

# Be Able to Introduce Yourself

By Lindsey Pollak

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“So, tell me about yourself.” Why is this question so hard? Because “tell me about yourself” sounds like a book-length essay question, but people expect a response that’s only a few sentences long.

Ask yourself the following questions”

- Which of your previous jobs, even if they were part-time or volunteer positions, provided you with experience relevant to what you hope to do now? If none, what about internships or academic experiences? What about courses you may have taken that gave you an understanding of the industry you’re pursuing?
- What are your strongest skills?
- List specific examples of projects that you worked on where you solved an important problem.
- What can you say about yourself that will set you apart from other young people or entry-level job candidates? In other words, what makes you memorable and special?

Step-by-step advice on how to craft your own personalized response:

### 1. Tell them who you are.

Remember that your primary goal is simply to introduce yourself. What's the most memorable thing you can say about yourself and your accomplishments? Begin with that.

“I am \_\_\_\_\_.”

Some examples:

- a magna cum laude graduate of \_\_\_\_\_ with a B.A. in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- a recent grad and recipient of the \_\_\_\_\_ award in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- an accomplished musician who managed a band and put myself through college.
- a championship athlete and captain of my soccer team.

### 2. Tell them what you’re good at.

Leverage the skills you listed earlier, and frame them in a way that is meaningful to an important networking contact who could lead you to, or be, a potential employer.

- “I excel at project management. In my internship as an editorial assistant I read three scripts a day while juggling administrative tasks for an office of ten people.”
- “I’m a quick learner. In my year abroad, I achieved fluency in two languages.”
- “I’m great with people. As a volunteer for the Red Cross I consistently won high praise for my ability to put first-time blood donors at ease.”

### 3. Provide a call to action.

The call to action is how you let someone know what you’re looking for. You can put yourself on anyone’s short list of young people to recommend or hire by making it clear that you really know what you want and will do a great job.

- “My principal career goal right now is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm excited to learn how your company's leadership position in the industry might open up opportunities for me.”
- “I believe very strongly in your company's mission. I'd love to explore with you how my success in this position could make a contribution to that mission.”

# Be Able to Introduce Yourself

By Lindsey Pollak

---

“So, tell me about yourself.”

This may just be the most common, and the most intimidating, phrase you’ll hear during your job search, from informal chats to formal job interviews. And be prepared, because you’re going to hear it all the time in networking situations.

Why is this question so hard? Because “tell me about yourself” sounds like a book-length essay question, but people expect a response that’s only a few sentences long. And, in this stage in your life, “So, tell me about yourself” is real-world-speak for, “So, tell me why I might be helping you get a job someday.”

By taking the time to learn the key elements of introducing yourself, you’ll be able to impress anyone you meet in a professional situation, from a networking event to an internship coordinator to a hiring manager at the company of your dreams. Luckily, you’ve already read about many ways to narrow down your interests and position yourself as a mature professional, so all you need to do now is put all of those elements together.

For help with this task, I turned to Laura Allen, founder of 15SecondPitch™, a company that trains people how to sell themselves more effectively. According to Laura, the best answers to “So, tell me about yourself” demonstrate confidence and leave the other person wanting to know more about you. And, a successful answer combines preparation and presentation—it’s not just about what you say, but how you say it.

According to Laura, “Whatever you do, don’t wing it!” There’s nothing worse than meeting an important contact or job interviewer and completely blanking when they ask this question, usually the first one they’ll pose. Take some time before you start meeting with people to think about the tangible skills you have, the challenges you’ve overcome, and the specific reasons why you will be a great job candidate and employee. To get started crafting your answer, Laura recommends that you ask yourself the following questions and write down your answers in your career planning notebook:

- Which of your previous jobs, even if they were part-time or volunteer positions, provided you with experience relevant to what you hope to do now? If none, what about internships or academic experiences? What about courses you may have taken that gave you an understanding of the industry you’re pursuing?
- What are your strongest skills?
- List specific examples of projects that you worked on where you solved an important problem. You can use those to show that you are a great troubleshooter and can think under pressure.
- What can you say about yourself that will set you apart from other young people or entry-level job candidates? In other words, what makes you memorable and special?

Now let's look at Laura’s step-by-step advice on how to craft your own personalized response, using some of the information you determined above:

### **1. Tell them who you are.**

Remember that your primary goal is simply to introduce yourself. What's the most memorable thing you can say about yourself and your accomplishments? What can you say that will immediately make the other person want to know more about you? Begin with that. "I am \_\_\_\_\_."

