

General Tips for Interviewing

These tips for interviewing are intended to help you think about how to approach your interview and prepare for questions. Ultimately, your responses to interview questions need to be congruent with who you are as a person and higher education professional.

Preparation, Preparation, Preparation

Do your homework! Talk to colleagues, visit the institution's website (especially the press releases—lots of information there), and search the Chronicle of Higher Education website for references to the institution and its key leaders. Review the mission and vision statements for both the institution and department, review any strategic planning documents on their website, and become familiar with key institutional descriptors and statistics.

Be Prepared with Measurable and Tangible Examples

Understand the concepts related to “behavioral interviewing.” While interviewers will likely want to know your philosophy on certain topics, they are much more interested in your management and leadership skills. Behavioral interview questions will begin with phrases such as:

- “Talk about your experience with...”
- “Explain how you have...”
- “Tell us about a time when...”
- “How have you managed change effectively to improve...?”
- “Describe a scenario in which you...”

Have examples (stories) in mind that demonstrate your ability to not only be responsive to issues that arise, but also outline how you have been strategic in advancing key areas/goals of your department.

Three Threes

Be prepared with three reasons you want them, three reasons they want you, and three good questions! You must always ask, “How will success be measured in this position?”

Understand the Search Committee

If not provided, ask for the names and titles of committee members *prior* to your interview. Look at the members of the committee as stakeholders—why are they there? What is the committee's charge? Who is the final decision-maker? Do not assume that you will interview with a single person. Anticipate group interviews and consecutive one-on-one interviews.

Expect the Unexpected

For many committee members, particularly faculty and students, this may be their first experience serving on a search committee. Similarly, committee chairs may be new to their role and may not have received significant (or any) training. Be prepared to help smooth over any rough spots.

There may be requirements from the human resources office that have not been clearly articulated by the search committee chair, so you will want to inquire if there are supplemental application processes that need to be completed. Some candidates have been screened out because they did not “officially” apply via the institution’s human resources job page.

There may be political issues on campus that find their way into interview questions. While you need to be open to “what if” scenario questions from the committee, be professional and show discretion by not getting drawn into opinion-based dialog. Problem-solving is one thing, but unpacking emotional baggage is better left for another venue.

Be Enthusiastic

Many interviewers get tired of the process and lose their energy. Be careful, as this can be contagious. Think about the pace of your answers and consider how the tone of your voice engages the committee. Most committees are also trying to get a sense of “fit,” so it is fine to let your personality shine through. Though you need to be careful, appropriate humor or wit can keep things upbeat.

Write a Tailored and Timely Thank-You Note

Either via email or snail mail, express your appreciation for the interview, highlight your strengths, and reflect what you learned throughout the interview. Be careful to proofread your note before sending it on its way.