

Giving Longer Answers to Basic Communication Questions

Below are some basic questions that might be asked in a real communication situation or in an interview test. Most of my students give short answers to these questions. In this lesson, you're going to learn how to give longer answers.

Question

1. What is your name?
 - 1a. Which is your family name?
2. Where do you live?
3. How old are you?
4. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
5. Do you have any pets?
6. What is your hobby?
7. What club do you belong to?
8. What sport do you play?
9. How do you come to school?
10. How long does it take?

Answers that are OK but too short

- I'm Tatushiro Tanaka
It's Tanaka
I live in Munakata
I'm 19 years old
Yes, a brother and two sisters
Yes, I have a dog
My hobby is watching movies
I'm in the art club
I don't play any sports
I come by train
It takes one hour

Why are these answers too short?

The answers above give the main information. In some situations, this is all that is necessary – for example, if you're asked for your name at passport control. However, in a communication situation, you want to give longer answers to appear more friendly and interesting, so the other person will want to talk with you for longer. In communication, short answers can seem very unfriendly. Meanwhile, in an interview situation, you are trying to show the interviewer that your English level is good. The longer you talk (and the more fluently), the better your English seems.

How can we make our answers longer?

There are basically two "rules": First of all, give the main information in a sentence form (not just the answer). Next, try to add a little extra information, or make a comment. Here are some examples for the questions above:

1. My name's Tatushiro, Tatushiro Tanaka. It's fine just to call me Tatsu if you prefer.
 - 1a. My family name is Tanaka. It's a very common name in Japan, as you know.
2. I live in a house in the countryside about 30 minutes by train from here. It's a town called Munakata. There's not much to do there, but I really like it.
3. Well, I'm 19 years old and I'm in the second year at university.
4. Yes, I have one brother and two sisters, so it's quite a large family. My brother is younger than me, and both of my sisters are older.
5. Yes, my family keep a pet dog. We've had him for about 5 or 6 years now.
6. I guess my main hobby is watching movies. I love movies, I have lots of DVDs and I go to the cinema probably once or twice a month.
7. I belong to the art club at my school. Many of the members focus on manga and drawing that kind of art, but in my case I prefer graphic design.
8. Ah, well I don't play any sports now. I used to play badminton, but I'm too busy to play anything now.
9. It's quite a long way from my house to the school, so first of all I have to go to the station by bicycle, then I take a train, and finally I walk from the station to my school.
10. Well, it's quite a long journey so the whole journey takes me about... well, just over one hour door to door.

>> Now you try with your own information