The background of the cover is a photograph of a modern university building with large glass windows, partially obscured by a large tree with green foliage. The sky is blue with some clouds. The overall image has a warm, slightly desaturated color palette. The text is overlaid on this image.

OXFORD BROOKES CAREERS APPLICATIONS GUIDE

**YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO
CVs, COVERING LETTERS
AND APPLICATIONS**

**OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY**

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What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide is designed to help you understand how to write effective applications. The information and documents you submit as part of your application play a crucial part in getting you through to the next stage of the process, so it is important that they clearly demonstrate your relevant skills and experience and allow you to show yourself in the best possible light.

The first two sections of the guide take you through the application process and how to identify your skills and understand what employers are looking for. There are then separate sections for CVs, covering letters, application forms, personal statements, and speculative applications.

A photograph of a modern building facade with a grid of glass windows and metal panels. The image is overlaid with a white rectangular box containing text. The overall color scheme is teal and blue.

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

THE SELECTION PROCESS

Ways you may need to apply

When applying for a job, it is important that you follow any instructions provided so that you are applying in the correct way. If you don't, your application may not be accepted.

What information do I need to send?

Many vacancies will ask you to apply with a **CV** and **covering letter** but this may not always be the case. Some companies/organisations may have their own **application form** for you to complete which may include some open-ended questions on your competencies and why you want the job, as well as more factual information about your qualifications and previous employment. Sometimes you might be asked to provide a **personal statement** or a **supporting statement** demonstrating your relevant skills and experience. If you are just asked for a CV with nowhere to provide any additional information, it is a good idea to also include a covering letter so that you have a chance to address why you want the job and to demonstrate your motivations.

How should I send my application?

Again, pay attention to the instructions provided and make sure you follow these in full. You may need to email your application to a specified email address with your CV and other required documents included as attachments. Alternatively, some companies/organisations will require you to complete and submit an online application form, perhaps uploading your CV as an attachment. Always make sure you email or submit your application well in advance of the deadline. This means you have time to deal with any technological problems, and you also limit the chances of your application being ineligible should the vacancy close early.

How does the selection process work?

Usually a vacancy will attract many applications! Therefore, the aim of the selection process is to, by a number of exercises, select and recruit the best candidate for the role who will fulfil its key requirements, fit well in the organisational structure and share the company's values. Normally, the employer advertises the position, usually (but not always) providing a job description, listing skills and aptitudes required for the role (selection criteria), outlining responsibilities and a summary of relevant contractual information.

Typically, the selection process involves a number of steps and may include:

- a) CV, cover letter and/or application form - to find out if the candidate meets the essential (and desirable) criteria, has the right motivation to join the company/apply for the position.
- b) Telephone or a video interview - to gauge candidate's personality and motivation, find out how well the candidate has researched the company, test verbal communication skills.
Video interviews have now become a common feature early on in the selection process with generally two types, (i) a video interview, which is conducted face to face, e.g. via Zoom or Skype, in real time or (ii) a pre-recorded interview, where questions appear on a screen and candidates must respond within a time constraint.
- c) Online tests- for example to check if the candidate has the numerical, verbal and logical capabilities required for the job and to gauge how he/she performs under pressure on time-limited tasks; to assess the candidate's thought process.
- d) Assessment centre - tasks given during an assessment centre are directly related to the requirements of each role and you will be assessed on how well you demonstrate your ability/potential for that role. This also allows employers to see how well the candidate interacts with others in group exercises and will he/she be a good fit for the company.
- e) Interview - to gather evidence that the candidate fulfills the essential and desirable criteria; assess candidates motivation, gauge personality and test communication skills

Not all of the above steps will be used by every employer for every vacancy but a selection of a few of them might be used (for example: CV and cover letter, followed by an online test, followed by a panel interview).

What are employers looking for?

The World Economic Forum has identified the top 10 skills for the future as:

- Analytical thinking and innovation
- Active learning and learning strategies
- Complex problem-solving
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Creativity, originality and initiative
- Leadership and social influence
- Technology use, monitoring and control
- Technology design and programming
- Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
- Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

In addition to this employers also want to see a positive mindset or a can do attitude, motivation for the role and the organisation by demonstrating that you have undertaken industry research and digital capability. It is worthwhile developing proficiency in the Microsoft packages particularly Excel.

Employers are looking for candidates who can provide evidence for and demonstrate a range of skills gained through education, employment, voluntary work or extra-curricular interests. Apart from the job-specific skills when, for example, a knowledge of a particular software or a laboratory technique is required, employers are interested in applicants with so-called “transferable or “soft” skills. Those typically, but not exclusively, consist of communication skills, time management, teamwork, problem solving, decision-making and self-management. For a more comprehensive list please see our Hot Tips leaflet, [‘SKILLS & ATTRIBUTES – what are employers looking for?’](#)

On many occasions employers list essential and desirable skills in the job advert or the job description. However, sometimes there is no list of criteria the candidate needs to fulfil but instead the employer provides a list of tasks that the candidate will do on the job. In such situations, you have to deduce for yourself what skills they are looking for.

For example, if the advert says:

“You will be working to strict deadlines, liaising with colleagues from different departments and daily interacting with clients”

you can assume that the employer is looking for someone with good time management and prioritising skills who is capable to work as a part of a team and has great communication skills to interact with both other colleagues and clients.

How to gather evidence

Job applications which stand out have **evidence** of how you are using skills that are required in the job. You may not even realise it, but you may well have been using some of the skills already!

Employers typically identify skills or competencies that they want to see from applicants. To make an impact on them, it will help to look at a wide range of experiences and what you did there, what difference it made, and what you learnt or might do differently because of your experience.

- Do look at any **work experience** you have done. This could be just for a few days, a more structured short term internship (a few weeks to three months), or a longer term work placement (6 - 12 months).
- Undertake a 'no-negativity' brainstorm - consider any ways in which you may have practised some skills (however imperfectly!).
- Write everything down - you can evaluate your ideas a bit later!
- Remember that even if you haven't used a particular skill, you may have observed others using these skills and learnt something new or had the chance to talk about that with them.
- **Other experiences** such as part-time work, volunteering, roles in student societies or sports clubs, or acting as a course rep or student ambassador.
 - **Part-time work** may not seem like graduate level experience, but think through ways in which you have shown skills such as time management, effective communication and problem solving.
 - Acting as a course / programme representative or as a student ambassador may have given you valuable experience of using skills such as listening to others, providing a service or consulting people on their experience and needs.
 - Have you taken on any responsibilities, for example in **sports clubs** or other **student societies**? What did you do? Note down any actions you have taken to do these tasks: what steps did you take to ensure an event was properly organised, a budget was managed or it was successfully marketed?
 - Even though **voluntary work** is for free, you may have been using some skills that will impress an employer!
 - Don't dismiss any experience you may have gained from **taking on responsibilities** in your community, social or faith groups - do you run Guides or a choir? Have you organised a big community event? Itemise everything that is involved in making this happen. Or have you had experience of promoting someone's business or managing their bookkeeping?

-
- It can help to produce a [mind map](#) or spider diagram to visualise times you used a particular skill and any details that you can recall. For example, with any of the above experiences, ask yourself questions like:
 - In what ways did I take initiative?
 - What types of problems did I resolve?
 - What types of clients have I gained experience of? What needs or concerns did they have, and how did I support them?
 - What have I learnt there? What knowledge or commercial awareness have I gained during your experience? (Insights can come from trying things out that you aren't yet expert at, and from valuable conversations with others that you worked alongside!)
 - Our Hot Tips leaflet '[SKILLS & ATTRIBUTES – what are employers looking for?](#)' gives further suggestions.

Exercise: complete a skills audit

Completing a skills audit is a good way to identify what experience you have gained that could be evidence of using a competency the employer requires. Rate yourself (1 - poor, to 5 - excellent) and note what you've done. Facing up to the gaps should lead to action - find out what you can do next to improve and develop a skill if you don't have much experience. If you get stuck with this, contact us - we can help you find ways forward! Here is a taste of our skills audit (the full version can be accessed [here](#)).

Your Skills / Attributes	Your rating (1-5)	State current evidence for and/or Identify potential opportunities for development
Self-management and Resilience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well organised, good time management Taking responsibility Dealing with challenges or setbacks Adaptability and Flexibility Developing through feedback and reflection 		
Teamwork and Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respecting others Co-operating to achieve goals Negotiating / persuading 		
Decision-making and Problem solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing facts and situations Using logical and methodical processes Applying creative thinking to develop appropriate solutions 		
Communication and interpersonal skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oral literacy, including presentations, listening and questioning Relationship management Collaboration Receptiveness to feedback 		

Your Skills / Attributes	Your rating (1-5)	State current evidence for and/or Identify potential opportunities for development
Application of Information Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word processing, file management and search engines • Using Excel, and pivot tables to analyse data • Engaging with social media particularly LinkedIn 		

Our Hot Tips leaflet '[Skills and Attributes Audit](#)' provides a more detailed audit worksheet to help you work through an audit of where you have used your skills, to help you self-assess your experience and consider further action you may need to take to address any gaps.

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.

-
- **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.

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

CVs

JOHN HENRY BROOKES
BUILDING

What is the purpose of a CV?

Your CV, along with any other application documents, is a tool to allow you to get through to the next stage of the application process. It is a structured account of your qualifications, skills, and experience, specific to the job you are applying for. Your CV should clearly demonstrate that your competencies and motivations make you an ideal candidate for the role.

The information in your CV should always be:

- Tailored
- Relevant
- Specific
- Evidence-based
- Methodical

Where do I start?

Research the job: find out as much as you can about the role and the company/organisation. Refer to the job description but pay particular attention to the person specification or selection criteria - this will tell you what skills and experience the employer is looking for, which should directly inform the focus of your CV.

Reflect on your skills and experience: think about what is the most relevant information to include in your CV - what evidence and examples can you provide of things you have done which demonstrate the required skills and experience?

Look at examples of CVs: use this guide and other recommended resources to research sample CVs and give yourself an idea of the sort of document you are aiming for.

Plan: work out what CV format will work best and what sections to include. You can then start to populate this structure with your information and examples.

Don't put it off too long! It can be daunting starting to write a CV from scratch but once you've got a plan it's often best just to get started with writing out a first draft. You might find it easier to refine and perfect your CV once you've got something to work with and you can see how it's starting to look on the page. Remember that your CV is never a finished product and will evolve for each application.

