

Tips for Telephone and Video Interviewing

Samford University Career Development Center

When Employers Call, Here's How to Answer

In recent years, employers are doing more first interviews in nontraditional ways. A potential employer may want to do a preliminary interview on the phone or via video-conferencing. Here are tips for acing those interviews.

Are You A Good Communicator?

Employers screen job candidates via phone or video because it cost less and it is less time consuming: virtual interviews average 30 minutes or less versus an hour or more for a face-to-face interview.

A telephone or video interview can be like an open-book test. You may have the answer in front of you (see No. 2 below), but you need to know the material thoroughly to do well on the test – or in this case, in the interview.

Employers hope to catch you unprepared in order to see if you can think on your feet and if you have superior communication skills. To lessen the chances of this happening, once you start sending out resumes and applying to organizations, do not answer your phone if there is a number you do not recognize. Rather, let it go to voicemail and then return the call once you are in a quiet place and able to have a professional conversation. Perhaps the call was just to schedule an interview, but since you do not know, it is better to not risk it. The last thing you want is to have to cut a conversation short because you are heading into class or you are in terrible traffic on hwy. 280! If you are prepared for the call, you will ace the test.

Here are some tips from the National Association of Colleges & Employers on preparing for a successful telephone interview.

Do These Things Ahead of Time:

1. Turn off distractions. Have your phone in a quiet room – away from radio, television, family, roommates, or anything else that may make noise or take attention away from your task.
2. Gather your tools by the phone.
 - Resume
 - Pen and paper to jot the interviewer(s) name(s) down immediately and to take notes during the interview
 - Company research (with relevant information highlighted)
 - Questions to ask about company and position
 - A loosely written outline of points to make or items to cover as you talk about the position
 - Comfort items: tissues, a glass of water

Do These Things at the Interview Time:

1. If the employer sets up an appointment in advance, dress the part for the interview. Experts say if you're dressed in a professional manner, you'll speak that way.
2. If the employer calls and wants to do the interview right away (instead of setting up an appointment), excuse yourself politely and offer to call back in five minutes. This will give you time to make the psychological switch from whatever you were doing to your professional demeanor.
3. If the employer says s/he will call you at a specific time and doesn't, wait 10 minutes and call him/her. There may have been confusion who was calling whom, or it could be a deliberate test on the employer's part to see if you will be proactive!

4. Stand up to talk if the interview is via phone. Your position affects the quality of your voice. If you are sitting down relaxing, you don't project the same readiness and intensity as you do if you stand up.
5. Talk only when necessary. Since you lack the visual cues of body language to assess whether you've said enough, mark the end of your response with a question, such as "Would you like more details of my experience as an intern with XYZ Company?"
6. Let the employer end the interview. Then you should say "Thank you for your time," and reiterate your interest in the position.

If you perform well on the telephone or via video, you'll probably be invited to interview with a hiring manager on site.

Lights! Camera! Job Offer!

Your big break in the job market may be via Skype or another alternative. Some employers are using videoconference technology to screen candidates before hosting on-sit interviews, particularly if many of the candidates are out of state.

You'll find the videoconference interview gives you some of the benefits of a telephone interview (you can have your notes handy for reference), even while you are face-to-face with the interviewer.

On-Camera Tips:

1. Dress as you would for an in-person interview.
2. Have equipment (computer, etc.) set up early so you can get comfortable.
3. Make sure the background behind you is tidy, not distracting, and doesn't give away any personal information (such as photos with children, etc.).
4. Adjust your chair so you can sit eye-level with the camera.
5. Check your posture. Don't slouch or lean sideways.
6. Use note cards or sticky notes that can't be seen on camera to remind yourself of points you would like to make.
7. See # 6 and #7 above.

No matter what kind of interview you do – telephone, video, or in-person – follow up with a thank-you e-mail to each of the people you have talked to.

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