

Kickstart Employment Sessions

Self-directed learning modules

Interview Practice: Part 1

How to use this sheet : Follow the sections and write your responses on a separate piece of paper. This should take approximately 2 hours.

Interviews are tricky! It's rarely fun being put on the spot and getting across the best version of yourself when you're nervous and under pressure! But if there's one thing that can help make interviews less uncomfortable it's practice, practice, practice (and a bit of structure!)

In this module we're introducing different types of interview questions and best practices for how to structure your answers, be confident in what you're saying, and keep your cool trusting yourself under pressure. This particular module in our employment series will focus on behavioural questions you can be asked during your interview and how to best structure your response. Of course, this list of questions isn't an exhaustive list, but it's a strong start in tackling common questions you're likely to be asked in your typical interview.

Again, practice and preparation is key to not feeling anxious about being caught off guard, about not knowing what to say, about rambling, and about lacking control in a situation where you want to come across as confident, capable and professional.

So, let's make a start on part 1!

Your Turn

Follow these questions and respond to them using our example structures.
Write your answers on a piece of paper as we go.

What is STAR???

STAR is a strategy used when answering behavioral questions. These are also thought of as competency-focussed questions, that might begin with phrases such as, "Describe a time when..." and "Share an example of a time where...." Specifically, they are about how you have handled certain work situations. Check out the next page a for step-by-step!

Your checklist!

Pen
Paper
Your CV
Job description of a
role you've wanted

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result

Situation: Describe the context in which you performed a job or faced a challenge at work. For example, perhaps you were working on a group project, or you had a conflict with a coworker. This situation can be drawn from a work experience, a volunteer position, or any other relevant event. Be as specific as possible.

Task: Describe your responsibility in that situation. Perhaps you had to help your group complete a project within a tight deadline, resolve a conflict with a coworker, or hit a sales target.

Action: Describe how you completed the task or endeavored to meet the challenge. Focus on what YOU did, rather than what your team, boss, or coworker did.

Result: Finally, explain the outcomes or results generated by the action taken. If appropriate you can emphasize what you accomplished, or what you learned. Whether it's qualitative or quantitative, try and measure

Let's work through some examples so you can see how these kinds of answers can be structured to ensure your response is concise, succinct, and clearly communicated. These examples might not all be closely related to your own experiences, but you'll get an idea for how the answer is structured and types of examples you can pull in.



"Tell me about a time you showed initiative on the job"

Situation: Last winter, I was acting as an account coordinator, supporting the account executive for a major client at our ad agency. The account executive had an accident and was sidelined three weeks before **TASK:** a major campaign pitch.

Action: I took the initiative and volunteered to fill in and orchestrate the presentation by coordinating the input of the creative and media teams. I called an emergency meeting and facilitated a discussion about ad scenarios, media plans, and the roles of various team members in relation to the presentation.

Result: I was able to achieve a consensus on two ad concepts that we had to pitch, along with media strategies. I drew up a minute-by-minute plan of how we would present the pitch that was warmly

The key to answering this question is not getting sidetracked with ALL the ways you've shown initiative, as much as you might want to impress.

Find one specific initiative relating to what the task called for and get your point across clearly, concisely, and within the parameters of the question you've been asked. It shows stronger communication than throwing everything at them.

Be sure to include the language they've used in their question in your answer. It reflects back that you've understood the question and helps keep your answer on track. See the underlined use of initiative.

received by the team based on our discussions. The client loved our plan and adopted the campaign and I was promoted to account executive six months later.

Sometimes an example of a behaviour or an answer you want to give could be phrased differently to respond to differently phrased questions.

Take, for example, our question opposite. This behavioural example could also be adapted to answer the question;

Tell me about a time you stepped up at work?

Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership?

Tell me about a time you surprised yourself?

Tell me about a time something went wrong - how did you handle it?

Tell me about something you're proud of achieving?

REMEMBER

Questions phrased differently can be answered in similar ways. Once you've learned your response structure, you should be able to adapt your STAR without getting tripped up!

Your Turn

Try answering the next question for yourself and adapting it to your own work experience. Try pulling examples from your most recent, relevant job. Once you've finished, see if you can adapt your example to answer any other behavioural questions (check out the list below). Once you've written out your answers, try learning to speak them aloud until you can give a response with the STAR structure that flows confidently but isn't rigid memory.

