

Unit 6. Job interviews

Motto: *Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs*
(Henry Ford)



Objectives:

In this unit you will learn:

- how to anticipate the interview situation
- how to prepare for a job interview conducted in English
- how to deal with unexpected difficult questions
- how to avoid making blunders

Lead in

Task 1

Form groups of four. Discuss the answers to the following questions. The group spokesperson will report your conclusions to the class.

1. Which do you consider the hardest part in getting a job: writing a CV and a cover letter or a job interview? Why?
2. Why is preparation before an interview so important? What can we prepare before attending a job interview?
3. Have you ever participated in a job interview? What do you think the interviewers are looking for in a candidate? Make a list of desirable qualities.

Task 2

You are going to read a Role Quiz based on a job interview.

Look at each of the roles below and try to decide whether it is primarily an interviewer's or an interviewee's role. Tick accordingly. In three cases, jot down in the column marked "Comments", one or two ideas that justify your choice.

	Role	Interviewer	Interviewee	Comments
1	Try to put the other person at ease.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	Think before you speak but don't appear uncommunicative.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	Try to appear confident and at ease. Lack of confidence and nervousness can detract from your purpose.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	Don't ramble on about irrelevancies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	Don't just answer Yes or No. Qualify points where appropriate, justify views, offer examples.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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6	Consider whether open or closed questions* are appropriate – use a fair number of open questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7	Keep a record of key points and your impressions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8	Try to monitor your own performance and assess the impression you are giving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9	Explain the purpose of the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10	Pursue questions that have not been adequately answered.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11	Be helpful. If possible, guide the talk into interesting or favourable areas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12	Do not dodge difficult questions entirely.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13	Give as balanced a picture as possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14	Don't be over-familiar or over-formal, smile as necessary (but don't over-do it).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

(based on <http://ec.hku.hk/epc>)

*open questions: what/where/why do you ...? (e.g. Where do you live?)

closed questions: do you ... ? (Do you live in Bucharest?)

Task 3

Match the words in the left hand column taken from the quiz with their definitions in the right hand column:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. detract from | a. avoid thinking about something unpleasant |
| 2. dodge something | b. talk about something at length in a disorganised way |
| 3. assess | c. watch and check something over a period of time |
| 4. qualify something | d. follow the succession of something |
| 5. ramble on | e. estimate the value of somebody/something |
| 6. pursue | f. make something seem of lower value |
| 7. monitor | g. make the meaning of a previous statement less general |

Task 4

Now use the words in the left column above to fill in the blanks in the following sentences. Use appropriate forms.

- a. When he left college, he being drafted into the army for as long as he could, claiming he was a conscientious objector.
- b. The interviewer lost interest and even yawned when the interviewee never stopped about his past work experience.
- c. The hotel manager the staff's movements ever since one of the guests complained about unjustified delay in answering room-service calls.
- d. They once told me that, in spite of her shy appearance, no amount of criticism could her professional achievements.
- e. Once in a while an employer who is genuinely interested in hiring you may seem to discourage you as a way of testing your reaction; it is then difficult the impact of your performance on the interviewer.
- f. The Chairman of the Board feels he must his earlier remarks about the current corporate policy in case anyone misinterprets them.
- g. He has always been a goal-oriented person. No wonder he his engineering career with determination since graduation.

Preparing for the interview

Task 5

Read the text below . Match each of its eleven sections with one of the headings below.

- a) Display your presentable self
- b) Relate to your interviewers
- c) Be yourself
- d) Advertise yourself
- e) Dress for success
- f) Preparing for a job interview
- g) The best or the worst is yet to come
- h) Persuade them and get the job
- i) Interview your interviewers
- j) In anticipation of the interview situation
- k) Interviewer's checklist/internal agenda

**First Impressions, Lasting Impressions:
Tips for Job Interviews**

1 Whew! You've written an outstanding cover letter and résumé. A search committee has read hundreds of resumes, debated countless hours, and they have now narrowed the pool to their top three picks. Congratulations! You're one of them. What happens now, when you've survived the first severe cut and are one of the few candidates invited for a personal interview? Face-to-face or telephone interviews can be the most intimidating part of the job search process. You are no longer just a piece of paper; you must impress your interviewers, and potential co-workers, with your competence and personality. Here are a few suggestions for surviving, and perhaps even enjoying, your next job interview.

