



Phone Interview Tips

Employers use telephone interviews as a way of identifying and recruiting candidates for employment. Phone interviews are often used to screen candidates in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. They are also used as way to minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates.

While you're actively job searching, it's important to be prepared for a phone interview on a moments notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk.

Be Prepared

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for a regular interview. Compile a list of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as a list of answers to typical interview questions. In addition, plan on being prepared for a phone conversation about your background and skills.

- Keep your resume in clear view, on the top of your desk, or tape it to the wall near the phone, so it's at your fingertips when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
- Turn call-waiting off so your call isn't interrupted.
- If you are on a cell phone, make sure they can hear you ok and that you are in a clear, quiet area, where you can focus.
- If the time isn't convenient, ask if you could talk at another time and suggest some alternatives.
- Clear the room - evict the kids and the pets. Turn off the stereo and the TV. Close the door.

Practice

Talking on the phone isn't as easy as it seems. I've always found it's helpful to practice. Have a friend or family member conduct a mock interview and tape record it so you can see how you sound over the phone. Any cassette recorder will work. You'll be able to hear your "ums" and "uhs" and "okays" and you can practice reducing them from your conversational speech. Also rehearse answers to those typical questions you'll be asked.

During the Phone Interview

- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
- Do keep a glass of water handy, in case you need to wet your mouth.
- Smile. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice. Standing up also projects a positive image through your voice.
- First impressions are as important on the phone as they are in face to face interviews - the first 30 seconds are crucial. The way you answer the phone has an impact on the caller. Your voice must express interest, enthusiasm, and confidence.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name.) Only use a first name if they ask you to.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer.

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- Then take the interviewer's lead, especially if you're on the phone. If you don't know anything about the interviewer, let them take the lead in the discussion, then at a comfortable point ask what brought him or her to this company, and what it is about their current project that they find challenging. This is a good way to steer the discussion toward the work.
- Have a copy of your cover letter and resume in front of you
- If you think of a question or comment while the interviewer is speaking, jot a note down so that you remember it later.
- Take your time - it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.
- Give short answers.
- Give detailed examples of accomplishments when possible. It is easy for someone to get distracted on a phone call, so you need to paint a vivid picture to keep the interviewer's attention. Also, try to quantify accomplishments (i.e. increased sales by X percent; oversaw a staff of X people; etc.)
- Give examples of what makes you different from a peer. For instance, instead of saying "I've performed 6 implementations" tell them " I performed 6 implementations, all on time, multi-currency, etc"
- Show what you can do "with permission", and then ask the manager for their feedback.
- If you're unsure how to bring it up, ask the interviewer, "Would you like me to give you an idea of how I'd tackle this job?"

After the Interview:

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
- Remember to say "thank you" and let them know if you are interested by saying "I am looking forward to the next steps" . Ask for their contact information and send a thank you note. Email is ok.

Interview Questions

Work History

- Name of company, position title and description, date of employment
- What were your expectations for the job and to what extent where they met?
- What were your starting and final levels of compensation?
- What were your responsibilities?
- What major challenges and problems did you face? How did you handle them?
- Which was most/least rewarding?
- What was the biggest accomplishment/failure in this position?
- What was it like working for your supervisor? What were his strengths and shortcomings?
- Why are you leaving?

About You

- Describe a typical work week
- How many hours do you normally work?
- How would you describe the pace at which you work?



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- How do you handle stress and pressure?
- What motivates you?
- What do you find are the most difficult decisions to make?
- If the people who know you were asked why you should be hired, what would they say?
- Do you prefer to work independently or on a team?
- Give some examples of team work.
- What type of work environment do you prefer?
- Describe a difficult work situation/project and how you overcame it.
- How do you evaluate success?

The New Job and Company

- What interests you about this job?
- What applicable attributes/experience do you have?
- Why are you the best person for the job?
- What do you know about this company?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- What can you contribute to this company?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Is there anything I haven't told you about the job or company that you would like to know?

The Future

- What are you looking for in your next job? What is important to you?
- What are your goals for the next five years/ten years?
- How do you plan to achieve those goals?
- What are your salary requirements - both short-term and long-term?

In addition to being ready to answer these standard questions, prepare for behavior based interviewing. This is based on the premise that a candidates past performance is the best predictor of future performance. You will need to be prepared to provide detailed responses including specific examples of your work experiences. The best way to prepare is to think of examples where you have successfully used the skills you've acquired.

Take the time to compile a list of responses to both types of questions and to itemize your skills, values and interests as well as your strengths and weaknesses. Emphasize what you can do to benefit the company rather than just what you are interested in.

The last question you may be asked is "What can I answer for you?" Have questions of your own ready to ask. You aren't simply trying to get this job - you are also interviewing the employer to assess whether this company and the position are a good fit for you.