

## **TALKING ABOUT YOUR JOB**

When talking about your job it might help to take into account some of the answers you could be asked.

For example:

1. What do you work as?  
I work as.... at/in....
2. What do your responsibilities include?  
I'm responsible for...
3. What sort of problems do you deal with on a day-to-day basis?
4. What else does your job involve?  
Well, I have to...
5. Do you have to produce any reports?
6. Do you ever attend meetings?
7. When do you normally work? Do you ever do shift-work?
8. Do you like what you do? What would you change?

## **Job Interview Questions and Answers**

Congratulations! You have applied for a job and now you are getting ready for that important job interview. Your English is excellent and you are looking forward to making a good impression on your future (hopefully) boss. Now, you need to make sure that you also have the right type of English for that job interview.

The job interview in English contains specific questions and appropriate answers. It also requires certain flexibility in your usage of tenses.

When you walk in the room the very first impression you make on the interviewer can have a great influence on the rest of the interview. It is important that you introduce yourself, shake hands, and are friendly. The first question is often a "breaking the ice" (establish a rapport) type of question. Don't be surprised if the interviewer asks you something like:

- How are you today?
- Did you have any trouble finding us?
- What do you think of the weather lately?

Don't be surprised by the friendly tone. The interviewer wants to put you at ease (help you relax). Answer the question without going into too much detail. The language you use should be simple but polite, for example;

How are you today?

### **GOOD**

I'm fine thank you, and you?

I'm well thank you.

**BAD**

So, so

OK

Not so well

**What is most important?**

Talking about your experience and credentials (qualifications) is the most important part of any job interview. Your qualifications include your education from High School on and any special training you may have done in the past. Your experience is any work that you have done that is directly or indirectly related to the job you are applying for.

**Education**

Remember that your education took place in the past. Therefore you need to use the past tenses, for example:

I attended the University of Helsinki from 1987 to 1993.  
I graduated with a degree in agricultural planning.

If you are currently a student you should use the following present tenses:

I am currently studying at the University of New York and will graduate with a degree in Economics in the spring.

Remember to include any training you may have had when talking about your education. This includes any computer training, correspondence courses, etc. Make sure to mention your English studies. This is very important as English is not your first language and the employer may be concerned about this fact. Assure the employer that you are continuing to improve your English skills by any courses you may be taking, or by saying that you study a certain number of hours a week to improve your skills.

**Experience and Qualifications**

Work experience is by far the most important topic of any job interview (at least in the United States and Britain). Therefore, it is important to explain what experience you have in detail. Generally, employers want to know exactly what you did and how well you accomplished your tasks. This is not the time to be modest. Be confident, and talk freely about your accomplishments in past employment.

*The tenses you should use are the following:*

When talking about current employment be careful to use the present perfect or present perfect continuous. This signals that you are still performing these tasks at your current job, for example:

Smith and Co. have employed me for the last 3 years as a salesperson.  
I have been creating customer contacts for 6 months.

When talking about past employers use the past tenses to signal that you are no longer working for that company, for example:

I was employed by Jackson's from 1989 to 1992 as a clerk.

I worked as a receptionist at the Ritz while I was living in New York.

### Talking about Responsibilities

Most importantly, you will need to demonstrate your qualifications and skills, which are required for the job you are applying for. The job skills that you have acquired in the past may not have been for the same exact job. Therefore, it is important to show how the capabilities you do have relate to the job you are applying for.

I remember a wonderful example of adapting skills to fit the job desired. I had a student from Moscow who had worked as the manager of an important theatre in Moscow. Unfortunately, he had to start from the beginning in New York and therefore wanted to get a job as a rodent exterminator (someone who kills rats!). When asked what kind of experience he had, he replied that, as the manager of the theatre, he had had to make sure that the theatre was always rodent free and was therefore capable of doing the job well! This is a fantastic example of the type of adaptability most employers in the United States are looking for.

## Essential Job Interview Tips and Tricks II

Now, it's time to focus on some of the common questions that are asked during the interview and appropriate responses to these questions.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about yourself.

**Candidate:** I was born and raised in Milan, Italy. I attended the University of Milan and received my master's degree in Economics. I have worked for 12 years as a financial consultant in Milan for various companies including Rossi Consultants, Quasar Insurance and Sardi and Sons. I enjoy playing tennis in my free time and learning languages.

**Candidate:** I've just graduated from the University of Singapore with a degree in Computers. During the summers, I worked as a systems administrator for a small company to help pay for my education.

