

ALUMNI CAREER PROGRAM

Mastering the Virtual Interview

So you built a network, landed a referral, applied for a position, and now have an interview for your dream job. Though you have come far, you have yet to clear the most significant hurdle.

Due to the pandemic, most interviews these days are conducted virtually. The two virtual interview scenarios are an in-person conversation, via one of the many videoconferencing platforms, or an artificial intelligence (AI) interview conducted via a computer platform. Increasingly, many companies are opting to use AI for early-stage interviews. In an AI interview, a computer system that can accomplish human-level tasks — such as visual perception and understanding of speech and learning — conducts the interview and filters out the best candidates for the recruiter to pursue.

Regardless of the type of interview, consider the following best practices.

1

Confident Body Language

Whether consciously or unconsciously measured by the interviewer, the way you present yourself speaks volumes to those deciding whether to hire you. The secret to exuding confidence is good preparation and practice. Start by reviewing the job description and putting together a list of questions the interviewer might ask you about the organization.

2

Mirror the Interviewer's Language

Remember your grade school teacher asking you to speak in full sentences? Because AI platforms benefit recruiters by filtering keywords that match the job description, use the same language from the job posting. For high AI recognition, memorize words and phrases from the posting that speak to your related skills and experience. It also helps your AI score to repeat the question before answering. Respond with, "What is my greatest strength? My greatest strength is" Again, practicing beforehand is key. Video record yourself before the interview to ensure you are hitting all the keywords.

3

Dress to Fit In

In recent years, many organizations have adopted increasingly informal dress codes. A helpful way to get a sense of an organization's dress policy is to locate a picture of the staff online. Match the organization's style of dress, not only for a virtual interview showing you are aware of the organization's culture but also for the AI interview. It sets you up to feel more confident.

4

It's All in the Lighting

Try to avoid positioning yourself in a dark environment. Choose a place where the light is shining *on* you, not *behind* you. In other words, do not sit in front of a bright window. Keep in mind that the focus of the interview is you, so the lighting should be subtle. You also do not want distracting items, like a bookshelf, behind you. Do not sit too close to the webcam. Allow for your head, neck, shoulders, and even portions of your arms and hands to be visible. This allows you to show your confidence through strong body language, like hand motions. Last, but not least, while Zoom backdrops can be fun, they are also distracting and can inadvertently cut off parts of your head and arms. You want to keep the focus on you and your contributions to the conversation.

5

Test Your Tech

Do not test your audio and webcam at the last minute. When using a built-in computer webcam or separate webcam, do a practice call with friends or family to test your equipment. Always make sure the audio is clear. While built-in microphones work, they don't always create crystal-clear sound. Purchasing an external microphone that has strong reviews online can strengthen your performance significantly. Remember, whether it is an AI platform or a live-virtual interview, you want the focus to be on what you are saying, not on technical difficulties. Finally, have a phone line available in case of an electricity outage or internet issue.

"THE SECRET TO SUCCESS IS TO PREPARE, PRACTICE, AND RECORD YOURSELF. BUT ALSO TRY TO ENJOY YOURSELF."

6

Take It Slow

Pace yourself and slow down. Feeling nervous or excited often leads to over-communicating, especially because in-person cues are not as easily picked up in virtual interviews. Again, practice prepared responses in front of the mirror or via your phone with a video recording, which gives you the chance to see yourself on your device. Small verbal cues by the interviewer, like a pause in the conversation, allow you to slow your pace or ask the interviewer to repeat a question. Asking for clarity is important if you think you misunderstood a question.

The secret to success is to prepare, practice, and record yourself. But also try to enjoy yourself. For more information, visit the Alumni Career Program's Interview Guide at alumni.umich.edu/career.

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