



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B1 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 9 · B1·9A

How long have you been doing this?

Theme · Careers & interviews



Unit 9 · B1·9A

How long have you been doing this?

Theme: Careers & interviews

B1 · Business English



Learning objectives

- Talk about ongoing career actions with present perfect continuous ('I've been working on this since March').
- Answer the two most-asked interview questions calmly, with a number and a concrete result.
- Use six high-frequency career verbs and nouns you can drop into any interview or LinkedIn line.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The last thing you started at work

Think of *ONE* thing you *STARTED* doing at work in the last 6 months and haven't finished yet. Answer in one sentence each.

How long have you been working on it?

What have you learned so far?

What's still unfinished?

Lead-in: career myths — myth or fact?

Six claims about hiring and interviews today. Vote MYTH or FACT for each, then reveal.

kind: myths

1. **claim:** Recruiters typically spend less than 10 seconds on a first CV scan. · **vote:** FACT · **explain:** The classic Ladders eye-tracking study says ~7.4 seconds. Your first line matters far more than your last.

2. **claim:** 'Culture fit' is a legally protected criterion in most European hiring. · **vote:** MYTH · **explain:** It's a vague preference, not a protected criterion — and it's increasingly seen as a source of bias. 'Skills fit' is the safer frame.

3. **claim:** For most B2B roles, LinkedIn now generates more interviews than job-board applications. · **vote:** FACT · **explain:** For qualified white-collar candidates, warm intros + LinkedIn typically produce 2–3× the interview rate of cold applications.

4. **claim:** Sending a thank-you email after an interview measurably improves offer rate. · **vote:** FACT · **explain:** Roughly 68% of hiring managers say a short, personal follow-up affects their view. It's a low-cost, high-return move.

5. **claim:** Cover letters are dead — nobody reads them anymore. · **vote:** MYTH · **explain:** For senior and specialist roles a short, personalised paragraph still moves the needle. The 500-word template is dead; the 4-line note is not.

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6. **claim:** Salary is the #1 reason people leave a job. · **vote:** MYTH · **explain:** Most exit surveys (Gallup, McKinsey) put manager quality and career growth AHEAD of salary. Salary is the reason people give — not the reason they leave.

followUp: Which answer surprised you most? Explain in one sentence.

Reading · The 90-second answer

Every interview opens with the same question. The wording varies — 'tell me about yourself', 'walk me through your background', 'how did you end up here?' — but the shape is identical. And most candidates get it wrong in exactly the same way: they treat it as a life story instead of a professional pitch.

A good answer is 90 seconds long. It has three sentences. Sentence one: what you've been doing recently, in present perfect continuous ('I've been leading a data team of six at a fintech in Lisbon for the last two years'). Sentence two: what you've achieved, in present perfect with a number ('We've cut reporting time by 70% and shipped a new dashboard used by 40 people daily'). Sentence three: why THIS role, in one honest line ('I'm here because your product is the one my team keeps quoting').

Ninety seconds is not a hard limit; it's an insurance policy. Under 60 seconds and you sound underprepared; over two minutes and the interviewer stops listening. Ninety seconds gives you a number, a result and a reason — which is the whole job.

The reason candidates struggle is that they've been asked 'tell me about yourself' hundreds of times in their life — at parties, at family dinners, on first dates — and always answered with autobiography. An interview is not a party. Cut the autobiography. Lead with the number.

1. How long should the ideal opening answer be?
 - (A) 30 seconds
 - (B) 90 seconds
 - (C) 3 minutes
2. Sentence one should use which tense?
 - (A) Past simple
 - (B) Present perfect continuous
 - (C) Future perfect
3. Why do candidates struggle with 'tell me about yourself'?
 - (A) It's too technical
 - (B) They answer with autobiography instead of a pitch
 - (C) Interviewers ask it in different words

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to the meaning.

a professional pitch — a short structured summary of what you offer

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shipped a new dashboard — delivered and released it into use
an insurance policy — a safety measure in case things go wrong
the whole job (of the answer) — everything the answer needs to do

True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text.

1. 'Tell me about yourself' has a fixed wording across companies.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
2. Under 60 seconds sounds underprepared.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
3. Ninety seconds is a legal maximum.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
4. Autobiography is the wrong register for an interview.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
5. Interviewers always time the answer with a stopwatch.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given

React to the text

Discuss briefly.

