

## RESPONDING TO COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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For many job seekers, the interview is one of many challenges to face before landing the perfect job. The interview process can vary greatly depending on the company and job position. Some interviews are brief, but others can be lengthy and intensive. Sometimes job seekers must attend a series of interviews for one company, while at another company they may need to attend only one interview. Sometimes a panel of managers and employees may conduct the interview, and sometimes only one person from the company conducts the interview. Regardless of the interview process, the questions in an interview can be somewhat predictable and similar across employers.

In this week's activity, students will learn how to prepare for the most common interview questions. In addition, students will prepare for the unexpected in interviews.

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### LEVEL

Advanced

Secondary level or adult learners

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### LANGUAGE FOCUS

Speaking

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### GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to

- Prepare confident, firm answers to the most common interview questions in business.
- Plan strategies for dealing with unexpected questions in interviews.

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### MATERIALS

- Common Interview Questions and Worksheet (see Appendix A)
- Pencils and paper

## PREPARATION

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- Print enough copies for all students of the handout Common Interview Questions and Worksheet.

## PROCEDURE

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1. As students take their seats, assign each student a number (1-20). Tell them they must remember their number for the first activity.
2. Give each student a copy of the handout, and explain that today they will focus on learning strategies for participating in successful job interviews.
3. Tell students to find the question on the handout that matches the number you gave them at the beginning of class.
4. Have each student turn to a neighbor and ask the question they've been assigned.
5. After each person in the pair has asked their questions and answered, they should review the list of questions quietly on their own.
6. Once all students have finished talking and everyone is reviewing the questions, bring the class back together.
  - Ask students if the question was familiar. How did they respond? What was difficult about answering the question? How well and confidently do they think they answered the question?
  - Explain that these interview questions are common, and job seekers can take time to prepare answers in advance.
7. As a class, brainstorm a list of what makes impressive answers to interview questions.
  - Write the ideas students have on the board.
  - Here are some possible ideas: brief but clear answers; answers that show the applicant is well-informed; answers that show the applicant knows about the employer; answers that show the applicant is competent and would be an asset to the company.

8. Once the students have brainstormed a complete list, ask them to apply their ideas to answering the first question on the handout. Tell students that their answer to the first question, “Tell me about yourself,” should focus on strengths and experience that are relevant to the job that they are interviewing for.

- Give each person a few minutes to write an answer.

9. As the students write their answers, put this sample answer on the board:

I’ve been working in \_\_\_\_\_ for the last 10 years in \_\_\_\_\_. In my most recent project, I focused on \_\_\_\_\_. That project required that I do \_\_\_\_\_. I was successful when \_\_\_\_\_. My real strength is in \_\_\_\_\_. I am now interested in \_\_\_\_\_.

10. Once students have completed writing an answer, ask them to look at the template you put on the board.

- Does their answer explain what they have done and offer their strengths and abilities?
- Based on the information in the template, what would they add to their answer?
- Is there any information they would remove from their original answer?
- Ask them to revise their answer and then share it with their partner from earlier in the class.

11. Turn their attention to the rest of the sample interview questions. Ask each student to choose 5 questions on the list that interest him or her and then prepare an answer for each.

- Remind students that answers should be clear, concise, positive, and relevant to the job for which they’re applying.

12. After students complete their answers, ask them to share the answers with their partners.

- Encourage partners to offer feedback that reflects the standards brainstormed early in the class (see step 7) and emphasized when discussing the first question.

13. Turn students' attention to page 2 of Appendix A.
14. Ask the class what they have done or might do when asked a question they don't know the answer to.
  - Some might say they lied or made something up, while others might say they were honest and used the line, "I don't know much about that."
15. Offer some suggestions for handling such questions, such as the following:
  - Take some time to answer the question.
  - Redirect the question to relate to experience you do have.
  - Ask for clarification.
  - If you really don't know the answer, confidently say, "That is not a concept I'm familiar with, but it is an area where I hope to develop professionally."
16. Have students write down two strategies that feel comfortable to them. For example, a student could write that he or she plans to relate an answer to personal and relevant experience.
17. Take a little extra time at the end of class to have students work with a new partner to practice the questions they have prepared answers to.
  - If students are feeling confident, encourage them to ask questions for which partners have not prepared answers so that students can practice responding spontaneously.

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### EXTENSIONS

Extend the activity by asking students to choose their dream job and dream company. Have them brainstorm some questions specific to that company. Have them then write responses to these questions in a way that highlights their knowledge of the company.

## APPENDIX A: COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND WORKSHEET

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1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths?
3. What are your weaknesses?
4. Tell me about a conflict you experienced at work. How did you handle it?
5. Why should we hire you?
6. What is an accomplishment you are proud of in your career?
7. What motivates you?
8. If I called your former boss today, in what area would he or she say you need to improve?
9. What are your career goals?
10. How do you handle pressure?
11. How did you hear about this position?
12. Why do you want to work with us?
13. What are some of your leadership experiences?
14. What questions do you have for me?
15. How would you deal with an angry customer?
16. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
17. Where would you like to focus your professional development opportunities?
18. What is your dream job?
19. Who is a role model to you?
20. What do you need from a manager to be successful?

Plans for the Unexpected Question

1. What are two things you can say if you are asked a question that you don't know the answer to?

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