

# ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interviewers Tend to Explore...

### Five General Areas

1. Education
2. Work experiences (Especially student teaching, child related experiences, leadership activities, and experiences useful to the school's extracurricular activities)
3. Career goals
4. Personal qualities
5. Knowledge of the school/district or the field

### Five Education Specific Areas

1. Specifics of student teaching experiences (group, population, setting, etc)
2. Classroom management, teaching philosophy, etc.
3. Specific content taught and curriculum/lesson development
4. Demonstrated human relations with children as well as adults
5. Leadership experience

## Interview Question Formats

- Situational (Relate to a hypothetical situation) - "What would you do..."
- Observational (Relate to a third party's actions) - "What are your thoughts on..."
- Conceptual/Personal (Relate to a teacher's beliefs, values, and personal philosophy) - "What is your philosophy of..."
- Behavioral (Relate to actions taken in past situations) - "Tell me about a time when..."

## Preparing for Interview Questions

- Think the above ten topics above in advance.
- Decide which points you want to highlight about these topics if given the opportunity.
- Think how the questions on pages 23 & 24 could be related to points you want to highlight.
- Anticipate and rehearse interview questions and techniques.

## Responding to all Interview Questions

- Relate your strengths and qualifications to the teaching position.
- Focus on how you can be an asset to the employer.
- Organize and outline the information in your head before you respond.
- Be specific. Give examples. Be realistic.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification of questions.

## Responding to Specific Types of Questions

### Open-Ended Questions

Think about which of the areas above, that the question pertains to. An open-ended question such as, "Tell me about yourself", could be related to your education, work experience, career goals, or any of the other areas. Since you've thought about points you'd like to highlight in advance, utilize this chance to highlight one. Focus on the employer's needs and give examples.

### Weakness Questions

First, remember that you are not necessarily "under attack". Focus your answer toward the interviewer's underlying concern, which is often whether or not you have the ability to self-evaluate or to accept criticism. Give an example of an innocuous weakness and explanation of steps you have taken and plan to take to improve that weakness.

### Illegal Questions

There are several possible strategies to be used in answering illegal questions, including pointing out the illegality of the question, refusing to answer the question, answering the question directly, "finessing the question", or using humor to deal with the situation. All of these methods can be appropriate for some people, in some situations. If you utilize any of these methods, be sure to think through the possible results. Probably the most effective method for both parties is to get at the underlying issue. Ask why the question's answer has a bearing on the position.

# COMMERCIAL / STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ASSESSMENTS

Commercial / structured interview assessments are instruments that school districts use to screen and hire teachers who demonstrate particular personal traits or qualities. These interviews are scripted, structured and criterion scored. The three most used commercial teacher interviews are TeacherInsight, Automated Teacher Screener, and Teacher Perceiver.

## TEACHER INSIGHT (Online)

The **TeacherInsight** Survey was developed by the Education Division of the Gallup public opinion polling organization. It is based on questions from two teacher surveys that are about 20 years old, the “Teacher Perceiver” and the “Urban Teacher Perceiver”. Today, the survey is used in about 1,500 districts nationally. The assessment requires approximately 40 minutes to complete.

There is also a shorter version for schools with a high volume of teacher candidates called the **Automated Teacher Screener (ATS)**. The ATS processes candidates through an automated telephone interview in which they answer 69 questions in 12 minutes based on a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the candidates score, the district may interview them using the longer TeacherInsight or the face-to-face Teacher Perceiver.

MPS uses an Urban TeacherInsight and Waukesha School District uses the Automated Teacher Screener.

### How TeacherInsight works:

1. Candidates answer multiple-choice and open-ended questions online using a 5-point Likert scale. Questions focus on three areas:
  - Teaching philosophy - To what extent is there a mission to teach, to what extent is teaching not a job, but a mission, a calling?
  - Relationships - How does the candidate create relationships with colleagues, students and parents?
  - Instructional approaches - Does the candidate see a class or a group of individuals?
2. Candidates’ answers are compared to Gallup’s pool of 400 high-quality teachers, identified nationally by teachers, principals and parents and a percentile ranking (0-99) is calculated based on his/her predicted potential for teaching success.
3. Candidates’ scores are reported directly to the district’s central office databases where they are available to principals and human resources staff, but not to candidates or anyone else in the district.

## TEACHER PERCEIVER (Face-to-Face)

The Teacher Perceiver interview is based on a twenty year study of the key traits of teachers most successful working with students. This interview can take upwards of two hours to administer in full so districts may use shortened versions in interviews and at fairs. Teacher Perceiver questions may also be seen on district application forms and on WECAN.

### How Teacher Perceiver works:

1. Candidates answer 63 open ended questions. 60 of them related to the twelve teacher perceiver themes and 3 questions related to how the candidate felt about taking the interview.
2. The trained interviewer scores the candidate’s responses based on “listen-fors” – specific phrased or concepts that reflect the themes. For example, one question might ask the applicant what is most rewarding about teaching and only a response that stresses student growth or success would earn a point.

