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AppliTrack: Tips for Successful Essays

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ONLINE APPLICATIONS: KEYS TO SUCCESS

Note: School districts and ROE consortia are now requiring essay questions as a part of the online application process. This strikes fear in the hearts of applicants. Here are some tips for survival and success.

- Answer all questions (it's surprising how many people don't think this is necessary). When in doubt about what a question means, ASK!
- Answer the question that has been asked. If the question is "Describe how you would you address a wide range of skills in the classroom," begin the response with "I would address a wide range of skills in the classroom by..."
- Answer the questions fully. Don't start out well, then wander off in some different direction.
- Use simple, clear, direct sentences. How you respond will give the reader an idea about how you will express yourself to your students. Remember, this is not a academic paper!



ONLINE APPLICATIONS (2)

- Avoid redundancy. Repeating a point doesn't make it more valuable.
- Eliminate extra, unnecessary, empty words, such as "various," "numerous," "a few," and "several."
- Omit tag-ons, like "etc.," "and so on," and "and more." These give the reader the idea that you became bored with your own answer. They provide NO useful information.
- Keep the tone of your answers positive. Focus on your successes!
- Demonstrate enthusiasm and creativity. Use BRIEF, concrete, specific examples when possible (but use them selectively – responses can become bogged down with too many examples). Make sure that the examples are relevant.



ONLINE APPLICATIONS (3)

- Create your responses as Word documents, then cut and paste them into the appropriate spot on the application. Online applications are created with that idea in mind.
- Use a readable font (Arial or Calibri work best), and don't use a font size that is smaller than 10 points.
- Avoid **ALL SPELLING AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS!**
- Have someone read your answers before you submit them. Someone else may catch your spelling and grammatical errors – and text that makes perfect sense to you may be confusing to someone else.
- **SAVE EVERY ANSWER YOU CREATE**, since it's likely that you will be answering the same questions again on other applications. Most application questions are created by an outside vendor (AppliTrack), so they are the same on each application.



ONLINE APPLICATIONS: FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember:

- The goal is to demonstrate how you are unique, to illustrate what you have done that separates you from others – not what makes you the same.
- Creative responses can work well, if they answer the question that has been asked.
- Creativity, however, is not the primary consideration. You don't have to spend hours trying to win the Nobel Prize for Literature when you write your responses. It is far better to have a well-written, error-free response than to miss a deadline because you are waiting for your muse, or to wander off in some obscure area in an attempt at originality.

**POSSIBLE ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE WHEN RESPONDING TO APPLITRACK
QUESTIONS
(THE DAWN JONES ORIGINAL GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION
RESPONSES – I’M SHARING MY SPECIAL SECRETS WITH YOU, SINCE
YOU’RE MY VALUED COLLEAGUES)**

1. What are your three most important reasons for wanting to become a teacher?

This is something that will differ for each candidate. Typically, people say things such as:

- The ability to be a mentor
- The chance to reach students that others have been unable to reach (to truly make a difference in students’ lives) – to help students to genuinely enjoy going to school (e.g., to inspire a love for the subject area and a love of learning)
- To see the excitement and joy in the eyes of a student who has finally grasped a difficult concept
- To work in a career where every day presents different challenges and rewards
- To create a safe and acceptant place for students to grow
- To promote and engage in lifelong learning
- To work in a collegial atmosphere where collaboration and sharing are key components
- To create a better world through encouraging students to be aware and productive members of a community

APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (2)

2. How much do you want to know about your students in order to be most helpful to them?

Again, this will vary with each individual. Here are a few common responses:

- As much as possible
- Only as much as is needed to teach them effectively

And then...people tend to elaborate:

- What sorts of successes and failures they have experienced in prior learning
- What they want to get out of the class
- Standardized test results
- What sorts of barriers to learning they might have (physical, emotional, psychological, learning-based)
- Their specific interests (inside and outside of the classroom)
- The amount of educational/emotional support and assistance they receive in their homes
- Technology available in the home
- The educational backgrounds of their families
- Ways in which parents might be resources
- Socioeconomic barriers to learning
- Other agencies/programs with which the students might be involved
- IEP information

APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (3)

3. What three things do you most want to know about your students?

Most common responses:

- Barriers to learning: physical, psychological, emotional, economic, home-based (including experiences with bullying – either as the bully or as the person who has been bullied)
- Learning style (auditory, visual, kinesthetic...)
- Other languages spoken (by the student or in the family)
- Specific interests (so that you can address them in class and use them as motivators) – including unique talents (music, art, sports)
- Experiences with living/traveling abroad
- Standardized test results
- Students' personal goals

APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (4)

4. What do you need to know in order to begin your lesson planning for a class?

- Content-area state and national standards to be addressed
- Lesson/course objectives
- Time framework for lessons (e.g., block, traditional...)
- Cross-curricular considerations (opportunities and/or expectations)
- Intelligences/learning styles of the students
- Methodologies to reach specific populations (e.g., ELLs)
- Technological and/or other special resources and materials available/needed
- Specific steps to implement the objectives and proceed with teaching the lesson
- District's (or school's) preferred assessment methodologies
- Formative and summative evaluation procedures



APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (5)

5. What four key components do you believe you must include in your lesson plan?

(Note: these are the components that research has revealed to be essential. They are the most widely-accepted responses.)

