Congratulations — you've been called for an interview! Your first step is to find out as much as you can about the school, the school district, and the music program where you will be interviewing. Use your contacts and try to acquire a general history of the music program—former teachers, problems, successes, and traditions.

You will also need to get directions to the interview site. Don't forget to ask about parking. Plan your travel time so you arrive at your interview city early. Do not be late. If you're driving to another city, allow time to get lost and still arrive on time. If you're a little early, drive around the area. What services are available? What is housing like? Pick up a local newspaper and get a sense of community issues and housing prices.

What Should You Wear?

Dress conservatively. School officials are looking for role models—clean-cut, all-American individuals to whom they will entrust their district's children. This is not a good time to demonstrate your individuality, sexuality, marching band jacket, or collection of rock band t-shirts. The clothes you wore in college may not be appropriate for your teaching career.

Keep your interviewer in mind when selecting what you'll wear, as clothes can be very distracting on a subconscious level. The person interviewing you may not be able to pinpoint exactly what it was about you that he or she didn't like. Select an interview look that says, "Look at me— I fit in here." Research has shown that the best interview colors for both men and women are gray, navy, and black.

Women need to be particularly cautious when interviewing with men. Don't wear anything that can be misconstrued as "flirtatious." Consider wearing an attractive suit or dress, and keep accessories to a minimum. Remember that wild earrings, low-cut or see-through blouses, and excessively tight clothing could project an image that an administrator (male or female) might not want to share with students. Style your hair so that it is neat and away from your face. Make-up and perfume should be kept to a minimum.

Men should wear a suit or a sports coat, tie, dress shirt, and polished shoes. A haircut is highly recommended. If you have long hair, tie it back. Facial hair should be neatly trimmed. Men's earrings should be tasteful, unobtrusive, or omitted.

Many interviews take place during the warm summer months. Don't waste your preparation by arriving wrinkled and drenched in perspiration. If you have a long drive to your destination, consider changing clothes somewhere after you arrive. This makes the long drive more comfortable, and you will feel more confident in clothes that are clean and wrinkle-free.
Body Language During Your Interview

Our bodies communicate a great deal about what we're thinking and feeling. What messages do you want to send during your interview? Do you have trouble maintaining eye contact? If so, you may be subconsciously telling your interviewer that you are not an honest, confident, self-assured professional. Do you habitually slouch when seated? This may indicate a sloppy, disinterested attitude. Do you usually fold your arms across your chest? This is a defensive posture that may indicate feelings of belligerence and closed-mindedness. Here are a few tips to help your body communicate to your advantage during the interview:

Maintain eye contact. Look at your interviewer when he or she is speaking and when you are responding (98 percent of the time). It's uncomfortable to maintain constant eye contact, so look away for an instant while the interviewer is asking you a question, and then return your eyes to your interviewer's face as you begin to answer.

Sit up straight. Place your hands together in your lap or rest them on the arms of your chair (no death grips, please). If you cross your legs, don’t make this a distraction with unnecessary nervous movements. Don’t make the mistake of trying to look too casual. It’s normal to be a little nervous.

Smile frequently. Administrators want to work with pleasant, happy people. You may not be able to express your terrific personality with verbal responses alone, so use your face! Do not, on the other hand, go overboard and grin uncontrollably or try to impress your interviewer with your joke-telling ability.

Shake hands. It’s customary for you to greet and bid farewell to other professionals by shaking hands. Many first impressions are destroyed by a limp and insincere handshake. Use a firm grip, but don’t break their wrist by pumping too hard.

Body Language Tips

What Questions Will You Be Asked?

It is impossible to anticipate every possible question an interviewer may ask, but preparation can improve your confidence and enhance your verbal presentation. Find a partner and have him or her ask you the sample interview questions in the list running from pages 18-21. Remember to pause for 1-2 seconds before answering a question, and try to keep your answers as brief as possible. Don’t ramble. Don’t try to bluff on questions you can’t answer.

Some questions need to be answered with a question before you can offer a personal response. For example, you might be asked how you feel about students who want to play football and participate in marching band at the same time. Your response might initially be, “How has this been handled in the past?” You should also be aware that every school experiences political problems between faculty and staff and that administrators may attempt to determine where you fit in on a specific issue. For instance, your response to, “Do you think it’s necessary for all elementary school teachers to assist with the Thanksgiving assembly dress rehearsal?” should probably be, “I’m not sure. I would need to study that situation and consult with my fellow teachers.” Find out if the administrator is hoping for a change.