## COMMERCIAL / STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ASSESSMENTS - CONTINUED

### Teacher Perceiver Themes:

- Mission – The teacher's goals is to make a significant contribution to student growth.
- Empathy – The teacher deals with the individual student's feelings and thoughts.
- Rapport Drive – The teacher likes students and promotes warm, accepting relationships.
- Individualized Perception – The teacher considers the interest and needs of each student.
- Listening – The teacher listens to students' feelings with responsiveness and acceptance.
- Investment – Teacher satisfaction comes from the learner's response, not teacher performance.
- Input Drive – The teacher searches for new ideas and experiences to share with students.
- Activation – The teacher motivates student to think, respond, and feel in order to learn.
- Innovation – The teacher is determined to implement creative new ideas and techniques.
- Gestalt – The teacher tends toward perfectionism, but the individual student is still considered first.
- Objectivity – The teacher responds to the total situation rather than with impulsive reactions.
- Focus – The teacher has models and goals and selects activities in terms of these goals.

### Sample Teacher Perceiver Questions:

- What do you want to accomplish as a teacher?
- How will (do) you go about finding out about students' attitudes and feelings about your class?
- An experienced teacher offers you the following advice: "When you are teaching be sure to command the respect of your students immediately and all will go well." How do you feel about this?
- How do you go about deciding what it is that should be taught in your class?
- A parent comes to you and complains that what you are teaching his child is irrelevant to the child's needs. How would you respond?
- What do you think will (does) provide you the greatest pleasure in teaching?
- How do you go about finding what students are good at?
- Would you rather try a lot of way-out teaching strategies or would you rather try to perfect the approaches that work best for you? Explain your position.
- Do you like to teach with an overall plan in mind for the year, or would you rather just teach some interesting things and let the process determine the results? Explain your position.
- A student is doing poorly in class. The student tells you that you are the poorest teacher he/she has ever met. What would you do?
- If there were absolutely no restrictions placed upon you, what would you most want to do in life?

Adapted from *Commercial Teacher Interviews and their Problematic Role as a Teacher Qualification* by Scott A. Metzger and Meng-Jia Wu. April 2003. <http://www.msu.edu/user/mkennedy/TQQT/Documents/CommercialInterviews.htm>

# FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

- How did you select your major?
- What grade level do you prefer?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- How have your past experiences prepared you for teaching?
- Tell me about your student teaching experience. What were your most important accomplishments? What difficulties did you encounter?
- What curriculum materials have you developed?
- How have you used (or would you use) aides or parent volunteers in your classroom?
- How have you involved parents in the learning process? Describe how you would establish and maintain positive relationships with parents?

## SUBJECT AREA AND GRADE LEVEL QUESTIONS

- How have you emphasized the development of basic skills? What skills do you feel are most important at this grade level (of subject)?
- What do you feel are the most important things students should learn at your grade level (in your classroom, subject area)?
- What do you feel is your strongest subject (or teaching) area? What subject is most difficult to you?
- Discuss a critical issue in your subject area.
- How do you teach reading (math, science) in your classroom? Describe a typical lesson?
- What should students have gained from having taken your course? Why is your field important for a student to study?

## TEACHING TECHNIQUE QUESTIONS

- Describe your typical teaching style. What teaching techniques do you use?
- Describe a teaching strategy you 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 would you individualize instruction to meet the needs of all your students? Would individualized instruction be a part of your teaching day?
- Describe a closure activity.
- How do you motivate students? Name three effective ways to motivate students.

## PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES / KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

- How have you recently improved your professional skills? What are your plans for future education / skill development?
- What professional journals do you read regularly? What have you read in the last six months or year?
- What are the qualities of some of the best teachers you studied with? Do you share any of their qualities?

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - CONTINUED**

### **PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION QUESTIONS**

- What do you consider an ideal class size?
- How do you personally feel students learn?
- What is your philosophy on homework?
- What is your philosophy on team teaching?
- What should schools do for students?
- What would be your ideal educational philosophy of a school/district?
- Describe the role of the teacher (principal, student, counselor) in the learning process.
- What is your philosophy on grading, report cards, classroom management?
- What issues in education are of greatest concern to you?
- 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?

### **ASSESSMENT / EVALUATION QUESTIONS**

- How do you appraise your teaching performance? How do you determine if your students are learning?
- What forms of assessment do you use? Do you grade on ability or effort?
- How do you feel about observations by supervisors?
- How do you communicate with parents about a student's progress?
- How would your students describe you?

### **CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION / LESSON PLANNING QUESTIONS**

- How is (was) your classroom organized?
- Are you well organized?
- What type of learning environment do you try to create?
- How do you structure your class to achieve maximum benefit from teacher/student contact?
- How do you handle the different ability levels of students? Different cultures? The gifted? Educationally or economically underprivileged? Limited English-speaking?
- Do you believe in detailed lesson plans? In lesson planning, how do you organize and prepare your material?
- Describe the specific components or steps of an effective lesson plan.

### **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS**

- What classroom management system do you use?
- How do you handle discipline problems?
- What is the toughest aspect of discipline?
- 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?
- If students tell you they have engaged in some illegal or immoral activity, what would you do?

# QUESTIONS TO ASK AN EMPLOYER IN AN INTERVIEW

## Effective questions to ask of the employer are:

1. Tailored to the particular district.
  2. Used to gather information and locate needs, so you can demonstrate how you could fill those needs.
  3. Used to confirm facts, showing you have done your homework and have thought about how you can make a contribution.
- How would teacher and/or parents describe your district/school?
  - What is the largest single problem facing your staff now?
  - 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 the principal and parents?
  - What makes a teacher successful in this school/district?
  - What support systems are available to a new teacher?
  - How is your district involving parents in the education process?
  - 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?
  - What is the student-teacher ratio?
  - Would I be part of a team teaching situation?
  - What are the strengths of the current staff?
  - What type of staff development is available?
  - What type of technology is used in the classrooms?