

Interviews

Chilling Out In The Hot Seat: Interviewing To Get Job Offers

by Rick Roberts



From the moment you walk into view, shake hands, and greet an employer for a job interview, they have already made a quick evaluation of you and within the next few minutes they will have made a tentative hiring decision on you. Employers use a variety of interview methods including:

- 1. General Interview:** One half-hour to one hour in duration it provides for an exchange of enough general information to enable both employer and candidate to determine if further contact is warranted.
- 2. Screening interview:** A short term interview designed basically to eliminate unqualified candidates
- 3. Second or Selection Interview:** One hour to an entire day in duration; both employer and candidate engage in a more in-depth discussion of qualifications, responsibilities and other aspects of the position and the organization. This could include interview sessions with individuals and groups. You might also be interviewed over lunch and/or dinner.

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“Be energetic, full of life. In brief, be a person of interest. Never be just another applicant”

BE KNOWLEDGEABLE

About the Organization: Interviewers are continually amazed at the large number of candidates who come into job interviews without any apparent preparation and a very vague understanding of the organization or field. The interviewer is trying to determine if you can become part of their organization and do a specific job. Do your homework and find out as much as you can about their organization. Most organizations maintain a website with information about their organization.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS!

First impressions are lasting impressions and you don't get a second chance to make a first impression. Appearance should reflect maturity and self-confidence. Be neat, clean, and dress in good taste. No extremes! Leave large bags outside the interview room. Some points to remember:

Attire and grooming for women: A professional wardrobe should always include a suit, either with a skirt or pants. The suit is the best bet in an interview. However, you should dress according to the job or field in which you are working. For example, if you are interviewing for a 1st grade teaching position, a suit may seem rather cold and staunch. Not the warm and caring feeling the teaching environment brings. In this case a tailored dress, slacks and shirt, pants suit, or skirt, blouse and jacket would be appropriate. Here are some tips:

- Choose colors that compliment you and are not especially bright. Navy and gray are always good bets.
- Wear pantyhose and clean, conservative shoes.
- Basic, comfortable pumps, polished, with medium or low heels are appropriate.
- Skirts and dresses no shorter than an inch above the knee.
- Blouses should not have plunging necklines or excessive frills; white and ivory are always safe colors, but any neutral tone that matches

your suit is fine. Avoid sleeveless blouses when possible.

- Hair should be neat and pulled away from face.
- Nails should be neat and trimmed. If you choose to wear polish, avoid the bright colors and styles and be sure they are free of chips.
- Minimal makeup with no bright colors. Remember that less is best.
- Do not wear dangling earrings/bracelets or large, clunky jewelry. Plain studs or small earrings are best; a single necklace is fine, as is a watch and a ring or two.
- Portfolio, purse and briefcase – You may want to invest in a portfolio or briefcase that can neatly hold all of your necessary items (i.e. pens, paper, resumes, reference sheet, etc.) and any necessity items from your purse. The less you have to carry the better.



In a corporate setting, it is recommended that men wear dark or gray suits (solid or subtle pinstripes). In organizations that are less formal (possibly nonprofit, education), one might consider a blazer, shirt and tie rather than a full suit.

- Dress shirts should be solid, preferably white. Be sure the shirt and suit are pressed/ironed. Avoid short-sleeved shirts.
- A variety of ties may be worn, keeping in mind that muted colors in solid, stripes, or small pattern are preferred.
- Make sure your shoes are clean and polished.
- Portfolio and/or briefcase – You may want to invest in a portfolio or briefcase that can neatly hold all of your necessary items (i.e. pens, paper, resumes, reference sheet, etc.). This will give you an organized professional look.
- Minimize or avoid the use of cologne; many interviews take place in small offices.
- If you have long hair, strongly consider putting it in a ponytail to keep it out of your face, giving a more professional appearance.
- If you do not have a full beard or mustache, shave! Beards and mustaches should be well groomed.



BE ON TIME!

Arrive at least 15 minutes early for the interview in order to acclimate yourself.

