

APPLYING FOR JOBS: YOUR GUIDE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is a basic guide for those who are looking to improve their job application skills.

The first contact

Your job application, whether an application form, a letter or a CV (curriculum vitae), is your first contact with a prospective employer (internal or external). Make sure that you read the job details thoroughly and complete your application carefully. If your application is accurate, well presented and interesting you are more likely to get an interview.

Suitability and enthusiasm

Your objective is to show the employer that you have the skills, experience and enthusiasm to do the job. First impressions are crucial. Take your time with an application and make sure it is as good as possible.

Only apply for a job if you believe you can do it and find the prospect exciting. You need to have the right qualifications and skills but enthusiasm and commitment are also important. Before putting in an application for a role it is suggested that you work through the following activities;

- Research the organisation e.g. information sent with application forms, trade journals, internet research, press, word of mouth.
- Study the job e.g. the advert, job description, person specification, selection criteria, research the organisation and perhaps talk to someone who currently works there.
- Think carefully about your suitability for the post i.e. your qualifications, your skills, your paid and unpaid work experience, your personality, your strengths, your measureable achievements and what you can offer the organisation.

2.0 APPLYING FOR JOBS

2.1 Application Forms

You may be asked to complete an application form rather than submitting a personal CV. Application forms are designed to ensure that all the information an organisation wants is supplied in one place.

Before you start completing the form, remember to:

- Give yourself enough time to do a good job of completing the form.
- Get a copy of the role description or person specification and carefully relate your own skills and experience to those required.
- Read any instructions carefully.
- Seek clarification if you do not understand something, either from the guidance notes (if supplied) or by contacting the recruiting manager.
- It may help to keep your CV handy to ensure details are accurate, such as dates.

Online applications

Many employers now use online forms. Some helpful hints for the completion of online forms are included below:

- Many systems give you a password so that you can complete the form over a period of time rather than in one sitting – remember to write it down so you do not forget it.
- If there is a spell check, do ensure you use it. If there isn't one, prepare text off-line in a Word document, spell check it and copy it across.
- If you can download and complete the application form off-line, this helps you to avoid losing your work if something happens to the internet connection. Some sites have a save facility and it is a good idea to use it as you go along
- Complete all sections as fully as possible, but be careful to stick to any word count limits.
- It's a good idea to make sure you have a copy of your completed form saved to your own computer before you submit it.
- If you have any complications or problems filling in the form, don't hesitate to contact the recruiting manager.

When completing the application form:

- If completing the form by hand, before you start it is worth photocopying the form a few times so you can practice filling it in.
- If you are handwriting your form, do it neatly and carefully with black ink as this photocopies better. If you make mistakes, do not cross them out, use correction fluid instead as this is neater.
- Analyse your skills and match them to the selection criteria.
- Answer the questions as fully as possible. Ensure that you organise and express your thoughts clearly.
- For work experience and education sections, the standard practice is to list the most recent things first.
- If you do not have an extensive employment history, don't forget to include part-time jobs and work experience, and what you learned from them.
- If there are gaps in your employment and education, include a brief explanation as to why.
- Ensure you complete the additional information/why do you want this job section as it is another chance to show how your skills match what is required.

Finally

- Read your application through carefully. Double check your spelling and grammar, and that you have answered the questions thoroughly and matched your answers to the job specification.
- It can help to get friends or family to look through what you have written, as an extra check.
- Keep a copy of your completed form. You will need to refer to it if you are called for an interview.
- If you are returning the completed form by post, put it in a large envelope, so it is not folded more than once. This makes it easier for the employer to scan or photocopy.
- Write a short covering letter to go with the application form. Do not forget to quote the reference number for the role (if there is one) and say where you saw the advert.

2.2 CV

A CV is a record of your personal, education and work details. It should be typed and up to date. Standard recruitment practice is that the CV should be no more than two pages long with each page printed on a separate sheet. It is not necessary to number the pages.

When writing your CV be confident and use positive language. Try not to make general statements about your qualities. Instead support your statements with specific evidence. Try to link your skills and experience to the requirements of the job you are applying for.

You may wish to include the following sections:

Personal details

There is no need to use a heading for this section. Include your full name, address, phone number and email address at the top of the first page.

Education

Include details of your education, normally from the age of 16, including the name of the school/college/university, attendance dates, qualifications achieved and when.

Professional experience

Detail your career history starting with your present or most recent employer. It is a good idea to briefly explain your main responsibilities, and any notable achievements or skills you have developed within each role.

Additional skills

This could include any other professional qualifications you have, and relevant skills that you have developed outside of your professional work, e.g. through hobbies or personal responsibilities.

