



## Job Interview Tips

*Introduction:* Getting asked in for an interview can often seem like a double-edged sword. At first you are *elated* - your cover letter and CV have done the job and you are in the running for that position you want so much. And then . . .the *nervousness* and *anxiety* set in. "What am I going to say?" "What if I blank out?" "What if they ask me something I don't have a good or quick response for?" Such feelings are natural, but you don't have to let them get the better of you. There's a lot you can do to prepare for that all-important face-to-face encounter . . .

### ***PREPARING CONTENT-WISE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW***

- ***Review, review, review!***
  - Review the *job description* with a fine-toothed comb one more time, this time trying to anticipate questions you may be asked.
  - Review what's in the *CV and cover letter* you sent with your application (a) to make sure you remember what it was you were trying to emphasize and highlight, and (b) to anticipate specific, follow-up questions you may be asked. Remember – all that they may know about you comes from these two documents. Be prepared to elaborate!
  - Review your *teacher portfolio* to see what items you want to take with you to the interview, just in case. What might they like to see a sample of, related to the job? (Note: Don't offer something from it unless it is solicited or pertinent to what you're discussing)
  - Review your *philosophy of teaching*, so it's right there in your mind, advising all your answers. You know you will be asked about this in some way or the other.
  - In other words, *activate all that knowledge* about your experiences, your beliefs, and your future job so you can walk in prepared, confident, and ready to talk about them. At the same time, *don't rehearse* exactly what you'll say. Interviews are not scripted events and will not likely be done in the way you imagine.
- ***Do your homework!*** Know about the institution, what courses are offered, what the student population is like, what niche the program has that other programs in the area may not have, who the faculty are and what their areas of interest are, who might be conducting the interview or be on the interview committee, and so on. You can make a good impression by showing that you are informed and aware (*rather than* coming in without a clue).
- Being prepared in this way can help you feel more at ease and more ready for your interview. You will definitely have plenty to share.

## ***PREPARING EMOTIONALLY FOR YOUR INTERVIEW***

- ***Be centered.*** Being centered means that you (the teacher) are comfortable with yourself -- aware of your teaching philosophy as it is evolving, aware of and comfortable with your personality, and aware of methods and techniques that fit your teaching style and would work within the program where you want to teach. Being poised, knowledgeable, and confident of the teaching ability and skills you have (and yourself) can go a long way toward creating a good impression.
- ***Be honest.*** Don't try to bluff an answer (the person conducting the interview may be an expert on the topic or may at least have a good "B.S. detector"). Also, honesty typically works in your favor in that the interviewer will get to know *the real you*, rather than a "you" that you're pretending to be – most interviewers understand the nervousness involved in the interview process and appreciate when someone is secure enough that they can admit not knowing something.
- ***Be flexible.*** It may turn out that the position might not be everything you had imagined it to be when you learn all the specifics. You might find that there are additional duties or responsibilities or situations you didn't know about, both good and bad. It's good to show that you are flexible, especially for a job you really want. *Being positive and cooperative* can do a lot to win them over to your side.
- ***Be on time and well dressed.*** It may seem like a no-brainer, but it bears repeating. Particularly if the interview is in an unfamiliar location, make sure you allow plenty of time to get to the interview early (like 15 minutes before). There is nothing that will heighten nervousness more than rushing in at the last moment (or late) to an interview. Don't do that to yourself. Also, just as a little superstition, Kenny and I recommend that you wear something green in your outfit (ask us why).

## ***KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER DURING THE INTERVIEW***

- ***Focus on how you (your qualifications, personality, etc.) can help your employer with their needs, wants, and anxieties.*** One way to combat nervousness is to stop thinking about you, you, you ("Ack! I blew that answer!" "Is my hair messed up?" "I hope they don't ask me that question") and *turn the focus on meeting their needs*. After all, when they put out the job announcement, their hope was to find someone who could handle the position effectively (needs), add to it, perhaps expanding into new future directions (wants), and will be able to fit in with the existing work environment and not be the employee from hell (anxieties). Your task will be to show how you are that person and how you will help them out, tapping into their aspirations and reducing their anxieties. Keep that focus in mind and it should relieve some of your own anxiety. (Of course, make sure not to be condescending in any way).
- ***Neither undervalue nor overinflate your experience.*** Don't say, "I was just a part-time graduate student, not a real instructor." Likewise, don't try to make it look like you were a full-time salaried instructor if you were a graduate assistant. There are a lot of things to emphasize about any job (i.e., for GA-ships, that at UHM the competition is keen, and

you beat out a lot of good people for your position, that you were involved in materials development, curriculum, testing, and a wide variety of duties, etc.)

