Virtual Interview Tips – Career Services
University of Illinois, Chicago

As we move into the "new normal" of job searching and interviewing in 2020, it's clear that virtual interviewing will emerge as a key skill set that all candidates will need to refine long after we return to our physical workspaces.

Here are some quick tips to make sure you are ready for your first (or next!) virtual interview.

1. **Complete a technology check!**
Technical skills are considered one of the top competencies employers look for in new hires, and hiring managers are able to assess your abilities easily during a virtual interview.

A virtual interview requires tools such as a camera and microphone on your computer, a software program (such as Google Hangouts or Zoom) and a reliable internet connection. Avoid potential technical issues by testing your equipment before the call. Pay close attention to the directions that the organization sends you prior to the interview and make sure you can log on easily to the platform they are asking you to use and test it out at least a couple of days before if possible. If the picture is grainy visuals or the audio is muffled you might want to invest in an external webcam or microphone. You should also secure your internet connection. Nothing makes for an awkward conversation more than a call dropped right in the middle of an important question!

2. **Keep Your Virtual Identity Professional**
In today's digital world, your email address or username is often your first impression.

Keep your email and usernames simple. Also, avoid utilizing symbols and the numbers one and zero, which look like letters depending on the font and can cause confusion during outreach.

3. **Dress for Success**
Projecting professionalism is essential in a virtual environment!

For virtual meetings, dress as though you're preparing for an in-person interview. Wear the same professional attire. Stick to dark and jewel tones. These colors will look best on screen. Also, avoid any busy patterns so as not to divert the employer's attention from your expertise. You should be the focus of the interview, not your wardrobe.

4. **Create a Set and Eliminate Environmental Distractions**
Virtual interviews create a unique situation that invites potential employers into what was once a very personal space.

If possible, sit in front of a blank background, so that you remain the focal point. If your house is void of empty walls, set up in your home office or living room—whichever area looks the most professional. Your background may also determine the color you should wear; make sure there is a contrast so you stand out.

Always make sure the space is clean before embarking on a video call; messy backgrounds do not promote a professional image. Check your lighting. Sitting near (but not right in front of) a window works best, as the best way not to appear washed out is to keep the light in front of you.

Make sure you have let others in your household know you are interviewing and ask them for quiet during the interview. Roommates, pets, small humans, and other family members can sometimes cause a bit of a distraction! Be sure to turn off the TV and your cell phone as well.

5. **Monitor Your Body Language**
This can get tricky, so it's important to try and do a practice run with a friend first if you can!

Unfortunately, this being a handshake impossible zone, it's often a challenge to try and greet employers with the same enthusiasm you would during an in person interview. Consider a nice smile and perhaps a quick wave when the interviewer or interviewers appear on the screen.

Try to convey confidence through your body language. Sit up straight, smile, and keep the camera at eye level to avoid looking up or down. Research shows that employers are more likely to remember what you said if you maintain eye contact, so be sure to keep your eyes focused on the camera—not the screen image of the interviewer—as you converse.

Pro Tip: Write your talking points on Post-it notes. You can then place those notes on your computer screen to avoid shuffling papers or clicking around during the call.

7. **Practice Answers to Common Interview Questions**
There's no way to know exactly what an interviewer will ask, but there are some common interview questions you can prepare for. Consider prepping answers to the following to ensure you put your best foot forward on camera:

- Why are you interested in this job? This company/organization?
- What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why should we hire you?
- How do you see yourself being successful in this role?

If you get a question that is unexpected, make sure to stay poised and take a moment to collect your thoughts.

Be sure to have ready a list of questions for the interviewer if asked as well!

8. **Don't Forget to Follow Up**
Treat the video interview as you would an in-person meeting and properly follow up. Within 24 hours of the meeting, send an email to whomever you chatted with, thanking him or her for taking the time to speak with you. If there's a question you wish you had answered differently or a point you wanted to elaborate on, here's your chance. Just keep the email concise.