

The STAR Interview Template

Behavioural interviews reward one skill above all others: telling a true story with a structure the listener can follow and score. STAR is that structure: **Situation, Task, Action, Result**. This template builds your story bank before the interview, so you adapt under pressure instead of composing under pressure. It also works from the other side of the table: teams that score STAR answers consistently hire better and argue less.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

Build five to seven core stories that flex to almost any behavioural question, with the result quantified before you walk in.

FOR TEAMS

Interview panels: ask structured questions, probe the same way every time, and score against anchors instead of gut feel.

FOR COMPANIES

Structured interviewing is the cheapest hiring quality upgrade available, and it stands up to audit when decisions are questioned.

01 The four parts, weighted correctly

PART	SHARE	WHAT BELONGS HERE
Situation	15%	Context in two sentences: where, when, what was at stake. Interviewers need just enough to care.
Task	10%	Your specific responsibility, not the team's. The word I starts appearing here and never leaves.
Action	50%	What you did, step by step, including one decision point where you could have chosen differently. This is the part being scored.
Result	25%	The outcome with a number, scale, or named consequence, plus one sentence on what you would repeat or change.

Most candidates invert the weights: two minutes of situation, ten seconds of action. If your story runs long, cut context, never action. A useful rehearsal drill is to start the story at the Task and see whether anyone misses the missing scenery. They rarely do.

02 The question decoder

Behavioural questions sound varied and score narrowly. Learn what each family is actually probing and you can route it to a prepared story instead of improvising a new one.

WHAT THEY ASK	WHAT THEY SCORE	STORY THEME TO ROUTE TO
Tell me about a time you failed.	Ownership and learning loop	A failure and what changed after
Describe a conflict with a colleague.	Empathy plus firmness, no villains	A conflict you worked through
Tell me about leading a project.	Initiative without authority	Leading without authority
A time you had to decide fast.	Judgment under uncertainty	A decision with incomplete data
Your proudest achievement.	Scale, impact, and your specific share of it	A result you are proud of
A time you had too much to do.	Prioritisation and honest tradeoffs	Pressure or a hard deadline

03 Build your story bank

You need five to seven stories, not twenty. Strong candidates reuse a small bank because one real story about a failed launch answers questions about failure, conflict, learning, and pressure, depending on which action you spotlight. Choose stories from the last three years, with results you can defend, spread across these themes.

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|---|--|
| ☐ A result you are proud of | ☐ A decision with incomplete data |
| ☐ A conflict you worked through | ☐ Pressure or a hard deadline |
| ☐ A failure and what changed after | ☐ Learning something fast |
| ☐ Leading without authority | |

Story bank index: name each story in two words and tick the themes it can carry.

STORY NAME (TWO WORDS)	THEMES IT CAN ANSWER

04 The story worksheet

Copy this page for each story in your bank. The decision point line matters most: a listener leans in when a person says, I had two options, and here is why I chose the harder one.

Situation, two sentences maximum

Task, what was yours specifically

Action, the steps, and the decision point where you chose

Result, number, scale, or named consequence, plus the lesson

05 Language upgrades

The same true story lands differently depending on the sentence shapes carrying it. These swaps come straight from mock interview sessions.

WEAK SHAPE	STRONG SHAPE
We worked hard and eventually it got done.	I split the backlog into three tracks and took the client facing one myself.
I was responsible for social media.	I owned three channels with a combined 40,000 followers and a weekly revenue target.
It went really well.	Sign ups rose 18 percent in six weeks, and the format became the team standard.
I learned a lot from the experience.	Since then I never launch without a rollback plan, and it has saved us twice.

06 For interview teams: probe and score the same way every time

Unstructured interviews measure confidence and similarity to the interviewer. Structure fixes both, and it starts with agreeing the probes in advance. Whatever the candidate's first answer, the follow ups are the same.

- What was the alternative you considered and rejected?
- What was your specific contribution, separate from the team's?
- What did it cost, and what did it return?
- What would you do differently now?

Scoring anchors: agree these before the first interview, score independently and in writing before any discussion.

SCORE	ANCHOR
0	No real example. Hypotheticals, generalities, or someone else's story.
1	Real example, but actions are vague or the result is missing or unverifiable.
2	Specific personal actions, a clear decision point, and a concrete result.
3	All of level two, plus honest reflection and evidence the lesson was applied later.

The first spoken opinion in the room moves everyone else's, which is exactly what written scores exist to prevent. Companies formalising this get a bonus: a written, criteria based record of why each decision was made, which is what fairness looks like when someone asks.

07 The panel calibration exercise

Before a hiring round, run this once. It costs forty five minutes and repays it in every debrief that follows.

- One panelist tells a real story from their own career, in STAR shape, three minutes.
- Everyone scores it against the anchors, silently, in writing.
- Reveal the scores. Any spread of two or more points gets discussed until the anchor wording is fixed.
- Repeat with a second story. Spreads shrink fast, and so do your debrief arguments later.

08 Rehearse the delivery, not the script

Say each story out loud three times: once from your worksheet, once from memory, once while doing something else with your hands. You are training the structure, not the sentences. Memorised scripts crack when a question arrives at an angle; a structure bends and holds. Aim for ninety seconds to two minutes per answer at a conversational pace, and record one run on your phone. You are listening for the Action share: if it is under half, cut scenery until it is not.

A NOTE FROM THE CLASSROOM

I coach interview preparation in Seoul, where many of my students face behavioural interviews in their second language. The ones who succeed are never the ones with perfect English. They are the ones whose stories have a real decision point in the Action section, because a listener leans in when a person says: I had two options, and here is why I chose the harder one. Structure carries you across language barriers. Adjectives do not.

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TAKE IT FURTHER

The Interview Strategy tool builds and stress tests your story bank interactively, and Mic Check rehearses the delivery. Free, no signup: careercomms.com/tools/interview-strategy