

Is Teaching the Right Career for You? (6 Questions to Ask Yourself)

According to the New Teacher Center (NTC), a nonprofit organization that helps create training for new educators, between 40 and 50 percent of new teachers quit within five years. Here are some questions to ask yourself to help you really understand the basics of the job.

First, do I really like being around kids all day? Why do I enjoy spending time around kids? Is there a particular age group I prefer more than others?

If you aren't able to answer this question with a resounding yes, then follow with a good explanation of why you enjoy working with kids, then it probably isn't the job for you. If you say yes to the first question but can't think of a time when you actually worked with kids, and by "worked with" I mean you tried to help them with something that they struggled with. Perhaps you taught a kid to ride a bike and it brought you joy or frustration, how about teaching a teenager to drive? Maybe you have done some coaching in sports. Many young people tend to want to be teachers because they enjoyed school so much. However, they rarely encountered classroom management issues as a student because they were usually in Honors or AP classes, where classroom management is usually not a problem. So when they enter their own non-honors or non-AP classroom to teach for the first time, they have no experience or even a point of reference on how to deal with behavior and discipline issues. This culture shock sometimes sends them running out of the teaching profession. If you have no experiences working with kids at all but just "feel" like you would enjoy it, here is my suggestion. Volunteer to tutor somewhere, monitor how you feel while doing it. If you skip this step you will have NO basis to answer this question and it is perhaps the most fundamental question you need to answer.

How dependable are you REALLY and when you start something do you always follow through?

This is tough to answer because we all like to think we are dependable and we get things done. This is where you need to be truly honest with yourself, are you the person that your friends KNOW they can count on? Ask them to be brutally honest with you. Perhaps more importantly do you always follow through what you start? Did you follow through on that New Year's resolution last year? The reason this is so important is because as a teacher YOU have to be the rock, the person that can always be counted on and the person who always backs up what they say they are going to do. Without this fundamental quality no one will respect you, most of all your students and that is the best way to hate your job and your life for about 4-5 years before you quit.

Do you genuinely have a passion for an academic subject? If so which one and can you think of why that matters so much to you?

Kids come first, content comes second. Loving what you teach isn't nearly as important as loving who you teach. However, if you are going to spend a lengthy career doing this you better love math, or science, or art or whatever the academic subject is. If you don't have a genuine passion for the subject then you will fail to convey that passion to students and they will fail to see its importance to their lives.

If you are a real science nerd then what makes you so passionate about it and WHY is it so important that future generations know this stuff?

Is working with kids and talking about a subject you like all day worth four years of university study (and tuition), long hours of tedious work, low pay, and little recognition to you?

You have to really care about education, there are very few teachers out there in which, to them, teaching is just a job. That's because the level of commitment the job requires goes beyond most typical jobs. Teaching is more of a lifestyle where personal sacrifice is an understood norm. Are you the type that likes to leave work at work? Then teaching is probably not for you. Don't think summers off are all fun and relaxation either, usually teachers work a second job while preparing for the upcoming school year, many need to gain further education to renew their license and do so at their own expense.

How do you feel about regimenting your life? Are you ok with being on a strict schedule before and after the work day? Are you an organized person?

As a teacher, your job comes first and the day is very regimented. You are constantly in a cycle of writing lessons, teaching lessons, and grading assessments among many other various tasks. To do all that is demanded it requires teachers to be very organized in their before and after work activities. Time management is one of the most important skills any good teacher has and if you tend to be a procrastinator you will get buried. Also some people are not cut out for a very regimented work day. This isn't corporate America where you may get an hour for lunch with breaks throughout the day. You have thirty minutes for lunch which many teachers work through to get more work done. Remember it is your responsibility to keep track of about 150 kids, not just their grades but many times what is going on in their lives that could affect them. If you sometimes think "I can barely keep track of my own life" then you may need to work on your organization skills if you are to become a teacher.

Can you accept being around kids that have significant disadvantages in life, mentally, emotionally, or socioeconomically and know there is almost nothing you can really do to help them?

If you become a teacher, you must know that a large percentage of kids that come through your class will have serious disadvantages in life. Poverty is perhaps the number one factor that plays into how students perform academically. Many students have some type of major life obstacle such as abusive families, poverty, diseases, emotional disabilities, learning disabilities the list is literally endless. Can you accept these problems and realize there is very little you can do about it? Can you take the emotional stress that goes with working with these kids day in and day out for years? Many times you will have to balance your expectations with what is realistically possible for them based on their life situations. Consider this heavily before jumping into the profession with both feet.

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