

Completing your Application Form

The application form plays a key part in an employer's decision whether or not to invite you for interview, so it is important that you complete it as fully and as accurately as possible.

While the following information is designed to assist applications, you should bear in mind that it is for you, the candidate, to demonstrate your suitability for a post in completing your application form.

The shortlisting panel will decide whom to interview on the basis of the information provided in the application form measured against the person specification. This is a document which lists qualities such as skills, knowledge, experience, qualifications etc which are 'essential' in order to do the job and those which are 'desirable' i.e. those which will help somebody to perform the complete range of tasks in the job more readily. It is important, therefore, that you complete the application form bearing in mind the job requirements as shown in the job description and person specification.

Remember

To complete all parts of the application form. If you think some parts do not apply, write N/A (not applicable) in the spaces provided.

- To make sure the information you provide is clear, precise and easily understood and appropriate to the job you are applying for.
- That the employer will not make any assumptions about you or your abilities. If you do not tell them, they cannot know.

Do:

- Check with your referees that they are happy to support your application before you submit the form.
- Take a copy of your application, if possible, before you return it.
- Be sure to return your application by the due date. Applications received after the closing date will not normally be considered by employers.

Do Not:

- Refer employers to your current job description.
- Say "I can do the job and will give details at interview". You need to show on the application form precisely what you have done and when you did it.
- Leave out any relevant information on skills, knowledge or experience – for example, voluntary work or unpaid work.
- Worry if you have gained your qualification overseas. If relevant, it will be taken into account.

- Submit a CV application unless it expressly states on the advert that CVs are acceptable.

CVs and Covering Letters

CVs

Follow the guidelines below to make sure you've included all the important information an employer may need.

Your personal details

You should include your name, address and contact details. It's up to you whether you include your age, marital status and nationality. Recruiters should be able to make a decision about your skills and abilities without this information.

Your personal profile

Your personal profile should summarise your:

- skills and qualities
- work background and achievements
- career aims.

It should only be a few lines and must grab the reader's attention. For example, if the job involves working with people, you could say you're a good team-worker and an effective communicator. Be brief as you can highlight examples of your skills in later sections.

Employment history and work experience

If you've been working for a while, you could put your employment history first. If you don't have much work experience, you might like to highlight your education and training.

In this section you should start with your present or most recent job and work backwards. You should include employer, the dates you worked for them, job title and your main duties. Provide more detail on the relevant jobs you've had and give examples of the skills you used and what you achieved. Use bullet pointed lists.

Try to relate your skills and experience to the job description or what you think the employer is looking for, if you're sending your CV on spec. Also include any relevant temporary work and volunteering experience.

Avoid unexplained gaps in your employment history. If you had time out travelling, job seeking, volunteering or caring for a relative, include this along with details of what you've learned.

Education and training

Start with your most recent qualifications and work back to the ones you got at school. Using bullet points or a table include:

- the university, college or school you went to
- the dates the qualifications were awarded and any grades
- any work-related courses, if they're relevant.

Interests and achievements

You can include hobbies, interests and achievements that are relevant to the job. For example, if you're involved in any clubs or societies this can show that you enjoy meeting new people. Try to avoid putting activities like cooking or reading, as these activities are too general and widespread to be of interest to an employer. Make them specific and interesting!

Additional information

You can include this section if you need to add anything else that's relevant, such as explaining that a gap in your employment history was due to travel or family reasons. You could also include other relevant skills here, such as if you have a driving licence or can speak any foreign languages.

References

At least one referee should be work-related. Or, if you haven't worked for a while, you could use another responsible person who has known you for some time. You can list your referees on your CV or just put 'references available on request'. If you decide to include their details you should state the relationship of each referee to you – for example 'John Turner, line manager'.

Writing Your Covering Letter

Follow these tips to creating the perfect covering letter:

What to include

Underline the skills in the advert. Write a rough copy of your letter and include the skills underlined. Be positive and emphasise why you are perfect for the job. You should include any relevant skills you have.

