

Using STAR effectively in your Job application and interviews.

“What’s STAR?”

Situation
Task
Action
Result

STAR is a great tool that can help you secure the job. While it has been around for a long time, it still provides an excellent guide for job applicants. STAR provides a structure that assists you to present examples as part of your written application or in an interview (typically competency based ones). It allows you to describe a situation or problem; highlight the task you had to accomplish; tell what actions you took to achieve the task; and show the result – what you achieved and what you learned.

So, how do you use it? See the example on the right for an idea of how to use STAR in your job application. It looks easy, but there are some tricks to making your example display your abilities in the best possible light.

Like any tool, however, STAR is only as good as you make it. It can be used very effectively, or it can demonstrate, for example, that you really don’t have those excellent writing skills you claim.

Don’t claim to have excellent communication skills – **prove you do.**

Situation:

Our Department was conducting a consultation to determine people’s views about a proposed change to legislation.

Task:

I was responsible for collating, sorting and summarising the feedback from several feedback sessions of the consultation.

Action:

First I ensured I understood exactly what the aims of the consultation were and the information my manager was seeking. I then developed a table for responses, themes, specific issues and comments. I could check back if any issue was queried. I grouped feedback themes and noted any issues and comments, such as related legislation. I was careful to work systematically through the feedback sheets so no important information was missed. When the feedback was collated and summarised, I presented the results to my manager and director.

Result:

My manager and director were both pleased with this work. My department was able to identify both positive and negative issues and key concerns, and work through them in progressing the new legislation.

1. Start with a strong example

Use an example that is at, or above, the level of the job you are going for.

Make sure the situation was challenging, something outside the day-to-day routine.

Select a task or challenge that you did well and achieved a good result. You want to paint yourself in the best light.

Finally, though we shouldn't have to say this, make sure it is a real example that you write about in your job application. You may be asked to talk about it in an interview, so you need to be confident you can do that.

2. Focus on what's most important

Keep your discussion of the situation and task as brief and succinct as you can – that information is not as important as what you did to address the problem and how you achieved a good outcome.

3. Make your role shine

Be very clear about what your role and responsibility was, and what actions you personally took. If it was a team effort, say so, but you still need to say exactly what you did within the team. Try to keep it sequential and if challenges arose, briefly describe them and what action you took to deal with them.

4. Go for a big finish

Increasingly we are expected to be outcome-focused, and the outcome is the good result you, your team, your unit, your branch and your organisation, achieved. Think about how you measured success, in tangible benefits. If you can show how your action contributed to the organisation's goals and objectives, even better – that helps you address that difficult capability, "supports strategic direction".

5. Write it well

Remember, everything in your job application displays your written communication skills. Use plain English and short sentences, avoid jargon, and use active rather than passive verbs (e.g. say 'I organised a meeting', not 'a meeting was organised by me'). Keep it succinct, to the point and interesting for the reader and proofread carefully. And don't underestimate the importance of 'white space' for readability – keep paragraphs short, put some space between each paragraph, and have good margins at the top and bottom and on both sides.

Summary

STAR can be a powerful tool to show the selection panel how well you meet the selection criteria, competencies or capabilities, but it's up to you to use it well in your job application. Find a strong example that displays your abilities, set it out clearly and succinctly, and show how it contributed to achieving your unit's objectives. A good example in your job application, that is also well written, will go a long way towards getting you an interview, and ultimately the job!