

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

The following questions are examples of questions frequently asked by school system recruiters. This list is certainly not all inclusive and should be used as a starting point in preparing for your interview. Take time to consider additional questions that may be asked of you as well as questions you would like to ask the interviewer.

## General

- Why do you want to teach?
- What is your philosophy of education?
- Describe your style of teaching?
- What grade level do you prefer? Why?
- Describe an ideal classroom.

## Career Goals

- What do you plan to be doing in five years?
- What are your career goals?
- Would you like to be involved in school (community) activities?

## Content Knowledge and Curriculum

- What are some math skills that students in your classroom have learned?
- Describe a two-week unit that you have taught.
- Tell me about a lesson that went well.
- How have you integrated writing skills into your curriculum?
- How have you integrated technology into your lessons?

## Methods and Planning

- Describe a lesson plan that exceeded your expectations when you taught it.
- 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?

## Classroom Organization and Management

- How would you use teacher aides and parent volunteers?
- Describe an experience you have had becoming established with a new group of students.
- What rules and rewards have worked in your classroom in the past?
- Describe a conflict you encountered with a student and how you dealt with it.
- A student is consistently late to your class. How do you handle the situation?
- How would you handle a student who continually “acted up” in your class?
- How and when do you discipline a student?

## Homework and Grading

- Describe a grading policy that has worked in the past.
- How have you assessed student achievement informally without grading?
- Tell me about a typical homework assignment in your class.
- What would you do, or how would you treat a student who refused to do the work you assigned?

## Meeting Student Needs

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

- How do you feel that the “rapid learner” should be provided for in your area of teaching?
- Some of your students always finish their assignments early. How would you deal with the free time that they have?
- How would you work with students who perform below grade level, especially those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds?
- With what kind of student do you most (least) like to work?

### **Communication**

- Share an example of a communication with a parent that helped you to understand a student in your class.
- 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.
- Are parent/teacher conferences important? Why or why not.
- How do you relate with minority students in the classroom?

### **Skills/Attributes**

- What is the greatest attribute you can bring to a class of students?
- What are the qualities of an excellent teacher? Which of these qualities do you have?
- Why should our school district hire you?

### **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 has had an impact in your classroom?
- You know that a staff member has been talking behind your back about what he or she sees as your ineffective teaching methods. What would you do?

### **Knowledge of School System**

- Why do you want to work in our district?
- What do you know about our school district?

### **Questions to Ask Recruiters**

- What is the teacher/student ratio in your district?
- Do you encourage teachers to earn advanced degrees?
- How many classes a day will I be expected to teach?
- Do you have teachers serving in areas for which they do not have full certification?
- Tell me about the students who attend this school.
- What textbooks does the district use in this subject area?
- Do teachers participate in curriculum review and change?
- What support staff members are available to help students and teachers?
- How does the teaching staff feel about new teachers?
- What discipline procedures does the district use?
- Do parents support the schools? Does the community?
- Do your schools use teacher aides or parent volunteers?
- What allowances are provided for supplies and materials?
- Does the administration encourage field trips for students?
- How are teachers assigned to extracurricular activities?
- Does the district have a statement of educational philosophy or mission? (*IF not stated elsewhere*)
- What are the prospects for future growth in this community and its schools?

# Dress Your Best

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**W**ell thought-out clothing can distinguish you as professional, polished, prepared, and serious about the job. Your appearance counts just as much as how you introduce yourself. Take the time to cultivate an appearance that leaves the professional impression you want it to. Observe principals and administrators and notice what they are wearing.

Go to a retailer and get fitted for a professional business suit. Work with the salesperson to choose the appropriate interviewing suit for you. Insist on a classic style; not one that is a current fad. The following are general etiquette guidelines about your professional appearance:

## Men

- Wear a suit with blazer, collared shirt, tie, and dress shoes.
- Maintain facial hair or shave.
- Avoid outrageous colors or patterns, such as neon or plaid; stick to classic colors like navy, brown, gray, or black.
- Be sure to wear pants that fit appropriately at the waist and wear a belt.

