The tips on research and preparation still apply if your interview is by phone.

However, since the interviewer can’t see your facial expressions showing your enthusiasm, warmth, sincerity and confidence, you need to be extra aware of making that come across in a phone interview.

The interviewer also cannot see if you have your resume and notes in front of you, so use that to your advantage in being prepared for the interview. Be sure you can’t be heard shuffling through papers though. Also, don’t let the papers be a distraction to you.

Have a list of the employers and jobs for which you’ve applied next to the phone so you can quickly reference the call if unexpected.

Other helpful hints:
- Turn off music, the computer and the television during the interview.
- If you are in your residence hall or room, be sure to let your roommates know you are going to be on a phone interview.

The way you handle illegal questions will depend on your personal preference. If you are asked an illegal question and you would prefer not to work for an organization that asks such questions, then do not be afraid to refuse to answer the question and tell the interviewer why. Pointing out illegal questions may persuade the interviewer not to ask them of other candidates in the future. If you choose to do this, however, be sure to be professional in your delivery. If you encounter an illegal question during an interview, you are encouraged to share your experience with The Career Center staff.

Phone Interviews

Handle Illegal Interview Questions

This information is meant to raise your awareness of issues related to interviewing and specific interview questions, not to scare you. Most employers are honest and only ask questions that are relevant to the position.

What is an Illegal Interview Question?
Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes discrimination on the basis of national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest record, military discharges, or personal information (e.g. height, weight) illegal. Any question that asks a candidate to reveal information that falls into any of these categories violates this act.

Which Questions ARE Still Legal?
If employers can phrase questions so they directly relate to specific occupational qualifications, then the questions may be legitimate. For example, an interviewer may NOT ask your age in an interview, but the interviewer may ask if you are over the age of 18 if being over the age of 18 is a requirement of the job.

What Should I Do if I am Asked an Illegal Question?
If you are asked an illegal question during an interview, you have several alternatives:

1. **Answer the question.**
   You may actually help your chances of getting the job, particularly if you give the “right” answer. Doing so, however, may convey to the interviewer that you are not familiar with the law. You may also harm your chances of being hired if you give the “wrong” answer.

2. **Refuse to answer the question.**
   You have the right to not answer an illegal question. However, a flat refusal to answer may harm your chances of being hired for the position if, as a result, the interviewer sees you as an uncooperative or stubborn person.

3. **Examine the intent behind the question.**
   Usually an interviewer who asks an illegal question is not intending to break the law. For example, if the interviewer asks “Do you have children?” the intent may be to find out if you will be able to travel as part of the job or possibly work late hours. Try to answer the intent of the question, rather than the question itself. A potential response might be, “I assume you are asking this because you are concerned about your employees’ reliability and dedication. I can assure you that I can meet any work or travel schedules required of this position.” You may or may not want to acknowledge that the question is illegal.

4. **Ask how the question relates to your qualifications or the requirements of the job** (and answer the intent as demonstrated in #3).

5. **Ignore the question and ask to move on.**

6. **Walk out of the interview** - this would have the most devastating impact on your chances for employment.

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