

# TEACHER INTERVIEWING GUIDE

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## TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING

### **Interviewing for a teaching position**

The employment interview is the opportunity for you to discuss with school personnel your education, experiences, activities, and skills that qualify you to be an excellent teacher. You need to relate what you have to offer to what the school district is looking for. In order to successfully "market" yourself during a 20 minute or 30 minute interview, you need to know yourself and your abilities, and you must be able to communicate your qualifications to the interviewer. According to our survey of local school districts, few hiring decisions are made after just one interview. The majority of districts conduct two or three interviews, so be prepared to go through the interview process more than once for a teaching position.

**A good first impression is critically important:** a firm handshake; good eye contact; professional dress; excellent pronunciation; and good voice projection.

**Follow up this good start by:** offering specific examples to support your answers; providing honest answers based on sound educational experiences and practice (not just your "inexperienced" opinion); being positive and enthusiastic throughout the interview; and asking insightful questions.

Avoid answering based on what you think they want to hear. While you may want to modify your answers according to the values or philosophy of the school district (if you know them), if you try to answer questions by guessing what they want to hear, you may be perceived as insincere or dishonest. Most importantly, you have no control over what they are thinking -- you do have control over what you say. Look for feedback from the interviewer(s), but answer according to your convictions and judgments.

**Common interview "knockout" factors include:** poor communication skills; lack of career knowledge; lack of energy, enthusiasm, and interest; insufficient evidence of achievements and accomplishments; and lack of preparation.

An interview is a two-way exchange of information. You need to discover whether the school district is for you just as much as the district needs to know whether you are a

good fit for them. Know what is important to you regarding a teaching position. If your research does not find this information, be sure to ask during the interview. A national survey of newly hired teachers revealed that the most frequently asked questions concern classroom management, student teaching, personal strengths, personal weaknesses, teaching philosophy, and what-if questions. You will also be asked questions pertaining to your subject area(s).

### **Practice answering interview questions**

Dozens of interview questions are listed in this guide. While you won't be asked all of these questions and there are questions not listed that you may be asked, take some time to practice answering some of these questions *out loud*. Practice with a friend, have a mock interview in Career Services, speak into a tape recorder -- whatever you do, practice and prepare!

### **Speak like a professional teacher**

You do not have to use long words when short words will do. You do not have to sound "stuffy" or arrogant. But you do have to sound educated. That's why practice interviewing is important. Become aware of any "**verbal distractions**" that slip into your speech. These are words or phrases that detract from the effectiveness of your communication. Examples are: "you know"; "like"; "know what I'm saying?"; and excessive um's or ah's.

If your speech is littered with **slang**, you are branding yourself as someone not ready to teach, someone not ready to be a professional. The first step is becoming aware of the verbal distractions; the second step is eliminating them from your speech. Good speech habits are appropriate whenever you meet educational professionals, parents, and community members as well as when instructing students in a classroom or an after school activity. At all times, present yourself in a professional manner because your job search success will depend on it!

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## **INAPPROPRIATE PERSONAL OR ILLEGAL QUESTIONS**

All interview questions should be job related. If an interviewer asks an inappropriate question, try to bring the topic of conversation back to the job and your qualifications. For example, if you are asked, "What are your plans for marriage?" you may effectively answer, "If you are concerned that my personal life will interfere with my commitment to teaching, I want to assure you that I will put in the time and energy necessary to be an outstanding teacher." Then you may provide an illustration to prove your point. Most inappropriate personal questions are asked out of ignorance, not intentional malice. The interviewer may have an issue underlying the question. You

need not provide details about your personal life (child care arrangements, marriage plans, religious beliefs, etc), but you can assure the interviewer that they will not hinder your ability to do the job.

Be aware that if you bring up personal issues in an interview, that the topic then becomes "fair game" for discussion. Also, some interviewers may chat with you before asking interview questions in an attempt to get to know you or to try and make you feel comfortable. There's no harm in small talk during an interview! In fact, you may establish rapport with the interviewer based on something you have in common, which may lead to you being judged in a positive manner. See a member of Career Services for more details about interviewing or to conduct a mock interview.

