

How to Nail Your Next Phone Interview

*A conversation with
Hannah Morgan*

By Mac Prichard
Founder of Mac's List



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The following conversation is transcribed from the podcast, [*Find Your Dream Job, Episode 55: How to Nail Your Next Phone Interview*](#), featuring Mac Prichard and Hannah Morgan. The transcript has been edited for length and style.

Topics covered in this conversation include:

- How to handle an unexpected call from a recruiter
- Research to do before a phone interview
- Why you need to ask the right questions to the right people
- How to follow up after your call

For more information on *Find Your Dream Job*, visit macslist.org/podcast.

About Hannah Morgan



Hannah Morgan is the founder of [CareerSherpa](#). Her talks, blog posts, and books offer no nonsense, actionable advice to active and passive job seekers.

Hannah also writes a weekly column for U.S. News & World Report, and is the author of [The Infographic Resume](#), published by McGraw-Hill Education.



Mac Prichard:

Let's start with the basics. Why do employers do phone interviews? Why not just invite people in for face-to-face meetings?

Hannah Morgan:

Face-to-face meetings with every candidate would be very time-consuming. Phone interviews are part of the screening process. The recruiter—or the person making that phone call—is trying to get an idea of whether or not you meet the requirements for the job on a basic level. They've seen your resume, so they're fact-checking some of the things that you have said.

They're also trying to get a sense of your personality, how you communicate, and what kind of a person you are.

Mac Prichard:

What's the best way people can prepare for a phone interview? Do you have any tips?

Hannah Morgan:

Sure. But keep in mind that phone interviews often come out of the blue, so sometimes you don't have a lot of time to prepare. You never know when the phone will ring.

Let's say you answer your phone and there's a recruiter on the other end, wanting to ask a few questions about a job you've applied to. If the call comes at a bad time—you're in a loud space, for example—the best bet is to ask to have that meeting deferred and find a convenient time to call the recruiter back.





If you can reschedule the call, it gives you some time to research the job and the organization. This gives you a huge advantage next time you talk to the recruiter.

Review the job posting and all the requirements. Come up with an example from your work history that speaks to each responsibility in the new position. Absolutely know the job description inside and out.

Also, spend some time researching the organization. Learn about their products and services, and find out who their customers are. Check out [Glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com) to find employee reviews of the company.

Look on LinkedIn to see if you know anyone who works (or has worked) at that company. If so, reach out and ask them about the company culture.

The more research you can do and the more resources you can tap into before the phone interview, the better your perspective is going to be on what that company might be like and what's important to them.



Mac Prichard:

These sound like the same steps that you should take before an in-person interview. And I guess that's the point. I think people treat the phone interview as a casual affair. But you're saying that candidates have to prepare as if it was an in-person meeting.

Hannah Morgan:

Yes! Thank you for making that point. The phone screen is really important! It is your first impression with the employer and it's going to determine whether or not you get the in-person interview.

Mac Prichard:

I like your point about asking to reschedule the call if it comes at an inopportune time. I think that people are uncomfortable doing this; they want to please the employer and their instinct is that asking to call back later will hurt their candidacy.

Hannah Morgan:

Honestly, it's not going to hurt them. I've talked to a lot of recruiters about this. Recruiters prefer calling because it moves the process along faster. But they understand that people have lives and they may not be able to take that call without prior notice.

Just keep in mind, that if you can't talk when the recruiter calls you, it is your responsibility to find a convenient time to chat. Don't let that burden fall on the recruiter.





Mac Prichard:

Tell us about the importance of the tone of voice, and the difference it can make in a phone interview?

Hannah Morgan:

Nonverbal body language comes across when you're speaking with somebody over the phone.

One of the things that's important to do is to smile when you talk. Whether it's an in-person interview or any kind of conversation that you're having, when you smile your voice will automatically sound more energetic, friendly and positive.

It sounds like such a trivial thing, but all the person on the other end of the phone has to evaluate you by is the quality and tone of your voice.

Another tip is to stand up during the phone interview. It's easier for you to project and have a conversation when you are standing, because it's easier for your diaphragm to move up and down. Standing up can really enhance the quality of your voice and make it easier for you to project. This is why opera singers stand when they sing!



Mac Prichard:

Any other vocal tips?

Hannah Morgan:

The other thing to keep in mind is to avoid talking over the interviewer. Sometimes during the interview, you can get excited and start talking before the person has actually finished their question. It's okay to have a slight pause before you actually go and give your answer. In fact, it's probably better to do that. Not only does it allow you to get your thoughts together, but it makes sure that you aren't speaking on top of the other person.



A nice outfit can make you feel confident in a phone interview. Dress for success!

Mac Prichard:

What about dress? Does this matter?

Hannah Morgan:

I think that everyone generally feels more confident and better about themselves when they're dressed up. And there have been numerous studies that have evaluated how dress affects your performance on the job. The studies have found that people who dress up tend to perform better.