1. In your country, is 'tell me about yourself' answered as autobiography or as a pitch?

2. Is 90 seconds realistic for a senior candidate?

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Scan for meaning

Find the phrase in the text that matches each definition.

1. a short structured summary of what you offer

2. delivered and released into use

3. a personal history from childhood onwards

Vocabulary · Six career verbs and nouns

a track record — your history of concrete results

a role / a remit — the job title plus the scope of responsibility

a hiring manager — the person who makes the offer (not the recruiter)

the shortlist — the final 3–5 candidates

the notice period — the time you must give before leaving

a counter-offer — your current employer's response to keep you

to apply for — to submit for a role

to shortlist — to select for the final round

to reach out (to) — to contact informally

to follow up — to send a second message after silence

to onboard — to bring a new hire up to speed

to hand in your notice — to officially resign

practice

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

1. She has a strong ____ in B2B sales — three years, three exceeded quotas.

2. The ____ told me they'd like to meet on Thursday.

3. I made the ____ of five candidates for the final round.

4. My ____ is three months, which will slow the start date.

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5. They came back with a ____ — 15% more and a promotion in six months.

6. I'll ____ next week if I haven't heard anything by Friday.

Collocations · career phrases

Match the verb with the noun.

apply for — a role

make — the shortlist

hand in — your notice

accept — an offer

reach out to — a recruiter

onboard — a new hire

Odd one out

Choose the word that does NOT belong.

1. role · position · shortlist · title

(A) role

(B) position

(C) shortlist

(D) title

2. apply · onboard · shortlist · resign

(A) apply

(B) onboard

(C) shortlist

(D) resign

3. recruiter · candidate · hiring manager · notice period

(A) recruiter

(B) candidate

(C) hiring manager

(D) notice period

Word building · verb ↔ noun

Complete the pair.

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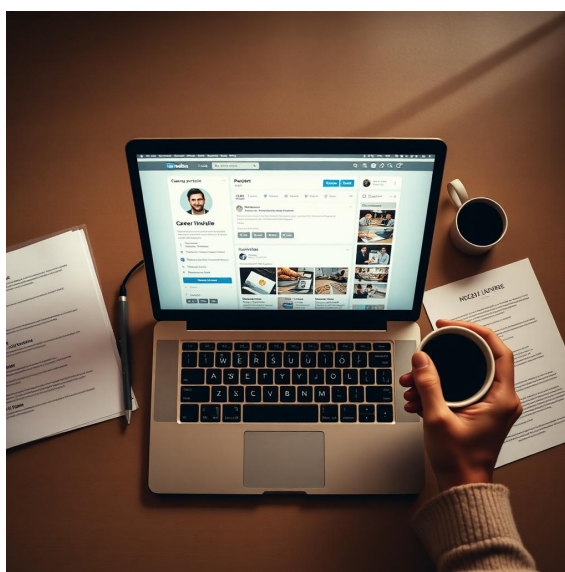
1. to apply → an ____

2. to hire → a ____

3. to promote → a ____

4. to resign → a ____

5. to interview → an ____



Grammar · Present perfect continuous

1. Form: have/has + been + verb-ing — • I have been working on this since March. • She has been leading the team for two years.

2. Use: an action that STARTED in the past and is STILL going — • I've been learning Portuguese for six months. (still learning) • We've been rebuilding the pricing model since January. (still rebuilding)

3. FOR (a duration) vs SINCE (a starting point) — • for two years / for six months / for a long time • since March / since 2022 / since I joined

4. Present perfect continuous vs present perfect simple — • Continuous: focus on the ONGOING activity → 'I've been writing the report all morning.' • Simple: focus on the RESULT / how many → 'I've written three reports this week.'

5. State verbs (know, own, need, have=possess) — **no continuous** — • I've known him for ten years. (NOT: I've been knowing.) • She's had that role since 2021. (NOT: She's been having.)

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**Exercise A — put the verbs in present perfect continuous or simple**

Choose the more natural form.

1. I (work) on this proposal since 8am and I'm exhausted.

2. She (send) 40 emails this morning.

3. We (rebuild) the pricing model since January.

4. They (interview) five candidates for that role.

5. I (learn) Portuguese for six months but I still can't order coffee.

6. He (know) the CFO for ten years.

Exercise B — find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake.

1. I've been knowing her since 2018.

2. She has been leading the team since two years.

3. We've been shipped three features this quarter.

4. I am working here since March.

Exercise C — for or since?