- ***Don't be too brief.*** Concise and to the point is good, but too brief, especially for a teacher, makes people wonder if you are going to be blunt or curt with the students. Make sure you are able to *elaborate* on your answers, with examples that are relevant, so that the interviewers can see what you might be like in classroom interaction (lots of interviewers assume that how you interact with them is a reflection of how you would interact with their students in the classroom— right or wrong, this often happens in interviews, so try to be at your best). At the same time, be careful not to overdo it (i.e., telling your whole life story in answer to each question). Give sufficient details to enable the interviewer to evaluate your credentials.
- If you're being interviewed by a committee, make sure that you *address all of the members and make eye contact with them*. (NOTE: This may not be appropriate in some cultures).

### ***DEALING WITH THE TOUGH SPOTS***

- ***Roll with it!*** It is inevitable that you will be asked a question that was impossible to anticipate. Don't panic! Remember that you are a capable individual with a lot to offer and you've worked hard for all of this! It's *okay to pause* if you need a moment to think about something, or *tell them that you hadn't anticipated that question, and would like to think about it more before answering, so you'd like to come back to it later in the interview*. Perhaps, by then, you'll think of a good response. If you need clarification or more details before you answer, ask for it. Also, if you think you blew a response, do not let it get to you and ruin the rest of your interview. Keep focused on the way you can meet their needs while discussing your experiences and ideas and move on. (If the rest of your interview is great and there was only one bad patch, it's doubtful they'll discount you because of that. And, after all, would you want to work for a place that does?)
- ***"What would you say your weaknesses are?"***- When the interviewer asks about your weaknesses or limitations, choose something work-related, but not so serious as to disqualify you. Briefly mention one (or more if they request it), always *ending on a positive note*. "I am not a good speller, so that's why I always use a Spellchecker and keep a dictionary handy." "Sometimes I have problems with X, so to tackle it, I . . ." If they ask you about a negative employment experience you've had, acknowledge the difficulty and say what you learned from it or discuss the positive outcome of the situation.
- ***Bringing up salary considerations*** - As a rule of thumb, "Never discuss price before establishing value." In other words, until you've demonstrated and convinced them of how valuable you would be to them and they've pretty much decided that you're their top choice, you should hold back on salary talk. Generally, you probably shouldn't bring up salary in the initial interview (although there are exceptions to this), but instead in a subsequent part of the selection process (i.e., when they make a job offer.)

**"DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR US?"** - This question is typically asked at the end of interviews and is often a *missed opportunity*. By not having any questions for them, they might get the impression that you're not truly interested in the job or institution and that you have no desire to probe further or learn more about them. (Much of this advice comes from Gary Will's "Asking Questions – An Essential and Overlooked Step")

- A *simple approach* would be to prepare some simple fact-finding questions in advance to get additional information about the job, the staff, recent projects, daily activities for the position, the institution, etc. and show your interest. (If, during your information search on this job, there was some important information you found missing or couldn't find, this might be a good time to ask about it.)
- A more *sophisticated approach* would be to ask questions that again get at the employer's needs and aspirations and give you an opportunity to talk more about what you can do for them:
  - *Explore the employer's current situation and previous experiences* - "You mentioned [specific situation/problem] before. How has that been going? How do you feel about the results you've been getting so far?" "Are there any special projects you have been working on that the person who is hired will be doing? How have they been going so far? What would you like to see done with them?"
  - *Explore the employer's desired situation* - "What would you like to see happening in the future? Where do you see this department/school going from here?" "If you are at liberty to discuss such things, what challenges do you foresee this department/school facing in the coming year?"
  - *Learn about success criteria and expectations* - "How do you expect the person in this position will benefit your department/school? What objectives do you hope to achieve with this person's help?" "When you evaluate how successful a person has been in this position, what factors do you consider?" "What are some of the qualities or abilities you're looking for in the person you hire for this position? What other traits or abilities do you feel are important for success in this kind of work?"

#### ***A FEW LAST TIPS***

- Trust yourself and try to enjoy the interview experience (keep in mind that even if you don't get the job, you will learn a lot that will help you in the next interview).
- For a nice touch, express your interest in the position at the end, thank the interviewer for interviewing you, and send a follow-up thank-you letter as soon as possible afterwards.