

# GETTING THE POSITION/ TRANSITIONING POSITIONS

*The job search process can be hectic and at times intimidating; and the desire to have a job before it's "too late in the year" can lead to hurried interviews, snap decisions, and missed opportunities. Taking the time to plan and ask useful questions to the appropriate people are key to navigating the application, interview, and hiring process.*

## STEPS TO SUCCESS

1. Develop a portfolio that reflects your experience and achievements.
2. Prepare for and manage your interview using the strategies for interview success.
3. Once offered a position, obtain the information you need to make the most of the opportunity.
4. Find your fit.

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# CREATING YOUR PORTFOLIO

*To land a position teaching agriculture, you need to “sell” yourself and your accomplishments to prospective employers. A professional portfolio can showcase how elements of your preservice training or professional experience have prepared you to do an exceptional job.*

To best showcase your experiences, build your portfolio around the elements that constitute a total agricultural education program: the classroom, FFA, and SAE. You may want to include pictures, sample lesson plans and papers, statements and/or summaries of related work experience, along with your ideas for the future. The portfolio can be hard copy or digital in nature. You might ask potential employers if you can quickly review your portfolio during the initial interview. Always bring a copy of all interview material if you plan to reference anything so they also have the copy in front of them. It should provide a “show and tell” opportunity to summarize your key experiences and accomplishments.

## INSTRUCTOR’S PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Include a professional resume (and extra copies) that outlines —

- your education/degree(s);
- training and experience as an instructor; (including field experiences if you are just starting out)
- awards and honors;
- membership in professional organizations;
- participation in professional conferences and special training opportunities (any and all certificates).

## CLASSROOM/LABORATORY INSTRUCTION

In your professional portfolio, include samples that illustrate —

- your use of various instructional techniques and strategies;

- familiarity with curriculum development and/or state-required course work;
- experience developing lessons that blend local and student needs with state requirements;
- development of laboratory-based lessons;
- example lesson plans and completed student work (with their names removed).

## COORDINATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Include examples that illustrate —

- your involvement with student supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs;
- familiarity with how work-based experiential learning can work in the agricultural education program;
- commitment to work-based, experiential learning.



## CREATING YOUR PORTFOLIO

### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION

Include samples that illustrate familiarity with—

- sources of funds for updated program content and equipment;
- current and emerging technology for the classroom and the workplace;
- elements of a quality agricultural education program.

### PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

Include samples that illustrate—

- your involvement with community volunteers in an agricultural education program;
- experience mobilizing volunteers;
- your own philosophy of community involvement.
- networking with FFA Alumni and Supporters

### AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM MARKETING

Include samples that illustrate—

- how you have promoted a positive image of agricultural education;
- a sample communication plan that includes student recruitment, brand development, networking, etc.;
- past involvement with program marketing.

### AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Include examples that illustrate—

- experience with FFA;
- participation in local, state and national student events;
- familiarity with other agricultural education organizations.
- Program of activities
- Chapter FFA Officer development

### DIGITAL PORTFOLIO TOOLS

There are numerous online resources that can be used to create a professional and effective digital portfolio, including

- Google Sites
- Live Binders
- PortfolioGen
- Bulb

# STRATEGIES FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

## TIPS

*You're on your way! Here are tips for turning the interview to your advantage.*

### INFORMATION TO FIND ON THE SCHOOL WEBSITE

1. How many agriculture courses are taught each semester? What are the titles?
2. Is this a ten-month or extended-contract position?
3. What class schedule is followed? (block, etc.)
4. What schools provide or "feed" students to this school?

### THINGS TO CHECK BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- My attire gives me a professional appearance.
- I have a notebook or portfolio to use for taking notes and holding papers.
- I am taking extra copies of my resume.
- I have a list of prepared questions to ask. I have thought about possible questions I may be asked and have prepared answers.
- I have planned to arrive 15-20 minutes early. I will leave myself plenty of time to get there! (It's better to be early than late.)

### INTERVIEW TIME

- Greet your interviewer(s) with a smile, firm handshake, and an accurate pronunciation of his or her name. In addition, express a sincere compliment of some kind, such as the beautiful school landscaping, how well laid out the school is, how friendly everyone is, etc. Everyone loves a sincere compliment!
- Sit down when you are offered the opportunity. Use your prepared questions to help you stay organized, and record answers to your questions. Writing down answers will help you remember small, but vital, details. If a response to one of your questions is unclear, ask for clarification.

- Having prepared questions helps you look interested and organized. You want to impart the feeling you are a valuable teacher that other schools also want.

### QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

1. How many students took agriculture courses last year? How many of these had special needs?
2. Does the agriculture department have an active advisory committee? How often does it meet?
3. Does the agriculture department have an active FFA Alumni group? How often does it meet?
4. Annual budgets?
  - classroom, FFA, SAE, Farm, transportation
5. Additional yearly duties?
  - committee involvement?
  - transportation (will an ag truck be available?)
  - is there an FFA stipend?
6. How is FFA funded?
7. What opportunities will there be for professional development?
8. How soon does the hiring committee expect to make a decision?
9. When should I get back to you concerning this position?
10. May I tour the agriculture room and facilities?
11. (If the former agriculture instructor is not present at the interview) Will the former agriculture instructor be available to answer some questions? May I set up a time to talk with him or her, or will you give me that person's phone number?
12. What are your expectations for the agricultural education program?
13. If there are multiple teachers, how are duties divided?

# STRATEGIES FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

## TIPS

*The following questions may or may not be appropriate. Talk them over with your university's faculty or an experienced agriculture instructor before the interview.*

1. What employment benefits do you offer?
2. Is the teacher contract fixed or flexible for salary negotiation?
3. Is there an extended summer contract? How long is it? What is the rate of pay or how is it calculated?
4. Are there other benefits, such as health insurance, a dental/vision plan, graduate course compensation, etc.?
5. Is there compensation for mileage or gas for personal car use?
6. Does the school pay for the agriculture instructor's professional development conferences and dues for professional organizations?
7. Is there a stipend for working with the FFA? How is it calculated?
8. Does the FFA or agriculture department have its own vehicle?
9. Is the agriculture instructor allowed and encouraged to attend appropriate FFA events?
10. Is there a local county salary supplement?

*If the former agriculture instructor is present at the interview, you may want to ask the questions that follow, perhaps while you tour the facilities. As a new instructor, the fewer surprises you encounter, the better. Make the most of your contact with the former instructor. This could be the last time you will have contact with that valuable information source, unless you are fortunate enough to replace a retiring instructor who doesn't mind helping you get started.*

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FORMER AGRICULTURE INSTRUCTOR:

1. Are there student files? Where are they located?
2. Do you have an advisory committee? How often does it meet? Where are the associated documents kept? What are the committee requirements? School board members? Alumni? Parents?
3. Are there old program of activities, meeting minutes, fund-raising files, etc. to refer to? Where can I find them?
4. How much are FFA chapter dues?
5. Which FFA programs and events did your chapter participate in last year (National FFA Convention, state leadership conference, Food For America, PALS, WLC, science fair, LDE, career development events, etc.)?
6. Is an FFA achievement points system in place? May I see a copy?
7. Are the students set up for supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs) with record books? Do you use AET or some other type of record keeping?
8. Do you have a copy of last year's banquet agenda, program, invitations and awards?
9. Did your chapter have a Program of Activities (POA) last year? Is a copy available?
10. What fundraisers did your chapter have last year? How much did each net?
11. How much money is in the FFA account? Who handles the money?
12. Do you have an FFA Alumni? Who is the contact person? Do they use their funds to support the FFA chapter or for their own activities?
13. How did the chapter handle member recruitment last year? Was it successful?
14. Did you set up a directory or phone list for your community or for students' parents? Is a copy available?
15. How do you manage the FFA chapter website and social media?

## STRATEGIES FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

16. Are there any current district, area, regional or state FFA officers in your chapter?
17. Did you hold other volunteer positions in the community (4-H leader, fair committee member, etc.)? Do you recommend I become involved in the same efforts? Can you give me the contact names and phone numbers?
18. Are there administrators' or board members' children in the agriculture program?
19. Did you have a state plan for your department? Where is it kept, and when is the next program review scheduled?
20. Where do you see this program going? What concerns need immediate attention?

# CREATING A FAVORABLE FIRST IMPRESSION

- **Do your homework on the school and community.**

Try to find out something about the people you plan to meet. People are always impressed when you know something about them.

- **Look over your online presence.**

Even before you arrive at the interview or start in the school, people will begin to form opinions of you based on your social media and other online accounts. Make sure they present the professional image you want to portray.

- **Be timely, do not be late.**

Being late for an appointment makes people think you do not value their time, and it creates a negative impression. Respond to school district requests in a timely manner.

- **Look like a professional.**

Dress and hygiene are important to convey a professional attitude. Make sure to present yourself in the best possible light with through professional attire.