What To Bring: A Small Portfolio For:

- Extra copies of your resume.
- A listing of the names, titles, organizations, addresses and phone numbers of your references.
- A “cheat sheet” which contains information to assist you in filling out an application neatly and completely. (Employers often use the application as a screening device.)
- Paper and pen/pencil.
- A portfolio containing samples of your work (if appropriate).
- Note: You may never be asked for any of these items, but when the occasion does arise, you will show that you are prepared and professional.

HELPFUL TIPS

1. Be energetic, full of life. In brief, be a person of interest. Never be just another applicant.
2. Begin and end with a good firm handshake (women too!).
3. Be pleasant, friendly, courteous, and tactful.
4. Be relaxed, cool and calm.
5. Always maintain good eye contact. Follow the interviewer’s eyes (If more than one interviewer, include each person by moving from one to another).
6. Listen carefully and answer the questions asked. Don’t go off on tangents.
7. Keep your answers concise and to the point, unless you’re asked to elaborate.
8. Use facial expressions and gestures to help communicate your thoughts and convey your personality.
9. Be truthful but positive.
10. Don’t be defensive, hostile, apologetic, desperate, or critical.
11. Let your sense of humor show through.
12. Create a positive feeling toward yourself.

13. Restate your interest in the position at the close of an interview.
14. Make a clear connection between you and the position.
15. When answering questions, use specific examples whenever possible.
16. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
17. Use the tone of your voice to draw attention to key points and to show enthusiasm toward the job and organization and to keep the interest of the interviewer.



Weaknesses/Negatives

- What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?
- Did you ever have problems with your supervisor?

Skills/Abilities/Qualifications

- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
- What qualifications do you have that makes you think you will be successful?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
- Why should I hire you?
- Why should we hire you over another candidate?

Knowledge of the Organization

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What do you know about our organization?

Values Clarification

- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Do you have a geographical preference?
- Will you relocate?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Are you willing to spend six months as a trainee?
- Describe your idea of an ideal job?
- Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?

Experience

- Tell me about your experience?
- What jobs have you held?
- What have you learned from some jobs you have held?
- What jobs have you enjoyed most? Least? Why?
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?

ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Close to 70% of an interview will be devoted to you talking about you. No matter how personable you are or how well you communicate, you can not anticipate some of the intricate, probing questions which may be asked. Experienced interviewers can spot an unprepared interviewee very quickly. It is critical to prepare and practice for your interviews.

COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Self-Awareness

- Tell me about yourself
- How do you think a friend or a professor who knows you well would describe you?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What led you to choose the career for which you are preparing?



BEHAVIORAL BASED QUESTIONS

More and more interviewers are using behavioral based questions or situational questions to predict future behavior based on past behavior. Here are some examples:

- Tell me about the time you were most persuasive in overcoming resistance to your ideas or point of view..
- Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating person with whom you have worked.
- Tell me about a time when you felt most pressured and stressed in your work/school/internship.
- Describe a time when you were most frustrated or discouraged in reaching your objectives or goals.
- What do you feel has been your most significant work/school/internship related accomplishment?
- Describe the last time you did something which went well beyond the expected in your work/school/internship.
- Tell me how you go about organizing your work and scheduling your own time.
- Tell me about a most difficult problem or decision which you faced in your work/internship/school assignment.
- Tell me about the last time your made a decision which backfired.
- Tell me about the time you most regretted not getting advice before going ahead.



Goals/Objectives

- What are your short range and long range goals and objectives?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?

Education

- How has your education prepared you for a career?
- Why did you select your college or university?
- If you could, would you plan your academic study differently?
- Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
- Do you have plans for continued study?
- Why did you pick your program or concentration?
- What courses did you like best and why? least?

Salary

- What do you expect to earn in five years?
- What are your salary expectations?
- What did you earn in your last job?

Interests

- What do you do with your free time?
- What are your hobbies?
- What types of books do you read?

General

- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates.
- What 2 or 3 accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?

THE “STAR” TECHNIQUE

One strategy which will help you with responding to behavioral based interview questions and styles is the STAR technique. The steps involved are to describe a SITUATION (S) or TASK (T) encountered, to identify the ACTIONS (A) taken to address the SITUATION or TASK, and to discuss the RESULTS (R) achieved by the ACTIONS.



HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE STAR TECHNIQUE:

Question: “Thinking back over your college experience, describe a situation in which you were challenged in using your communication skills. Tell me all about it in detail.”

Your response might be: “Last semester, I participated with four other students on a research project for a Biology course. One of the members was difficult to work with as she had a tendency to not want to listen to our ideas on how to complete the research project. In fact, she had appointed herself “group leader.” **(SITUATION/TASK)**

“The other members of the group and myself recognized that she was impacting our efforts to complete this project. I decided to approach her and discuss with her our thoughts and feelings on her being in charge and not listening to our ideas. When I sat down with her one-on-one and communicated our concerns to her, she was surprised.” **(ACTION)**

“As a result of our conversation, she admitted that she had a hard time trusting other individuals to do quality work and would take charge of a group to ensure that quality work would get done. In discussing further with her what her concerns were and more specifically the project and what we were trying to accomplish, she began to understand the different ways we could all contribute to the project. She realized that she would not have to single-handedly deal with everything and would have less stress to share the workload of the project with the rest of us. We all worked well together through the rest of the project and received an “A” for our efforts.” **(RESULTS)**

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Employers may not legally ask applicants race, religion, national origin, marital status, children, relatives, age, birthplace of applicant or relatives, prior record, sex/ gender, and handicaps . Anything that is not a “bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ)” may not be covered directly, though the interviewer may seek the information indirectly. Be sure you know the law what questions are legal and which ones are not. Request clarification if you need it. A suggested response might be: “I am not sure what that has to do with my ability to do this job...” Remember to “keep your cool” and be as positive and confident as possible.

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK:

Remember that you have as much right to evaluate an employer as an employer has to evaluate you. One way to ensure that you have adequate information to make a sound judgment is to ask questions. Here are some questions for you to ask:

- What kind of supervision will there be and how will I be evaluated?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- What kind of orientation and training are available to new employees?
- Are there any long range plans for the office or department?
- If someone had this position before, why did he/ she leave?
- What are the major issues that this organization will be facing in the near future?
- What do you see as the biggest challenge for the person taking this job?
- What happens next?



AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Follow up your interview with a thank-you note. In this note, you may refer to specific issues which were discussed, express your thanks, and restate your interest in the position. Also, provide whatever credentials, references, or employment applications which may have been requested by the employer. If you do not hear from the employer in the specified period of time, you may wish to contact the employer with a phone call.

DISCUSSING SALARY

Prior to the interview stage, research the job market and learn the salary range for the types of jobs for which you will be interviewing.

Salary is often based upon value and your ability to produce. You will need to know your market value. Do not negotiate salary until a job offer has been made. Negotiation involves compromise. It is a “win/win” situation. Negotiate on the basis of your qualifications; your education, experience, skills,

and capabilities in relation to their worth in the job market, NOT on the basis of your wants or needs. Some salary scales are non negotiable, especially in the non profit and public sectors.

HOW DID YOUR INTERVIEW GO?

Interviewing is a skill that is developed through experience and evaluation. After each interview, sit down and assess your performance “under fire.” Examine both the strong points and the weak points of your interview and develop strategies for improvement.



Teaching Interviews



THE TEACHING INTERVIEW

What Qualities Do School Administrators look for:

- Civility, cooperation, pleasant demeanor, kindness
- Good rapport with students, love of children
- Commitment to education, enthusiasm, sense of mission
- Good character: honesty, integrity, fairness, and other role model qualities
- Strong professional ethics
- Knowledge of education or subject matter
- Excellent grammatically correct written and oral communication
- Flexibility, creativity
- Professional Appearance
- Ability and willingness to do coaching or extra-curricular assignments

Self-Awareness/Career Decisions/ Values/Your Educational Preparation

- When did you first become interested in teaching?
- Why did you decide on a career in education?
- Tell me something about your background
- What experience influenced your decision to teach?
- How will your students describe you?
- How well has your college/university prepared you for the field of teaching?
- What coursework have you taken that have made

you especially suited for this position?