Q A "Could you give us an example of a personal or professional achievement?"

Try thinking of an achievement where the skills you demonstrated relate to the job you're applying for. Always make sure the RESULT is something relevant to their ideal candidate and demonstrates a transferable quality/skill.

Don't forget the importance of soft skills. Maybe in your personal life your martial arts black belt taught you about self-discipline and how to self-correct. Maybe your poetry competition entry was received well and reflects your strong communication and public speaking skills.

If you are talking about a previous job, be sure to include what you were working as, for how long you worked on the achievement prior to the outcome.

Instead of saying, "We did xyz," say "I did xyz."

Be mindful of the line between boastful, and reflective of your strengths and capacity for growth/success.



"Give us an example of a challenge you've had to overcome?"

It's tough thinking about challenges and professional hiccups you've had, especially framing them in a way that can sell you positively. Remember, this doesn't have to be a solitary challenge, as you might have completed it in a group or problem-solved with a team.

What they want to identify is that 1) you're self-aware and know you can improve and that you're actively working on that, and 2) that you know how to problem-solve, stay calm, and work under pressure when things don't go to plan in the context of their workplace and their specific challenges.

When talking about challenges and personal "weaknesses" stay away from clichés like "I work too hard" or are actually positives framed as negatives. It shows self-awareness to be honest and frame answers as space to grow.

So, again, you'd pick a challenge that would be relevant to the job you're interviewing for. If you're applying for a marketing agency, your examples could pull from responding to a crisis online, how you've handled angry customers via social media, how you've dealt with a difficult client, how you sourced a new client when business was slow, or how you've handled criticism. Pick a challenge where overcoming it demonstrates an attractive strength/quality that the employer would want to have in someone they hired.

This question could also look like...

Tell us about a time when things went wrong... how did you handle it?

Tell us about a time when you had to keep your cool in a difficult situation

Your Turn

In your own time try creating a STAR response to the following questions (and find plenty more online!). When you answer it, think if this answer could be used to answer another questions as well. If you can think of more than 1 example for a question, write them both out as a back up!

Describe a time when your impact made a difference

Describe a time when you've had to manage 2 conflicting deadlines and tasks

Talk me through a time when you had to communicate to a large group. How did you get your message across effectively?

Have you ever had to make quick changes to a plan when things went wrong?

Talk me through a time when you had to be resourceful to achieve results?

Describe a time when you successfully challenged someone whose views you knew were incorrect.

Have you ever had to handle conflict with your manager or your colleagues?

Can you think of ways you've had to use your initiative in your work?

Can you tell us about a time you had to learn something new?

Can you tell me about a time when you've needed to ask for help? What did you do?

Industry Specific Examples

You should have a good understanding about what kind of questions might be asked relating to your industry. Once you've had a Google to see what broader resources might be available to read through, use this tip. Find the job description and pull questions out of what kind of person they're looking for. If they're looking for someone who has experience working in live broadcasts and events - consider that there might be a question that relates to how you've done this well and how you've handled live events not going to plan. If they're looking for someone who can work under pressure, handle multiple clients simultaneously, creatively problem-solve, write campaign proposals, use Xero or QuickBooks, write website copy or use CRM backends, update websites with Wordpress or work with children - anticipate you'll be asked about these specific industry aspects and talk about how YOU fulfill their brief.

Talk about a change you made which resulted in an improved customer experience.

Describe a time you've gone above and beyond to help a customer?

Tell me about a time you used your political know how and expertise to initiate a difficult project.

Tell me about a coaching or mentoring strategy you've designed or facilitated. What part did you play and what was the outcome?

Have you ever written a social media strategy before?

Given the current government cuts to publicly funded arts spending, how has your work had to adjust to remain sustainable?

Have you ever had to interview someone before? What was your role in the process?

Talk me through a time when a client hasn't been satisfied with your service - how did you respond?

Over to you

How was that? Hopefully you're getting more comfortable with your verbal articulation, public speaking, how to communicate your ideas in a clear and structured way, and understanding how to adapt your responses based on the varying question phrasing. This isn't an exhaustive list of questions, but there are always more resources online to keep practicing. Check out Part 2 on interview questions where we'll go through common non-behavioural questions and how to best approach answering them.

Head to CRATE Future Young Enterprise Hub to learn more about employment skills and resources for self-improvement

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