

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a white rectangular card. The card has the text 'TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF' printed on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface.

**TELL ME  
ABOUT  
YOURSELF**

**The dreaded “Tell me about yourself” question!**

# That dreaded question nearly always asked in an interview!



Why do interviewers think it has to be that first question they ask after the initial chit chat?

Why do you get worked up about it?

Do you know how to answer it?

What are they trying to get from me in the answer?

What is the best way to answer it?

Where do I start?

How long should I answer for?

I knew it was probably coming, why did I not prepare for it?

**Let's try and help you.**



# Tell me about yourself!

So, lets look into the question a bit deeper.

## Why ask the question? Could be a number of reasons:

- The interviewer is not prepared, hasn't had time to look through your CV properly, hasn't done their homework, buying time to try and work out some questions to ask, is not trained in how to interview, lazy. Could be a number of things down to not being skilled or has not planned and prepared for the interview.

## There is however an agenda behind it:

- The interviewer wants to get to know you. Simple.
- They want to see how the interview will go, it sets the tone and what it might bring up in further questioning.
- It's a question that is fairly simple to answer, who knows yourself better than you? However, lots of people stumble at this first hurdle. They are looking to see how you handle questioning, answer and how you will best fit the role and work in the company.
- They also want to know if you can communicate clearly and effectively, connect with and react to other people, and can you present yourself professionally?
- **The big one** – Does it make sense why you're sitting in front of me and are you qualified for the role?



# Tell me about yourself!

The question can be worded differently, but it's always after the same answer.

## How will an interviewer ask the question?:

Straight out with it, Tell me about yourself?

I have your CV in front of me, but can you tell me a little bit more about yourself?

Can you walk me through your experiences?

I'd love to hear more about you and your journey to date?

Can you tell me a little more about your background?

**This one will always be at the start so be prepared and listen out for it and it's many disguises.**



# Scare the ghosts!

So what should you do to prepare for the scary question you all dread?

**Use a simple formula: The ghosts in Charles Dickens A Christmas Carol is an easy way to remember it. Scare those ghosts.**

Past + Present + Future = Answer or Present + Past + Future = Answer

Put these three in order of the relevance to the role.

**Present:** Here you can talk about what you do currently. A great place to showcase one or two relevant big achievements you did recently and the scope of what you do in the current role. It would also be a place to put a positive spin on being out of work. Discuss the courses you have done to further your learning to be able to do the role.

**Past:** This is where you need to be relevant to the role or the company by telling the interviewer how you got to where you are now and the previous relevant experience that fits for what you are applying for, again a big achievement works really well.

**Future:** This is the place where everything you have done is for this one moment and shoe-horn yourself into the role and demonstrate what a great fit you are.

**IT'S COMING...**

## **I know it's coming, how can I prepare for it?**

The first thing you need to do is research the company and analyse the job description. See the document about this in another post called "Research tips".

Find the things such as the company value, relevant products/services/projects, your answer needs to resonate with the interviewer to show you are the best fit for a role.

Your answer needs to be crystal clear why you're interested and what you bring to the table that aligns with the role and company.

Your objective needs to fulfil the company goals and demonstrate that you get the role.

It's worth having a basic template that you will tweak for the company or role you are being interviewed for.

As a recruiter if you can demonstrate that you really get the role I am more likely to engage with you and it sets the tone moving forward for the rest of the interview.

## I know it's coming, how can I prepare for it?

Keep your answer professional. It's not the time to get personal and start talking about your family, pets or hobbies.

Don't be a robot though, you want to be professional, however, you're talking about yourself and want the role. Your expertise is what you do and can bring so be engaging and passionate, but not over the top. An interviewer should sense and see that you want the job.

Within your answer for example, when you're talking about what got you in to the type of role you do or industry area, relate to something that changed your life. It might be something such as: "I'm really passionate about xxx and when I was at school, one of my teachers used to help me with extra activities in xxx and inspired me to get into this industry....."

Something along the lines of the above could give you that advantage over your competition. It shows how passionate and interested you are in whatever it is you are applying for.

I personally love it when someone really engages and demonstrates their understanding and commitment in explaining about themselves and how much they fit to the role.



# Don't be a monosyllabic parrot robot?

An absolute NO!

The absolute worse thing you can do is recite your CV, going through all the career and dates. The interviewer has your CV in front of them, if they wanted to know that then they would just read it and not ask the question.

Regurgitating your CV will bore the interviewer. Believe it or not, they are assessing how you might speak in meetings or converse with your colleagues and also what they can expect from you if they ask an open ended question.

Would you want someone to waffle on for 10 minutes if you asked them an open-ended question?

z  
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I'm really excited about xxx and xxx which attracted me to your company because..."

It's all about creating a compelling visual story that engages and demonstrates knowledge, passion, understanding, fit, expertise etc

# How long should I prepare my answer to be?



There is no hard and fast rule to this.

