

How to Succeed in Your Phone Interviews (a.k.a. Phone Screens)

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The goal of a phone interview is an invitation to come to the employer's location for an in-person interview.

Phone interviews are typically called "phone screens" by the employer because they are screening candidates.

These interviews are short, usually less than 30 minutes and may be as short as 10 minutes.

Three to six of those candidates who make it through the phone screen will be invited to participate in the next round of interviews.

Usually the phone screen interview is relatively short, typically lasting between ten and thirty minutes, focused on confirming your match with the job opportunity.

Candidates who don't pass this screen are eliminated from consideration.

Handling Unexpected/Unscheduled Phone Interviews

When the unexpected call happens, you can take one of two approaches — accept the call, or ask to reschedule because you are unable to talk at that moment.

The best approach is to ask for a better time — when you are in a quiet, safe environment, have your notes in front of you, and are mentally prepared for the interview.

Good interviewers usually schedule the interview in advance. (more below)

Sometimes the calls come out of the blue when you answer your phone!

If you currently have a job, do NOT take this call in your workplace! Your boss or a co-worker may interrupt and may also discover your job search, putting your job at risk!

Most recruiters and employers will understand that their timing may not be right and be willing to reschedule. Don't ask to reschedule to a date in the distant future. Choose some time within the next few hours or next day, if possible.

12 Tips for Successful Phone Screens

Since you may not know when to expect the telephone interview, it is critical that you do not wait to prepare for the interview until you have the interview scheduled. You have to accomplish your goal – selling yourself, your skills, your experience, and your value – with only the words that come out of your mouth now.

You have just three assets for a phone screen– your attitude, your voice, and your preparation! What can you do to have the best opportunity for success?

BEFORE the Interview:

1. Have professional voicemail.

This interview determines whether or not you are considered for the job. Your goal is to make a great impression. Later you can decide whether or not you really want this job.

Start with your voicemail since these interviews are often set up via a phone call. When you can't answer the phone number you provided on your application or resume when someone calls, be sure that a voicemail message is available, confirming that the number belongs to you, and clearly stating your name in a professional way.

Voicemail Do NOT: *“Hi. I’m out partying right now. Leave a message, and, if it’s interesting enough, I might call back.”*

Voicemail DO: *“You’ve reached Bill Jones’ phone. I’m unable to take your call right now. Please leave your name, phone number, and the reason for your call. I’ll call you back as soon as I can.”*

When you are able to speak with the interviewer, be professional. Have your calendar ready to schedule the interview.

While you may be justifiably tempted to answer with *“Finally! I was wondering if I would ever hear from you!”* when you answer the initial call, resist that temptation. This is a business call! That annoyed response or an unprofessional greeting like *“Yah?”* when you answer the call may immediately end the opportunity.

A much better response is “*Thank you for calling. I am very interested learning more about this job.*”

2. Schedule the interview carefully, confirming the interviewer’s information.

Choose a time that works best for you.

- Experienced interviewers know that, if you are employed, you will need to schedule the call for a time when you are not at work. So, they are accustomed to taking calls before 9, after 5, or at lunch time — whenever you are *not* at work, if employed.
- Schedule the call for a time when you are *sure* you can be on time (being late will likely kill the opportunity!) and undistracted.
- If they say the call will last 10 minutes, set aside 20 minutes. If they say 15 minutes, set aside 30, etc.
- Choose a time when you will be awake and sober — not before you’ve had your morning coffee (if required) or after a celebration (if scheduled).

When you schedule the call, choose a time when you can be in a quiet place where you won’t be interrupted by a co-worker or family member, barking dog, or other loud noises. You must be able to easily hear the interviewer, and you want them to hear you easily, too.

When the date and time have been established, collect information about the interviewer. The person you speak with may change depending on the date and time of the call, so when the call has been scheduled, ask for the name and job title of the person who will be interviewing you.

- If you are supposed to call them, confirm their phone number.
- If they are to call you, be sure that the number they have is correct.

3. Do your research in advance.

Know as much as you can about the employer and the opportunity *before* the interview, just as you would for an in-person interview:

- Re-read the job posting, and make notes of where you meet or exceed the requirements (and where you don’t).
- Review the organization’s website (if any) to see what they do, where they are, and the latest news they may have posted.
- Look for a LinkedIn “Company Profile” to see what information they post, as well as other job openings they might have.
- Google the company and the product/service names. See 50 Google Searches to Avoid Bad Employers for more ideas.
- Check a site like Glassdoor.com to see the job interview questions commonly asked by this employer as well as the salary ranges and employee reviews.
- Based on your company research, have questions to ask if the opportunity arises or you risk looking uninterested *and unprepared* (not good!).

This research will help you to succeed in the face-to-face interview later, hopefully. It should also help you to determine if you really want to work for this employer.

For more pre-interview research ideas (and details), read [The Winning Difference: Pre-Interview Preparation](#).

4. Know your answers to the common questions usually asked.

Brief “yes” and “no” responses will not move a telephone interview forward, but *will* end it quickly. So, start by practicing your [answers to the top interview questions](#) now so that you are ready when the unplanned telephone interview occurs.

After confirming that you meet the basic requirements (education, skills, and experience), these questions are typically asked in phone screen are [Tell me about yourself](#) and [Why do you want to leave your current job?](#)

Paint visual pictures with your words by telling [stories that demonstrate results you achieved](#) or contributed to with answers that express the who, what, when, where, how, and why. Those answers will make you stand out.

The more you prepare now, the less you will ramble and omit from your answers during the actual interview.

