

# Applying for that dream post



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Two crucial elements when applying for a teaching post are the quality of your CV/personal statement, as well as how you perform in the interview lesson.

**Robyn Johnstone** offers some advice...

**M**any teachers do not realise that an effective CV can make the difference between being shortlisted for the job of their dreams and not making it past the first stage of recruitment.

Often NQTS and teaching graduates struggle the most because they may have not written a CV before and they lack the experience to stand out. By following these guidelines you can ensure you are giving yourself the best possible chance of success.

## A dedicated teaching CV

Teachers need to understand the importance of a teaching CV to help them focus on what experience they have and what skills they have developed. This needs to be refined into a succinct and concise document. Once you have a strong teaching CV, it makes it easy to quickly market yourself to prospective schools. Employers often know there

is no ideal match but through a CV you can present yourself as close a fit as possible.

If you are currently completing your PGCE or Bachelors in Education, you can actively seek employment before you graduate by sending your CV to agencies who are constantly proactively searching for suitable teaching candidates. It will also enable you to attend recruitment agency events throughout the year, allowing you to meet with several hiring schools in one evening.

## Constructing a winning teaching CV

A successful candidate's CV will document experience to date, highlight their achievements and how they have developed and improved over time.

When writing a CV you should put yourself in the hirer's shoes. Does your CV confirm you are qualified to fulfil the job? Does your experience meet the job specification? Most importantly, will the person reading it want to find out more by inviting you to interview?

Your CV should include your teaching qualification – typically a PGCE or Bachelor of Education (BEd), your start and finish dates, the college or university at which you studied, and a brief overview of the course.

If you have studied another subject to degree level then provide details in the same format as your teaching qualification and link your degree to relevant aspects of teaching. Be sure to also include any additional qualifications that are relevant to the role.

Include any interesting hobbies or interests you have to demonstrate how transferable skills developed through such pastimes can also be valuable work skills. Be mindful that this is not just a list of your favourite hobbies but an illustration of how these activities have improved your teaching ability.

## Personal statement

When writing your CV it is important to include a personal statement. A personal statement is usually situated at the top of your CV, under your personal information, and is one of the first sections that the school will read.

A personal statement allows you to personalise your message to prospective schools or agencies. Look carefully at the school's website and demonstrate that you understand the ethos of the school.

Take time also to check out that school's

performance information and news reports published in local papers.

A personal statement should demonstrate your passion for teaching, supported by the skills and extra-curricular opportunities you can bring. Briefly give evidence of your teaching successes, where you can bring added value and, if applicable, where you have helped raise attainment.

It should be no more than one short paragraph so do not try to cover everything that you have studied or all your achievements. Again, make sure you proof-read your personal statement carefully.

## Career summary

State the roles, schools and dates in your employment history, regardless of your level of experience. Provide a brief summary of specific teaching responsibilities, and highlight achievements and any extra responsibilities you have been given as well as extra-curricular activities. If relevant, include techniques and methods you use to effectively control and teach your class.

## Formatting your CV

It is important to follow the correct formatting to make it easy for the recruiter to read. You may love the casual typeface Comic Sans and think you will stand out using it, but your future employers won't be impressed!

It is recommended to use Times New Roman for hard copies and Arial for electronic copies. Ensure that you use the same font throughout and only black.

Go easy on the bold and italics. Only use bold for section headings and italics for job titles. Make sure your formatting is consistent and, above all, easy to read. Many employers allocate only a short amount of time to read each CV, therefore your impressive experience and skills need to be easy to pick out.

Punctuation and grammar is the simplest step to check yet the easiest and most common to slip up on. Do not be complacent and make sure you and a friend check your CV before sending it to a school.

## References

In line with the Department for Education's statutory guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, you will need to supply two referees. One of these must be from your most recent teaching post or placement.

Make sure you inform your referees that they will be contacted. Aside from being polite, it will ensure that they are returned in a timely manner.

Make sure you also include the following in your application and highlight how they have influenced and developed you as a teacher:

- Any other teaching experience (e.g. sports coaching, summer camps or youth groups).
- Relevant voluntary experience.
- Any other interests you may have that are relevant to teaching.
- Skills that will be useful in the role (e.g. leadership, IT and languages).

