

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING TIPS

Tufts Career Services

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Behavioral interviewing is a popular framework for conducting interviews because employers believe it will illustrate how you – as an employee – will function in a new organization. Proponents of behavioral interviewing theorize that *the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations*. Thus, employers will pose a problem or describe a scenario and ask how you would handle it. Likewise, they will ask you (or you are expected to volunteer) similar situations from your own background. This more probing style of interviewing is expected to demonstrate how you manage challenges, awkward situations, and stress (see sample questions listed under “Behavioral Interviewing”).

Many employers have come to view behavioral interviewing as a more reliable predictor of your performance than more traditional inquiries, such as “*Tell me about yourself.*” In the more traditional approach, you might be asked “*How would you handle a (fill in the details) situation?*” You might offer the “perfect response,” but an employer has no idea if it’s a reliable indication of what you would actually do in that set of circumstances. Thus, most interviews today will involve a combination of the two styles.

To prepare for behavioral interviewing, you should develop a repertoire of examples from all your experiences: employment, internships, and extracurricular activities. Think of it as storytelling. In your repertoire, you’ll have stories that exemplify your strengths, achievements, work style, teamwork, initiative. When asked to describe a situation, you simply choose the most appropriate example and adapt to fit the question. The more stories you develop, the better equipped you are for behavioral interviewing.

As you tell your stories, be prepared for more questions. An employer may want to know the “How” and “Why” of what happened. “*What prompted you to choose that course of action?*” “*How did you handle that obstacle?*” or “*Tell me more about _____.*”

This probing gives depth and detail to an employer’s knowledge of you. It’s difficult to ‘fake it’ when you’re providing real life examples. And if you haven’t figured it out by now, honesty is the best policy. Remember: an employer has access to your references who may be asked to verify the stories you’ve told.

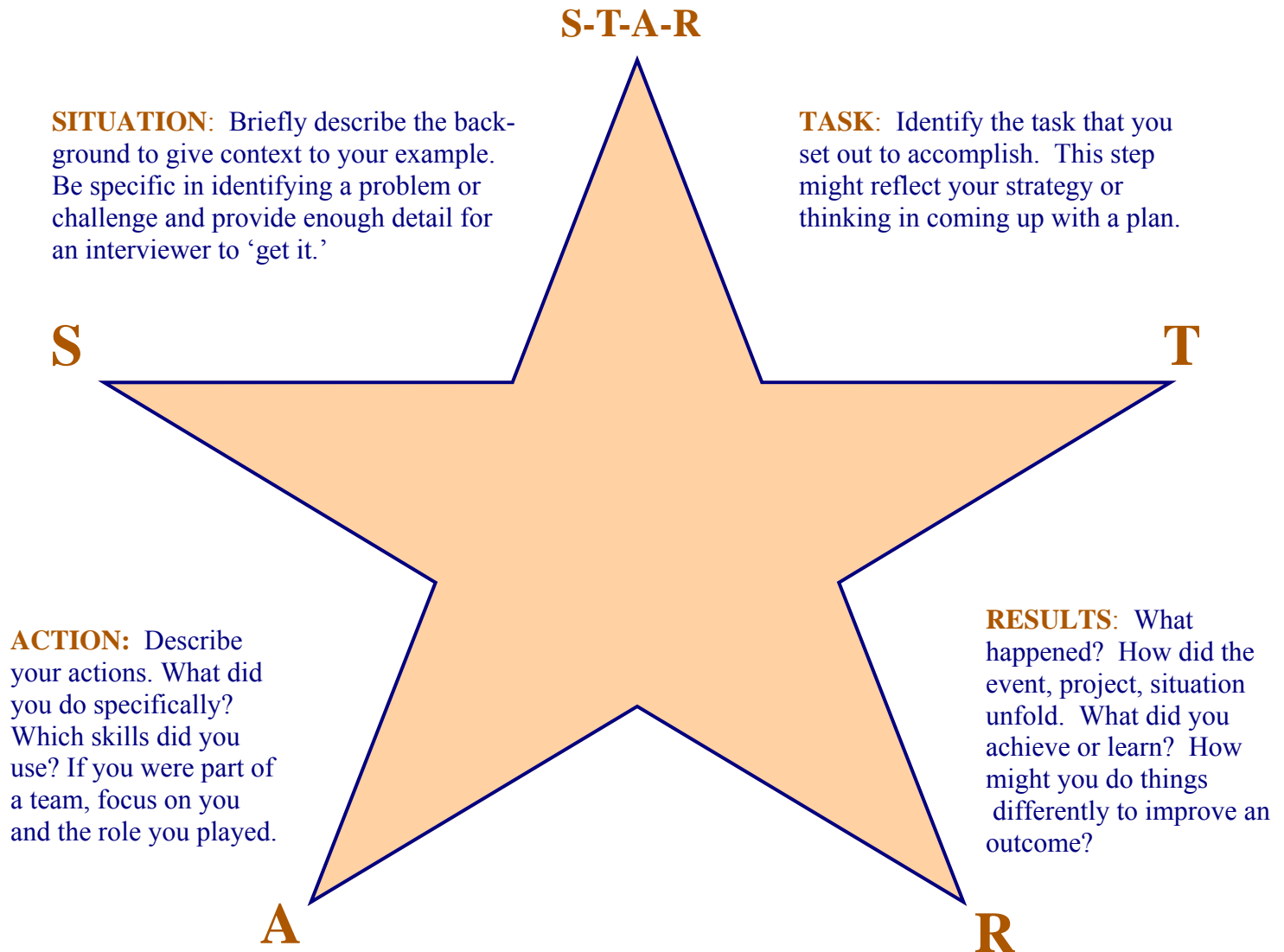
If you’ve done your research on the position, the organization, and the industry, you’ll have a good grasp of what is needed in an entry level candidate. Knowing this, you can create a list of stories illustrating skills, knowledge, and abilities that position you as someone who meets the job-related needs of a specific employer. For example, if you know the employer requires individuals to work in teams, be ready with stories of your team work. Likewise, if presentation skills are a requisite, polish your description of class, internship, or service projects where you played a lead role in reporting to a group. The more you can quantify or provide specific details, the more credible your responses.

NOTE: Employers are interested in how you handle negative or awkward situations (akin to the “*What are your weaknesses?*” question) so make sure you have a few stories that acknowledge how you made the best of a bad situation or managed to produce a positive outcome.

MASTERING BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING WITH THE S-T-A-R MODEL

The STAR model offers a useful framework for storytelling and will keep you on track. It will help you organize your stories to give the ‘big picture, get quickly to the point, and make a positive impression. Keep your story to 3 – 5 minutes and when you conclude, you may want to invite questions from your interviewer to ensure that you accurately interpreted the question and provided helpful information.

Example: “*Would you like to hear more about ____?*” Or “*Is this information what you were looking for?*” Here’s how the STAR model works:



BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING CHECKLIST

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experiences that demonstrate behaviors and skills that employers typically seek.
- Develop stories to describe these examples, emphasizing your achievements and attitude, yet remembering to include some evidence of struggles or turnarounds.
- Diversify your stories. Choose from internships, classes and school projects, volunteering and campus activities, hobbies, part-time jobs, and other areas that give a 360-degree view of you.
- Organize your stories using the STAR model.