

Tell Me About Yourself

“So, tell me about yourself,” is one of the most common prompts in an interview or at a networking event. At the same time, it is very difficult to offer a response without preparing ahead of time. When introducing yourself in a professional context, it is important to be focused and articulate. Here are some tips for how to create a powerful introductory statement.

Keep it Brief

When asked to introduce yourself in a professional context, you don’t need to start at the beginning of your work history or with a lot of details about your personal life. In a job interview, you’ll want to give a summary statement that focuses on how your past experiences and current interests make you a good fit for the job. In a networking situation, you can give a brief statement describing your professional or academic status. If you are looking for a job, you may also want to include a few details about your career goals. Think of your introduction as a movie preview – highlight the best parts of your career and yourself as a professional so that your audience will want to know more.

Be Prepared

The most powerful introductions illustrate who you are with experiences. Reflect on the following questions:

- What past experiences (paid, unpaid, academic) are relevant to what you want to do now or in the near future?
- What experiences show that you’ve solved problems, taken initiative, overcome challenges?
- What sets you apart from others?

It is important to consider the length of your response. An introduction in response to an interview question should be approximately 90 seconds long, while an introduction at a networking event or as part of a casual conversation should last approximately 30-45 seconds.

To compose your “Tell me about yourself” response to an interview question, you may want to break down the time as such:

- *15 seconds* – Information about you, e.g. “I am originally from Texas, but I moved to DC two years ago to get policy experience working on Capitol Hill.”
- *15-30 seconds* – Information about your educational background, e.g. “I studied English and Political Science at Texas A&M and am now pursuing a Master of Public Health degree at GW with an emphasis on Health Policy. This past semester I took a course that focused on low income and at-risk populations, and I’m very interested in issues related to affordability.”
- *30 seconds* – Information about your professional experience, e.g. “For the past two years I’ve worked in the office of Senator Tom Harkin, first as an intern and then as a Legislative Aid. I have performed in-depth research on topics such as tobacco cessation and HIV prevention campaigns, which was used in compiling briefs and position papers used by the Senator. What I liked most about my time in Senator Harkin’s office was the opportunity to see the process in

which ideas become policy and are then put into practice. After a couple of years I decided that I wanted to deepen my understanding of public health, so I began graduate work at GW. At GW I've been able to work with faculty in The Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy, collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data."

- *15 seconds* – A statement that relates what you have said to the job for which you are applying and summarizes what you can contribute, e.g. "I have a strong interest in government and public service, and I'm eager to use my familiarity with the legislative process, as well as the quantitative analysis skills I've gained in my MPH program."

To compose your "Tell me about yourself" introduction in a networking context, you may want to consider the following guideline:

- *15 seconds* – Information about you, e.g. "I am originally from Texas, but I moved to DC two years ago to gain policy experience working on Capitol Hill."
- *15 seconds* – Information about your educational background and experience, e.g. "I worked in Senator Tom Harkin's office for a couple of years and ultimately decided that I wanted a deeper understanding of public health, so I recently began the MPH program with a concentration in Health Policy at GW."
- *15 seconds* – Information about your career goals, e.g. "Right now I am working as a Research Assistant in the Department of Health Policy, but after I complete my degree, I would like to work as a policy analyst for the federal government, ideally in work that focuses on issues of health care affordability."

Although you should compose introductions ahead of time, you don't want to sound scripted. Be sure to practice so that you can introduce yourself in a fluid and natural manner.

Practice, Practice, Practice

When introducing yourself, it's not just what you say, but also how you say it that makes a big impact.

- Practice introducing yourself in a variety of contexts, i.e. over the phone, as an answer to the first question of an interview, at a professional conference, to a contact who works in your desired field.
- Avoid monologues. An introduction is often a way to begin a conversation; adapt your introduction to the context. As you listen to what your conversation partners have to say, you'll better be able to apply who you are and your achievements to the needs of your audience.
- When you're nervous you probably tend to speak faster; make a conscious effort to speak deliberately and with confidence.
- Do not memorize and recite. Be natural.

Additional Examples

As a greeting: *Hi, I'm Elizabeth. I'm a graduate student in public health with an emphasis in marketing and communications. I've been managing the social media platforms at XYZ Communications this semester.*

As a response to an interview question: *I've been teaching yoga and nutrition classes at the local community health center for the past two years, and I'm finishing up an MPH in health promotion this*

May. Prior to graduate school, I taught middle school science for two years with the Teach for America program, and I wrote and received a \$5,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to fund an after-school club at the middle school. I'm really excited to apply my teaching skills and health background to developing wellness programs for the Anytown School District.

In a networking context (e.g. "So what do you do?"): *Right now I'm in my first year of a graduate program in Health Services Administration and Leadership at GW. I've become really interested in issues of quality improvement, and I'm currently looking for a summer internship that will give me some experience in that area so that I can eventually work as a consultant to hospital systems.*