

7 Tips to Ace a Phone Interview

What you need to know to impress during a phone screen interview

You have probably replied to many [job postings](#) without hearing anything back. Then, you finally get a call that begins like this: “Thank you for your interest in our company. Your résumé is impressive. Can we schedule an initial phone interview this week?”

Euphoria. As soon as you finish the call you start jumping for joy. You think to yourself: “They want me, the job is in the bag.”

Simmer down. The reality is that at this point you have several more hoops to jump through before you get the coveted job offer. Too often, well-qualified candidates trip themselves up at the first one: [the phone screen interview](#).

At this stage you will likely deal with someone in human resources whose role it is to pave the way for the hiring manager to decide which candidates to bring in for a more serious discussion. He or she is tasked to gain basic information about multiple candidates and make initial judgments about personality, temperament, communications style, salary expectations and more.

It’s likely that you’ve got your story all bottled up inside, and you want to make sure to get every detail of your history and capabilities out there for consideration. Remember, however, that this interview will last only about a half-hour. Contain your urge to spew forth a detailed narration of your professional history. Instead, follow these tips for a more successful outcome:

TIP No. 1: Be prepared to explain every job transition. An HR screener will likely want you to step him or her through [your résumé](#). Why did you make this or that choice of career direction? Why make that lateral move, or how did you get that promotion? And what about those short job stints or gaps between jobs? Be sure to have a copy of the same résumé you submitted next to you and/or on your screen in front of you before the interview begins.

This part of the interview is usually a check off item unless you give signals that there is more than meets the eye. “I was recruited,” “I left for greater responsibilities” or “I was part of a larger company reorganization” are all you need to say in most instances.

If you left to deal with a family or medical situation, you can simply say that without going into detail, but if it is true make certain to cast it as your fulfilling your basic obligations, and that the crisis (or whatever) is now fully resolved and you are ready to fully devote that same 100 percent commitment back to your career.

Tip No. 2: Be prepared to explain everything on your résumé. Any bullet point on your résumé might pique the curiosity of your interviewer. Be prepared to give more detail, but

don't take too much time on any one answer. After a few sentences, ask: "Is this what you were after, or would you like me to go in a different direction or provide greater detail?"

Tip No. 3: Understand that the interview isn't just about questions and answers. Your interviewer is likely trained to glean from your conversation your level of self-confidence, personality and ability to communicate effectively. Remember that no matter what your prior situation may have been, you need to build trust in yourself and knowledge of your abilities from the ground up. [Don't rush your answers](#), and keep an even tone in your voice. But at the same time, do show something of your personality.

Tip No. 4: Understand your red flags and prepare to lower them. While you may be reticent to have to deal with issues like age, employment gaps or frequent job-hopping, you should understand that you can do a great deal to mitigate these issues when you address them head on. Just answer the question in a nondefensive, factual way, pivot the conversation to something else and move on.

Tip No. 5: Don't get flustered when uncomfortable questions arise. The big four questions almost always rear their heads in a phone screen in one-way or another: Tell me about yourself. Tell me about your biggest strength/weakness. What are your salary expectations? And where do you expect to be in five years? There are numerous articles dealing with these and similar questions. [Review them](#), and practice your answers many times.

Tip No. 6: Do your homework and prepare great questions to ask. You will likely be given an opportunity to ask questions. Use it to show your enthusiasm, ask about this or that aspect of the job, or ask about how you would be able to use X in your background to do Y. Never use this as an opportunity to ask about their process, start dates, salary, benefits or anything else they can do for you.

Tip No. 7: Control your environment. Always arrange to be in a quiet, well-lit room, free from distractions. Sit in a chair with relevant materials easily in front of you. Give your sole, focused attention to your interviewer, and whenever possible make sure you are on a landline rather than shaky cell connection.

When you keep these tips in mind, you'll jump through the first hoop with ease, and be prepared for the in-person interview.