

# CAREER CENTER

## Interviewing Guide

### FOR TEACHERS



#### CAREER CENTER

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Westfield  
STATE UNIVERSITY

# THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

The interview is a chance for applicants and employers to mutually evaluate the fit between the applicant's qualifications and the position being considered.

Because interviewing can be a nerve-wracking process, the Career Center encourages you to learn as much as possible about interviewing do's and don'ts so that hearing the question, "Would you like to join us for a job interview?" will be exciting instead of scary!

## Interview Types

**Screening Interviews** – The screening interview is generally used to determine whether or not you are qualified for the position and to develop a first impression. This type is typically short (20-30 minutes) and can be completed via phone or on-site. Selected candidates are then offered an opportunity to move on to the next stage of interviewing at a later date.

**Phone Interviews** – Employers generally use a phone interview when it is not convenient or possible to meet in person. Employers might also use Skype in lieu of a traditional phone interview, so be prepared to secure access to a computer with a camera function and familiarize yourself with the program. Remember to find a quiet place (without the possibility of interruptions), smile (even though it won't be seen via phone – it helps to change your tone) and dress professionally (especially if using Skype).

**On-Site Interviews** – These interviews are typically longer and more comprehensive in nature, taking place inside the workplace. On-site interviews may be facilitated by just one interviewer, but often include a series of one-on-one meetings with small or large groups of people. On-site interviews might include a meal, tour of the workplace, assessments and more. Remember, it's certainly appropriate to ask for an agenda in advance to best prepare for an on-site interview.

## Preparing for an Interview

**Do your homework on the SCHOOL**– This is often overlooked but recruiters consider research as the key to interviewing success. Find out as much as you can about the school including the history, mission and values, and current happenings. What makes this school unique? Why are you interested in working for this school versus another employer? At a minimum, visit the school's website, review the school's profile on the state's Dept. of Education website, and even consult local periodicals and newspapers. To go the extra mile, try connecting with a current or past employee at the school through your network or LinkedIn.

**Do homework on YOURSELF and the POSITION** – Review your own history thoroughly. What are the top three to five skills or experiences you can offer this particular employer? Prepare examples of these skills/experiences so that you can effectively communicate them during an interview. Revisit the job posting – what are the main responsibilities of this position and how can you convey your ability to complete those tasks successfully? Ask yourself: Why do you want this particular job over any other position?

**Practice the ROUTE** – To ensure you will arrive with ample time prior to the interview, practice the route you will take in advance. Research the parking situation so that you not only know where to park, but are prepared for potential costs and the time it will take to find the interview location from the parking lot. You cannot be late for an interview! Arriving to the interview 10 minutes early is strongly suggested.

# DRESS FOR SUCCESS

*Should* your clothes and appearance be a consideration for whether you can perform the duties of a job? No.  
*Will* your clothes and appearance be considered in evaluating you for a particular job? YES!

It's all part of the process. Your primary goal in dressing for an interview is to feel good about the way you look while projecting an image that matches the requirements of the position and company, or even a step above that.

## Guidelines for Professional Dress

### Suits:

Conservative and tailored fit business suit, pantsuit, or skirt of length no shorter than the knee  
Choose neutral colors such as black, navy, gray or brown-muted pinstripes are also acceptable

### Ties:

Conservative stripes or paisleys that complement your suit; silk or good quality blends preferred

### Shirts:

Simple style white, soft or classic colors  
Good quality button down, collared shirt or blouse  
Overly detailed or low cut shirts should be avoided  
Be sure it is clean and ironed

### Shoes:

Highly polished pumps or low-medium heels in a neutral color-no open toed shoes  
Lightly polished flats or laced dress shoes  
If wearing a dark colored suit, brown or black shoes would be best

### Stockings & Socks:

Sheer hosiery if wearing a skirt-avoid lace and patterns  
Choose dress socks that match your suit

### Jewelry & Tattoos:

Keep it simple and minimize – a watch is often helpful during an interview  
Keep in mind body piercings body piercings and tattoos may not be viewed positively by most employers

### Perfume and Cologne:

Use sparingly if at all.



