

Network to Work Meeting – July 2021

RESOURCE DOCUMENT

Preparing for a Job Interview

The Screening Interview

The first interview you may face after you apply for a job is the “screening interview”, conducted by the recruiter. It is a brief discussion involving straightforward questions that are asked to evaluate how qualified and well suited you are for the position. This is your first meaningful interaction with the employer’s representative so you want to grab the attention of the recruiter. This interviewer will likely be a junior representative of the hiring manager, who lacks the power to hire but is empowered to move a candidate along in the process. So, a candidate who does well in the screening interview will likely be added to the short list of potential hires.

Here’s what you should know:

1. Use this interview to impress the recruiter with your communication skills, answers to interview questions, appearance, body language and professionalism.
2. Use the conversation to gain insight into the employer and the position.
3. Answer the questions in a way that demonstrates that you meet or exceed the minimum requirements of the job.
4. The screening interview occurs after you submit your application to determine if you will be called for an in-depth interview with the hiring manager.
5. This could take place via the telephone, a video conference like Zoom, or face to face at the employer’s premises or a casual setting like a coffee shop.
6. This is typically much shorter than subsequent interviews; it may be only 30 minutes.
7. The questions asked at a screening interview are preliminary ones that focus on your interest in the job, how your qualifications match the job requirements, and next steps and logistics.

Here’s how to prepare for the screening interview:

1. Research the company well. Look at its website and social media accounts, and do a Google search for news and other information about the company.
2. Learn all you can about the position. Review the original posting and identify the main criteria in education, skills and experience.
3. Review your resume and your cover letter.

4. Dress professionally and in accordance with industry practices and the company's culture.
5. Research the professional etiquette that is appropriate for the interview setting (telephone, video chat, or in person).
6. Prepare your opening greeting so you make a great first impression. For example:
 - a. *Good morning! I'm very grateful for this amazing opportunity to learn about working at [company name].*
7. Write down polished answers for generic interview questions such as:
 - a. *Tell me about yourself.*
 - b. *What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?*
 - c. *What are your current job responsibilities?*
 - d. *What has been your biggest achievement so far?*
 - e. *Why do you want to work here?*
 - f. *What drew you to this position?*
 - g. *Do you have any specific questions about this role?*
 - h. *Describe your employment history.*
 - i. *What management style do you prefer?*
 - j. *What kind of company culture suits you best?*
 - k. *What motivates you in a job?*
 - l. *Why should we hire you?*
 - m. *What are your salary expectations? (It is best to provide a salary range and indicate this is negotiable.)*
 - n. *When can you start?*
 - o. *If necessary, can you commute (or relocate) for the job?*
8. Write down polished answers to job specific questions that will focus on your experience and qualifications.
9. Practice giving your answers; try doing so in front of a mirror or role play with a dependable friend. This will improve your confidence, answers and impact.
10. If the interview is done on the phone, try standing up during the meeting. This will help you feel stronger and more confident.
11. Prepare your questions; use the opportunity to learn about the company, the job, and the hiring process. Good questions show your engagement, curiosity, and that you are prepared. Don't ask questions simply to impress the interviewer. Focus on the areas that are important to you, such as career growth or work environment. Questions about salary and benefits should be asked later on in the hiring process. As the interview is on the shorter side, plan to ask two or three open-ended questions tailored to the position and the company.

Here are some questions to ask:

- a. *What does a typical day look like for someone in this position?*
- b. *What does success look like for this role?*

- c. *What do you enjoy about working for this company?*
 - d. *Is the work environment collaborative or independent?*
 - e. *What is the typical career path for someone in this role?*
 - f. *Where do you see the company in the next five years? (This shows your interest in having a future with the company and lets you learn about the company's priority.)*
 - g. *(At the end of the interview) What are the next steps in the interview process?*
12. Prepare a closing statement. You want to end the screening interview in a positive way. Write down what you could say to show your appreciation for the meeting and desire to move on in the process. For example:
- a. *Thank you for a great interview! I learned a lot about this wonderful job opportunity. Please let me know what can I expect next?*
- Also, ask for the interviewer's email address so you can follow up.
13. If using a video chat such as Zoom, be sure your background is professional, uncluttered, and not distracting. A clean, blank wall is ideal. *(See more on this below.)*
- a. Also, check your internet connection and devices in advance to avoid interruptions during the interview.
14. Minimize or prevent the likelihood of being disrupted by noisy children or pets.
15. If meeting in person, arrive 10 minutes early.
16. After the screening interview, send a thank you note within 24 hours. Express your appreciation for the opportunity to interview and reiterate your interest in the position.