Sample Interview Questions

25. How should music
be the toughest aspect of
teaching today?
24. Describe your most
difficult class different
day from other subjects?
23. What is the toughest
development concerning professional
career education in music?
22. What are your plans
to become a teacher?  
21. What made you decide to
career education in music?
18. What rules do you
every student teaching.
17. What’s your favorite
class in college?
16. Describe independent
class in college?
15. What is the ratio of time
and recreation?
14. What are the current
classroom? Tell me about
13. How do you individualize
music education today?
12. How do you introduce
career education in music?
11. Describe an ideal
curriculum in music.
10. What have you found to
be the toughest aspect of
discipline?
9. What is the most exciting
ingredient happening in music
education today?
8. State a behavioral
objective you taught in your
last class.
7. Where do you want to be
different five years from now? Ten
years?
6. How do you handle the
process?
5. What techniques do you
use to motivate students?
4. What was your favorite
instrument in the band? In the
music program?
3. Tell me about
your student teaching.
2. Describe your last teaching day.
1. What is your favorite
music teacher?
Special Interviews & Screening Procedures

Some schools are utilizing special techniques to pre-screen applicants. For example, the Gallup Teacher Insight Assessment is an online interview subscription tool for school districts. It uses a combination of question types that includes multiple choice scales (strongly agree, strongly disagree, etc.) and open-ended essays. A computer scores the essays by looking for “keywords” and then compares the scores on all questions to the scores of outstanding teachers, before sending the results to the school. Sample questions include:

- How would you plan a lesson to reach both auditory and visual learners?
- How would you incorporate different cultures in your classroom?
- Why did you want to become a teacher?
- After school, you come across a student whom you know who is crying. He’s 16 years old. You ask him what is the matter, and he says he was caught cheating. What would you do?
- One member of a team working on a curriculum project isn’t pulling his or her weight. What would you do?
- How would your co-workers describe you?
- Other similar tools are available for administrators to use to determine various aspects of your personality and philosophy of teaching. These tools, similar to the Gallup Assessment, look for keywords in your responses and provide the administrator with a “pass” or “fail” rating scale for each question.

Security Screening

Be prepared for a district to ask you to undergo fingerprint screening at an external site. This is becoming more and more popular as a tool for districts to protect themselves from hiring individuals with criminal records. Background checks of any kind may also be a state requirement that protect schools from hiring the wrong people.

Auditions

In rare cases, savvy administrators may ask you to “audition” for a position. This could include having you teach a sample class, conducting an ensemble, sightreading a musical selection on an instrument, or playing the piano. You may also find yourself being interviewed by a committee of music students and parents. Be prepared.

Sample Questions You Could Ask During An Interview

- How often would my classes meet? For how many minutes?
- Who are the other music teachers? What are their responsibilities?
- Is music required or elective?
- How much say will I have in scheduling my classes?
- Is there an addendum contract ($$) for extra duties?
- How transient is the student population?
- When would I get to start?
- What would my budget be?
- How many students are participating in ensembles now?
- Are there any special commitments that would be expected of me or my ensembles? Assemblies? Traditions?
- How successful has the program been recently?
- What are the facilities like? Can I see them?
- What is the district policy on professional leave for conferences, etc.?
- Could I have a copy of the salary schedule?
- Does the district reimburse travel expenses if I have to work at more than one building?
- What other duties are expected? (Lunch monitor, etc.)
- When will you be making your decision?
- Is there a music parent organization in place?
- Have your music students traveled in the past? How often?
- How important is music competition in this district? Would this be required?
- What types of music technology are available? Will music students have access to a technology lab?

Interview Follow-Up

After the interview, write a brief thank-you note or e-mail restating your interest in the position. Remind the interviewer of your qualifications and why you want to teach for this particular school district. Mail this note immediately, as it won’t help you if your interviewer receives the note five days after he or she has made the decision. Discuss what you learned during the interview with family, friends, and professors to help you prepare for a decision if you are offered the position.

Do not deluge the administrator with phone calls in the days that follow to see if the position has been filled. A call is appropriate only if you are offered another position while you are waiting and need to know if you must choose. If this happens, phone the person who interviewed you, say that you’ve been offered another position, and inquire about the status of their search.

If you’ve decided to accept another position, notify any potential employers of your decision with a phone call or withdrawal letter. Express your appreciation for their consideration, tell them you’ve found other employment, but do not tell them you found a “better” job. Never “burn bridges,” as such actions may come back to haunt you.