

How to Ace a Phone Interview

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I have recently realized how uncomfortable many of my candidates are with the idea of a phone interview. The most common concern my candidates have is that they feel that they interview better in person. They worry that their personality may not come through over the phone. They also feel that if the firm were truly interested in them, they would bring them in for a face-to-face interview.

Why A Phone Interview?

A phone interview is very common when firms are talking to an attorney who is located out of town. However, I am seeing more phone/screening interviews happening even for local candidates. Many candidates are confused or insulted when this happens to them.

Firms are run more efficiently than they used to be. When I started practicing law in the early 2000s, phone interviews were rare, even for out of town attorneys. If they liked your resume, they brought you into the office. Firms wasted a lot of time and money doing this, and thus, the screening interview has become far more common. Many firms even have the screening interviews conducted by the recruiting coordinator, rather than their attorneys, so as to not to waste the attorneys' time.

The Common Goals of a Phone Interview

As an interviewee, your goal in a preliminary interview is a focused goal: to get a second interview. The firm usually will either have very targeted questions about your experience, or they will ask very broad questions. This is because you will likely face one of two scenarios: the firm either wants to know that in general, you have the type of personality that they want, or they are looking for very specific experience before moving to the next step with you.

The first step is to know, if possible (it usually is), who will be interviewing you.

If you are being interviewed by an attorney or attorneys, obviously, find out what you can about them. If the attorney is the chair of the department and does not handle the kinds of work you would be doing (this happens often in IP and litigation, for example), research who the firm's clients are, and which attorneys do the work that they likely have you in mind for. Know something about the client base. Even if the entire interview consists of you answering their questions, you can answer them with an eye towards the firm's client base and the work you are capable of.

If you are being interviewed by an HR person or Recruiting Coordinator, the questions may be more general. A Recruiting Coordinator wants to hear how you speak and present yourself. They may ask you the much-reviled, "tell me about yourself," for exactly this reason. They may ask about your ties to their community. On the other hand, they may have specific questions about certain experience that the firm is targeting before they move forward with a candidate, and the RC may jump directly to that.

No matter who is interviewing you, there are common questions they will probably want answered. If you are coming from out of town, they will want to know why you are targeting their town. Especially in my market, which covers the Midwest and Rocky Mountain regions, firms always want to know if you have ties to their area. This is because each city is unique, and more importantly, each city thinks of itself as unique. They all want to know that you understand their town, and that you won't be unhappy if you move there. It amazes me how often candidates underestimate the importance of where they live.

Often, attorneys think that the worst case scenario is that they will move to a town they know nothing about, and if they hate it, they will move on in a couple of years. This almost never works out. Trust me, your firm will

know if you are unhappy, and they will be very disappointed, and it won't end well. They do not want to hire someone who will leave after a couple of years. They want to hire someone who is in for the long haul. It is therefore well worth your time you do at least some research on the city before you do the phone screen. Show them that you have researched the cost of living, the major attractions, a little history, some neighborhoods where you might like to live. This goes a really long way towards getting an in-person interview, because it shows that you are serious about their city.

They will also want to know why you are moving on from your present position. Never, ever, trash your current employer (or, if you were laid off, your past employer). Come up with the most neutral (honest) explanation you can. Is the workload lighter than you had hoped? Is your work provider retiring? Is the work itself not what you had anticipated? Do you have some reason unrelated to the job for moving (your spouse has enrolled in graduate school in another city, for example). Keep in mind that negativity tends to reflect poorly on you.

Tips and Tricks for Acing the Interview.

A. Get to a land line.

I can't stress this enough. I recently had an interviewee, despite my advice, use his cell phone for an interview. Sure enough, the call was dropped several times, the potential employer was frustrated and annoyed (this was very clear in their feedback to me), and the attorney did not get a second interview. Even if your call is not dropped, the connection is just never as clear on a cell phone.

