

# 3 Ways to Screen Candidates Better Through Telephone Interviews



# Table of Content

## 1. Introduction

## 2. Planning

- 2.1. Collect the required data
- 2.2. Shortlist candidates for telephone interview
- 2.3. Structuring the telephone screening
- 2.4. Inviting candidates to the phone interview

## 3. Execution

- 3.1. Duration matters
- 3.2. Opening the interview
- 3.3. Asking questions
- 3.4. Making notes
- 3.5. Closing the phone interview
- 3.6. Evaluating candidates
- 3.7. Communicating results to decision-makers

## 4. The use of Technology

- 4.1. The positive impact of Technology on screening
- 4.2. How technology improves and facilitates screening calls
- 4.3. The future of Recruitment tech related to phone interviews

## 5. Conclusion

# 1. Introduction

We live and work in a world where technology and other disruptive global forces are driving a dramatic transition, which brings new challenges and opportunities for recruiters. CEOs admit that the existing skills gap keeps them awake at nights, while research from [Inclusionary Leadership Group](#) shows that the talent shortage is expected to increase further and hit 23 million by 2020 ([PwC, 2019](#)). If you still feel unsure about the importance of recruitment in this market, keep reading.

Businesses that get recruitment right are more productive and achieve an average of 3.5 times increased revenue growth and 2 times higher profit margin in comparison to other employers ([ERE, 2019 & SHRM, 2019](#)). However, 75% of HR pros admit their talent acquisition is not hitting the mark, which shows that most employers don't put the required focus on recruitment ([HR Research Institute, 2019](#)). Little do they know, the cost of unsuccessful recruitment can be shocking! A bad hire can cost up to \$250,000 considering the average cost per hire and the negative effect it has on productivity and morale ([SHRM, 2015 & SHRM, 2017](#)). Improving candidate screening is one of the easiest and quickest ways to avoid costly recruitment mistakes and the good old telephone interview is one of the most useful tools to achieve this.

Screening calls done right enable recruiters to assess a candidate's qualifications, experience, skills, salary expectations and more, which make them a great tool for narrowing the field of applicants to invite for more time-consuming and costly assessments, like an in-person interview ([SHRM](#)). While telephone interviews have been around for a while, we want to ensure you know how to get the most out of them through effective planning, best practice execution and the use of related technology. Here is how to do it!

