

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews are actual interviews held over the phone instead of the traditional face-to-face style. Employers use telephone interviews as a cost-effective way of undertaking initial screening during the recruitment process.

Employers usually use this method to gather information about your suitability for the job and to decide whether to invite you for a face-to-face interview. This stage can be performed by a third-party agency. As with other interviews you will be expected to convince the interviewer that you have the appropriate qualifications, personal skills, motivation and experiences for the job.

The section below outlines the most common types of telephone interview.

TYPES OF TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Unannounced

Following your submission of an application form or CV you are telephoned, unannounced, and an interview is under way. Very often the sorts of questions will be similar to those encountered in a normal face-to-face interview. For example: what do you consider your main strength to be? What is your major weakness? Why have you applied to this company? Why do you want a career in...?

This method is often adopted as a preliminary screening process by medium-sized and smaller organisations, perhaps an advertising agency or firm of solicitors.

Pre-arranged

Following submission of an application form or CV a letter arrives advising you that the next stage of the recruitment process is a telephone interview. You are likely to be fully briefed on the format of the interview which is generally one of two types:

a) You are given a Freephone number and a Personal Identification Number (PIN). At a time of your choosing within a specified period, usually seven days, you ring the Freephone number from a touch-tone telephone and respond to the statements read out to you by pressing an appropriate button on your phone. They are usually the agree/disagree type of question, for example, you would press key 1 if you strongly agree with the statement and 5 if you strongly disagree. Examples are: 'Overall, I enjoy working more than playing'; 'I have a gift for seeing the strengths in others'.

There may be as many as 80 statements to respond to. You are advised at the start that your response times are recorded. This is not to indicate that you are in any kind of race or competition but to ensure your answers are genuine reactions.

b) The second type is a 'structured telephone interview'. Similar preliminary arrangements to those above are made but in this instance the interview is with a trained

interviewer. You may be advised that your responses will be recorded. Questions are based on the required competencies for the job and your responses are analysed by trained interviewers/analysts.

In addition - and this really does depend on the nature of the job - you may receive a telephone call, again following initial arrangements, when the conversation is based around the concept of you trying to sell something to the interviewer. Needless to say this type of approach is used when the job for which you have applied involves selling of some kind. The interviewer will be assessing your ability to be professional and credible on the phone.

This method is very popular in the recruitment of telemarketing staff. Applications for roles as call centre staff also usually involve some kind of telephone assessment.

The major companies operating telephone interview techniques are keen to be as open as possible about the process and will give you full briefings on the methods to be employed.

So, having identified the major types of telephone interview, what is the best way to prepare for them?

TOP TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS BY TELEPHONE

Much of the advice you would normally receive on how to prepare and conduct yourself at a face-to-face interview holds true.

To agree or not to agree

If the interview is arranged in advance and is to be of the agree/disagree touch-tone phone type, as outlined above, then arrange to make the call from a comfortable, quiet place with no distractions. Your careers service may offer facilities but you would need to check this in advance.

- All that is required is a sincere response in a reasonable time.
- Do not try to pick the answer you think the interviewer wants; the questions are designed to check for inconsistencies in the answers. If you do succeed in beating the system all that will happen is that you may end up with a job which does not suit your personality and which you do not enjoy.

Unarranged

- Remember, if you have recently submitted an application or CV there is an increasing chance you will be telephoned, without notice, as part of the assessment process. However, you may be able to reschedule unarranged calls to a more convenient and specific time.
- If you live with others it would be a good idea to advise them of this possibility and keep it very much in mind yourself. For example, make sure you change an unsuitable answering machine or voicemail message.

- Make arrangements, in advance, to take calls with some privacy or at least quiet and respect from your friends.
- Make sure your CV or application form is to hand, as well as pen and paper to write any details or instructions you may be given at the end of the interview.
- If you have applied to more than one company or organisation keep the applications, brochures, correspondence etc in separate folders so that relevant documents are at hand. The sound of paper rustling while you search for the relevant form will not create that all-important good first impression.

Prepare for success

Whether the interview is unannounced or of the pre-arranged type, the questions will be no different from those asked at face-to-face interviews. Your careers service will have reference material on interviews, including other leaflets in this series, that you can use for preparation:

- Remind yourself of the details you included in your application.
- Make a list of the skills required for the job and a range of examples that prove you have those skills.
- Research the employer and the industry so you are more informed about relevant issues.

Improve your verbal image

The major difference between face-to-face and telephone communication is, of course, the lack of visual contact. Research has shown that in face-to-face situations communication relies on non-verbal signals and tone of voice. Hence, on the telephone, the tone and rhythm of the conversation is as important as the words themselves:

- An awareness of how you sound is as useful as what you say, if not more so. Arrange with a friend to practise some answers on the phone and obtain feedback from them on how you sound.
- Record some answers on a tape recorder, listen to them yourself and get someone to offer constructive comments.
- A more positive image can be projected if you stand up when talking, providing this does not make you sound too aggressive.
- Breathe deeply and relax. Speak slowly, clearly and with purpose.
- If you smile when you are talking this is communicated in your voice. Try it, it really works!
- Some people advocate dressing as if you were attending a face-to-face interview. This can help you get in the right frame of mind.
- Try to vary the tone and volume of your voice, be enthusiastic when appropriate and be careful not to mumble or shout.
- On a basic practical note, have a pen and paper ready to make notes of anything you might want to mention later.
- Make sure you have a diary to hand to take details and time(s) of any further contact.
- Have your questions ready.
- Have a glass of water nearby, just in case you dry up.

Do not be put off if you are not getting much feedback from the interviewer; this happens in face-to-face interviews too. Try to avoid long pauses, or at least explain them - for example with 'could I just take a moment to think about that?' Remember, a

telephone interview is almost invariably a precursor to a face-to-face meeting. Very few, if any, companies or organisations will offer a job on the basis of a telephone interview and almost certainly not a graduate position. However, a favourable impression created on the telephone will go a long way to helping at the face-to-face stage.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- *How to Succeed at Interviews and other Selection Methods*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2007
- *I Can't Believe They Asked Me That!: Tips and Techniques to Quickly Prepare for a Tough Job Interview*, Ron L. Krannich and Caryl Rae Krannich, Impact Publications, 2007
- *Successful Interview Skills*, Rebecca Corfield, Kogan Page, 2006
- *Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions*, Martin Yate, Kogan Page, 2005
- *Excel at Interviews*, Patricia McBride, Lifetime Careers (Wiltshire) Ltd, 2004
- *201 Best Questions to Ask on Your Interview*, John Kador, McGraw-Hill Education, 2002
- *Winning at Interview: A New Way to Succeed*, Alan Jones, Random House Business Books, 2001
- www.careers.lon.ac.uk/sortit a collection of interactive modules designed to increase your ability to manage your career, from choosing your future path to settling in to your new job. Look at the 'implementation' section for interviews help.

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