

## EFFECTIVE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

The interview portion of the job search tends to produce the most anxiety in job candidates who may feel they are being analyzed, judged, or manipulated. The interview may be perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity! These negative impressions can be neutralized and even transformed into positives by realizing that an employment interview is basically a conversation with a purpose between two or more people. The mutual objective is to evaluate the degree of fit between the employer's needs and the candidate's interests and qualifications. The additional challenge to you, the candidate, is to convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job! Successful interviews require preparation, practice, and presence.

### PREPARATION

Preparation involves self-assessment and employer research. You must thoroughly analyze your interests, values, strengths, weaknesses, and accomplishments to determine how your knowledge, experience and skills can contribute to the employer's needs. You must also find out everything you can about the employer. There are many resources to assist you with this investigation including school websites, school publications, local newspapers, our career services library and website, and networking contacts. Your research will allow you to determine the initial degree of fit between the school's mission, philosophy and policies and your values and goals. During the interview, your research should help you better market your qualifications and ask knowledgeable and pertinent questions, thus demonstrating your initiative and thoroughness to the employer.

### Useful Facts to Know About Employer

- History, philosophy, goals, mission/focus statement
- Background of school administrators and their roles
- Student organizations
- District salary schedule
- Demographics of community
- Number and reason new teachers hired each year
- Benefits, i.e., insurance, retirement, leaves, tuition reimbursement
- Courses and content in the curriculum; any new developments
- Textbooks (recency of adoption) and supplementary materials; availability of AV materials/equipment
  - Characteristics of student population (i.e., placement policies, percentage of graduates enrolled in college)
- Type and size of district or school
- Typical class size
- Counseling and guidance services
- Size of faculty within departments/building
- Support staff available and their roles
- District requirement for residency of staff
- Methods and frequency of teacher evaluation
- Involvement of parents and community in school programs
- Names (correct spelling) and titles of your contact people

### PRACTICE

See our section on "Sample Education Interview Questions." Formulate your responses to each of these questions and say your responses out loud. Then practice in the mirror, on tape, or with someone, so you get more comfortable hearing your own voice and your responses become more polished. Schedule a recorded practice interview session with the Career Development Department so you can observe your initial presentation and impression.

## **PRESENCE**

Positive first impressions are essential! Your interview begins the moment you are in sight of the employer. You are being observed throughout the entire time that you are visiting, not only during the formal office interview. “Presence” includes your appearance, attitude, and communication skills.

**Appearance:** Good hygiene, grooming (i.e., clean hair, no body odor, fresh breath, etc.) and appropriate dress are essential. Update eyeglasses to reflect mainstream fashion. Do not smoke or chew gum. Avoid distracting or too much jewelry, showing too much skin, wearing too tight or inappropriate attire, too much makeup, bright nail polish or nail art, any visible piercings or tattoos, and too much cologne, perfume, or aftershave. Clothes should be pressed and should fit you well (i.e. right size and length). If in doubt about what to wear, call the company’s human resources and ask what is appropriate interview attire. Several days before your interview do a “dress rehearsal;” try on all your interview clothes in front of a three-way mirror.

**Men:** Wear a dark suit (navy or gray), pressed white long-sleeved button-down shirt, leather belt, polished shoes, clean leather briefcase/portfolio, and a conservative tie. A fresh shave, haircut and trimmed nails are essential.

**Women:** Wear a pant suit or skirt suit (length at or slightly below, the knee) (dark, traditional colors – avoid pastels or bright colors), nude hose, polished pumps and coordinated accessories (clean matching handbag or leather briefcase/portfolio). A stylish haircut, trimmed nails and appropriate make-up are important.

**Attitude:** You need to convey a sense of professionalism, confidence, enthusiasm, friendliness and sincerity! Be considerate and polite to everyone you meet. Arrive about ten minutes before your actual appointment time. Remember the importance of a firm (not hard) handshake, direct eye contact, proper posture and appropriate facial expression and gestures. Above all, be yourself!

**Communication Skills:** You may be the most qualified candidate for the job, but unless you can convince the interviewer that you have the necessary skills and experience, a less capable candidate who has superior communication skills might get the job offer. Communication skills (speaking and listening) are critical to success!

