The Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are becoming a major part of the interview process when applying for internships, jobs, and graduate school. Make sure you avoid distractions and are prepared for that sometimes unexpected phone call.

Hi, my name is Chad and I am a grad student in the Software Engineering program at St. Thomas.

Employers may contact you anytime during the day, night, and weekend, either informally or formally. They may request additional information, set up a formal interview, reschedule a time or simply chat with an applicant to get a sense of their personality. Nowadays, telephone interviews may indeed be “first round” screening measures for employers. It may also be your only interview for the position!

To prepare for a call “out of the blue” here are a few steps you should follow:

- Record a professional greeting on your answering machine.
- Don’t answer the telephone if you are sleeping or busy. Let it go to voice mail. You always need to be awake and alert when talking to a potential employer.
- Do not ask the employer to “call you back later.” You must be prepared to speak with an employer anytime you answer the telephone. If not, don’t pick up the phone. It is best to talk with employers when you answer!
- When you do take the call, thank the employer for calling.
- Later, follow up with the employer by sending a letter thanking them for the call.

If the phone interview is to occur at a set time, and you know exactly when the call will take place, there are additional steps you can take:

- Keep all of your employer research materials within easy reach of your phone.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
- Warm up your voice while waiting for the call. Sing an uplifting song to yourself.
- Have a glass of water handy, since you will not have a chance to take a break during the call.
- Use the restroom in advance.
- Have a copy of your resume, transcript, and the job description in front of you during the interview.
- Eliminate the possibility of background noises intruding on your conversation.
- Clear the room. Evict friends, kids and pets!!
- Turn off the stereo and the TV.
- Place a “Do Not Disturb” note on your door.
- Close the door.

Never interview while driving or walking. Talking on a cell phone outside or in a car creates lots of background noise from traffic and wind. Taking an employer’s call at a time when you are
multitasking and prone to distractions is not a good idea as you need to remain focused on the interview. I cannot stress enough how important it is to be in a quiet room free of distractions with your resume and notes on hand.

When you pick up the phone, ask the recruiter to repeat his or her name. Verify the spelling and write it down. Use the recruiter's name in your response. You're now ready to make a good impression during your first five minutes.

**During the phone interview sound positive, self-confident and focused!**

What you say and how you say it is critical to your career future. If you're properly organized, take out your notes for easy reference during the interview. Be thoroughly familiar with your accomplishments, skills and professional history.

Make sure you have researched the organization and the position you are applying for. Be prepared to discuss your qualifications or weaknesses if asked, just like in a face-to-face interview.

Also during the interview:

- Don’t smoke, chew gum, eat or drink.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Smile. When you smile, your facial muscles help your voice sound upbeat and convey a positive image to the listener.
- Don’t interrupt the interviewer. Let them finish speaking before you speak.
- If you have call waiting DO NOT take other calls!
- Take your time. It’s perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts. Silence isn’t bad. Lag time is common in telephone interviews. Often the interviewer may be jotting down notes.
- And finally, give concise answers; attention spans are shorter on the telephone.

At the end of the interview, tell the recruiter you're interested (assuming you are) and want to pursue the matter further. Ask about the next step in the interview process as well as the hiring timetable. Thank the interviewer on the telephone. Follow up with a thank you letter reiterating your interest in the position.

Oh! One last tip:

**Rehearse and rehearse again!** This is the best technique for assessing how well you know your career history, calming nerves, untwisting tongues and building confidence. Do a couple of rehearsals in person and a couple using a phone. Your rehearsal partner will tell you if you are stumbling over words or sounding nervous.

These are a few points concerning the Telephone Interview. If you have additional questions on this or any other career related concerns, be sure to visit the University of St. Thomas Career Development Center for additional resources or to meet with a counselor.