



CAREER SERVICES CENTER

INTERVIEW PREPARATION GUIDE FOR EDUCATION/ECE MAJORS

(Information is to be used as a guidance and not repeated verbatim)

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Congrats! Based on your job application/resume, an employer saw potential in you and requested an interview with you. During the interview, you can determine whether the organization and position matches what you want, express to the employer that you have the right skills and qualifications as well as demonstrate how you can relate/fit in with the organization.

Do your Research: Take the time to learn about the organization, school, district, company, etc. and the people who might be interviewing you. If you have a contact who works for the employer, see if you can meet with him/her for an informational interview. Try to identify what they're looking for in a candidate, the purpose of the position, the population/demographics of the student body, the organization's goals, mission, values, needs, etc. If you can identify the people who you will be interviewing with, write down their names and research who these people are, their roles, background, and interests. Often, you can find this information on the organization's website, LinkedIn, Google, etc. Be able to explain why you are interested in working for them.

Interview Format: Identify the type of interview you are going to attend. There are different types of interviews. It is also common to experience a combination of the following.

- Initial Screening - Sometimes an HR representative will contact you to ask you several questions. This is to screen any unqualified applicants and to send those who are qualified further into the process.
- 1:1 Job Interview - This is the traditional interview where you are interviewed by one representative, most likely the hiring manager.
- Group Interview - This is an opportunity for organizations to quickly prescreen a group of candidates. This may involve a short presentation about the organization, followed by asking questions to each candidate individually. This allows employers to observe how well candidates interact with others.
- Phone/Video Interview - This usually happens because either the candidate or the employer is not in the position to meet in person. A phone interview can also happen unexpectedly. As such make sure you have a professional voicemail as well as answer numbers you do not recognize in a professional manner. Video interviews usually are scheduled in advance. Make sure you are in a quiet area with service and with few to no distractions.
- Case Interview - Candidates are presented a situation and asked how they would approach it, analyze it and solve it.
- Competency Interviews - These types of interviews are designed to see if you have the skills to do the job. For some positions, you may be required to take a test on a computer.
- Audition/Presentation Interview - Here you may be asked to demonstrate something, teach something, explain something, etc.
- Structured Interviews - With this type of interview, candidates generally are asked the same rigid and formal questions in the same order. This type of interview doesn't allow for deviation.
- Unstructured Interviews - More flexible than structured interviews. It gives the employer and candidate the freedom to deviate from the typical flow of an interview. You might be asked followup questions and probing questions that could lead the format into a dialogue.
- Mealtime Interview - You may be asked to interview over a meal or coffee.
- Panel Interview - This type of interview consists of different representatives from an organization. Each panelist may be responsible for asking you questions that represent relevancy from their position.
- Behavioral Interview - During this type of interview, you will be asked questions based on



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common situations related to the job you are applying for. Utilizing the STAR method will help you in succeeding with this type of interview.

- **Situation, Task, Action, Result (STAR)** - Being able to showcase your skills and how you fit the needs of an organization in a compelling and easy to understand way, without rambling, is invaluable. Using the STAR method, you will be able to tell a story about a previous work experience.
 - **Situation** - Set the scenario for your example - In my current role, teaching a class of 15 kindergarten students, I began teaching students the fundamental math skills of counting by 1s, 2s, 5s, and 10s. Most of the class picked up the concepts quickly and were ready to process; however, 3 students had trouble grasping the concepts and were losing interest.
 - **Task** - Describe the specific challenge/task that relates to the question - I had to find a way to re-engage the students who were having difficulty grasping the concepts without slowing down the rest of the class.
 - **Action** - Talk about the actions that you took to accomplish the task - The next time we focused on math; I prepared a fun group activity. While the class remained engaged in completing the activity, I was able to spend some 1:1 time with the 3 students struggling with counting. I was able to explain the process in a way they understood. Of the 3 children, 1 child still had some difficulty. As such, I sent some guidance notes along with his homework to the child's parent.
 - **Result** - Present the results that followed because of the chosen action - After some 1:1 focus and additional practice time, all 3 students are confident in their counting abilities and are now caught up with the rest of the class.

Practice: Don't just practice responding to questions in your head. Practice out loud. This is critical. Participate in a mock interview. Practice responding to interview questions with anyone in the field, the Career Services Center at SMC, other professionals, etc. Know your resume/portfolio well and be prepared to answer questions about them. Be able to talk about yourself and how you make a good candidate for the job. This requires knowing the job description inside and out. However, don't over exhaust yourself. Make sure to get some rest.

Prep Application Materials: Bring extra copies of your resume, your portfolio (if you have one), a notepad with some questions prepared for the interview as well as if you need to take any quick notes, a pen, your list of references and any other materials requested by the employer. Make sure you have cash (dollars, coins and card) to pay for parking. Depending on where you park, you may only have access to using one form of payment. It is also important to bring the contact information of the person interviewing you and/or the main office information.

Stay Up to Date: Read the newspaper, check the internet, read articles related to education. You may be surprised with ice breaking small talk about current trends and/or events.

