Application Forms

Why do employers use application forms?

Employers want to know certain things about anyone applying to their company and it is why they create their own application forms. All employers are different and so they will ask different questions to find out about you. The way you complete the application form, and answer their questions, will determine whether or not you go through to the next stage of the process (e.g.) to an assessment centre. So don’t think the questions are irrelevant or intrusive. Treat each one seriously and provide as much information as you can.

Top Tip: Provide appropriate evidence targeted to the employers requirements.

Employers tell us the main reason applicants don’t progress through to the next stage is that they didn’t provide evidence that meets the employers’ requirements.

Here are the ‘Dos and Do Not’s of writing a successful application:

DO:

1. Do your research before attempting the form. Research the organisation, the job role and other relevant information so you know exactly what the employer is looking for.

2. Use your research to decide what your best examples are to answer the employer’s questions. Use a range of examples including experience at university, part-time or voluntary work and extra-curricular activities.

3. Follow all instructions carefully. Read the form carefully from start to finish and follow any specific instructions including word counts - which you must never go over. Writing succinctly is a skill. Try deleting any unnecessary words or phrases which don’t add anything extra.

4. Pay close attention to detail. This is expected by ALL employers, so check the final form for ‘typos’, misspellings and poor grammar. These are a big turnoff which can result in all your hard work being destined for the bin.

5. Sound motivated and enthusiastic. You need to be asking yourself why THIS company and THIS role and have some convincing arguments. Employers want to employ people who want to work for them.

6. Ask someone to read over your form. If English isn’t your first language, ask an English friend to look at your form for grammatical and spelling errors. It’s good to do this anyway as you may not pick up on mistakes after you have looked at it for the 50th time. We do not check for typos in Careers but we do provide guidance on structure and content.

7. Keep a copy. When it comes to the interview stage, it is immeasurably useful to remember what you have told the employer.
DO NOT:

1. **Exceed the word count.** Often the application form will stipulate how many words/characters your answer should be. Do not go over this limit. Also remember that being way under is also a ‘no no’. You do not have to meet the word limit exactly but aim to get within a few words/characters.

2. **Leave whole sections empty.** Sometimes there is a section that does not apply to you. Write ‘Not Applicable’ as it shows that you have read the form properly. If you are not sure about the content of any section check with a Careers Consultant.

3. **Complete the application in one sitting.** Avoid application fatigue as you will begin to make mistakes. It is better to be fresh each time you tackle it as they can be difficult and will require your full attention.

4. **Copy and paste large sections from other application forms.** You might want to copy some small sections however they must be tailored, and remember every employer has slightly different requirements, which will be in a very different context. It is not unusual for students to leave in a previous employer’s name.

5. **Say ‘See my CV’.** Always follow the instructions exactly, and never ever take this short cut. If they wanted a CV they would have asked for one in the first place.

6. **Be too wordy.** There is a fine balance between providing enough detail and being too verbose. You need to give employers a flavour of your experience without overloading the text with lots of unnecessary words and phrases. Remember employers may be reading through hundreds of application forms.

**Top Tip: Follow the STAR method to ensure you answer questions**

**How to demonstrate your skills using STAR:**

**S**ITUATION: Briefly explain the situation you were in so the example makes sense to the employer.

**T**ASK: What were you required to do/what was your role?

**A**CTION: What specific actions did you take? Use the word ‘I’ where possible.

**R**ESULT: What was the final result of your actions? Is this quantifiable in any way?

**An example of STAR to demonstrate ‘good teamwork’:**

**S**ITUATION: As a member of the Geography Society I was part of the team organising a fundraising ball.

**T**ASK: I was in charge of publicity for ticket sales.

**A**CTION: I designed posters and put them up on all floors of the Geography department. I wrote an email inviting all Geography students and staff to the ball with instructions on how to purchase tickets.

**R**ESULT: We sold 450 of the 500 tickets and raised £1000 in profit for the new Geography minibus.

**In Summary**

When responding to open questions always:

- Say what YOU did – make it personal.
- Demonstrate that you have relevant skills, qualities and knowledge by relating your experience to the requirements of the job.
- Indicate that you understand the organisation.
- Use STAR.

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**COMPETE** for success