

Ten Tips for Mastering the Phone Interview

Phone interviews are almost always conducted as a first step in the interview process. On the positive side, with a phone interview you don't have to worry about having your suit pressed, and you can have your notes right in front of you. On the flip side, it's much more difficult to establish rapport and get a read on the hiring manager during a phone conversation.

Below are 10 tips to get the most out of your phone interviews.

1. **Schedule the meeting during a time when you won't be distracted.**

A phone interview should be scheduled like any other interview. At the designated appointment time, be sure the dog is in the backyard and someone else is watching the kids. Don't add additional hassle to an already stressful situation. If a recruiter or hiring manager calls you without advance notice and wants to interview you on the spot, use caution. If the interview "conditions" are not optimal at the time of the call, it's best to tell the interviewer that you are very interested in the position, but need to schedule another time to have a conversation. That time can be as soon as ten minutes later if that works for you -- just make sure that you can take the call without being distracted.

2. **Conduct interviews from a landline.**

Cell phones are a boon to modern communication, but the quality is still not the same as that from a land line. The last thing you want to do is frustrate the recruiter or hiring manager with a bad connection. Using a cell phone means you have a greater chance of getting distracted by multi-tasking when your attention should be completely focused on the interview. A landline forces you to stay in a relatively stationary locale. Plan your interview from a reliable phone line.

3. **Create an office space.**

Dedicate an area as your office. This area could be as simple as a card table with a phone and your documents. Conduct your interviews from your "office". Being seated at a desk or table allows you to create an environment similar to an in-person interview.

4. **Put a mirror in front of you.**

This helps you focus, and it anchors your conversation to the visual representation of a person. Monitoring your facial expressions helps you see if you are communicating your enthusiasm to the recruiter.

5. **Have a glass of water nearby.**

If your throat is dry or you get a tickle you can take care of it before it turns into a cough and disrupts the flow of the interview.

6. **Have your notes in front of you.**

A phone interview is like an open book test. You can have your research about the company and answers to potential interview questions right in front of you. Try organizing your key information on colored index cards by category so you're not fumbling through papers in the middle of the interview.

7. **Vary your voice.**

Since the other person can't see you, it's critical that you vary the tone and cadence of your voice to communicate interest and develop rapport.

8. **Use pauses effectively.**

Pauses in an interview situation are always difficult, and they can be especially awkward during a phone interview since you can't judge what the interviewer is thinking by their body language. Rather than wondering what the person on the other end of the line is doing (or even if they're still there!) use the silence to ask a question. For example, if the interviewer has just asked you about your strengths and your response is met with silence, make that an opportunity to ask a question like "What are the key strengths of your ideal candidate?" This tactic both takes care of the silence and allows you to learn more about the position.

9. **Don't multi-task.**

We have grown so accustomed to multi-tasking; however, as mentioned in tip #2, it can be counterproductive during a phone interview. Don't check your email or stick a casserole in the oven while you are engaged in a phone interview. Act the same way you would for an in-office interview, and maintain your focus.

10. **Practice.**

Record some of your answers to prospective interview questions. Play them back and critique yourself. Are you easy to understand? Are you talking too fast? Is your presentation riddled with long pauses and "ums?" Do you communicate interest and enthusiasm? If necessary, rework your answers and your overall presentation.