## Women

- Wear a pant or skirt suit with closed-toed professional shoes; heels over three inches are not recommended.
- Make sure your top has an appropriate neckline and keep your appearance conservative.
- Be cautious of the skirt length; it should be no shorter than above the knee.
- Avoid too many accessories or excessive makeup; keep it simple.

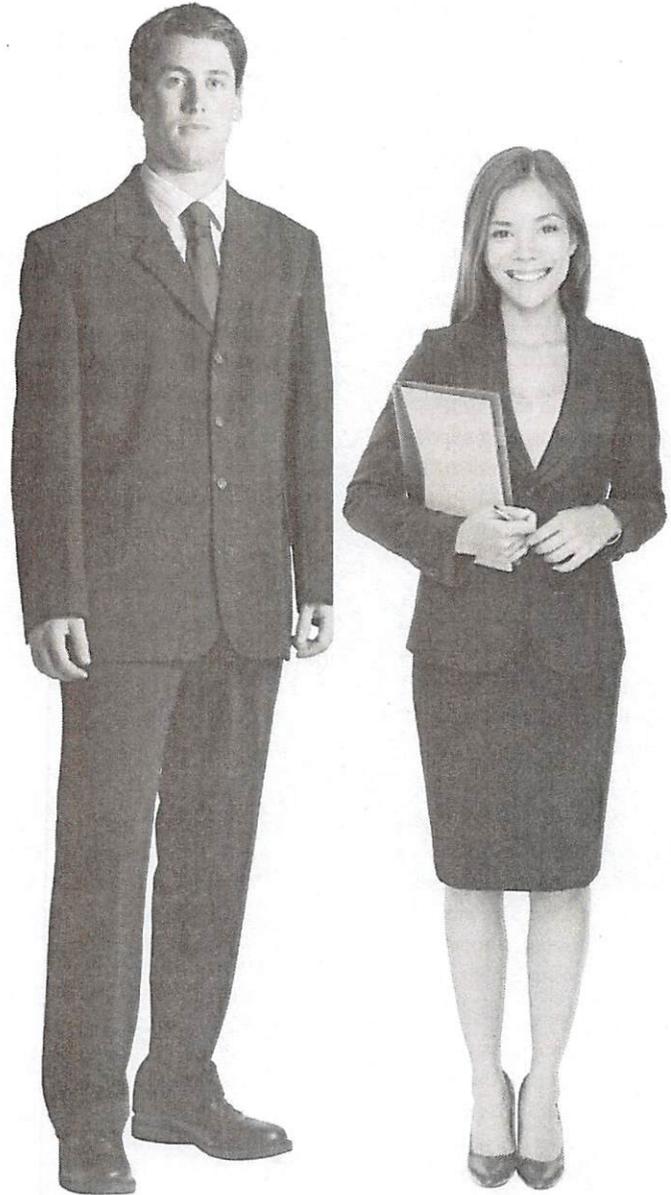
## Both Men and Women

- Attend to your hygiene and wear your hair professionally.
- Avoid fragrant perfumes or cologne.
- Limit the exposure of tattoos and piercings.
- Bring a portfolio or briefcase to organize and store documents.
- Always iron your attire and make sure you are polished.

## What NOT to Wear

- Tennis shoes, flip-flops, or evening shoes
- Jeans or shorts
- Tee-shirts or low-cut shirts (no cleavage)
- Colorful or patterned socks
- A backpack
- Chipped nail polish
- Ill-fitting pants or skirt
- Clothes that are too tight

Use *Pinterest* to find your professional style. *Pinterest* is a visual social network that allows you to create pin boards based on your interests. Create a board for "Interview Attire" and begin searching for professional business wear and pin what appeals to you.



# 8 Tips for Preparing for a Job Fair

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**D**uring the school year, many colleges and universities hold job fairs for their students. If you don't know when the next job fair is or you are looking for one specific to teachers, head to your career center to find out.

To ease you into the job fair experience, here are eight tips that will help you get ready for your next job fair and maximize your opportunities while you're there.

## 1. Dress for success

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 20 percent of job seekers find jobs at career fairs. Therefore, first impressions count. Your interview process may begin the moment you step into the fair.

