



# Teacher Education Interviewing Guide

Congratulations! You got the interview! Now what?

The best way for you to succeed in an interview is to:

1. Research (yourself, the position, the school, the district)
2. Dress appropriately, know where you are going and arrive on time
3. Practice, practice, practice!

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# TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

**SCREENING**: The purpose of a screening interview is to eliminate unqualified candidates who don't meet the requirements for the position or who would not be a good fit with the organization.

**TELEPHONE**: Often used in the screening process to determine if the employer wants to invite you to interview on-site. Keys to successful telephone interviews:

- Give the interview your complete attention
- Treat a phone interview as though you are interviewing in person (be professional, get dressed, etc.)
- Have your resume and a copy of the job description nearby
- The employer can't see your body language; therefore it is important to communicate your enthusiasm through your words and tone of voice. Stay confident, upbeat and positive!

**ONE-ON-ONE**: Standard type of interview, with one interviewer and one applicant. Your goal in this interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer and communicate your skills and qualifications, as well as your fit for the position/organization.

**GROUP**: This type of interview can include multiple interviewers and multiple applicants. Gives the interviewers the opportunity to observe your ability to "think on your feet" and interact in a group setting. The key to this type of interview is to make eye contact with each member of the group as you are speaking and do so in a relaxed and confident manner. Group interviews are commonly used for graduate school interviews.

**MEAL**: The interview takes place while eating, typically over lunch. Follow the interviewers lead in ordering food and dining etiquette. A great way to prepare is to attend a dining etiquette program at SNC if possible.

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. **Analyze the Position.** Review the job description so you understand the required job duties and qualifications. Be prepared to discuss how your skills and background fit the qualifications for the position. Be prepared to communicate your interest in that particular grade, school, and district.
2. **Research the School/District.** Utilize the school/district websites to learn all you can about the school. Use the school board minutes (typically posted on the district website) to learn more about the school. Use personal contacts in the school/district to gain additional information.
3. **Research the Industry/Career field.** Learn about the issues or major news related to the career field.
4. **Know Yourself.** Clearly define your goals before the interview. Identify your skills, qualifications, experience. Be prepared to communicate these in a clear, concise manner.
5. **Practice, Practice, Practice!!!** Know your skills and qualifications and be prepared to talk about them. Use the list of frequently asked questions in this packet to help prepare. Schedule an appointment with a career counselor for a mock interview to practice your interviewing skills and get feedback. Attend the Mock Interview Relay for Teachers (MIRT) hosted by Career Services and held every March. This event allows you to practice your interviewing skills and receive feedback from administrators at local school districts.
6. **Attend the Interviewing Skills for Teachers Workshop** hosted by Career Services and held every Spring to learn more about improving your interviewing skills.
7. **Utilize Online and Library Resources** to research frequently asked interview questions and strategies for answering those questions. (Ex: [www.collegegrad.com/intv/](http://www.collegegrad.com/intv/); [www.wetfeet.com/advice/interviewing.asp](http://www.wetfeet.com/advice/interviewing.asp))
8. **Prepare your 60 Second Commercial.** Use this strategy to answer the interview question “Tell me about yourself”, to introduce yourself at an education career fair, to network at a professional event or to mingle at a party. Please see the Teacher Education 60 Second Commercial handout for more information on creating your own unique 60 Second Commercial.
9. **Map out directions to the interview site.** If possible do a trial run to determine what route you will take, how long the drive will be and where you will park.

# DRESS FOR SUCCESS

## MEN

## WOMEN

- WEAR A SUIT! Even though you might think you will never wear a suit again, you should still wear a suit. You may be surprised at how much use you will get out of that suit. Don't have a suit? It's time to buy one. Can't afford a suit? Borrow one (as long as it properly fits!).
- Solid color button down shirt.
- Conservative tie. Avoid cartoon characters, less-than-serious graphics or theme ties.
- No distracting jewelry.
- Socks must match pants.
- Hair length should be appropriate and hair should be clean and well groomed.
- Well trimmed facial hair.
- Polished, dress shoes. Make sure the color of your shoes matches the color of your belt.
- Remember to iron your clothes! If you don't have an iron, borrow one!
- Your scent should leave the room when you do, so go easy on the cologne.