Types of CVs and reasons for choosing them

There are a wealth of different potential ways to structure your CV and exactly what format you use will be determined by how you can best showcase your relevant skills and experience. Some typical types of CV are as follows:

- **Chronological CV:** A chronological CV is structured around a reverse-chronological outline of your work experience/employment. In this CV format you discuss your skills primarily in the context of your work experience. It can work well if you have a reasonable amount of fairly relevant work experience.
- **Skills-based CV:** The main focus of a skills-based CV is an expanded skills section which allows you to draw on examples of your skills from a wide range of contexts. This could include academic studies, volunteering, and interests, as well as work experience and employment. This CV format can work well if you have limited or no work experience, or if your work experience is in a very different area to what you are now applying for.
- **Part-time job CV:** If you are applying for a part-time job to earn some money whilst you study, as opposed to a job related to your career, then often a shorter CV format is appropriate. You will still need to provide evidence of your skills and experience, but only those that are relevant to the job you are applying for. For example you probably don't need to go into detail about academic modules or subject-specific skills.
- **Academic CV:** If you are applying for further study you will need a CV which focuses mainly on your academic skills and experience. You might want to go into more detail about modules you have studied, or projects or dissertations you have worked on, and how these are relevant to the course you are now applying for.

How to write a good profile

Example 1 - what's wrong with this?

I am a self-motivated, enthusiastic, hard-working and very determined individual with excellent communication and team-working skills who thrives in a challenging environment. Looking for a position that will allow me to further my career and build on my existing skills.

- Vague
- Could be written for any job and by any candidate
- Long list of adjectives with no evidence
- Meaningless - no real insights provided

Example 2 - what's right with this?

A final year Business and Marketing student with one year's experience of business-to-business marketing, on track for a 2:1. Excellent communication and customer service skills from developing relationships with clients at 'Bank Busters' to ensure repeat business. In addition, six months retail experience. Now looking for an entry-level marketing position with an innovative retail company.

- The candidate clearly states their current situation and sells their relevant experience with evidence
- They write about their skills in the context of their experience
- Key points are highlighted without resorting to generic statements
- The candidate specifically refers to the type of role they are interested in

Example job description

This job description and person specification relates to the example CV on page 25.

Company: Oxford Universal Publishers

Department: Marketing

Title of Post: Marketing Assistant

Post Number: W07/076

Overall purpose of post: To assist with the development and implementation of the OUP's marketing strategy in order to raise the profile of the company. Support the delivery of a range of marketing activities including communications, production of digital and printed marketing materials, events organisation and promotional activity.

Skills and experience required for post: Experience in a marketing related post with excellent creative, organisational, communication, teamwork and IT skills.

Main duties:

1. Contribute to the development and implementation of OUP's Marketing & Communication Strategy
2. Contribute to the creation, maintenance and production of imaginative marketing materials within the Company's branding guidelines
3. Assist with the development and maintenance of OUP's website within company branding guidelines
4. Contribute to social media accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn) to maximise the positive exposure of OUP.

Person Specification

Specification	Essential	Desirable
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undergraduate degree or relevant experience. 	
Relevant Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proven design, marketing and promotion work. Competent user of Microsoft Office, design software. Digital and online development to include designing and updating websites and setting up and managing social media accounts, Facebook, LinkedIn etc. Writing / designing for the web and social media. Experience of administrative systems and processes in particular recording and managing contact databases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of Adobe In-Design Software Knowledge of CMS Experience of a CRM system
Relevant Skills / Aptitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confident and professional manner to establish rapport with clients & colleagues. Good standard of spoken English, speaks clearly and confidently, able to present to and network with internal and external stakeholders. Demonstrable written communication skills in English for example, writing and editing marketing copy. Strong attention to detail when writing copy and carrying out administrative tasks. Ability to work flexibly and co-operatively in a team and across the wider company. Ability to act on own initiative and demonstrate problem solving skills. 	

Chronological CV example 1

Jane Schiller

Ground Floor Flat, Kinn Road, Oxford, OX2 6HU

Email: j.schiller@gmail.com Tel: 07778 955555 www.linkedin/in/janeschiller

Final year English and Creative Writing undergraduate with marketing experience in a publishing company. Experience of developing digital platforms such as company websites and social media to increase outreach. Previous work has included designing and creating print material using Adobe InDesign and Photoshop. Seeking the position of Marketing Assistant at Oxford Universal Publishers.

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University

2018 – 2021

BA (Hons) English Literature and Creative Writing (2:1 predicted)

Relevant modules:

- Critical theory in action
- Stylistics
- Culture and criticism
- Texts in performance

Dissertation: Analysis of impact from persuasive writing methods used within 2010 General Election British political manifestos. Completing this dissertation has developed my ability to compare a wide range of sources, views and writing techniques.

Ampleforth College, York

2011 – 2018

A Levels: English (B), German (C), Music (A)

AS Level: History (C) GCSEs: 8 grades A* - C

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

Cross Culture Encounter Publishing Ltd, Aylesbury

January 2020 - present

UK Marketing Assistant

Working part-time for a small modern fiction and travel writing publishing start-up alongside studies.

Skills / achievements:

- **Creativity:** creating and designing digital and print posters and Instagram posts within company branding guidelines using Adobe InDesign and Photoshop to advertise author signings and forthcoming publications.
- **Making an impact:** Regularly interacted with potential audiences on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook - this led to a 25-40% increased following of four authors I was promoting during their product launch campaigns.
- **Written communication:** composing letters and writing copy for e-shots to clients. This includes discussing content with my manager to ensure the appropriate tone and language is used in our communications and that it is targeted to customers' areas of interest.
- **Administration:** visiting prospective venues in the UK, liaising with event coordinators and representatives, and analysing survey results.
- **IT skills:** creating and updating the marketing internet page, providing administrative support to the sales and marketing teams, and ensuring effective responses to email enquiries.
- **Attention to detail:** managing lead data and the contact database. This includes updating contact information and making sure we have an accurate record of company addresses to promote our events and invoicing information we require.
- **Organisation:** sourcing advertisement opportunities through local and national communications such as newspapers, online advertisements and radio. Creating a spreadsheet to compare competitor prices and identify likely target audiences for further outreach.

Try to include a LinkedIn profile link, so recruiters can find out more about your experience. This could include 'recommendations' from previous employers

Writing a profile is optional but can highlight relevant skills and experience you've gained.

Can you identify any particularly relevant module choices?

Can you highlight your skills by referring to a final year project / dissertation?

A brief summary of where you are working can add value.

Bullets in this CV template are based on a skill, then how it has been evidenced. Try to be specific - e.g. what have you created? Who for? What was the impact? What did you change or improve as a result?

OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

Amateur Orchestra

September 2018 - September 2019

Concert Manager

Skills / achievements:

- **Advertising:** creating and distributing posters, sending targeted emails, and creating programmes for each concert on a weekly basis.
- **Networking:** liaising with musicians about set length and finding out biographies for programmes.
- **Initiative:** arriving early to set up chairs and equipment and ensuring each performance does not overrun. Notifying staff in advance about pending concerts.
- **Oral communication:** presenting musicians to the audience and notifying the audience of upcoming events.

Tesco Oxford

May 2017 - October 2017

Food Service Assistant

Skills / achievements:

- **Problem-solving:** dealing with special customer requests in often a short period of time involved calling both head office and other stores in the area to source stock on a limited time scale.
- **Teamwork:** training new starters as well as leading a subsection team on Sundays in the absence of my line manager.
- **Responsibility:** setting up and closing down sections; working alone on sections when required and taking stock counts.

I.T. Skills

- Very competent with computers and databases including CRM systems.
- Particularly familiar with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, InDesign and Photoshop.
- Experienced in managing company social media accounts including: Facebook and Instagram

Languages

- English native.
- Fluent in German, written and spoken.

Interests and Achievements

- **Writing:** write reviews on local concerts and festivals for Oxford's 'Daily Info' (www.dailyinfo.co.uk/reviews).
- **Music:** play drums in local bands and record music at home.
- **Sport:** member of the university basketball team; school captain of the girls' hockey teams.
- **Charity events:** raised £2000 for a Ugandan village by walking 550km from Uganda into Kenya with a group of 100 volunteers.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Try to describe how you have used transferable skills from general employment / work experience.

Including short bullets is ideal to highlight achievements. Facts can be compelling!

Chronological CV example 2

Tom Brown

2 Church Close, Oxford OX2 1TP

Email: tbrown@hotmail.com Tel: 07823 588888 www.linkedin.com/in/tombrown

Final year Environmental Science student passionate about conservation and the environment. Extensive voluntary experience working for wildlife trusts in various capacities, including marketing, website editing and writing press-releases. Looking for a position in a wildlife trust to further develop skills in marketing and communications from July onwards.

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University

2018 – 2021

BSc (Hons) Environmental Science, (2:1 predicted)

Relevant modules:

- Biodiversity Law
- Sustainable Resource Use
- Communities, Conservation, Conflict & Change
- Survey and Monitoring for Biodiversity

Research Project: Field research on biodiversity in Malaysia has given me knowledge of biological field techniques such as wildlife tracking using GPS telemetry, wildlife collating and wildlife health monitoring.

Newbury College

2016 – 2018

A levels: Environmental Science (A), Biology (C), Chemistry (D)

Newbury School

2011 – 2016

GCSEs: 8 A-Cs

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

Oxford Wildlife Trust, Conservation Volunteer (weekend/voluntary)

2018 – 2020

Weekend volunteer working in small teams to clear rhododendron bushes, coppicing and preparing environments for the Heath Fritillary butterfly.

Oxford Environmental Centre, Marketing Intern (Summer Intern)

June – July 2019

- Managing telephone, email and written enquiries at the centre.
- Supporting the Marketing Team to promote the centre in Oxfordshire through direct email and developing website.
- Conducting visitor tours around the insect house.
- Providing demonstrations of energy saving techniques to visitors.

Frontier, Conservation Volunteer, Ecuador

August 2019

- One month spent in Ecuador Wildlife Sanctuary working with injured mammals and organising environmental education activities for visiting schools.
- Achievements included writing regular press releases for the Marketing Team.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Oxford Brookes University, Academic Support Worker

2019 – Present

- Taking lecture notes and editing materials for disabled students where I learnt to write quickly and clearly, whilst paying attention to detail.

ABC Cinemas, Front-of-House Staff

2019 – Present

- Dealing with the general public through ticket and snack sales, bar work and ushering has developed my communication skills.

Tom has summarised his studies, experience to date and immediate career goals.

Tom has summarised his project experience, which is very relevant to the employer's work.

Creating a 'Relevant Experience section' allows Tom to highlight the experience that will matter most to the employer and to ensure it is on the first page of his CV.

Tom has opted to ensure that most of his short bullet points emphasise that he is action-focused, by beginning the bullet point with a verb

Topshop, Sales Person

2017 – 2018

- Maintaining the shop floor, stock and providing a good level of customer service during busy periods.
- Additional responsibilities included opening and closing-up shop, banking, sending orders and using initiative for customer requests and orders.

