

BEP 374 – Online Job Interviews (Part 1)

Hello and welcome back to Business English Pod for today's lesson on doing an online job interview. Today, we're going to look at some tips for online interviews, especially how to relate your experience to a new field of work.

Just a few years ago, you might have been surprised if a prospective employer requested an online interview. After all, we often think of interviews as a good chance to meet face to face. But these days, in many sectors, online interviews are completely normal. In fact, with the move toward remote work, many newly hired people have never met their colleagues or boss face to face.

This is part of a shake-up in the world of work brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the pandemic, millions of people lost their jobs. Now, more and more of those people are getting hired for new positions, often in different industries. And to get those jobs, they likely had to talk about how they would transfer their experience to a different line of work.

One of the things you'll have to deal with in an online interview is, of course, possible technical issues. It's a good idea to be able to deal with such problems calmly and confidently. Another important skill in any interview is talking about how you added value in your previous position.

When it comes to transferring experience, you'll need to consider how to discuss similarities between the industry you're leaving and the one you're hoping to find work in. And given the uncertainty of the pandemic, it's a good idea to talk about how you've adapted to change and demonstrated learning.

In today's dialog, we'll listen to part of an online interview for the job of operations manager at a property management company. Rachel is applying for the job after working for many years in operations at a hotel chain. Let's hear how she answers the interviewer's questions, deals with technical issues, and talks about transferring her experience.

As you listen to the dialog, try to answer the following questions:

1. What accomplishment does Rachel feel demonstrates her value at her last job?
2. What did Rachel focus on during the transition to remote work?
3. What kinds of learning did Rachel focus on in her last job?

Vocabulary

A sec: a very short time; "I'll be with you in a sec, I just have to finish this email."

To drop out: if sound "drops out" on a recording or audio device, it is temporarily interrupted; "Sorry Neil, but your sound is dropping out. Can you try connecting your headphones?"

Earbuds: small earphones worn in the ear; "I find that background noise doesn't bother me as much when I wear earbuds."

"No worries:" no problem, informally; "A: I'm so sorry Amy but I won't have time to look at your report this afternoon. B: No worries. I got Tom to give it a good proofread."

To stand out: to be especially impressive or important; "Colin did many great things for our company, but his vision and leadership are what stand out most."

Proud of: feeling a sense of accomplishment; "One thing I'm especially proud of is my ability to build trust and relationships really quickly."

To overhaul: to completely change; "With these new regulations, we're going to have to overhaul our entire financial reporting methods."

Outdated: old and not suitable or useful anymore; "Our website looks so outdated, I'm worried we'll lose business if we don't modernize it soon."

"So to speak:" we say "so to speak" when we have just expressed something in an unusual way; "We let Judith go because she was costing us too much management energy, so to speak."

Held over: to continue or postpone something past a certain time; "I understand we're totally changing the website structure, but is there any content we can hold over?"

To shave something off: to reduce by a little bit; "A change in travel policy enabled us to shave \$400 a month off our sales team's expenses."

To a high standard: of great quality; "We can either do this quickly, or to a high standard, but not really both."

Pandemic: when a disease affects many people throughout a country or the world; "What started as a small outbreak of a new virus has become a global pandemic impacting the entire world economy."

To downsize: to significantly reduce the costs and staff of a company; "With a huge decrease in demand, many airlines are downsizing and permanently reducing operations."

Interior: inside buildings; "Well, from the outside it just looks like an old building, but the interior has been completely modernized."

Exterior: outside buildings; "This is a notice to tenants that we will be doing maintenance on the exterior of the building throughout the month of June."

Upkeep: regular maintenance; "Without regular upkeep in the factory, I'm afraid there will be an increase in safety and hygiene issues."

On-call work: work done on an as-needed basis by people who are available when and only when necessary; "We're not big enough to need a full-time maintenance person, so we have a semi-retired person for on-call work."

Seasonal: changing depending on the time of year or season; "I'm looking to buy a seasonal business, doing something like lawncare, so I can spend my winters travelling."

Residential property: a building, such as a house or apartment building, where people live; "Residential properties are being bought and sold at record rates, but the commercial property market downtown is very slow."

