

Application forms- handy hints and tips

You might find the following hints and tips useful to keep in mind when completing application forms.

The Practicalities

- Follow the instructions. Read through the application form first before doing anything else. Make you have all the supporting documents relating to the form. Pay particular attention to the job description and person specification, underlining essential and desirable criteria as this is the information that often forms the short-listing criteria by which assessors will be identifying candidates to call to interview. If you have any queries about any aspect of their instructions or guidelines phone in advance to check.
- Promote yourself. Keep in mind that the application is your personal marketing tool and the only route to attaining an interview so make the most of all the documentation provided so you can tailor your responses.
- Start early. Gather positive examples and evidence that could prove your competency related to the role you are applying for. Use the evidence in your e-portfolio, get into the habit of adding to your portfolio soon after each event/course you attended – it is much easier to fill in the application form when you have a variety of experiences to call on that you have documented at the time rather than having to delve into your memory.
- Do your career research. Make sure the role you are applying for is really what you want and have your reasons ready as to way you are applying for this. What can you bring to the role in regards to skills, attributes and enthusiasm?
- Set aside time to complete the form. Consider how long you think it will take and then add some more time to the estimate. Often forms will take longer than we first anticipate. Do not leave it to the last minute, this is often where silly mistakes are made that could lose you the all important interview.
- Aim to submit your application at least 2 days before the deadline – With an online system – from a technical point of view, if everyone submits their forms at the last minute, the system can be extremely slow and may even crash. Forms submitted after the deadline will not be processed, so make sure you submit yours early.
- Gather your information together. Have all your important information in one place. Having an e-portfolio will help with this.
- Referees – Wherever possible contact these people before you even start the form to make sure that they are happy to be a referee for you. Brief them on the opportunity you are applying for so they can be specific when they create a reference.
- Managing your application – Once registered on an application form site you can print out a version of the application form and work with pen and paper or you can work online and save changes and sections as you go along. If you do choose to cut and paste from Word, remember to double check that you're matching the answers to the correct question. Writing a first draft of an answer and then leaving it for a few hours is recommended. When you come back to it is far easier to see what changes need to be made.
- Spelling & Grammar. Make sure your responses are all grammatically correct – language skills are assessed in the application and silly mistakes can result in people losing marks unnecessarily. Also, poor spelling can look like you are not showing very good attention to detail

Competency based questions

A number of the questions on the application form will often be 'competency based' – asking for an example or situation where you demonstrated specific skills/knowledge related to the role you are applying for. These questions don't concentrate on the act or situation itself, but more HOW you dealt with it, showing your ability

to learn and reflect – just stating what happened in an even is now enough to show the reader your competency.

Important: Use a variety of examples to answer the competency questions (e.g. Do not use the same situation/experience twice within the same form).

Providing relevant evidence of reflection and learning

It is important to ask yourself what do my answers say about me? Do my answers reflect what the question is exploring? Are my comments relevant to the job and person spec? Is this likely to contribute to me being short-listed?

Before you post your application form put yourself in the selector's shoes and look at everything critically. Is there a more effective way of answering the question?

Using plenty of action words

Using these in your response can help demonstrate to your reader what you did and what you learnt from a situation. There are lots of examples within the 'Action words for CVs and Applications' appendix to this paper.

Using 'STAR'

- Situation. Put the situation in context, briefly describe the situation so that the example can be clearly understood by your assessors – avoid explaining too much detail at this stage.
- Task. What were you doing? Provide a concise overview of the example ensuring that it is relevant to the question.
- Action. State what action you actually took – what was your contribution? Explain what, how and why you did it. Avoid 'we' if talking about a situation in a team context. The assessor needs to know what specific contribution/difference YOU made. What skills did you use? The actions you describe should highlight relevant skills.
- Result. Describe the outcome of your action – what were the positives/learning points/reflections on the situation? (show that you can think laterally and fully about a particular experience). What was accomplished?

Use of passive and active language

Your choice of language is a key way to fine tune your application.

Consider the following example about leadership:

'In this role I was required to delegate tasks to other team members for a charity event and I learnt a lot from this event in terms of team working'.

(PASSIVE: this statement doesn't demonstrate team working skills – 'I was required to' could mean 'I was told to' – doesn't tell us much about what they ACTUALLY learnt).

Now consider the next example:

'In 2017 I led a team of 6 people as president of (society), to organise an annual charity event for Claire's House Hospice. My contribution to the team was to ...What I learnt from this was...The result was that from an initial budget of £1,000, the event made a profit of £3,000 for the charity..

