

MODULE 6

Telling Your Story



You have a story to tell, and only you can tell it. As you branch out and learn your organization, taking the time to reflect and crystallize your experience will not only help you speak confidently about your returnship, but will also inform your personal growth.

For instance, you might be prompted to speak at a team meeting or present your accomplishments as a capstone project at the conclusion of the program. After this returnship, your next career step up the corporate ladder – or to a different department or company – will ultimately lead to interviews requiring you to speak concisely and effectively about your story.

And regardless of where you are in your journey, keeping your LinkedIn and resume up to date is always a good idea.

“Those who tell
the stories rule the
world.”

– Native American proverb



In this guide, we'll discuss general best practices for telling your story, as well as how to discuss your specific returnship experience. You'll soon be able to share your returnship story in a compelling way – for networking, pitch letters, interviews, and beyond.

Keep Track of Projects and Progress

We recommend keeping a list of your responsibilities throughout your returnship. Add your accomplishments to your resume or repository as they happen, so you aren't struggling to remember details of what you accomplished later. Sixteen weeks go by quickly, and if you don't document while things are fresh in your mind, you might miss key metrics that can help prove your abilities down the road. Many returners recommend keeping a daily or weekly work journal and, depending on the nature of your work, taking screenshots of your work and feedback that you've received as a way to document your progress.

As you meet with management and your team, observe how your contributions fit into the larger picture so you can discuss your impact on a macro scale. When you receive feedback, take note of what you are excelling in as well as opportunities for improvement. Regularly referencing these notes allows you to be more mindful about your actions and will directly inform how clearly you speak on your responsibilities.

The STAR Method: A Storytelling Framework

Whether it be in a meeting, interview, or informal chat, the components of a thorough explanation include context, stakes, your input, and the final result – preferably outlining how you were crucial to success. In other words, a good answer requires effective storytelling techniques. As you start to craft your stories, consider employing the STAR Method, detailed below. This framework is guaranteed to help you think through answers that go beyond the surface and help showcase your unique qualifications.

Checklist for using the STAR method for behavioral questions

<input type="checkbox"/>	SITUATION	Set the scene with the 5 W's. Who was involved? What was the challenge? Where, when and why did you have to overcome the challenge?
<input type="checkbox"/>	TASK	What was needed and what did you actually do? What obstacles or constraints could have prevented you from completing the task?
<input type="checkbox"/>	ACTION	What are the steps you took to achieve the task? What actions did others on the team take and how did you work collaboratively with them? Be sure to use the word "I" when describing your action.
<input type="checkbox"/>	RESULT	What was the outcome? How did your actions directly contribute to the result? What did you learn? What would you do differently in the future?



Talking About Your Experiences

Though a returnship puts you on a path towards a specific position, the possibility of interviews and assessments at the conclusion of the program is high. As you accumulate experience, it's important to consider how you'd talk about it down the line. Along with your aforementioned list of completed tasks, write a sentence or two on how you want to tell that story. Specifically, what needs to be emphasized?

When you have a conversion discussion with your manager and/or recruiter at the end of your returnship, they'll want to know the specifics on your projects and impact. Don't fall into the bad habit of rattling off your bullet points verbatim. Think of interviews and performance reviews as a chance to demonstrate what a piece of paper or data set cannot convey alone, such as passion, motivation, collaboration skills, and interest in the company. Here are a few basic project-based questions commonly used in interviews (or interview-adjacent scenarios) and the opportunities they provide for you to share your strengths.

Question	Opportunity	How?
What did you enjoy about the project you worked on?	To show passion!	"I was tasked to test a new product before we launched it. I loved really digging into the niche technical aspects and became the resident expert."
How did you contribute to it?	To highlight newly relevant skills and experience.	"I tested each of its functionalities every which way to see its limits. Not only did I learn it inside and out, I learned how to explain it to others."
Who else was involved? How did you collaborate?	To show teamwork!	"After finding a major bug, I worked with our engineering team to use our combined expertise and fix it before going live."
What was the outcome?	To demonstrate your experience in driving results.	"I initiated biweekly meetings to be proactive about other potential bugs. We tackled issues the second they were discovered. The product is now among our highest-rated!"



