

Tips and language for telephone interviews

What tips could you give someone about each stage of telephone interviews written below?

Starting the telephone call

Technical problems

Taking notes

Mentioning documents

Answering questions

Problems with the questions

Asking questions

Ending the call

Compare your ideas with the tips on the next two pages.



Starting the telephone call

- Sit in a professional manner
- Smile
- Phone exactly on time, or be ready to receive their call at least ten minutes before the arranged time
- If anyone else phones you at the arranged time, quickly but politely end that call
- If you are phoning, mention who you are and why you are phoning
- If they are phoning you, answer the phone in a business-like but friendly manner, including your name so that they know they have the right person
- Thank them for something, e.g. phoning you or interviewing you
- If you get through to a secretary instead, ask them to put you through
- If you get through to someone else and the person you want to speak to isn't available, pass on your message and check when you should phone again
- If you get through to an answer machine instead, try again every five or ten minutes, but don't leave more than two messages in total
- If you can't get through for more than about twenty minutes, you could try emailing them as well
- Address them with their title and surname, unless or until they ask you to use their first name

Technical problems

- If the mobile or Skype line is bad, consider asking them to call you again on your land-line
- If you agree to hang up and try again, check who will phone who
- Mention if there is an echo, delay, noise etc, so that they will be know why you have problems understanding or hearing
- If you are cut off, quickly phone them again, apologise (even if it isn't your fault) and continue asking or answering the same question.
- Sort out any other technical problems

Taking notes

- Don't interrupt the interviewer – note down any questions you want to ask and ask them later
- You may also want to make a note of any questions you found difficult, in case you have the same questions in another interview
- If you can't write and speak or listen at the same time, tell them that that is what you are doing

Mentioning documents

- If you have already told them some information, mention where (e.g. on your CV)
- If you know something about their company, say where you found it out
- If you are quoting someone else or using someone else's ideas, mention it



Answering questions

- Keep answers short, maybe checking if your answer is detailed enough
- If you forget what the question is while speaking, don't be afraid to say so

Problems with the questions

- Use different phrases every time you need confirmation of what they are asking, especially if you need to ask for confirmation of the same question more than once
- Avoid general phrases like "I don't understand", "Can you repeat the question?" and "Pardon?" as much as possible. Point out what your misunderstanding is instead
- If you need time to think, tell them that or use phrases and noises to fill the silence. If you misunderstand many times, make excuses for your lack of understanding and/ or suggest a solution
- You could also try answering what you think the question might be and check that that is the right answer
- If you just can't answer the question, say why

Asking questions

- Tell them when your questions are finished
- Acknowledge their answers
- Tell them when it is the last question
- If you then think of one more question, introduce it
- If you are taking time to find or think of a question, fill the silence

Ending the call

- Thank them again
- Emphasize that you are still interested in the job
- Ask about the next stage
- Maybe email them to follow up

Are there any stages missing above?

Write at least one useful phrase for each of the tips above.

Compare your phrases with the list on the next two pages.



Starting the telephone call

- **Phone exactly on time, or be ready to receive their call at least ten minutes before the arranged time** – *“I’m sorry to phone you a bit early.”* – *“That’s fine, I was just sitting here waiting for your call.”*
- **If anyone else phones you at the arranged time, quickly but politely end that call**
- **If you are phoning, mention who you are and why you are phoning** – *“My name’s Alex Case. I have a telephone interview with you/ Jean Sherbert arranged for two o’clock.”* *“This is Alex Case. You asked me to phone you for an interview at half past twelve.”*
- **If they are phoning you, answer the phone in a business-like but friendly manner, including your name so that they know they have the right person** – *“Hello. Alex Case (speaking).”*
- **Thank them for something, e.g. phoning you or interviewing you** – *“Thanks for giving me this opportunity to interview for the job.”* *“Thanks for phoning.”*
- **If you get through to a secretary instead, ask them to put you through** – *“Is he/ she available?”*
- **If you get through to someone else and the person you want to speak to isn’t available, pass on your message and check when you should phone again** – *“Could you tell him that I called and that I’ll try again soon?... When might be a good time?”*
- **If you get through to an answer machine instead, try again every five or ten minutes, but don’t leave more than two messages in total** – *“Hi, this is Alex Case again. I’m afraid I have a meeting at two so I won’t be available on this number until about five. I’ll try you again then.”*
- **If you can’t get through for more than about twenty minutes, you could try emailing them as well** – *“Dear Mr Smith, My name’s Alex Case. We arranged to have a telephone interview at three o’clock this afternoon. I’ve been having some problems getting through, so could you try me on 090 9999 9999 whenever you have time?”*
- **Address them with their title and surname, unless or until they ask you to use their first name** – *“Please call me John.”* *“(Okay), thanks.”*