Complete with 'for' or 'since'.

1. I've been working here ____ March.

2. We've been rebuilding the site ____ six weeks.

3. She's been leading the team ____ 2023.

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4. They've been interviewing ____ nearly a month.

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

Exercise D — your own 'I've been...' line

Write *ONE* true sentence about *YOUR* work using present perfect continuous + a duration.

1. About your current role.

2. About a project.

3. About a skill you're building.

Exercise E — the 90-second answer

Write your 3-sentence 'tell me about yourself' answer. Sentence 1: present perfect continuous + duration. Sentence 2: present perfect simple + a number and a result. Sentence 3: one honest reason for *THIS* role. Max 90 words.

1. Prompt: you're interviewing for an operations manager role at a scale-up.

Listening · Three answers to 'tell me about yourself'

Three candidates apply for the same B1-level operations role. Listen to their opening answer and decide which one you'd invite to the next round, which one you'd coach, and which one you'd politely decline.

pre

In your own last interview, how long did YOUR opening answer last?

What is the ONE phrase you're tired of hearing candidates use?

gist

1. Which candidate stays close to 90 seconds and leads with a number?

2. Which candidate tells a life story instead of a pitch?

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3. Which candidate is too short and sounds underprepared?

detail

1. What specific number does Candidate B mention?

2. Why does Candidate A lose the interviewer?

3. What does Candidate C forget to say?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

1. Which candidate has probably rehearsed the answer?

2. What should Candidate A do BEFORE the next interview?

Useful language from the audio

Match each phrase to what it does.

"I've been leading operations for the last three years..." — opens with duration + role (present perfect continuous)

"We've cut errors from 4% to 0.6%." — reports a concrete result with numbers

"I'm here because your onboarding flow is the one my team keeps quoting." — gives one honest reason for THIS role

"So, I was born in Braga, went to school there..." — opens with autobiography (wrong register)

"Yeah, that's me." — trails off without a reason

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Candidate A: So, I was born in Braga, went to school there, my father was actually an engineer, so I always liked technical things. I studied management at university, my first job was in retail — it was a small shop but a great learning experience — then I moved to logistics, and after four years I moved to my current company, where I've been for about, I don't know, five or six years now, doing a bit of everything really.

Candidate B: Sure. I've been leading operations for a 40-person e-commerce company in Porto for the last three years. In that time we've cut order-processing errors from 4% to 0.6% and doubled weekly volume without adding headcount. I'm here because your onboarding flow is the one my team keeps quoting to me — I'd like to help build it.

Candidate C: Hi. So I've worked in operations for a while. Currently at a small logistics company. I saw the job, I thought it looked good, and I applied. Yeah, that's me.

Fourth listen — fill the gaps

Complete the exact phrases from the audio.

1. I've been ____ operations for a 40-person e-commerce company in Porto for the last three years.

2. We've ____ order-processing errors from 4% to 0.6%.

3. I'm here ____ your onboarding flow is the one my team keeps quoting to me.

4. I've worked in operations ____ a while.

5. I saw the job, I thought it looked good, and I ____.

Speaking · Your 90-second pitch

Prepare and deliver your OWN 90-second 'tell me about yourself' answer. Three sentences: present perfect continuous + duration; present perfect simple + a number and result; one honest reason for the role. Then role-play the interviewer's first follow-up question.

Scene: Role 1 — Operations Manager at a Porto scale-up

A: You: the candidate. Deliver your 90-second pitch, then answer the follow-up: 'What went wrong in the last 12 months, and what did you learn?'

B: You: the hiring manager. React — probe the number, push on the reason, or ask about the last mistake.

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**Scene:** Role 2 — Junior Product Manager at a fintech

A: You: the candidate (2 years experience). Deliver the 90-second pitch, then answer: 'Why product, and why now?'

B: You: the hiring manager. React — challenge the transition, ask about the last product decision you owned.

Scene: Role 3 — Head of Customer Success at a SaaS company

A: You: the candidate. Deliver the 90-second pitch, then answer: 'What's the ONE metric you've moved that you're proudest of?'

B: You: the CEO. React — ask how you'd move it in the FIRST 90 days here.

Class discussion

Discuss briefly.

In your industry, is 'tell me about yourself' answered with a number, or with a story?

What's the ONE question in interviews you dread most, and why?

Is a rehearsed answer a strength or a weakness in an interview?

