Education Majors
Formal Interviewing

Career Development Center
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TOP INTERVIEW TOPICS

- Classroom Management
- Learning theories and instructional strategies
- Teaching philosophy
- Collaboration/team-building
- Subject matter/grade-level expertise
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Assessment and evaluation

STAGES OF THE INTERVIEW

Introductory Phase (2-5 minutes)

- Shake hands
- Use the interviewer's name
- Assure the interviewer has your name
- Project a positive attitude – enthusiasm

Qualification Assessment (15-20 minutes)

- Questions regarding goals, objectives, education, experience, interests, activities
- Listen actively
- Watch for cues for feedback
- Pride in past performance
- Answers should be complete, clear, concise, true
- No "yes" or "no" answers

Organization Information Phase (10-20 minutes)

- Listen
- Clarify any question about job or organization
- Prepare 5-6 questions to ask interviewer

Termination Phase (1-2 minutes)

- Briefly summarize your strongest qualifications
- Express enthusiasm for the job
- Make certain you understand the next step
- Thank the interviewer
TIPS ON INTERVIEWING

1. **BE ON TIME.** This means ten to fifteen minutes early.

2. **KNOW THE INTERVIEWER'S NAME AND HOW TO PRONOUNCE IT.** Know whether you should use Mr., Ms., Miss, or Mrs. If you don't know the proper usage, ask the receptionist or the switchboard operator.

3. **BRING A SPARE COPY OF YOUR RESUME IN A BRIEFCASE OR FOLDER.** This demonstrates that you are prepared. It also gives the interviewer something to take notes on.

4. **EXPECT TO SPEND SOME TIME DEVELOPING RAPPORT,** because personal chemistry is a main ingredient in the hiring process. Try to get comfortable with one another. This will help the rest of the interview go well.

5. **WATCH YOUR NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION.** Pay attention to your physical posture. Maintain appropriate eye contact (don't stare). Attempt to be at a reasonable distance from the other person, not too far or too close. Feel free to place your chair at an angle to get comfortable.

6. **DON'T BE EMBARRASSED BY NERVOUSNESS.** Interviewers are human and are probably nervous too. In fact, nervousness is a good sign – it shows that you are taking the interview seriously. Avoid nervous mannerisms, such as tapping your fingers, feet, playing with pens, etc.

7. **DON'T PLAY COMEDIAN OR TRY TO ENTERTAIN THE INTERVIEWER.**

8. **DO NOT EXAGGERATE OR LIE.** It may come back to haunt you.

9. **FOLLOW THE INTERVIEWER'S LEAD.** Don't try to take over the interview. Stick to the subject at hand but don't dwell too long on one point. It is better to deal with many questions than just one or two in depth, unless that's where the interview leads.

10. **BE PREPARED FOR PERSONAL QUESTIONS, EVEN SOME INAPPROPRIATE ONES.** Some interviewers may not be aware of what they can ask, legally. Anticipate how you will handle personal questions without blowing your cool.

11. **BE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION.** Feel free to ask for clarification.

12. **EMPHASIZE THE POSITIVE.** Act natural and dwell on the positive. Be frank and honest, but never apologize for lack of experience or weakness. Be self-confident but don't be overconfident or cocky.

13. **DON'T INTERRUPT THE INTERVIEWER.** A few interruptions are natural, but if you catch yourself always doing it be careful.

14. **WAIT FOR AN OFFER TO TALK ABOUT SALARY.** Let the interviewer bring up this subject.

15. **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR TIMING OF ANSWERS.** Use silence and intentional pauses to your advantage. Time is occasionally needed to think and reflect.
16. **EMPHASIZE WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE ORGANIZATION.** This means emphasizing your transferable skills.

17. **DON'T TRY TO GIVE THE "ANSWER HE OR SHE WANTS."** Most recruiters and employers know a 'set answer' when they hear one.

18. **BRING A PEN AND PAPER, BUT DON'T TAKE NOTES DURING THE INTERVIEW.** Immediately following the interview, write down as much as you can remember, as well as jotting down your feelings and impressions.

19. **AVOID DEBATE.** Arguing with an interviewer will shorten the interview...and your chances.

20. **NEVER SLIGHT A FORMER EMPLOYER, COLLEAGUE, TEACHER, OR INSTITUTION.** It only reflects on you. If there were any problems with previous experiences, try to put your answers in the positive rather than the negative.

21. **IF YOU CATCH YOURSELF MAKING AN ERROR OR CONTRADICTION, CORRECT YOURSELF.** It's better to tumble (and appear honest) than to get caught later.

