APPLICATION FORMS

Many employers will produce their own application forms in addition to or as part of the application process and require candidates to complete it. Application forms are also commonly used for applications for postgraduate courses.

Some employers may use forms specifically designed for graduate trainees which can be demanding to complete whereas others may use generic forms which can present more challenges as it can put more emphasis on experience rather than qualifications.

Whatever the format, the basic techniques for completing application forms are the same. It is advisable to give yourself plenty of time for completing applications. In order to write a strong application, it will take much longer than you think.

Application forms usually begin with straightforward and factual information about your education, qualifications and experiences. It is recommended that you have all the essential information such as dates and grades achieved readily available as this usually required.

PERSONAL OR SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Employers will often give you the chance to demonstrate your relevant competencies in a single account called a personal statement.

This gives you the opportunity to prove that you are the best person for the job, and to demonstrate how you meet the elements of the person specification. Before addressing this, it is best to indicate why you are interested in the company and the role - if you have not already done so elsewhere in your application or via a covering letter. Tell the employer what of interest to you from your research into the company, and what particularly draws you to the role you’re applying for.

Quite often, you will get a vague request such as ‘Please provide a statement in support of your application’. This can be confusing but there is no need to panic about it. All you have to do is go through the person specification, and write about how you meet each criterion.

Some people like to use headings, taken directly from the person specification, and to provide evidence for each point in a clear and structured way beneath each one.

If you are faced with a great number of criteria, you may find it helpful to group some criteria if these overlap, if you are struggling to meet the word count.

It is up to you to decide how you go about it, unless instructions or direction has been given on the application form.

But whatever your approach, break up your answer into paragraphs or sections to make it easier for recruiters to follow your thought process, and make sure that you address the employer’s requirements.

One of the most effective methods for demonstrating evidence to support your skills and competencies is the STAR approach. Situation, Task, Action and Result.
QUESTIONS

Many large organisations use competency based questions as part of the application form with questions that usually begin with “Describe a time when……. Give an example of…….” asking for examples of specific skills that the employer has identified as being essential for the role. The STAR approach can prove very effective in answering these types of questions in a concise and comprehensive way.

Don’t overlook the fact that recruiters will be looking at your use of English, how well you express yourself and your use of spelling and grammar.

Here is an example of how you could answer this question:

“Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a personal or group task?”

SITUATION - “During my summer job as an administrator of a chain of pubs

TASK - “I was given the responsibility for reviewing the stock control system

ACTION - “I looked at factors such as the ordering process, whether stock was used and how often orders were placed. I worked out a method of streamlining the process and created a database which I submitted to my manager”

RESULT - “My ideas were accepted and implemented and we achieved a 15% reduction in wastage”
Applications forms for competitive areas often ask more challenging questions such as:

“Who do you admire the most and why”

“In 2,500 characters (approximately 500 words), tell us why you have applied to JLL (real estate) and what you believe you can achieve working with us”

Remember to think originally and take the initiative to demonstrate your own ideas. Make your answers interesting to read and although you need to keep the job description in mind, don’t just try and tell the employer what you think they want to hear.

REFERENCES

Generally, employers will expect one academic and one employment reference. The academic refer may be your academic adviser who is usually happy to give you a reference. If you feel that another member of staff knows you better of will give you a more favourable reference, it is fine to ask them.

The employment referee may give a work related reference or more general character reference. You could ask current or previous employers from vacation, part time or voluntary work as well as longer term jobs or placements. If you feel uncertain about who to ask to be your referee, careers would be happy to advise.

Always ask for your referees’ permission to give their names and tell something about the jobs for which they are applying. It is often a good idea to maintain appropriate levels of contact with your referees (depending on how well you know them!) to keep them updated on your plans and progress. It might be advisable that you provide them with details of the role to which you are applying so that they can structure their reference accordingly and don’t forget to thank the referee for their time and trouble!