

Employers are increasingly using phone interviews to narrow down a pool of candidates before bringing them in for in-person interviews. Here are some tips to help you have a successful phone interview.

Setting up the Interview

When a company wants to schedule an initial phone interview with you, it is likely that someone from either the human resources department or the department you are applying to work in will contact you by either phone or email. When choosing a mutually convenient day and time, you should consider factors other than just your schedule. For instance, think about whether you are a morning person or not. If not, try to make the phone interview for the afternoon! Similarly, you'll want to arrange the interview for a day and time where you can find some quiet space – free from the distraction of co-workers, family members, roommates, classmates, and other external noises – to focus on the interview.

Once you settle on the day and time of the interview, be sure to ask for the names of the people with whom you will be interviewing. You will want to get the first and last name of each person who is expected to be on the call. You'll also want to get each of their titles. You don't want to go into the interview without this information; it is crucial not just for interview preparation, but also for follow-up. If it is easier for the employer to email you the information, just be sure you receive the email prior to the interview. Follow up with them if you do not.

In some cases, you may receive an unplanned call from an employer who wants to proceed with a phone interview right then. In such a case, you should try your best to postpone the conversation – if even just for an hour. The reason for this is that you want to be in a place where you are focused, in control, and prepared. If caught off-guard and suddenly asked important questions, you may not answer them the way you'd really want to had you been prepared. One way to handle this situation might be to say, "I am very excited to talk about this opportunity. However, I am just about to leave for an engagement. Can we schedule something for (later today, in an hour, tomorrow)?"

Make sure that you have a professional-sounding voicemail message to receive calls that you are unable to answer. Your message should include your name and/or phone number to assure the caller that she/he has reached the correct person. Always return calls as soon as you are in a quiet place.

Preparing for the Interview

Use the company website, as well as internet resources such as LinkedIn, Vault, and Glassdoor to become familiar with the company. If you know who your interviewers will be, read their bios on the company webpage or their LinkedIn profiles to get a better idea of with whom you will be speaking.

Prepare your answers to some frequently asked interview questions. Create an outline of specific experiences that you can use to highlight your skills and qualifications. However, it is important that you

don't read answers word for word over the phone; in doing so you risk sounding rehearsed instead of genuine.

You should also be prepared to ask some questions. Using your company research, prepare a list of questions about the company and the position. You can find some sample questions in the Practice Interview Questions document.

You may also want to dress for an interview. Although the interviewers won't be able to see you, the way you dress often affects the way you act. Wearing business attire rather than pajamas may help you to act and sound more professional.

Before the call, make sure that you have a copy of your resume, a copy of the job description, a list of your accomplishments, your calendar or planner, your notes, and a list of questions on hand for your reference. It may also help to have a glass of water nearby.

During the Interview

Take the interview call in a place that is quiet and free from distraction. If possible, use a land line. If that's not possible, make sure that you will get clear cell phone reception and have a fully charged battery.

Answer the phone with your name. "Hello, this is _____."

During the call, listen carefully. Periodically provide listening cues such as "I see," "Interesting," "Yes, I understand," to indicate your attention, and take notes on important points to address and questions to ask. However, be careful not to interrupt. Pause for a second or two to make sure that the interviewer is finished speaking before you provide an answer.

When speaking, rephrase questions to make sure that you understand what the interviewer is asking. Speak clearly and smile; a smile will change the inflection of your voice, which will be heard over the phone. Since you will not be able to read the interviewer's body language, give brief answers and then check in with a phrase such as, "Would you like me to provide another example?"

When closing the call, reaffirm your interest in the position and summarize your qualifications. Ask about next steps. Be sure to thank the interviewer for his/her time.

After the Interview

Write down notes, including new information about the position and any questions that you didn't get a chance to ask.

Send a thank you note to each of the interviewers. Express appreciation for the person's time and re-indicate interest in the position. You can also include information that you may have forgotten to mention in the interview or that you feel did not come across clearly, but this should be brief.