



How to Interview for a Band Director Position - What They Want to Hear

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“Get that Job!”

Interview Process Suggestions for Band Directors

How to Write a Killer Resume Cover Letter

Experts say keep resume cover letters short, sweet, and memorable. Dread isn't uncommon when it comes to resume cover letters. However, this is an area where job-seekers could do the most to improve their opportunity of being hired. Most people just write generic resume cover letters, and it is the cover letter that is really going to decide whether the employer looks at your resume. Try thinking of resume cover letters as jalapeno peppers—small, but packing a wallop—and heed the following tips on how to write a cover letter.

1. Keep it short. We suggest resume cover letters should be one page, with about three paragraphs total. Once you roll over onto a second page you're really taking a risk. The writing should be punchy and crisp. Resume cover letters are a form of marketing. Make it easy for recipients to be interested. Find what they're looking for, and make them want to know more about you.
2. Draw the reader in immediately. The first paragraph of a resume cover letter should be an attention-grabber: Use an interesting fact, ask a question, or mention a personal connection to someone at the school. Learn how to write a cover letter that engages the reader.
3. Pack it with a “wow” factor. You create the wow factor by highlighting accomplishments on your resume cover letter. You're not just stating what you did in your last job, but what you achieved, created, and how you exceeded expectations.
4. Write well! Resume cover letters are a prime place to demonstrate that you have strong grammar, writing, and communication skills.
5. Don't recreate your resume. You might underscore one or two points on your resume, but be selective and don't turn the resume cover letter into a laundry list. Learn how to write a cover letter that is unique.
6. Have someone else read it. Using a second set of eyes is always a good idea, and after someone reads your letter, ask them if he or she thinks it's effective.
7. What about responding to ads that ask for salary history? While this is a difficult question to address in a resume cover letter, it's best not to ignore it. Be broad and vague, giving a general salary range, and stress that you're negotiable.
8. Finish with a statement that keeps the conversation rolling. A good resume cover letter has an action close that asks to take the next step. Job-seekers aren't interested in coming on too strong, so I suggest a phrase such as “I look forward to hearing from you.”
9. Follow up! I think when it comes to your own job search you need to take more control. If you're hesitant because an ad reads, no phone calls, I suggest sending an e-mail to follow up your resume cover letter.

The Search for Appropriate Openings

- Websites
- Word of mouth
- Applications on file

Application Process

- Written
- Electronic (via district website, etc.)

Making Contact

- Phone call or email to “contact person” or office
- Cover letter and resume
- “Follow up” after reasonable wait
- Supportive letters from references to contact person

The Wait for Possible Interview

- Research the school and district (website, etc), so you can impress them with your knowledge about the school.
- Become familiar with goals, objectives, initiatives, challenges and accomplishments of the specific campus and of the district
- Continue to seek other options in the event that you are not selected to interview.

Types of Interviews

- A. Formal, with full committee
- B. Specific verbal questions, asked one at a time
- C. Written questions, with a timed period to address them all verbally
- D. Informal “chat” session
- E. Scripted “standardized” interview questions with rubric scoring
- F. Actual teaching/conducting a lesson with an ensemble or class
- G. Make-up of interview committee could be a combination of:
 1. Campus principals and/or other campus administrators
 2. Music administrators
 3. Other teacher

Networking

Think carefully about what you need to know about the school district, the job’s expectations, the head director or supervisor, tidbits about the interviewer, etc. Then, email your professional and personal networks to see who’s got the information you need. Reach out to these people purposefully, asking specific questions rather than general questions. Don’t ask for a job or a job lead. It may put people on the spot — a helpless feeling. Instead, limit your requests to information only.

Never seem to come up with the right answer during an interview? Not sure about what to wear? Worried you’ll freeze trying to answer the most important question?

Interviews may be the toughest part of the job search process, since everything about you is on display for the employer. Figuring out how to dress and the right thing to say can stump the most experienced job seekers. You dress in the best clothes you have. No exceptions. You cannot afford to have a hair out of place. Full business professional attire is required and expected. You really never do get a second chance to make a good first impression. By investing some time and money in creating a suitable interview wardrobe, you will invite others to easily invest back in you.

