

# Stop saying these 9 things in your interview

When you're preparing for an interview, working out what you're going to say is key.

Some words are best avoided in an interview, even if they seem positive. Some are overused and clichéd, while others may understate your abilities – and a hiring manager has probably heard them a thousand times before.

Here's a look at which words and phrases to avoid – and what you should say instead.

## Beware of using words that downplay your abilities

If you struggle talking about your skills, you're not alone. Jobseekers at all levels can feel uneasy talking about themselves in an interview, says Leah Lambart, Career Coach at [Relaunch Me](#).

“Surprisingly, even chief financial officers and chief executive officers find this incredibly difficult. As a result, people can fall into the trap of using words that tend to downplay their achievements for fear of sounding boastful or arrogant in an interview situation.”

But an interview isn't the time to downplay your accomplishments, Lambart says. “It's important to use positive language that sells your strengths.”

These words can send the message that you're not comfortable talking about your achievements:

- **We**

If you had to describe how you overcame a problem at work, do you tend to use “we” instead of “I”? Many of us naturally do that – but the interview panel is only interested in your positive impact.

“It's really important that people get comfortable using ‘I’ instead of ‘we’ so the panel can assess your personal contribution to a successful outcome,” Lambart says. You can practise saying “I” by doing some mock interviews with a friend.

- **Just**

Often we use “just” to downplay our responsibilities and achievements, Lambart says. For example: “I just assisted with the project”, or “I just have basic Excel skills”. While it's important to be honest about your skills in an interview, using “just” will emphasise a skill you're lacking or not confident in. Practice talking about your skills and achievements without using “just”.

- **Only**

This word also downplays your abilities, such as “I only worked there for one year”.

Lambart suggests avoiding “only” as it reinforces you’re lacking skills in a certain area. “If you feel you have limited experience or skills, be upfront about the experience you do have and how you plan to gain further exposure or to upskill in a certain area,” she says. In a job interview, you should be pivoting back to your strengths and skillset whenever possible.

- **Obviously**

Your interviewer probably hasn’t met you before, so don’t assume anything is obvious. “Using the word ‘obviously’ can rub people the wrong way as it suggests the other person should understand something when they may not,” Lambart says. Avoid potential conflict by removing this word from your interview vocabulary.

## **A word on sentence fillers (um, literally, like, you know)**

When we’re nervous, it’s easy to fall back on phrases like “um” or “you know”. There’s nothing wrong with the odd “um” or “ah” but using lots of filler or repeated words in every answer could give the impression you’re not confident or well prepared.

It can be hard to recognise when you’re doing this, so try recording some practice answers or rehearsing them with a friend to see if you can pick this up and change the habit. Remember, it’s ok to pause for a few seconds before you answer.

## **Avoid these overused words**

Some words are used so often during interviews they can irritate the panel, Lambart says. Examples of these words are:

- **Workaholic**

This term is no longer a selling point, Lambart says. “Most employers are looking for employees who have a balance between professional and personal life and can manage their time effectively.” To show that you’re willing to put in extra time or effort, describe the ways you are hardworking or focused on getting great results or outcomes.

- **Perfectionist**

We often describe our “perfectionist” tendencies as a way of turning a weakness into a positive, but hirers have heard this term countless times. It also suggests you might spend too long on tasks, when efficiency is important.

It might be worth [considering other ways of talking about your weaknesses](#), or avoiding this word altogether. If this is a key problem for you, describe it differently, Lambart suggests. “You could say you set very high standards for yourself and sometimes need to recognise when a task has been completed well enough, that it’s time to move on.”

## Be wary of using terms that you cannot back up

It's important to sell yourself and your strengths in an interview, so prepare to back up your claims. "It shouldn't be up to the interview panel to draw these examples out of you," Lambart says.

Words or phrases that need good examples to back them up include:

- **Resilient/motivated by a challenge**

What are some examples of challenges you have overcome in the past? "Describe what the challenge was and why it was difficult, and then describe in detail what you did to overcome this hurdle," Lambart says.

How did you prepare? Did you need to develop new skills? Who did you ask for help? How did you stay positive and focused on the end goal? It's important to 'unpack' any claims that you're resilient so it's meaningful in an interview setting.

- **Detail-oriented**

If you describe yourself as "detail-oriented", make sure there are no typos or spelling mistakes in your application and that you haven't missed any important details in the job ad. Have some specific examples of when you used your high attention to detail to pick up an error or oversight that could have been costly for the business, Lambart says.

- **Team player**

"Almost everyone claims to be a "team player" on their resume, but it's important to back that up in an interview with examples of when you have made a positive contribution to a team," Lambart says. For example, when did you share information with the team, ask for feedback, or support and motivate colleagues? How did you do it, and what was the outcome?

## What you *should* say in your interview

It's important to use strong, positive language in your interview, says Lambart. The strong action statements below will ensure you take the lead and drive actions to achieve great results:

- "I identified"
- "I developed"
- "I proposed"
- "I implemented."

These phrases are perfect for giving examples of skills you used to overcome problems, such as: "Tell me about a time when you helped a colleague" or "Describe a situation when you resolved a

conflict.”

Lambart recommends giving specific examples using the STAR method: **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ctions, **R**esult.

With this method, answer succinctly but directly, outlining the Situation, identifying the Task you set out to achieve, describing your Actions, and recounting the Results.

For example, if the question is, “Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership skills”, a STAR answer might be:

- “My team recently had to adapt to working with a new system. It was a big shift, especially for people who’d been at the business a long time.” (S)
- “I needed to get everyone across the new system fast, because we had a very busy sales period coming up and couldn’t risk slowing down delivery to customers.” (T)
- “The company provided video tutorials, but I took it a step further and organised training sessions so my team could be walked through things and have specific questions resolved as they went. I created a ‘buddy’ system so more confident employees could support others, and I also developed quick-reference troubleshooting sheets.” (A)
- “As a result, we went into our busy sales period with the whole team confident in using the system and knowing where to turn for further support if needed.” (R)

“This method shows the interview panel you demonstrated leadership skills by describing in detail the specific actions and behaviours you used,” Lambart says.

“It gives the interviewer reassurance you will deal with future problems in the way they would expect and in accordance with their behaviours and values.”

If this method is new to you, add some STAR examples to your interview practice sessions, too.

Getting to the interview stage in your job search is an exciting step. Thinking about the words you’ll use to best describe yourself and your skills will boost your confidence. When talking about your strengths, remember to back up your claims with examples of how you benefited the business. With careful preparation and practice, you’ll can give the interview your best shot.