Role-play · the follow-up question that surprises you

Student A delivers the 90-second pitch. Student B (interviewer) asks ONE surprise follow-up. A answers in ONE calm sentence, present perfect continuous where possible.

Scene: 'What have you been doing to grow, outside your day job?'

A: Student A: the candidate. Answer in ONE sentence using present perfect continuous.

B: Student B: the interviewer. React with one probing follow-up.

Scene: 'Why haven't you been promoted in the last three years?'

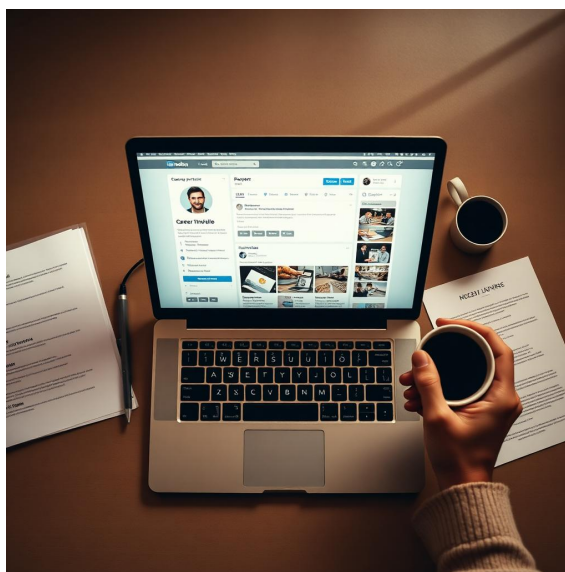
A: Student A: answer honestly, without defending or blaming.

B: Student B: react — accept, or push harder.

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Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary gap-fill

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

Word bank: track record · hiring manager · shortlist · notice period · counter-offer · follow up

1. She has a strong ____ in B2B sales — three exceeded quotas in three years.

2. The ____ told me they'd like to meet on Thursday.

3. I made the ____ of five candidates for the final round.

4. My ____ is three months, which will slow the start date.

5. They came back with a ____ — 15% more and a promotion in six months.

6. I'll ____ next week if I haven't heard by Friday.

2. Present perfect continuous or simple?

Choose the more natural form.

1. I (work) on this proposal since 8am and I'm exhausted.

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2. She (send) 40 emails this morning.

3. We (rebuild) the pricing model since January.

4. They (interview) five candidates for that role.

5. I (learn) Portuguese for six months but I still can't order coffee.

6. He (know) the CFO for ten years.

3. For or since?

Complete with 'for' or 'since'.

1. I've been working here ____ March.

2. We've been rebuilding the site ____ six weeks.

3. She's been leading the team ____ 2023.

4. They've been interviewing ____ nearly a month.

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

4. Which 'tell me about yourself' answer is stronger?

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

1. Sentence 1 (opener):

(A) 'I was born in Braga and went to school there...'

(B) 'I've been leading operations for a 40-person company in Porto for the last three years.'

(C) 'I've worked in operations for a while.'

2. Sentence 2 (result):

(A) 'I've done many things.'

(B) 'We've cut errors from 4% to 0.6% and doubled weekly volume.'

(C) 'I'm very passionate about operations.'

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3. Sentence 3 (reason):

- (A) 'I saw the job and I applied.'
- (B) 'I'm here because your onboarding flow is the one my team keeps quoting.'
- (C) 'I need a change.'

5. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake.

1. I've been knowing her since 2018.

2. She has been leading the team since two years.

3. We've been shipped three features this quarter.

4. I am working here since March.

6. Listening — three candidates, one 'tell me about yourself'

Three candidates open with different answers to the same question. Who moves forward, who gets coached, who gets rejected?

1. Which candidate stays close to 90 seconds and leads with a number?

2. Which candidate tells a life story instead of a pitch?

3. Which candidate is too short and sounds underprepared?

Candidate A: So, I was born in Braga, went to school there, my father was an engineer, so I always liked technical things. I studied management at university, my first job was in retail — a small shop but a great learning experience — then I moved to logistics, and after four years I moved to my current company, where I've been for about five or six years now, doing a bit of everything really.

Candidate B: Sure. I've been leading operations for a 40-person e-commerce company in Porto for the last three years. In that time we've cut order-processing errors from 4% to 0.6% and doubled weekly volume without adding headcount. I'm here because your onboarding flow is the one my team keeps quoting to me — I'd like to help build it.