How to Stand Out in a Virtual Interview

1. Use your space and environment to make a positive and lasting impression. Have a clean, uncluttered background that is simple and free from distractions. It could be a blank wall, or a wall with just a few pictures on it. Having a clean backdrop will also keep unconscious biases from creeping in.
2. Check your lighting; you want to be lit from the front. When you are sitting in front of a window or other light source, you are likely to appear as a dark outline of yourself. This will be very distracting to the recruiter.
3. Position yourself so that you are no more than two feet from your camera. Make sure your head and the top of your shoulders take up most of the screen.
4. Check your internet speed. Try to be the only one using the internet at the time of your interview to maximize the speed. You want to avoid a lag in the conversation.
5. Study and become skilled in the platform that will be used for the interview. Do some practice calls with a family member or friend.
6. Learn how to hide your own video image from the screen. It will be distracting for you in an interview to see your image on the screen. Here's how to "Hide the Self View" on Zoom:
 - Start or join a Zoom meeting. The meeting automatically begins in Speaker View and you can see your own video.

- Hover over your video and click the ellipses button in your video to display the menu
- Select “Hide Self View”.

Don’t worry, the interviewer will still be able to see you unless you have turned your webcam off.

7. Have notes handy with the points you want to make, especially relating to your notable work accomplishments. It is okay to have your notes handy, but don’t refer to them too often. Use bullet points to stay organized.
8. Put a Post-It note or something similar next to your webcam. This will be a good reminder to keep your eyes on the webcam so you will appear as if you are making eye contact with the interviewer. This is an important first step in building trust.
9. Rehearse. Have another give you feedback on your facial expressions, gestures, body language and tone.
10. Research. You will want to spark conversations and not provide long, drawn out and monotonous answers. It will be important to pay attention to the social cues and body language of the interviewer.

Show genuine interest in the interviewer by asking questions. If you know who you will be meeting with, do a Google search in advance to learn about them. Perhaps you have common interests. Ask about these things if the conversation begins to lag. If the interviewer looks bored, wrap up your answer before they lose interest, and try to show some personality.

11. Be mindful of the pace of your speech – neither too fast nor too slow. There is a tendency for us to speed up our speech when we are nervous. Take time to pause before the important points you want to make.
12. Keep an open posture and don’t cross your arms. Use wide hand gestures when making big or exciting points. Move your hands closer to your heart when sharing personal reflections. This will help people connect with you.

Post-Covid Interviewing

As a result of the pandemic, most employers have new concerns in operating their business and so will likely have new questions to ask job candidates. They will want to know about your experience working remotely and how skilled you are with this new way of working. These questions would be in addition to the traditional questions asked to understand your ability to the job and your fit with the organization.

Questions you may be asked regarding remote work: (Write out your answers prior to a screening interview.)

1. Have you ever worked remotely? If so, what changes did you make to adapt to an at-home work environment. (If appropriate, indicate that your at-home work environment is free of distractions.)
2. What aspects about working from home did you enjoy? Which did you find most challenging? (Be prepared to discuss your comfort level with technology.)
3. When working remotely, how did you organize your day?
4. What ways would you communicate with your manager and co-workers in a remote setting?
5. How have you handled the stress of Covid 19?

6. Are you willing to work in an office when working remotely is no longer required?

Questions you can ask regarding remote work:

1. How has COVID impacted your team and your company?
2. During COVID, what's been the best boost for employees' productivity and morale?
3. How do you think the office culture has changed with the shift to more remote work?
4. How does the team communicate right now?
5. What tools do you use to collaborate?
6. How do you monitor remote work?
7. How does one meet new colleagues virtually?

Sources:

"The Screening Interview: What you Should Know", by Glassdoor.com. <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/guide/screening-interview/>

"Screening Interviews: Everything you Need to Know", by the Indeed Editorial Team, Indeed.com. December 9, 2020. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/screening-interview>

"Top Phone Interview Questions to Ask Your Interviewer", by the Indeed Editorial Team, Indeed.com. June 21, 2021. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/phone-interview-questions-to-ask-your-interviewer>

"4 Tips to Nail a Virtual Job Interview", by Ben Laker, Will Godley, Selin Kudret, and Rita Trehan. March 9, 2021. <https://hbr.org/2021/03/4-tips-to-nail-a-virtual-job-interview>

"Answer Interview Questions Employers Ask During the Coronavirus Pandemic", by Barbara Schultz. Job-Hunt.org. https://www.job-hunt.org/job_interviews/pandemic-interview-questions.shtml

"29 Questions you must ask in 2021 Job Interviews", by Marc Cenedella. TheLadders.com. February 22, 2021. <https://www.theladders.com/career-advice/29-questions-you-must-ask-in-2021-job-interviews>

"The 5 Crucial Interview Questions of 2021 (and how to answer them)", by Ashley Stahl, contributor. Forbes.com. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashleystahl/2021/04/09/the-5-crucial-interview-questions-of-2021-and-how-to-answer-them/?sh=2ef87a865150>