

Interview Guide

for

Public School Positions

What Interviewers Look For

Differentiation

A job interview is all about fit. Interviewers will be asking themselves, “Why should we hire you?” They will evaluate your understanding of teaching and learning as well as your personality, relative to the open position. More than that, they will want to know how you differentiate yourself. Who you are as an educator? What is the specific value you bring? What are your strengths? What are your major accomplishments? In what situations in your experiences have you made an impact? In other words, what is your value proposition?

District Knowledge

What do you know about the district? What do you know about the individual school? Do your research (district and school web sites). Weaving your knowledge of the district and school into your interview conversation will make a positive impact, since it sends a clear message of your interest.

Love of Kids

Most importantly, **do you love kids?** Your love of and commitment to the betterment of children must be genuine and should come across during the interview, in order to maximize your chances for success.

Define Your Value Proposition

- If a school principal walked into your classroom, what three things would she observe about you that tell her you are a good teacher?
- For each skill or quality you listed above, write a brief story, from your past, about how you demonstrated it in the classroom. In your stories, reflect upon your specific achievements.
- Teaching “buzz words,” or “key words,” include the following:
 - ✓ IEP’s
 - ✓ Parent communication
 - ✓ Co-teaching
 - ✓ Student Engagement
 - ✓ Flexible grouping
 - ✓ Differentiated instruction
 - ✓ Behavior planning
 - ✓ Interventions
 - ✓ Inclusion
 - ✓ Least restrictive environments

How have you demonstrated these, and others, in your experiences? What have been your successes?

- List the opportunities you have had to connect with kids outside of the traditional classroom (camp counselor, etc.). How do these experiences enhance your candidacy? What did you learn from them?
- What do you feel are your greatest strengths as an educator? What are some concrete ways you have demonstrated your strengths in the past?
- What are some classroom management techniques you have used, successfully?
- Describe your experiences collaborating with others (with teachers, administrators, parents, etc.)

- ☐ To which districts are you applying? What has your research taught you about what is important to each?
- ☐ Who are you as a reader, learner, teacher, writer?

First, and Lasting, Impressions

- ☐ Appearance counts. Wear a formal interview suit in a dark color.
- ☐ Be well-groomed. Hair, jewelry, and make-up should be conservative.
- ☐ Show confidence and enthusiasm— shoulders back, good eye contact, pleasant look on face, energy in voice.
- ☐ Keep arms and legs uncrossed and lean in, slightly, while seated.
- ☐ Give a good, firm handshake. Get feedback beforehand and practice.
- ☐ Arrive 15 minutes EARLY.
- ☐ Be sure your body language reflects the message you want to send.
- ☐ Grammar counts. Teachers must always model proper grammar. Avoid slang (gonna, etc.) and overuse of “filler” words such as “O.K.” and “like.”
- ☐ The interview begins the moment you step foot within the vicinity of the school. Be courteous and kind to all individuals that you meet. Everyone you encounter will form an impression of you and may be asked to volunteer that information to the interviewers.
- ☐ Please put away your mobile devices and keep them turned OFF. Do not use your cell phone or other electronic devices to make calls, text, or surf the web while you are waiting for the interviewer. Cell phone conversations in waiting areas can be distracting and rude to others around you. Other uses of an electronic device can send a message that your focus is on the device and not your classroom or your work. Instead, use your wait time as another chance to glance at your resume or your prepared questions. Do NOT check your cell phone during the interview as such behavior would convey rudeness and disinterest.

Hiring Decisions

Who ultimately makes hiring decisions?

- ☐ Usually, school boards approve hires based upon the Superintendent’s recommendations. School boards generally don’t get involved in interviewing teachers and counselors except maybe in very small schools or for positions that are considered “high profile.”
- ☐ Recommendations to the Superintendent come from the Principal.