PRACTICAL CONSERVATION SKILLS

- A full clean driving licence with 4-wheel drive experience.
- NPTC Agricultural Tractor Operation Certificate.
- Undertook a small mammal identification course at Oxford Wildlife Trust.
- Chainsaw Certificate.
- First Aid Certificate.
- PADI Diving Certificate.

COMPUTER SKILLS

- Very proficient with PC and Mac along with all the standard software such as Microsoft Office.
- Advanced Adobe Photoshop skills.

INTERESTS

I like to draw, paint and do other forms of arts and crafts as well as read and socialise. An avid reader of Nature and New Scientist, I have submitted articles on conservation in Ecuador, expected to be published this year.

REFEREES

Dr Andrea Goodman
School of Life Sciences
Oxford Brookes University
Headington
Oxford OX3 0BP
Tel: 01865 555555
Email: agoodman@brookes.co.uk

Ms. A Manager
ABC Cinema
Oxford OX4 2YP
Tel: 01865 222222
Email: manager@abccinema.co.uk

Tom has allocated less space to describing roles in the 'Other Experience' section - but has noted ways in which he has taken responsibility and acted professionally.

Here, Tom highlights various certificates that prove he has developed relevant skills to a required standard.

Skills-based CV example 1

Frank Smith

23 Oxford Road, Oxford, OX4 1SA

Email: fsmith123@hotmail.com Mobile: 07735 511111 [linkedin/in/franksmith](https://www.linkedin.com/in/franksmith)

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University, BEng (Hons) Motorsport Engineering 2019 – 2022

2:1 Predicted

Key modules:

- Stress Analysis 1
- Engineering Thermo-fluids
- Engineering Mathematics
- Engineering dynamics 1
- Materials Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Design

Otago Polytechnic, Certificate in Automotive Technology (Electrical) 2018 – 2019

Units include:

- Wiring repairs and electrical circuit testing
- Basic tuning on 4 stroke engines

Otago Polytechnic, Diploma of Mechanical Engineering 2017 – 2018

Modules include:

- Engineering Drawing 82%
- Computational Mathematics 70%
- Strength of Materials 70%
- Mathematics 65%

SKILLS

Mathematics

- Gained a good understanding of Advance Matrix Algebra, MATLAB, Mathcad, application of Finite Differences and Laplace Transform, throughout my second year. Applied this knowledge to solve varied engineering problems.

Analysis

- Developed a good understanding of front pull rod suspension as part of design group project. Carried out FEA (Finite Element Analysis) in SolidWorks to analyse the stresses that act on the suspension components such as wishbones, pull rods and uprights under heavy braking, cornering and full bump.

- Learnt and developed analytical skills in Stress Analysis. Defined the characterisation of Stress Profiles, Yielding and Buckling, under different load conditions.

Mechanics

- Race Go Karts competitively, which has helped me to improve my understanding of how karts behave with different kinds of set up. This experience included toe in and toe out, caster and camber adjustments, changing front and rear widths, using different tyre pressures.

Team player

- Participating in Formula Student, I learnt how to work in groups through listening to what others had to contribute, as well as how to build trust and bond with new people.

Working under pressure

- Undertook various tasks while at Chubb that often required extra work at short notice. I ensured that important jobs were prioritised and completed to deadlines.

AUTOMOTIVE EXPERIENCE

Formula Student Member (Electrical & Electronic Groups) Nov 2019 – Present

Oxford Brookes University Team, Oxford

- Made and installed the wiring looms and sensors for both class 1 and 1A cars.
- Contributed to design and making of dashboards, fuse boxes and brake lights for class 1 and 1A cars.

Use a professional sounding email address

Include relevant modules

Use bullet points to make your experience easy to read and start each point with relevant action words eg gained, developed etc.

Don't just tell them what you did in the role but explain how you did the role. Detail when and how you have used the skill the employer wants.

Don't overlook the "soft skills" - these are just as important!

Support Technician

Aug 2017 – June 2018

Delphi Heavy Duty Diesel Systems, New Zealand

- Built and tested diesel injectors and pumps – proved to be a useful and demanding experience as I had to learn how to operate the test rigs and build pumps and injectors with the group. After one month I was able to proceed on my own.
- Measured diesel injector and pump parts with Talysurf and CMM machines.
- Prepared build sheets for both diesel injectors and pumps.

Automotive Technician

Apr 2016 – July 2017

Kendall Cars Ltd, New Zealand

- Mechanical and Electrical servicing and repairs – clutch and gear box replacements, electrical fault finding, tyre and brake pad replacements, serviced vans, cars and Lutons.
- Automotive Apprentice Feb 2013 – Jan 2014 CBS AUTOS, New Zealand
- Developed skills in mechanical and electrical servicing and repairs – CV joint replacements, brake pad and disc fittings, wheel alignment, overhauled starters and alternators.
 - Assisted with engine tuning, using scanning tool. Traced electrical faults, undertook M.O.T.s

OTHER EMPLOYMENT**Fire Protection Engineering Draughtsman**

Mar 2015 – Jan 2016

- Chubb Systems & Services, New Zealand
- Contributed to the design of small to large installations of sprinkler systems.
- Preparation of sprinkler system drawings, schematic diagrams, block plans, reports and maintenance manuals.

I.T SKILLS

- Competent user of Microsoft Office packages, AutoCAD, SolidWorks, Crocodile clip, TinyCAD, MATLAB, Working Model and Mathcad.

INTERESTS

Motorsports: Go Karting – member of Formula Brookes Sports: Boxing and Gym workout

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Member of The Institution of Mechanical Engineers – IMechE Student,
Full UK driving licence.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Employers value all experience, but make sure you identify the key skills acquired that are relevant to the role to which you are applying

Mention any practical skills, particularly relevant to the role

Skills-based CV example 2

Linda Evans

10 Oxford Road, Headington, Oxford OX12 1PT

levans@hotmail.co.uk Tel: 07234150000 www.linkedin.com/in/lindaevans

A second year Biotechnology undergraduate with excellent laboratory skills in areas such as spectrophotometry, chromatography and centrifugation developed during my degree. Able to communicate effectively to varied audiences through experience giving numerous presentations. Looking for a one year placement in a commercial laboratory from July to develop my skills.

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University, BSc (Hons) Biotechnology 2019 – Present

Second year modules include:

- Laboratory Techniques for the Biosciences
- Genes and Genomes
- Mammalian Biochemistry
- Microbiology and Immunology

High School, London 2012 – 2019

A Levels: Physics, Biology, Chemistry

GCSEs: 10 A-C grades including Maths and English

KEY SKILLS

Laboratory

• Modules such as Laboratory Techniques for the Biosciences have greatly improved my ability, knowledge, confidence and understanding of practical techniques, such as spectrophotometry, chromatography and centrifugation.

Communication

• PowerPoint presentations at university have improved my oral and written communication skills, helping me to project my voice and speak clearly when addressing large audiences.

• Working as a waitress and developing a rapport with customers has significantly improved my interpersonal skills. I was voted 'Waitress of the month' for excellent customer service.

Organisation

• Managed my time at university to meet multiple deadlines whilst working as a part-time waitress and also maintaining many sports hobbies.

• Frequently make lists, use an electronic diary and prioritise tasks. This helps to keep track of ordered procedures, which can be applied to laboratory work.

Teamwork

• A range of university projects such as paired lab work and group poster presentations have helped me develop teamwork skills, obtaining excellent marks in all projects.

• The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme allowed me to undertake an expedition with a team of four where we successfully achieved a cross-country expedition over a three day period.

Problem-solving

• Dealing with problems in a calm and professional manner during busy nights while I was a PR Assistant for Students in London. This involved being creative with resources including changing promotions last minute in the face of shortages on certain products.

IT

• Confident in the use of Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint which I use on a regular basis throughout my degree programme.

Clearly state your stage of study and what you have to offer. Highlight what you are looking for

Relevant and most recent modules

Provide evidence of how you can demonstrate key skills relevant to the role

Don't overlook the importance of relevant transferable skills from part time jobs or other activities

WORK EXPERIENCE

Top Restaurant, Waitress

2017 – 2019

- Employed for outside catering events where tasks included taking orders, using the till and setting up events. Voted waitress of the month by customers.

Bradley Solicitors, work experience placement

2018

- General office work and creating databases for case files which greatly improved my organisational and IT skills. Liaising with solicitors and the IT department over the design of databases and communicating ideas in team meetings.
- In 2014 I was employed for two weeks covering for an Office Junior, consisting of filing, sorting the post and general office work. I learnt how to work under pressure in order to prepare correspondence for next day delivery.

Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme Mentor

2018 – Present

Supporting young people to achieve several goals including an expedition and service to the community.

Students in London, PR Assistant

September 2016

- Promoting student nights out in London and creating guest lists. Role involved developing relationships with new people and excellent organisation skills in order to compile guest lists.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Member of university diving, gymnastics and dance teams. In addition, I was selected to be swimming captain and gymnastic captain on several occasions. Interests
- Many of my interests revolve around sport including swimming, boxercise, gymnastics and dance.
- To help raise money for charities such as cancer research I have participated in sponsored swimathons and sponsored walks, and also helped the local Rotary Club to raise £250 for charities by selling raffle tickets.
- Music is another interest of mine and I have attended several music venues in Oxford.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Part-time CV example: care assistant

Caitlin Hear

54 James Street, Oxford, OX4 5FH
cheat@gmail.co.uk
07738 433333

A second year Adult Nursing student at Oxford Brookes University with experience as a volunteer with Age UK. Looking for a part-time job in care work to further my skills working with vulnerable adults.

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University, BSc (Hons) Adult Nursing	2018 – 2021
Mary Filler College, Nottingham A Levels: English (C), Psychology (B), Health and Social Care (B)	2016 – 2018
Foxhill Secondary School, Nottingham GCSEs: 8 GCSEs grades A*-C including English, Maths and Science	2011 – 2016

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

- **Sensitive and compassionate work ethic:** Volunteering at Age UK, combined with my natural disposition towards care and support work, has developed my ability to empathise, show compassion in my work and be approachable towards those I work with.
- **Communication and Interpersonal skills:** This includes dealing with challenging customer requests in an attentive manner and discussing appropriate activities with my team to undertake with the elderly.
- **Team work:** I have undertaken cooperative and successful teamwork as part of my degree producing group presentations and essays with up to 5 people. Whilst volunteering with Age UK I communicated with members of my team of 9 to ensure clients received a consistent experience of the service.
- **Organisational:** Combining my work in retail and volunteering alongside my studies has developed my ability to manage my workload, organise my time effectively and meet multiple deadlines.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Volunteer, Age UK	September 2017 – July 2019
Running activities with the elderly, arranging risk assessments and health and safety checks, general office work and administration, as well as providing a friendly, approachable and professional front line service to the public.	
Sales Assistant	May 2016 – July 2017
Keeping the shop floor tidy and appropriately arranged, providing assistance and sale recommendations to customers, providing quality customer service and working as part of a team to ensure that the shop floor duties were covered.	

