



## **PART ONE**

# **THE BASICS**

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Getting the Right Job



### In this chapter you will learn about:

- How to find a job that is a good match for your skills and interests
- How to prepare for your first job interviews
- Tips for putting together a résumé

*Dory received the dreaded letter—she didn't get the job she really wanted. She plans to search for several different positions and is thinking about how to prepare better for the interviews. Dory wishes they had provided more guidelines for this in her preparation program.*

Great beginnings are no accident. We hope, as part of your teacher preparation, you developed critical knowledge about how to teach students with disabilities and started putting what you learned into action through field experiences in schools. Yet learning to teach is a lifelong process and the steps that you take at the beginning of your career are critical to a great start. The first step is to find a job that is a great match.

## AN INITIAL PRIORITY: FIND A GOOD JOB MATCH

*Special education teachers wanted: well-prepared, enthusiastic, intelligent, energetic, and personable individuals—intrinsic rewards unlimited!*

Finding a good job match is perhaps the most important step you can take toward having a great beginning to your teaching career. Your ability to find a good match may be difficult or easy depending on the job market in which you live or the one in which you hope to relocate. Although some new teachers have multiple offers, others struggle, and the lack of available jobs in some areas is a significant source of stress for new teachers.

It is also important to know that central office personnel and principals may be constrained in whom they hire and when they can hire. For example, they may be required to hire employees who have been laid off before considering anyone else. Sometimes the reassignment of teachers creates delays in hiring, with offers coming later in July or even in August.

If you are applying in an area where there are few special education jobs, keep in mind that it is often easier to find jobs in rural or high-need schools. For example, in one geographical region, it is almost impossible to get a job in a preferred school system. However, it is relatively easy to get jobs in the surrounding areas. If the job market is tight in your preferred school district, you will want to be vigilant about learning about the school system, its needs, and what the administration is looking for in applicants.

A thoughtful and systematic approach to your job search should increase the odds of finding a position that is a good match for your qualifications and interests. If you are not in a hurry and if you have options about where you live, you can afford more time in looking for a good match. Some teachers take the first position that is offered even when it is not a very good match for their interests, skills, and abilities. Those who are not well matched to their jobs are more likely to leave their positions.<sup>2</sup>

## STEPS IN YOUR JOB SEARCH

Once you decide on your priorities, take time to get the most out of the job search process. Following are specific considerations when searching for a position that is a good match.

### Identify Your Priorities

Consider what is important in a job for you. The clearer you are about what you want, the easier it will be to find positions that match your interests and abilities. Take ten minutes to write a description of your ideal position. For example, consider the following:

- ▶ Is it at the elementary or secondary level?
- ▶ Would you be as comfortable working in a large versus small school or a suburban versus urban environment?
- ▶ Do you want to spend most of your time co-teaching?
- ▶ Are you interested in teaching a particular subject(s)?
- ▶ What certifications do you hold? What additional certifications are you willing to acquire?
- ▶ Do you have more experience with some kinds of students with disabilities than with others?
- ▶ Where do you want to live?
- ▶ How far are you willing to commute?

Of course, you probably won't find the perfect fit, but by identifying your priorities, you will help focus your attention on finding a pretty good match. Even better, make a list of must-haves, should-haves, and nice-to-haves. Evaluate each job according to these priorities. Karen, a new graduate with a master's degree, describes the job she wants:

I hope to find a job in an elementary school that is fully inclusive. Because I have worked mainly with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, I want to make sure I have

opportunities to work with these students. I want to work close to home so working in one of several specific counties is important to me. Having materials as well as support from administration and mentors are priorities.

## **Investigate a Range of Options**

Perhaps you know exactly where you want to work; if so, skip to the next point. Most prospective teachers will want to search a range of possibilities. Fortunately, there are many different websites for teachers interested in learning about special education positions (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children—Career Center, Recruiting New Teachers, and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education). If you are interested in a particular state, district or school, you can contact it through its website or through the district personnel office.

