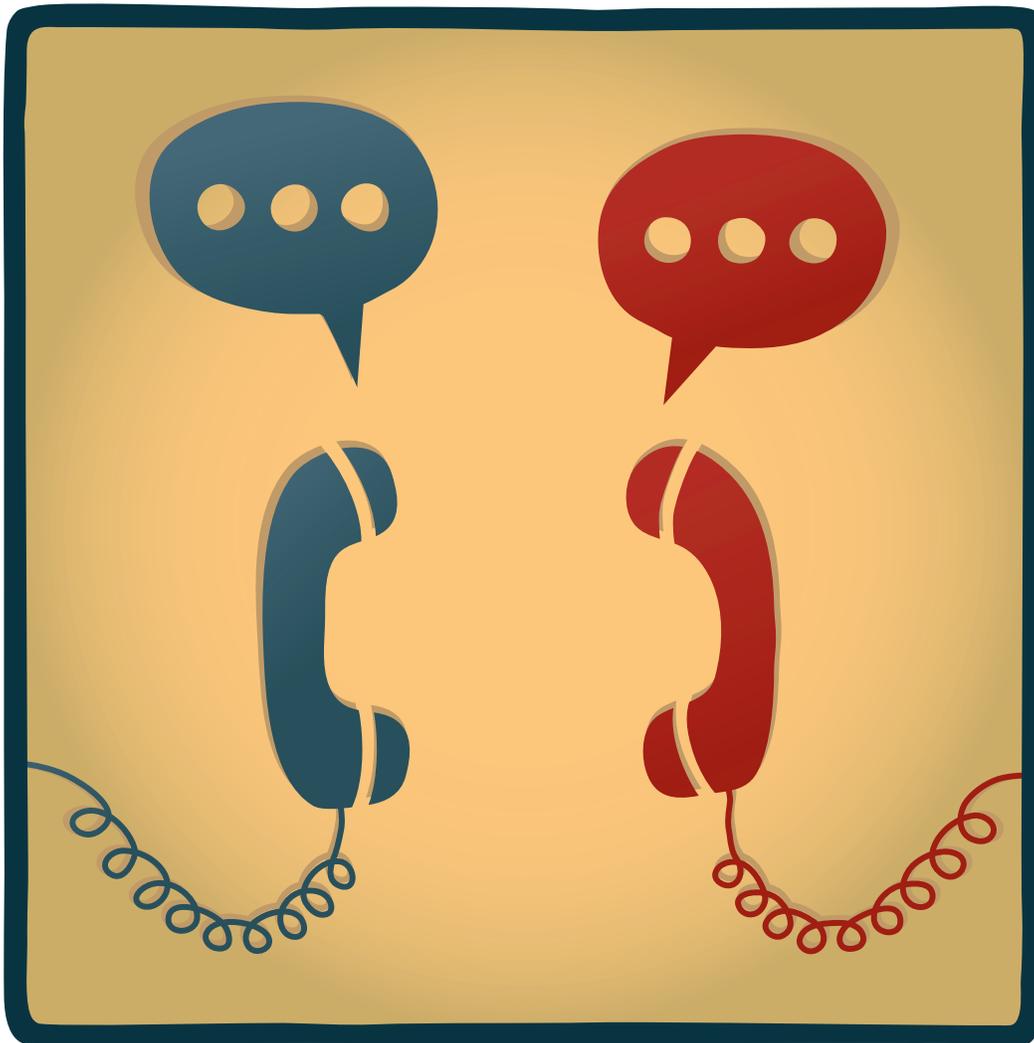


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15 tips for conducting great interviews

Talking to people is easy. Interviewing someone, however, is another matter altogether.



Both sides are typically nervous. The interviewer wants to get good information for her story, and the interviewee wants to come off sounding intelligent, which isn't as easy as it sounds. Let's put everyone's minds at ease by sharing our top 15 tips for interviewing.

- 1. Be prepared.** Do as much research as you need to do so that you feel comfortable when the interview begins. You definitely want to sound confident. Have a list of questions written out so you can reference them during the call.
- 2. Put the interviewee at ease straight away.** The best way to do this is by finding something in common and mentioning it at the beginning of the call. LinkedIn profiles are a great way to learn about people, but it could be something as simple as the weather. If you establish that connection upfront, vs. firing away with your first question, they will relax and feel comfortable.
- 3. Have good energy in your voice.** The interviewee will want to match your enthusiasm.
- 4. Keep it conversational.** You absolutely, positively do NOT want to be reading in a rote manner from your questions list. That creates for a very staid interview. You start it off as a conversation and you keep it that way. If you have your list handy, you can ensure that you have addressed all the important items you wanted to discuss.
- 5. Do NOT use the speaker phone function.** That is the fastest way to kill a smooth conversation. Use your ear buds so the conversation can be more seamless. Landlines are ideal, but we know no one has those anymore. (Editor's note: I refuse to give up my landline, and I use a Plantronics CT14 headset phone that is simply fabulous. I've had it for over a decade and the quality is still outstanding. It's around \$100. It's also great for long calls with mom because you can do laundry and dishes, but I digress.)
- 6. Don't be afraid to veer off topic.** You definitely don't want to wander into the Amazon, but sometimes you get really good information when you're not exactly on point. Very often, you will get personal tidbits that work really well in leads and conclusions.
- 7. Don't say too much about yourself.** It is tempting, but somehow it always leads interviews astray since it isn't the purpose of the

call. You can absolutely share items that are germane to the conversation; just don't get carried away with it.

- 8. Don't give up.** If you have someone who is not giving quality answers or isn't saying much at all, keep talking. You can always find a way to break through, but it will take patience and creativity.
- 9. Don't be proud.** If your subject gives you an answer that you don't understand, don't be afraid to say so. He won't think less of you and would be very happy to explain it again.
- 10. Always ask if you've left anything out that is important.** Nine times out of 10, you get a great answer on this one. You're smart, but you certainly can't think of everything.
- 11. For the love of Pete, ask how his name is spelled, even if it's Mike Smith.** He may want to be identified as Michael, or he may spell Smyth with a "y." We broke our rule once on a Customer Spotlight candidate and just used the spelling we saw on the magazine's website. Turns out, the magazine's own website was incorrect and we sent the article to the person with his name spelled incorrectly 14 times. Pretty darn embarrassing.
- 12. Beware of the person who can talk all day.** You'll know it straight off the bat, because they pick up the phone and just start talking a blue streak. You will have to wrestle control of the conversation from this person, but obviously with grace. You can say things like, "That's great, but I really want to ask you about XX," or "My – this is fun but we really should get back on topic." It's not easy, but we believe in you.
- 13. Be effusive at the end.** Express how delighted you were to speak with the person, and honor the fact that she took time out of her busy schedule to speak with you. If the person is to review your story, give her an approximate timetable for when you will be sending it.
- 14. Review your notes immediately after the call.** It's easiest to fill in the blanks while your memory is still fresh.
- 15. Treat yourself for a job well done.** Whether you listen to your favorite music or eat a dark chocolate truffle, reward yourself for knocking it out of the park. It is certainly a learned art, and you will get better each time you do it.