Behavioral Interviewing & The STAR Technique

What is behavioral interviewing?
It is a relatively new type of job interviewing style that allows an employer to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors in order to determine their potential for success in their organization. It is based on the belief that past performance is the best predictor of future behavior. The interviewer identifies desired skills and behaviors and then structures open-ended questions to elicit a detailed response. Even if you don't have a tremendous amount of work experience, companies expect you to be able to relate past experiences (situations from undergraduate or graduate school, volunteer work, student activities) to the job for which you are interviewing.

How do I spot a behavior-based interview question?
They generally start with any one of the following phrases:
- Tell me about a time when you…
- Describe a situation when you were faced with a problem related to…
- Tell me how you approached a situation where…
- Think about a time in which you…

When your interview is behavioral-based, it will typically be a structured interview with set questions rather than a conversational style of interviewing. You will sometimes receive follow-up questions that probe for more details.

Some of the most common behavioral questions evaluate soft skills such as:
- Leadership Ability and Style
- Team-work and Interpersonal Skills
- Motivation and Initiative
- Communication Skills (both written and oral)
- Problem Solving Skills
- Adaptability
- Time-management Skills
- Conflict Management
- Ethics and Values

How do I prepare for a behavioral interview?
The STAR method is an effective technique for responding to a behavioral-based interview question.

Situation: Describe a particular situation that you were in or a task that you needed to accomplish. Provide appropriate background information, and do not generalize.

Task: State the goal you were working towards.

Action: Describe the actions you took to address the situation specifically focusing on your contribution.

Result: Describe the outcome of your actions. What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

To prepare for the interview, review the job description and highlight all the soft skills mentioned (i.e. strong communication skills and the ability to work in a team environment). It's almost guaranteed that you'll be asked questions directly related to the soft skills mentioned in the job description!

Next brainstorm scenarios from your past experiences that highlight these soft skills. Review your resume to help identify examples. Then use the STAR technique to develop a well-thought-out response to potential questions. Make sure your response provides specific evidence of your skills and capabilities. Also, vary your examples; do not use a single situation or experience to answer all questions. The goal is not to memorize your answer. Instead, by brainstorming and writing out a potential response, you will be able to recall past accomplishments with more confidence!

Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get across an important and complex point.	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	

Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	

Describe a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.	
Situation	
Task	
Action	
Result	