Question 2: Leadership Experience

Prove the instance, not the title: a real decision with real risk, and a quality you admire grounded in someone you actually watched.

200	2	2	Free
WORD LIMIT	HALVES TO ANSWER	WORKED EXAMPLES	TO READ & DOWNLOAD

ABOUT THE EXAMPLES.
All names, organisations and figures below are invented, to show technique. Yours must be real and defensible at interview.

01 SECTION 1

What this question actually asks

The question. "What is your leadership experience to-date? What leadership qualities do you admire in others?" In no more than 200 words.

This is two questions wearing one word limit, and most applicants give all 200 words to the first half and a throwaway sentence to the second. Both halves are scored. The second half is not small talk: it is how the panel checks whether you can recognise leadership in someone other than yourself, which is a different skill from simply having led.

The two halves

HALF	WHAT IT IS TESTING
Your leadership experience	A specific instance where you exercised initiative, responsibility, originality or risk-taking, not a job title
Qualities you admire in others	Whether your model of leadership is more than yourself: can you name a quality, show where you saw it, and say why it matters

Word plan at 200 words. The experience itself, around 130 words. The quality you admire in others, around 70 words.

You do not need formal employment to answer this well

WHT does not require prior work experience, and this question does not either. A university society you ran, a community event you organised, or a volunteer group you took charge of can carry exactly as much weight as a workplace story, provided it still passes the tests above: a real decision, a real risk, a result. What matters is the shape of what you did, not the letterhead it happened under.

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02 SECTION 2

Writing it, beat by beat

A structuring tool: Situation, Task, Action, Result

If you are struggling to fit the experience into 130 words, the STAR method gives you a fast way to triage what to keep. Write one clause for the **situation**, one for the specific **task** or decision in front of you, more detail for the **action** you took, and a clause for the **result**. Most first drafts over-invest in the situation and under-invest in the result; STAR makes that imbalance visible before you cut, rather than after.

The experience, around 130 words

Choose one instance, not a summary of a role. WHT names the qualities it is listening for directly: **initiative, commitment, responsibility, originality, creativity and risk-taking.** Pick the instance that shows one or two of these clearly, rather than trying to prove all six in 130 words.

Give it a shape: the situation, the decision only you could have made, what you risked by making it, and what happened. A decision with no risk attached to it rarely reads as leadership; it reads as competent execution of someone else's plan.

> ***Weak:*** *"As team lead I was responsible for managing our group's project and ensuring deadlines were met."*
> ***Strong:*** *"When our main data partner withdrew six weeks before submission, I proposed we rebuild the survey around three smaller partners instead of requesting an extension. My supervisor disagreed. I ran the smaller pilot myself over two weekends, found it worked, and only then brought the team back in."*

The quality you admire, around 70 words

Name one quality, not a list, and ground it in a specific person or moment you actually observed, not an abstract description. Say briefly why that quality matters to the kind of leadership you are trying to build, so this half connects to the first rather than sitting beside it unrelated.

Write "I," and name what you did apart from the group

If your instance happened inside a team, the panel is reading 200 words to understand you specifically, not the team's achievement. Write "I," not "we," and be precise about which decision was yours. "We decided to change our approach" could have been written by anyone on the team. "I proposed the change, over a colleague's objection, and ran the first test myself" could only have been written by you. This is not about denying the team's contribution; it is about answering the question actually asked, which is about your leadership, not the group's result.

Show it, rather than asserting it

Naming a quality ("I am a decisive leader") and then demonstrating the same quality through what you did are different answers, and only the second one counts as evidence. If a sentence could be cut without losing any information, because it only restates a trait you are about to show anyway, cut it. Let the decision, the risk and the result carry the claim.

03 SECTION 3

Two worked examples

All names, organisations and figures are invented, to show technique.

Example A: a research team under pressure

> *When our main data partner withdrew six weeks before our submission deadline, I proposed rebuilding the survey around three smaller community partners instead of requesting an extension, which our funder discouraged. My supervisor disagreed with the approach. I ran a pilot with one partner myself over two weekends, found the method held, and only then brought the wider team back in to scale it. We submitted on time, with data our funder later cited as a model for future rounds.*
> *The quality I most admire in others is the willingness to say "I was wrong" quickly and without defensiveness. I saw this in a mentor who reversed a funding decision in front of her own board within a week of new evidence arriving, at real cost to her authority in that meeting.*

> *That kind of leadership makes an organisation correctable, which matters more to me than being right the first time.*

Example B: an enterprise under regulatory threat

> *When local regulators proposed banning informal waste collection outright, most of our 40 partner collectors expected us to lobby quietly on their behalf. Instead, I organised them to present their own data directly to the regulatory committee, a meeting I had no guarantee would go well and that risked the relationship we had spent two years building. It worked: the committee amended the proposal to a registration scheme instead of a ban.*
> *The quality I admire most in others is the discipline to hand over the microphone rather than speak for people who are capable of speaking for themselves. I saw this in a colleague who, offered the chance to present our results at a national conference, insisted a collector present instead. That instinct, trusting the people closest to the problem, is the leadership I am trying to build in myself.*

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04 SECTION 4

Dos and don'ts

Do

- Choose one specific instance, not a role summary
- Show a real decision with real risk attached to it
- Use WHT's own named qualities as a lens: initiative, commitment, responsibility, originality, creativity, risk-taking
- Give the admired quality a real person or moment, not an abstract description
- Connect the two halves so they read as one view of leadership, not two unrelated answers

Don't

- List your job titles as if a title were evidence of leadership
- Describe a decision that carried no risk or disagreement
- Answer the second half with a list of adjectives and no example
- Admire a quality you do not yourself attempt to practise

- Spend all 200 words on the first half and one sentence on the second

05 SECTION 5

Common mistakes, and the fix

MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS MARKS	THE FIX
"I led a team of ten people."	A title, not an instance	Choose one decision inside that role and describe it
No disagreement or risk in the story	Reads as execution, not leadership	Show the moment someone else thought you were wrong
Second half is a list of adjectives	Unverifiable, no evidence	Name one quality and the person or moment you saw it in
Two halves feel unrelated	Reads as two separate mini-answers	Let the admired quality explain why your own instance mattered

06 SECTION 6

Checklist

- One specific instance, not a job description
- A real decision, with real risk or disagreement attached
- At least one of WHT's named qualities visible in the instance
- One named quality admired in others, grounded in a real person or moment
- The two halves connect to one view of leadership
- Under 200 words