

Course Name- Complete guide for campus interviews: Step by step preparation for Internships and Full-time jobs

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STAR interview preparation

Hello folks, so in this set of presentations we'll walk through the STAR interview preparation or the behavioral interview preparation, talk about in detail of how you practice what some of these questions are and do a deep dive on them. The topics we'll cover are of course what is STAR, some of the STAR questions across different categories and then some homework that you guys can do. What is STAR? We discuss this in brief, but a STAR or a behavioral interview answer consists of four different buckets that you will have to address. And these are related to the situation that was given to you or the situation you found yourself in when you undertook a task. The task itself, which was given to you by your manager or something that you picked up. a group of actions that you performed and the results that were achieved.

Every star answer IDD should be about three to five minutes in length. The situation and the task is maybe a line or maybe two lines each. You would spend bulk of your time discussing the actions. You would talk about frameworks that you used, try and bring out how you were able to bring out analytical skills and logical framework to the actions that you performed.

the challenges that you faced and how you overcame them. Then finally, you will always end by the results that you achieved. Results have to be quantified. They have to be numbers and they have to be something that can be used to compare how the change happened. Remember, most of the time would be in actions.

You'd always end with results and results would be numbers. We discussed this earlier, but we'll discuss again quickly. Why are behavioral questions or star interview questions important? Again, behavioral questions are the norm these days. Every company that you're gonna go and have an interview with would have one or more behavioral interview rounds. Behavioral interview rounds are always a method for companies to one, compare answers given across candidates and identify those candidates for a better fit for their company and for their team.

Also, behavioral questions are some things that can be measured and they are quantified. Behavioral questions are based upon incidents that have happened in the past. It is not a cooked up scenario. So nobody is going to ask you, OK, how will you go solve a problem x? That is not a behavioral question. Behavior is based upon things that have happened.

They would ask you, tell me a time or tell me a situation where certain things happened and explain what you did. So the idea is your past actions are a reflection of your future potential or future work. So if you have had challenges in the past but have overcome them, we can expect in the company that when faced with similar challenges, you will actually overcome them. So that's the idea why behavioral interviews have become a norm these days across all interviews and across all companies. We discussed the relative importance between say highly technical roles versus those that require managerial or leadership capacities.

But remember, even for highly technical roles, you would always have at least one round with the HR manager or someone very high in the organization where they're looking for a fit with respect to the company or the team. So we've been talking a lot about this behavioral questions. So let me give you a couple of examples, right? Tell me a time where you led a group of people. It could be a thing like, hey, tell me a time where you had to get work done with limited resources. So remember, it is always tell me a time in the past where you actually did X to achieve certain things.

That's the standard. So tell me a time in the past where you did certain things and what was the outcome. That's always the question pattern. We're going to discuss a little bit more about it. Before we look at the different scenarios and then get into what could be good answers, I think this is a sample answer that actually is very powerful and I want to walk you guys through this.

One of the times that we stumbled upon a student who actually worked with IIT Madras fourth estate, and he had a very excellent answer to the question we asked about, hey, tell us a time where you had to actually meet a certain challenge at your workplace. you are able to overcome the challenge and deliver results, was the question we asked. And we felt that the answer was really fantastic from the student. If you look through the answer, I'll give you a minute to read. But if you look through the answer, you will note that it is not the kind of like company or or the value from the team that is important it is a value of the work that the student themselves did that is important so if if you have answers for example working for a premium company versus let's say i'm just giving a name let's say if you have had a work experience with say google versus a work experience with a small project which should you choose the one that is able to explain the actions you have done and able to bring out a better set of results specific to the job should be the one that you target.

So let's look a little at this specific answer that is given by the student. So the situation the student found themselves was that they were working for a newspaper organization called the Fourth Estate, and the revenues were falling off. And why was it falling off? It was falling because the long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts. So the student was given a task which was they were asked to actually go ahead increase their revenue by 10%. So do what you have but increase their revenue.

