

Checklist ✓ for “Intelligent” Interviews

Guide from A to Z for Successful Marketing of Yourself

A Perspective for PCMEA members and new or recently relocated music teachers

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Congratulations, you have made it! You have completed your study of music education, are now certified to teach, and are looking for a full-time job. You send out your letters and résumés, and *voilà*—the requests for interviews start “rolling in.”

Now, what? How do you prepare to present all of your talents and schooling to a third person, usually someone who knows little about your content area, get a school district’s administration to notice your best qualities, and market yourself for a life-long career in a chosen community?

Many say that during the interview, *first impressions* are critical—“the first ten seconds will create the interviewer’s first judgments about you, and then after four minutes, it’s all over.” The research also suggests that during the interview, the evaluation of your merit is based 7% on what you say, 38% on your voice or how you say it, and 55% on our facial expressions and non-verbal cues.

However, in this highly competitive marketplace, employers are always screening for those high-end achievers, educators who can demonstrate the potential for mastery of their content areas and essential elements of instruction, show their love of children and teaching, understand the goals, philosophy and needs of public education, and model the skills of *professionalism*. They are looking for candidates who have the ability to speak in public, organize their time and manage stress, utilize technology in the workplace, display experience in problem solving and teamwork, and habitually self-evaluate and write down their personal goals and views in a concise, orderly, scholarly and open-minded manner.

Interviews involve the art and science of public relations, market research and selling oneself. In short, the more prepared you are, the better. The points below will serve as areas you can study, review and approach using that familiar process of a good musician—*practice, practice, practice!*

✓ Pre-Interview

- A. Complete a written self-assessment of accomplishments, skills, experiences, strengths, weaknesses, and qualities you do and do not wish to convey to a prospective employer.
- B. Research the school, music program and community:
 1. What do you know about this school district?
 2. What music courses and extra-curricular activities do they offer?
 3. What is the organization of the music curriculum and scheduling?
 4. How many periods (not counting lunch) are in the school day?
 5. What specialties are emphasized—Kodaly, Orff and/or Dalcroze?
 6. What is the average make-up of the community (education and socioeconomics)?
 7. What educational, cultural and sport/leisure activities are available in and around the community?
 8. What position(s) is(are) open and what duties are required?
 9. What avenues of professional development exist?
 10. What percentage of students are involved in the music program?
 11. What percentage own instruments, take lessons, seek outside ensembles, etc.?
 12. What indicators of cooperative parental and community support exist (concert attendance, private teachers, booster groups, community arts organizations, etc.)?
 13. What resources are budgeted for music students (sheet music, music technology, field trips, piano tuning, instruments and instrumental repair, teacher in-service, festivals, etc.)
 14. How often is curriculum updated?
 15. What is the school district grading scale and music grading policy/practice?
- C. Prepare a list of well-researched questions to be asked of the interviewer(s).
- D. Find someone who works in the district; ask him/her about the job opening, the school district's mission statement, work climate and community.
- E. Compile/review an extensive list of personal examples for modeling professionalism (these will become interview questions so have your views/experiences ready):
 1. Statement of philosophy and goals
 2. Time and stress management
 3. Use of technology
 4. Oral and written expression
 5. Leadership
 6. Teamwork
 7. Judgment, problem solving and decision making
 8. Planning and organizing
 9. Innovation and creativity
 10. Personal initiative, energy and enthusiasm
 11. Self-insight and professional development
 12. Dependability
 13. Adaptability
 14. Appearance
- F. Practice interviewing techniques (role-playing, mock interviews, audio/video-taping).
- G. Be prepared and familiarize yourself with specific elements of the interview site:
 1. Learn the name, title and level of responsibility of the administrator(s) and/or interviewers.
 2. Know where you are going (make a trial run).
 3. Arrive early (at least fifteen minutes before interview).
 4. Dress to project an image of confidence and success (wear a suit).
 5. Bring additional materials (transcripts, portfolio, updated resume, etc.).

