



English for
Job Interviews

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ENGLISH FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

STUDENT WORKBOOK

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ENGLISH FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

Part 1

First Impressions & Common Questions

Before the Day of The Interview

- Find out as much as you can about the company. You can do this by looking online and checking their social media. The same for the post you are applying for – try to find out as much as you can before you go to the interview so that you know what will be expected of you and you can start thinking of how you can tailor your abilities to those required for the position.
- It is useful to know how long the company has been established, what it does, how many staff work there, and the turnover of the company in some cases, plus company ethics on internal promotion etc..
- Go to the company to see how to get there, how long it takes to get there so you can plan how much time you need to arrive in time, and so that you can see if it is an area, building etc. That you would like to work in. While you are there, you may also be able to see some of the existing staff coming in and out which could give you a good indication of how to dress for the interview.
- Plan your interview clothes. You should always be dressed more smartly than you would normally be. If you haven't had an interview for a long time and you have an interview suit, make sure it is clean and ironed and that it fits you well! As first impressions count for so much, at least you can look good which will make you feel better about yourself and give you extra confidence.
- Practice commonly asked interview questions and answers. How would you answer in your own language? This is your opportunity to practice selling yourself. Practice out loud and preferably with a friend or teacher to make sure your answers are in good English.
- Make sure you plan at least one hour for the interview plus travelling time when asking for time off work!
- Go to bed early and get a good night's sleep.

Questions

1. How do you prepare for an interview?
2. Are any of the things on the list above different from what you would normally do?

How to Dress for the Interview

There are some main points to remember. For a white collar job (in an office) it is important that you dress soberly and professionally.

FOR MEN:

- A dark suit, either dark blue or dark grey normally, but black is also becoming more acceptable.
- A light shirt, either white or a pale colour (preferably not white with black otherwise you run the risk of looking like a waiter!).
- A plain tie is usually best, or with a slight pattern to it, but no Donald Duck ties!
- Dark shoes and dark socks, make sure the shoes are clean and shining. If you wear new shoes you may find that they hurt your feet during the interview and cause you to concentrate more on your feet than on the interview.
- Make sure if you have any tattoos that they are covered, and try to limit jewellery to a watch and a ring.

FOR WOMEN:

- A suit is best, and preferably a skirt suit, unless you look particularly good in trousers. The suit should match (jacket and skirt) and a plain blouse should be worn with it. NOTE: many British companies still like their women to wear skirts in the office, and the skirt hem should cover the knee when sitting.
- Although for British companies it is becoming acceptable to wear coloured tights, it is advisable to wear one-coloured, not patterned, and if you are being interviewed at an American company, you should wear skin-coloured or beige tights – even in summer.
- Shoes should not be too high or too low and should preferably match your bag and/or your suit.
- Hair should be tied back or very well groomed, and it's best to wear a little make-up and not too much jewellery.
- Dresses can be worn to interviews, but the style should be as classic as possible, well cut and should cover the knee.

Don't forget that no perfume or aftershave is better than too much!

Questions

3. How would you expect candidates for the following jobs to dress: office assistant, shop assistant, salesman/woman, nanny, bartender, office manager. Why?
4. Is the advice in the article above appropriate for your country?

Commonly Asked Questions

- *Tell me about yourself.*

Don't launch into a long diatribe about yourself! Think of pertinent points - that you enjoy being with people, that you enjoy a challenge, that you love researching things, resolving problems (give a couple of examples) perhaps a sport which you enjoy, try to steer clear of things like "I love being with my children" especially if you are a woman, or anything very personal.

- *Why do you want this job?*

Try to answer, matching your capabilities to the good points of the post.

- *What do you know about the company?*

This is a question which applicants for a job often cannot answer very well. Someone who is prepared with an answer will make a much better impression than someone who has no idea, however, keep your answer as brief and complimentary to the company as possible.

- *How would your best friend describe you? What would they say your weak points are, and what would they say your strengths are?*

This seems like a really easy question, and yet it isn't. Try to think about your faults, list them and then try to turn them into positive things. List your good points and then try to pick the ones which are really like you – be honest, don't go over the top, but pick two or three good points and also an example of them. It can be more difficult than you think to choose suitable attributes – try to make them fit the job skills you are applying for.

