INTERVIEWING
TECHNIQUES
FOR EDUCATION MAJORS

1. Preparation

**Appearance:** Dress for success. Think professional and conservative.

**Research:** Understand the job description and research information about the school district.

**Background:** Know your own skills, educational background, and experiences. Know why hiring you would be beneficial.

**Rehearse:** Practice your responses to difficult questions, so you won’t be caught off guard.

2. Right Before

**What to Bring:** Bring extra copies of your materials (resume, cover letter, references), and writing tools such as a portfolio and pen.

**Arriving:** Don’t be late! Check in 10-15 minutes before the interview.
- Turn off your cell phone during the interview.

**Presence:** Provide a firm handshake coupled with a smile and good eye contact.
- Be kind and respectful. You want to leave a positive impression.

3. During the Interview

**Answering Questions:** Be an attentive listener. Understand the question being asked and its context to ensure you give a proper response.
- Respond to questions with more than a yes or no answer.
- Emphasize what you can do for the organization.
- Highlight your qualifications with real-life experiences and examples.

**To Close:** Thank each interviewer, shake hands, and re-state your interest in the position.

---

**Common Nonverbal Mistakes**

- Failure to make eye contact: 67%
- Lack of smile: 38%
- Fidgeting too much: 33%
- Having little knowledge of school district: 47%
- Bad posture: 33%

---

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
River Falls
CAREER SERVICES

187 Rodli Hall
715-425-3572
www.uwrf.edu/careerservices
## Interviewing Techniques for Education Majors

The goal of creating a high-quality resume and cover letter is to obtain an interview. Once that is achieved, it is easy for job seekers to shrug off an interview as simply a conversation with the employer. However, for many people, interviewing can be the most challenging step in landing the job. Interviewing requires preparation and practice to be successful. The major objective of the interview is for the employer to get to know you as well as possible. This means not only your education and experiences, but your personality as well. The goal of employers for any field is to find candidates who are a good “fit” within their organization or school district.

### Interview Types

There are six major interviewing formats, which include one-on-one, group, panel, series, phone, and webcam. Inquiring about the format of the interview can be beneficial in helping you to be better prepared. Below is a description of each type of interview and items to consider for each format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW TYPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>ITEMS TO CONSIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phone         | - Interview over the phone  
- Also referred to as a “screening” interview or “weeder” interview  
- First round interview used to narrow the candidate pool  
- Typically around 30 minutes and with a Human Resources professional  
- Also a type of interview used to minimize cost for out-of-town candidates | - A phone interview is a “real” interview.  
- The interviewer is unable to see your nonverbal communication, and it may be difficult to convey enthusiasm on the phone. Smile. Smiling changes the tone of your voice and helps convey enthusiasm.  
- The interviewer may call you and want to conduct the interview on the spot. If this is the case, make sure you are in a quiet location free of interruptions. Otherwise, ask to schedule a time to speak with the interviewer.  
- Utilize notes, the position description, your resume, and cover letter.  
- Don’t try to fill all moments of silence. The interviewer is likely taking notes.  
- Remember to consider time zone differences and be aware of interview logistics (who is calling who). Ensure you have good phone reception. |
| Skype/Webcam  | - Sometimes used as a first-round interview and other times used to minimize cost for out-of-town candidates | - Dress professionally, just as you would for an in-person interview.  
- Consider your background and lighting before the interview (test it).  
- Look at the camera, not the image of yourself reflected on your screen.  
- Double check your internet connection and signal at least a half-hour before your interview. If you run into issues, you will have time to fix internet connections, audio, or visual issues.  
- Communicate with your interviewer to confirm logistics (who is contacting who, time zones, etc.). If you do not have a Skype username, create a professional username prior to the interview.  
- Silence your cell phone and turn off the TV or any music playing. Limit all distractions as much as possible.  
- Have a back-up plan in case technology fails (phone number for employer). |
| One-on-One    | - Conducted between the hiring manager or human resources representative and candidate | - Maintain proper eye contact throughout the interview. |
| Panel         | - Hiring panel (usually five or six people) interview a candidate simultaneously | - Multiple people may be asking questions. Make eye contact with everyone.  
- Ask for the job titles of the interviewers prior to the interview so you can ask appropriate questions. |
| Group         | - Several candidates interviewed as a group  
- Often used by employers to evaluate which candidates stand out/should be moved to the next round | - This is a common type of interview for sales positions.  
- You want to speak enough, but also be sure to listen to others. A group interview is a way for an employer to see how you interact with others.  
- Be sure to reflect on what makes you unique prior to the interview. You do not want to repeat the same answer as everyone else in the group. |
| Series        | - Candidates participate in a series of two or more interviews | - Interviews can be multiple formats (panel, one-on-one, etc.).  
- Try to obtain a schedule of the day and know who you are interviewing with, so you can best prepare. |
DRESSING for the INTERVIEW