The Actual Interview

- A. Be clear on directions to the school or interview office, making a “dry run” ahead of time if instructions are complicated.
- B. Be armed with attractive copies of resume and other supportive documents.
- C. Be on time and appropriately dressed.
- D. Be sure to recall the names of those on the interview committee or panel.
- E. While addressing all of the members of the committee with your answers, specifically respond to the person who asked the question, and make eye contact with them.
- F. Be prepared to discuss (or acknowledge an awareness of) district/campus issues or initiatives, in case the interviewer happens to ask if you are familiar with them (e.g., TEKS, curriculum mapping, vertical teaming, enrichment vs. foundation courses, budget woes due to Chapter 41 etc.)
- G. In SOME instances, you might want to be prepared for some “technical” or musical pedagogy questions.
- H. You can generally count on discussions of philosophy, classroom management, grading, curriculum, record keeping, campus teamwork, public relations, etc.
- I. Try to stick to the subject of the question; avoid drifting into other areas of discussion.
- J. Avoid “negative” statements, especially about current or former employers.
- K. If the question is not clear, ask for a clarification before attempting to respond.
- L. Don’t be afraid to admit that, based on your lack of experience, you don’t know the answer to a particular question. But, you can certainly express that you are a quick learner, and acknowledge the importance of the issue cited.
- M. If unsure about a question on “procedure,” you might say that you would defer to campus policy, or would follow the lead of a superior.
- N. PRACTICE the interview process with a partner!

Interview Questions:

Regardless of what questions get thrown your way, there are a handful of interview questions you should *never* be asked. Be aware — questions about subjects in these categories violate your rights:

- Age
- National origin
- Birthplace
- Race
- Color
- Religion
- Disability
- Sex
- Marital/family status

However, don’t assume an employer’s prying questions are suggestive of discriminatory intentions. Often, a Human Resource person is just trying to assess your fit for the job, not trying to illegally discriminate. While you can’t be asked directly about any of these topics, don’t be surprised if you find yourself discussing your family or religion with a potential employer either. It all depends on how the question is phrased.

While it’s important to protect yourself from illegal interview questions, there *are* legal alternatives to get the same information out of you. Be prepared and know your options by checking out these six examples of illegal interview questions, and how they can be rephrased to pass the law.

A Quick Look at Possible Interview Questions

Here are ten somewhat tough questions that you **MIGHT** encounter:

Question #1: Why do you want to work in this District?

Don't just say you like it. Anyone can do that. Focus instead on the history with that particular district and, if you can, tell a success story.

Question #2: Tell us about yourself

Instead of giving a chronological work history, **focus on your strengths** and how they pertain to this position. If possible, illustrate with examples.

Question #3: What do you think of your previous boss?

Remember: if you get the job, the person interviewing you will someday be your previous boss. **The last thing they want is to hire someone who they know is going to badmouth them** some day. Instead of trashing your former employer, stay positive, and focus on what you learned from him (no matter how awful he really was).

Question #4: Why are you leaving your current position? Again, avoid badmouthing your previous employer. Instead: I've learned a lot from my current position, but now I'm looking for a new challenge, to broaden my horizons and to gain a new skill-set – all of which, I see the potential for in this job.

Question #5: Where do you see yourself in five years?

There's really no right answer to this question, but **the interviewer wants to know that you're ambitious**, career-oriented, and committed to a future with the district. So instead of sharing your dream for early retirement, or trying to be funny, give them an answer that illustrates your drive and commitment.

Question #6: What's your greatest weakness?

This question is a great opportunity to **put a positive spin on something negative**, but you don't want your answer to be cliché – joking or not. Instead, try to use a real example of a weakness you have learned to overcome. i.e. private clarinet lessons to make you more effective in rehearsals and sectionals since you are a brass player.

Question #7: What salary are you looking for?

“I'm more interested in the role itself than the pay. That said, I'd expect to be paid the appropriate range for this position, based on my five years of experience. I also think a fair salary would bear in mind the high cost of living here in Houston.”

Question #8: Why Should I Hire You?

A good answer will **reiterate your qualifications**, and will highlight what makes you unique.

Question #9: What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?

