



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B1 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 9 · B1·9B

The interview process

Theme · Careers & interviews



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Theme: Careers & interviews

B1 · Business English



Learning objectives

- Handle the four most-asked interview questions without freezing (strengths, weaknesses, gap, salary).
- Ask three sharp candidate-side questions at the end that reveal what the role is actually like.
- Use present perfect continuous naturally in interview answers — with numbers, not fluff.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The question you dread most

Think of the ONE interview question that makes you anxious. Answer three quick questions in one sentence each.

What's the question?

Why is it hard for you?

What would a calm 30-second answer sound like?

Lead-in: what would you say?

Four tricky moments from the interview process. For each, choose the option that keeps you in the running WITHOUT sounding fake. There is one clearly better answer per case.

kind: scenarios

1. **title:** The classic weakness question · **setup:** 'What's your biggest weakness?' You have 30 seconds.

2. **title:** The two-year employment gap · **setup:** There's a 24-month gap on your CV between your last two roles. The interviewer notices.

3. **title:** 'What are your salary expectations?' · **setup:** You know the role's realistic range is €55–70k. You don't want to underprice or overshoot on the first call.

4. **title:** The good question to ask at the end · **setup:** The interviewer says: 'Do you have any questions for me?' You want to sound curious, not desperate.

followUp: Which of your answers was the closest call? Explain in one sentence.

Reading · The five stages of a modern interview process

Ten years ago, most job interviews had two stages: a phone screen and a face-to-face. Today the median process for a mid-level white-collar role has FIVE — a recruiter call, a hiring-manager call, a technical or case task, a panel round, and a final leadership conversation. On paper it sounds thorough. In practice it takes six weeks and quietly excludes candidates who are already working full-time.

Stage one is the recruiter call. It's about fit and salary. Twenty minutes. Say the number.

Stage two is the hiring manager. It's about the 90-second answer, one or two real projects, and whether you can talk about work without defending yourself. Forty-five minutes. Bring one number per answer.

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Stage three is the task — a case, a coding exercise, a portfolio review. Companies say it takes 'two to three hours'. It usually takes six. This is where the process gets unfair, because juniors and career changers spend the six hours and seniors don't. Increasingly, the good companies pay for it.

Stage four is the panel. Three to five people you'll work with, forty-five minutes, rapid-fire questions. Your job is not to be brilliant. Your job is to be the same person you were on the recruiter call — same numbers, same story, same energy at 5pm as at 10am.

Stage five is the final. It's not really an interview; it's a mutual decision. If you're there, they want to hire you. Your job is to ask the ONE question you still don't know the answer to, and to trust the answer you get.

1. How many stages does a typical modern process now have?

- (A) Two
- (B) Three
- (C) Five

2. What is the point of the recruiter call?

- (A) Deep skills evaluation
- (B) Fit and salary
- (C) Reference checks

3. Why is the task stage unfair, per the text?

- (A) The tasks are too easy
- (B) Juniors spend more time on it than seniors
- (C) Only remote candidates get one

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to the meaning.

a phone screen — a short initial call to filter candidates

a case task — a work sample given during the process

the panel — a group interview with several colleagues at once

rapid-fire questions — many short questions in quick succession

True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text.

1. Most processes today take about a week.

- (A) True
- (B) False
- (C) Not Given

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2. Case tasks usually take longer than companies estimate.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
3. Some companies pay for the case task.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
4. The final stage is more about mutual choice than evaluation.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
5. Panel interviews always include the CEO.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given

React to the text

Discuss briefly.

1. In your industry, do 5-stage processes filter for the best candidates — or for candidates with the most free time?

2. Should companies pay for the case task?

Scan for meaning

Find the phrase in the text that matches each definition.

1. a group interview with several colleagues at once

2. a short initial call about salary and fit

3. the moment when it's really a mutual decision

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Vocabulary · Six interview verbs and nouns

a phone screen / screening call — a short initial call to filter candidates

a panel interview — several interviewers at the same time

a case task / case study — a written or spoken work sample

the final round — the last interview before an offer

the offer / an offer letter — the formal proposal outlining terms of employment

the reference check — when a company calls your past managers

to shortlist someone — to keep in the final group

to reject someone — to say no formally

to ghost someone — to stop replying with no reason

to negotiate an offer — to discuss the terms before saying yes

to accept / decline an offer — to say yes / no formally

to reschedule — to move an interview to another date

practice

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

1. The ____ took 20 minutes and covered salary and start date.

2. I'll ____ the offer tomorrow after I sleep on it.

3. They asked me to do a ____ — a two-hour spreadsheet exercise.

4. The company ____ me for two weeks after the final — no reply at all.

5. I need to ____ the interview because I'm sick.

6. In the ____, they usually call two of your past managers.

Collocations · interview phrases

Match the verb with the noun.

pass — the phone screen

negotiate — an offer

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reschedule — an interview

accept — the position

decline — an offer

ghost — a candidate

Odd one out

Choose the word that does NOT belong.

