

TACKLING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

by Shaminie Chetty, UCT Careers Advisor

Behaviour-based interviews, which are commonly used by employers, require you to draw on your life experiences to provide evidence that you possess a required or desired skill. It is based on the idea that past behaviour is a good predictor of future performance.

So, how do you answer competency-based questions? One of the more popular interview response techniques is the STAR method. The acronym 'STAR' stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. Breaking your answer up according to these sections will help you to focus and stop you from waffling.

▶ SITUATION: An event, activity, state of affairs or problem

Here you are describing the context of the situation and creating a scenario. Describe a specific situation that indicates the skill being assessed, rather than referring to many varied occurrences. This will prevent confusion. Use real-life examples. Provide sufficient information for the interviewer to understand (e.g. where relevant, mention the number of members in the organisation, the budget required for the activity, or the timeline for completion of the task).

▶ TASK: What was the job you had to do? What did you need to accomplish?

What had to be done to achieve the goal or desired outcome? Include relevant informa-

tion and be concise. What did you or the team propose as a possible solution? State what your individual role and duties were.

▶ ACTION: What did you do? What activities did you have to perform?

This is the most important part of your answer as it provides a clear framework for the identification of the skill or attribute being assessed. Mention your specific tasks and how you managed them. What was your individual role or duties? How did you accomplish them? Give clear details – don't assume that the interviewer will figure it out. You can also include your thoughts or feelings about the process, where relevant.

▶ RESULTS: What was the outcome? What eventually happened.

Were your expectations met? Were the goals achieved? Was the problem resolved? Don't be afraid if there was a negative outcome. If there were difficulties in attaining the desired results, how did you overcome them? If you were unable to overcome them or did not achieve your goals, what did you learn and what would you have done differently? Be honest in your response.

▶ AN EXAMPLE USING THE STAR TECHNIQUE:

QUESTION: Tell me about a time when you assumed a leadership role to complete a team project.

ANSWER:

- **Situation:** As an executive member of the Film Society on Campus, I was thrilled when a suggestion was made to host a 24 hour non-stop film festival during the university vacation. Two weeks after the Society members had voted this as project for the semester, I had not received any emails or meeting requests, although students were excitedly chatting about it.
- **Task:** I knew that we had to start planning early or the Film Festival would never get off the ground. I decided to request a meeting of the members to set up a Film Festival working group. I sent out emails and posted a notice on Vula. I booked a venue for the meeting and drew up an agenda, which was sent out before the meeting.
- **Action:** I chaired the meeting during which we brainstormed possible festival themes, marketing ideas, and the logistics required for such an event. There were lots of ideas and a lot of energy, but no plans on how to take them forward. I suggested that we needed to finalise our ideas and set up smaller teams to deal with each aspect

of the Festival. We voted in team leaders and set appropriate deadlines for our tasks. I was tasked with being the Film Festival project manager.

- **Result:** The Film Festival was an amazing success with many students asking when we were planning the next one. Although our 'Movie under the Stars' got rained out, and had to be held indoors – we did have popcorn! The 24 hour Film Festival has now become an annual Film Society event. ✨



TOP TIPS

- **PICK** 6-8 scenarios that highlight various skills required by employers and use the STAR technique to develop appropriate answers.
- **DISCUSS** situations from various aspects of your life, not just your university experiences.
- **IF** your scenario does have a negative outcome, say what you learnt or what you would have done differently.