



Teaching
Agency

Applying to ITT: Tips for physics candidates

Having decided to apply to an initial teacher training (ITT) course, you will need to submit a written application and attend an interview. An ITT assessment interview will be awarded on the quality of your application, an extremely important element of which is your personal statement.

What is a personal statement?

It is your opportunity to stand out from all other physics applicants. It is important that you convey **why** you want to teach physics, **what** you can offer, and **why** you will make a good physics teacher. You will need to explain **how** you know that teaching is right for you, and **in what way** the school-based experience you have had confirms this.

What the Institute of Physics says:

Avoid clichés and make sure your statement shows that you have thought about teaching and that you being in a school truly appeals to you, rather than it being a last resort. You need to show you are passionate about physics, can explain it clearly and sensibly and that you understand what it is to be a learner - and the barriers.

Your personal statement must demonstrate that you have:

- A strong commitment to becoming a physics teacher
 - Be enthusiastic about physics and show that you want to share this enthusiasm with pupils
 - Identify specific reasons for wanting to become a physics teacher
 - Demonstrate a desire to work with young people

What the Institute of Physics says:

Successful physics teachers have an interesting personality and an infectious enthusiasm for their subject in the face of negative stereotyping in society. Being able to talk about an interesting or favourite part of your degree or career with enthusiasm gives a good insight into your commitment.

- A good understanding of what life as a physics teacher is really like
 - Recent experience of a secondary school, including observing science, ideally physics, being taught.
 - Ability to analyse the teaching you have observed and describe what you have gained from the experience.
 - Understanding of what life as a physics teacher is really like
 - Understanding of the skills needed to be a teacher and work with young people

What the Institute of Physics says:

You need to show you can explain abstract and conceptually difficult concepts to a wide range of pupils who think they are familiar with them e.g. current - most people think they know what it is, but it is in the curriculum to be taught to pupils from Year 7 to Year 13. Also you need to show that you can use technically complex equipment e.g. A-level physics practicals and demonstrations that appear once a year, sometimes with technical support, sometimes without. As a physics teacher, you are likely to be in a minority in the science department, perhaps you may be the only specialist. And as physics is a fast developing field, you'll need to show you can bring current research and developments into the classroom and curriculum.

- Appropriate personal qualities and values, for example:
 - Ability to work and interact with others
 - Ability to think on your feet
 - Good communication skills

What the Institute of Physics says:

Great physics teachers make the abstract become real. They can marry the impossibly big and impossibly small with the world that our students see around them.

A five-paragraph suggested structure

1. Why teaching and why you?
2. Relevance of and reflections upon your school-based work experience
3. Why physics?
4. Any additional factors in support of your application
5. Conclusion

Practicalities

Word process your draft personal statement so you can check it for spelling and grammatical errors before copying and pasting it into the ITT application form. You must be concise in describing your potential to be a successful teacher – for a Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) application you have only 47 lines (4,000 characters) in which to persuade the ITT providers to offer you an interview!

The Interview

Each ITT provider will run the interview in slightly different ways, but they will be looking for the same sorts of things as you have described in your personal statement – but in more detail. It's a good idea to print out your personal statement and read it through before your interview, as you are likely to be questioned on specific things that you've written. The ITT provider will also be looking to make a judgement about your subject knowledge – remember, they will be most interested in your knowledge of secondary school physics, not degree level physics.

What the Institute of Physics says:

Don't assume you are still on top of this material. Your undergraduate course in quantum mechanics may have been fascinating and you may be able to derive all of Maxwell's equations. But can you clearly – and correctly - explain to a 14 year old why a satellite doesn't fall back to earth? Or help an 11 year old understand why lights are generally wired in parallel?

Finally, remember you are talking to education professionals who are passionate about their field and can tell when a candidate is exaggerating. Be yourself, take your time, and think carefully about what you say – below are some real examples, provided by the Institute of Physics, of what candidates have said at interview which did not go down so well:

Don't you know I have a PhD in physics?

While this shows someone who is enthusiastic about physics and has gained expertise at the cutting edge of research it says nothing about their suitability as a secondary school physics teacher.

I like the idea of teaching because of the long holidays.

The old cliché which tells the tutor you know nothing about life as a teacher. You won't win friends in the education world by wheeling this one out.

I have always wanted to be a physics teacher.

If you're going to make a sweeping statement like this, make sure you can back it up. Did you really know you wanted to teach about electro-magnetism and the laws of thermodynamics when you were in infant school? Be honest about when you realised your calling and think about what it actually is about teaching that is so attractive to you.

I have a degree in English and have always had a keen interest in Science.

Physics teachers do come from all sorts of backgrounds and English graduates are no exception. With a Subject Knowledge Enhancement course, you could make a fine physics teacher. But don't tell a physics ITE tutor you have always been interested in science if you went off to do a completely unrelated degree. Be honest and explain why you now want to teach science.

I just want to teach in a nice quiet school where the kids don't misbehave and I can deliver my lessons, mark my books and go home.

If only it were that simple. In the real world, people are complicated beings and children don't just come to school to soak up knowledge. Being a teacher encompasses a wide range of skills including subject knowledge, communication skills, empathy, tact, behaviour management, presence, and organisation.