

THE "STAR" APPROACH TO SKILLS-BASED QUESTIONS

One way of dealing with competency-based questions is by using the STAR approach. Star stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result. It helps you to structure your answer as a mini essay.

The SITUATION and TASK are usually combined to form an introduction, describing the scenario you faced. The ACTION forms the main body and should be the longest part. The RESULT is the conclusion, and, like the introduction, should be quite short.

Situation	When, where, with whom?
Task	Describe the situation or the task you were faced with
Action	How? What action did YOU take? Sometimes people focus on what the group did without mentioning their individual contribution.
Result	What results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach/what did you learn from the experience?

EXAMPLE

Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a personal or group task.

ANSWER

Situation	Whilst employed at Weaver Bros. last summer
Task	I was given the task of rationalising the stock control system
Action	I would look at factors such as when the stock was last ordered, what it was used for and how often it was used. I worked out a method of streamlining the paperwork involved in this process and redesigned the relevant forms, which I then submitted to my manager.
Result	My ideas were accepted and implemented and a 15% reduction in stock levels was achieved

TIPS

- Try to give quantifiable results if possible.
 - "During my time as chairman, membership rose by 20"
 - "We raised £200 for charity"
 - "My marks improved from 55% to 65%"
- You can't always do this, but it gives a much better impression of your achievement.
- If the result was negative, then say what you learned from the experience and what you would do differently next time.
- The examples you give can be from work, study or personal life – but try to give a variety.
- Don't go into too much background detail - keep to the point! Often there isn't enough room to use the STAR approach, but it's still worth keeping in mind when you prepare your draft answer.
- Think of the most relevant examples, rather than the most "impressive". If you are asked to describe a time when you had to give a presentation in front of the public, a seminar paper which involved research and planning will carry more weight than "presenting a bouquet to the Queen when I was four years old"!
- It's very important to be able to deal with these types of questions effectively as they form an increasingly major part of application forms and many interviews.