Investing your time and money in a yoga teacher training program can be an effective way to deepen your understanding of yoga in order to share it with others and possibly move towards a career doing what you love. Finding the right program can make all the difference between a mediocre experience and a life-changing one.

In the past 5 years, there’s been a boom in yoga teacher training programs in the US as yoga has become big business. It takes a significant amount of experience, dedication, and time to craft a quality program. However, for some schools teacher training programs are primarily viewed as a source of revenue, and in those cases the program’s quality may reflect those priorities. Asking the right questions as a prospective student will help you determine whether a program will prioritize your education and personal development, or whether they’re more interested in your participation for financial reasons.

If your teacher training experience is just a fast-track to certification, you’ll graduate feeling only vaguely familiar with the material. A quality program will provide repeated exposure to key concepts, adequate support and feedback, and plenty of time to absorb the information so you’ll feel confident and practiced enough that you could teach any yoga pose or philosophical concept to your grandmother.

Will you be ready when a student in your first post-teacher-training class asks how to modify for their back issue or wants to know what that Sanskrit term you’ve been throwing around really means?

These 10 questions will give you an insider look at what’s really important when choosing a program:

1. Is the program an RYS? Over the past year, Yoga Alliance has become the essential player in the yoga world, to the point where it’s hard to get a teaching job if you don’t attend a Registered Yoga School (RYS) and obtain the Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) designation. Yoga Alliance offers valuable member benefits such as health insurance, liability insurance, educational webinars, and more. Even if you aren’t sure you want to teach, it’s wise to invest in a program that will enable you to get your RYT because if you change your mind and want to teach after graduating you will not have to spend additional money on a second RYS program. To ensure you can get your RYT designation upon graduation, verify that a prospective program is listed as an RYS on Yoga Alliance’s website so you know the program is in good standing.

2. What is the style of the training and will it make you a versatile teacher? While demonstrating respect for the broad tradition of yoga, the program should focus on one particular approach (that resonates with you) rather than providing a survey of 10 different yoga styles. On the other hand, consider whether the program’s teaching certificate will make you a versatile instructor who can teach in a variety of settings, or whether you will only be qualified to teach a branded class in a particular location or for a particular company.

3. How experienced are the primary teachers? To become a skillful yoga teacher, you need to learn more than just the basics of alignment and a bunch of Sanskrit. You’ll learn most from the insights your primary teachers share based on their years of experience practicing, studying, and working with thousands of students. With teacher training programs cropping up everywhere, it’s important to find out how long the primary teacher has been teaching. The depth of what you can learn from a teacher who been honing her craft for 10 or more years is significantly more than someone who just graduated from her own teacher training program 2 years ago.

4. Will you be ready when a student in your first post-teacher-training class asks how to modify for their back issue or wants to know what that Sanskrit term you’ve been throwing around really means?
Passionate about making yoga accessible for day-to-day living, Kerry is the Founder and Director of Bloom Yoga Studio and its Teacher Training programs. Kerry has been teaching yoga since 1996 and has completed over 700 hours of yoga teacher training. She is proud to serve on the Board of Directors for Yoga Alliance and as the chairperson for its Ethics Subcommittee.

What is the curriculum and classroom format? Yoga Alliance requires RYS to provide a minimum number of Instructional hours in six educational categories, but each program can choose to allocate those hours in a variety of ways. Ask the primary teacher to show you the curriculum and book list, and find out the format of classroom hours. According to Yoga Alliance guidelines, teacher training classroom hours must be in a “dedicated teacher training environment (into which others might occasionally be invited) rather than in classes intended for the general public.” If the program doesn’t follow a clear curriculum and your teacher training sessions are open to the general public, the depth of your learning will be compromised.

Does the program prepare you to teach beginners and modify for students with injuries? Teaching intermediate students is pretty straightforward – just call out ‘handstand’ and, voila, up they go! While it can be fun to play with more challenging poses, part of being a good yoga teacher is meeting students where they are. As yoga becomes more popular, it’s essential to know how to safely teach a variety of students (not just fit and flexible yogis) because regardless of what level you plan to teach, every class is really a mixed level class. The program should emphasize learning alternate variations so you can empower students to participate at a level that’s appropriate for them rather than risking overdoing it or having to sit that challenging arm balance out.

How much yoga experience is required to apply? If a program requires no previous yoga experience for applicants, this should raise a red flag. It means you will receive a less-thorough education because your teacher trainers will need to spend more time instructing newer students in the basics of alignment and technique. It may also indicate the program values generating revenue over accepting appropriately-qualified candidates. One year of consistent yoga practice prior to applying is a minimum standard for potential teacher trainees.

The answers to these questions will help you determine which program will be the best fit for your educational needs while preparing you to become a skilled and knowledgeable yoga teacher. Enjoy the journey!

Kerry Maiorca
E-RYT 500, RPYT

Passionate about making yoga accessible for day-to-day living, Kerry is the Founder and Director of Bloom Yoga Studio and its Teacher Training programs. Kerry has been teaching yoga since 1996 and has completed over 700 hours of yoga teacher training. She is proud to serve on the Board of Directors for Yoga Alliance and as the chairperson for its Ethics Subcommittee.