

Student Life Center 2300  
727-873-4129



CareerCenter@usfsp.edu  
usfsp.edu/careercenter

## **Telephone Interviews**

Telephone interviews are no longer rare and are used with increasing frequency as interview costs continue to rise. Calling someone long-distance is much cheaper than flying that person to another state.

Telephone interviews are merely for screening and are used to eliminate poorly qualified candidates so that only a few candidates are left for personal interviews. You might be called unexpectedly, or a telephone call to check on your resume might turn into an interview. Your mission is to be invited for a personal face-to-face interview.

Many interviewers try to make sure that the timing is convenient for the candidate to be interviewed. Most recruiting professionals will give the candidate this courtesy. Should you be called unexpectedly, try to reschedule the interview, for you will not be your best. Say something to the effect, "I am so happy that you called, however, I have a scheduling conflict at this time. May I call you back later this afternoon?" By suggesting a later time you are expressing your interest in being interviewed.

### **Basic types of telephone interviews**

- You initiate a call to the hiring manager and they are interested in your background. The call from that point forward is an interview.
- A company calls you based upon a previous contact. You may not be prepared but it is still an interview.
- You have a pre-set time with a company representative to speak further on the phone.

### **For a telephone interview that is expected**

- Tape your résumé to a wall in view of the telephone
- Have all employer research materials within easy reach
- Find a quiet space without interruptions
- Turn off the stereo, TV, and any other potential distraction
- Warm up your voice while waiting
- Have a glass of water handy
- Turn off call-waiting on your telephone.
- Anticipate the dialogue: Write a general script with answers to questions you might be asked. Focus on skills, experiences, and accomplishments. Practice until you are comfortable. Then replace the script with cue cards that you keep by the telephone.

### **During the interview**

- Speak loudly enough that you can be heard
- Use correct grammar and complete sentences
- Avoid long pauses
- Keep your notes handy. Have any key information, including your résumé, and information about the company. Have a calendar with all scheduled commitments available, a notepad and pen to jot down notes, and questions you wish to ask at the end of the interview. Sit in front of your computer to have access to all you may need.
- Be prepared to think on your feet. If you are asked to participate in a role-playing situation, give short but concise answers. Accept any criticism with tact and grace.
- Telephone screeners often ask you to name an expected salary. Try to avoid the issue by using a delaying statement or give a broad range with a \$15,000 spread. At this point, you do not know how much the job is worth.
- Say thanks. Express your appreciation for the time spent with you.
- Remember to write a thank-you letter. Just because the interview was via telephone doesn't negate the wisdom of putting your thanks in writing (fax, postal mail, or e-mail)

## **Techniques for Phone Interviewing**

### *A. The Phone Personality Matching Technique*

The Phone Personality Matching Technique is a variation of the Personality Matching Technique. Personality Matching is the secret to successful interviewing. It is the process of mirroring the personality of the person to whom you are speaking. It is based upon the proven fact that we like people who are like us. It is the halo effect in action – anyone who is like me must be a good person. The result is commonly instant rapport.

To successfully implement personality matching, first match the voice and then the physical characteristics of the interviewer. In matching the voice, the important aspect is to match the rate of speaking (tempo), and then match the pitch. In matching the physical characteristics, it is most important to match or reflect the facial expressions, then the posture (sitting back or forward, etc.). Although you should not be trying to mimic every move, you should attempt to closely match him or her.

During a phone interview, you obviously cannot match the interviewer's physical characteristics. You can, however, try to match the interviewer's speaking rate and pitch. Remember to stay within your personality range, but venture toward that portion of your range that most closely matches that of your interviewer. This is an excellent way to establish rapport quickly over distance and phone lines.

### *B. The Open and Available Technique*

You have a major advantage in a phone interview that does not exist in a face-to-face interview. You cannot be seen. Use this to your advantage.

Have all of your materials on yourself and the company open and available on your desk as you are speaking on the phone. This includes your résumé, and a "cheat sheet" about the company, including specific critical points, describing the company and their products or services. As the interviewer is talking with you, he or she will have no idea that you are being prompted from your papers as you are speaking (unless you rattle papers and give yourself away).

### *C. The Stand at Attention Technique*

This is a simple technique that increases the enthusiasm and positive image that you project over the telephone. Whenever you are talking with a potential employer on the phone, stand up. It gets your blood flowing, improves your posture, and improves your response time.

### *D. The Vanity Technique*

In preparation for a telephone interview make sure you have a mirror within view. By looking into the mirror consistently throughout the phone call and smiling, you will improve your telephone presence 110%. You will find yourself coming across much friendlier, most interested, and more alert. If you are self-conscious about seeing yourself in the mirror, use it as an occasional checkpoint. Seeing ourselves reflected in a mirror gives us the kind of feedback necessary to make instant modification toward a more positive presence.

Finally, if you are told you will hear about a position by a specific date but do not hear anything by then, call the organization and ask about the current status of your candidacy.