



ANSWERING STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

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INTERVIEW PREPARATION RESOURCE

BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

A behavioural question is one of the most common types of question an interviewer will ask. The applicant is prompted to describe their actions in a given situation (provided by interviewer) from their past experiences. It is used to predict future performance based on past experience.

QUESTION: Tell me about a time when you were unable to meet a project deadline.

TECHNIQUE: Detail a real-life example by using the SAR method!

SITUATION Tell them the circumstances, and what happened.

Example:

In my role as a marketing assistant, I was tasked with completing a set of three social media posts to be posted on our calendar. It was scheduled to be released two weeks after I was expected to complete it. At the time, I was managing two other projects, and a day before the deadline I realized that although two posts were done, I wouldn't have enough time to completely finish the campaign.

ACTION Tell them what you did, and how you did it.

Example:

I believe in accountability, so I brought up my concern to my immediate supervisor. I apologized, explained the situation, and suggested a revised timeline by examining the urgency and priority level of the other projects. This new timeline would ensure the project was completed at least a week before publishing, so there was still time for review and any necessary revisions.



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RESULT Tell them the outcome, impact, and what the reactions were.

Example:

My supervisor appreciated my transparency, and worked with me to make sure I had time to complete the project without sacrificing the quality of work with the other projects. We ended up implementing the priority metrics strategy I came up with for all projects so that other team members were able to more accurately understand how to manage their time effectively. I haven't missed a deadline since, and there's ongoing trust between my supervisor and I.

Try to have a different story for each soft skill. In this example, the interviewer is looking for evidence of time management and problem solving. In the answer above, communication and initiative are also demonstrated. By using this technique, you can be sure that your answer won't be too short, and it also gives the interviewer a clear idea of how you react to a situation - by seeking positive results!

TIP: You can identify a behavioural question if it starts with "Tell me about..."

SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS

A situational question is another common type of question you can expect in an interview. In these questions, applicants are asked to describe how they would react in important or decisive situations they would likely encounter on the job. An interviewer uses this method of questioning to predict future performance based on intentions.

QUESTION: How would you react if your co-worker wasn't pulling their weight on a group project?

TECHNIQUE: Explain your thinking by outlining steps that show you share the company values!

ANALYZE Tell them what your personal goal is from the situation.

Example:

First, I would want to analyze the situation for some more context. Is this a pattern, or is it a one-time situation? Based on the circumstances, I might approach the situation differently. But ultimately, my goal would be to address the issue as soon as possible with the parties involved - which would be my coworker, and if it escalated, then our supervisor.



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ADDRESS Tell them how you will be proactive, and why.

Example:

My next step would be to approach my coworker on a one-on-one basis. I would bring up my concern in a professional manner, careful not to use blaming language. For example, I would say “I feel that I would really appreciate more support in these areas” versus “you aren’t doing what you need to be doing.” Then, I would ask for their perspective. Sometimes, it’s a simple misunderstanding - a lack of communication about expectations, a personal issue that’s affecting their performance - whatever it is, I would want to be able to understand them before having to escalate the situation. From there, I would suggest a solution that would work for both of us, and be clear about how the work might be affected if the pattern continues. If it does, then I would take the next step to involve my supervisor.

AVOID Tell them the steps you would take in order to avoid having this situation occur.

Example:

Finally, I would touch base regularly to make sure it doesn’t reoccur. Of course, I would want to prevent rather than react - so before it ever gets to this point, I would want to build a relationship with my coworker at the very beginning that clearly communicates responsibility and trust.

This kind of question is a perfect opportunity to highlight some of the soft skills outlined in the “Qualifications” section of a job posting, and using steps makes your answer easier to follow. This example demonstrates teamwork, conflict resolution, and honesty. If these are qualities that the company lists as their values, it also helps to align yourself as a great fit!