1. phone screen · panel · offer · onboarding

(A) phone screen

(B) panel

(C) offer

(D) onboarding

2. accept · decline · negotiate · ghost

(A) accept

(B) decline

(C) negotiate

(D) ghost

3. recruiter · hiring manager · candidate · commute

(A) recruiter

(B) hiring manager

(C) candidate

(D) commute

Word building · verb ↔ noun

Complete the pair.

1. to negotiate → a ____

2. to reject → a ____

3. to select → a ____

4. to refer → a ____

5. to decide → a ____

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Grammar · Present perfect continuous — the interview version

- 1. Answer 'how long?' with FOR + duration or SINCE + starting point** — • 'I've been leading this team FOR two years.' • 'I've been running the roadmap SINCE January.'
- 2. Signal 'still ongoing' — perfect for interviews** — • 'I've been building this dashboard' (still building — sounds current) • 'I built this dashboard' (finished — sounds distant)
- 3. Use present perfect SIMPLE for the number / result** — • Ongoing: 'I've been rebuilding the pricing model since January.' • Result: 'We've moved conversion from 2.1% to 3.4%.' • Best answer uses BOTH: 'I've been rebuilding it since January — we've moved conversion from 2.1% to 3.4%.'
- 4. Weakness answers: perfect continuous shows growth** — • 'I've been learning to give harder feedback earlier.' • 'I've been working on delegating more instead of stepping in.'
- 5. Avoid state verbs in continuous form** — • ✓ 'I've known the CFO since 2019.' • ✗ 'I've been knowing...'

Exercise A — put the verbs in the right form

Present perfect simple or continuous.

1. I (work) here for three years.

2. We (ship) five features this quarter.

3. She (lead) the team since 2022.

4. I (know) the founder for ten years.

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5. They (interview) candidates for six weeks now.

6. We (hire) three engineers this month.

Exercise B — rewrite the weakness answer using present perfect continuous

Turn each 'weakness' into a growth answer using PPC.

1. I sometimes wait too long to give feedback.

2. I don't delegate enough.

3. I say yes to too many things.

Exercise C — for or since?

Complete with 'for' or 'since'.

1. I've been in this role ____ two years.

2. We've been interviewing ____ mid-March.

3. She's been my manager ____ she joined in 2023.

4. The process has been running ____ six weeks.

5. I've been reaching out to recruiters ____ Monday.

Exercise D — the two-sentence answer

For each question, write ONE PPC sentence + ONE result sentence.

1. 'What have you been focusing on in your current role?'

2. 'What's a skill you've been building outside work?'

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Exercise E — full answer to 'why should we hire you?'

Write a 3-sentence answer. Sentence 1: PPC + duration (what you've been doing). Sentence 2: present perfect simple + number (the result). Sentence 3: one honest reason for THIS role. Max 90 words.

1. Role: Head of Customer Success at a B2B SaaS.

Listening · Two candidates, one panel

The final panel round for a Head of Marketing role. Two candidates answer the same four questions. Listen and decide who to make the offer to — and one thing you'd say to the other in the rejection call.

pre

In your industry, do panels usually decide by consensus, or by the loudest voice in the room?

What's ONE question you'd add to any panel?

gist

1. Which candidate answers with numbers, and which with adjectives?

2. Which candidate asks a sharp question at the end?

3. Which candidate handles the weakness question well?

detail

1. What specific number does Candidate B mention?

2. Why does Candidate A weaken their own answer?

3. What is Candidate B's honest reason for wanting this role?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

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1. Which candidate is likely to negotiate the offer harder?

2. What ONE piece of feedback would help Candidate A most?

Useful language from the audio

Match each phrase to what it does.

"I've been leading marketing at a B2B SaaS for four years." — opens with PPC + duration (grounded)

"We've grown MQLs 40% year-on-year." — supports the claim with a number

"I've been learning to say no to good ideas so the great ones ship." — handles weakness with growth framing

"What has surprised you most about the last two hires in this role?" — closes with a sharp candidate-side question

"I think I'm kind of a strategic person." — hedges (weakens the claim)

Candidate A: So, I think I'm kind of a strategic person, I like the big picture, I've been in marketing for a while and I think I bring a lot of creativity and passion. I think this role sounds interesting and I've been kind of looking for something new. My weakness is probably that I care too much about the work. And, um, do you know how the holiday policy works here?

