

Interview Guide For Telecommuters

Interviewing? We've got you covered



VirtualVocations



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CONQUERING YOUR NEXT VIRTUAL INTERVIEW

Mastering a virtual interview doesn't require a lot of special preparation, but there are a few things to consider. The sooner you prepare, the sooner you'll be ready to rock your next interview. Here are a few tips for conquering your next virtual interview:

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Just as you researched the company when you applied, you should research the company before your interview. Be sure to take note of any recent press releases or news, and be sure to mention your findings in the interview. Learning more about the company demonstrates your interest in working for them versus your interest in simply getting a job.

CREATE A CHEAT-SHEET

One advantage of a virtual interview is that you can keep notes handy for easy reference throughout the interview.

- Write out your [unique selling proposition](#).
- Jot down the top three reasons why you are the one for the job. Be clear and concise.
- Use a highlighter to mark important aspects of your resume- those that speak to the job posting.
- Make a list of three to five questions you have about the position. Keep in mind that some of your questions may get answered during the interview, so it isn't a bad idea to jot down a few extra.
- Write out what you want to say as the interview comes to a close. Consider restating your USP and summarizing how you can add value to the organization.

GET FRIENDLY WITH TECHNOLOGY

Nothing ruins a virtual interview faster than a technology mishap. Here's how to avoid one:

- ◉ A few days before your interview, conduct a mock interview with a friend to get comfortable with the technology you'll be using on the big day.
- ◉ Speak back and forth with your friend so that you become used to the transmission delay and won't talk over the interviewer.
- ◉ Ask your buddy if she can easily hear you.
- ◉ Adjust the camera angle to a position that you feel is most flattering. Usually, this is a straight-on shot.
- ◉ Make sure your laptop is fully charged.

CONSIDER YOUR BACKGROUND

Ensure nothing gets in the way of the interviewer hearing you. Remove or insulate the area you will be conducting the interview in from noises like barking dogs, loud music, a chatting teen, or a crying baby. This is especially critical for positions that require telephone work – if the interview hears a lot of background noise; odds are he won't move forward to the next step of the recruitment process. Can you blame him? If you can't keep your environment quiet while you're trying to get a job, odds are it won't be quiet and professional when taking calls.

PLAN WHAT TO WEAR

Just because the interview is taking place in your living room rather than the boardroom doesn't mean you should wear your pajamas. Wear an outfit that makes you feel great about yourself, even if it's not traditional business attire. We present ourselves differently when we feel good about how we look. Stand out by wearing something that makes you feel like a million bucks.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR NEXT TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

So you've exchanged a few emails with potential client or employer and things are looking promising. They like your resume and now want to schedule a phone interview. If you're new to telecommuting, this may seem like a big change from the in-person interviews you've completed in the past.

Fortunately, phone interviews aren't that much different from in-person interviews. The main difference is that you won't be able to rely on facial expressions and body language to determine your interviewer's attitude or reaction to your discussion. Still, savvy telecommuters pay attention to vocal inflections and tone during an interview and can adjust their conversation accordingly.

BASIC PREPARATION

Prepare for your phone interview as you would for having a guest in your home. You want to look presentable and provide a comfortable atmosphere:

- ◉ **Quiet House:** If you live alone, make sure that there is no distracting noise in the background such as noisy air conditioners, air filters, or heaters. Put your barking dog in another room. If you live with others, ask them for silence and privacy. If you have young children, get a friend or family member to babysit then outside the house during your interview.
- ◉ **Good Phone Line:** Don't risk dropping a call during the interview. If you have a landline, use it. If you rely on a cell phone, conduct the interview in the part of your house with the best reception.
- ◉ **Documentation:** Make sure you have your resume, work portfolio, and a pen for taking notes handy. If you responded to a job posting, have the post pulled up on your computer for reference during the interview. Do the same with any correspondence between you and the interviewer or other company representatives.
- ◉ **Dress for Success:** Don't interview in your PJs. Dress and groom yourself the way that you would for an in-person interview. If you have time and money, consider having your hair professionally shampooed and styled before taking the call. It will make a world of difference in your confidence level.

