

# TIP SHEET

## PHONE INTERVIEWS

Many companies now use the "phone screening interview" to make the initial determination of which candidates they will consider for a position. While the face-to-face interview is difficult enough, the phone interview can be tricky for different reasons. Applicants must anticipate calls at unexpected times and be ready to present themselves well. The following tips can help you do well with phone interviews.

Phone interviews are meant to give the interviewer a feel for your skill-set, interests, desired compensation etc., and to see if there is a match between their needs and your strengths. If they are interested, then the phone interviews are usually followed by an in-person interview.

1. **Plan for the unexpected.** After submitting your resume there is no way to tell if you will get a call. In some cases you can find out through your network which companies use phone screening interviews. This will help you anticipate and plan ahead, so you will not be caught totally off guard.
2. **Control the message.** Just as with in-person interviews you need to be very clear about the impression you want to make and what skills and qualifications you are offering to this company. Since phone screenings are *brief* conversations, you must be able to get to the point quickly and emphasize the important areas. Make a list of the three key skills this company would be most interested in along with your qualifications and experience using those skills.

Make a list similar to what you listed on your resume and keep it by the phone or keep it with you if you listed a cell phone:

Skills	Qualifications	Experience
Office skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Certified Microsoft Office Specialist</li> <li>➤ Type 98 WPM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prepared annual reports for 6 years</li> <li>➤ Handled correspondence for company executives</li> <li>➤ Performed mail-merge letters and labels for corporate mailings</li> <li>➤ Tracked project timesheets in Excel</li> <li>➤ Managed executive calendars and meeting room schedules in Outlook</li> </ul>

3. **Control your space.** Staying organized and keeping good records is vital. Wherever you are conducting your job search, keep the materials you will need on hand. This includes your resume, job postings for which you have applied, names and phone numbers of persons at this company, internet research you have collected on the company, notepads, etc. If you carry a briefcase and are out a lot, keep copies with you.
4. **Control the time.** This is not always easy, but if the call comes at an inconvenient time, it is better to call them back in 20 or 30 minutes than try to conduct an interview when you are distracted. You don't need to explain your reason, just say, "I am very glad you called, but I am in the middle of something, can I call you back in 20 minutes? Make it a reasonable amount of time (don't say 5 minutes if you won't be able to do it), and be sure to follow through on time. If you really can't do it today, ask if you can call them tomorrow and make a specific appointment time.

Some interviewers want to catch you off guard so that they get a feel for how you respond when you are spontaneous. If you feel you are quick on your feet, you may want to go ahead. If you are not as good in a spontaneous situation, call them back later, or the next day, when you are prepared.

5. **Control the flow.** Don't hesitate to ask questions to understand who is calling you and where they fit in the hiring process. Are they the hiring manager, HR person, outside recruiter? Some companies conduct as many as 3 phone interviews by different people before inviting the top 3 candidates in for face-to-face interviews. You will also want to follow through with a thank you, so you want proper spelling and address. You might want to ask how much time the interviewer has for this call, so you can know how to pace yourself to be sure you get your most important information across.
6. **Control your state.** State means your emotional, mental, and physical state of being. A phone screening may deprive you of some of the communication channels that make you feel most comfortable with others. You won't be able to see them to read expressions and visual non-verbal cues. You will have to listen more carefully than you may be used to doing. To come across well on the phone you still need to communicate enthusiasm in your voice, interest in the position, and other qualities that make you a good candidate. Many people are not at their most comfortable on the phone. You may need to practice getting comfortable talking to someone you can't see.

One suggestion is to stand during the conversation. This keeps your energy up, keeps you breathing from the diaphragm, and keeps you alert.

7. **Control the ending.** Always end by stating in one way or another that you want the job. In many cases you can ask the person how they think you fit the qualifications for the job. If they say they think you are mostly qualified but you lack XY or Z skills, this gives you a chance to counter this objection while they are still on the phone.
8. **Control the follow-through.** Immediately after the phone interview you will want to send a thank you card with a brief note. Thank you notes are NOT opportunities to make another pitch for the job. They are where you express your sincere thanks for the opportunity to talk with them about what a good fit you are for the position, and to restate your interest in the position and the company. You can also request an in-person interview. Here's an example: "Thank you for calling me today about the marketing position. I enjoyed the conversation and have a better understanding of the job. I am very interested in the position and would appreciate the opportunity for an on-site interview to further discuss the skills and abilities I can bring to your company."

#### 9. **Common Phone Interview Questions.**

You may get any of the typical interview questions, but since this is a screening interview, the interviewer will be looking for a match between your skills and the job requirements. They will also seek a better understanding of what is on your resume.

- Why did you leave your last job?
- Have you ever been fired or forced to resign?
- Can you explain this gap in your employment history? What have you been doing for the "X" months since you were last employed?
- Why have you had so many jobs in such a short period of time?
- What do you really want to do in life? What do you see yourself doing five years from now? Ten years from now?
- Have you any questions for us?

In some cases they may give you an immediate conclusion based on your answers. You may hear statements such as:

- You don't have enough or the right kind of experience.
- You may be overqualified or too experienced for the position.

If you feel they are overlooking something, this is your chance to correct any misperceptions.

10. **Debrief and Relax.** The better prepared you are, the more comfortable you will feel and the better you will perform. Afterward, take a few moments to consider what you did well and where you could improve. Then congratulate yourself and relax.