

STAR

- Improve the way you describe your skills

INTRODUCTION

How many times have you sat down to write your CV skills section and then given up? How many times has an application asked “*Tell me about when you worked in a team?*” and you’ve thought “*I don’t know how to answer this?*” Well in both these cases it’s because most people find it very difficult to write about their skills. But having made an attempt, the one common mistake is to provide a long description of “where” they did the skill and not much else. A good answer, and what employers are looking for, is a brief mention of “where” you did the skill, then loads of detail about “how” you actually do the skill.

The **STAR** technique is an acronym that provides a structured way of describing a skill. It is versatile enough to be used on CVs, on application forms and even in interviews. Indeed, some employers actually suggest you use the technique when providing guidance on how to complete their application forms.

STAR TECHNIQUE

STAR forces you to break down the description of a skill into manageable chunks. First it gets you to describe the **S**ituation where you used the skill, then it requires you to mention the **T**ask that you were using the skill for, then it gets you to provide information on the **A**ction you took when using the skill, and finally it asks you to describe the **R**esult of the action. The following gives you a more detailed description of how to use the technique.

▪ SITUATION

The first thing you have to do is to find a context or an environment (i.e. a situation) that allows you to answer the question or describe your skill. Basically you are giving an example and this could be from part-time or full-time work, university, gap year, voluntary work, personal experience, Duke of Edinburgh Award, President of the Chess Club, or anywhere/thing that allows you to provide enough detail to impress the reader. This is the start of your answer and it should be short, sharp and succinct.

Examples:

(The following “skills” examples continue under each part of STAR):

- ✓ **Leadership:** “When at university...”
- ✓ **Communication:** “Whilst on my Gap year in...”
- ✓ **Problem Solving:** “A good example of problem solving is when I worked in customer services”

▪ TASK

The next thing you should talk about is what you had to do, and this should link to the question you are being asked on the application form, or the skill required by the job. Again this can be fairly brief.

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Career Options and Skills, CVs and Covering Letters

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Examples

- ✓ "...I was president of the Student Union, one of my tasks was to lead the team organising the May Ball."
- ✓ "...when my passport was stolen. In order to get a replacement I had to find different ways of communicating with the local police as they didn't speak English."
- ✓ "One of my tasks was to deal with customer problems, a specific example was helping a customer who had lost their receipt."

▪ ACTION

This is the really important bit. For some employers the context (the S&T) is not so important, what really impresses them is "how" you performed the skill. This is because they think that you will be able to apply the same process to different situations and tasks in future job roles. So make sure you provide lots of detail, this means that this section will be longer than the others. In order to do this you will need to not only to select a good example, but also to reflect back on it, do this by breaking it down step by step. Remember to tell them what **you** did (so use "I" rather than "we"), especially when explaining how you work in a team (don't explain what the team did here, but you can for S&T).

Examples:

- ✓ "As team leader I first had to recruit the team members, I then had to brief them as to their responsibilities, I then had to co-ordinate them in terms of their tasks, and finally I had to motivate them to achieve high standards."
- ✓ "I did this in a variety of ways e.g. drawing pictures, using key words from my phrase book, speaking slowly, using hand gestures, and asking a local who could speak a little bit of English to interpret."
- ✓ "When dealing with problems I always listen very carefully to the customer, I then summarise their problem and repeat it back to them to ensure I've not misunderstood, I then... etc"

▪ RESULT

So you've explained where you did the skill, what you had to use the skill for, and how you used the skill, finally you have to explain what the result was of having used the skill. This can be a positive or negative result, but if it is the latter remember to explain what you learnt or what you would do differently. Again you can be brief and to the point, usually one line will do.

Examples:

- ✓ "Although I put a lot of effort into ensuring I recruited the right staff, they did ask me a lot of questions which meant I had less time for my other tasks. In hindsight I would put some time aside for regular team meetings."
- ✓ "By using different methods of communication I eventually got the police to write a report which I could then forward onto the Embassy. In future I will make sure my family have a photocopy of it, I will keep it in a safer place and keep a record of my passport number."
- ✓ "Because I stayed calm and listened to the customer, they always felt that I was doing the best for them, on one occasion a customer returned to say thank you for helping to solve their problem."

CONCLUSION

So as you can see, putting all these elements together produces a detailed story which allows the reader to build a picture in their mind's eye of your capabilities. It should enable them to see your potential to do the job and apply the skill in lots of different situations. By being explicit and detailed, the reader does not need to be a mind reader!