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Candidate C: Hi. So I've worked in operations for a while. Currently at a small logistics company. I saw the job, it looked good, and I applied. Yeah, that's me.

7. Writing — your 90-second pitch

Write your own three-sentence 'tell me about yourself' answer. Sentence 1: PPC + duration. Sentence 2: present perfect simple + a number/result. Sentence 3: one honest reason for the role. Max 90 words.

8. Case study preview

Before Case Study 9, answer briefly.

1. You have two great finalists and one job. What's the SINGLE piece of information that most influences your decision?

2. How do you reject the loser without burning the bridge?

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Answer key — Class Book

Reading · The 90-second answer

1. (B) 90 seconds
2. (B) Present perfect continuous
3. (B) They answer with autobiography instead of a pitch
1. (B) False
2. (A) True
3. (B) False
4. (A) True
5. (C) Not Given
1. Model: mostly autobiography — school, first job, and then now. The pitch answer sounds foreign, but it works.
2. Model: yes — the more senior you are, the more you have to leave OUT. Discipline signals seniority.
1. a professional pitch
2. shipped a new dashboard
3. autobiography

Vocabulary · Six career verbs and nouns

1. track record
2. hiring manager
3. shortlist
4. notice period
5. counter-offer
6. follow up
1. (C) shortlist
2. (D) resign
3. (D) notice period
1. application
2. hire (or 'hiring')
3. promotion
4. resignation
5. interview (also: interviewer / interviewee)

Grammar · Present perfect continuous

1. have been working
2. has sent
3. have been rebuilding
4. have interviewed
5. have been learning
6. has known
1. I've known her since 2018.
2. She has been leading the team for two years.
3. We've shipped three features this quarter.
4. I've been working here since March.
1. since
2. for
3. since
4. for
5. since
1. Model: 'I've been running the customer-support team at a Lisbon SaaS company for the last 18 months.'
2. Model: 'I've been rebuilding our onboarding flow since March — the drop-off is already down 22%.'
3. Model: 'I've been studying data analysis in the evenings for about a year.'
1. Model: 'I've been leading operations for a 40-person e-commerce company in Porto for the last three years. In that time we've cut order-processing errors from 4% to 0.6% and doubled weekly volume without adding headcount. I'm here because your product-market fit looks like the moment I've enjoyed most in every job I've

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had.'

Listening · Three answers to 'tell me about yourself'

1. Candidate B — three sentences, one duration, one specific result, one clear reason.
2. Candidate A — starts with school, first job, and by minute two hasn't reached the current role.
3. Candidate C — 20 seconds, no number, no reason. Ends with '...yeah, that's me.'
1. 'We've cut order-processing errors from 4% to 0.6% in three years.'
2. By minute 2 the interviewer has not heard about the CURRENT role. The autobiography kills attention.
3. Any reason for wanting THIS role. No 'I'm here because...' sentence at all.
1. Candidate B — the structure is too clean to be improvised. That's a positive, not a negative.
2. Cut the first 60 seconds entirely. Start at the CURRENT role, in present perfect continuous, with a duration.
1. leading
2. cut
3. because
4. for
5. applied

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Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. track record
2. hiring manager
3. shortlist
4. notice period
5. counter-offer
6. follow up

2. Present perfect continuous or simple?

1. have been working
2. has sent
3. have been rebuilding
4. have interviewed
5. have been learning
6. has known

3. For or since?

1. since
2. for
3. since
4. for
5. since

4. Which 'tell me about yourself' answer is stronger?

1. (B) 'I've been leading operations for a 40-person company in Porto for the last three years.'
2. (B) 'We've cut errors from 4% to 0.6% and doubled weekly volume.'
3. (B) 'I'm here because your onboarding flow is the one my team keeps quoting.'

5. Find and fix the mistake

1. I've known her since 2018.
2. She has been leading the team for two years.
3. We've shipped three features this quarter.
4. I've been working here since March.

6. Listening — three candidates, one 'tell me about yourself'

1. Candidate B — three sentences, one duration, one specific result, one clear reason.
2. Candidate A — school, first job, and by minute two hasn't reached the current role.
3. Candidate C — 20 seconds, no number, no reason.

8. Case study preview

1. Model: how they'd spend the first 90 days. Anyone can look good on paper — very few describe the first 90 days concretely.
2. Model: name what you'll remember about their process, offer ONE concrete thing (feedback call, intro, second look in 12 months), keep it under 100 words.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class