2 In order to be a successful interviewee, you need to know what the interviewer is looking for. Selection criteria vary from job to job and from employer to employer. To prepare for an interview, you should therefore do as much research as you can and try to work out what kind of person the employer will be looking for.

3 Brainstorming questions that are likely to come up in an interview will help you put on a better performance. Remember that the employer wants to know if you are the best candidate for the job. The question underlying every other question is: "Why should we hire you?" General questions are designed to find out about your personality and attitude to work. Job specific questions

are designed to assess your suitability for the job.

4 Many employers ask questions based on your résumé. They may appear to structure the questions on (1) your report of *work experience, education and extra-curricular activities*, or (2) *their criteria for the job*. Either way, both factors play a part and you need to consider both as you prepare for your interviews.

5 Some questions seem simple but are actually designed to give you an opportunity to show yourself in a positive light. Avoid giving short, obvious answers and take the opportunity to talk. Make sure that your answer is relevant, interesting and allows you to show off your strengths. Your answers should not sound like they have been prepared in advance and should be delivered naturally and convincingly.

6 Your personal appearance is also of great importance when attending a job interview. Therefore, you should get a good night's sleep the night before your interview. You need to be refreshed, alert and cheerful when meeting your interviewers. You'll often need to have good stamina to go through an interview.

7 Dress professionally in order to be taken more seriously. You're safest in subdued colours, styles and patterns of clothing. Don't let your clothes distract from your message. Navy blue is still the most popular colour for interview outfits. However, don't

feel compelled to wear navy. Choose a colour that flatters your skin and hair colour. Men should wear a suit and tie. Women should wear a simple suit or dress.

8 During interviews, candidates sometimes come across situations where they are lost for words. So, apart from anticipating general and job-specific questions, you need to develop strategies for handling difficult or unexpected questions. At the end of an interview, the interviewer usually invites the interviewee to ask some questions. Prepare some questions appropriate to the post. This is not the best time to clarify queries about salary, which can be done later if you are actually offered the job. Ask questions politely and do not seem critical of the company or the job. If you cannot think of a question, or your prepared questions have already been answered, just decline to ask questions politely.

9 Focusing on the people you're meeting and talking with can help relieve your nervousness. Treat your interviewers like "real" people. Concentrate on getting to know them as individuals, instead of a faceless mass of interviewers. Try to "connect" with them. Focus on getting your message across to them, on how they are responding. Listen. Tune in to what issues or questions are important to your interviewers.

10 Don't put on a facade. Be as much "yourself" as you can be. It's important that

your interviewers know what they're getting and that you know that you'll work well together. Answer their questions honestly. Guarding your answers, or answering only what you think they want to hear will make you appear dishonest. Let your personality shine through. Try not to let nervousness block any signs of life. Your interviewers will remember someone who shows enthusiasm and warmth.

11 And now the rest is up to you whether you can convince your possible future employer that you are the one for the job. What you may still need is to wish you good luck in the interview.

(based on

http://www.liscareer.com/klob_interviews.htm)

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Task 6

Read the text again and complete the following sentences according to the information in the text.

- a. Before attending a job interview you need
- b. You should in order to prepare for an interview.
- c. You should as well as answer them.
- d. During the interview, avoid
- e. You need to the night before the interview.
- f. Keep questions about until you're actually offered the job.
- g. Professional dress in a job interview means
- h. Try not to
- i. Interviewers don't like candidates who

Task 7

Decide whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F) in the light of the information in the text above.

1. Whether you succeed or not in a job interview greatly depends on preparation before the interview.
2. You will not be trusted as a candidate if you give only the answers that you think would be expected by your interviewers.
3. In order to look professional, a candidate should always wear a navy blue suit.
4. It is not a good idea to start boasting about yourself in a job interview.
5. If you try to anticipate questions, your answers will certainly appear untrustworthy.

