

# Answering Behavioural Interview Questions

*Behavioural interview questions are a special kind of interview question that must be answered a particular way.*

To be successful in responding to these types of questions you must provide a story about something you have actually done in the past (i.e. a past 'behaviour') – you can use examples from work, during your studies, or any setting, so you cannot say 'That has never happened to me'. Please note it takes practice to answer behavioural questions properly.

You can easily tell if a question is going to require a behavioural response if you listen carefully to the way the question is asked: It will begin with something like this 'Tell us about a time' or 'Describe a situation when ...'. Depending on what comes next, the interviewer will want you to tell a story that describes how you responded to a situation in the past.

Here are some examples of situations they might want you to talk about:

- > Please tell us about a time when someone asked you to do something that you didn't want to do.
- > Describe a situation where you needed to work in a team.
- > Please talk about a problem you had to solve. What was the problem, what did you do, and what was the result?
- > Describe a time when you had to work to a deadline.
- > Tell us about a time when you failed at something. (How you deal with failure and cope when things don't go right is important, too).

A common way to answer these questions is to use the STAR method. This method helps you to tell a story that the interviewers can understand, and shows them what skills and qualities you have.

Preparation is the key to answering behavioural-based questions and with practice you continue to get better at responding to them.

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## THE STAR METHOD

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| <b>Situation</b> | You give a brief outline of the situation or setting. Who was involved? Where were you? Who else was involved? What were you doing? |
| <b>Task</b>      | You describe your role and what you needed to achieve, how you took responsibility.   |
| <b>Action</b>    | You describe the actions you took, step by step, showing the skills and qualities you used.   |
| <b>Result</b>    | You talk about what happened in the end – this should be a good result, or if it was not good, what you learned from it.            |
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Keep these in mind while preparing answers to these questions:

- > Your answer should not be too short or too long: between 1 – 2 minutes is good.
- > Use past tense e.g. – *I did ...*, *It was up to me to*, *He asked me to ...*, *I decided to ...*
- > Give one example only, unless you are asked for more.
- > Give an honest answer, don't make something up.
- > When you are in a real interview, it is OK to ask for some time to think about your answer/response.

## Finding and using examples for Behavioural Interview Questions

Sometimes, it might be difficult to think of situations and particular examples for behavioural interview questions. The example you give can be quite simple, and if you have prepared well, you will usually find you can answer most behavioural questions.

For example, if they ask you to talk about a time you handled conflict you might reference a personal conflict with another person, or when you observed conflict between other people, and explain how you would have approached the situation.

It is OK to start with something like:

*'I would prefer to avoid conflict and I haven't experienced much in my life, but once I saw my brother arguing loudly with one of his friends. I realised while I was watching, that both of them were right in some ways, and both were wrong; there are always two sides to an argument. In the past, when someone has said something that I felt differently about, I have asked them to explain a bit more and then usually we find we are not so different after all. I can give you an example of that if you like?'*

The interviewer may be more interested to hear how you avoided conflict as this will demonstrate that you are likely to get on with the people you work with.

Hopefully you can see why it is important to think about some of these questions and write down some situations in advance.

Here are some examples of behavioural question types and situations you can use to answer them:

### Working in a Team

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- SITUATION
- > Group work in class
  - > Sporting team, singing group, band
  - > Work group
  - > Church or community group

### Communication

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- SITUATION
- > Giving someone directions
  - > Explaining a concept
  - > Talking through issues
  - > Presenting to class group
  - > Writing reports

### Handling Conflict

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- SITUATION
- > Respecting other people's points of view
  - > Handling customer complaints
  - > Apologising when in the wrong
  - > Dealing with misunderstandings

### Problem Solving

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- SITUATION
- > Working out how to get somewhere new
  - > Losing something important
  - > Missing an appointment
  - > Having trouble with an assignment

### Working alone responsibly

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- SITUATION
- > Doing independent research for assignments
  - > Teaching yourself something instead of waiting for someone to show you
  - > Getting things done without being asked

### Managing Time

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- SITUATION
- > Managing a busy schedule (e.g. work, study and sport)
  - > Keeping a diary to make sure all assignments are handed in on time
  - > Working steadily so work or study assignments are not left to the last minute
  - > Prioritising multiple tasks so that urgent matters are attended to first
  - > Writing daily 'to do' lists so that important items are not forgotten