Virtual Interviews

For a variety of reasons, companies are turning to computers instead of inviting candidates to their offices when they conduct initial or screening interviews (and sometimes for 2nd or 3rd interviews too). Common platforms include Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, and WebEx. While this may seem challenging at first, all you need to succeed is a computer with a webcam and microphone, and a good internet connection. Here are a few tips:

Prepare ahead
- Download the software the employer plans to use well in advance of the interview:
  - Practice makes perfect: do training/test calls with your friends to become more comfortable using it
  - Create a professional username
  - Conduct a quick test the morning of the interview to make sure the lighting looks okay, both sides of your face are visible, and the camera and the microphone are working correctly
- Give yourself plenty of extra time before the interview to make sure your Internet connection is working, camera is set up, the camera is at the right angle (with a laptop, it often looks like the viewer is looking up your nose!), mic works, etc. Have the interviewers' names and phone numbers written down on a piece of paper in case the platform you use doesn't work and you have to call the employer instead
- Make sure you have at least a cell phone fully charged and ready to go in case the audio drops out of your call. Ideally, have a land line ready. Be ready for any manner of technical hiccups, ranging from the audio cutting out to the picture freezing. Don't let this distract you—VOIP is never 100% reliable

Smile and Focus
- One of the easiest rules to remember when interacting with anyone is simply to smile. There is nothing more engaging than smiling throughout your call with a friendly expression
- Also remember to make direct eye contact. It may feel strange to stare at the camera rather than your interviewers' face(s), but it helps create connection

Choose your Colors Wisely and Look Professional
- Certain colors like many shades of blue - royal, navy, sky blue - look great on video while others like reds and bright colors like magenta can be overpowering.
- Patterns like small dots or stripes can be less attractive than solids so think about a color to wear that is easy on the eye and a pattern that won't be distracting to your viewer.
- Dress (at least from the waist up!) in a business suit or appropriate business attire.

Background Check and Lighting
While you are the focus of the call and the video, remember that there will be background material that the viewer will see. Think about how your webcam is set up and what can be detected behind you. Try your best to make the background plain (a blank wall) or make it look office-y if possible (a big potted plant, or a nicely framed, not-distracting picture would be fine). Check to be sure you have enough lighting that doesn't create shadows or throw strange light onto your screen.

Research/Reference Materials
Use the fact that you're not right there to your advantage: have a copy of your resume and some of your STAR accomplishment stories in front of you where you can refer to them - without being too distracting. Always remember that you are on camera! It's very easy to forget this and start doing something distracting. Try to maintain some amount of eye contact with the camera 90% of the time, but you can briefly glance at your notes if you need to. You can also take notes in a way that's not distracting and might help you focus your answers.

Get a Visual
Research interviewers and find photos, if possible, to get a visual introduction to the people who are interviewing you. It makes the interview much better if you can visualize who's interviewing you even if they aren't all on camera at one time.

<u>**Telephone Interviews**</u>

Telephone interviews often precede in-person or virtual interviews and are used as a screening tool to filter out potential candidates for a position. In an employer's point of view, they are an efficient way to further narrow the candidate pool to those who will best fit the position. Telephone interviews are often less in-depth and lengthy than face-to-face or virtual interviews, and can be more unnerving to the candidate due to their spontaneous nature.

Prior to the interview
- Employers will sometimes call you directly to set up the interview, here are some quick tips:
  - No matter which phone number you give them, make sure your voicemail message is professional.
  - If you use a landline number, keep a log of which employers you are expecting (or hoping!) to hear from and brief roommates, partners, or family members how to take the best message for you – possibly by letting your voicemail take the message!
  - You can feel free to call the employer back if you are not ready for the interview at that moment. Just make sure you convey your interest, find a time very soon to return the call, and make sure you follow-through on any time commitments you promise.
  - It is also okay to say something like, "I'm so happy you called. I have about 10 minutes before I must run out the door. Is that enough time, or can I call you back later this afternoon?"
- Have access to a landline for the interview? If available, consider giving the employer a landline number instead of a cell. This will allow you more control over your surroundings and less "picket fencing."

How to prepare
The first step to being prepared is to make sure you know the organization and position very well. Besides that, you will want to keep the following items handy (and preferably set up in a private, quiet place where you will be able to concentrate):
- Your resume
- Any info you have about the organization (maybe their webpage up on your computer)
- Paper and pen to take any notes you need to during the interview
- Notes to help you answer common interview questions
- A list of questions to ask the interviewer
- A glass of water

Although it may seem trivial, it may be helpful to dress in a professional manner to psychologically assume the right mindset. Do not slouch or roll your eyes at any point during the interview, and remember that smiling will single-handedly enhance the tone of your voice, giving warmth and energy, which can be harder to convey over the phone!

During the interview
- Slow down, breathe, and concentrate!
- Watch for pauses. They are dead air, unlike in a face to face interview, they cannot see you are thinking.
- Speak in a normal tone – do not use speakerphone and make sure they can hear and understand you.
- Remember to smile, sit up straight or stand, and make sure your surroundings are not distracting you!
- When the interviewer seems to have no questions left, make sure you have questions prepared to ask them.
- It is all about getting a face to face interview – let them know you are interested in meeting in person, ask the interviewer for an approximate timeline of when the company will be notifying candidates for in-person interviews.
- Hanging up can be awkward. Have a closing line planned, end on a high note, not an awkward one! Thank him/her for making the time to call you, confidently hang up.
- Then get busy writing a thank you note!