

Dealing effectively with interview questions

Responding to questions at an interview is your opportunity to give evidence of your skills and experience, prove you know what the job entails, and demonstrate that you are the best person for the job.

5 a In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- 1 What questions might you expect to be asked in any job interview?
- 2 What advice would you give somebody about dealing with interview questions?

b Look at the following common interview questions. Write the type of question (a–c) next to each question (1–12).

- a Questions that require you to talk about yourself, your ambitions, your personality, your hobbies and interests
- b Questions that require you to prove you have researched the job and company you have applied for work with
- c Questions that require you to demonstrate you have the skills and experience required for the job

- 1 Can you tell us something about yourself? a
- 2 What experience do you have that is relevant for this position? ____
- 3 What did you learn during your time at university? ____
- 4 What do you see as your strengths? ____
- 5 What do you think about our website? ____
- 6 What attracted you to the position? ____
- 7 How would your colleagues describe you? ____
- 8 What sorts of projects did you work on in your last position? ____
- 9 What university did you attend and why did you choose it? ____
- 10 How do you typically approach new projects? ____
- 11 What do you know about our company? ____
- 12 Where do you see yourself in five years' time? ____

- c** In pairs, try to think of some more questions for each category (a–c). Which questions would you welcome in an interview? Which questions would you not like to be asked?
- d** In pairs, take turns to ask and answer the questions in Exercises 5b and 5c. Which questions are easiest to answer? Which are the most difficult?
- e** ▶4.4 Listen to three extracts from an interview. Which three questions in Exercise 5b is the candidate responding to?
- f** ▶4.4 Listen again and, in pairs, discuss how each answer could be improved.
- g** Match the advice on how to answer questions (1–5) to the practical tips (a–e). What were the specific problems with the three extracts in Exercise 5e?

1 Be clear and explicit	a If you personally did something, say 'I did' rather than 'we did' or 'it was'.
2 Be audible	b Most lies or exaggerations get discovered and suggest bad judgment on your part.
3 Be concise	c Do not assume interviewers know what your previous job involved, even if they work in the same organisation. It is also important not to use jargon or acronyms that the interviewer might not be familiar with.
4 Be truthful	d Don't talk for too long, or drift away from the point. Be alert to any signs from the interviewer of boredom, loss of concentration, or signals that you are talking too much. However, also ensure that you say enough.
5 Focus on action you have taken	e Answers that can't be heard demonstrate poor interpersonal and communicative skills.

- h** Look at the first interview extract from Exercise 5e. Rewrite the candidate's answer and improve it by:

- deleting any sections which drift away from the point;
- trying to make the remaining sentences more dynamic.

Well, I've never really thought about it. I suppose I'd like to be married with kids, perhaps. My sister's got three kids, and they're really great. I'd also like to be doing a job I enjoy. There's nothing worse than being stuck in a boring job where you have the same routine every day. It'd be a job with lots of responsibility, but I suppose not too much. I wouldn't want to get stressed. If I was lucky enough to get this job, it'd be great, but I suppose five years is a long time without a change, so I'd try to get a promotion, if I could.

I see myself doing a job I really enjoy.

- i** ▶4.5 Listen to an improved answer and compare it with your ideas. What techniques did the candidate use in the improved answer?

j Look at the third interview extract from Exercise 5e. Rewrite the candidate's answer and improve it by:

- trying to make it more action-focused – make every sentence focus on what the speaker actually does or did;
- adding specific examples.

Well, usually there needs to be a clear picture of what the aims of the project are. So it's essential to speak to everyone involved before taking any action. In my current job we use project management software to help us keep track of what we have to do and when we have to do it. Of course, it's important that someone keeps an eye on whether people are actually doing what they're supposed to be doing, and obviously you also need to deal with unexpected situations as they come up.

The first thing I do is make sure I've got a really clear picture of what I need to achieve. Let me give you an example ...

k ▶ 4.6 Listen to an improved answer and compare it with your ideas.

l In pairs, take turns to ask and answer the three questions in Exercise 5e.