22. **DON'T OVERPLAY YOUR TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE.** Avoid sounding didactic.

23. **TRY TO BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE.** Never say, "I'll do anything!" Take charge of your own life or someone else will take charge of it for you.

24. **WATCH YOUR GRAMMAR.** Employers are interested in candidates who can express themselves properly. Even if you have to slow down to correct yourself – do it.

25. **HAVE SOME QUESTIONS PREPARED.** When asked for comments or questions, have some – this shows that you're prepared.

26. **DON'T BRING IN A PILE OF EXHIBITS OR SAMPLES UNLESS ASKED.**

27. **IF YOU ARE IN IOWA CITY, IOWA AND APPLYING FOR A JOB IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, SUGGEST A HALF-HOUR TELEPHONE INTERVIEW.**

28. **DON'T EXPECT AN OFFER ON THE SPOT.** Offers usually follow the interview, sometimes two or three weeks later. If, by any fluke, you would be offered the position on the spot, it is appropriate for you to ask for one or two days to think about the offer before responding.

29. **BE CAREFUL WITH THE CLOSING.** If you are not good at closing conversations, don't linger. End quickly and courteously.

30. **MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL: BE YOURSELF!** You don't want to get hired on the basis of something that you're not. You want to be hired for who you are. YOU!
Teaching Philosophy
Do you have a philosophy? YES!
Your “philosophy” is simply what you, as a teacher, believe about: Management, Content, Methodology, Values. Your philosophy determines your teaching style and behavior. Out of your beliefs, you develop meaningful practices for your students.

Employer Pointers for responding to the philosophy question

Don’t give us:

• **Textbook version.** Use your personal philosophy
• **Long, detailed answers.** Summarize your beliefs in a few thoughtful sentences.
• **Excuse for not having one.** Take the time before your interview to develop a statement of your philosophy.

Classroom Management

How do you answer the question asked most often by employers nationwide? Consider incorporating these five points into your answer:

• Student behavior standards
• Lesson design purpose
• Inclusion of all learners
• Learning environment
• Effective classroom routines and procedures

How do I talk about my “Weakness”

Without hurting my chances of getting hired?

**Key Strategy:**
Identify teaching or educational deficiencies, not personal weakness.
Take a weakness and turn it into a strength.

Sample: “I’m a new teacher and I know I have a great deal to deal to learn. Inexperience is my greatest weakness at this point.”

Behavioral Based Interview- For Teachers

Even if an employer isn’t using questions structured in a BBI manner, candidates can build their answers to indicate positive past performances. When asked, “Tell me about yourself,” a candidate prepared for BBI will answer, “I just finished 14 weeks of student teaching (situation), where I was required to teach five history classes a day to a total of 129 students (task). I used the active learning lesson plans I was taught by my professors, and at the end of the semester, 87 percent of our history students passed the pre-graduation sample test (action and result).” That answer will wow an employer. **Based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance, a behavior-based interview relies on questions that elicit responses about the candidate’s previous work.**

Use the STAR method
Situation
Task
Action
Response

Sample STAR
• **Situation:** While I was student teaching, there was a student in my history class who was continually disruptive.
• **Task:** I needed to find a way to minimize these disruptions without reinforcing her desire for attention.
• **Action:** I talked to the student privately after class and told her that I needed her to pay more attention and set a good example for the other students by not being disruptive. I praised her during class when she was working or listening quietly.
• **Response:** I did have to give her one warning for detention, but within 2 weeks she was acting considerably less disruptive.

Sample behavior-based questions:

- Describe a two week unit that you have taught.
- Tell me about a lesson on __________ that went well.
- Describe a lesson that didn't succeed and how you would change it for a future class.
- Describe a lesson that exceeded your expectations.
- Describe an experience you have had becoming established with a new group of students.
- Describe a conflict you encountered with a student and how you dealt with it. (or a conflict with a parent or another teacher)
- How have you assessed student achievement informally without grading?
- Tell me about a typical homework assignment in your class.
- How have you modified assignments for gifted or special education students?
- Describe an experience where you identified a student's special need and modified a lesson for that individual.
- Share an example of a communication with a parent that helped you to understand a student in your class.
- Describe a time when you team-taught or co-planned with a colleague.
- Tell me about a time when you asked a teacher or administrator for help.
- What parts of your teacher education training do you use on a regular basis?
- What have you read recently that led to an improvement in your classroom?

