

# From Student to Teacher: *Resumes, Interviews and the First Year*



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## ***My Experience***

I finished up my student teaching through California State University, Northridge in December, 2015. In my last semester I started gathering my letters of recommendation, finishing my resume and began applying on Edjoin. I got a long term substitute position at CHIME Charter School in Woodland Hills, CA. Throughout this time I was constantly applying to possible job opportunities. At first I was only applying to jobs that fit my "list" of qualifications: High School, instrumental, good district, booster program, parent and administrative support. It wasn't looking so good. Then I started to broaden my search: elementary, middle, choir, general, band, orchestra, traveling teacher, you name it. I submitted about 16 applications and went on close to 10 interviews. I heard hundreds of different questions with different types of panelists and interview atmospheres. I was successful in getting two job offers and chose the right one. I am now the director of bands at Huntington Park, CA. I'm here to give my secrets and what I learned to help ease the stress of getting a job.

## ***First Thing's First***

So you're almost done with college and student teaching and you're ready to start teaching, for REAL! It's never too early to start preparing for interviews and first year teaching. If you're currently student teaching, start asking for advice from your mentor teacher on resumes and interviews. Although each position/district will ask for different things, here is a basic checklist for what you will need to start applying:

1. Cover Letter
2. Resume
3. Letters of recommendation (mentor teachers, professors, principals)
4. Transcripts
5. References (former employers, professors, mentors, NO friends or family members)
6. Credential copy (from the CTC website)
7. CBEST/CSET scores
8. Subject Matter Competency Waiver (if you didn't need to take the CSET)

Start getting familiar with [www.edjoin.org](http://www.edjoin.org). This is where most employers post their job openings and where you will be submitting your applications.

# ***“Get that Job!”***

## ***How to Write a Killer Resume Cover Letter***

1. Keep it short. Resume cover letters should be one page, with about three paragraphs total. Once you roll over onto a second page you're really taking a risk. The writing should be punchy and crisp. Resume cover letters are a form of marketing. Make it easy for recipients to be interested. Find what they're looking for, and make them want to know more about you.
2. Draw the reader in immediately. The first paragraph of a resume cover letter should be an attention-grabber: Use an interesting fact, ask a question, or mention a personal connection to someone at the school. Learn how to write a cover letter that engages the reader.
3. Pack it with a “wow” factor. You create the wow factor by highlighting accomplishments on your resume cover letter. You're not just stating what you did in your last job, but what you achieved, created, and how you exceeded expectations.
4. Write well! Resume cover letters are a prime place to demonstrate that you have strong grammar, writing, and communication skills.
5. Don't recreate your resume. You might underscore one or two points on your resume, but be selective and don't turn the resume cover letter into a laundry list. Learn how to write a cover letter that is unique.
6. Have someone else read it. Using a second set of eyes is always a good idea, and after someone reads your letter, ask them if he or she thinks it's effective.
7. Finish with a statement that keeps the conversation rolling. A good resume cover letter has an action close that asks to take the next step. Job-seekers aren't interested in coming on too strong, so I suggest a phrase such as “I look forward to hearing from you.”

# SAMPLE COVER LETTER

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for your consideration of my application for the Band Director position for the William S. Hart Union High School District. I recently received my preliminary teaching credential in music from California State University, Northridge in December 2015. I graduated from CSUN in May of 2014 with a degree in musical performance while simultaneously taking music education courses so I could qualify for the credential program. Because of this qualification, I did not need to take the CSET because the basic skills requirement was met.

Although I am a newly credentialed teacher, I have been teaching and coaching music for the past six years. Within these 6 years, I have been the coach of the marching band and winter drumline at James Monroe High School. In this position I have built the drumline program from the ground up. I first started as a volunteer coach, and because of my dedication and commitment to the program I was hired by the after school program. My duties include running marching rehearsals, teaching marching basics, and writing marching drill and visuals for each show. Before my arrival, there was no winter drumline program, no consistency of practice schedules, and the students' knowledge of percussion fundamentals was slim. Once I arrived, I created a practice schedule, taught the students essential fundamentals and made them a team and well-rounded ensemble. Since starting the program, the drumline has been very successful at competitions with the American Drumline Association and has qualified for ADLA finals under my direction. We also have taken home a trophy every year at the LAUSD drumline championships.

