



APEX ENGLISH · A2 BUSINESS

Unit A2-9A

My first job

My work story — the CV behind the CV

My first job

My work story — the CV behind the CV · A2+ · 55–65 min · Business English



“Your first job doesn't define you — but the story you tell about it does.”

— Rule of the working memory

Objectives

- Talk about your early career with a clear timeline: past simple + accurate time markers (ago, in, when, while).
- Turn a job memory into a professional narrative — not just a list of dates.
- Handle past-tense questions in an interview: 'How long did you stay?', 'Why did you leave?', 'What did you learn?'
- Extract a transferable lesson from an early job and connect it to what you do today.

Class Book

Warm-up · Career-story reflex

Solo · about you · 4 min

Think through these three questions in your head — no writing needed. We'll use your answers throughout the lesson.

- In an interview tomorrow, someone asks: 'Tell me about your very first job.' What are the FIRST five words you'd say?

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- Which one thing from your earliest working years still shows up in how you do your job today?
 - 'Ten years ago I was...' — finish the sentence with something specific (a place, a role, a fear, a habit).
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Lead-in · The first-job quiz

Quiz · working-life trivia · 8 min

Six quick questions about how people's first jobs actually work in Europe. Guess, then reveal — most people get 3 out of 6.

Follow-up: Notice the pattern: the strongest answers turn a small early job into a transferable lesson. That's the move we're rehearsing today.

Reading · The hotel receptionist who learned to say no

10 min

My very first job was at the reception of a small hotel in Faro, the summer I turned eighteen. I earned five hundred euros a month, which felt like a fortune at the time, and I worked six nights a week from six in the evening until two in the morning. On paper the job was answering the phone, handing out room keys and taking payments. In reality it was mostly about staying calm.

During the first two weeks I said 'yes' to absolutely everything. When a guest asked me for a taxi at three in the morning, I called four different companies until I found one. When another guest complained that the wifi was slow, I stayed up trying to reset the router even though nobody had trained me on it. When my manager asked me to cover an extra shift on my one day off, I said yes and cried in the staff bathroom.

The turning point came in week three. A regular guest — a businessman who came every Tuesday — asked me to iron his shirt at midnight. I remember standing there with the shirt in my hand, realising two things at the same time. First, that ironing his shirt was not, and had never been, part of my job. Second, that saying 'yes' to everything was not making me a better employee; it was making me an exhausted one who couldn't do the actual job well.

I looked him in the eye and said, very politely: 'I'm afraid ironing isn't a service we offer at reception, but I can arrange for the laundry service in the morning at seven.' He blinked, said 'fair enough', and went to bed. Nothing bad happened. My manager didn't shout at me. The guest still came every Tuesday. Nobody complained.

I stayed at that hotel for exactly three months. I left with two things: a small amount of savings, and a professional skill that no university course teaches. I learned that 'no, but here's what I can do' is one of the most useful sentences in any career. Fifteen years

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

later, in every job I've had since, that summer shift still pays my salary.

Comprehension check

1. During the first two weeks, the narrator's approach to work was best described as...
 - ☐ A. Confident and organised
 - ☐ B. Saying yes to everything to prove she was useful
 - ☐ C. Distant and uninterested
2. The 'turning point' was primarily about learning to...
 - ☐ A. Iron shirts more efficiently
 - ☐ B. Recognise that saying yes to everything was making her worse at her actual job
 - ☐ C. Complain to her manager
3. The main argument of the last paragraph is that...
 - ☐ A. The pay was more valuable than the lesson
 - ☐ B. A specific communication skill learned in a first job still matters years later
 - ☐ C. First jobs are always in hotels
4. The businessman's reaction to being told 'no' was...
 - ☐ A. Angry — he complained to the manager
 - ☐ B. Calm — he simply accepted it and went to bed
 - ☐ C. Confused — he didn't understand

True, False or Not Given?

Choose based on the text only.

