The Vocabulary of Job Hunting

Words, Phrases, and Nuance | Level C1 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever looked for a job, an internship, or a part-time position? Where did you look, and what did you have to send?
2. What English words or phrases do you already know for applications and job interviews?
3. How might job hunting differ by country, age, or industry?

Introduction

Job hunting has its own dialect. Advertisements ask for people who can "hit the ground running." Recruiters promise to "keep your details on file." An interviewer who says "we'll be in touch" may mean it, or may simply be ending the conversation. Much of this language is polite code, and reading it correctly is part of the search itself.

The words also change with geography. What applicants in Britain and much of the English-speaking world call a CV, most employers in the United States and Canada call a résumé, and in the United States a CV usually means a long academic record. Losing a job because a company is cutting costs is being laid off in American English and made redundant in British English. Neither means the same as being fired.

Then there is tone. The same request can sound confident or pushy, polite or vague, depending on a few words. "How much will you pay me?" and "Could you tell me the salary range for this role?" ask for the same information, but the second is far safer in a formal interview. This unit gathers fifteen key terms, grouped by the four stages of a job hunt, with notes on words that are easy to confuse and a bank of phrases for common situations, from asking a contact for a referral to turning down an offer without burning a bridge.

Key Terms

Fifteen words and phrases, in the order of the four stages of a job hunt (searching, applying, interviewing, offers and leaving). The post has fuller notes, examples, and translations.

vacancy: a job that is open and waiting to be filled

referral: a recommendation from someone who puts you forward for a job

transferable skills: abilities from one job or activity that are useful in others

tailor: to adapt something so it suits a particular purpose

track record: past achievements used to judge future performance

shortlist: to choose the best applicants for the next stage

career gap: a period of time not in paid work between jobs

overqualified: having more skills or experience than a job needs

competency: a skill an employer needs and tests for in a job

culture fit: how well a person's values and style suit a workplace

follow up: to contact someone again about something earlier

ghost: to stop replying to someone with no explanation

counteroffer: a new offer made in reply to a previous one

notice period: the time you must keep working after you resign

probation: a trial period at the start of a new job

Say It Right

Polite, professional phrases for common situations. Practice saying them aloud.

Asking a contact about their company	Would you have fifteen minutes for a quick chat about what it's like to work there?
Asking a contact for a referral	Would you feel comfortable referring me for the analyst role?
Opening a cover letter	I am writing to apply for the Project Coordinator position advertised on your website.
Explaining a career gap	I took a year out to care for a family member, and during that time I completed a course in data analysis.
You did not understand a question	Sorry, could you rephrase the question, please?
You need a moment to think	That's a good question. Let me think for a moment.
Asking about pay	Could you tell me the salary range for this role?
The interviewer asks if you have questions	What would success look like in the first six months?
Following up after an interview	I wanted to follow up on my interview last Tuesday and ask whether there is any update.
Asking for time to decide	Thank you for the offer. Would it be possible to give you my answer by Friday?
Negotiating the salary	I'm very interested in the role. Is there any flexibility on the starting salary?
Turning down an offer	After careful consideration, I've decided to decline the offer. I hope our paths cross again.
Resigning	Please accept this letter as formal notice of my resignation. My last day will be 31 May.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

shortlisted **vacancy** **competency** **probation** **counteroffer** **referral** **track record** **career gap** **follow up** **tailor** **transferable skills** **ghosted** **culture fit** **overqualified**

1. The school has a _____ for a part-time music teacher.
2. Many companies give a bonus to staff whose _____ leads to a new hire.
3. Organizing events at university gave him _____ that he now uses as a manager.
4. Before you apply, _____ your CV to the words in the advertisement.
5. The new director has a strong _____ of turning around failing schools.
6. I've been _____ for the second round of interviews.
7. He used his _____ to retrain as a nurse.
8. They said I was _____ for the position, so they gave it to someone with less experience.
9. Problem solving is a key _____ for anyone working in IT support.
10. The interviewers asked about my values to judge my _____ with the team.
11. If you do not hear anything after an interview, it is fine to _____ politely.
12. After the final interview, the company _____ me and never replied to my emails.
13. The employer rejected her salary request but made a _____ that included extra leave.
14. New staff must complete a six-month _____ before their contract becomes permanent.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. advertise a	_____	**a.** probation
2. tailor your CV	_____	**b.** track record
3. a proven	_____	**c.** notice period
4. explain a	_____	**d.** for an interview
5. be shortlisted	_____	**e.** vacancy
6. make a	_____	**f.** career gap
7. work your	_____	**g.** to each job
8. pass your	_____	**h.** counteroffer

