

## Telephone Interview Preparation

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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 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.
- 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.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly. – But make it natural!
- 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. Be a good listener.
- Take your time - it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.
- Give short answers.
- Remember your goal is to set-up a face-to-face interview. After you thank the interviewer ask if it would be possible to meet in person.

### **After the Phone Interview:**

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
- Remember to say "thank you." Follow with a [thank you note](#) which reiterates your interest in the job.

## **Awaiting the Call**

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There are several things you can do to prepare for a phone interview. For an unexpected contact:

- Tape your resume to a wall in view of the phone. It will be there for the call and will be a constant reminder for your job search.
- Keep all of your employer research materials within easy reach of the phone.
- Have a notepad handy to take notes.
- Keep a mirror nearby (you will see why in the next few pages).

If the phone interview will occur at a set time, there are additional steps you can take:

- Place a "Do Not Disturb" note on your door.
- Turn off your stereo, TV, and any other potential distraction.
- Warm up your voice while waiting for the call. Sing an uplifting song to yourself.
- Have a glass of water handy, since you will not have a chance to take a break during the call.
- Speaking of breaks, if your phone interview is at a set time, make sure you answer nature's call first.
- Turn off call waiting on your phone.

*Keep your mind focused on your phone call. Remove all distractions from your line of sight.*

## **The Open and Available Technique**

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You have a major advantage in a phone interview which does not exist in a face-to-face interview. Namely, that you cannot be seen. Use this to your advantage.

Have all of your materials on yourself and the employer open and available on your desk as you are speaking on the phone. This includes not only your resume, but also a "cheat sheet" of compelling story subjects which you would like to introduce. It can also include a "cheat sheet" about the employer, including specific critical points describing the employer and their products.

As I am speaking with you on the other end of the phone, I have no idea that you are actually being prompted from a document as you are speaking. All I can hear is a well-informed, well-prepared interviewee. Keep in mind that this preparation is not "cheating" at all. It is preparation, pure and simple.

So have your materials open and available when you are preparing for a phone interview. They are there to support you and enhance your value to the employer, who will greatly respect your ability to answer questions with focus and meaningful content.

## The Stand and Deliver Technique

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Here is a simple technique to increase the enthusiasm and positive image that you project over the telephone: stand up. Whenever you are talking with a potential employer on the phone, stand up. It gets your blood flowing, improves your posture, and improves your response time.

It's interesting to note that many telemarketing companies have come to realize that standing can actually improve their sales, so they often provide the telemarketers with hands-free headsets that allow them to stand and pace back and forth. It helps give an action perspective to an otherwise passive activity. So apply this same technique to improve your telephone presence.

## The Vanity Technique

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When I was in college I had a roommate who enjoyed flexing his muscles in the mirror. He could do it for hours at a time. A little vain? Well, I am going to ask you to do the same thing (except leave out the flexing muscles part). In prep for a telephone interview (or any telephone contact), make sure that you have a mirror within view. Why? Because I want you to look into that mirror consistently throughout the phone call. And smile. You will improve your telephone presence 110 percent just by using this simple technique. You will find yourself coming across much friendlier, more interested, and more alert. If you are at all self-conscious about seeing yourself in the mirror, you can use the mirror as an occasional checkpoint. But for most of us, seeing oneself reflected back gives us the kind of feedback necessary to make instant modification toward a more positive presence.

Remember, you are standing, so a wall mirror usually works best. You can pick up a small wall mirror for a limited amount of cash. It's worth it.

Try it the next time you are on the phone. But don't do it with your roommate around.

## DOs and DON'Ts of Phone Interviews

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- When in job-hunting mode, **don't** have a disproportionately silly or long greeting on your answering machine or voicemail.
- **Do** ensure that household members understand the importance of phone messages in your job search.
- **Do** know what job you are interviewing for.
- **Do** practice, if possible. Have a friend call you to do a mock phone interview so you get the feel of being interviewed over the phone.
- When being interviewed by phone, **do** make sure you are in a place where you can read notes, take notes, and concentrate.
- If you cannot devote enough time to a phone interview, **do** suggest a specific alternate time to the recruiter. It's often best to be the one who calls back so you can be mentally prepared.
- **Do** consider keeping some note cards or an outline in front of you to remind yourself of key points you want to cover with the interviewer. You don't want your responses to sound scripted, but you don't want to fumble for important points either. **Do** also have your resume in front of you so you can remember highlights of your experience and accomplishments.
- **Do** ensure that you can hear and are being clearly heard.
- **Do** consider standing when being interviewed on the phone. Some experts say you'll sound more professional than if you're slouching in an easy chair.
- **Do** consider dressing nicely for the phone interview. It may sound silly since the interviewer can't see you, but you really will project a more professional image if you're dressed for the part instead of wearing, for example, a ratty bathrobe.
- **Don't** feel you have to fill in the silences. If you've completed a response, but the interviewer hasn't asked his or her next question, don't start babbling just to fill in airtime. Instead, ask a question of your own related to your last response.
- **Do** create a strong finish to your phone interview with thoughtful questions.
- **Don't** panic if you have special needs. If you are hearing-impaired, for example, phone interviews are still possible.
- **Don't** snuffle, sneeze or cough. If you can't avoid these behaviors, say "excuse me."
- **Don't** chew gum or food or drink anything noisy.