Candidate B: I've been leading marketing at a B2B SaaS in Barcelona for four years. In that time we've grown MQLs 40% year-on-year and cut CAC from €340 to €190. On the weakness side, I've been learning to say no to good ideas so the great ones actually ship. And one question for you: what has surprised you most about the last two hires in this role?

Fourth listen — fill the gaps

Complete the exact phrases from the audio.

1. I've been ____ marketing at a B2B SaaS in Barcelona for four years.

2. We've grown MQLs 40% year-on-year and cut CAC from €340 to ____.

3. I've been ____ to say no to good ideas so the great ones ship.

4. What has ____ you most about the last two hires in this role?

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5. I think I'm kind of a ____ person.

Speaking · The 45-minute hiring-manager call, in 8 minutes

Role-play the middle of a hiring-manager call: three questions, three answers, one candidate-side question at the end. Use present perfect continuous in your first answer, present perfect simple in the second, and one sharp question of your own to close.

Scene: Question 1: 'What have you been focusing on in your current role?'

A: Student A: candidate. Answer using PPC + duration + ONE number.

B: Student B: hiring manager. Probe: 'What went wrong on the way?'

Scene: Question 2: 'What's your biggest weakness right now?'

A: Student A: candidate. Use PPC to show a real growth area — no clichés.

B: Student B: hiring manager. Reaction: accept, or push for a second one.

Scene: Question 3 (candidate side): 'What has surprised you most about the last six months in this team?'

A: Student A: candidate. Ask the question.

B: Student B: hiring manager. Answer as honestly as you can.

Class discussion

Discuss briefly.

In your industry, what's the ONE weakness that's genuinely disqualifying?

Is a 5-stage process a sign of a mature company or a slow one?

How would you react if a company ghosted you after the final round?

Role-play · the salary conversation

Student A is the candidate, Student B is the recruiter. B asks the salary question. A answers using the anchor-then-package formula.

Scene: Role: Senior Product Designer, realistic range €55–70k.

A: Student A: 'I'd be looking in the region of €62–70k, but the whole package matters.'

B: Student B: react — push down, push up, or accept the anchor.

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Scene: Role: Head of Operations, realistic range €80–100k.

A: Student A: anchor + one reason based on scope.

B: Student B: react — mention budget, or ask for flexibility on start date.

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Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary gap-fill

Complete each sentence with **ONE** word or phrase from the box.

Word bank: phone screen · case task · panel interview · final round · offer · reference check

1. The ____ took 20 minutes and covered salary and start date.

2. They asked me to do a ____ — a two-hour spreadsheet exercise.

3. I have five interviewers on Thursday — it's the ____.

4. I've made it to the ____ — one more conversation with the CEO.

5. The ____ came in on Friday: €68k + bonus.

6. In the ____, they usually call two of your past managers.

2. Present perfect continuous or simple?

Choose the more natural form.

1. I (work) here for three years.

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2. We (ship) five features this quarter.

3. She (lead) the team since 2022.

4. I (know) the founder for ten years.

5. They (interview) candidates for six weeks now.

6. We (hire) three engineers this month.

3. Which interview answer is stronger?

Choose the answer that would move you to the next round.

1. 'What's your biggest weakness?'

(A) 'I'm a perfectionist — I care too much.'

(B) 'I've been learning to give harder feedback earlier — I used to wait weeks.'

(C) 'I don't really have any weaknesses that would affect this role.'

2. 'What are your salary expectations?'

(A) 'Whatever you think is fair.'

(B) 'I'd be looking in the region of €62–70k, but the whole package matters.'

(C) '€120k, non-negotiable.'

3. 'Do you have any questions for me?'

(A) 'What's the salary?'

(B) 'What has surprised you most about working here in the last six months?'

(C) 'No, I think you've covered everything.'

4. 'Tell me about a 24-month gap on your CV.'

(A) 'That's personal.'

(B) 'I took time to care for a family member. During that time I completed a data course and started freelancing.'

(C) 'I couldn't find a job.'

4. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake.

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1. I've been in this role since two years.

2. She's been knowing the CFO since 2019.

3. We've been ship five features this quarter.

4. I am interviewing for three months already.

5. Listening — two candidates, one panel

The final panel for a Head of Marketing role. Two candidates answer the same questions. Which one gets the offer?

1. Who answers with numbers and who with adjectives?

2. Who asks a sharp candidate-side question?

3. Who handles the weakness question best, and how?

Candidate A: So, I think I'm kind of a strategic person, I like the big picture, I've been in marketing for a while and I think I bring a lot of creativity and passion. This role sounds interesting and I've been kind of looking for something new. My weakness is probably that I care too much about the work. And, do you know how the holiday policy works here?