Other points to consider are:

- Be careful when writing dates for your education and career history, ensure these are accurate and explain any gaps.
- Unless there are specific criteria for the advertised job, you don't have to include personal details such as your gender, nationality, marital status, age and date of birth and whether or not you have children.

- Only give details of hobbies, interests and other skills if you feel they are relevant.
- You may also choose to include details of two referees at the end of your CV. Give names, positions and contact details. Make sure you have obtained their permission first and brief any referees on the types of jobs you are applying for so that they can write a reference that is relevant. Alternatively, or if space is tight, state that references are available on request.
- If applying for different roles then you should modify your CV to reflect your suitability for roles requiring different skills or in a different sector.

Which CV?

There are many different CV formats and no real 'rights or wrongs'. Choose one you feel demonstrates your skills, experience and qualifications to the best advantage.

Please see the useful links section at the end.

2.3 Cover Letter

Your CV should always be accompanied by a covering letter. This gives you an opportunity to give your CV some context and to highlight your suitability for the role.

The covering letter is also a way to demonstrate your understanding of the employing organisation and how you relate to its values, ethos and aspirations. While your CV sets out the skills you have for the post, your covering letter more explicitly presents your motivation and adaptability. A covering letter should:

- Demonstrate to the employer your interest in and knowledge of the company.
- Highlight particular parts of your CV that are your unique selling points.
- Draw attention to additional information that does not fit easily into a CV.
- Explain any personal circumstances or anomalies in your application e.g. any gaps in employment.

Well-written covering letters are also particularly effective for speculative applications outside a recruitment cycle.

Style

- It is best to address your letter to a named person. This will ensure that it reaches the right person and it also gives you a contact name for a follow-up call or email.
- Think from the employer's perspective rather than your own. Tell them what you can contribute to the organisation rather than how it can benefit you.
- Ideally your covering letter should be no more than one page long and with short and clearly themed paragraphs

Content

The following format provides a useful overview for a letter:

- Briefly introduce yourself, state what position you are applying for and where you saw it advertised. For a speculative letter, specify the type of work you are looking for.
- Explain why you are interested in this type of work, demonstrating an understanding of what it is likely to involve.
- Explain why you are interested in working for this particular employer. Demonstrate enthusiasm and evidence of research into such aspects as their successes, values or clients.
- Highlight the ways in which you are suitable for this position. Provide evidence of your key strengths by referring to experience listed on your CV. Aim to show that your key strengths reflect the requirements of the employer and the needs of the role. You can use examples from your personal interests and experiences if they are relevant.
- Take the opportunity, if necessary, to explain any anomalies in your background, such as any employment gaps or any ways in which you do not match the selection criteria.
- Indicate availability for interview and thank them for considering your application.

2.4 Hints & Tips

- Always keep a copy of any job applications in case you are invited to an interview. It is helpful to remember the things you wrote.
- Do some research into the organisation and try to use this in the application.
- Do ask someone to check your draft CV and then re-check your final version.
- It creates a better impression if you use good-quality paper and a good printer for typed CVs and letters.
- Send applications by first class post to ensure they arrive quickly.
- Remember Dear Mr...Ms.....should end 'Yours sincerely' and Dear Sir...should end 'Yours faithfully'.

3.0 INTERVIEWS

3.1 Before the Interview

GOOD PREPARATION for an interview is vital.

Suggestions for how you might prepare yourself:

- If applying for roles outside the University, find out about the organisation. Most organisations will be happy to send information explaining what they do, alternatively look at their website.
- If applying for a role within the University try and find out about the Institution/Department itself. The University website contains comprehensive information as to what different parts of the University do, their structure, latest achievements etc.
- Read up about the job: most organisations supply an information pack for a vacancy including a job description. If they haven't done so you can usually obtain more information by reading the advertisement again, calling the recruitment agency, if there is one, or contacting the recruiting manager directly, for more details. Also take the opportunity to do some internet research.
- Check on interview arrangements: for example, how will you get to the interview, how long will it take, who will conduct the interview (Human Resources or a Head of department), what will you be expected to do (is it just an interview or will there be tests as well)
- Don't forget to take with you any documents or information requested in your interview invite. Also take a spare CV, pen and notepad.
- It helps to think in advance about any questions you might be asked at the interview both in terms of evidence of your skills and experience and explaining any gaps you may have in terms of the job requirements. Some typical questions you may be asked are included in the 'At Interview' section.
- Do practise your interview technique: you could ask a friend or partner to act as interviewer. The more you practise, the more at ease you will feel on the day.

