

# Hiring a Language Teacher

## Suggested Interview Questions and What You Want to Hear

In addition to questions that would be asked of all new hires, use the following to help determine whether or not a language teacher is the right person for your school.

### **Why are you interested in the language you want to teach?**

Teachers must demonstrate a passion for the language they teach. Most importantly, teachers should mention how they think they get students excited about the language.

### **How proficient are you in the target language and what qualifications do you have to teach the language?**

Verify that the teacher has advanced language skills, either via credentials (such as an ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview score) or via an interview with someone who speaks that language. Also, just because someone is a native or heritage speaker of a language does not necessarily mean they will be a good language teacher. After all, all English speakers aren't meant to be Language Arts teachers!

### **How do you engage your students in instruction and get them to use the target language?**

Although it is crucial teachers know the language, it is even more important to see evidence that their students are using the language. It is important for STUDENTS to be actively speaking and using their new language skills daily. Language classrooms should NOT be quiet classrooms, but at the same time teachers need to possess the skills to convey to students when it is ok to talk and when they need to listen. At all levels of instruction, the teacher should mention pair and small group work, as well as interactive classroom activities.

### **What do you do when it is obvious that students do not understand what you are saying?**

The input the teacher provides during instruction needs to be comprehensible to the students. Often, the teacher may be using language that is too sophisticated or too far beyond the proficiency level of their students. Language teachers need to be able to "talk around" more difficult vocabulary (circumlocution). Translating into English is generally not an acceptable way to check for comprehension, because ultimately the students know that if they pretend not to understand, the teacher will always revert to English!

**Tell me how you assess whether students understand what is happening in your classroom and what are some common issues English speakers have when they are learning a second language and how do you help students overcome those issues?**

At all introductory levels of language, it is crucial for teachers to continually assess their students. This can be done in numerous ways, such as signaling comprehension, pointing to various objects or take the form of more traditional or performance assessments. In general, younger language learners need more ongoing informal assessments than adults.

**What is your philosophy of using the target language in the classroom?**

In general, the trend in language education is to focus on function and not form. In other words, teachers should not be teaching lessons that only focus on grammar. Instead, they should have students practice various forms through real-life simulations and activities.

**How can language instruction integrate with other curriculum areas ?**

The short answer is that language can integrate with any subject area, even at introductory levels. It is important for language teachers to connect to other disciplines so students see the relevance of learning the target language.

**Walk me through a lesson you have taught that has gone particularly well, highlighting how you integrated language and culture throughout.**

You want to make sure the prospective teacher has an understanding of the target language cultures. There are 20 Spanish-speaking countries and 40+ French-speaking countries, not to mention regional dialects and cultural practices within all countries. If possible, try to get a feel for how much the prospective teacher knows about the diversity of the people who speak the language they want to teach.

**Describe what you know about the standards for foreign language learning.**

Teachers should be versed in the 5 “C”s of language education: **Communication** and its three modes: *Interpersonal Communication* [speaking/listening and writing/reading between at least two people], *Interpretive Communication* [interpreting the content of a written or spoken text] and *Presentational Communication* [students presenting information in either spoken or written form], **Culture** (in terms of practices and products of a culture and their underlying perspectives), **Connections** (to other curriculum areas), **Comparisons** (both comparing the culture students are learning about to their own as well as comparing the language they are learning to English) and **Communities** (instilling the desire to be a life-long language learner and taking the language beyond the classroom setting). All of our AKS are built around these five standards.

**What is the role of grammar and accuracy in language learning?**

Stay away from someone who insists on accuracy and focuses solely on grammar, especially at beginning levels of language. Teachers should talk about teaching language in meaningful contexts.

**How proficient would you expect students to be at the end of a certain period of time of instruction?**

Teachers should talk about realistic attainable proficiency level expectations for their students. Generally, elementary students will remain at the novice level, as will students in middle and high school until they enter Level 3 or 4. Ideally, teachers should be able to describe the novice language student as someone who uses primarily memorized words and phrases and who understands much more language than they are able to produce.

**(For middle and high school teachers) What is the role of the textbook and other ancillary materials?**

The text and materials should be viewed as a resource, NOT the curriculum.

**For prospective teachers from other countries: How familiar are you with the American education system?**

Heritage or native speakers are often unfamiliar with American schools, so it is important to make sure the teacher knows how to work with the students at your school.

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