

Applying for a Position in ELT: Behind the Scenes (Part 2)

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Part 2: On the Short List—The Interview

In the [first part](#) of our behind-the-scenes look at what employers consider and value in applicants for ELT positions, we discussed that part of the application process that can help you make a favorable impression on the search committee and be placed on the final candidate short list: the application portfolio. In this part, we discuss the next step: your role as an interviewee. We provide insights into how you can highlight your talents and abilities in order to strengthen your chances of being offered the position.

Interview

Before the interview, you should review any research you have conducted on the potential new employer. No doubt several weeks have elapsed between the submission of your application portfolio and the notification that you are a finalist for the position. Therefore, you should reacquaint yourself with the target program by studying its website, brochures, and information on social media, and, if possible, by networking with those familiar with the program. Being properly informed about the target program enables you to understand its mission and goals, and allows you to prepare questions, in advance, that you would like to ask during the interview.

Once the interview day and time have been set, you should follow a few fundamental rules that convey your professionalism:

- arrive at the interview location on time (therefore, know where to be and how to get there), and
- dress appropriately (err on the side of a more conservative dress code).

Both these rules also apply when your interview is conducted via Skype: you should be online at the right time and should dress as if you were in a face-to-face interview. You should also check the view that the search committee has of your environment and choose a professional background setting. For instance, “a...wood bookcase in the background is more visually appealing...than a blank white wall,” but “the background [should also be] free of clutter” (Career Services at Princeton University, n.d., para. 4).

Interview Questions

While it is unlikely that you will be told ahead of time what questions you will be asked during the interview, interview questions are not difficult to anticipate. Applicants for teaching positions are asked questions about teaching, and more specifically, the teaching approach that has been adopted by the targeted program. Interview questions may be based on your teaching portfolio; therefore, it is appropriate to bring a copy of your portfolio for easy reference. Most likely, questions will be based on core competencies and the *situational fit* required of you, the potential new faculty member, as noted in the position advertisement. This includes job-related, managerial, cultural/environmental, and motivational factors. Some questions may address

philosophical areas, such as what you believe makes an effective teacher and a good language program, but most questions tend to be behavioral in scope, related to *past* behavior, and require your concrete application of situations from your teaching (Biesenbach-Lucas & Wormuth, 2016). If you have little past teaching history on which to draw, it is acceptable to explain what you *would* do rather than what you have done in the past.

A review of the position announcement can help you predict potential questions. Focus on the teaching methodology emphasized by the target program, levels you'll be expected to teach, educational technology with which you should be familiar, anticipated collaboration with coteachers, as well as required level of professional engagement. Questions can also be of a more general nature. You can expect to respond to questions and prompts like the following:

- Tell us about the skills and at which proficiency levels you have taught.
- What do you like most about teaching?
- What are your greatest strengths as a teacher?
- In your teaching, how have you used the [program's target methodology] in your classroom to engage students?
- Which learning strategies have you emphasized in your classes?
- How have you addressed diversity (not only cultural) in the classroom?
- How have you addressed students' different learning styles?
- How have you dealt with students who lacked motivation?
- Tell us about materials that you have created and that you have found particularly effective.
- How have you integrated technology into your teaching?
- Have you worked as a member of an instructional team? How have you collaborated with coteachers?
- Have you had to design a new course or curriculum? How did you go about this?
- What are the attributes of a good teacher?
- What factors contribute to a good language program?
- In which professional development activities have you engaged? What are your professional development goals?
- What are your professional goals for the future?
- If hired, what would you bring to our program?

If you do not yet have a broad professional development repertoire, you should show through concrete examples in which events you are planning to engage (e.g., conference attendance) or how you will contribute to the profession (e.g., giving a presentation).

Responses to questions such as these can be practiced in advance. Rehearsal is a good idea as you can write brief notes, which you might bring and refer to as the search committee members ask their questions. During the interview, you need to maintain eye contact with the members of the search committee, respond to the questions asked and provide complete, yet concise, answers. During Skype interviews, it helps to actually jot down key words from questions, especially if these are multipart questions, to ensure a complete response. You should be careful not to digress from the question foci and should not turn the responses into lengthy and long-

winded monologues. You should take notes during the interview for possible follow-up questions.