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## **TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

### **Teaching a sample lesson**

Many school districts require candidates to teach a sample lesson, usually after an initial screening interview when the field has been reduced to a manageable number. Sometimes you will teach the lesson to administrators, sometimes to other teachers, and sometimes to a class of genuine, live students. Usually, you'll be given the topic in advance in order to prepare an effective lesson. Sometimes, you'll have to respond to an immediate request to teach. Whatever the situation, here's your chance to show them what you have!

Infrequently, employers will ask to see a video of a lesson that you have taught. If you have video taped several lessons, you may want to edit those and make a "highlight tape" of your best teaching moments. Analyze your video and be able to articulate in an interview what you learned from it.

### **The "stress" interview**

Sometimes teacher candidates will complain that an interview was stressful. Actually, you should hope for an interviewer who asks tough questions. How else can you address issues and discuss how you are an outstanding teacher? Teaching is a profession that is emotionally, physically, and mentally challenging. Administrators desire teachers who can meet these demands successfully and professionally. During a "stressful" interview you have the opportunity to prove you have what it takes to be cool under pressure.

### **The panel interview**

Many school districts include a panel in the interviewing process. This panel can be composed of district and/or building administrators, teachers, school board members,

and sometimes community members. The process of the interview will be the same as an individual interview. You'll be asked questions, and you'll have the opportunity to ask questions. It is still two-way communication. Obviously, you'll want to pay close attention to the person who asks you the question, but when you answer, make eye contact with all of the committee members. Slowly and naturally, change your eye contact from one panel member to another. It is similar to teaching -- you are communicating information to several people at once.

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## PROFESSIONAL DRESS

Teachers need not be as formal as those going to a business interview, but do not be too casual either. Most of the time, you will interview with administrators who usually dress more formally than teachers. Wear an outfit in which you feel comfortable, yet professional. Men have the option of wearing a suit or a sports coat. Always wear a tie and polished dress shoes. Women may choose a suit, a dress, a skirt / blouse combination, or dressy pants. Shoes should be polished, simple pumps with low to medium heels. A sharp pants suit may work best for a follow-up interview where you may teach a lesson which may include working on the floor, at the chalk board, or with "messy" materials.

You do not want to stand out for wearing the wrong clothes such as short skirts or jeans. Be conservative with cologne or perfume, your jewelry, and other accessories -- interviewers are there to assess your teaching abilities, not to ask you out on a date. Men are advised to take off earrings.

One superintendent shares this advice for teacher candidates: "Sports coats, shirts and ties and slacks are as acceptable as suits for male candidates. There aren't many school districts that will consider only those in suits. Female candidates should dress in good taste. Short skirts and dresses are not appropriate. Dresses, skirts with blouses and or sweaters will do. *If candidates are dressed tastefully and are well groomed, the interviewer can focus on the candidate and not the clothes. Neatness and grooming are as important as the clothes.*"

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## EVALUATION OF YOUR PERFORMANCE

Some schools will have specific criteria for assessing your potential to be an outstanding teacher. One Western PA school district uses the following categories: **dress and appearance, voice, tactfulness, use of English, knowledge of subject matter, evidence of scholarship, poise, personality, and knowledge of professional methods and skills.** This district rates each category as superior, above average,

average, or below average.

### **Why?**

From the interviewer's perspective, the purpose of the interview comes down to two basic questions: -*Why should we hire you?* -*Why do you want to work for us?*

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## **SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**From *Teacher Employment Opportunities: A Job Search Guide for New Teachers*, a Spring 2000 publication by the MAASCUS.**

