Applications & Interviews

Application Forms
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Go to: Applying for a Job

There are many different types of application form, but they are all basically after the same thing:

- Why should they want you?

- And why do you want them?

You need to start by working out what the recruiter is looking for – their **selection criteria**. The next stage is to match your skills, experience and qualifications to it, and present your evidence in a positive light.

Before you start filling in any job application form take or print out copies. Practice on these first. Only complete the actual form (on line or on paper) when you have all the information you want, laid out properly.

Start with the facts

Most application forms contain factual sections asking for details of your name, address, education, previous work, etc. It is a good idea to have your CV handy to help you complete these sections.

The wide open spaces.

These factual sections are often followed by a blank space with a heading something like this:

> *Additional information*
> *Please enter below any additional information in support of your application. If you require more space than is provided please ensure that any attached papers contain your name and the post for which you are applying.*

Here are a few tips to help you with this type of question.

- Look at the job vacancy, and draw out the **selection criteria**. Aim for about seven or eight paragraph headings.
- Delete any criteria which are already covered by the details you have filled in on the application form (e.g. don't repeat lists of relevant qualifications).
- Using your full range of experiences, provide evidence under each paragraph heading.
- Write an introduction and a conclusion. For example, your introduction could explain why you want the job, your conclusion could summarise your best selling points.
- If it says you may use additional sheets, it implies that additional sheets are expected.

Complex questions

Some forms do not allow you as much freedom as this, and have very specific questions. One example is the application form for teacher training - the GTTR (Graduate Teacher Training Registry) form. It asks a long, complex question:

Describe briefly your reasons for wanting to teach giving the relevance of your previous education and experience,

including teaching, visits to schools and other work with young people.

What you need to do with questions like these is break them down. The above example is a question in three parts. You need to make sure you answer each part.

Competence based application forms

What are they?
They normally start like any other application form, with factual sections about education and so on. Then they go on to ask more probing questions about skills and competences, and ask for evidence of how you acquired them.

Examples:
- Describe a challenging project, activity or event which you have planned and taken through to a conclusion. Include your objective, what you did, any changes you made to your plan and state how your measured your success.
- Describe a situation where you were required to persuade someone to your point of view. What was your objective and how did you achieve it?
- Think of a problem you had to resolve. How did you go about finding a solution? What did you learn in the process?

Tips:
Brainstorm a 'menu' of situations that you can draw on which show when and how you have developed skills that employers might want. Take these situations from:
- Your studies - degree, A levels, Access course
- Your work experience - full time, part time, voluntary

- Your hobbies and interests - travel, sport, clubs
- Other significant achievements - raising a family, overcoming an illness
- Ask your friends/colleagues/family if they can think of things you have done that demonstrate your skills and qualities. Don't worry about whether your examples are exciting or unusual enough. Concentrate on showing that you have developed the competences they are looking for.

Some employers also include questions which explore applicants' commercial awareness and knowledge of current affairs.

Examples:
- Using a company of your choice explain why you believe the company has or has not been successful.
- What do you feel are the major challenges facing this industry/group?
- Describe a current affairs issue which you have read about recently.

Dos and Don'ts

The Dos
- Answers should be brief, factual and well expressed
- As there is not much space - it is better to use one well thought out example than several
- Only include positive situations, or situations where you appear in a positive light
- State what you achieved by your actions
- Provide evidence of your skills
- Read the questions carefully so that you are clear which of your skills and evidence you need to write about
- Keep linking your answers to your analysis of the vacancy - tell them what they need to hear
- Fill in every section, put *Not applicable* if necessary

The Don'ts
- Put in too little detail or cram in too much. Just provide evidence.

- Use vague, verbose or woolly statements
- Leave the selector to guess why something is relevant
- Go over the top, but avoid sounding dull
- Try to cover everything scantily - it is better to pick one area and go into more detail
- Claim to possess certain skills without providing the evidence
- Get so involved in describing the situation that you don't also demonstrate your skills (eg. talking about the finer aspects of setting up a PA without demonstrating how this involved negotiating, working as part of a team, etc.)

The Standard Application Form.

This is a competence based form, which is used by some graduate recruiters. You can pick up a Standard Application Form from the careers library, or check it out on Prospects website.

Online applications
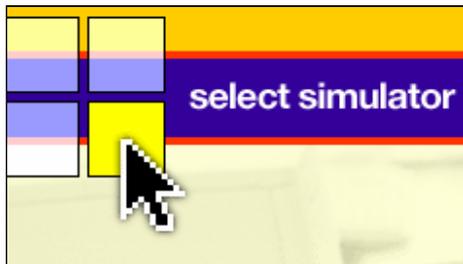
Many of the modern graduate recruiters now use online application systems. These can be quite basic or more fancy systems which might allow you to complete psychometric tests online and book the time and day of your interview and assessment centre. However basic or sophisticated the system,you still have to obey the fundamental rule of all job applications: preparation (see previous tips). You can practice online applications using the simulated exercise at www.selectsimulator.com

Additional tips for online systems:
- Download the form and have a good think about your answers before you start.

- Make sure your spelling and grammar is as watertight as ever – now isn't the time to slip into e-mail speak.
- Make use of the 'save and return' facility. Make sure you're happy with the whole form before you press 'submit'.

More help

Visit Prospects website at
http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/Appforms

Pick up the AGCAS booklet, *Making Applications*, from the Careers Library.

Visit the Careers Module Help menu at
www.staffs.ac.uk/careers/ecs

Practice your form in rough. Bring it in to a Careers Service and a Careers Adviser will have a look at it for you, and make suggestions on how it may be improved.