

candidate tool kit:

# interviews

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interviews:

# do's and don'ts

## Do's

- Arrive early. Tardiness is never excusable.
- Answer the interviewer's questions as specifically as possible. Relate your skills and background to the position requirements throughout the interview.
- Give your qualifications. Focus on accomplishments that are most pertinent to the job.
- Be professional. Smile, make eye contact, and maintain good posture.
- Anticipate tough questions. Prepare to turn perceived weaknesses into strengths.
- Make your first impression a professional one.
- Ask questions. An interview should be a mutual exchange of information, not a one-sided conversation.
- Listen. Concentrate not only on the interviewer's words, but also on the tone of voice and body language (if possible). Once you understand how the interviewer thinks, pattern your answers accordingly and you will be able to establish a better rapport.

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interviews:

# do's and don'ts

## Don'ts

- Don't answer vague questions. Ask the interviewer to clarify fuzzy questions.
- Don't be disrespectful. (Ex. Chewing gum, smoking in their office, placing items on their desk/table)
- Don't be overly familiar, even if the interviewer is.
- Don't ramble. Overlong answers may make you sound apologetic or indecisive.
- Don't lie. Answer questions truthfully.
- Don't express bitterness. Avoid derogatory remarks about present or former employers

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# interviews: in-person interviews

- Arrive 15 minutes early. Not only does it give you an opportunity to observe the company's surrounding and their employees, but it builds in extra time for any unforeseen events, such as getting lost or parking issues.
- Be professional. Smile, make eye contact, and maintain good posture.
- Dress appropriately. Make your first impression a professional one.
- Listen. Concentrate not only on the interviewer's words, but also on the tone of voice and body language. Once you understand how the interviewer thinks, pattern your answers accordingly and you will be able to establish a better rapport.
- Almost always a key part of the interview process, your face to face can make or break a job offer.

## Putting your Best Foot Forward

- Dress for the part with a new interview suit and fresh crisp shirts or blouses. Shoes should be polished and fresh.
- Keep cologne and jewelry to a minimum. Less is better than more in this case.
- A portfolio pad is a good place to keep three copies of your resume, resume supplement, and reference sheet along with any material you may want to have readily available for your interview.
- Turn off your cell phone when you arrive at the company so that you are not tempted to use it while waiting for your interview.
- Be polite and friendly to everyone you meet. Many employers check with their front office person to see how they were treated by the candidate waiting to be interviewed. Treat each person like they are the president of the company.

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# interviews: phone interviews

Research shows that 98% of business executives can assess a candidate's personality after 13 seconds of a phone call, with absolutely no visual information. As companies are continuing to look for ways to keep costs down and streamline processes, phone interviewing is a common occurrence. While no one is ever hired from a phone interview, and the goal is simply to be invited to another interview, you need to make a strong first impression in order to be considered as a viable candidate for the job.

The good news is that proper preparation can increase your confidence level while giving you the ability to make a favorable impression during a phone interview. Since you cannot rely upon visual stimuli like eye contact and body language...your voice, tone, energy level, and speaking mannerisms will be the only tools you have to use. The more relaxed and comfortable you are during your phone interview, the more your confidence, enthusiasm, and intelligence will come through.

The following tips and techniques are designed to help you prepare for a phone interview so that you can perform at a high level of comfort. Of course, these are only suggestions and ideas. The most important factor in a phone interview is to be yourself...so if something is not comfortable for you it is better that you do not try to force it as then it would not be natural.

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# interviews: phone interviews

Certain aspects of a phone interview are unpredictable, however with proper preparation you should be able to go into the call ready to avoid any major issues and overcome any potential obstacles.

In many cases, we will be able to provide you with information about the interviewer and what to expect from them, but this will still not cover every possible scenario or question that may unfold during the call.

Here are a few ways that you can prepare to ensure the best outcome of your phone interview:

- Be certain that you have secured a quiet and private location to have the phone call.
- Landlines are best, but if you must use a cell phone be sure you are set in an area that you know you will have good coverage. Try not to be driving, as coverage can go in and out.
- Keep your smartphones or other electronic devices out of the room so they cannot distract you.
- Research the company and have any relevant information printed and accessible to you.
- Take the time to carefully craft 5-6 questions that you would like to ask during the interview, these should pertain to the company, the role and the culture.

