



## Skills 360 – Interview Tips 1: Preparing for an Interview

### Discussion Questions

1. How do you usually introduce yourself in a job interview?
2. What kinds of interview questions do you fear the most?
3. How do you typically answer a question about your biggest weakness?

### Vocabulary

**To anticipate:** to expect that something will happen; "Economists are anticipating an economic slowdown as a result of the political problems."

**To land something:** to get something you have been trying to get, such as a job or opportunity; "After college, I was hoping to land a job in Europe, but my wife wanted to stay in the U.S."

**Territory:** subjects or topics; "Okay everyone, we have a lot of territory to cover in this meeting so let's get started."

**Curveball:** something unexpected that causes confusion or problems; "Every time we make a plan, Brian throws us a curveball and announces some big change he wants to make."

**To script:** to write out something that you will say; "If you're feeling nervous about your speech, why don't you script it and practice in the mirror?"

**Authentic:** real, genuine, or true to one's spirit or character; "Ryan is such a good salesperson because he knows how to be authentic, which makes customers trust him."

**To throw someone:** to make someone confused or surprised with something unexpected; "The presentation was going great, until a really tough question from a participant totally threw me."

**To fumble:** to say something awkwardly or ineffectively; "If you get a tough question, instead of fumbling for the right words, take a minute to think about your answer."

**First impressions:** the initial mental image or opinion that we form when we meet someone for the first time; "My first impressions of Sian weren't so great, but over time I've come to really respect her."

**Succinct:** short and clear, for writing or speech; "Our current mission statement is about 70 words long, and we'd like help making something more clear and succinct."

**To ramble on:** to talk for a long time in a confusing way; "If Charlie rambles on again like he did last meeting, I'm sure we won't end on time."

**Passion:** strong excitement or enthusiasm for something; "Sure, Tina has a real passion for design, but she can't back it up with talent or skills."

**To master:** to become very good at something through practice; "I realize the new accounting software takes some time to learn, but I'm sure you'll master it after three months."

**Laundry list:** a long list of items; "I knew that staff had a few complaints, but I didn't expect them to come to the meeting with a laundry list of problems."

**To set someone apart:** to make someone special or different from others; "All the candidates are really qualified, but I think Sally's personality and leadership skills help set her apart."

**To tackle:** to try to deal with or solve a problem; "We need to get together and talk about how we're going to tackle this issue of safety in our overseas factories."

**Demanding:** difficult or requiring a lot of time and energy; "Some people like business travel, but with three young kids at home, I find it too demanding."

**Bound to face:** certain to have to deal with; "Costs have been rising for years, so we were bound to face financial difficulties at some point."

**To dread:** to feel very worried about something that will or might happen; "With so much extra work on our team, I really dread tax season."

**Perfectionist:** a person who always wants things done perfectly; "It's really hard having a perfectionist for a manager, because I always feel like I'm not good enough."

**To fly:** to be accepted, for an idea, plan, or opinion; "Sure, I'd love to renovate the office, but given our tough financial situation, that's not going to fly with the boss."

**To struggle with:** to try hard or do something very difficult; "I like the face to face part of sales, but I kind of struggle with the paperwork side of things."

**Toastmasters:** a global club dedicated to promoting communication, public speaking, and leadership; "Joining Toastmasters has really improved my confidence in groups and meeting new people."

**To delegate:** to assign some of your work duties or responsibilities to another person; "Rather than working 60 hour weeks, you need to learn to delegate more to your staff."

**Blow up:** to cause problems or destroy something; "Two disappointing quarters in sales has sort of blown up our plans to open an office in Madrid."

## Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at how to prepare for an interview in English.

When I say "prepare," I'm not talking about making an appointment at the hair salon or picking out a clean shirt. I'm talking about doing some research, [anticipating](#) what you'll be asked, and practicing how to respond. Yeah, I know I'm always going on about preparation, but this time it's not just a suggestion, it's essential. If you do it right, you'll be able to head into the interview feeling relaxed and confident. And that will increase your chances of [landing](#) the job.

Now here's the thing: most interviews cover the same basic [territory](#). Sure, you might get a couple of [curveballs](#), but for the most part you can predict what questions you'll be asked. And that means you can plan your answers. I don't mean [script](#) your answers. It's pretty tough to appear [authentic](#) and natural while delivering a memorized response. But you can outline your answers and practice your delivery.

So how do we go about doing that? Well, let's start by talking about how to introduce yourself in an interview in English. The old "tell me about yourself" question. It's amazing how many people are [thrown](#) by this question, or [fumble](#) through an awkward response as they wait for the *real* interview questions. But [first impressions](#) are important! And you need a good answer for "tell me about yourself."

My advice is to keep it [succinct](#), instead of [rambling on](#). Keep it professional, but show [passion](#). And keep it positive. And if you need a formula, try present-past-future. How does that work? Check out this example. "I'm currently a marketing manager with a medium-sized software firm. Since I was young, I've loved writing and design and all things tech. So in university marketing felt like the perfect fit, and I went straight from college to IBM, where I worked for five years. I'm happy with what I've accomplished, but I'm really looking for a new challenge now, and I love what you guys are doing." In that example you heard me mention my current position, my educational and work background, and the change I want in the future.

