

Telephone interviews

For applicants, the goal of a phone interview is to secure an in-person meeting. For recruiters, it's to narrow their list of prospects. Most times a telephone interview is used as a 'screening interview,' it is an expense for employers to consider flying someone to their location for an interview. Another telephone interview tactic is trying to catch you off guard and "surprise" you.

Job hunters often mistakenly believe that phone interviews are less formal than face-to-face meetings, recruiters say. Yet they're a critical first hurdle in landing a job. It is essential that you minimize distractions. Do not do anything else while you are interviewing, you wouldn't in-person so don't do it over the phone. As soon as you answer the phone, you're on!

The goal of any interview is to sound interested and intelligent enough to be invited to a face-to-face interview. Given a phone interview's lack of eye contact and body language, candidates are evaluated largely by what they say and how they say it, according to recruiters. Interviewers listen for clues indicating such qualities as passion for the job, professionalism and whether the person might be a good cultural fit. Obviously, your resume caught their attention and they are more than likely trying to get a feel for who you are as a person.

Prepare for a telephone interview, as you would for any type of interview. Review the interview questions employers typically ask and be able to address several of these "commonly asked questions." As often as you can, answer questions using examples from your experiences and remain positive. Focus on what you have done, not what you haven't employers are looking to see what skills you have so sell yourself, but genuine.

Listening carefully can also help you read the interviewer's mood. Is the person interested and enthusiastic, or bored and distracted? Is the interview conversational? Are questions and answers flowing easily? If the interviewer seems distracted, use one of the powerful questions you were saving for the "Do you have any questions?" section of the interview. A well-chosen question can re-engage the person conducting the interview and put it back on track.

The key to any kind of interview is to stay positive and never mention salary or monetary compensation. Your goal will be to establish yourself as a strong candidate, so use the time to provide evidence of your skills and use your different experiences to your advantage. Another method to help you stand out from the interviewees is to follow-up. After a phone interview, send a thank you note that recaps your best selling points.

Other telephone interview tips:

Interview completely free of distractions – no kids, pets, friends, etc

Try to conduct the phone interview on a landline if possible, if not be sure you are in a place of good reception (feedback and cutting out is a distraction) and you never know when a cell phone signal may drop

Keep job supporting documents in front of you – including resume, skills, job descriptions and also a pen and paper handy to take notes during your interview

Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name) only use a first name if they ask you to do so

Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink

Do keep a glass of water handy, in case you need a sip to wet your mouth

Dress for a telephone interview – a little more formal, your attitude and professionalism will be projected over the phone

Always remember to breathe. It will help you stay calm and sound more relaxed

Smile! Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice

If you feel your confidence wane, stand up. Standing can make your voice sound more powerful

Don't interrupt the interviewer. To listen carefully, try closing your eyes when the interviewer is speaking so you can focus on what is being said

Give short answers – you need to be more concise on the telephone and more brief – in depth stuff will get lost over the phone

Take your time – it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts

Remember that a phone interview is different – head nods and other body language won't be visible

Speak slowly and enunciate clearly and make sure that they understand you and that you understand them, especially words that sound similar

"Teen speak," slang and other unpolished speech habits are a common knockout factor. Learn (and practice) to say "yes" and "that is correct" – not u-huh... umm... etc

Practice these techniques so you are comfortable with the process. Remember to relax about how you answer and don't interpret silence as a bad thing (usually they are busy taking notes after your responses).