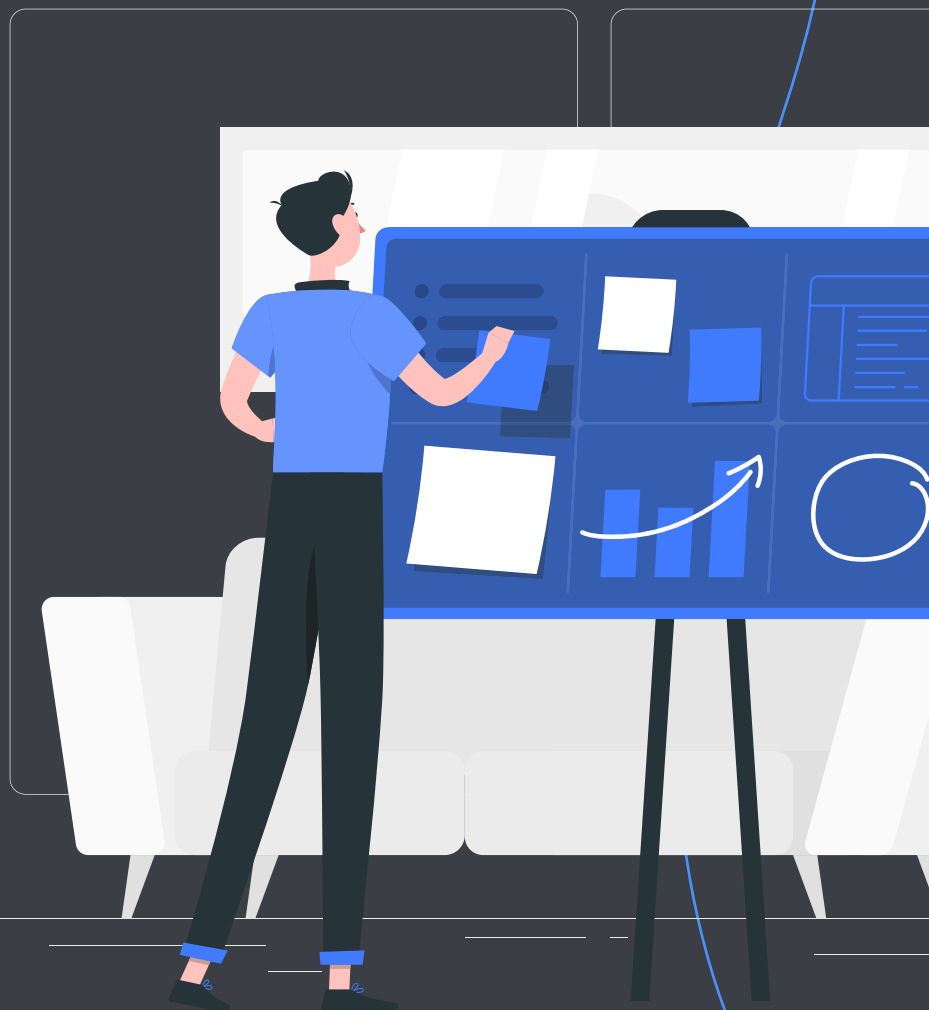
## 2. Planning

### Collect the required data

An effective phone interview is based on data and information provided by the candidate during the application stage. It is good practice to consider requesting the candidates to provide the following information:

- Contact details
- Working experience
- Education & Qualifications
- Career Aspirations
- Interest in the job
- Right to Work
- Salary Expectations
- Notice Period

You can then use this information to make an informed decision on who will be shortlisted for a telephone interview.



# Shortlist candidates for telephone interview

Time for shortlisting! Recruiters should compare the candidates' knowledge, skills and abilities to the essential requirements of the job. We advise you to follow the below steps:

- Check the candidates' CV and cover letter to identify whether they have the essential education/qualifications, work experience, skills and knowledge. Candidates who seem to cover the essential requirements should progress to the next phase.
- Evaluate the candidates' interest in the industry, business and role. The cover letter and other free text that may be part of the application reveals if a candidate is passionate and enthusiastic for the specific opportunity or if they have submitted a generic application. The former are strong candidates for shortlisting, while the latter may not be a good fit.
- Always keep cultural fit in mind. While it can be challenging to get a deep understanding of an applicant's cultural fit based solely on their documentation, it is worthwhile to evaluate the format, structure and tone of voice of their documents and gauge whether these are in line with the role and the business.



# Structuring the telephone screening

After compiling the list of candidates for telephone screening, it is time to start preparing for the screening call. The below steps aim to outline different options and provide food for thought:



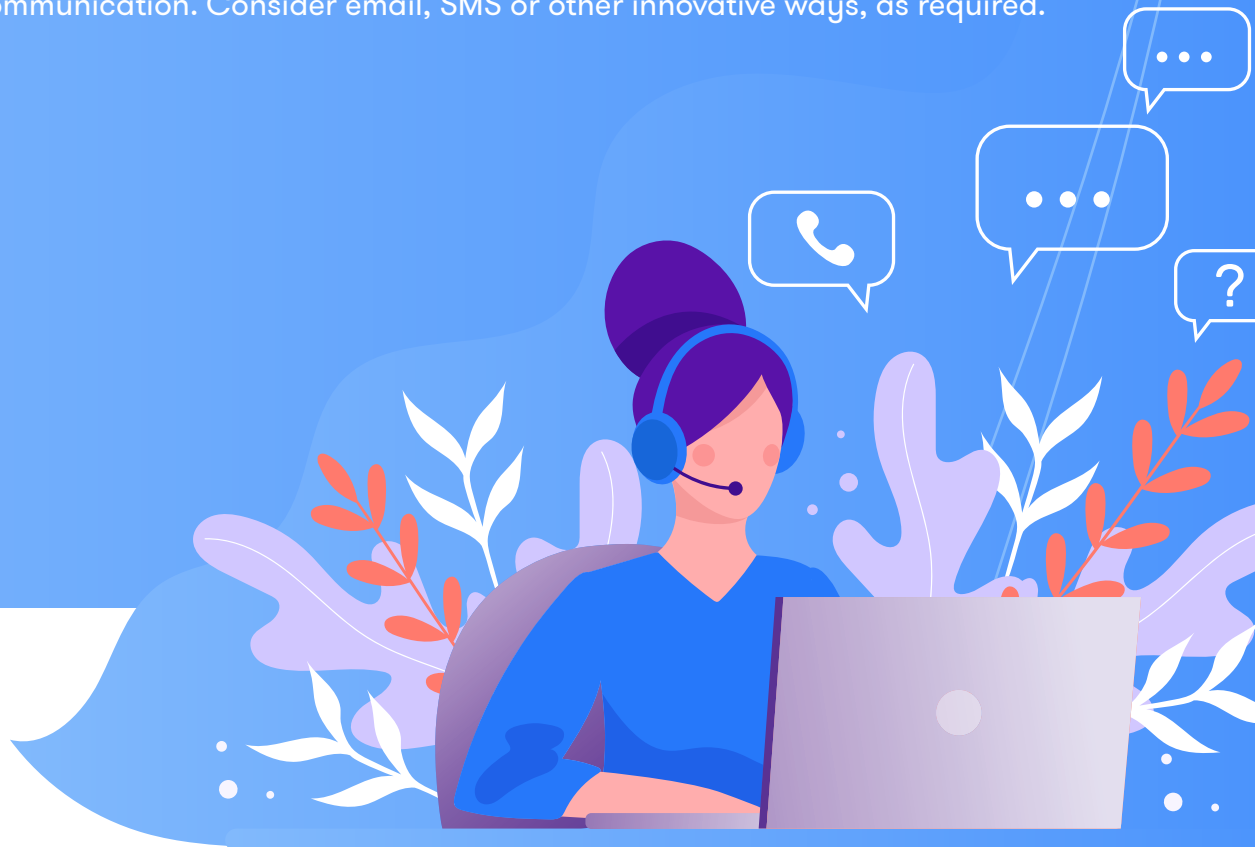
- **Planned or surprise call:** a telephone interview can either be scheduled with the candidate or be a surprise call. While there are pros and cons to both approaches, a planned interview is more effective in most cases, as both parties will be available and prepared to talk.
- **Structure:** There are two interviewing schools of thought, the structured and the unstructured. A structured interview's main advantage is ensuring all candidates will be treated in the same manner. On the other hand, an unstructured interview provides more flexibility and can result in a more natural conversation. There is also a hybrid telephone interview, which is somewhere in between and can include the best of both worlds.
- **Questions:** The most efficient way for designing a phone interview is having a bank of existing questions to use and complementing it with additional job-specific questions if required. In any case, it is important to keep in mind that a telephone interview is meant to be a high-level conversation and should not delve too much into the detail.
- **Scoring:** Quantifying the assessment process by scoring candidates facilitates an informed, objective and fair decision. Scoring is recommended as it minimizes biases and can protect the business from discrimination allegations if things go wrong.
- **Consistency:** Consistency is key. Regardless of which of the above options appeal to you most, remember to be consistent in the way you conduct the screening calls. From inviting candidates to the interview to greeting them, interviewing them and evaluating them, all candidates must be treated in the same way.



# Inviting candidates to the phone interview

This is an important step as in most cases it will be the first human interaction of the candidate with your business, which makes it a vital part of the candidate experience. The below steps can help you to ensure a positive introduction:

- Be flexible: Flexibility is always appreciated. Nowadays, flexible working is a highly desired benefit. Start your working relationship with candidates by offering them flexibility in interview scheduling. They will feel valued and appreciated!
- Detail the process: While recruiters & HR professionals are familiar with each stage of the selection process, this is not the case for all candidates. It is good practice to share information on the next steps of the process as well as the timelines you are working to.
- Play by the candidates' rules: Recruitment starts by understanding the requirements of a job and identifying the desired candidate persona. Top employers align the assessment process to this persona by adopting their preferred means of communication. Consider email, SMS or other innovative ways, as required.



