

Interview Preparation for Teacher Candidates



Prepared by:
Sharon K. Moss, M.Ed., Coordinator
CSU Career Services Center, Rhodes West Room 280
Phone: (216) 687-2233 Fax: (216) 687-9313
Web: www.csuohio.edu/career

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DRESS SMART

Do's and Don'ts: Dress for Interview Success

Business Professional

Business Professional (Conservative)

- Most common dress code in the western world today.
- Consists of, for men, a dark-colored suit, worn with a long-sleeved shirt and tie. For women, a jacket with matching skirt or trousers plus a blouse.
- Appropriate for nearly all formal settings, but commonly worn at job interviews and in business settings.



Men

- A conservative two-piece business suit
- A conservative long-sleeved shirt
- Neck ties should be silk with a conservative pattern
- Dark shoes (black lace ups are best)
- Dark socks
- No rings other than wedding band or college ring
- No earrings

Women

- A conservative suit with a jacket; no dresses
- A conservative shirt/blouse
- No stilettos or high heels; shoes should be polished, competent, no-nonsense pumps
- Conservative hosiery at or near skin color
- Clear or conservative nail polish
- Minimal use of makeup
- No more than one ring on each hand
- One set of earrings only
- No tank tops or clothes that are too short, too sheer, or too low cut

Both Sexes

- Conservative two-piece business suit (solid dark black, blue or gray is best)
- Well-groomed hair style
- Shower; wear deodorant
- Makeup should be light and natural
- Clean, polished conservative shoes
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- No visible body piercing (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.); no tacky jewelry
- No gum, candy or cigarettes
- Light briefcase or professional portfolio case
- Empty pockets-no bulges or tinkling coins
- Black belt (belt should always match shoes)
- **NO RINGING CELL PHONES** (turn your cell phone off or set it on vibrate)

Cracking the Dress Codes

CORPORATE: Suit, shirt and tie mandatory. Closed toe shoes with a low medium heel. Blouse, crisp shirt or a knit sweater or shell under a suit.

BUSINESS APPROPRIATE: Shirt mandatory. Tie optional. Jacket mandatory. Suit preferred. A skirt and blouse or sweater set worn with heels or boots; tailored trousers paired with a turtleneck and jacket.

BUSINESS CASUAL: Shirt or sweater mandatory. Jacket not required but preferred. Ironed khakis with a classic white shirt; a casual skirt and a sweater set; a cleaned tailored pair of dark jeans with a jacket.



LAST MINUTE INTERVIEW TIPS

- **Prepare: access your skills, values & interests**
 - **Research: learn about the organization**
 - **Practice: go over what you want to express**

Before the Interview:

- Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. On the left side, make a list of what the employer is looking for (based on the job posting). On the right side, make a list of the qualities you possess that fit those requirements – *What Do I Bring to the Table?*
- Organize a professional interview portfolio.
- Research the company, the industry, and the competition. Visit the company website and put the company name in a search engine to see what pops up.
- Prepare a brief statement to answer “Tell me about yourself.” Focus on your powerful qualities and accomplishments vs. just listing out your resume.
- Write at least five success stories to answer behavioral questions (such as “Tell me about a time where you dealt with a difficult student/parent”). Focus on what the situation was, what action you took, and what resulted from your action.
- Write out your successful classroom management plans.
- Prepare 10 questions to ask the interviewer about the job, the company, and the industry to take with you to the interview.
- Research salary data and determine your worth.
- Determine your salary needs based on your living expenses – what is your bottom line?
- Get permission from your references to use their names.

Before you to to the interview:

- Do you look professional? Check yourself in the mirror; part of your confidence will come from looking good.
- Bring the following with you to the interview: several copies of your resume on quality resume paper; a copy of your references with complete contact information; addresses and phone numbers of previous employers; a pad of paper from which you can take notes; directions to the interview site and a contact person’s name.
- Review what you would say to the 10 most common interview questions:
 1. Tell me about yourself.
 2. Why did you leave or why are you leaving your present position?
 3. What do you know about this school district/company?
 4. What are your career goals?
 5. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
 6. What to you want to work for this school district/company?
 7. What has been your most significant achievement?

