

POP QUIZ: HOW DO I GET A TEACHING JOB?

by MARY C. CLEMENT

Take this quiz to see how much you already know about finding a job, and then read "From Résumé to Teaching Job: What You Need To Know" to learn more about landing your first job in the classroom.

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| <p>1. WHEN SHOULD I START SEARCHING FOR A TEACHING JOB?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. At the end of the student teaching semester B. The week after college graduation C. About a year before you want to be employed D. At the end of your sophomore year in college | <p>2. HOW DO I FIND TEACHING JOBS TO APPLY FOR?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Search online databases, visit job fairs, and network. B. Walk into school district offices with a résumé. C. Walk into principals' offices with a résumé. D. All of the above are true. | <p>3. BEFORE I START MY JOB SEARCH, I WILL NEED TO CREATE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. A résumé B. Sample cover letters C. A portfolio of my work D. All of the above | <p>4. JUST LIKE IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS, TEACHERS NEGOTIATE THEIR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Salaries B. Extra duties C. Parking spots D. All of the above | <p>5. IT IS BELIEVED THAT ____ OF EMPLOYERS GO ONLINE TO SITES LIKE FACEBOOK TO FIND INFORMATION ABOUT A TEACHING CANDIDATE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. About 75% B. About 50% C. About 25% D. It's illegal for employers to do this. |
| <p>6. WHEN I DO GET A JOB INTERVIEW, I WILL INTERVIEW WITH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. A principal B. A group of teachers C. A personnel director or other administrator D. Possibly all of the above | <p>7. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT APPROPRIATE TO WEAR TO A JOB FAIR OR INTERVIEW?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Women: A beautiful sundress with heels and a sweater B. Women: A tailored pant suit C. Men: A suit and tie D. Men: Dress slacks, sport coat, and tie | <p>8. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MIGHT MAKE OR BREAK A JOB INTERVIEW?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Seeming a little nervous B. Asking the interviewer to repeat a question C. Failing to write a thank-you note afterward D. Arriving 20 minutes early | <p>9. WHO CAN HELP ME FIND A TEACHING JOB WHEN I AM IN COLLEGE?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The college career center B. Your education professors C. The teachers you meet during your field experiences D. All of the above | <p>10. WHAT IF I DON'T GET A JOB OFFER AFTER A COUPLE OF INTERVIEWS?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Go back to your summer job. B. Move back in with your parents permanently. C. Get help with your interview skills. D. Become an insurance salesperson. |

ANSWERS

GIVE YOURSELF ONE POINT FOR EACH CORRECT ANSWER.

1. **C.** It takes about a year to find a teaching job, so start organizing for your job search a year before you complete your college degree. During the fall of your senior year is a good time to get started.
2. **A.** There are great national and state databases for teaching jobs. See www.teachers-teachers.com or type in your state and "teaching jobs" for an online search. Read the web sites of nearby districts, and attend job fairs. It is not recommended that you walk into school offices in person.
3. **D.** All of the above. You will need a résumé, a cover letter, and a portfolio for job searching. Your college career center can help you create these.
4. **B.** Only extracurricular duties are negotiable. Being able to coach a sport or produce a yearbook or theater production may help you to land your first job.
5. **A.** While no hard data exists, many think it's about three out of four. It is important that your Facebook account, or any online information about yourself, appears completely professional. Have a professional voice mail message and email address, too.
6. **D.** Yes, you may interview with many people in a school district. You may also be asked to teach a lesson to a group of students, who may evaluate your teaching and give input to the administrator.
7. **A.** Women may wear a career suit with tailored pants or a skirt or a suit that consists of a dress and matching jacket, but not a sundress. Men should definitely dress well and always wear a tie.
8. **C.** Answers A and B are completely normal. Additionally, you should arrive at least 10-15 minutes early to make sure that you are in the right location. A well-written thank-you note may help you get the job.
9. **D.** Your college or university will offer services to you that cover all aspects of job searching. Your professors and the teachers you meet become part of your professional network.
10. **C.** Always keep trying! Go back to your college career center and ask for a mock interview, or find a college professor or practicing teacher who can help you improve the presentation of your teaching skills.

