

TIPS FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

WHO CONDUCTS TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS AND WHY?

Employers may choose to conduct telephone interviews for several reasons.

- For screening applicants, making first cuts, to determine if they want to arrange a face-to-face interview.
- To interview for an internship position – a small number of internship positions require only a phone interview.

Students may initiate a phone interview as part of their job search to conduct an information or networking interview.

WHEN DOES A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW OCCUR?

A telephone interview may result from several different situations:

- You are networking and the employer begins a screening process immediately because you seem interesting.
- You are called because you applied for a position.
- You are called as a result of a “resume referral” to the employer by UCS.
- You and the employer have arranged a specific time for the interview.

HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW?

The unexpected interview:

While you are conducting your job or internship search, be prepared for the “unexpected” telephone interview. A call may come in at any time.

- Check the outgoing message on your voicemail. Is it professional? Is it the type of greeting that you would want an employer to hear? Remember, first impressions stick.
- Maintain easy access to your resume and your calendar whenever possible. Have notepaper and a pen to take notes during the conversation. If accessible, you may want to have copies of correspondence you have sent or received from the employer to remind you of your current status.

The scheduled interview:

- If your telephone interview is scheduled in advance, be at your phone early, turn off call waiting, if possible, and be prepared to be available for a longer period of time than originally scheduled (e.g., call may be scheduled from 5:00-5:30, but might actually take place 5:10-6:00.).
- Whenever possible use a landline instead of your cell phone – you don’t want to have to deal with poor connections or dropped calls during an interview!

WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW DURING AN INTERVIEW?

For an unexpected call (when you can identify the caller), if you are in a situation that would make it difficult to speak, do not answer the phone. Let it go to voicemail, then return the call when you are in a better position to have a conversation.

Otherwise, it is okay to take a few minutes to compose yourself if the call comes unexpectedly. Ask for a moment. Turn off the television or background music. If roommates or guests are in the room, go to another room so you will not be distracted. Take a deep breath and return to the phone composed. Remember, this is a REAL interview and all the usual guidelines apply.

TIPS FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

GUIDELINES:

1. **Sit up straight and smile.** Your composure comes through even when the caller can't see you. Make an effort to sound alert and "perky." You may prefer to stand up. "Standing changes your breathing and your tone of voice and makes you sound alert and confident," suggests one career coach.
2. **Do not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum during the interview.** The sounds of these activities carry over the phone.
3. **Do not be overly relaxed or familiar just because you are sitting at home.** Use the interviewer's surname (e.g. Ms. Smith).
4. **Immediately write down the interviewer(s) name(s).** There may be more than one person interviewing you (via speaker phone).
5. **Speak clearly and directly into the phone.**
6. **Do not answer "call waiting."** Transferring to another call is disruption and conveys lack of interest in the interview.
7. **Prepare a "cheat sheet."** Write down answers to possible questions. Why should we hire you? What about related experience? What are your skills? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? Research other possible questions for your interview.
8. **Take notes.** Jot down key words of the questions as they are asked of you so you can be sure you are addressing the important elements. Also, keep track of how you answered questions and information you are given about the employer. These notes will be valuable when you are preparing for the face-to-face interview.
9. **Do not talk too much.** Keep up your end of the conversation. Answer all questions in full but don't ramble. Shorter answers are best in a phone interview setting. Try to pick up cues from the employer in terms of how extensive your answers should be. You might ask, occasionally, something like "Does that answer your question?" or "Would you like me to elaborate any more on that?"
10. **Do not give "yes" or "no" answers if more detail is needed.** Remember that this is your opportunity to let the interviewer know why you are a strong candidate for the position.
11. **If a question catches you off guard,** just ask for a moment to think about it, and then do your best. Don't call attention to weaknesses or areas that you lack.
12. **Ask follow-up questions:** "What are the next steps in the interviewing process?" "What will be covered in the next round?" "What are you seeking in a candidate?"
13. Remember to **say thank you at the end of the interview** and **express your continued interest in the position.** Address the interviewer(s) by name.
14. **Send a formal thank you letter,** along with any additional information the interviewer(s) may have requested.

CONCLUSION

Successfully completing a telephone interview may lead to an on-site interview. This is usually the next step in the job seeking process, and you should prepare diligently for this interview. Do not assume that you automatically have a job just because the employer asked you for another interview.