



Career Connection

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How to Master Telephone Interviews

Purpose

Often, the first step in the hiring process is the telephone interview. Companies and recruiters employ the telephone interview to develop a pool of candidates to look at closer, and to pare down the number of applicants for a job opening. Your strategy is to provide facts that support your resume, with some context about your performance. Since you are unlikely to win the job from a telephone interview, your goal is to secure an in-person interview with the person who has the authority to hire. Approach the call with that attitude.

Managing the Telephone Interview

Have ready

- Pen and paper.
- The job ad and the resume and cover letter which you sent in response to the ad.
- A list of your accomplishments which relate to the job you are discussing.
- Research you have done on the company.
- A short list of questions about the job.
- Your calendar.
- It may also be a good idea to have a glass of water nearby.

Tips for a Telephone Interview

- At the start of the conversation, make sure to write the person's name down correctly- ask for correct spelling and get the phone number so you can call back if somehow cut off.
- You may dress up as though you are going on a face-to-face meeting. It will usually enhance your energy level and professional presence.
- Be aware that the caller can't see you - can't see your hand gestures, can't see you taking notes.
- Try to speak louder since most phone reception reduces phone sound levels.
- Pace the call. Let the caller do most of the talking, without interruptions.
- Short sentences are more easily understood over the phone than long orations. They also give more opportunity for interchange between you and the interviewer, which helps both of you maintain your interest.
- Do use the technique of repeating or re-phrasing questions. It tells the caller that you listened carefully, and gives you time to think about your answer.
- A note of irritation or frustration in your voice is much more noticeable over the phone, and can't be offset by positive body language. Try to sound relaxed and confident
- Avoid the simple yes or no; support your answers with concrete professional experiences.
- Ask several good questions as if it were a face-to-face meeting.
- If you need time to think, say so, silence during a telephone conversation is dead air time.
- Re-affirm your qualifications; express your interest in the job and the company. Say you would appreciate the opportunity to talk about the job further - in person.
- Compensation issues come at the end of the interviewing cycle, never at the telephone stage. You can truthfully say you don't know enough about the job to state a salary figure. And, of course, you would need a personal interview to really talk with the company. This is another way to go for the personal interview.
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time, and follow up with a "thank you" letter.

Practical Techniques

- **Open and Available Technique** ~ Have your materials open and available when you are preparing for a phone interview. They are there to support you and enhance your value to the employer, who will greatly respect your ability to answer questions with focus and meaningful content.
- **The Stand at Attention Technique** ~ To increase the enthusiasm and positive image that you project over the telephone: stand up. It gets your blood flowing, improves your posture, and improves your response time.
- **The Techniques of a Pro ~ Smile** - it comes through in your voice. Speak directly into the phone. Don't smoke, chew gum, eat or drink anything. It all telegraphs to your listener. Avoid ah, er, hum. This habit is especially noticeable on the telephone. This takes practice.

Sample Interview Questions ~

Work History

- What were your expectations for the job and to what extent were they met?
- What were your starting and final levels of compensation?
- What were your responsibilities?
- What major challenges and problems did you face? How did you handle them?
- Which was most/least rewarding?
- What was the biggest accomplishment/failure in this position?
- What was it like working for your supervisor? What were his strengths and shortcomings?
- Why are you leaving?

About You

- Describe a typical work week
- How many hours do you normally work?
- How would you describe the pace at which you work?
- How do you handle stress and pressure?
- What motivates you?
- What do you find are the most difficult decisions to make?
- If the people who know you were asked why you should be hired, what would they say?
- Do you prefer to work independently or on a team? Give some examples of team work.
- What type of work environment do you prefer?
- Describe a difficult work situation/project and how you overcame it.
- How do you evaluate success?

The New Job and Company

- What interests you about this job?
- What applicable attributes/experience do you have?
- Why are you the best person for the job?
- What do you know about this company?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- What can you contribute to this company?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Is there anything I haven't told you about the job or company that you would like to know?

The Future

- What are you looking for in your next job? What is important to you?
- What are your goals for the next five years/ten years?
- How do you plan to achieve those goals?
- What are your salary requirements - both short-term and long-term?