Arrive at the job fair in professional attire. For males, this may include a clean suit, shirt, and tie. If you do not own a suit, wear clean dress pants with a button-up shirt and a tie, or a nice sweater. A variety of ties are acceptable to wear, but keep in mind that muted, solid colors, stripes or small patterns are preferred.

Females can wear suits as well in neutral or dark colors, such as black, navy, brown or grey. For a job fair, it is acceptable to wear a sweater set with a skirt, a dress, or dress pants rather than a full suit. It is important to remember that skirts and dresses be knee length.

Additionally, wear comfortable dress shoes. You will be on your feet and walking around the job fair. For males, make sure your socks are a dark color – never white – when wearing dress shoes. For females, it is

professional to wear neutral hosiery if wearing a dress or a skirt.

## 2. Prepare your elevator pitch

Prepare and practice your one-minute elevator pitch to prospective school districts/organizations. Your pitch may include your name, major, career interests, prior work experience, and information connecting your background to a school district's needs.

Similarly, when a school district asks you what type of position you are seeking, your answer shouldn't be "anything." Think about teaching positions you are looking for and what excites you most about entering the classroom.

## 3. Show initiative

Take initiative and introduce yourself with a handshake and a smile to school district representatives. Follow this by handing the representative your resume, then launch into your elevator pitch.

## 4. Network and collect information

Review pre-registered school districts/organizations before attending the job fair. For example, research their website and current job openings. Gathering information ahead of time will help you target the school district recruiters that you want to meet and collect further information from. Likewise, get to know less familiar districts at the fair. They may have unexpected opportunities that you might be very interested in.

Lastly, keep a file of all the contacts you have made at the job fair and include the school district/organization name, the date, and the place where you met. You may be attending more than one fair so looking back on this information will be very helpful during follow-up communication or while completing the application process.

## 5. Bring extra

Before attending any job fair, it is essential to gather core items, including a portfolio with notepad and pen, research notes on the school districts, and copies of your resume.

Find the number of school districts/organizations prior to the job fair to determine the number of resumes to bring, and then bring extra. Organizations may have more than one representative at the fair, and all may want to receive a copy of your resume when speaking with you.

## 6. Ask questions

When you speak to a school district recruiter, you should ask about job opportunities, the application process, qualifications, and career development opportunities.

## 7. Show respect to fellow candidates

School districts and organizations are usually given one table for two representatives at a job fair. They are just as excited to meet you as you are to meet them. As a result, these recruiters want to spend time meeting potential candidates and may incur a line during the process.

Be patient, show respect to the line, and be professional. If you get stuck in a line, take the time to practice your elevator speech in your head or take out a fresh copy of your resume. If you don't want to wait in a line, move on to the next table and remember to come back to visit those you've missed.

## 8. Say thank you

After a representative takes the time to get to know you at a job fair, say thank you.

Since you have collected the organization's contact information, send an email or note after the job fair. Thank them for their time, acknowledge any opportunities you may be interested in, include a copy of your resume, and, if requested, provide any additional information.

# Are You Ready For Behavioral Interviews?

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In a behavioral interview you will have to demonstrate your knowledge, skills, and abilities, collectively known as competencies, by giving specific examples from your experiences. The principal or human resources recruiter doesn't want to know that you can do something, but that you have done it. Prior to the interview, the competencies required for the position are determined. Then, the interviewer develops a series of questions that will allow him or her to find out if you – the teacher candidate – possess the necessary competencies to perform the job and are a good fit for that particular school. The basic premise of the behavioral interview is that past performance is a good predictor of future success.

While many teacher candidates are intimidated by this method, a behavioral interview provides the opportunity to demonstrate what makes you well suited for the job and the school. Rather than merely telling the interviewer what you would do in a situation, you must describe, in detail, how you handled a situation in the past. What better way to "strut your stuff"?

## S.T.A.R.

This is an acronym to help you with behavioral interview questions. Think of answering the questions like a short story. ST = situation or task; A = action you took; R = result of that action. If you are just graduating from college, think about situations from your student teaching experience, field experiences, and class work. If you are asked a behavioral question and you have never had an experience to fit that question, do NOT answer

what you think you would do, because you truly don't know. If you cannot answer the behavioral question, let the interviewer know that you have never experienced the situation, but that you believe it would take skills in \_\_\_\_\_. Never make up a story.

