

The Job Interview Playbook – Directing a Showstopping Performance!

by Paul K. Fox, Chair of the PMEA Council for Teacher Training, Recruitment, and Retention □ PMEA News Summer 2016 □ Page 1 of 2

Employment Tips for PCMEA Members and Prospective Music Teachers

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts... – William Shakespeare*

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice! How do you market yourself, take interviews, and succeed in landing a job? **Practice, practice, practice!**

This article reviews rationale and methods to intentionally prepare, rehearse, “stage,” and “act out” your answers to potential employment screening questions.

Depending on the structure of the interview, the hiring procedures of the institution, and the type of session (whether it is a general screening prior to any job opening, or the first round, second round, demonstration lesson, final round with the superintendent, etc. in order to fill a specific position), you will be exposed to many different kinds of questions.

For **samples of more than 70 interview questions**, please go to <https://paulfox.blog/2016/02/27/interview-questions-revisited/>. As they say, it is time to “woodshed” your upcoming performances!

The first step is to think up as many examples as possible of past incidents that exhibit your **mastery of the core standards of teaching**, critical thinking and problem solving, professionalism, music and academic accomplishments, and all positive interactions with children, in both musical and non-musical settings. Assemble and catalog these successful “scenes” (even write them down) to prep your responses for the interview.

At job fairs and mock interviews for music education majors, soon-to-be candidates are advised to practice their **storytelling skills** and recall relevant **personal anecdotes** in order to satisfy the interviewers’ questioning, promote an image of competency and self-confidence, “show that you have what it takes” and would be a “good fit” for their school district, and ultimately “ace” the examination.

One example given to the “recruits” is probably best for a sales position. If an interviewer asks something like, “What was your first job?” – your response should not be a quick rejoinder of several words like “a paper route.” To enhance your **“personal brand”** and illustrate your character, proficiency, and work history, you should take the opportunity to tell a story about that first “gig.” Describe what you did as the neighborhood paperboy, perhaps revealing a little insight into the kind of entrepreneur you are, adoption of “customer-first” philosophy and habits, a savvy business sense, focused motivation, and a strong work ethic. Narrate an anecdote rather than list facts. Plan (and dress rehearse) something like this script:

“My route was small, so I surveyed my existing customers, asked about their needs, desires, and their definition of a ‘perfect paper delivery,’ and how I could help them. I tagged and followed-up on their unique requests, like ‘hiding the pile of papers that end up accumulating during vacation periods’ (avoiding any advertising to the world that homeowner is out-of-town), and ‘when NOT to place the paper in the screen door early in the morning so as to avoid waking up the dogs and the whole household.’ I also solicited business from non-subscribers, asking them how I could be of assistance. Pretty soon, word got around, and my enhanced customer-care translated into almost doubling the number of the people on my route.”

Set-up one or more video recording sessions of **“mock interviews.”** Put yourself in the shoes of the both the interviewer and the interviewee... randomize and select questions from all categories for multiple interview-settings and formulate your responses. View and assess your performances. What are your strengths and weaknesses, and what improvements could be recommended? Besides the content and clarity of your answers,

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monitor and evaluate your body language, eye contact, posture, vocal tone and projection, and those intangibles like “charm,” “attitude,” and “first impressions.” If you do this in a group (roommates, collegiate music education chapter, methods class, etc.), request feedback from your “critics.”

Finally, here are **five more considerations for successful interviews**:

1. **Answer the questions as truthfully as possible.** Be true to yourself. Never try to predict or recite what you think the interview panel wants to hear. Also, keep in mind, “anything you say may be held against you...” such as declaring a willingness to participate in a host of extracurricular activities, sports, student council, and other clubs. If you claim you want to become the marching band director, musical choreographer, swim coach, Sadie Hawkins dance organizer, and yearbook sponsor, the administrators (who are always seeking to fill these positions) will expect you to sign up for all of these extra-duties in your first year!
2. Some questions may be designed to see **how you respond to stress.** Although no longer considered a valid measurement of intellectual capacity or emotional stability, “stress interviews” are still conducted by some institutions. You’ll know immediately if for some reason you are thrown into one of these seemingly “hostile environments.” No matter what you say or how you respond to a question, the interviewer(s) will exhibit a negative attitude, look disinterested, inattentive, unimpressed, or disappointed, or even act angry, belligerent, or argumentative. Talk about “playing to a dead crowd!” Actually, their sole purpose is to evaluate your behavior during artificially-induced tension or conflict. Your only strategy? Play the game! Stay calm, cool, and collected.
3. **It is not a crime** for not knowing the meaning of a single educational term, solution to a problem, or failing to answer a question. If you are just starting out in your career, recently completed coursework in music education, don’t be surprised if a question or two is beyond your study or experience. Just admit it! You could say something like, “I haven’t had the pleasure of teaching long enough to totally comprehend what I would do in that situation.” Or perhaps, “I am not familiar with that term/method/philosophy, but I am willing to research it, ask my building principal or supervisor for his/her advice,” etc.
4. **Don't get carried away**, offer too much information, or share irrelevant personal information or random opinions. Listen carefully to the question. Be precise and stay “on topic.” Refine your response to a specific story to back up your perspective, understanding, and/or success in dealing with the issue. And, as the dictionary defines the term “run on,” don’t “blab, blubber, blurt, cackle, chat, gossip, gush, jabber, mumble, mutter, prattle, rant, rave, run off at the mouth, trivialize, or yak!”
5. **Search and consume every job resource** you can get your hands on. Peruse articles about marketing your professionalism, branding yourself, creating e-portfolios, taking interviews, etc. Archives of numerous blogs, handouts, and online sources are available from the top menu link “Becoming a Music Educator” from this WordPress site – <https://paulfox.blog/becoming-a-music-educator/>.

“The world is a stage” and now you need to “act your part” when participating in employment interviews. Carefully prepare to show-off the best elements of your training, skill sets, and personality traits. In the field of music and music education, we preach “perfect practice makes perfect,” so apply your performance know-how to interview storytelling and get ready for the questions! **The stage is now yours!** “Break a leg!”

*The word “theater” comes from the Greeks. It means “the seeing place.”
It is the place people come to see the truth about life and the social situation. – Stella Adler*

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