RESULTS

- 9-10 correct:** You already know a lot about teacher job searching and interviews! You get an A.
- 7-8 correct:** This is great. You get a B+, and you still have time to improve your knowledge.
- 0-6 correct:** Take advantage of the resources in this issue of *Educational Horizons* and other publications to find out everything you can about finding your first job. **EH**

TAKE THE MYSTERY OUT OF YOUR JOB SEARCH.

FIND EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO GET A JOB:

- EXPERT ADVICE ON SEARCHING FOR JOBS, CREATING RÉSUMÉS AND COVER LETTERS, AND ACING YOUR INTERVIEW
- CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR EACH STATE
- GEOGRAPHIC TEACHER SHORTAGE DATA

PILAMBDA.ORG/BENEFITS/CAREER-RESOURCES



WWW.EDHORIZONS.ORG

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WHAT

Suggested reading

2011 Job Search Handbook for Educators by American Association for Employment in Education (www.aaee.org)

Getting Hired: A Student Teacher's Guide to Professionalism, Résumé Development, and Interviewing by Rebecca Anthony and William Coghill Behrends (Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2010)

The Definitive Guide to Getting a Teaching Job by Mary C. Clement (Rowman and Littlefield Education, 2007)



FROM RÉSUMÉ TO TEACHING JOB YOU NEED TO KNOW

by MARY C. CLEMENT

How can you stand out among everyone else who is looking for teaching jobs? Learn the dos and don'ts of the job search — including when to start looking — and the secrets to writing résumés and cover letters, filling out applications, creating your portfolio, and preparing for interviews.

"During the last week of student teaching, I went to a seminar and learned it can take a year to find a job. I should have started my search earlier."

"When I saw hundreds of professionally dressed job seekers in the parking lot of the district job fair, I was overwhelmed."

"The principal asked me how I had used student data to inform my lesson planning, and I had no idea how to respond."

The teacher job market has become very competitive, but the good news is that there *are* jobs in schools. Candidates who do their homework and work at getting a job with the same dedication they put into earning their teaching licensure will be employable. The question is, "Where do I start?"

Step one: Start looking

The earlier that you become aware of job market trends, the better. More than a year before you want to be employed, start evaluating your marketability and where you might want to teach. We know that the demand for teachers in the fields of special education, math, and science remains high. Certified teachers who complete extra coursework in these three areas or earn an endorsement that adds to their initial teacher certification are also more employable. Other good extras include work in reading, English as a second language, or Spanish. To find out more, read the *Job Search Handbook for Educators*, published annually by the American Association for Employment in Education.

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Whether you are still in college or have graduated and are entering the teaching profession, take advantage of the offerings of your college career center. Most centers offer training in job searching, résumé writing, and interview skills. Some centers offer mock interviews and sponsor job fairs. Attend these events.

Go online. Visit some national sites like www.teachers-teachers.com or www.schoolspring.com, and see where the jobs are. Find your state's job site, and see what is available. You can also search online for the name of your state and "teaching jobs." You will discover that there are districts that are hiring, including large urban districts. Consider your job options for out-of-state or even out-of-country positions. Why not make your first years of teaching an adventure?

A year before you want to be employed, begin reading online sites on a weekly basis. Bookmark district web sites and check them often.

These are the key steps to finding a job opening:

1. Read national and state education web sites.
2. Read the web sites of professional associations in your field.
3. Locate districts where you want to work, and read their web sites often.
4. Join professional organizations, and stay connected with them.
5. Talk with college professors and teachers. Volunteer in your child's school or work as a substitute, and network with everyone you meet.
6. Go to educational conferences, and make a lot of contacts.
7. Watch for job fairs, and attend them. Attend fairs for a year before you want to secure employment.

Stan says: Roll up your paperwork

The paperwork for your job search includes your résumé, cover letters, district applications, and your portfolio. All of these should be created before you finish your teacher education program or in the year before you plan to be re-employed in a school. With online applications, you may complete both paper and electronic

versions of all the paperwork. The biggest tip for job searchers is always to submit your application in the manner that the job posting states. If a job opening states that you must submit all materials online at their web site, do that. If you are to submit both paper and online materials, then follow the directions. Incomplete or improperly submitted materials keep you from being a finalist.