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES:**

- Discuss your student teaching experience. What you liked/disliked? Changes you would have made? (NOTE: Whatever you do, do not blame a bad student-teaching experience on the cooperating teacher or supervisor. This will not be a good reflection on your ability to take control of your own situations and accept personal responsibility.)
- Please review for us your teaching experiences such as levels subjects taught, years, location, etc.
- Please tell me about your most challenging experience while working with children or in the classroom and how did you handle it?
- Discuss your feelings/experience in reference to working in an urban setting.
- When did you first become interested in teaching?
- Tell us about your other school-related experiences such as extra-curricular activities, committees, curriculum development, etc.
- What experience do you have in teaching writing skills?
- What experience do you have with in-class support?
- What opportunities have you had to bring multicultural education into your classroom?
- How well has your college/university prepared you for the field of teaching? (NOTE: Do not blame your university or professors for your shortcomings. While this may be true to an extent, it more adversely reflects you than it does your university.)
- What experience have you had with students from culturally diverse backgrounds?

### **INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS:**

- Describe the best lesson you have delivered. Why was it successful?
- Tell us two ways you can grade and evaluate student work.
- What was your most creative lesson for reading to help the struggling reader?

- What are the most current and effective trends in teaching mathematics and reading?
- Describe the teaching techniques or strategies that are most effective for you.
- Describe your typical lesson. What does it include and who participates – how do they participate (what activities occur)?
- How would you include cooperative learning in class teaching?
- How important is success in learning? How do you help pupils experience success?
- How will you instruct/challenge students with varying abilities?
- If pupils were having difficulty learning a skill or concept, what would you do?
- Tell us how you assess your students to determine how well they are learning.
- What techniques would you use to be sure that pupils understand?
- What do you include when you write objectives?
- Do you feel that the teacher should be responsible for developing objectives or should they be provided in the curriculum?
- How can individualization actually be practiced in the classroom? How would you put individualization into practice?
- How do you know whether pupils understand what you are teaching during a lesson?
- How do you feel when a student fails?
- What techniques do you use to keep pupils actively involved during a lesson?
- What are your beliefs about reinforcement of pupils?
- How do you end a lesson?
- It seems like there is never enough time to cover the curriculum or to get children to master content and skills. Would you comment on that?
- Is drill and practice important? How and when would you use it?
- How do you increase the chances that pupils will understand the meaning of a concept or skill that you are teaching?
- What would you do to insure that children understand exactly what is expected of them in a homework assignment?
- How would you assess your effectiveness as a teacher?
- Are you constantly searching for things you can show, tell, or demonstrated to pupils? Tell us about some recent discovery, something that you have found.
- How do you deal with the unmotivated student?
- Tell me about some specific motivational strategies to get students excited about learning.
- Given the multitude of material that must be taught what is the optimum way to cover all subjects and still meet individual needs? How does your management of your classroom facilitate this?
- What would I see in your (subject area) class?
- What is the most important "thing" a student could learn in your class?
- Explain how you have changed your lesson plan preparation and presentation to students as you have gained experience.
- How do you meet the needs of individual students in your classroom?
- Describe different student learning styles or modalities of students and how you adjust lessons to benefit those differing styles.

- How do you differentiate instruction?
- Teaching Algebra to students entering the ninth grade in September will be a challenge. Many of the children have not acquired successful strategies for problem solving and critical thinking. Where would you begin if this were your classroom? What would you do at your grade level to better prepare students for this challenge?

### **TECHNICAL SKILLS:**

- How would you apply technology to enhance daily instruction and increase student learning and achievement?
- How would you/have you incorporate technology in you classroom?
- Explain your skills using a computer – address classroom management (ex: grade book), instructional, other?
- Are you comfortable with the use of technology in the classroom?
- What are your computer skills?
- What computer software have you used?

### **CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE:**

- Describe your philosophy regarding discipline.
- What was the most challenging discipline problem you've encountered and how did you handle it?
- What techniques would you use to handle discipline problems that may arise in your classroom?
- Describe the elements you would include in a discipline plan.
- How would you deal with a student who disrupts?
- What kinds of rules do you have in your classroom? How are they established?
- What do you feel are the most important factors in classroom control?
- What techniques do you use to increase the probability that pupils will behave appropriately?
- How would you create and promote a safe atmosphere within your classroom?
- How do you recognize and respond to individual differences and what behavior might you expect?
- After school you come across a pupil whom you know who is crying. He's 16 years old. You ask him what is the matter, and he says he was caught cheating. What would you do?