## Sample Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Tell me about a time when a lesson plan didn't go well. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a conflict you had with a student/parent.
- Describe an experience where you identified a student's special needs and modified the lesson.
- Share an example of communication with a parent that helped you better understand a student in your classroom.
- Tell me about a specific instance when you collaborated with other colleagues. What was the result of that collaboration?
- Describe a lesson plan that went very well. What made it work?
- Give an example of a time when you had to make a quick decision. What were the results?

As with any interview, you need to prepare in advance. Assess yourself: know your skills, style, and what you have to offer the employer. Do your research: learn about the school and the district; know what they are looking for in a teacher candidate. Also, prepare questions to ask the principal. Always have a list of questions to ask at the end of the interview.

Think about the possibility of behavioral interviews when you do something at work or in school that will demonstrate a competency to a prospective

employer. Record the experience as soon as possible. Consider keeping a journal since time has a way of clouding our memories.



## Quick Question:

What should I do if I am asked an illegal interview question?

## Quick Answer:

Employers are prohibited by law to ask you interview questions that do not somehow relate to the job. Illegal topics include race, color, sex, religion, birthplace, national origin, age, marital or family status, and disabilities. Most of the time, an interviewer is inadvertently asking an illegal question such as, "How many kids do you have?" Perhaps such a question may come up while "chatting" with school representatives before or after the actual interview. It is possible that an interviewer is asking such a question with the intention to base a hiring decision on this information. Either way, an illegal question should not be asked.

You have a few choices if you are asked an illegal question. You may answer the question. However, if you have any trepidation about the intent of the question, the best action may be to acknowledge the question but guide the discussion back to the qualifications for the position. For example if you are asked about your family, you may respond, "I want to assure you that my family responsibilities will not interfere with my ability to be an outstanding teacher. Among the qualities I'll bring to your school are ..." Keep your answer positive and avoid accusing the interviewer of asking an illegal question.

Your remaining choice is to refuse to answer the question which may create an awkward situation. You even have the right to file a discrimination claim with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), but it would be wise to seek legal advice before going this route. It is difficult to prove hiring discrimination, especially in a market where there are numerous qualified candidates in the interview pool, and such action on your part could damage your reputation with other potential employers. If you feel the interviewer was blatantly inappropriate, you may want to inform his or her supervisor that you were uncomfortable with the questions asked during the interview.

Fortunately, most employers will conduct an ethical interview and you will not encounter this situation. But it is wise to consider in advance how you will respond if you are asked an illegal question.

# Using STAR To Answer Behavioral-Based Interview Questions

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**W**hen you provide answers to behavioral interview questions, use the STAR technique: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Pay particular attention to the results of your activities because this is how your audience assesses your effectiveness. Below are two examples.

"Describe a difficult student you instructed and the strategies you used to teach him or her."		
<b>Situation</b>	What initially happened?	This semester I had a difficult student named Brad who was apathetic. On several different occasions he was joking around in class and distracting his peers.
<b>Task</b>	What task or goal did you set out to accomplish given the situation?	My goal was to engage Brad in the classroom and motivate him to complete his assignments.
<b>Action</b>	What did you do to achieve the task?	I engaged in a meaningful dialogue with Brad to identify what was preventing him from participating. I also explained the potential consequences of his behavior. After some probing, he revealed that he was reluctant to complete the assignment because he was not entirely sure how to answer some of the questions. I encouraged him to meet with me after school. I did not frame this as detention or a punitive sanction. I wanted him to choose to participate.  Brad agreed to meet with me and we continued to meet during the lunch period for the next two days. I made the assignment more fun and applicable by relating it to his future career. I also helped him learn how to evaluate his progress on the assignment so he could identify his learning and increase his confidence.
<b>Result</b>	What ultimately happened as the result of your behavior? Provide specific details to demonstrate your success.	Not only did Brad's participation increase during class, but I was also able to establish more rapport and trust with him. Plus, I learned not to pass judgment on students or assume that their lack of motivation is the result of laziness or defiance. I am now able to better assist students who are not engaged.

