Lesson Objectives:
- Understand cultural expectations for interviews in the U.S.
- Retrieve information from an article and transfer to a graphic
- Use a T-chart to organize information as pre-writing strategy
- Compare/contrast U.S. interview culture to that of native country

Language Skill Proficiency:
- Speaking
- Listening
- Reading
- Writing

Materials and Equipment:
- Interviewing Across Cultures (Interviewing in the United States) by Pamela Leri
- Chart: Interview Culture in the United States

Activity Plan

Warm Up*: Write the following quotes on the board: "Those who talk do not know. Those who do not know talk" - Lao Tzu / "He who converses not, knows nothing" - John Ray, English Proverbs. Ask Ss to discuss the quotes in pairs. Which quote do they agree with?

Introduction: Explain to Ss that in the U.S., a high value is placed on oral communication. People who communicate well verbally are seen as being competent, knowledgeable and trustworthy. Nonverbal communication isn’t used as much as in other cultures. Unfortunately, in the US, silence is avoided and people are encouraged not to be shy. Explain to Ss that this is just one of many cultural norms in the U.S. that should be considered during a job interview. Understanding the culture of interviews in the U.S. is the focus of today’s lesson.

Presentation: Ask Ss what needs to be considered when interviewing for a job in a different country. Make a list on the board. Add the following points (if not already present): Dress and appearance; Etiquette; Roles in an interview; Level of formality; Value of credentials (education, experience, intellect); and, Role of personal connections. Go over the terms to clarify meaning. Allow Ss to share examples from their native culture to illustrate the points.

Practice: Place Ss in small groups. Have Ss use the above-mentioned points for consideration to make a list of possible norms that describe U.S. interview culture. NOTE: At this point, Ss may not have much knowledge on the topic. The activity serves as an initial brainstorm to get Ss discussing and considering the topic. Have Ss share their ideas as a class.

Practice: Provide each S with a different section from Pamela Leri’s article Interviewing Across Cultures (Interviewing in the United States) and the chart Interview Culture in the United States. Organize Ss in groups so that an information share can take place. These could be small groups that shift or a larger group (10 Ss, one for each point) that stays together throughout the duration of the activity. Have Ss work together sharing the information in the article regarding U.S. interview culture in order to complete the Interview Culture in the United States chart. Go over as a class.

Practice: Ask Ss how the culture points discussed in the article compare to interview culture in their native countries. Ask Ss to make a T-chart comparing U.S. interview culture to that in their native countries. Upon completing the T-chart, have Ss write a paragraph answering the following questions:
How do expectations for interviews in the U.S. differ from what you are accustomed to? and, How can you adjust your behavior to be credible and effective in an interview in the U.S.?

**Evaluation:** Have Ss share their paragraphs comparing U.S. interview culture to that in their native countries.

**Extension Activities:**

- Have Ss create mock interviews that highlight U.S. interview culture. Encourage Ss to add humor and demonstrate both the dos and the don’ts of interviewing in the U.S.
- Have Ss create an informational brochure or memo explaining U.S. interview culture to newcomers.
- Help Ss create post-interview thank you notes as a cultural practice in the U.S.

*Source: Warm up activity found at [www.englishandculture.com](http://www.englishandculture.com)*
Interviewing in the United States

Job interviews in the United States pose particular challenges for foreign nationals. While job interviews in other countries may tend to be more structured and predictable in nature, the style and content of job interviews in the United States may be more random and reflect the individuality and personality of the interviewer and the corporate culture of the company. For example, a person seeking a position in a financial services firm in Boston, Massachusetts, may have a very different experience in a job interview than a person applying for work in a high technology start-up in Northern California’s Silicon Valley. Just as people seeking work in the United States may tailor their curriculum vitae or resume to emphasize certain aspects of their experience when they apply for a job, you may have to think about how to customize your style to the expectations of the company where you are interviewing. Research and preparation are essential to understand the regional, organizational, and functional differences among companies in the United States. Be aware that while you may be interviewing for a job in Georgia, the person interviewing you may originally come from a Midwestern state like Minnesota, so a basic knowledge of U.S. geography, regional communication styles, and culture will be helpful to you in presenting yourself most effectively to the interviewer or interview team.