8. How would your last supervisor and colleagues describe you?
9. Why should we hire you?
10. What are your salary expectations?

Upon Arrival:

- Arrive early – enter the building 10 minutes prior to your interview time.
- Go to the restroom and check your appearance one last time.
- Announce yourself to the receptionist in a professional, courteous manner.
- Stand and greet your interviewer with a hearty – not bone crushing or limp – handshake.
- Smile and look directly into the interviewer’s eyes.

During the Interview:

- Try to focus on the points you have prepared without sounding rehearsed or stiff.
- At the conclusion: express your interest for the job; thank the interviewer; and determine the next steps.
- Ask for the interviewer’s business card so that you can send a follow-up letter.

After the Interview:

- As soon as possible, write down your thoughts and feelings about the interview.
- Look at your notes and assess how well you did.
- Within 24 hours, write a follow-up thank you letter, reminding the interviewer of your qualities.

INTERVIEW PROFILE CRITERIA

Profile...Does the applicant:

1. Love kids?
2. Have sound character?
3. Possess arts/crafts skills in:
 - differentiated curriculum?
 - assessment?
 - technology?
 - organizational preparation?
4. Have Master Teacher potentiality?
5. Have excellent references.

University/Degree –

Praxis -

Certification/Licensure –

Years Teaching –

Grade Level Preference -

Qualitative Assessments – How well did you perform?
What did you achieve?
What impact did your projects have?
What challenges did you overcome?

Evaluative Assessments - Judgment
Problem-solving ability
Motivation
Enthusiasm
Personality
Interpersonal ability
Other personal characteristics

Interview Questions:

1. Background/Experience – Student Teaching, Call to teaching
2. Philosophy of Education
3. Keys to effective teaching
4. Model Classroom Lesson
5. Describe your favorite teacher
6. Personal/Professional Goals
7. Planning – Discipline – Enthusiasm
8. Commitment – Action – Feeling
9. Discipline – Scenarios
10. Character Traits: Loyalty, Accept Criticism, Responsibility, Punctuality, Flexibility, Creativity, Cooperation
11. Strengths
12. Improvements
13. What adjectives would your friends use to describe you?
14. What would typically be observed in your classroom if someone walked in?
15. What should our district hire you?
16. Extra Curricular Interests

INTERVIEW ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Area(s) of Licensure _____

| | When | Where |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|
| Student Teaching Experience | | |
| Background Check (BCII) | | |
| Praxis II Passed | | |

Content Knowledge/Pedagogy:

- **Knowing students' background/knowledge/experiences** (How do you get to know your students? What do you do the first day of school?)
- **Clear learning goals and instructional procedures** (Describe your best lesson? Include the Goals and Procedures of the lesson.)
- **Understands content connections-learned/current/to be learned**
- **Ability to create/select appropriate teaching methods**
- **Evaluation Strategies** (What form of evaluation did you use to determine student learning in the lesson you described?)
- **Monitor understanding/provides feedback/adjusts activities**
- **Use instructional time wisely** (Do you see yourself as more creative or organized and what do you do to balance these?)
- **Reflect on learning goals** (What was the worse lesson you have ever taught and what would you do differently?)
- **Appropriate use of instructional resources, including technology** (Tell about your background as it relates to technology experience and use in integrating it into instruction.)

Communications/Relationships:

- **Climate that promotes fairness** (What rules and procedures would you have posted in your class?)
- **Establish and maintain rapport with students**
- **Communicate expectations to students**
- **Consistent standards of classroom behavior** (Description of a scenario of unruly student who thinks teacher is unfair. How would you react?)
- **Provide safe and conducive environment for learning** (What do you see as a teacher's most important responsibility?)
- **Demonstrate a sense of efficacy (belief that you can make a difference)** (Given a choice to teach in an outer suburban district and an urban district what would you choose and why?)
- **Build professional relationships with colleagues** (What professional organizations do you belong to or would you like to join? React to a scenario where the colleague is negative.)
- **Communicate with parents/guardians** (How do you keep parents informed of student progress and problems?)