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# interviews: phone interviews

## Phone Personality

The need to make a good impression on the phone cannot be overemphasized. The phone interview is a make-or-break proposition, your one chance to convince the interviewer that you are worth serious consideration.

While it is most important to “be yourself” and not try to force anything that is not natural for you... here are a few ways you can maximize your phone personality:

- Voice reflects personality - A well-modulated, controlled voice communicates authority and heightens the verbal impact you will make. The quality, pitch and tempo of your speech convey a certain attitude, energy level, and enthusiasm. Here are a few things to keep in mind with regard to your “phone personality” and overall presentation:
- Avoid sitting in a hunched position - This will add a note of stress to your voice. Try standing as it opens your diaphragm to a smoother airflow. Consider standing at a counter, as that will put you at a natural level to take notes if you are planning to. However, do not become so consumed with taking notes that you are not paying attention to the flow of the conversation. It is more important to be engaged and not distracted during a phone interview.
- Move around - If you have a long cord or cordless phone, you may even consider getting up and moving around as that introduces an element of action and can make you feel more at ease. Be sure not to move around so much that you become short of breath or distracted.
- Do not talk “at” the other person - Speak in a relaxed and conversational way. Listen carefully to get the big picture and to avoid any mental distractions. Allow the interviewer to completely finish questions without finishing their sentences or blurting out answers.
- Stay focused - It is critical to stay focused during the conversation and to be succinct with your answers. Any distraction on your part or long rambling answers will quickly frustrate the interviewer and you will lose their interest

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# interviews: phone interviews

Establishing a rapport at the beginning of a phone conversation sets a favorable tone. During the first few minutes, mention something that shows commonality of interest or similarity in background. This helps both parties feel more connected and more comfortable as the conversation begins.

Ask the interviewer how much time they have to speak at the beginning of the conversation. Make a note of this and keep an eye on the time. When there are about 10 minutes remaining in the conversation, make a special point to remind the interviewer that you know they are almost out of time and ask them if there is anything in particular they would want to make sure is covered or discussed within the remaining time. This will be looked upon favorably as you are showing respect for their time and that you can maintain focus.

As the conversation winds down, become less talkative and give more thought to what you say as your final words will generally have a greater impact and be remembered longer. Careful word choice and voice inflection will underscore your interest and sincerity, whereas a rambling stream-of-consciousness statement will overwhelm and frustrate the interviewer.

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# interviews: video interviews

- Look at the camera, not the screen. It is very tempting to watch yourself or your interviewer during a Skype session, but looking directly at the video camera is the only way to maintain direct eye contact with your interviewer. If needed, try putting a colored sticker next to the camera as a reminder and something to focus on.
- Dress the part. When it comes to what you wear, treat your Skype interview like an in-person interview and dress professionally from head to toe (or at least from head to waist!). A professional dress code with video interviews is expected, not excused.
- Prepare your surroundings. Pick a quiet place to interview without an elaborate backdrop so that you can be the focal point on the screen. Remove anything distracting behind you and keep it neutral. Consider finding a space with ideal lighting.
- Practice makes perfect. Doing a run through interview with a friend beforehand is helpful because your first few Skype calls are likely to feel awkward, especially if you have to retrain yourself to watch the camera and not the screen. Play around with everything beforehand so that when it's interview time, you can shine without being distracted by the program.
- Close other programs on your computer. Getting Facebook notifications during your interview is distracting and unprofessional. Before your interview, make sure all other windows on your computer are closed (especially if they make noise).
- Use notes – BUT don't rely too much on them! Don't be afraid to help yourself with post-it notes or a copy of your resume handy when you interview. A benefit of having a Skype interview is that you can have a cheat sheet in front of you so that you don't have to memorize everything you want to mention. Just make sure your notes are easily scannable so that you use them as quick reminders, not a script. While having notes is certainly a plus, relying too heavily on them can cause awkward pauses during your interview. An interviewer won't be impressed if they only see the top of your head during the interview, so while having notes is good, be sure to use them sparingly.