- *What makes you think you are the right candidate for the job?*

This can be a difficult question to answer – consider all your attributes, your previous experience – is it relevant to the post? Try not to repeat what you have already said.

- *Why are you leaving your current job?*

Whatever you say, don't be derogatory about your current employer. Something like "I don't feel challenged enough at the moment" may be perfect. It also depends on the job you are applying for!

- *Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?*

This is also difficult to answer, and will depend on the type of job you have applied for. You risk losing the job if you seem too ambitious, however, you may equally lose the job if you don't appear ambitious enough.

- *What would you do if..?*

Take your time and think carefully. Don't forget to use the correct grammatical construction e.g. "I think I would ask the client to take a seat in an office and then I would call the manager to ask for his/her opinion on how to proceed."

Questions

5. Can you think of the most common questions you are asked in interview situations? Write them below:

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Part 2

Difficult Questions

How to Stand Out

If an interviewer asks you about your qualities, and everyone says the same things, the interviewer will find it difficult to choose between the candidates. You need to stand out! So let's start:

Write 10 good points about yourself here:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____

Write 5 bad points about yourself here:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Write the times when you showed your good qualities here:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____

Change the bad things about yourself into good things and write them here:
(see notes below if you don't know how to start)

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

These examples could be the difference between getting a job, and not getting it!

Questions to Ask, and Questions to Avoid

Write 8 questions you could ask in a first interview here:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____

Write 8 questions you should NOT ask in a first interview here:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____

Some Pointers on Body Language and Interview Techniques

Body language

Someone who is slouching in their chair is not giving a positive signal to the interviewer – they are likely bored and possibly quite self-opinionated.

Someone who is sitting with both his arms and legs crossed is unwilling to give any information away about themselves, and either does not have a great deal of self-esteem, or is likely to be a very defensive and probably a reactionary person.

Someone who has one arm over the back of his chair is open, however, is not very serious and does not listen well. He is probably over reacting as he has decided he should look as natural as possible.

Someone who has their hands folded in their lap and both feet on the floor is the person who will take in most if they are in an interview situation, and who will make the best impression. This posture is one of the most relaxed and receptive.

The handshake

A good handshake is essential. It can make or break an interview.

A good handshake is firm but not too hard, and lasts roughly 20 seconds. You should shake hands on meeting and on leaving.

Facial expressions

If your eyes are alert and bright, and look directly into the interviewer's eyes, you will be much more effective than if you do not make eye contact or your eyes are always downcast.

Staring is not considered polite by British people, so you need to remember to blink and look away from the interviewer from time to time! The eyes are a gateway to the soul, you need to project yourself as confident and capable without being confrontational.

Smiling is an essential tool in an interview situation, and it is worth practicing smiling beforehand. As an interview can be a very stressful situation, it is worth noting that a smile can easily become a grimace! Practice smiling with the other students.

Attention!

Thinking positively is essential. Your belief in your own capabilities is easily transmitted to an interviewer, if you really do believe in yourself. Otherwise it can be very difficult to achieve this impression.

Turning Our Bad Points into Good Points

“I find it difficult to concentrate on more than one job at a time.”

A solution could be: I try to dedicate myself fully to the job in hand, to make sure it is done to the best of my ability.

“I don’t like taking orders from people.”

A solution could be: I am able to organise my work and prioritise well without needing to be told.

“I like talking to people too much, I am a chatterbox!”

A solution could be: I am a good communicator, I find that people will automatically refer to me for advice and help.

“I don’t like hard work!”

A solution could be: I am good at delegating work and cutting through red tape to make sure the minimum amount of time and energy is used to finish a project.

“I don’t like working with people.”

A solution could be: I prefer to work alone so that I can concentrate more fully on the work I need to do.

“I don’t like working alone.”

A solution could be: I am a good team player!

“I find it difficult to meet deadlines.”

A solution could be: I prefer working at my own pace to make sure I don’t miss any important parts of the job.

What to Ask and What Not to Ask in an Interview

Things which should NOT be asked at the first interview:

- How much is the pay?
- How many holidays would I get?
- Do I get sick pay?
- Would I get a company car/telephone/credit card?
- How long is the maternity/paternity leave?
- When do I start?

