



Career Center  
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## **HOW TO ANSWER BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Behavioral based interviewing focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that are job related. It is based on the belief that **past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance**. You may use work experience, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, school projects, family life (anything really!) as examples of your past behavior. Current employment literature indicates that there is a strong trend toward this type of interviewing.

### **WHAT EMPLOYERS EVALUATE IN BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING**

Employers are looking for 3 types of skills:

1. **Content skills** are work specific skills such as computer programming, accounting, welding, etc. These skills are expressed as nouns.
2. **Functional or transferable skills** are used with people, information or things such as organizing, managing, developing, communicating, etc. These skills are expressed as verbs.
3. **Adaptive or self-management skills** are personal characteristics such as dependable, team player, self-directed, punctual, etc. These skills are expressed as adjectives.

### **BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

There are 3 types of questions typically found in interviews:

1. **Theoretical questions** place you in a hypothetical situation. These questions are likely to test your skill at answering questions rather than in doing a good job.  
Example: How would you organize your friends to help you move into a new apartment?
2. **Leading questions** hint at the answer the interviewer is seeking through phrasing.  
Example: Working on your own doesn't bother you does it?
3. **Behavioral questions** seek demonstrated examples of behavior from your past experience and concentrate on job related functions. They may include:
  - a. **Open-ended questions** that require more than a yes or no response. They often begin with "Tell me...," "Describe...," "When..."  
Example: "Describe a time you had to be flexible in planning a workload."
  - b. **Close-ended questions** are used mostly to verify or confirm information.  
Example: "You have a degree in psychology, is that correct?"
  - c. **Why questions** are used to reveal rationale for decisions you have made or to determine your level of motivation.  
Example: "Why did you decide to major in this program at Lewis & Clark rather than a larger university?"

## **PREPARING FOR AND ANSWERING BEHAVIORAL-BASED QUESTIONS**

Prepare for the interview by identifying examples of situations from your experiences on your resume where you have demonstrated the behaviors a given organization seeks. Try to choose two to three of your top selling points and decide on demonstrated (Situation, Task, Action, Result or “STAR”) stories to convey your value as an employee.

During a behavioral interview, listen carefully to the questions, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely. To answer, tell the interviewer about a specific situation that relates to the question, specifying what you did and the positive result. You should try to include the four steps of STAR in your answer for optimum success.

### **THE STAR METHOD**

The STAR technique is an excellent formula for answering questions in behavioral-based interview situations. It follows the format of:

**Situation** – Give an example of a situation you were involved in that had a positive outcome.

**Task** – Describe the tasks you performed in that situation.

**Action** – Talk about the various actions involved in the situation’s tasks.

**Results** – Elaborate on the results that followed because of your actions. Quantify these.

**Digging a well:** After hearing your initial response, the interviewer may pick apart the story to try to get at the specific behavior(s) they seek. This is referred to as “digging a well.” The interviewer may first ask you open-ended questions to allow you to choose examples. Then, when a part of your story relates to a skill or experience the interviewer wishes to explore further, they will then ask you very specific follow-up questions regarding your behavior. These can include “What were you thinking at that point?” or “Tell me more about your meeting with that person.” or “Lead me through your decision process.”

### **Other STAR tips**

- Numbers can illustrate your level of authority and responsibility in your responses. For example: “I was a Shift Supervisor.” could be “As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated 4 employees.”
- Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then? What did you learn? Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering these questions.
- Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years by looking over your resume or listing them out.
- Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internships, classes, activities, team involvements, community service and work experience.

