Completing job Application Forms

Application forms are used by employers to ask questions and gather key information specific to their needs and the job requirements. They recruit by matching applicants against the criteria they require and deter those who do not meet the criteria by making the process challenging. Application forms are therefore very important and they are the first chance you have to market yourself effectively.

Most application forms are completed online and accessed through the employer’s website. Occasionally you may be asked to complete a paper application (eg for a part-time job). Whatever the format, the principles and approach for completing an application form are the same.

Filling in an application form takes time and effort, so ensure that it is a job you are really interested in by reading all the employer’s recruitment literature carefully, especially the job description. The job description may be a formal document or it may be a list of activities taken from the website.

Preparation

Begin by researching the employers via their website/brochure, and the sector to which you are applying; you can relate what you find out to why you want to work for that company. Focus on what you can contribute and what distinguishes the company from its competitors.

Use the job description/person specification to identify the skills, abilities and attributes that the employer requires. Think through your own experiences, skills and attributes, concentrating on how you can demonstrate that you have those relevant to the position.

These experiences/skills etc may have been gained or developed from anything you have done, eg work experience, voluntary work, your degree, involvement in societies, sport. Consider how you will be able to use examples from these experiences to demonstrate that you have the competencies required by the employer.

Sections of the form

Application forms are usually divided into very specific sections which ask for information on things like: personal and educational details; course content; awards; other qualifications or skills such as IT and language skills; activities and interests. You will usually be providing factual responses in these sections.

NB. If the application form does not allow you to put in non-UK qualifications, you must contact the company’s recruitment team for advice on how to proceed – do not just leave this section blank.

Follow the instructions carefully; you may be required to present information in a particular order. A very important part of the form is the opportunity given to you to say why you want the job and why you would be an excellent choice. This section will take the form of either:

- a personal statement
- a series of very specific questions
- a question about relevant experience

Whichever format it takes, it provides you with the opportunity to market yourself by highlighting your strengths and achievements.
Reasons for Applying
This is the section that allows you to impress the employer by matching your skills, qualities and experience to what they are looking for.

Let them know;
• What attracted you to this job
• How your qualifications and experience are relevant
• How your skills match the job’s requirements
• Which aspects of your personality show how you will fit in
• How activities you are involved in demonstrate these personality traits
• Why this is a logical move forward for you and how it fits in with your long-term career plans

Be honest, and don’t forget to sell yourself.

Specific questions:
These are questions which relate to the competencies required by the employer. This is your chance to provide evidence to show that you have these competencies. Can you reflect on what you have done and relate it to the question? Sometimes there are very tight word limits for your answers. This is a chance to demonstrate that you can write coherently and concisely.

A few examples:
• Tell us about a time when, despite a setback, you persevered in order to achieve a goal
• Give us an example of a team decision you were involved in recently. What did you do to help the team reach a decision?
• Describe a time when you had to weigh up the pros and cons of several options to make a decision
• What do you feel are the major problems facing this industry?
• What was the most important thing you learned from any work experience you have had? How will it help you in this position?
• What has been the biggest challenge in your life, other than your academic career?
• What factors have influenced your career decision making?

Tackling these questions:
• When preparing, think about your experiences, use the CAR framework i.e. think about the Context (situation and task), Action (what you actually did) and Result (the outcome)
• Break the question down, making sure you understand exactly what is being asked
• Make sure you answer the whole question
• Make sure you talk about yourself; what you did
• Be specific about the examples you use

See the resources section below for some examples of how to answer these questions.

General tips:
• Read the whole form before attempting to complete it
• Practise your answers first, write in a blank Word document, then cut and paste into the application form when you are happy with them
• Be positive; don’t make negative statements
• Give examples from all aspects of your life
• Remember: Recent (don’t go back too far in time); Relevant (give evidence of the skills the employer is seeking); Robust (stands up to further questioning at interview)
• Take care when cutting and pasting from one application form to another- this can lead to mistakes such as leaving the name of the last company you applied to in the pasted text, or simply failing to tailor your application to the specific requirements of a given employer
• Keep to the word limit (if applicable) - do not add an extra sheet unless invited to do so
• Check spelling and grammar as they are very important
• Use professional, formal language - don’t use slang and don’t be too informal or chatty
• Proof read – several times!
• When applying online keep a note of any passwords used and prepare against system crashes by regularly saving your form as you complete it
• Keep a copy of your form, you will need it for interview preparation
• If you are asked questions about criminal records, health, disability etc. and you are unsure what to disclose, you are welcome to discuss this with a Careers Consultant
• It is not usually expected that an application form should be accompanied by a covering letter, however sometimes you are asked to upload a CV. You can use this opportunity to further market yourself
• Print or photocopy several copies of the form to practise on
• Follow the instructions carefully, eg number of words allowed in each section, handwritten or word processed, colour of ink, etc
• Have someone else read through it as you don’t always spot your own mistakes.

Remember: your application form is your entry to the next stage of the selection process.

Useful Resources

Careers and Placements:
Events – Look out for events offering help with the recruitment process, eg sessions on CVs and covering Letters, writing application forms, and interview skills. As part of our events programme these can be viewed via Careers Gateway: www.york.ac.uk/careers/gateway.

Information enquiries – Speak to a member of staff at the Information Desk or call into a Drop-in session (available weekdays in term-time) – no appointment necessary. They can answer your initial questions and help locate the most useful resources.

Appointments - You may bring an application form for review to a Careers Advice Appointment or a CV/Application Review. Again, this can be booked via Careers Gateway. For more details see the Talk to us page.

Online Queries – Face to face appointments are always the most beneficial, but if it is not possible to come into Careers and Placements (for example, if you are on a placement), then you can submit your application forms for review through a query in Careers Gateway.

Web Resources:
www.prospects.ac.uk – click on Careers Advice, then Applying for Jobs
www.kent.ac.uk/careers/applic.htm- includes some competency based questions
http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice - click on Applications and CV
www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/applicationsinterviews/- click on Application forms and then Application form guide for a useful information sheet.

Please note: The websites listed here are not intended to represent a comprehensive list. Careers and Placements cannot be held responsible for the content of external websites.

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