



Interview Tips: Telephone Interviews

A guide for students and
graduates



A recruiter may use a telephone interview to screen candidates as the first stage of the process, before deciding who to invite to a formal face-to-face or video interview. It is usually the interviewer's first real impression of what kind of candidate you are, so it is worth taking just as seriously as any other stage.

Telephone interviews are still professional, and are usually pre-scheduled so you have time to prepare. Interviewers are listening for a friendly telephone manner, genuine enthusiasm, and a clear understanding of the role you have applied for. Expect to be asked about your CV, your current situation, where you heard about the role, and where you have demonstrated relevant skills in the past. Most telephone interviews last somewhere between 15 and 45 minutes.

Related Step Guides

This guide covers the telephone stage specifically. For the rest of the interview process and other formats, see our other Step guides:

- Interview Hints and Tips, for essential advice to help you perform your best on the day
- Interview Tips: What to Wear, for dress code by sector and video interviews
- Interview Tips: The STAR Technique, for compelling answers using Situation, Task, Action, Result
- Interview Tips: Video Interviews, for live and pre-recorded video interview formats
- Interview Question Tips, for answers to the most common interview questions
- Interview Tips: Assessment Centres, for what to expect and how to stand out on assessment days
- Psychometric Tests Hints and Tips, for confidence in aptitude and personality tests

Preparing for Your Telephone Interview

- Research the company and the role, so you can speak confidently if asked what you know about the business, such as its size, products, and reputation.
- Study your CV and application. Highlight your key experiences and qualifications, and make brief notes on how to expand on them if asked.
- Practise likely interview questions out loud, so your answers sound natural and confident rather than rehearsed.
- Think about what genuinely attracts you to the role. Real enthusiasm comes through far more convincingly than a rehearsed answer.
- Prepare a few questions of your own to ask at the end, to show genuine interest in the role and the company.
- Find a quiet space and use a landline if you can. If you must use a mobile, make sure it is fully charged and you have good signal.
- Keep your CV and any relevant notes in front of you, along with a notepad and pen for jotting things down as the call progresses.

Using AI To Prepare, Not To Perform

AI tools can be genuinely useful for practising likely questions or checking that your examples cover the right skills. Used well, they help you prepare stronger, more natural answers. What does not work is trying to read a fully AI-written script during the call itself. Interviewers can tell the difference between a candidate speaking naturally from a few prompts and one reciting rehearsed lines, and it rarely lands the way you would hope.

During the Telephone Interview

- If your call is scheduled, be ready and expect the phone to ring on time. Treat it exactly like any other interview and be punctual.
- Stay professional throughout the call and avoid slang, even if the tone feels informal.
- Smile as you speak. The interviewer cannot see you, but a smile changes the tone of your voice and comes across as warmth and friendliness.
- Refer back to your CV and notes naturally as you answer, rather than reading from them word for word.
- Do not be afraid of a short silence. The interviewer may simply be taking notes. If you are unsure whether you have answered fully, it is fine to ask.
- Be patient and concise. Give the interviewer the information they need without rambling.
- Take a short pause after each question if you need to gather your thoughts before answering.

Action Point

Keep a few bullet points of key examples next to you, and nothing more. A page of full sentences will pull you into reading it, and an interviewer can hear that straight away. A slightly untidy answer in your own voice lands better than a polished one that sounds recited. Write each prompt as three or four words, so there is nothing there to read aloud.

Ending the Call

- Ask what happens next in the process, and whether there is anything further you can provide.
- Thank the interviewer for their time and say you are looking forward to the next stage.

Do and Avoid

DO	AVOID
Research the company and the role in advance	Going in unprepared and hoping general knowledge is enough
Keep brief notes and your CV to hand	Reading from a full script or rustling paper audibly
Smile while you speak	Speaking in a flat or disengaged tone
Use AI tools to practise and refine your answers	Reciting a fully AI-written script during the call
Take a short pause to gather your thoughts	Rushing your answers or filling every silence
Ask about next steps before ending the call	Hanging up without expressing continued interest

Checklist Before Your Telephone Interview

- ☐ Researched the company, including size, products, and reputation
- ☐ Reviewed your CV and application, with notes on key examples
- ☐ Practised likely questions out loud, using AI tools to help if useful
- ☐ Prepared two or three questions to ask the interviewer
- ☐ Found a quiet space with good signal, and charged your phone if using a mobile
- ☐ Kept a notepad, pen, CV, and brief prompts nearby, not a full script



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