**Comment:** *This question is meant as an introduction. Do not focus too specifically on any one area. The above question will often be used to help the interviewer choose what h/she would like to ask next. While it is important to give an overall impression of who you are, make sure to concentrate on work related experience. Work related experience should **always** be the central focus of any interview (work experience is more important than education in most English speaking countries).*

**Interviewer:** What type of position are you looking for?

**Candidate:** I'm interested in an entry level (beginning) position.

**Candidate:** I'm looking for a position in which I can utilize my experience.

**Candidate:** I would like any position for which I qualify.

**Comment:** *You should be willing to take an entry level position in an English speaking company as most of these companies expect non-nationals to begin with such a position. In the United States, most companies provide many opportunities for growth, so don't be afraid to start from the beginning!*

**Interviewer:** Are you interested in a full-time or part-time position?

**Candidate:** I am more interested in a full-time position. However, I would also consider a part-time position.

***Comment:** Make sure to leave open as many possibilities as possible. Say you are willing to take any job, once the job has been offered you can always refuse if the job does not appeal (not interest) to you.*

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about your responsibilities at your last job?

**Candidate:** I advised customers on financial matters. After I consulted the customer, I completed a customer inquiry form and catalogued the information in our database. I then collaborated with colleagues to prepare the best possible package for the client. The clients were then presented with a summarized report on their financial activities that I formulated on a quarterly basis.

***Comment:** Notice the amount of detail necessary when you are talking about your experience. One of the most common mistakes made by foreigners when discussing their former employment is to speak too generally. The employer wants to know exactly what you did and how you did it; the more detail you can give the more the interviewer knows that you understand the type of work. Remember to vary your vocabulary when talking about your responsibilities. Also, do not begin every sentence with "I". Use the passive voice, or an introductory clause to help you add variety to your presentation*

**Interviewer:** What is your greatest strength?

**Candidate:** I work well under pressure. When there is a deadline (a time by which the work must be finished), I can focus on the task at hand (current project) and structure my work schedule well. I remember one week when I had to get 6 new customer reports out by Friday at 5. I finished all the reports ahead of time without having to work overtime.

**Candidate:** I am an excellent communicator. People trust me and come to me for advice. One afternoon, my colleague was involved with a troublesome (difficult) customer who felt he was not being served well. I made the customer a cup of coffee and invited both my colleague and the client to my desk where we solved the problem together.

**Candidate:** I am a trouble shooter. When there was a problem at my last job, the manager would always ask me to solve it. Last summer, the LAN server at work crashed. The manager was desperate and called me in (requested my help) to get the LAN back online. After taking a look at the daily backup, I detected the problem and the LAN was up and running (working) within the hour.

***Comment:** This is not the time to be modest! Be confident and **always** give examples. Examples show that you are not only repeating words you have learned, but actually do possess that strength.*

**Interviewer:** What is your greatest weakness?

**Candidate:** I am overzealous (work too hard) and become nervous when my co-workers are not pulling their weight (doing their job). However, I am aware of this problem, and before I say anything to anyone, I ask myself why the colleague is having difficulties.

**Candidate:** I tend to spend too much time making sure the customer is satisfied. However, I began setting time-limits for myself If I noticed this happening.

**Comment:** *This is a difficult question. You need to mention a weakness that is actually a strength. Make sure that you always mention how you try to improve the weakness.*

**Interviewer:**Why do you want to work for Smith and Sons?

**Candidate:** After following your firms progress for the last 3 years, I am convinced that Smith and Sons are becoming one of the market leaders and I would like to be part of the team.

**Candidate:** I am impressed by the quality of your products. I am sure that I would be a convincing salesman because I truly believe that the Atomizer is the best product on the market today.

**Comment:** Prepare yourself for this question by becoming informed about the company. The more detail you can give, the better you show the interviewer that you understand the company.

**Interviewer:** When can you begin?

**Candidate:** Immediately.

**Candidate:** As soon as you would like me to begin.

**Comment:** *Show your willingness to work!*

The above questions represent some of the most basic questions asked on any job interview in English. Probably the most important aspect of interviewing in English is giving detail. As a speaker of English as a second language, you might be shy about saying complicated things. However, this is absolutely necessary as the employer is looking for an employee who knows his or her job. If you provide detail, the interviewer will know that you feel comfortable in that job. Don't worry about making mistakes in English. It is much better to make simple grammar mistakes and provide detailed information about your experience than to say grammatically perfect sentences without any real content.

I hope these features help you to improve your job interviewing skills. Practice your replies often to these and other questions. Sit down with a friend and act out the interview. By repeating these phrases you will gain much needed confidence.