Task 8

Now write your own 5 False sentences about the text. Ask another student to correct them. Work in pairs.

Task 9

What do the words/expressions below mean in context?

1. debated (paragraph 1)
a) argued b) discussed c) selected
2. narrowed the pool (paragraph 1)
a) drained the water b) reduced the number of choices c) made the pool smaller

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3. picks (paragraph 1)
a) choices b) examples c) priorities
4. designed to (paragraph 3)
a) shaped b) devised c) intended
5. stamina (paragraph 6)
a) energy b) endurance c) flexibility
6. distract from (paragraph 7)
a) prevent from concentrating b) take a message to c) show off
7. outfits (paragraph 7)
a) appearance b) footwear c) clothes
8. compelled (paragraph 7)
a) inclined b) forced c) persuaded
9. relieve (paragraph 9)
a) maintain b) increase c) reduce
10. shine through (paragraph 10)
a) come out b) extinguish c) fade

Task 10

In the text you have just read, the author gives advice to prospective interviewees.

Example:

Your answers should not sound like they have been prepared in advance and should be delivered naturally and convincingly.

Can you find other examples of modal verbs in the text above? What do they express? (For further information on modal verbs, go to the Grammar Reference section, page 229.)

Task 11

*Rewrite each sentence using **should** or **shouldn't** to express advice, opinion or expectation.*

Example:

Don't ramble on when talking about an issue or you'll lose your audience's attention.

You should stick to the point. (advice)

1. If I were you, I'd answer all the questions briefly.

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2. I expect the Human Resources Department will soon contact me for an interview.
3. I don't think it is a good idea to cross your legs during the interview.
4. You'd better wear a suit and tie when you attend the interview.
5. You are wrong to prepare all the answers in advance.
6. It would be a good idea for you to try to anticipate some of the questions.
7. It is a well-known fact that employers ask questions based on the applicant's résumé.
8. To be successful in an interview, I believe you need to develop strategies to cope with unexpected situations.

Task 12

Choose the correct modal verb in each sentence.

1. Look at the interviewer's face. She can/might/must be satisfied.
2. This is impossible! It can't be/mustn't be/may not be the good answer.
3. Well done! You may be/must be/might be very pleased!
4. I've no idea where this department is. It could be/must be anywhere in the building!
5. I suppose I stand a chance, although a thin one. I might/can/must get the job after all.
6. I'm not sure. I must not/may not be able to get there on time, even if I take a taxi.

Task 13

*Rephrase the following statements using **so** and **such** in each of them. Make the necessary changes. For each statement there are two possibilities.*

Example:

The lecture was very boring, that's why I left.

The lecture was so boring that I left.

It was such a boring lecture that I left.

1. The CV was very confusing, that's why he threw it into the wastepaper basket.
2. His arguments were very unconvincing, that's why the board rejected his case.
3. The applicant's answers were too short, that's why the interviewer didn't seem impressed.
4. He seemed very communicative, that's why the interviewers liked him.
5. The interview was very tough for an inexperienced young person, that's why he failed to get the job.
6. The team was very hard-working, that's why everyone has been awarded a 10% rise.

Handling difficult questions in a job interview

Task 14

Sometimes interviewers give candidates a hard time by asking them difficult questions.

Below are 4 groups, lettered A, B, C and D, of 5 frequently asked questions. In groups of four, work out the best answer to each question in the group assigned to you by your teacher. When ready, share your answers with the class who will give you feedback.

A:

1. What are your salary requirements?
2. Why do you want to work as a/an?
3. What qualifications do you have that make you a good candidate for the job?
4. What is your idea of success?
5. What makes you better suited for this job than the other applicants I've already interviewed?

B:

1. What are your long-range goals? What do you want to be doing in five years' time?
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
3. How did your education prepare you for this job?
4. What is your impression of our firm?
5. Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?