[Related: [Pre-Interview Preparation](#), [50+ Questions to Ask in Your Job Interview](#), and [45 Questions You Should NOT Ask in a Job Interview](#)]

5. Have the documentation you need at your fingertips.

Having easy access to the company and job information will allow you to confidently respond to questions without fumbling regarding which job you are talking about.

So have a copy of *both* the job description and a copy of the resume or application you submitted in front of you *before* the interview starts.

Also have the notes you made during your research — questions to ask about the organization. Having questions which are specific to the employer will impress them with your interest and your attention to detail.

DURING the Interview:

6. Listen carefully.

As in every business discussion, listening to the “other side” is as important as what you say, and, in fact, what you say will be more effective if you are listening carefully.

Avoid making assumptions about what is being said. Ask for a clarification if necessary so that your response will be most appropriate.

Completely focus your attention on the interviewer. Answer the interviewer's questions carefully, and ask your own.

Don't take other calls or texts, and avoid all other distractions.

[Related: [Interview Success Secret: Smart Listening!](#) and [Smart Answers to Interview Questions.](#)]

7. Smile while on the phone!

You will find that you sound more upbeat and engaged when you do this. Your smiles will be "heard" by the interviewer making for a positive impression. This is where your attitude will really show.

To help you remember to smile, *place a mirror by the phone*, where it will be easy for you to see yourself in it. Then, during the call, make a point of looking into it, and smiling while you are talking.

8. Focus on your language and voice.

You have only the power of your voice in a telephone call. Speak clearly, stay upbeat, and use positive language. Smiling (#6, above) will help.

Don't trash anyone, not even the former boss who was such a jerk!

Try to take cues from the interviewer (does he or she speak slowly and softly or fast and loud?), and modulate your own tone and word choice to make a positive impression.

The mirror (#6, above) will help in staying positive, but you must remember that the words you choose (your language) and the motivation you put forward (tone, modulation, enthusiasm) will help determine your outcome.

9. Take notes.

As the interview begins, ask for the name and job title of the person who is interviewing you, and write it down in your notes. At the end of the interview, ask for, or confirm, the person's email address (so you can send your thank you).

If possible, take notes during and *immediately* after the call. Focus on giving good answers rather than writing copious notes, and you can write most of the notes after the call.

Note the date and time of the call and, if scheduled, whether they were on time. Then:

- *During the call*, write the name and job title of the person who called. If they don't volunteer it, ask, and confirm the correct spelling of their name.

- *During the call*, write down any commitments you make for after the call, like sending a sample of your work or following up with the answer to a question that you couldn't answer during the call. Do be careful not to put a current or former employer's confidential information at risk.
- *At the end of the call*, be sure to make note of the answers to the questions in #11 below.
- Note anything about you that seemed particularly important to them, indicated by the interviewer asking you several follow-on questions about that topic.
- Note anything about you that seemed to disappoint them.

These notes will help you write your thank you note and also help you to prepare for the in-person interview.

10. If you have a web portfolio or a complete LinkedIn profile, direct the interviewer to it, if possible.

Imagine this: The interviewer asks you to describe a challenge you have faced. Ask if he or she has access to the Internet.

If the answer is yes, suggest they visit your web portfolio or LinkedIn Profile (links hopefully on your resume), and have them click on your project highlights page. There, the interviewer will see what you have made public, perhaps an outline of key projects and a terrific graph that expresses your results.

Telephone interviews are truly one of the best reasons for creating a web portfolio or making sure that your LinkedIn profile is complete and shows your accomplishments.

This enables the interviewer to see your value while you talk about it.

[Related: LinkedIn for Job Search.]

AT THE END of the Interview:

11. End the call effectively.

If the interviewer is bringing the call to an end without discussing the next steps, speak up! Express your enthusiasm for moving forward, saying something like this:

“Thank you for your time today. I’ve enjoyed speaking with you, learning more about this opportunity, and I would be very happy to discuss more about it in person.”

Ask if email is the best method for staying in touch (so you will be more sure that your thank you message gets through, if sent by email).

If an in-person interview is not scheduled at the end of the call, find out *when and how* you can follow up with the employer.

Be sure to ask for contact information (name, phone number, job title, and email address) of the person, or people, who will be your contact(s).

[Related: [Gathering Information for the Follow-Up After the Job Interview](#) and [5 Absolute Must-Ask Questions for the End of Your Next Interview.](#)]

AFTER the Interview:

12. Send your thank you, immediately.

Sure, it was a telephone interview, but that is no reason for not taking the time to exercise simple but powerful courtesies. Write a thank you letter, and email it as soon as you can after the interview. *Don't just say thank you!* Make a point of reiterating your strengths and value for the position.

[Related: [Sample Phone Interview Thank You Email](#), [Sending Your Job Interview Thank You](#), and [Sample Job Interview Thank You Email.](#)]

The Bottom Line

Phone screen interviews are typically the first hurdle in the interview process used by employers to quickly separate the qualified from the unqualified job candidates. Follow these 12 steps to succeed in your next phone screen interview, and you'll be invited to continue the interviewing process. These steps will guide you successfully through the telephone interview. Remember, do not leave this interview to chance – prepare now for success!

More About Succeeding in Phone Interviews:

About the author...

[Laura DeCarlo](#) is recognized as the career industry's 'career hero' making a difference to both job seekers and career professionals as the founder of [Career Directors International](#). She possesses 11 top-level certifications in resume writing, career coaching, and career management; 7 first place resume and job placement awards; and has written three books on interviewing and job search including *Interview Pocket RX*, *Interviewing: The Gold Standard*, *Resumes for Dummies*, and *Job Search Bloopers*. Follow Laura on Twitter at @careerhero.
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