Suggested layout

First, give a summary of your skills and experience. Keep it brief and to the point. Then, say when you will be free for an interview. Remember to include your name, address, phone number (if you have one), the date and enclose a copy of your CV.

What to say

Be clear. Don't use a long word if a short one will do. If you have been unemployed for a while, say how you spend your spare time (for example, by doing voluntary work, study and so on). Be honest, don't say you enjoy bungee jumping if you get dizzy standing on a stool, you will get caught out at an interview! Keep to the facts and try not to oversell yourself.

How to say it

Include the job reference number if there is one in the job details. Enter it below the opening line. For example:

Dear Mrs.....

Re: Job reference 345

Try to find out the name of the person you need to write to. If you start with 'Dear Sir/Madam', end with 'Yours faithfully'. If you start with the person's name (for example, 'Dear Mrs Smith', end with 'Yours sincerely'. Finally, double-check your spelling and grammar before sending the letter.

How the letter looks

Be neat, whether your letter is handwritten or typed. Leave plenty of space around the edges and a clear space between each paragraph. Use good quality plain paper and envelopes. Check against your rough copy to make sure you have not missed anything. If your application is in audio format check that the content is clear, to the point and easy to understand.

Sign the letter and print your name underneath to make sure it can be read easily. Ask a friend or relative to check over your letter before you send it. Finally, make sure your application arrives on time. If you are posting it, allow for delays. If your application is late, the company might not even consider it and your time will have been wasted.

Information taken from Next Step (2010)

Example Covering Letter

The following letter is an example of a cover letter you could send in response to a job advertisement which requires submission of a CV.

Your address

Mr Knight
Westfords Ltd
500 Sample Street
Sample Town
LZX 1XX

Date

Dear Mr Knight,

I would like to apply for the job of IT Support Officer which was advertised in today's Journal.

For the past four years I have worked in IT with Brown's. As the company is moving to another part of the country, I will be made redundant in two weeks' time.

My present job involves various IT duties in person and by phone. I also:

- deal with IT queries
- handle incoming calls
- handle incoming and outgoing post
- order printer consumables.

Before this job I was a trainee with Brightson's (Solicitors) in North Street, Invertown and completed RSA I and II in Business Administration and have various Microsoft package experience.

I have always enjoyed working with people and think my previous experience will allow me to work as part of the team and to be an effective representative of your company.

I am available for interview at any time and could start work immediately. You can ask for references from my present and previous employers.

Please find enclosed a copy of my CV for more information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Your signature
Your name

Preparing for the Interview

Being invited to an interview means you've passed the first test: your application must have made a good impression. Now you need to prepare yourself for the interview to make sure you are successful at this stage.

Before your interview

Research the company

If you are invited to an interview you should spend some time researching the company as this will give you confidence should you be asked any question on what the company does. It will also allow you to ask the employer questions.

You could contact the company to ask for an information pack or you could look at their website.

It's helpful to find out the following things about the employer:

- what they do, make or sell?
- who are their customers?
- what sort of organisation are they?
- what is the job likely to involve?
- how can you best fit your skills to match the job?

Plan for the interview

Find out what the interview will involve to make sure you're prepared.

If you have a disability, all employers must make reasonable adjustments for you to have an interview. If you need the employer to make particular arrangements - for example, to help you get into the building - contact them before your interview. This is to make sure they can make these arrangements.

You should think about who will be interviewing you. If it is the person who would be your manager if you got the job, the interview may be more detailed. If it's the personnel manager, the interview may be less detailed but could still be as testing. Find out how many people will be interviewing you and their positions in the company. This will help you prepare for the kinds of questions they may ask.

Finding out how long the interview is likely to last will give you an idea of how detailed the interview will be. You should also find out if you will have to take a test or make a presentation.

Plan your journey

Consider travelling to the company the day before the interview to check how long the journey will take. If necessary, ask the employer for directions, bus routes or details of where you can park your car. You should plan another way of getting there in case something unexpected happens (such as your car breaking down, or your train being cancelled). If you have a disability, let the employer know so they can make any special arrangements.

