



# Interviewing for International Students

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Today will provide a few  
**concrete tips** and **frameworks**  
for succeeding in job interviews



What is the most common concern that international students bring up when preparing for job interviews?



**My English isn't good enough**



# An interview is NOT a language exam!

Effective communication about professional skills and persona has nothing to do with syntax, grammar, or vocabulary



# What an interview *is*

- A conversation (friendly, at times difficult or uncomfortable)
- An exercise in self-narration (i.e. the choices you make as you narrate your story)
- A venue for presenting your scholarly and/or professional persona
- An exploration of (mutual) fit and future prospects



# What an interview *is NOT*

- An interrogation
- A venue for attacking or belittling you
- A sales pitch
- And it is most certainly not about “empirical truth”







# What an interview *is NOT*

- A language exam\*

Of course, there is a basic level of conversation that you need to be able to carry

Some resources that can be of help:

Conversation hours (ELI or other)

Conversation classes (ELI or other)



# Today's Agenda

- I) **General tips for success**
- II) General Questions
- III) Non-verbal
- IV) Illegal Questions
- V) Your Questions



# General Tips for Success

- Understand what **motivates** the question
- Answers have **beginnings, middles, ends**
- **Less is more:** make your answers shorter
- The # of possible questions is **not infinite**
- It's okay to ask for **time** and **clarification**
- Know your **strengths** and **weaknesses**
- **Practice** the way you **play**
- Always have **good questions** ready
- Understand the process in order to make effective and impactful choices
- Always send **thank you notes**



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# Examples of Questions (I)

## The Question

“Tell us about yourself/walk me through your resume”

## Motivation

The interviewer wants to see how you situate yourself within a specific field.

## Traps

- Thinking and speaking like a junior trainee
- Repeating your resume
- TM's: Too much information, too much specialized information and jargon, too much monologue.

## Tactics

- Brevity: Two sentences instead of three
- Use smaller “building blocks”: instead of a 3-minute response think about three, 1-minute responses.
- Focus on broad stakes and not details.



# Be Modular

- **Why be modular?**
  - Helps keep you organized
  - Creates hierarchy of importance
  - Ensures central message isn't truncated
  - Allows you to be interruptible



# Be Modular

Current  
Research

Teaching

Future  
Research

Impact

Broad  
Research  
Interests

Skills



# Be Modular





**Your ultimate goal, regardless of settings, is to have a good conversation.**

**Monologues, by definition, are not conversations.**



# Examples of Questions (II)

## The Question

“Why do you want this job?” [“Why should we hire you?”]

## Motivation

Interviewers want to get a sense of your vision for your career path—past, present, future.

## Traps

- Being generic (or too humble/arrogant if they ask why they should hire you)
- Not interweaving your specific story with theirs

## Tactics

- Express the specific things that excite you about this job (aside from the paycheck!)
- Link the aspects of the job to your past experience and your future career plan (as someone who has done X, and who sees their future in Y, this opportunity is especially exciting because of...)



# Examples of Questions (III)

## The Question

“What’s your greatest weakness?”

## Motivation

How do you narrate your life experiences? Are you self-aware?  
Positive? Sincere?

## Traps

- Thinking that this question is about empirical truths
- Offering too much information/details
- Being too personal or too generic
- Not ending on a positive note

## Tactics

- Remember that this is an exercise in self-narration. You’re expected to choose a weakness that showcases an understanding of context
- Keep story short, details minimal.
- Being too personal or too generic
- Use “softeners” (past tense; I had a tendency); indicate steps you’ve taken to improve and your happiness with the progress/growth



# Examples of Questions (IV)

## The Question

Do you have questions for us?

## Motivation

The interviewer wants to see how you see yourself fitting in, that you understand the position and the various contexts of the job

## Traps

- Not knowing or not understanding the specifics of a position
- Not understanding the difference between a first round and second/third round interview

## Tactics

- Do your homework (“it’s a great company!” will not get you the job)
- Contextualize and explain your motivation (“I’ve spent time doing ABC and have enjoyed the experience. Can you say more about opportunities to do similar things in company X?”)
- Weave things that excite you about the position into your story—a story that combines your past and present with the future you see yourself having at that position.
- Remember that they have anxieties too. Ask questions that showcase your knowledge of and desire to know more about the company but frame them in an open way that provides wiggle room
- Good questions for us are those that spark a conversation.
- Avoid asking questions about material things—focus on skills, experiences, projects, etc.



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# Non-verbal:

## Appearance and Body Language

- Handshake\*/Smile
- Eye contact
- Warmth of Voice
- Open Gestures
- Posture\*
- Attire



# Non-verbal:

- Handshake:\*
- Firm grip, stand upright, make eye-contact
- Do not bow or gesture deference



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# Illegal Questions

## Illegal Questions

Questions about national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest and conviction record, military discharge status, race, gender, or pregnancy status are illegal.

Any question that asks a candidate to reveal information about these topics **without the question having a job related basis** are a violation of various state and federal discrimination laws.

## Examples of Illegal Questions

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Are you planning to have children?
- What does your husband/wife do?
- How old are you?
- What is your religious affiliation?



# Illegal Questions

## How to Deal with Illegal Questions

If asked an illegal question you can:

- **Choose not to answer**
  - “I’m uncomfortable with this question and prefer not to respond”
- **Choose to answer**
  - Respond directly and briefly if you feel comfortable doing so
  - Respond to the intent of the question
    - “Nothing in my personal life will prevent me from taking this job”
  - Ask for the motivation behind the question
    - “It’s not clear to me why you’re asking about this. Can you please explain?”
  - Deflect
    - “It’s interesting you ask me about children--do you have kids yourself?”
  - Ignore and change the subject
    - “I hear the music scene here is great”



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- VI) Your Questions**



**be in touch:**

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