

Telephone interviews

Why use them?

A number of employers conduct telephone interviews, often at an early stage of selection. If you are offered a telephone interview, the most important fact to remember is that the employer wants to find out the same information as they would face-to-face, so preparation is **vital**.

Key factors in preparation include:

- **knowing yourself – review your application form/CV**
- **knowing the job for which you are applying – gather evidence against the skills (competencies) the job requires. Don't just rely on the ones already mentioned on your application – add to this list if possible**
- **knowing all you can about the employer – check their website, use trade press and other sources to get an overview of the company**

One immediate bonus of the telephone interview is that you can prepare outline notes with key words or 'prompts'. A word of caution, however: restrict yourself to a few brief notes, ideally on one side of a piece of paper, rather than lots of sheets.

Interviews are all about communication and telephone interviews are no exception. Plan how you want to come across, bearing in mind that no visual communication will be possible. Telephone interviews depend upon oral communication and so all those other signals which normally support your answer (the nod in agreement, the enthusiastic smile, the friendly eye contact) must be replaced by, and reflected in, your tone of voice. **The better prepared you are, the better the interview.** If you are concerned about any aspect of telephone interviews, ask to see the Careers Adviser on Duty to discuss these issues further.

Hidden Signals

Think about the different telephone conversations you have with friends, where ready responses and genuine interest encourage you to continue. Contrast this with the tiresome call to a busy mail order line where you may wish to question something. You know very quickly when you haven't got the attention of the person you are talking to, and you may even pick up the sound of their word processor in action.

Types of telephone interview

- Like a face to face interview but without all of the information you can get from body language
- The telephone interview which takes the form of a number of statements being read to you with the request that you indicate your agreement or otherwise by pressing number keys on your telephone or giving your answer verbally. In such cases, where your responses are probably being used to screen people for the next stage of selection, all you can do is to answer as honestly and positively as possible
- The structured interview, when the interviewer is following a list of questions – usually competency type questions. For some examples, see the Employability website
- For a sales role, you might be asked to "sell" something to the interviewer during the interview

The Practicalities

When you find out that an employer wants to interview you by telephone there are several things to consider:

- The employer will probably suggest the time and date and you will need to arrange a suitable venue.
- You should find somewhere appropriate for the interview. If you need to use the Careers Centre come in and talk to us. We will suggest that the employer either calls you at an agreed time or you call the employer briefly to let them know you are ready to receive their call.
- Remember to have your application form, CV and a few notes with you.
- Ensure that there is a writing surface very near the phone, with a suitable chair. An armchair does not encourage you to respond in a business-like manner. Nor does lying on your bed!

- Have a pen and paper ready.
- Arrange the desk or table so that your writing hand is free.
- Dress in a manner which will help you perform best. Some people like to dress as if they are going to attend a conventional interview as this helps them to concentrate and act the part, while others prefer to remain casually dressed. Find out what works for you.
- Make sure you won't be interrupted and, if you are using your mobile, check battery and signal strength so it won't cut out halfway through!

The Techniques

As already stated, you only have your voice to communicate so it's a good idea to think about how you can enhance your responses:

- The telephone exaggerates sound, so try not to subject the interviewer to an ordeal of heavy breathing (can happen if you are nervous).
- Sound positive, interested and enthusiastic. Introduce yourself at the beginning and listen carefully.
- If you smile you will 'lift' the tone of your voice and immediately generate a positive sound.
- Try not to interrupt the interviewer in your enthusiasm to reply.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification if necessary. Remember that the interviewer can't use visual communication either.
- If there is a silence at the other end, the interviewer may be making notes.
- Resist the temptation to say something simply for the sake of it. The telephone can encourage this tendency.
- Try not to speak too quickly. Ask friends if you sound clear on the phone.
- Try to avoid any repeated verbal habits, like 'sort of' or 'you know'. The phone seems to exaggerate their use. **Top Tip: "Keep a professional tone, you don't have to use business jargon, but do be aware of coming across professionally"** (Large retail bank)
- Consider standing up if you want to emphasise a point.
- Use normal gestures when you are replying, as they will add emphasis to the tone of your voice.
- Conclude the interview with thanks to the interviewer and find out what the next stage in the selection process will be.

Further Support

Careers Advisers are always willing to offer advice and guidance on this issue. We have a great deal of experience resulting from our on-going discussions with recruiters. If you are facing a telephone interview, do not hesitate to arrange a meeting with a Careers Adviser either in your School or at our headquarters in Reed Mews.

Materials: listen to the podcast on the Employability website, take part in Mock Interviews with employers on campus, attend an interview skills workshop in your School or as part of the core employability programme, go for The Interview Experience (a vital part of The Exeter Award), pick up the leaflet: 'Going for Interviews' from the Careers and Employment Service in Reed Mews.

Careers and Employment Service

Reed Mews, Streatham Drive

Opening times:

Monday to Friday 9.45am-5.00pm

(closed 12.30pm-1.30pm during vacations)

Employability website: www.ex.ac.uk/employability

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