QUESTIONS

Job interviews can be free-for-alls and each interviewer has his or her own agenda and style. Still, there are some questions that you should be prepared to answer.

Questions About Yourself

Don't assume that the interviewer knows a lot about you or has spent a great deal of time checking out your resume. This is particularly true if the interviewer regards your interview as a first screening prior to letting you talk to a more senior person in the company. Be prepared to answer some pretty basic questions, some of which you may have already answered in emails.

Questions About Your Resume

The interviewer will likely ask several specific questions about your resume and your previous employment. Have a copy handy during the interview so you can refer to it.

Hint: Make notes about your interviewer's resume questions. These can be clues about portions of your resume that need clarification.

Questions About Online Work or Social Media Activities

Your interviewer may have looked you up online to see your work portfolio or to check out your social media profiles. Be prepared to answer questions about what he or she finds. If you have a work portfolio online, pull it up on your computer so you can reference it easy during the interview.

TURNING THE TABLES

Asking You if You have Any Questions

When a potential employer or client asks you if you have any questions, never turn down the opportunity to ask them. By turning down questions, you give the impression that you are either not interested in the job/company, that you are a know-it-all who will be impossible to work with, or that you are unprepared.

As many career experts note, asking questions gives you a chance to take control of the interview. Be sure to do your research about the company and position before the interview and have several questions prepared. During the interview, write down questions that pop into your head. Good questions make for successful interviews.

FOLLOW-UP

Be sure to send a follow-up email to your interviewer. Thank her for taking the time to consider you for the position and be sure to include any additional information that she asked for during the interview. If you addressed a specific topic during the interview and you have a relevant example of your work that you could send along, do so.

For telecommuters and freelancers, telephone interviews are inevitable. As with most things, the more phone interviews you have, the easier they will become. The key is to remember that because your interviewer can't see you, you'll have to impress him with well-chosen words, insightful questions, and an enthusiasm that is evident in your voice.

6 PRO TIPS FOR YOUR NEXT VIDEO INTERVIEW

With Skype, Google Hangouts, and a myriad other web-based video conferencing tools, video interviews are becoming increasingly more commonplace, making it more important than ever to put your best face forward during an online interview. Master these six easy tips and you'll be on your way to looking and sounding like a broadcast pro.

1. BE CONVERSATIONAL, NOT CASUAL

One purpose of a video interview is to establish rapport; therefore, it's important to consider how you come across. Using slang or ending your sentences on an up pitch (think of the valley girl phrase "Like, oh my GOD!") isn't entirely professional, but using overly stuffy language or office-speak (words and phrases like "at the end of the day," "disconnect," and "harmonize") will make you sound like a robot, devoid of any personality.

So how, exactly, do you sound conversational, yet professional?

Speak in short sentences, use contractions, and utilize the active voice. Here's an example of a sentence in the active voice: "Our team met the project deadline." That same sentence in the passive voice sounds like this: "The project deadline was met by our team." Do you hear the difference? The last tip to sounding conversational is what I just did: Ask a question to get feedback.

2. REINFORCE YOUR BRAND THROUGH YOUR "SET"

You have likely seen doctors interviewed in a hospital, lawyers interviewed in front of a bookcase, and politicians interviewed with the American flag draped next to them. Those props are no accident. They are carefully staged to reinforce the expertise and brand of the speaker.

What's your brand? Do you want it to be that photo of you in the background where you're hoisting a beer with friends? Or do you want something that reflects your profession and personality?

If you're a graphic designer, you may want to have artsy pictures in the background, especially designs you created. If you're a writer, consider using books or photographs of famous writers. Whatever you select, just be sure it's something that speaks to your professional passions.

3. DRESS FOR THE CAMERA

The camera doesn't like busy patterns. That means no plaids, strips, squares, or polka dots. Stick to solid, dark colors. White and light colors cause the camera to decrease the size of the iris because of the reflective nature of bright colors. When that happens, your face becomes darker and many of your expressions are lost.

