

# Interview Behavioral Questions and STAR Format

Melissa Hoon,  
Associate Director, Industry  
Engagement, Career Center  
[mhoon@ucsd.edu](mailto:mhoon@ucsd.edu)

**BIO**  
**SCI**

UC San Diego  
BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

# What are behavioral questions?

- Behavioral questions are questions about how you responded to situations. Your answer will provide the interviewer insight with how you would likely respond to situations on the job.
- Behavioral questions usually focus on these areas:
  - **Problem-solving/critical thinking** (how you solve problems)
  - **Teamwork** (how you work with others)
  - **Stress** (how you work under pressure)
  - **Self-awareness** (how you know and apply your abilities and limitations)
- Note that all of these areas affect one another (your stress can affect teammates, you work with others to solve problems, etc.)

# Examples of Behavioral Questions

1. Tell me about a challenge you've faced. How did you handle it?
2. Have you ever disagreed with a colleague or classmate? What happened and what was the result?
3. What is a high-stress situation you've dealt with? How did you react?
4. What is your greatest strength? Tell me about a time when you exhibited this.
5. Have you experienced a time when you failed or a project you were working on failed? What happened?

# Key Points on Answering Behavioral Questions

- **Be positive.** Mistakes and weaknesses are okay and normal. You can admit them in an interview, but you need to focus on how you handled or resolved the mistake, and how you've turned your perceived weaknesses into strengths.
- **Share anecdotes.** Storytelling is crucial when giving your answers because it gives the interviewers an idea of how you've responded to situations, which tells them how you'd handle things on the job.
- **Share results.** Focus on the outcome of situations. Even if things didn't turn out perfectly, share what you learned and how you might solve the program in the future.

# The STAR Method



## *Situation*

Disclose details of the specific event



## *Task*

Explain your responsibility in that situation



## *Action*

Describe how you accomplished the task



## *Result*

Outline the impact of your actions

# Examples

- Tell me about a challenge you've faced. How did you handle it?
  - In my intro lab class, I originally had trouble with sequence accuracy (**Situation**). My partner and I needed to amplify the DNA of several organisms in a tight time frame (**Task**). I could tell my partner was getting frustrated with my inaccuracies, but she was great at PCR, so I asked her to explain the process in further detail (**Action**). She did and my sequence accuracy was no longer an issue. We ended up completing the project a couple days before the deadline (**Results**).
- Have you ever disagreed with a colleague or classmate? What happened and what was the result?
- What is a high-stress situation you've dealt with? How did you react?
- What is your greatest strength? Tell me about a time when you exhibited this.
- Have you experienced a time when you failed or a project you were working on failed? What happened?