# TIPS FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

## Interview Checklist

- ✓ Research the school and the district. Understand the student population, school culture, resources, etc. Don't expect to learn all about the school at the interview! It makes you look less interested.
- ✓ Take a test drive to the location of the interview prior to the interview date.
- ✓ Dress appropriately, conservatively, and professionally. No excessive jewelry or other accessories that distract the interviewer from focusing on YOU.
- ✓ Prepare questions to ask the interviewer (At least 3).
- ✓ Prior to your interview, review your resume and rehearse key points you want to communicate. Be sure to mention qualifications that fit the job requirements.
- ✓ Arrive early (Preferably 10-15 minutes).
- ✓ Bring a professional padfolio with a notepad, pen, EXTRA RESUMES, your portfolio, and a list of references.
- ✓ Be personable. Greet the receptionist, staff, and interviewer with a smile.
- ✓ Offer a solid handshake. Show enthusiasm and interest! Remember to SMILE!
- ✓ Do not sit down before the interviewer. Wait to be shown where to sit or to be asked to be seated. Sit up straight with upright, yet relaxed posture.
- ✓ Make good eye contact with everyone at the interview. Do not fidget with pens, paper, or your hands. Try to keep hands still or folded in your lap.
- ✓ Speak slowly and clearly and don't be afraid to pause a moment to collect your thoughts. Silence is better than filling the time with "um's" and "uh's".
- ✓ Do not criticize previous employers, supervisors, professors, etc. When explaining your reasons for leaving, communicate your rationale professionally.
- ✓ Be honest. Don't try to cover up mistakes. Instead, focus on how you learned from them.
- ✓ Be assertive. Remember, the interview is a way for you to learn if the job is right for you.
- ✓ If you don't understand a question - or need a moment to think about it - say so. Never pretend to know something or someone when you don't.
- ✓ Don't inquire about salary or benefits until you have been offered the job.

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Common Questions Interviewers May Ask You & Example Responses

### 1. Tell me about yourself.

Keep response related to the position you are applying for. You may include educational experience, interests, goals, recent activities, etc.

- **Example:** I am delighted to be here today to interview with a district ranked in the top five in the state for student achievement. Having just finished student teaching in a neighboring district, Springfield Public Schools, I had a wonderful cooperating teacher who helped me apply everything I learned at Westfield State University. One of the strengths I bring to teaching upper elementary school is the work I did last semester with the “Top Notch” reading program.

### 2. Tell us about your involvement outside the classroom.

It is best to give actual examples if you were a coach, initiated a student club, chaperoned school dances and concerts, or made a point of cheering on a troubled student playing a sport after school.

### 3. Describe a lesson that didn't go well and why.

- **Example:** While student teaching, I prepared a math lesson about adding fractions. As I taught, I realized my students didn't know the basics of fractions and were confused. I changed the plan as I went, and implemented a review of the basics. Then, we went on to adding fractions. I learned to assess prior knowledge and not assume students know material that was supposed to have been covered earlier.

### 4. How have you worked to be an advocate for students who are at-risk in your school?

- **Example:** I currently teach at a high school that is striving to increase its graduation rate. I am assigned a homeroom and I am to monitor students' grades, referring some students to peer intervention and others to counselors if I see danger signs of dropping out. While time consuming, I find that students who know that I am there for them come to me for help. This program makes homeroom teachers the advocates and it works well.

### 5. How do you partner with parents?

In forming a partnership, demonstrate you are both proactive and reactive. Be sure to mention how you open lines of communication, maintain the home-school connection, and tackle problems constructively.

- **Example:** Parental involvement is key to success in the classroom. I send monthly newsletters home, email parents with student success stories and connect with them on a regular basis. When issues have arisen, I make sure to listen to the parent's input, and try to strategize ways to enlist the parent's help in resolving the problem.

### 6. Describe your discipline philosophy.

Talk about how you use positive reinforcement. You are firm, but don't yell. You have appropriate consequences for inappropriate behavior, develop ground rules the first week of class, and adhere to school discipline guidelines. You can also state that you expect discipline issues to be minimal since you are able to cultivate positive relationships with your students. Also, you should mention that you would only send students to the principal's office for serious behavior problems.

### 7. How will you prepare students for standardized assessments?

There are standardized assessments at almost every grade level. Be sure you know the names of the tests. Talk about your experiences preparing students. You'll get bonus points if you know and describe the format of the test because that will prove your familiarity.