(This is much more ACTIVE – it tells the reader what they did (led) and in what capacity (president) – it tells us more about the actual number of people involved in the task and who the event was for, which can then be expanded on through use of specific examples – you can also see the 'STAR' technique being applied in this example, to add relevant evidence and reflection on learning).

Be succinct!

While your application needs to 'flow' and make sense, sometimes previous applicants have overused 'linking' statements where they could have been using more EVIDENCE of learning and reflection. When you only have 150 words, every word counts! Consider the following:

As a result of this I was able to... (9 words)	TO	Consequently/therefore/hence...(1word)
Owing to the fact that ...(5 words)	TO	Because of... (2 words)
At the present time I am...	TO	Presently I...
Before doing this I would...	TO	Preceding this...
In order to make this effective, I supervised...	TO	I supervised...
One of the things I learned from this experience was ...	TO	From this, I learned...

Don'ts for application forms

Plagiarism

Never lie on the application form and make sure your answers are all your own work. Often applications are audited randomly where you may be required to provide evidence to back up the examples you have used in your application. There are sophisticated plagiarism finders to detect any similar statements.

There are internet sites where you can get tips and help on CVs, application forms but it's recommended that you only use them to help you develop your own examples and answers based on your own experience. Don't be tempted to copy and paste stock phrases into your applications. Do not pay someone else to complete your application form for you – selectors do remember what they've read and software sitting behind application systems can identify answers that are similar or the same as other applicants.

Leave gaps in what you have done.

Recruiters will expect a full timeline of what you have been doing so far with everything accounted for. If you have had time out of work for a career break include it in the appropriate sections of the form.

Assessors nightmares!

The following comments have been generated from previous selectors when asked about their negative experiences of reading through applications – bear these in mind when constructing your responses.

- Overuse of same verbs
- Boring to read
- Lack of creativity with language
- Lack of promotion of positive points
- Poor grammar
- Spelling mistakes
- Examples don't 'stand out' from other peers
- Fails to answer the question set
- Lack of qualifying information (e.g. when/where/how many).
- Hasn't reflected well
- Ignored person specification
- Left a question blank
- No insight
- Little evidence of self-awareness
- No or little actual evidence demonstrated
- Just recounted the situation, not what they learnt
- Limited range of examples
- Response not structured well

- Repetitive –get a thesaurus!
- Use of convoluted sentences
- Using sentences that just appear to make up the word limit, rather than of actual evidence that flows with the overall response
- Use of big words – trying to over-impress doesn't work

Final thoughts

Be methodical in your approach to your application so you avoid any last minute rush – set yourself weekly goals and make checklists to keep you focused and on track.

Action words for CVs and Application forms

Achieved Administered Analysed Built Capable Competent Consistent Controlled Co-ordinated
Created Designed Developed Directed Economical Engineered

Established Expanded Experienced Guided Implemented Improved Initiated

Led Managed Monitored Organised Participated Positive Processed Productive

Proficient Profitable Qualified Repaired Resourceful Sold Specialised Stable Successful Supervised
Trained Versatile Wide background

Operating equipment Organising people and work Persuading others Planning agendas
Preparing charts or diagrams Promoting events Raising funds Recording data Reviewing
Running meetings Speaking in public Supervising staff Teaching/training Managing staff
Motivating others

Expanding your list of personal skills

Advising Arranging events Calculating numerical data Checking for accuracy Classifying records
Compiling figures Co-ordinating events Delegating responsibility Dispensing information Drafting
reports Editing documents Handling complaints Interpreting data Maintaining records Mediating
between people

Thesaurus

ARRANGED/PLANNED	BEGAN/STARTED	CHANGED	IMPLEMENTED
Administered	Built	Altered	Conducted
Arranged	Conceived	Combined	Demonstrated
Assembled	Constructed	Converted	Effectuated
Centralised	Created	Diversified	Enacted
Compiled	Devised	Modernised	Enforced
Composed	Established	Modified	Executed

Co-ordinated	Founded	Re-arranged	Formed
Deployed	Generated	Re-designed	Formulated
Designed	Initiated	Re-organised	Negotiated
Developed	Inspired	Replaced	Performed
Engineered	Introduced	Re-structured	Processed
Enhanced	Launched	Shaped	Produced
Organised	Piloted	Simplified	Provided
Positioned	Pioneered	Transferred	Represented
Prepared	Rejuvenated	Unified	Undertook
Proposed	Renewed	United	Utilised
Scheduled	Set up	Vitalised	