If you [master](#) your "tell me about yourself" pitch, you can practice responding to the next most common English interview question: "what are your strengths?" First, a don't: don't give them a [laundry list](#) of random skills. Like "Well, I'm good at communication, organizing, teamwork, and I take the initiative all the time." That's totally forgettable.

Instead, choose two or three important strengths that relate *directly* to the position you're applying for. Choose ones that will [set you apart](#) from others. And give some evidence. So if you're applying for a marketing manager position, you might say: "People tell me that I'm a creative manager. I can motivate a team and make people

feel appreciated. For example, our team recently **tackled** a tough project for a really **demanding** client...”

And did you notice that I said “People tell me that I’m a creative manager?” It’s not just *your* opinion! You’re telling them that other people think so too. Now, I wouldn’t necessarily take the same approach to the next type of question you’re **bound to face**, and which you probably **dread** answering: the “*what are your weaknesses*” question.

Yes, you’re sure to get this question in a job interview, so you’d better be ready for it. Three bits of advice: first, don’t choose something that’s actually a strength. I’m talking about the old “well, sometimes I’m too much of a **perfectionist**.” They’ve heard that before. It doesn’t **fly** anymore. Secondly, choose something that isn’t central to the position you’re applying for. Thirdly, talk about how you’ve worked to improve this weakness.

Let’s say you’re applying for a marketing manager position and you’re asked about a weakness. You might try something like this: “In the past, I’ve **struggled with** public speaking. Giving presentations to large groups of people, at a conference for example, is a real challenge. That said, I’ve joined **Toastmasters** and I’ve been working hard to develop more confidence with this.”

Other good weaknesses to talk about? Being patient when working on a team, **delegating** responsibility, giving feedback, or analyzing data. If one of those isn’t *central* to the role, it could be a good one to mention.

All right, how about a quick recap of these tips? First, practice a good response to tell me about yourself that’s professional, passionate, positive, and succinct. Second, talk about strengths that are related to the job and set you apart from others. And third, talk about a weakness that doesn’t **blow up** your chances of getting the position and that you’ve worked to improve.

That’s all for today. If you’d like to test yourself on what we’ve just covered, have a look at the BusinessEnglishPod.com website. There you’ll find a quiz about today’s show as well as a PDF transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

## Review

1. Which of the following is true about preparation before a job interview? [Select all that apply]
  - A It is suggested, but not essential.
  - B It may negatively influence how natural you appear.
  - C It will increase your confidence.
  - D It involves some research.
2. Which of the following are recommended ways of preparing for a job interview? [Select all that apply]
  - A Outline answers to common questions.
  - B Write out your responses.
  - C Make an appointment at the hair salon.
  - D Practice your delivery.
3. Which of the following should you do when faced with the question "tell me about yourself?" [Select all that apply]
  - A Avoid talking about the past.
  - B Keep your answer succinct.
  - C Show professionalism and passion.
  - D Stay positive.
  - E Focus your answer on the future.
  - F Avoid mentioning your current position.
4. Which of the following demonstrates an effective beginning to a response about your strengths? [Select all that apply]

I've got many strengths, including being good with numbers, I can write well, I'm energetic, I work hard. I'm also...

  - A I am a skilled communicator and mediator. For instance...
  - B Many people have told me that I'm a good problem solver. Just to give a recent example...
  - C Well, I don't like to boast, but there are so many things I'm good at. For example...
5. Which of the following should you NOT do in response to "what is your weakness?"
  - A Choose a real weakness instead of mentioning a strength.
  - B Talk about how you've improved.
  - C Mention a weakness that isn't central to the position you're applying for.
  - D Talk about what other people have told you is a weakness.

6. Which of the following would be the best choice of weakness to discuss when applying for a position as a programmer with a software company?
- A Attention to detail.
  - B Working on a team.
  - C Delegating responsibility.
  - D Quick learning ability.

## Review Answers

1. Which of the following is true about preparation before a job interview?  
**C It will increase your confidence.**  
**D It involves some research.**
2. Which of the following are recommended ways of preparing for a job interview?  
**A Outline answers to common questions.**  
**D Practice your delivery.**
3. Which of the following should you do when faced with the question “tell me about yourself?” [Select all that apply]  
**B Keep your answer succinct**  
**C Show professionalism and passion**  
**D Stay positive**
4. Which of the following demonstrates an effective response to a question about your strengths?  
**B I am a skilled communicator and mediator. For instance...**  
**C Many people have told me that I’m a good problem solver. Just to give a recent example...**
5. Which of the following should you NOT do in response to “what is your weakness?”  
**D Talk about what other people have told you is a weakness.**
6. Which of the following would be the best choice of weakness to discuss when applying for a position as a programmer with a software company?  
**C Delegating responsibility.**