Managerial: related to managing; "After several years as a junior salesperson, I'm looking to move into a more managerial role where I can use my leadership skills."

In nature: have certain qualities; "The position says *coordinator* but it's really administrative in nature."

Direct report: someone a person manages directly; "When they combined our departments, I went from having four direct reports to supervising a total of eight people."

To hit: to begin affecting someone or a situation; "We started moving many of our services online in 2019, so when the pandemic hit we felt ready."

Day-to-day: on a daily basis; "I like dealing with clients, but the day-to-day work of invoicing and administration can get pretty boring."

Remote: happening away from a company's offices; "90% of our workforce lives right here in Chicago, but the remainder works remotely from different parts of the Midwest."

Hybrid: a combination of two things or ways of doing something; "The Toyota Prius is a hybrid automobile, combining a gas engine with a battery motor."

To embrace something: to accept or adopt something energetically; "I'm really glad to see our older employees have managed to embrace videoconferencing."

Inherently: naturally or by definition; "I know you don't want to spend too much on this, but research and development is inherently expensive."

To look into something: to investigate; "I'm not sure if the city will allow us to build in this way, but let me look into it this afternoon."

Virtual facilitation: running a meeting or discussion through an online platform; "We need someone who's skilled at virtual facilitation to run our planning sessions."

Dialog

Kevin: All right... well that's good to hear. Now, maybe we can talk a bit about your time at Century Hotels... you were there for... seven years, right?

Rachel: Yes, just over seven years... actually. Uh oh...hold on... just give me a **sec**, sound's **dropping out**... going to switch to **earbuds**... Ok, that's better. Thanks.

Kevin: **No worries**. So, Century Hotels, I'd like to know more about what you think you accomplished there? Anything **stand out** that you're particularly **proud of**?

Rachel: Well, yes, I think I did really good work there. And one big thing I'd say... was **overhauling** our maintenance contracts. We had some **outdated** arrangements, **so to speak**. One of many things **held over** from previous ownership. In the end, I was able to **shave** 12% **off** maintenance costs. And the work being done was **to a higher standard**. So yeah, that was a big thing for me.

Kevin: And that's fairly recent?

Rachel: Before the **pandemic**. I think I started that process... a year before our big **downsizing** in June.

Kevin: I see. And... when you say maintenance contracts, you're talking about what exactly?

Rachel: **Interior** and **exterior**... basic maintenance, **upkeep**, and cleaning. Though not room cleaning of course. Er, **on-call work** but also **seasonal** priorities. Very much the same as what you'd be doing for a **residential property**.

Kevin: So, it sounds like your role was **managerial**?

Rachel: That's right. At Century they call it a "coordinator" position. But definitely managerial **in nature**.

Kevin: And so that involved managing *people* too?

Rachel: Yes, I was responsible for the team in San Diego. Four **direct reports**.

Kevin: So when COVID **hit**, were you still in the office **day-to-day**? Or did you go **remote**... or **hybrid**... what did that look like?

Rachel: We were pretty quick to go remote. And... we really didn't know how long it would be, but I wanted to make sure we could do it as long as necessary. So I really focused on getting the right tools and training for the team, and tried to **embrace** it.

Kevin: You didn't find that challenging... working from home, trying to manage a staff and all that?

Rachel: It was definitely challenging. For everyone. Managing people is **inherently** challenging, even without the distance. But I **looked into** training, and... really tried to improve my skills at **virtual facilitation**. And remote management overall.

Debrief

Now let's go through the dialog again and look at the language and techniques Rachel used during her interview. We join the interview just as Kevin is asking about her past experience.

Kevin: All right... well that's good to hear. Now, maybe we can talk a bit about your time at Century Hotels... you were there for... seven years, right?

Rachel: Yes, just over seven years... actually. Uh oh...hold on... just give me a **sec**, sound's **dropping out**... going to switch to **earbuds**... Ok, that's better. Thanks.

Unfortunately, just as Rachel begins talking about her experience at Century Hotels, her sound starts "dropping out," or getting interrupted. But she doesn't get confused or frustrated. As you can hear, first she calmly states what the problem is. Then, instead of just remaining silent while she fixes it, she explains what she's doing.