- **Objective**
- **Methodology**
- **Assessment**
- **Evaluation**

APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (6)

6. When you think about your students, in what major ways do you most want to influence their lives?

This one, of course, is very personal. It will depend on your own values. Some ideas:

- Inspire them to love learning and to become lifelong learners
- Help them to find the tools necessary to learn in the best way possible
- Help them to become aware of the community and the world around them, with a focus on the way that they might fit into that world
- Encourage them to find their passion and begin pursuing it
- Help them to see ways in which each one of them is unique
- Provide the necessary building blocks to move on to the next class/level
- Help them to develop a sense of respect for themselves and others – teachers, family, other students, and, especially, those who are different from them
- Encourage them to question – and to learn multiple methods of research to find answers to their questions – to become self-directed learners
- Teach them effective problem-solving strategies
- Help them to understand that there are many ways to approach any problem
- Inspire them to dare to hope– no matter how difficult life may seem
- Encourage them to learn to give– to the community, to those in need, to those whose strengths differ from theirs

APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (7)

7. What two core teaching strategies do you most use to achieve this result?

This really depends on the strategies with which you are most comfortable. Some thoughts:

- Classroom discussion
- Group work
- Varying teaching methodologies
- Differentiation (attention to varying abilities and learning styles)
- Including outside speakers/resources/field trips
- Peer mentoring
- **LISTENING** (personally, I think this is one of the most essential. Good teachers **MUST** be good listeners, too.
- Story-telling (using narrative methods to illustrate difficult concepts)
- Demonstration (many people learn by watching)
- Collaboration with colleagues and administrators
- Effective classroom management
- Dialogue with parents

APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (8)

Please describe how you would use technology to improve your effectiveness as an educator.

- Remember that technology ENHANCES teaching; it does not REPLACE it!
- Use technology to heighten interest
- Use technology to simplify difficult concepts
- Use technology to appeal to visual or auditory learning styles
- Teach students to use technology to broaden their learning – to become familiar with common technological resources that will enhance learning
- Stress importance of continuously updating your own technological capabilities and staying current with technological innovations for the classroom
- Don't be afraid or unwilling to learn about technology from your students! Many of them may be familiar with the most current technologies – especially if you are a nontraditional teacher or if you are teaching at the secondary level

APPLITRACK QUESTIONS (9)

List any additional information which will help in determining your professional qualifications for a position.

This question allows you to bring into focus any other factors (not included on your resume) that might enhance your candidacy.

Here are some things that others have mentioned (although there could be many others not included here):

- Familiarity with demands of teaching profession, since parents/siblings/close relatives are teachers.
- Study abroad experience, leading to exposure to and understanding of other countries' educational systems.
- Experience as a parent yourself, which would help you to understand the developmental stages and characteristics of the children you teach.
- Understanding of special needs students developed through having a sibling, close relative, or neighbor who had special needs, or through babysitting/childcare with a child with special needs.
- Personal experience with serious illness or injury that might increase compassion for children in similar situations.
- Completion of unique courses (NOT those that everyone in your program takes), workshops, or trainings that relate directly to issues/problems in teaching.
- Going through the career change process, which might involve extensive reflection or even forsaking a more lucrative career (e.g. law) for the more humanitarian career of teaching.
- Specialized awards or honors that you have been awarded.
- Vast community experience (don't call it "community service," since this is what youths do to avoid incarceration!
- Previous career that could enhance teaching (e.g. social work/counseling, computer science, accounting, mathematics, editing/proofreading – or anything else that might deepen your understanding of children or of subject matter).
- Peace Corps experience, military experience or public service experience. All these experiences are typically valued by districts.



APPLITRACK QUESTIONS FINAL THOUGHTS AND DISCLAIMER

These responses were crafted by:

Dr. Dawn Jones, Past President of *American Association for Employment in Education*, after talking with AppliTrack representatives, reviewing hundreds of applications, conducting research, and reflecting upon her own experiences. They are just a compilation of her own ideas – so there may be other things not covered.