Application

Forms

Marketing Yourself Effectively

Graduate applications are based on a matching process. Put simply, an employer will analyse their vacancy and decide which qualifications, aptitudes, personal qualities, skills and interests are required to do the job. Your objective is to clearly demonstrate to the recruiter that you match their requirements by providing specific and relevant evidence of what they are looking for!

The initial application stage of a selection process is where the vast majority of applicants fall down (in high volume recruitment up to 75-85% of applications do not get progressed to the next stage). It is therefore worth spending time and effort on learning how to complete applications effectively to give you the best chance of securing an interview!

Before you start writing

Make a list, using the vacancy advert, recruitment brochure or company website, which specific qualifications, skills and experience the employer has highlighted. Reflect on your academic study, work experience and spare-time activities to identify situations and activities where you have clearly demonstrated the very same skills.

Completing the form

- Follow all instructions carefully.
- Read through the form before starting to check what each section requires.
- Don’t add attached sheets unless requested to do so.
- Draft your answers on a copied version first.
- Answer every question and try to fill each box fully – make sure you use any word limit to the maximum.
- If completing a paper form by hand, use your neatest writing.
- Keep your answers concise and relevant, backed up with examples.
- Don’t waffle!
- Demonstrate a positive approach and enthusiasm for the job.

Some ‘Action Verbs’ to describe what you have done

- Achieved, analysed, assessed, budgeted, chose, completed, contributed, co-ordinated, created, decided, demonstrated, developed, devised, directed, elected, enjoyed, evaluated, expressed, gained, handled, increased, initiated, implemented, improved, interpreted, investigated, led, measured, organised, planned, prepared, presented, produced, raised (money), ran, researched, selected, set up, started, supervised, tested, understood, wrote.

Some ‘Positive Adjectives’ to describe yourself

- Accurate, adaptable, calm, commercially minded, conscientious, determined, hard-working, impartial, logical, methodical, patient, persistent, persuasive, precise, reliable, resilient, resourceful, responsible, self-reliant, sensitive, systematic, tactful, tolerant.
Typical Question Types

1. Questions about your reasons for applying
   e.g. “What attracts you to a career in accountancy?”
   Such questions examine your motivation for a particular career. They are designed to assess how well motivated you are and whether you have thought about how well this option matches your skills, values and aspirations.
   - Describe why you are interested in this field of work (e.g. strong numerical skills, interest in finance, course options taken)
   - Say why this particular opportunity interests you. (e.g. this company, this industry sector, the job function offered)
   - Explain what you feel you will be able to bring to the role (e.g. why you will be good at the tasks involved by highlighting any relevant experience and skills you possess)
   - State briefly why the career prospects offered attract you and show that you have ambition. (e.g. desire to take on management responsibility at an early stage, to develop a high level of professional expertise, to gain broad international experience)

2. Questions about choice of company
   e.g. “Why have you applied to ABC Enterprises?”
   Such questions examine whether this company is of particular interest to you or you have applied to them randomly for no apparent reason.
   - First read through the company’s brochure/annual report/website.
   - Identify what attracts you to the company in terms of:
     - their range of products or services offered, market position and client portfolio.
     - the ethos/goals of the company e.g. if they regard their employees as their greatest asset or if they are leaders in their field or if they develop/use cutting edge technology.
     - their commitment to staff development including the quality and comprehensiveness of the training offered.
     - the prospects and opportunities offered e.g. early responsibility, overseas placements and broad experience across the business.

3. “Competency” questions
   Competencies are behaviours, skills or abilities that the employer has identified as being required to do the job well. Competency questions are frequently used on application forms and the answers are scored and used to decide whether or not to progress the application to the next stage of the selection process.
   You must tailor your answers to relate to what you have discovered about the job and the kind of person best suited to fill it. You’ll get this information by carefully reading the Job Description and Person Specification.
   Think about why an employer may be asking a particular question. What is it they want to know about you?
   Use the STARR approach (Situation, Task, Action, Result and Reflection) to structure your answer: see the example on next page. Use positive and specific words to describe your experience and skills, rather than vague terms and tired clichés. See below for some ideas of words to use.

Example competency question
   Give an example of when you have had to work as part of a team.”
   Suggested Approach: Identify a specific, and ideally your most impressive, example of contributing to a team activity.
   Use the STARR approach to structure your answer:
   **SITUATION** - Describe the situation
   **TASK** - Outline the task
   **ACTION** – Give precise details about what YOU did to contribute to the success of the task
   Always try and mention relevant skills such as co-operating or liaising when describing what you did.
   **RESULT** - Briefly explain the result and give evidence of asuccessful outcome e.g. a good grade for a group project.
   **REFLECTION** – If possible say what you learnt from the experience or would do better next time

Completing the Form – Our Top Tips!

Employment and Work Experience Section

Use this space to highlight what you have contributed most to the company/organisation you worked for and what you achieved working there. Focus on skills used that might be relevant to the role you are applying to.

Personal Interests and Achievements Section

Take the opportunity here to highlight successful events, projects, roles that you have been heavily involved in and consider a particular achievement. Be sure to focus on your skills and personal attributes that are most relevant to the job you are applying for.

Planning, Implementation and Achieving Results Questions

- Main points to remember when constructing your answer to this type of question:
  - Read the question – then read it again!
  - Write about a specific project, activity or event.
  - Make sure the example you choose is one that you had the main role in planning and executing successfully
  - Describe why this activity was a challenge to you
  - Describe in some detail exactly what you did to achieve your stated objective
  - Remember to include an assessment of how successful the activity was
  - Read the question again and check that you have answered it!!

Influencing, Communication and Teamwork Questions

Main points to remember when constructing your answer to this type of question:

Read the question – then read it again!
Write about a specific time when you used your communication skills to influence others
State clearly exactly who these ‘others’ were and why they needed persuading
Describe in some detail exactly what you did to influence their opinions
Remember to include an assessment of how successful you were in achieving your objective
Read the question again and check that you have answered it!!