C:

1. How can I be assured that you are able to make quick decisions?
2. Are you willing to work overtime?
3. What do you plan about your professional development?
4. What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?
5. How would you describe your personality?

D:

1. Why should we hire you for this position?
2. How does your experience relate to this job?
3. What are your most relevant academic accomplishments?
4. What are the main things you have learned from your work experience?
5. Have you taken any additional training courses?

Task 15

Interviewers have a checklist of topics to ask about, for example educational background, personality. Could you reconstruct such a list for the questions above?

Give a heading to each section. Identify the questions that go under each heading.

Example: Education – D 3, ...

Task 16

Can you suggest at least one other question for each of the headings you have found?

Task 17

You may be invited to ask questions about the position you are applying for.

Look at the job advertisement below. What questions would you ask the interviewer if you were interested in such a position?

National/international firm with amazing growth (250% in 2003) is seeking to fill the position of web-designer. Now!

Requirements: Must be assertive, independent, high energy, results oriented and possess a strong sense of urgency. Ability to work in a team.

Advanced knowledge of HTML, Flash, Dreamweaver and latest programming languages.

Fluency in English, other languages would be an advantage.

Unlimited career opportunity for people with a positive attitude and a drive to succeed.

We offer:

- Flexible hours (work from home)
- Healthcare benefits
- Complete training programme
- \$ 100,000 + per year benefit

If you have the desire to grow professionally, we want to talk to you!

Send your CV and cover letter to SIT-QUANTO IT, WORLDTRADE CENTRE, BUCHAREST, ROMANIA, P.O. Box 113, e-mail: recruit@esitquanto.ro

Task 18

Listen to part of an interview for the job in the advertisement above. As you listen fill in the table.

	Constance Duncan
Education	
Skills	
Qualifications	
Work Experience	
Personality	

Task 19

Listen again. What questions have you heard?

Task 20

Would you have answered the questions in a different way?

Task 21

Will Miss Duncan get the job? Give reasons for your answer.

Task 22

Listen to two extracts of job interviews. What is wrong in the way the interviewees answer the questions they were asked?

Using positive language

Sometimes you can say the same thing or make the same point in a variety of ways which might have a different effect or create a different impression on the listener. In an interview this may be of vital importance.

Task 23

Tick the expression which is more likely to create a favourable impression with the interviewer.

1. ☐ I appreciate job security.
☐ I want a nice, safe job.
2. ☐ I like watching TV every evening.
☐ I enjoy following world events in the media.
3. ☐ When confronted with something new, I prefer a flexible approach and to explore all avenues.
☐ I don't search for any particular ideas on how to do that.
4. ☐ I gained experience in dealing with telephone enquiries.
☐ I learned how to answer the phone.
5. ☐ I am keen to acquire new skills to apply to the job.
☐ I am always ready to do some training for the job.
6. ☐ I got pretty average grades most of the time.
☐ I was consistently successful at school.
7. ☐ I have used a variety of computer applications.
☐ I mainly use the computer for playing games.
8. ☐ My term project was rather difficult and boring.
☐ I did an in-depth investigation for my term project which was highly relevant to my career interests.
9. ☐ I am easily bored by office routine.
☐ I prefer to be challenged by different responsibilities and opportunities.
10. ☐ I want a lot of money.
☐ I expect that the reward would be commensurate with my qualifications.
11. ☐ My university career demanded independence and high academic standards.
☐ I didn't go to lectures but managed to pass most of the exams.
12. ☐ I 'm keen to start making a contribution to society as soon as I can.
☐ I need to start earning money really fast to pay off my debts.
13. ☐ My friends think I'm really weird.
☐ I have original and creative ideas.
14. ☐ I prefer to keep my options open for the time being.
☐ I haven't got a clue about what I want to do in future.
15. ☐ I am a good communicator and can create a congenial atmosphere.
☐ I find it difficult to stop talking but I like playing practical jokes on colleagues.
16. ☐ I enjoy a leadership role.
☐ I like telling other people what to do.
17. ☐ My last job was collecting and posting letters.
☐ I was responsible for organising the mail distribution system.
18. ☐ I'm sociable and approachable.
☐ I spend all my time chatting and laughing.
19. ☐ I prefer independent work.
☐ I dislike working with other people as part of a team.
20. ☐ My present job is really boring.
☐ I'm looking for greater responsibility than offered by my present job.