Résumés

There are some simple ways to help your résumé stand out from hundreds of others:

1. Lead with something strong that sets you apart. This may be one to two lines at the top of the résumé. Sometimes called a professional profile, these short lines catch the reader's attention immediately. This profile states what you bring to the job.
2. Your teacher certification should be next, followed by your education.
3. Your teaching experience should be outlined succinctly. Remember that student teaching is teaching experience.
4. List awards and special recognition, but don't go too far back in history.
5. Include your work in the business world and volunteer work. This is critical for career changers who are new to education.
6. Your résumé should be one or two pages (no longer) and easy to read. Don't use small fonts, pictures, or cute designs. Make sure to print it on high-quality paper.

Cover letters

Yes, cover letters are still used. A cover letter is three short paragraphs that fit on one page (if printed) and introduce you and your résumé. Of course, your cover letter may be an email message or other electronic submission. Explain your interest in the position, and tell how you found the opening. Promote your work and accomplishments. Explain how you can be reached, and state that you have completed the application. If the cover letter is on paper, sign your name legibly.

Applications

Complete the application materials exactly as stated. Many times, this is done online. Whether online or on paper, be sure to remember these tips:

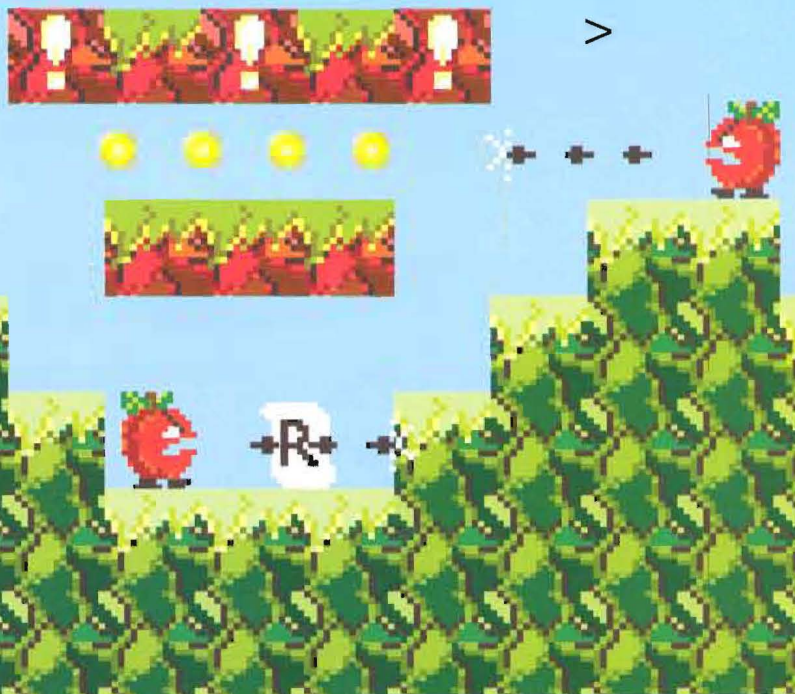
1. Make sure that your application has been proofread by someone and that there are no spelling or grammatical errors.
2. Don't be surprised if you are asked to write an answer by hand. Employers want to know that you have legible handwriting or printing.
3. The application process often includes letters of recommendation. If your college has a credentials file system, use it. This means that you ask references to write you one letter, and they turn it in to the career center either online or on paper. When you need letters of recommendation, you can request that all of your letters be sent by the career center to the potential employer. Some of these systems are self-managed, so that you send your electronic reference letters out to each employer. You may be applying for dozens of jobs, and those who write letters appreciate writing one letter that you use multiple times.
4. The application may also ask for specific references. Ask your college professors, former employers, and those who have supervised your teaching to be your references. They may be contacted by phone or asked to complete an online form about your work.
5. Keep track of where you have applied and when you submitted the application. You can then quickly review materials before a job fair or if you are called for an interview.

