
Impressing an Employer during a Phone Interview

Make a “Cheat Sheet”

The advantage of a phone interview is that you can refer to notes during your conversation. Make a “cheat sheet” of the key points you want to convey – your strengths, evidence of your passion for the field, keywords to help you respond to typical interview questions, and a few questions that you can ask the interviewer. Keep this information and a copy of your resume near the phone. Have a pen handy so you can write down the interviewer’s name and any other pieces of information you will need later.

Stay organized by creating a log to keep track of the resumes you send out. Record each company, position title, contact name, and the date when you applied. Be sure to research the companies by reading about their mission, history, locations, services and current news items. Keep notes on each company in your job search log. Having this information at your fingertips assures you will not be caught by surprise when the phone rings.

Be Prepared for a Call Anytime

Not all phone interviews are scheduled ahead of time. At any moment, an employer could come across your resume and decide to call you about your application. Employers are increasingly using phone interviews as an initial screening tool.

If you are in a place where you cannot take a call (in class, driving, out with friends) let it go to voice mail. It’s better to return the call when you are in a quiet place where you can focus than risk being unable to hear or sounding distracted. Return all calls as soon as possible; if you end up playing “phone tag” be persistent.

Make sure you have a professional sounding voice mail message – this is your first impression!

Practice, Practice, Practice

Just like with a traditional job interview, you should try to anticipate questions the interviewer might ask. If you practice your answers ahead of time, you will sound much more intelligent and confident during the interview.

Typical interview questions include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself in 1/5/10 years?
- What is your leadership style? Give an example of a situation in which you took on a leadership role.
- Describe a situation where you had to work with others to solve a problem.
- Give an example of a stressful situation you have encountered on the job. How did you handle it?
- Talk about an accomplishment you are proud of.
- Do you have any questions?

Employers want to know not only what you've done but in what context. Be prepared to back up your skills with specific scenarios and details about your performance. Use the **STAR** approach to help you respond to behavioral interview questions: explain the **Situation** or **Task** you were faced with; describe what **Action** you took, and end with the positive **Response** or **Result** of your actions.

Finally, Follow These Tips

- Be in a quiet place with a good phone connection during the interview.
- Speak slowly.
- Sip water periodically – it will help you speak clearly.
- Avoid chewing gum, eating or smoking.
- Stand during the interview– it will keep you energized and help project enthusiasm.
- Smile - it makes your voice sound friendly.
- Be careful not to sound overly confident. No matter how much you've accomplished to this point you are still the potential new hire. The last thing you want is to display a sense of entitlement or arrogance.
- Dress up - there's evidence to suggest that when you dress professionally you speak professionally.
- Give short answers – talk long enough to answer the question but don't feel you need to fill every silence. An interview should be a dialogue rather than a monologue.
- If you need a minute to prepare an answer, it's appropriate to say “let me take a minute and think about that”. This avoids “dead air”.
- Sometimes a phone interview is a conference call with a committee of people. In this case, be sure to get the names of everyone on the call for your subsequent thank you letters.
- Your goal is to secure an in-person interview with a hiring manager. If the interviewer doesn't mention what will happen next, you should bring it up. For example, you can say, “Thank you very much for taking the time to call me. I'd like to have the opportunity to meet in person. When will you be scheduling the next round of interviews?”
- Thank the interviewer.
- Send a thank-you note by email or regular mail.

Most importantly, schedule a mock interview with Career Services to practice your responses and get helpful feedback!