- **Say a person's name correctly and use it more than once.**

Do not be afraid to ask if you are unsure of people's names. They will appreciate your interest.

- **Be a good listener: don't talk too much and don't interrupt.**

An overabundance of chatter makes you seem nervous and unsure of yourself. Give others the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. Never interrupt while someone else is speaking. People appreciate being heard, they have lots of insight to share.

- **Act in an ethical and responsible manner.**

Teaching is an honor and a privilege. Teachers are in a position of trust and authority with youth. It is your responsibility to conduct yourself in a manner that reflects the Ag Teacher's Creed.

- **Follow up after the interview.**

It is important to follow up after the interview to remind the administration you are interested and look forward to hearing from them regardless of their decision.

## FINDING YOUR FIT

*Whether it's your first school or your fourth, you want the school, community, and program to be a good "fit" for you and your career goals. While there is no guaranteed way to find your fit, it is important to consider a variety of factors. Here are just a few:*

- What does the curriculum teach? Is it something I am comfortable with?  
Is it something I am willing to learn?
- What are the school administration's and the community's expectations for the program?
- How is the CTE director supportive of agricultural education?
- Will this program help me achieve my career goals?
- Can I see myself working here in five years? 10 years? Retiring?
- Is the administration supportive of the program and teacher professional development?
- Is there an alumni/supporters group? How have they interacted with the previous teacher?
- What is the turnover rate of teachers in the district? Are teachers leaving quickly?
- What are the administrators most proud of in their district? Does it align with your values?
- What does the school's website and social media accounts say about what they value?
- How does the school support and mentor new teachers?
- Is the salary and additional contracts/stipends competitive to other districts?
- Do the teachers like one another?
- What does your "gut" tell you?
- Is the program single or multiple teacher? How does that fit for me?

# ACCEPTING THE POSITION

*Great news! They are offering you the position! What's next?*

- If the district has a negotiable contract situation, set up a second interview to finalize the details of your contract. Know exactly what you want (and a justification) when you go in and what you will, in reality, settle for if what you want is out of reach. If the details are nonnegotiable, and this is the job you want, you only have to say, "I'll take it!" Ask when you need to come in again to sign papers and/or meet with other faculty.
  - Buy yourself a planner of some type if you do not already have one. It is essential to stay organized. Paper and digital versions only work if you use them. Select whatever method you are most comfortable with. In about a month, your new planner will undoubtedly look quite full—and that is the way it will probably stay.
  - Visit the secretary you made friends with when you first called, if you have the job in hand, or the principal or superintendent, if you are seeing one of them to accept an offer.
5. What is my classroom supplies budget? How does ordering materials and reimbursement for classroom materials work?
  6. Is there a yearly bulletin board or poster allotment to decorate classrooms that does not come out of the department budget?
  7. What is the district's policy regarding teachers transporting students in private vehicles or driving a school vehicle?
  8. Who are the maintenance director and janitors? Where are their offices?
  9. What are the name and phone number of my contact person in the school district office?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK AFTER ACCEPTING THE POSITION:

1. Is there a schedule of teacher's meetings prior to the start of school? What are the dates and times?
2. Are there student and teacher handbooks? (Check the school website before asking.)
3. Are copies of the school calendar available? (Check the school website before asking.)
4. How do I request a vehicle (bus, school car, etc.) for field trips? What type of paperwork must be completed prior to a field trip?

## HOW TO RESPECTFULLY RESPOND IF YOU DON'T GET THE POSITION:

It can be difficult to find out that you didn't get a job you wanted. Think of the application and interview process as a networking opportunity. Creating a professional connection, whether or not you are selected for a position, may be useful later in your career. Here are a few key points to include when responding, whether in person, on the phone, or by email.

- Thank the interviewer
- Express your disappointment
- Show continued interest
- Ask for feedback

These few simple steps can make for a more positive experience for both you and your interviewers. Should the position become open again, they may remember your professionalism and give you a call.

## ACCEPTING THE POSITION

### IN CONCLUSION

You may think this introductory process is exhaustive, but you will also find it invaluable. An effective teacher never stops learning. They understand that questions lead to knowledge—and that knowledge provides the confidence necessary to succeed in the classroom.

By the end of your first year, you will have asked many more questions than those listed here! You also will find there are many people eager to help, including administrators and parents. In addition, your advisory committee should help review past accomplishments and ask pertinent questions about coming plans. By listening to and asking questions, you show you are open to change for the improvement of your program.

If you are considering multiple offers, be sure to communicate openly with all the schools involved. That will prevent any misunderstandings while you are figuring out which offer you will accept.