That was a task given to them. Now student did a couple of things. So they did a couple of promotional packets that they sent explaining why their college newspaper is much better than other ad sources. And they also set up a sort of a training session with students who would actually reach out to new advertisers, new sponsors. And to do that, they actually trained them by working with the operation research professor.

And they were trained into competitive selling strategies. So the student did this set of work, the outreach as well as the internal training work. And as a consequence of it, they were able to increase their revenue. And they say that they increase the revenue of new advertisers by 20%. And also that they signed, contracted five former advertisers.

So if you look at it, there is a set of actions that are very clear. It is not important that they did with something very high profile work. They were very logical. They both did the outreach work, improved the, changed the outreach work, as well as they worked through the training part of it. Both were the bottlenecks towards increasing the revenues or the efficiencies.

right? Consequently, they showed numbers. So the student clearly talked about the 20% gain or that five former advertisers signed up. So these are very quantifiable numbers. It shows value from the work that they've done. And you can see that the number is 20% versus the target set to them was 10%.

So it's clearly way over and above what was expected. So this is a fantastic answer. It is not something that you would expect from a student, but this is a standout answer that you can see. So again, go through we'll go through the examples today but remember always there is a every answer to these questions always begins with what was the situation normally the situation is something before you join the team or before you handed the project what was the work that you actually decided to undertake it could be something that you took up you identified you took up or it could be something that normally is handed over to your manager by your manager You're looking through the set of actions and always the results and the numbers are something that comes finally out of the work that was done. So let's look at some possible star questions and maybe go a little deeper into them.

So we look at bunch of categories. So what we know that they have done is that we have actually looked at all questions that have normally asked on interviews, broken them into a common pattern and put them into different subheadings. So for example, teamwork is one subheading in which there are a few important questions that we have listed. So normally you would get questions of this flavor, very similar to these kind of questions or maybe a slightly different flavor to what is being asked. If you practice, for example, the set of questions written over here, you would be comfortable answering any teamwork related questions that's ever thrown at you.

So teamwork is a people skill. It will be something that might be in the job description saying your job description as a description as a consultant might require that you show certain expertise in teamwork. And during the interview, if that is the kind of role that is being interviewed for, you will get one of these questions in exactly this way or slightly in a different favor. So, let us take one of them and look at what could be a good answer.

Let us look at the last one. Tell me a time where you needed to get information from someone who was not very responsive. What did you do? So, Remember, there are a few things on the high level that you need to understand from this. Firstly, it's a very common question or a very common understanding at workplaces that people around you are not always cooperative. So, if not, how would you actually approach it? So, they're trying to judge whether you'll actually get work done in future in their workplace, right? When you look at this, you always have to understand that you are going to talk about a professional experience. So irrespective of all the database of questions that we showcase to you, the answers that you are supposed to give are related to either projects you have done or related to work experience you have so if you have so in order of priority always talk about work experience you had over even projects that you get but if you're not able to get work experience that talks about this particular question then always use projects where you worked upon okay do not try and avoid personal work that you have done between friends as an example because that's not a professional environment and you don't want to showcase that so that's that's a background okay A good answer for the last one would be, for example, that you were blocked by a team or a group of people from getting a certain work done.

It could be that I needed, maybe let's say in workplace, you needed certain data from a certain team and that team actually responded saying that they were unavailable or that they were too

busy with other work. That's possibly the context you need to give. So in your situation, you will always have to talk about, hey, at a time when I was working for a company X, during year, like maybe like two years, just two years ago, when I was working for company X, this was my internship for three months. I had this challenge where, right? So that's your setting up the situation. So always give that situation first.

Talk about the task itself. The task was that, For urgent work, I needed to get data from a team X, but the team was not very cooperative. The team had other pending work and they were putting me in a lower priority. Consequently, now you'll have to talk about actions. Use some structure to answer why did you do the certain set of actions. Like you can be random in it and say that I did X, I did Y, I did Z.

