

Preparing for a Telephone Interview

Objectives

1. Learn the importance of telephone interviews in the job search process.
2. Become aware of appropriate telephone interviewing behaviors, and be able to demonstrate these behaviors.
3. Understand the elements and characteristics of a telephone interview.

Purpose of a Telephone Interview

When an employer invites you to participate in a telephone interview, also known as a screening interview, it is important to understand the role of a telephone interview in the job search process. Employers often use telephone interviews to narrow the pool of applicants to be invited for in-person interviews. Additionally, phone interviews are more efficient and minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates. For job hunters, the objective of a phone interview is to secure an invitation for a face-to-face interview.

Prepare for the Telephone Interview

The telephone interview is an opportunity to make a good first impression. You want to present yourself as professionally as possible and be prepared to communicate effectively. According to Joyce Lain Kennedy, a nationally syndicated career columnist, most people do not prepare for screening telephone interviews as rigorously as they do for face-to-face meetings, [and] the casualty toll is heavy. Therefore, it is imperative that you prepare for a telephone interview just as you would for a traditional face-to-face interview.

Many organizations utilize telephone interviews before in-person interviews because they are:

- cost-effective and efficient
- used to differentiate between candidates who may appear similar on paper
- helpful in determining the organizational “fit” of a potential candidate
- an easy method for the employer to check if the candidate is affordable and available
- convenient screening devices for out-of-town applicants

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Practice

In a traditional interview, employers rely on your non-verbal and verbal body language to evaluate you as a candidate. However, in a telephone interview, the employer cannot see you, so it is important for your voice (and communication skills) to convey your personality. The best way to improve your communication skills is to practice role-playing before the interview. Consider participating in a mock *telephone* interview at The Career Center or ask a friend or your roommate to simulate an interview. Review “The First Job Interview” guide at career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides for additional information and tips on preparing for an interview.

Dress Appropriately

When seeking a professional position, you must look like a professional. Regardless of the fact that the employer will not see you, your dress influences both your language and confidence level. Choose professional clothing that you will be comfortable wearing. This may contribute to enhanced confidence during your interview.

Know About The Employer

It is important for you to find out as much as you can about the organization, agency, institution, etc., with which you are interviewing. Employers expect candidates to research their organization. Visit the organization’s website to gather information before your interview, or visit glassdoor.com to perform more research. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What does the organization make or what services does it provide?

- What is the size of the organization? What is its organizational structure?
- What is the mission of the organization?

Review the “Researching Potential Employers” guide in The Career Center or online at career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides for more research ideas.

Clarify the Call

Employers typically prefer to call candidates at their convenience and will arrange the interview time accordingly and in advance. However, employers may ask candidates to call them to test how serious they are. Always clarify the time zone, the length of the interview, telephone number, and who will be conducting the interview. If you receive a call from an employer at an unexpected or bad time, thank him or her for the opportunity and ask if you can call back in ten minutes or so to position yourself in a location free from distraction. It is better to ask to reschedule than to come across unprepared.

Be On Time

Interviewers have busy schedules and if you miss the telephone call, your behavior could be interpreted as disrespectful. Try to be near your telephone at least 10-15 minutes early so that you do not miss the call. If there is a chance that you might miss an expected call from an employer, make sure your voicemail message is clear and professional. If you miss the telephone call, immediately get back to the employer and politely request to reschedule or ask if there is still time to interview. Be prepared to explain the misunderstanding.

Telephone Interview Tips

Before the telephone interview begins, there are several ways you can prepare for the scheduled call.

Get Organized

- Warm up your voice and practice smiling. A smile can be “heard” over the telephone.
- Print your résumé, cover letter, and the job advertisement for use during the interview.
- If possible, have pictures and/or bios of the interviewer(s) in front of you. Pull up the organization’s website on a computer.
- Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
- Prepare a short list of questions about the job and the organization.
- Have a calendar available should you be asked to schedule another interview.
- Be prepared with pen and paper to take notes!