Another challenge to the foreign national interviewing in the United States is that while the nation appears to be very multicultural and ethnically diverse, interviewers may actually have little knowledge of your country’s culture and political, economic, and educational systems. It is best not to take offense at the interviewer’s lack of knowledge but to develop strategies to explain quickly and concisely the relevant aspects of your background. For example, your university may be quite prestigious in your own country, but the U.S. interviewer may not have heard of it nor recognize the difficulty of entering such a renowned institution. Do not assume knowledge on the part of the interviewer. A Japanese man interviewing for a position in a chemical company in the United States was quite astonished to find out that the interviewers he met had no idea that the university he graduated from in Japan was attended primarily by the royal family and members of Japan’s aristocracy. Graduation from this university, while not the most famous in terms of academic credentials, carried with it a great deal of status and said much about his background and upbringing. Therefore, in preparing for your interview, consider what might be well known and respected about your educational institutions or the companies you have worked for in your own country that will be important to convey to your U.S. interviewer. Practice delivering this information in terms that will be relevant and understandable to the interviewer.

Job interviews in the United States are all about selling oneself. The candidate is expected to be able to articulate the benefits and skills he or she will bring to the company. The tone of the interview is expected to be upbeat, positive, optimistic, and enthusiastic. You should avoid making self-deprecating or negative comments about your background, abilities, or experience. A typical U.S. interview is no place for humility and hesitancy. You need to answer questions honestly, but avoid focusing on the negative or difficulties you have had in the past. If an interviewer specifically asks you about what has been most challenging for you in other positions, it is best to focus the answer on things you would like to learn or skills you would like to acquire so that you can resolve those challenges in the future. In fact, the interview itself might be very future oriented. An interviewer may ask questions such as, “What are your career plans and goals?” or “What do you see yourself doing in five years?” Questions from you about the direction the company is taking may be highly appreciated.

During a U.S. interview, you should be confident and assertive and exhibit a can-do approach. In fact, the interview may focus more on what you have done, as opposed to your academic credentials or certifications. While it is important to state that you enjoy working with others and are a good team player, you may need to focus on what you have done as an individual as opposed to what you have done as part of a team or group. Taking credit for making changes, solving problems, or developing new initiatives is highly valued. Be prepared to quantify your work experience. Did you manage to cut costs in your last position? How much money did you save your company? How much money did you make for your company? How many training programs or language lessons did you conduct? How many people did you train? What was the volume of sales you achieved? How many clients did you serve? Knowing the numbers attached to your experience will help you be more persuasive in selling yourself.

Another quality that U.S. interviewers look for in candidates is spontaneity. It is unlikely that a U.S. interviewer will review your curriculum vitae or resume with you point-by-point, step by step. In contrast, a U.S. interviewer may jump around, asking you questions out of sequence to see how quickly you respond and how flexible you are. He or she may ask you many questions about one aspect of your experience and virtually ignore the rest of your background. You may be
asked questions about how you would solve or approach particular problems. U.S. interviewers are often looking for people who are “quick on their feet” and “think out of the box.” Your willingness and ability to try new things may be assessed during the course of the interview; depending on the position you are applying for and the company’s culture and area of business.

Speed of communication is often critical during an interview. One high technology company in the United States has a saying that if something cannot be said in 30 seconds it is not worth being said. While this may be an extreme example, most U.S. interviewers expect quick responses to questions. U.S. Americans often communicate in a somewhat truncated bullet-pointed fashion. The expectation is that the most important information in an answer comes at the very beginning. Keeping your answers simple and to the point is a common expectation, especially when time is limited. Avoid packing your answers with too much detail or background information. If a U.S. American wants to know more about a certain topic, he or she may ask you questions rather than assuming you will give a thorough answer. Try to read your interviewer’s verbal and nonverbal cues. Is he or she impatient with your answers? Does he fidget, tap his pen, or look frequently at his watch? Does she interrupt you when you are speaking? If you are being interviewed by a team, do they look at you when you are speaking or do they look at each other? These behaviors may be indicators that your answers are too lengthy and you are not focusing on what may seem to the interviewer to be the most important points. Efficiency and time management are highly valued in the United States, and you should avoid any behavior that may make the interviewers think they are wasting their time. U.S. Americans expect initial friendliness, openness, and the appearance of equality.