“When I was in college, I took an art class to supplement my curriculum. I didn't take it very seriously, and assumed that, compared to my Music classes; it would be a walk in the park. My failing grades at midterm showed me otherwise. I'd even jeopardized my scholarship status. I knew I had to get my act together. I spent the rest of the semester making up for it, ended up getting a decent grade in the class. I learned that no matter what I'm doing, I should strive to do it to the best of my ability. Otherwise, it's not worth doing at all.”

Question #10: Describe a time when you did not get along with a co-worker

Good Answer: “I used to lock heads with the middle school assistant director. We disagreed over a lot of things – from the methodology of beginning clarinet to the necessity to speak with a student's family. Our personalities just didn't mesh. I asked her to lunch and we talked about our differences. It turns out, it was all about communication. We communicated differently and once we knew that, we began to work well together. I really believe that talking a problem through with someone can help solve any issue.”

Here are Some Additional “Typical” Interview Questions

- **Tell us a little about yourself with regard to your background, your experiences, and your qualifications for this position.**
- **What do you know about _____ (name of school) _____? What attracted you to us?**
- **How would you establish yourself as a team player on the campus...with regard to the staff, administration, etc.?**
- **What are your greatest strengths with regard to musical pedagogy?**
- **What are your most obvious weaknesses or opportunities for improvement? What strategies might you utilize in addressing these?**
- **Take us through a typical class or rehearsal for (grade level, class, or type of ensemble). Start with what the room looks like before the students enter. You may select a unit or a time of year. (Or, the questioner might stipulate this...such as beginners in November, or top performing ensemble in March)**
- **How would you differentiate your instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners, including economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, physically handicapped, etc.?**
- **How might you integrate mathematics (or science) into your curriculum? *(Be ready for this one!)***
- **What are your expectations with regard to classroom management? How would you communicate your expectations? What types of corrections and consequences might you utilize?**
- **What do you see as the greatest difference between teaching middle school students as compared to high school students?**
- **How would you establish yourself with parents? In the community?**
- **What are your planned procedures for assessments and grading?**
- **Describe your warm-up/fundamental drill routine, and include the expected outcomes.**
- **How might you utilize your time in sectionals?**
- **What does the term “aligned instruction” mean to you, and how might you apply it in this position?**
- **What are your goals and plans with regard to implementing a sequential curriculum? What methodology might you use to help you do this?**
- **Specific situation questions, such as: “What do you do when a parent calls and says that Little Johnny is bored in band?” OR: “How would you make modifications for my child with special needs?” OR: “What would you say if your principal flute player had to attend math tutoring three days a week during your band class for two months prior to TAKS?”**
- **Describe your organizational skills in terms of record keeping and finances?**
- **Do you have questions of us? (And you SHOULD have questions, such as “What is Your Expectation of Me?” “What is your policy regarding _____?” Etc.)**

Six Examples of Illegal Interview Questions:

- ILLEGAL:** “Are you a U.S. citizen?”
LEGAL: “Are you authorized to work in the U.S.?”
ILLEGAL: “How old are you? When did you graduate from college?”
LEGAL: “Are you over the age of 18?”
ILLEGAL: “Are you married? How many children do you have? Who do you live with?”
LEGAL: “Can you relocate if necessary? Are you willing to travel as a part of this job?”
LEGAL: “Can you work overtime as necessary?”
ILLEGAL: “How much do you weigh?”
LEGAL: “Are you comfortable with lifting heavy objects?”
ILLEGAL: “Do you have any disabilities? Any recent illnesses or operations?”
LEGAL: “Are you able to perform the essential job functions?”
ILLEGAL: “Ever been arrested?”
LEGAL: “Ever been convicted of ___?”

Follow Up After the Interview

Following up after the interview is especially important. You want to do everything you can to set yourself apart from the other applicants! Don't forget to send a thank you note to every single person who interviewed you, so make sure you've got the right names and contact information of everyone you interviewed with. In the note, it might be a good idea to remind them of something specific you said that was memorable or impressive, so they can tie a face to your name.

Now That You Have Gotten the Job...

