
EDUCATIONAL CAREER SERVICES

In the process of applying for K-12 teaching positions in education, you and employers communicate through a variety of formal business letters. All major steps, decisions, and interactions in the employment process are confirmed or documented by letters. Thus, these letters are an important part in the employment process.

Until you are actually invited for a job interview, your qualifications are only evident to employers through your written communications – business letters, resume, transcripts, and application. As a candidate, you have to be able to create through your written communications the image that you want an employer to have of you. Your image is projected through the design, content, and organization of materials you submit. What an employer learns about you from your materials is often generalized to your abilities as a future employee. If your materials are neat, complete, and well organized, an employer will logically conclude that you will be a neat, well-organized employee who will handle other job responsibilities in the same way.

Since your materials represent you, they need to be accurate, informative, attractive, and helpful to those who are considering your application – directors of personnel, superintendents, principals, department heads, faculty members, or others. Your written communications should speak for you and present a strong, positive, professional image of you – both as a job seeker and as a future employee.

There are at least **four** types of business letters that you may write in the job search process. Your first business letter will be either a **letter of application** in which you apply for a specific position that has been publicly advertised, or a **letter of inquiry** in which you request information about possible vacancies in your teaching field. These letters indicate your interest in and understanding of positions that are or might be available, acquaint the employer with your qualifications for it, and encourage the employer to invite you for a job interview. **Post-interview thank you letters** are sent immediately after you return home from an interview to express your appreciation to all of the individuals who participated in your interview, to

reinforce your name, application, and qualifications to the employer, and to indicate whether or not you are still interested in being considered a candidate for the position. Finally, if you are offered a contract, either verbally or in writing, you will need to write either a **letter of contract acceptance** or a **letter of contract non-acceptance** to confirm your decision regarding the offer.

UNDERSTANDING THE POSITION

You should only apply for positions that you understand well and those for which you are qualified and interested. We suggest doing the following before deciding whether or not to apply for a position:

- Read the brief vacancy announcements that appear in your campus career office, vacancy listings in journals or job bulletins of your professional associations, want ads in commercially published newspapers, or listings in other printed sources. Even a brief vacancy announcement generally contains information about the position, employing institution or district, the duties and qualifications required of job applicants, certificates or licenses required, starting date of employment, salary, deadlines for applications and/or nominations, the schedule of the search, the name, address, and phone number of the employing administrator, and a description of the application procedures and materials to be submitted by candidates. Always examine such announcements carefully before deciding to apply for a position.
- Obtain a copy of the complete job description, if possible, either from your campus career office or directly from the employer. A complete job description, which may range from one to ten pages, can provide you with much information. It can assist you in deciding whether or not to apply for the position, more fully understanding the position, employer and community, tailoring your letter of application, and preparing for a job interview.
- Contact other people whom you know are working or have worked recently in the district in which the position is available or other people who know the school or district well. You may wish to talk to staff members in the career office, faculty in your

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department, friends, or others who may be able to provide you with information about the employer.

- Examine employer literature that may be available in your campus career office or directly from the employer's website. Such materials can provide you with basic information about a school district's philosophy of education, size, administrative staff, and student population.

COMMUNICATING WITH EMPLOYERS:

General Guidelines

All of your letters to employers are formal business letters that should be printed onto 8 1/2x11 quality paper and look attractive, readable, and professional. Each letter should be an original with your original signature, not a form letter.

Always use standard 8 1/2"x11" paper for your resume and cover letter. Also, keep copies of all your correspondence and communication with employers, copies of position descriptions, and a written record of all transactions related to the job search. The Educational Career Services Office has a handout, Interview Preparation Form, that is designed to help you record the dates and times of correspondence to and from employers, phone calls to and from employers, and dates on which transcripts, resume, cover letter, and application were submitted. Stay organized.

Most applications are now online. Begin completing them and follow their directions for their application procedure. If you have any questions regarding application procedures or materials, you should contact the secretary of the employing administrator with whom you are communicating.

Once all of your application materials have been submitted, employing administrators then examine them and/or share them with other members of the school or district staff who are involved in the employment process. Because this process does take time, you may become impatient. While it is important to keep employers informed of your continued interest in the position whenever you correspond with them, try not to bother employers unnecessarily.