## **Develop Your Résumé**

A well-crafted résumé highlights the most important aspects of your teaching work. You should take copies to teacher job fairs and your interviews. You should also send it as part of your application. You may want to revise your résumé for specific positions, highlighting those aspects of your preparation and experience that are consistent with the position you are seeking. For example, if the job announcement includes references to specific skills, such as co-teaching or tiered instruction, highlight those relevant experiences on your résumé.

Those who interview you may look at your résumé very quickly, so make sure you highlight the most important information. Here are some specific tips to consider when developing your résumé. An example is shown in exhibit 1.1.

- ▶ Emphasize your strengths and your specific knowledge and skills.
- ▶ Highlight your work with students with disabilities and your specific skills.
- ▶ Create a focused, concise, and readable résumé (12-point font such as Times New Roman).
- ▶ Use a high-quality printer and good paper.
- ▶ Use bullets, not sentences or paragraphs.
- ▶ Proof carefully and have other professionals read and make suggestions.

## **Complete Your Application and Follow Up**

After you have narrowed your search, you will need to complete the application process. This usually includes providing a written or online application, securing transcripts and references, and providing teacher exam scores. Be sure to follow the instructions exactly. Don't leave anything out. You should follow up to make sure the district has received all parts of your application. If you do not hear anything after a period of time, call the district to let them know you are still interested.

## **THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

Be prepared for the interview. In particular, read the job announcement carefully and prepare for any aspects of the position that are highlighted in the interview (e.g., help students prepare for postsecondary settings, co-teaching). Here are some key tips to increasing your chance of getting an offer.

## Exhibit 1.1 Résumé Example

### ALTHEA POLSNEY

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#### Education

University of Brightsville	May 2012
Master of Education in Special Education	GPA: 3.9
University of Highrock College	May 2009
Bachelor of Psychology/Spanish minor (fluent)	GPA: 3.8

#### Student Teaching Jan.–May 2012

##### *Dominion Elementary School, Anytown, NY*

- ▶ Co-taught lessons in reading and mathematics in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms
- ▶ Managed a caseload of twenty-two students with high-incidence disabilities
- ▶ Developed IEPs and implemented curriculum-based measurement
- ▶ Participated in the schoolwide improvement committee
- ▶ Presented a professional development session on positive behavioral supports

#### Employment

Graduate assistant, Department of Special Education	Aug. 2010–Jan. 2012
Assisted faculty in research, teaching, and service	
Preschool paraeducator at Lilly Park Preschool	Aug. 2009–June 2010
Provided assistance to three students in a fourth-grade classroom	
Summer camp counselor for students with autism	June 2010–Aug. 2010
Assisted primary-age children at a summer camp full time	

#### Volunteer and Leadership Activities

President, student chapter, Council for Exceptional Children	Sept. 2010–Aug. 2011
After-school tutor, Monterey Elementary, Anytown, NY	Aug. 2007–Dec. 2009
Volunteer coach, Special Olympics, Anytown, NY	Jan. 2006–Dec. 2006
Highrock College Spanish Club	Aug. 2007–Aug. 2009

## Before the Interview

- ▶ Review the job announcement carefully.
- ▶ Learn about the district and the school.
- ▶ Visit the school. Some school districts have centralized interviews at the district office, others hold them at the school, and still others offer district and school interviews. If possible, visit the school or schools that have openings. In addition, try to talk with other teachers and administrators at the school: they have insights that will help you better understand the job.

## Preparing for Interview Questions

- ▶ Interviewers will likely ask a range of questions about numerous aspects of your experiences and your knowledge and skills as a teacher. Thinking through possible questions and practicing your responses is an excellent way to prepare for your interview. Exhibit 1.2 provides examples of questions that you might be asked. You may want to outline a few of the key points you would make for each of the questions in the column on the right-hand side of the exhibit. You will likely make a better impression if you concentrate on several well-thought-out points than to try and share everything you know about a topic. Also, include specific examples, especially things that worked well.
- ▶ If you have difficulty with any of the practice questions, review the specific chapters in this handbook that address that material. Use the additional resources listed in each chapter if you need more information.
- ▶ If you are applying for a position for students with a specific disability (e.g., students with autism or students who are hard of hearing), customize the questions by rewording them to apply to a specific population. For example, what are characteristics of effective instructional environments for students with autism?
- ▶ Be ready with a written list of your own questions (e.g., mentoring support, student–teacher ratio).

