

Hints and Tips for Video/SKYPE interviews

With video interviews becoming more common during hiring, not being prepared can easily keep you out of the running. While meeting via video is time saver, getting past the technological barriers of not speaking face-to-face can be difficult.

Be sure you're prepared and use Skype to your advantage, experts says. For one, use your computer screen to refer hiring managers to your achievements or provide explanations.

"Prepare a digital portfolio that you can link to during the interview or show the interviewer your screen, which has a sample of your work," says social media expert Marian Schembari, who adds that you can also send relevant links through the chat function.

Looking for more ways to impress? Here's how to handle a Skype or video interview:

1. Look at the camera, not the screen

It can be confusing, but when you're looking at your monitor it actually makes the interviewer feel as if you're looking away. Instead, look directly at the video camera you're using for your interview. And although you're not making eye contact in the traditional sense, this is the way that the interviewer perceives that you're looking straight ahead.

2. Be aware of interruptions

Since you're used to living in the house, it can be easy to forget to turn off a phone or not warn family members to give you some privacy, Schembari says. Have a plan for whatever distractions you have in your house, including children and dogs. "Too many people don't take [Skype interviews] as seriously as in-person interviews, but you need to be just as professional here," she says.

3. Practice in front of a mirror

During the interview, you can see yourself in the video camera, which can be startling if you've never seen yourself speak. "It's important to get familiar with your own facial expressions when you talk," says Colleen Aylward, chief executive of InterviewStudio Inc., a company that offers video interview capabilities. "It also gets rid of some of the camera shyness."

4. Mind the background

Your surroundings can say a lot about how you've prepared for the interview, so it's important to put your best foot forward. "Shoot your video against a blank wall or a warm one-colour background," Aylward suggests. "Clear off your desk, or have only awards and certificates in the background."

5. Avoid patterned clothing

Wear a shirt that's business casual and complimentary to your skin tone. Avoid patterns that come across as too loud on screen, such as anything floral or bright stripes. Clothing can distract the interviewer from the information conveyed during the conversation, so it's important to plan your outfit carefully.

6. Conduct a mock interview

Being comfortable with the technology prevents the added stress from a tech malfunction. Find a person you trust and use Skype or other video conferencing software to conduct a mock interview. You're bound to make mistakes, so it's best to practice with someone who can provide honest feedback.

7. Test audio and video

Just because your laptop has a built-in video camera and microphone doesn't mean the quality is up to par. Instead, test out the video and audio capabilities on your computer and decide whether you need to buy a headset with a microphone or an attachable video camera. Before the interview, some companies may send their own video devices to applicants.

8. Add extra enthusiasm

Any news announcer will tell that your reactions translate differently when on-screen, so it's important to compensate with extra enthusiasm and concise answers. Additionally, speak succinctly and remember that speed is important, Aylward says. "Practice speaking more quickly than you normally do," she says.