- Describe your educational background and teaching experience related to your subject area.
- Tell us about yourself and why are you interested in this school district and or/position?
- What academic subjects did you like best? Least?
- What part does your family play in your life?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- Do you have a geographical preference?

Technology

- How would you apply technology to enhance daily instruction and increase student learning?
- How would you or have you incorporated technology in your classroom?
- Explain your skills using a computer? What computer software have you used?
- Are you comfortable with the use of technology in the classroom?

Teaching Experience/Instructional Skills/Strengths/Weaknesses

- Discuss your student teaching experience. What did you like? Dislike? Changes you would have made?
- Please review for us your teaching experiences such as levels and subjects taught, years, locations etc
- Please tell me about your most challenging experience while working with children or in the classroom?
- How was your room organized? What was the atmosphere of your room?
- What techniques do you use to keep pupils actively involved during a lesson?
- What would you do to insure that children understand exactly what is expected in a homework assignment?
- How do you deal with the unmotivated student?



- Tell me about some specific motivational strategies you use to get students excited about learning
- What current educational trends do you consider to have the most impact and how do you implement them?
- How well organized are you? Why is organization important for a teacher?
- What do you include in your daily lesson plans? How closely do you follow your plans?
- What are some of the considerations you make when planning your lessons?
- How much homework will you assign? How do you know how long it will take your students?
- Should a teacher intentionally use humor in the classroom? How do you use humor in the classroom?
- In planning your lessons or units of study, how do you organize and prepare your material?
- What can you contribute to our school?

Classroom Management

- What is your classroom management plan/style?

What are your goals?

- If I walked into your classroom; what would it look, feel, and sound like?
- What role does classroom management play in the educational process?
- When students say they want the teacher to be fair, what do you think they mean?

Interests/Extracurricular Activities

- Tell us about your other school-related experiences such as extra-curricular activities, committees, curriculum development, etc.
- What hobbies or interests do you have that might help you as a teacher in the classroom?

Discipline

- What worked best for you in classroom control?
- Describe your philosophy regarding discipline?
- What was the most challenging discipline problem you've encountered and how did you handle it?
- Describe the elements you would include in a discipline plan.
- How would you deal with a student who disrupts?
- What kind of rules do you have in your classroom? How are they established?
- What do you feel are the most important factors in classroom control?
- How would you create and promote a safe atmosphere within your classroom?

Assessment/Follow-up

- If pupils were having difficulty learning a skill or concept, what would you do?
- Tell us how well you assess your students to determine how well they are learning.
- What techniques would you use to be sure that pupils understand?
- How do you know whether pupils understand what you are teaching during a lesson?
- How do you feel when a student fails?
- How would you assess your effectiveness

as a teacher?

- What kinds of materials have you used to assess pupil strengths and weaknesses?
- What kinds of tests do you like to give?
- What are some methods of communicating student progress to parents other than report cards?

