Interview Tips

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me via email: maya.antonio@fulbrightmail.org

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Before the Interview

Determining How You Best Fit the Role

First:

- If it's for a job, read the job description carefully
  - Identify the **key skills** they're looking for
  - Look up any technical/formal vocabulary that you don't understand
- Research the company or school
  - Identify their **core values, goals, and unique qualities**
    - Consider which of these match your own values, goals, and qualities
- Research your interviewer(s)
  - If you're interviewing for a graduate school, these will likely be professors. Make sure you have a general understanding of their research

After you understand the role:

- Review English vocabulary related to the job responsibilities or to student life. Make sure you'd feel comfortable explaining in your own words what you'd be doing at the job/school.
- Review your resume. Consider: Which of your experiences are most connected to the job/program? The interview is most likely to ask you to explain these experiences in more detail.
- Draft a short summary of your career goals. Be ready to explain how your goals connect to the company or school's
- Identify a few experiences (from school, an internship, or a job) that are related to the key skills, values, or goals of the school/company. Ideally, these experiences should relate to more than one
- Have a ~1-minute introduction (also called an "elevator pitch") ready to share. This should include:
    - A brief summary of your education
    - A brief summary of your relevant work/internship/volunteer experiences
    - Your career goal(s) and how this job or program will help you achieve that

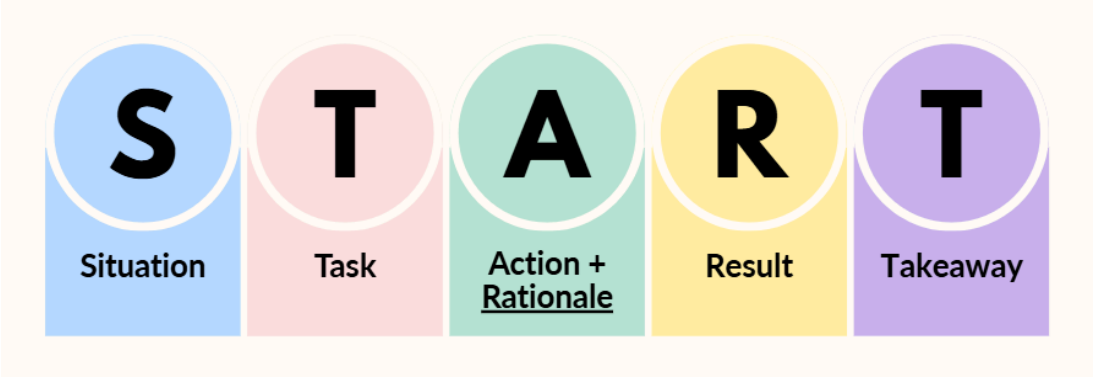
From STAR to START

Many guides online will tell you to use the STAR method when responding to behavioral interview questions such as "Tell me about a time when you…". While STAR can be helpful, many explanations of it do not include two key elements:

- **Rationale (argument)**: When you give your "Action" in STAR, explain why you did what you did in that situation.
    - E.g., "I led a social media campaign to advertise our new product. We designed the advertisement campaign to be trendy." (no rationale) vs. "Because the new product was designed for college students, I had my team focus on advertising the product on Instagram. I assigned team members to research current social media trends so we could increase our advertisements' visibility by appealing to what was most popular." (rationale)
- **Takeaway**: What did you learn from this experience, and how did it prepare you to be successful for this job?
    - E.g., "I learned that many of these issues could have been avoided by spending more time brainstorming with the team at the start. Now I always spend more time ensuring everyone on the team understands the complexities of the situation before beginning work. As a developer at your company, I would bring deep analytical thinking and an ability to collaborate well with a team to resolve any challenges." (adapted from: Use the STAR Interview Method to Land Your Next Job)

Rationale (argument) and takeaway are the two things that take your answer from good to great. It is unlikely that the exact situation you describe will happen again. **What the interviewer is most interested in is your ability to handle a similar situation in the future**. Including Rational and Takeaway proves to the interviewer that the skills you demonstrated or gained in this experience will make you successful at their company/school/etc.

I recommend using **START** instead of STAR to help you remember these elements:



*To help you better remember rationale, you can think of the A as being both **action + argument**.