### **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:**

- What is your classroom management plan/style? What are your goals?
- I walk into your classroom, what would it look, feel, and sound like?
- How would you organize your classroom? What would it look like?
- What would a typical day look like in your classroom?
- Describe the first day of class.
- Describe what you would consider to be a model classroom.

- How would you describe your learning environment?
- Describe your organization, management strategies.
- Share three interesting techniques used in the classroom.
- What role does classroom management play in the educational process?
- Given the multitude of material that must be taught what is the optimum way to cover all subjects and still meet individual needs? How does your management of your classroom facilitate this?
- How do you evaluate student learning in your classroom (formally and informally)?
- Do you know a person who is a good listener? Describe that person as a listener.
- How can you tell when you are doing a good job of listening?
- When students say they want their teacher to be fair, what do you think they mean?
- What does "teamwork" mean to you? Give an example.
- Describe a situation in your last job when you felt pressure. How did you handle it?
- What would you do if 50% of a class did poorly on a test?
- A student tells his teacher that he forgot to bring his paper which he had written the night before. The teacher says, "I understand. I sometimes forget things like that too." How do you evaluate the way this teacher responded to the student?

#### **KNOWLEDGE OF CONTENT/MATERIALS:**

- What special course work have you taken that you feel has made you especially suited for the position you are applying?
- What kinds of materials and supplies would you need to do your best job?
- What kinds of materials have you used to assess pupil strengths and/or weaknesses?
- Are there any materials you have used that you find are especially effective for slow learners or bright students?
- What kinds of tests do you like to give?
- How do you organize your teaching supplies and/or materials?
- Describe your educational background and teaching experience related to your subject area?
- What curricular changes do you hope to see over the next few years?
- How do you stay current in your field?

#### **PLANNING SKILLS:**

- How well organized are you? Why is organization important for a teacher?
- What do you include in your daily lesson plans?
- Do you prefer to do long term or short term plans? How do you plan for instruction?
- How closely do you follow your plans?
- How do you feel when you don't meet a deadline? What do you do when pupils

- do not meet their deadlines?
- Describe for me the organization that goes into your planning for a lesson. ... I'm sitting in the back of your classroom; in some detail tell me what I see as you implement the lesson just described.
- What are some of the considerations you make when planning your lessons?
- How do you go about planning a unit?
- How much homework will you assign? How do you know how long it will take your student

#### **ADMINISTRATORS/STAFF:**

- Would you describe an outstanding teacher to me please?
- What kind of person do you like to work for?
- If you could establish an ideal school, what would it be like?
- If you were to tailor-make an in-service program for you, what should be included?
- Describe how you could be an effective communicator as part of the school community. (parents , staff)
- What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with and why? – Applicable to all three categories. (faculty, parents, students)
- What do you do when a supervisor or principal criticizes a teaching technique that you are using?

#### **PARENTS:**

- Describe your approach with a parent who is upset with you – and you know you are right.
- What are some methods of communicating student progress to parents other than report cards?
- How do you feel about parent contact?
- Write a letter to a parent explaining why you will not recommend moving the child to a higher math grouping (or more advanced math class).

#### **STUDENTS:**

- Are you willing to sponsor any extra-curricular activities?
- How would your students describe you as a teacher?
- How do you want students to view you?
- Do you want pupils to like you? Why?
- As a teacher, should you intentionally try to build rapport with your students? How?
- How can you get students to be excited about learning?
- What do you value most in a child?
- Should a teacher intentionally use humor in the classroom? How do you use humor in the classroom?
- Have you developed any new ideas about teaching in the past few months?

Describe one or two of them for us.

- If I were a child why would I want to be in your classroom?
- Do you have a specific grade level/age that you prefer to teach? Why?
- What do you feel is important for you to know about the students with whom you work? How do you go about gathering this information?