Be certain that you follow the directions for the structure or format of the interview and clearly and concisely answer the question that was asked. Be sure to actively listen so you are not asking for information the interviewer has already given you! When you are asked a question, try to keep your answer to two minutes or less. Don’t be afraid to pause for a moment to collect your thoughts. Turn off your cell phone and any other devices or watches that may make a sound during the interview.

## **FINISHING TOUCHES**

Bring extra copies of your application materials, supporting materials if you have any, and a list of former employers, addresses and telephone numbers in the event that you are asked to provide this information at the time of the interview.

Immediately after the interview, send a thank you letter to everyone you met (ask for business cards or the correct spelling of names). This follow-up will set you apart from your competition and give additional evidence of your good communication skills.

## INTERVIEW METHODS

School districts use various methods of interviewing candidates. Recent graduates report that both individual and group interviews are common. Some have been required to teach a lesson and others to write a letter to a parent. Interviews may follow a set of structured questions and be videotaped or scored. The following formats are used by some of the St. Louis area districts.

**Screening Tests** - SRI (Selection Research Inc.) Perceiver or similar screening tests (like TeacherInsight) may be used as part of the online application process or as a Telephone Screening. You are asked a series of timed questions such as “If you were a teacher, which event would you find most significant? a) Your class gave more money to charity than any other class. b) Standardized test showed your class made a year and a half’s progress in one year’s time. c) A pupil who had not talked in three months asked a really good question.” Interviewers are trained to interpret answers to questions in a dozen categories--including empathy, innovation, listening, and mission. In addition to open-ended items, the screening tests may include multiple choice, and Likert scale responses. Online screening tests may take 40-45 minutes of uninterrupted time to complete.

**Structured Interview**--4 Step process:

1. First interview--candidates are videotaped or given an online screening test answering a series of set questions. The interviewer makes no response to your answers.
2. Second interview--candidates are called back for a second, longer set of questions that may be videotaped.
3. Meet the Principals Night--candidates are asked to make a presentation to a group of principals.
4. Building Interviews—candidates are interviewed for actual positions with the hiring principal.

*To prepare—Think about people and relationships, what qualities do you admire in teachers?  
Remember what you say first and repeat carries more weight.*

### WHAT SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE LOOKING FOR:

- Child- centered responses--are you able to help students grow and develop?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve?
- Willingness to develop sensitive, caring and positive relationships.
- Special traits, what makes you different and unique?

**USE EXAMPLES! TELL A STORY TO HIGHLIGHT YOUR SUCCESSES!**

## TOP TEN INTERVIEW TOPICS

1. Classroom management
2. Student Teaching
3. Strengths
4. Weaknesses
5. Teaching Philosophy
6. "What if ..."
7. Future Plans
8. Teaching Style
9. Motivational Theories
10. Lesson Plans

## SAMPLE EDUCATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### MOTIVATION AND PERSONALITY

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about the teacher that you would most like to emulate.
- Why did you decide to enter the field of education and your subject area in particular?
- What do you enjoy most about teaching?
- What is there about you that would cause a district to hire you over others?
- What are your future career goals - educational and professional?
- What do you expect to be doing five years from now?
- What kind of a relationship would you like to have with students- with your fellow teachers?

### PREPARATION

- What is your philosophy of education?
- What are your areas of certification?
- Tell me more about your other college coursework.
- What additional talents & skills do you have?
- How did you use your time outside the classroom?
- What extracurricular activities can you supervise?

### STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Describe your student teaching experience.
- What was the highlight?
- What was the worst problem you had? How did you handle it?
- How did you generate the desire to learn in your students?
- Describe one activity or lesson that you were particularly proud of that you accomplished during your student teaching experiences.
- What adjective would your students use to describe you?
- Did you have any discipline problems? If not, how do you account for that? If so, what behavior modification program did you use?
- How would you judge your success as a teacher?
- Describe your community and parent involvement.

### TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND STYLE

- How do you meet range of skills needed in classroom?
- When do you use individual/group/whole class approach?
- What is necessary to be sure pupils learn a particular skill?
- How do you stimulate active class/student participation?

