The application form is usually the first hurdle in the selection process, and the stage at which most applicants fail. Like a CV, your application form must convince the employer that they should interview you. Unlike a CV, you do not control what you tell the employer. You have to answer the questions posed on the employer’s form, and you must do this exceptionally well.

**Follow instructions**
Read the form through carefully and note any specific instructions and follow them exactly. Do not send a CV instead or as well as completing the form, unless this has been specified in the application instructions.

**Be prepared**
Allow yourself plenty of time to read the form, plan your answers and draft them. Research the organisation then tailor your answers to their needs.

- Explore their website
- Search news archives for recent items
- Talk to people who know the organisation
- Update yourself on current issues in the sector

**Education and Qualifications**
It is usual to include detail of your qualifications, including those taken prior to degree study. Many employers look for good results at each level of your education, and are likely to ask for detail of grades or marks attained. If you have qualifications gained outside of the United Kingdom, use the correct title and grades. You may have to briefly clarify the grading system, if it would otherwise not be clear whether your result was good.

Be honest. You may be caught out at interview and if a lie is discovered after you start a job, your employment could be terminated.

**Questions about the job or organisation**
Employers want to assess how enthusiastic you are about working for them and about the job they want to fill. They want to see that you have done your research and you understand what they do and what the job involves. However, avoid filling your answer with facts and data about the organisation. This is detail that they know. Questions might include:

**Answer the questions**
Reasons for not selecting applicants include:

- Not answering all the questions
- Not answering each question properly

Read each question, clarify with the employer if you are not sure about any, check you have completed all sections and proof read it before sending.

**Personal details**
Your name and contact details will be requested. An employer may choose to contact you by post, email or telephone, so have a business-like email address and professional voice mail or phone message. Humour is best avoided if you want to give a positive impression.
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- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why are you applying for this opportunity?

To stand out, your reasons for applying need to be original and specific, not generic. Draft an answer and ask yourself:

- Could I write the same for any employer or job?
- Is this what other applicants will say?

Think about the organisation and what it is that you identify with. Is there anything they do that has impressed you? Anything they are particularly good at that you like, or you have some experience of? Have you spoken to employees of the organisation and found out what they like about their employer? What do they think distinguishes their organisation from others in the same sector? What do you hope to gain, and which of your strengths do you think you will be able to utilise if you get the job? Your strengths could be skills, knowledge and even experience. Have you done the same or similar work before? What will you enjoy about the job? See examples of questions and answers.

Skills or competency questions

Some employers will ask questions that require you to describe how you have applied a particular skill or ability. For example:

- Please tell us about an occasion when you have worked as a member of a team or group.
- Describe an idea or project that you have implemented.

These will reflect the skills that the employer has identified as key to success in the role. Keep these answers clear and concise. Try to use different examples for different questions that are recent and relevant.

**STAR**

This is a helpful way to structure an example:

- Briefly describe the **Situation**
- Clarify the **Task** or tasks
- Describe the **Action** that you took
- End positively with the **Result** or outcome

**Other questions**

Some may seem unrelated to the selection criteria. For example:

- Tell us about your most important achievement to date. How did you do it and what obstacles did you overcome?
- Please describe how you set yourself apart from your peers.

In answering such questions, select key events or successes that mean something to you and which demonstrate that you have a set of desirable skills. The nature of the achievement is not as important as how you describe it, and how well you demonstrate skills and qualities that are key to the employer’s requirements.

**Writing personal statements**

Some employers, especially in the public and not for profit sector, e.g. the health service, voluntary organisations and education, may include a section titled ‘personal statement’ or ‘additional information’. This is a vital part of the application and if the employer has sent a person specification it is usual to follow this, providing evidence that you meet each point made. You can choose to address each point in the same order as it appears in the person specification. You might use the same headings too. This makes it easy for the reader and helps you to ensure you address each point. Use examples to demonstrate you have applied a skill well. Keep it clear and concise. Do not write one personal statement and assume it will suit every job.

**Online applications**

Most applications are now online. The rules and issues stay the same, but there are additional practical concerns. For example, technology can let you down. Tackle applications well before the stated deadline and if you do have technical difficulties, contact the employer well before the deadline to ensure that your application gets through.

**Top tips**

- Make your answers clear and concise and stick to word limits.
- Be positive about what you have to offer.
- Avoid duplicating information.
- Avoid any significant gaps of time (of one year or more) that are not accounted for. This will raise doubts in an employer’s mind.
- If a section is not relevant write ‘Not Applicable’ or ‘N/A’.
- Spelling and grammar must be perfect. Some recruiters may allow for a very small number of errors but others may
Application Forms

reject an application with just one error.

• Always keep a copy, it can help when you are preparing for the interview.

• Don’t use ‘text language’ or jargon.

• Use correct grammar, punctuation, and capital letters and lower case as appropriate.

• Do not send until you have proofread carefully, and ask a friend or a Career Consultant to read it too.

• Not all employers keep to deadlines. If the response is good, they may close the application window so watch closing dates and don’t delay too long.

Resources

Support from CityCareers

• Workshops on completing application forms by careers consultants employers are listed under events at www.city.ac.uk/careers.

• Book an appointment to discuss your application with a careers consultant.

• Look at the books on applications in our office.

• You will find useful resources on CareersHub. Type “CVs and Applications” or “Application Process” in the search box.

• Start using your MyPortfolio online space to start storing examples of your skills, making it much easier making applications.