



Tips on applying for Teaching Assistant roles

We're going to be looking at how the teaching assistant application process works, the desirable skills, experience and characteristics for budding teaching assistants and how you can ensure that these qualities all shine through in your application. We've also included an application check list to help you make sure you don't miss anything vital.

How does the application process work?

Increasingly, teaching assistants are expected to go through a formal application process, just as a teacher would. This usually involves filling out an application form, completing a covering letter and attending an interview which is likely to involve both answering questions from a panel of interviewers and working with a small group of children. This might sound intimidating but it's actually designed to find your strengths rather than to catch you out.

If you're going through a formal application process, then a job description and person specification will be made available to you. You should read these carefully and think about how your skills, characteristics and experience match with what is required. Wherever possible you should highlight this in your application and talk about it at your interview.

What skills and characteristics do teaching assistants need?

The role you're applying for may outline specific skills and characteristics that the school is looking for – be sure to bear this in mind and work any relevant skills into your application. The list below outlines the typical skills and characteristics that make great teaching assistants:

- Reading, writing and numeracy skills
- Good communication skills
- The ability to build good relationships with children and adults
- Excellent organisational skills
- A love of working with children and the ability to manage groups of pupils
- The ability to manage difficult behaviour effectively
- Flexibility and creativity

How can I demonstrate these skills in my application?

You can demonstrate your good literacy and communication skills by putting together a well written, spell-checked application which clearly communicates why you think you would be good for the role. Don't worry about turning out a great work of literature, instead focus on communicating clearly and succinctly – this is how you will be communicating with the children in your care soon.

Demonstrate your organisational skills by completing the form in full, supplying any requested documents or letters and ensuring that everything is submitted in good time before the deadline.

You won't be able to demonstrate all of your skills and characteristics in your application but where possible, use illustrative examples.

What experience should I include on my application?

When writing your application, the secret is to think about all the different experience you've got and how to use it to demonstrate that you're suitable for the role.

Hopefully you've got at least a little experience of working with or spending time with children, otherwise it will be difficult for you to know whether a teaching assistant role is suitable for you. Perhaps you have volunteered to listen to children read at school or helped out on school trips. You might be involved in your local Brownies or Scouts and, of

course, you can always draw on your experience of raising your own children or looking after siblings. Try and think about how you can apply your experience to show your prospective employers that you're suitable for the job.

Including relevant experience in your application

If you have some highly relevant experience, then make sure you include this in your application. Any work with children whether on a paid or voluntary basis is fantastic evidence that you may be suitable for the role. Include as many examples as you can think of.

"I am a volunteer helper at Amesbury Little Dippers swimming club each week. I help to make sure the children are all ready on time for the lesson and I am involved in helping to teach the children new swimming techniques."

"I am a volunteer reading helper for Miss Simpson's class. I come to school for half an hour twice a week to listen to children read. I hugely enjoy it and am proud to say that the children are always excited to see me and want to be the first to read to me!"

This type of experience is the very best guide you can give your prospective employers about your likely abilities as a teaching assistant. If you don't have relevant experience it is worth considering volunteering at your school or local clubs for children so you have some great experience to draw on. However, there are other types of experience you can talk about as well, which are outlined below.

Including informal experience in your application

Perhaps you've not formally worked with children; but you're probably applying for this role because you love children – how can you make that clear to your prospective employers? Perhaps you have great fun with your own children or have been involved in looking after younger siblings. This is all great experience to outline especially if you can write about structured activities you've been responsible for.

"My children often bring friends home at the weekend; we have made quite an art of cooking parties where I work with the children to teach them basic cooking techniques and they create the evening meal which we all enjoy together."

"I have a brother who is eight years younger than me. Growing up I have always been responsible for helping look after him and his friends at his birthday parties and family gatherings. I organise the games and make sure everyone is happy and sort out any problems quickly."

Including experience that does not involve children in your application

You can also draw on experience that does not involve working with children to demonstrate your relevant skills. Think about skills that you have used in previous jobs or that can be demonstrated by your hobbies.

"I'm highly creative and spend a lot of my free time painting and scrap booking. I think I could put these skills to great use when putting together classroom displays."

"My previous role, as a receptionist, required me to manage a high volume of calls. This meant I had to be highly efficient and organised. I was particularly strong at diffusing difficult situations which I think will stand me in good stead for dealing with difficult behaviour in the classroom!"

Checklist for completing your application

Here is a checklist to run through before you submit your application:

- Have you read the job description and person specification and made sure your application form and/or letter demonstrates the skills that the school is looking for?
- Have you spell checked your application?
- Have you asked a friend to read through your application – ask them to be honest.
- Have you drawn on your previous experience to demonstrate why you'd be good at the role?
- Have you been honest in your application?
- Have you completed all relevant forms and provided all requested documents?
- Is your application ready in plenty of time before the deadline?