



Central States Troops to Teachers

Employment Preparation Portfolio

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Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this guide is to assist you in successfully securing a teaching position with a district in your area. This guide will provide you with an overview of the documents required to apply for teaching positions and tips when writing your cover letter, resume, and educational philosophy. This guide also offers sample documents to use as guides when finalizing your application materials. Finally, the interview process is outlined with sample interview questions and possible answers.

Each school district is unique and principals aim to hire teachers that will be a good fit for their individual school. It is highly recommended that you research the schools in your area to find the district and school that best aligns with your philosophies. It may also be beneficial to speak with current teachers and principals within the district prior to the interview process to gain insights into the process for that specific district. You may also gain valuable information from the district website.

This guide should be used as just that. These are simply recommendations gathered from Troops to Teachers counselors based on their years of experience assisting military members as they transition to careers as public school teachers. There are many different ways to approach a cover letter, resume, and interview. The content of this guide is simply a compilation of what has been effective for prior Troops to Teachers participants. The suggestions in this guide should be adapted to meet the needs of the district, school, and applicant.

Application Materials

Cover Letter

The cover letter is your first contact with the hiring official. This is where you highlight how your experiences align with the available position. This is a formal letter and should be written professionally, with proper grammar. Make sure to address the cover letter directly to the hiring official whether it is the principal or a contact from the HR department. Generic, “To Whom It May Concern” letters are less personable and indicate that you have not researched the position enough to know who the hiring official is.

The standard format of a cover letter is three paragraphs. The first paragraph is an introduction that lists the position for which you are applying and how you heard about the position. The second paragraph is where you describe why you are the ideal candidate for this position. This paragraph should include an overview of your qualifications for the position. Do not simply list everything on your resume. Rather, highlight the relevant experience that you want to make sure the hiring official recognizes. You can highlight your experience using a table that lists the requirements for the position and how your experience aligns with those requirements. This is an easy way to illustrate why you are a good candidate for the position. The last paragraph is a conclusion, which should thank the hiring official for their consideration and indicate you look forward to a personal interview.

The cover letter should be completed in a word processor. The standard format of a cover letter is one inch margins. The text should be a 12 point readable font such as Times New Roman or Arial. The top of the page should include your personal letter head with contact information. You should also include the date and address block for the hiring official. A sample cover letter is provided on the next page.

Sample Cover Letter

Jane Smith

7755 Arrow Road
Nowhere, CO 70707

Phone: 719-555-4444
Email: jane.smith@email.com

August 1, 2010

Paul Johnson
Principal, Wilson Middle School
9999 Bridger Drive
Nowhere, CO 70707

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Please consider this letter and supporting documents as my application for the Middle Grade Mathematics Teacher position available at your school. After reviewing the qualifications for the position on the district's website, I feel I would be a wonderful addition to your education team.

My resume fully outlines my qualifications for this position. However, I would like to highlight the key areas I believe make me an ideal candidate for this position.

Desired Qualifications	My Qualifications
Colorado state license.	Interim Authorization for Secondary Mathematics Expires: April 2011
Experience teaching mathematics.	One year experience as a student teacher for a 5 th grade mathematics classroom. Five years experiences as a mathematics tutor.
Understanding of diversity and teaching diverse learners.	Tutoring and student teaching experience was conducted at low-income schools with highly diverse student populations. Completed coursework addressing diverse learners and culturally responsive teaching.
Ability to work in a team environment.	Worked with a diverse group of teachers during student teaching experience.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my application. I look forward to discussing my qualifications and personal teaching philosophy with you during a personal interview.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

Resume

The resume is a snapshot of your personal and professional experiences related to the position for which you are applying. It is not necessary to include all of your professional experiences. Hiring officials are purely interested in how your experiences relate to the position and the qualities and strengths you can bring to the organization.

There are two basic formats for a resume: chronological and functional. **Chronological resumes** outline work experiences in the order of the experience with the most recent experience listed first. This method is appropriate if past work experiences are similar to the position. However, this format is usually not the best format for Troops to Teachers participants as your professional experiences are less likely to qualify as professional teaching experience. For this reason, a functional resume is recommended.

Functional resumes are organized based on the qualifications of the position. The focus of a functional resume is to ensure the hiring official connects your experiences with the desired qualifications. Experiences can still be listed chronologically, but the resume is organized into categories related to the position. An example of a functional resume is provided on the next page.