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Part-time CV example: hospitality/restaurant work

Eleanor Adams

8 Duster Avenue, Oxford, OX21 7TP
07412321768 / eleanoradams@gmail.com

Music undergraduate with 3 years' work experience in the hospitality industry. Previous experience working in busy bar and restaurant environments has developed high standards of customer service and communication skills. Currently seeking a part time position within the food and beverage industry to utilise and further develop my skills. Available to work 16 hours per week.

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

Turners Inn, Bar Staff

2018 – 2020

- Serving customers behind the bar, taking orders and advising on drinks.
- Restocking wines and spirits.
- Delivering orders of food and wine to customer tables.
- Responsible for cashing up at the end of shift.
- Advertising weekly karaoke nights, involved producing and handing out posters.

The Hutch Restaurant, Waitress

2016 – 2018

- Providing a warm welcome to customers entering the restaurant.
- Delivering excellent customer service when taking orders for food and drinks, also providing alternative recommendations when required.
- Preparing and serving drinks at the bar.
- Handling cash and debit transactions.
- Promoting health and safety by keeping the restaurant clean and tidy.
- Coping under pressure and ensuring high level of customer service during peak times.

OTHER SKILLS

IT: Proficient in the use of Microsoft office applications including Word, Excel and Access.

Languages: Fluent in Spanish and German, both written and spoken.

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University

2018 – Present

BA (Hons) Music

Secondary School, Oxford

2011 – 2018

A Levels: English (B), Music (A), Philosophy (B)

GCSE: 7 grades A-C including English and Maths

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Part-time CV example: office/administration work

Mike Lowden

2 Rosey Lane, Oxford, OX1 5TW
mlowden@gmail.co.uk
07778 599999

A third year Psychology undergraduate student at Oxford Brookes University with 2 years' experience in administration roles. Previous duties have included: managing room bookings, organising Google-calendars and producing marketing material. Seeking to gain further work experience in an administrative setting.

EDUCATION

2017 – 2020: BSc (Hons) Psychology, Oxford Brookes University
2015 – 2017: Louis Freen College, Southampton:
A Levels: English grade B, Psychology grade A, Maths grade C
2010 – 2015: Foxhill Secondary School, Nottingham:
6 GCSEs grade C – A* including English, Maths, Science and IT

WORK EXPERIENCE

Receptionist, Florence Spa, Headington

March 2017 – June 2019

- **Customer service:** Provided clients with information over the phone, by email and provided high quality customer service to anyone arriving at the spa.
- **Creativity:** Created and arranged the distribution of promotional materials.
- **Management of calendar and bookings:** Organised bookings for clients and contributed to the arrangement of staff rotas using an access database.

Administration Assistant, Louis Freen College Union

January 2015 – January 2017

- **Communication:** Answered the telephone, generated meeting notes and agendas, and communicated within my team on issues such as rotas.
- **Organisation:** Created and distributed minuted documents to a team of 27 people, worked towards strict deadlines.
- **IT:** Involved in social media implementation, proficient with Microsoft office applications, created and maintained spreadsheets regarding Union interactions with students.
- **Attention to detail:** Updated and maintained files of resources for students.

REFERENCES

Linda Key, General Staff Manager, Florence Spa: lkey@florencespa.co.uk 01584 485748
Martin Gillis, Union President, Louis Freen College: mgillis@lfreen.ac.uk 01922 483755

Part-time CV example: retail/shop work

Emily Simmons

456 Headington Hill, Oxford, OX3 0BP

07667 888887

emilysimmons@gmail.com

A Business Management undergraduate with a year's experience working in a customer facing role. Strong organisational and time management skills developed through balancing work and study. Currently seeking a part time position in a customer service role.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

H&M, Sales Advisor

February 2018 – April 2019

- Provided excellent customer service, operating tills, handling cash and debit transactions; assisting and advising customers on products, and providing alternatives when appropriate.
- Supported a team of 20 staff to help exceed sales targets by 3%, resulting in a Christmas bonus.
- Demonstrated initiative, working out which stock needed priority when replenishing from fitting and stock room.
- Managed my time and prioritised tasks such as serving customers, processing deliveries and creating promotional displays.

Macmillan Cancer, Fundraising Volunteer

August 2017 – December 2018

- Communicated with members of the public in order to generate donations of up to £100, awarded prize for raising the most money, 2 months running.
- Lead a group of 6 volunteers and coordinated appropriate fundraising locations to raise maximum amount of funds; awarded prize for best team of the month.
- Organised fancy dress events in order to boost team morale which raised over £300 for the charity.

IT SKILLS

Proficient in the use of Microsoft Office applications.

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University

2018 – Present

BA (Hons) Business and Management

Secondary School, Oxford

2011 – 2018

A Levels: Business Studies (A), Information Technology (B), Maths (C)

GCSEs: 9 GCSEs from A-C

INTERESTS

- Blogging: blog every fortnight on current trends in fashion and my latest fashion buys, currently followed by 230 readers from around the world
- Sport: Active member of the university basketball team

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Part-time CV example: international student

Mǐn Xu

32 Iffley Road, Oxford, OX4 4AH

Tel: 07564 242222

Email: MinXu@gmail.com

Second year International student at Oxford Brookes University. Previous experience working in a customer service role undertaking group tours that developed my communication skills. Currently seeking a part time position within retail, available to work 12 hours per week.

Permission to work: Current visa allows me to work X hours per week during semester time and X during vacation

EDUCATION

Oxford Brookes University 2018 – Present

BA (Hons) Business and Marketing Management

- Improved level of verbal communication through assessed PowerPoint presentations achieving a 2:1 in the majority of assignments, subsequently increasing my English language skills.
- Proficient in the use of Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop, Internet Explorer and Visual Basics.
- Prioritised and managed my time in order to meet a number of university deadlines, I did this using to-do lists and an electronic diary.

First High School Guangzhou, China 2016 – 2019

National University Entrance Examination 2nd Class

Equivalent to UK A-Level and GCSE B/C grades

WORK EXPERIENCE

First High School Guangzhou, China 2019 – Present

- Assisted a team of 6 students, organising fortnightly events such as cooking classes. Took the lead role in organising and planning the annual party for up to 120 guests.
- Managed a small team and was required to delegate tasks to fellow members, as well as keep to a fixed budget.
- Utilised my problem-solving skills when the venue we had booked was no longer available.

Tour Guide, Wildlife Park 2016 – 2019

- Working independently guiding groups of children aged between 8-11 years old, communicating instructions clearly when visiting certain sites and explaining health and safety to the children.
- Maintained patience and composure when dealing with challenging groups of children.
- Managed my time to ensure I was not under or over running on the allocated tour time.
- Developed the ability to work well under pressure as the number of people visiting the park doubled during the busy summer period.

LANGUAGES

Good level of English - IELTS Level 7, Fluent in Mandarin

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

CV360

CV360 is an online CV checker available to you through our Careers Resources Portal.

Once you have used this Applications Guide to make a draft of your CV we recommend using CV360 for an initial review of your CV. It will give you instant CV feedback and it is quick and easy to use. It will perform over 50 checks including presentation, structure, skills, and language. It is based on the checks performed by Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), which some large recruiters may use for an automated initial CV sift. CV360 will provide feedback to help you improve your CV. This will make sure it is optimised for ATS use, and that it follows many important CV recommendations.

CV360 will give your CV a score out of 100, but don't be too concerned by the number. A high score doesn't mean your CV is perfect and a low score definitely doesn't mean it's terrible. The feedback will give you points to work on so follow the advice, reupload your CV, and watch as your score gets higher.

CV360 will get many of the basics right, but always use it alongside the comprehensive advice and examples in this Guide. CV360 cannot give you personalised feedback so get in touch with Careers (careers@brookes.ac.uk) once you have got as far as you can with our CV resources. We provide advice on CV content, on tailoring to a specific job or sector, and with some of the tricky areas where the ATS gets confused. CV360 may also get confused with some more specific CV types. For example academic CVs which may be longer than two pages, and creative CVs for art and design roles which may contain images and icons which CV360 cannot see.

Access CV360 on our Resources Portal here: <https://www.abintegro.com/u/ys4wre14>

For more information and advice on CV360 and Applicant Tracking Systems please see our Hot Tips sheet: <https://www.abintegro.com/u/hvo4yarh>

CV checklist

Personal Details

- ☐ I have used my name as the heading (not CV or Résumé!)
- ☐ I have included my mobile number and email address
- ☐ I have included my LinkedIn / personal website address if I have one
- ☐ I have not included: date of birth, gender, marital status, age, photograph

Profile (optional)

- ☐ I have written no more than 3-4 sentences
- ☐ I have tailored the CV to the role I am applying for
- ☐ I have highlighted my key experience and skills
- ☐ International students: Do I want to explain that I have permission to work (visa)?

Education

- ☐ I have summarised in reverse chronological order (current Oxford Brookes study first)
- ☐ I have included the places of study, course titles and dates attended
- ☐ I've included predicted degree result, relevant modules and dissertation topic
- ☐ I have included A level subjects and grades, and summarised my GCSEs

Work Experience (relevant and other)

- ☐ I have summarised all my experience in reverse chronological order
- ☐ I have a 'Relevant Experience' section to give prominence to most useful experience
- ☐ I have included employment, placements, internship and voluntary work experience
- ☐ I have used active language to identify relevant skills and provided evidence
- ☐ I have included the names of employers, job titles and dates of employment

Additional Information (optional)

- ☐ I have provided further relevant information e.g. technical skills, languages, driving licence

Interests (optional)

- ☐ I've included any interesting details, skills or achievements (not just listing my interests)

References

- ☐ I have stated 'references available upon request', unless otherwise required.
- ☐ I have gained consent from my referees so that their details can be provided where necessary.

Overall Layout and Formatting

- ☐ I have used [CV360](#) to check and improve some basic aspects of my CV
- ☐ I have used an appropriate, professional font e.g. Arial, minimum 11 pt
- ☐ My formatting is consistent throughout, avoiding narrow margins and densely packed lines
- ☐ I have not included: graphics, tables, coloured font and italics
- ☐ I have used bullet points to avoid lengthy paragraphs
- ☐ I have kept the CV length to two sides maximum (one side for part-time jobs)
- ☐ I have avoided unnecessary acronyms and abbreviations
- ☐ I have proofread my CV and checked for spelling, grammar, and professional language
- ☐ I have saved my CV with an appropriate title e.g. my name and the vacancy reference

CV FAQs

What style of CV should I use?

