



Self-study material for students | © University of Helsinki Career Services

VERBALISE YOUR SKILLS WITH THE STAR MODEL

Why?

The ability to explain your skills is a central – the most central, according to many alumni – factor affecting employment. It is also a key tool in building your expert identity: you must be able to identify your skills before you can fluently describe them to others.

This is not always simple. Words can evade you, and the description can turn into a generic list of adjectives: “self-motivated, responsible, good with people...”. Such adjective lists can be cumbersome in job applications and make it hard for you to stand out from the competition.

How?

A good way to describe your skills is to tie them to your experiences. The STAR method helps you do this. Stories created using the STAR model will explain your experience to the recipients in more detail, making it easier for them to grasp in concrete terms what it is that you are good at and how you act. The method allows you to describe your skills in a convincing manner both to yourself and to others. You can use the STAR model any time you are writing your CV, a cover letter or preparing for a job interview.

The idea is to use verbs rather than adjectives, describing your concrete actions in previous situations.

The acronym STAR stands for:

- **S = Situation:** What was the situation?
- **T = Task:** What task were you required to carry out?
- **A = Action:** What action did you take? Did you take on additional duties? Did you do something outside your job description? Did you take initiative? What was your role?
- **R = Results:** What did you achieve? What did you learn? What feedback did you receive? How did the employer or others benefit from your contribution?

An example: Instead of describing yourself as “self-motivated, responsible and good with people”, create a story using the STAR model, for example like this:

“As the project assistant of company X, I was in charge of the communications for project Y. I created a network of key stakeholders, compiled a regular newsletter and organised network meetings for them. In my work, I improved my interaction, communication and organisational skills and received praise for taking initiative and being responsible. When the project ended, I was asked to continue in another project by the same company.”

Tip: When you are getting ready for a job interview, prepare a brief story that highlights one of your successes. Also prepare a story of how you managed a challenging situation and what you learned from it.