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- **Shoes**: should be shined, neat and clean; match suit and belt
- **Hands**: and fingernails well groomed; no chipped nail polish
- **Clothes**: should be wrinkle free
- **Piercings and Tattoos**: cover tattoos and take out obvious piercings
- **Jewelry**: avoid over-the-top accessories (nothing excessive)
- **Hair**: wear hair up if it is long and you fidget with it
- **Makeup**: that makes you look natural; no lines or lipstick on teeth

SUIT JACKET and PANTS/SKIRTS

- **Jet color**: should be the same color

COLORS

- **Colors**: kept to a dark, neutral, solid color palette
- **NO** bold prints or bright colors
- **Skirts**: should be knee length

BELTS

- **Belts**: should show no obvious wear and should coordinate with pants as well as shoes and socks

TIES

- **Ties**: stick to silk ties in a plain, stripe, paisley or small pattern

SOCKS

- **Socks**: should be dress socks, no athletic socks

Things to keep in mind:

- Statistics show that first impressions are determined by:
  - **55%**: the way you dress, act and walk through the door
  - **38%**: the quality of your voice, grammar and confidence
  - **7%**: the words you choose to say
Interview Preparation

Research the School District

Many prospective teachers apply to several different schools. In order to tailor your resume and cover letter appropriately and prepare for an interview, it is important to conduct research on the school district and the school to which you are applying. Important sources of information are the Human Resources department, the district/school board notes, friends/family/fellow teachers who are familiar with the school, and the website of the school itself. Researching a school district will provide information about the educational philosophies and practices in the school district and will help you to develop questions to ask the employer at the end of the interview. Some benefits to this research include:

- You will be perceived as a serious, interested candidate for the position.
- You will be able to more effectively communicate your qualifications related to the position and school district.
- You will be able to ask intelligent questions regarding the position and school district.

What to Find Out

You may wish to research the following details:

1. Is the school public or private?
2. What grades am I applying to teach? What subject areas?
3. What is the predominant educational philosophy of the school?
4. What are the major projects the school is involved in?
5. What are the possibilities for providing services beyond teaching?

Behavioral Interviewing and the STAR Technique

An increasing number of school districts use behavioral-based interviewing, which rests on the premise that past performance predicts future performance. Past performance examples may come from work experience, student teaching, internships, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, family life, etc. Prepare for the interview by having several different STAR examples in mind.

The STAR Technique

Situation: Describe the specific situation. Set up your story.
Task: What was the task you were trying to accomplish? Tell who, what, when, where, and why (include only relevant details!).
Action: What did you do to solve the problem or meet the task?
Result: Specify results. What happened? Give numbers, volume, dollars, etc. Link the skills you were demonstrating in this example to the specific job. Tell how the employer is going to benefit from hiring you.

Example:

"Your student teaching experience included a large amount of time working one-on-one with populations of diverse and at-risk students. Tell me about how this experience changed your philosophy of teaching."

- Situation- My student teaching placement was at St. Paul Central High School in St. Paul, Minnesota.
- Task- Part of the time while I was at Central, I was asked to work individually with five diverse and at-risk students who were having a difficult time mastering the concepts of their algebra class.
- Action- I met with the teacher to determine the specific areas where the students needed extra attention. From that point, I developed a course of study that provided reinforcement in basic concepts, differentiated methods of teaching algebra, and time for students to practice samples and ask questions that would increase their understanding.
- Result- As a result, all five of the students improved their general math scores at the end of the semester and had a better understanding of the basic concepts of algebra. Three of the students were also able to take concepts that we had worked on together and use them to successfully pass the mathematics portion of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment. I understand that part of my job as a teacher will often be to adapt my curriculum to meet the needs of students with different levels of understanding. My experience working with this population has
increased my comfort level and helped me develop a great number of useful tools and adaptations to empower all students to succeed.

