

JobSage

Inclusive Phone Screening Guide





Phone Screening: Why It's Important to Do It Right

Phone screening is an important part of your overall interview process. You want to give candidates a great first impression of your company, and you also want to spare your hiring teams from wasting time on lackluster in-person interviews.

Unfortunately, phone screens are too often a place where biases can creep in. The following resource outlines a sample script you can follow to create a more inclusive phone screening experience. Additionally, we provide the reasoning behind each suggestion to empower you and help reinforce this approach on your team.



Starting Your Call

What to say:

Hi [Candidate Name], this is [Your Name] from [Company Name], calling regarding your application to our [position name] opening. Is now still a good time for you to talk? [If not, ask the candidate to provide a time within the next 24 hours when they will be available.]

Why:

Life happens, and unexpected inconveniences like a sudden lack of childcare or a health emergency disproportionately affect women and members of other marginalized groups. Asking if this is still a good time shows that you recognize that candidates have lives outside of the job search and gives them an opportunity to reschedule if something has indeed come up, rather than feeling pressure to move forward (and underperform) simply to stick to the original time.



Asking the Right Questions

What to ask:

What motivated you to apply to this position?

Why:

This question helps understand where the candidate is in their professional life and how motivated they might be to engage in the interview process and accept an offer, if one is ultimately given. This is also a nice way to start the conversation and can help put candidates at ease.



Asking the Right Questions

What to ask:

Can you share more about the experiences you have that will help you succeed in this role?

Why:

Rather than asking a candidate to walk you through their resume, this question focuses specifically on what aspects of their experience they believe are related to their ability to succeed in the role.

It also might uncover connections you missed in the resume, like how a job as a retail associate gave them experience resolving customer complaints on the spot that will translate into their success as an account manager.



Asking the Right Questions

What to ask:

Our company is committed to diversity and inclusion. What kinds of experiences have you had in working with people whose backgrounds are different from your own?

Why:

Every employee has a role to play in building an inclusive workplace culture. This question sets that expectation at the outset and helps you avoid advancing candidates who don't align with your company's goal to build a more diverse and inclusive workplace. It is especially important to ask this question to prospective people managers given their impact on employee experience.



Asking the Right Questions

What to ask:

[Explain the workplace culture of the team they'd be joining and/or the manager to whom they'd be reporting. Perhaps point them to your JobSage profile.]

Does that sound like a workplace culture you would enjoy?

Why:

The common practice of asking a candidate to describe their ideal workplace culture could disadvantage candidates who aren't familiar with your industry or company's working norms. Our suggested phrasing keeps you from inadvertently disqualifying those candidates who would be perfectly happy with your actual workplace culture, even if it isn't their ideal or within their realm of experience.



Asking the Right Questions

What to ask:

Based on market research, we have budgeted around \$X for this position, depending on experience. Is that within your expectations?

Why:

Pay bands and pay transparency are among the best practices in inclusive hiring. Before posting a role, request hiring managers to give you a ballpark of the compensation that has been budgeted for the role.

Asking this question minimizes the risk that you'll move a candidate to the offer stage only to discover their salary expectations are incompatible with your budget. Please note that asking a candidate "What are your salary expectations?" or questions on past or current salary contribute to the gender and racial pay gap and, in fact, can be illegal in some locales.



Asking the Right Questions

What to ask:

If offered a position, when would you be available to start?

Why:

This question helps avoid a situation where a candidate advances to the final stage only to let you know they are unable to begin until a much later date that won't work for your hiring team. It also helps manage expectations on both ends about the overall hiring process.



Wrapping Up the Phone Screen

What to ask:

Would you like to ask me anything?

Why:

This question gives the candidate an opportunity to learn more aspects of the role that are important to them. While their questions might provide insight into their candidacy, avoid penalizing candidates who don't have questions. Many recruiters take it as a sign that the candidate isn't engaged in the process, but that isn't always the case.

Some people, particularly from marginalized groups, have been penalized for asking questions. Culturally or just personally, they have come to believe that asking questions implies weakness. If your company values curiosity and is looking for diverse candidates, make sure to add an encouraging statement like “We value curiosity. There is no such thing as a dumb question. Our leadership loves when people ask questions.”



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