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Several nursing positions at the hospital are still _____. (*vacancy*)
2. Could you _____ me to the hiring manager? (*referral*)
3. The training program is _____ to each new employee's needs. (*tailor*)
4. She is highly _____ in three programming languages. (*competency*)
5. New staff are hired on a _____ basis for the first six months. (*probation*)
6. I'll send a quick _____ email on Monday. (*follow up*)

What Would You Say?

Write or say what you would say in each situation. Use the key terms and phrases.

1. A friend's company has a vacancy that interests you. Ask your friend for more information.
2. You want a former teacher or manager to be a reference. Write the first two sentences of your message.
3. An interviewer says, "Tell me about yourself." Answer in three or four sentences for a job you would like.
4. Your job was cut when your company closed a department. An interviewer asks why you left your last job.
5. Your CV shows an eight-month career gap. Explain it in two sentences.
6. An interviewer asks a question you did not fully understand.
7. It has been ten days since your final interview, and you have heard nothing. Write a short follow-up email.
8. You receive an offer, but the salary is lower than you hoped. Respond.
9. After you resign, your manager makes you a counteroffer, but you plan to leave. Decline politely.

Nuance Check

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. In the United States, a CV usually means a long academic record. **T / F**
2. A reference is someone who puts your name forward before you apply. **T / F**
3. If your job was made redundant, the job was cut; you did not do anything wrong. **T / F**
4. You apply to a job and for a company. **T / F**
5. A headhunter often contacts people who are not looking for a new job. **T / F**
6. If you are shortlisted, you have been offered the job. **T / F**
7. Ghost, as a verb meaning to stop replying, is informal. **T / F**
8. Overqualified means that you do not have enough experience for the job. **T / F**

9. A counteroffer can come from your current employer when you try to leave. **T / F**
10. Probation is the time you must keep working after you resign. **T / F**

Language Focus: Softening Requests and Refusals

Softening makes a request or refusal less direct, so the other person can say no without losing face.
Tools: *would / could* (not *will / can*); past tense for the present (*I wanted to*, *I was wondering if*); possibility questions (*Would it be possible to…? Is there any flexibility on…?*); cushions for bad news (*I'm afraid*, *Unfortunately*, *After careful consideration*).
From the phrase bank:
"**Would it be possible to** give you my answer by Friday?"
"I **wanted to** follow up on my interview last Tuesday and ask whether there is any update."
Tip: Do not soften everything. Your main point (the date, the role, the decision) should still be clear.

Part A. Rewrite

Rewrite each message so that it sounds polite and professional. Use the word in brackets.

1. Send me the job description. (*could*) _____
2. I want more money. (*flexibility*) _____
3. Tell me if I got the job. (*wondering*) _____
4. I can't come on Monday. (*afraid*) _____
5. Give me until next week to decide. (*possible*) _____

Part B. Finish the message

Finish each sentence so that it fits the situation in brackets.

6. (Asking a former manager to be a reference) I was wondering if you would _____
7. (A recruiter calls while you are on a train) I'm afraid _____
8. (Asking about working from home) Would it be possible _____
9. (Writing to someone you met at a careers fair) I wanted to _____
10. (Turning down a second interview) Unfortunately, _____

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. Have you ever applied for a job, a part-time position, or a place on a course? How did it go?
2. Where do people in your country usually find out about job vacancies?
3. What transferable skills have you gained from school, hobbies, or part-time work?
4. Would you feel comfortable asking a friend for a referral? Why or why not?
5. Is culture fit a fair reason to reject a candidate, or can it be a cover for bias?
6. If your employer made you a counteroffer, what would make you stay?
7. How much should personal connections matter in hiring?
8. Should employers be required by law to reply to every applicant? Who would benefit, and who would bear the cost?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/job-hunting-vocabulary** for nuance notes, translations in eleven languages, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and an AI interview practice prompt.