6 Step Approach for Getting Hired for a Satisfying Long-Haul Teaching Position

How to reach the finish line of teacher preparation by securing a job you love and where you will be loved.

You’ve meticulously pushed through your undergraduate work where you majored or minored in education. You passed your coursework, compiled your student teaching units, got observed, and took and passed all your examinations for provisional licensure. In addition, you made certain that you attended and got credit for your antidrug, substance abuse, suicide prevention, and anti-bullying workshops. You got certified for CPR and took emergency planning workshops as well. Even better you notice by your email from various hiring agencies that there are plenty of openings for new teachers at good starting salaries in schools geographically close to you. You think it’s going to be a walk in the park to get your first job with little effort since as part of your final accreditation and graduate degree, you had to put together a résumé and a cover letter—exactly what all those offers in your license area need attached. Other than sending out a few responses, you can sit back and wait for job offers to pour in and then pick and choose as suits you. Ha, it’s a pretty picture, but a fantasy! Read on to learn the reality of job searching today.

Step 1 – REDO YOUR RÉSUMÉ FOR EACH JOB.

Redo and reconfigure your résumé for specific school jobs, cultures, and job description needs. While it certainly would be time effective to just send out the résumé you already have for a given position, that approach will not distinguish you as an applicant with little experience from your pool of competitors. Rather, carefully read the job description and also read through the school’s website including its mission, special programs, events and partnerships. As much as is relevant and true to your philosophy and current capacities, connect what you can do and the position/school mission in a first “self sales pitch” paragraph of no more than 6 sentences. Do not hesitate to throw in exact words and terms that seem to resonate in the position description and the school web site.

Will this take more time that just using that great résumé your grad advisor helped you put together and approved? It certainly will and if you apply for 8–10 positions, you will need several hours researching and customizing for each specific school and district and job position, but it will pay off in the end. While is true that as a brand-new entry level teacher you are a desirable hire, so are your many peers and without highly distinguishing traits and abilities, there is no assurance your résumé will even be closely reviewed unless you closely match the school’s culture or philosophy.
Also, in doing the first overall site and philosophy overview of schools and job descriptions, you may realize that you do not share the school’s educational, political, or arts mission or that you cannot stay certain evenings or weekends or accompany students on workplace or college tours. It is better to realize this from the start than to get hired for a job you philosophically or physically cannot do. You want to develop as a teacher in your first job, not be looking for a new one right away. Redo your résumés to focus on job descriptions and schools that are a perfect fit for who you are and where you want to teach. Less is more if you get hired where you will be happy and so will the administration be with your performance.

Step 2 – CUSTOMIZE YOUR COVER LETTERS.

Given the fact that you had to redo your résumé for every job with a connecting first paragraph, you should realize that you need to customize your cover letter as well. In fact, odds are you will never get a face-to-face interview unless there is something more compelling in your cover letter than what is in the cover letters of your peers who are just out of undergrad or grad school. Once again reread the website and anything your state’s DOE website has about the school and look into yourself.

Focus on what you, as a new teacher, can bring to the school, students, and staff that will enhance their ongoing mission and be your unique contribution. If it is an international school and you have traveled, studied, or lived abroad or are from a country the majority of students were born in, that might be the link. If the school fosters business and your family ran a business or you did marketing before teaching, that might be the connection. If you are a trained musician or artist and can teach or start a group that the school does not have, share that in your cover letter. Make a case in the cover letter for what you can do for your school community that connects to what they want, need, or should receive.

Step 3 - EVALUATE THE ONLINE ASSESSMENTS.

When you get an email back saying they want to know more about you, you think, “Oh, a face-to-face interview—the next to last step of hiring! Hooray!” Not true in the 21st century hiring climate.

As you read through the congratulatory email, you see there is a link to an online multiple choice assessment. There are twelve pages of items which are one-sentence long and have a Likert scale of clickable options from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The assessment survey tells you it will take twenty minutes of your time, but you can click and save what you do each visit and then review it at the end before submitting it online.
Do not decide it is best to get this no-writing-just-clicking task done as soon as possible by just clicking mostly Strongly Agree and a few neutrals. You are wrong to assume that this step requires no research on a website and it is intuitive to click “Strongly Agree.” Teachers are supposed to be positive, right? Get it done and do it in twenty minutes since the Assessment suggests that is the time it will take, right? Wrong, if you actually want or need the job!!! As a teacher who will be heavily involved in giving assessments and being assessed throughout your career, you want to honestly and thoughtfully address this assessment survey as an educator.

Read all the items. Take notes, do some honest responding to those you can without thinking or researching, and step away by saving if you can. Most of the online assessment surveys give the teacher candidate a chance to walk away from the survey—even if for a few hours—before returning to complete and submit it. Take that time to copy down questions or items which confuse or perplex you. Read and reread them later on your own away from the computer. Go with your gut on most of the survey but some questions about situations may not have an easy or obvious response. They may be case-to-case and you may just AGREE or be NEUTRAL or DISAGREE on some items. Clarify what is being asked with a mentor or advisor or another teacher. Talk it through.

**Step 4 – ALWAYS BE READY FOR A PHONE INTERVIEW.**

Technology and the fact that multiple charter and public school systems hire HR /Talent persons to supervise their search, may mean that even after submitting the cover letter, the résumé, and the assessment survey, you are still not scheduled for a meeting with a teacher/parent leadership team or principal at the school site. You find out that someone from Talent wants a thirty minute cell phone conversation with you. What do you do? How do you prepare?