- The format of CV you choose is the one that presents your experience most effectively for the particular job or opportunity you are applying for.
- The two main types are chronological and skills based.
- A chronological CV clearly demonstrates chronologically how your previous experience is relevant to the opportunity to which you are applying and is generally most commonly used.
- A skills based CV is useful for directly targeting the opportunity by emphasising the skills you have attained from your other achievements. To find out more, please see our CV examples

How can I develop my CV if I have very little work experience?

Identify the skills and attributes you have developed from extra-curricular activities, voluntary work and any other experiences you may have had. Ensure that you are tailoring skills to the requirements of the person specification. It is advisable to obtain relevant work experience wherever possible. Check out our Hot Tips, '[Internships: Gaining Work Experience](#)'.

Should I include a personal profile on my CV?

If you are attaching a covering letter with your CV, a personal profile is not generally required. However, if you do decide to include a personal profile, be sure to keep it brief and succinct and not too generic. For further advice on writing a profile see the How to Write a Good Profile section earlier in this guide.

Do I send my CV with an application form?

Only send your CV if they request it as an additional upload with your application form. Ensure that your CV is targeted to the specific role highlighting relevant skills and experience. It may be advisable to convert your CV to a PDF file in order to ensure that the layout does not get altered when it is being uploaded.

Do different countries expect different CV formats?

Yes, it is advisable that you undertake research to find out what individual countries expect in terms of format, content and layout as they can vary considerably. Take a look at 'GoinGlobal' (via Resources section on www.brookes.ac.uk/careers) and the Prospects.ac.uk website.

What do I do if I have gaps in education or employment?

This will depend on your individual circumstances and it is recommended that you contact Careers to discuss your personal situation with one of the team.

Who can I ask to provide references?

You could ask academic staff who have taught or your student support coordinator who may know you well enough. Other references can come from work experience or from contacts you have made from extra-curricular activities or voluntary work you have undertaken.

Whoever you ask, remember to always ask their permission before you submit their contact details.

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

COVERING LETTERS



Introducing your application

You have seen the vacancy and want to apply - but should you send a 'covering letter/email' with it? And what is that all about?

For the most part, employers really expect to see this and are surprised if you don't provide one. Very occasionally an advert specifically states that a covering letter is not required or desired - but in most cases, recruiters do expect to see this even if they have not suggested you provide one.

A covering letter is very important because it introduces your application and is an opportunity to convey a number of important things:

1. **Explain why you are interested in their company.** Be specific here. Where did you hear about them? What do you like about them as a company? If you do lots of research into the company from its website and other sources, think about what has struck you about this employer. Employers want to read about what you have noticed. Don't just list facts here, but show your thoughts, observations and appreciation. Tailor it - make what you write relevant to this particular employer. Show you've done some research and reflection.

Top Tip

If you could remove the name of the employer from your covering letter and it would still work for another employer's vacancy, you have not tailored your application. See '*Ways to do your research*'

2. **Describe why the role interests you** - refer to particular aspects of the role that draw upon strengths and things that motivate you. Show a clear understanding of what is involved in the role.
3. **Explain how you match the key competencies they are requesting** - in this section, consider using a couple of examples of situations where you have demonstrated a few of the key competencies that they hope to see. While your CV provides a factual summary of your experiences, the covering letter gives you space to be more reflective and to describe how you have demonstrated your suitability in a few key occasions in more detail. Giving this insight helps the employer to see whether they would like to talk further in person about your application!

End with a polite closing statement in a final paragraph, for example: 'Thank you very much for considering this application. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my interest in person.'

Ways to do your research

There are many clues - most company websites have a section called 'About Us', and may have sections on their history, products and services, locations, and client testimonials. They may have an 'In the news' section - many applicants forget to look at these - and if you do that and reflect positively and intelligently on what you've seen, this will make you stand out. You may be able to find out more about the company in staff or company LinkedIn pages, in the press or sector news websites. You may also be able to talk to people about the role before you apply. If you are lucky enough to have contacts that work there, do also talk with them.

Activity

1. Spend a few minutes looking through the company website - Ask yourself what they want customers to think about them as an organisation. What are their values?
2. What are the company's goals? What is it aiming to achieve? Who are its potential customers and what particular types of customers is the company trying to reach? Does the company have a mission statement? Read it and notice any overall message being presented.
3. Find the company's 'News' section if it has this and read 3 articles. What points are made that you find interesting? What could you note down and refer to in your covering letter to show you have gained insights from finding out about the company?

Covering letter example

Ground Floor Flat
Kinn Road
Oxford

Sam Jones
Oxford Universal Publishers
Great Clarendon Street
Oxford
OX2 6DP

1/9/20

Dear Ms Jones,

Re: Marketing Assistant (W07/076)

I am writing to apply for the position of Marketing Assistant as advertised on the Oxford Universal Publishers website. Enclosed is my CV for your consideration. I am not only drawn to OUP because of its development into digital publishing, but also because of its focus on education targeting all age groups. My recent experience as an undergraduate and “end user” of academic journals such as Essays in Criticism and The Review of English Studies has sparked an interest in a marketing role at Oxford University Publishers.

My current position as UK Marketing assistant at Publishing Co. together with my role as Concert Manager at Oxford Brookes University has given me a strong interest in a marketing career. As a Marketing assistant my duties include designing print material such as posters, booklets and leaflets using Adobe InDesign and Photoshop. The designing process requires high level of attention to detail, taking into account marks and bleeds, image resolutions and ink coverage to ensure the end product is of the highest quality. Liaising with suppliers regarding our events and the materials we need has allowed me to develop networking and account management skills. Discussing the most appropriate products for the work we produce and estimated delivery times allowed me to forge a stronger relationship with our suppliers. In addition, managing the company’s database has developed my account management skills, ensuring all contact addresses and invoicing details are up to date.

As a concert manager, my duties included managing our social media pages such as Facebook, twitter and Instagram. This involved uploading images and promotional offers for current and upcoming events. I also developed my oral communication skills liaising with musicians about time slots and equipment requirements. Writing reviews for Oxford’s “Daily Info” has enhanced my copywriting and written communications skills, ensuring all work has the correct spelling and grammar.

As a result of my experience to date both professionally and academically, I believe that I could make a valuable contribution to OUP as a Marketing Assistant. I look forward to hearing from you. I am available for interview at any time.

Yours sincerely
Jane Schiller

Your letter needs to fit one side of A4, written in a sensible font no smaller than 11 and formatted as a professional letter

Wherever possible, address your letter to a named person. Contact the company to find out who to send it to

Highlighting the job title and reference number makes it easier for the recruiter to immediately see which role you are applying for

Introduce yourself, your reason for writing and where you saw the advert

State your motivation for applying, what attracts you to the company and the role. Why them? Try to show you have done your research

Using the person specification as a guide, show why you are suitable by highlighting key skills and experiences, state what you can bring to the role and why they should consider you

Positive ending. Finish the letter with a strong paragraph

If you addressed the letter to a named person it should end with “Yours sincerely”, if you started with “Dear Sir or Madam” it should end with “Yours faithfully”

Covering letter checklist

If you are including your covering letter as an attachment or by post:

- ☐ I have made sure that I included: my address, the employer's address, date of my letter and the job reference number
- ☐ I have saved my covering letter with the job reference number / job title and your name

Introducing your letter:

- ☐ I have written to 'Dear (Named Person) or Sir / Madam if it was not possible to find out who to write to.

Concluding your letter:

- ☐ I have signed off with 'Yours sincerely' (for a named person) or 'Yours faithfully' (if you do not have the names of the recipients.) 'Kind regards' is also acceptable, particularly in an email.

I have structured my covering letter to cover the following three main areas:

1. Why this Employer interests me:

Preparation:

- ☐ I have taken time to research the company so that I can show some awareness of how it operates and what I think about it.
- ☐ I have found out about its history, culture, values, products and services and any latest news and developments.

Reflection:

- ☐ I have articulated the aspects which I found most interesting.

Motivation:

- ☐ I have said why the company appeals to me, showing enthusiasm and motivation.
- ☐ I have chosen reasons that the company would also find admirable.

2. Why this Role interest me:

- ☐ I have explained why the role interests me, giving reasons would be meaningful to the employer.
- ☐ I have indicated which competencies I would particularly enjoy and are my strengths.

3. How I have relevant experience for the competencies which the employer requires:

- ☐ I have provided specific examples of how I have demonstrated competencies (refer to exercise you have completed and see Hot Tips - Describing My Skills leaflet for further ideas)
- ☐ I have given more space to providing examples that can demonstrate more than one competency (giving details of the context, actions, results and my evaluation (e.g. what I learnt, how I might do things differently if faced with a similar situation)).

If I'm writing to express interest in an advertised position:

- ☐ I have included the job reference number and job title at the start of my letter.

If I'm writing speculatively:

- ☐ I have identified specific contacts that might be interested in my application.
- ☐ I have kept the letter short and focused.
- ☐ I have attached a CV and ensured that I have presented relevant skills the employer is likely to value.

If I'm writing to make a contact:

- ☐ I have referred to any mutual contact we may have in common.
- ☐ I have explained why I am interested in their company and sector.
- ☐ I have shown my desire to learn more and asked for a short amount of time to have a conversation (whether that is in person or over the phone or through an online meeting).

Proofreading and checking your covering letter

- ☐ I have kept my covering letter to one side A4.
- ☐ I have checked my letter is clear and logical.
- ☐ I have proofread to check for spelling and grammatical mistakes.

Covering letter FAQs

Do I attach my cover letter as a separate document or do I write it in the body of the email?

It is usually fine to incorporate your covering letter into an email rather than having it as a separate document - unless you have been asked to upload or attach a covering letter.

If I am attaching as a separate document, do I have to convert it to a PDF file first?

It is fine to convert your covering letter into a PDF file (to preserve formatting) unless you have been asked to upload it as a Word document.

How to address someone e.g. Mr, Mrs, Ms, Mx, first name or full name? Or Sir/Madam?

Try to find out the name of the hiring manager, if possible - it looks good to address your letter to a named person. You could use titles e.g. Mr, Mrs, Ms or Mx (Surname). If you don't know their title or are unsure about assigning one, you could write 'Dear Firstname Surname'. It is best to avoid 'Dear (Firstname)' in case this is considered too familiar. If you don't know who to address the letter to, 'Dear Sir or Madam' is acceptable.

What font do I use?

Fonts such as Arial are popular and widely considered to be acceptable. It is wise to avoid fonts such as Comic Sans, which can be seen as unprofessional. Font size of 11 or 12 points is considered to be ideal.

I have no previous work experience, what do I write in the skills section?