✓ Interview Process

- H. Market yourself with a positive first impression:
 1. Promote a positive and cheerful attitude.
 2. Share a warm greeting and firm handshake.
 3. Build rapport and demonstrate an attitude of openness and sensitivity to the interviewer's style.
 4. Show a feeling of mutual responsibility for creating a comfortable atmosphere and establishing common ground
- I. Treat the interview as an exchange of information between two individuals.
- J. Be yourself and demonstrate relaxed speech, posture and body language
- K. Exhibit positive nonverbal cues:
 1. Respond to interviewer with an occasional affirmative nodding of the head.
 2. Sit erect in chair with hands, feet and arms unfolded, leaning forward.
 3. Offer good eye contact and smile appropriately.
 4. Maintain a pleasant facial expression.
- L. Provide thoughtful, professional and firm answers to interviewer's questions:
 1. Back up statements with specific examples.
 2. Share the outcome or solution to a specific problem.
 3. Summarize to emphasize your strengths.
- M. Avoid verbal clutter—speak in short sentences or bulleted items (not long paragraphs), using active verbs, concrete examples, summaries and transitions.
- N. Remember the three C's—be calm, concise and congenial.
- O. Be open, thoughtful and a good listener of the interviewer's points/questions.
- P. Don't go overboard and volunteer too much!
- Q. Say what you mean—if you get the job, you may be “stuck” with your words.
- R. Angle your position so as not to sit directly in front of interviewer—select chair *beside* the interviewer's desk, not *across* desk (avoid barriers).
- S. Use the person's name when talking—it's the best way to get/keep his/her attention.
- T. If you do not know the answer to a question, be honest and admit it— inexperience is not a crime!
- U. Interview the interviewer—ask questions that reflect the amount of research you have done rather than your lack of knowledge about the employer.
- V. Close the interview with a short summary of why you're the best candidate for the job, thank the interviewer, give him/her another firm handshake and walk confidently from the room.

✓ Post Interview

- W. Debrief yourself—write down everything you feel you handled right and wrong.
- X. Note information you need to include in future correspondence/follow-ups.
- Y. Write a personalized thank-you letter (set yourself apart from other applicants).
- Z. Follow-up your visit by making phone calls, sending requested materials, etc.

Some additional recommendations

- ✓ Be ready to respond to several of the most popular questions at interviews:
 1. Who had the greatest influence on you becoming a teacher and why?
 2. What are the most important qualities of an outstanding educator?
 3. What is your personal philosophy of student discipline?
 4. How would you assess the learning in your classroom/rehearsal?
 5. What purpose does music education serve in the public schools?
 6. Describe the importance of continuing professional development and how you plan to incorporate it throughout your career.
 7. What are your personal goals? Where do you see yourself in ten years?

- ✓ Be aware of the occasional use of *stress interviews*, an uncomfortable style of the interviewer(s) deliberately introducing “stresses” into the conversation, long periods of silence, challenging your opinions, or seemingly being unfriendly or disinterested—all designed to see how you’ll react under pressure.
- ✓ Some administrators have a perception that music teachers are “temperamental” or have big egos. How would you respond to a direct question on this subject?
- ✓ Avoid describing yourself as a specialist. Underscore your enthusiasm for teaching and love of and proficiency in music. De-emphasize preferences or expertise in a particular music subject, grade level or performance area (choral director, string teacher, etc.). *You teach children.*
- ✓ Don’t highlight inquiries on salary, benefits, contract length, etc. Ask these specifics later if they are not offered before signing a contract.
- ✓ Administrators are always looking for staff members to sponsor extra-curricular activities. Make sure you express enthusiasm for participating in school events *after* the final bell rings. State any interest in coaching sports, directing musicals, charting marching band shows, organizing forensics or speech and debate, working on the school yearbook or newspaper, etc.
- ✓ Bring to the interview a copy of your professional portfolio with the following:
 - recent references;
 - student teaching evaluation sheets;
 - sample programs of recitals and concerts;
 - updated copy of resume;
 - personal philosophy of music education;
 - sample sets of lesson plans, original compositions and student assessment vehicles;
 - copy of transcripts;
 - certificates/letters of scholarships and other awards;
 - informal congratulatory notes on student, substitute or private teaching, as well as recitals, shows, public speaking engagements and performances.
- ✓ Video-tape examples of teaching and performances and loan a copy to the interviewer:
 - demonstrations of elementary, secondary, general music, choral and instrumental classes;
 - senior solo recital;
 - chamber music recitals;
 - student teaching experiences of your conducting and piano accompanying performances;
 - summer music camp and/or private teaching/coaching experiences;
 - public speaking at workshops or PCMEA meetings.

Acknowledgements: Carnegie-Mellon University pamphlet *Interviews: Stages and Topics Commonly Asked*; Upper St. Clair School District *Professional Applicant Interview Reference Manual* by Jean L. Rogers, Director of Human Resources.

Additional Sources: *Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed* by H. Anthony Medley; *More Power to You* by Connie Brown Glaser and Barbara Steinberg Smaller; *You Are the Message: Secrets of the Master Communicators* by Roger Ailes; *Help! My Job Interview Is Tomorrow!* by Mary Ellen Templeton; *Knock 'em Dead: The Ultimate Job Seekers' Handbook* by Martin John Yate.