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21. ☐ I take a consultative approach.
☐ I don't like being held responsible and taking decisions alone.
22. ☐ I hope that I will get a nice office when I start work.
☐ I look forward to joining the team and meeting my new colleagues.

(based on <http://ec.hku.hk/epc>)

Task 24

How would you handle the situations below? Work in pairs. In note-form, jot down possible solutions in the right-hand column.

Difficult situations	How to handle?
1. Do I need to prepare some answers to possible questions before the interview?	1.
2. What should I do if I feel very nervous?	2.
3. If the question is unexpected and difficult to answer, what should I do?	3.
4. If I need more time to think, what should I do?	4.
5. If I could not catch the question or understand the intended meaning of the question, what should I do?	5.
6. If I felt answering the question would put me or a third party (example: a previous employer, colleague) in an unfavourable light, what should I say?	6.
7. If my answer is very long, how can I avoid losing my listener?	7.
8. If there is a conflict between my view and the interviewer's, what should I say?	8.
9. If there is an aggressive interviewer who interrupts my answer or shows that s/he is not convinced by my answer, what should I do?	9.
10. If I were asked how much starting pay I expected, what should I say?	10.

Interview simulation

Task 25

You are well prepared now to enact a full blown job interview. In the previous unit, you have designed your CV and cover letter for a job provided by the teacher.

Form groups of five persons: two interviewers and three interviewees. Draw lots to see who plays which role.

Step one

Interviewers:

1. Get together and work out the profile of the successful candidate. Think in terms of: “*we want somebody who is/has done, etc ...*”.
2. Agree on four or five questions to ask the interviewees (see Task 14).

Time: 15 minutes

Interviewees:

1. Revise possible answers to questions (see Task 14).
2. Prepare one or two questions about the company you want a job with to ask your interviewers.

Time: 15 minutes

Step two

Act out the interview.

Interviewers are invited into the room, one at a time, by one of the interviewees.

Step three

The two interviewers decide together who is the successful candidate. Give reasons to support both your choice and your decision against the other candidates.

Time: 10 minutes.

Interviewees get together and evaluate the way interviewers did their job in the light of the suggestions for interviewers made in the *Role Quiz* (Task 2).

Time: 10 minutes

Step four

A spokesperson for each panel of interviewers makes their decision known to the class and supports it with arguments.

A spokesperson for each group of interviewees gives the class their evaluation of the job done by the respective panel of interviewers (example: friendly/aggressive, eye contact, questioning strategy) with suggestions for improvement.

Checklist

Before you attend the interview make sure:

- you re-read your CV/resume and letter of application;
- you are your presentable self (example: dress and appearance);
- you research the company;
- you anticipate the interview situation; *i.e. refocus your goals and strengths around the job description, develop answers to anticipated questions and formulate a number of questions you would like to ask the interviewer.*

During the interview:

- stress your accomplishments, training, experience, skills and personal qualities relevant to the job you are applying for;
- mind the language you are using (for instance, the use of dynamic verbs like *develop*, *improve* can add value to your answers);
- back up your claims with evidence (example: quantitative data);
- speak clearly, distinctly and with confidence;
- watch your body-language (e.g. eye-contact) and posture;

Personal qualities:

- professionally competent;
- well-trained;
- hard-working;
- reliable;
- ambitious;
- well-organised;
- resourceful;
- energetic;

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- enthusiastic;
- dynamic;
- a good communicator;
- self-motivated;
- goal-oriented;
- tactful;
- courteous;
- self-confident;

After the interview:

- thank the interviewer for his/her time and consideration;
- write a letter thanking the employer for the interview, expressing interest in the company and restating briefly why you think you can make a good choice for the job.