

INTERVIEW ENGLISH

Tell Me About Yourself

The answer that decides the rest of the interview

Level B1–B2 · 60 minutes · job interviews, speaking, business english, self-introduction

Goal

By the end of this lesson the student can answer "tell me about yourself" in 60 to 90 seconds using a Present, Past, Future shape, without reciting their CV, and can redirect the answer toward the job they are applying for.

Assumed knowledge

Comfortable with present perfect and past simple. Has applied for at least one job.

1. Lead-in

Talk with your partner or teacher. Two minutes, no notes.

1. What is the hardest question you have been asked in an interview?
2. "Tell me about yourself" is usually the first question. Why do you think interviewers ask it?
3. How long should the answer be? Guess in seconds.

TEACHER'S NOTE

Do not correct here, you are listening for two things: whether they default to reciting their CV in chronological order, and whether they think the answer should be long. Most say three to five minutes. The real answer is 60 to 90 seconds, which usually surprises them and sets up the whole lesson. Write their guess on the board and come back to it at the wrap.

2. Key language

Read the phrases. Mark the three you would actually say out loud.

PHRASE	WHEN TO USE IT
I'm currently working as a...	Opening the Present part. Neutral, works everywhere.
I've been in the role for about three years.	Present perfect continuous for how long you have been somewhere.
Before that, I spent two years at...	Moving into the Past part without saying "after that" ten times.
What I enjoy most about it is...	Adding one line of motivation so you sound human, not like a document.
That's what led me to apply for this role.	The bridge into the Future part. The single most important line.

I'm looking to move into...

Naming the direction you want without criticising your current employer.

Happy to go into more detail on any of that.

Closing so the interviewer knows you have finished.
Stops the awkward pause.

TEACHER'S NOTE

Drill the stress on "That's what LED me to apply" — students flatten it and the bridge disappears. If the student is below B2, cut "I'm looking to move into" and keep six phrases; seven is too many to activate in one lesson.

— 3. Listening / reading

Two candidates answer the same question. Read or listen, then answer the questions below.

A first-round interview for a logistics coordinator role. The interviewer asks the same opening question to two candidates.

Interviewer

So, to start — tell me a bit about yourself.

Candidate A

Okay. So I was born in Da Nang, and I went to school there, and then I studied business administration at university, I graduated in 2019, and then my first job was at a small import company where I did data entry, and then after about a year I moved to another company, and there I was doing customer service, and then...

Interviewer

Thank you. And you?

Candidate B

Sure. I'm currently a logistics assistant at Minh Phu Trading, and I've been there just over two years. Day to day I handle shipment tracking and I'm the person our Korean suppliers email when something is late. Before that I spent a year in customer service, which is where I got comfortable delivering bad news politely. What I enjoy most is the problem-solving — a container is stuck and somebody has to fix it. I'm looking to move into coordination properly rather than assisting, and that's what led me to apply for this role. Happy to go into more detail on any of that.

TEACHER'S NOTE

Play or read it twice. First time books closed, just: who would you interview again? Second time with the text. Candidate A is not a strawman — it is the answer almost every student gives, and it is chronological, starts at birth, and has no end. Candidate B is 90 seconds. Do not let the student conclude that B is better because their English is better; B's English is not more advanced, it is more organised.

— 4. Comprehension

Answer in note form.

1. Where does Candidate A begin their answer?

At birth / childhood — "I was born in Da Nang". Chronological from the very start.

2. Where does Candidate B begin?

With their current job — "I'm currently a logistics assistant".

3. Candidate B mentions customer service. Why is it relevant to a logistics job?

Because it taught them to deliver bad news politely, which is exactly what a logistics coordinator does when a shipment is late. B connects the past job to this job rather than just listing it.

4. What does Candidate B say to signal the answer is finished?

"Happy to go into more detail on any of that."

5. Which candidate says why they want THIS job? Quote the line.

Candidate B: "I'm looking to move into coordination properly rather than assisting, and that's what led me to apply for this role." Candidate A never mentions the job at all.

— 5. Language focus: the Present, Past, Future shape

A good answer has three parts: where you are NOW, one relevant thing from the PAST, and why you want THIS job (the FUTURE). Complete the sentences.

1. I'm CURRENTLY working as a shift supervisor at a hotel.

Present. Signals you are answering about now, not your childhood.

2. I've BEEN in the role for about eighteen months.

Present perfect for an unfinished period.

3. BEFORE that, I spent two years teaching in a private school.

Moves cleanly into the Past part.

4. What I enjoy MOST about it is training new staff.

One line of motivation. Optional but it is what makes you sound human.

5. That's what LED me to apply for this role.

The bridge. Past simple of 'lead'. Students write 'lead' — correct the spelling.

6. I'm LOOKING to move into operations management.

Future, framed as direction rather than dissatisfaction.

TEACHER'S NOTE

If they finish fast, ask them to say the whole six-line answer out loud as one paragraph. That is the point of the exercise — the gaps are trivial, the fluency of the joined-up version is not.

— 6. What goes where

Match each piece of information to the part of the answer it belongs in.

INFORMATION	ANSWER
Your job title and employer right now	PRESENT — first
The city you were born in	Leave it out entirely

A previous role that built a skill this job needs	PAST — second
Your university degree, when it is not relevant to the role	Leave it out entirely
Why you are applying for this particular job	FUTURE — last
Your marital status and age	Leave it out entirely
One sentence about what you enjoy in the work	PRESENT — first

TEACHER'S NOTE

The three "leave it out" items matter more than the rest. In many countries students have been taught to open with age, hometown and marital status because local CV conventions ask for them. Be explicit that this is a convention difference, not a mistake on their part, and that in an English-language interview it spends their 90 seconds on information the interviewer did not ask for.

— 7. Speaking task

Build and deliver your own answer. Your teacher will time you.

1. Write four or five bullet points only. Do not write the full answer as sentences — you will read it aloud and it will sound read.
2. PRESENT: your role now, how long, one thing you actually do, one thing you enjoy.
3. PAST: one earlier role, and the skill it gave you that this job needs. One only.
4. FUTURE: the direction you want, then the bridge line: "and that's what led me to apply for this role."
5. Deliver it. Target 60 to 90 seconds. Finish with "Happy to go into more detail on any of that."
6. Do it a second time, 15 seconds shorter, without the notes.

TEACHER'S NOTE

Time it visibly and say the number out loud afterwards; the length is the lesson. Round one is almost always over two minutes and note-bound. Round two is the one that sounds like an interview. If you have time for a third round, play a difficult interviewer: interrupt once with "can you say a bit more about that?" so they practise expanding without losing the thread.

— 8. Homework

Before the next lesson:

1. Find a real job advert you would actually apply for. Print it or save the link.
2. Rewrite your FUTURE part so it names something specific from that advert.
3. Record yourself on your phone, once, without stopping. Listen back and note where you went over 90 seconds.
4. Send the recording to your teacher.