

# LESSON 9

## HOW TO TALK ABOUT WAITING AND LYING

My dad drove me to the big Merrill Lynch building downtown. I wanted to drive myself, but he insisted that I needed to maintain all my energy for the big interview. I wanted to tell him he was freaking me out so much it was actually *draining* my energy, but I didn't. Dad was gripping the wheel so tightly his knuckles were turning white. I couldn't very well tell him *now* that I hated the idea of this interview. And I *really* couldn't tell him that I wasn't even sure I wanted to go to college next year. Dad was an Ivy Leaguer, and the thought of his firstborn not being interested in college would be about as weird as ... well, about as weird as her wanting to shave her head.

"Okay, sweetheart. Now, I don't want you to get too nervous," he said, trying unsuccessfully to sound soothing, "but this interview could very well determine the rest of your life."

"Thanks, Dad. Real calming."

He turned to look me in the eye. "Please, Alex, take this seriously."

"*Dad!* Watch the road!" I screamed, as a little blue-haired lady wandered out in front of our Toyota. My dad yelled something unprintable and then swung the car around.

"Sorry, I'm just nervous."

"Dad, *you're* not the one taking this interview, so stop it."

I made him sit in the car while I went inside. I was interviewing with J. D. Weston, a big-shot alum. I sat down in a chair and tried my best to look like dignified college material, even though my stomach was imitating a fleet of Olympic gymnasts going through their floor routines. I checked out my reflection in the mirror-crap. That cowlick was still there. I tried to smooth it down but my hair was being uncooperative. Finally, the receptionist led me into Weston's office.

Weston was tall and imposing, with a shock of white hair and an expensive suit. He looked at my spiky hair, frowned, and wrote something down in his note as book. *Great*, I thought. *I haven't even opened my mouth and I've got a strike against me.*

Things went downhill from there. He asked me what my hobbies were, so I told him I liked to read poetry at a club downtown. He raised his eyebrows and barked, "Anything else? Sports? Student government?" I babbled something about writing for the newspaper every once in a while, but that I didn't have a regular staff position. He asked about work experience, and I said I worked in a fast food restaurant.

"I handle a deep fryer really well: I joked, but he wasn't laughing.

Finally, he turned to my essay. "Frankly," he said, "if my daughter came home with a shaved head, I'd probably behave just like your father."

At this point I was so tired of his attitude I just said, "Well, then, it's probably a good thing you're not my father." He frowned one last time and scribbled on his pad again before showing me out the door.

Dad was sitting on the hood of the car, looking eager. "Well? How did it go?"

"Rotten," I muttered as I got in the car. "Maybe I'll just never go to college."

Dad looked crestfallen. "Oh, Alex," he sighed, as he got into the driver's seat. "You're so smart. I just don't get it." I slumped further in my seat and didn't talk the whole way home.

## WORDS ABOUT WAITING

I found it hard to **endure** my time in the waiting room - all I wanted to do was get out of there.

**endure** (v): to painfully wait or suffer through something

### RELATED WORDS

**bide** (v): to wait until something happens; usually used in the phrase "to *bide* one's time"

**tarry** (v): to wait idly

**linger** (v): to stick around some place because you're reluctant to go

**stall** (v): to delay someone or something

**loiter** (v): to stand around with no obvious purpose

I had **qualms** about meeting Weston. What if my outfit wasn't conservative enough? Maybe I shouldn't have worn my combat boots

**qualm** (n): a nervous feeling

I tried to keep the **timorous** shake out of my voice as I introduced myself to the receptionist, but I couldn't really hide my **apprehension**.

**timorous** (adj): nervous

**apprehension** (n): fear, nervousness

I thought I saw a look of **consternation** cross her face - maybe she thought I shouldn't have worn the combat boots, either.

**consternation** (n): confusion and dismay

I'm not normally a **fretful** person, but this was an unusual circumstance.

**fretful** (adj): tending to be nervous or easily agitated

As I sat there drumming my fingers on the table, I had a **presentiment** that something huge was going to happen as soon as I walked into the office.

**presentiment** (n): a feeling that you know what's going to happen

If you have a presentiment that something specifically bad is going to happen, you're experiencing **trepidation** or **foreboding**.

**trepidation** (*n*): fear of something about to come

**foreboding** (*n*): a sense that something bad is about to happen

Man, I really wanted that receptionist to **expedite** this whole process for me, but she seemed to have no intention of doing anything but filing her nails.

**expedite** (*v*): to speed something up

I tried to **quell** the awful butterflies in my stomach by reciting Beatles lyrics to myself in Spanish.