Interview portfolios

Your interview portfolio is not the same as one you may have done to complete student teaching or your teacher education program. An interview portfolio must be in a neat, one-inch binder, so that you may carry it with you for show-and-tell in an interview. Your paper portfolio includes:

1. A lesson plan that went well;
2. A few pages of a unit plan or curriculum map;
3. A classroom management plan;
4. A letter to parents explaining the start of the school year, the curriculum, or your classroom management plan;
5. A sample or two of student work, with all student names removed; and
6. One or two pictures showing an efficient classroom where you have worked (probably without student pictures, due to confidentiality issues).

If you create an online portfolio, you may list that on your résumé. For example, "To see sample lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations, and management plans that I have used, go to www.nameofmywebpage.com." However, you must make sure that no student confidentiality is revealed on your site and that no student pictures are posted. Some people offer the interviewer a disc or flash drive to view a portfolio. Most interviewers will not have time to use this. Do not expect employers to ask for your portfolio. That is why a small paper portfolio is so useful: It is your visual aid.



Your online presence

Many employers will do an online search to see what they can find out about you before considering you as a finalist for an interview. Make sure that your Facebook page and any other social media sites have nothing negative posted about you, whether it's messages or photographs that you wouldn't want potential employers to see. Control your sites to limit access to the public, remembering that postings are open to a whole world of readers. You should also have a professional email account name to use for your job search (not ready2party@email.com), and be sure to record a professional voice mail message for potential employers to hear.

Step three: The interview

New graduates, and even practicing teachers, report that they are terrified of job interviews. To take the fear out of interviewing, it helps to remember that school districts need highly qualified, caring, competent teachers. The second thing that takes the panic out of interviewing is being familiar with behavior-based interviewing (BBI).

Long-used in the business world, BBI is a style of interviewing that requires candidates to describe their past experiences to convince the employer that they have the skills and expertise to do the job. Behavior-based questions begin with phrases like:

- Tell me about a time when ...
- Explain how you have ...
- Describe how you ...
- What have you done with/for ...

In an interview for a teaching position, BBI-style questions are created on the topics of what teachers have to know and be able to do. These topics are curriculum, planning, management/discipline, differentiation of instruction to meet all students' needs, data analysis, assessment, parent communication, and professionalism. These are some common BBI-style questions you might encounter in your interview:

1. Tell me how the state curriculum standards have guided your teaching of the content.
2. Describe a lesson plan that you have taught that went well. Why did it go well?
3. Explain one example of differentiation of instruction that you have used successfully.

Since these types of questions require an answer based on experience, it is very useful for you to have a template, or guide, in your mind when you answer. There are two simple acronyms to guide your answers: PAR and STAR.

PAR stands for Problem, Action, and Result. Many teacher job interview questions are about problems. Some examples include "How have you dealt with students who don't follow rules?" or "Describe a time when you had to work with a challenging parent." If asked a problem-type question, build your answer by describing your experience with that problem, the action that you (or your supervising teacher) took to solve the problem, and the result of the action, which is what you learned. For example, "With regard to students who do not follow rules, I learned that how the rules, procedures, and routines are presented is very important. In student teaching, I worked with a teacher who had a posted management plan, and she modeled with students the positive things that happened when they followed rules and the corrective actions we

would take if a student broke a rule after a warning. (*Showing portfolio*) Here is a copy of the plan we used in student teaching, with only four rules, and when hired, I would look at your schoolwide rules and then create a similar plan. With a plan like this, a student learns that he or she has chosen a corrective action if he or she chooses to not follow a rule. It works.”

Hopefully, not all of the questions asked in an interview will be about problems. For other topics, consider the use of STAR to guide your answers. STAR represents Situation, Task, Action, and Result. It’s similar to PAR, but it allows you to explain your past experience with a variety of experiences that weren’t problems. Always strive to be very positive in an interview, as school administrators seek upbeat, enthusiastic new hires. For example, if the interviewer said to you, “Give an example of differentiation of instruction in your teaching,” this would be a good reply:

“I know that students learn in different ways and at different speeds. For the teaching of vocabulary (*situation*), I use a variety of ways to introduce and reinforce the words (*task*). I have students repeat new words so that they can pronounce them, and we have word walls for a visual. Some students learn by writing words, and others have to have the words preprinted for them at this grade level, so I do both (*actions*). I keep reinforcing new vocabulary over time, reminding students of the context where we learned the words. Last year, during the semester when I was a long-term substitute, I had students who increased their vocabulary scores on a schoolwide practice test for their grade by as much as 15% (*results*).”