Some examples:

- a magna cum laude graduate of \_\_\_\_\_ with a B.A. in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- a recent grad and recipient of the \_\_\_\_\_ award in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- an accomplished musician who managed a band and put myself through college.
- an extreme sports enthusiast who jumps out of airplanes and learned to fly them.
- A strong researcher who made significant contributions to \_\_\_\_\_ .
- a championship athlete and captain of my soccer team.

### **2. Tell them what you're good at.**

Leverage the skills you listed earlier, and frame them in a way that is meaningful to an important networking contact who could lead you to, or be, a potential employer. (You don't have a lot of employment experience on your resume, you say? Talk instead about how you rose to the occasion in other situations.) Here are some examples:

- "I'm a great organizer. In my internship as a production assistant I received three promotions in one summer."
- "I excel at project management. In my internship as an editorial assistant I read three scripts a day while juggling administrative tasks for an office of ten people."
- "I'm an exceptional problem solver. In my work-study job at the registrar's office I received a special commendation from the dean for fixing the copy machine to make an important deadline."
- "I'm a quick learner. In my year abroad, I achieved fluency in two languages."
- "I'm great with people. As a volunteer for the Red Cross I consistently won high praise for my ability to put first-time blood donors at ease."

### **3. Provide a call to action.**

The call to action is how you let someone know what you're looking for, and also that you're done talking. The reason it's critical to convey that you are keenly interested in networking with this person or getting a job from them is that people, especially hiring managers, want to recommend or hire someone who is passionate about a particular position or industry, not someone who is wishy-washy or will decide to leave a job after six months. You can put yourself on anyone's short list of young people to recommend or hire by making it clear that you really know what you want and will do a great job.

Examples:

- "My principal career goal right now is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm excited to learn how your company's leadership position in the industry might open up opportunities for me."
- "I believe very strongly in your company's mission. I'd love to explore with you how my success in this position could make a contribution to that mission."

### **4. Practice Your Presentation**

Lastly, it's time to think about how you'll deliver your answer and practice, practice, practice. Laura recommends that you think of your presentation in terms of the three Cs: be clear, creative, and concise.

Also be sure to tailor your delivery to the interpersonal circumstances of the moment: the goal is to maintain a conversational tone and not sound rehearsed. Think of the above elements—who you are, what you’re good at, and your call to action—as “sound bites” that you can assemble into the flow of the conversation. And be sure to maintain eye contact and appropriate body language during the interview. These non-verbal cues say a lot about who you are and how ready you are to take on responsibility.

While most other college students and recent grads are likely to stammer and ramble, you’ll be delivering a confident and polished introduction to yourself. You’ll be ahead of the pack from the first few minutes you meet anyone.

### **MAKE THIS WORK FOR YOU**

You can study all the tips in the world about preparing an answer to the question, “So, tell me about yourself,” but the only way to know if you’ve got a great answer is to test it out for yourself. Here are three tricks to try:

**1. Tape yourself.** I cringe every time I hear the sound of my voice on a tape, but this reality check can be incredibly helpful. Speak your introduction into a recorder and ask yourself: Do I sound confident? Am I clear, creative, and concise? Is it apparent what I want? Am I being polite? Do I have any weird speech tics, such as using lots of “ums” or “likes,” or speaking too quickly?

**2. Test your introduction with a friendly audience.** Once you’re happy with the way your intro sounds to your own ears, try it with friends, family members, advisors, or career services counselors. Remember that every time you test your introduction and get feedback, you’re also getting more and more comfortable talking about yourself.

**3. Create a cheat sheet.** Write your intro on an index card or on the back of one of your business cards and keep this in your wallet or handbag at all times. (Laura Allen even creates business cards with 15-second pitches on the front for her clients.) Refer to your card before you walk into any situation where you might use your introduction—a networking event, informational interview, job interview, or anyplace else. Take a quick peek for extra confidence and clarity.

---

*About the author: Lindsey Pollak is a bestselling author, speaker, and blogger specializing in career advice for college students and young professionals. She is the author of Getting from College to Career: 90 Things to Do Before You Join the Real World and writes the top-rated Lindsey Pollak Career Blog. Lindsey is also the career contributor for ABC News on Campus, has written for Marie Claire magazine and Metro New York newspaper, and frequently speaks at universities and corporations across the country. She is a graduate of Yale University.*

*This article was excerpted from College to Career: 90 Things to Do Before You Join the Real World. To learn more, visit [www.LindseyPollak.com](http://www.LindseyPollak.com)*