## Common Questions Interviewers May Ask You & Example Responses – CONT'D

### **8. How do you differentiate instruction?**

It's best to integrate what we know about best practice with specific strategies and activities you have implemented, or can implement, in the classroom. The school wants to know that you can effectively work with students from all points along the achievement continuum.

- **Example:** Working with the sixth-grade teacher next door, we divided students for a math activity, based on the students' needs for review. I was able to work with students who really needed more one-on-one attention to attain higher scores. Even within my group, I modified how I presented information to students who needed more hands-on examples.

### **9. What is your philosophy of teaching?**

Interviewers ask this question to find out your guiding principles for education. Outline your top core beliefs on teaching and student learning, and describe specific examples of how your philosophy has informed your curriculum and instruction methods.

- **Example:** I believe that every child can reach their learning potential, with high expectations, the necessary support and opportunities, and a caring classroom. I support this effort by greeting each student as he/she enters the classroom, so that each student feels welcome and believes that he/she is part of a learning community. I clearly state the learning and behavioral expectations for my class, and I follow through in upholding these standards. For instance, if a student turns in a substandard project, then I meet with the student, reiterate my expectations, and provide any further assistance or support that the student might need to finish the project.

### **10. Be prepared to address questions specific to the grade or discipline you would be teaching.**

Elementary and middle school teachers can count on questions about the Common Core and/or any standards the state or district has adopted. Science and social studies teachers have new standards too, developed by their professional associations. If you've carefully researched the school, you can take an educated guess about what will be asked. For example, you might notice references on the school website to literacy blocks, middle school philosophy or college and career readiness.

### **11. How have the Common Core State Standards guided your lesson preparation? Or, how have your state or local standards guided your lesson preparation?**

- **Example:** The standards are certainly a focus point. In my college classes, we started our plans with the standard, and then developed a student objective that would demonstrate mastery. Next, we determined how to focus students, do a quick review to tie the material to something already learned and how to engage the students with the new material. We always assessed each lesson in some way, formally or informally. Having posted standards helped students monitor their own learning, too.

### **12. With so much content to cover with standards, describe your approach to long-term planning.**

- **Example:** In the school where I currently teach, we have grade-level meetings to go over our curriculum maps. Curriculum mapping has helped me to see the year at a glance, as well as to look for gaps and overlaps in the curriculum from my grade to another. I can now lead curriculum mapping for a grade level.

### **13. What do you know about our community and school?**

Researching the school before the interview will pay off. There are several motivations underlying this question. Interviewers want to know you've done your homework. They want you to recognize their school is a special place before you are invited to join the faculty. There is always a connection between a classroom and the community just beyond school walls.

# BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The premise behind behavioral interview questions is that past performance will predict future behavior. With this in mind, it is important that you anticipate questions that will ask you to provide concrete examples of times when you demonstrated a skill or behavior. Ideally, the examples you provide will convince the interviewer that you have the skills, experiences and behaviors that are a match for the position and the culture of the organization.

## Sample Behavioral Questions

- Tell me about a time when you went above-and-beyond the call of duty in your position.
- Tell me about an effective method to teach \_\_\_\_\_ that you have found to work.
- What have you done to stay current in your field?
- Give me an example of a teaching style that you implemented. Why did you implement it and what was the result?
- Tell me about a time when you failed.
- Describe a time you felt most challenged by a student. How did you handle the situation?
- What methods of communicating with parents have you used that worked? Why?
- Tell me about a time when you experienced a significant accomplishment.

## Questions about Negative Experiences

Employers will ask difficult questions in an interview to see how an interviewee will handle it. Some questions however are specifically targeted to bring about a negative response.

### Examples:

- What are your three biggest weaknesses?
- Tell me about a mistake you made in your work and how you handled it.
- Can you tell me about a time where worked with an individual who you did not like/did not like you?
- What was one thing you really did not like about your last school?

### Answering Questions about Negative Experiences:

The best way to answer questions like these is to be honest. However, instead of following the negative tone of the question, attempt to make your answer more positive. Use this as a way to illustrate some of your skills such as use of communication to resolve an issue, the ability to work as a team to meet a deadline or your problem solving skills to dissolve a conflict.