4. LOOK AT THE CAMERA LENS, NOT THE COMPUTER SCREEN

Looking at the computer screen, rather than directly into the camera lens, makes it look as if you are having an interview with yourself. You want to look your conversation partner in the eye, and the only way to do that in an online video interview is to look directly into that little teeny camera lens at the top of your computer screen.

5. PUT YOURSELF IN THE BEST LIGHT

You don't need to know the details of stage lighting, but understanding where and how to place lights can mean the difference between looking like a crazed stalker, and looking like a knowledgeable expert.

To achieve the best lighting, place one lamp (without a shade) slightly above and to one side of the computer screen. Place another lamp, also without a shade, on the other side of your computer screen to offset the shadow created by the first lamp. This will evenly flood your face with enough light so the camera picks up your best features, without creating harsh shadows.

6. FOLLOW SOUND ADVICE

A good quality microphone and an environment where your voice won't echo are essential. If you have hardwood floors in the room where you will be conducting the video interview, place a large rug on the floor to absorb some of the sound. Another way to absorb sound is to place a standing towel rack behind your computer screen and drape a large towel or rug over it.

As you can see, you don't need a broadcast journalism degree to look and sound professional in a video interview. Now go knock 'em dead!

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING A TELEWORK INTERVIEW

Asking questions during an interview for a telework position can be a bit of a challenge if you're new to working from home. While some of your questions should focus on the organization you'll be working for and your specific role, it's also a good idea to confirm the details of your telework arrangement. Things like ownership of technology and office equipment, scheduling, and availability should be clarified before you begin your job.

If you are a federal government worker, much of this information should be addressed in your [telework agreement](#). Still, it's a good idea to address these points with your hiring manager to ensure you are both clear on the position expectations. If you aren't a federal teleworker, but you work for a state or local government organization, look for details on its telework policy online. [USA.gov](#) is a great resource that lets you search for information on all government websites.

Here are six telework-related questions you should ask your hiring manager during your interviews:

Am I expected to work a set schedule?

Some employers expect you to work set days and hours while others don't care what hours you work as long as things get done. If you want to work from home because you need flexibility, clarify the employer's expectations before taking the job.

What are the availability requirements?

Does your manager like to hold meetings at 7:00am on Monday mornings? Even if you don't work a set schedule, you may find that your supervisor still wants you to be available for specific meetings via phone or web.

What sort of equipment or software am I expected to have?

Telework employers may expect workers to have access to a variety of home office equipment, including computers, copiers, fax machines and paper shredders.

Be sure you clarify what equipment you are expected to have. Don't forget to ask about software and operating system requirements as well.

Will you provide necessary equipment or software?

Some telework employers will provide you with some or all of the equipment or software that you need. While this can make things easier on your pocketbook, you'll also be responsible for caring for and, eventually, returning these items.

Ask your employer if they have insurance to cover theft or damage or if you need to cover that. You may need to get a home office rider on your homeowners or renters insurance policy to protect yourself against liability.

Who will I be working with at the home office?

Identify your supervisor and co-workers; if you are a contractor, ensure you know who your primary contact is at the organization. Learn about the roles your contacts play in the office so you know who to contact when you need assistance.

Will I ever need to travel or visit the home office?

Government regulations or company policy may require you to occasionally visit the home office for trainings or sensitive meetings. If traveling or commuting is a challenge, talk to your hiring manager about them to see if accommodations are possible.

If you are expected to travel or visit, ask about whether you will be reimbursed for the cost of your travel or commute. You should also ask about reimbursement rates.

HOW TO FIELD TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviews are designed to determine whether a candidate is the right fit for the job and the company culture. Seasoned interviewers are adept at coming up with challenging interview questions to see if you're a good fit.

Interviewing successfully isn't as difficult as you might think. Preparation and practice is the key to acing an interview and landing a good job. We've put together a list of difficult questions and ways to practice answering them.

Tell me about a situation where you had a co-worker who wasn't doing his end of the work; how did you handle it and what happened?

Be careful not to drag up dirt on previous coworkers or make yourself look like the bad guy by being too negative. A safe way to answer this question may be to discuss a coworker who was having difficulty understanding a new concept. Discuss how you approached the situation and what tactics you used to help bring your coworker up to speed.

