Job Club
Histon and Impington

Application Forms

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Basic principles

Application forms come in different formats – most commonly online - but there are still a few organisations which prefer you to complete a paper copy.

Most employers use their own application forms so that they can compare all candidates on the same basis, asking questions which are most appropriate to that organisation.

Whatever the format, the basic principles of approaching application forms are the same.

Application forms consist of a mixture of
◦ Factual sections (personal details, qualifications, work experience etc.)
◦ sections based on the other selection criteria, where you will be required to write about yourself in a way that demonstrates your skills, knowledge and experience.

Unless instructed otherwise, list your qualifications and work experience in reverse chronological order (with the most recent activity first).

Before you start

Do sufficient research to understand the job role and the competencies required

- Write your application in relation to these.
- Use the keywords from the job description
- Always keep in mind the person reading it.
- Think about what they are looking for - Make it easy for them to put your application on the 'invite to interview' pile!

Read all the instructions carefully and follow them exactly.

- Some questions may have several parts to them, read it carefully and make sure that you answer all parts.
- Complete ALL sections of the form, don't leave something blank just because you don't know how to approach answering it. Your form will be instantly rejected.
- If the question really isn't applicable to you, you should write 'N/A' (not applicable).

Build up a library of examples

Transferable skills	Examples of when I have developed these skills

Knowledge-based skills	Examples of when I have developed these skills

Filling it in

'Sell' yourself to the employer
- It isn't time for false modesty but make sure that you don't go too far and tip over into arrogance
- Avoid exaggeration
- Keep in mind positive thinking and positive writing

Ensure that you use good English language throughout
- Check all spelling, grammar and punctuation
- This is vitally important as many applications are rejected on this basis alone
- Avoid repetition of words "I really want.."

Use the word count
- Not too long

Structure your answers

'STAR' (Situation, Task, Action and Result) can help you provide a concise and effective answer to competency based questions.

Situation - provide some brief details about the situation you were in when you used your competencies so that the reader can understand the context of the example.

Task - outline what your objective or purpose was during that situation, again, to put your answer into context.

Action - describe what you (personally) did in that situation and how you approached it. It is worth including what you were responsible for

Result - state the outcome, for example: Were the objectives met? What did you learn/gain from being in that situation?

Don't cut corners

Don't be tempted to 'cut and paste' information and answers across from previous applications.

◦ Employers can usually tell when this is done as your answer won't exactly match the question that they asked.

◦ Even worse, applicants sometimes leave the previous organisation's name or a different course title in the application!

◦ You can use a previous application as a prompt but write a new answer for each question.

Take plenty of time over the application.

◦ A good application takes a long while to complete and rushing an application will simply be a waste of your time.

◦ It might take you a whole day to complete your first application form properly but hopefully your efforts will be rewarded with an interview or an offer on a course!

Tips

It is worth creating documents listing your achievements in education, work and in your personal life, to ensure you have a database of your work recorded to draw from when completing an application form.

Read the job description and person specification carefully. Note down 6-8 main criteria from it and write underneath each one examples of work experience and education that give examples of how you fulfil each criterion. Use this outline as a basis for writing the supporting statement.

If the organisation is a larger one, get a copy of their Annual Report.

Get a friend to read it through for you - we often are taught not to boast and so we sell ourselves short when completing applications. An honest friend - ie. one who will tell you what you've done wrong as well - will be able to point out what you do that you haven't included on the application.

Summary

In order not to be rejected, make sure you:

Customise your application to the organisation or institution you are applying to

Show enthusiasm as to why you really want the job

Show you meet the criteria.
◦ Some recruiters will place emphasis on academic achievement whilst others will be looking for particular skills, knowledge and experience

Give complete answers and provide convincing examples

Check your spelling and grammar

Positive Writing Tip 1:
Don't list

When writing about your experiences don't just list your activities or duties.

This will mean very little to the recruiter as they won't know what those duties actually involved or what you got out of them.

Where possible, go on to describe the results you achieved and the skills or qualities you demonstrated.

Positive Writing Tip 2: Use Power Words

Here are a few examples

Accomplished	Implemented
Achieved	Improved
Adapted	Influenced
Advised	Led
Analysed	Maintained
Co-ordinated	Motivated
Communicated	Negotiated
Completed	Organised
Created	Participated
Delivered	Persuaded
Developed	Planned
Enhanced	Researched
Established	Resolved
Fulfilled	Team Working
Helped	Trained

Positive Writing Tip 3:
Use verbs at the start of the sentence

Starting a sentence with a verb or power word (eg, Completed…, Negotiated…, Delivered…)

- ◦ Not only provides a strong and clear opener
- ◦ It can also make your skills and achievements stand out
- ◦ Especially if the recruiter is speed-reading your application.

It also stimulates the reader to want to learn more about you.

Positive Writing Tip 4:
Write in an active style

An active style puts the emphasis on the action you took, rather than what you were expected to do - the latter sets a rather passive tone which won't impress a recruiter. Here's an example:

Passive style: 'The project required me to research information from various sources. I had to make conclusions and present my findings in a report. It involved working under pressure and coping with deadlines.'

Active style: 'Researched information using various sources including databases and scientific journals. Produced a comprehensive report that detailed my findings which received 76% (equivalent to a 'distinction' level grade). Learnt the value of prioritising tasks for effective time management.'

In the passive style, the sentences are accurate, but weak and vague. Using the active style, the writer implies that they took the initiative.

Positive Writing Tip 5:
Write concisely

Tip No. 5 - Write concisely (short sentences, line spaces & bullet points)

This paragraph shows how text in a CV or application form can often be difficult to read when grouped together in one huge 'block'. Selectors could have difficulty in extracting the key information and this is not what you want to happen. Not only can it be difficult to extract pertinent information, huge blocks of text don't always look good on the page, and can create a poor first impression. This negative attitude may influence how employers react to the content of applications. It can also lead to a negative judgement on how well you communicate. If you claim to have good communication skills and then present long paragraphs of text that are off-putting to read, then you are failing to communicate effectively through your application.

Compare a large block of text with a bullet point approach, where text is also broken up by sub headings and line spacing:

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Organised information

Look how easy it is to get a similar number of words across by splitting the text into two sections and using bullet points and bold text.

These are easier to read, look neater on the page, and grab a recruiter's attention to create a positive first impression.

Recruiters can see your key points clearly without real effort.

Effective wording

You have to use short sentences and get to the point.

You need to give examples and evidence to prove your point.

This style makes it easier to read and communicate key selling points relevant to the job or course.