- Ensure interview materials are strategically laid out and that you are familiar with them.
- Prepare written notes, but do not write entire paragraphs as it might sound robotic or rehearsed if you read directly from the notes!

Prepare the Technology

- To ensure quality of the conversation and to guard against dropped calls, use a landline phone. **Do not use a cell phone!** Contact The Career Center if you need to schedule an interview room with access to a landline.
- Turn off call waiting so you are not interrupted.

Prepare the Interview Room

- Close the door to ensure the interview location is free of distractions (e.g., kids, pets, TV).
- Have a clock nearby to monitor the time you have remaining in the interview. Respect the time parameters set by the interviewer.

Attend the Telephone Interview

At the time of your scheduled interview, be prepared to answer the phone on-time and politely. You may want to have a glass of water nearby, in case your throat gets dry during the conversation. Try to speak slowly, clearly, and directly into the phone receiver to effectively articulate your thoughts. Verbal communication is extremely important during the telephone interview. Try to enunciate your words, use correct grammar, and speak with vocal clarity. Watch your tone of voice as it is your only communication tool, and you want to come across as interested, confident, and capable. A quick tip to automatically exude friendliness is to *smile* during your telephone interview. You may want to sit erect at a desk/table to help your voice sound stronger or more alert. Avoid interrupting, and let the employer take the lead in asking you questions. If multiple interviewers are on the phone, write their names down and try to address each interviewer by name. If you miss a question, or need something repeated, it is okay to ask for clarification, just like you might do in a traditional face-to-face interview.

Ending the Telephone Interview

- Reaffirm your qualifications and end with a strong closing. Express your interest in the job and the organization.
- Ask the interviewer at the end of the conversation where you stand and what the next step will be, e.g., timeline, second phone interview, arranging an on-site interview, etc.

- If things sound good to you, say so.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity.
- Request contact information for follow-up questions and thank you letter submission.

Things to Avoid During the Telephone Interview

- Do not smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
- Avoid overuse of the following words: “ah,” “err,” “hum,” “uhhh,” and “like.” This habit is especially noticeable on the telephone and eliminating it takes practice!
- Avoid the simple “yes” or “no” response; add selling points at every opportunity by backing up your answers with specific examples from previous work and/or education experience.
- Do not bring up salary before the employer, but be prepared to address it if asked. Research salary information ahead of time. The “Negotiating Job Offers” guide, available at career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides, might be a helpful tool for exploring this topic.

After the Telephone Interview

Make Each Interview a Learning Experience

As soon as possible after the interview, write down what you have learned. Ask yourself:

- Which of my points interested the employer?
- Which questions were most challenging?
- What did I do effectively in the interview?
- How can I improve my next interview?

Write a Letter of Thanks

Similar to a traditional interview, a letter of appreciation, either as an email or handwritten note, should be sent within 24 hours of the telephone interview. Previous communication with the organization may give you an idea of the best format to use. Tell the interviewer you are still interested in the position, and review some of your qualifications discussed in the interview so that the interviewer’s memory will be refreshed. You can also include pertinent questions that you did not ask during the interview, or expand on any information that you forgot to mention.

Summary

The telephone interview is just as important as a traditional face-to-face interview. In some cases, it will determine whether or not you advance to the next round of interviewing. Interviewing is both a skill and an art; careful preparation is necessary to produce optimal outcomes. Individuals who take a proactive approach to preparing, executing, and evaluating telephone interview skills may experience more successful and enriching interviews.

Additional Resources

Select Career Center Library Resources

<i>Interview Magic</i>	VB W45
<i>Knock ‘em Dead Job Interview</i>	VB Y3
<i>Adams Job Interview Almanac</i>	VB M6
<i>The 250 Job Interview Questions</i>	VB V4
<i>301 Best Questions to Ask on your Interview</i>	VB K33



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