



How to Stand Out in a Phone Interview

By [ALISON GREEN](#)

February 1, 2012

More employers are using phone interviews as screening mechanisms to narrow down their applicant pool. These calls can range from short and perfunctory to long and in-depth, but either way, it's crucial to be prepared for them.

[See our list of the [50 Best Careers](#).]

Here are 10 tips to help you become a phone interview ninja:



Alison Green

1. Ask ahead of time how much time to allot for the call. This can tell you what type of interview to expect. If you're told it'll take 10 to 15 minutes, it's just going to be a simple screening to check your basic match-up with the job. But if you're told to set aside 45 minutes or an hour, expect a much more thorough call where you might be asked about past accomplishments and where you might face [behavioral interview questions](#).

2. Make sure you have somewhere quiet to talk where you won't be interrupted. This sounds obvious, but some candidates on phone interviews get interrupted by kids, barking dogs, coworkers at their current jobs, or other calls coming in. Not only does this come across as unprofessional and as if you're not taking the opportunity seriously, but it also will harm your ability to focus.

3. Keep notes in front of you. A major benefit of phone interviews is that you can have all the notes in front of you that you want. Take advantage of this, and prepare notes about the points you want to make. Obviously, you don't want to sound like you're reading a script, but you can use your notes to prompt you to remember pieces of information that you want to cover, or to use language for answering difficult questions.

[See [5 Questions to Ask on Your Next Interview](#).]

4. Be prepared. Before the interview, go to the employer's website and read enough to get a good feel for their work and their general approach. Don't leave the site until you can answer these questions: What does this organization do? What is it all about? What makes the organization different from its competition?

5. Know the job description. There's nothing worse than a phone interview where the candidate doesn't seem to grasp what the job is all about and why they'd make a good fit. So before the call, go through the job description and think about how your experience and skills fit with each line. Don't be alarmed if you're not a perfect fit; people get hired all the time without being a line-for-line match. The idea is simply to have thought through how you are a match, so that those thoughts are easily retrievable and can be turned into answers in the phone screen.

6. Think about the questions that you're likely to be asked, and write out your answers to each of them. At a minimum, cover these basics: Why are you thinking about leaving your current job? What interests you about this opening? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What experience do you have doing the major responsibilities of the job? You especially want to prepare for questions that you find tricky, like, for instance, talking about a firing or talking about weaknesses. Write out your answers to these questions not because you'll read them word-for-word, but because doing so will help prep you for the call.

[See [How to Answer an Awkward Interview Question](#).]

7. Be ready to talk salary. You can try to avoid talking about salary at this stage, but a lot of interviewers are going to insist on it. In fact, part of the point of the phone interview may be to make sure that you're in the same ballpark, salary-wise.

8. Come up with questions of your own to ask. Good questions at this stage are clarifying questions about the role itself and open-ended inquiries about the office culture. Don't ask about things like benefits, hours, or job security. These are important elements but there will be plenty of time to talk about them if you move forward; the phone screen is about establishing whether you're a good match.

9. Pay attention to your tone of voice. On a phone interview, the interviewer can't see your body language or gestures, so your tone of voice matters more than ever. Make sure to sound upbeat, interested, and engaged; not sluggish or distracted. And let your personality come through; after all, a major reason for the phone interview is to get a sense of what you're all about.

10. At the end of the call, always ask about next steps and the employer's time line for getting back to you. That way, you'll know when you can expect to hear something (or if you can expect to hear something), and you won't sit around anxious and wondering why you haven't heard back yet.

Alison Green writes the popular [Ask a Manager](#) blog where she dispenses advice on career, job search, and management issues. She's also the

author of *Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Leader's Guide to Getting Results* and former chief of staff of a successful nonprofit organization, where she oversaw day-to-day staff management, hiring, firing, and employee development. She now teaches other managers how to manage for results.

Twitter: [@AskAManager](#)

Tags: [interviews](#), [careers](#)

[« Previous Post](#)

[Next Post »](#)

YOUR CAREER»
The 50 Best Careers

Our list includes 50 high-opportunity jobs—so you can find the one that's right for you.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY»
How to Avoid an IRS Audit



YOUR RETIREMENT»
The 10 Best Places to Retire in 2012

Selecting a place to retire requires a great deal of thought and planning. Use our Best Places to Retire search tool to find the perfect place for you.

ONLINE EDUCATION»
Advance Your Career With an Online Degree



INVESTING MONEY»
Best Mutual Funds
Best ETFs

Research thousands of mutual funds and ETFs to find the right investment for you.

Copyright © 2012 U.S.News & World Report LP All rights reserved.
Use of this Web site constitutes acceptance of our Terms and Conditions of Use and Privacy Policy.