- Research the community, the local culture, local values, sources of pride, etc.
- Learn the specific goals for that campus, perhaps included in the *Campus Improvement Plan*, or where there might be specific shortfalls in TAKS scores, such as math, science, etc. **BUY IN** to those goals!
- Know where to go for help when (not IF) you get confused, frustrated, or have problems (other teachers, principal, supervisor)
- Ask for a district mentor (some districts pay a stipend for teachers who mentor new teachers), **OR:**
- Work with TMEA in securing a mentor (www.tmea.org, or 512/452-0710)
- Avoid letting yourself get isolated, especially if you are the only music teacher or director on the campus. Attend district meetings where other teachers share and collaborate...**OR**, arrange with your administration for you to do visitations to classes or rehearsals at schools with exemplary programs.
- Show a sincere interest in and support for campus initiatives, especially with regard to TAKS testing, curriculum alignment, site-based decisions, etc.
- Attend **ALL** faculty meetings and professional development sessions; be on time, and be actively involved in any discussion, even though it may not seem relevant to you.
- Show a sincere interest in other teachers and their programs; get to know the custodian, school secretary, and the coaches!
- Seek opportunities to integrate what you do with “foundation” curriculum, but not lose sight of music education for its own sake.
- Join and be active in professional organizations.
- Seek continued training. Attend clinics and conferences, such as TBA, TCDA, TODA, OAKE (Orff and Kodaly), MENC, etc.
- Utilize the CEDFA (Center for Educator Development in Fine Arts.) website. This is an amazing resource for connecting the TEKS, aligning curriculum, finding resources, etc. (www.cedfa.org)
- Take the approach that “**STUDENT LEARNING**”...not “teaching” is what we are about.

“Issues That are Often Higher on “Principals’ Lists” than the Musical Success of Your Students”

- **TAKS Test (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills)**
- **STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness)**
- **EOC (End of Course) Exams**
- **What YOU (Fine Arts) can do to raise test scores and close the “achievement gap.”**
- **AYP (Average Yearly Progress as per NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND)**
- **Average Daily Attendance**
- **Prompt and accurate paperwork and financial records**
- **Curriculum Maps, Scope and Sequence, Lesson Plans, Online Curriculum Tools...all designed to enhance student learning (and of course, high stakes test scores!)**
- **Classroom Management**
- **TAKS and STAAR (Oh yeah...we already listed that!)**
- **Parent and Community Relations**
- **Your “buy-in” with regard to campus policy and procedures**
- **Your help with non-fine arts events (lunch duty, bus duty, chaperoning a dance, etc.)**
- **Your attendance and participation in campus initiatives that may seem unimportant to you at the time**
- **Did we mention TAKS or STAAR tests? (Principals’ jobs often depend on these scores...and remember: “It all runs downhill.”)**
- **At some point you may experience frustration when a principal does something really outside the box and seemingly inappropriate that might impact your program. But eventually, good communication will tend to set things right...just approach tactfully and carefully and always be perceived as a team player.**

“Knock ‘Em Dead” by Martin Yate

- ❖ It is time for a radical shift in your career management strategy.
- ❖ Your career is not a fixed thing that came as a gift with the purchase of your college diploma.
- ❖ Enlightened self-interest means placing your financial survival front and center in your life.
- ❖ The purpose is for you to develop effective, offensive career management strategies and defensive strategies to allow for success at your current position. The establishment of personal credibility for the services you deliver.
- ❖ 85% of today's workforce loses their current jobs not because of ability in their teaching field but their ability to get along with others.
- ❖ Job change is an integral part of modern life. It comes around about every four years.
 1. Evaluate the market and package your skills for those needs.
 2. Identify every program in your target area.
 3. Get connected with influential people in your profession.
 4. Implement an integrated job search plan.
- ❖ Long-term career success is much easier when you are credible and visible within your profession.
- ❖ Identify your transferable skills, learned behaviors, and core values and make them part of your professional development program. Basic transferable skills are:
 1. Technical skills – the ability to do the job
 2. Communication – verbal, listening, writing, technology, grooming and dress, social graces, body language, emotional IQ
 3. Team work – success as a leader means you were first a great team player, share credit not blame
 4. Critical thinking
 - a. What is the problem?
 - b. Who is it a problem for?
 - c. Why is it a problem?
 - d. What is causing the problem?
 5. Time management and organization
 - a. Two types of individuals
 - i. Task-oriented – tasks fill the time
 - ii. Goal-oriented – organize, prioritize, and strive to get all the work completed.
 - b. Always set aside time to reflect at the end of the day, end of competition, end of semester, etc.
 6. Leadership
 - a. Two important characteristics:
 - i. He is going somewhere
 - ii. He is able to persuade others to go with him
 7. Creativity – the ability to develop ideas and bring the project to life. Be passionate about everything you do. “I will not be denied.”
- ❖ The pursuit of knowledge is a way of life.

