ensure that the situation is appropriate and could not be deemed unprofessional.

Task

The next stage of using the STAR approach is **the task or challenge** that you were presented with in that particular scenario.

This can be something as simple as fixing a computer, or something as complex as creating a piece of software, as long as it is something that needed to be done.

Make sure to explain the importance of completing the task itself, as well as the loss that would occur if the task were not completed.

Action

The most important stage of the STAR structure is **the action you have done to change the situation for the better**. This can be as simple or complex as you want, though remember that your answer will be dependent on the competency you are demonstrating.

It must be an action that you as a person, rather than as part of a team, has done.

Result

The final stage of the STAR technique is **the result that was achieved**. This requires you to specifically explain what your actions alone did to solve the problem, as well as any other benefits that arose from you solving it.

Example answers using the STAR technique

Tell me about a specific time when you used your initiative to handle a difficult situation

Situation: I was part of a project team of six working as a business analyst. The project was to help the front office by developing a systems and process upgrade to help with some new Fixed Income Products being launched.

Task: We had a set deadline with front office which we had to achieve. However, our Project Manager unfortunately became ill and had to leave meaning the project fell behind schedule

Action: I enjoy taking responsibility and offered to stand in as project manager. By using my previous technical analysis skills we spotted a few small mistakes populated during the initial data analysis. These were relatively sporadic errors that slowed us down. I negotiated with our program manager a small bonus incentive for the team, and budgeted for two pizza evenings, so we could pull a couple of late night shifts to correct the initial data analysis mistakes and get the project on track.

Result: The project was seen as a great success as we ran on budget and avoided us missing the deadline pushed onto us by Front Office. The team were delighted and I have now been officially promoted to Project Manager as a result.

Describe a situation when you had to complete a piece of work to a high standard while meeting a strict deadline.

Situation: As part of the final project for my degree, I completed a quantitative research project to explore whether customer loyalty increased or decreased with businesses who use social media as opposed to those who don't. I worked with a creative agency who sponsored my project to allow me to gather the information I needed.

Task: To provide useful information for the agency, I needed to carry out thorough research and draft the report within a three-month period.

Action: To ensure the project was delivered on time, I had to become fully conversant with quantitative research techniques. I therefore studied this extensively, which improved the way I



gathered data for the project. I also managed to complete this project while fulfilling my other volunteering commitments and assignments for other courses.

Result: Even though the workload was significant and I was under a great deal of pressure, I achieved a pass of 80% for my final project and my work was published in a respected journal. The agency who sponsored the research also published the findings of their project, and I secured an internship with them over the summer.

Describe a situation which required the use of your creativity.

Situation: In the HR business where I interned, a client was experiencing high employee turnover without an obvious cause.

Task: I was asked by a manager to carry out some data analysis, to identify any trends or patterns that would reveal the likely causes.

Action: I decided to develop an anonymous staff questionnaire which all employees could complete online.

Result: A significant proportion of staff completed the questionnaire. A key finding was that many felt that their training and development wasn't taken seriously. Furthermore, staff felt that it was difficult to speak to management about change. These suggestions were passed onto the management team, who made improvements to training and development, established more effective channels of communication and began an open-door policy. Turnover in the next six months showed a marked decrease.