

What is the STAR technique?

The STAR technique is a way to structure your answers to competency based questions either on an application form or at interview. Employers often ask how you have demonstrated, in the past, the competencies that you will need to use in the role for which you are applying.

How does it work?

Use the STAR Technique to structure your answers as follows:

- S – Situation:** Set the scene. Where were you? What were you doing? Pick a specific example of a time when you have demonstrated the desired skill and give enough information to allow someone to understand the context of your example.
- T – Task:** Provide details of the task you were faced with or what you were trying to achieve? What was your desired outcome?
- A – Action:** What specifically did you do? How did you handle the situation? This should make up the main body of your response and remember if you are discussing working in the team don't overuse "we". The recruiter wants to know what you did.
- R – Result/Reflection:** What was the outcome? (result). Try to make this as specific and positive as you can. Regardless of the outcome, what did you learn? (reflection). How would you handle it differently next time to improve upon your performance?

You can demonstrate your skills using examples from all of your recent life, eg **academic studies, voluntary work, work experience, sports activities, societies, clubs or hobbies and interests**. The point is to evidence your skills in a positive manner and to provide a specific example of how and when you used the skill that you are being asked about. When asked a series of such competency questions, use different examples to show evidence of your capabilities.

Putting the STAR Technique into practice

Below are three responses to the same interview question with some feedback on each.

The final example uses the STAR technique.

Question:

Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team?

Answer 1: I work as part of a team in the Teach Society at university; the group hadn't been very motivated, but I think that's changed since I joined. I helped motivate the team to bring about big changes and great progress for the society, which has never been in a better position.

Feedback: This answer is vague; it's not giving the employer a specific instance of how the student worked as part of a team or how they brought about change. Simply stating possession of a skill does not provide any evidence that you have it!

Answer 2: Yes, I'm in the Teach Society at university, and it was my idea to increase paid membership to allow our affiliation with the Students' Association. As a team we worked together to motivate our fellow society members and achieve our ultimate goal.

Feedback: This answer doesn't provide the employer with a clear context and, though it describes the activity, it does not explain why it was needed or what resulted.

Answer 3: **[Situation]** In my second year at university, when I founded the Teach Society, **[Task]** I worked as part of the committee to increase the number of paid memberships to enable affiliation with the Students' Association (so that we could have access to their resources and financial grants). While we had 200 members we needed a minimum of 24 members who paid the membership fee of £3 to become affiliated. We aimed to achieve this by the end of the first semester, but then one of the committee members became very ill. This put myself and my fellow members under extra pressure to complete this task to deadline.

[Action] As President I took on the additional duties of the Secretary while she was ill. I got up to speed with the paperwork and I was able to draw on the organisational leadership skills which I acquired from captaining the university rowing team. I motivated the team by arranging incentives including a prize on completion and two Thai food evenings to enable us to work effectively and attract more members to help us.

[Result] Under my leadership we successfully acquired 24 paying members and achieved affiliation by the deadline. This ensured that we were able to avail of funding and training provided by the Students' Association in time for our first Careers Talk event in the second semester.

[Reflection] Looking back, I would have recruited more members to the team as early as possible to ensure all tasks were covered in case of absence.

Feedback: This answer shows the employer how the student worked effectively in a team. It uses the STAR technique to describe the context, to detail what the student actually did and the effect that these actions had. Finally, the student has revealed their subsequent reflection and awareness of potential for improvement.

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