Although most of my experience is at the high school level, I have had the privilege of teaching music to every single grade level; spanning from elementary grades, to middle school, and through high school. Not only have I been teaching and coaching instrumental classes including winds, strings and percussion, but general music classes as well. I am currently working as a long-term substitute teacher at CHIME Charter School in Woodland Hills, CA. At CHIME I teach TK-4th grade general music as well as 5th -8th grade bands. CHIME Charter is well known across the state for its all-inclusive curriculum. At CHIME, students with special needs learn alongside their naturally developing peers in all classes, which has given me the opportunity to teach students of all levels and special needs.

I know I am an ideal candidate for this position because I would be able to apply my expansive teaching experience and passion for music to your school. I am a hard-working, passionate, and creative person with many skills and experience in the music education world. I believe every student deserves a well-rounded and complete education, which includes music as a core subject. Music is essential to education because it improves students' brain function and allows students to express themselves creatively, something that is missing too often in schools. I want to bring this philosophy of music education to the school I teach for.

Thank you for your consideration of my application. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Kelly McCarley

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# How to Write a Show-Stopping Resume



- Things to Include
  - Education/Degrees
  - Teaching experience
  - Other job experience
  - Volunteer experience
  - Musical ensembles performed with
  - Special scholarships or awards received
  - Professional development (CASMEC/NAfME National Conference/SCSBOA conference, NAfME Collegiate meetings or positions)
  - References (if necessary, sometimes there is a spot for these on the application)
- Have an easy to read layout. Have decent margins with some space around each main point so it's easier on the eyes.
- As a recent graduate coming into your first job, most people suggest having on page. BUT! Don't jam pack your resume to fit one page. If you have a lot of experience and you feel it's necessary to include, it's okay to have a one and a half page resume.
- Don't include volunteer jobs earlier than three years if you have more experience to showcase. They want to see your most current experience, especially experience you were hired and paid for.
- Always have other people read your resume. You need fresh eyes to catch your mistakes, and more advice is better than none.
- 15-45 seconds is all an employer gives a resume on the first read, make it stand out.

## **So I Submitted My Application....time for the waiting game**

- Don't just wait around doing nothing. Start researching the schools and districts you applied to. What is their demographics like, their music program like, why are they looking for a new teacher. These things will give you an edge in the interview.
- Follow up. Give the district office or school a call after a reasonable amount of time. Make sure they know you are interested, but don't come off annoyed that it's taken a long time.
- Try to figure out who you will be doing the interview with (e.g. principals, assistant principals, music teacher, special education coordinator, outgoing music teacher, parents, students, etc.). Each of them will be looking for something specific and have different questions to ask you.
- Keep applying to other jobs in case you don't get an interview for your number one pick.

# *Kelly McCarley*

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**CERTIFICATION** California Preliminary Teaching Credential  
Single Subject: Music; GPA: 3.99  
California State University, Northridge. December 2016.

**EDUCATION** Bachelor of Music, Trombone Performance;  
Summa Cum Laude; GPA: 3.96  
California State University, Northridge. May 2014.

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## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

**Elementary/Middle School Music Teacher (long term substitute teacher)** CHIME Charter Institute, Woodland Hills, CA. January 2016-Present.

- Taught TK-4<sup>th</sup> grade choral and general music, 5<sup>th</sup> grade beginning instrumental classes and 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade concert band. CHIME is a full inclusion school specializing in special education practices. At CHIME, typically developing students, special needs students, and gifted students all learn side by side, including in the music classes I am currently teaching.

**Assistant Marching Band Director/Drumline Director**, James Monroe High School, North Hills, CA. 2011-Present.

- Work with the marching band on music, visuals, and marching fundamentals in fall semesters.
- Organize and teach the indoor Winter Drumline program in spring semesters.
- Write drill and visuals for marching band and winter drumline.
- Work closely with the concert band and collaborate often with the instrumental music teacher, Ryan Gonzales.

**Student Teacher**, Glendale High School, Grades 9-12. Fall 2015.

- Taught full orchestra, string orchestra, concert band, jazz band and marching band with Amy Rangel; master teacher.

**Student Teacher**, Elementary General and Instrumental Music, LAUSD, Grades K-5. Spring 2015.

- Taught 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade instrumental string and wind classes with Linda Mouradian at two LAUSD Elementary Schools.
- Taught K-4<sup>th</sup> grade elementary choral and general music with Terry Brockmann at two LAUSD Elementary Schools.

**Beginning Band Teacher**, Haynes Charter and Woodland Hills Elementary Schools. Grades 2-5, 2013-2015.

- Taught beginning band and beginning instrument classes consisting of brass and woodwind instruments.

