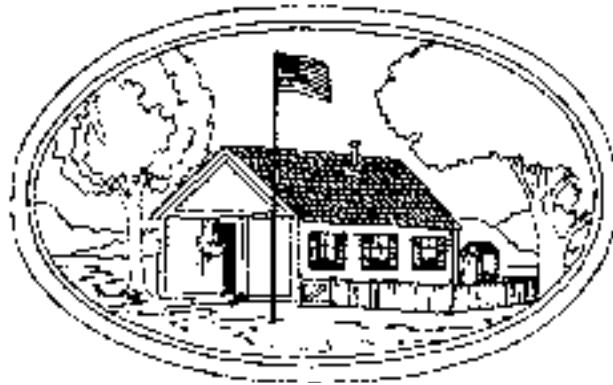


# 2020 Teacher Interview Guide

Hanover College Levett Career Center



# Teacher Interview Guide

by Margaret Krantz

# Prepare!

Preparation can have an enormous impact on the success of an interview. The more you are able to anticipate and prepare for possible questions, the more likely you are to make the most convincing case for getting the job. There are a few ways you can prepare prior to your initial interview.

## Research the school district

- Study both the school district's and school's web sites and social media accounts carefully. Read even the recent school board minutes.
- Look them up on the State's Education site, [www.doe.in.gov](http://www.doe.in.gov). Know the basic demographics of the district. What are its geographic boundaries? How many students are enrolled? What are typical students like socio-economically? What grade levels are served? How many teachers are employed? How many students are on free and reduced lunch? How strong is the support of the community (tax base)? Study statistics of pupil achievements in reading and math. Are most of the district's students below, at, or above grade level?
- Drive through the district. Acquaint yourself with the environment.
- Review the district's organization. Memorize some of the key names: superintendent, principal, personnel manager, head of curriculum, etc.
- Visit a school. Always call for an appointment. Talk to the teachers and administrators. Learn about the textbook series being used, observe the manner of dress, inquire about teacher training programs.

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- Research your possible work environment. Ask if the teachers are represented by a union. If yes, study the contractual agreements between the union and the school district.
- Obtain a salary schedule from the district. (Avoid asking questions about salary during the interview. Salary is determined by seniority and education level.)
- Determine whether the district has a residency requirement.
- Contact alumni living in the area or working at the school.
- Familiarize yourself with the district's instructional program and learning objectives for its students.
- Read the local paper's website. Find out what extracurricular and sport programs are offered in the district. Learn whether the district has received any special honors or recognition by state or federal agencies for academic excellence.

## Know about yourself

- Assess your career goals and objectives and how you plan to achieve them.
- Summarize the reasons you chose Hanover and your major.
- Identify your functional skills and find examples of them in action (for example, it is not enough to say that you have strong organizational skills; you must be able to discuss the results of your skills -

"During my student teaching, I implemented a new format for maintaining grades which enabled us to tell at a glance which students needed extra assistance in a given area.")

- Identify your work values (what you need from a position and what you want to avoid).
- Summarize your experience, extracurricular activities and course work as they relate to your career interests.

## Know about interviewing

- Plan an agenda. Determine three things about your skills, experience and interests that the interviewer should know. Think of examples of them in action. (See page 4)
- Write down your answers to common questions, remembering to focus on those aspects of your background that correspond most closely with the needs of the position.
- Learn about the various styles of interviews including behavioral, panel and series.
- Learn to listen carefully to questions, to answer clearly and precisely, citing examples, then to STOP.
- Practice!!
  - Try out answers using a mirror.
  - Have several friends, together and separately, interview you.
  - Schedule a mock interview at the Levett Career Center.
  - Sign up to participate in mock interview panels and attend TCID and other teacher job fairs.

# Interview tips

1. Be on time, that is, ten to fifteen minutes early. Sometimes interviewers are ready before the appointed time.
2. Know the interviewer's name and use it in the interview to personalize the conversation and add warmth. If you don't know the name, call the school beforehand and ask. Get the secretary's name as well; if you need to call back, you will have it. Secretaries can have a strong influence.
3. Take your portfolio and a copy of your resume. The one you sent may not be available; this will demonstrate your preparedness.
4. Do not be embarrassed by nervousness. The interviewer may be nervous, too. In fact, nervousness may be a good sign; it shows you are taking the whole thing seriously, and often gives energy and focus.
5. Be sure you understand each question. Ask for clarification rather than guessing. Listen to the entire question before composing your answer. A brief silence before you answer a tough question is perfectly permissible.
6. Respond concisely to questions. Over-elaboration is a common error. If you are not sure you have answered sufficiently, ask the interviewer if you should elaborate.
7. Watch your grammar. Employers are interested in candidates who can express themselves articulately and properly, especially in education. Even if you have to go slowly and correct yourself, accuracy is preferred over fluency.
8. Respond only to the question; keep your answer relevant. Do not

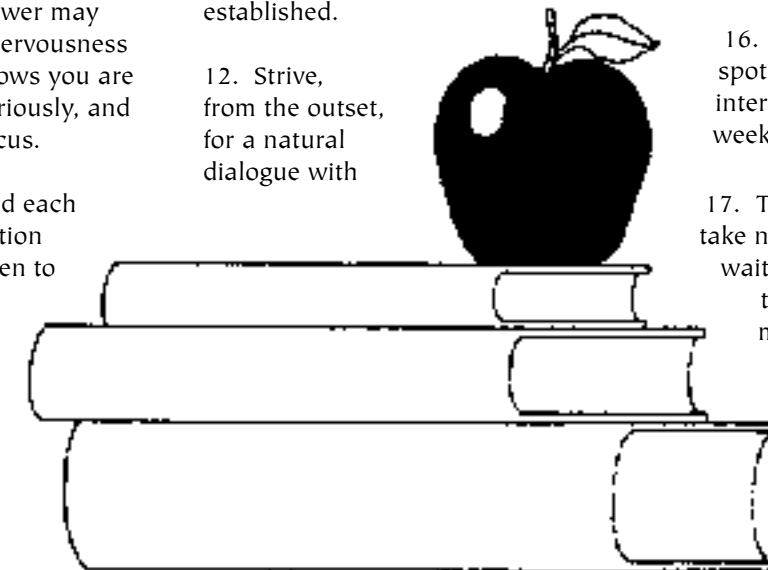
volunteer information unless it is positive and pertinent. Avoid the use of negative terms and phrases. Instead of "problem" for example say "challenge" or "opportunity."

9. Never slight a former employer. Never slight a former teacher, institution, or friend. Employers assume that if you complain about someone else, you'll complain about them.

10. Take advantage of opportunities to show you have done your homework.

11. If possible, avoid using key material in the first few questions. Save your big hits for later when momentum has been established.

12. Strive, from the outset, for a natural dialogue with



your interviewer.

Speak neither loudly or softly; neither rapidly or slowly. Allow him/her to set the tone and pace of your dialogue.

13. Be aware of the interviewer as a person. Notice the office surroundings, the desk arrangements, the mannerisms of the individual across the desk. Try to take stock of the interview style; respond to questions appropriately. Use your instincts and intuition to read signals your

interviewer is sending.

14. Strive to discover, as naturally as possible, all key details about the position. It is important to focus your answers to demonstrate the ways in which your past experience and accomplishments will meet the needs of the school. Further, you will need the information to decide whether or not you are interested in the position.

15. It is very likely that the interviewer will give you a chance to ask questions, so have some prepared based on your research. When asked for comments and questions, be sure to respond. It is acceptable to bring a portfolio with your questions on it. One should be how to follow up.

16. Do not expect an offer on the spot. Offers usually follow the interview, sometimes two or three weeks later.

17. Take paper and a pen. Do not take notes during the interview; wait until immediately following the interview to write down as much as you can remember.

18. Be careful with the closing. More people blow an interview at the closing than at any other time (except for the opening). If you are interested in the position, simply express that, saying, "I am very

interested in this position, feel that I would bring strong skills to it, and hope you will consider me." Do not linger; end smoothly and courteously. Allow the interviewer to open the door for you.

You wouldn't go into a test unprepared and expect to do well, and you can't go into the interview unprepared and expect to shine either. Be prepared; your interviewing skills are an important aspect of your landing the job you want.

## Behavioral interviews

In “Behavioral Interviews” (sometimes referred to as “STAR” or “pattern” interviews), questions focus in detail on past behaviors and experience in order to best determine how the candidate will act in the future. This style of interview can be recognized by questions which begin:

“Tell me about a situation in which...”  
 “Walk me through a time in your past in which you...”  
 “Give me an example of a case when you...”, etc.

When a question is posed in this format, you are asked to give

considerable detail about your step-by-step approach to the skills being explored and the result of your efforts. Whether you have a question of this or a more traditional style posed to you, the most effective way to phrase your answer is to use a “STAR” response outlined below:

### Phrasing a great STAR answer

#### Follow these steps:

**S - (Situation)** Describe clearly and briefly the situation and players involved. Make it clear what your role in the situation was.

**T - (Task)** Describe your evaluation of what the difficulty or challenge in the situation was, the task you were faced with.

**A - (Action)** What steps did you take to meet the challenge? List them clearly; this is the most important part of your answer to the interviewer.

**R - (Result)** What happened as a result of the steps you took? Discuss both short-term and long-term results. Do not omit this part of your answer.

#### As shown in this response:

**(S)** “During my student teaching at Southwestern High School, I encountered the issue of whether to allow the use of calculators in the classroom.

**(T)** I definitely feel calculators are useful teaching aids that frequently help motivate students to do their work. However, I did not want my class to rely solely on a calculator in order to complete an assignment.

**(A)** To encourage my students to learn the fundamentals of math, while allowing them the opportunity to use the calculator, I made a game out of learning. The students were allowed to work in teams of three or four to solve a number of word problems. They were told to work without their calculator to determine the answer. When at least two had the same answer, they were allowed to solve the problem using the calculator to check their results. The student or students who had the correct answer were to then explain to the others in their group how they got their answer.

**(R)** By working together, the children learned the importance of team work. They developed their reasoning skills by discussing individual problem solving with their classmates and gained basic calculator skills.

**Question:** “Tell me about a critical issue in your area of study that you have had to deal with and how you handled the issue.”

### Typical STAR questions:

- Describe the worst discipline problem you have experienced during student teaching.
- Tell me about a situation in which your authority was questioned.
- What was the most difficult task you have faced on the job?
- Give me an example of an obstacle you have encountered and how you overcame it.
- Tell me about a time that you met with an unhappy parent.
- Tell me how you have handled a situation dealing with a behavioral problem.
- What would you do if the project you had been working on was rejected?
- What is a recent risk that you have taken?
- Tell me about your greatest accomplishment.

## Typical questions

### Background strengths/weaknesses

- If you were asked to rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10, how would you rate?
- Describe your best student teaching experience. Describe your worst.
- What aspect of teaching do you feel most confident in? Which do you feel needs to be improved?

- What grade level do you prefer?
- Why did you decide to pursue a career in teaching?

- What educational experiences have you had?
- What do you think are the most important attributes of an outstanding teacher? Which of these qualities do you possess?
- If a workshop were offered for an area you are weak in, what would it be? Why?

- What makes you the best candidate for the position?

- If you were going to write an ad to promote yourself for a teaching position, what kind of things would you say about yourself?

- Was your cooperative teacher open to your ideas? Did he/she give you free rein?

- What extracurricular activities would you be willing to sponsor?

- What are your goals?

- How do you organize your time to handle all of your responsibilities?

- Why did you become interested in teaching?

- There are a lot of experienced applicants for one job position. Why should you be chosen?

- Describe yourself.

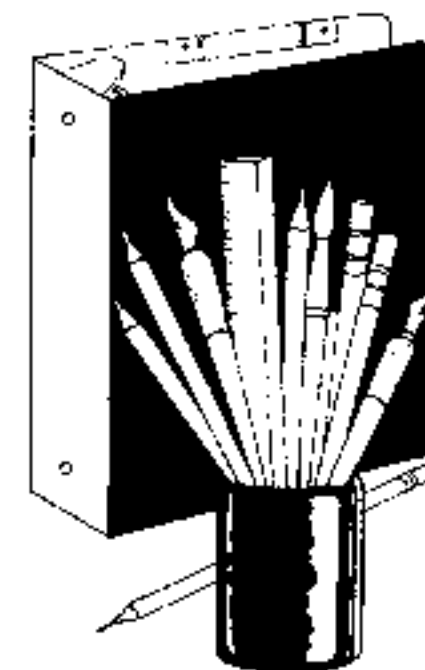
- What college classes have you enjoyed the most?

- What quality would you like me to know about you?

- If you had to do it all over again, would you change your curriculum or major?

### General

- Do you have any team teaching experience?



- Which teaching method do you like the most? Why? How do you use it in your daily teaching strategies?

- What are the advantages of teachers working together on a team? Disadvantages?

- What aspects of teaching are the most difficult?

- Which aspects of teaching are the most satisfying?

- How do you keep abreast of current educational trends?

- Are teachers overpaid?

- Describe ways in which you work together with colleagues.

- Do you think parental communication is important to a child's education? Why?

- What is the purpose of a teacher's union?

- What do you feel the job of the union should be?

- Why should you be hired?

- What is the role of the principal in your building?

- What do you expect of the principal in your school building?

- If you were setting up a philosophy for a school system, what would it be?

- If a program to get parents involved was going to be implemented in your school, how would you try to start it?

- What do you expect from the people you work with?

- What three words would you say describe an exemplary teacher?

- What do you tell a student who complains to you about another teacher?

- How do you make students excited about learning?

- A student tells you that you are the worst teacher they have ever met. How do you respond?

- What is the most important issue in education today?

- How do you go about deciding what you should teach?

### In the classroom

- As a classroom teacher, how do you individualize instruction?

## Typical questions continued

- What kind of instructional materials do you use to individualize instruction?
- What is the elementary school's responsibility in the area of computer education?
- How do you establish good rapport with students?
- Can you give two keys to good classroom control?
- What is the greatest asset you bring to the classroom?
- If you were given a sack of potatoes/pasta what would you do with them?
- How would you help a mainstream LD student?
- What type of parental involvement or method of communication with parents do you prefer?
- How would you deal with a parent who comes to talk to you concerning their child's poor grade and blames it on you?
- How do you deal with individual differences?
- How would you incorporate computers into your classroom?
- Describe your approach to classroom management.
- What tactics do you use in the classroom to implement reading and writing?
- If you are working with a small group that needs help, what would other students be doing?
- How do you use fine arts in your overall curriculum?
- What will I see when I walk into your classroom?
- How do you evaluate children?
- Describe your classroom environment.
- What should the reading goals be for a third grade class?
- What do you feel is the best way to teach math?
- If a child stated that he hated you and cursed at you, what would you do?
- What are the components of a good lesson plan?
- What would you write in a letter to a parent that explained their child has a constant behavior problem?
- Describe a project or lesson you have used in the classroom. Did it work? Why or why not?
- How do you prepare a lesson which meets the individual needs, interests and abilities of the students?

### Situational questions

This style of question is designed to elicit your individual techniques in dealing with a variety of situations. In answering, remember that you can say, "I don't know."

#### Examples:

- You receive a phone call from a parent who complains because you disciplined the entire classroom for their rude behavior in the cafeteria. She contends that her child is a model student and never causes any trouble. Generally you agree, but since there was so much noise in the cafeteria you took recess away from the entire group. What would your response to this parent be?
- You have a student in your class who is a real discipline problem. He's disruptive, rude, and does very little school work. You realize that the situation cannot be

ignored. What steps would you take to improve this situation?

### Illegal questions

#### Examples:

- How do your own parents feel about you going this far away from home?
- Are you planning to marry?
- If teachers were on strike would you cross the picket line?
- How will you arrange for child care?

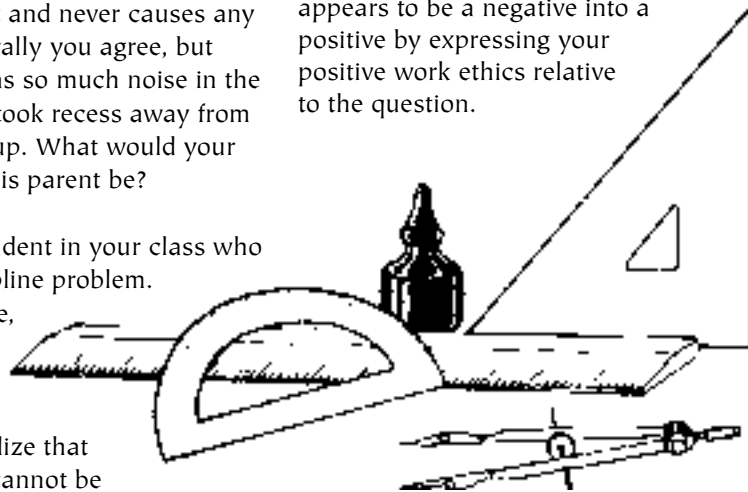
#### Plan ahead:

Consider how you will handle an illegal question should it arise. Your decision should be thought out carefully beforehand rather than made in the stressful setting of the interview.

#### Possible options include:

- Answer the underlying question. For example, if the question were about your fiancé's need to relocate, a simple statement indicating your plan to remain in the area indefinitely will handle their real, underlying question.
- Ask how the question relates to the job for which you are interviewing.
- Tactfully ask, since the question deals with an area of illegal inquiry, if they are sure you should answer.

Whenever possible, turn what appears to be a negative into a positive by expressing your positive work ethics relative to the question.



## Don't miss the extra credit

**"D**o you have any questions for us?" is perhaps the question most often asked by interviewers. Your response indicates the seriousness of your interest in the job, so answer carefully. The best questions have the following:

- A request for information you really want (and can't find by reading the organization's literature)
- A demonstration of your knowledge of the organization
- A brief description of your strengths relative to the question. For example, "In preparing for this interview, I learned that Southwestern began using a new curriculum

last year. I am always seeking to learn new ways of teaching and would be interested in how successful you have found this new curriculum to be."

Write or type four good questions to bring to your interview. Adapt any of the following to what you know about the organization or develop your own:

- Find out why the job is open, who had it last, and what happened to him/her. How many people have held this position in the last couple of years? What happened to them subsequently?
- Why did the interviewer join the school? How long has he or she

been there? What is it about the school that keeps him or her there?

- To whom would you report? Will you get the opportunity to meet that person? Where is the job located? How much choice does one have in class projects?
- If there is a written job description, may you see it? How regularly do performance evaluations occur? What model do they follow? How would they describe the work environment?

PLEASE NOTE:  
DO NOT inquire about salary and benefits until the third interview.

## Dress the part

**C**lothes play a major role in creating a professional image. It is most important to dress similarly to those currently employed by the school as people are more likely to be hired if they appear to fit in. Generally, wearing clothes one step more formal than those of current employees helps you to look both serious about and appropriate for the job. Dress professionally even to drop by to pick up an application.

For career fairs and on-campus interviewing, wear suits in shades of black or dark gray. Men should wear socks that match their suits, women should wear neutral-toned hose. Shirts should be white or a light color. Recent comments from on-campus recruiters indicate that most do not consider long earrings, excessive use of styling gel in hair, perfume, or cologne appropriate.

## Non-verbal behaviors

The importance of non-verbal behavior in an interview situation is well-documented. Your poise, appearance, and behavior during the interview may affect the interviewer's hiring decision as much as what you say. It is important, therefore, that you be aware of some of the following non-verbal behaviors during your job interview:

- Make and maintain eye contact, but don't stare.
- Shake hands firmly. If you tend to get sweaty palms, try spraying them with unscented anti-perspirant to keep them dry.
- Sit up straight in a relaxed pose. Do not lean sideways or backwards; do not touch or lean on the interviewer's desk.
- Speak clearly, using normal volume.
- Feel free to use humor or to smile when appropriate.
- Always let the interviewer finish speaking before composing your answer. Pause briefly if necessary before speaking.
- It is okay to cross your legs at the ankles or knees, but avoid resting one ankle on the opposite knee.

# Follow-up letters

**T**ake time to write a letter to your interviewer(s) within 48 hours of your interview. Occasionally, if a recruiter is having trouble choosing between two equal candidates, a well-written letter can be the deciding factor in one candidate's favor.

## The letter should be brief:

- Limit yourself to no more than two-thirds of a page.
- Type the letter flawlessly, or find someone who can. A typographical error in your letter can undo your best interviewing efforts.
- Use business-letter format. Spell the recruiter's name correctly,

addressing a woman: "Dear Ms. Soandso."

- Sound like yourself (presumably, the interviewer will remember you).
- Do not mention how you would benefit from having a job with this organization; recruiters are generally only interested in what you can do for them.

## Include the following:

- Thank the recruiter for the opportunity to meet with him or her.
- Reaffirm your interest in the position and school, and how you are qualified for the job.

- Make it clear that you understood what was said during the interview.

## If applicable:

- Include anything you omitted to say in the interview, but which will have bearing on the interviewer's understanding of your qualifications for the job.
- If you feel that you mishandled a question, this is a chance to clarify what you had meant to say. Word it carefully.

Again, take no more than 48 hours to mail or e-mail your letter; it's well worth the effort. And remember, if you e-mail your letter, it still needs to be perfect!

April 5, 2020

Mr. U. Shud Hireme, Principal  
Madison Consolidated High School  
743 Clifty Drive  
Madison, IN 47250

Dear Mr. Hireme:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you yesterday. I am excited about the possibility of teaching at the Madison Consolidated School District.

As we discussed, having served as a student teacher at Madison, I am familiar with your current staff and student body. Sharing the same philosophy in what it takes to offer quality education, I feel I would be an asset to your team. I am aware of your excellent reputation and commitment to the educational community in Madison, and would be proud to be a member of your teaching staff.

I am available for additional interviews at your convenience. I look forward to hearing from you regarding your decision.

Sincerely,

*Lindsay W. Pennywhistle*  
pennywhistle18@hanover.edu  
(812) 555-1234