The Interview Process

The interview process *could* include any of the following:

- 1. Small group interview with 3-5 administrators, usually lasting 20-30 minutes**
- 2. Interview with school principal**

Tips:

- ☐ Interviewers should make you feel comfortable. Consider it a red flag if they do not. You should be evaluating each district as much as they are evaluating you. If you don't feel comfortable there, you don't want to work there.
- ☐ In most cases, every candidate is asked the same questions.
- ☐ Interviewers will take notes and sometimes fill out "score sheets" for each candidate. Decisions at this level are made by the group.
- ☐ Bring a professional-looking folder/binder with paper and pen and take some notes during the interview. This will show you are interested and engaged.
- ☐ Be sure to talk about yourself and what YOU have done or would do, being careful not to focus on how wonderful your mentor teacher's methods were.
- ☐ USE your portfolio as a tool during the interview. Make it meaningful. Refer to the concrete examples of your work contained therein to support your answers. Don't just present it like a scrap book at the beginning of the interview and ask generally if anyone would like to view it.
- ☐ BE HONEST. If you can't deliver professionally what you say about yourself during the interview, you run the risk of losing your position in the near future.
- ☐ Ask questions. Be sure to have 3 or 4 questions prepared to ask the interviewers.

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- 3. Lesson presentation, usually lasting about 20 minutes & sometimes followed by written reflection of your lesson performance. Audience can be school administrators or kids in a real classroom.**

Tips:

- ☐ You should receive interview instructions ahead of time telling you exactly what type of lesson to prepare and what to bring. If you don't receive instructions, ask.
- ☐ Be sure to ask how many participants will be in the audience so you bring along enough materials.
- ☐ Sometimes administrators are the audience. They may mimic certain disruptive behaviors of students during the lesson presentation to see how you will respond. Think about different behavioral scenarios and how you would address them. This is an opportunity for you to demonstrate what you know about behavior management.
- ☐ Use the standards.
- ☐ Don't show frustration.

- ☐ Get your point across.
- ☐ Plan from start to finish.
- ☐ Be sure the lesson has closure.
- ☐ Write the objective of your lesson on the board, in kid terms.

Note: You may also be asked to produce a writing sample -- either hand-written or electronic -- as part of the interview. This is not a part of the interview process at all schools. When providing hand-written samples, use your very best penmanship.

Interview Questions and Preparation

- ☐ Some questions may be focused on current “hot topics” in education, or “key words” such as:
 - ✓ Parent communication
 - ✓ Co-teaching
 - ✓ Student Engagement
 - ✓ Flexible grouping
 - ✓ Differentiated instruction
 - ✓ Behavior planning
 - ✓ Interventions
 - ✓ Inclusion
 - ✓ Least restrictive environments
- ☐ Get ready for the interview by preparing examples from your past experiences that demonstrate your very best abilities and knowledge in these areas.
- ☐ Talk to new teachers in the field – what were they asked?
- ☐ There are hundreds of sample interview questions for teachers...some of which are included in this handout. Don't try to memorize answers to specific questions because you will never know which specific questions will be asked during an interview. Instead, focus on what you **do** know, which is **yourself**. Be prepared to talk about your greatest strengths and attributes, demonstrate your knowledge of current “hot topics” in education through examples, and be prepared to answer the following questions:
 - ✓ “Tell us about yourself and how it relates to this position.”
 - ✓ “Who Are You As a Learner?” (What sorts of things do you like to learn about?)
 - ✓ “Who Are You As a Reader and Writer?” (What do you read? What do you write?)
 - ✓ “Who Are You As a Teacher?” (What do you enjoy teaching?)
- ☐ Further Questions to Consider As You Prepare:
 - ✓ Teaching is a team effort, so what do you have to offer?
 - ✓ Coaching is nice, but can you teach?

Tips:

- ☐ Know how your body reacts to stress.
- ☐ If your mouth gets dry, eat a breath mint a few minutes before your interview.
- ☐ If your hands sweat, keep a tissue in your pocket and discretely blot them dry before you shake hands.
- ☐ Don't ask "me-centered" questions like, "What's the salary for this position?"
- ☐ Don't be a bad comedian.
- ☐ Don't be high maintenance (don't ask for water or if someone could open a window, etc.)
- ☐ Don't waste time. Your answers should be under 2 minutes.
- ☐ Don't ever say anything negative about anyone you have worked with or any place you have worked – especially if asked the question, "Why are you leaving your current position?"
- ☐ If asked the question, "Is there something you've prepared that we didn't ask you?" Be sure to share some additional information about yourself.
- ☐ Send a **THANK YOU** note to the interviewer(s) within 48 hrs. and provide any follow-up information in a timely manner.

