

# The Language & Mechanics of an **INTERVIEW**

An **interview** is a conversation to see if you are the right candidate for a job or internship position

An **English Language Center** guide to help you prepare for interviews

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## Preparation

Preparation is key to talk about yourself and gives you confidence as you start your interview.

Some easy steps to help you feel ready are:

- **Review information about the company** such as its mission, values, goals, past/current/future projects, and employees.
- **Review the job posting** and remind yourself of themes, competencies, and other key terminology.
- **Review all application materials you submitted** to ensure you're familiar with your resume and the information you focused on.
- **Conduct mock interviews** to practice answering different interview questions with VU partners (e.g., the Career Center, the ELC) or an online tool (e.g., Big Interview).
- **Be physically ready** – know what to wear, where to be, at what time, and how to get there.

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## Small Talk

Small talk is an important tool for networking and relationship building in academic and professional contexts in the U.S. Whether you are arriving for an interview, or chatting with coworkers, **small talk is a key skill to master.**



Here are some key strategies to remember and use:

- Talk about **general, uncontroversial topics** (e.g., sports, weather, traffic).
- Ask **open-ended questions** (What? Where? Why?) rather than yes/no questions that will only lead to brief responses.
- **Provide one or two details** in your answers to help carry on the conversation and give your partner options to respond.
- **Balance** answering questions with asking questions back and forth.

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## Self-Introduction

Self-introductions come in many forms and can be anything from a "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_" to a 3-minute answer to the question "Tell us about yourself." Share as much as you think **appropriate for the context.**



One way to structure your answer is the **Present-Past-Future** approach:

<b>Present</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name</li><li>• Current position/role</li></ul>	"My name <b>is</b> ____ and I <b>am</b> a ____-year student at Vanderbilt majoring in ____ and ..."
<b>Past</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Personal, education and professional background</li><li>• Accomplishments</li></ul>	"I <b>was born</b> and <b>raised</b> in ____. " <b>After finishing</b> my ____ <sup>th</sup> year, I completed an internship at ____."
<b>Future</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional goals</li></ul>	"After graduation, I hope to..."

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## Traditional Questions

Tell us a little about yourself questions are aimed at **learning more about you** and whether you are excited about the job, motivated, and the best candidate for the company. You may hear questions like these:

- How did you find out about this job?
- Why should we hire you?
- What are your greatest strengths and/or weaknesses?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- Where do you see yourself five years from now?

### How to Respond?

- **Tailor** your answers to this specific interview.
- **Show** that you have done your research.
- **Demonstrate** you have the qualities and skills they are looking for in a potential hire.
- Give **specific examples** to support your answers.
- **Do not simply repeat** what is on your resume.
- **Be concise** and keep your responses under two minutes.

## 5 Behavioral Questions

"Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult situation/had a tight deadline/showed leadership..."

**Behavioral interview questions** are asked to get an idea about **future behavior** based on past actions.

As you prepare for your interview, **identify qualities and skills relevant for the job** and think of directly related (and indirectly related, if necessary) stories, projects, and experiences to answer different questions. Then, use the **STAR** method to structure your answer.

<b>S</b>	<b>The SITUATION you are in</b>	junior year, group work all semester, one group member got ill
<b>T</b>	<b>The TASK you had to complete</b>	final project due, strict deadline
<b>A</b>	<b>The ACTION you took</b>	you took charge, called a meeting, created new timeline, redistributed tasks
<b>R</b>	<b>The RESULT that was achieved</b>	project saved, team worked closely together, submission on time

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### Competency-based or Technical Questions

Whether you are getting ready for a technical interview or a surprise technical question, here are some questions you can expect:

<b>What</b>	system	do you know?
	software	are you familiar with?
	program	do you use?
	framework	do you like to use?
	programming language	do you prefer and why?

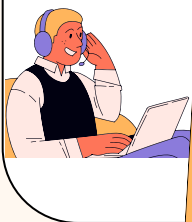
**What is your experience** with \_\_\_\_?

**Tell me about** the \_\_\_\_ you have used

**How would you go about** doing \_\_\_\_?

**What are the steps involved** in doing \_\_\_\_?

**Tell me how you would** do/design/handle \_\_\_\_?



#### How to Respond?

- **Be detailed** and talk through your thought/decision process.
- **Be honest if you do not know** an answer and highlight relevant related experiences instead.

**Expect the unexpected**

Does the interviewer have to step out to answer a phone call? Is it a different interviewer than you expected? Did they just ask you an unexpected question? Do not let it throw you off guard! Stay calm and carry on.

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### Your Questions

During an interview, **your questions are almost as important as your responses** to the interviewer's questions. They are an integral part of the conversation and you do not have to wait until the end to ask them. **Prepare at least three questions** in advance, but be flexible as new questions might arise.

The questions could be related to:

**the job**

"What does a typical day/the performance review for this role look like?"

**the team**

"Who would I be working most closely with/directly reporting to?"

**the culture**

"Are there collaborations or joint projects with other units?"

**professional development**

"What opportunities for additional training and advancement exist?"

#### Tip #1

When possible, tie your questions to your own research into the company, e.g., "I read on your website that... Can you elaborate more on that?"

#### Tip #2

As a final question, inquire about what is ahead, e.g., "What are the next steps in the process?"

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### Follow-Up

Learn more



Shortly after an interview, **it is important to follow up to show your continued interest**. It is important to strike a balance between sounding interested and excited, yet not overconfident, presumptuous, or desperate. Here are some suggestions:

- Send a **brief thank you email to interviewer**
  - Thank them for their time
  - Highlight a detail or aspect you learned from the interview
  - Reiterate your continued interest
  - Offer to provide additional information if needed
- Send a **thank you email to recruiter** a week after the interview, if no response to initial *Thank You* email.
- If you receive a rejection and would like to **ask for constructive feedback**, send a **follow-up email**.

For additional support & interview practice, check these resources:



VANDERBILT  
Career Center



biginterview



VANDERBILT  
English Language Center

