Tips for Successful Virtual Interviews:
Video Conferences

It is becoming increasingly popular for employers to schedule a video conference interview instead of an in-person interview, especially if you and the interviewer are not located in the same city. These interviews are more personal than phone interviews, but they may still be daunting and uncomfortable. These tips will help you control the situation from your side of the camera.

PREPARATION: CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLES

Scheduling. When scheduling the video interview, be sure to get the following information: name of the software or application you will be using, date and time of the interview (keep in mind time zone differences), expected length of the interview so you can reserve enough time in your schedule and, if need be, the username of the person interviewing you.

When confirming the date and time, we suggest reserving an extra 30 minutes before to allow for time to log in, check the Internet connection and ensure the software is running properly, as well as after in case the interview runs long.

Location. Select a space that is free of distractions and interruptions. A public location like the coffee shop around the corner from your office or home is probably not your best option. You don't want the interviewer to be distracted by people moving in the background or your attention to be diverted by the commotion at the cash register. The background of the shot must be tidy and distraction free. Find a quiet and clean space like a home office so the interviewer is visually and audibly focused on you.

Lighting. In order to be sure that you can be seen clearly, avoid placing lights behind you as this can create a glare. The best option is to have lighting slightly above and in front of you and the camera. This will eliminate shadows and illuminate you properly.

Noise. No matter where you decide to conduct your interview, avoid distracting noises. If you are at home, think about putting a "do not disturb" note on your front door so the delivery man doesn't ring the doorbell when dropping off a package; let family members or roommates know to be quiet; call a sitter to help keep an eye on small children; if you have a dog or other pets, make sure they are in a location that won't allow them to interrupt your interview with a loud bark. Outside noises like construction can also cause interference. It is hard to think of every possible diversion, but controlling the controllables in your environment and immediate surroundings will help make your interview a success.

Device Selection. Once you know the software or application, make sure you download and install the most up-to-date version on the device you plan to use for the interview. A computer with a wired connection is always the best choice, but a phone or tablet will also work. If you're using a tablet or phone, you will have to make sure you have a stable, flat surface to rest the device on. You do not want to be holding the device in case you have an unsteady hand due to interview jitters. In order to avoid a shut down or battery outage, make sure your device is fully charged before and, if possible, leave it plugged in to a power source for the duration of the interview.

Test the software or application. If you have never used the technology before, be sure to log in and become familiar with the software. Practice using the technology by doing a dry run. Do your camera and microphone work? Have a pair of headphones with a mic handy just in case you run into issues during the actual interview. Have a backup plan lined up in case anything goes wrong the day of the interview. If you run into issues, utilize the software or application website. Most well-known programs have a user guide or helpful tips section anyone can access and review in advance.

DO:
John.Smith
John.R.Smith

DON'T:
buckeyefan01!
coffeegirl1974

Some applications ask you to create a username and upload a profile photo. We cannot stress enough how imperative it is to have a professional username and profile photo. We suggest using FirstName.LastName or Firstname.MiddleInitial.LastName.

For your profile photo, it is best to use a professional headshot, not a cropped photo from your most recent family vacation or night out.

Attire. Dress like you would for an in-person interview—wear business attire or a suit. Even though the interviewer will likely only see you from the chest up, you should still be dressed professionally from head to toe. When selecting your outfit, you will want to avoid "busy" patterns or prints and colors that wash you out. Solid, bright colors appear best on screen regardless of hair color and complexion. If you wear jewelry, stay away from flashy and shiny pieces that could reflect light.

Practice ahead of time. In order to feel prepared and confident, you will need to practice, especially if this is your first time being interviewed via video conference. Have a mentor or friend Skype or FaceTime with you asking various interview questions to help you prepare. We suggest practicing on the same device and, if possible, in the same location you plan to be for the interview so that you get comfortable in the environment. At the very least, record yourself answering questions on your phone and then replay the video. Review the recording to see if you move around too much, if you have optimal video and sound quality, if you speak too fast or if you are not focusing on the camera. You will put your best foot forward when you feel prepared, confident and relaxed.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Equipment check. Test your Internet connection and log in 20–30 minutes before your interview begins. Close any open applications and disable pop-up alerts and sound notifications. You don't want an email alert popping up on your computer or a text message ding to go off during the interview. If you are using Wi-Fi, have others on the same connection disconnect to provide you with a stronger signal. If you are not using your phone, place it on mute and out of eyesight to limit distractions (you may want to do this right before the interview is scheduled to begin in case the interviewer needs to call or email you quickly if they are running late, etc.).

Make "eye contact." When positioning the camera, make sure that it is eye level with you and roughly one foot away. One of the biggest mistakes candidates make during the interview is not making "eye contact" with the interviewer. Candidates tend to look at themselves when they're talking or at the interviewer on the screen when they should be looking at the camera. Try to imagine that the interviewer is sitting right behind the camera lens. An easy trick to help is to move the little rectangle with your video feed in it just below the camera or next to it. If you're one of those folks that tends to look at yourself, this will help you to look at or near the camera.

Body language. Come to this interview with the same energy and positive vibe that you would in an in-person meeting. Sit up straight and pay attention to your posture; don't make any sudden movements as they may appear blurry on the screen; and keep your hands comfortably on your lap or the flat surface in front of you. You will want to avoid talking with your hands and fidgeting.

Speaking. When answering a question, wait a second or two to make sure the interviewer is done asking you the full question. Sometimes there is a delay in audio and visual transmission. If you are talking to more than one interviewer, make sure you are speaking to both of them, not just one or the other. You may call them by name, for example, "Katie, that's a great question…" or "I've never thought of that before, Ryan…"

Wrap-up. As the interview is coming to a close, concisely reiterate your interest in and fit for the role. If the interviewer has asked you to send in a writing sample or transcripts, be sure to clarify the timeline he/she is expecting to have this information by. If it seems appropriate, ask the interviewer what the next steps in the process might entail and his/her timeline for making a hiring decision. Don't forget to ask the interviewer for his/her email address so you can send a thank you note. At the conclusion of the interview, thank the interviewer for his/her time and properly close and exit out of the software or application.