While it is true that the interviewer and other company representatives are in the superior position during the interview, their preferred style of interaction may be quite informal with the use of first names, humor, and an easygoing, relaxed attitude. Being too formal and reserved may be misinterpreted by U.S. Americans as arrogance or coldness. The best approach is a balanced one. Try to adjust as much as is natural for you to the style and tone that the interviewers set, but avoid becoming too relaxed and familiar, especially if that style is unnatural for you. The interviewers may try to make you comfortable throughout the interview with informal gestures and jokes. These are not meant to be disrespectful or condescending but simply are how the U.S. Americans may prefer to be treated themselves.

Also, try not to take offense if the U.S. American appears unfamiliar with the details of your curriculum vitae or resume during the interview. Depending on the rigor of the screening process or how your name came to the attention of the interviewer, he or she may have spent only a few minutes reviewing the key points of your background as opposed to scrutinizing your application in great detail. The person who selected you to be interviewed may not be the same individual now tasked with interviewing you.

In a U.S. curriculum vitae or resume, people tend not to list personal interests such as hobbies and activities. However, during a job interview, you may be asked about your outside interests and memberships in professional and service organizations. In many U.S. companies, you may be asked about your volunteer, community, or service activities. There is a tradition in the United States of helping those in one’s own community or those in need. From a young age, many U.S. Americans spend time on a weekly or monthly basis volunteering in hospitals, schools, antipoverty programs, or literacy programs; fund-raising to find cures for diseases such as cancer or AIDS; supporting the arts; or working to preserve the natural environment or endangered species. They may do these things individually or through a service organization, church, or community group. Many people gain excellent organizational skills through their involvement in these activities that may benefit them in school or on the job. In fact, colleges and universities often use volunteer and extracurricular activities as criteria in evaluating students for admission. A well-rounded person is thought to have interests extending beyond work and/or school. Other cultures may not place the same emphasis on these types of activities, and if you are asked about volunteering, you may want to explain how the expectation in your country differs from that in the United States.

Finally, talking about the connections and networks you have may not be as valued in the U.S. business context as in other countries and cultures. If you have been introduced to the company by an employee or third party, the interviewer may briefly ask you about your relationship to this person, but do not expect the discussion to be in detail or go on at great length. You will be judged more as an individual, although connections will definitely help you get the opportunity to be interviewed in the first place. Finding common ground with your interviewer such as attendance at the same university or involvement in a professional organization is helpful, but discussions of this nature tend to represent a small proportion of the time spent in an interview. Try to avoid the appearance of name-dropping or talking about well-known family members, friends, or connections you have in your own country or region. While some U.S. Americans may be impressed, others may judge you as arrogant or elitist, preferring to focus on what you personally have accomplished and what talents and abilities you may possibly bring to the company. Others may have no idea of what you are talking about and judge you negatively for wasting their valuable time.
Finally, make sure that you thank the interviewers for their time and the opportunity to meet with them. Reiterate your most relevant credentials by linking them with the requirements of the position. A follow-up letter containing the same points always reflects positively on your candidacy.

Source: http://www.fordschool.umich.edu/downloads/InterviewCross Cultures.pdf
# Interview Culture in the United States

*Directions: Listen as Ss share different parts of the article “Interviewing Across Cultures” by Pamela Leri. Complete the chart using the information you learn from the article.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. Interview Culture Points</th>
<th>Description and Advice</th>
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| Interviews vary.              | • Interviewers have different personalities.  
|                               | • Regions have different cultures.  
|                               | • Companies have different cultures.  
|                               | • Prepare for interview by researching the culture of the company as well as the communication styles of the region.  |
| Interviewer may have little knowledge of your country. |                        |
| Interviews are for selling yourself. |                    |
| Discuss what you have DONE.   |                        |
| Test: Are you spontaneous? Flexible? |                     |
| As you speak, practice efficiency and time management. |                  |
| Be friendly and not overly formal. |                        |
| Your resume may have only been looked over quickly. |                      |
| Volunteer experience is valued. |                        |
| Don’t overstress personal connections to company. |                    |
| The closing of an interview is important. |                  |