Common Interview Questions

General
- Tell me about yourself including why you chose to become a teacher.
- How have your past experiences prepared you for teaching?
- What are the greatest challenges facing education today?
- What has been the most rewarding experience during your student teaching practicum?
- Why did you choose the University of Wisconsin-River Falls?
- What has been your favorite class while attending college and why?
- What research have you done about our school? Why do you want to work in this district?
- Why should we hire you?

Philosophy of Teaching and Learning
- Tell me about your philosophy of education and how it will impact the way you function as a teacher.
- How do you get students excited about the subject matter you teach, and what techniques do you use to stimulate active participation in the classroom?
- An experienced teacher offers you the following 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?
- How do you incorporate technology into your classroom? Provide examples.

Differentiated Instruction
- Describe how you have differentiated a lesson to accommodate varying student needs.
- Describe your experiences with IEPs.
- What is your experience with diversity? How do you integrate diversity into the classroom and lesson plans?
- How do you go about ensuring educational equity for all students, regardless of learning disabilities, ethnicity, or economic status?
- How have you worked to be an advocate for students who are at-risk?

Classroom Management
- Provide an example of your classroom management style.
- How do you keep students on-task?
- Describe some characteristics of a well-managed classroom. What are some of the techniques/rules you will implement to maintain classroom control?
- Describe the most challenging student discipline situation you have encountered and what happened.
- If you had a problem with a student in your class, at what point would you notify administrative staff?
- You are giving an assignment. A couple of students interrupt your presentation, complaining that it is confusing to them. How would you respond?

Assessment
- How do you measure student success, and how do you improve student achievement in your classroom?
- Describe a time when you provided specific feedback to students during a time of learning.
- Provide an example of how you have used formative assessments to inform your instruction. Please be specific in your example.
- Describe assessment measures that you have used and what you have done after receiving assessment results.

Parent Communication
- How would you like to report your students’ progress to parents?
- Developing a positive relationship with the parents of your students is a very important trait of successful teachers. Name two or three ways you would establish this with them at the beginning of the school year.
• How do you handle a difficult phone call to a parent?
• A parent comes to you and complains that what you are teaching their child is irrelevant to the child’s needs. How would you respond?
• Please provide an example of a time you contacted or engaged with a parent this term.
• What role have parents played in your classroom?
• How would you facilitate collaboration between home and school?

**Collaboration**
• How do you plan on becoming an integral part of our staff?
• What extracurricular activities might you direct or assist?
• Describe the best team you have ever been on and why?
• Describe how you see the role of a principal, and what type of support do you need from them?

**Grading and Lesson Planning**
• What instructional strategies have you found most effective?
• Do you believe in detailed lesson plans? How do you use lesson plans?
• Describe a lesson that was particularly successful by walking me through each stage from planning through delivery.
• Describe your preferred grading practices (weighting activities, creating study guides, late or missing assignments, retaking tests).
• Tell me about one of your most successful teaching experiences or units, and what made it successful?
• Please outline the key components of a lesson plan. How do you know if your lesson was successful?
• How do you incorporate writing into the curriculum?

**Questions for the Interviewer**
Employers expect that candidates will arrive to an interview with several questions for them. It is very rare for an interview to end without the interviewer asking, “Do you have any questions for me?” Having several well-thought-out questions ready to ask shows your preparation, interest in the position, and appreciation of the school district and its goals. Be sure you are selecting questions appropriate to your interviewer. These questions should be formulated from research performed on the school district. Some common questions that could be asked are:
• What are you most proud of about your school?
• How do teachers integrate technology into the classroom?
• Do you offer a mentoring program?
• How does the school district support professional development?
• What do you see as the greatest challenge in this position?
• Can you explain the performance review process, or how I would be evaluated?
• Describe the typical first year assignments for this position.
• What are the extracurricular opportunities for teachers at your school?
• How much freedom is given to teachers in the area of curriculum development?
• What is the educational philosophy favored by your school?
• What is the relationship/involvement between parents and the school?
• What are the procedures/mechanisms for dealing with challenging students?