At the end of the interview, interviewees are usually given an opportunity to ask their own questions, and it is important that you actually do so. If you have no questions after you have been interviewed, you may convey a disengaged, disinterested, and unenthusiastic impression. You “[send] the message that you have no independent thought process, or are ill-prepared, or are not bright” (Questions to Ask Employers During Interviews, 2015, para. 2). You should come to the interview prepared to ask your own questions; they should demonstrate that you have researched the teaching program. Your questions should *not duplicate* what could be learned from the program’s website or from a Google search. In general, appropriate questions you might ask address:

- course levels, goals, and objectives for the program’s courses;
- the typical course load;
- service responsibilities;
- professional development expectations and opportunities;
- the teaching environment and resources; and
- advancement opportunities.

In some cases, those questions might already have been addressed in the interview itself. In that case, if you have taken notes during the interview, you will have additional questions to ask. Questions about benefits and salary are best not asked during the initial interview. While a candidate who asks questions signals his or her interest and qualifications for the position, a good number of questions is three to five (Konop, 2014). You may have several more questions, but you should be respectful of the search committee’s time. Therefore, you should “prioritize your questions” (Questions to Ask Employers During Interviews, 2015, para. 4).

Teaching Demonstration

If you have not been required to submit a teaching video with your application portfolio, you may be asked to deliver a teaching demonstration as part of the interview process. If that is the case, you will usually be informed about the parameters of the expected teaching ahead of time so that you can prepare appropriate materials for the sample lesson. The length of a sample lesson can vary: It might be as short as 20 minutes, or it could be a complete 50-minute class. Similarly, the audience for teaching demonstrations can vary: It might be the members of the search committee, it might be a group of students from the target program, or it might be both. Teaching members of the search committee can be quite awkward, especially if they try to act as students with insufficient English skills. However, regardless of length and audience, you are usually given specific instructions for the type of lesson you are expected to teach: the teaching focus might be a grammar point or a specific language skill like listening or reading. In some cases, you may be given time before the interview day to prepare a lesson; in other cases, you might not learn about the teaching demonstration focus until you arrive on scene.

Nevertheless, it is important that you follow instructions and do not assume that you are teaching your current or prior students for whom you have materials handy. Teaching demonstrations

usually require that candidates *create* materials that *fit the context* of the target program and its students. Observers will look for your content knowledge, pacing of activities, and student engagement. Dennihy (2015) advises job candidates to “[prepare] an effective, engaging, and memorable class session,” in which you “show how you engage with students and create a productive and supportive learning environment” (para. 7). She also recommends that the lesson taught reflects how you have portrayed your teaching in other parts of the application, like the cover letter, philosophy of teaching statement, and sample materials submitted in the portfolio. For example, if you have emphasized use of pair or group tasks, the observers will look for students’ engaging in tasks with each other, facilitated by you, the instructor. You should “underscore your dynamism as a teacher” (Wilsman, 2013, para. 7) and “show that you like teaching and working with students” (Dennihy, 2015, para. 13). Teaching demonstrations are probably not the best forum in which to display facility with classroom technology because some technology may not be available for the sample lesson at the target institution.

Follow-Up

After the interview day, you may not hear from the search committee for a few weeks. Programs may or may not provide you with a timeline for their decision process. However, you should send a follow-up letter/email within 2 days of the interview to all search committee members (make sure that you obtain the names of each committee member during the interview; Biesenbach-Lucas & Wormuth, 2016). A good follow-up letter/email consists of the following parts:

- an expression of appreciation for the interview and possibility of being offered the position,
- a reference to skills that you can offer to emphasize your fit with program,
- a reiteration of the specific experience that you have and that matches the program, and
- a positive attitude about your contribution to the program as well as long-term possibilities.

Search committees are always impressed with candidates who take the time to reflect on the interview and convey their sincere interest in the position through their follow-up letter.

Conclusion

Final candidates pursuing an ELT position who have researched the position carefully, prepared for the interview thoughtfully, and, as a result, demonstrated their competence and enthusiasm for the position increase their chances of being offered the position. The application portfolio and the personal interview provide the tools necessary for the search committee members to decide if the applicant will be a good fit for their program’s instructional environment.

References

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