**Marching Band Walk-on Coach**, Royal High School, Simi Valley, CA. Grades 9-12, August 2012-December 2012.

- Worked with the front ensemble and percussion students for the Fall 2012 marching band season.

**Elementary Instrumental Teacher**, Calahan Elementary School, Grades 4-5, 2010-2014.

- Volunteered once a week teaching beginning and advanced students in flute, trumpet, trombone, and violin. Also acted as a student administrator for two years supervising other volunteer teachers, reviewing lesson plans and organizing the program.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Member of NAFME, CMEA, and SCSBOA  
California Music Educators Association (CMEA) Collegiate Council Chairperson, March 2015-present.

NAFME Collegiate Advocacy Summit attendee, Washington DC, June 2015

NAFME Western Division Leadership Seminar attendee, June 2015

California All-State Music Education Conference attendee, February 2014-2016

## **AWARDS AND ACTIVITIES**

NAFME Collegiate Member, CSUN Chapter, 2011-Present

Chapter President, 2014-2015

Chapter Treasurer, 2013-2014

NAFME Collegiate Professional Development Achievement Award, 2015

For dedication to NAFME, music education, and to the development of the chapter at California State University, Northridge.

CMEA Collegiate Chapter of the Year, 2015

For the work and accomplishments of the California State University, Northridge CMEA chapter

Pi Kappa Lambda Member (National Music Honor Society)

The Gelb Music Education Outreach Award, 2011-2013

*References furnished upon request*

***The Interview:  
How to Leave Them Wanting  
More***



## General Advice

- Be clear on how to get to your destination and where to park. Most schools are in neighbors with parking restrictions.
- Come with your own copies of your cover letter, resume, and other documents you may think are necessary, even if you submitted them already. You never know!
- Turn off your cell phone! Having a phone go off in an interview is a no-no.
- Dress well! Look professional, look the part.
- Shake their hands. Make sure it's a good a firm handshake, but not overpowering.
- Walk slowly, but with a purpose. Don't rush your movements.
- Use mirroring techniques, if they lean forward, a few second later do the same. It makes them feel more connected to you.
- Learn the names and positions of who is on your interview panel. You may be working with them someday.
- Smile a lot. You want to seem approachable and someone these people could work with.
- While addressing all of the members of the committee with your answers, specifically respond to the person who asked the question, and make eye contact with them.
- Try to stick to the topic of the question and avoid drifting off into other areas of discussion.
- If the question is not clear, don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
- Don't be afraid to admit that, because of your lack of experience, you aren't sure of the answer to a question. This is a good opportunity to say that you are a quick learner and interested to learn from others.
- Breathe! The more you breathe the less nervous and more focused you will be.
- Awkward moments are bound to happen that you can't predict. Just go with the flow and shake it off later.

## Types of Panelists/Interviews

- Group vs. individual
- 1-3 interviewers vs. 5-8
- Administrators vs. Music Teachers
- Phone vs. in person
- 1st time interview and call backs



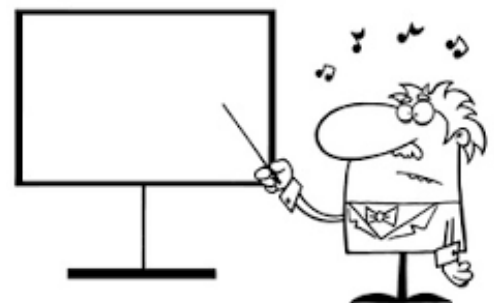
- Demo lessons

## The Questions They'll Ask You, Guaranteed

- So tell us about yourself
  - Have a short biography of yourself ready to go. Hit on your biggest points of experience teaching. Always display your strengths. They like to hear what inspired you to be a teacher, why it's your passion.
- Why do you want to teach here (school/district)
  - Even if this isn't your number one choice for a position, make a point or two why you think you are the right fit for working there.
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years/Where do you see this music program in 5 years if you take this position?
- What is your greatest weakness?
  - This is a great opportunity to put a positive swing on something negative. Tell a story of a real weakness you have overcome, or are working to overcome.
- What is your experience collaborating with other teachers?
  - Sometimes they may ask about a conflict you have had with a prior co-worker and how you resolved it.
- How would you mainstream special education students into your classroom?
- How do you plan your lessons to include diverse learners and English language learners?
- What is your classroom management style or strategies? Do you have a behavior plan?
- Take us through your daily music classroom routine.
- How are you going to include parents in the program?
- What is your plan for professional development and what have you been doing already to grow as an educator?
- Do you have any questions for us?
  - Have at least one question ready. It will make you seem more interested in the position.