Sometimes in the interview the interviewer may start the question with “In no more than 30 seconds, tell me about yourself?” Every scenario will be different.

This may throw you if you haven’t prepared for this. It is worth timing your answer to 30 seconds, 1 minute or no more than 3 to 4 minutes.

## **Let’s look at the facts:**

After about 1.5 to 2.5 minutes of uninterrupted talking, people tend to lose steam, if it’s not compelling then the interviewer will probably lose interest.

2 minutes is a really long time to talk when you may feel under a bit of pressure.

Generally when someone speaks longer than a 3 or 4 minutes, there’s a good chance you’re getting into too much detail.

You have to go with whatever you feel comfortable to put across your objective.



## Practice, Practice, Practice?

Practice your answer by speaking it out loud.

A good way is to record it on a phone and walk away for an hour or so. Ask the question to the phone and play back your answer. When you do play it back, does the answer sound credible and relevant? Is the tone right. What about emphasis? Does it display passion. How do you think you come across?

Another great way to practice this is to do it with a family member or friend and get them to give you feedback. Why not ask them how they would answer the question and switch roles so you get the perspective from the interviewers point of view.

There is a fine line between practicing and memorising. You really don't want to recite it word for word and sound like it's pre-rehearsed. You want to be authentic. The best way is to imagine yourself speaking to a friend.

# Who's in the crowd?



Who are you going to be talking to?

It maybe that you have more than one interview and could be interviewed by different people within the business. You need to be adaptable to all levels of authority and make sure that you have answers to the question that are relevant to the person(s) asking it.

The “Tell me about yourself” question could come up at any stage or all of them by different people interviewing you. It would most probably come up on a phone interview right through to the final round. Be prepared.

What is meant here is that if you were talking to your prospective manager then you might be a bit more technical. If the person interviewing you might be a recruiter and screening you then focussing on the bigger picture might be better. You might be interviewed by one of the directors which would mean you need to resonate with the overall mission and values of the company.

It is also good if you get more than one interview, is to throw something in the answer by saying “When I talked to xxxxx it really impressed me that your mission or value is.....” Naming someone is good.



# Be Positive

This is not the place to highlight that you were fired for example.

Wait until you get a specific question about why you want to change jobs or why you have a gap in your career.

You want to give a good impression at the start so it's also not a good thing to badmouth your previous employer. Do this and the interviewer will immediately be turned off and will just go through the interview process and more than likely cut it shorter than was planned.

Any question that you are asked, you need to plan it obviously and anticipate and think what answer should I give that turns the situation around?

“I was made redundant, what positive can I put on this to turn the negativity around?”

“I lost my job because of Covid, what positive things have I done to turn this around?”



# Make an impression

It's a common thing to hear: "You have one chance to make an impression", "First impressions count".

This is true.

Most hiring decisions are made within the first minute. From the initial greeting, how you shake a hand (face to face), how you smile (Video), What you say (phone), what eye contact you give and the first thing that you say. It's all part of the interview process.

The first proper thing you say will probably be the answer to the dreaded question. So be prepared, scare the ghost.

It is going to set the tone. Do it right and you won't be playing catch up to swing the minds of the interviewer back to employing you. A bad opening affects everything. A well practiced, planned and confident opener sets you up for the rest of the interview.

Be confident from the start and engage, show passion, show knowledge, show you care, show you are planned and structured and the qualities you can bring to the role and the company.

Show the interviewer you are the right fit for the job.



## Possible answers

Interviewer: "Tell me about yourself?"

Me: I have always enjoyed writing going back to when I was at school. One of my teachers helped me with extra activities and really inspired me to want to use my talent, so it led me to pursue writing-related passions, for example at secondary school, sixth form and university I was the editor for our newspaper and won an award for the best University publication. In addition to writing, I also got to learn how to manage a team on the papers and the writing process. After University, I took a job at xxxxxx as a Social Media Marketing Manager, writing copy and social content for the company blog and website. An opportunity arose to work on the communications plan for a product launch which is where I discovered my interest in product marketing. After switching to a product marketing role I managed the process of the two most successful new product launches the company had ever had last year, it was then I realised how excited it would be to take on a new role in a company that I really like. I've learned I work best on products that I love and use, and given that I'm a big user of your company's products I jumped at the chance to apply when I saw the job posting.

Now reading that through and putting my own spin on it, it takes about 2 minutes 20 seconds. Should give you an idea of the length of what is needed.

# Will you scare that ghost away?

- Research the company.
- Find their values, mission, goal etc.
- Plan and prepare your answer relevant to the role and company.
- Create a visual story that makes an impression.
- Practice but don't memorise.
- Be positive.
- If you do it right and then what used to fill you with dread will no longer scare you.
- **YOU'RE IN CONTROL.**



  
  

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