



Behavioral Interviews

Behavioral Interviews are now employed by virtually all companies and therefore should be expected by all candidates interviewing for a position.

The purpose of the behavioral interview is to reveal tangible perspective around an individual's motivations and thought processes. Furthermore, when the behavioral interview approach works the way it is intended to, the candidate shares vivid illustrations of their past behavior in a variety of situations. The idea being, past behavior predicts a candidate's future performance.

The best preparation for a successful behavioral interview is to spend time thinking about how your successes and failures have assisted in shaping you personally and professionally. You should be able to speak animatedly about your work and then connect what you've done to the effect/results your actions have had.

In shaping your responses, a helpful mnemonic device is "STAR," which stands for Situation/Task, Action, Result. Using this as a mental trigger, you should be able to create responses to open-ended questions that reflect or illustrate your skills and expertise in a logical and progressive manner. Very much like stories, your answers should include a beginning, a middle, and an end. At the same time, they should be succinct and should provide a targeted response to the initial question.

Behavioral interview questions can take many forms. In general, though, the questions fall into these categories: Open-Ended questions, Why questions, Closed-Ended questions and Follow-up questions.

Open-Ended Questions

Generate performance data. These are very obviously behavioral questions because the interviewer specifically requests examples of your past behavior.

- Describe a time when you best demonstrated your analytical thinking skills.
- Give me an example of an important goal that you set for yourself in the past and your success in reaching it.
- Tell me about a project you initiated, the challenges you faced, and how you overcame them.

Your goal in answering is to connect your experience to the situation suggested by the interviewer. Try to include the problem, your actions and the result with relevant details.



Why Questions

Can be used to reveal preferences, rationale for decision making, or to determine your level of motivation.

- Why are you interested in our organization?
- Why did you opt to accept your current job?
- Why did you leave your last job?

Closed-Ended Questions

Most commonly used to confirm or verify information and can be answered with either a short phrase, or a single word, 'yes' or 'no'.

- You have a doctorate in immunology. Is that correct?
- Have you lead a team from project initiation through to completion?
- Is leading a larger group something that's important to you?

Follow-up Questions

Interviewers use follow-up questions to probe for details that prove consistency in your story.

For example, in response to you mentioning that you recently worked in a team on a preclinical project, the employer might ask:

- What was your role, and how did you feel about that role?
- What was the result of your work?
- What would you do differently if you had the opportunity?

Again, to ensure the best possible outcome, you should prepare in advance by mentally cataloguing past experiences (tangible events) that speak to your competencies and display how you approach problem solving. Add to that, you should pay special attention to incorporating examples of your experience working in a team setting and contributing towards collaborative efforts. Many people make the mistake of speaking exclusively in the first-person singular (ie/ using I or me) and neglect to point to the fact that they worked as a part of a larger team. Regardless of your level/seniority, being able to work collaboratively in shaping consensus driven approaches is imperative. As a result, you must recognize that a prospective employer is also grading you on your ability to be a team player and effectuate change through partnership and collegial debate, rather than iron-fist tactics.