



Home  
 News  
 Money

[Job Center Home](#)

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[Jobs by e-mail](#)

[Who's Hiring](#)

[Help](#)

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[Salary Wizard](#)

[Company Research](#)

**Advice**

[Workplace](#)

[Job Hunt](#)

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**Weather**

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## Top tips for screening applicants over the phone

By Mary Clare Jalonick, special for USATODAY.com

Before you can decide if a candidate who's perfect on paper is the perfect applicant in person, you might want to talk to them. Screening applicants over the phone requires quick judgments about the people you are talking to — or you'll be on the phone for weeks.

Keep phone calls short, and don't advertise your direct line unless you are prepared for an onslaught of calls. Instead, set up a new line that only accepts calls about jobs and leave a message to steer applicants in the right direction.

Follow these tips for screening applicants over the phone:

### 1. Take notes.

When talking to a potential applicant on the phone, have an organized system for keeping track of what they say.

Use an interview questionnaire for each phone call and jot down impressions, says Arlene Vernon, a Minneapolis-based human resources consultant. "With only a voice reference for comparing candidates, these notes will help you differentiate people."

### 3. Ask for questions.

"Before you end, ask the candidates if they have any questions," Vernon says. "Since the interview will be quite short, they should have some questions — and these questions always show insight into the candidate's thought process."

If the candidate doesn't have any questions for you, then chances are he or she isn't that interested in the company — or doesn't have a very inquisitive mind.

### 4. Look for the bad candidates.

You can't pick out a good candidate over the phone, says Paul Glen, a



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California management consultant. But you can recognize who isn't right for you. Think of telephone screening as a process of elimination.

"You can think of a phone interview as being like a first date. It's easy to tell if you will never marry the other person. It's hard to tell if you will," he says.

### **5. Don't overrate telephone skills.**

Though phone screening can be a good way to pick up clues, it also is flawed, says Joy Hazucha, senior vice president of global development and deployment for Personnel Decisions International.

"Don't be overly influenced by their telephone communication skills unless this is a key part of the job," she says.

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