Tell me about a time when you struggled to work well with your supervisor; what happened and how did you deal with the situation?

Whatever you do, don't bash a prior manager. Questions like this are designed to test you. You need to have an answer that emphasizes communication and working together to get past differences in personality, management style, and other areas.

Why should we hire you?

This is a popular question that many job seekers aren't prepared to answer properly. Simply saying, "Because I'm the best candidate" isn't enough. You need to do your homework on the company and the position. Explain how you're the right person for the job by providing concrete examples of prior work experience and education that align with the position requirements and preferences.

Have you ever had a coworker you didn't like? If so, how did you handle it?

The best way to answer a question like this is to be honest. Everyone has encountered at least one coworker they don't really like. The main point here is to keep it about work-related issues. Instead of talking about your annoying coworker's halitosis, discuss his inability to meet deadlines or follow directions and then bring it around to a positive by communicating you have learned how to get along with anyone at work.

Describe a time when you failed at work. What happened and why?

Everyone fails at some point – it's what you do after the failure that provides insight on your personality. When answering this question, talk about a time when you failed briefly and then go into detail about actions you took to fix the error.

Do you check voicemail and email when on vacation?

This is a hard question to figure out. The interviewer could be asking because it's something that's expected in the position or it could be a way for him to determine if you can step away and unplug. The best way to answer this question is to be honest. You don't want to say that you don't mind answering emails when you're on vacation if you really have no intention of doing it after you're hired. It's always best to set realistic expectations upfront.

INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR LEFT-BRAIN THINKERS

Are you familiar with the theory of right-brain vs. left-brain thinking? The theory suggests that each side of our brain controls a different type of thinking. People who are “right-brained” are thought to be feeling, creative, subjective thinkers while “left-brained” folks are more logical, analytical, and objective thinkers.

While the formal structure of an interview may appeal to a left-brained person, once the free-form questions start flowing, it becomes more challenging. Traits that help a left-brain thinker succeed, like **methodical thinking** and **controlled emotions**, **don't jive well** with **free-flowing interview questions**. Interviewing also requires a hefty dose of self-marketing – a skill most left-brained thinkers don't typically possess. If you're a left-brain thinker, read on to discover five interviewing tips specifically designed for left-brained thinkers.

LET YOUR PERSONALITY SHINE.

Left-brained people tend to be less verbal than right-brained people. Lefties are known to stay in control of their emotions, speak in a monotone voice, and take the “less is more” approach when it comes to communicating. While there's a lot to be said for a left-brainer's controlled communication style, showing too little emotion during an interview can come off as impersonal or aloof.

Solution: Make a conscious effort to relax. **Smile**, use **inflection** in your **voice**, and express your **genuine excitement** about the job. If this seems like an overwhelming task, make a video of yourself and practice loosening up.

SAY SO-LONG TO STRUCTURE.

Remember that old saying “everything in moderation?” Well that includes structure. While a left-brainer's propensity for structure helps them excel in careers they are naturally drawn to like science, coming off as too structured can damage an interview: the interviewer may misinterpret a left-brain person's need for structure as unwillingness to embrace change or inability to think creatively.

Solution: We aren't suggesting that you be disingenuous, but you want to give the interviewer the impression that you're adaptable. Before sitting in the hot-seat, make a mental note of **times** you were **faced** with **change**, how you **adapted** to it, and what the **positive outcome** was. When the interviewer asks how you face change, you'll be well prepared to answer the question.

ORDERLY-THINKING:

Left-brainers not only prefer to think in sequential order, they also firmly believe there is a proper order to be followed. They are rational thinkers and problem solvers. While this approach is helpful in certain careers like law, accounting and IT, a left-brainer must be able to break free of sequential thinking when necessary.

Solution: Before your interview, write down **two or three situations** when your **structured thinking resulted** in a **positive change**, but also consider a time when you deviated from that systematic approach and enjoyed equally rewarding results.

OH SO SKEPTICAL

Left-brainers are usually skeptics and are often cynical about “new” things. Whether it's a new piece of office equipment, a revised work schedule, or company reorganization, they're resistant to the change. Today's workplace is evolving at a frantic pace and showing that you're willing to get “on board” with new ideas or products makes a positive impression.