"Tell me about a time you failed."		
<b>Situation</b>	What initially happened?	My first semester in college I earned a grade that I was disappointed with in my History class.
<b>Task</b>	What task or goal did you set out to accomplish given the situation?	I am very committed to excellence and set a goal for myself to earn an A on the next exam. My understanding of the material was even more important than my grades, so I resolved to comprehend the information.
<b>Action</b>	What did you do to achieve the task?	I began to review my notes on a daily basis and used timelines or charts to organize the information. I met with the professor to communicate my commitment to his class and identify if he had any additional suggestions. I created flashcards for myself and formed a study group the week before the exam. We each identified possible exam questions and then pooled them together to create a practice test.
<b>Result</b>	What ultimately happened as the result of your behavior? Provide specific details to demonstrate your success.	I earned an A on my next exam and in the class. More importantly, I learned how to teach myself, manage my time, and be persistent. The experience also cultivated a sense of empathy for students who are failing and about to give up. Since that time, I have been satisfied with my academic achievement and, have made the Dean's list every semester.

STAR will help you keep your answers focused as you incorporate stories that address the behavioral-based interview questions. Interviewers will remember your stories because they provide evidence of your qualifications and bring credibility to your statements.

# Acing the Cyber Interview

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**S**ometime in your job search, you will likely have a *cyber interview*—an interview that doesn't take place in person. Districts have been conducting phone interviews for many years, and more and more districts are turning to Skype, FaceTime, or other similar video chat software as a means of interviewing candidates. While many aspects of the cyber interview are the same as being face-to-face, there are some additional factors to consider when interviewing virtually.

## Prepare well and follow up afterward

You must prepare for a cyber interview every bit as thoroughly as you prepare for a face-to-face meeting with a recruiter. In fact, it might be fair to say that you have to prepare more thoroughly than you would for a standard interview because there are limitations to how effectively you can communicate when you aren't in the same room with the person conducting the interview. You'll want to have your resume in front of you to refer to during the conversation. Practice common interview questions out loud ahead of time so you have a clear sense of how well your answers come across in real time. Research the school district so that you can authentically discuss why you want to teach there. Be prepared to illustrate your teaching skills by talking about real life experiences you've had in the classroom. And just as you would for an in-person interview, sending a thank you note or an email is still a professional way to follow up with the recruiter.

## Dress the part

If your interview involves a webcam, it's important to wear a complete professional outfit. Don't

assume that you will only be seen from the waist up. You may need to stand up briefly to retrieve an item or to demonstrate something for the interviewer, and you wouldn't want to be caught "half dressed"! Make sure that the color of your clothing doesn't make you look pale or create a backlit effect on the webcam. And remember, even if the recruiter can't see you, your mindset is affected by your attire. It's still an interview, even in cyberspace.

## "Arrive" early

Be in place and ready to talk 10 minutes before your scheduled interview time. Don't forget to visit the bathroom BEFORE the interview starts. It's common for the interviewer to initiate the interview by calling you, but it's wise to confirm with the recruiter who will be making the first contact.

## Test out the technology

Make sure that everything is connected and working. Do this the day before if possible, to allow time to address any technological issues. Do a sound and volume check of your microphone and evaluate the lighting in the room if you'll be on a webcam. Ensure that the position of the webcam picks up your face and shoulders clearly so that your facial expressions can be seen by the interviewer, and that you won't appear to be looking away from the person on the other side of the screen. If you're on a cell phone, make sure that you have good reception and a full battery. You don't want to seem unprepared or caught off guard.

## Eliminate distractions in the environment

Choose an interview location where you're not going to be interrupted and you'll have a table or desk for your materials. Ask your roommates or family to keep it quiet and not walk

through the interview area. Put the dog outside. If you're not conducting the interview on your cell phone, turn it (and other phones in the house) off. If your windows are open, you might want to close them to eliminate outside noise. Remember that your surroundings are part of your professional image, especially for a video interview, so make sure that the room is tidy and outside noise is kept to a minimum.

