

ASPIRING TEACHER'S GUIDE

IS TEACHING THE RIGHT CAREER FOR YOU?
FIND OUT HOW TO TAKE THE NEXT STEPS.



CONSIDERING THE CLASSROOM

Teachers are role models who truly make a difference to their young students. The job is more than helping kids learn to read and do math. Teachers show kids how to behave, and they help them dream and aspire to reach their goals. They challenge, encourage, and teach kids how to reason carefully and well.

Is teaching the right career for you? If you're ready to get started, there's no better time than now to pursue a career as a teacher.

With teacher shortages across the country, there's an ongoing need for dedicated and talented new teachers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 2014 and 2024, almost 88,000 new kindergarten and elementary school teaching positions will be created nationwide—and that's not counting the additional special education and STEM positions that will also need to be filled.

This is an exciting time of change in education. With new technology resources and innovative teaching strategies available, today's classrooms are a different world than they were even a few years ago. Students have more resources at their fingertips, and so do teachers.

Of course, earning your degree and teaching license takes an investment of time, money, and effort.

This brief guide will help you:

- 1) Determine if you have the talents and temperament for success as a teacher.
- 2) Decide if going back to school is a wise investment for you.
- 3) Reduce the stress of applying to school.

Let's get started!



AM I A NATURAL TEACHER?

If you are considering becoming a teacher, some important questions to ask yourself before you start are: Are my skills and temperament a good match for the classroom? Will I actually enjoy the daily reality of teaching?

The following is a list of 10 common teacher traits identified by longtime teacher, principal, and superintendent, Suzanne Capek Tingley. You don't need to have all 10 traits to become a great teacher, but see how many resonate with you!

10 TRAITS OF GREAT TEACHERS

1. You're a good organizer.

Whether it's planning a vacation or organizing the kitchen cupboards, your friends and family like you to take the lead. They know you have a knack for making things run smoothly, and that you'll seek the best outcome for everyone.

2. You give directions people can follow.

You can explain things in simple steps others can follow. What's more, you like helping people succeed, and you can even help them do things they may not find particularly interesting (like figure out how to properly use vacuum attachments).

3. You have the patience to let kids be kids.

While you prefer and encourage good manners and behavior, you also understand that kids are still learning. There may be spills, or pranks, or even tears, but as long as everyone is trying to be their best, you don't expect six-year-olds (or even sixteen-year-olds) to behave like adults.

“Teaching is a great second act. I was 36 years old when I became a teacher. I feel like the experience I got out in the real world helped me become a better teacher.”

-Nancy Barile,
Massachusetts,
23-year veteran high
school teacher



4. You have a great sense of humor and can laugh at yourself.

Some things are just funny. When you say the wrong word, notice a smear of mustard on your shirt while meeting with your boss, or watch all your posters fall at the exact moment that your big presentation freezes, you can still find the funny in life's awkward and stressful moments.

5. Your voice can command a room.

Not only can your voice withstand hours of presenting each day, when you speak, people listen. And they know when you mean business.

6. You have eyes in the back of your head.

You pay attention and are aware of your surroundings. You can listen to others even while you are speaking. And you know that with kids too much silence sometimes means trouble.

7. You're an optimist.

You truly believe things will turn out for the best. You believe that people are basically good. And most importantly, you believe that all kids can learn and get better at whatever challenges them—it may take a little longer for some, but everyone will get there in the end.

8. You're a good storyteller.

At social gatherings, you're the one people listen to. You can captivate an audience, and have great timing. You can also appreciate other people's stories and jokes. Even the corny ones.

9. You listen when others talk and you expect them to do the same.

You are respectful and actually listen when other people talk (you don't just wait for your turn to respond). Even if you don't agree with someone's opinions, you allow them to respectfully express their thoughts. Conversely, you expect others to extend the same courtesies.

10. You actually like kids.

From coaching or tutoring to being the favorite aunt or uncle, you enjoy kids—listening to their stories, encouraging their talents, and helping them find their strengths.

If you're still not sure if you'd truly be comfortable in the classroom, volunteer to help at your local school, or talk to your local principals and see if you can sit in and observe a teacher in action. This will give you a sense of what a teacher's day is really like, and whether or not you'd enjoy a career in education.

You may also want to speak with teachers you know. Ask them what their typical day is like. Find out what they like best about being a teacher, as well as which parts of the job they find challenging. The more familiar you are with everyday realities of teaching, the more you'll know whether it's the right career choice for you.



WILL A DEGREE BE WORTH THE INVESTMENT?

Now that you know you want to be a teacher, the next big decision is where to go to school to earn your degree. Choosing a school can be daunting, as can finding the right path to licensure for you. (Your path to licensure—bachelor’s degree, Master of Arts in teaching, alternative route to licensure, etc.—is determined by how much schooling you have already completed.)