When crafting an educational resume it is also important to:

- **Tailor the resume to each position:** Make sure to modify and highlight the various experiences that directly relate to the qualifications of the position. Standardized resumes are more likely to be ignored.
- **Use key words from the job posting:** Some organizations use software programs that search for key words within a resume. Using the same language as the job posting increases the chance that your resume will be reviewed based on key word searches.
- **Use a format that is easy to read:** Avoid writing paragraphs in your resume. Instead, use bulleted lists that are easy to read and highlight your qualifications.
- **Keep the resume to two pages:** Hiring officials typically do not read an entire resume that is over two pages.
- **List the most important qualifications first:** Hiring officials often skim resumes. Therefore, you want all of the vital information listed first. If you have a license or are enrolled in a licensure program, list this information at the top of your resume.
- **Focus on teaching experience or experiences working with children:** If you do not have K-12 teaching experiences, draw from the training and instruction you provided during your military career. You can also highlight any volunteer experiences you have with children in the K-12 age range.
- **Remove military jargon:** Civilian hiring officials are not familiar with military terms.

Sample Resume

Jane Smith

7755 Arrow Road
Nowhere, CO 70707

Phone: 719-555-4444
Email: jane.smith@email.com

Teaching Philosophy

I believe every student has the ability to learn. I believe in creating a cooperative teaching environment in which the administration, teachers, students, and parents engage in collaborative efforts with the goal to aid in the growth of each student.

Certification and Licensure

Colorado Interim Authorization
Secondary Mathematics

Expires: April 19, 2011

Florida Professional Educator's Certificate
Middle Grades Mathematics

Expires: June 30, 2014

Education

Teacher Ready – Teacher licensure program
University of West Florida
Major: Middle Grades Mathematics

May 2009

Masters of Business Administration
University of Phoenix

Dec 2007

Bachelor of Science in Business Management
University of Colorado at Colorado Springs
Concentrations: Human Resource Management and Marketing

May 2004

Teaching Experience

Colorado College Children's Center **Aug 2001 – Present**
 Classroom Volunteer/Substitute Teacher

Duties

- Assist classroom teachers with daily lessons
- Monitor and supervise children during learning experiences
- Engage children in creative play and learning activities
- Provide one-on-one tutoring to children during classroom activities

Wilson Elementary School – Colorado Springs District 11 **Sep 2010 – May 2009**
 Student Teacher

Duties

- Provided math instruction for fifth grade students
- Created age appropriate lesson plans
- Provided one-on-one tutoring to students during classroom activities
- Assessed student learning through formative and summative assessments
- Graded student assignments and provided feedback for improvement

Professional Experience

United States Army **Apr 2000 – May 2010**

- Achieved the rank of Captain
- Trained soldiers in a variety of subject areas including safety, first aid, and combat lifesaver
- Developed and taught training courses throughout military career
- Mentored soldiers regarding professional development and civilian education opportunities
- Obtained the ability to perform under pressure, adapt to a variety of situations, and work in a team environment

Community Involvement

Youth Services Director, Colorado Community Church 2005-Present

Intramural Basketball Coach, YMCA 2006-Present

Educational Philosophy

Some school districts may ask for a written teaching or educational philosophy as a component of the hiring process. Your teaching philosophy is important as it provides a guide for decisions regarding your lessons and implementation methods. There is no right or wrong answer to a philosophy. Your philosophy is a personal statement regarding your beliefs of how students learn, how you teach students, and how you implement your beliefs in the classroom setting.

Hiring officials use your educational philosophy to determine if you are a good fit for their school. It is important to tailor your educational philosophy to the educational beliefs of the school or district to which you are applying. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you research the educational philosophies of the schools and districts in your area to determine the school and district that best aligns with your personal philosophy. Also, it is important to revise your educational philosophy throughout your teaching career as you learn and grow as a professional. Many of the suggestions provided in this section were pulled from *Writing Your Own Educational Philosophy* by Dr. Jurgen Combs and can be accessed at www.edulink.org/protfolio/philosophies.htm.

Items to address in your educational philosophy include:

- Why do you want to teach?
 - What is the purpose of education?
 - What is your role as an educator?
- Whom are you going to teach?
 - Specifically how will you reach the wide diversity of children that you will have in your classroom?
 - How do you define your community of learners?
- How and what are you going to teach?
 - What are your beliefs about how children learn?
 - How will these beliefs impact your teaching?
 - Classroom management
 - Instructional strategies
 - Curriculum design
 - Assessment
 - How do you balance the needs of individual learners with the need of the entire class?
 - What are your goals for your students?
- Where are you going to teach?
 - How will you bring a global awareness into your classroom?
 - What will be your relationship with the community, parents, teaching, colleagues, and administration?