Creating the right image

Deciding what to wear for the interview will depend on what sort of work you will be doing. Decide what to wear and get your clothes ready the day before. You don't have to buy a new outfit. Aim for a neat, clean and tidy appearance, if you look good it will help you feel good.

Gather together the information you'll need at the interview

Remember to take a copy of your CV or application form to refer to and prepare notes or cue cards to help if think you might need a prompt during the interview. Take items the employer has asked you to bring along - for example: references, certificates or your driving licence.

Reread the job advert to refresh your memory and to make sure you haven't missed anything.

Think about possible interview questions

It is important to spend some time prior to the interview thinking about some common questions which are asked by employers, then preparing your answers. You will find some example questions and answers on the 'Interview Q&As' page, which can be accessed by clicking the link to the left.

Finally

Try to get a good night's sleep.

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Sample Interview Q&As

An employer will ask you a lot of different questions at an interview to find out about you and your skills. It is always best to prepare.

1. Why do you want to work here?

Mention the following:

- the good reputation of the firm
- any other positive information you have about them - for example: their training record or their equal opportunities policy
- the job will give you the opportunity to do work that interests you

2. Why did you leave your last job?

Be positive. If you left for health reasons, explain that you're now able to carry out all the duties for the job you are applying for. Don't use this as an opportunity to criticise your previous company. If you were dismissed, say that you take responsibility for your actions and have learnt from the experience.

3. Have you done this kind of work before?

If you have, tell them the skills and experience you have and how you can use them in this job. If you haven't, describe other work experience that is relevant to this job or which will help you learn this job quickly. Emphasise your interest and your enthusiasm to learn.

4. What did you do in your last job?

Describe the following things:

- skills and duties relevant to the new job
- your responsibilities
- how you worked with others
- if you worked with customers - say how you worked with them
- how long you were there
- whether you were promoted
- responsibilities you volunteered to take on

5. What kinds of equipment can you use?

This is an opportunity to show an employer how you can fit into their company, remember to:

- name the types of equipment you can use that are relevant to the new job
- mention any relevant qualifications or training you have had
- tell them the length of time you have used this equipment

6. How long have you been out of work and how do you spend your time?

Describe the following:

- what you have done to look for a job
- any voluntary work you have done
- any further education, study or training you have undertaken
- your hobbies and leisure activities – if appropriate

Try to link what you did to the skills and experience the employer is looking for.

7. What makes you think you are the right person for this job?

Tell the interviewer about the following:

- the skills and experience you have which are relevant to the job
- the personal qualities that you bring to the job

8. Why have you had so many jobs?

You could say the following things:

- you wanted to widen your experience in different types of work or in different companies
- many of the jobs were temporary
- you would rather be in work than out of work

9. Why have you only had one job?

You could say the following things:

- you had several jobs within your last company

- the job offered you the opportunity to develop
- you enjoyed the work

10. Why should the employer take you on?

Be ready for this question and answer confidently and positively:

- describe your skills and experience and how relevant they are to this job
- tell them you are enthusiastic and willing to learn
- tell them you are hardworking, reliable and capable

11. Aren't you overqualified?

Emphasise the following:

- you are looking for something different
- you can take as well as give instructions

12. How do you get on with people?

Tell the interviewer:

- how you have worked as a team in the past
- how you get on with people at all levels - give examples
- how you have provided good customer service, if this is relevant - give examples

13. What makes a good team member?

Describe the skills needed, for example:

- good communication skills
- flexibility
- the ability to adapt to change
- the ability to cooperate with other people
- having a good sense of humour

Give examples of how you showed these in previous work situations or leisure activities.

14. How do you cope with pressure?

Describe pressures in previous jobs using a recent example - such as: how you coped with a deadline that had been brought forward or how you completed a rush order or dealt with staff shortages.

15. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

It is a good idea to have one or two examples of each ready for this question. Employers value people who can admit their mistakes rather than blaming their failings on others.

- strengths: the employer should already know your strengths from your application but you may want to emphasise particular skills relevant to the job by giving examples
- weaknesses: start by describing parts of your last job which you found difficult and then explain how you overcame these difficulties or be brief but honest - for example: 'I can sometimes be a little too enthusiastic'

16. What would you like to be doing in five years' time?

Explain that you would ideally like to be working for the same company but to have developed within it.