## Music Specific Questions

If being interviewed by only a principal, you may get more instructional and educational based questions. If a music teacher is on your interview panel, especially at a high school with an established program, be ready for more questions like these:





***\*These are either real questions I have been asked in interviews or they are questions I gathered from other teachers and employers***

1. Describe a typical 60-minute rehearsal for a beginning band.
2. In general terms, describe the process for starting a beginning clarinet player. A beginning trumpet player.
3. What counting system would you use with your students? What would be your approach to teaching rhythm?
4. What is the number one most important thing that your students must be able to do on his/her instrument?
5. Besides the regular band classes in place, do you have plans for any additional ensemble or activities? If so, what?
6. How do you envision the relationship between the high school and junior high school band program?
7. Please demonstrate or explain the following fingerings:
  - a. Trumpet—4<sup>th</sup> line D
  - b. Clarinet—G below the staff
  - c. Saxophone—Bb (alternates)
  - d. Trombone—C 2<sup>nd</sup> space
  - e. Flute—5<sup>th</sup> line F#
  - f. Describe the process/timeline you would use to recruit students into the junior high band program?
8. Would you plan on using a technique book? If so, which book and for what levels of students?
9. Who are three composers of junior high music that you feel write quality music? What is your favorite piece for junior high band?
10. What staff would you want to hire for marching band?
11. What do you think are the most important aspects of a successful marching band program?
12. If two students in our marching band are dating and you have gotten complaints about PDA, how would you deal with that situation?
13. What kind of music are you going to teach/program?
14. What is your experience dealing with a budget?
15. How much money do you think a music program needs each year to be successful?
16. How are you going to raise money?
17. What do you think is the biggest role of parent boosters?

## **Elementary Questions**

These are the exact questions I was asked for an elementary choral/general music position:

1. Tell us about yourself: Give us a description of your professional and educational background., including experience and training in musical instructional performance.

2. Describe an ideal curriculum in music. What are the current curriculum trends in music?
3. What is your favorite musical concept to teach? What is the most exciting thing happening in music education today?
4. Describe your behavior management plan?
5. How would you mainstream special education students in your ensembles?
6. Give a few examples of how you will incorporate cross-curriculum teaching into a music class?
7. At what age do you begin teaching students how to read music? Describe the process you use?
8. What are some techniques that you have used to help students singers learn how to breathe and identify phrases in their music, as well as counting to come in at the correct time?
9. Describe how you would teach a second grade class a new song that no one is familiar with.
10. Please describe the educational technologies or tools you use, or would use, in a music classroom.
11. How would you get parents and teachers involved when putting on a music production?
12. Some of your music classes will be performance-based. Your rehearsal time may be limited. What classroom strategies would you use to get the maximum result in a minimum amount of rehearsal time? Please include any educational technologies or tools you would use.

## **After the Interview**

- Have someone to call or debrief with after the interview. It helps you process what just happened and gives you a better idea of how you did. Most times, you will forget everyone you just spoke to and half of the questions they asked.
- Follow up after the interview, even if it's just to say thank you, and you should! Send an email the next day to those who interviewed you thanking them for their time and the opportunity, and that you look forward to speaking with them again soon!

# So You Got the Job, Now What?



- Start planning on how soon you can get into the room and see what supplies/equipment you will be working with.
- Speak to the outgoing music teacher if possible. Ask them how they ran things, what they accomplished and what their goals were. If they are leaving on good terms and were there for a few years, usually they still want to help out.
- Meet with some of the students and get to know them.
- Meet some fellow teachers and make friends.
- Figure out who you are going to go to when you need help as you start the job (mentor teacher, principal, custodian), because you are going to have PLENTY of questions in your first couple of months.
- Be nice to the custodians! You never know when you are going to need a key, a broom, a ladder, lights turned on, you name it!
- Start connecting with the local music teachers and feeder schools. If you're at high school, speak with the middle schools and start recruiting. If you are at a middle school, speak with the high school director and see how you can help as a feeder to their program. We need to be nice to each other!
- Attend as many professional development conferences as possible. Soak up all the knowledge as resources as you can.

## Questions?

Please feel free to email me with any future questions  
at [Kelly.mccarley@lausd.net](mailto:Kelly.mccarley@lausd.net)

GOOD LUCK!! 😊