How to write a successful job application

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I S T A N B U L

How to write a successful job application?

Job applications forms, whether online or on paper, are the first vital step to getting a job interview. This step-by-step guide explains how to give employers the information they need to put you on the shortlist.

Although some graduate recruiters prefer CVs, the majority ask applicants to complete a job application form, either online or on paper. These forms generally include standard biographical information (eg about your education and experience), along with some open-ended questions that give you the chance to highlight your suitability for the job.

How employers use job application forms

Many recruiters prefer application forms to CVs because they help to standardize applications. This can be seen as fairer because recruiters can compare candidates easily. The downside is that this standardized approach also allows recruiters to filter out unsuitable candidates quickly (sometimes this is even done by computer), so it's important to include all the information necessary to make your case.

Employers use written applications to select candidates for interview and may also refer to information on the form during the interview. It's a good idea to keep a copy so you can remember what you wrote.

What employers are looking for in application forms

When assessing an application for a job, recruiters want to know two things:

1. Do you meet their criteria? This information lets them filter candidates into a 'long list'. Make sure you check the job description and prove that you match the requirements.

2. Do you stand out among the other applicants? This is what helps recruiters make their shortlist for interview. If other candidates have similar qualifications it may be your work experience or extra-curricular activities that reveal your employment potential.

How to complete a job application form

Step 1. Prepare yourself

- Get all your basic information together: personal details, education etc.

- Contact the people you want to use as referees, to get their permission and to confirm their contact details.

- Think about why you want the job.

- Think about what you have to offer and what makes you stand out.

Step 2. Find out what the employer wants

- Check closing dates; if possible, apply before the deadline. Some employers start processing applications before the closing date – and they are usually deluged by last-minute applications – so if you submit yours early you may get more attention.

- Read the job description and personal specification to find out what skills and experience they are looking for.

- Research the organisation for more clues about the kind of applicant who would be successful.

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Step 3. Write your application

- Give yourself enough time: writing a good job application is likely to take longer than you expect.

- Draft your answers first, before you start filling in the form.

- Read the application form right through before you write anything. Follow all instructions and answer the questions asked (yes, it is a bit like an exam!).

- If there is a question that does not apply to you, write 'not applicable' or 'N/A' in the appropriate box. This shows that you have considered the question and is better than leaving blanks.

- Make your answers relevant, interesting and personal. Your aim is to write your own interview invitation, so you want to stand out.

Step 4. Final checks

- Spell check and proofread your application. If possible, ask a friend or careers adviser to check it too.

- Check that you have included everything you've been asked for.

- Keep a copy of your application, so you can go over it before the interview.

- Sign and send!

Online application forms

❖ Applying for a job online is similar to filling in a paper application form. The questions will be the same; only the format is different.

❖ Allow plenty of time and make sure you won't be disturbed. Some online forms allow you to 'save and return' but some have to be completed in one sitting.

❖ If possible, print off the form so you can prepare your answers offline. This gives you thinking time and lets you check your answers before pasting the text into the form. Use a word-processed document to write longer answers so you can edit and spell check them first.

❖ Write for online applications in the same way as you would for a paper form beware of lapsing into the informal style you might use when sending emails to friends.

❖ If you are asked to email your CV, it is likely to be electronically scanned. You may have to use standard typefaces etc so follow any instructions you are given. If a recruiter is using scanning software, you'll also need to ensure you include keywords for the specific skills and qualifications that they have asked for.

❖ Some online application forms include built-in psychometric tests, so it's useful to get some practice in first.

❖ Keep a copy for reference: print out the form before you hit 'send'.

The 'further information' section in job applications

✓ Most application forms will include questions such as 'Why are you suitable for the job?', 'What is your

✓ greatest achievement?' and 'What are your interests and hobbies?' Don't ignore it: this is your chance to make an impact.

✓ This gives you a chance to reveal something of your personality: aim to show that you're more interesting than other candidates with similar work experience and grades. Use a range of examples from all areas of your life – college, work and other interests/activities.

✓ Sometimes an application form will just have the heading 'additional information': this is an open invitation to tell them what you want them to know.

✓ However the question is worded, your answers should demonstrate that you are a well-rounded individual with the skills, aptitude and personality to do the job and to fit into the organisation. That's exactly what a recruiter wants to hear.

Job application checklist

Here are some final checks before you send off your application form:

➢ Are your personal details accurate?
➢ Have you spelt the employer's name correctly?
➢ Have you filled in all the fields?
➢ Have you signed the form and cover letter?
➢ Have you kept a copy?

Job application tips

❑ Take your time: it could take several hours and a lot of concentration to complete an application form.

❑ Think about what's behind each question: what are recruiters looking for?

❑ Keep a copy for reference: if it's a paper form, photocopy it; if it's online, print it out before you hit 'send'.

❑ Make sure you meet all the employer's criteria, and make it easy for them to see this.