

Section 4
Researching Your Background

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As mentioned in Section 3, to begin your interview preparation you must research yourself. In this section, we will help you prepare for some common interview questions, cover the STAR format, and provide space to begin writing down your best examples from your military career. We will only be jotting down the key words to remind you of these stories and will associate them to common interview topics. We strongly recommend that you write out your interview answers in order to think through them fully. This should be done outside of this workbook format.

The purpose behind having specific examples prepared is that it allows you to be able to effectively communicate your best-selling points and career achievements, regardless of the question that is asked. Having a repertoire of solid stories is one of the greatest resources that you can have as you prepare for interviews, because instead of just giving your theory behind a topic, you can show how you have put those thoughts into practice in real world experiences. Good examples will also help differentiate you and your potential competition.

Identifying Your Examples

Many candidates prepare for interviews by focusing on a list of interview questions and working to develop an answer for each of them. This can be helpful, and we will provide dozens of sample questions to work on, but we strongly suggest that you focus on your background first. What are your best stories? If you know your background well and focus on what interview topics your best experiences associate to, you can put yourself in a position to answer any question.

We have provided the table below to assist in jotting down key words that represent examples from your career, linking them to common interview topics. These topics are not all encompassing, but cover enough of the interview spectrum to start the self-research process. Note that you can use the same example more than once, but be careful not to over use the example in an interview. A potential employer may see that as a lack of professional experience. If it is a great story that highlights your key attributes and skills, you want to ensure that it is presented in the interview wherever possible. This allows you to control your message.

An example of a completed worksheet is below:

Leadership 1. <u>OIF Deployment</u> 2. <u>FSMAO Inspection</u>	Strengths 1. <u>Attention to Detail – 271 FEX</u> 2. <u>Problem Solving – ATLASS II</u>	Significant Achievements 1. <u>FSMAO Inspection</u> 2. <u>Navy Commendation Medal</u>
Goals 1. <u>Transition</u> 2. <u>Growth - Education</u>	Improving Performance 1. <u>Limited Duty %</u> 2. <u>LCpl Paylor</u>	Process Improvement 1. <u>ATLASS II</u> 2. <u>PPC Import</u>

The Orion Team suggests that you use your resume, evaluations, awards, certifications and any other background documentation to assist you in identifying your key experiences and selling points. Fill out the background worksheet on the next page, and then we will dive into the STAR format and developing your examples.

Leadership 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Strengths 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Significant Achievements 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
Goals 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Improving Performance 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Problem Solving 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
Process Improvement 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____	Weakness 1. _____ 2. _____	Failure 1. _____ 2. _____
Conflict - Senior 1. _____ 2. _____	Conflict – Peer / Junior 1. _____ 2. _____	Sold an Idea / Influenced Others 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

Tell Me About Yourself

One of the more predictable yet important questions you can prepare for is “Tell me about yourself.” It is important because it will set the tone for your interview and predictable because most employers will ask this question, or a similarly phrased question, in an effort to assess your ability to effectively communicate your background and experience. Because this is one of the first questions asked in an interview, you should develop an impactful answer. An effective answer will highlight your skills and strengths and give an employer an insight into your decision making processes. The best answer to this question will also be tailored for that employer and touch upon specific strengths and experiences which are particularly relevant to the position you are seeking. You will want to have a transitional statement to close your answer, letting them know why you are transitioning from the service or your current role (always be positive) and what you are looking for in your next career. You must be enthusiastic and confident in your answer.

The best answers for this question are well rehearsed. Spend some time to build a good outline of the key points and practice your answer. Saying an answer out loud is particularly effective. Done well, this question can really get an interview off to a great start! The manager should be excited that what you just told them really demonstrates you could be a great fit for the job.

The STAR Format

When developing examples from your career that will highlight the skills, traits and experiences that are commonly explored in interviews, you must utilize the STAR format to help you frame your answer effectively. The STAR Format is:

Situation

The situation is the background story to the example that you are about to provide. Where were you? Who were you with? At what point in your career did this example occur? Paint a solid picture for the interviewer so they can relate to the rest of your story.

Task.

The task can be referred to in several ways. The mission you were assigned. The problem that you had to solve. The challenge that you were facing. You need to make it clear to the interviewer what task you were working to complete.

Actions

The Actions are the steps that you took to accomplish the task, or solve the problem that you described above. Be specific! Make it clear to the interviewer what YOU did. You cannot speak in generalities here, because the interviewer will not understand the depth of your experience and thus will not be able to evaluate you effectively.

Results

You seal a solid STAR format interview response with quantifiable results. Were your actions successful in accomplishing the Task? How successful? Can you provide numbers that prove the level of your success? These are key steps to consider.

