

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

ANALYSING THE VACANCY



How to analyse the vacancy

Explanation of job description and person specification

An advertisement for a job will usually state the job title, the name of the company or organisation, the salary, and maybe a brief outline of the role. However it is important to look beyond just these headline points in order to find out as much information about the role, and your suitability for it, as possible. Most advertised roles will provide you with further information in the form of a job description and person specification. These may be within the job listing itself, or you may need to download them as separate documents or link through to the company/organisation website to access them.

Job description

A job description is a summary of the duties and responsibilities that the role encompasses. It should give you an idea of what the postholder would be doing, and what the day-to-day work might be like. Some job descriptions assign percentages to individual tasks/responsibilities to show roughly how much of the overall working time they would require. This can help you to understand the balance between daily tasks and less regular tasks.

Person specification

The person specification is a list of criteria that the employer would like applicants to fulfil. It might include qualifications, experience, skills, or abilities. The person specification is an extremely valuable tool when you are writing a job application as it tells you exactly what the employer is looking for. You can then tailor your CV, covering letter or application form to demonstrate how you meet the stated criteria.

A person specification is often split into two sections - essential criteria and desirable criteria.

- **Essential criteria** are the primary criteria the employer will be basing their shortlisting decisions on. To be considered for an interview applicants will need to clearly demonstrate that they meet all of the essential criteria.

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- **Desirable criteria** are experience, skills, or attributes which would be highly advantageous in the role, but which are not necessarily essential. To have the best possible chance of success with your application you should be able to show that you meet both the essential criteria, and any desirable criteria. However employers may be happy to pursue applicants who do not meet some or all of the desirable criteria, as these criteria are not required to be able to do the job.

Even if you do not fully meet all of the essential criteria it may still be worth putting in an application as long as you can sufficiently demonstrate your suitability for the role. Sometimes employers create ambitious person specifications, but are happy to accept candidates with different experiences/attributes, especially if only a small number of applications have been received. In the main, though, shortlisting applications is an objective process based on the person specification. Therefore it is important not to rely on employers inferring or assuming how you match their criteria, but to outline it for them clearly and specifically.

Worked example of a vacancy

When applying for an opportunity, it is important to consider the method employers use to shortlist candidates for the next part of the recruitment process. They will be searching your application for evidence of how well you meet the specified criteria for the role.

This criteria can usually be found in the person specification with details of the essential and desirable criteria required for the particular role.

It is important that you carefully analyse the job description and the person specification and provide clear examples of evidence to demonstrate how you fulfil each of those criteria. It may be the case however, that there is no person specification and in this instance, it is important to carefully scrutinise the available information in order to identify what are the key criteria.

Here is an example of a vacancy which does not have a clearly defined person specification but the criteria are evident and are highlighted.

Example vacancy

- Designing and draughting of vehicle components and the jigs and tooling required to manufacture them
- **Following best practice** as defined by the department for all activities
- The **preparation of reports** or other technical documentation as may be required
- Gaining experience in specialist areas of fault diagnosis, stress analysis, cad design, laminate design, cad draughting
- Developing **problem solving and communication skills through working closely** with designers, managers, mechanics and technical specialists **throughout the organisation**

The successful applicant will demonstrate

- A good understanding of a **3D CAD system**
- An understanding of Mechanical principles
- A **good hands-on approach**
- Knowledge of **MS Office software**

In addition to the necessary Technical skills, there are also a number of additional skills that are no less important.

In order to submit an effective application, it is essential that you provide examples of evidence of the following.

- Written presentation skills (preparation of reports)
- Problem solving (fault diagnosis, stress analysis)
- Working collaboratively with others (working closely with colleagues)
- Communication (written- preparation of reports, verbal- communication with colleagues)
- Team work (collaborating with colleagues in a variety of disciplines)

In addition, consider what other skills are required from the vacancy.

- Attention to detail (following best practice)
- Practical skills (hands on approach)
- Flexible and adaptable and Interpersonal skills (working throughout the organisation)

Exercise

Try it for yourself! Find a vacancy that appeals to you and highlight the key skills and attributes they are looking for. Then, using the skills audit above, reflect on what evidence you can provide that demonstrates that particular skill.

Once applications have been received, the employer draws up a table to identify which candidates have clearly demonstrated examples of evidence of the key criteria. The candidates who have met most if not all of the criteria are shortlisted for the next stage of the recruitment process.