Do communicate with them when it is important or necessary to do so. For example, if you have a change of name, telephone number, or address, if you need to provide additional information such as a grade received during student teaching or another course in your final semester, or if you would like to mention

dates you may or may not be available for interviewing because of travel, vacation, or other commitments, it is proper to contact employers.

If you accept a position from an employer, either before or after you have interviewed with other employers, you will need to write a letter to those employers who are still considering you to notify them that you have accepted employment elsewhere. This is very important because they are doing you the courtesy of considering your application and you should do them the courtesy of notifying them that you are no longer a candidate.

PREPARING COVER LETTERS OF APPLICATION AND INQUIRY AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

If you feel that you fully understand a position and that you are qualified for it and sincerely interested in it, you should begin developing your written job application materials based on this knowledge and your research. All of your letters should demonstrate your knowledge of the position, the school, and the district and suggest ways in which you can make positive and important contributions in that position.

Cover Letters of Application and Inquiry

Cover letters of application and cover letters of inquiry are generally one page in length and contain the following essential information:

- Introduction (1 paragraph)
In the introductory paragraph, you mention the job objective and the source of the vacancy. You indicate specifically the position for which you are applying by subject, grade level, or school, and the actual source of the vacancy, i.e., the May 26, 2009 online Job List in the Educational Career Services Office at the University of Illinois. If you are writing a letter of inquiry, your job objective will be the types of positions in which you are interested if they become available (subject and grade levels) and when you will be available for employment (month and year).
- Body (1 to 2 paragraphs)
In the paragraphs in the body of the letter, you provide identifying information about who you are and where you are currently living, attending school, or are employed; reasons why you are interested in the position and what you know about the position, school, or district; statements of your qualifications, such as degrees, certificates completed, and student teaching experience, relevant educational and non-educational work experience, and outstanding

academic or non-academic accomplishments. Emphasize your strengths and abilities and use concrete examples. Be specific.

- Close (1 or 2 paragraphs)

In the final paragraphs of the letter, you need to mention the date you are available for employment, your interest in having a job interview, dates you will or will not be available for interviews, and your willingness or actions to request transcripts and any other documents. In addition, you may wish to request other information that you need such as school district application forms or websites, or other information about application procedures, or dates on which their administrators may be recruiting in your campus career office.

Resumes

Always submit your resume with any letters of application or inquiry. Information about resume development is available in your campus career office.

Academic Transcripts

Employers expect that they will receive copies of your final academic transcripts directly from the transcripts divisions in the offices of admissions or records of all the post-secondary institutions you have attended. Before requesting transcripts, you should be sure to check your transcripts to be certain that they are correct and that your final GPA and final grades have been included. Generally, you will receive written receipts from the university to indicate dates on which your transcripts were mailed to employers. You may wish to retain these receipts for your records.

Employer Application Forms

Complete applications (online or hard copy) as soon as possible and submit to the employer even if the information requested is also found on the resume you have submitted. Do not leave sections blank, and do not write the words "see resume."

Other Materials

School district employers may also request other application materials, such as handwritten statements of educational philosophy, other writing samples, or portfolios. If you expect materials such as art portfolios to be returned to you, you should request their return in writing in your initial letter of application and provide employers with a self-addressed, stamped envelope or mailer for their return.

PREPARING POST-INTERVIEW THANK YOU LETTERS

Post-interview thank you letters are sent immediately after you return home from an interview. The thank you letter is imperative and reflects your knowledge of professional/business etiquette and protocol. In your letter, you can express your appreciation to all of the individuals who participated in your interview, reinforce your name, application, and qualifications to the employer, and indicate whether or not you are still interested in being considered a candidate.

If you are interested in the position, indicate this as clearly as you can. If you are no longer interested in the position, indicate this as clearly and politely as you can and thank the employer for taking the time to interview you. You may wish to indicate to the employer the reasons why you are no longer interested if it seems appropriate and important to do so (i.e., acceptance of other employment, a decision to continue formal education instead of seeking a full-time position, etc.). While you are not required to provide a reason, it is polite and often helpful to employers to do so.