17. What wage do you expect to earn?

If the wage level is negotiable, be prepared to negotiate. The difficult thing to decide is where to start. If you tell them a wage that is too high, you could price yourself out of the job. If you give an amount that is too low you could lose out.

Before going to the interview, try to find out about wage levels in your area. You can look at similar jobs advertised with your Jobcentre, in newspapers or on the internet. You might be able to use this information in your negotiations. If you are really not sure, then say you would expect to receive the going rate for the job.

18. When would you be available to start?

As soon as possible. Do not put any barriers in the way.

19. Do you have any questions?

You may like to prepare for this, as it is almost always asked at an interview. Asking some questions (but not too many) can show you are interested. One or two of these may be appropriate:

- do you offer ongoing training and development?

- what will my first job be?
- how soon will I hear the result of my application?
- does the company carry out performance reviews and how often?

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At the Interview

Before you set off

Give yourself plenty of time to get ready and make sure you've got all the relevant paperwork with you. If you are delayed, contact the employer as soon as possible to explain, apologise and arrange another appointment.

When you arrive

You should aim to arrive about ten minutes before the interview time. When you arrive give your name to the receptionist or whoever is there to greet you.

Try to relax and keep calm, chat to the receptionist, or whoever greets you before going into the interview; this will help calm you and remember that the interviewer can be just as nervous as you.

At the interview

Accept that it is natural to be nervous and that you may have a fast heartbeat, clammy hands and 'butterflies' in your stomach. These are your body's natural way of meeting a challenge, and in small doses it can help you.

You will make an impression in the first few minutes. It takes this time for people to assess you and store this information. Once you have made a first impression, it's hardly ever changed. It's important to make a good first impression.

If you're nervous your voice may sound shaky and squeaky. Practice deep, slow breathing before you get to the interview. This will slow down your heart rate and help you avoid taking quick shallow breaths.

For some general tips which may help you follow the link below. Not all of these will be appropriate to you, use the ones that are suitable to your situation or style.

Once you're at the interview you need to make a good impression with the employer to impress them and let them know that you are the best person for the job. To do this there are things you should and shouldn't do at an interview.

Things you should do

Here are some helpful hints and tips to help you during your interview:

- enter the room confidently
- shake hands firmly and introduce yourself
- smile
- be polite, friendly and look the interviewer in the eye as soon as you enter the room
- check that it's OK to use cue cards or notes during the interview
- try to maintain eye contact with the person or people you are talking to
- look interested and ask questions as well as answering
- answer questions as fully as you can, avoid just saying 'yes' or 'no'
- provide examples to prove your skills and achievements
- tell the truth
- ask if you don't understand a question
- speak clearly
- sell yourself - get your good points across and be positive
- listen
- answer questions with examples
- keep your answers brief and to the point
- come prepared
- appear confident

Things you shouldn't do

Here are some things you shouldn't do in an interview:

- sit down until the interviewer asks you to
- fidget or slouch in the chair or fold your arms
- swear - even mildly
- criticise your past employers
- interrupt
- draw attention to your weaknesses
- lie or be too enthusiastic - stay calm and stick to the facts

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Following the Interview

In an ideal world, we would always be the successful candidate but, in reality, that is not always the case! If you do find yourself being turned down for a job, the most important thing you can do next is to ask the interviewer(s) for feedback.

Constructive interview feedback is invaluable as it will allow you to reflect upon your preparation for and performance at the interview, identifying where you might be able to make improvements ready for next time.

Furthermore, requesting feedback is looked upon favourably by employers as

it shows professionalism and demonstrates your commitment to self-development.

Where possible, you should try to obtain written feedback. In cases where this is not possible and you are instead given verbal feedback, be sure to take notes of what the interviewer says so that you can reflect upon the points after the conversation.

There will be occasions when you receive negative feedback from an interviewer. In those situations, it is important not to take the comments personally and instead you should try to turn this into a positive learning experience.