

STAR – Skills and behaviours

Sample responses with assessor commentary



What is this?

Examples of completed STAR templates with assessor notes on good and poor answers

Why do I need it?

It helps you see the detail required and has useful tips on what the assessor wants to see.

How do I use it?

The worked examples are best used in conjunction with the [guidance for applicants](#), which outlines what is required in the STAR templates and also has examples of the types of examples you might choose and self-reflection questions to help you think about examples from your work experience. You will also find it helpful to look at the Achieved and Not Achieved descriptors for STAR templates, which both your PER supervisor and assessors will use when reviewing your STAR templates.

The example you chose will be particular to your personal work experience. The assessor tips and characteristics of good answers will apply equally to any skills/behaviour or core activity, so although we've chosen to use examples of growth mindset and ethics here, the tips will be relevant for any STAR template you write up.



Example showing good practice

Skill/behaviour: Growth mindset

1. Situation

Briefly outline the specific context of your example.

I have always sought opportunities to expand my finance knowledge and to learn new skills by attending courses and seeking out new work experiences. One example of seeking out a new work experience, that I feel demonstrates my growth mindset, is when I undertook a six-month secondment to the financial reporting team. Through studying for my exams, I understand the principles of financial reporting, but as part of the management accounting team, I had little practical experience in applying these. I felt that the secondment would help me develop my understanding of financial reporting and my understanding of the business.

2. Task

Describe your specific role and responsibilities in the example situation

My secondment to the financial reporting team covered the period from two months before our year-end until four months after. Therefore, I was part of the financial reporting team for the preparation of the financial statements and the external audit of those financial statements.

I was given specific responsibility for:

- Ensuring that the tangible non-current assets and lease balances were correctly stated at the year-end.
- Preparing the first draft of the notes in the financial statements relating to tangible non-current assets and leases.
- Liaising with and assisting the external auditors with any queries regarding tangible non-current assets and leases.

3. Action

Describe the actions you took and how these actions demonstrated this skill/behaviour.

Within my company, secondments are not common practice so I had to personally push for this opportunity. During my six-month review, I identified that the practical application of financial reporting knowledge was a gap in my experience and that I would like to address this through a possible secondment. My line manager supported this and, with their assistance, I submitted a request to the head of the financial reporting team. I had to undergo an interview but was then offered a six-month secondment. The head of the financial reporting team commented that they were impressed by my tenacity and personal drive to secure the secondment.

At the start of my secondment, I spent two weeks shadowing my colleague, whose role I would be taking over for the period, and who would be my mentor. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and, within a few days, I was preparing journals and felt that I had started to better my understanding of the processes. After the initial two weeks, I took over the role full time, with my colleague as mentor.

A clear focus here on finance.

Giving a specific example of a situation where growth mindset on a personal level has been demonstrated. This is about of the candidate rather than the growth of the business that they work in.

Both the situation and task sections are shorter than the action and evaluation sections of the template. The situation and task sections set the scene and are succinct and to the point.

Throughout this section personal actions have been described that demonstrate growth mindset. A lot of 'I' rather than 'we'!

This links back to the personal self-reflection questions for growth mindset in the candidate guidance with respect to 'reflect upon areas for professional improvement and identify appropriate development activities to fill those gaps.'

The most challenging aspect of the role was dealing with the leases. Whilst I had some technical understanding of how to account for leases from my studies, this was not sufficient to deal with the many complications arising from the leases that my company had in place. Recognising a gap in my knowledge, I attended two webcasts on accounting for complex leases and sale and leaseback transactions. Both of these boosted my understanding and showed that I had taken the initiative to learn for myself rather than keep asking my mentor.

I dealt with all of the queries from the external auditors as efficiently as I could, although it was challenging at times because queries would come in blocks rather than a steady flow. Initially, I would stay in the office late to ensure that all of the queries were dealt with straight away. But, after some feedback from my mentor, I asked for the auditors to give a priority rating for their queries so that I could better manage my time. This proved really successful and has been a practice set for all future audits.

4.Result

How did you provide **insight** and **influence** the outcome of this situation? What was the **impact** for (business benefit to) the organisation?

Through this secondment, I gained a lot of new knowledge about financial reporting and enhanced my business understanding which I have been able to take forward into my normal role. I also gained experience working in a higher-pressure environment than my usual role, especially in relation to the external audit and meeting the reporting deadline.

I feel that this has made me a more rounded and as a result better management accountant, which benefits my business. Indeed, the head of finance has recently decided to set up a formal secondment process, in recognition that experience across the finance roles adds value to the business.

