



APOLITICAL EVENT

STAR Storytelling & Moving into Senior Civil Service Roles

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12 March 2026

What we'll cover today



Strong STAR examples

What makes them clear, relevant and impactful



Everyday work as stories

Turn routine work into compelling application evidence



Common mistakes

Pitfalls in competency-based applications



Moving into senior roles

How expectations shift and what panels look for

Why STAR matters

Panels are looking for clear evidence you've demonstrated certain behaviours in real situations.



Situation

The context and setting



Task

Your responsibility



Action

What you personally did



Result

The outcome or impact

What makes a strong STAR example

The ownership test

If someone could replace your name with "the team" and the example still works — it's not specific enough.

1

Clear situation

Just enough context for the panel to understand what was happening

2

Your responsibility

What was specifically asked of you or expected

3

Specific personal actions

The most important part — what you personally did

4

Result or outcome

What changed as a direct result of your contribution

Weak vs strong example

WEAK

"Our team improved the service and stakeholders were happy with the outcome."

What's missing:

- What was the issue?
- What did you personally do?
- What actually changed?

STRONG

"When our digital service failed accessibility testing, I led a two-week redesign sprint with designers and engineers. We prioritised the most critical issues and introduced automated testing. The service passed compliance checks and user complaints dropped significantly."

Clear challenge + Specific actions + Measurable outcome

Turning everyday work into stories

You don't need a huge transformation programme. Strong STAR examples come from everyday work.

Stakeholder challenges

Resolving a difficult stakeholder issue shows judgement and communication

Process improvement

Improving a process that wasn't working well shows initiative and delivery

Tight deadlines

Delivering under pressure shows resilience and prioritisation

Unblocking problems

Fixing something stuck for a long time shows problem-solving and persistence

These situations demonstrate the behaviours panels are really interested in — judgement, collaboration and delivery.

Your STAR matrix method

A personal evidence bank — map your projects against competencies so you're never starting from scratch.

	Leadership	Stakeholder Mgmt	Delivery	Problem Solving	Strategic Thinking
Project A	✓	✓	✓		
Project B			✓	✓	✓
Project C	✓	✓			✓

1

Forces you to translate work into STAR format — exactly the preparation you need

2

Becomes your personal evidence bank — refine and adapt when roles come up

Your STAR matrix method

A personal evidence bank — map your projects against competencies so you're never starting from scratch.

	A	B	C	D	E	
1	what	Competan	Situation - Detail the background,	task - the challenge and	Action - what did you do, how, what tools did you use	result
	Setting up International team pipeline work	Setting up a new	My role as Head of International Delivery at CDS	I was tasked with designing and testing a	developed hypothesis on how it would work based on my agency	Was able to develop a robust process with requests
2						
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Common application mistakes

1

Too much context

Spending half your answer explaining the organisation or project background. Panels just need enough to understand the situation.

Keep situation to 2–3 sentences
maximum

2

Over-relying on "we"

Teamwork matters, but panels need to understand your individual contribution.

Use "I" for your specific actions

3

Missing the result

Not clearly explaining the outcome or impact. Even learning from failure counts.

Always state what changed as a
result

Mid-level vs senior roles

MID-LEVEL FOCUS

"Can you do the work?"

- Delivering work effectively
- Solving problems
- Managing stakeholders
- Improving services



SENIOR FOCUS

"Can you lead and shape outcomes?"

- Strategic decision-making
- Leading teams or organisations
- Managing complexity
- Influencing across boundaries

Lessons for moving into senior roles

From delivery to enabling

You're no longer assessed on what you personally deliver — but on creating conditions for delivery through others. Setting strategy, aligning teams, influencing across boundaries.

Navigating complexity

Senior roles involve competing priorities, incomplete information and difficult trade-offs. Show how you made judgement calls, not just solved problems.

Leadership over expertise

Show how you built a team, created clarity in a complex situation or helped others succeed. Examples of cross-boundary collaboration are particularly powerful.

Additional assessments at senior levels

Beyond competency interviews, senior roles may also include:

Psychological assessments

Exploring leadership style and
self-awareness

Scenario exercises

Testing judgement in complex,
ambiguous situations

Personality-based interviews

Understanding how you approach
relationships and decisions

The same preparation helps here too — thinking clearly about your experiences, decision-making and how you lead others.

Three practical tips

01

Build before you need them

Keep a STAR matrix or evidence bank — it makes applications much easier when a role comes up

02

Practice out loud

Saying your examples aloud helps refine them and keeps them concise for interviews

03

Clarity over complexity

Panels aren't looking for the most impressive story — they want the clearest evidence you can do the role

The shift as you grow:

Solve problems → Shape systems

The key to a strong application is being able to tell those stories clearly.

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Thank you — looking forward to your questions