Most schools now do a phone pre-interview. It can be conducted by the principal, a teacher leader or coach, or even the school secretary. It will not be scheduled, so your cell phone could ring while you are with friends, working out in the gym, driving, or any time day or evening. How can you be prepared?

First, right after submitting your application, review the school website again, especially the mission, programs, and student activities. Write down questions about them and ways in which you can participate or serve the school needs.

Second, have your exact licenses and credentials printed and always at hand, along with any key papers or units you developed that you may want to cite.

Third, prepare a list of phone and email contacts for your three key references. If it is summer, find out from your references if you can give home emails and cell phone numbers because they
will not be at school to answer an email or phone call and that will delay or sabotage your being hired.

During the phone call, step away from your friends or go to a quiet spot. Speak slowly and pause to smile, even though the caller will not see that. Your voice changes when you smile! Listen to the caller. Let him or her talk as much as possible and ask relevant questions based on the conversation. Be genuine and at the end, ask any questions you have about benefits, time on site, expected afterschool and extracurricular responsibility issues/concerns. If you have ideas based on your review of the site or have read about the school, add that.

At the end of the conversation, ask specifically when and how you will hear about the next steps and what the timeline for those steps is. Say it was a pleasure talking with her or him and you look forward to moving forward in the process.

Send an email to thank the interviewer and verify the next steps. Write a real thank you note, put a stamp on it, and mail it! So few people do this that it makes a great impression.

**Step 5 – PREPARE FOR THE CAMERA.**

You’re on camera!! Ironically, given the accessible technology and services that market themselves to busy school districts, school consultants, and charter school systems, there is a profusion of employment positions which entail being interviewed on your home computer or cell phone using an app or a link. These interviews generally include 5 to 7 questions, some posed on video while others are on text screen.

In these situations, the interviewee is shown a timer length for responses—usually 90 to 120 seconds—and told to prepare and then counted down to the start of recording. Generally the interview subject can redo at least once and finally, if satisfied, press submit and be done. The entire recording takes 20 minutes. Ah, at last a modern technology step which needs no further participant preparation!!

Even if you are a particularly high-profile selfie-taker or you love being in front of a camera, you need to prepare. Your attire and hair need to be professional with a touch of camera-ready solid blue, purple, or even dress white. Nails, jewelry and diverting gestures need to be minimized. Many of the videos offer the interviewee a training session where he or she can listen to the recorded voice values, note the visual quality, and practice answers to know if they fit within the time given.

Should someone who films himself or herself teaching and has prepared a video as part of his/her licensure, or for a grad ed course, still practice? Yes!! If you are theatrical or you normally have
make up or accessories or have a hairstyle that is definitive, you may need to practice toning down and being vanilla. If you are a fast talker or a singer/jokester in real life, that is not appropriate here. If you go on and on or are slow to warm up, you have to practice finishing and filling time for each answer. This is not necessarily a solo rehearsal. Get a teacher pal or principal or peer or even grad advisor to review your rehearsal. Don’t rush to call it a “take.” Learn from Pacino or Brando and shoot and reshoot.

Step 6 – TELL THE TRUTH AND BE TRUE TO YOURSELF.

If you are hired based on your agreeing with survey items so that you would look like a good fit, you may be very unsuccessful in the school culture. You have taken a ton of tests and assessments as part of your pathway to provisional certification and your teaching credential. As the proverbial compliant classroom student and graduate student who wanted to get a good grade, you may know what the “correct” or “high scoring” assessment response is. You are smart enough and have succeeded enough in school and beyond to know that honesty will not necessarily lead to a job. Should you “psych” out the assessment and just analyze it for high score response values and pick those options that will “rate” well No!! Rather, step back and analyze the assessment choices.

You may realize you are not the “right” teacher for a school with these values. Were you to succeed in getting hired, you would not “fit” day-to-day. Sometimes evaluating the assessment items and the message they give about the hiring school may be enough to tell you that this school is not the place for your first job and not somewhere you can develop as a teacher and colleague comfortably. That can be as important a self-assessment and indicator for you as actually completing the assessment and going on to the next level.

Take Polonius’s Advice: “To thine own self be true. . .Thou canst not then be false to any [one].” As with the assessment, cover letter and phone interview, you may be able to use your savvy to ace the Hire Vue or other professional interview step. But if you find you are falsely scripting and styling a physical performance that does not reflect who you are day-to-day or who you want to be in your own classroom, stop the process.

Love your job, grow as a teacher, and be loved by your colleagues and students.

At the end of the day these multiple media steps on the stairway to your first job may seem to be work-intensive and research-heavy since you have already done Olympic Gold Medal moves to pass all obstacles and just want to ascend any platform to a paid teaching position. Sometimes the worst thing can be getting what you wish for and played to, and being desperately unsuited for the first job in a profession you chose. Following these 6 multimedia steps will allow you to
get hired for who you truly are and can be as an educator at a school that resonates with your teaching and lifestyle. Be true to yourself and find your own Hogwarts Academy if being a wizard is your thing or check out Ms. Peregrine’s School or be part of a charter or community school where your values rule!!

**Resources:**

Hire Vue - [www.hirevue.com](http://www.hirevue.com) - This site has extensive tutorials and practice videos.

Six Common Interview Questions for Teachers - Teach Hub -

[http://www.teachhub.com/6-common-interview-questions-and-how-to-answer-them/](http://www.teachhub.com/6-common-interview-questions-and-how-to-answer-them/)

You Tube has a vast collection of teacher interviews for viewing