You can refer to any other experience e.g. volunteering, student societies, acting as a course representative, sports, and experience gained in your academic studies (e.g. group presentations). For further advice, check out our [Hot Tips leaflet on Work Experience](#) and speak with Careers.

I am an international student, do I mention it in the cover letter and ask for visa sponsorship?

Before considering your visa request, employers normally want to be persuaded that you meet their selection criteria. For that reason, it is best to first show your interest in the company, the role and how you meet their requirements. After this you could insert a short sentence e.g. 'I am an international student and able to work in the UK under the terms of my visa for X hours.' or 'I am an international

student currently able to work in the UK under the terms of my visa for X hours and believe my experience could be useful to your company - and would therefore like to ask if I could be considered for visa sponsorship.'

Do I sign off with 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully'? How do I sign off in the email?

If you are writing to a named person, end with 'Yours sincerely'. If you don't have the names of the recipients, use 'Yours faithfully'. 'Kind regards' is acceptable as an ending within an email.

Do I need to put my address and the company's address if I write my letter in the body of the email?

No, this is not usually expected by employers within an email. If you haven't provided your own address elsewhere in your application, you may wish to include it here.

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

APPLICATION FORMS



What is the purpose of an application form?

Application forms are used by employers to select the best candidates for the positions they are advertising by looking for evidence of the following:

A desire to work for that organisation - Do you clearly demonstrate that you understand what they do and fit in with their culture and uphold their values?

The desire to do the job - Are you motivated and enthusiastic about the role?

The ability to do the job - Do you have the right skills, qualifications and experience?

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 is usually required.

Applications - getting started

What should I consider before I start?

The key to writing an effective application is preparation and plenty of time to think about how to complete the application and to undertake your research.

Start by reading through the job description and person specification. The job description explains the duties you will need to perform in the role. A person specification clearly shows what qualifications, knowledge, skills or competencies the employer is looking for. You need to clearly demonstrate this by providing examples of evidence that you can meet the essential criteria they are looking for in order for you to progress to the next stage of the application process.

Other research you need to undertake is about the company or organisation such as what they do and how they operate, who their competitors are, the challenges or issues they may be facing and their ethos and working practice. This research can be done by looking at their website and their social media feeds and also by keeping yourself up to date by following current affairs.

What are employers looking for in my application?

Application forms are used by employers to select the best candidates for the positions they are advertising by looking for evidence of the following:

- **A desire to work for that organisation**
- **The desire to do the job**
- **The ability to do the job**

Demonstrating knowledge of the company can be referred to as commercial awareness and is a great way in which you can show your motivation for wanting to work for a particular organisation and the contribution you will be able to make.

Find out more about what the company does and how they operate, who their competitors are, the sector they work in and some of the challenges they are facing. Research their ethos, values and culture and show how you would fit in with them. However, be careful not to just repeat back basic information that they already know about themselves! Instead, make sure to remark on how the employer and its work have motivated you to apply.

Writing your 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 is 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.

SITUATION - forms the introduction

TASK - outlines what you needed to do (may be combined with the situation if you have a limited number of words to your answer)

ACTION - the action you took should form the main body of your answer

RESULT - outlines what you needed to do should be your conclusion – try to be specific if you can e.g. "We raised £400 for charity."

How can I describe my skills effectively?

Start by listing the key criteria the employer is looking for and then write examples of what you have done as part of your degree, work experience, paid and unpaid and extra curricular activities that evidence the skills and attributes relevant to that role. A detailed personal statement may be required but some application forms do not make this very clear. The form may just state - 'Please provide any additional information here'.

Example 1 - personal statement

This student is currently completing a BSc (Hons) in Adult Nursing is aiming for a career in cardiac nursing.

Example of why the applicant is interested in working with this particular employer:

As a regional referral centre of excellence, the Oxford Heart Centre at the John Radcliffe Hospital would present me with wide-ranging opportunities to develop my learning as part of my first post.

Example of what the values of the organisation mean to the applicant:

I am committed to the trust's values, enshrined in the NMC Code, in my treatment of every patient in my care, recognising the need to treat people as unique individuals and to uphold dignity at all times. For example, compassion and respect were demonstrated when interacting on placement with a patient with dementia who needed personal care, reassurance and understanding in frequent interactions. His adult children were struggling to cope with his care and initially were reluctant to interact with nursing staff. Building trust and rapport with them enabled me to improve effective communication with them about their father's treatment and care needs.

Example of applicant explaining why this role is of interest:

Cardiology is of particular interest to me as patients can have a heart problem at any age and this contributes to the varied conditions such as arrhythmias, hypertension and heart disease that present on the ward.

My interest in working in cardiology has developed due to my invaluable placement experience on a cardiothoracic ward where I gained experience of interacting with patients recovering from heart conditions. Although it can be challenging supporting patients during vulnerable times, I find it hugely rewarding to support them to come to terms with their condition. This has also allowed me to gain an insight into the critical role we can play in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease and other cardiovascular conditions.

Example of applicant using STAR to provide evidence against one of the competencies in the person specification:

I have used my communication skills effectively with patients in a range of situations. **(Situation)**

Part of my work on the cardiothoracic ward has included interacting with patients after a stroke who have expressive dysphasia, to assist their ability to communicate their wishes or concerns and to facilitate non-verbal communication. **(Task)**

Making use of picture boards with stroke patients has enabled me to facilitate effective communication. After ensuring that patients understand how to use the board effectively, I assisted them to communicate with staff and relatives in ways that are tailored to their individual needs. **(Actions)**

My mentor commented that I had patience when communicating with patients with expressive dysphasia. These experiences have offered me opportunities to develop creative and innovative ways to communicate effectively with my patients. **(Results)**

Example indicating willingness to work flexible hours:

I currently work for NHS Professionals as a care support worker in my spare time, and have been flexible in picking up weekend and night shifts as necessary. I would be willing to work at variable hours and weekends in order to take full responsibility in completing shift patterns required in the role.

Example 2 - personal statement

This student is currently completing a BA (Hons) in English Language and Linguistics and is aiming to start a career in digital marketing.

Example of demonstrating commitment or passion for chosen career path:

I am actively involved in using multiple social media platforms. I participate in LinkedIn forums in order to develop insights and increase my commercial awareness about issues and challenges affecting the industry. I follow the latest practices of professional bodies including the CIM. Recently I attended a webinar hosted by BBC Academy on 'LinkedIn for Creatives', which enabled me to learn about a range of strategies that can help to actively engage my audience including use of colourful imagery, initiating discussions and asking questions.

Example of applicant demonstrating commercial awareness:

In addition to my studies, I have undertaken a range of online courses including one in data-driven marketing through Future Learn, the Basics of Marketing Analytics. Through taking part in reading, following recommended research tasks and contributing to discussion forums, I gained many new insights that have increased my confidence.

Example of applicant demonstrating transferable skills gained through placement or voluntary work:

I have been an active member of my _____ society at University. As its marketing officer, I actively sought to attract new members via a range of creative social media activities. I engaged in some market research to identify topics and activities which would be of most interest to potential members. As a consequence, membership increased and the society gained twice as many followers on Facebook.

I have been involved in supporting fundraising events for Cancer Research. I worked collaboratively with a small group of volunteers to identify innovative ways to engage sponsors - activities included organising a village fun run and a second-hand clothes fashion show. These experiences have enabled me to gain a greater insight into the different aspects of planning successful events which were well attended. I also learned about how to manage a budget to achieve goals with limited resources.

Example of applicant demonstrating transferable skills gained through placement or voluntary work:

While working as a test and trace contactor during lockdown, I regularly communicated with members of the public that needed to self-isolate due to pandemic restrictions. I provided additional advice to some individuals to raise their awareness of how to self-isolate and I adapted my communication style to individual needs. **(Context)**

I gained experience of explaining clearly what action customers need to take, in a calm, friendly and positive way which engaged them with the process they needed to follow. I provided concise information, facts and strategies, displayed empathy and created opportunities for them to engage in discussion and respond positively to their questions. **(Actions)**

I received positive feedback from members of the public who complimented me on my ability to explain things clearly and empathetically **(Results)**

Through this experience I have gained confidence in my ability to understand customers' needs and to respond to them in a way that is flexible and responsive. **(Evaluation)**

Application form questions

There are usually questions about the organisation, industry and the wider sector. These could include;

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What inspires you about working in digital marketing?
- What are the major challenges facing the publishing industry over the next 5 years?

These types of questions are used to measure the candidate's motivation and understanding of the job role. Clearly explain why you are interested in the role at that company in particular. Demonstrate the research you have undertaken but be careful not to repeat back to them what they have written on their website. Employers are interested in what you think. Also, don't be tempted to cut and paste your answer from previous applications you may have made.

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 to tell the employer what you think they want to hear.

References

Generally, employers will expect one **academic** and one **employment** reference.

- The **academic** referee 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 or 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!

Application form exercise

Try out the STAR/CARE approach now by selecting creating a vacancy which interests you and working out how you would demonstrate

	Competency Example - Communication	Competency Your example:.....
Situation / Task / Context	<i>When I was working in customer services in my local supermarket, I often had to show good communication skills when dealing with customer complaints, so that I positively represented my employer. For example, I had to respond to an irate customer returning an item that was defective.</i>	
Action (say what you did)	<i>I listened carefully to what the customer said, acknowledging their issues. I kept calm, explained what I could do next. I discussed options with my manager, explained these to the customer and identified a solution he was happy with.</i>	
Result	<i>The matter was resolved to the customer's satisfaction I was complimented by the customer and they came back again on future occasions</i>	
Evaluate (say what you learnt)	<i>I learnt from this that it is always worthwhile to listen carefully to understand customers and to keep them informed, so that they know we care about their concerns</i>	

You may find it useful to check the '[Action Words](#)' and '[Describing your skills](#)' resources to get some ideas!

Application form checklist

Initial research and planning

- ☐ I have researched the company/organisation and the specific role I am applying for.
- ☐ I have read the job description and the person specification for the role in full.
- ☐ I have enough time to complete and submit my application well before the deadline (remember vacancies may close early if sufficient applications are received).
- ☐ I have investigated what the application form requires and any particular instructions e.g. word counts.
- ☐ I am drafting my answers in a separate document so that I can edit and perfect them before uploading/sending my application.
- ☐ I have contacted the employer for further information if I am unsure about any aspect of the role or the application process.

Completing the application form

- ☐ I have used STAR or CARE to demonstrate that I have the skills the employer is looking for.
- ☐ I have provided evidence-based answers with clear examples of my skills/experience.
- ☐ I have related my answers back to the essential criteria in the person specification.
- ☐ I have avoided highlighting any negatives or weaknesses.