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**M**any UK teaching job interviews frequently include the candidate conducting a live lesson with a class of students, which is observed by some or all members of the selection panel. This is what is known as an observation lesson.

Rather than being nervous about this part of the interview, try to think of it as your chance to impress. After all, teaching children is what you're here for. It is also an opportunity for you to assess whether the school is a good fit for you and your personal teaching philosophy and style. For those of you who feel nervous about teaching in an unfamiliar environment, here are some tips on how to triumph in an observation lesson:

## Preparing for the lesson

Check with the school to ensure you know the key stage and content you are required to teach, as well as how long you will be expected to teach for. Some schools only observe 20 to 30 minutes of teaching while others observe a full lesson. If you can, find out the seating plan in advance, as well as any important student information, so you can use it in planning your lesson.

Find out if you will be expected to take the register and be sure to build in time for this before you begin the lesson, or take the register while students are involved in their starter activity.

Write out a lesson plan and print out copies for the observers to follow. Make sure you use a lesson plan template and link the lesson content to the relevant sections of the curriculum.

It is crucial to plan ahead for the use of key

technology and ICT and remember to have a back-up plan, should your ICT fail. It is often advised to avoid using technology where possible to prevent any chances of failure, followed by unnecessary time wasting as you try to fix it (when you could be showing off your teaching ability).

## Getting started

At the start of the lesson be sure to introduce yourself and write your name and lesson objectives on the board so that learners understand the context of the lesson, and how it fits into the big picture. Don't forget to take the register, if it has not been done by another member of staff. If there are any difficult names, check their pronunciation beforehand.

What's your hook? Plan an interesting starter activity to get the students immediately engaged. Remember classroom management starts from when students arrive at the door.

Check with the school if there is a typical procedure on how to start a lesson, such as getting the students to line up outside. Also ensure that you know your cue to start and end, often through the school bell, but not always.

## Keep it simple

Don't try to cram in too much or plan complicated activities that eat into the limited time you have to display your teaching prowess. Try to focus your lesson on one tight learning objective or key theme to keep students engaged. Ensure you plan to reactivate key learning from previous lessons, if appropriate.

Follow the typical lesson pattern of using a starter activity to engage students, a main activity that develops through the lesson and end with a plenary to summarise and reinforce learning. Consider using

an exit activity which you can use as an assessment for learning exercise as well.

If the school has asked you to provide an exercise for homework, ensure that it is well prepared, relevant to the lesson and suitable for all learning abilities.

## Classroom management

If possible, find out the school's behaviour management policy and code of conduct ahead of your lesson. Students can often play up when taught by an unfamiliar member of staff. It is important you plan ahead and think about how you might manage:

- Low-level behaviour challenges.
- Escalating behaviour challenges.
- Transitions between activities.
- Group work dynamics.
- Resource distribution.

Try to involve as many students as possible when moving from one activity to another. Plan how and when you will check levels of understanding throughout the lesson and make sure you vary your techniques to show your breadth of skills when managing a class.

Keep a close eye on your timings, as the observers will want to see you running the lesson on schedule while still ensuring students are engaged and progressing with the learning activity.

## Be explicit in your differentiation

You need your observers to be able to see you can change your behaviour and communication when working with other staff members, compared to the children. Interact with the teaching assistant, if you have one, by briefing them before the lesson on what you plan to do, listening to their feedback on students, and explaining clearly how you would like

them to support you in the lesson. Ensure you also maintain interaction during the lesson.

Use open and closed questioning techniques to suit different students, and be prepared with extension questions for more able learners. Make sure you have alternative explanations to scaffold learning when required.

A simple solution to this is to use graphic organisers, such as a concept map or Venn diagram. These can be used to help students quickly identify areas of focus within a broad topic, reducing the time you must spend introducing key themes. If possible, use small group questioning techniques which allow all students to play an active role in answering.

## What are the observers looking for?

Typically, the observation and selection team will judge you on the following:

- Subject knowledge.
- Classroom management.
- Rapport with students.
- Innovation and potential.
- Student engagement and progress.

Many of these skills will be part of your natural style of teaching and you will have developed tried and tested methods that work for you. However if you are unsuccessful in securing the role, schools will often give prompt and meaningful feedback so you can understand what you need to improve for your next interview.

Overall, remember to smile, be confident, listen to the students and respect their learning environment.

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