See [Top Ten Interview Questions](#) for more information

B. Go somewhere where you are comfortable.

Take advantage of the fact that they can't see you. Wear comfortable clothes (although I do not actually advise pajamas). Sit somewhere quiet where you can speak freely and will not be interrupted.

C. Speak Slowly and Extra Clearly.

Interviewees discount how much easier it is to understand someone when you can see that person's face. Often, we do not realize when we speak quickly or when we mumble, but it can hurt you in a phone interview. Be extra careful to enunciate and speak slowly. Take a moment before answering each question and pause. This also gives you a moment to reflect on your answer.

D. Review Everything You Submitted in Your Application and be Familiar With All of it.

This is true for your in-person interviews as well. You never know what piqued their interest in you. Was it an article you wrote? A particular deal you did or a case you handled?

See [Interviewing Tips](#) for more information

E. Print Out Helpful material and have it sitting in front of you.

It is hard to remember everything you need to know in an interview, and in our nervousness, we often forget things we later wish we had said. Again, the fact that they can't see you can be used very much to your advantage. Print out the following documents and have them spread out in front of you:

Your Resume (and deal sheet, writing sample, etc., if applicable)

The bios of those interviewing you.

A list of likely questions and answers. If you are working with a recruiter, she may provide you with such a list. You can also add your own, tailored questions that you think the firm may ask you based on your particular experience. If there are sticking points on your resume (a layoff, a lot of moves from firm to firm), you can be

sure the firm will ask about them, so attack those first in your written list. Write out all of the answers, and have them spread out in front of you. Interviewing is nerve-wracking, and you may forget what you wanted to say. Having written notes will be invaluable.

A list of items you would like them to know, if possible. Think of this list as aspirational. If, for example, you are interviewing with someone who has similar personal interests, try and sneak this in, but don't insist if it feels unnatural. If you have a recent certification or more skills that are not on your resume, again, try and get these in, but don't push it.

A list of questions you would like to ask them .

This is also really important. Interviewers almost always ask you if you have questions for them. You should avoid saying "no". Again, if you are working with a recruiter, she can help you think of questions to ask. Avoid asking about money, compensation, fee structures, and the like. These questions are always inappropriate in a screening interview, and discussion of money just makes people uncomfortable. More appropriate questions center around they type of work you will be doing, how it will be distributed, how you will receive feedback, and how projects are staffed.

Information from the firm's website about the group. You should not ask about things that are immediately available on the firm's website, so make sure you have looked at it in detail. Press releases are especially helpful as they discuss items such as high-profile matters, wins, and new partner and associate additions to the firm. These are things you should know inasmuch as they affect the group you are interviewing with.

There are actually a lot of advantages to doing a phone interview. You can make a great impression over the phone if you plan ahead. You can have tools and interview aids at your disposal that are not available in an in-person interview, and that will make the process much easier.

Learn why attorneys usually fail law firm phone-screening interviews in this article:

[Why Most Attorneys Fail Telephone-Screening Interviews](#)

See the following articles for more information:

[Top 23 Law Firm Interview Tips: How to Excel in Law Firm Interviews](#)

[21 Major Interview Mistakes to Avoid at All Costs](#)

[The Best Way to Prepare for a Job Search and Interviews](#)

[How to Talk About Other Interviews in Your Interviews](#)

[How to Answer the Tell Me About Yourself Interview Question](#)

[How to Answer the Do You Have Any Questions for Me Interview Question](#)

[Had a Great Interview But Have Got No Response to My Thank-You Emails](#)

[What Does It Mean if I Haven't Heard Anything Back from an Application/Interview in a Couple Weeks?](#)

[What to Wear to a Lunch Interview?](#)

[How to Effectively Interview Lateral Candidates: Pointers for Law Firms](#)

[The Interview Post-Mortem: Don't Forget Your Thank You Notes!](#)

[The Secret to Effectively Sharing Concerns about Your Current Employer without Committing the Most Common Interview Blunder](#)

[How to Conduct Yourself During a Lunch Interview](#)