Technical problems

- **If the mobile or Skype line is bad, consider asking them to call you again on your landline** – *“We seem to have a bad connection. Do you think it is worth trying my landline instead?”*
- **If you agree to hang up and try again, check who will phone who** – *“I’ll call you this time, if that’s okay.”*
- **Mention if there is an echo, delay, noise etc, so that they will know why you have problems understanding or hearing** – *“I apologise for the background noise here, my neighbour is building an extension on her house, so I might have to ask you to repeat some of your questions.”*
- **If you are cut off, quickly phone them again, apologise (even if it isn’t your fault) and continue asking or answering the same question.** – *“I’m really sorry, we were cut off for some reason. So, as I was saying.../ Where was I?”*
- **Sort out any other technical problems** – *“I can’t hear you very well.”* *“There’s a bit of an echo.”* *“I’ll move my microphone.”* *“There’s a loud hissing noise”*

Taking notes



- **Don't interrupt the interviewer – note down any questions you want to ask and ask them later** – “Can I ask a question that I wrote down earlier?” “Before we go on, I had a question about the previous topic, if that's okay.”
- **If you can't write and speak or listen at the same time, tell them that that is what you are doing** – “Just a moment, I'm just making a note of that.”

Mentioning documents

- **If you have already told them some information, mention where** - “As you can see on my CV...” “As I said in my cover letter...” “As I wrote on the application form...”
- **If you know something about their company, say where you found out** – “I was interested to see on your company website that...”
- **If you are quoting someone else or using someone else's ideas, mention it** – “My business hero is Bill Gates, and he says that...” “I once read an article in The Economist that said (something like)...”

Answering questions

- **Keep answers short, maybe checking if your answer is detailed enough** – “Does that answer your question, or would you like me to explain in more detail/ give you some more examples?”
- **If you forget what the question is while speaking, don't be afraid to say so** – “Sorry, I seem to have gone off track. What was the question again?”

Problems with the questions

- **Use different phrases every time you need confirmation of what they are asking, especially if you need to ask for confirmation of the same question more than once** – “I'm sorry, I still don't quite understand.” “I think I understand better this time. Can I just check...” “I'm sorry, I still just don't get what you are saying.”
- **Avoid general phrases like “I don't understand”, “Can you repeat the question?” and “Pardon?” as much as possible. Point out what your misunderstanding is instead** – “I didn't catch the last part of your question.” “What does ‘six sigma’ mean?” “Are you asking what I did or how I did it?” “Is that bet with a B or vet with a V?” “Is that one five – fifteen?”
- **If you need time to think, tell them that or use phrases and noises to fill the silence** – “That's a difficult question.” “I've never really thought about that before.”
- **If you misunderstand many times, make excuses for your lack of understanding and/ or suggest a solution** – “I'm sorry, a lot of this jargon is new to me” “Could you spell the most difficult words out for me?” “Can you type the more difficult questions into the dialogue box as well?”
- **You could also try answering what you think the question might be and check that that is the right answer** – “If you mean..., then...”
- **If you just can't answer the question, say why** – “Sorry, my mind has gone blank.” “I know there have been examples, I just can't think of any right now I'm afraid” “Sorry, I really don't think I can explain that in English.”



Asking questions

- **Tell them when your questions are finished** – “I think you've told me everything else I wanted to know.”
- **Acknowledge their answers** – “ Thanks.” “I see what you mean.” “Good point.”
- **Tell them when it is the last question** – “There's just one more thing I wanted to ask about...”
- **If you then think of one more question, introduce it** – “Actually, I've just thought of one more thing.”
- **If you are taking time to find or think of a question, fill the silence** – “I wrote a few questions down that I wanted to ask. Just a moment while I look for the piece of paper.”

Ending the call

- **Thank them again** – “Thanks again for giving me the opportunity to talk to you.”
- **Emphasize that you are still interested in the job** – “I'm still very interested in the position.”
- **Ask about the next stage** – “Will there be another interview if I pass this stage?”
- **Maybe email them to follow up** – “Thanks once again for the opportunity to interview for the position of...”