



Competency based questions and how to answer them...use the CAR!

One way of dealing with this type of question is to use the CAR approach. CAR stands for Context, Action, Result. It helps you to structure your answer like a mini essay.

"Context" is your introduction, where you describe the scenario you faced, date and place. The "Action" forms the main body and should be the longest part of your answer. The "Result" is the conclusion and like the introduction, should be quite short.

- **Context:** Describe the situation and the task you were faced with, when, where, with whom?
- **Action:** How? What action did YOU take? Sometimes people focus on what the group did without mentioning their individual contribution.
- **Result:** What results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach/what did you learn from the experience? Any next steps?

Show me what you mean...

Describe a time when your personal planning and organisation resulted in a successful achievement of a task.

(Context) – Whilst employer at ABC company last summer I was given the task of improving the stock control system.

(Action) - I looked at factors such as when the stock was last ordered, what it was used for and how often it was used. I worked out a method of streamlining the paperwork involved in this process and redesigned the relevant forms, which I then submitted to my manager.

(Result) - My ideas were accepted and implemented and a 15% reduction in stock levels was achieved. This was then shared and taken forward by other departments.

Oh no....a negative question!

Quite often you will face a question on something you've done that hasn't gone well or the result was negative. These things do happen and you're really being assessed as to how you deal with these situations. This is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how well you learn lessons from failure, but also to demonstrate qualities such as resilience (to bounce back and try again);



determination; strength of character; flexibility; initiative; and lateral thinking. <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/excellence.htm>

Another example please...?

Tell me about a time when you failed to complete a task.

(Context) – In my current role, I tend to have lots of competing deadlines and found as a result, some deadlines were not being achieved.

(Action) – I decided to review my work practises, and suggested implementing a 'traffic light' prioritisation system; labelling tasks as red, amber or green depending on their urgency.

(Result) – My ideas were accepted and implemented by my whole team, and I now find that I (and my colleagues) are now managing to hit 100% of our deadlines.

That's helpful...what next?

As important as it is to have a professional CV you should also have a good six prepared responses to competency question...do this well and you're start to find you're able to better sell yourself on applications and in interviews. Using your CAR plan responses to the following:

Tell me about a time when you have worked to a deadline.

Tell me about a time when you have delivered excellent customer service.

Tell me about a time when you've dealt with a difficult situation.

Tell me about a time when you have used your initiative.

Tell me about a time when you have had to manage change.

Tell me about a time when you have contributed to the success of a team.

Finally....in constructing your answers remember to say what you did i.e. 'I did'...'I resolved'...if you use a 'We did'...'We resolved' otherwise it's hard to say what you actually did or if somebody else had done it. When thinking of responses remember you are looking to sell yourself so only select examples that put you in a favourably light. Get second opinions on responses, run through your responses with others. And last but not least, consider your answers from the employer perspective by putting yourself in their shoes and ask the question: Does that answer demonstrate to me that the person has the ability to do my job?

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