# 3. Execution

## Duration matters

Time management can always be challenging. On the one hand, the desire to acquire all the information required to make an informed decision can make the interview overly lengthy. On the other hand, a recruiter may be having a busy day and rush screening calls missing important information.

In order to time-manage interviews successfully, make them approximately 20-25 minutes long. This way, you can use 2-3 minutes as an introduction, around 15-20 minutes to acquire all the information needed and 2-3 minutes to close out.



## Opening the interview

In order to get as much valuable information as possible and ensure a positive candidate experience, keep the below recommendations in mind to build rapport and foster discussion with the applicant ([SHRM](#)):

- Prepare for the interview by reading through the candidate's application.
- Set aside a quiet place for the interview.
- Schedule enough time so that the interview will not be rushed.
- Introduce yourself.
- Ask for permission to record the interview or take notes.
- Begin in a manner that provides a comfortable atmosphere for the candidate.
- Outline the interview objectives and structure.
- Try to ask questions that will facilitate discussion.





# Asking questions

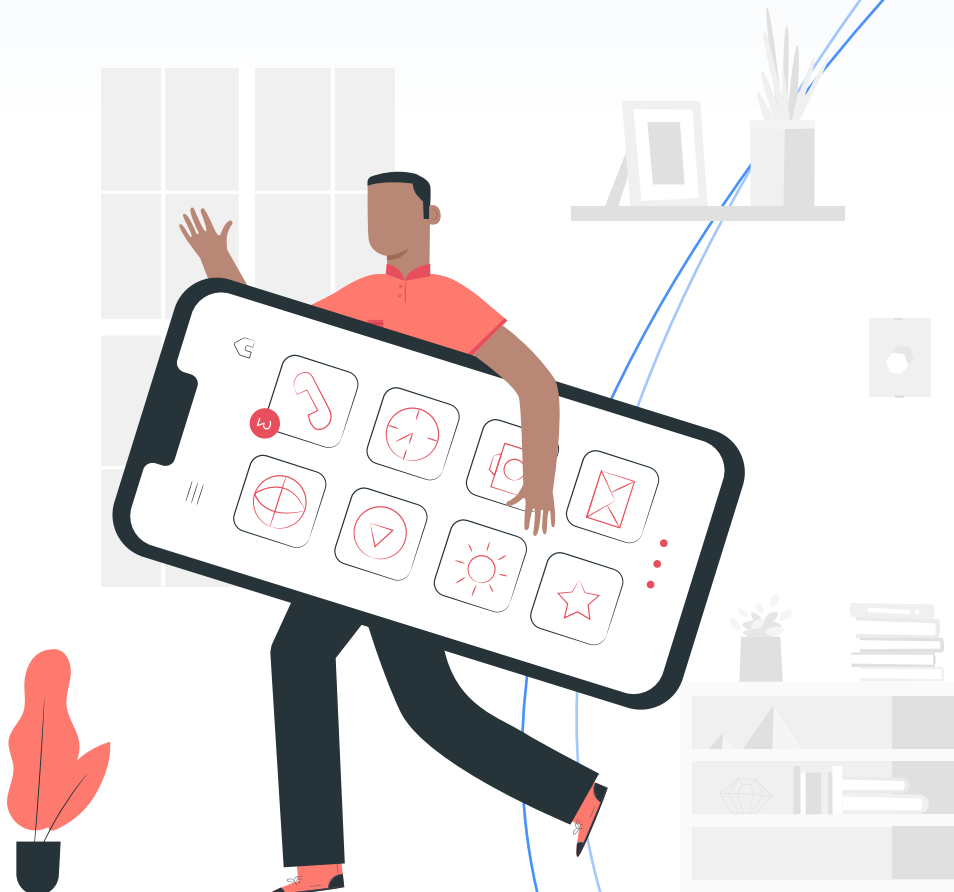
Use the below questions to ensure the candidates meet all the essential criteria and to identify the best contestants to progress to the next assessment phase.

- What is your current (or last) and expected salary?
- Do you have the right to work in the job location?
- What is your notice period? Is it negotiable?
- Why are you leaving your current role / why did you leave your current role?
- What are you looking for from your next role?
- What is your most successful, relevant piece of work?
- Bonus: ask a question related to the mission, vision or values of the business to assess cultural fit.