## STAR EXAMPLE

	<b>What you need to include</b>	<b>Interview Question Example</b> “Can you give me an example of a time when you served as the leader of a group?”
<b>Situation</b>	Briefly describe the situation you were in.	“As part of a communication class, we were divided into groups of four and given a project to complete.”
<b>Task</b>	Describe what assignment you were given to complete. You might use examples from your education, work experience, or activities.	“We needed to develop a presentation for an organization in order to increase public awareness of the organization and its services. My group selected a small nonprofit organization that serves homebound seniors.”
<b>Action</b>	Actions are activities you engaged in to get the task accomplished.	“During our initial meeting, everyone just threw out ideas and talked a lot, but no was taking charge to keep us focused. So, I stepped in and tried to provide some structure to the meeting and to keep us focused. The other members of the group responded favorably, so from then on I was looked at as the leader of the group. What we ended up doing was developing a multifaceted marketing campaign. Each of us was assigned a specific task each week. I made sure everyone knew what their responsibilities were and checked to make sure they were meeting the deadlines we agreed upon. Two people developed a radio spot; one person developed an ad that could be used in magazines, on billboards, etc., and I developed a computer presentation.”
<b>Results</b>	This is the outcome of the task and action. Whenever possible, stat the results in quantifiable terms.	“We had the opportunity to present our campaign to the managers of the organization. They ended up using parts of our presentation, which ultimately led to a 24% increase in the use of their services over a 3 month period. Also, their name recognition increased by 17% based on surveys completed. Our group also received an award from the marketing club for creativity.”

Notice in this example the specificity used to describe each step of the process and the numbers used to quantify the results. These are simple ways to improve your responses to questions during an interview.

## **TIPS FOR PREPARING FOR A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW**

- Analyze the type of positions for which you're applying. Try to get an actual job description. What skills do employers require?
- Analyze your own background. What skills do you have (content, functional, and adaptive) that relate to your job objective?
- Identify examples from your past experience where you demonstrated those skills. How can you "tell a story" about your use of particular skills or knowledge? Concentrate on developing complete STAR answers and remember that a good story has a beginning, middle and end.
- Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility.
- Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do when this happened?
- Before starting the interview process, identify 2 or 3 of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated STAR stories) during the interview.
- Once employed, keep a personal achievement diary to help document demonstrated performance (STAR stories).

### Additional Resources

<http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/a/behavioral.htm>

[http://www.quintcareers.com/sample\\_behavioral.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/sample_behavioral.html)

## BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEW PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Under each of the following headings, write down some examples of the skill using the STAR method:

Teamwork Skills	Technical Skills
S	S
T	T
A	A
R	R

Interpersonal & Communication Skills	Leadership Skills
S	S
T	T
A	A
R	R

Analytical/Problem Solving Skills	Other
S	S
T	T
A	A
R	R

Other	Other
S	S
T	T
A	A
R	R

Develop a “story” around these examples to describe your strengths and practice this story with others!

## **POSSIBLE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe a situation in which you had to persuade someone to see things your way.
2. Describe a time when a team member came to you for help. What was the situation? How did you respond?
3. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with someone whose personality was different from yours.
4. Tell me about a leadership role you had in an extracurricular activity. How did you lead?
5. Give me an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision. How did you handle it?
6. Give me a time where you had to carry out a directive you did not agree with. How did you handle it?
7. Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a customer/teacher/etc. How did you go about doing so?
8. Describe a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get the job done.
9. Describe a time when you saw a problem and took action to correct it rather than waiting for someone else to do so.
10. Give me examples to convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of situations, people, and environments.
11. What makes you the best person for this job?
12. Tell me about your most successful presentation and what made it so.
13. Tell me about a class in which you were part of a study group. What role did you play in the group meetings?
14. Tell me about a meeting where you provided technical expertise. How did you ensure that everyone understood?
15. Have you ever been in a situation where someone regarded you as a threat? Describe the situation and tell how you handled this.
16. Describe a time when you took a risk that you later regretted.
17. Describe a time when you took a risk and were glad you did.
18. What goals have you set for yourself and how are you planning to achieve them?
19. Who or what has had the greatest influence in the development of your career interest?
20. What were the biggest challenges/problems you encountered in college? How did you handle them?
21. What was the toughest academic decision you have had to make? How did you make that decision?
22. What kind of work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
23. How are you conducting your job search and how will you go about making your decision?
24. What types of situations put you under pressure and how do you handle them?
25. Tell me about an accomplishment of which you are especially proud.
26. What is the most important lesson you have learned in or out of school?