Things which CAN be asked at the first interview:

- When are you looking to have someone start?
- What are the hours of the job?
- Are those hours Monday to Friday, or are staff expected to work Saturdays?
- Is this a full time position?
- Is this a permanent job?
- May I see where I would be working if I were successful?
- Who would I be working for?
- Do you offer any training, and how long is it for?
- Is there a career path?

TALKING ABOUT MONEY SHOULD BE AVOIDED UNTIL THE SECOND INTERVIEW

If money is asked about in the first interview, the interviewee is interested mainly in the money, which is not necessarily the main point in the employer's eyes.

If a person is suitable for the job and shows sufficient interest in their surroundings and what the job entails, the salary may well be influenced by these factors. However if a candidate speaks mainly about money, it shows that this is their main concern, and that they are probably not the right person for the job since money is their only real motivation.



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ENGLISH FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

Part 3

Fillers & Unprepared Questions

Time Fillers

Knowing the type of questions an interviewer may ask and knowing your CV is essential to making a good impression.

This means practising the answers to probable questions as much as possible is invaluable.

However, what if an interviewer asks something you haven't prepared for? You need to know some time fillers.

For example: *"That's a good question, I'll have to think about it for a second..."* or *"I'm sorry, could you repeat the question, please?"*

Exercise 1

Write below any time fillers you or the other students have suggested:

Exercise 2: Difficult Questions

Answer the following questions:

1. Why are you leaving your current position?

2. Do you think it is essential to have guided training?

3. Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?

4. If you were faced with an emergency situation and your boss was not available (for example, all the computers crashed and you needed information from the computer for the clients in front of you), what would you do?

5. What would you do if you were the last person to leave the building and you had forgotten to take the key with you – everyone else has gone home and you are left alone in an empty building?

Difficult Questions: Example Answers

Well, there are a lot of reasons, personal ones and professional ones. The main reason, though, is that I feel I cannot grow anymore in my job and I'm looking for a new challenge.

It would be great to have some new training for example, a new way of approaching problems...

Erm, well, guided training. No, I suppose that training does not have to be guided necessarily, but I do think that some training at the start would be useful, just to make sure that the job was being done the way the company wanted it to be done.

I'm not sure, I'd have to be in that situation to be able to give you an honest reply but, I think I would...

Hum, yes, well, if that situation happened, I don't know, I don't think it would happen because I take a lot of care when I am left in charge of important things like locking up... I think I would telephone my boss, or the relevant key-holder.

Note

Sometimes just repeating the question will give you time to think, while also letting the interviewer know that you have understood and are really thinking about the question.

Noises such as "um" "er" "well" "hum" and "good question" give extra thinking time too.

ENGLISH FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

Part 4

Recruitment Agencies

Introduction

In many cases, a job agency will advertise one job when they actually have many jobs available which are very similar.

It is a good idea to write your covering letter to explain more generally what you are looking for, rather than what the agency is advertising. This is also the case with your CV.

Questions

1. Have you ever used a job agency before?
2. Do you know what to expect from an agency?

Reading Exercise

Agencies

You may find that there is an agency which specialises in the area of work you want. This is more likely to give you the results you want than a general agency, and will ask you questions which are much more pertinent to the job you are looking for than a general agency.

You should be interviewed by a smart looking person, away from the hustle and bustle of the main office. If this is not the case, you should consider how much attention the agent is paying to you, and how seriously they are taking their job.

If you are kept waiting for more than 20 minutes without a very good reason, consider carefully whether this is the agency for you.

You can use as many agencies as you wish, and you don't have to tell the agency that you are with other agencies too. If they do ask you or they tell you that you may not see other agencies, tell them politely that you are looking for a job, and the first agency which comes up with what you are looking for will be the agency you will use in the future, but for now you need a lot of exposure and as many opportunities as possible.

Remember though, that it is often worthwhile to work with only one agency to start with, so that you avoid having your CV sent 6 times to the same job, which may have a negative effect, and also, you will reduce the number of telephone calls you have to answer with keen agents telling you about jobs you are not really interested in.

Timing

An interview in an agency is more likely to be flexible than a company interview, so you can decide on times which are more suitable for you to fit in with your working day.

Arriving in time is essential, and being smart and prepared is also a prerequisite. You should allow at least 1 hour for the interview. Make sure you tell the agent the times and days you are available for interview, and also when they may telephone you.

Do not leave a work telephone number unless the people where you work know you are looking for another job, or you have given in your notice.

