

Five-Minute Activities for Business English

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1.1 Job skills

Focus Introducing vocabulary for skills and abilities

Level Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Write on the board one job name, e.g. *sales manager, accountant, IT systems manager, Chief Executive Officer, journalist*, or choose one that several members of the group have or know about.
- 2 Brainstorm and write on the board the skills and abilities that you need to do this job. Some typical ideas for a variety of jobs are given in Box 2, but follow whatever the students suggest.

Box 2 Examples of skills and abilities

being good with figures/people/technical issues

being a good administrator

being good at organising your time

having a good understanding of the market

liking challenges

working well in a team

being a good communicator

Follow-up

- Choose another job to generate more ideas.
- Students write down the skills and abilities they need to do their own job. Afterwards the teacher can collect them in and then read them out in random order. Other students have to guess whose job is being described.

1.2 What's your job?

Focus	Asking about aspects of jobs
Level	Elementary – Intermediate

Procedure

- 1 Elicit and write on the board a few questions to ask people about their jobs. For example:

Can you work from home?

Do you have to work long hours?

Does your work involve a lot of travelling?

- 2 Invent a new job for yourself. Tell students that you have changed your job and they have to guess what you do now. They should do this by asking you questions, but you will only answer with *yes* or *no*.
- 3 If there is time, the student who guesses your job then thinks of one and is questioned by the other students.

Follow-up

Continue for a short while, then summarise the questions the students used on the board.

1.3 Perks and drags

Focus	Discussing job descriptions
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Write on the board:

One of the perks of the job is ... (+ -ing)

(+ -ing) ... is a bit of a drag

- 2 Check the students understand the vocabulary. A *perk* is an extra benefit that you get from your job, in addition to your pay. Typical perks are a company car, or a laptop computer, or language lessons. A *drag* is something that is boring or unexciting and that you don't like doing. Typical drags are writing reports, having to make a long car journey to work every morning, or attending unnecessary meetings. The word *drag* is used mostly in informal speech.
- 3 Use the sentence beginning and ending on the board to give a few examples from your teaching job.

- Students complete the sentences for themselves, then compare with a partner.

Follow-up

You can explore in a class discussion the different sorts of incentive that people get (beyond their salary), and also what to do about aspects of their work that they don't enjoy.

1.4 My job and me

Focus	Discussing job responsibilities
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- Say to the students:

'When you start a job, you do more or less what your boss expects, more or less what the previous person did, more or less what the job description says. But then after some time . . . you bring something new to the job, you change how things are done, you make a difference because of who you are.'

- Ask students to think of one way that they have 'made a difference' in their current job, i.e. how they have developed the job through their own initiative.
- Students tell the group (as many reports as you have time for).

1.5 Dream job

Focus	Describing your perfect occupation
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- Write on the board:

Dream job

If I wasn't a . . . , I'd like to be a

- Complete the sentence for yourself, and write it on the board underneath. For example:

If I wasn't a teacher, I'd like to be a potter.

- 3 Respond briefly to any questions that your statement provokes.
- 4 Ask the students to write down their dream job, and provide vocabulary of occupations as needed. They share their ideas in small groups and answer questions.

Follow-up

Ask students for examples of people they know who have radically changed their career. Why did they do it? Was it successful? How easy was it to do?

1.6 What would your boss say?

Focus	Talking about your own job in the role of someone else
Level	Intermediate – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Ask for a volunteer who is going to take on the identity of their own boss. This person will come to the front of the class and answer questions about themselves in real life, but speaking in the role of their boss.
- 2 The other students question the ‘boss’ (the volunteer in role) about the ‘employee’ (the volunteer in real life). For example: What are his/her strong/weak points? What do you think he/she will be doing two years from now?

Follow-up

- Do the same activity, but the volunteer takes on the identity of one of their own subordinates. They will now answer questions about their ‘boss’ (the volunteer in real life).
- This activity could introduce a lesson on Human Resources.

1.7 Interview experience

Focus	Discussing job interviews
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Tell the students about an interview that you had.
- 2 Invite them to tell the group about their own experience of job interviews: what is the best or worst one they have ever had?

Follow-up

- You might discuss the different ways in which an interview can be conducted (formal, with a panel of people on the other side of the table; informal, with a chat over a cup of coffee).
- You might discuss whether students have come across any unusual techniques, e.g. psychological tests, using graphology to analyse handwriting.
- You might discuss interviewing and selection procedures in their own company: How is it done? Who decides? Do they have any suggestions for changes?

1.8 Interview questions

Focus	Discussing job interviews
Level	Intermediate – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Ask students what questions interviewers in their company ask a candidate for a job (or which ones they are often asked in job interviews). Elicit some examples and write them on the board. See Box 3 for typical interview questions.

Box 3 Some typical interview questions

*Tell me something about yourself.
What have you learnt in your current job?
Why do you want to leave your current job?
What are your strong points?
What are your weak points?
What are your career objectives?*

- 2 Discuss in the class: Which are the questions that show the most about a candidate?

Follow-up

- Other questions to discuss might include which ones are the most difficult to answer.
- In pairs or groups, students choose three of the questions on the board and discuss how they personally would answer them.

1.9 Career stages

Focus	Discussing significant events and changes in your career
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Write up on the board four dates, places, or names that have been significant in your career. Start talking about them and encourage students to ask you questions.
- 2 Students then write down their own four dates, places, or names. They get together in pairs or small groups and explain them to each other. Encourage them to ask each other questions.

Follow-up

One student repeats for the whole class, writing the four items on the board and telling the class about them. Other students ask questions.

1.10 What's your background?

Focus	Summarising your life and career
Level	Elementary – Advanced

Procedure

- 1 Write up on the board:

What's your background?

Make sure the students know the meaning of *background* in this context (the type of education, work and experience you have had in your life).

- 2 Tell the students that this question is very common when people meet for the first time in a business situation. To answer it, you need to summarise your whole life in about 30 seconds!
- 3 Give the students an example of how to answer using your own life and career (or possibly read out a previous student's answer). It's best to make it up spontaneously as you go. In Box 4 there is an example for one of the authors of this book that takes about 30 seconds to say at normal speaking speed.
- 4 Tell the students that you want them to do the same. They work in pairs, each telling the other their background as you did in the demonstration.

Box 4 Example for ‘What’s your background?’

I was born and brought up in London, then I went to university in the north of England. I lived in Manchester for many years, working as a teacher in community education. In my mid thirties I moved to Portugal, and I lived in Lisbon, working as a freelance Business English trainer. I did that for six years. I came back to the UK in 1996, and I've had two parallel jobs since then. Over the summer I teach at International House, London, but most of the year I write books in the field of Business English. I also do a bit of teacher training.

Follow-up

To consolidate the activity, the students can work on their background speech for homework. Then in the next class they perform their speech publicly, and they have to say it without notes.

1.11 Career plans

Focus	Writing about possible developments in your career
Level	Elementary – Advanced
Preparation	Write on the board, or photocopy and distribute, the text in Box 5.

Box 5 Career plans

Over the next few years		I intend to . . .
		And I'm going to try to . . .
		If possible, I'd also like to . . .
		And I hope to . . . , although I know it won't be easy.

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Procedure

- 1 Establish a clear business/professional context: students are writing about how they can develop their careers, not about their personal lives.
- 2 Ask students to write 1–2 sentences to complete each sentence beginning.

Follow-up

Students read out their sentences, explaining in more detail and answering questions.