Technical troubles are just a regular part of online work life. When you have to deal with them, it's good to just stay calm and talk about what's going on. This way the other person or people can understand what's happening, and you can avoid an awkward silence.

What are some other ways of talking through a technical problem during an online interview? Let's practice some more examples.

- Hmm... looks like my video isn't on, let me just fix that.
- Seems there's no sound... So just going to adjust my speakers.
- Please hold on a sec, I need to reset my connection here.
- Oh, that's much too bright isn't it? Maybe if I turn this light off.

Now let's hear Kevin ask a bit more specific question about Rachel's time at Century Hotels.

Kevin: **No worries.** So, Century Hotels, I'd like to know more about what you think you accomplished there? Anything **stand out** that you're particularly **proud of**?

Rachel: Well, yes, I think I did really good work there. And one big thing I'd say... was **overhauling** our maintenance contracts. We had some **outdated** arrangements, **so to speak**. One of many things **held over** from previous ownership. In the end, I was able to **shave 12% off** maintenance costs. And the work being done was **to a higher standard**. So yeah, that was a big thing for me.

Kevin wants to know about any accomplishments that "stand out," or that are especially important to Rachel. This kind of question is an opportunity to highlight your impact, and you'd best be ready with a good answer.

As Rachel shows, a good answer is specific. She talks about how she "overhauled," or totally changed, the company's maintenance contracts which were "outdated," or old. And she doesn't just say what she did, she explains the *results* of *what* she did. In particular, she talks about cutting costs by 12% and improving the quality of work.

Talking about how you added value at a previous workplace is crucial in any job interview. Let's try some more ways of doing this.

- The sales training program I implemented led to a 15% increase in revenue.
- The system I introduced was almost twice as efficient as the old one.
- Well, one thing I brought to the company was a vast network of retail contacts.
- I was able to bring our proposal success rate up to 60%.

Kevin wants to hear more about Rachel's accomplishment. As you can hear, he also wants to ensure this was a recent accomplishment, which is a good reminder to focus on fairly current achievements.

Kevin: And that's fairly recent?

Rachel: Before the **pandemic**. I think I started that process... a year before our big **downsizing** in June.

Kevin: I see. And... when you say maintenance contracts, you're talking about what exactly?

Rachel: **Interior** and **exterior**... basic maintenance, **upkeep**, and cleaning. Though not room cleaning of course. Er, **on-call work** but also **seasonal** priorities. Very much the same as what you'd be doing for a **residential property**.

If you're applying for a job in a different industry or field of work, you can bet the interviewer is wondering if your skills are transferable. So take the opportunity to show similarities between the industries whenever you can.

In this case, Kevin wants more information about the maintenance contracts at the hotel company. Rachel mentions several aspects of the contracts, including "upkeep," or regular maintenance, and both "interior" and "exterior," or inside and outside work. As she says, this is similar to what Kevin's company would do for a "residential property." Note that property management companies might deal with "residential properties," such as apartments and condos, or "commercial properties," for business use.

Let's run through some more ways of emphasizing similarities between the field that you're coming from and the field that you're hoping to enter.

- I think many of the problems you see in mining are similar to those in forestry.
- On the surface they look different, but there are a lot of structural similarities.
- These two industries are similar in that both are very dependent on oil.
- Yes, I understand this kind of regulation is important in real estate as well.

Next, Kevin wants to talk more about Rachel's previous position and responsibilities. He asks if her role was "managerial," or involved aspects of management.

Kevin: So, it sounds like your role was **managerial**?

Rachel: That's right. At Century they call it a "coordinator" position. But definitely **managerial in nature**.

Kevin: And so that involved managing *people* too?

Rachel: Yes, I was responsible for the team in San Diego. Four **direct reports**.

As Rachel explains, her role was definitely managerial, as she had four “direct reports,” or people she supervised. This topic leads Kevin to ask about Rachel’s experience when the pandemic started, or “hit.”

Kevin: So when COVID **hit**, were you still in the office **day-to-day**? Or did you go **remote**... or **hybrid**... what did that look like?

Rachel: We were pretty quick to go remote. And... we really didn’t know how long it would be, but I wanted to make sure we could do it as long as necessary. So I really focused on getting the right tools and training for the team, and tried to **embrace** it.