Objective

Having seen an advertisement from any one particular agency, we assume that that job exists. Quite possibly, however, this is not the case.

Recruitment agents will invariably try to convince candidates to go for interviews for which they are unsuitable, therefore it is worth knowing exactly what type of job you are looking for beforehand.

Money

Recruitment agencies are paid when they match a company and a candidate successfully. The Agency is paid by the company, not the candidate.

This means that some agencies will not be particularly scrupulous when they try to match candidates and companies. They will have permanent and temporary and part time and full time work on their books - decide before going to the agency what you will settle for.

We saw before that salary should not be spoken about in a first interview. This is not the case at an agency interview.

It is good to have a salary range for the agency to work with, but make sure that the amount you give as your lowest salary is slightly higher than you need, as invariably you will be put forward for jobs which have a lower salary.

Honesty

You can be much more direct and honest in an agency interview than in a company interview. If you don't like working with other people and are much more of a loner, you may say so, as the agent will then try to word your 'failings' in a better light, and they have lots of experience in doing so.

If you only want to work in a particular field, be explicit about it, otherwise you may find yourself with interviews for things you have no interest in.

CV

Quite often your CV will be re-written or changed slightly by the agency. Make sure you know if this is the case, and ask for a copy of the CV if the agency gets you an interview. You need to know what the company interviewer knows about you!

Silence

In some cases, you will not hear from the agency for what seems like an eternity. This can be for several reasons.

- The type of job you are looking for is very specific and the agency has nothing available for you at the moment.
- The salary you have asked for is too high for the jobs that the agency has available.
- You did not come across well at interview and they do not want to use you unless it is as a last resort.

Ring the agency after a couple of weeks to find out why. They will usually be fairly truthful.

Interview

You will probably find that you are telephoned about many different vacancies. You will be told that you have an interview on such a day and at such a time – if you are not available, the job description is not what you are looking for, or the salary is not enough (you can ask the agent about the salary), you are not obliged to go to the interview, and indeed may be wasting your time.

If you haven't had many interviews and are currently unemployed, it is worth going just for the experience.

The agent will give you the name of the interviewer, the company, the address, and should be able to give you clear instructions on how to get there, and possibly how long it will take. They will give you the job title, a description of the job and the salary range.

If you want to, you can ask how many other candidates the agency has put forward, to give you an idea of the competition.

Remember though, that unless the company is working with only one agency, it is possible that the 10 candidates your agency is putting forward can be multiplied by 10!

Post Interview

Contact the agency and tell them what you thought about the job. If there were any doubts you had, they may be able to clarify them for you, or after they speak to the company about you.

Notice

Never give in your notice at work until you have a signed copy of the contract for the new job in your hands. Do not take an agent's word that the job is yours until you have the contract.

Accept no excuses - they can fax you a copy if it is an urgent start. The only exception to this is if you have lots of money and you don't need to work for another 6-12 months!

Starting the new job

A phone call to say thank you to the agent who found you the job is really important as the agent should be the first person you contact when you need another job.

If you were really impressed with the service, send a small bunch of flowers. This will ensure you get tip top service next time round!

Questions

3. Is this what you expected?
4. Is the situation the same in your country?

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Part 5

Role Plays

Instructions

Your teacher will give you a role-play card.

Use the observation sheets on the following pages to make notes and score the simulated interview.

Give the **interviewee** a mark between 1 and 10, to represent if you would call them back for a second interview or not.

Note for Self-Study Students

If you are using this workbook for self-study, you can ask a friend or other student to help with the role-plays.

The description cards are at the end of the teacher book. You can download the teacher book from www.blog.tjtaylor.net/job-interviews

OBSERVATION SHEET

Student name: _____

Dress

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Handshake

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Posture

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Eye Contact

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Smile

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Use of English

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Grammatical Mistakes

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Overall Impression

OBSERVATION SHEET

Student name: _____

Dress

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Handshake

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Posture

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Eye Contact

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Smile

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Use of English

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

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Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Posture

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Eye Contact

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Smile

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Use of English

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Grammatical Mistakes

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Overall Impression

OBSERVATION SHEET

Student name: _____

Dress

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Handshake

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Posture

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Eye Contact

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Smile

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Use of English

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Grammatical Mistakes

Comments: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Overall Impression

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www.blog.tjtaylor.net

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