1. The narrator was punished by her manager for refusing the shirt.
 - ☐ A. True
 - ☐ B. False
 - ☐ C. Not Given
2. The narrator still uses a skill from that summer in her current job.
 - ☐ A. True
 - ☐ B. False
 - ☐ C. Not Given
3. The businessman stopped visiting the hotel after this incident.
 - ☐ A. True
 - ☐ B. False
 - ☐ C. Not Given

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About the text — think and write

Answer briefly. The final item is a discursive task — write it out in full paragraph form.

1. The narrator says: 'saying yes to everything was not making me a better employee; it was making me an exhausted one who couldn't do the actual job well.' Why is this counter-intuitive for a new employee?

2. The polite refusal formula in the text is: 'no, but here's what I can do.' Rewrite it for YOUR job — a specific request you'd politely decline and the alternative you'd offer instead.

3. ****Discursive task (100–130 words).**** Think of one early job you had — paid or unpaid, part-time or full-time. In your own words, describe (a) what you thought the job was on your first day, (b) what it actually turned out to be, and (c) one skill or habit from that job that still shows up in the way you work today. Use past simple + at least two time markers ('ago', 'when I was...', 'at that time', 'in [year]').

Vocabulary · Career-story language

10 min

Roles

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Term	Meaning
entry-level role	the first professional job in a career — expects to learn, not to lead
steep learning curve	a lot to learn in a short time; often used positively about a first job
stepping stone	a job you take on the way to something bigger — its main value is what comes next
under my belt	already achieved / already experienced — 'with two years under my belt I moved on'
hands-on experience	practical work, not just theory — the thing recruiters care about most
career pivot	a deliberate change of direction between industries or roles

Smalltalk

Term	Meaning
straight out of university	immediately after graduating, with no gap year
back in the day	in that earlier period — slightly nostalgic
looking back on it now	with the perspective of today
at the time I didn't realise...	used to introduce a lesson learned later
what really stuck with me was...	the thing I still remember most
on paper vs in reality	the official job description vs what the job actually was

Practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word or phrase from the lists above.

1. It was an ___ ___ — I wasn't managing anyone, I was learning how to be managed.
2. For the first three months it was a ___ ___ ___ — I'd never used the software before in my life.
3. That job was just a ___. I stayed nine months, then moved to what I really wanted.
4. ___, that role was the best training I ever had — I just didn't see it at the time.
5. ___ the job was 'assistant editor'; ___ I was making the tea and rewriting other people's paragraphs.

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6. I started ____ university and I've been in the same industry ever since.

Collocations · verb + noun (career story)

Match each verb with the correct noun / phrase.

Term	Meaning
land	your first job
build	a professional network
climb	the career ladder
outgrow	a role
hand in	your notice / your resignation
make	a career pivot

Odd one out — which register is different?

One option is far too casual (or wrong) for a professional interview answer.

1. 'Tell me about your first job.' — Which answer is professional?

- ☐ A. 'Honestly, it was a bit of a disaster.'
- ☐ B. 'It was an entry-level role that gave me my first real hands-on experience with clients.'
- ☐ C. 'I only did it for the money.'
- ☐ D. 'I don't really remember much about it.'

2. 'Why did you leave?' — Which is the strongest answer?

- ☐ A. 'My boss was a nightmare.'
- ☐ B. 'I'd outgrown the role and was ready for something with more responsibility.'
- ☐ C. 'I was bored.'

Grammar · past simple + time markers (interview-ready)

14 min

1. Past simple — the workhorse tense of a career story

Use for a completed action at a defined moment in the past.

- I worked at the hotel for three months.
- She left the company in 2019.
- Questions: did + subject + base verb — 'Where did you work?', 'How long did you stay?', 'Why did you leave?'

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· Yes/No: 'Did you enjoy it?' — 'Yes, I did. / No, I didn't, but I learned a lot.'

