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How to answer tell me about yourself if you are unemployed

If you have ever been in an interview, then you have undoubtedly had to answer the “Tell Me About Yourself” question. It is so common that it is often neglected during our interview preparation. However, it is arguably the most important interview question as it sets the tone for the rest of the interview. The way you respond to this question will decide the success of the interview and ultimately whether or not you will get the job. Don't worry too much- the interviewer is on your side and they want to hire you. They want more than anything for you to crush the interview, so that they can stop spending hours reviewing resumes and doing interviews. If you can successfully answer the “Tell Me About Yourself” question your chances of getting the job increase tenfold. When answering this question, there are two rules you should consider: 1. Don't Tell Your Life Story 2. Do Tell Pertinent Info The first rule is easy enough to follow. When the interviewee is unprepared, they often resort to answering the “Tell Me About Yourself” with the history of their life. The interviewer doesn't want an hour-long diatribe on your life story starting from childhood, nor does he/she want to know the names of your pets or your favorite movie genres. The interviewer wants to know about the second rule, but it begs the question, “What is pertinent info I should share, and how much should I say?” To effectively answer the “Tell Me About Yourself” question, your response should be broken into five categories. Recent professional achievements Educational achievements Applicable skills Professional goals Reason for interest in the company Unless necessary, try not to go over 30 seconds per category. That gives you a solid 2 minute and 30-second presentation to start yourself out on the right foot. Try not to go less than two minutes, and avoid going over 3 minutes. Hit that sweet introduction spot and blow the hiring manager away. Let's take each section individually, and discuss what's important in each part, and what mistakes should be avoided. 1. Recent Professional Achievements Don'ts: Recite your resume Waffle around your experience Mention achievements that are unrelated to the position Rambling or waffling during your response tells the interviewer that you are unprepared and can't perform well in an unstructured situation. A long-winded response will also reveal your lack of confidence in an employer and can severely hurt your chances of getting the job. Do's: Plan out 3-5 professional achievements before the interview Mention achievements that relate to the position you are applying for Practice, Practice, Practice The best way to sound smooth and confident in an interview is to practice your response in front of a mirror. Plan out your answer and choose the key points that you want to discuss within each category. Don't plan out your response word for word. Instead, map out each category and practice until you are able to improvise around each one. 2. Educational Achievements Don'ts: Go too in-depth if you are already a seasoned professional Ramble on about your thesis papers Recite your course list If you already have a wealth of professional experience, don't worry about shortening your educational achievements. The hiring manager doesn't want to hear every course you took in college. Employers want to know more about course projects and the knowledge you gained from them. Do's: Explain how the abilities and knowledge you gained can be leveraged to successfully satisfy the position's requirements Refer to extracurricular activities in which you gained leadership skills Expand on major projects that you worked on Mentioning your leadership roles within your extracurricular activities is a great way to sneak in tidbits about your hobbies and personal interests. Although you shouldn't expound on your hobbies, you can carefully drop references to your private life that can color you as an individual, make you more memorable, and even cause the hiring manager to ask you more personal questions and make the interview more casual and less stressful. 3. Applicable Skills Don'ts: Simply list any skills that you may possess Talk about skills that are unrelated to the position Lie about your skills Lots of people like to lie or exaggerate their skills in an interview. This is a big mistake. Your employer will find out if you were lying and then it is all downhill from there. Do's: Prepare 2-4 relevant skills Discuss skills that fit the job duties Explain how you gained these skills It's a good idea to mention how you learned your skills rather than just listing them. This will help to provide a background to how your skills were utilized. 4. Career Goals Don'ts: Discuss your life goals (i.e. owning a house, raising kids) Give off the impression that you lack career goals Mention goals that you won't be able to achieve with the company Make sure you stick to discussing your career goals and not your life goals. If you don't have clear goals you may give off the impression that you are not a goal-oriented individual. Do's: Mention goals that the company can help you achieve Talk about goals that show you are forward-thinking Demonstrate that you want to build a stable career Employers are looking for candidates that are interested in a stable long-term career. If your goals bounce around and lack direction, it will reflect that you might not stick around for long. 5. Reason for your interest in the company Don'ts: Talk about the pay Just say you want a job Mention you want to work for the company because of the great commute Be careful how you phrase this section. If you are only interested in the position for the money or the convenient commute, you will give off the position that you are not really dedicated to helping the company succeed. Do's: Explain how the company can help you achieve your goals Compliment the company's healthy work environment Indicate that you could see yourself with the company long term If you follow these Do's and Don'ts, answering the “Tell Me About Yourself” question will be a breeze. A solid response will be sure to impress the employer and ensure that your interview goes smoothly. Author: Erik Episcopo is a career and resume expert at resumegenius.com, an online resource for resume writers, job seekers, and the unemployed. No amount of advance work can help prepare for off-the-wall interview questions like “How do you fit an elephant into a cupboard?” There is, however, one question that every candidate should assume will always come up. “Tell me about yourself.”Not only is it one of the most