

How to Make Your Application Form Stand Out From the Crowd

It is vital to submit a high quality application form, because more applications are rejected at the application form stage than at any other point of the selection process. What you write must be accurate, relevant and of a high standard so the employer says, "Yes, I think this person could work for us."

Most application forms include difficult questions which you may find challenging to answer. The point of some questions may not be immediately obvious, so it is useful to think from the employer's point of view. They have identified the skills and personal attributes needed for the job and they choose questions which encourage you to provide evidence of possessing them.

Before you start completing an application form, spend some time thinking about the things you have done and skills and abilities you have. You are revising your life, just like an exam topic. Think about study, work, leisure or community activities and what they show about you as a person. You should end up with quite a long list, information that will also come in handy at interviews.

As well as thinking about what you have to offer, you need to discover what the job requires. There are often clues in the questions on the forms. Try to gather together as much information about the job you're applying for as you can.

You could use:

- The job description, person specification and advert
- Information produced by the company that describes the organisation, its values and the positions available - check their web site thoroughly

With these two sets of information you are now ready to start filling in the form. In your answers you should focus on demonstrating to the employer that you match their requirements. Think of all the questions as opportunities to prove yourself. Use the list of your skills and experiences to find evidence that you can do the things that are important to them. Remember that everything you do can show lots of different strengths, but try to use a variety of examples.

An employer may receive many applications. Well-known employers with vacancies in popular types of work sometimes receive thousands. It is your task to make sure that your form is both interesting and easy to read.

- In your descriptions of what you have done use active words. These are words like organised, planned, negotiated, created, trained or improved. Avoid non-specific words like helped.
- Create a structure for your ideas before you start to type. Treat longer answers like mini-essays, with an introduction, main body and conclusion. Using signposting language like 'firstly,' or 'the main achievements were,' will help readers know what to expect.
- Keep your sentences short and to the point. Long sentences with long words in them are hard to understand, but it is good to have variety in the length of your sentences because this increases readability.

- Make sure you answer the question. If they ask, "Why would you be suitable for a career in Marketing?" tell them about your skills, abilities and personal qualities. Don't write an essay on "What is Marketing."
- If the question is in several parts, asking you perhaps to describe three aspects of something you've done, then write about all three and give them roughly equal space.
- Don't be afraid to use "I". They are interested in the personal contributions you have made. Use specific examples and explain what you did. Instead of writing, "The team organised....." you should mention what you took responsibility for.

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