2. Time markers — the coordinates of your story

ago → 'I started three years ago.' (never with 'in')

in + year / month → 'in 2019', 'in September'

when + past clause → 'when I was 18', 'when I finished university'

at + clock time → 'at 6pm', 'at midnight'

on + day / date → 'on Monday', 'on my second day'

straight after / right after → 'straight after school', 'right after graduating'

3. Past simple vs used to — routine in the past

Both describe past events, but 'used to' emphasises a routine that no longer happens.

· past simple: 'I worked six nights a week' (a fact, one period).

· used to: 'I used to work six nights a week' (a habit that ended). □ 'I used to walk to work.' □ 'I used to walk to work yesterday.' (used to ≠ single event)

4. Common irregular past forms recruiters hear a lot

get → got · leave → left · take → took · make → made · give → gave · begin → began · win → won · buy → bought · spend → spent · think → thought · become → became · deal → dealt · learn → learnt/learned · teach → taught · quit → quit.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise A — Complete with the correct past form + time marker

Use the correct verb form. Choose the correct time marker in brackets.

1. I ___ (land) my first job three years ___ (ago / in / at).
 2. She ___ (hand in) her notice ___ (in / on / at) a Friday afternoon.
 3. How long ___ you ___ (work) there before you ___ (become) team leader?
 4. ___ (in / on / at) 2018 I ___ (make) a career pivot from teaching to marketing.
 5. He ___ (leave) the company ___ (straight after / ago / when) his second promotion.
-

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise B — Turn a statement into an interview question

Write the past-simple question that would produce each answer.

1. 'I worked there for two years.' → ____

2. 'I left because I wanted more responsibility.' → ____

3. 'I learned to run a small team.' → ____

4. 'My starting salary was €22,000.' → ____

5. 'It was a stepping stone into marketing.' → ____

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise C — 'past simple' vs 'used to' — choose the more precise option

Only ONE option is fully correct for A2+/B1 register.

1. 'When I was 19, I ___ six nights a week at a hotel.' (a one-summer job — completed once)
 2. 'Before smartphones, I ___ every meeting on paper.' (a habit that no longer happens)
 3. 'Yesterday I ___ my resignation letter at 4pm.' (single event, one moment)
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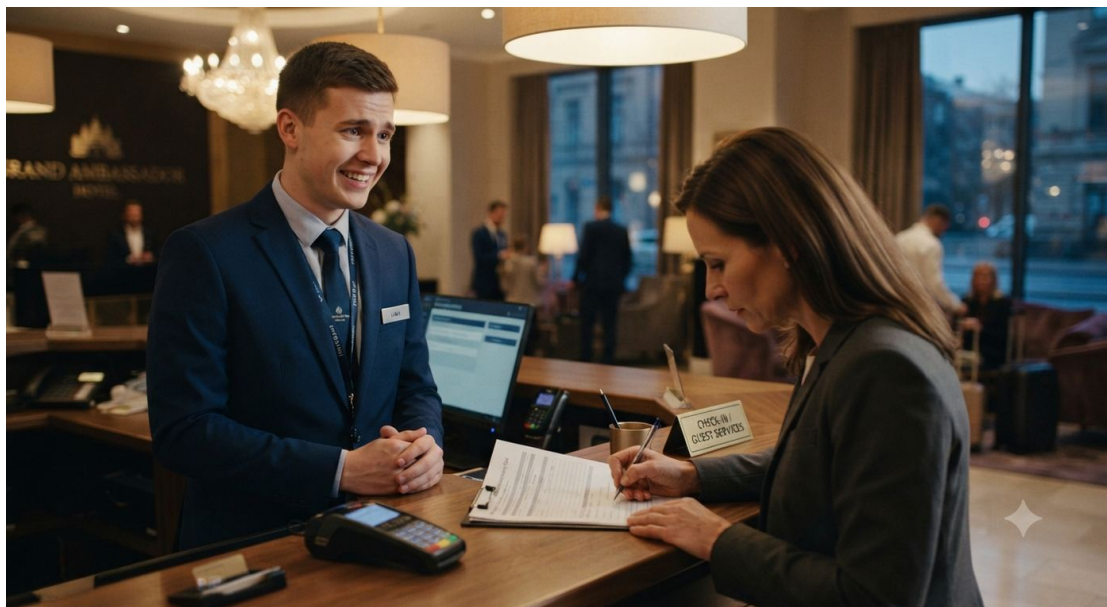
Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Exercise D — Discursive: a 90-word career-story paragraph