### **PERSONAL QUALITIES:**

- Why have you selected teaching as a profession?
- Tell us about yourself and why are you interested in this school district and/or position?
- What are your career goals short term and long term?
- What do you consider to be your major strength you bring to the classroom?
- What do you believe is the one area you want to work on improving?
- What distinguishes you from other candidate?
- What do you bring to the community besides your educational background?
- Is there anything you would like to add to help us evaluate your candidacy?
- Reason for leaving prior company/school?
- Describe yourself as "the teacher"?
- What makes you an effective teacher?
- What do you enjoy most about teaching?
- If I were to contact your references, what do you think they would say about you?
- Who influenced your choice to become a teacher? How?
- What is your mission? What are your beliefs about the significance of education?
- Tell me three things you believe about teaching.
- Describe yourself with three adjectives and explain why they were chosen.
- Why have you chosen the field of education you have?
- What is your most successful accomplishment?
- What gives you pride?
- Describe your fears of being a teacher.
- Describe your heroes.
- Describe your mentor.
- Tell me whom you would like to emulate?
- Would you describe your self as a team player or individual achiever?
- Would you tell us what you have read in the past two months? Why have you done this reading?

### **MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS:**

- How has the American Education been successful over the past twenty years?
- Tell us what you know about the Pennsylvania standards and the PSSA.
- What are your thoughts on NCLB?
- What educational research do you find most compelling and how have you incorporated it into your classroom?

- What current educational trends do you consider the have the most impact and how do you implement them?
- Please respond to the following statement:
- How would you define development as it relates to the children in your classroom?
- Important human characteristics are believed to be innate endowments, fixed at birth, distributed unequally among the population and among different population groups.

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR**

- What is your method of training new employees?
- What type of orientation would I receive?
- Is there a new teacher mentoring program?
- What are some of the common denominators among the districts successful employees?
- How can I become familiar with the policies and etiquette?
- How does the organization define a successful individual?
- Which grades are responsible for what topics?
- Who has the responsibility for a particular topic?
- How does the administration work with teachers to improve instruction?
- Are there school psychologists, counselors, or public agencies that help students and teachers?
- What types of media resources are available?
- How is the budget for this academic program developed?
- What textbooks do you use in this subject area?
- Describe the district's textbook adoption policies.
- Tell me about supervision visits.
- How often are performance reviews done?
- How is performance evaluated and how often? What measures of success are used?
- How would you describe the typical professional staff member in this district?
- In what area does the school district excel, or in what area does it have limitations?
- Does the staff spend time together outside normal school hours?
- How does the staff feel about new teachers?
- How active are teachers working with community organizations?
- Tell me about the students who attend this school.
- How involved are parents in school activities?
- What do parents expect of teachers in the district?
- What are some of the major short and long-range goals that the district has?
- What are some of the characteristics that the district considers to be unique?
- How has the district changed over the past five or ten years?
- What new projects or ventures are contemplated in the near future? What future challenges does this department face?
- What is your biggest departmental problem?

- In reviewing your organizational literature, I noticed that you recently \_\_\_\_\_ . How is that progressing?
- What is it about the organization that attracted you in the first place and kept you there?
- What types of school activities promote parent-teacher-student interaction?
- What discipline procedures does the district use?
- To what extent do staff members work collaboratively to solve problems and respond to the needs of the students?
- What technology resources will be available to me in the classroom?
- Can you tell me what kind of person you hope to hire for this position? What types of skills and attributes would be the most beneficial in the short/long run for an effective career here?
- Based on what you have seen of me so far, where do you think I could contribute most effectively?
- What professional skills do you expect of the person you hire?
- What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
- Are the employees encouraged to take courses of graduate study? Is tuition reimbursed?
- Do employees of the department participate in professional associations? Conferences? Are employees encouraged to do so?
- What is the budget for this activity?
- What does the community expect of activity sponsors?
- Are there auxiliary groups involved in the activity?
- Are there fundraising requirements that are a part of this activity?
- May I have a copy of this year's activity calendar?
- Are other faculty members also assigned to this activity?