

Lesson 2 – English for Interviews

Today you're going to learn the most common questions asked in job interviews – and some tips for answering them in English.

First, let's learn some vocabulary for finding a job. You need to prepare your **resume** or **CV** - this is a document listing your education, work experience, and skills. You send your resume or CV to the company with a **cover letter** – this is a letter or e-mail introducing yourself and explaining why you want the job. This process is called **applying for a job**.

If the company likes your resume and cover letter, you may be called in for an interview to ask you additional questions. If the company wants to hire you, it will **offer you the job**. You can **accept the job** (say yes) or **turn it down** (say no).

1. Small Talk

Now let's learn some common interview questions with sample answers. When you arrive for the interview, the interviewer may make **small talk**. He may ask, "How are you?" You can say, "I'm fine, thanks. And you?"

The person may also ask, "**Did you have any trouble finding us?**" - this question is asking if it was difficult to find the location of the office. You can answer, "No, not at all." or "**It was a little difficult, but I made it.**" In this statement, "I made it" means "I arrived."

The interviewer may also ask you if you want anything to drink:

- "Would you like any coffee?"
- "Would you like a glass of water?"

You can say:

- "Yes, please"
- "No thanks"
- "A cup of coffee would be great."

Finally, the interviewer may say, "**Have a seat.**" - this means "Please sit down."

2. “So, tell me a little bit about yourself.”

One common question to start an interview is, “So, tell me a little bit about yourself.” To answer this question, give a brief summary of your education, experience, and goals. Here’s a sample answer:

I studied chemistry at Colgate University, and I’ve been working for Smith Pharmaceuticals for the last three years. My experience is mainly in the area of clinical testing, but I’m very interested in the field of cancer research.

Notice the three verb tenses used in this answer:

- **The Past tense** (studied) for events that started and finished in the past.
- **The Present Perfect** (I’ve worked) for events that started in the past and continue to the present.
- **The Present tense** (my experience is / I’m very interested) to describe the current situation.

Here’s some additional vocabulary you can use to talk about your studies. You can say:

- “I studied chemistry at university.”
- “I studied marketing at university.”

An alternative way to say this is:

- “I majored in chemistry.”
- “I majored in marketing.”

The word “**major**” in the context of a university means your concentration of studies. You can also use the phrase, “I have a degree in...” for example:

- “I have a degree in chemistry.”
- “I have a degree in marketing.”

If you want to be more specific about what type of degree you have, you can say:

- “I have an Associate Degree.”
An associate degree is a 2-year degree.
- “I have a Bachelor’s Degree.”
That’s a 4-year degree.
- “I have a Masters Degree.”
- “I have a Doctorate” or “I have a Ph.D.”
- “I have a technical certification.”
If you’ve done a specialized technical course.

3. “What were some of your responsibilities at your last job?”

In the interview, you’ll probably be asked questions about your previous job, or your current job. To answer this question, you can say:

- I was responsible for...
- I was in charge of...
- I worked with...

Here are some examples:

- I was responsible for **negotiating contracts**.
- I was in charge of **advertising**.
- I worked with **farmers**, helping them to follow environmental laws.

Remember that in these phrases we use the -ING form of the verb.

4. Past Experience

In job interviews, it’s also common to ask questions about past experience, for example:

- “Tell me about one of your biggest accomplishments.”
- “Tell me about a problem you faced, and how you handled it.”

To answer these questions, you can use the **STAR** strategy:

- Describe the Situation or **T**ask
- Tell the **A**ction you took
- Describe the **R**esults

Remember to use past tenses! Here’s an example answer:

SITUATION/TASK: “While I was working as an HR manager, there were an increasing number of conflicts among international staff members due to miscommunications and cultural differences.”

ACTION: “I organized training sessions to teach staff about our company culture and mission in all our international offices. I also established scholarships for employees to take English classes, in order to improve overall communication.”

RESULTS: “Over 500 employees benefited from these programs, and the number of staff complaints and conflicts decreased significantly.”

5. “Why do you want this job?”

The interviewer may ask, “Why do you want this job?” or “Why do you want to work for this company?” Never say, “Because I need a job” or “because I need some money” – even if it’s true!

Instead, say some positive things about the company, and connect your skills to the company’s needs or mission. Here’s a sample answer:

- **“Why do you want this job?”**
“TechNet is known for its innovative, high-quality products. As a programmer who enjoys solving problems creatively, I’d be an excellent fit for this position.”
- **“Why do you want this job?”**
“One thing that impresses me about Brown Consulting is your dedication to your clients, and my passion for service would make me a valuable addition to your team.”

6. “What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?”

Possible answers for strengths:

- I have great communication skills.
- I’m a people person.
The expression “people person” means you enjoy working with people and using your social skills
- I’m a quick learner.
- I’m a hard worker.
- I’m organized and punctual.
“Punctual” means you arrive on time.
- I’m creative and forward-thinking.

To talk about your weaknesses, say your weakness and also say something you are doing to improve it. Here are three examples:

- “I need to be a little better organized. I’m working with a new time management system to help me keep track of multiple projects and meet all the deadlines.”
- “I work very independently, and I don’t always look for feedback from others. However, in my last job I joined some group projects, and this really helped me learn to work as part of a team.”
- “I’ve realized I tend to get impatient with colleagues who don’t work as fast as I do, so I’m now making a conscious effort to encourage and motivate co-workers in a positive way.”

You’ve now finished lesson 2!

Take the quiz to fill in the missing words in the interview answers, and come back tomorrow for Lesson 3: Around the Office.

Quiz: Lesson 2 – English for Interviews

Question 1

"Did you have any trouble finding us?"

"No, not _____."

- A enough B in time C at all

Question 2

"Can I get you anything to drink?"

"A glass of water _____ be great."

- A should B could C would

Question 3

"Where did you go to college?"

"I got my Bachelor's _____ at the University of Sao Paulo, and now I'm doing an MBA at Columbia University."

- A doctorate B degree C major

Question 4

"Tell me about your last job."

"I was in _____ of maintaining the electrical systems of an oil refinery."

- A charge B change C share

Question 5

"Do you have any teaching experience?"

"No, not officially, but I was responsible for _____ new employees at my last job."

- A train B training C trained

Question 6

"Tell me about a problem you faced and how you handled it."

"While I _____ at Dow Chemical, we had several emergency shutdowns due to equipment failure..."

- A had worked B work C was working

Question 7

"Why do you want this job?"

"I really admire the way this company works with the local population in developing its projects, and I believe my experience as a community outreach coordinator makes me an ideal _____ for the position."

- A fit B team C value

Question 8

"What are some of your main strengths?"

I'm a _____. I do whatever it takes to get my work done on time, and done well."

- A quick learner B hard worker C people person

Question 9

"Can you tell me about one of your weaknesses?"

"I _____ to focus on the 'big picture' of the work so much that I'm inattentive to the smaller details. That's why I always make sure to work with a team member who is detail-oriented."

- A find B tend C realized

Answers - Quiz 2

1. C

2. C

3. B

4. A

5. B

6. C

7. A

8. B

9. B