- WEAR A SUIT! Even though you might think you will never wear a suit again, you should still wear a suit. You may be surprised at how much use you will get out of that suit. Don't have a suit? It's time to buy one. Can't afford a suit? Borrow one (as long as it properly fits!).
- Pant suit or skirt suit. If you choose to wear a skirt suit make sure the skirt length is to your knees. Also, if you wear a skirt be sure to wear skin-colored hosiery – no bare legs!
- Solid color button down shirt.
- Tasteful accessories (small earrings, one ring per hand maximum).
- Keep color-treated hair updated.
- Well-groomed fingernails. If you choose to wear fingernail polish, keep it a conservative color and be sure there are no chips in the polish.
- Makeup should be neat/refined.
- Polished, dress shoes.
- Remember to iron your clothes! If you don't have an iron, borrow one!
- Your scent should leave the room when you do, so go easy on the perfume.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. **Carry these items to the interview:** several copies of your resume on quality paper, copies of your references, professional looking portfolio to take notes following the interview and carry your resumes/references, directions to the interview site.
2. **Leave these items at home:** cell phones/pagers, friends/family, bad manners/negative attitude, gum.
3. **Upon arrival:** arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview, treat the receptionist with respect, check your appearance in the restroom, take along a breath mint, try to relax and take a few deep breaths.
4. **Be aware of your disposition.** Greet everyone you meet with a smile, good eye contact and a firm handshake. Always be aware of your nonverbal behavior. Maintain a relaxed, but professional posture and a positive tone of voice. Show excitement for the position.
5. **Listen and relax!** Enjoy the conversation and listen carefully by focusing and giving the interviewer your full attention.
6. **Think before you speak.** Before you answer a question: take a deep breath, organize your thoughts, understand the question and clearly communicate your response.
7. **It is ok to ask for a minute to think about a question.** It is perfectly acceptable to pause for a moment to collect your thoughts before responding to a question. Simply say to the interviewer “May I have a minute to think about that?”. Interviewers would rather you take a minute to think about your response and give a well thought out answer, rather than have you ramble on because you didn’t take enough time before responding. If you are really stumped on a question it is acceptable to ask “Can we return to that question later?”.
8. **Be specific and give examples.** Do not diminish past experiences. It adds to your credibility when you can give specific examples with a few strong points.
9. **Be honest!** Under NO circumstances is it ever acceptable to lie or make up an example. If you are struggling to come up with an answer, ask for a minute to think about the question or ask if you can come back to that particular question later.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. **Collect business cards from each interviewer.** This ensures you have the correct contact information if you have questions after the interview and so you can send a thank-you note.
2. **Evaluate your performance.** What parts of the interview went well? What parts need improvement? Be sure to address the areas for improvement to ensure that it goes better during the next interview.
3. **Thank the interviewer.** Always write a thank-you note to the interviewer. Send a letter within 1-2 days to each person you met with. If you are limited by time, an e-mail thank you is acceptable; otherwise a handwritten note is better. This is your opportunity to remind the interviewer of your great qualities, share something you may have forgotten to in the interview and again express your interest and enthusiasm for the position. Please see the Teacher Education Thank You Letter Guide for more information on writing a thank you letter.

# BEHAVIORAL-BASED INTERVIEWS

The basic premise of behavioral-based interviews is that past behavior predicts future behavior. Behavioral-based interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision by focusing on your actions and behaviors rather than subjective impressions. These types of questions are structured to obtain specific, behavioral examples. Recall situations that highlight favorable behaviors or actions, such as student teaching, sophomore block, other career-related experiences, coaching experience, course work, class projects, volunteer experience, work experience, leadership, teamwork, activities. Utilize the **PAR** technique to help you highlight relevant pieces of your examples and give structure to your answers.

**P = Problem** (Describe a problem or situation)

**A = Action** (Explain the action you took, individually or as part of a group)

**R = Results** (Talk about the positive results, quantifying if possible)

## Examples of Behavioral-Based Questions

- Tell me how you have dealt with unmotivated students.
- Tell me how you have handled a student who continually disrupted your class.
- Describe the toughest discipline situation you have encountered and how you handled it.
- Describe a positive impact you had on a student.
- Discuss a challenge you encountered from student teaching. What did you learn from it?
- Discuss the most challenging aspect of student teaching.
- Describe a situation that demonstrated good communication between you and a colleague, administrator or parent.
- Tell me about a memorable experience you have had as a teacher.
- What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction?
- How do you work under pressure?
- When have you failed?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- Describe a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Describe a situation where you had to do several tasks at the same time.
- Tell me about a time when you had to exert leadership in a crisis situation.
- Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond expectations.

# SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS/SKILLS/STRENGTHS

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why did you choose teaching as a career?
- Who most influenced your decision to become a teacher?
- What passions do you bring to teaching?
- What grade level do you prefer? Why?
- What unique qualities do you possess that we should consider?
- What activities or clubs would you be willing to advise?
- What is your strongest personal asset?
- Name 3 of your strengths.
- What would your cooperating teacher/supervisor say about you?
- What three words would your students use to describe you as a teacher?
- What are your interests outside of teaching?
- Is there anything we haven't discussed today that you feel is important for me to know about you as a teaching candidate? What sets you apart from others interviewing for this position?
- Describe your technology skills.

## WEAKNESSES

- What is one of your weaknesses?
- What would you say is an area in which you need improvement?
- What would you change about yourself and why?

## PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY

- What is your philosophy of education?
- How do you feel about thematic (unit) planning?
- What are your thoughts about PTA and other community organizations?
- Please give me your thoughts on a recent educational issue.
- What constitutes an effective classroom? An effective study hall?
- What is "right" about American education today?
- What should be improved in American education as it exists today?
- Describe an effective teacher for me.
- What do you consider an ideal class size?
- How do you personally feel students learn?
- What motivates you?
- What is your philosophy on homework?
- What is your philosophy on team teaching?
- What is the toughest aspect of teaching today? What are some of the challenges of being an educator?
- What are your concerns and outlook for the future of public education?
- Describe your ideal classroom.

## EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:

- Describe the ways you assess student performance.
- How do you evaluate your teaching performance? How do you determine if your students are learning?
- What evaluation techniques do you use? Do you grade on ability or effort?
- How do you feel about observations by supervisors?
- How do you assess whether your curriculum is appropriately matched to your students' needs?
- How does standardized testing affect your teaching?
- Should students have a part in the evaluation of teachers? Why or why not?

# SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## TEACHING TECHNIQUE

- What teaching methods do you find most effective?
- How do you know when students are engaged?
- How would you differentiate your instruction to accommodate the varied needs of students?
- How did you incorporate technology during your student teaching?
- Describe your typical teaching style. What teaching techniques do you use?
- Describe a teaching strategy you have used to maximize the learning potential of all students.
- What innovative ideas would you like to initiate in your classroom?
- Define cooperative learning and give an example of how you have used it.
- How do you motivate students? Name 3 effective ways to motivate students.
- What are the components of an effective lesson plan?
- Describe a lesson that was particularly successful. Describe each stage from planning through delivery.

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT/ORGANIZATION

- What classroom management system do you use?
- How would you handle cheating?
- Explain the structure of your discipline plan. What rules do you establish in your classroom?
- How would you handle a student who is a consistent behavioral problem in your classroom?
- How would you handle a student who refused to do what you asked?
- How do you handle discipline?
- What is the toughest aspect of discipline?
- How would you handle controversial issues as they came before your class?
- How is your classroom organized?
- What type of learning environment do you try to create?
- How do you structure your class to achieve maximum benefit from student/teacher contact?
- How would you develop student independence and self-discipline in your classroom?
- If you are having classroom management difficulties when and who would you ask for help?

## HUMAN RELATIONS/INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- How would you utilize the services of the guidance and counseling staff? Parents and teacher aides?
- As a teacher in our district, what would be your role in our community?
- What, in your opinion, is the best way to communicate with parents?
- What is your concept of the role of the administration in relation to teachers? To students?
- What are your expectations of a building principal?
- What are the best ways to establish rapport with students?
- How would you develop a good working relationship with your colleagues?
- How do you facilitate collaboration between home and school?
- When confronted by a parent on an issue, how do you best respond?

## GOALS/DIRECTION

- What are your plans for furthering your education?
- How have you recently improved your professional skills? What are your plans for future skill development?
- What are your short-term and long-term goals?
- How do you see this position fitting into your career goals?
- What do you believe to be the major trends in your career field at this time?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK THE ADMINISTRATOR

Typically at the end of the interview, the interviewer will ask you if you have any questions. You should ALWAYS have questions prepared to ask the interviewer. If you don't have questions prepared you might damage your chance of a successful interview. This is your opportunity to gain valuable information to determine if this position/school/district are a good fit for you.

Topics to avoid asking questions about include: salary/benefits, information about the school/district that is readily available on the website or brochures, personal questions, and questions that have already been answered during the course of the interview.

Topics to consider asking questions about include: specific questions about the position/district/school, qualities and skills the employer is looking for in candidates, advancement and promotion, training programs. Below are some possible questions to ask.

- What is the teacher/student ratio in your district?
- Tell me about the students that attend this school.
- Do teachers participate in curriculum review and change?
- What type of orientation/training process is provided for new teachers?
- Does your school/district make use of teacher aides or parent volunteers?
- How many classes a day will I be expected to teach?
- What discipline procedures does the district/school use?
- In what ways are teachers involved in extracurricular activities? How are advisors/coaches selected?
- What are the prospects for future growth in this community and its schools?
- How does the district/school meet individual student needs?
- What is the district/school doing to improve classroom instruction?
- How much support can I expect from the principal and parents?
- What makes a teacher successful in this school/district?
- What are you seeking in the candidate for this position?
- What classroom management techniques are used in this district/school?
- Does the district encourage decision-making at the school/classroom level?
- Why is this position open?
- How are teachers evaluated?
- Would I be part of a team teaching situation?
- What are the strengths of the current staff?
- What support systems are available to a new teacher?
- What type of staff development is available?
- What types of staff development programs and conferences have the teachers attended in the last year?
- What type of technology is used in the classroom?
- How is the district incorporating the Internet into instruction?
- How do staff members work collaboratively to solve problems and respond to the needs of students?
- Does the district encourage field trips?
- What do your teachers do during the summer?
- What are the next steps of the hiring process/what is the timeline of the hiring process? (These are great questions to end with if the interviewer has not already covered this topic.)