Checking and submitting

- ☐ I have given answers to all the questions - in particular I have provided full answers to any general sections e.g. 'additional information' or 'tell us why you want this job'.
- ☐ I have made sure that each answer directly answers the question being asked.
- ☐ I have proofread my application and checked my spelling and grammar.
- ☐ I have kept a copy of the information and answers I have submitted in case it is not possible to retrieve this at a later date.

Application form FAQs

What should I put in the supporting statement on the application form?

This is your opportunity to show your motivation by giving reasons why you want to work for that company in that particular role. This means undertaking research about the company, what they do and the personal qualities they are looking for. Carefully study the job and person specification and provide evidence for the essential criteria. This could include relevant examples of experience from University, part time work and extracurricular activities. Use the STAR/CARE method to provide clear examples to show evidence and how you have developed and used the key skills required. See our Hot Tips, '[Describing your Skills](#)'.

How far back can I go when giving examples of evidence?

There are no hard and fast rules about how recent your examples should be, but anything beyond 5 years may probably be considered out of date. Try to use up to date examples wherever you can. These can be from your studies, not only from extracurricular activities, as they will have enabled you to develop the skills and attributes employers are looking for.

Can I use an example more than once?

It is advisable to try to demonstrate how you have developed the necessary skills from a range of experiences wherever possible. Try to think of the experience that best demonstrate that particular skill or attribute which could come from your studies, employment, volunteering or extracurricular activity.

What if I don't meet all the essential criteria?

It is important to always carefully read the person specification to see that your skills meet the essential and desirable criteria as much as possible. However, for some of the criteria, this may be more difficult. Think about the transferable skills you have gained from your course, part time work and any other extra curricular activities. For example, working in retail can require you to demonstrate good communication, time management and teamwork.

Should I disclose information about my disability or health issue?

The Equality Act (2010) makes it illegal for an employer to discriminate against a person on the basis of their disability. However there are many reasons why you may be reluctant to disclose your disability on your initial application. Deciding when to disclose depends on your disability and your individual needs. For more information and advice check out our Hot Tips leaflet, '[Disability – Talking to employers about your disability. Tips and support](#)'.

How do I deal with negative aspects in my application?

It is advisable not to dwell on things that do not reflect you positively and avoid highlighting the areas in which you feel less confident. Instead, try to reflect on what skills and attributes you have developed as a result. Difficult times and dealing with adversity can demonstrate resilience and determination. Responding positively when things go wrong or not according to plan shows that you are able to effectively evaluate, analyse and show problem solving skills.

The application requests additional information, what do I include?

If you have not yet had the opportunity to demonstrate your motivation for wanting to apply for the job or course this could be where you can add this information. If you have not already highlighted your key skills relevant to the job role or course then this could also be included. Consider any other achievements or experiences pertinent to the role that you have not yet included. This section can also be used if you would like to explain any aspects of your application that may need further explanation.

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

SPECULATIVE APPLICATIONS



Introduction - what is the purpose of a speculative application?

What is a speculative application?

Not all vacancies are formally advertised - there can also be a 'hidden' jobs market of unadvertised opportunities. A speculative application is a way to proactively approach a company or organisation who may not actually be advertising roles, and apply to work for them. In many ways, a speculative application is similar to a normal application as you will need to clearly outline your suitability and relevant skills and experience. However a key difference is that you will not have a job description or set of selection criteria to work from, so you will need to do some research to determine what sort of roles the employer may offer and what sort of skills/attributes they might be interested in.

Ask for a conversation (an informational interview)!

Making contact with a potential employer or with someone who already works for the industry can be really helpful in not only developing your knowledge and understanding but could create work opportunities. [An informational interview](#) is a meeting whereby a job seeker seeks advice on their career, industry and the culture of a potential future workplace. However, rather than asking for a job/ internship/work experience when making initial contact, ask for this conversation. Check out our [practical guide to Networking](#) for more ideas.

What should I include in my application?

Remember that you are not responding to an advertised vacancy, but expressing and demonstrating your interest in this company/organisation and suitability for their work. You should keep your application short and succinct to maximise the chances of it being read. You will need to explain who you are and why you are interested in this specific company/organisation. Explain also why you are speculatively approaching them in this way - for example you might have noticed the company is currently expanding, or you might be interested in a particular project they are undertaking. Think about what you are able to offer them in terms of your skills and experience. Make sure you include something about next steps - you could ask for an informal telephone discussion or for further information on their recruitment processes.

How should I make a speculative application?

Often it will be an email or letter to the company/organisation but remember that you can also use LinkedIn to connect with potential employers. To work out which employers to approach you will need to do some research using any networks you have, or resources such as Prospects.

-
- Think carefully about how you might adopt the right 'tone' in writing which the reader would consider to be relevant and professional to them.
 - What tone would you use if you are writing to a person that you know?
 - Could you ask if you could arrange to have a telephone call or video call at a time which suits them?
 - If using LinkedIn to connect, avoid just sending a note which is generic e.g. 'I want to connect with you' - personalise it.
 - Here is a checklist below (also see the examples of speculative approaches on the following pages).

Speculative applications checklist

Making contact by emails or letters

- ☐ I have thoroughly researched the company - refer to our Hot Tips guides about how to understand [the company](#) and how its work fits into [the wider job sector](#).
- ☐ I have considered the likely issues, objectives and concerns which the employer may be facing and showed my awareness and appreciation in how I have referred to it.
- ☐ I have clearly explained my purpose in writing to them.
- ☐ I have sought to identify and write to a named person.
- ☐ I ensured that I maintained an appropriate professional tone in my letter even when addressing the letter to a person I know.
- ☐ I have ensured my letter is brief and succinct.
- ☐ I have checked that I come across as confident and persuasive, but not demanding.
- ☐ I have referred to protocols for starting and ending a letter (see *Speculative Applications FAQs* in the Applications Guide)
- ☐ I have considered whether I wish to refer to my intention to follow up my email/letter.
- ☐ I have checked spelling and grammar.
- ☐ If I'm writing a personal email or LinkedIn note, I have ensured that I have written a targeted, personal note which shows my interest and dedication to learn more.
- ☐ I have made sure that my LinkedIn profile is consistent with my CV and personal statement / covering letter.

Speculative applications FAQs

Why is it worth me writing speculative letters?

- You may get to hear about opportunities that haven't yet been advertised. (Making direct contact with employers can be really useful as they may be thinking about recruiting!)
- It may lead to an opportunity for some work experience which in turn could lead to employment.
- You could write to ask for a chance to speak with the employer to learn more about their company, career and employment sector.

Who should I send it to?

Unless you want to work in HR, it's often best to send speculative letters directly to specific contacts/managers (outside of recruitment or HR, as these functions act as gatekeepers/filters). Departmental managers may also have a clearer idea of immediate job/work requirements than HR staff.

How should I begin and end my speculative letter or email?

Always try to write to a specific, named person. Use their correct title in the salutation i.e. 'Dear Mr Jones' or 'Dear Ms Smith'. If you really cannot find a name use 'Dear Sir/Madam'.

End the letter correctly: Letters to a named person i.e. 'Dear Ms Smith' should sign off with 'Yours sincerely'. Letters to 'Dear Sir or Madam' should end with 'Yours faithfully'.

Can I follow up on my speculative letter?

Yes, this could be useful but be careful to be polite and not pressurise - allow a week or two between your first email/letter and your follow up. You may need to accept that the employer may not have had time to look at your email or does not wish to reply.

How could I write a speculative letter over LinkedIn?

Refer to how you came across this person / company and explain why it interests you. Show commitment to learn and benefit from their perspective. Ask if they would be willing to give you further advice - perhaps in person.

Example 1 - speculative covering letter

Your Address

Mr P Egan
Retail Manager
FancyRags
Queen Street
Oxford, OX1 2AB

Dear Mr Egan,

I read with interest the recent report in the Oxford Times describing the forthcoming completion of FancyRags newest retail outlet in the city centre. It looks like a great opportunity for your business and I am writing to enquire whether you may have a need for additional staff.

I am currently undertaking a degree in English at Oxford Brookes University and have two years sales experience in a range of retail outlets, including Next and Debenhams. I am currently available for part-time work (up to 15 hours per week) but am planning to take a gap year and would be available for full-time work from June. In the longer term I'm looking to develop my career in the retail sector.

I am attaching a short CV, which expands on my experience, and would welcome an opportunity to find out more about any suitable vacancies. I will telephone you in a few days to hopefully arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Swift

Example 2 - request for an information interview

Your Address

Mr Brown
Marketing Manager
Siemens Industrial Projects and Systems
Sir William Siemens House
Princess Road
Manchester
M20 3UR

Dear Mr Brown,

Jo Smith (of xxxx) suggested I drop you a line to see if it would be possible to arrange an informal discussion with you.

I have decided that I want to move into the field of xxxx. I am not looking for a job at present but rather to extend my knowledge of the sector and to see how suited I would be to working in it. I am a graduate (or undergraduate) of xxx, with a variety of work experience and skills which seem well suited to xxxx.

I have already undertaken some research into the field and the type of companies and roles available, and I can see my skills seem to be a good match for a number of jobs. At this stage I am now trying to meet with knowledgeable people to deepen my understanding of what it is actually like to work in this sector.

I would be very grateful if you could spare me 15-20 minutes for a discussion, at a mutually convenient time. I attach my CV for information and will give your office a call in the next few days to see if we can arrange to meet.

Yours sincerely,

Sam Crow

Example 3 - request for an information interview

This could be shortened to create a briefer LinkedIn note

Dear Chris,

I have been very interested to follow your varied work as a political correspondent at the BBC, particularly in engaging new audiences through the Brexitcast and Newcast podcasts, and your ability to host political debates on Any Questions. It was great to read your RGS article online and to discover that, like myself, you are a Geographer.

I'm now in my second year at Oxford Brookes and have already been seeking to develop my reporting skills during hustings for The Tab student online newspaper and gaining the chance to interview several candidates in the recent general and local elections.