Write a short paragraph (about 90 words) about your very first job. Use **AT LEAST** four past-simple verbs and **THREE** different time markers. Include one 'on paper vs in reality' sentence.

1. Your paragraph starts with: 'My very first job was...'

Describe the picture



Look at the picture. In 5–6 sentences, tell the story of what is happening **AND** reconstruct what was probably happening ten minutes earlier. Use past simple for the events on screen and 'when / while / ago' for the timeline.

Target language: Ten minutes ago, the receptionist was still... · Then the phone rang and he ... · When the guest arrived, she was already ... · She asked him for ... and he ... · By 21:15, the check-in ...

Listening · A career coach interviews a former teacher who pivoted into product

10 min

A career coach (Voice A, female) interviews a former secondary-school teacher (Voice B, male) who has pivoted into product management. Two voices.

Before you listen

- In a good career-story interview, in what order do you expect: what the job was, why you took it, what you learned, why you left, what came next?
- Which of those does an inexperienced storyteller usually skip — and why?

Gist

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1. Who are the two voices and what is the format?

2. What is Voice B's overall attitude towards his first career?

Detail

1. How long did Voice B teach before pivoting?

2. What was the specific moment he decided to make the career pivot?

3. What did his teaching experience give him that pure product-management training wouldn't?

Listen and complete

Complete with the exact words the speaker uses.

1. 'I started out ____ in a state school in Lisbon...'

2. 'The turning point was a Sunday afternoon in November, when I was ____ ...'

3. 'What that job really taught me was how to ____ simply.'

Useful career-story phrases

Match each phrase to its function.

Term	Meaning
I started out in...	open a career story with your first field
What that job really taught me was...	state the transferable lesson clearly
Looking back on it now...	add the adult perspective on an old decision
The turning point was...	signal the specific moment of change
That's what led me to...	connect the past directly to the present role

Speaking · Own your career story

10 min

Use the language of this unit — past simple + time markers, career-story vocabulary, structured storytelling — to run these three tasks with a partner.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Writing · Career-summary paragraph for LinkedIn 'About' section (120-150 words)

12 min (or homework)

Write the opening paragraph of your LinkedIn 'About' section (120-150 words) that starts with your very first job and lands, by the end, on what you do today. Include: (a) where you started, in what year, (b) one specific detail from that first role that still shapes you, (c) one clear career pivot or step-up, (d) a one-sentence framing of your current work. Use AT LEAST four past-simple verbs and three different time markers. Avoid: 'passionate', 'motivated', 'team player'.

Workbook

My first job — Workbook

1. Vocabulary in context

Complete each sentence with ONE word or phrase from the box. Two items are extra.

1. It was an ____ — I wasn't managing anyone, I was learning how to be managed.
2. The first three months were a ____ — I'd never touched the software before in my life.
3. That job was really just a ____ into consulting; I stayed nine months and then moved on.
4. With two years of client work ____, I felt ready to lead my own account.
5. Recruiters didn't care about my grades — they wanted ____.
6. In 2019 I made a ____ from journalism into product management.
7. I joined straight ____ and I've been in the same industry ever since.
8. I ____ my notice on a Friday afternoon and I've never regretted it.

2. Past simple + time markers

Write the correct verb form and, where marked, the correct time marker.