For most people, the two most important factors in choosing a school are time and money. You’ll want to consider both.

TIME

- Will you be able to fit school into your current schedule or will jobs, family commitments, and social activities have to be adjusted to make school possible? Will you attend a traditional program that holds classes at fixed times on campus each week, or will you choose an online program that offers more scheduling flexibility?

Some people prefer the structure of predictable, regularly scheduled class times. This more traditional approach works for their schedule, and it gently forces them to stay on track.

Other students, due to existing work and family commitments, need more flexibility. In fact, flexibility is one of the primary things students love about online education. Some online programs still require students to log in for class at specific times, but more and more online schools are moving to a format where students can attend class any time that works for them.

Because WGU is an online university, you can complete coursework and exams any time that is convenient for you, without interrupting your other responsibilities. Degree programs that lead to teacher licensure also incorporate a full-time, supervised, in-classroom student teaching component of 12 to 20 weeks. (You can complete it at a school near you.)

- How long will it take from the time you start your program until you will be employable as a teacher?

Traditional programs generally take three to four years to complete. A competency-based program, like those offered by WGU, may allow for faster completion of your degree, since you can complete courses as quickly as you demonstrate mastery of the material.

The average time to a WGU degree is two to four years for a bachelor’s degree, and two years for a master’s degree.

MONEY

- Can I afford, or secure sufficient funds through loans, grants, or scholarships to cover the cost of tuition, fees, books, etc.?

A majority of university students receive some form of financial aid to help cover educational expenses. See the “How Will I Pay for School?” section below for more details about the financial aid options that may be available to you.

WGU is a nonprofit university committed to keeping costs low for students. Our flat-rate tuition for all Teachers College degree programs is \$3,190 per six-month term; that’s about half the cost of other online universities.

- Can I afford the potential reduction in work hours/income that may be required to complete my program?

Accredited teaching programs that lead to licensure (including WGU’s) require an in-classroom student teaching experience that typically lasts between three to five months. Some prospective teachers choose to take a leave of absence from their current job to make time to student teach, while others choose to quit their jobs. You’ll need to plan ahead to ensure you can complete the student teaching requirement.

- After I graduate, will I be able to find a job?

The career outlook for teachers is on par with the national average for job growth. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the number of teaching positions in the United States is expected to grow at least 6% by 2024. That means, for example, that over 116,000 new elementary school teaching positions will be created nationwide between 2016 and 2024. There’s also an ongoing national initiative (100Kin10) to recruit, prepare, and retain 100,000 STEM teachers by 2021.

If you really want to teach, earning your degree is one of the best investments you can make. Whether you’ll be 25 or 50 when you graduate, so there’s no reason not to select a school and get started now.

A Word about Accreditation

Whatever school you choose to attend, make sure that it is accredited by a recognized accrediting body. Public school districts will only hire teachers who hold a degree from an accredited college or university. Without the proper accreditations, all the time, money, and effort you spend on school could be in vain.

WGU is regionally accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the highest standard recognized by the U.S. Department of Education; in addition, WGU Teachers College programs have earned specialized accreditation from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).





HOW WILL I PAY FOR SCHOOL?

FINANCIAL AID

The financial aid process can sometimes feel overwhelming, which is why many schools offer financial aid webinars and workshops. You will also want to speak with a financial aid counselor at your school to discuss payment options, and learn about scholarships and other financial aid opportunities.

If you plan to seek federal financial aid, you will need to fill out the FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). To complete that form, you'll need your tax return as well as the FAFSA code for the school to which you're applying. Most schools will list their FAFSA number in the financial aid section of their website. (WGU's FAFSA code is 033394.) Be meticulous when entering your information, and allow a few hours to complete the FAFSA process.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Most universities offer both needs-based and academic scholarships. For example, WGU has awarded over \$15 million in scholarships over the past three years.

Don't let your assumptions about scholarships stop you from applying. You might not think you're a scholarship candidate, when you actually are.

"I think a lot of people believe they have to have this stellar educational background and accomplishments for an impressive scholarship application," says Amanda Savage, WGU's Senior Manager of Scholarships. "But we're not making decisions based solely on what someone did or didn't do in their prior college experience. We're also looking for their passion to get their degree."

"Some schools prorate scholarship amounts based on income, or won't award money if you haven't maintained a certain GPA," said Savage, "But remember that not every school will require the same standards to award you a scholarship."

It will likely be worth your while to investigate scholarship opportunities, so don't hesitate to explore options and discuss them with a financial aid counselor or scholarship advisor at your chosen school.

HOW CAN I TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF APPLYING TO SCHOOL?

Once you've decided to earn your teaching degree, the next step is applying to school. The application process can seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be. In many cases the process has been streamlined and can take as little as 20 minutes! Here is a step-by-step guide to filling out most college applications.