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# interviews: video interviews

- Avoid interruptions. If you are interviewing in a house with multiple people or pets, be sure to let everyone in the house know ahead of time that you will be in an interview while securing any animals away from your interview space. Nothing is less professional than having to tell your potential employer to hang on while you shoo your dog away from the camera.
- Keep your profile professional. Unlike an in-person or phone interview, your first impression during a Skype interview doesn't actually involve you. The first thing your interviewer will see is your Skype username and picture, so double check that they are both interview appropriate (or create a professional Skype account — after all, they're free!)
- Watch your body language. Not all physical cues translate from in-person interviews to Skype interviews, which make the ones that do even more important. Be sure to have good posture and relax your shoulders to avoid stiffness.
- Avoid a "Can you hear me now?" situation. Nothing is more frustrating than only catching every other word a person is saying, so be sure to tweak the Skype audio ahead of time to make sure you can both hear and be heard without difficulty.
- Use a computer, not a phone! Nothing is more difficult than having to juggle your cell phone in one hand, your resume in another, while trying to keep eye contact with your interviewer. Not to mention having to rely on your phone's quality while Skyping. Try to avoid using your phone during a Skype interview and make sure you have a reliable connection.
- Follow up! A thank-you letter is just as important after a Skype interview as it is in an in-person interview. Avoid following up on Skype, though, unless the interviewer requests it!

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# interviews: closing

## Asking for the Job

If you don't ask for the job, someone else will. There's a difference between healthy enthusiasm and aggressively jumping over the desk and asking for the job. If you have demonstrated interest and energy throughout the process, it will be natural at the end of the interview to indicate that you would be very interested in an offer, should you be the candidate of choice. If there is a close decision between you and another candidate, it is possible that the candidate that shows more enthusiasm in the position will be the winner.

## Closing the Interview

Job candidates often second-guess themselves after interviews. By asking good questions and closing strongly, you can reduce post-interview doubts. If you feel that the interview went well and you want to take the next step, express your interest to the interviewer.

Try an approach like the following: "After learning more about your company, the position and responsibilities, I believe that I have the qualities you are looking for. Are there any issues or concerns that would lead you to believe otherwise?"

This is an effective closing question because it opens the door for the hiring authority to be honest with you about his or her feelings. If concerns do exist, you may be able to create an opportunity to overcome them, and have one final chance to dispel the concerns, sell your strengths and end the interview on a positive note.

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# interviews: closing

Here are some general examples of strong closes to maximize your chance at getting another interview:

- “I appreciate the time you have given me today and I continue to be very interested in exploring the opportunity. What do you anticipate the next step being? Great, when should I expect to hear something further?”
- “Thank you for the time you have spent with me today and for sharing the information you have given me. Is there additional information I can provide to ensure I move forward in the process?”
- “I greatly appreciate the time you have taken to talk with me today and based on our conversation I am excited about the opportunity and would like to move forward in the process. Do I have your recommendation to move to the next step?”

## **Suggestion for Closing the Interview**

“After learning more about this position, your goals and direction for your company, I am extremely interested. What else would you like me to elaborate on in terms of my background and fit because I would very much like this position and I can see myself working here? How do I compare to others you may be considering?”

## **A Few things to Remember During the Closing Process**

Don't be discouraged if an offer is not made or a specific salary is not discussed. The interviewer may want to communicate with colleagues or conduct other scheduled interviews before making a decision. Make sure that you have thoroughly answered these questions during the interview: “Why are you interested in our company?” and “What can you offer?” Express appreciation for the interviewer's time and consideration. Ask for the interviewer's business card so you can write a thank you letter as soon as possible.

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# interviews:

# follow up

After your interview, follow up is critical. When you get in your car, immediately write down key issues uncovered in the interview. Think of the qualifications the employer is looking for and match your strengths to them. A “thank you” letter should be written no later than 24 hours after the interview. Be sure to call your recruiter to discuss your interview and your next steps, as well.

## Thank You Notes

It is important to follow up interviews with Thank You notes to everyone you met with. Email is a very good option because of speed, but don't rule out the uniqueness of a hand written personal note, delivered, rather than mailed. Differentiating yourself from everyone else will give you the edge.

## References

Prepare a complete reference sheet with updated contact information. Be sure to obtain permission from your references to use his / her name.

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