Candidate B: I've been leading marketing at a B2B SaaS in Barcelona for four years. In that time we've grown MQLs 40% year-on-year and cut CAC from €340 to €190. On the weakness side, I've been learning to say no to good ideas so the great ones actually ship. And one question for you: what has surprised you most about the last two hires in this role?

6. Writing — your weakness answer

Write a 3-sentence answer to 'What's your biggest weakness right now?'. Use present perfect continuous to signal growth. Include one specific past behaviour ('I used to...') and one specific present behaviour ('now I...'). No clichés. Max 60 words.

7. Case study preview

Before Case Study 9, answer briefly.

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1. Two finalists, one role. What's the ONE deciding factor for you — track record, culture fit, first-90-days plan, or cost?

2. How do you write a rejection that keeps the door open?

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Answer key — Class Book

Reading · The five stages of a modern interview process

1. (C) Five
2. (B) Fit and salary
3. (B) Juniors spend more time on it than seniors
1. (B) False
2. (A) True
3. (A) True
4. (A) True
5. (C) Not Given
1. Model: often the second. The best candidate is often already employed and can't do six hours of unpaid case work.
2. Model: yes above ~4 hours. It's the cleanest signal that they respect your time.
1. the panel
2. the recruiter call
3. stage five is the final

Vocabulary · Six interview verbs and nouns

1. phone screen
2. accept
3. case task
4. ghosted
5. reschedule
6. reference check
1. (D) onboarding
2. (D) ghost
3. (D) commute
1. negotiation
2. rejection
3. selection
4. reference / referral
5. decision

Grammar · Present perfect continuous — the interview version

1. have been working
2. have shipped
3. has been leading
4. have known
5. have been interviewing
6. have hired
1. I've been learning to give feedback earlier — I used to wait weeks, now I try in the first days.
2. I've been working on delegating more, especially the parts I know I could do faster myself.
3. I've been practising saying 'not this quarter' without feeling I have to justify it.
1. for
2. since
3. since
4. for
5. since
1. Model: 'I've been focusing on our onboarding flow since March. We've cut drop-off in the first 7 days from 34% to 21%.'
2. Model: 'I've been studying data analysis in the evenings for about a year. I've built two internal dashboards our team now uses weekly.'
1. Model: 'I've been running customer success for a 60-person SaaS in Madrid for four years. We've moved gross retention from 82% to 94% and built a health-score system that flags churn 8 weeks earlier. I'm here because your product-led growth motion is exactly the transition I want to lead next.'

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Listening · Two candidates, one panel

1. Candidate B answers with numbers ('grown MQLs 40%', 'shipped 6 campaigns'). Candidate A answers with adjectives ('strategic', 'passionate', 'creative').
2. Candidate B — 'what has surprised you most about the last two hires in this role?'. Candidate A asks about holiday policy.
3. Candidate B — 'I've been learning to say no to good ideas so the great ones ship.'
1. 'MQL volume up 40% year-on-year and CAC down from €340 to €190.'
2. Uses 'I think' and 'kind of' four times in 60 seconds. Confidence leaks out.
3. 'You're the first company I've seen where marketing owns the pricing page — that's where I want to work.'
1. Candidate B — clear numbers, confident language, and a sharp question at the end all signal a candidate who knows their market value.
2. 'Bring one number per answer.' Adjectives don't survive panel comparison; numbers do.
1. leading
2. €190
3. learning
4. surprised
5. strategic

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Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. phone screen
2. case task
3. panel interview
4. final round
5. offer
6. reference check

2. Present perfect continuous or simple?

1. have been working
2. have shipped
3. has been leading
4. have known
5. have been interviewing
6. have hired

3. Which interview answer is stronger?

1. (B) 'I've been learning to give harder feedback earlier — I used to wait weeks.'
2. (B) 'I'd be looking in the region of €62–70k, but the whole package matters.'
3. (B) 'What has surprised you most about working here in the last six months?'
4. (B) 'I took time to care for a family member. During that time I completed a data course and started freelancing.'

4. Find and fix the mistake

1. I've been in this role for two years.
2. She's known the CFO since 2019.
3. We've shipped five features this quarter.
4. I've been interviewing for three months already.

5. Listening — two candidates, one panel

1. Candidate B → numbers ('MQLs 40%', 'CAC €340 → €190'). Candidate A → adjectives ('strategic', 'passionate').
2. Candidate B — 'what has surprised you most about the last two hires in this role?'. Candidate A asks about holiday.
3. Candidate B — 'I've been learning to say no to good ideas so the great ones ship.' Growth framing with PPC.

7. Case study preview

1. Model: first-90-days plan. It's the only signal that separates 'good candidate' from 'good hire for THIS company'.
2. Model: name what you'll remember, be specific about why they aren't the pick this time, offer ONE concrete thing (feedback call, intro, second look in 12 months).

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