

# Preparing for a Telephone Interview

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## Objectives

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1. To recognize the important role telephone interviews play in the job search process.
2. To be aware of appropriate telephone interviewing behaviors and to be able to demonstrate these behaviors.
3. To understand the elements and characteristics of a telephone interview.

## Activities

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1. Read through this guide to understand the telephone interviewing process.
2. Attend an interviewing workshop in the Career Center.
3. Participate in a mock telephone interview through the Career Center. Learn more at [www.career.fsu.edu/mockinterview](http://www.career.fsu.edu/mockinterview).
4. Refer to the *Preparing for a First Interview* guide, located at [www.career.fsu.edu/img/pdf/guides/TheFirstJobInterview.pdf](http://www.career.fsu.edu/img/pdf/guides/TheFirstJobInterview.pdf). Ask a career advisor or other Career Center staff member about interview and job search activities that fit your personal employment needs.
5. Refer to the additional resources listed at the end of this guide.

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## Purpose of a Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews, also known as telephone screening interviews, are a convenient way for employers to narrow the pool of applicants to be invited for in-person interviews. Additionally, phone interviews are more efficient and minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates. For job hunters, the objective of a phone interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer.

## Advantages to the Organization

Telephone interviews are:

- cost effective and efficient
- often given using standardized questions
- used to differentiate between candidates who appear similar on paper
- helpful in determining the organizational “fit” of a potential candidate
- an easy method for the employer to check if the candidate is affordable and available
- convenient screening devices for out-of-town applicants

## Who Calls Whom?

Employers typically prefer to call candidates at their convenience and will arrange the interview time accordingly. However, employers may ask a candidate to call them to test how serious they are. If you receive a call from an employer at a bad time, ask if you can call the employer back in ten minutes or so in order to position yourself in a location free from distraction. It’s better to ask to reschedule than to come across unprepared. If there is a chance that you might miss an expected call from an employer, make sure your voicemail message is clear and professional. When rescheduling, remember to request a time that will also be convenient for the employer. Try to avoid arranging the interview too early in the morning or late on Friday afternoons. Remember to always clarify what time zone, the length of the interview, and who will be conducting the interview. Occasionally, there will be more than one person conducting the interview.

## Preparing for a Telephone Interview

You want to present yourself as professional as possible. According to Joyce Lain Kennedy, nationally syndicated careers columnist, most people don’t prepare for screening telephone interviews as rigorously as they do for face-to-face meetings, [and] the casualty toll is heavy. Prepare for a telephone interview just as you would for a traditional face-to-face encounter.

### **What to do...**

- Practice. Use a voice recorder to get an idea of how others hear you on the phone or have a mock telephone interview at the Career Center.
- Dress in a professional manner. If you’re dressed for business, both your language and paralanguage will convey greater professionalism (Krannich & Krannich, p. 47). Choose professional clothing that you will be comfortable wearing (Colvenbach).
- Research the organization.
- Have a pen and paper ready for note taking.
- Warm up your voice and practice smiling. A smile can be heard over the telephone.
- Keep your resume or CV, cover letter, career portfolio, and job advertisement in clear view.
- If possible, have pictures and/or bios of the interviewer(s) in front of you.
- Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
- Prepare a short list of questions about the job and the organization.
- Have a calendar available should you be asked to schedule another interview.
- Ensure interview materials are strategically laid out and that you are familiar with them. No employer wants to hear shuffling papers.
- Turn off call waiting so you are not interrupted.
- Close the door and ensure the interview location is free of distractions (e.g., kids, pets).
- Turn off your stereo and television.
- Have a clock nearby to monitor the time you have remaining in the interview. Respect the time parameters set by the interviewer.

### **What not to do...**

- **DO NOT USE A CELL PHONE!** To ensure quality of the conversation and to guard against dropped calls, use a land-line phone.
- Have important points written down on paper, but **DO NOT** write entire paragraphs or sentences and read them when you are conversing with an employer. It is very easy for someone to tell if you are reading, and they may test how quickly you can think on your feet (MIT Careers). Think of your notes as a “cheat sheet” that you can refer to when making important points, not a script (Colvenbach).

- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity.
- Request contact information for follow-up questions and thank you letter submission.
- As with all interviews, ask for the job! Restate your interest and desire to move to the next step.

### **What not to do...**

- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
- Avoid the overuse of the following words: “ah,” “err,” “hum,” “uhhh,” and “like.” This habit is especially noticeable on the telephone and eliminating it takes practice.
- Avoid the simple “yes” or “no” response; add selling points at every opportunity by backing up your answers with specific examples from previous work and/or education experience.
- Do not mention compensation. This conversation typically comes at the end of the interviewing cycle and not during the telephone interview stage.

## **During the Telephone Interview**

### **What to do.....**

- Have a glass of water by the phone in case your throat gets dry.
- Speak slowly, clearly, and directly into the phone receiver.
- Enunciate your words, use correct grammar, and complete sentences.
- Be careful with the tone of your voice. It is your visual representation. Make sure you sound interested, confident, and capable.
- Smile so your friendliness can be heard!
- Address the interviewer by name. If more than one person is interviewing, know who asked you the question and address the answer to that person and their possible “interests.”
- Repeat the question if necessary to clarify your response.
- Sit up erect at a desk/table or consider standing. Your voice may sound stronger and more alert.
- Pace the call. Let the caller do most of the talking, without interruptions.
- Reaffirm your qualifications and end with a strong closing. Express your interest in the job and the organization.
- Ask the interviewer at the end of the conversation where you stand and what the next step will be (e.g., time line, second phone interview, arranging a on-site interview, etc.)
- If things sound good to you, say so. The interviewer can't see you, so he/she can't read your body language.

## **After the Telephone Interview**

1. Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
2. Evaluate the conversation to improve your performance in future phone interviews.
3. Follow up with a thank you note that reiterates your interest in the job.
4. Send any requested material immediately.

Employers are conducting telephone interviews with greater frequency and use these as a screening process. So take them seriously, prepare thoroughly, and remember that your goal is to set up a face-to-face interview.

## Sources

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The preceding guide was adapted from the following resources:

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- Walsh University Office of Career Services [Online] *Phone Interviewing Etiquette* (2006). Retrieved from [www.walsh.edu/OLD/stuaffrs/jobs/guide9.htm](http://www.walsh.edu/OLD/stuaffrs/jobs/guide9.htm)

## Additional Career Center Resources

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<i>Interviewing for Success</i> .....	VB K7
<i>Nail the Job Interview</i> .....	VB K72
<i>Adams Job Interview Almanac</i> .....	VB M6
<i>The 250 Job Interview Questions</i> .....	VB V4
<i>Interview Power</i> .....	VB W31
<i>Get Hired Now!</i> .....	VD H3
<i>Knock 'em Dead: The Ultimate Job Seeker's Guide</i> .....	VDY2



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