



Interviews: “Hello?”

Telephone interviews and knowing how to answer the call.

The sound of success.

In today’s tough economy, telephone interviews are a growing means for employers to save time and money. They enable companies to pre-screen the candidate pool, as well as minimize recruiting travel and hotel expenses. For a job seeker, this means your voice, quick thinking, and winning phone personality must convince the recruiter that you are an ideal candidate worth pursuing.

Telephone interviews are 1) no less critical than in-person interviews, and 2) their sole purpose is to get you an in-person interview. Calls may be impromptu, unexpected, or scheduled. And once the questions begin, so has the interview.

Testing. Testing. Testing.

All key points for an in-person interview hold true for a phone interview; it’s all about practice and preparation. Know your material inside and out, and get ready to take the call.

“Do not disturb.” Find a quiet place with privacy. Remove all distractions and background noises; close the door and windows; select a time without pets, TV/radio, vacuums, children. No chewing, eating, or smoking. Mute or turn off other devices.

The writing on the wall. Have your résumé, job description (in case you’re applying to several), and notes with vital points, accomplishments, and responses either spread on a table or taped to the wall for easy access. It’s okay to use them.

At your finger tips. Have paper, two working pens, calculator, calendar, and a glass of water handy.

Suit up. Yes, dress up. It actually puts you in a more professional frame of mind. PJs are comfy, but can make your attitude a bit too blasé.

“Can you hear me now?” Use a landline over a cell to avoid dropped calls. Charge cordless batteries, or have an extra handset. Turn off call waiting. And no speaker phones: You’ll sound like you’re in a bathroom.

Answer the call. Of Nature first, *before* the interview. Don’t flush away your chances of a future meeting!

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Let’s talk.

It’s acceptable to reschedule a surprise call, if need be. Return missed calls immediately. However, once you’ve decided to move ahead with the phone call, remember these call signs:

Manners matter. Greet and answer politely. Use appropriate titles: Mr., Ms., Dr. Sound professional, as though meeting face-to-face. Remember, this is a business call, not a date.

Stand and deliver. Stand up and/or walk around. Standing opens up your diaphragm; you’ll project and sound stronger. Walking about can relax you. Just don’t sound out of breath. A headset will free up your hands to take notes.

Take your time. Listen closely, then speak slowly and clearly, but naturally. Use silence and pauses to your advantage. Don’t interrupt.

Smile. Even if your charming smile can’t be seen, it makes a difference; a smile can be heard. Also, sound enthusiastic. Remember, you have to make up for the lack of visual cues.

Watch your voice. Nervousness leads to more rapid speaking, and at a higher pitch. Don’t ramble. Again, take your time, pace yourself, and breathe. Avoid “um,” “ya know,” “like,” and slang.

Details, details. Answer the question. Where appropriate, provide facts and figures from your own experiences, not just a yes or no; “show” rather than just “tell”. Speak in confident sound bites.

No no’s. Don’t wing it. Don’t put the interviewer on hold. Don’t eat. Don’t lie.

End by asking about the next step. And, a prompt email thank you in this case is fine. Follow up in a few days. If the telephone interview was successful, the next time you reach out and touch someone will be for that in-person handshake.



i n a nutshell:

Even if they don’t require a pressed suit or travel directions, telephone interviews demand no less:

- They are a means to an end, the end being an in-person interview
- Be prepared, know your stuff, sound professional, focus
- Confirm the time and date of a scheduled call; don’t forget
- Smile; you’ll sound better
- Keep your résumé, notes, and the job description handy
- Don’t be casual; the caller isn’t your new BFF
- Avoid jangling earrings and crackling paper; noise travels

When your future’s on the line, be ready to answer.

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