Whatever you can do to give yourself the competitive advantage to feel great about yourself, to feel powerful and confident, I say do it.



Mac Prichard:

You talked about research and having stories ready. What about questions? Should you have questions ready for the people who are interviewing you?

Hannah Morgan:

I really think it's important for job seekers to ask questions throughout the interview. The alternative is to endure the interview as an interrogation, where you simply respond to a series of questions from the interviewer. This constantly puts you on defense, rather than leveling the playing field. Job seekers can and should ask questions, and I suggest that they prepare those questions in advance.

“Figure out the information you absolutely must know before you step into the role.”

There are a stock set of questions that any candidate for any job would want to know the answer to. Questions like, “Why is this position available?” Or “What happened to the person who was in this position before?” “What are the most important things that you would expect somebody in this role to be able to accomplish in the first 30, 60, 90 days?” Some people like to ask the question, “What keeps you up at night as a manager of somebody in this role?”

There are lots of lists of questions out there. You won't be able to ask them all, so figure out what information you absolutely must know before you step into the role.



Asking questions is a great way to learn about the organization's culture and whether it's going to be a good match for you.

Of course, defining "culture" can be difficult. You can't just ask "What is your office culture like." The best way to get this kind of information is by asking probing questions about their management style.

You can ask things like: "Give me an example of some of the employees who are top performers in your company. What do they do that makes them top performers?" Or, "Can you give me an example of a time where you were leading a group and managing your team, and it didn't work out the way you wanted?"

These questions only work if you're talking with a hiring manager. If the screening call is being done by someone from Human Resources, they won't be in a position to answer any management questions.

An HR representative will still know a lot about the culture of the organization. Ask them why they started working there and what they like most about the company.

“Ask questions that are relevant to the person you're speaking with and relevant to the job at-hand.”





Mac Prichard:

What's your advice about how to close the conversation? When you feel that it's coming to an end, what do you see successful job seekers do in phone interviews?

Hannah Morgan:

There are a couple of things. I'll start with the easiest one. Ask about the time frame for filling the position. What are the next steps in the process? When will you hear back from the employer?

If you ask those three questions at the end of the phone interview, you'll have a good idea as to when (and how) to follow-up on your part.



If the interviewer gives you an ambiguous answer like “I’ll be in contact with you soon,” you should press them for a more clear timeline. I think it’s okay to ask whether “soon” means a couple of days or a couple of weeks. You need—and deserve—to have clarity on this issue.

“**A trial close gives you a final opportunity to overcome objections before the call ends.**”

I’ve also heard candidates close an interview with a sort of “trial close.” This is a risky strategy but it can work. They ask a question along the lines of: “I’m really interested in the opportunity and what I’ve learned about it so far. Can you think of any reason why you wouldn’t move me forward in the process?”

By asking that question, you’re giving the interviewer a chance to raise any concerns they may have.

The interviewer may—or may not—raise an issue. If they do mention something, you now have the chance to rebut their concerns. The trial close gives you a final opportunity to overcome any objections before the call ends.

Mac Prichard:

I like that question a lot! Once you hang up the phone, is this like an in-person interview? Should you send a thank you note? What’s the best next step after you’ve determined what the process is?





Hannah Morgan:

The general rule of thumb really is to send a thank you note. Most people don't do this, which is why you should! You're going to stand out and be remembered.

Timing is important here. If the employer is going to be making a decision in the next few days, you need to send your thank you via email, because it won't arrive in time through postal mail. If you're working with a longer timeline, then by all means, send a hard copy thank you note to the person who conducted the phone screen.

The best practice is to send an immediate follow-up by email saying quickly, "Thank you so much for your time. I enjoyed learning about your company," and then follow that up with a hard copy thank you note.

It might sound like overkill, but when we're talking about etiquette, manners, and common courtesy I don't think you can ever really be over the top.



About Mac Prichard

Mac Prichard, founder and publisher of [Mac's List](#), has been connecting people to rewarding work for decades. As a transplant to Portland, Oregon in the early 1990s, Mac learned the secrets to finding work in a competitive market. He has since become a recognized expert on job hunting and career management. Mac writes for the [Mac's List blog](#), hosts a weekly podcast, [Find Your Dream Job](#), and is the author of [Land Your Dream Job in Portland \(and Beyond\)](#) and [Land Your Dream Job Anywhere](#).

About Mac's List

Since 2001, Mac's List has been Oregon's premier job search resource, an online community connecting thousands of passionate and talented people to meaningful work opportunities in the Pacific Northwest. A registered B Corp, Mac's List is an organization with a social mission: to give people the tools and knowledge they need to conduct effective job searches. We do this through our [job board](#), a [blog](#), a [podcast](#), and [online courses](#) all dedicated to the nuts and bolts of job hunting and career management. More than 80,000 people a month connect with Mac's List.

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