

# TEN TIPS FOR MASTERING THE TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Telephone interviews are a common format used by search committees and HR professionals, as they provide a cost and time effective means of prescreening candidates, especially when it is not feasible to invite a large pool of candidates onsite. As with a face-to-face interview, preparation is key. Here are some guidelines to help you master your next telephone interview:



## TELEPHONE INTERVIEW TIPS

1. **Handling the initial call.** In most cases your telephone interview will be scheduled ahead of time. However, in the case of a “surprise” interview, be polite and try to reschedule – “I’m glad that you called, however right now is not a good time. Can I call you back...”
2. **Treat it just as you would a face-to-face interview.** Research the organization and practice responding to commonly asked questions ahead of time. Make sure that you will be somewhere private and free from disturbances. Remember, this is no time for multitasking (i.e., typing, sorting through papers). Have everything you will need in front of you including your CV or resume.
3. **Prepare a “cheat sheet”.** Write down a few talking points to address questions you anticipate being asked. Tell me about yourself? What are your research interests? Why does this position appeal to you? Can you describe your ideal course? Also, write down the name(s) of your interviewer(s).
4. **Do not talk too much.** Keep up your end of the conversation and answer all questions in full, but don’t ramble. Try to pick up cues from the interviewer in terms of how extensive your answers should be. You might ask, “Does that answer your question?” or “Would you like me to elaborate any more on that?”
5. **Avoid “yes” or “no” responses.** Provide specifics in a clear and concise manner and provide examples whenever possible. Remember that this is your opportunity to let the interviewer know why you are a strong candidate for the position.
6. **Sit up straight and smile.** Your composure comes through even when the caller can’t see you. Make an effort to sound alert and “perky.” Smiling also transmits through the phone, conveying interest and enthusiasm. So does confidence!
7. **Handling a question that catches you off guard.** Ask for a moment to think about it, and then do your best. Don’t call attention to weaknesses.
8. **Do ask questions.** Questions demonstrate interest and can provide you with valuable information that will help you later on in the decision-making process. Interviews are a two-way process!
9. **Remember to say thank you at the end of the interview.** If genuine, end by expressing your continued interest in the position. Address the interviewer(s) by name.
10. **Follow up with a formal thank you letter or email.**

*Individual career coaching and mock interview training is available to all UNC postdocs thru the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.*  
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