

Continued from pages 10-11, "Winning a Teaching Position in a Tight Job Market" by Kniseley, Vesey, and Zakin.

Important Selection Factors for Hiring Recent Graduates

Here are important selection factors used by principals for hiring recent graduates. The means (3 = high, 1 = low) are ranked from most important selection factor to least important selection factor. The ranking is based on responses from 35 elementary principals who were surveyed December 2008 through January 2009.

SELECTION FACTORS	MEAN
High level of verbal communication and interpersonal skills demonstrated during interviews or other meetings with the interview committee	2.91
High level of written communication demonstrated in application materials (e.g., application form, résumé, cover letter, or on-site writing sample)	2.41
Unique skills, knowledge, and experience (e.g., subject matter expertise, instructional technology, travel, or prior professional experience)	2.37
Prior teaching experience (e.g., substitute teaching or full-time teaching in another school outside the district)	2.26
Direct observation of teaching by a member of the hiring committee (e.g., as part of interview, substitute teaching, or student teaching)	2.21
A portfolio with clear evidence of effective teaching (e.g., binders or e-portfolios that include evidence of planning, action, and reflection)	2.20
Honors, awards, and recognition for teaching, scholarship, creativity, or community service	2.20
Strong letters of recommendation from applicant's references	2.14
Academic or teaching content major	2.09
Strong recommendations from applicant's references as part of a telephone background check	2.06
Endorsements beyond initial teaching certification (e.g., special education, ESL, middle level)	2.06
High grade point average on college/university transcript	1.97
Completion of an advanced degree (e.g., Master of Arts or other post-graduate degree/certificate programs)	1.77
College/university where applicant completed his/her teacher education program	1.69

Dress for Success

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Appearances count at job fairs and on the job. In general, what you wear conveys a message. Therefore, it is wise to consider this as you gather your ensemble for your interview. By the same token, choose wisely when selecting the wardrobe you will wear on the job. Some districts are now enforcing a dress code for teachers.

Attire

A few administrators may be okay with more casual interview attire such as a tailored dress or slacks with a blazer for women, and dress slacks with a sport jacket, shirt, and tie for men. However, the majority of administrators are expecting to see a conservative business suit. You may wonder why this is, since the job you will be doing in the classroom will not require such attire. The interview, however, is a professional activity, separate from the actual job itself. As such, you will need to dress accordingly.

Studies indicate that acceptable professional colors for an interview suit include colors such as navy blue, charcoal, gray, black, a subtle pinstripe, and maybe dark burgundy. In the not-too-distant past, pantsuits for women were inappropriate but that trend may be changing. Regardless, a skirt-suit will likely be the safest route, unless you do enough research to determine that the specific district is accepting of pantsuits.

Trends

Given that the interview does not invite the latest fashion trends, it is important, particularly for women, to keep some very important points in mind as you put together your outfit. Carefully consider what you will wear with your business suit, and make sure you wear something under your jacket. Low-cut and lace garments are unacceptable. If you have purchased a pantsuit with low-riding pants, make sure your jacket is long enough to cover any possible skin exposure. Likewise, short skirts are not appropriate. The current trend of wearing a top underneath that is longer than the outer top is a cute fashion style, but not interview-appropriate. Men should wear a coordinating shirt, tie, and belt with their suit.

Footwear

Although your footwear may not seem like a place to focus your attention, it can make or break the outfit. Sandals and boots are not professional attire. For women, make sure you choose dark, close-toed pumps with no higher than two-and-a-half inch heels to match your suit. It is also a good idea to wear skin-colored stockings. For men, wear matching dress shoes such as wingtips or oxfords, which should be clean, polished, and in good condition, along with dark socks.

Jewelry

When it comes to jewelry, a good rule of thumb is to keep it simple. It is considered unprofessional to have earrings that dangle or trail up the ears, as well as eyebrow rings, tongue rings, or multiple rings on the fingers. Men who wear earrings would be well advised to remove them for the interview.

According to etiquette advocate, Jodi R. Smith, "eyes are the window to the soul, and hands are the gatekeepers." Women, leave the fake, brightly colored nails at home. Both men and women should have simple, clean, well-manicured nails.

Accessories

Accessories are another touch that adds to a pristine finish. Accessories communicate that you pay attention to detail. Women may bring a small purse that matches the color of their suit. Consider topping off your look with a pearl necklace and earrings. Your hair should be neat, clean, and worn in an up-to-date style. No non-traditional colors or outrageous hairstyles. Men, shave your face and avoid the five o'clock shadow. If you have facial hair, make sure that it is trimmed and neat. Job candidates who have tattoos are advised to cover them up for interviews.

One of our recruiters was recently quoted as saying, "we hire professionals, not students." It is necessary to do everything you can to enhance your professional appearance. In general, do not dress in any way that would detract from you, the person.