

Career Guide

Telephone Interviews

How to have a successful telephone interview

Telephone interviews often are a make-or-break situation and in many cases will be the only interview conducted prior to the employer/client making a decision. At minimum, an initial telephone contact will validate statements made on the resume, and be used to assess the candidate's personality, oral communication skills, and level of interest in the employer and the opportunity.

In most cases telephone interviews are scheduled in advance. You must determine whether it is best to have the interview at home or in your office, whether you will be making or receiving the call, the exact time (taking into consideration time-zones), and the name(s) and phone number(s) of all parties who will be involved. When scheduling the interview, take advantage of any time-zone differences to allow you to have the interview at home before or after work, but still within the interviewer's regular business hours.

On the other hand, your interviewer might just pick up the phone and surprise you with a call, so it is always best to be ready, prepared and able to make the kind of impression you want. **If it is a bad time for you to talk, ask whether you may call back in 5 or 10 minutes, or otherwise make arrangements to reschedule.** If you decide to take the unplanned call when it comes, ask the interviewer to hold a few seconds, take a deep breath, get a note pad, and forge ahead.

BE PREPARED! Do your research about the company you are speaking with and if this is a contract opportunity, find out what you can in advance about the project environment. Obviously, the Internet will have much of the information you will need, but it always helps to call a friend or acquaintance that may have additional insight for you. Have your resume with you and ready to speak from when the call comes, including notes regarding points you would like to make and questions to ask, along with your references' names and telephone numbers. Always keep a pad and pen handy to take notes during your phone interview.

Once an interview time is set, set aside at least an hour for the call. Have a glass of water by the phone and be ready five minutes early. Be in a quiet place, turn off the television or music, if you are at home, put out the dog, and ask anyone that might be around you to be quiet and not disturb you during this important phone call. Stand up when you speak and smile.

Dress in a businesslike manner to put yourself in the proper frame of mind and sit or stand with good posture. Although your interviewer cannot see you, these things affect the quality of the image you project through your voice. You want your interviewer to imagine you perfectly groomed and sitting in an office, rather than lounging around in your shorts and flip flops. If, for some reason, the interviewer does not call or is unavailable at the appointed hour, be sure to call the interviewer and leave a message expressing your interest and request to reschedule the interview.



Speak slowly and clearly, with plenty of enthusiasm, and inflection. Do not eat, chew gum, or smoke. Always answer your phone in a professional manner, whether at home or at work, because you never know who may be calling. After the initial introductions and pleasantries, open with a positive expression of your interest based on what you have learned about the opportunity and the firm, then say, **"I am looking forward to meeting you. In the meantime, what can I tell you about my qualifications?"** Have a brief "commercial" summarizing your strengths and accomplishments, written down and in front of you ready to refer to when the call comes. Remember you are selling both yourself and your credentials, experience, and how you can help solve whatever issue faces the employer.

Do not use slang like "yeah" and try to avoid contractions or "can't" or "don't". Do not use profanity under ANY circumstances, even if your interviewer does so. Avoid fillers such as "ums" and "errs". Try to avoid yes or no answers; **answer in short, complete sentences.** Always try to let your interviewer speak the majority of the time.

Let your interviewer know you are listening. Make sure you get all parties' names with proper spelling and pronunciation, titles, addresses, and telephone numbers (another reason to have a note pad handy). Periodically use their name (their surname until invited to do otherwise). Say "yes" or "I see", repeat their words, ask follow-up questions. Do not rush, interrupt, or contradict the interviewer. Listen carefully and make sure you understand the question before you answer. **Answer directly, and always follow-up by asking if you answered the question.** After making a statement, simply ask, "does that answer your question"?

Cadence; an excellent technique for establishing rapport is to match the interviewer's rate of speech, volume, and pitch, within your own personality range, of course. This creates a subliminal bond between you and the interviewer and enhances the communication quality.

Don't ask about salary or rate. Leave this up to ROI. If asked, you should respond with: **"While compensation is important, I am more interested in the opportunity at this time."** If asked again, be clear as to your financial expectations and finish with, "If this is a good match, I am confident that we can come to an agreement."

ABC – Always Be Closing; Summarize your qualifications and ask for the next step. Say something like, "This sounds like an interesting and exciting opportunity. With my background, I believe I could make a valuable contribution to your project. I have two questions: 1) What is the next step, 2) When would you like for me to start?"

And, have your calendar handy so that you can give specific dates.

Before completing the call get agreement on the next step, and confirm any additional information that require your follow-up such as a list of references, or more detailed project descriptions.

Thank the interviewer for their time and express how much you enjoyed learning about the company and the position they are looking to fill. Always follow the interview with a written thank you note. If this is being sent by email, wait until the end of the day to send it, but no later than 24 hours. After the interview, communicate immediately with the ROI recruiter. Provide any observations, new information, and what the next point of follow-up will be.

Telephone interviews are important and significantly more difficult than a face to face interview. There isn't an opportunity to couch your responses by interpreting the interviewers body language or other non-verbal cues. Stay on your toes, be professional, and be prepared.