Solution: If you have the tendency to be skeptical (you know who you are), make sure you **keep your words positive**. Avoid phrases like “the last place I worked always did ‘it’ this way.” That's a red flag that you're not ready to take a fresh or inventive approach.

BRING ON THE BENEFITS

A laundry list of skills is fantastic, but a hiring manager wants to know how you've used those skills to benefit your employer. In short, you need to quantify your accomplishments. Doing so is difficult for any job-seeker, but because left-brainers are often reserved, they have an especially difficult time acknowledging their accomplishments.

Solution: The **interviewer isn't a mind reader**. You need to **give** him all the **information** he **needs** to decide if you're a viable candidate. That means telling him how you have benefited your employer in the past and how you can benefit his company in the future. Prior to the interview, make note of moments that your skills saved your company money or time or improved quality of a product or service.

Tip: If you are currently employed, keep a journal of your professional accomplishments and note quantifiable outcomes. When it's time to start your job search you'll be fully prepared. Did you save the IT department \$8,500 last year? Jot it down!

It's a sad fact that the **hiring manager doesn't** always select the **most qualified** candidate for the job. Instead, it's **often** the **candidate** that did the best job **marketing** his **skills** in the interview. If you're a left-brain thinker, promoting yourself might not come naturally. But study our tips prior to your next interview and it very well maybe your last.

5 REASONS YOU'RE NOT GETTING INTERVIEWS

Have you filled out more job applications, resumes, and cover letters than you can remember, but haven't landed a single interview? Before you curse the employment gods for your rotten luck, ask yourself if you have ruined your interview prospects by making even one of these 5 simple mistakes.

1. YOU DIDN'T FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

Treat your fiftieth job application the same as your first. Don't ignore instructional paragraphs on applications or emails. If you ignore directions and assume you know what your potential employer wants, she will assume that you cannot follow directions, don't respect authority, aren't capable of listening or, most importantly, aren't worthy of an interview.

2. YOU DIDN'T INCLUDE A COVER LETTER

Always, always, always send a cover letter when you apply for a job, even if doing so isn't required. Attach your cover letter as a separate document or simply include an introduction and summary of qualifications in the text of your email. Cover letters have numerous benefits, which can increase your chances for an interview:

- You can set yourself apart from the rest of the hiring pool
- You get to say exactly why you want the job
- You can showcase your knowledge of and interest in your potential employer
- You can explain why you will be an asset

3. YOU OVERLOOKED GRAMMER ERRORS AND TYPOS

Did you catch the spelling error in the subheading above? If you didn't notice that grammar isn't spelled with an E, then you have most likely overlooked grammatical errors and typos in your employment documents. If your application, resume, and/or cover letter contain misspellings, misplaced punctuation, or misused words, your interview offer will go in the trash along with your documents.

Carefully proofread your application, resume, and cover letter before submission and pay particular attention to these common gaffes:

- ⦿ Errors in your contact information
- ⦿ Errors in employer contact information• Improper punctuation of bulleted points
- ⦿ Spacing inconsistencies
- ⦿ Shifting font styles

4. YOUR SOCIAL LIFE IS A LIABILITY

If you think the Spring Break photos your BFF tagged you in are “no big deal,” think again. Your social media activity is particularly important to potential employers. Your tweets, statuses, blogs and photos are viewed as a reflection of your employer’s values and integrity. It’s the same principle as when your first

grade teacher told your class to be on its best behavior during a field trip because you were representing your school. You can avoid online hiccups if you set your personal profiles to private and create a professional profile, which your potential employer can reference, on a networking site like LinkedIn

(<http://www.linkedin.com>).

5. YOUR CONTACT RESOURCES ARE UNPROFESSIONAL

Let’s say your potential employer is pleased with your application, cover letter, and resume but when he attempts to contact you to schedule an interview he is greeted with a ringback of “In Da Club.” Yeah, your interview was over before it began. Ensure that contacting you isn’t a lesson in unprofessionalism and maintain a proper voicemail message and email address.

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