Application forms

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"The Careers and Employability Centre is an amazing resource which has massively helped me search and apply for graduate schemes and jobs."

GRADUATE
(SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS)

APPLICATION FORMS

WHY DO EMPLOYERS USE APPLICATION FORMS?

When applying for a job it is likely that you will be asked to complete an application form. Recruiters use application forms to ensure that each applicant is judged against the same criteria so that candidates can be shortlisted.

The employer decides on the skills, qualities and experience that they would like their ideal candidate to have and it is your role to show how you meet the criteria by giving examples from your previous experience. The employer will then shortlist candidates and invite those who meet the criteria to interview.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

Some employers, particularly graduate recruiters, use online application systems. Candidates are required to create an account and fill in the application online. Other employers, particularly in the public sector and third sector, use application forms that are usually in the form of a Word document that you can either type into directly or complete by hand.

Many graduate schemes will have a list of competencies that they would like their ideal candidate to demonstrate. These could be a range of skills and personal qualities, for example:

- good communication skills
- interpersonal skills
- leadership skills
- problem-solving skills
- initiative
- willingness to learn.

Depending on the role, some graduate recruiters may also ask for specific technical skills.

For other job advertisements, it is likely that there will be a job description and a person specification. These list all the responsibilities and activities that the job involves along with the experience, qualifications, skills and qualities that an ideal candidate is likely to need. It is your responsibility to show, using examples, how your experience matches the requirements of the role.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Before you begin writing your application, investigate:

- the role
- the employer
- the skills and requirements of the position
- how you need to apply.

Start your research by reading the job advert, job description and person specification. Find out about any competencies that the employer is looking for and visit their website to find out more about the company.

It is important to read all the instructions in the application pack or online guidance before you start filling in the form.

- Is there a word limit?
- How are you expected to apply?
- Do you need to email the application with a title or are you submitting the form online?
- Most importantly, what is the deadline?

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Employers will usually give guidance on what they are looking for from applicants. For example, graduate recruiters often ask applicants some questions based around the competencies that they are looking for.

WHAT TYPES OF QUESTIONS WILL I BE ASKED?

It is likely that you will encounter a range of questions on application forms. Graduate recruiters particularly use competency-based questions and motivational questions in their recruitment.

Competency-based questions

Competency-based questions are based on the principle that how you behaved in the past is an indicator of how you will behave in the future. Typical competencies might include: teamwork, communication, leadership and motivation. It is your job to give examples of how you have demonstrated these competencies in the past.

Typical competency-based questions:

- Can you tell us about a time when you worked as part of a team? What was your role and what did you do?
- Can you give us an example of when you showed good communication skills?

Motivational questions

Motivational questions are designed so that the employer can find out more about why you want the role and if you will fit into the organisation.

Typical motivational questions:

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What are the major challenges facing our sector currently? Who are our competitors?
- Where do you see yourself in X years' time?

HOW DO I COMPLETE AN APPLICATION FORM WITH A BLANK SECTION?

Many application forms include a blank section where you have to show the employer how you meet the criteria on the job description or person specification. It is similar to writing a personal statement. The key to filling in this section is structure and giving examples of how you meet each point on the person specification. It is a good idea to use each point on the person specification as a heading and provide your example underneath. This makes it easier for the people shortlisting to see how you meet the criteria.

HOW DO I MATCH MY EXPERIENCE TO THE JOB?

After you have done your research on the company and found out what skills and experience the employer is looking for, the next step is to match your experience to the job by giving good quality examples of how you meet the employer's criteria. This is extremely important in making a successful application. Think about all areas of your life that you can draw on to give examples, e.g. academic studies, extra-curricular activities, part-time work, volunteering, responsibilities at home.

Examples:

- Presentations given during your degree are useful for demonstrating communication skills, an ability to communicate complex information and research skills.

- If you are a member of a University society, you could write about your role and responsibilities, i.e. an events co-ordinator can demonstrate interpersonal skills because the role requires talking to many different people.