After the above, take 1-2 minutes to explain the job at a high level and ask the candidate whether they think they are a good fit.

Also, make sure to not ask questions related to the following topics, as they are not related to the job:

- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion
- Race
- Marital Status
- Disabilities
- Citizenship
- Age



# Making notes

Every interview is likely to produce a lot of information that can be vital to assess candidates effectively. Make sure you track all important information in a way that will facilitate candidate evaluation by following the below recommendations:

- Use a template: create a template while planning the interview and use it for all candidates interviewing for the role
- Recommended structure: include questions and a placeholder for comments and scoring, as well as the candidates personal and contact details
- Be consistent: track the same information from all interviews



# Closing the phone interview

While after asking the questions a recruiter has all the information they need, remember to close out on a positive note to boost candidate experience ([SHRM](#)). Keep the below steps in mind:

- Offer the candidate the opportunity to ask questions
- Explain the next steps of the process and associated timelines
- Thank the candidate for their time and interest in the job and the company

# Evaluating candidates

Quantifying the evaluation process can be a robust way to make a fair decision while minimising biases. There are many approaches on how to go about this, however, it is best practice to use a straightforward, efficient and tailored method, such as the below:

- Scoring scales: You can use a 3, 5 or 7 point scale
- Weighting: You can apply weighting to questions based on their importance



# Communicating results to decision-makers

After completing all the telephone interviews and getting a good grasp of the quality and quantity of candidates, as well as their expectations and availability, it is time to communicate the results of your hard work to stakeholders. We recommend scheduling a meeting with the hiring manager and other key decision makers to share key information and ensure alignment for the next steps.



# 4. The use of Technology

## The positive impact of Technology on screening

Technology has more or less changed everything around us and talent acquisition is not an exception. Recruitment software is proven to reduce the time required for screening and to improve the quality of hires and it is no more a secret that it is a necessary element of any successful talent acquisition function.



## How technology improves and facilitates screening calls

Recruitment software supports the screening call process by storing relevant info, automating part of the process, facilitating collaboration, and enabling reporting. For more information on how you can use technology, check the below steps:

- Collecting and storing candidate applications: recruitment software provides functionality for receiving and tracking applications in its database
- Pre-screening candidates: talent acquisition applications can automate the pre-screening process based on requested keywords that are relevant to the job
- Searching, sorting and categorising candidates, and running reports: recruitment technology makes it easy to manage candidate-related data and to create reports in order to facilitate decision making
- Making notes and comments during the assessment process: recruitment software has the functionality to support notes and comments in a candidate's record in order to serve as a central repository throughout the talent acquisition process



- Contacting applicants: recruitment applications can also have functionality for facilitating candidate communication by offering the option of direct, mass-messaging
- Collaborating with hiring managers and other stakeholders: talent acquisition software enables all key stakeholders to work together by making information-sharing easy

Jobylon offers all the above functionality and more! Make sure you find out more on [www.jobylon.com](http://www.jobylon.com), where you can also schedule a free product demo.

## The future of Recruitment tech related to phone interviews

As talent acquisition software becomes progressively more advanced, artificial intelligence and chatbots are emerging as powerful tools that will disrupt the industry. You can already leverage these technologies for a best-in-class recruitment process, and here's how:

- Artificial intelligence can automate CV screening by identifying desired characteristics and predicting which candidates would be the best fit for your business. This functionality presents an immense opportunity for businesses to achieve objective and unbiased candidate assessment.
- Chatbots can act as conversation-starters with candidates after the submission of an application. By asking questions related to work experience, education, areas of interest and more, chatbots can evaluate a candidate's match to the job. After the screening process, chatbots can also schedule interviews and inform applicants of the next steps in the recruitment process, which is a huge opportunity for efficiencies.



## 5. Conclusion

These days, recruitment is shaped by constant change and presents new, major opportunities and challenges for organisations. One of the key challenges is the existing skills gap and talent shortage. An effective talent acquisition strategy and process utilising modern technology can enable you to overcome this challenge and hire top talent.

A spiced-up telephone interview can minimise costly bad hires, increase recruitment quality and reduce time to fill. In order to reap these benefits, remember to plan effectively, follow best practice execution and get tech on your side.



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