Since Action+Rationale and Takeaway are most important, try to **avoid spending too much time on the Situation, Task, and Result** parts of STAR. Give just enough information for them to know:

- When this experience took place (e.g., “Two years ago…”)
- What role you were in (e.g., “at an arts administration internship at the National Museum of Taiwan History”)
- What you had to do and why the task mattered

Practice, Practice, Practice

Ideally, practice with someone else pretending to be the interviewer. Ask them to give you feedback on not just your answers themselves but also on your **body language and speaking style**. Things to consider:

- Eye contact (in the US, it’s considered more polite to make frequent eye contact)
- Posture
- Hand gestures
- Speaking speed
- Tone of voice/ emotion

Your goal is to seem professional, confident, and genuinely interested in the interview.

If you practice alone, I recommend recording your practice. It can be a little embarrassing to watch a recording of yourself, but this is the best way to give yourself feedback on all aspects of your interview skills.

Questions for the Interviewer

At the end of the interview, there will usually be a few minutes for you to ask the interviewer a couple questions. **This is an opportunity for you to better determine whether the job or school is a good fit for you**. It's also another chance for you to **show that you are genuinely interested in the job/school**. Show them you have done your research and want to learn more about them by asking thoughtful questions.

Other Things to Prepare

- For an online interview, it's fine to pull up another window with some notes. Keep these as short as possible, though. Interviewers can often tell when you are reading from a script.
- Know how to contact the interviewer(s) if you are running late or having technical difficulties
    - You'll also need this information for after your interview (see Sending a Thank You Email Your Interviewers).

During the Interview

How to Handle Unexpected and/or Difficult Questions

Phrases to Buy Time

Below are some phrases you can use to give you a little extra time to think before beginning your actual answer:

- "That's a great question. I would say that…"
- "I haven't considered that before, but if I had to say…"
- "Well, there are a couple of examples I can think of where I [original prompt/question], but I think the most relevant one would be…"
- "Give me a minute to determine the best example for that."

If you're not sure what the interviewer is asking, there is no shame in asking for clarification:

- "Could you explain in a little more detail what you mean by XYZ?"

- “I just want to make sure I understand what you mean by XYZ. Are you asking about…?”

Figure Out What They’re Truly Asking

You may receive a question that seems completely unrelated to the job/school. The first step to answering a question like this is to determine *why* they are probably asking this question. Think back to the key skills and values you identified earlier. What key skill or value is their question related to and how can you connect your answer to that?

What if I’ve Never Done XYZ?!

No need to panic. As explained in my version of STAR, what’s most important to the interviewer is determining whether you would be able to handle a similar situation in the future. This means the actual experience itself is less important than why you handled it the way you did. With that in mind, remember that it’s okay if you’ve never done something! Just do your best to answer the question either by:

- Explaining the thought process you’d use to approach this situation
- Describing a similar/related experience and if your actions would change in the context of the interviewer’s question

Finish with a Thank You

End the interview by sharing your gratitude and confirming your interest. Thank the interviewer for their time and share a positive comment about your experience like, “I enjoyed our conversation a lot!” or “I’m very excited by what I heard today and look forward to staying in touch!”

After the Interview

Reflecting for Future Interviews

Reflecting and taking notes right after your interview will ensure you don’t forget anything you want to remember for next time. Here are some questions you can consider:

- Were there any questions or prompts you struggled with? Why?
    - If you think you may be asked something similar in the future, note these down to practice with in case you’re
- What things went well?
- What would you do differently next time?

Sending a Thank You Email Your Interviewer(s)

For interviews with US companies, schools, and organizations, sending a thank you email to the people who interviewed you is seen as 1) a polite thing to do and 2) **an indication that you are truly interested in the position**. This can be very similar to what you said at the end of your interview, and it doesn't have to be long! Generally, you should:

1. Thank them for their time and/or for the opportunity to interview
2. Comment on something that came up in the interview, usually your excitement or positive feelings about something the interviewer told you
    a. This shows the interviewer you were paying attention and truly cared about what they had to say
3. Confirm your interest in and excitement at the possibility of receiving the position
4. Offer to answer any other questions they have

You can refer to some examples and more detailed guide here: How to Write a Thank You Email After an Interview (with Examples)

Make sure you **send your thank you email quickly**. Within 24 hours after the interview is best, but better late than never.