Philosophy/Teaching Style/Motivation

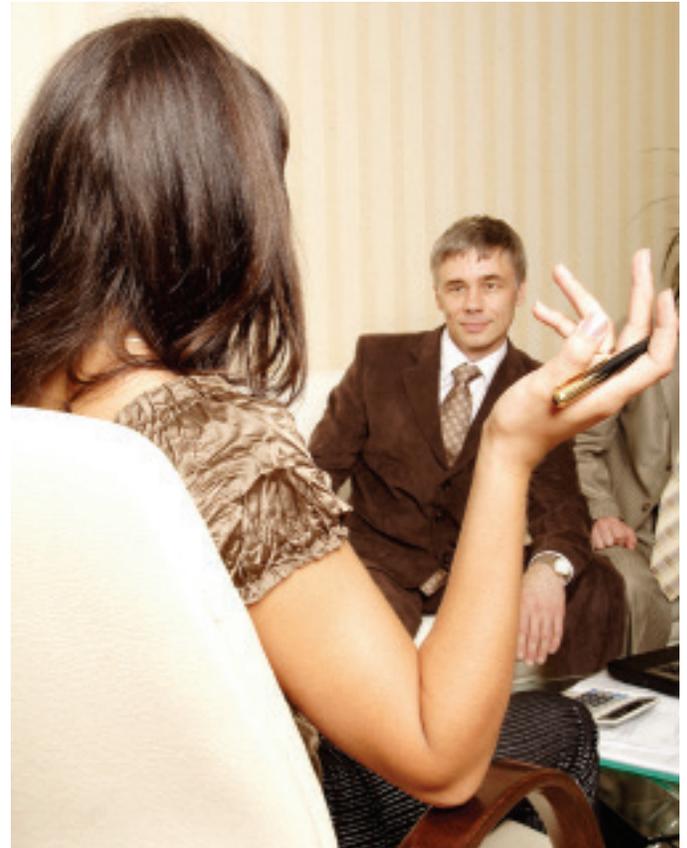
- What is your philosophy of education?
- How can you get students excited about your subject area?
- What innovative ideas would you like to initiate in your classroom?
- Describe three ways to motivate students
- What kind of relationship do you want with your students?
- Who was your best teacher and why?
- What subject do you want to teach and how would you teach it?
- Would you describe an outstanding teacher to me please?
- If you could establish an ideal school, what would it be like?
- What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with and why?
- What do you do when a supervisor or principal criticizes a teaching technique that you are using?
- Do you have a specific grade level/age that you prefer to teach? Why?
- Describe a time when you were most frustrated or discouraged in reaching your objectives or goals.
- What do you feel has been your most significant work/school/internship related accomplishment within the past year or so?
- Describe the last time you did something which went well beyond the expected in your work/school/internship.

Short-term and Long Term Career Goals

- What are your professional plans?
- What are your career goals: short term and long term?

Professional Development

- What have you read in the last six months or year?



Diversity/Cultural Awareness/Learning Differences

- Discuss your feelings/experience in reference to working in an urban setting
- What opportunities have you had to bring multi-cultural education into your classroom?
- What experience have you had with students from culturally diverse backgrounds?
- How do you provide for individual differences within your classroom? What was the socio-economic level of your students?
- How will you instruct/challenge students with varying abilities?
- How do you handle curricular content in classes with many levels of ability?
- Describe different student learning styles or modalities of students and how you adjust lessons to benefit those differing styles.
- What would you do if 50% of a class did poorly on a test?
- Are there any materials you have used that you find are especially effective for slow learners or bright students?

Situations/Problem and Solving/Stress Questions

- Describe a difficult decision and how you solved it
- Describe an experience with kids or peers by discussing:
 - The most difficult moment/situation
 - The most rewarding moment/situation
 - An incident that required discipline
 - A favorite/least favorite student, camper, hall resident, etc.
- What would you do or how would you treat a student who refused to do the work assigned?
- What does “teamwork” mean to you? Give an example
- Describe your approach with a parent who is upset with you—and you know you are right.
- Did you ever have problems with your supervisor?
- What causes you to lose your temper?
- How often have you been absent from work, school, or training?
- Have you ever had trouble with other people on the job?
- Can you take instructions without getting upset?
- Don’t you feel you’re a little too old/young for this job?
- With your background, we believe that you are overqualified for this position. Why have you applied for this job?
- You haven’t had sufficient experience in this field. Can you elaborate on related experiences?
- Our experience with women on this job has not been good. Why do you think you would be a better suited?
- What would irritate you most if I as a manager did it?
- Tell me about the last time you were criticized by a supervisor/professor.
- Tell me about a time when you felt most pressured and stressed in your work/school/internship.
- Tell me about a most difficult problem or decision which you faced in your work/internship/school

assignment.

- Tell me about the last time you made a decision which backfired.
- Tell me about the time you most regretted not getting advice before going ahead.
- Tell me about the last significant crisis situation you faced in your work.
- Tell me about a time when you were most persuasive in overcoming resistance to your ideas.
- Tell me about the last time you had a disagreement or clash with someone at work.
- If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would you do?
- What do you believe your role and obligations to be toward other faculty members?
- How do you feel about parent contact?
- Tell me about the time you were most persuasive in overcoming resistance to your ideas or point of view.
- Tell me about the last time someone made an unreasonable request of you.

Knowledge of School District/Community

- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization/school?
- What do you know about our organization/school?
- What job in our organization/school do you want to work toward?