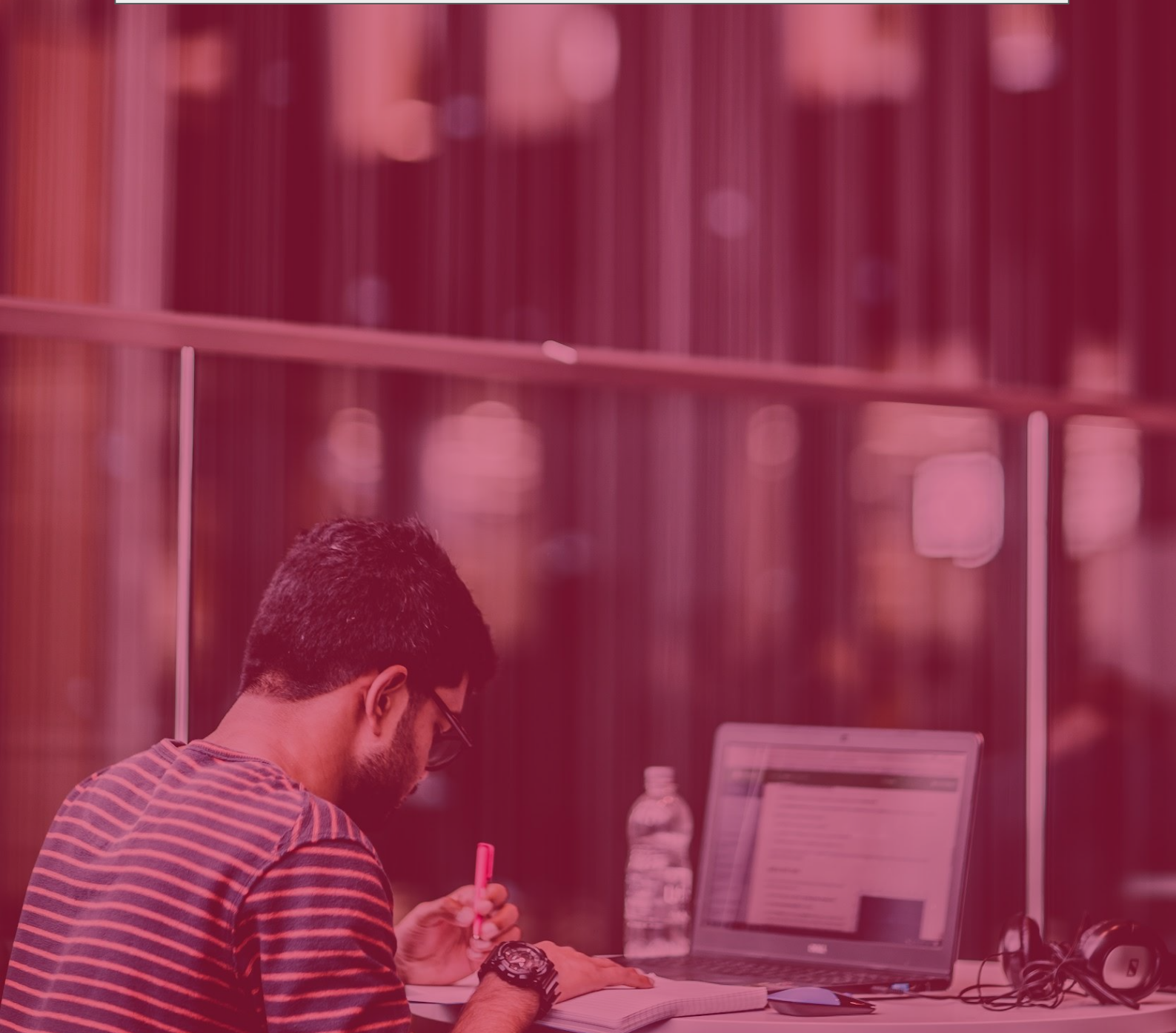
Could you possibly find a way to have a 15 minute telephone or Zoom call so I could learn more about your career experience and gain some valuable tips for how I could further develop myself so I might one day follow a similar path to you in future? Hope to hear from you soon.

Thanks and best wishes,

Sarah-Jane Smith

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

APPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY



Introduction to applications for further study

What is the purpose of further study applications?

Like applications for a job, you will need to undertake research about the course you intend to study. Find out more about what you will be studying, how you will study and what skills and knowledge the University is looking for.

You will need to explain in your application, why you have chosen that particular institution and department. The University will expect you to have found out the detail of the course content, what expertise they have and the latest research they are currently undertaking.

What to include in the personal statement for a postgraduate course

The personal statement should include why the subject you are applying for interests you. This could include aspects of the course that particularly appeal to you and your reasons why. Try to draw and make connections with your current course, any relevant work experience you may have or any other activities you may have undertaken that demonstrates your motivation. E.g. further reading, talks. Include examples of where you have shown the key skills necessary for postgraduate study such as research, independent study and time management. Explain what you hope to gain from the course and where you hope it might lead in the future.

Use the STAR/CARE technique as detailed throughout this guide to provide structured examples.

Check out the Hot Tips leaflet '[Applying for Further Study: Personal Statement](#)' for further tips and [example personal statements on Prospects.ac.uk](#).

Applications for further study checklist

Initial research and reflection

- ☐ I have reflected on my next steps and considered whether postgraduate study is right for me.
- ☐ I have investigated the range of different types of postgraduate course which are available and considered which is most suitable for me.
- ☐ I have investigated funding options and established that postgraduate study is financially viable.
- ☐ I have researched the course content and the modules/study areas which will be available to me.
- ☐ I have checked the application process - How do I apply? What documents do I need to submit? When is the deadline?

Writing the application

- ☐ I have avoided using my undergraduate personal statement as a starting point.
- ☐ I have avoided starting my application with narrative/autobiographical information and instead gone straight to the point.
- ☐ I have explained the reasons why I want to study at this particular university.
- ☐ I have explained the reasons why I want to study this particular course.
- ☐ I have demonstrated enthusiasm for, and interest in, the subject of study.
- ☐ I have shown how my current studies at undergraduate level have prepared me for postgraduate study.
- ☐ I have demonstrated that I have the academic skills to complete the course successfully.
- ☐ I have highlighted other relevant skills and provided evidence of these.
- ☐ I have used STAR or CARE to ensure that I discuss my skills in full and provide evidence-based examples.
- ☐ I have focused on what I have learnt from my experiences, not just what I did.
- ☐ I have related the postgraduate course to my future plans and shown how it might fit in with my career aspirations.

Applications for further study FAQs

What funding is available for PG study?

The main source of funding for masters courses is the non-means tested postgraduate loan which means that the amount you receive does not depend on your financial background. Other sources of funding are scholarships and bursaries available from the University at which you want to study and many charities and trusts. For more comprehensive information, see [the Gov.uk guide to funding](#) and [further advice on Prospect.ac.uk](#).

What are the different types of PG study?

The main types of Postgraduate courses include Masters and postgraduate Diplomas, PhD, professional courses such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and [conversion courses](#) where required e.g. in Psychology.

What do I need to include in my personal statement for PG study?

It is important that you clearly demonstrate why studying the subject at that institution interests you and what you hope to gain from the course. Evidence reasons why you think makes you a good candidate for the course which could include skills and attributes gained from degree study and extra-curricular activities such as independent study or technical skills. See our Hot Tips leaflet, '[Applying for Further Study: Personal Statement](#)'.

How does studying for a Masters differ from a degree?

A taught Masters such as MA, MSc, MEng usually focuses on one subject area and consists of seminars and lectures including research methods which culminates in a dissertation. The main differences are that at Masters level study, you are likely to have much more extensive and advanced reading lists and it is much faster paced and requires much more self-directed learning.

How does PhD differ from a Masters?

A PhD is typically a 3-4 year research degree although it can take longer. It is almost completely self-led and completely unique with its research aims and contributions that are made. There are usually 2 supervisors that provide academic support but the management and progress of the work will be entirely your responsibility.

How many PG courses can I apply to at any one time?

For academic courses applications are made directly to the University and there are generally no restrictions to how many you apply to at any one time. However, bear in mind that you will need to submit separate applications and provide necessary data for each one. Vocational courses such as PGCE have a centralised system.

When are the deadlines for PG courses?

These can vary considerably for each course as some can have deadlines as early as Semester 1 and others will still accept applications later in the second semester. It is strongly recommended that you undertake thorough research as early as possible.

Are there any upfront costs involved?

Some universities will charge you a non-refundable admissions fee which means you will not get this returned if you are unsuccessful with your application or decide not to subsequently accept the offer. It is important to do your research to make sure you have all the up to date information.

How can I tailor my postgraduate application when applying from a different subject area?

Begin with undertaking research about your proposed area of study so that you are able to confidently express your motivation for wanting to explore an alternative subject area. Reflect on your experiences so far, including academic study and extra-curricular activities and identify relevant key skills and attributes you have acquired that demonstrate that you would be successful in this course of study. Remember to mention how this course of study contributes to your future plans.

What references do I need to include?

Each University will specify which references you will need to include. This will usually be academic referees. It is important that you choose referees that know you, and have had contact with you as they will then be able to comment on your academic performance and suitability for the course to which you are applying. It is courteous for you to ask your referee whether they give their consent prior to making your application and to keep them up to date with the status of your applications.

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

LINKEDIN AND APPLICATIONS



LinkedIn and applications

Social media has now become an integral part of researching information, job searching and extending your personal network.

LinkedIn is the world's biggest professional networking platform used extensively by organisations, students and graduates. If you are not familiar with LinkedIn, explore [LinkedIn for Students](#).

Your profile

Create your profile using the online instructions. Remember that this is likely to be how you make a great first impression and create a professional online presence. Your profile is like your online CV which highlights your education, skills and experience.

Upload a professional photo as your profile is much more likely to get viewed.

Researching Organisations

Most organisations will have a company page where you can find out more about them including their culture, values and any opportunities.

Consider taking part in relevant discussions to show that you are motivated, interested and well informed.

Looking at profiles of existing employees can provide some invaluable insights into how to develop your own profile and potential career development opportunities.

Exploring and joining Groups

Take the time to explore what professional bodies, groups and forums are already established on LinkedIn. There are likely to be groups for most sectors and career areas.

Joining groups could enable you to develop your network, keep up to date with news and any developments and also be made aware of job opportunities.

Making connections

LinkedIn is very effective networking tool and used extensively by job seekers to explore the “hidden job market” (jobs that are not advertised).

When approaching an employer, always personalise your request with a message and ask for help, advice or information but not a job!

If you would like help and advice on how to start to develop your LinkedIn profile and/or how to use it to enhance your job search, get in touch with Careers who will be happy to help.

See our Hot Tips leaflet, ‘[Social media: building your online presence](#)’.

APPLICATIONS GUIDE

GLOSSARY



Glossary

ATS (Applicant tracking systems) - software used by human resources that acts as a database for job applicants. ATS are used by companies of all sizes to organise, search, and communicate with large groups of applicants.

CARE (Context, Action, Result, Evaluation) and STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) - two methods of answering interview or application questions in a structured manner.

CV (Curriculum Vitae from Latin: the course of one's life) - an account of a person's education, qualifications, and previous occupations. Usually required for job applications in the UK.

Informational interview - An informal conversation with an employer to gain insights into an industry, a company or/and a role.

Résumé - Shorter than a CV (a Résumé is typically one page long). A summary of a person's education and work history relevant to the job an individual is applying for. This shorter format is often used in North America and some European countries.

Shortlisting grid - clear and visual method which allows the employer to compare each candidate against the criteria set for the role, in a fair and systematic way.