# PGCE Interview Preparation Checklist

## How to use this checklist

This checklist helps you prepare for a teacher training interview in England, for primary or secondary, PGCE, School Direct or SCITT. Work through it in the two weeks before your interview, then use the one-page checklist at the end on the day.

Every provider runs its interview differently. Your invitation email is the final word on what you will be asked to do, so read it first and treat everything here as a guide, not a promise of what will come up.

## Before the interview

The single most useful thing you can do is read your invitation carefully and list every task it mentions. Then prepare for those tasks first.

- ☐ Write down the date, time, format (online or in person) and how long it lasts.
- ☐ List every task: interview questions, presentation, short lesson, written task, group activity, maths or English test, subject knowledge test.
- ☐ Check whether any test must be done before the day.
- ☐ Note what to bring or upload, for example ID and original certificates for your degree and GCSEs, if asked.
- ☐ If you need reasonable adjustments, for example for a disability, health condition or neurodivergence, tell the provider now so they have time to arrange them.
- ☐ Read the provider's website: their partner schools, how placements work, anything that genuinely appeals to you.
- ☐ Skim the Teachers' Standards and the national curriculum for your phase and subject.
- ☐ Read the basics of Keeping children safe in education, the statutory safeguarding guidance.
- ☐ Re-read your own application and personal statement. Interviewers often ask about something you wrote.
- ☐ Unsure what a task involves? Email admissions and ask. It is a normal question.

The Get Into Teaching interview guide says most providers ask for a presentation, and some set maths or English tests in advance.

## Common questions and how to answer them

Strong answers are short, specific and end with what you learnt. A simple shape that works for most questions: **the situation, what you did, what happened, what you learnt for teaching**. Prepare one or two real examples you can reuse.

| Question | What they want to see | How to answer |
|---|---|---|
| Why do you want to teach? | Real motivation, not a cliché | One specific moment that made you want to teach, then what you want pupils to get from you |
| Why primary / why this subject? | You understand the phase or love the subject | Primary: teaching the whole child, early foundations. Secondary: one example of what excites you in the subject |
| Why this provider? | You have done your research | Two concrete things: their partner schools, placement model, a specialism |
| Tell us about your experience with children or young people | Reflection, not just hours | One example: what you noticed about how pupils learn or behave, and what you would do differently now |
| What makes a good teacher? | Understanding of the role | Two or three qualities with an example of each you saw in school |
| Describe a good lesson you observed | You can analyse teaching | What the teacher did, how pupils responded, why it worked |
| How would you manage poor behaviour? | Calm, consistent, follows school policy | Clear routines, follow the school's behaviour policy, praise, deal with it quietly first, involve colleagues when needed |
| How would you support a pupil who is struggling? | Inclusion and adaptation | Find out why, adapt the task, scaffold, check understanding often, work with the SENCO or teaching assistant |
| How would you challenge a high-attaining pupil? | Stretch without just giving more work | Deeper questions, extension tasks that need reasoning, chances to explain to others |
| What would you do if a child told you something worrying? | Safeguarding basics | Listen, do not promise to keep it secret, record their words, act immediately and report the concern to the DSL or a deputy. See the safeguarding section |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| What are the main challenges for teachers today? | Awareness of the profession | Pick one or two, for example workload, behaviour, mental health or recruitment, and say how you would look after yourself and your pupils |
| How will you manage the workload? | Resilience and realism | Concrete habits: planning routines, using shared resources, asking for help, protecting some time off |
| Tell us about a time you received feedback | You can reflect and improve | The feedback, what you changed, what improved |
| What are your strengths and weaknesses? | Self-awareness | A real weakness with the steps you are already taking to improve it |
| How would you make your subject engaging? | Subject passion with practical ideas | One specific topic and how you would hook pupils, linked to real life |
| How do you know pupils have learnt something? | Assessment for learning | Questioning, mini whiteboards, exit tickets, checking misconceptions during the lesson |
| How would you work with parents and colleagues? | Professional relationships | Clear, positive communication and working as part of a team |
| What do you know about the national curriculum or your subject's key stages? | Basic curriculum knowledge | Name the key stages you will teach and one or two topics in them |
| Where do you see yourself in five years? | Commitment to teaching | Growing as a classroom teacher, perhaps a subject or pastoral role later |
| Do you have any questions for us? | Genuine interest | Always have two ready. See the last section |

Do not memorise word-for-word answers. Learn your examples and key points, then practise saying them out loud to someone.

## The short lesson or presentation

Keep it to **one small idea taught well**, and show you check that learners got it. Interviewers are not looking for a perfect lesson. They want to see you interact, explain clearly and notice how learners are doing.

**Planner for a 5 to 10 minute lesson**

| Time | What you do | What learners do | How you check |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0–1 min | Hook: a question, picture or object linked to the idea | Think, answer, guess | Take two or three answers |
| 1–4 min | Teach the one idea with a clear example | Listen, try one example with you | Ask a quick question to a named person |
| 4–7 min | Short task: they try it themselves | Mini whiteboard, pair talk, quick quiz | Look at answers, pick up one misconception |
| 7–10 min | Recap and link to what comes next | Say or show what they learnt | One exit question |

For a 5-minute task, halve each step and drop the link at the end.

**Checklist**

- ☐ One clear learning objective, written in pupil-friendly words.
- ☐ Pitched at the age group in the invitation. Adults playing pupils still expect you to teach at that level.
- ☐ At least one moment where learners do something, not only listen.
- ☐ At least one check of understanding.
- ☐ Timed out loud twice. Five minutes goes very fast.
- ☐ Simple resources that work without technology. Bring a back-up if you plan slides.
- ☐ A one-line plan to hand over if they ask for one.
- ☐ Ready to say what you would change. Many providers ask you to reflect afterwards: what went well, what you would do differently, and why.