- Explain your style of teaching - strategies, methodologies, techniques.
- What area would you like to strengthen?
- What is your grading philosophy?
- What are the traits of a good teacher?
- What do you feel are your greatest teaching strengths?
- What seem to be your greatest teaching weaknesses?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- How would you approach your first assignment?
- How would you incorporate all aspects of the curriculum in your lessons?
- What goals do you establish for yourself in this setting?
- What experiences do you have with implementing individualization?
- How would you motivate the hard-to-reach child?
- What responsibilities will your students have for their learning?
- What is your philosophy of discipline?
- How will you appraise your teaching performance?
- What are the components of a lesson plan?

#### **TEACHING PLANNING/PREPARATION**

- What kinds of planning are necessary?
- How do you plan for year/week/day?
- How do you know what you will cover?
- What are your favorite resource materials?

#### **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT/DISCIPLINE**

- What are characteristics of well-managed classroom?
- What is your view on the student's responsibility to learn?
- What types of rewards and consequences do you use?

#### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT/PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

- How do you plan to improve your abilities in the future?
- What professional development topics interest you?

#### **STAFF RAPPORT/RELATIONSHIPS**

- What should a principal expect from teachers?
- What should teachers expect from principals?

#### **KNOWLEDGE OF THE EMPLOYER**

- What do you feel would be the most significant contribution you could make to our district?
- What do you know about our district?
- Why did you choose our school district?

#### **HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS**

- What would you do if:
  - You caught a student cheating?
  - A student never had his/her homework completed?
  - A student seemed to be an outcast in the class?
  - You knew a student had a very serious personal problem?
  - A student disrupted your class?

You saw two of your fellow teachers, a man and a woman, kissing in a vacant classroom during the school day?

A student called you an obscene name?

You saw a student far down the hallway take a pill at the water fountain?

- How would you communicate with parents?
- How would you start your first day of school with students?
- How will you go about meeting the needs of exceptional children?
- How would you handle an incorrect oral answer?
- If money were unlimited, how would you improve education?
- Should a student pass if he tries?
- If I looked in your grade book at the end of the first quarter, what would I see beside a student's name, how many tests would you give, for what things would you keep records?

### **LEGAL/ILLEGAL QUESTIONS**

Not all interview questions are legal under the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC). Interview/pre-employment questions and tests must be job related. Generally, interviewers from human resource departments are well versed in what questions can and cannot be asked and adhere to these standards and guidelines. However, not all hiring interviewers are informed or compliant.

If you are asked an illegal question, you have three options: answer, refuse to answer (tricky to do tactfully) or answer through your understanding of the employer's intent. For example, if you are asked if you have children, you might reply that there's nothing in your life to prevent you from doing the travel that the position requires. Watch also that your own comments do not introduce topics that should not be discussed! The types of discrimination prohibited by the laws of the EEOC are: Age (40 or older), Disability, Genetic Information, National Origin, Pregnancy, Race/Color, Religion, and Sex. The EEOC also offers additional pre-employment inquiry guidelines on other areas such as: Arrest & Conviction, Citizenship, Credit Rating or Economic Status, Height & Weight, Marital Status/Number of Children. (A full listing is available on the [EEOC](#) web site.)

## **SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK**

### **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

- Which grades are responsible for what topics?
- Who has the responsibility for a particular topic?
- May I have a copy of the scope and sequence?
- Tell me about supervision visits.
- How does the administration work with teachers to improve instruction?
- What types of media resources are available?
- How is the budget for this academic program developed?
- What textbooks do you use in this subject area?
- Describe the district's textbook adoption policies.

### **STAFF/STUDENT/COMMUNITY**

- How would you describe a typical professional staff member in this district?
- What professional skills do you expect of the person you hire?
- Does the staff spend time together outside of normal school hours?
- How active are teachers in working with community organizations?
- Tell me about the students who attend this school.
- How involved are parents in school activities?
- What do parents expect of their teachers?

### **EXTRACURRICULAR RESPONSIBILITIES**

- What is the budget for this activity?
- What does the community expect of activity sponsors?
- Are there auxiliary groups involved in the activity?
- Are there fund-raising requirements that are part of this activity?
- Are other faculty members also assigned to this activity?