It's true that there are quite a few steps in the application process, but none of them should be insurmountable. Take them one at a time, and before you know it, your application will be complete.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

When preparing to fill out an application for a teaching program, your first step should be to call the school and speak with a program advisor. This person is trained to help make the application process easier for you. They're also a great resource for answering your questions about the program, including the required courses and the estimated timeline to completion.

You can speak with a WGU Enrollment Counselor by calling 866.225.5948.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Applying to college programs involves more than just filling out the application. Most schools also require external materials such as transcripts, essays, and letters of recommendation that must accompany the application.

Transcripts

You will likely need to provide a copy of your official transcript from any high school or college you've attended. These documents can usually be obtained from schools you have attended by filling out an online transcript request form. A small fee (typically about \$5) is often required for each official copy you request. For some schools, you may have to send a written request.

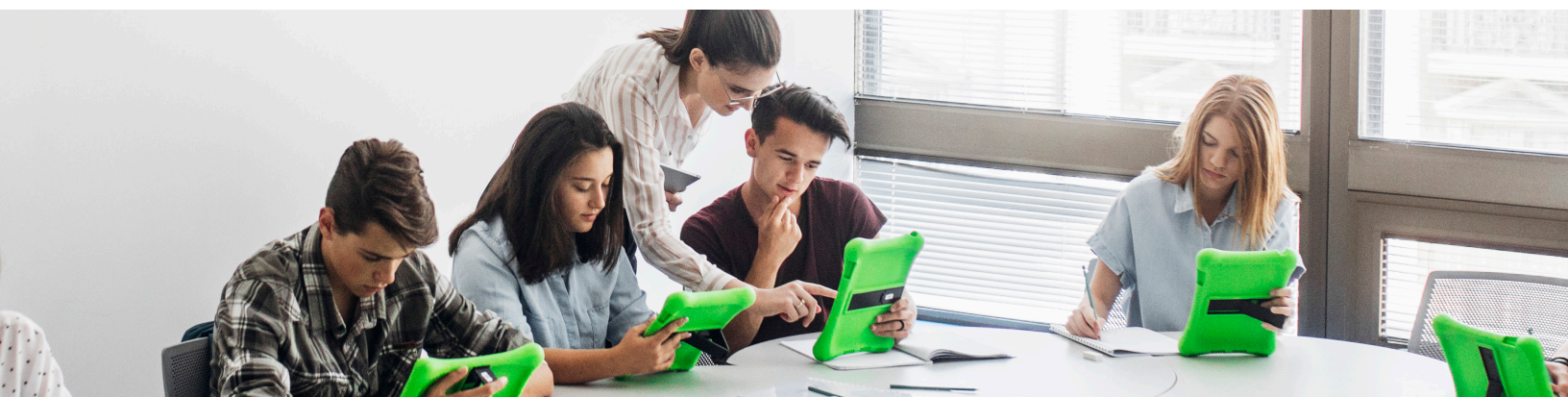
Essays

Some schools will require you to submit an essay along with your application. This essay helps the admissions office get to know you better. It can and should be conversational and about your life and goals for the future, not a reiteration of your résumé.

Letters of Recommendation

Some applications—including those for select WGU degree programs—also require a letter or letters of recommendation, usually written for you by your previous teachers, professors, or professional references. Reach out to those who knew you the best and can speak to the traits that prove you're ready for college-level work.

To make it easier for the people you ask to write you a recommendation, send along your résumé or a fact sheet, or list the classes you took from them. Additionally, mention any special accomplishments you want highlighted in their letter. Finally, be sure to give them plenty of time to complete the letter, be clear about the deadline, and include a stamped, addressed envelope if they'll be submitting the letter via mail.



THE TAKEAWAY

It's a great time to become a teacher, with a strong job market and exciting innovations. If you are interested in teaching, and think you'd be a strong match for the classroom, you really should consider going back to school for your degree and teaching license.

Some teaching programs will allow you to accelerate and graduate faster, while others will follow a fixed semester schedule. All programs will include several weeks of student teaching. It will take time to earn your credentials, but it will be worth it.

ABOUT WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY



Western Governors University (WGU) is a nonprofit online university with more than 100,000 graduates from all 50 states. Nationally respected and regionally accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, WGU was named a "Best Value School" by University Research & Review for four consecutive years.



WGU's Teachers College offers more than 30 bachelor's and master's degree programs, and is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, now CAEP).



Our degree programs can lead to licensure in all 50 states, and are known for their high quality. In fact, in 2017, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) placed WGU's Teachers College in the top 1% nationwide for the quality of its secondary teacher-preparation programs.

Contact a WGU Enrollment Counselor today at 866.225.5948 or visit us at wgu.edu/education.

