

Recommendations for Skype Interview Preparation & Performance

Preparation

- 1) Understand fit.** As with all interviews, review their website, read the interviewers' publications, and review the job description for themes. The best preparation is to have a sense of their culture and to understand how you can/will fit in. If there is something you don't know, write it down and keep it for questions you want to ask. Be conscious of the areas in which you don't fit with them – this means you have something innovative to add and it prepares you for questions they may have concerning your fit. Basically, follow this equation:

The top 3 aspects of their culture + the top 3 aspects of my personality/experiences = the 3 primary ways in which our interests, skills, and values align.

- 2) Test tech.** I cannot stress this enough – even if you have used Skype (etc.) with your parents a hundred times, test the volume level, background, view, ability to answer/connect, etc. You should not have to ask “can you hear me” during the interview; you should be confident in your tech. You will want the screen close enough so that they can see you from the shoulders up, at least, and your full head should be full, not cut off at all; it should ideally be at eye level or at a very slight angle, looking very slightly downward. Anything else looks unnatural.

Also, close all other programs on your computer. Facebook messages will “ding” when they come up and email messages will distract you.

- 3) Set the scene.** Think about the view behind you. A blank wall is very uninteresting and, if it is white or bland, it drowns you out if you are Caucasian but can make you too bright if you are a person of color. Try to find a solid colored wall with something basic in the background (though too interesting, like a bookcase, can be too distracting).

Likewise, what you wear matters. Find something that goes nicely with your skin tone that neither drowns you out nor overtakes your face. Again, this is something to check out and test beforehand. Depending on the type of department, job, or university, anything from a dress shirt/tie to a suit are acceptable. While you can certainly wear shorts below, since they aren't likely to see this part of you, I usually feel more professional and confident in full professional garb. The point is – choose something comfortable that shows up well on screen.

- 4) Practice.** We can set up a practice session, at which time we will be assessing voice tone, confidence, and nonverbals. On Skype, nonverbal communication is intensified as they don't see your full body. So, fidgeting, etc. is really obvious. Likewise, “um,” etc. are accentuated. It is better to understand your habits ahead of time so that we can manage them.

If you live with someone and/or are prone to others stopping by, make sure everyone knows when you are interviewing. You do not want them to interrupt while you are interviewing.

- 5) Questions.** I never practice questions verbatim, especially for Skype interviews, because it comes off as fake and it's relatively obvious. Instead, I think about the types of themes of interest to them (per #1), and I think of the points I want to make when we are discussing these themes (bullet points, if you will). Bullet points are easier to remember (and to post in front of me, out of computer view of the interviewee), and they allow me to answer more naturally. It also allows me an easier answer if they don't ask exactly the question I planned for. Finally, think of several stories which could potentially show examples of what you are talking about. Per the practice tip above, practice telling these stories so you don't ramble.

Performance

- 1) Storytelling.** The following equation should help you tell your stories more effectively:

Situation/Task: What were you doing and/or what was required of you in the story?

Action: What did you do about it (i.e. – YOU specifically, even if you were part of a team; most people spend far too little time in this step and too much above); how did you approach the situation; how did you solve the problem?

Result: What happened immediately, later, and/or where does it stand today?

- 2) Trust.** Interviews are not tests, interviewees are not trying to trick you. Rather, they simply want to know you are a fit. Assuming there is a "right" answer and trying to answer the way you think they want you to answer will only hurt you. Answer truthfully as your best self in a concise, intentional manner.
- 3) Confidence.** Getting rid of "um, uh," "I think," and "I don't know" from your vocabulary is important to show you are confident and this only comes from knowing that you know you are a good fit. Make eye contact when you answer questions and sit up in your chair. Slouching and looking away are especially noticeable on Skype.
- 4) Converse.** Show you are engaged by saying "yes," shaking your head while they talk, smiling, etc. Essentially, treat it like the conversation with human beings because that is exactly what it is. Further, look at the camera, not the screen.
- 5) Notes.** Notes are fine and recommended, but don't rely on them and don't answer questions verbatim. As I've said, this should be a natural conversation. The best way to ace this interview is to know yourself, them, and your mutual fit really well.
- 6) End well.** As with any interview, have questions for them, prepare a final summary statement, and thank them. When you are finished, send a thank you email or card.