

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.

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- 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