frequently asked interview questions, but it's also typically the first. More importantly, your answer could easily make or break your chances of landing the job.According to the advisors at Yale University's Office of Career Strategy, the best answers to “Tell me about yourself” all include a “motivational story.” (Think of it as a short narrative that illustrates how and why you first became interested in your area of work.)There isn't a standard rule for how long your answer should be, though a general guideline is to keep it under two minutes. According to research from Yale's career experts, one version of a perfect answer might look like this:“I graduated last year from Yale, where I majored in Data Science and Environmental Engineering, with a specific interest in fashion and sustainability. The field is so aligned with everything I loved doing as a kid: Volunteering at Street Care events, joining a community garden, thrift shopping, and making my own clothes.I first became interested in sustainability because I wanted to work with a company whose mission is to promote a new textile economy — one that will protect the future of our planet. When I learned that the fashion industry will consume a quarter of the world's annual carbon budget by 2050, I decided to organize a campus fundraising event to help fight textile waste.We raised more than \$10,000 and donated an entire truck of unwanted clothing to a local homeless shelter. It was one of my proudest accomplishments. At my last job, I helped develop a new technology that turns cotton waste into new materials that can be used for many industrial purposes.I'm very excited about this opportunity at your company because it would allow me to use my knowledge and experience to educate people about how their actions — like their shopping habits and what brands they support — can make a serious impact on our environment.”The answer above consists of all the elements that Yale's career experts agree make up a strong answer:Opening: Short and sweet, no longer than one sentence.A motivational story: Briefly tells a story about a challenge (or new situation) you faced, what choices you made in response, and how the outcomes of those choices influenced your interest in the field.Academic work and supporting experiences: Relevant coursework, research, passion projects, internships, or past employment that helped you build the knowledge and skills that will be useful to the job.Closing: This can be a few short words explaining how your story and background make you a good fit for the job — or something about the company you're particularly excited about, and why.I've conducted hundreds of interviews over the past several years, and the candidates who were able to hold my interest all had one thing in common: They were personable.I'm not saying you have to be outgoing, charming, nice, bubbly, pleasing, and generous all at once. Just be open and pleasant. If you were the candidate giving the answer above, for example, consider showing the interviewer pictures from the fundraising event from your phone (just don't forget to put the phone away once you're done).Showing authenticity is also crucial. By presenting someone vastly different from your true self, you may find yourself in a role that isn't a good fit for you.If you're a homebody who enjoys alone time, for example, don't try to come off as an energetic thrill-seeker. The values, ambitions, and accomplishments you bring forward in your answer should be impactful and reflect who you are today.To get started, review your resume and identify which pieces of your background you want to highlight. The career experts at Yale also recommend using the questions below as prompts to plan your answer:What sparked your interest in this field?What are some supporting experiences have helped you further develop the skills that would be useful for this job?What have you already learned about the field and what are you hoping to learn from this opportunity?What activities or groups are affiliated with? What experiences or exposure are you gaining from the affiliation?What about this company do you find particularly exciting?Finally, as important as it is to structure and plan your story, it's equally important to practice presenting it. As the career experts at Yale put it, “what is in your mind is often not what is actually communicated in the moment.”Also, avoid writing every word out and memorizing it. “This will make your story sound unnatural, rehearsed, and overworked,” the experts note. “First impressions are made quickly, so make sure you present yourself as a confident, self-aware professional.”Dobby Carreau is the founder of Inspired HR. She has been recognized as one of Canada's Top 25 HR Professionals and is a regular contributor on multiple TV shows, Entrepreneur Magazine and many other print and online publications. She is a board member for Young Presidents Organization and sits on the Advisory Board for FinDev Canada.Don't miss:Like this story? Subscribe to CNBC Make It on YouTube! “Tell me about yourself.” Be honest, in reading that, did you automatically start to feel a little anxious? There's a reason this question (though really more of a statement!) is so difficult to tackle. The “tell me about yourself” interview question can be nerve-racking because it's so open-ended—and this often makes job seekers feel unsure of how to answer. “It's important to remember that the reason this question is asked is because employers are really looking to see how you would fit into the specific role at the company,” says Toni Frana, a FlexJobs career coach. Successfully responding to this question involves tying your answer in with the role you're applying to and preparing a response ahead of time. Here's how! How to Answer “Tell Me About Yourself” – Relate Your Answer to the Job at Hand “Tell me about yourself” is probably better phrased as, “Tell me what brought you to apply for this job, and some of the main qualifications that make you stand out. And maybe throw in something that helps showcase your personality.” But that's obviously too long a statement to make, so employers often shorten it to a much broader question. No matter how a hiring manager phrases it, focus on these four aspects in your answer: Your most recent background that is applicable to the job What made you want to apply for the job Your top qualifications for the job What makes you interested in the company – Keep Your Answer Short, to About 30 Seconds or Less Start by addressing those four subjects in a draft version of your answer. Once you've got how their actions — like their shopping habits and what brands they support — can make a serious impact