



# ANSWER THE CALL: HOW TO ACE YOUR TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

*Interviewing over the phone can be intimidating – especially for those of us who rarely use our phones to make actual phone calls anymore. To start, telephone interviews lack the element of personal contact that is so important to typical job interviews. Candidates are asked to communicate their enthusiasm, relevant experience, and general competency without the benefits of eye contact, body language, and clothing. All of this can be difficult; in the absence of these important signifiers, everything that remains is magnified. What this primarily means is that oral communication skills and preparedness become extremely significant. Consult the following tips to ensure that you’ve left the best possible impression when the time comes to hang up. Of course, remember that telephone interviews are still interviews. Consult our “Impressing Your Future Employer” and “Answering Common Interview Questions” resources for much more information.*

## **Why conduct a telephone interview in the first place?**

Companies that schedule interviews over the phone are often concerned with logistics. Conducting telephone interviews allows an employer to a) schedule a large volume of interviews in a relatively short amount of time, and b) consider applicants who live far away but are willing to relocate. Alternatively, some employers deliberately privilege phone interviews as they are an excellent way to evaluate potential employees for oral communication skills.

## **Know what you’re getting into:**

Some telephone interviews function as preliminary screenings (to be followed by a more formal sit-down meeting), while others are full-fledged, in-depth hiring interviews. Do you know which yours is?

## **Take it seriously:**

Any interview that you can perform in your pajamas will understandably feel less formal or consequential than a traditional face-to-face appointment. To help combat your natural inclination to approach telephone interviews casually, we recommend that you “embody your performance” by smiling often and standing up as you speak. This sounds illogical, but smiling really does make a difference to the way your voice comes across over the phone. Standing up allows more oxygen to flow through your airways, which translates to a more robust and energetic voice. We also recommend making the effort to dress up professionally and concentrating on maintaining appropriate posture and body language. It all adds up.

## **Respect the parameters established:**

Be prepared to make yourself available during normal work hours. Set aside more time than you are likely to need. If your interview has a preassigned time limit, tailor your responses appropriately.

## **Set the scene:**

Make sure you have a private, quiet space to isolate yourself from distractions. Inform your roommates or family members that you are not to be disturbed for the duration of the interview. If you have call waiting, turn it off, and ensure your phone is fully charged. You probably don’t have a landline, but use one if you do. Keep a glass of water nearby, and be prepared to take notes (this might be a good time to invest in a basic hands-free headset). You should also keep your resume and/or your completed job application nearby. Your interviewer will likely refer to it, and you don’t want to be caught off guard.

## **Preparation is paramount:**

- As with any interview, research the company to which you’re speaking – beyond the first page of its website! Supplying detailed, irrelevant information will do you no favours, but neither will knowing only the absolute basics – or less – about a company.
- Because you won’t be sitting in a room with your interviewer, you have the opportunity to read from pre-prepared materials. In the days leading up to your interview, review the job posting and develop a list of the most important criteria it specifies. Consider how your qualifications match those criteria, anticipate some related interview questions, and write down your best answers to them.

- You should also prepare for general questions that you would encounter in any interview setting. Your interviewer(s) will likely ask you to describe yourself and outline how you would react – or have reacted – in specific circumstances. In particular, compose a response to the highly likely, “Tell us about yourself” prompt.
- Practice reading naturalistically. Can you deliver your prewritten information in a way that doesn’t sound like you’re reading off a script? In some cases, it may be more helpful to jot down a loose “skeleton” of points and compose sentence-form answers in real-time. If your answers are well composed and thoughtful but sound spontaneous, they will leave a stronger impression.
- Give concrete evidence of your accomplishments to support your skills and experiences. This is not specifically related to phone interviews, but it’s tremendously important. Speak with enthusiasm, passion, and optimism. It’s an obvious point, but that makes it no less true.
- Create a checklist to ensure that you successfully communicate everything you intend to say about yourself and your experiences. Monitor it as the interview proceeds. Along the way, writing down questions you are asked may help you to concentrate and ensure that you answer every part of the question.
- Close confidently: Pre-prepare a closing statement that will leave a powerful, lasting impression.

### How to talk on the phone:

- Listen and maintain focus. It can be easier to drift off when you’re not physically occupying the same room as your interviewer(s).
- Verbal tics (*ah, erm, hum, like, you know*, etc.) can be even more conspicuous over the phone. While it’s very difficult to completely eradicate this sort of subconscious language use, concentrating on enunciating clearly, speaking slowly, and articulating your thoughts can make a real difference.
- Along similar lines, it’s perfectly okay to ask for clarification if you don’t quite catch something an interviewer says.
- Avoid awkward silences. It’s completely acceptable if you need a few seconds to consider your response before delivering it, but make a point to announce that you are doing so.
- Verbalize everything! In person, many of us naturally use hand gestures and facial expressions to communicate ideas and emotions. This strategy, obviously, is much less effective over the phone.
- Remember that your interviewer is taking notes. Don’t assume that anything is “off the record.”
- Avoid smoking, gum chewing, eating, or drinking anything beyond the occasional sip of water.
- Try your hardest not to interrupt your interviewer(s).

### Next steps:

- After your phone interview concludes, make sure you know exactly what happens next. You may need to schedule a further interview. We recommend following up with your interview(s) within 24 hours. Request his or her (or their) email address(es) during the phone call if you don’t already have this information.
- Send a simple, concise email the next morning in order to thank the interviewer(s) for giving you the opportunity to speak about the position. Very briefly reiterate your suitability for the role. While physical letters – even handwritten notes – are nice gestures in the working world, in this case it’s important that you make contact before the hiring committee has arrived at a decision. (Please see our other Career and Employment Services resources for more on writing formal emails and following up after an interview.)

Co-op, Career and Employment Services: [www.uwindsor.ca/cces](http://www.uwindsor.ca/cces) | mySuccess: [success.uwindsor.ca](http://success.uwindsor.ca)



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