That's not structured. So if someone does not give you or does not support you, you would like to say, what did you do? Did you think about it? Hey, the problem was there was a problem. The problem could be broken as there was some practices within the team where they put me into lower priority. Or it was number two, it was a personal issue where someone was not available during a certain time. Or it would be that there were certain technical challenges related to the organization which prevented it prevented me from getting data directly from the company. So you would need always to think about these three buckets or some of the buckets and then say, OK, within the bucket, this was my first option.

I tried some other set of actions. And consequently, this was the outcome. So always break down the activities you have done into some logical framework. Talk about why did you choose that particular activity and then talk about what was the consequence of it, which finally comes to the results part of it. Results part will always be something like I got the work done, but that's sure you got the work done. But what did that mean? It meant that you got the data which allowed for a certain dashboard to be prepared or you got the data which was very difficult to be got by making some technical improvements or technical changes to the database, something of that nature.

But what was the improvement? What was the impact? It now made data available within minutes for everyone who was looking for it. That could be a possible outcome. The data that was generated allowed our manager to make a presentation and consequently get the team funding for a new project of worth maybe, I don't know, maybe a million dollars. That's again outcome. So be very specific on the outcomes, talk about the results.

In teamwork, a key thing to talk about is Personal challenges that people have, how you actually able to resolve it and how you worked with the group of people or a person to resolve that. I think the key thing from a teamwork's perspective is you are able to build bridges where bridges do not exist. You are able to communicate effectively with people. You are able to identify challenges and surmount them and make life of others easy in the process.

That's key to call out. Another set of questions that come would be focused upon customer focus. Now, if you are going to interview, for example, with a company like Amazon, which says it is the most customer-centric company in the world, the customer is a god for anyone in Amazon. This could be a set of questions along the customer focus would be definitely questions you face during your interviews. But every company today that is actually delivering a product to the market has to be customer focused. So if you are going to interview for any product company, you can expect to hear something related to customer focus.

Again, let's look at one question maybe like... how about the the first one describe a time when it was especially important to make good impression on a client and what did you do how did you go about doing it right so client is a customer if you are working for maybe a consulting company right and if you are interviewing for consulting company or if you're interviewing for a product company maybe they want to know this kind of question so it is important to know that The question is focused upon customer focus. So you have to talk about everything from the point of view of customer. So every advice that I gave earlier about describing a situation, task, action, result, hold. On top of it, you want your answers to focus upon how you looked from the customer's perspective.

What were the challenges that were inherent in your team? And what did you do that ensures that your client had a good experience? So for example, things could be that I was pulled in for a very tricky situation where customer was expecting a certain outcome and our team was not able to deliver on the outcome. So I had to go talk to the customer and convince him or find a favorable solution for both him and for our team. That could be the conversation. And then you can discuss about what are the things that you discuss with your customer? What are some of the options you gave them? What did you do to understand their real challenges? Did you go sit with your customer? Did you watch their team? Did you look at what was a, did you pull data about how much is a business impact for the customer? Those things become perfect sense because what you're trying to do is you're going to unblock and create value for your customer, which is exactly what a consulting company or a product company is trying to do.

Okay. As an example. So, Dimension your answer along those lines. Think from the perspective of customers and how you unlock value for them. And talk about, consequently, how you made a very satisfied customer. That's a perfectly great answer.

Always close with the results. Talk about, hey, consequently, we signed a deal with the customer, which led to whatever. For example, in the example of that fourth estate, the student got the customers to renew contracts. So that's obviously a place where the favorable impression was made. But you can do something of that nature in the answers that you talk.

not all numbers are quantitative. They can also be qualitative. But qualitative also leads to comparison that can happen. So we can say that the client actually went ahead and had lot more interactions with us. So we would not have any team discussions with the client before this meeting. And consequently, we were able to meet after this great favorable impression.

The client was open for client meetings like once a week.

We changed the dynamics. We made the team... a lot more approachable and unlock a lot more potential value for the company. So that could be a direction you want to head towards. But if you can quantify it, if you can put the numbers to it, that will make your case really solid. I will not dive into all the answers, but I guess you guys get a gist of it.

