

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 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.