



BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEWS

What is Behavior Based Interviewing?

Behavior based interviewing is a common interview method used by employers. It is structured on the belief that past behavior and performance predicts future behavior and performance. By asking behavior-based questions, the interviewer attempts to solicit information about how you demonstrate your skills and competencies and the impact your behavior has on others. You may use any work experience, including internship and volunteer activities, as well as school projects and extracurricular activities as examples of your past behavior.

What Do Employers Evaluate in a Behavioral Interview?

Employers are looking for three types of skills: Content Skills, Functional, and Adaptive.

Content Skills – These skills demonstrate your knowledge of a specific field or task. These skills are expressed as nouns. Examples of content skills include computer programming, and accounting.

Functional or Transferable Skills – These skills are demonstrated when working with people, information, and things. These skills are expressed as verbs and are understood by terms such as organizing, managing, developing, communicating, etc

Adaptive or Self-Management Skills – These skills highlight an individual's personal characteristics. These types of skills are expressed as adjectives. Examples of adaptive skills include the following: creative, dependable, team player, self directed, and punctual.

How Can I Best Answer Behavior-Based Questions? Think SAR!

A complete answer to a behavior-based question must have the following three parts: A Situation (S), an Action (A) taken, and the Results (R). Structuring your response in an SAR format allows you to tell the interviewer a cohesive story about how you will apply your practical skills. Below is an example of how to apply SAR.

Describe the Situation (S): Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, *the Stetson Reporter*, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

State the Action (A) Taken: I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of *Reporter* circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a School of Business Administration professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

Describe the Result (R): We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent (*quantify your results where possible*) over the same period last year.

(OVER)

How Can I Prepare for A Behavioral Interview?

Listed below are several strategies to help you prepare for your interviews.

- Analyze the type of position(s) for which you're applying. Try to get an actual job description. What skills are required by employers?
- Analyze your own background. What skills do you have (content, functional, and adaptive) that relate to your career objective?
- Identify examples from your past experience where you demonstrated those skills. How can you "tell a story" about your use of particular skills or knowledge? Concentrate on developing a complete (SAR) answer sequence. Remember, a good story has a beginning, middle, and end.
- Whenever possible, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility.
- Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then?
- Before starting the interview process, identify 2 to 3 of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points during the interview.

Sample Behavior-Based Questions

Below is a list of common behavior-based questions. Competencies sought by the interviewer are listed in parentheses.

- Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a research paper. What was the topic? What journals did you read? (*research/written communication*)
- Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker or classmate criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others? (*oral communication*).
- Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your supervisor or professor on an idea or concept. How did you proceed? What was the result? (*assertiveness*)
- Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused? (*commitment to task*)
- Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company or class was facing. What was the challenge? What role did others play? (*creativity and imagination*)
- Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome? (*decision making*)
- Describe a time when you got co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome? (*teamwork*)
- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn? (*time management*)
- Describe two specific goals you set for yourself and how successful you were in meeting them. What factors led to your success in meeting your goals? (*goal setting*)

Source: *The Ultimate Job Search Kit* by Damir Joseph Stimac.