Always send thank you letters after interviews regardless of whether or not you had a good interviewing experience and regardless of whether or not you plan to continue to be interested in the position. This is etiquette that good job candidates demonstrate as professionals and will reflect well on you for any future employment.

When employers do not receive thank you letters for job candidates for interviews, they often assume that candidates are not aware of professional protocol that they will need to demonstrate on the job. With either assumption, employers may select other applicants.

PREPARING LETTERS OF EMPLOYMENT ACCEPTANCE OR NON-ACCEPTANCE

If you are offered employment, first you will, most likely, receive a verbal offer or intent to hire--either in person or over the telephone. The employer will later confirm his/her intent by sending you a business letter offering you the employment and a teaching contract to read, sign, and return. The employer then expects to receive a response from you to the offer--either an acceptance or a non-acceptance of the offer. This should first be made verbally, either in person or over the telephone, as soon as you have made

a decision. Then, you need to confirm your decision formally by sending the employer a letter.

However, before accepting an offer, be certain that you understand the offer thoroughly. You should read the letter of employment and the legal contract very carefully. The employer should provide the following information in the offer of employment:

- the school to which you will be assigned and your building principal
- specific duties to be performed, such as the number and types of teaching preparations (tracked or heterogeneous groups; remedial, average, or advanced students)
- the number of class preparations and the number of periods of special assignments, such as coaching, bus driving, supervising of playgrounds, cafeteria or study hall, or supervising of student clubs or other activities
- starting and ending dates of employment
- salary and the contract period (9, 10, 11, or 12 months)
- medical and other benefits
- district policies regarding sick leave, maternity leave, sabbatical leave, personal leave, or professional days
- district policies regarding residency of teachers
- tuition and fee reimbursement for graduate study
- policies regarding reimbursement of substitute teachers
- district policies and procedures for the evaluation, promotion, and tenure of teachers

If you have any questions about the employment offer, contact the employer for information.

Never sign a blank contract -- one that contains none of the information regarding the conditions of employment, teaching assignment, salary, and other important information. Always request that all specific information regarding the conditions of employment be specified or included in the contract before you make a decision regarding the offer. If an employer attempts to have you sign a blank contract, either by sending it to you in the mail or by asking you to sign it during or immediately after a job interview on campus or at the school district office, do not sign it. Any contract that you sign is a legal document -- regardless of whether or not it is blank or complete.

Also, if an employer, during an interview, wants you to sign a contract on the spot, either a blank or a completed one, you should not sign it during the interview. You probably need some time to consider the

offer, so indicate to the employer that you would like to take it home to examine it carefully and to consider the offer. If you decide to accept it, then you can return it to the employer by mail.

After you have received a written employment offer that you wish to accept, sign the completed legal contract and prepare a letter that acknowledges the offer, confirms your understanding of it, confirms your acceptance of it, and indicates the date you will report for employment. Make copies of the contract and letter for your records and mail the originals to the employer as soon as possible. To expedite the process, you may wish to contact the employer by telephone to confirm your acceptance, unless you have already done so, and to indicate that you will be returning the contract and a formal letter of employment acceptance.

If you accept employment with one district but you are still being considered as a candidate in other districts, notify the other districts in writing that you no longer wish to be considered a candidate. This is considered good etiquette.

If you receive a verbal or written offer of employment that you do not wish to accept, be sure to notify the employer of your decision as quickly as possible, first verbally, in person or by telephone, and then in writing. In your phone call and letter of employment non-acceptance, you should acknowledge the offer of employment, express your appreciation to the employer for considering you as an applicant, and confirm your decision not to accept the offer. You may wish to indicate the reasons why you will not accept the offer if you think it would be helpful to the employer or if it seems important or appropriate to do so.

SAMPLE LETTERS

We have developed several sample letters to illustrate the essential information to be communicated to employers, the proper organization of the information, the format for formal business letters, and the formal level of diction to be used in business letters.

However, these sample letters cannot reflect your own personal writing style or your personality. **So be sure that you do not imitate or copy these letters exactly.** Make your letters as personable, friendly, and sincere as possible. Remember that these are only samples with essential information included. You are free to add more information if you wish. Also, make sure you use business letter format.