At the end of the secondment, feedback from my mentor indicated that I had been a valued member of the team. Despite some long hours, the financial statements were prepared on time and the audit process was relatively smooth and whilst this was a team effort, I was pleased that I had been viewed as a valued member of this team.

My attention to accuracy and detail had been noted in my first drafts of the notes to the financial statements. There were also areas for improvement identified, such as better prioritisation of day-to-day tasks and developing a more sceptical mind when dealing with reconciliations of financial information, all of which I acted on.

PER supervisor for this skill/behaviour

State the name of the person who can verify your achievement of this skill/behaviour and the example you have given and ensure that their details are included in section 2 above.

– Dilip Lee

Focusing on a specific example within the context of the wider example to help support growth mindset.

Linking back to growth mindset in terms of taking ownership of own development.

Again, linking back to growth mindset in terms of continuous improvement

References the benefit to the business and further actions that support this benefit.



Example showing poor practice

Skill/behaviour: Ethics and integrity

1. Situation

Briefly outline the specific context of your example.

All accountants should act ethically and with integrity at all times. The CIMA ethical code identifies the following five fundamental principles that a CIMA accountant should not only know but most importantly apply in their everyday work:

- **Integrity** – Acting with honesty and in a straightforward manner
- **Objectivity** – Not allowing bias, conflict of interest or the undue influence of others to influence professional judgements
- **Professional competence and due care** – A duty to maintain professional knowledge and skills
- **Confidentiality** – Respecting the confidentiality of information accessed in a professional capacity and not using such information for personal gain
- **Professional behaviour** – Complying with the relevant laws and regulations and acting so that the accounting profession is not discredited

Compliance with these principles can be threatened by any of the following:

- **Self-interest** – The threat that a financial or other self-interest will affect the ability to be objective
- **Self-review** – The threat of not reviewing your work or the work of others appropriately
- **Advocacy** – The threat of promoting a position so that objectivity is compromised
- **Familiarity** – The threat that a close personal relationship might influence behaviour
- **Intimidation** – The threat that pressure being placed on an accountant which might influence their behaviour

Therefore, an accountant, must be aware of these threats, which can be countered by ensuring that there are sufficient safeguards in place

2. Task

Describe your specific role and responsibilities in the example situation.

As part of my role within my organisation, I am expected to carry out my day-to-day activities with honesty and integrity. My responsibilities include being up to date with ethical guidance and the training provided by CIMA and internally within my organisation and acting honestly and preparing financial information that, to the best of my knowledge, fairly reflects reality. I am also expected to recognise any threats that affect my ability to apply the fundamental ethical principles in my day-to-day work and act accordingly.

Giving general information about ethics and integrity. This is not needed – your assessors already know all of this!

Describing responsibilities in a very general sense in the context of overall role, rather than setting the scene for a specific situation where acting ethically and with integrity were demonstrated.

3. Action

Describe the actions you personally took and how these actions demonstrated this skill/behaviour.

I have attended all of the ethics courses run by my organisation and passed all of the ethics-based assessments associated with these courses. I have also attended a number of webcasts run by CIMA on ethics.

As part of my day-to-day activities, each month I collate the financial information that is reported in the performance slide pack for the Board. This includes significant variances and KPI measures against targets. I need to ensure that the information that is included in the pack is correct and that it fairly reflects the financial information supported by our systems. There have been times where I have been asked to change some of the content in the pack before it goes to the Board, either to make a decision that a significant variance is not significant, or to change some of the KPI results for the month. I have always resisted doing this.

4. Result

How did you provide **insight** and **influence** the outcome of this situation? What was the **impact** for (business benefit to) the organisation?

By keeping myself up to date with ethical guidance I have been able to recognise where undue pressure has been placed on me to act unethically. For example, with the board pack, I always ensure that the information I include is correct and am never influenced by somebody asking for it to be changed so that it can paint them in a better light.

PER supervisor for this skill/behaviour

State the name of the person who can verify your achievement of this skill/behaviour and the example you have given and ensure that their details are included in section 2 above.

– Amanda Habib

[Find more information on the practical experience requirements \(PER\) application](#)

Giving a general situation rather than a specific situation at this stage of the STAR template. This would be better as the introduction in the situation section to set the scene and then focus on a specific time that this was undertaken where there were threats to ethical behaviour that had to be overcome.

Not giving a specific instance when this occurred. This would potentially be a good example to use, but it would need to be expanded upon and more fully explained in the context of actions that were personally taken to deal with a specific situation, which presented an ethical dilemma.

Too brief, principally because of a lack of focus on a specific instance and a lack of detail in actions. There is no comment on the impact for the organisation either.



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