KEY HINT: Administrators want to know that you can articulate how you teach and that you can prove the impact of your teaching

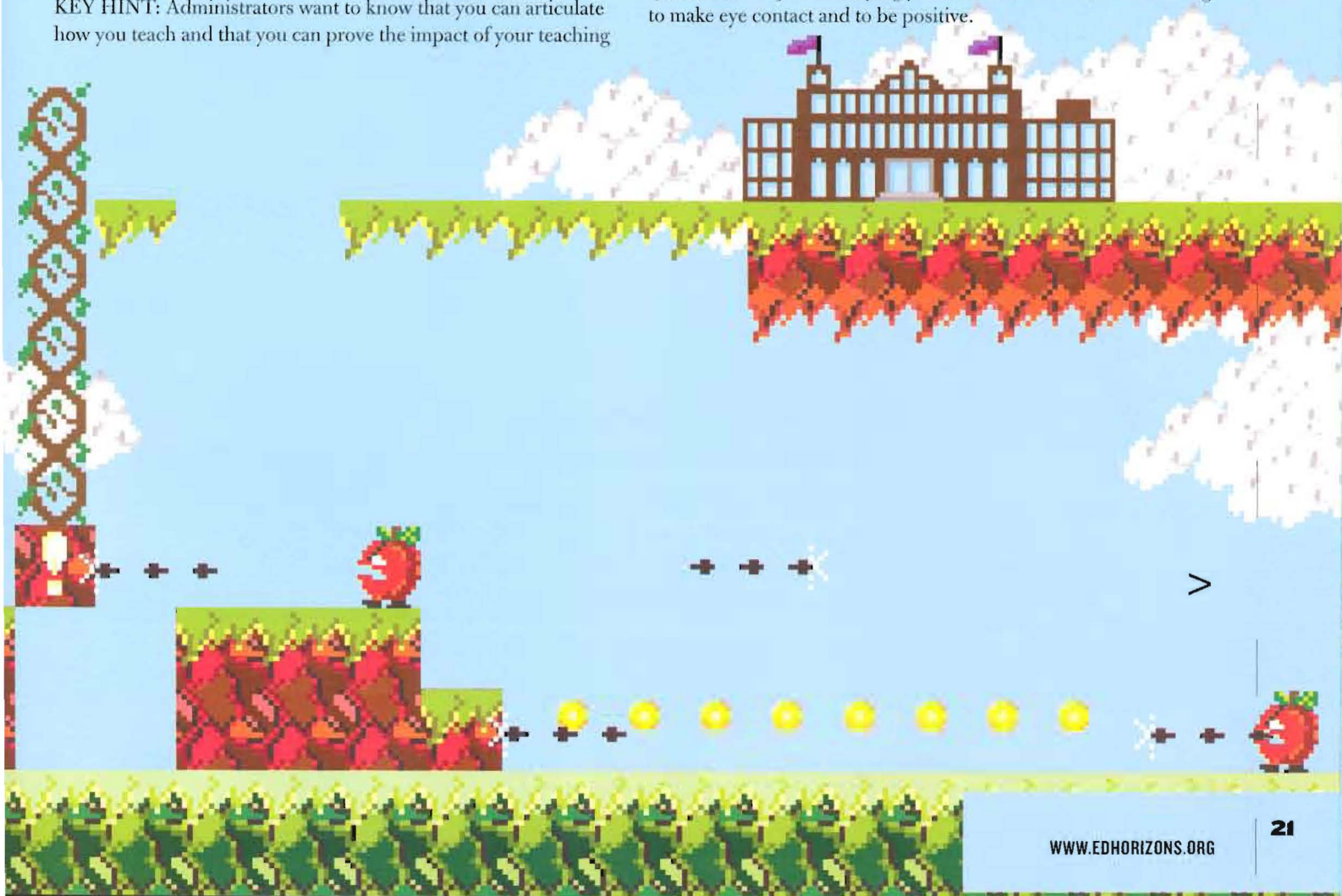
on student achievement. Providing facts and figures about student scores on standardized tests, as well as qualitative stories, is an important key in winning a job. Remember to give scores without any reference to a specific student or teacher with whom you worked.