## Subject knowledge, maths and English tasks

The old national skills tests were removed in 2020, so each provider now checks maths, English and subject knowledge in its own way. Ask admissions what level their task is set at. They usually tell you.

| Task | Usually covers | How to prepare |
|---|---|---|
| Primary maths | Mental arithmetic, the four operations without a calculator, fractions, decimals, percentages, ratio, simple word problems | 15 minutes a day on non-calculator questions for two weeks, then timed practice |
| Primary or secondary English | Spelling, punctuation, grammar, a short piece of clear written English | Proofread your own writing slowly. Practise a 300-word answer in 20 minutes |
| Secondary subject knowledge | GCSE and A Level content in your subject, sometimes a | Audit yourself against the GCSE and A Level |

| Task | Usually covers | How to prepare |
|---|---|---|
| | self-audit form | specifications. Revise your weakest topics first |
| Explaining a concept | Turning one idea into something a pupil understands | Pick three core topics and practise explaining each in two minutes, with an example and a common mistake |

**If your degree does not match your subject**, the provider may offer you a place on condition you complete a Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) course. Read about SKE on Get Into Teaching and be ready to say which areas you will strengthen.

**Self-audit tip:** list every topic in the GCSE specification for your subject and mark each red, amber or green. Bring the green ones into your answers and have a plan for the red ones.

## Safeguarding and behaviour basics

You are not expected to be an expert yet, but you should know that **safeguarding is everyone's responsibility** and what to do first. Read the summary of Keeping children safe in education before the interview.

### If a child tells you something worrying

1. Stay calm and listen. Let them speak in their own words.
2. Do not ask leading questions or investigate.
3. Do not promise to keep it secret. Explain kindly that you may need to tell someone who can help.
4. Write down what they said, in their words, with the date and time.
5. Act immediately and report the concern to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a deputy, following the school's child protection procedure. Do not wait until the end of the day.
6. If a child is in immediate danger, follow the school's emergency procedure.

### Behaviour: the points interviewers listen for

- Clear routines and expectations from the first lesson.
- Following the school's behaviour policy consistently.
- Praise and positive relationships as well as sanctions.
- Dealing with low-level disruption calmly and quietly first.
- Asking colleagues for support, and knowing you are part of a team.

Useful reading if you have time: *Running the Room* by Tom Bennett.

## Written tasks, group activities and online interviews

**Written task.** Usually a short response to an education topic or article. Plan for two minutes, write a clear opening that answers the question, give one or two reasons with examples, and leave five minutes to check spelling and punctuation.

**Group activity.** Assessors watch how you work with others, not who talks most.

- Listen and build on other people's ideas by name.
- Invite quieter people in.
- Keep the group to time and task.
- Summarise the group's view at the end if no one else does.

**Online interview.**

- ☐ Test the platform, camera, microphone and internet the day before.
- ☐ Use a quiet room, a plain background and good light from the front.
- ☐ Put the camera at eye level and look at it when you speak.
- ☐ Have your notes, a pen, paper and water nearby, and your phone on silent.
- ☐ If you are teaching online, use simple resources you can share on screen or hold up to the camera.
- ☐ Have a phone number ready in case the connection drops.

## On the day and afterwards

**On the day.** Arrive or log in 10 minutes early. Be polite to everyone you meet, from reception to current trainees. It is fine to pause before answering, or to ask for a question to be repeated.

**Good questions to ask them** (pick two):

- How much time will I spend in school, and how are placements chosen?
- What kinds of schools are your partner schools?
- How are trainees supported by mentors during placements?
- How is the course assessed?
- How does the course help trainees find their first teaching job?

**Afterwards.**

- Write down the questions you were asked and how you felt each went, while it is fresh.
- Waiting times vary. Some providers reply the same day, others take a week or more. If you have heard nothing after the time they gave you, a polite email is fine.
- An offer may come with conditions, such as an SKE course or a GCSE equivalency. Check what each one needs and by when.
- If you are not offered a place, ask for feedback. It tells you exactly what to work on before you apply again.

## One-page checklist

**Two weeks before**

- ☐ Every task in the invitation listed, and any pre-interview test booked or done
- ☐ Provider website, Teachers' Standards and safeguarding guidance read
- ☐ Two or three real examples prepared, each with what you learnt
- ☐ Lesson or presentation planned around one idea, with a check of understanding
- ☐ Maths, English and subject knowledge revised at the level they told you

**The day before**

- ☐ Lesson timed out loud twice, back-up resources ready
- ☐ Documents, ID and route (or online set-up) checked
- ☐ Two questions to ask them written down

**On the day**

- ☐ Early, calm, polite to everyone
- ☐ Answers short and specific, ending with what you learnt
- ☐ Ready to reflect on your lesson: what went well, what you would change

## About Jane

Jane is a qualified teacher (QTS) who did her PGCE at UCL. Since 2024 she has helped applicants in many subjects, including maths, physics, geography and music, prepare their applications and interviews, and several have received offers.

For a mock interview or feedback on your lesson plan, visit jianjianpgce.com/en.

This checklist is general guidance. It is not linked to any training provider and cannot guarantee an offer. Always follow your provider's own instructions.

## Sources


- Prepare for your teacher training interview, Get Into Teaching (DfE)
- Teachers' Standards, GOV.UK
- National curriculum, GOV.UK
- Keeping children safe in education, GOV.UK