

## A Guide to Acing a Headship Interview

By Dr. Deborah Welch

*You've made it to the semi-finalist interview stage. Use these three tables to organize and focus on the "presentation" aspect of interviewing.*



You've made it to the semi-finalist interview stage for a headship position. Whether you are an aspiring head of school or an experienced one, interviews provoke anxiety. How do you present who you are as a leader to Board members and other Search Committee members in the best possible way? What are tips for connecting with interviewers to spark conversation? What kind of room background and lighting are best for a virtual interview? How might you use notes inconspicuously? What about the role of nonverbals? How do you control your nerves?

This article focuses on the "presentation" aspect of interviewing. A previous article, "[The Short Guide to Preparing for a Headship Interview](#)," explored the "content" aspect of an interview. Together, these provide a comprehensive preparation package that will enable you to communicate that you are competent, professional, and worthy of being at the helm of a school.

Use the tables below for before, during, and after the interview as your guide. Print them out and check off things as you prepare. After the interview, use the tables again to review how the interview went and to jot notes to improve for the next time. Several of the pointers are specific for video interviews but many apply to in-person interviews as well.

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Category	Tips for Acing the Interview	Preparation Notes	'After Action' Review Notes
<b>Background</b>	In a virtual interview, your background should be a neutral, professional looking space.		
<b>Lighting</b>	Lighting that is in front of you (behind your monitor) is the most complimentary. Consider using an adjustable lamp with levels of soft light. If your monitor is against a wall, move it forward and place a lamp behind your monitor. Use it to shine light on the wall to bounce light back onto you.		
<b>Internet</b>	Be in a quiet, private space with a reliable connection. Test the link ahead of time and familiarize yourself with the tech platform.		
<b>Audio</b>	Turn off your cell phone so an incoming call is not distracting.  Consider earphones or a headset to hear questions clearly and to help you focus.  Also consider a USB microphone (good ones are less than US\$100) to help people hear you clearly.		
<b>Camera</b>	Elevate your appearance with a webcam. The most flattering camera position is slightly above your eyes. You can also stack books or use a laptop stand.		
<b>Dress</b>	Dress professionally. This doesn't necessarily mean a tie or a jacket but a professional appearance never fails to impress.		
<b>Nerves</b>	Ask questions so you understand the situation. How many people will be present? What are their roles? Length of the interview?		

	Then, if the interview is virtual, think of a confidence-boosting mantra to have on a post-it note in front of you. How about, “You got this!” or “Every day in every way, I am getting better.”		
<b>Content Rehearsal</b>	Know your application documents well. Record yourself beforehand responding to sample question or practice with a colleague or friend.  Prepare talking points on post-its and place them at eye level for a virtual interview.		

### DURING THE INTERVIEW

<b>Category</b>	<b>Tips for Acing the Interview</b>	<b>Preparation Notes</b>	<b>‘After Action’ Review’ Notes</b>
<b>Opening</b>	Connect with the group with your smile, eye contact, and asking questions that relate to their setting.  Communicate warmth and excitement with your voice and nonverbals.		
<b>Responses to Questions</b>	Be ready to respond to the questions, “Why are you interested in this position?” and “Why would you be a good fit?”  Stay on topic.  Think, “show, don’t tell.” When asked a question, think about an <u>example or accomplishment</u> that demonstrates your experience in the area. Describe the <u>actions</u> you took. Finally, provide the <u>results</u> achieved.  Have questions prepared to ask about the school and the position.		

<b>Nonverbals</b>	Increase the expressive nature of your body, when appropriate, through gestures, eye contact, and posture.		
<b>Attitude</b>	Be honest and authentic. Assume the best is happening!		
<b>Closing</b>	Provide a summarizing statement that addresses the question, “Why you?” Draw parallels between you and what the school has identified they desire.		

### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Tips for Acing the Interview</b>	<b>Preparation Notes</b>	<b>‘After Action’ Review Notes</b>
<b>Appreciation</b>	Within a day, send a gracious thank you email to the Chair of the Search Committee. Be genuine in your appreciation for the opportunity to interview with them.		
<b>Learning</b>	<p>Interviewing is a skill and you can learn from each experience. Take the time to reflect on what you did well and what to improve next time. Ask yourself, “How do I think I was perceived during the interview? What could I have done differently? Were my answers specific and accomplishment driven? Did I stay on topic? Did I listen well?”</p> <p>Write down the questions you remember being asked and use them to rehearse for the next interview.</p>		

The time you spend using this guide to prepare will enable you to be confident for the interview and focused on exploring the match between you and the school. Together with the previous article related to the “content” aspect of the interview, you can rest assured that all bases are covered. An interview is, after all, a wonderful opportunity for you to speak passionately about your leadership journey in service to students and the school community. Seize the occasion and use these articles to make the most of the moment that you have been given.

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