Preliminary interviews

Preliminary interviews are done by telephone, by online video conferencing, and at job fairs (see “Job Fair Tips” sidebar). Usually, only five or six questions are asked. Typical ones include:

1. Tell me about your best teaching experience.
2. Describe a classroom where you have worked in terms of organization, procedures, and routines.
3. Explain a classroom management plan that you have used that worked.
4. Describe a typical lesson that you have taught and how your lesson plans have been developed.
5. Tell us what you know about our district, and explain your interest in working here.
6. What else do you want us to know about your teaching experience and career?

To practice answering these questions, compose an answer to each question. Then, stand in front of a mirror and practice each answer. Time your answers, and don’t go over one and a half to two minutes for each answer. Be specific, sharing vignettes from your training or past teaching. Better yet, have someone ask you these questions, and practice saying your answers to them, remembering to make eye contact and to be positive.



On-site interviews

When you are invited to an on-site interview, you must prepare. The rules of dressing for success apply, and you should practice giving answers that are packed with relevant information about your teaching experience. Knowing everything you can about the district is critical. Read its web site. You can expect to be interviewed by several people in succession, starting with a personnel director and then continuing with a principal and possibly ending with a lead teacher or department chair. Sometimes a group of teachers will interview you, and you may be asked to teach a lesson. In addition to the questions already listed, which will be asked again, be prepared for very specific questions in your field. Below are some sample questions for different grade levels.

Elementary grades

1. Describe reading strategies that you have used with this grade level.
2. How have you incorporated social studies into the curriculum?
3. Describe an activity that would be developmentally appropriate for this grade level but would frustrate younger students.

Middle grades

1. Describe your work with team teaching.
2. Explain the maturity level of 7th graders.
3. How have you raised student achievement in math?

High school

1. How have you encouraged students to stay in school and graduate?
2. What are your teaching strategies for your subject area?
3. Explain your grading scale to me as if I were a 9th-grade student.

Hot questions

For any grade level, be prepared to explain your background with differentiation of instruction, the use of student data to inform lesson planning, and multiple ways of assessing students. Raising test scores, meeting the needs of all students, and your successful experience with diverse student populations will all be addressed by on-site interview questions. (See "How to Answer Bad Questions" for more details about handling tricky moments in your interview.)

Your questions

As an interview ends, be prepared for two questions.

1. "What were you prepared to tell us today that we didn't ask about?" Your response should reinforce one of your experiences or strengths.

Job Fair Tips

Going to a job fair can be an overwhelming experience since you will be one of hundreds of job seekers who are all trying to win interviews and get noticed. The secret to making a job fair work is to prepare ahead of time. Some job fairs are held on campuses, while others are held in school districts. Learn who will be at the job fair before you attend. Know the schedule of the fair, and find out if districts are just collecting résumés or if they are offering preliminary interviews as well.

Dress appropriately for a job fair. This means both men and women should wear a conservative suit. It should be clean, pressed, and worn with polished shoes. This is not the time for women to stand out with a bright sundress, extra-high heels, or a skirt that is too short. Men should not consider a shirt and tie, without a jacket, to be good enough. Your attire matters, and you must make a good first impression with your clothes, your hair, and limited accessories.

What should you carry during the job fair? You will look professional carrying a briefcase to hold your extra résumés, portfolio, and a notebook and pen. If you have business cards, bring lots of them. Some candidates are carrying small flash drives or discs with samples of their work to leave with employers.

Job fairs may include some group interviews, where three or four candidates go to a room for interviews by a committee of administrators. Group interviews may seem extra challenging, but be cordial and confident with other job seekers in the room. Remember that you are well-prepared, and you will do fine.

Individual preliminary interviews are usually no more than 15 to 20 minutes long. Don't waste time by saying, "There's so much I could say." Just start explaining your past experiences, emphasizing student successes.