The STAR format is an extremely useful tool intended to ensure that you can communicate your background clearly for the interviewer. We are not looking to provide the content of your interview answer, but rather to ensure that the experiences that you have are articulated clearly, allowing the interviewer to effectively evaluate your experience and skill sets against the position.

Keys to Success

When considering what examples that you want to use as you start laying out your experiences, consider the following pointers:

- Focus on developing your best STAR format examples, regardless of interview question / topic. Your best examples will be impactful, and typically will relate to several common interview topics. Find your best examples first, and see what interview topics they match up with.
- Avoid examples that do not translate well to civilian careers, such as targeting or eliminating insurgents. While you can be proud of your military accomplishments, and there is no doubt that the planning and leadership that you used to achieve these tasks is relevant, the shock value of such statements may concern the interviewer. Soften the terminology and translate the experience to fit for the general population.
- Focus on what you specifically did in your career. As military officers, we often push recognition down to our team. That is a quality that translates into the private sector, but the employer in the interview is looking to hire you, not your platoon or section. They want to know what you specifically did to accomplish your tasks and achieve results.

Interview Preparation Webinars

The Orion web page contains numerous resources to help you go into more depth on these topics, but it is often best learned through discussion. Therefore, we recommend that you sign up for one of our interview prep webinars via the following web address:

<https://www.orientalent.com/military-job-seekers/transition-resources/officers/webinars/interview-preparation.aspx>

Developing Your Examples

The worksheets on the following pages will help you expand your experiences, annotated earlier in this section, utilizing the STAR format. Pay special attention to the Actions that you took to accomplish your Results. These are key areas to an effective interview. Note that we have only included one form for each topic. Utilize your own worksheets for additional examples.

Once you have sketched out your STAR format for these key examples, write out these stories in a narrative format, and then practice out loud. Verbalizing your answers will ensure a well-rounded, detailed story that can be adjusted to fit the question asked.

Our next section will expand on specific questions that are often asked in the interview process. Once you have a solid understanding of what makes a good interview response, write out your answers in detail and then practice them out loud!

Tell Me About Yourself Examples

- 2 - 3-minute overview of your skills
- Key Selling Points
- Solid Transitions
- Why are you here today?

Starting Point:

Highlight 1:

Highlight 2:

Highlight 3:

Highlight 4:

Current Situation:

Why are you looking?

Leadership Examples

Provide 3-4 examples of a time that:

- You were in charge of a task or group.
- Required you to overcome an obstacle.
- Demonstrates your leadership style or philosophy.
- Details a significant leadership accomplishment.

Example: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Strengths

Prepare 3-4 Examples

- What are your strengths and how have you used them in your career?
- Demonstrate how your strengths were effective with an example.
- Relate to the position.

Strength: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Significant Achievement

Prepare 3-4 Examples

- Occurred over an extended period of time.
- Demonstrates your ability to learn new skills and use resources effectively.
- Is NOT something that numerous other applicants have done (graduating, getting married, etc.)

Acheivement: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Weakness

Prepare 2 Examples

- An ongoing challenge you have worked to overcome (through training, planning, controls, etc.)
- The Actions are the steps you took to improve upon your weakness.

Weakness _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Failure

Prepare 2 Examples of a time you have failed.

- Not mission critical or with severe consequences
- Own up to it
- What did you learn from the situation? How have you used the lessons learned to be successful since?

Failure: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Problem Solving

Prepare 2-3 Examples

- Set the stage and clearly define the problem
- Focus on what you did, even if part of a team - explain your thought process within the problem
- What was the result of solving the problem?

Problem: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Process Improvement

Prepare 2-3 Examples

- Examples where you recognized an inefficiency
- Systems that you created or actions that you took to improve this inefficiency
- Is the new process still being used? Do you have a measure of effectiveness?

Process: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Dealing with Conflict with a Supervisor

Prepare 2 Examples

- Do not speak negatively. Focus on people skills.
- What did you learn from the situation? Did you still accomplish the mission?

Conflict: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Dealing with a Conflict with a Peer or between Subordinates

Prepare 2 Examples

- Do not speak negatively. Focus on people skills.
- When / How did you deal with it?
- What did you learn from the situation?

Conflict: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Improving a Team/Person's Performance

Prepare 2 Examples

- Do not criticize or talk down. Focus on your people skills.
- Quantify if possible to show performance before and after your actions.

Poor Performer: _____

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Actions: _____

Results: _____

Sold an Idea / Influenced Others

Prepare at least 2 Examples

- Helps sales focused candidates bridge the gap from the military to a sales role.
- Try to show your understanding of the sales process in your answer. Show that you first sought to understand the problem and what the decision maker wanted or needed and then developed a solution to meet those needs. Explain the benefits your solution delivered.

Sold Idea:

Situation:

Task:

Actions:

Results:
