

STORYTELLING GUIDE: RESOURCE 12

Seven Tips for Talking About Yourself in Interviews

It is hard not to dread the question, “Tell me about yourself...”

... especially at the start of a job interview when we are particularly nervous. Even when we’re genuinely proud of our accomplishments, it can be difficult feeling like we’re bragging or we may be afraid of rambling. A few tips for these stressful moments:

- **Reset your mindset.** Remind yourself that people genuinely want to learn more about you. It isn’t a quiz on your life—thinking about it this way will be more stressful and make you sound defensive. Worry less about what you think they want to hear and think of your story as an opportunity to offer a small window into who you are.
- **Treat your answer as a story, not a list of accomplishments.** The ways that stories are structured (with an arc, a journey, with a beginning/middle/end) is a much more engaging and informative way to portray your values, choices, and emotions than listing off your experiences.
- **Get excited.** Stories need to be driven by emotions, so talk about something that excites you, motivates you, drives you, or interests you. Let the story come from the heart.
- **Commit to a clear message that is genuinely important to you.** You can avoid rambling if your story has a destination and final takeaway. Instead of letting listeners make their own conclusions about you, be clear about the message you want them to take away.
- **Don’t cover everything.** Sometimes, less is more, so make sure to keep your story compact and as specific as possible. The less you cover, the more detail you can include and the more engaged listeners will be. Be okay with leaving them wanting to know more.
- **It isn’t bragging, it’s sharing.** As you’re talking, quiet the self-doubt demons that are telling you that you sound full of yourself. If the story comes from a genuine place, then it is more about sharing who you are to hopefully build a connection with another person.
- **Frame your story.** Many storytelling templates are just about one thing: making sure your story has a structure that listeners can follow. Instead of immediately launching into an example, start off with a simple main idea and end with a universal connection—this places your specific story or example in a context that is relatable. As an example structure, consider the following:

Section	Description	Options
Main Idea	1. State the main idea of your story. This can be a thesis sentence related to a belief statement, a theme, or a broad quality about yourself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I am someone who....” • “When I think of _____, I think of...” • “Throughout my entire life/professional experience/education, I have always...”
Illustration	2. Describe a specific story that connects to the main idea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One specific example • Mentioning a range of related experiences (“from this...to this...to this...I have always....”) • Give a sense of dedication over time (“when I was in high school I....fast forward to today, I still....”)
Link	3. Connect your story to what it means for you in the future and why the story is a relevant portrayal of you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This story is only one example of...” • “I will take these lessons in to my future work by...” • “In the future, I will...”