Look at the bucket that you're looking for. For example, this is related to flexibility and how you are able to adjust to the situations. So if you have things like learning agility, ability to be flexible to change ability to accommodate other people's need. I think those all fall into the bucket of activities over here. So whether you've done projects where you had challenges related to delivery with respect to your teammates, how you would actually go ahead adjusting their work with respect to the outcomes required, what did you do over and above what was expected from you? Those are always great answers for questions on this bucket of activity. a

key thing to remember is when you are asked a question like for example if you are you are under a lot of pressure what did you do how did you like um achieve on a project um with that pressure you want to answer those questions always specifically to the to the question asked like ensure that your answers are consistent and answer the question asked rather than be a little bit more generic so if it's a lot of pressure remember if the question is hey tell me a time where you had a lot of pressure and still delivered definitely talk about why there was a lot of pressure what that meant for you on a personal on a professional level and what that meant on on the sacrifices you had to do on a personal level to actually ensure make things happen right What was the outcome for a company? I think those things need to be talked about.

But remember, be very specific to the question asked when you answer this set of questions, star-related questions. Anywhere when you are in project management, product management, software engineering, you always come into resource management related questions. If you are a consultant, definitely. These are very favorite bucket where interviewers pull questions from.

So again, we listed a bunch of questions. I would suggest you guys look through them. Like first one, you have to be very strategic in order to meet your priority. Remember, it is a resource management question. So, you may do not get sidetracked into purely into say a strategy that you had. Do not get caught into the action which is not relevant to the question itself, which is related to how do you manage resources from a strategic perspective.

So, keep that in mind. Always structure your answers very narrowly to the question. Definitely show your results, but it's the same pattern that we discussed. Always talk about the time that I was doing a specific work. Always start with that.

It also allows you to ease into a conversation. When I was at this year, like two years ago in 2022, When I was doing an internship, when I was doing a project, I was working with a group of people, I was working with a professor on this certain item. It eases you into the thing. So set up the situation, talk about the task, talk very specifically about the actions and talk about the results that happened. Always quantify it again. um communication again another favorite bucket specifically for anything related to product anything related to consulting anything related to managerial roles anything again the key thing for any of these questions is not really that you are a fluent english speaker um it is that you are able to communicate effectively which is you are able to talk about the task and the work that needs to be done you are able to be someone who communicates with data who is able to talk about uh numbers and results, right? I think those are the key things that you would want to look for.

Again, another bucket called motivation. I'll leave you guys to look through a set of questions. Irrespective of every role, this is my key takeaway is irrespective of every role, any company, any role, you would want to see highly motivated individuals. Motivated individuals who rise above and beyond the challenge that they face. So you want to have answers that show that you're passionate about roles, you're passionate about the job, you're actually able to meet challenges and not be driven away from that, but actually rise over and above that.

So those are the key things that you want to talk about. Always talk about results, of course. Talk about completion, about success. Follow them with numbers. The hours you put, all those become great numbers to talk through. Even if there is a negative question, so in the specific case, the last question was, tell me a time when you're dissatisfied with work, what could you do to make it better? It's a really tricky question if you think over it.

It is falsely masked as dissatisfaction, even though all the interviewer wants to do is find out how you actually rise above personal dissatisfactions or limited challenges that occur within a company. you would want to talk about the nature so in these kind of questions you always want to talk about the fact that hey you are dissatisfied you are dissatisfied because the process was not the most efficient it was not the way that work would be more efficiently done it was something where other people were not utilized to the potential you want to talk about dissatisfaction from that high generic perspective right And then you want to talk about what did you do that actually make it better? And you want to say, hey, if it didn't happen, it was because of things like there was a certain blocks in place which I had no control over, but I raised certain measures to actually remove those roadblocks. I think those are perfect answers and those are the directions you would want to talk about. even negative questions always look for you as a candidate who's inspiring and motivated they want you to say or they want to look from the perspective of hey given challenging times will this person rise over and above and try their level best to modify things or make improvements we come to some homework for you guys but let's talk about it so we discussed all these 30 odd questions what I want you guys to do is Write down your answers on a sheet.