### **Top Qualities Valued by Employers**

1. Leadership
2. Teamwork
3. Communication Skills
4. Problem-Solving Skills
5. Strong Work Ethic
6. Initiative
7. Analytical/Quantitative Skills
8. Flexibility/Adaptability
9. Technical/Computer Skills
10. Attention to Detail

# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR INTERVIEWER

Don't forget to develop a list of (at least three to five) questions to ask during your interview! This is a great way to show an employer your sincere interest in the position and school, ways you can fit into their success, as well as demonstrate your level of interview preparedness.

Research the school, district and position in detail and determine anything that you might wish to have clarified. Do NOT ask anything that can be found on their website and do NOT bring up salary or benefits.

## Potential Questions

- I am interested in participating in an induction/mentoring program. Can you describe the one here?
- What professional development opportunities are available for teachers here?
- What types of computer/technology resources are available in the classroom? School?
- Ask anything specific about the school that indicates you have some knowledge, and are genuinely interested in learning more.
- How would you describe the support from parents in this community?
- What initiatives have you launched recently?
- What reading program are you currently using?
- Do teachers participate in curriculum review and change? How frequently does this happen?
- What types of activities do you have that promote parent-teacher-student interaction?
- What textbooks does the district use in social studies (or English, biology, etc.)?
- What discipline procedures does the district use?
- Does the school make use of teacher aides and parent volunteers? How?
- Do you encourage teachers to earn graduate degrees? How does the district support teachers pursuing graduate degrees?
- How do teachers and administrators work collaboratively to solve problems and respond to student needs?
- How many classes will I be expected to teach each day?
- What courses will the person in this position be assigned to teach?
- What kinds of staff development activities did the entire faculty participate in this past year?
- How are teachers assigned to extracurricular activities? Is compensation provided?
- Please tell me about the students who attend the school. What percentage of students continues on to two- and four-year colleges?
- As a new teacher, how will I be supported and evaluated? Will I be paired with a mentor teacher or a support team?
- How active are parents at this school?
- Will the school be addressing any major issues or changes this year?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?
- When should I expect to hear from you?

# THANK YOU LETTERS

It is good practice to send thank you notes to those who give you their time, either in person or over the phone.

Always write thank-you notes within 24 hours. Sending an email thank you note is advisable—especially if the hiring manager is set to make a fast decision – though following-up with a handwritten note demonstrates further initiative.

It is especially important to write a thank-you note after an employment interview to at least the primary interviewer. If you are interviewed by more than one individual, it's best to write to each person if possible. When writing individual notes, it is important to personalize them as much as possible. This requires more time and effort but is an impressive touch.

A typical thank-you note after an interview may have the following format:

**Paragraph 1:** Shows gratitude and makes specific reference to the job.

**Paragraph 2:** References your overall fit and stresses key points working in your favor. When writing to more than one interviewer, you may want to note a particular question asked by the interviewer or thank them for a specific kindness that was extended.

**Paragraph 3:** Reiterates interest in the position, restates gratitude and closes on a positive note.

## Sample Post-Interview Thank You Letter

Ms. Paula Ceglowski  
Director of Human Resources  
Westfield Public Schools  
94 North Elm Street, Suite 101  
Westfield, MA 01085

June 2, 2019

Dear Ms. Ceglowski:

Thank you so much for the opportunity to interview for the 4th grade teaching position at Franklin Avenue Elementary School. After meeting with you, I am even more excited about this potential opportunity.

In addition to my enthusiasm, I will bring to this position my ability to quickly establish rapport with students, well-built classroom management, bilingual skills in English and Spanish, and a strong work ethic. Through my international teaching experience in Costa Rica, I gained an appreciation of diversity, which I hope to instill in my students. I believe my three years of experience working in a daycare center has given me the confidence and ability to manage my own classroom. As we discussed, I am also interested in being an advisor for extracurricular activities.

Thank you again for taking the time to interview me. I would welcome the opportunity to become a staff member at Franklin Avenue Elementary School and believe I would be a powerful addition to your staff. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Jackson

# HOW DO YOUR SKILLS MATCH THE POSITION?

An additional step that you can take to prepare for an interview is to review the job description for the major job responsibilities and then think about how your previous experiences (class, jobs, volunteer activities or clubs) demonstrate your specific qualifications.

Major Job Duties/Qualifications	My Qualifications