Interview Tips for Education Students

An interview is your opportunity to present yourself as a strong candidate to a potential employer. If you apply for a position and are invited to an interview it means that the employer is interested in you as a potential employee. You’re off to a good start! Now you need to think about ways to perform to the highest level possible – before, during and after the interview.

How can I prepare myself for interviews?
Much of your success at an interview depends on how thoroughly you prepare. Give yourself the best chance of a successful interview outcome by:

- researching the organisation – check the organisation’s website and brochures
- finding out as much as you can about who will be interviewing you, the format of the interview, directions for how to get there, and so on
- ensuring you have appropriate clothing clean, well-maintained and ready at all times for interviews that may be called at short notice
- having a professional portfolio ready containing documentation relevant to the position you are being interviewed for
- re-reading your application to refresh your memory of what you have already told the employer about yourself
- anticipating questions you may be asked and preparing answers for these – check out www.careers.qut.edu.au and look under Interviews and Beyond for a list of common general interview questions.
- practising your responses to key questions. You don’t want to hear what you say about yourself for the very first time at an interview! Practise in front of the mirror, with your friends, your mentor, your mum or your cat. However, you also need to keep in mind that it’s important not to over-rehearse your responses – you don’t want to sound as if you are memorising a script.

Grace’s advice
The best thing I did to help me with my interviews was to ask my mentor to be my “interviewer” in a videotaped “interview” with me. What an eye-opener! I didn’t realise that I had some really distracting mannerisms like playing with my hair and tapping my pen when I was nervous.
A positive surprise was how calmly I spoke even though I was feeling anxious. My mentor also gave me feedback on how to improve some of my responses.
This experience gave me much more awareness of how I communicate and present myself, and where I needed to improve. This resulted in me feeling a lot more confident when I attended “real” interviews.

What are some of the questions I might be asked at teaching interviews?
Start by reading carefully through the QCT Professional Standards for Teachers at www.qct.edu.au. This will give you a good idea of the abilities, knowledge, understandings and professional values that teachers in Queensland schools demonstrate – and the questions you may be asked to provide examples of how you meet these standards.

For example, for Standard One: Design and implement engaging and flexible learning experiences for individuals and groups you might consider the following questions:

- How will you choose the curriculum used in your classroom?
- How would you cater for individual differences in learning styles?
- How would you manage group work with children who have different learning styles?
- EQ places special importance on literacy and numeracy development. Why do you think these two areas are significant?
Possible interview questions spread across the QCT Professional Standards:

It is not possible to predict every type of question, but this list will give you lots to think about and prepare for.

- Can you briefly state your philosophy of early childhood/primary/secondary education?
- In what type of environment do you believe children best learn?
- Why do you teach as you do? What criteria have you in mind when making decisions?
- What have you read recently which was significant to you?
- What are your attitudes and beliefs about teaching and professional development?
- What experiences do you have working as a member of a team?
- How would you respond to community views that may be quite different to your personal views?
- How do you respond to changes in your work environment?
- Why do you think you are a good teacher?
- What attracted you to the profession?
- What attracted you to this particular job?
- What have you contributed to the profession until this point?
- How have your education and life experiences prepared you for this position?
- What is the most exciting thing happening in the area of education?
- How would your students describe you?
- What has been your most positive/negative teaching experience?
- How would you ensure there is no gender discrimination in your classroom?
- How will you integrate computers into your classroom?
- What strategies would you use in assessing your own teaching?
- Would you use formative or summative evaluation in your classroom?
- What do you think is involved in creating a supportive learning environment?
- How would you begin to manage your classroom during the first week of school?
- How would you handle a disruptive child in your class who is calling out consistently?
- How do you incorporate the wider school community in your classroom?
- Explain some strategies you could employ to encourage parental involvement in your classroom.
- How would you foster positive working relationships with support services?
- How do you draw the line between parental involvement and parental interference?

Bruce’s advice

Whatever type of interview you have, the principles are the same – do your research on the organisation and role; think about likely questions and prepare answers; know what your skills and strengths are and have example stories ready; manage your anxiety so you listen carefully and respond calmly; and present yourself as enthusiastic, competent and professional – someone who would be an asset to the employer.

What about questions for Catholic schools or other schools founded on religious principles?

Generally you can expect the same types of questions as for government schools, with the addition of questions regarding:

- Why you believe that faith schools are important
- What your faith means to you
- What you intend to contribute to the school and surrounding parish
- Evidence that you are practicing the specified faith (some schools say that they will choose practising candidates over non-practising should they be equal in all other aspects).

For more practice questions go to http://students.usask.ca/current/life/employment/
What should I do to present myself well at interviews?

Present yourself well at your interview by
- arriving on time
- dressing appropriately
- being confident and creating a positive first impression (smiling, firm handshake, eye contact, participating in icebreaking conversation)
- taking along a portfolio including your resume and evidence of your achievements to refer to (where appropriate) during the interview
- managing your nerves – sitting comfortably and not fidgeting, holding onto your other hand or the arm of the chair if you are nervous, and practising deep breathing
- maintaining eye contact and keeping all interviewers involved in the process with your confidence and enthusiasm
- using the interview as an opportunity to illustrate the skills you possess and how you can assist the organisation
- having questions to ask – further information about the position (e.g. professional development, expectations of outcomes for your first week/term/semester) and/or the timeline for the recruitment process

I’ve been to an interview. Now what do I do?

Take time after your interview to:
- make notes about the questions you were asked and the answers you gave, and reflect on how well you responded to each question. This will help you prepare for your next interview! Don’t agonise over perceived poor responses – think about how to respond better next time.
- request feedback from the employer if you were unsuccessful in obtaining the position. This request needs to be focused on what you could do to improve your performance at future interviews – not on why you did not get this particular job
- send a note to the interviewer/panel to thank them for taking the time to meet with you. This shows professional courtesy and will help you to be remembered in a positive way. Use this opportunity to reiterate your interest in the position and the skills/experiences you would bring to the role.
- Keep the momentum going by continuing to apply for positions. It may take a while to know the outcome of the interview, so in the meantime, assume you are still engaged in your job search!

Want more information about maximising your performance at interviews?

www.careers.qut.edu.au has more interview help under Interviews/beyond.

For more great interview advice check out http://career-advice.monster.com/job-interview/careers-all.aspx, for example:

Articles on preparing for your interview:
- 10 tips to boost your interview IQ
- Interview cheat sheet

Articles on performing effectively during your interview
- Non-verbal communication – escape the pitfalls
- Get over interview jitters

Articles on what to do after your interview
- Get interview feedback

Remember that achieving success at interviews involves skills that most people aren’t born with – they have to be learned and practised! Treat your research on how to be an excellent interviewee as seriously as your research for assignments.