General Questions
Why do you want to be a teacher?
How has the University of St. Thomas prepared you to become a teacher?
What parts of teaching appeal most to you? What parts appeal least?
What is your philosophy of teaching?
What special skills or talents will you bring to our classroom?
Tell me a little about yourself? (Hear: Tell me about yourself professionally as it related to this position.)
What does diversity mean to you?
What has been your most inspiring moment in teaching?
What do you think will be the most challenging aspect of teaching for you?
At the end of the school year, how will you determine whether or not you were successful?
Who was your most influential teacher and why?
What are your professional goals? Where do you want to be in five years?
What is your greatest strength as an educator? What is your greatest weakness as an educator? (Tip: Omit the word “greatest” as you consider this question. Focus on strategies you are using to overcome an area of challenge.)
Why do you want to teach in this district/school?
What are your interests?

Questions about Student Teaching
What was most rewarding/frustrating about your student teaching?
Describe the best lesson you taught and one that didn’t work.
From your student teaching experience, what would you have eliminated from the curriculum?
If I were interviewing your students, what would they say about you?
During your student teaching, if it had been your classroom, what would you have done differently?
If I spoke with your cooperating practitioner, what would she/he say you do especially well? What would she/he say you could improve upon?

Questions for Elementary Teachers
In what curriculum areas do you feel particularly strong?
What grade do you want to teach and why?
Describe an ideal reading program.
Describe a typical school day and the activities of children.
How would you involve parents in the classroom?
How would you incorporate phonics into a balanced literacy program?
What would you do if a parent escorted her daughter into your classroom in the morning, angry that you had placed her in the “wrong” reading group?
What do you know about _____ grade developmentally and how would you incorporate that knowledge into the curriculum? What is important in _____ grade?
What are the components of a balanced reading program?
During literacy time in your classroom, what are you doing? What are the children doing?
Describe rules for a _____ grade classroom vs. a _____ grade classroom.

Questions for Teachers K-12
When I visit your classroom, what will I find to be most impressive?
Describe the first day of school.
Tell me about a time when you worked with ELL students.
What kind of homework do you give to _____ graders?
How would you go about developing a curriculum unit?
How will you integrate technology into the curriculum?
How would you set up your classroom?
How will you evaluate students’ mastery of a subject?
What instructional approaches would you use in your classroom?
What would you do if a student brought in a project and it was obviously done by a parent?
What is your approach to classroom management? How is classroom management different from discipline?
Tell me about a time when you had a disruptive student in your classroom. How did you handle the situation?

Questions for Special Education Teachers
What type of assessments have you used?
Describe a student with a challenging learning disability and how you supported him/her.
What are your views on inclusion and remediation?
What are some of the timelines related to IEPs?
How have you supported students on IEPs in the regular classroom?
Describe both a successful and challenging collaboration experience with a regular education teacher.

Questions for School Counselors
Please describe your counseling experience with individuals and groups. Tell me about some specific examples.
Describe your crisis intervention experience.
Describe your collaboration with community agencies when you were a school counseling intern (i.e. DSS, DMH, community mental health organizations, hospitals, etc).
What experience and knowledge do you have regarding special education laws and issues?
Our school is culturally diverse. What impact do you see that having on the role of the school counselor?
If you had the opportunity to offer classroom workshops, what topics would you address and how would you approach them?
Tell me about a difficult interaction with a parent.
What knowledge and/or experience do you have in filing out a ___ form?
How have you dealt with issues of bullying, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse and prevention?
For high school: What experience do you have with assisting students with the career planning and college admissions process?

Types of Interview Questions
Subject Area - Designed to assess your knowledge of both theory and practice in your area of licensure.
Educational Methodology - Designed to elicit information on your techniques in dealing with classroom situations.
Educational Philosophy - Focus on your value system and commitment to teaching.
Hypothetical Situations - Questions which ask you to respond to hypothetical situations which might come up as a teacher.
Behavioral Interviewing Questions - Rather than a hypothetical situation, you are asked to describe how you handled an actual specific situation in the past.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer
Would you describe the in-service training opportunities in your district?
To a principal: How would you describe your leadership style?
What are the strengths of this district?
What kind of support/mentoring is available to first year teachers?
How active are parents in this building and in the school district?
What are the opportunities for team teaching or team planning?
How do you anticipate this district changing over the next five years?
Are extracurricular assignments available for teachers interested in, and qualified for, after school activities?
I read about your new _________ program on your web site. Would you tell me a bit more about it? or How has it been received by students/parents?
What models of special education are utilized in this district?