## Organize your materials

Although it's true that you can have more resources at your disposal when you are not face-to-face, shuffling through papers for information or looking away from the webcam to check your notes will backfire in a virtual environment in the same way it would in person. If you want to have extra information available during the interview, make sure you've organized it in a way that's easily accessible without breaking the flow of the conversation. Wedging the phone between your shoulder and your ear to help you focus or make a good impression with the interviewer! Anticipate what you might need and have it near you, within easy reach.

## Think about how you sound

Since phones and webcam microphones can distort sound, you may need to take care to speak a bit more slowly or distinctly. You'll also want to watch your volume. Many people find that they speak more loudly when using a cell phone or a webcam microphone. If you practice with online interview software, you'll get a good sense of how you look and sound. Check with your college's career center to see what resources they have available for online practice. Your manner of

delivery should sound professional and upbeat, and remember, even if you can't be seen, a smile can still be heard!

## Focus on what the interviewer is saying

If you are doing a webcam interview, look at the camera, not at the screen to make eye contact with the interviewer. It might take some practice, even if you routinely video chat with friends. Listen closely to the interviewer as well. When you are not face-to-face, it is more difficult to maintain attentiveness and appear engaged in the conversation. As with a face-to-face interview, if you have not heard or understood a question, ask for clarification.

## Expect some "weirdness"

No matter how carefully you prepare, it's likely that a cyber interview will just feel different or odd. You might have moments where both you and the interviewer start to speak at the same time, or you experience a hiccup in the connection that causes the signal to break up or the video stream to transmit in a jerky fashion. The key to handling the uncomfortable aspects of a virtual interview lies, at least in part, in anticipating that there will be some awkward moments and not allowing them to surprise you or derail your train of thought. If you're experiencing technical difficulties, let the interviewer know. You could say something like, "My Internet connection seems a bit slow at the moment. Are you able to see and hear me?" This way, the interviewer can adjust if possible or even reschedule if the issue cannot be resolved.

With a little innovative preparation, you'll be able to get past the barriers of not being face-to-face and ace the cyber interview.

# Interview Success: What Employers Seek (and What They Are Not Seeking)

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The interview is your opportunity to prove to employers that you are the right person for the job. You have limited time to highlight your skills and knowledge that are related to the job and school district. It is natural to think, “What do the interviewers want to hear?” However, it is critical that you answer each question honestly and avoid insincere answers that you think they want to hear. Employers want to hear your candid answers based on sound educational theory and practice.

Being honest doesn't mean that you answer each question with whatever pops into your head. As a professional educator, you must be aware of the issues that are important to administrators. Your awareness of professional issues should guide you in your interview preparation.

At the Spring 2013 Pittsburgh Education Recruitment Consortium Teacher Job Fair, 60 school district representatives from across the United States responded to a survey that asked two questions:

- What are at least three of the most important characteristics (skills, knowledge, qualities, etc.) that you seek in new teacher hires?
- What are at least three interview “knock-out factors” that lead to candidates being eliminated from consideration?

## Important Characteristics Interviewers Seek

School district representatives seek a variety of characteristics that are often difficult for candidates to display simply through written materials. Therefore, consider how you can highlight these skills

through conversation by citing specific examples from your past experiences. Below is a list of the characteristics administrators cited as important as they interview candidates. The areas are listed in order of the frequency cited by the respondents.

- Knowledge of content area(s)
- Classroom management skills
- Instructional methodology knowledge and skills
- Passion and enthusiasm for teaching and students
- Knowledge of state and national standards and how to integrate them into lessons
- Ability to use technology in the classroom
- Willingness to learn and grow
- Excellent verbal communication skills
- Ability to work in a team and collaborate with others, including co-teaching
- Positive attitude
- Confidence and a professional presence
- Ability to differentiate instruction
- Work ethic and dedication
- Ability to develop and deliver creative lessons
- Knowledge and training in special education
- Professionalism and appropriate dress
- Ability to effectively use a variety of assessment techniques
- Good written communication skills
- Common sense

- Ability to build relationships with parents, students, colleagues, and the community
- Being adaptable and flexible
- Organization skills
- Critical thinking skills to solve problems
- Experience working with diverse populations
- Time management skills
- Willingness to get involved in school community

## Interview Knock-Out Factors

While you consider how to address the characteristics administrators seek in new teachers, you also want to avoid the interview knock-out factors identified by survey respondents. Unlike the important characteristics, several of which are not immediately evident, many of these knock-out factors are observable during an interview. The list below highlights the importance of interview preparation and developing a professional image. Employers will not hear your evidence of teaching competence if they are distracted by your appearance.