1. I ____ (land) my first job three years ____ (ago / in / at).

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2. She ___ (hand in) her notice ___ (in / on / at) a Friday afternoon.
-
3. How long ___ you ___ (work) there before you ___ (become) team leader?
-
4. ___ (In / On / At) 2018 he ___ (make) a career pivot from teaching into product.
-
5. 'I ___ (walk) to work every day for three years' — a habit that ended, so also possible: 'I used to ___'.
-
6. ___ you ___ (enjoy) your very first job? — 'Yes, I ___, but I ___ (outgrow) it quickly.'
-
7. She ___ (leave) the company ___ (straight after / ago / when) her second promotion.
-

3. Interview register

Choose the option that sounds professional in a real job interview.

1. 'Tell me about your first job.'
- ☐ A. 'Honestly, it was a bit of a disaster.'
 - ☐ B. 'It was an entry-level role that gave me my first real hands-on experience with clients — it taught me how to explain a product in one sentence.'
 - ☐ C. 'I only did it for the money, to be honest.'
2. 'Why did you leave?'
- ☐ A. 'My boss was a nightmare.'
 - ☐ B. 'I'd outgrown the role and I wanted more responsibility than that job could offer.'
 - ☐ C. 'I got bored, basically.'
3. 'What did you learn there?'
- ☐ A. 'A lot of things, you know.'
 - ☐ B. 'One specific thing — how to say no politely to a request that isn't part of my job, and always offer an alternative.'
 - ☐ C. 'I don't really remember.'
4. Which sentence is the strongest bullet on a CV?
- ☐ A. 'Was responsible for various tasks.'
 - ☐ B. 'Handled reception for a 40-room hotel, six nights a week, for three months.'
 - ☐ C. 'Did a bit of everything really.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

5. 'I used to work six nights a week' vs 'I worked six nights a week' — which is more accurate for ONE specific summer?

- ☐ A. 'used to work' — it emphasises the habit
- ☐ B. 'worked' — it's a completed period with a defined start and end
- ☐ C. Both are identical in meaning.

4. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE grammar or register mistake typical of A2+/B1 professionals. Rewrite it correctly.

1. Ago three years I landed my first job in Lisbon.
2. I used to hand in my resignation letter yesterday at 4pm.
3. In two years ago I made a career pivot from teaching to product.
4. I didn't enjoyed my first job but I learned a lot.
5. 'My boss was a nightmare' — that's why I leave.
6. I was work in a hotel when I had 18 years.

5. Reading & discursive response

Read the short case, then answer.

1. Case: A candidate has three months of work on her CV in a small hotel reception at age 18. She's now interviewing for an office role and is embarrassed to mention it — she thinks it's 'not a real job'. In 100–130 words, argue for OR against her instinct, using this unit's language (past simple + time markers, career-story vocabulary, on-paper-vs-in-reality). Give her one specific way to reframe the summer job in the interview.

6. Listening — 60-second career-story voicemail

A former colleague leaves a 60-second voicemail preparing you for an interview panel where you'll be the candidate. Listen (or read the transcript) and answer.

1. What is the caller's overall goal in leaving this voicemail?

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2. Which SPECIFIC detail does the caller tell the candidate to keep in the story?

3. What does the caller explicitly tell the candidate NOT to say?

4. Name the ONE closing tip the caller gives.

7. Writing — LinkedIn 'About' opening paragraph (120-150 words)

Write the opening paragraph of your LinkedIn 'About' section (120-150 words) that starts with your very first job and lands, by the end, on what you do today. Include: (1) where you started, in what year, (2) one specific detail from that first role that still shapes you, (3) one clear career pivot or step-up, (4) a one-sentence framing of your current work. Use AT LEAST four past-simple verbs and three different time markers. Do NOT use: 'passionate', 'motivated', 'team player', 'results-driven'.

8. Case study preview

Look at this unit's Case Study. Answer briefly.

1. What is the main challenge in the case for Unit 9, and which stakeholder is under the most pressure?

2. If you were coaching that stakeholder, what is the ONE reframing sentence you would give them for their next conversation — the equivalent of 'no, but here's what I can do'?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class