Extra-Curricular Interests _____

Professional Appearance/Demeanor _____

Ratings: Based Rubric – Not Proficient/Minimally Proficient/Proficient/Highly Proficient/Outstandingly Proficient



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. 30 Second Introduction

Smile

Handshake

Eye contact

Marketing message (20 seconds)

II. “HOT” Questions

- **What is the latest book you’ve read that is not a textbook or career related? And Why?**
- **Tell me about a successful lesson you have taught.**
- **Give an example of your worst lesson. What happened? What did you do to correct the situation? What did you learn from it.**
- **Describe your greatest strength in the classroom.**
- **What is your greatest weakness? What are you doing to conquer it?**
- **How would you incorporate technology in the classroom?**
- **Which is your favorite standard and how do you use it in the classroom?**
- **How do you accommodate for different learning styles?**
- **Describe your behavior management plan. How do you keep control in the classroom?**
- **What do you think will be your greatest challenge your first year of teaching? What steps are you implementing to be able to meet this challenge professionally?**

LAST QUESTION: WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU????

III. Close the Interview

Smile – Eye contact – Handshake

Thank You

Clarify the next step in the interview process?

ASK FOR THE JOB! Tell the interviewer how much you would appreciate the opportunity to work in that school district!

Interview Questions

Here are some possible questions you may be asked on an interview:

- Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- When did you decide to become a teacher?
- Are children born with the ability to learn, or is that provided by you, the teacher?
- What was your best lesson?
- What was your worst lesson?
- Tell me an adjective to describe yourself.
- What was the last educational article you read?
- How would you handle working with someone you do not get along with?
- What are the duties of your assistant? How would you use an assistant in your classroom?
- What is your weakness?
- Tell me about a weakness that you have not turned into a positive.
- What is your strength?
- How have you used technology in your classroom?
- How do you handle discipline in your classroom?
- What have you found to be the toughest aspect of discipline?
- Do you contact parents? How often?
- Would you send a child to the principal's office?
- How have you used parents in your classroom?
- How do you include parents in their child's education?
- What have you done to improve your school?
- What have you done to improve your classroom?
- How do you teach a classroom of children with differing intellectual abilities?
- How do you teach reading?
- What is your favorite subject to teach?
- What is your least favorite subject to teach?
- How do you help those who are below level?
- How do you help those who are above level?
- Tell me about your past teaching experiences.
- Tell me about yourself.
- Describe your personal and educational background.
- Why did you choose to enter the teaching profession?
- Describe positive/negative student teaching experiences.
- What techniques or model do you utilize to ensure good classroom management?
- Define current curriculum trends in your area.
- What rules have you established for your classroom?
- Of what use are behavioral learning objectives in the teaching/learning process?
- Describe a typical lesson in your classroom. What would I see you and your students doing?
- Describe the format you use to develop a lesson.
- What questions do you ask yourself when planning lessons or units?
- What do you look for to evaluate that learning is taking place in your classroom?
- How do you handle different ability levels of students in your classroom?
- What principles do you use to motivate students?