## The Interview Itself

- ▶ Dress professionally for the interview.
- ▶ Arrive on time.
- ▶ Make eye contact with everyone who is present.
- ▶ Bring a portfolio or examples of lessons (ask if they are interested in looking at them).
- ▶ Don't ask about salary until an offer is made (this information is often available on the district website).

## After the Interview

- ▶ Thank each individual for taking the time to interview you.
- ▶ Express your interest in the position.
- ▶ Follow up with a handwritten note or at least an e-mail indicating your interest.

## Exhibit 1.2 Job Interview Questions<sup>3</sup>

Areas	Possible Questions	Highlight Key Points You Want to Make
Experience and preparation for position	Tell us about yourself and your preparation for this position.	
State requirements: (1) Licensure (2) Required teacher tests (3) College program accreditation	Tell us about your preparation for this position and your current licensure status in this or other states.	
Teacher dispositions	How would your students describe you?  Tell us about yourself and what you bring to this position.  What was your biggest challenge in your last job (or internship) and how did you address this challenge?	
Teacher roles	Describe your ideal teaching position.  How would you describe the role of the special educator in the school?  What concerns do you have about filling this role?	
View of special education	What are characteristics of effective instructional environments for students with disabilities?	
Understanding students with disabilities	Describe the needs of a student with disabilities whom you have worked with over a period of time.	
Understanding diversity and working with families	Describe considerations that you have made in addressing the needs of students (and families) from diverse backgrounds.  How do you communicate with parents?	



## Exhibit 1.2 Continued

Areas	Possible Questions	Highlight Key Points You Want to Make
Assessment and monitoring of learning	Describe specific strategies that you have used to assess student learning. How do you prepare students for state assessments?	
Collaboration and co-teaching	Tell us about your experiences collaborating with general educators. Please give an example of a situation that worked well and any challenges you encountered. What are various ways that you might collaborate and co-teach with general educators?	
Knowledge of content and state standards	How do you teach to state standards? What content area(s) do you feel best prepared to teach and at what levels? For the area you selected, outline some considerations that are important to teaching that specific content.	
Instructional strategies	What types of teaching strategies have you used in your teaching? How do you decide which teaching strategies to use?	
Individualized education programs (IEPs) Transition planning	Describe how you would facilitate an IEP meeting. How would you incorporate transition planning in the IEP?	
Student behavior	How would you approach working with a student who regularly disrupted a class and refused to cooperate?	
Paraprofessionals	Describe how you would establish a positive working relationship with paraprofessionals.	
Assistive technology	Describe any experiences or training that you have had using assistive technology.	

## CONSIDER THE OFFER

Congratulations, you received an offer! Before accepting on the spot, write down the specifics of the offer. Ask how much time you have to make a decision. Usually they will give you at least a couple of days. Take time and review the written description that you outlined. How well does this specific job match your abilities, experiences, and interests?

One note of caution: some districts make offers and later assign you to positions. If the district is unable to tell you what position you will have at the time they extend an offer, ask if they can ensure you a particular level (e.g., elementary) or type of position (co-teaching). At this time, you may also ask about any incentives such as signing bonuses, paying for course work, and so on. Although some districts do not offer special incentives, others do.

## TO SUM UP

- ▶ Know the kind of job you really want and systematically search for that job.
- ▶ Prepare a well-crafted and readable résumé that emphasizes your strengths and abilities.
- ▶ Prepare for the interview and practice with specific questions.
- ▶ If you have difficulty with any of the questions, try to review the material in this book before the interview.
- ▶ Consider your offers carefully, weighing the extent to which the job is a good match for you.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

In chapter 2 we will cover some of the things you might expect in your first few years based on what we know about new special education teachers. We will also cover ten actions that you can use to have a great start. In addition, we address how to take advantage of available support systems and resources that will help you in your professional learning.