There are several items to consider when drafting your educational philosophy:

- **Use the literature:** It is appropriate to include citations from educational theory. You can state, “Much like Erikson, I believe...” Quoting classic educational theory provides justification for your strategies and strengthens your philosophy.
- **Address current hot topics:** You should also be familiar with current trends in K-12 education and speak to those issues in your philosophy. Topics may include cooperative learning, parental involvement, use of technology in the classroom, diverse learners, and culturally responsive teaching.
- **Be comprehensive.** A strong educational philosophy will have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
- **Stay positive.** We all know there are issues in education, but you should maintain a positive tone throughout your philosophy. Your philosophy is not the place to discuss everything that is wrong with our educational system.
- **Be simple.** Avoid using extensive education jargon and if you do use jargon make sure you fully understand the concept if a hiring official should ask you to expand on your beliefs. Also, write clear and concise sentences to ensure your philosophy is interpreted as you intended.
- **Provide support.** You need to support your philosophy by providing examples of how you will implement your philosophy in the classroom. For example, the statement “all children can learn” is meaningless without supporting it with methods you will use to engage lower performing students while challenging high performing students.

Sample Educational Philosophies

These philosophies were pulled from Oregon State and can be accessed at <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/ed416/sample.html>.

Sample One

I believe that each child is a unique individual who needs a secure, caring, and stimulating atmosphere in which to grow and mature emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially. It is my desire as a educator to help students meet their fullest potential in these areas by providing an environment that is safe, supports risk-taking, and invites a sharing of ideas. There are three elements that I believe are conducive to establishing such an environment, (1) the teacher acting as a guide, (2) allowing the child's natural curiosity to direct his/her learning, and (3) promoting respect for all things and all people.

When the teacher's role is to guide, providing access to information rather than acting as the primary source of information, the students' search for knowledge is met as they learn to find answers to their questions. For students to construct knowledge, they need the opportunity to discover for themselves and practice skills in authentic situations. Providing students access to hands-on activities and allowing adequate time and space to use materials that reinforce the lesson being studied creates an opportunity for individual discovery and construction of knowledge to occur.

Equally important to self-discovery is having the opportunity to study things that are meaningful and relevant to one's life and interests. Developing a curriculum around student interests fosters intrinsic motivation and stimulates the passion to learn. One way to take learning in a direction relevant to student interest is to invite student dialogue about the lessons and units of study. Given the opportunity for input, students generate ideas and set goals that make for much richer activities than I could have created or imagined myself. When students have ownership in the curriculum, they are motivated to work hard and master the skills necessary to reach their goals.

Helping students to develop a deep love and respect for themselves, others, and their environment occurs through an open sharing of ideas and a judicious approach to discipline. When the voice of each student is heard, and environment evolves where students feel free to express themselves. Class meetings are one way to encourage such dialogue. I believe children have greater respect for their teachers, their peers, and the lessons presented when they feel safe and sure of what is expected of them. In setting fair and consistent rules initially and stating the importance of every activity, students are shown respect for their presence and time. In turn they learn to respect themselves, others, and their environment.

For myself, teaching provides an opportunity for continual learning and growth. One of my hopes as an educator is to instill a love of learning in my students, as I share my own passion for learning with them. I feel there is a need for compassionate, strong, and dedicated individuals who are excited about working with children. In our competitive society it is important for students to not only receive a solid education, but to work with someone who is aware of and sensitive to their individual needs. I am such a person and will always strive to be the best educator that I can be.

Sample Two

I believe the children are our future...

I believe each and every child has the potential to bring something unique and special to the world. I will help children to develop their potential by believing in them as capable individuals. I will assist children in discovering who they are, so they can express their own opinions and nurture their own ideas. I have a vision of a world where people learn to respect, accept, and embrace the differences between us, as the core of what makes life so fascinating.

Teach them well and let them lead the way...

Every classroom presents a unique community of learners that varies not only in abilities, but also in learning styles. My role as a teacher is to give children the tools with which to cultivate their own gardens of knowledge. To accomplish this goal, I will teach to the needs of each child so that all learners can feel capable and successful. I will present curriculum that involves the interests of the children and makes learning relevant to life. I will incorporate themes, integrated units, projects, group work, individual work, and hands-on learning in order to make children active learners. Finally, I will tie learning into the world community to help children become caring and active members of society.

Show them all the beauty they possess inside. Give them a sense of pride...