- What are some of the most successful strategies or techniques that have worked for you in the classroom?
- What steps would you take to handle a student who is a consistent behavioral problem in your classroom?
- How will you interact with parents of the students you teach?
- What is the most difficult aspect of teaching today?
- What qualities make a "superior" teacher?
- Three words to describe yourself. How would students, colleagues, friends, etc. describe you?
- In what areas would the district need to provide support for you in order to help you become an excellent teacher?
- Goals 5 years from now?
- Changes to educational system?
- What is your philosophy of education?
- With what kind of student do you least/most like to work with?
- Describe your teaching style.
- Describe student teaching experience(s).
- How do you individualize your teaching?
- Why should we hire you?
- Write a letter home on the first day of school. What would you say in your "Back-to-School" letter?
- Compose a weekly newsletter. What information would you include? Why?
- How would you handle an attendance problem in your classroom?
- How would you handle a personal attack from a parent? (For example: A parent tells you, "What do you know about teaching children, you don't have any!?")
- If you could choose to teach any concept in your area, which would you select? Why?
- What should schools do for students?
- What provisions have you made for the gifted/talented?
- By law, I am not allowed to ask you about your personal life, is there anything you would like me to know?
- Do you have any theories or teaching methods that have been especially meaningful to you? (hint: don't answer "no")
- What do you want to accomplish as a teacher?
- What do you think provides the greatest pleasure in teaching?
- What personality traits to you see as most valuable as a practicing or aspiring educator?
- What is the role of homework?
- What activities will you sponsor if you are hired for this position?
- What is the most exciting thing happening in the area of education?
- Describe effective teaching techniques that result in intended learning.
- What are your practices in dealing with controversial subjects?
- In what areas do you feel you need improvement?
- What two books, concepts or experiences have influenced you most in your professional development?
- How do you handle jobs/tasks you do not enjoy?
- Describe your experience with differentiating instruction. With cooperative groupings. With curriculum mapping. With hands on instruction. With inclusion.

Respond to the following **education terms** (usually they have 4-6 of these):

1. Constructivism--Piaget
2. SOL'S (Standards of Learning in Virginia)
3. Cooperative learning
4. At-risk students
5. Assertive Discipline
6. Madeline Hunter
7. State regulated questions (for VA teachers, see #2!)
8. Grouping practices (tracking)
9. Site-base management
10. Schools of choice
11. National standards (curriculum/assessment)
12. Ungraded/non-graded
13. Middle level
14. Higher level thinking
15. Gifted education (Talented and Gifted program)
16. Authentic assessment
17. Whole language
18. Peer coaching
19. Parent involvement
20. Restructuring
21. National goals
22. Interdisciplinary curriculum
23. Learning to learn
24. Portfolios
25. Developmental appropriateness
26. Learning styles
27. Special Education (Mainstreaming and Inclusion)
28. Outcome-based education
29. Home bound
30. Home-schooling vs. public schooling
31. Home-schooling vs. private schooling
32. Lee Canter
33. Professional Development Standards
34. Highly Qualified Standards
35. No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

And, the final and probably most important question:

What questions do you have?

I hope these help any teachers getting ready for an interview, whether it's your first time or 15th time! Good Luck!

SPECIFIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavior/Situational-Based Specific Interview Questions

As school systems become more selective in their hiring process, they need to be able to assess the skills of a potential new hire quickly and effectively. This sophistication in teacher education interviewing techniques has led some districts to embrace behavior/situational-based interviewing. 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. "Tell me about a time ... " or "Describe ... ", or "Give me an example ... " The interviewer is looking for details of your past abilities and specific work performance. He or she rates each response to determine how well you reacted to these situations in the past, and to predict your future performance with their company. These situational questions are thought-provoking and you should consider your answers carefully.

Here are some sample behavior-based specific:

- 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?

Elementary School Specific

- What type of reading program did you use in student teaching? (basal, novel, whole language, etc)
- How would you describe the ways that children learn from birth to age 9?
- If you could design the ideal classroom for the elementary grades what would it look like?
- We know that children learn by making connections. What implications does this have for curriculum at the elementary level?
- Which subject area do you believe is your strength, which is your weakest? What steps will you take to improve in this area?

Middle School Specific

- A lot has been discussed regarding motivation of students at this age. What do you think contributes to the lack of motivation students feel?
- What do you think is an appropriate amount of homework for this age student?
- How much weight would homework hold in your consideration for grading on report cards?
- What do you think are the top three qualities needed to be a successful middle school teacher?

- What is meant by "teaming" at the middle school level? How does it support instruction?
- What are some characteristics of middle school aged students that need to be considered when planning middle school programs?