Behavioral Interviewing

What is Behavioral Interviewing?

Behavioral interviewing is a technique employed by interviewers to evaluate your past behavior in order to predict your future behavior in a particular position. Answering behavioral questions can be challenging, however thorough preparation will assist you in answering them successfully.

Using "STAR" stories, explained below, will help you construct an organized, specific, thoughtful, and concise answer.

Five Steps to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview:

1. Analyze the position you are being interviewed for; determine the skills required.
2. Evaluate and reflect upon your background to identify your skills and experiences related to the position.
3. Develop brief scenarios or “STAR stories” prior to your interview that demonstrate your teaching methods, classroom management, communication, initiative, etc. Each “story” should explain the situation, task, action and result (STAR).
4. Be specific in your stories. Giving generalizations will not help the employer understand and evaluate your behavior and skills. Employers want to know what you DID do rather than what you WOULD do in a given situation.
5. Identify three to five top selling points that set you apart from other candidates - and be sure to make the opportunity to point them out during the interview.

<u>S</u>ituation and <u>T</u>ask	Describe the situation that you were in and the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a practicum or internship, a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
<u>A</u>ction you took	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Describe what you did -- not the efforts of your mentor teacher or other team members. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.
<u>R</u>esults you achieved	What happened? How did the project end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING WORKSHEET

When preparing for an interview it is best to consider how you would respond to certain questions. Recall that a behavioral interview question is attempting to assess your proficiency with a particular skill. You can identify the skills an employer may try to assess by reviewing the position description. Below are examples of transferrable skills that are desired by education recruiters. While the questions you are asked during an interview may be different, try to identify an example for each of the skills below. Write your responses in the space provided.

SKILL	SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULT
Communication Share an example of a communication with a parent that helped you to understand a student in your class.				
Content Knowledge & Curriculum What are some math skills that students in your classroom have learned?				
Methods & Planning Describe a lesson plan that exceeded your expectations when you taught it.				
Classroom Organization & Management What rules and rewards have worked in your classroom in the past?				

Additional Behavior-Based Interview Question Examples

Content Knowledge and Curriculum

- Describe a two-week unit that you have taught.
- How have you used cooperative learning in your classroom?
- How have you integrated writing skills into your curriculum?

Methods and Planning

- Describe a lesson that did not succeed and how you would change it for a future class.
- How have you ensured coverage of state-mandated standards in your planning?
- Tell me how you have motivated students in the past.

Classroom Organization and Management

- Describe how you have organized your classroom in the past.
- Describe an experience you have had becoming established with a new group of students.
- What was the most challenging discipline problem you've encountered and how did you deal with it?

Homework and Grading

- Describe a grading policy that has worked well in the past.
- How have you assessed student achievement informally without grading?
- Tell me about a typical homework assignment in your class.

Meeting Student Needs

- How have you modified assignments for gifted or special education students?
- What are some strategies you have used to teach your subject to students who were not good listeners?
- Describe an experience where you identified a student's special need and modified a lesson for that individual.

Communication

- Describe a time when you team-taught or co-planned with a colleague.
- Tell about a time when you asked an administrator or teacher for help.
- Give an example of how you have dealt with a defiant student.

Professionalism

- What parts of your teacher education training do you use on a regular basis?
- How have memberships in professional organizations or attendance at conferences and workshops improved your teaching?
- What have you read recently that led to an improvement in your classroom?

Sample Questions to Ask During Your Interview

Helpful Links:

[The Guardian](#)

[About.com careers](#)

Final Tips:

Practice. Schedule a mock interview with Career Services by calling 610-758-3710.

Ask questions that demonstrate your interest in the position.

Show confidence and enthusiasm throughout your interview.

Put a positive spin on your answers, even when asked about something negative, like “what is your greatest weakness?” Mention the weakness and then reveal what you are doing to improve upon it.