My classroom will be a caring, safe, and equitable environment where each child can blossom and grow. I will allow children to become responsible members of our classroom community by using strategies such as class meetings, positive discipline, and democratic principles. In showing children how to become responsible for themselves as well as their own learning, I am giving them the tools to become successful in life, to believe in themselves, and to love themselves.

Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be...

Teaching is a lifelong learning process of learning about new philosophies and new strategies, learning from the parents and community, learning from colleagues, and especially learning from the children. Children have taught me to open my mind and my heart to the joys, the innocence, and the diversity of ideas in the world. Because of this, I will never forget how to smile with the new, cherish the old, and laugh with the children.

Other Documents

- Most schools districts will also require:
 - Three letters of recommendation
 - Transcripts from all colleges or universities where a degree was awarded (undergraduate and graduate degrees).
- It is recommended to order transcripts and request letters of recommendation early.
- Your Troops to Teachers counselor is able to provide you with a letter of recommendation if needed.

Preparing for the Interview

Research the School/District

- To be properly prepared for the interview you must know the school and district to which you are applying.
- Most schools and districts have their mission and vision listed on the website. Become familiar with the mission and vision for both the school and the district.
- It is also necessary to understand the student population. This information is also readily available online. You can search school and district demographic information at www.greatschools.net.
- Based on your research, generate a list of questions to ask at the end of your interview. Sample questions may include:
 - What is a standard day like for a teacher in your school?
 - What are common student issues in your school?
 - How does the structure of your school enable collaboration among teachers?
 - What is the culture of your school?
 - What curriculum do you use?
 - What is the standard class size?
 - What opportunities are available to become involved in extracurricular activities?

Types of Interview Questions

It can be difficult to predict what questions will be asked during an interview. However, it is helpful to understand the different types of interview questions and how to answer each type. There are four basic types of questions you should familiarize yourself with before an interview: resume/background, self-appraisal, situational, and behavioral.

Resume/Background Questions: Resume and background questions are usually straightforward and require little preparation. Hiring officials may ask you to expand on a job experience you have listed on your resume, or on an educational concept you have outlined in your educational philosophy. Keep your answers to the questions brief and to the point. The intention of these questions is to provide a better understanding or gain clarification of a qualification you listed on your application.

Self-Appraisal Questions: Self-appraisal questions include, “What is your greatest strength?”, “What is your greatest opportunity for improvement?”, “What can you bring to this school that would be unique?”, “What have you done in the past that required you to be creative?” Self-appraisal questions require you to reflect on yourself and the qualities you possess. You can

prepare for these questions in advance by reflecting on your strengths, weaknesses, and accomplishments.

Situational Questions: Situational questions ask you how you would react to a specific situation. As an example a situational question may include, “You have a student who is not engaged during math lessons and continually disrupts other students. What would you do?” The intention of situational questions is to evaluate your judgment and decision making skills. To answer situational questions make sure to address the underlying issue. Give a complete answer of how you would handle the situation. Also, make sure to include some self-reflection on how your actions may have lead to the situation.

Behavioral Questions: Behavior questions are focused on something you have done in the past. An example behavioral question would be “Tell me about a time when you had to diffuse a racial conflict between students.” The goal of a behavioral interview question is to discover more about your actions and beliefs through past experiences. To answer a behavioral interview questions you should use a three step process: situation, action, and result. Start by outlining the situation. Then discuss the action you took to address the situation. End with a discussion of the results and what you learned from the situation.

Basic Interview Tips

- **Ask for clarification:** If you do not understand the question it is okay to ask to have the questions repeated or reworded.
- **Take your time:** Do not be afraid to pause before answering a question. It is best to thoroughly think about a question before jumping into an answer.
- **Be honest:** If you do not know the answer to a question, it is okay to say, “I don’t know.” It is better to be honest than to make up an answer to a question. If you are not truthful, you will become stressed and uncomfortable and the hiring official will pick up on that.
- **Avoid controversy:** The interview is not the place to discuss controversial topics. Stay as neutral as possible.

After the Interview

After the interview it is common practice to send a thank you note to every member of the interview panel. Make sure to spell the names of each interviewer correctly. You can send the thank you notes via email or standard mail. If you would like feedback from an interview experience where you were not hired for the position to learn how you can improve, you can request feedback from the hiring official. Please note, not all schools and districts allow hiring officials to provide feedback to interviewees.



Central States Troops to Teachers
205 Jefferson Street
P.O. Box 480
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480
www.troopstoteachers.mo.gov
1-877-530-2765