Preliminary vetting of applications is increasingly being undertaken by telephone and various methods of Telephone Interview - (TI) - are used.

There are a number of actions you can take to prepare for this type of interview but firstly, let's look at the methods employed.

**TYPES OF TELEPHONE INTERVIEW**

**Unannounced**
Following your submission of an application form or CV you are telephoned, unannounced, and an interview is underway. Very often the sorts of questions will be similar to those encountered in a normal face to face interview e.g. What do you consider your main strength to be? What is your major weakness? Why have you applied to this company? Why do you want a career in ........?

This method is often adopted as a preliminary screening process by some of the medium sized and smaller organisations, perhaps an advertising agency or firm of solicitors.

**Prearranged**
Following submission of an Application Form or CV a letter arrives advising you that the next stage of the recruitment process is a telephone interview. You are fully briefed on the format of the interview and there are generally two types:

a) You are given a Freephone number and a Personal Identification Number (PIN). At a time of your choosing within a specified period, usually seven days, you ring the Freephone number from a touch tone telephone and respond to the statements read out to you by pressing an appropriate button on your phone. These are of the agree/disagree type; for example, you would press key 1 if you strongly agreed with the statement, 2 if you agreed, 3 if you neither agreed/disagreed, 4 if you disagreed and 5 if you strongly disagreed.

Examples are: “Overall, I enjoy working more than playing”; “I have a gift for seeing the strengths in others.”

There may be as many as 80 statements to respond to. You are advised at the start that your response times are recorded. This is not to indicate that you are in any kind of race or competition but to ensure your answers are genuine reactions.

b) The second type is a Structured Telephone Interview. Similar preliminary arrangements to those above are made but in this instance the interview is with a trained interviewer. You are advised that your responses will be recorded. Questions are based on the required competencies for the job and your responses are analysed by trained interviewers/analysts.

**Sales**
A telephone call received, again following submission of an application or CV, where the conversation is based round the concept of you trying to sell something to the interviewer. Needless to say this type of approach is used when the role for which you have applied involves selling of some kind. It is also much used in the recruitment of telesales staff. Applications for roles as call centre staff also usually involve some kind of telephone assessment.

The major companies operating telephone interview techniques are keen to be as open as possible about the process and will give you full briefings on the methods to be employed.

Having identified the major types of TI what is the best way of preparing for them?

**TOP TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS BY TELEPHONE**
Much of the advice you would normally receive on how to prepare and conduct yourself at a face to face interview holds good.

**To Agree or Not to Agree**
- If the interview is arranged in advance and is to be of the agree/disagree touch tone phone type, as outlined above, then arrange to telephone from a comfortable, quiet place with no distractions. Your Careers Service may offer facilities.
- All that is required is a sincere response in a reasonable time.
- Don’t try to pick the answer you think the interviewer wants, the questionnaires are designed to spot anomalies in the answers. If you do succeed in beating the system all that will happen is that you may end up with a job for which you are temperamentally unsuited.

**Out of the Blue**
- Remember, if you have recently submitted an application or CV, there is an increasing chance you will be telephoned, without notice, as part of the assessment process.
- If you live with others it would be a good idea to advise them of this possibility and keep it very much in mind yourself. It may be a cliché to say, ‘You never get a second chance to make a first impression,’ but it remains painfully true.
- Remember, you could be the one who answers the phone and a dozy sounding “Yeah, who is it?” or “What did you say your name was again?” is not going to help.
- Make arrangements, in advance, to take calls with some privacy or at least quietness and respect from your friends.
Make sure your C.V. or Application is to hand.
If you have applied to more than one company or organisation keep the applications, brochures, correspondence etc. in separate folders. The dreadful sound of silence punctuated by frantic rustling of paper and the odd explosive while you search for the relevant form will not create that important good first impression.

Prepare for Success........
- Whether the interview is announced or of the pre-arranged type, the questions will be no different from those asked at face to face interviews. Your Careers Service will have reference material on interviews which you can use for preparation.
- If you are asked what your greatest strength is, what will you say and what example will you use to demonstrate it?
- What is your greatest weakness? What actions have you taken/are taking to minimise the effects of this?
- When have you worked well in a team? What examples do you have?
- Why did you choose your degree course?
- Why are you applying to this Company?
- What do you know about the Job? And so on

The Differences
- The major difference between face to face and telephone communication is, of course, the lack of visual contact.
- Research has shown that in face to face situations communication is made up of 55% non-verbal signals, 37% tone of voice and only 8% the words used.
- On the telephone just two of the media are left and no research has yet been done on the relative importance of these. However, as with face to face, it can confidently be assumed that the split will place more emphasis on the tone and rhythm of the conversation than the words themselves.
- Therefore, an awareness of how you sound is as useful as what you say, if not more so. Arrange with a friend to practice some answers on the phone and obtain feedback from them on how you sound.
- Record some answers on a tape recorder, listen to them yourself and get someone to offer constructive comments.

- A more positive image can be projected if you stand up when talking, providing this doesn’t make you sound too aggressive.
- If you smile when you are talking this is communicated in your voice. Try it.
- Some people advocate dressing as if you were attending a face to face interview.
- If you speak in a monotone this will have a much greater effect on the telephone than in a face to face interview where dress, facial expressions etc. occupy some of the attention.
- Use gestures just as you would in normal conversation. Be enthusiastic when appropriate.
- On a basic practical note, have a pen and paper ready to make notes of anything you might want to bring up later.
- Suppose they like the sound of you and invite you to a meeting: is your diary to hand to take details?
- You know what it sounds like at the other end of the phone when someone is scrabbling around for a pen and paper - disorganised. Is this the impression you want to create?
- Have your questions ready.

Don’t be put off if you are not getting much feedback from the interviewer; this happens in face to face interviews too.

Remember, a telephone interview is a precursor to a face to face meeting. Very few, if any, companies or organisations will offer a job on the basis of a telephone interview and almost certainly not a graduate position. However, a favourable impression created on the telephone will go a long way to helping at the face to face stage.

The good news is that to the best of our knowledge no organisation is conducting assessments by e-mail in order to measure comprehension and writing skills. Yet!

FURTHER INFORMATION
Interviews, Christine Ingham, Fourth Estate 1997
First Interviews - sorted!, C. Phillips, GTI 1996
Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions, Martin Yates, Kogan Page, 1998
How to Succeed at Interviews and other Selection Methods, The University of London Careers Service, 1998
The ACC Guide to...how to be successful in telephone interviews. ACC Telecom, 1998,
http://www.accuk.co.uk/students