COVID affected workplaces in many different ways. Some businesses, and some people, adapted well, but others didn’t. Kevin wants to hear about Rachel’s experience, in particular whether they shifted to “remote work” from home, or adopted a “hybrid,” or mixed approach.

Rachel takes this question as an opportunity to show how she is able to adapt to change. She emphasizes how she tried to get the right tools and training for her team. And she doesn’t complain about change, but rather talks about how she “embraced,” or welcomed, the change.

What are some other ways we can show a positive approach to dealing with change? Let’s run through some more examples.

- I saw the changes as an opportunity to improve my technical skills.
- It was important for me to learn how the new managers communicated.
- It was definitely a challenge at first, but I came to see it as an opportunity for personal development.
- I had to find new ways to work with the marketing team.

Rachel tried embracing the change, but of course change is hard. And Kevin wants to know about the challenges. Let’s listen.

Kevin: You didn’t find that challenging... working from home, trying to manage a staff and all that?

Rachel: It was definitely challenging. For everyone. Managing people is **inherently** challenging, even without the distance. But I **looked into** training, and... really tried to improve my skills at **virtual facilitation**. And remote management overall.

In an interview, you don’t have to pretend that everything is easy, or that you never face challenges. Instead, you can use these challenges to show how you solve problems.

As Rachel says, managing people is “inherently” challenging, or naturally challenging, even without the complexities of remote work. But she shows how she focused on learning to overcome these challenges. For example, she did training on “virtual facilitation,” or running meetings with online tools.

Showing a learner’s attitude is *especially* important if you’re hoping to transfer your skills to a new field of work. So let’s practice some more examples of demonstrating learning.

- I decided it was a good idea to take an online course on design.
- I was confused at first, but I found some videos that taught me the basics.
- It took a while, but I was able to get good enough to help my co-workers.
- Joining a new team was a good chance to learn about different work styles.

So Rachel seems to be doing very well in her interview. She’s overcome some early technical issues and highlighted some good achievements and a positive approach to change and learning.

Now let’s practice some of the language we learned in today’s lesson. Imagine you have a background in software but are now interviewing for a job in healthcare. You’ll hear a cue from the interviewer, then I’ll give you a suggestion for what you can say in response. We’ll guide you through each step in the practice and provide an example answer for each response.

Ready? Let’s give it a go.

Cue 1: All right, so... oh-oh, is there an issue with your video or something?

Start by saying you’ll adjust your webcam and confirming the fix.

Answer: _____

Cue 2: Ah, okay, that’s better. So, you were telling me what you did at Doyle Tech?

Now say that you gave a big boost to research at the company.

Answer: _____

Cue 3: I see. And do you think that is something that would be useful in this position?

Next, say that both software and healthcare rely a lot on research and development.

Answer: _____

Cue 4: True enough. So, you were at Doyle when they moved into Spain?

Confirm you were and say that you were able to build new relationships quickly.

Answer: _____

Cue 5: That must have been difficult. I mean, with the language barrier?

Finally, say that you actually studied Spanish for six months before the move.

Answer: _____

Answer 1: Maybe... Let me just adjust my webcam... How's that?

Answer 2: Yes, I believe I gave a big boost to research at the company.

Answer 3: Certainly. Both software and healthcare rely on research and development.

Answer 4: I was, and I think I was really able to build new relationships quickly there.

Answer 5: Well, I actually studied Spanish for six months before the move.

Now let's practice some of the vocabulary we've covered in this lesson. In a moment, you'll hear a series of sentences with a word replaced with a beep. Repeat each sentence, *including* the missing word.

For example, if you hear:

Example Cue: This year, we really need to completely <beep> our safety manual.

You can say:

Example Answer: This year, we really need to completely **overhaul** our safety manual.

After each response, we'll provide the correct answer. Let's begin.

Cue 1: We expect our proposals to be written to a very high <beep>.

Answer: _____

Cue 2: I spend a lot more time in meetings now that I have six direct <beep>.

Answer: _____

Cue 3: With a great home office, I'm really happy we've gone to <beep> work.

Answer: _____

Cue 4: The IT consultant thinks our website is very old and <beep>.