on our environment.”The answer above consists of all the elements that Yale's career experts agree make up a strong answer:Opening: Short and sweet, no longer than one sentence.A motivational story: Briefly tells a story about a challenge (or new situation) you faced, what choices you made in response, and how the outcomes of those choices influenced your interest in the field.Academic work and supporting experiences: Relevant coursework, research, passion projects, internships, or past employment that helped you build the knowledge and skills that will be useful to the job.Closing: This can be a few short words explaining how your story and background make you a good fit for the job — or something about the company you're particularly excited about, and why.I've conducted hundreds of interviews over the past several years, and the candidates who were able to hold my interest all had one thing in common: They were personable.I'm not saying you have to be outgoing, charming, nice, bubbly, pleasing, and generous all at once. 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No matter how a hiring manager phrases it, focus on these four aspects in your answer: Your most recent background that is applicable to the job What made you want to apply for the job Your top qualifications for the job What makes you interested in the company – Keep Your Answer Short, to About 30 Seconds or Less Start by addressing those four subjects in a draft version of your answer. Once you've got a rough version on paper (or screen), it's time to start narrowing, focusing, and distilling. You're aiming for about 30 seconds from start to finish. (Yes, it should be that quick!) Time yourself to find out how long you're talking, and you'll see that 30 seconds is just about right. Any more than that, and it can start to sound like rambling. It might also help to remind yourself that this is just an introduction to you. During the rest of the interview, even if it's just an initial screening, you'll have further chances to showcase more skills, qualifications, and personality. So don't try to pack it all in at the beginning. – Practice Your Responses Without sounding too rehearsed, you'll want to have a clear understanding of how to answer this question. Practice will help you to: Build your confidence, so you're not shaken or nervous if you're put on the spot. Solidify your own understanding of who you are and what you can offer. Focus your answer so you don't ramble. Show exactly how you think your path has prepared you to work for this particular company. But in order to practice something, you've got to know what you're saying in the first place! Below are three examples of how to answer “tell me about yourself.” 3 Sample Answers for “Tell Me About Yourself” 1. Go Step by Step “I'm an innovative recruitment manager with 8 years of experience managing all aspects of employee prospecting—from resume screening and phone screening to benefits—for Fortune 500 companies. I have spent the last 4 years developing my skills, leading to performance recognition and two promotions. I love vetting candidates and determining how they align with an organization's culture and business goals. And although I enjoy my current role, I feel I'm now ready for a more challenging assignment and this position really excites me.” 2. Think “Past, Present, Future” Using this simple three-part formula can help you craft a professional, informative answer to “Tell me about yourself.” “Well, I'm currently an account executive at Smith, where I handle our top performing client. Before that, I worked at an agency where I was on three different major national healthcare brands. And while I really enjoyed the work that I did, I'd love the chance to dig in much deeper with one specific healthcare company, which is why I'm so excited about this opportunity with Metro Health Center.” 3. Answer With the Company in Mind Do some research ahead of time to best know about the company and how your specific expertise and strengths can help them. Putting yourself in the employer's shoes is a great way to stay focused when answering this question. Here's an example: “I was born and raised in this county and have an excellent knowledge of the area, as well as Central and XYZ counties. During the last 9 years with the ABC Freight Company, I have progressed through positions of Package Loader, Courier, Dispatcher, and Team Lead. In my most recent position, I have had the opportunity to complete numerous management training programs, provide supervision and leadership to all positions within the station, and participate in special projects in conjunction with Senior and District Managers. I enjoy being a Lead and the opportunity to empower and motivate my team. Last year I was awarded ‘Lead I’ for greatest team gains in productivity. I believe this experience and training has prepared me to take the next step and pursue a management position with you.” What Not to Say When Answering “Tell Me About Yourself” – Don't Regurgitate Your Resume It may be tempting to nearly read off your entire resume, but don't. You can generally mention where your career started, some jobs along the way, and your most current role, but now is not the time to list them one by one or to talk about every task you had at each job. As we said before, keep it succinct and about 30 seconds long. – Don't Focus on Unrelated Jobs Depending on where you're at in your career, your career history may go pretty far back. If your first job out of college isn't related to your current career, don't mention it. Or, if you've had a career change, you can opt to only focus on the roles that directly relate to your new career area. Mentioning unrelated roles could be a distraction and lead an employer to wonder if you're focused on or experienced for the job you're applying to. – Don't Get Too Personal Steer clear of any personal topics, such as if you do or don't have kids, your marital status, or your religious or political affiliation. Not only are these illegal for an employer to ask you about, but they're not relevant to the job and could even cause your interviewer to discriminate. Want Interview Help? Practicing your answers to tough interview questions and getting guidance on how to best present yourself can make a world of difference in landing a job. FlexJobs members have exclusive access to one-on-one career coaching to help you practice in a mock interview. With their expert advice, you can tweak and perfect your answer to any interview question. Ready to get started? Learn about all the benefits of membership! Don't forget to share this article with friends!

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