Preparing for the Interview

Set the Stage
One of the first steps to having positive interview experiences is realizing that you are always “on stage” and being evaluated. Even now, you are being evaluated by the teachers with whom you are working with in your field experiences as well as the building principal. Your interactions before, during, and after the job interview — chatting on the phone, sending in a résumé, scheduling the interview, sending a follow-up note — all come into play when you’re being considered as a candidate for a position. Teachers tend to know teachers in other buildings, school administrators tend to know administrators in other buildings as well as other districts. Employers know other employers; even if one job doesn’t pan out, an interviewer might pass along your résumé if you made a good impression. Always present yourself as a professional.

- It is important, therefore, to make sure you present yourself as a professional with every interaction and every contact. This includes:
  o the parking lot of the school and surrounding streets.
  o your voice mail message (If a school administrator calls you for an interview and receives your voice mail message – do you sound like a professional educator?)
  o the school office and interactions with school staff.
  o your punctuality, preparedness, and willingness to show initiative during your field and internship experiences.
  o your social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) page (more and more administrators are viewing these to get background information on a candidate).

- Put yourself above the majority of candidates by doing the following:
  o Be enthusiastic – even though you may be nervous, show your passion for this opportunity!
  o Submit neat and complete application materials.
  o Be available for an interview when called – ask when they need you there.
  o Research the employer before the interview – which includes getting your own directions on how to get there. There are many on-line resources that offer turn-by-turn directions.
  o Carry these items to the interview: several copies of your résumé on quality paper, copies of your references, and a professional looking portfolio to take notes.

The bottom line: make it as easy as possible for someone to hire you.
Before the Interview

Preparation is key to a good interview and good preparation will begin well in advance of the actual interview day. Some basic tips and pointers:

- **Research the employer in advance.** Begin researching the employer and company as soon as you schedule an interview. It shows interest and will help you focus your responses appropriately. Look up the employer’s website or read through any print materials you may have.
  - Information you may find online:
    - Faculty/salary schedules
    - Curriculum and class offerings
    - Management and discipline plans used
    - Demographics
- **Research the Industry/Career field.** Learn about the issues or major news related to the field.
- **Know Yourself.** Clearly define your goals before the interview. Identify your skills, qualifications, experience. Know your strengths as a teacher and why you chose this profession. Be prepared to communicate these topics in a clear, concise manner.
- **Review the Sample Interview Questions.** Practice responses both to yourself and with a partner.
- **Practice, Practice, Practice!!!** Know your skills and qualifications and be prepared to talk about them. Use the list of frequently asked questions to help prepare. Schedule an appointment with the Education Career Services Office for a mock interview to practice your interviewing skills and get feedback.
- **Attend an Interviewing Skills for Teachers Workshop** hosted by Career Services to learn more about improving your interviewing skills.
- **Prepare your 60 Second Commercial.** Use this strategy to answer the interview question “Tell me about yourself”, to introduce yourself at an education career fair, to network at a professional event, or to mingle at a party.
- **Dress professionally.** Plan out your wardrobe well in advance. Polish shoes, press shirts and slacks, and get a haircut if needed.
- **Get a good night’s sleep** and eat a healthy breakfast the next morning.
- **Map out directions to the interview site.** Driving directions can be obtained from a variety of online sources. If possible, do a trial run to determine what route you will take, how long the drive will be, and where you will park. Fill your car with gas the day before. Allow plenty of time to drive where you need to go, park your car, and locate the appropriate office.
- **Print multiple copies of your résumé** – no less than two.

**Upon arrival**

Arrive 10-15 minutes early and alone. Leave cell phones, bad/negative attitudes, gum, and friends/family at home. If you are traveling to an unfamiliar district and want to have a friend make the trip with you, plan to drop him or her off at a nearby fast-food restaurant before reaching the interview site. Treat the receptionist with respect, check your appearance in the restroom, take along a breath mint, try to relax and take a few deep breaths.
During the Interview

- **Be aware of your disposition.** Greet everyone you meet with a smile, good eye contact and a firm handshake. Always be aware of your nonverbal behavior. Maintain a relaxed, but professional posture and a positive tone of voice. Show excitement for the position.
- **Listen and relax!** Enjoy the conversation and listen carefully by focusing and giving the interviewer your full attention.
- **Think before you speak.** Before you answer a question: take a deep breath, organize your thoughts, understand the question, and clearly communicate your response.
- **It is ok to ask for a minute to think about a question.** It is perfectly acceptable to pause for a moment to collect your thoughts before responding to a question. Simply say to the interviewer “May I have a minute to think about that?” Interviewers would rather you take a minute to think about your response and give a well thought out answer, rather than have you ramble on because you did not take enough time before responding. If you are really stumped on a question, it is acceptable to ask “Can we return to that question later?”
- **Be specific and give examples.** Do not diminish past experiences. You can provide examples from a wide variety of experiences including: student teaching, academics, career-related experience, volunteer work, activities, etc. It adds to your credibility when you can give specific examples with a few strong points.
- **Be honest!** Under NO circumstances is it ever acceptable to lie or make up an example. If you are struggling to come up with an answer, ask for a minute to think about the question or ask if you can come back to that particular question later.
- **Remember the students.** Always phrase your answer in terms of the student, not yourself. **Trust your skills.** Vocalized pauses – those “ums” and “likes” – make you sound less confident. Refer to theories you learned in class; even if it’s not the model that district uses, they will know you’ve been well trained.
- **Ask for a business card** at each interview so you can remember how to address the thank you letter afterwards.

After the Interview

**Follow-Up**

Say it in writing. Thank the interviewer before you leave, then write a thank-you letter within 24-48 hours. In the case of a panel, address the note to the person who was the main interviewer (or you can choose to write each person a thank you letter).