By far (cited by every respondent except one), the number one knock-out factor is a lack of professionalism. Specifically, respondents cited these unprofessional physical characteristics:

- Unsuitable attire and grooming
- Poor body language
- Lack of eye contact
- Weak handshake
- Facial piercings
- Inappropriate demeanor or appearance

They also cited these unprofessional characteristics related to communication skills:

- Inappropriate language (swearing, slang, poor grammar)
- Sharing too much personal information
- Negative references to past employers or co-workers
- Exaggerating
- Lying

Administrators also viewed lack of research and preparation for the interview as poor professionalism.

Other knock-out factors (listed in order of frequency) cited by administrators include:

- Negative energy or a lack of energy
- Lack of knowledge in training, content, common core, technology, and pedagogy
- Inability to articulate why he/she was applying for a position at their school
- Inability to engage in and maintain a conversation
- Responses lacking depth or creativity
- Not answering the questions—indicating a lack of listening
- Being over-confident or arrogant including the use of sarcasm or displaying a “know-it-all” attitude
- Not being student-centered; rather, being more self-centered and interested in money, benefits, or convenience of the job
- Not present, inattentive, or unfocused
- Responses and materials not tailored to specific position

# Plan An A+ Demonstration Lesson

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- Rigidness, lack of flexibility, or not willing to work in other roles
- Not motivated to go above and beyond
- Use of cell phone during interview
- Late or no-show without notice
- Making excuses for past performances
- Lack of questions for interviewer
- Immaturity

As expected, many of the knock-out factors represent a lack of one or more of the important characteristics sought by school district representatives.

Overall, administrators are looking to hire teachers who are passionate, professional, and knowledgeable. Possessing the skills, knowledge, and experience administrators seek is not enough to land a job; you also must be able to effectively communicate your qualifications to an employer during an interview.

You got the call! After investing hours in the job search, a prospective employer has called to invite you for an interview. You've prepared for this moment by researching the district's website, reviewing sample interview questions, participating in a mock interview, and developing questions to ask the interviewer. However, when the caller indicates that you should plan to teach a mini-lesson, your anxiety level escalates. As you graciously thank the caller for the upcoming interview and opportunity to teach a lesson, your inner voice is screaming, "Where do I start?"

First of all, don't panic. You're a teacher. You can do this! Don't let the audience and abbreviated time frame intimidate you. Here are some tips to help you prepare an A+ demonstration lesson:

Consider the employer's objectives. What are they looking for? The observers will be interested in several components, including: a) planning and preparation; b) classroom environment; c) knowledge of content/teaching strategies; and d) professionalism.

## Planning and Preparation

- Prior to the interview, ask who your "students" will be and how many you should anticipate. Will you teach actual students or administrators, school board members, teachers, and parents posing as students? Additionally, ensure that you are clear on the parameters, including time, context, number of students, and topic.
- Demonstrate your strengths. This is not the time to stretch your creativity. If possible, choose a lesson that you have

implemented before and revise it for the abbreviated time frame.

- Your plan should be thorough; provide a cover sheet with the rationale for your lesson.
- Don't try to cover too many objectives in your lesson. Keep it focused and manageable.
- Rehearse the lesson. Time it and have a veteran teacher critique it.

## Classroom Environment

- Anticipate that you will have little set-up time. Keep your plan simple! Don't assume that any resources are available on-site. You may inquire about available technology, but don't rely on it. In other words, have a back-up plan to show that you've anticipated all potential snafus.
- Consider taking the first minute to have students prepare name tags so that you can call on them by name. (To save time, one of my teacher candidates prepared a packet for each student. She included name tags and markers along with other materials students would need during her lesson.)
- Be prepared for the unexpected. For example, there may be contrived discipline problems from administrators.

## Knowledge and Teaching Strategies

- Engage the students—this is key!
- At the end of the lesson plan, describe extensions, i.e. "If I had more time, I would ..."
- Try to ask some higher-order thinking questions.

