Purpose

Employers use phone interviews to differentiate between candidates with similar qualifications and skills. A phone interview is used to screen qualified candidates for an in-person or virtual interview. The phone interview is typically not the determining step that results in a hire. A phone interview could be a 15-minute screening interview or a 60-90 minute in-depth interview. It could consist of just behavioral interview questions, but could also include technical interview questions. Your goal as the phone interviewee is to secure a face-to-face interview with the person who has the authority to hire.

Tips for Phone Interviews

- Use a landline if at all possible to avoid problems with cell phone reception. If you must use your cell phone, be stationary to avoid dead zones and be sure your phone is fully charged. You may get better, more stable reception if you connect your cell phone to your Wi-Fi network.
- Your outgoing voicemail message should be clear and professional; there is a chance you will miss an expected call.
- If you receive a call from an employer at a bad time or at a distracting location, ask if you can call back in ten minutes or so to transition to a quiet location. It is better to reschedule than to leave the employer with an impression that you were unprepared.
- When rescheduling, accommodate the employer’s schedule as well as your own. Ask the employer when will be a convenient time for them.
- When asked to provide times you are available for a phone interview, provide several options. Be specific with the date and time frame. For example, instead of “next Tuesday,” say “Tuesday, Oct. 24, between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. Central Daylight Saving Time, and Wednesday, Oct. 25, from 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon Central Daylight Saving Time.”
- Be sure to confirm the phone number you want them to call. Resumes sometimes have more than one phone number.
- Clarify the time zone for the appointment, the length of the interview, and who will be conducting the interview. You may have multiple interviewers.
- During the interview, you can refer to your resume and notes that remind you about examples for different types of questions. This is an advantage of a phone interview.
- Pay close attention to questions; it is easy to let your mind wander. If a question is not clear to you, repeat questions to confirm or ask to have it repeated.
- Have a strong close. Check your list of 2-3 points you wanted to make about yourself, and if you missed any, add them in here. As with any interview, you should have at least three good questions to ask. Confirm when you can expect to hear back from them. Express continued interest in the position. Since you have access to notes, there is no excuse not to have a strong closing.

Refer to the Interviewing Techniques guide for more information about answering different types of questions and preparing for interviews.
Communication Don’ts

- Do not smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink while interviewing. You may want to have water nearby, however, if you will be speaking a long time or are prone to dry mouth.
- Speak CLEARLY. Do not mumble, do not speak too quickly, too softly, etc.
- Avoid verbal fillers such as “and,” “ah,” “err,” “um,” “uh,” “like.”
- Avoid answering questions with “yes” or “no” responses. Respond with detailed answers by referring to specific examples from previous work and/or academic experience.
- Maintain energy and enthusiasm throughout the conversation. One disadvantage of phone interviews is that you lose face-to-face contact and body language feedback. You can easily sound flat/disinterested/distracted. Even though the interviewer cannot see you, sit up straight and smile during the interview in order to sound energetic and positive.

After the Interview

- Promptly follow up with a thank you email that reiterates your interest in the position. Write the thank you email or at least make notes of the interview conversation right after the phone interview for a fresh account of what was discussed in the interview. As with an in-person interview, the thank you email should be sent within 24 hours.
- Send materials/documents requested by the employer immediately.