



# The Behavioral Interview

## Ready Reference ♦ G-7

♦ OSU Career Services

The behavioral interview is an increasingly popular style of interview used by employers. Behavioral interviews are designed to focus on an individual's past experiences and performance with the goal to identify desired behaviors necessary for success on the job. Interviewers seek to predict a candidate's future behavior by understanding past behavior.

### Characteristics of a Behavioral Interview

There are some subtle and obvious clues to identify when a behavioral question is posed. The traditional interview will include questions related to your skills or how you would handle a situation or task. The behavioral interview, however, will include questions asking you to describe *how* you handled a situation or task by describing a *specific* past experience. In a behavioral interview the interviewer will ask you to provide details to steer you away from theorizing or making generalizations. The behavioral interview is typically more structured, and more controlled by the interviewer. The behavioral interviewer will probably take many notes during the interview.

### Preparing for a Behavioral Interview

First of all, don't be intimidated. Remember that you will be in an interview, but will have the opportunity to talk about someone you know better than anyone else--yourself! A behavioral interview will consist of telling brief stories, approximately two minutes in length, about your role in recent situations that demonstrate favorable behaviors or actions. Normally, these questions center on your work experiences, class projects, leadership roles, teamwork, conflict resolution, or ability to take initiative. Be specific; don't generalize about several events or a possible situation. Use the **STAR** acronym to provide a framework for your answer. Briefly explain the **Situation** or **Task**. Give a specific description of the **Action** you took. Finish the story with strength by completing it with the **Result** of your actions while especially highlighting

your role in the final result. If you can quantify the outcome, it will have even more credibility. Make sure the outcome reflects positively on you, even if the result itself was not favorable. Be honest. Don't embellish or omit key parts of the story. Behavioral interviewers are trained to probe and determine if your story is built on a weak foundation.

### Commonly Asked Behavioral Questions

- "Tell me about a time you had a problem with a co-worker and how you dealt with it."
- "Describe a time when you had to be a leader."
- "Give me an example of a time when you worked hard to overcome a challenge or meet a difficult goal."
- "Have you ever been a member of a team when one person wasn't pulling his or her weight? How did you deal with it?"
- "What was your favorite class? Why?"

Follow-up questions may include:

- "Can you give me an example?"
- "What did you do or say?"
- "What was your role?"
- "What was the result?"

### The Basics

Your interview will probably consist of a mixture of traditional and behavioral questions.

The best preparation for any interview is to do your research prior to the interview. Research the employer and industry. Most importantly, spend quality time to reflect on your many experiences that have influenced who you are. Know the questions you should expect, and prepare your responses in advance. Practice telling your two-minute stories aloud or to someone else. Be ready to put your best foot forward by being properly attired and well groomed. Arrive promptly; demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence, and a positive attitude.

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