- If you are a member of a sports team, you could write about your role and the skills you have developed. You can use your involvement to demonstrate team-working skills.

- Part-time work is very useful experience when writing an application. You might have experience dealing with customers, handling money and balancing work with your studies, which are good examples of communication and interpersonal skills, responsibility, and time management.

- Volunteering is an excellent way to build the types of skills and experience that employers look for and you can use it to provide examples.

- Responsibilities at home, such as caring responsibilities and raising children, are excellent examples of time management.

In your examples it is also important to show that you understand what the company does and what the job involves, by linking your experience to the role.

HOW DO I STRUCTURE MY ANSWERS AND EXAMPLES?

Structure is very important when answering questions or completing an application form with a blank section. Using the **STAR** model (see below) can help give your examples a clear and concise structure.

As well as using **STAR**, make sure that you use positive language and positive examples. Spend time finding the right words to describe your experience and show what you have learnt from your previous experience, linking it to the job description.

When you have written your application form, check your spelling and grammar!

For every vacancy several good applicants don't get an interview because their application form contains poor spelling or grammar.

TOP TIP

If you are writing an online application, write the text in Word first so that you can use the reviewing tools to check your spelling and grammar.

SITUATION
What was the occasion/setting?

TASK
What did you need to do?

ACTION
What did you do? Describe the action that you took.

RESULT
What was the result?

STAR example for organisation skills

Situation – I worked as an activity leader at a children's summer camp in America.

Task – There were 10 leaders and due to bad weather we had to come up with a plan to keep the children busy indoors.

Action – I suggested that we brainstorm some ideas and then get into groups of three to spend an hour developing one idea each. I then drew up a rota so that we all knew what we were doing and when.

Result – The extra activities were popular and the other leaders were happy to have shared the workload and limited the amount of additional work.

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DO I NEED TO DISCLOSE A DISABILITY OR CRIMINAL RECORD?

Most application forms will ask you to complete sections on disability and criminal convictions. Whether to disclose these is a personal decision – you can discuss your options with a Careers and Employability Consultant. You can also read further information on disclosure at:
▸ **sussex.ac.uk/careers/diversity**

WHO CAN I USE AS REFEREES?

Employers will generally ask you to provide details for a minimum of two referees with your application. One of these referees should be someone you have had contact with recently who can comment on you as an individual. This could be an academic at Sussex. It is also preferable to use a work reference from a previous job. If you haven't worked before, think about other people who could provide a reference. This could be a school teacher/head teacher or a family friend.

CAN I ATTACH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUCH AS MY CV OR WRITTEN REFERENCES TO SUPPORT MY APPLICATION?

Unless an employer specifically asks for additional documents it is very often the case that they won't accept CVs or written references. This is because all applicants filling in an application form are being judged against the same criteria for the role. If you have additional documents that you want to send, it is worth contacting the employer in advance to see if they will review them as part of your application.

DO I NEED TO SEND A COVERING LETTER WITH MY APPLICATION FORM?

This depends on the format of the application and what the employer is asking for as part of the application process. If the application is an online form, it is likely that you will submit the form via an online system and there will be no need for an additional covering letter. If you are sending the application directly to an employer via post or email, you can attach a covering letter or email. It is important to read the application instructions before you submit your application. If you are unsure about what you need to submit, then it is wise to contact the employer beforehand.

WHEN CAN I EXPECT TO HEAR BACK FROM THE EMPLOYER ABOUT MY APPLICATION?

The employer will usually provide information as part of the application process to tell you about the timeline for the role and when you will receive a response. If there isn't any information, and you haven't heard anything for two weeks after the deadline, it is fine to contact the employer to follow up the status of your application.

NEED MORE HELP?

We can review your application before you send it to an employer. You can book an appointment with a Careers and Employability Consultant in CareerHub or send it to us via 'Ask a Question' for written feedback:
▸ **careerhub.sussex.ac.uk**

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