Answer: _____

Answer 1: We expect our proposals to be written to a very high **standard**.

Answer 2: I spend a lot more time in meetings now that I have six direct **reports**.

Answer 3: With a great home office, I'm really happy we've gone to **remote** work.

Answer 4: The IT consultant thinks our website is very old and **outdated**.

We've reached the end of this lesson, the first in our series on online interviews. We've learned how to deal calmly with technical issues, talk about how you added value, and discuss similarities between industries. We've also looked at how to show you can adapt to change and how to demonstrate learning.

Thanks for listening and see you again soon!

Language Review

A. Review Quiz

For each question, you must choose the sentence that best fulfills the given language function or purpose.

1. Which of the following demonstrates dealing calmly with technical glitches?
 - a) What the... I can't believe my video isn't working.
 - b) Please just wait.
 - c) Sorry, but I'm having trouble with my sound, so let me just try clicking this...
2. How might you talk about how you added value at a previous position?
 - a) I was responsible for many different aspects of operations.
 - b) After I pushed through some policy changes, we saved about \$1,000 a month.
 - c) I was really fortunate to work with a great team of people.
3. How could you emphasize similarities between industries?
 - a) I'm quite confident that I could transition to the private sector successfully.
 - b) Well, I think it's important that both these fields are about serving business customers.
 - c) I feel there are a lot of things I learned in my last role that will help me in this new one.
4. What would be a good way to talk about how you adapted to change?
 - a) Yes, when the new regulations came in it was a real challenge for everyone.
 - b) With the reorganization, I took it as an opportunity to build relationships with people in other departments.
 - c) The shift to remote work was fairly easy because most of us were already working from home much of the time.
5. How could you demonstrate learning during a job interview?
 - a) Before moving into a manager role, I did some leadership training.
 - b) There were a lot of things in my new role that I hadn't done before.
 - c) I'd definitely be interested in getting more involved in the marketing side.

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

Fill in the blanks with words from the box below. Be sure to put any verbs in the right tense.

hit stand	shave standard	overhaul report
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1. With about twenty direct _____ I find a lot of my time is spent in team meetings and giving one-on-one coaching.
2. If you could _____ 300 words off this proposal I think it would be much tighter.
3. I think our success at penetrating new markets in Europe _____ out as our biggest accomplishment last year.
4. We're hoping to make minor changes to the database this year, then next year we can _____ the entire thing.
5. We're looking for a supplier who can commit to doing things to a high _____, just as we do.
6. I don't mind change, so it wasn't too hard for me when the pandemic _____ to adapt my ways of working.

Study Strategy

The entire purpose of a job interview is to determine whether a person is right for a position and a company. One of the best ways to do that as an interviewee is to show that you have added value in past jobs, and that you're good at learning. It's hard to get the job if you don't check those boxes.

Think about your current or most recent position. Make a list of things you did to add value to the company. Rather than just listing job duties, try to think of specific accomplishments you made and their impact. Now, with each accomplishment, make a note of one thing you had to learn to achieve it.

Now, with a colleague or friend, imagine you have applied for a job and are having an interview. Your partner can begin by asking about any accomplishments in your current or most recent position. Talk about your accomplishment, including what you learned. Your partner can continue asking until you've covered everything on your list. When you're finished, switch roles and let your partner try.

Answers

Listening Questions

1. Rachel feels her value is demonstrated by her overhaul of maintenance contracts.
2. With the shift to remote work, Rachel focused on getting the right tools and training for her team.
3. Rachel focused her learning on virtual facilitation and remote management.

A. Review Quiz

1. c; 2. b; 3. b; 4. b; 5. a

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

1. With about twenty direct **reports** I find a lot of my time is spent in team meetings and giving one-on-one coaching.
2. If you could **shave** 300 words off this proposal I think it would be much tighter.
3. I think our success at penetrating new markets in Europe **stands** out as our biggest accomplishment last year.
4. We're hoping to make minor changes to the database this year, then next year we can **overhaul** the entire thing.
5. We're looking for a supplier who can commit to doing things to a high **standard**, just as we do.
6. I don't mind change, so it wasn't too hard for me when the pandemic **hit** to adapt my ways of working.