



Interview Guide

Telephone Interviews

Treat the phone interview seriously, just as you would a face-to-face interview

A phone interview seems so informal on the surface that it can be easy to fall into the trap of "phoning it in" -- i.e., not preparing for it as well as you would for an in-person interview. Don't get caught with your guard down. Be sure to research the company, study the job description, and practice your responses to anticipated questions, just as you would for any other interview.

Have your CV and cover letter in front of you

You'll almost certainly be asked about some of the information that appears on these documents. You might also want to have in front of you any supporting materials that relate to information in your CV and cover letter, like documents you've designed or written, a portfolio of your various projects, or the written position description from your past positions.

Make a crib sheet

Jot down a few notes about the most critical points you want to make in your interview. Are there certain skills and experiences you want to emphasise? Do you have certain interests or passions you want your interviewer(s) to know about and understand? Be sure these pieces of information appear on your crib sheet. Then touch on them during the interview, even if your only chance to do so is at the end of the session when the interviewer asks you if you have any questions or anything to add.

Get a high-quality phone

This isn't the time to use a mobile phone that cuts in and out, or a cheaply made phone that makes it difficult for you and your interviewer(s) to hear and understand each other.

Stand up, or at least sit up straight at a table or desk

Face to Face Interviews

In the current job market, presentation and preparation are key to giving you the best chance against the competition. Review the following points before you attend that all-important interview.

Look Sharp

A couple of days before the interview select your outfit. Depending on the industry and position, your smartest suit is usually the best option. Even if the company operates a casual policy, at this stage it is important that you are looking your very best. Above all, dress with confidence. If you feel good, others will respond to you accordingly.

Be on Time

Never arrive late to an interview. Allow extra time to arrive early in the vicinity of the building, allowing for factors like getting lost. Enter the building 10 to 15 minutes before the interview. Nobody ever made a negative impression by arriving early – but you may ruin your chances if you are late.

Do Your Research

Research the company before the interview and learn as much as possible about its services, products, customers and competition. This will give you an edge in understanding and addressing the company's needs. The more you know about the company and what it stands for, the better chance you have of selling yourself. You also should try to find out about the company's culture to gain an insight into your potential happiness in the role.

Be Prepared

Bring along a folder containing extra copies of your CV, a copy of your references and paper to take notes (optional). You should also have questions prepared to ask at the end of the interview.

Show Enthusiasm

A firm handshake and plenty of eye contact demonstrates confidence. Speak distinctly in a confident voice, even though you may feel nervous.

Listen

One of the most neglected interviewing skills is listening. Make sure you are not only listening, but also reading between the lines. Sometimes what is not said is just as important as what is actually said.

Answer the Question Asked

Candidates often don't think about whether or not they actually are answering the questions asked by their interviewers. Make sure you understand what is being asked, and get further clarification if you are unsure.

Give Specific Examples

One specific example of your background is much more valuable than a number of vague stories. Prepare your responses before the interview. Give examples that highlight your successes and uniqueness. Your past behaviour can indicate your future performance.

Ask Questions

Many interviewees don't ask questions and miss the opportunity to find out valuable information. Your questions indicate your level of interest in the company or role.

Most Common Interview Questions

What Are Your Weaknesses?

This is the most dreaded interview question of all. Handle it by minimizing your weakness and emphasizing your strengths. Always counteract a negative with a positive and only concentrate on professional traits: "I am always working on improving my presentation skills. As a member of the PMI I am often required to give speeches at my chapter, which I find very helpful in refining these skills."

Why Should We Hire You?

Summarize your experiences: "With five years' experience working in the financial services industry and my proven track record of saving the company money, I could make a big difference in your company. I'm confident I would be a great addition to your team."

Why Do You Want to Work Here?

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought and are not sending out resumes just because there is an opening.

Researching the company and industry before your interview will ensure you stand out as an informed and well-prepared applicant. Many companies will discount any candidate that hasn't taken the time to find out a bit more about the organisation – you may come across as disinterested in the role if you are not eager to discover more about them. The best answers to this question are backed up by facts – for example "I read on your website that you have recently signed a contract with (partner) and I feel this will offer great scope and the chance to grow with the company".

It would also be beneficial to think of at least two reasons this job is a good match for your skills, strengths, experience and background. What you can bring to the company? What do you offer that others applicants do not? Write down your thoughts and rehearse them as part of your script.

What Are Your Goals?

Sometimes it's best to talk about short-term and intermediate goals rather than committing yourself in the distant future. For example, "My immediate goal is to get a job in a growth-oriented company. My long-term goal will depend on where the company goes. I hope to eventually grow into a position of responsibility."

Why Did You Leave (Are You Leaving) Your Job?

The key here is being positive. If you're unemployed, state your reason for leaving in a positive context: "I managed to survive two rounds of corporate downsizing, but the third round was a 20 percent reduction in the workforce, which included me."

If you are employed, don't dwell on the downside of your current situation, focus on what you want in your next job: "After two years, I made the decision to look for a company that is team-focused, where I can add my experience." Never give a negative answer to this question – it may make the interviewer question your future loyalty.

When Were You Most Satisfied in Your Job?

The interviewer wants to know what motivates you. If you can relate an example of a job or project when you were excited, the interviewer will get an idea of your preferences. "I was very satisfied in my last job, because I worked directly with the customers and their problems; that is an important part of the job for me."

What Can You Do for Us That Other Candidates Can't?

What makes you unique? This will take an assessment of your experiences, skills and traits. Summarize concisely: "I have a unique combination of strong technical skills, and the ability to build strong customer relationships. This allows me to use my knowledge and break down information to be more user-friendly."

What Are Three Positive Things Your Last Boss Would Say About You?

It's time to pull out your old performance appraisals and boss's quotes. This is a great way to sell yourself through someone else's words: "My boss has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can rely on me, and he likes my sense of humour."

What Salary Are You Seeking?

It is to your advantage if the employer tells you the range first. Prepare by knowing the going rate in your area, and your bottom line or walk-away point. One possible answer would be: "I am sure when the time comes, we can agree on a reasonable amount. In what range do you typically pay someone with my background?"

Interview Check List

Relax – this is a checklist to make sure you stay focused before, during and after the interview. Creating a cheat sheet will help you feel more prepared and confident. You shouldn't memorize what's on the sheet or check it off during the interview. You should use your cheat sheet to remind you of key facts. Here are some suggestions for what you should include on it.

In the Days before the Interview

- Draw a line down the centre of a piece of paper. On the left side, make a bulleted list of what the employer is looking for based on the job specification. On the right hand side, make a bulleted list of the qualities you possess that fit those requirements.
- Research the company, the industry and the competition.
- Prepare your 60-second personal statement: Your answer to the, "Tell me about yourself," question.
- Write down at least five success stories to answer behavioural interview questions ("Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of a time...").
- List 10 questions to ask the interviewer about the job, the company and the industry.
- Get permission from your references to use their names.

Before You Go to the Interview

- Do you look professional? Check yourself in the mirror; part of your confidence will come from looking your best.

Carry these items to the interview:

- Several copies of your CV on quality paper.
- A copy of your references.
- A pad of paper on which to take notes (optional).
- Directions to the interview site.