

## Answering competency based and situational questions

### Competency-based questions

A competency-based question will be about the about the specific skills needed to do the job.

There is an acknowledged technique for answering competency-based questions that want you to explain something you've done previously. It's called the STAR technique, and is based on the following acronym:

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| <b>S</b><br>ituation | Begin your answer by providing a little context for the example, e.g. where you were, when this was, high level context for your objective   |
| <b>T</b><br>ask      | Describe the challenge you were specifically undertaking. This will normally be a problem you were trying to solve or an opportunity you're trying to take advantage of  |
| <b>A</b><br>ction    | This should be the part of your response that you devote most time to. You should describe what you did to achieve your objective  |
| <b>R</b><br>esult    | Don't forget to finish the answer by outlining what happened as a result. It's OK if the results weren't entirely positive if you're able to reflect on what you learned and how you might tackle the situation next time. |

### Situational questions

A situational question is designed to assess your strengths, by asking you to describe what you would do in a hypothetical situation.

Some argue that situational questions are easier for candidates with limited work experience to answer, as they don't require you to call upon examples from your past in order to be able to answer the question. In these types of questions, the interviewer will describe a hypothetical situation and ask what you would do if you were confronted with such a situation. Somewhat confusingly, there isn't necessarily a "correct" answer to these types of questions, as everyone tackles situations differently. The good thing about this, is it also means there isn't a "wrong" answer to these types of questions.

Interviewers ask these questions to understand your preferred way of working – the process you would follow, rather than the outcome you would achieve. All applicants have strengths and weaknesses, and in answering how you might tackle the situations described, you will indicate your preferences, as you're unlikely to envisage doing things that you don't want to do!

Hints for answering situational questions include:

- Take time to think about the situation
- If you want to ask questions to clarify the situation, do so, but bear in mind the interviewer may not be willing or able to give you more information
- Reflect on your past experience. Even though the situation described is unlikely to be one that you've encountered, there might be aspects of it that are familiar, which you can then draw upon to describe your likely actions
- Your answer should focus on your method for dealing with the situation or the steps you would take, rather than trying to come up with a solution to the problem.