

Two-Minute Commercial, aka “Elevator Speech”

The two-minute commercial is designed to answer the first question most interviewers ask. "Tell me about yourself" It also allows the job seeker to share with the interviewer the most important thing they want to know — "Why should I hire you?"

The two-minute commercial is made up of four parts:

1. **Personal and Education** (15 seconds)

This part is used to give the interviewer relevant information concerning you personally and about your educational background. This does not include personal information such as marital status, children, etc. This does include information such as: hometown or state and/or personal attribute(s). The education should be either the latest obtained and/or major field if relevant to job objective.

2. **Early Career/Life Experiences** (15-30 seconds)

This part is used to share with the interviewer past work and life experiences relevant to the job objective.

3. **Recent Work History/Life Experiences** (45-60 seconds)

This is the most vital part of the two-minute commercial. This is the time for the job seeker to relate to the employer two accomplishments/results of the job seeker that indicate why he/she is the best candidate for the position sought.

4. **Why you are here** (15-30 seconds)

This is used either at the beginning or end of your two minute commercial, depending on the question asked by the employer. In this part, the job seeker speaks with enthusiasm that he/she is here for the specific position sought.

Example

My degree is in finance and I will be graduating this December. While attending college, I worked 25 to 30 hours a week. I spent the last 4 semesters working in a cooperative education position for Hastings in their accounting and finance department. I was able to get "hands-on" experience in cost accounting, cash-flow analysis, and budget development, and assisted in preparing client proposals.

Through these job experiences, I have been given the opportunity to polish my customer service skills, as well as gain technical skills. I have strong planning and documentation abilities and am analytically oriented.

My career goal is to work for a bank and eventually become a loan officer. I believe I have the key traits for success in banking. I have good common sense, can juggle multiple tasks, have a positive attitude, and excellent communications skills. I think my greatest strength is my capacity to get along with a wide variety of people and personalities.

Interviewing: Selling Yourself

What to Say

- Introduce yourself with a smile and firm handshake. Maintain good eye contact during conversation.
- Demonstrate to the recruiter what you want to and can do for the employer today, based on employer research. Give two minute commercial.
- Answer questions with:
"Yes, for example (accomplishment/result statement)" and
"No, however (accomplishment/result statement)"
- Show interest in what the interviewer is saying, by nodding your head and leaning toward him/her occasionally.
- Give positive answers to negative-based questions.
- Ask the recruiter prepared questions.
- Initiate the next step by asking what the next step is.
- Ask for the recruiter's business card for future contact. Immediately after you leave make notes of important points of discussion.

What to Do

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- Use time wisely to review employer research information.
- Have pen and paper. Asking to borrow a pen indicates lack of preparation.
- Be enthusiastic. Recruiters remember a positive attitude.
- Listen carefully to the interviewer's complete question before responding.
- If needed, pause and take time before answering difficult questions.
- Keep going even if you feel you made a mistake.
- Carry extra resumes, references, etc. organized in a portfolio.
- Unless asked, do not discuss salary and benefits.

After the Interview

- Send a hand-written thank you letter to the recruiter.
- Address it to the recruiter, by name and title.
- Demonstrate employer knowledge in 2-3 sentences.
- Restate employment objective.
- Answer the question – "What can you do for them today?" – based on something specifically discussed during your contact. Use accomplishment or results statements that demonstrate your ability to meet those needs.

Illegal Interview Questions

It is important to keep in mind that most employers only ask questions that they believe will help them choose the best person for the position regardless of race/color, sex/gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, national origin/citizenship. With that in mind, much of the time if an employer asks an illegal question they are not asking it for the reason it is illegal.

For instance if some asks: "Does your (boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife) have a problem with you working long hours since we work 45-50 hours a week?" Their concern is actually: can you work 45-50 hours a week. So they should have asked: "Is there any reason you would not be able to work 45-50 hours a week?"

Most questions that ask about military discharge, arrest record, disabilities, marital/family status, age, national origin/citizenship, race/ethnic background or any other non-job related attribute are illegal. But keep in mind that some are job related. For example: Many Department of Defense jobs require U.S. Citizenship.

Good online article: <http://www.hrworld.com/features/30-interview-questions-111507/>

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

- This should be a 30 second to 2 minute “commercial” of the student’s education, relevant experience and unique strengths. This can also include why the student is interested in a particular position, or for this purpose, what specialty/pursuit they wish to pursue.
- This should not contain information about the student’s religious beliefs, race, sexual orientation, marital status, current salary, status at your current position (i.e. wanting to leave or having a bad relationship with a boss), etc.
- *Advice to students* – This is in virtually every interview. This sort of question allows you to provide an overview of your personality, your background and your relevant strengths. As such, you should rehearse this piece, if nothing else, to ensure that your interview begins on a strong note. Remember, a strong first impression is critical and will allow for you to shine through during the interview.

2. What are your three greatest strengths?

- The student should ideally respond by stating “My three greatest strengths are...” then provide a brief story or anecdote about each. A good example is “I am particularly strong at synthesizing information. In medical school, we are responsible for integrating classroom material with practical, scenario-based clinical experience.”
- Obviously, one-word answers are not good. Likewise, the strengths provided should be relevant and the student should be able to provide good examples that fit (a person who lacks people skills shouldn’t state that they are good at working with people if they aren’t).
- *Advice to students* – Make sure that your strengths are in-line with what the position calls for. Employers appreciate when you match your skills to those of the position and this is an opportunity to show that you’ve done your homework about the company/position.

3. What are your three biggest weaknesses?

- The student should ideally respond by stating “My three biggest weaknesses are...” then provide an explanation of how the student is addressing these weaknesses. A good example is “I am a perfectionist. Everything has to be right. However, as I interact with others and rely on them, I have come to understand that not everything has to be perfect. I am working hard to prioritize what is important so that I focus on the most important things in my life and ensure that they are perfect. Other aspects are meant to be done well, but I am trying not to sweat the small stuff.”
- Again, one-word answers are not good. It is also not a good idea to provide a weakness if it is called for in the position (i.e. being bad with numbers is not a good weakness to highlight if the position requires budgetary oversight). Employers look for this to see that interviewees are human, that they aren’t perfect, and that they are trying to improve themselves.
- *Advice to students* – It is important that you identify several weaknesses that apply in different situations. It is not recommended to respond with “I have no weaknesses” or “I can’t think of any”. Instead, it is best to speak honestly, provide an objective evaluation of yourself and present your plans for improving yourself. Likewise, it is not necessary to always try to turn your weaknesses into strengths (i.e. “I care too much” seems like something that could be construed positively, but it could also be construed negatively to mean that you obsess).

4. Explain a difficult situation or conflict that you have experienced and discuss what steps you took to deal with the situation.

- The student should provide a situation that highlights their strengths. More than anything, this is an opportunity for the student to provide insight into their thought process and their coping strategies.
- *Advice to students* – This is your opportunity to demonstrate how you assess different situations and how you handle pressure. There is no right or wrong answer. Employers look to see that you can 1) process through a tough situation effectively and 2) you have had success in dealing with difficult people. More than anything, this provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your creativity and critical thinking skills.

5. Why should we choose you over the other candidates?

- The student should identify unique characteristics that they believe sets them apart. This might be their education, their past work or volunteer experience, a particular experience or training, etc.
- *Advice to students* – This is generally at the end of an interview right before “Do you have any questions for me?” This is at the end because it provides a final opportunity to make one final pitch as to how your unique skills and strengths are best suited for the position. Be sure to swing for the fences!