Secondary School Specific

- What do you believe is an acceptable failure rate in courses at the high school? What do you believe causes school failure?
- How would you get a student to do their work when they absolutely refuse to do anything? (i.e. A senior who says, "I don't care if I flunk, I have enough credits to pass anyway.")
- Describe your grading practices. What ingredients go into grades and what percent would you give to each?
- What are some alternative scheduling configurations being used at the high school level?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
- Which should be the primary concern of high school teachers: the content or the kids? Provide a rationale for your choice.

Math-Related Questions:

- What techniques do you administer in your classroom for teaching mathematics? (open ended questions, schema, constructivism, etc.)
- How do you keep enforcing student involvement?
- Do you incorporate technology into your instruction? What's been more effective/less effective?
- What manipulatives do you use? How effective are they?
- Do you teach in whole group settings or individual instruction?
- How do you provide instruction for a cultural diverse classroom...what modifications are made?

Situational Questions:

- You know that a colleague has been talking behind your back about what he or she sees as an ineffective teaching method. What would you do?
- A student is consistently late with assignments. How do you handle the situation?
- A student is doing poorly in class. You talk to her, and she tells you that she considers you to be the poorest teacher she has ever met. What do you do?
- A teacher gives you advice, "When you are teaching be sure to command the respect of your students immediately and all will go well." How do you feel about this advice?
- A parent comes to you and complains that what you are teaching his child is irrelevant to the child's needs. How would you respond?
- A student is lightly tapping his pen on the desk, and you can see that it is distracting to the students around him. How would you respond?
- An irate student gets "in your face" and yells at you. It is the last hour of the day with fifteen minutes left to go in the hour. How would you respond?

Questions YOU can ask during an interview

By asking pertinent questions, you will show your interviewer that you understand fundamental issues relating to teaching. Well-designed questions can elicit valuable information about the needs of the school, the culture of the workplace, and the personalities of the people who will be your colleagues and supervisors if you get the job.

You should have several questions in mind before you arrive for your interview. The following questions should give you a good start.

- What is the teacher/student ratio in your district?
- Do you encourage teachers to earn graduate degrees?
- How many classes a day will I be expected to teach?
- What types of school activities promote parent-teacher-student interaction?
- Tell me about the students who attend this school.
- What textbooks does the district use in this subject area?
- Do teachers participate in curriculum review and change?
- Does your district promote staff development activities and conferences?
What types of programs have the teachers attended in the last year?
- How does the teaching staff feel about new teachers?
- What discipline procedures does the district use?
- Do parents support the schools? Does the community?
- Do your schools use teacher aides or parent volunteers?
- To what extent do staff members work collaboratively to solve problems and respond to the needs of students?
- Does the administration encourage field trips for students?
- How are teachers assigned to extracurricular activities?
Is compensation provided?
- Does the district have a statement of educational philosophy or mission?
- What are prospects for future growth in this community and its schools?
- What technology resources will be available to me in the classroom?
- What is the educational philosophy of your school?
- What will be expected of me as a first year teacher?
- What percentage of your students go on to higher education?
- What has been the history of success in passing school levies?
- How do you evaluate teachers? How often is the evaluation accomplished?
- What facilities do you have in the way of technology, library, laboratories, etc. What technology resources will be available to me in the classroom?
- What is the districts' policy in regard to discipline in the classroom?
- What specially trained personnel are available to assist students and teachers (counselors, therapists, psychologists, etc.)?
- What extra-curricular activities may I become involved in?
- What professional development programs are available to staff and teachers?
- Ask questions concerning a subject of special interest to you, i.e., What remedial reading program does your school use? What math program?
- How many classes per day will I be expected to teach?
- What types of school activities promote parent-teacher-student interaction?
- Tell me about the students who attend this school.
- What textbooks does the district use in this subject area?
- Do teachers participate in curriculum review and change?

Note: It is perfectly acceptable to prepare your questions for the employers in advance, type them up and print them out to take with you to your interview. This shows you are well prepared for your appointment and serious about the position.