- Plan for differentiated instruction—even if particular student needs aren't revealed beforehand. In your lesson plan, indicate how you will accommodate various needs.
- Consider if your lesson would accommodate an opportunity for you to interact with students one-on-one. A principal shared with me recently that he likes to observe candidates providing individual assistance to one or two students.

## Professionalism

- Demonstrate your resourcefulness by researching the district and local community website. If possible, "localize the lesson" by incorporating a school mascot, tradition or community landmark.
- Check out professional association websites for resources; mention this in your lesson plan or cover sheet.
- Along with your thank-you letter after the interview, include a self-reflection: "If I taught this lesson again, I would ..."

With conscientious planning, your mini-lesson will truly show the prospective employer the teaching strengths you bring to the classroom. Therefore, prepare carefully, practice, and pursue this phase of the interview process with confidence. You're ready to demonstrate your passion for teaching!

# The Importance of Thank-you Letters

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A thank-you/follow-up letter or note is an ideal, professional way to maintain contact with an employer after a meeting or interview. This correspondence will assure the hiring official of your continued interest in the position. The primary purpose of this is to maintain contact, but you'll want to be sure that you have a substantial reason for contacting the employer each time you write, such as:

- ▶ Thanking the employer for the opportunity to interview.
- ▶ Sending supportive materials, e.g., updated transcripts.
- ▶ Notifying the employer of a change of address or additional experience gained since submitting your application.

Thank-you letters should be sent as soon as possible after the interview (preferably within 24 hours) and before the hiring decision is made. Well-written notes should say more than "thank you." Here are some elements to consider:

### *Express Enthusiasm:*

Remind the interviewer that you are a good fit for the school or district and that you have continued interest in and enthusiasm for the position. It is one more chance to market yourself for this specific job.

### *Answer Unresolved Issues:*

Answer and expand upon any relevant questions raised in the interview. If you did not get a chance to mention certain points, you can address those items now. The thank-you note is another opportunity to expand on your fit for the position.

### *Express Sincerity:*

Be genuine and sincere in your gratitude. Comment on the importance of the meeting.

### *Personalize It:*

Highlight a key point from your meeting that was unique and meaningful. This will refresh the interviewer's memory of you. Interviewers are typically impressed with proof that candidates listen and remember the conversation. If you met with several people, it may not be obvious who the real decision-makers are. Make sure you vary slightly the content of each thank-you note. No one likes to receive a carbon copy of a message that everyone else received. This will also force you to remember with whom you interviewed, which will make your follow-up more effective. Remember to ask for business cards before leaving the interview so that you have the correct spelling and title of your interviewers, and make some notes while your memory is fresh.

### *Keep It Short:*

The "Rule of Three" in communications says that the human mind can only remember three things about anything. If pushed to remember four, the mind will forget all four from overload. Choose three points you want to stress about yourself which might include skills, knowledge and personal traits. Ideally, these three points should be presented in the resume, reflected in the cover letter, discussed in the interview, and then summarized in the thank-you note.

For more conservative school districts, you may want to consider

typed thank-you letters. Using a business letter format conveys that this meeting was important enough to take the time to present yourself in a professional manner. However, alumni and people with whom you are more familiar may prefer a handwritten thank-you note. You must still prepare it carefully, write legibly and use tasteful stationery. If you want to add to one of the answers you gave at the interview, a lengthier, typed letter directed toward the issue may be beneficial.

If the school district representative has been communicating with you online, then a well-written email message may be appropriate. A word of caution: do not make the message overly friendly (people have a tendency to be less formal with email). Also, try to keep your message to one screen length; administrators appreciate brevity. However, be aware that some employers may appreciate the traditional approach, especially because handwritten notes are so rare these days. In addition, hard copy thank-you notes typically get filed in an applicant's folder, whereas email is usually read and deleted.

A thank-you note can make you stand out from the competition by demonstrating your professionalism, follow-through and interest. And a little common courtesy never hurts! Statistically, fewer than 10% of interviewees follow up with thank-you notes. Imagine how positively that 10% will be viewed compared to the 90% who neglect to write a thank-you letter.

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