

Instructor's Guide
for
GETTING THE JOB YOU REALLY WANT VIDEO SERIES

Getting Good Answers to Tough Interview Questions

Overview

Whereas the previous video in the series guided viewers through the entire interview process, this video focuses on the specific questions job seekers are most likely to be asked. More specifically, it provides tips for answering these common, and often troublesome, questions:

- Why don't you tell me about yourself?
- What are your major strengths?
- What are your major weaknesses?
- What sort of pay do you expect?
- How does your previous experience relate to the jobs we have here?
- What are your plans for the future?
- What will your former employers (or references) say about you?
- Why are you looking for this sort of position, and why here?
- Why don't you tell me about your personal situation?
- Why should I hire you?

While students should be prepared to answer each of these questions, there is no way to anticipate every question they will be asked. To help them tackle all possibilities, the video also provides a three-step process for answering interview questions, one that emphasizes the need to address an employer's underlying concerns by proving they have the skills to succeed. Finally, the video touches on "problem" or potentially illegal questions and offers strategies for approaching them as well.

While students should be encouraged to formulate and even rehearse answers to a few key questions they are bound to encounter, it is much more helpful to have them practice general interview strategies rather than memorize hundreds of canned responses. Therefore, some class time should be spent in mock interview role-plays using a variety of questions. Stress to students that they will be able to answer any interview question provided they are confident in their skills and can provide examples to support their strengths.

Presentation Suggestions

Start by going around the room and having each student relate one question that they struggled to answer during an interview. Make a list of these questions on the board or overhead. Pick a few of the more common questions and discuss with the class why the interviewer might have asked those questions. What concerns did the employer have? What kind of answer was he or she looking for? Was this question just another way of asking, "Why should I hire you?" If you'd like, pick one of the problem questions and take suggestions for how it could have been answered effectively. Tell students that there are several questions they should anticipate getting, but that it's ultimately more important to have a general strategy for answering *any* interview question.

When you feel the students have begun to think about what that strategy might be, give them the **Anticipation Quiz** to complete prior to viewing the video. If you wish, allow the students to state their answers and discuss them.

Show the video. Encourage students to make changes to the answers they put down for the Anticipation Quiz while watching the video. At the conclusion of the video, ask students to discuss any changes they made to the answers on their Anticipation Quiz.

Follow up the discussion with the **Activities**. Use the **Discussion Questions** to request oral or written responses from students, or assign the questions as homework essays. Give the **Quick Quiz** at the conclusion of class and correct the quizzes as a group. Finally, you can assign the **Homework Option**, if desired.

Anticipation Quiz

Directions: Answer these questions as completely as possible. You may revise your answers as you watch the video.

1. Are you required to answer questions about your age, race, or gender?
2. True or false: If asked about your weaknesses, you should say you don't have any.
3. Should you refuse to reply to a question about your personal life?
4. What are some ways to prove you have the skills needed for a job?

Answer Key

1. No. But you should consider why the employer is asking and try to alleviate their concerns.
2. False. But you should show how you've learned to compensate for it or turn it into strength somehow.

3. No. More often than not, an employer just wants to know that you are dependable and reliable and that you will stick with the job.
4. Tell a story. Provide quantifiable results. Use a portfolio to show examples of your work.

Activities

Activity #1: Dealing with Tough Personal Questions

Format: Small group

Time: 30–35 minutes

Materials: Timer, pen, paper

Procedure:

1. Organize the class into groups of three.
2. Give each group these statements on a piece of paper:
 - You were fired from your last job because you were often absent due to an ongoing family illness. You have since asked for help from a relative and should not have to spend as much time helping out at home.
 - You stayed at home to raise kids, resulting in an eight-year gap in your work history. Now that your kids are both in school, you are just now coming back to the workforce.
 - You have lived in seven cities in the last three years because your spouse's job has required that you make frequent and unexpected moves.
3. Ask students to take turns role-playing an employer and job candidate in an interview (5 minutes per role-play). Have each employer ask about the candidate's personal life with one of the three scenarios in mind. Candidates cannot lie and cannot refuse to answer a question.
4. The third member of the group should keep a list of techniques used to honestly address a personal situation in a positive way. Have students share with each other the most successful and least successful approach they observed.

Activity #2: Prove It!

Format: Individual, pairs

Time: 20–30 minutes

Materials: Index cards, pen

Procedure:

1. Write the following workplace situations on the board:
 - Dealing with an irate customer
 - Having to succeed within a tight budget or time constraints
 - Overcoming a particularly difficult obstacle to finish a task
 - Taking initiative to solve a problem at work
 - Taking a leadership role in a group project
 - Recovering from a costly mistake
 - Dealing with a conflict with a coworker
 - Creating something that leads to increased profit or productivity
2. Have each student pick two or three of these situations and think of examples of when they have succeeded in each. They should use the index cards to write down specific details and list the skills they used to succeed.
3. Break students into pairs and have them role-play an interview where the employer asks the candidate to prove he or she could be successful in one of the situations the candidate chose.
4. When everyone has finished, come back as a class and talk about all the ways students can “prove” that they have the skills and experience to succeed on the job.

Discussion Questions

1. The video states that the driving force behind most interview questions is the question “Why should I hire you?” Identify a few typical interview questions and discuss how they relate to that all-important question.
2. What would you do if an interviewer asked you a question that made you uncomfortable? How would you answer questions about your personal life or home life, for example? Why should that matter to an employer? What can you do if an employer asks something completely inappropriate or illegal?
3. How can you use stories and anecdotes to support your answers during an interview? Why are such examples so effective at highlighting your skills and experience?

Quick Quiz

Note: You may read these questions out loud, allowing time for students to respond, or copy and hand this out as a written exercise. If you read the quiz, write responses on the board or overhead.

Directions: Indicate whether each statement is true or false, according to the video.

1. You should address the question of salary as soon as possible in your first interview.
2. It's okay to lie during an interview if you think you can get away with it.
3. Most interview questions are simply a variation of "why should I hire you."
4. You can research salary ranges for the job for which you're applying on the Internet and in the library.
5. The first step in the three-step process is to understand what is really being asked.
6. Employers who ask you to tell them about yourself want to hear your life story.
7. When stating your weaknesses, don't relate them to the job you're applying for.
8. Employers are not allowed to ask about race, gender, or age.
9. You should know ahead of time what former employers will say about you.
10. When asked about your plans for the future, you should focus on the rewards you expect the company to give you, not what you hope to do for it.

Answer Key

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|----------|-----------|
| 1. False | 6. False |
| 2. False | 7. True |
| 3. True | 8. True |
| 4. True | 9. True |
| 5. True | 10. False |

Homework Option

Have students imagine an employer only has time to ask them one question in an interview, and of course he asks, "Why should I hire you?" He allows exactly three minutes to answer. Have students write their response to this question. Have them include specific details and examples. They should rehearse their answer with friends or family or even in front of the mirror and then come to the next class prepared to give their answer as a presentation in front of the class.