

Interview Tips for Teaching Candidates

In the world of retail sales they say, “know your product.” In your case, your product is you, and you can’t sell yourself unless you know your strengths and weaknesses.

Being aware of your personal strengths and weaknesses is prerequisite to the other steps you must take to market yourself as the top-notch classroom teacher you know you can be. And you will almost certainly be asked to tell about your strengths and weaknesses during your teacher interviews.

Your tangible skills include those related to the teaching profession — including your ability to teach on the elementary or secondary level — and specific skills, such as your ability to work with bilingual or gifted children.

Next, we come to your intangible skills. These skills have to do with your personality, your character and your ability to get along with others. Are you patient? Responsible? Are you excited about becoming a teacher? Do you get a charge out of motivating students? How are your leadership qualities?

Once you’ve told the panel about your strengths, expect to be asked about your weaknesses. When you’re faced with the question, “Tell us about your weaknesses,” don’t go on the defensive and immediately begin to explain how you don’t like to teach science because it’s always been difficult for you. Right away you’ve turned the committee off and they’ve heard just about all they want to hear on the subject. Instead, talk about your most “angelic” weakness, one that can be turned into a positive.

The top 20 interview questions

1. What is your greatest strength as a teacher?

What they’re really asking: How do you perceive your talents and abilities as a teacher? Will you be an asset to our school and our students?

2. What is your greatest weakness?

What they’re really asking: How honest are you being with us and with yourself? What skeletons do you have in your “teaching closet” that we should know about?

3. What can you tell us about yourself?

What they’re really asking: What makes you special? What might you bring to our children?

4. What is your philosophy of classroom discipline?

What they’re really asking: Do you have a plan? Are you going to be able to control kids?

5. What steps would you take with a student who is disruptive in your classroom?

What they’re really asking: Can you handle most discipline problems yourself, or will you send students to the principal’s office at the drop of a hat?

6. What kind of classroom management plan do you like best? How would you implement it in your classroom?

What they’re really asking: How will your lessons be planned? Will your students be on task and challenged?

7. Why do you want to be a teacher?

What they’re really asking: Do you have a passion for children and the teaching profession? How will our children benefit by having you as their teacher?

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8. Why do you want to teach in this district/school?

What they're really asking: Do you care where you teach? Did you take the time to research our district/school?

9. Why should we hire you for this position?

What they're really asking: Can you convince us that you're the one? How much confidence do you have in yourself?

10. What are your goals in education? Where do you see yourself five years from now? How does this position fit into your career plans?

What they're really asking: Do you want to stay in one position for the long haul, or will you be here a year and move on? Are you a stable person?

11. What would we see if we walked into your classroom?

What they're really asking: Do you have a well-managed classroom? Are your students interacting with you and the other students?

12. What are some trends, issues and methodologies in education that relate to your specific curriculum area or grade level?

What they're really asking: Do you know what's going on in education today?

13. What books are you currently reading or have you read recently?

What they're really asking: Teachers should be avid readers; are you a reader? How well-rounded are you?

14. What are some of your hobbies or leisure-time activities?

What they're really asking: What do you do outside of school that would transfer positively into the classroom?

15. What special skills or talents will you bring to your classroom?

What they're really asking: Do you have a wide variety of interests and experiences that will make you an exciting, stimulating teacher?

16. Would you be willing to teach at a different grade level (elementary) or teach a different subject (secondary)?

What they're really asking: Are you flexible? Do you have enough confidence to consider other grade levels or subject areas?

17. Would you be willing to pursue an extra certificate or credential?

What they're really asking: Are you a teacher who will increase our staffing options?

18. What is your philosophy of team teaching?

What they're really asking: Do you work well with others?

19. What were you hoping we would ask you today, but didn't?

What they're really asking: Is there anything special about yourself you want us to know?

20. Do you have any questions for us?

What they're really asking: Are you interested enough in our district to ask questions?