

Be Prepared for Behaviour Descriptive Interviews



Use the STARS Technique

In your next job interview, the interviewer may ask you to describe a situation from your work history. When interviewers use this behaviour descriptive technique, they are assessing how you will perform in the future based on how you performed in the past.

The interviewer might ask you to describe a time when

- * you had to deal with a challenging problem
- * you went above and beyond the call of duty
- * your work or an idea of yours was criticized
- * you had a problem working with others on a team project
- * your schedule was suddenly interrupted
- * you did not agree with an employer's policy

Interviewers who ask behaviour descriptive questions are not interested in how you usually respond or might respond in the future. They want to know what you actually did. It's important that you recall the situation you're describing clearly and concisely and that your story reflects well on you as a potential employee.

Analyzing the job requirements

Behaviour-descriptive questions help interviewers assess how you will handle conditions you will likely encounter on the job. For example, if the work requires good decision-making skills, the interviewer may ask you to describe a situation where you had to choose between two strong options. The interviewer may follow up with specific questions about how you handled the situation and what happened as a result of your actions.

Based on the job description and the research you've done on the employer, **list** the work-specific, transferable and personal management **skills** that the job requires. Think of several situations in which you have used the skills the job requires (e.g. leadership skills, problem-solving skills, communication skills). **Choose situations** where your actions contributed to a positive outcome. These situations do not have to be work-related—they could involve leisure activities, volunteer work or school projects.

Using the STARS Technique to develop descriptions will help you describe what you did and the results you achieved:

- * **Situation:** Describe the circumstances and the problem you faced
- * **Task:** Explain what you did, why you did it and the challenges involved
- * **Action:** Describe the actions you took
- * **Results:** Explain what happened as a result of your efforts
- * **Skills:** Describe the skills you used to accomplish what you did

This example shows how a candidate uses STARS to answer the following behavioural-descriptive question:

- * **Situation:** An unhappy customer claimed the shipping department sent his shop the wrong parts
- * **Task:** As parts foreman, I had to determine if it was our mistake or the customer's
- * **Action:** I assured the customer that I would look into the situation myself. I checked all the details. Sure enough, we had made the mistake - a typo. The problem was with our parts-numbering system, where similar parts had numbers that were too much alike
- * **Results:** I couriered the correct parts to the customer overnight and told him this order was on us. I assured him that we would make changes so that the problem wouldn't happen again. I worked with a team to develop a new numbering system that has cut response time by 15 per cent and reduced errors from an average of 11 to 3 per month
- * **Skills:** I used my communication, analytical and teamwork skills to solve a specific problem for a customer and an overall problem for my organization

Preparing to answer behaviour descriptive questions

It's a good idea to develop at least three STARS descriptions of how you handled situations similar to those you might encounter on the job.

Limit your examples to situations you handled well. Interviewers who ask behaviour-descriptive questions believe that how you reacted in the past is a good indication of how you'll react in the future. They may disregard anything you say about how you'd handle the situation differently next time.

If your prepared stories do not fit the question, take time to think about your answer. You can't anticipate all of the possible questions, so be ready to think on your feet.

If you don't have work-related experience, describe a situation from a volunteer or community experience. If you have no experience relevant to the situation, describe how you would handle the situation, if it were to happen.

Always be honest. Don't make up your answers. When the interviewer follows up with detailed questions about the situation, you risk exposing your dishonesty.

Interviewers ask behavioural descriptive questions so they can assess how you've coped with challenges in the past. Using the STARS technique, you will be able to describe the positive results you've achieved concisely and convincingly.

