STAR Technique

A Careers Shortcut to the best practice in the job market.

What is the STAR Technique?

Essentially STAR helps you to articulate an answer in a clear and logical way, so that the way you describe your experiences is coherent and the reader can easily follow the thread.

This is important in your jobs search as a prospective employer will be making a decision based on what you have said. This often is whether or not to take you through to the next stage of the process, e.g. to an interview or even to offer you the job!

When might you use STAR?

It has lots of uses but in the careers context it is most often used by employers during the following parts of the recruitment process:

- **CV** – in a CV you will need to describe your core set of skills, e.g. how you work in a team.
- **Application Form** – similarly you will be asked to describe your skills, and in addition you will be asked questions, for example: “what has been your biggest achievement to date?”
- **Interview** – during an interview you will have to both the above, but this time you will speak about your skills and experiences rather than write them down. Here you will need to retain the structure of the STAR technique in your head.

The STAR Technique Broken Down

STAR forces you to break down what you are describing into manageable chunks. First it gets you to describe a Situation, then it requires you to mention the Task that you were doing, then it gets you to provide information on the Action you took to complete the task, and finally it asks you to describe the Result of the action.

Taking the example of describing a skill, the following gives you a description of how to use the technique:

**Situation**

The first thing you have to do is to find a context or an environment (i.e. a situation) that allows you to answer the question or describe your skill. Basically you are giving an example and this could be from part-time or full-time work, university, gap year, voluntary work, personal experience, Duke of Edinburgh Award, President of the Chess Club, or anywhere/thing that allows you to provide enough detail to impress the reader. This is the start of your answer and it should be short, sharp and succinct; certainly no more than two sentences. Examples:

- **Leadership:** “When at university I was president of the Student Union…”
- **Communication:** “Whilst on my Gap year in I was in a foreign country when my passport was stolen…”
- **Problem Solving:** “A good example of problem solving is when I worked in customer services.”

**Task**

The next thing you should talk about is what you had to do, and this should link to the question you are being
asked on the application form, or the skill required by the job. Again this can be fairly brief.

- **Leadership:** “...one of my tasks was to lead the team organising the May Ball. “
- **Communication:** “…In order to get a replacement I had to find different ways of communicating with the local police as they didn’t speak English.”.
- **Problem Solving:** “One of my tasks was to deal with customer problems, a specific example was helping a customer who had lost their receipt. “

**Action**

This is the really important bit. What really impresses employers is “how” you performed the skill. This is because they think that you will be able to apply the same process to different situations and tasks in future job roles. So make sure you provide lots of detail, this means that this section will be longer than the others. In order to do this you will need to not only select a good example, but also to reflect back on it, do this by breaking it down step by step. Remember to tell them what you did (so use “I” rather than “we”), especially when explaining how you work in a team.

- **Leadership:** “As team leader I first had to recruit the team members, I then had to brief them as to their responsibilities, I then had to co-ordinate them in terms of their tasks, and finally I had to motivate them to achieve high standards. “
- **Communication:** “I did this by drawing pictures, using key words from my phrase book, speaking slowly, using hand gestures, and asking a local who could speak basic English to interpret.”
- **Problem Solving:** “When dealing with problems I always listen very carefully to the customer, I then summarise their problem and repeat it back to them to ensure I’ve not misunderstood, I then ……etc.”

**Result**

So you’ve explained where you did the skill, what you had to use the skill for, and how you used the skill, finally you have to explain what the result was of having used the skill. This can be a positive or negative result, but if it is the latter remember to explain what you learnt or what you would do differently. Again, be brief and to the point.

- **Leadership:** “Although I put a lot of effort into ensuring I recruited the right staff, they did ask me a lot of questions which meant I had less time for my other tasks. In hindsight I would put some time aside for regular team meetings.
- **Communication:** “By using different methods of communication I eventually got the police to write a report which I could then forward onto the Embassy. In future I will make sure my family have a photocopy of it, I will keep it in a safer place and keep a record of my passport number.”
- **Problem Solving:** “By staying calm and listening to the customer, they always felt that I was doing the best for them, on one occasion a customer returned to say thank you for helping to solve their problem.”

**Finally...**

As you can see, putting all these elements together produces a detailed story which allows the reader to build a picture in their mind’s eye of your capabilities. It should enable them to see your potential to do the job and apply the skill in lots of different situations. By being explicit and detailed, the reader does not need to be a mind reader!

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For more CV, Application and Interview advice, visit the [COMPETE](http://reading.ac.uk/careers) section of our site.