

# Applying for your first teaching job:

## How to write a personal statement or letter of application

### What is the difference between a personal statement and a letter of application?

Some schools request that applicants write a supporting letter of application; others request a personal statement. So what is the difference?

**A supporting letter of application** must be written as a formal letter following standard letter writing rules. Your first sentence needs to state which post you are applying for and where you saw it advertised: for example: *I wish to apply for the post of Main Scale 1 Teacher as advertised in... on...(date)*. Your letter will need to conclude formally e.g. *Yours sincerely...* The main body of your letter will then be the same as a personal statement.

**A personal statement** should be written in the first person and needs to convince the employer that you would be suitable for the job. Your introductory paragraph must grab the reader's attention, and your conclusion should end with a strong summary of why you are suitable for the advertised post. You may be asked to write a statement as part of the application form, or enclose it separately.

Both supporting letters of application/personal statements should be no longer than two sides of A4 unless stated otherwise. Read the application guidelines carefully, as some schools or LEAs will specify a length.

### What do I need to cover in a personal statement or letter of application?

You need to demonstrate very clearly

- **How you meet the essential and desirable criteria** listed in the job description and person specification. You will only be shortlisted for an interview if you can prove you meet all of the *essential* criteria!
- **Why you are suitable for the advertised post.** This means showing that you have researched everything about the school and post and you can show how your strengths, values, interests will be a perfect fit. Write a different letter/statement for each job.

Providing evidence to support your claims is vitally important. Wherever possible include examples to prove you can do something; or demonstrate what impact an experience either had on your personal development as a teacher, or the impact for the children. Use the STAR framework (situation, task, action and result) when you describe your examples.

### How can I tailor my application/letter to fit the advertised vacancy?

Start with a **strong introductory paragraph** that captures the employer's attention and explains why the post and teaching in general interests you. Refer to any links or knowledge you have of the school or LEA. Mention any visits you have made to the school and comment on aspects that particularly impressed you. If you haven't been able to visit, then find out as much as you can about them from the school website and Ofsted reports. Mention any special circumstances you think are important to your application (eg religion). Throughout your letter/statement show how your strengths and skills as a teacher would benefit the school.

### The application form asks for details of my teaching placements, so do I need to cover my teaching experience in my letter/statement?

Providing some detail about your teaching experience, will give the employer a clear picture of your skills and understanding of what make an effective lesson, and what you know about successful teaching and learning. Include the ages of the children you taught, the size of groups, and any special features. Give examples of how you plan, deliver, monitor and evaluate learning outcomes. Mention your class management and behaviour management strategies; how you differentiated lessons; how you worked with teaching assistants; how you worked with parents and explain what was successful and why. Avoid generalised statements.

## Do I need to say anything about my teacher training or degree course?

It's a good idea to explain how your teacher training has prepared you for the role and mention your professional interests and strengths. These need to be relevant to the job vacancy. For example: giving a brief account of any classroom based research projects or written assignments will demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of pedagogy and show that your continuing professional development is important to you. You could also describe the kind of a teacher you hope to be. For example, describe some of your values and beliefs about primary/secondary education and how these might inform your practice. Give specific examples of how your beliefs have developed. You could touch on areas like how children learn, classroom management, teaching styles and strategies.

## What about any previous work experience that I've had that isn't related to teaching?

Mention other aspects of your education and/or experience and show how this will be relevant to your professional future in the classroom. Any involvement with children (Brownies, clubs, youth work, summer camps) is definitely worth mentioning. Don't forget to bring in additional skills and knowledge that might make you an attractive proposition, i.e. are you an experienced musician/athlete/artist/designer/photographer etc. Could this enhance the experience you could give to the children?

## Top tips from head teachers

- Proof read your letter/statement very carefully. Spelling, punctuation or grammar errors will result in your application being rejected. So check and double check.
- Don't send a generic letter/statement. Make each one personal to the school/post you are applying to.
- Avoid formulaic statements that don't really say anything useful about **your** skills and knowledge.
- Saying that you have experience of something, but not going on to reflect on what you learned from this experience and/or what impact it had, is not a lot of use.
- Promote your strengths, but don't exaggerate.
- Put yourself in the shoes of a busy head teacher and imagine what things are important to them. What will they be looking for?

## Further support and advice:

The University of Cumbria Careers and Employability Service is here to support you for up to three years after you complete your course. You can find lots of resources on our web pages at <https://my.cumbria.ac.uk/Student-Life/careers>. You can also log on to our new career hub, My Career Enriched (<https://mycareerenriched.cumbria.ac.uk>) to book an appointment, find events, arrange a practice interview or request feedback on your application. Submit your draft CV or application form (along with the job details of the post you are applying for) in the 'CV and Application Feedback' module and we'll email you with feedback.

## Useful links and further information:

**Prospects:** write a successful job application

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs/write-a-successful-job-application>

**Targetjobs:** how to write a great personal statement for a teaching job

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/teaching-and-education/330635-how-to-write-a-great-personal-statement-for-a-teaching-job>

**TES:** Interesting articles and advice on their career clinic pages

<https://community.tes.com/forums/career-clinic.2129/>