Finally, never underestimate a seemingly casual encounter or conversation. An employer once saw a candidate enter a door and not wait to hold it for her when she was carrying a large poster. Later that day, when the candidate had a short interview with her, she made the interview extra short and did not consider the candidate. Another job seeker noted that an employer seemed bored with the candidates ahead of her. When she reached the table, she was asked to turn in her résumé and tell the employer one thing about herself. She said, "I student taught in New Zealand, where elementary schools are famous for how they teach reading. I learned specific strategies for raising literacy rates, especially with English-language learners, since many of my students were Maori." She got a 20-minute interview and later, a job, because of that unique answer.

How to Answer Bad Questions

Bad questions are outdated, hypothetical, illegal, or crazy ones. How do you answer these questions? Carefully!

Outdated questions include “Tell me about yourself,” and “Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten?” When asked these questions, remember what behavior-based interviewing is all about. You should answer any bad question by explaining your past training and experience in a positive way. The best answer to “Tell me about yourself,” is to say, “I just finished an intensive 15-week student teaching experience that prepared me to teach 7th grade. I had an incredible supervising teacher, and I learned strategies and methods to reach diverse students who didn’t have 7th-grade skills when they started the year. Shall I explain more?”

Hypothetical questions include “What would you do if a student were to fall asleep in class?” and “What would you do if a student called you a foul name?” Here’s a good answer for these types of questions: “I haven’t had this happen yet, but I have

taught long enough to know that we need to understand who our students are and that we need to get them help for their social and emotional issues. I would follow my management plan when needed, but I would also know my students well enough to know when they need to talk with me or a counselor about problems that are blocking their learning, like not enough sleep or anger issues.”

Illegal questions cover a wide variety of topics. You should not be asked any questions about your personal life, family status, children, religion, native language, or disabilities before employment. Do not volunteer too much of this information either, unless it adds to your résumé. If you are asked an illegal question, only you can decide how to answer it. When asked if they have children, some candidates say, “You have asked a very personal question. I will respond by saying that yes, I have children, and having children has made me a better teacher. I can share with you how I talk to parents, as I know

how I want to be addressed by teachers of my children.” You do not have to answer a personal or illegal question, and some candidates do not. They respond that they know that time is limited, and they want to talk about teaching. You decide.

Finally, there are questions that are just plain crazy. Many start with “If you were a....” Examples include “If you were an ice cream cone, what flavor would you be and why?” and “If you were a plant, what would you be and why?”

Some employers may ask these questions just to see your reaction and to see if you can think on your feet. You may laugh, while thinking, and then respond with something about teaching. For example, “I could be any plant. You know, students are like plants. Plants need sunshine and water to grow. Students need positives and support to learn, and I am certainly positive and supportive.”

The bottom line is that when you are asked any bad question, answer with a positive answer about teaching.

2. “What questions do you have about our district?” Good questions for you to ask include:

- Tell me about your new teacher induction program.
- Tell me about your mentoring program for new hires.
- What professional development activities will your district offer this year?

Questions about salary and benefits are usually not necessary, as these should be posted on the district web site. If they’re not posted, you may ask where that information may be found.

The interviewer should tell you when final decisions will be made. Do not make a pest of yourself before that decision date. Write a thank-you note, on paper or by email, and send it to the primary interviewer. Then, wait until the decision date before checking back with the district. Some districts have additional paperwork for you to complete before leaving the site.

Final comments

Even in today’s competitive teacher market, use the interview to decide if you want to work for the district. You will get a sense of support for teachers and of the school as a workplace from the on-site interview. Teacher interviews are different from ones in

the business world, as salary schedules are set by district and state guidelines. You won’t be negotiating salary, but you may be asked to coach or sponsor an extracurricular activity during your interview. Final key reminders include:

1. Always arrive about 10 minutes early for a job interview.
2. Practice answers in front of a mirror or by speaking to someone to prepare what you will say.
3. Know what you bring to the table. This means that you can articulate your teaching skills and experiences to prove that you can do the job.
4. Radiate enthusiasm, energy, and a positive attitude.
5. Keep reading about the job search process, and create a professional network of contacts. **EH**

AUTHOR ID

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