

Top interview questions for teachers

Preparing answers for an interview with a principal, or any others involved in a hiring decision, is critical. The key to having ready answers is knowing which questions they are most likely to ask.

Here are 20 questions you'll likely be asked that are specific to teachers, and 20 more general interview questions which might also pop up.

Especially with behavioral questions, you'll want to give specific examples of times when you handled difficult tasks or situations successfully. Think of **STAR: Situation, Task, Action and Result**.

Teacher specific questions

- What is your teaching philosophy?
- Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- What type of classroom management structure would you implement?
- How do you find new ideas for lessons?
- What are methods you might use to teach a lesson?
- How do you determine if students have learned?
- How do you maintain control in your classroom?
- How have you used, or how will you use, technology in a classroom?
- How would you engage a reluctant student?
- What interests you about our district/school?
- Would you be interested in leading any after-school activities?
- What would you say to a parent who is angry about their child's grade?
- How do you motivate parents to get involved in the classroom and in their child's education?
- What would you do if you suspect neglect or abuse in the home of a student?
- How do you assess and evaluate students?
- How do you meet the needs of students who are advanced or say they're bored?
- How will you motivate uninterested or demotivated students?
- How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our school?
- What three words would your administrators, peers or students use to describe you?
- What could you contribute to our school's professional learning community (PLC) for your subject?

General interview questions

These might come up in any situation, not just for teachers. You can bet that principals have read a list of these and incorporated a few into their thought process.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Which bosses have you found most difficult to work for and why?
- What are your key strengths?
- What are your weaknesses? (Tip: Give only one, keep it short and describe how you turned that weakness into a strength.)
- Give me an example of a time when you did more than your job required.
- Describe a situation where you faced a difficult problem and tell me how you solved it.
- How do you handle changing priorities?
- Where do you want to be in five years?
- How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?
- Describe your ideal work environment.
- What is your best professional accomplishment?
- What other jobs have you interviewed for?
- What are you looking for in this position?
- Describe the circumstances under which you left your last position (if applicable).
- What motivates you?
- What do you like to do outside of work?
- Why should we hire you?
- What makes you unique?
- How do you best learn?
- How did you hear about the position?

Do your best to come up with your own answers to these questions. If you need guidance, check out tips from thebalancecareers.com, weareteachers.com, themuse.com or teachermagazine.com.au for help.

Behavioral questions

In recent years it has become trendy for interviewers to ask behavioral questions. These questions are less about what and more about why. They dig a little bit deeper, and often your answers can attest to your ability to handle tough situations.

These behavioral questions, from recruitshop.com, are specific to teachers:

- Describe an effective process you have used in handling a disruptive student in class.
- What strategies have you used to help students who are below grade level?
- What steps did you take to improve a lesson plan that did not work?
- What is important to you when you prepare to meet with parents of students?
- Describe an effective way to teach the concept of teamwork in the classroom.
- Explain your step-by-step process when writing your lesson plans.
- Tell me about a time when you did not have enough time in class to cover the planned material. What steps did you take?

And there are more general behavioral questions too. These are provided by **Tampa Bay JobLinks**:

- Tell me about a time when you took responsibility for a task outside of your job description. What happened and what did you do?
- Describe a challenging goal that you set and explain how it was achieved.
- Describe a goal that you were not able to achieve.
- Describe a task you were asked to perform where you were given very little direction. What did you do?
- Tell me about a mistake you made. How did you address it?
- Describe a time when you had to resolve a work conflict. What were the circumstances, what did you do and what was the result?

Now it's your turn

At the end, you likely will be prompted to ask some questions of your interviewer. Do not pass up this opportunity.

Always bring a notepad and pens to jot down notes during the course of the interview. Then ask a few questions – prepare about 10 but be aware that you want to keep it to maybe three or four. So why bring that many of your own questions if you won't ask them all? Because some questions will have been answered already during the course of the interview and you don't want to be left without anything to ask. When you write down your questions, list them in order of priority.

If the principal addresses one of your questions during the course of the interview you can say something like, "I'm glad you brought that up" or "Yes, I intended to ask about that." This shows that you were prepared and it shows you have been listening even as you check that question off your list (mentally or actually crossing it out).

Here are some of the best questions to ask:

- What other responsibilities might I have outside of presenting that day's lesson?
- How would you describe your management/administration style?
- What would you like the new teacher in this position to do differently from the previous person who held this position?
- What are the most pressing issues this school faces?
- What significant changes are in the pipeline at this school?
- What does above-average performance look like?
- What's your favorite part about working here?
- What characteristics would you say are most necessary to be a successful teacher?

And always save this for last, this is the one question you absolutely must ask:

- What are the next steps in this process and what's the timetable for a hiring decision?

One more thing: Always email a quick thank you to everyone in the interviewing process and follow up with a handwritten thank you card. That small gesture shows a personal touch. When you send that card, reiterate your interest in the job. This is also a chance to include any information that didn't come up in the interview but might be helpful or at least relevant.