**quell** (*v*): to soothe

Here are some synonyms for *quell*:

**assuage** (*v*): to provide relief

**palliate** (*v*): to provide relief

**ameliorate** (*v*): to improve something

**mitigate** (*v*): to make something less harsh or violent

These four words have to do with making something easier or more manageable; *quell* has the added emphasis of actually bringing the harshness to an end. For example: "He managed to *quell* the angry mob, and sent all the protestors back home."

I tightly clutched my personal **talisman** – a purple rabbit's foot my mom gave me when I was seven – which I kept in my coat pocket for good luck.

**talisman** (*n*): an object believed to have magical powers

Whenever I gripped it, I was filled with a deep sense of **tranquility**.

**tranquility** (*n*): peace, calm

## WORDS ABOUT INTERVIEWS

Weston was very **curt** throughout the interview, which made him seem very short-tempered.

**curt** (*adj*): rude, abrupt

Janet is a fantastic interviewee. I wish I had her sense of **aplomb**, but I always get really sweaty palms and have a tendency to crack awful, nervous jokes.

**aplomb** (*n*): grace and style in the face of a challenge

I did manage to maintain my **equanimity** throughout, even when the guy asked me some really personal questions that I thought were pretty rude.

**equanimity** (*n*): evenness of temper, composure

The questions were so surprising and coming so fast, I felt totally **ambushed**.

**ambush** (*v*): to attack by surprise

When I tried to weasel my way out of an uncomfortable question, he would **probe** that subject even more.

**probe** (*v*): to search thoroughly

## RELATED WORDS

He **scrutinized** me coldly, as if I were an inanimate object being

**appraised** and not a human being.

**scrutinized** (*v*): to examine extremely carefully

**appraise** (*v*): to judge the value or worth of something

I mean, what kind of **inquisition** was this?

**inquisition** (*n*): a harsh or unfair investigation

He gave me a **disparaging** look when I told him I liked to perform in poetry slams. Apparently, he didn't find that too impressive.

**disparaging** (*adj*): showing disapproval

I had practiced offering clear, succinct answers that were quick but didn't seem too **perfunctory**.

**perfunctory** (*adj*): quick, brief, shallow

The interviewer's questions were totally **arbitrary** and random. First he was asking me about my poet/f, then all of a sudden he was asking me for my thoughts on the Middle East.

**arbitrary** (*adj*): chosen without any particular logic

At one point he asked me, "If you had to choose, would you rather have gills or antennae?" I told him I wasn't exactly sure how to solve that particular **conundrum**, but I guessed gills would be easier to hide under clothing.

**conundrum** (*n*): puzzle or riddle

I meant that as a **quip**, but he just seemed confused.

**quip** (*n*): short, witty remark

All my attempts to make the guy laugh fell flat; I tried to seem **serene**, but it really bothered me.

**serene** (*adj*): calm, unworried

My performance was far from **impeccable**, but I thought I did okay, considering.

**impeccable** (*adj*): perfect

## WORDS ABOUT THE LYING

I wasn't *exactly* lying when I said I never got a B in my life; I was just being **equivocal**. I mean, I got a C once, but that wasn't a B!

**equivocal** (*adj*): manipulating the truth just enough to avoid lying outright

## RELATED WORDS

Here are other words that can be used to describe sneaking around the truth.

Weston's expression was **ambiguous** - I couldn't tell if he thought I was funny, charming, strange, or all of the above.

**ambiguous** (*adj*): unclear, having more than one interpretation

The interviewer looked at my spiky haircut and, after a moment, said it was "interesting." Which, of course, is a **euphemism** for "downright strange:

**euphemism** (*n*): a polite way of saying something distasteful

When he asked me why I wanted to go to this school, I went on a big **circumlocution** about college in general, just to avoid talking about it. After all, I'm still not sure I even want to go there!

**circumlocution** (*n*): using more words than necessary in order to avoid saying something directly

I didn't want to use some **hyperbole** like "If I don't go to your school, I'll die."

**hyperbole** (*n*): extreme exaggeration

I told Weston that my legal name was Alex, not Alexandra, because my parents thought I was going to be a boy. The story's probably **apocryphal**, but my dad likes to tell it anyway.

**apocryphal** (*adj*): probably not true, but generally believed to be true

I would never write anything **fallacious** in my application.

**fallacious** (*adj*): false, deceptive

I want a school to accept the real me, not some **spurious** version of myself.

**spurious** (*adj*): being different from what it claims to be

I think I answered everything honestly. I didn't bother being **devious** in any of my answers- except about that C.

**devious** (*adj*): insincere, dishonest

I'd swear as to the **veracity** of everything in there.

**veracity** (*n*): the truth

The antonym of *veracity* is mendacity (*n*): a lie.

If I get into that school after all, though, I'll swear it was a case of **chicanery**.

**chicanery** (*n*): trickery

At the end of our interview, Weston made no sign that would **divulge** what he thought of me.

**divulge** (*v*): to reveal