Dress to Impress: Consider the company's culture when dressing for an interview. In general, be conservative with your choice of clothing, accessories, hair style, make-up, and jewelry. Examples of outfits include dress pants, dress shirt, tie, sport coat, business dress, skirt, and blazer. Avoid wearing sneakers/tennis shoes, workout gear, ultra-high heels, or flip flops/sandals. Engage in good hygiene practices prior to your interview. Look neat and be clean and well-groomed. It is also important to be cognizant that some people are sensitive to different and/or strong scents/perfumes/colognes. Do not smoke or chew gum. Cover tattoos and any unprofessional piercings.



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Know Where You Are Going: Ideally, you want to know where you are going before the day of your interview. Drive by the location of your interview before the day of your interview. Identify places to park. If possible, visit the location of your interview during the same time of day so you can see what the traffic is like. Do not be late to your interview.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

It is okay to be a little nervous in an interview. Everyone experiences nervous feelings during an interview. Try to stay focused and remember what you practiced. Still nervous? Try taking slow, deep breaths to help you relax.

Arrive Early: Always give yourself extra time. You don't want to be late because of unexpected traffic, street closures and/or traffic accidents. Plan to arrive at least 15 to 20 minutes early to give yourself a buffer and to use the restroom. Arriving early will allow you some time to remove animal hair, shoulder flakes, check for static, wash clammy hands, etc. Consider checking in only 5 to 10 minutes before your scheduled interview time. Leave your coffee or soda in the car.

Technology: Turn off or completely silence your phone/smart watch. Everyone can hear a phone/smart watch vibrating. This is different than completely silencing your phone. Stay off any forms of technology while you are waiting to be interviewed. Use this time to focus on your interview.

Greetings and Handshakes: Treat everyone you encounter like an interview. Don't forget to always smile. Remember, you need to demonstrate that you fit with the organization and smiling helps to convey that you're friendly and approachable. Hiring managers may also ask other staff to share their impression of you. Treat everyone as if you are being interviewed. Always stand to greet someone. Practice giving firm handshakes. Make sure it represents what you want to convey to the interviewer(s). When you have the opportunity, write down the names and titles of anyone that interviews you, so you can follow up with a thank you note to each interviewer. Always wait to be seated.

Be Genuine: Be concise and to the point, yet sincere in your responses. Your answers should be authentic. Do not lie about or exaggerate any aspects of your education or experience. You should be the best version of yourself. Remember, to have a professional conversation. If you mess up, you can acknowledge it and correct it. Always be positive in your communication and attitude. Do not speak negative of past employers. Remember you are trying to sell yourself. Communicate clearly and avoid any grammar errors or use of profanity. Steer clear of expressions such as "like," "um," "uh," "yeah," and "you know." It is okay to pause briefly and collect your thoughts before responding to a question. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification on a question. Never answer a question with just "yes" or "no." Always elaborate.

Be Engaged: Listen carefully to the questions and comments from employers. Show interest in the interview by smiling, nodding as well as using other verbal/non-verbal cues. Sit up straight, lean slightly forward towards the interviewer, and make frequent eye contact with those interviewing you. Do try to avoid slouching, fidgeting, playing with your pen or other objects, leaning too far back, crossing arms, finger tapping, cracking knuckles, yawning, touching your hair/face, etc. Ask questions.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Congrats! You have just finished interviewing. However, your work is not done yet. It is important to followup after the interview.

Thank You Note: It is recommended that you send one email within 24 hours of the interview to each interviewer. A handwritten card is suggested as a supplement when a personal or more creative touch might be especially valued. Reference in your note either of the following: a topic that discussed during the



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interview, one or two examples showing off your expertise or a response to one of the key interview questions.

Dear Jane Hahm:

I would like the opportunity to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I enjoyed talking to you and learning more about Santa Monica Loving Preschool. After meeting with you, I am even more excited about the opportunity to join your team.

I am confident that I can make a strong contribution to the continued growth at the Santa Monica Loving Preschool. In addition to my enthusiasm, I will bring to this position, the knowledge and skills I learned while being a student in the Associate in Science Early Childhood Studies degree program at Santa Monica College, my bilingual skills in English and Spanish and my experience developing curriculum. Through my experience as a teacher's aide, I helped develop innovative lesson plans in Spanish and English. I also worked in the after-school program, managing the tutoring program. These experiences have given me the experience and knowledge to serve as a teacher's aide. As we also discussed, I am also interested in spearheading the reading and tutoring after school program.

Again, thank you for the time and courtesy extended to me. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me at (310) 987-6543 or by email at Corsair.Joe@student.smc.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and in joining the team at Santa Monica Loving Preschool.

Sincerely,

Joe Corsair

Follow Up Instructions: Make sure to follow the instructions provided to you by the hiring manager/HR team. For example, if they tell you that it will take two weeks, wait the two weeks. If they said follow-up needs to be done by email, do not call them on the phone. It is natural to be anxious but that doesn't give you the permission to pester/stalk the employer. After you have left a message and followed up at their recommended time, if you haven't heard back after two calls, you should move forward and prep for your next round of interviews and/or job applications.