Personal Values:

1. Motivation and energy
2. Commitment and reliability
3. Determination
4. Pride and integrity

Business Values:

1. Productivity – enhance productivity through time, resources and effort
2. Economy – efficiency engages the creative mind
3. Procedures – plan for every aspect

- ❖ Your resume is the most financially important document you will ever own.
 - 15-45 seconds is all your employer will give to the first reading. The one that carefully relates the resume to the job description gets read a second time.
 - Get inside the employer's head.
 - People get hired based on their credentials, not their potential.
 - Job requirements mean you list all the things you bring to the party to meet that requirement.
 - Critical thinking: All jobs are problem identification, problem avoidance, and solution.
- ❖ Think of the best person you have ever seen doing this job and what made him or her stand out. Now think of the worst person you have ever seen doing this job and what made that individual stand out in such a negative way.
- ❖ Six Resume Rules
 1. Always have a target job title placed at the top of your resume.
 2. Always have a performance profile or career summary. Do not tell your needs as they are not interested at this time.
 3. Always have a “core competencies” section.
 4. Never put salary on a resume.
 5. Keep your resume focused (2 pages is best).
 6. Emphasize your achievement...focus on: achievements, problem solving skills, professional behavior profile.
- ❖ Promotions don't come in reward for loyalty and tenure; they come as a result of capabilities.
- ❖ Have a cover letter; it introduces you, puts your resume in context, and demonstrates your writing skills.
- ❖ You have to go out and make your life happen.
- ❖ One third of all hires come from personal/professional networks. Most likely double that in band.
- ❖ When networking, never talk about what you want in your next ideal job; focus the talk about what you can do.
- ❖ Do not use current managers and co-workers as references or it could cost you your job.
- ❖ Do not use school email for any aspect of a job search or it could cost you your job.
- ❖ When you dress and look like a professional, you are likely to be treated as one.

- ❖ Selling a car. I always sold mine to the person when they drove up and first looked at it. That is when the sell transpired!
 - Porsche – there are only certain color schemes; the others have no value
 - Brook Brothers makes a statement.
 - IBM...Navy pinstripe suit with a power tie.
 - Men's shirts: long-sleeved (never short-sleeved), white, cream or pale blue

- ❖ Seven guidelines to good body language:
 1. Walk slowly and stand tall upon entering the room
 2. Smile, make eye contact, respond warmly.
 3. Sit upright, butt back, head up, maintain eye contact, smile naturally whenever the opportunity arises.
 4. Use mirroring techniques. If interviewer leans forward to make a point, a few moments later you do so.
 5. Head up and eyes forward at all times.
 6. Remain calm and do not hurry your movements. This will control your persona.
 7. Breathe. You cannot be nervous unless you breathe rapidly.

- ❖ First impressions are the strongest.

- ❖ “Places, please” is made 5 minutes before the curtain rises.

- ❖ Before heading on stage for my honor band concert I jogged in place for a moment. Get that energy flowing. Col. Klink did the same technique before the “Lincoln Portrait.”

- ❖ Turn off your cell phone.

- ❖ Practice smiling – it releases endorphins.

- ❖ Be the best prepared for the interview. Things to avoid:
 1. Failing to listen to the question
 2. Answering a question that was not asked
 3. Providing inappropriate or irrelevant information
 4. Being unprepared

- ❖ Four secrets of the hire:
 1. Ability and suitability – Explain your approach in clear, simple terms. Show how this fits into the overall efforts of the department and school.
 2. Motivation – Commitment to take the rough with the smooth, rotten assignments with the plum ones. Are you prepared to make coffee? Show enthusiasm for your work/profession and show enthusiasm for this opportunity.
 3. Manageability and teamwork – Don't bring up religious, political, social, or racial matters during the interview. You are a team player with a genuine liking for your fellowman. You get along with others because you respect them and have no problem tolerating the opinions or beliefs of others.
 4. Being prepared!