How You Frame the Returnship is Up to You!

There are a few different ways you can list and speak about your returnship. The amount of information you provide is entirely up to you, and we will not be offended in the slightest if you choose to omit the full details of this program. However, there are certain benefits that come with leaning into the uniqueness of your position.

We have heard from our returnship alumni community that talking about their returnship was beneficial to their job search, especially immediately after the conclusion of the program. Returnships are inherently interesting to employers and tapping into that can help foster conversation and frame the rest of your experience – particularly when you tout your accolades as a proud caregiver. Make sure to consider your options given your specific scenario, and keep in mind that the way you choose to discuss your returnship can always change as you see fit.

- **If you're less comfortable being identified as a returner...**

You might also choose to list and speak about your returnship as contract work or an internship. Companies hire temporary workers for headcount reasons, project-oriented roles, and many other reasons. This direction suits those who like a bit more privacy and/or simply do not wish to disclose the reasons for their gap.

- **If you're staying on at the company where you did your returnship...**

You might be eager to “move on” from your returnship identity. If you're asked about your returnship and you'd rather not discuss in detail, you can keep your responses short and simple: “I really appreciated the chance to ramp-up, learn more about the organization, and have the time to figure out how to best apply my talents to the team. Now that I'm a full-time member, I'm really eager to accomplish...”





- **If you get extended on a contract...**

Treat the returnship and your ongoing employment as one entry and timeframe on your resume and LinkedIn. There's no need to distinguish your original returnship experience from what follows. Keep it short and simple as one entry. (Example: March–Present, not Returnship March–June, Contract July–Present).

- **If you are not converted...**

Instead of focusing on the fact that you weren't hired full time, consider an approach that focuses on what you gained:

"I applied for a very competitive, temporary returnship at a growing company. They selected me because I have (unique experience, skill set, etc.) I was able to leverage that experience throughout the 16-week program by (working on specific projects, collaborating with teammates, etc). I learned a lot about the kinds of work I enjoy doing, where to best apply my strengths, and discovered/renewed my passion/interest in (xyz). In researching your organization, I think there is great alignment between my skills and the challenges you're looking to solve. I'd love to tell you more about that."

- **If the career gap comes up in later discussion...**

Don't apologize or indicate any sense of embarrassment. Be clear, simple, and skip the details, then bring the focus back to your skills and experience:

"I spent (#) years doing (function, skills and experiences). I had the privilege of being out of the workforce for (#) years to focus on my family. I'm very grateful for that time. I've returned to the workforce through this very selective returnship program, where I refreshed my skills in (xyz). I'm excited about this position specifically because it includes/requires (experiences, skill sets), which directly relates to my career/returnship doing (function, skills, and experiences)."

Many members of our community wear their returnship experience like a badge on their sleeves and are proud to discuss their experience. Confidence – or lack thereof – will come through. Own your experience. Be proud. If you're not there yet, keep practicing. Faking it until you make it is a real thing.



Be Positive and Focus on Accomplishments

Like all jobs, returnships have highs and lows. As you develop your story, accentuate the positives and find the lessons in the challenges. Just as you wouldn't show up to a first date talking badly about your ex, don't go into a job interview with a list of grievances about your last job.

Expressing that you learned from a less-than-ideal work environment or annoying setbacks shows a growth mindset, which is a valuable soft skill. Employers want people who adapt and learn from their (or others') mistakes.

There's no doubt that during your returnship, you worked on great projects, collaborated with smart and talented people, and have numerous new bullet points on your resume. Find the projects you are especially proud of and have those stories ready for the next time you get to share your story. Try to develop at least two stories: one where there is an impressive metric you helped reach and one where things did not go so well but you learned a valuable lesson – and then elaborate on how you've adapted because of that lesson!

Remember that you are the sole arbiter of what you share and how. However you choose to tell your story, make it compelling and memorable.



Path Forward

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