

What sticks better – the beginning or the end of a story?

When asked in a job interview, «Please introduce yourself briefly», many candidates are unsure how to present their career: chronologically or in reverse chronological order. What do you think?

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At first glance, telling your story chronologically seems logical. After all, we live our lives from the past through the present into the future. Each stage builds on the previous one, creating a coherent narrative. Another advantage: the most recent information comes last, remaining particularly vivid for the rest of the conversation.

Indeed, experience shows that what is said last tends to stick best. So, is the question settled—or not quite?

Both ends are memorable

It is not that simple. Studies show that both the beginning and the end of a story leave the strongest impression. Communication experts therefore advise paying special attention to both parts.

I cannot speak for every kind of communication, but in a job interview I clearly recommend structuring your account in reverse chronological order.

Why? Because of the expectations of interviewers: they are primarily looking for job-relevant information and tend to filter out anything not directly related—just as I described in my article

«Of job interviews and gorillas». If you construct your career narrative as a perfectly logical sequence of stages leading up to your current role, it may simply take too long. Your listeners tire, their minds wander. Many recruiters will already be thinking about their next question.

Anchor the right points!

Put metaphorically: if the fuse is too long, the audience has mentally checked out before the bomb goes off. Especially today, with short attention spans shaped by fast communication and social media, this is a real risk.

So, captivate your audience right from the start with your most relevant information and tell your story in reverse chronological order. It may feel unusual, but with good preparation it works extremely well.

There is another reason for reverse chronology: your opening sets the reference point against which everything else will be judged. First impressions run deep and are hard to correct—as I explained in my article «How do you want to be remembered?».

And surely, you do not want to be remembered as a fresh graduate, but as the experienced professional you are today.

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