



## CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Telephone/Video Interviews

## Why Employers Conduct Telephone/Video Interviews

Employers regularly use telephone and video interviews to identify and recruit candidates for employment, and they also report that many candidates struggle to perform well during these interviews. A key to a successful phone/video interview is being able to identify quickly which of three basic types of calls you're participating in and to practice phone/video interviewing.

### INFORMATION-GATHERING INTERVIEWS

An employer may ask to speak to you over the phone in order to assess your interest in the company. This often occurs if you are referred through a personal contact, referral, or someone you met at a career fair. This kind of call should be treated as seriously as an in-depth interview. It is a good way for you, as the potential employee, to see if you are a good fit for the company and their objectives.

### SCREENING CALL

Many companies use telephone and video calls as initial screening mechanisms in order to narrow the pool of applicants for in-person interviews. Screening interviews are quick—usually 30 minutes—and are often conducted by someone from Human Resources.

### IN-DEPTH TELEPHONE/VIDEO INTERVIEW

In this case, the telephone or video is being used as a way to minimize the expenses (e.g. travel costs) involved in interviewing. These interviews may be with an individual or group.

Since you are unlikely to win the job from a telephone/video interview, your goal is to secure an in-person interview with the person who has the authority to hire. Using your strong 21<sup>st</sup> century career-readiness skills in communication, critical thinking, digital technology, professionalism and intercultural fluency will help you shine in an interview.

## Pros and Cons of Telephone Interviews for Candidates

Remote interviews via telephone have one advantage over other types of interviews—you can have your preparation materials in front of you as the interview is taking place. These include not only your resume, but also a "cheat sheet" of compelling story topics that you would like to introduce. It can also include a "cheat sheet" about the employer, including specific information about the employer and their products.

Have your materials open and available when you are preparing for a phone interview.

It is important that your phone interview sounds well-organized and thoughtful, but not rehearsed. Only write down important points to refer to during your interview; do not write down entire paragraphs or sentences and read them when you are conversing with an employer. It's easy for someone to tell if you are reading, and they may test how quickly you can think on your feet.

Telephone interviews can be challenging because it is more difficult to gain rapport with the interviewer when you cannot see the interviewer's non-verbal reactions and cues. Conversely, the interviewer cannot see your enthusiastic expressions or professional appearance. This places all the weight on your phone manners, clarity of speech, tone of voice, and the content of your answers.

## Be Prepared

Prepare for a remote interview just as you would for an in-person interview. Do your homework on the company. Compile a list of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as a list of answers to typical interview questions. Also, practice! Talking on the telephone/video chat isn't as easy as it seems. Have a friend or Center for Career & Professional Development (CCPD) staff member conduct a mock interview and record it so you can hear how you sound. You'll be able to hear your "likes" and "ums" and "uhs" and "okays," and you can practice reducing them in your conversational speech. It's also a good idea to rehearse answers to typical interview questions.

Make the following physical preparations for the scheduled phone or video interview:

- Select a quiet, private room with a technology in good working condition (The CCPD interview room is an option.)
- Clear the room of distractions. Evict the roommates and the pets. Close the door and hang a do-not-disturb sign. Turn off music, TV, and any additional technology.
- Have ready a short list of questions about the job and the organization, as well as the job posting and an outline of the research you did on the organization.
- Dress professionally—it can help you feel professional and therefore appear more formal and confident, even if the interviewer can't see you. If you are on video, professional attire is a must.

For phone interviews specifically (where the interviewer cannot see you):

- Keep your resume in clear view on the top of your desk or tape it to the wall near the phone so it's at your fingertips when you need to answer questions.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note-taking, as well as your calendar and a calculator.

## During the Phone/Video Interview

- Do not smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink. If you have to take a quick sip of water, cover the speaker.
- Breathe deeply and relax.
- Smile. Smiling will change the tone of your voice and project a positive image to the listener.
- Speak slowly, directly into the technology and enunciate clearly. Consider standing up to help project your voice.
- Use the person's title (Dr., Mr., or Ms.) and their last name. Only use a first name if they ask you to. Write down the full names and titles of each call participant (phone only).
- Let the interviewer do most of the talking. Be courteous and try not to speak over the interviewer. If you do, apologize and let the interviewer continue. On the phone you lack the visual cues of body language to assess whether you've said enough, so mark the end of your response with a question, such as "Would you like more details of my experience as an intern with XYZ Company?"
- Take your time—it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts. 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. If you need a moment to think, say so. Silence during a telephone conversation is dead air time.
- Support your statements with detailed examples of accomplishments when possible. It is easy for someone to get distracted on a phone or video call, so paint a vivid picture to keep the interviewer interested.
- Avoid fillers like ah, er, and um. This habit is especially noticeable on the telephone. This takes practice. So practice.
- Take notes when appropriate. Don't type on a computer, as it sounds like you're not paying attention.
- If the interviewer inadvertently answers a question from your prepared list before you ask it, cross it off. If you forget and ask it later, it seems as if you were not listening.

Compensation issues come at the end of the interviewing cycle, rarely during remote interviews. If you are asked about salary expectations, you can truthfully say you don't know enough about the job to state a salary figure. Re-affirm your qualifications; express your interest in the job and the company. Say you would appreciate the opportunity to talk further about the job in person.

## Before You Hang Up

- Let the employer end the interview.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity.

- Get the correct spelling of your interviewer's name and contact information for follow-up.
- Before ending the call, be sure you know the next step in the process, and offer to provide any additional information needed.
- Remember to make a strong and confident closing. Reiterate how you can make a contribution.
- Don't hang up until the interviewer has hung up.

If you perform well on a remote interview you'll probably be invited to interview with a hiring manager on site.

## The Unexpected Call

While you're actively job searching, it's important to be prepared for a phone interview at a moment's notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk. Don't mistake an initial call from an employer for a telemarketer—you may not get a chance to correct your error. If you are job searching, prepare to answer all phone calls, even from numbers you don't recognize. And set up your phone's voicemail. Employers are unlikely to text you, and if they can't leave a message, they may move on to the next candidate.

It is 9:15 a.m.; you're in bed and the telephone rings. The best strategy for handling the unexpected call is to determine whether it is a call or an interview. Calls are primarily informational, while interviews include job-related questions.

If it is an interview, decide quickly if this is a good time to talk. If it isn't, simply ask if you can arrange a mutually convenient time to conduct the interview.

Apply your best interviewing skills (even if you are dressed in your pajamas).

## After the Interview

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
- Follow up promptly (within 24 hours) with a thank-you note, reiterating your interest in the job. If you don't do so, you have just invalidated all your other efforts!