# Lesson 2: Interview English

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. To look for a job, check the **job listings** in the newspaper or online. You might also be contacted by a **recruiter** or **headhunter** – that’s a person who helps find potential employees for companies.

When you find a job you want to **apply for,** 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.

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).



## Small Talk

When you arrive for the interview, you might have to interact with the company receptionist first. Say “Hello” and then tell him/her the reason for your visit to the office:

* + “I’m here for an interview at 2:00.”
  + “I have an appointment with Ms. Johnson at 3:15.”

When you meet the interviewer, he or she may start by making **small talk.**

Here are some common small talk comments and replies:

* + “Very nice to meet you!” “Nice to meet you, too!”
  + “How are you doing?”

“Good – I’m glad to be here.”

* + “Did you have any trouble finding us?”

*(asking if it was hard to find the location of the office)*

“No, not at all.” / “It was a little difficult, but I made it.”

* + “Would you like any coffee?” / “Would you like a glass of water?” “Yes, please.” / “No, thanks.” / “A cup of coffee would be great.”

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

## "Tell me a little bit about yourself."

One common question to start an interview is, "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. I currently run clinical tests there, using the latest techniques. I'm very interested in the field of cancer research, and I’d like to move into more of a management position.

Notice the verb tenses used in this answer:

* + The **past tense** (studied) for events that started and finished in the past.
  + The **present perfect continuous** (I've been working) for events that started in the past and continue to the present.
  + The **present tense** (I currently run / I'm very interested) to describe the current situation.
  + The use of **I’d like to** to describe your future hopes/goals.

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

* + "I **studied** chemistry."
  + "I **majored in** chemistry.”
  + “I **have a degree in** chemistry.”

The verb **"major"** in the context of a university means your concentration of studies. 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 Master’s Degree."
  + "I have a Doctorate" or "I have a Ph.D."
  + "I have a technical certification."

*If you've done a specialized technical course.*

It’s good to mention your experience and also your interest in the company’s

current activities:

* + “I have a lot of experience in… *(areas of your past work)*”
  + “I’m very interested in… *(the company’s current activities)*”

## "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 about a past job, you can say:

* + I was responsible for...
  + I was in charge of...
  + I worked with...
  + My day-to-day work involved…

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.
  + My day-to-day work involved **doing market research** and **designing products.**

## 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 **S**ituation 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 a 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, so we could improve overall communication."

**RESULTS:** "More than 500 employees benefited from these programs, and the number of staff complaints and conflicts decreased significantly."

## "Why do you want this job?"

The interviewer may ask,

* + "Why do you want this job?"
  + “Why are you interested in this position?”
  + "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 and interests to the company's needs or mission. Here's a sample answer:

### "Why do you want this job?"

*"I know that this company has been developing innovative products, which is very exciting. I’d love to use my creative programming skills in these projects."*

### "Why are you interested in this position?"

*“The job involves editing and proofreading, and those are two of my strongest skills. I really enjoy helping improve publications, and I’d like to do that here at (company name).”*

### “Why do you want to work for this company?”

*“One thing that impresses me about this company is how much you care*

*about your customers. I also have a real passion for customer service, so*

*I’d love to join your team.”*

## "What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?"

Possible answers for strengths:

* + I have great communication skills.
  + I'm a people person.

*(this 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.
  + I take initiative. / I’m proactive.

*(these mean you take action with your own motivation without needing to be told what to do)*

To talk about your weaknesses, say your weak point 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."

## #7 – Why are you leaving your current job? / Why did you leave your last job?

**Don't** complain about your previous job or boss, because it makes you sound negative. Instead, it's good to emphasize the positive things you're hoping to gain by changing jobs. Here are some diplomatic ways to answer:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Don’t say:** | **Say:** |
| I don’t enjoy the job/area/company. | I'd like to take my career in a new direction. I'm especially interested in (this position/area) because (say  exactly why it appeals to you). |
| The salary was too low / There were no promotions available. | There weren't very many opportunities for advancement, so I'm looking for a position where I can  grow with the company. |
| I’m bored in my current job. | I feel like I've accomplished everything I could in that role, so now I'm looking for new challenges  and opportunities. |
| I didn’t like the work. | I'd like to find a position that's a  better match for my skills and career goals. |
| I lost my job. | The company eliminated my position, unfortunately – but my former manager was always very  happy with my work. |
| I was fired. | The job wasn’t a good fit for me, and I was let go. Now I’m committed to finding work that I enjoy in a place  where I can make a real contribution. |

## #8 – Where do you see yourself in five years?

This question can be hard to answer. Basically, the interviewer wants to see if your answer matches the company's long-term goals. Don’t say you plan to move on to a different job, or that you hope to be in charge of the whole company. Instead, talk more generally about how you hope to improve your own skills and contribute to the company’s work:

* + Over the next five years, I want to continue developing my skills so that I can become an expert in my work.
  + I hope to gain more experience and move into a management role if possible.
  + I’m really passionate about this work and I could see myself doing it for

a long time.

* + I’d like to do the best job I can in this role, and I’d be interested in

opportunities for advancement in the company.

At the end of the interview, the interviewer might ask, “Do you have any

questions for me?” This is your opportunity to ask intelligent questions to get more details about the job and show your interest – you should always have a question ready, so keep this in mind during the interview!

When finishing the interview, you can also ask, “What’s the next step?” to find

out the next action that the company will take, and when they will contact you. Here are more resources for how to answer interview questions:

* + <http://www.talkenglish.com/speaking/interview/intbasic1.aspx>
  + [http://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/english-job-interview-](http://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/english-job-interview-questions/) [questions/](http://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/english-job-interview-questions/)
  + <http://theinterviewguys.com/blog/>

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

1. "Did you have any trouble finding us?" "No, not ."
   1. enough
   2. in time
   3. at all
2. "Can I get you anything to drink?" "A glass of water be great."
   1. should
   2. could
   3. would
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."

* 1. doctorate
  2. degree
  3. major

1. "Tell me about your last job."

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

* 1. charge
  2. change
  3. share

1. "Do you have any teaching experience?"

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

* 1. train
  2. training
  3. trained

1. "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..."

* 1. had worked
  2. work
  3. was working

1. "Why do you want this job?"

"I really admire the way this company works with the local population in

developing its projects, and I’d love to join your ."

* 1. fit
  2. team
  3. value

1. "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."

* 1. quick learner
  2. hard worker
  3. people person

1. "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."

* 1. find
  2. tend
  3. realized

1. “Why are you leaving your current job?”

“I've been working in the construction industry for several years, and now I'd like to take my career in a new .”

* 1. advancement
  2. direction
  3. position

1. “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

“I'd like to gain more experience and eventually have a leading in community development projects.”

* 1. passion
  2. role
  3. skill

1. “Thanks for coming in for an interview.” “My pleasure. What’s the next ?”

“You can expect to hear from us within the next week.”

* 1. contact
  2. question
  3. step

### Quiz Answers: Lesson 2

1.C, 2.C, 3.B, 4.A, 5.B, 6.C, 7.B, 8.B, 9.B, 10.B, 11.B, 12.C