Practice on all these questions. So we will talk about some of them. Practice makes you perfect. So practice, practice, practice. Write down.

Do the preparatory work. Sit with your friend or colleague or your relative. Have this conversation. Let them ask you a question. You should speak out.

So, whatever you practiced upon, try to bring that out. Think of it as a play. It's easy to start improving yourself. Think of it as something that is fun and something that you can keep repeatedly doing. So, again, for each question, take a sheet of paper. Write down the question. Write in detail in that same situation, task, action and result on that specific question.

highlight your actions highlight your results remember that you are trying to fit yourself with respect to a job description so ideally you should have for example if you are looking for consulting roles should have had a chance to look through like maybe 15 or 20 consulting job descriptions. List down what are the key skills required. And then during your preparatory work, try and highlight those skills too within your answer. It is not in absence of skills that you're talking. You're talking about answers that are relevant, but also showcase the skills you're looking for.

the toughest part is going to be quantification especially where I had people say hey I did a project I don't know what the outcome was right I did it for my faculty like and he asked me to do this I completed the project and handed it over like I don't really know what happened after that Make an educated guess. If you can't make an educated guess, follow up. When you write these things in a paper, you can always follow up and find out from your professor or the project where did it head to. Come out with some educated guesses on where the numbers should be, what should be the improvement be.

It is a good idea to talk about percentage changes. So if you did from like I did, I improved something from one number to two number. It doesn't make much sense to say that. But if you talk about a change of 100%, that seems a lot, right? So think about that. Talk always about before, after.

I think those are some of the things that you need to work through. Again, always write down answers first. Make a best answer that you can write down on paper. Practice them on yourself, like read them, memorize them, be aware of it. See how each question can be modified if the question was slightly different.

You may not have 30 experiences for 30 questions. What I would normally suggest is think about 5 to 6 experiences and think about how you can morph it to all the 30 questions. There will be different parts of that work that you have done from that experience that fit a question better. So think about which question for this question what about my experience about the 5 experience makes it a good sell.

So talk about those lines. So we know that I did this practice. It's part of the practice that we did after MBA. In fact, if you think over it, most MBA students spend the entire two years practicing on star interview questions. So remember, they spent two years practicing. So if you have not done that, you should, because that's the kind of quality of people who are, you come there, they're prepared with the answers.

You should also be so prepared when you get to the job market. Okay, again this is work for thousands, so we did like immense work, we wrote that down, but I've seen that every successful candidate, it's almost the same script, hard work before the interview, where they wrote down all the answers, practiced, they practiced with their friends, they rehearsed it until perfection, so when the actual questions came, it was like a piece, like you should never be taken aback, you can of course think during the interview, but normally what you want to do is, you want to like smooth, you want to make it like a easy flow so when the question is asked it should be prepared should already have answers ready you're able to deliver it smoothly during that time so you it becomes like a like a easy process if you have practiced this many many many times in the past We have done this. We have had remarkable successes. Initial interviews are always a pain. You see that it's a little bit of a stumble.

But after a practice, I have seen personally that my interviews like exponentially changed. I've seen that with my friends. I've seen, we know this, had the same experience. And so are like thousands of students that we have advised and mentored, right? So whether they've gone for further studies, they've had a discussion with their students, with their career counselors or whether they had discussions for actual job. It always been that practice had made them perfect and able to deliver really smoothly and confidently over the interview.

With that, I end today's presentation. But again, I want you guys to take one key takeaway, which is do your homework. Practice, practice, practice. Communication is not a skill that most people are born with.

Even those who are born with, it has to be honed. It has to be tuned. So put a lot of effort. Make this as your daily practice ritual. It is fun. You will see a dramatic change within your interviewing skills. So please practice on it and hope you guys get a great career ahead from all the practice that you do. Cheers.