3.2 The Interview

This part is divided into arrival, the interview itself and after the interview. Its purpose is to help you feel less nervous on the day. The more confident you feel, the better able you will be to present yourself accurately and positively to the interviewer.

Arrival

- In order to create a good first impression dress smartly and aim for an outfit you feel comfortable in. If you do not have a business suit, wear smart trousers/skirt and a shirt. Remember, even if you are applying for an internal role and you know the interviewer, you still need to make a good impression and dress appropriately for the interview.
- Aim to arrive in plenty of time: that way you will be allowing for any travel problems and will be calm as you go in to the interview.
- Familiarise yourself with the surroundings: do this while you are waiting. For example, what is the building like, what do the staff seem like? This is all useful information as to whether the organisation is the right fit for you.
- Be prepared to wait: you may be one of several candidates and therefore it is possible that, unless you are the first candidate of the day, your interview may be delayed.
- You may sometimes be asked to complete a further form while you are waiting. Again, make sure you do this carefully and legibly.
- First impressions count: a firm handshake, direct eye contact and a smile in greeting will make a positive impression.
- Think carefully before answering. There is no need to rush. The questioner may use your application form or CV to structure the interview (it is useful to have a copy with you) and will be asking you questions about your knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to the job, your potential, interests and aspirations. You will usually be asked open questions (how, why, what, when) to encourage you to give a full answer.
- **Typical questions you may be asked are:**
 - What do you know about the organisation/department?
 - Why did you leave your last job (if applicable)?
 - Why did you apply for this vacancy?
 - What skills can you bring to this role?
 - What gives you job satisfaction?

What knowledge/experience do you have of.....? (different parts of the job)

- **Think of suitable answers to difficult questions e.g.**
What are your strengths/weaknesses, likes/dislikes?
What interests you most about this job?
What are you looking for in your next job?
What do you see yourself doing in terms of role in a few years time?
What did you like/dislike about your last/current job?
- **Many employers use behavioural questions** (sometimes called competency questions) the theory behind this is that past behaviour is the best indicator of future behaviour. You could be asked for example to speak about a time when you used your initiative to achieve a goal.
- Prepare beforehand, examples of times when you have demonstrated the skills required in the job e.g. working in a team, solving problems, dealing with a difficult situation, working to deadlines etc.
- Answer positively and enthusiastically, interviewers place weight on evidence provided to back up statements. Don't lie if you haven't got what they are looking for, and avoid using the same example more than once, but don't be afraid to use examples from outside of work – for example, skills developed from interests, organisational abilities etc. Sell yourself – they will only know you are good at something if you tell them! If you haven't had the chance to mention some relevant experience, say so at the end of the interview.
- Ensure you answer the questions succinctly and if you did not hear the question or understand it fully, do ask the interviewer to repeat it.
- Try to build rapport: this is easier in a one-to-one interview setting (most commonly used in the private sector). If you are in a board interview with many interviewers (most commonly used in the public sector), concentrate on the questioner when giving your answer whilst attempting to include other interviewers. Maintaining eye contact is important, although your questioner may well look down to make notes, and you should aim to keep gestures and body movement to a minimum as they detract from your answer. By watching your interviewer you may be able to judge how she/he is reacting to you and respond accordingly.
- Include your own questions: the interviewer will lead the interview but will usually expect you to ask questions towards the end of the interview.

Typical questions you may want to ask are about:

terms and conditions	e.g. training, hours of work, probationary periods, performance appraisal, etc. <i>Questions regarding salary or holiday are usually asked at a later date.</i>
policies	e.g., health and safety, training and development.
the department	e.g., who will you report to/ what is the line management structure, how many people will you work with, where is the department located?
the future	e.g., the future direction of the company and the department – how may this affect the job you applied for? What challenges does the organisation face?
the interview	e.g., how does this fit in with the total recruitment process? When will you hear the decision?

3.3 After the Interview

- Reflect on the interview experience and whether you liked the organisation and the job. Ask yourself whether it would be the right position for you if offered the role.
- Seek out the decision: if you haven't heard by the company's deadline, wait a couple of days, and then call them.
- Understand the decision: if you're not selected, ask for feedback, this can give you useful information for your future job search and interviews (e.g. on strengths and weaknesses).

4.0 SUMMARY

These are guidelines to assist in applying for a new role. The best you can do is to prepare yourself well, answer positively and confidently and ask questions at the interview which enable to you fully understand what the job involves.

5.0 CHECKLIST

Before the Interview

Am I prepared for the interview?

- Do I know about the company?
- Have I found out about the job?
- Have I prepared a list of questions they could ask me and I could ask them (see below)?
- Have I practised my interview technique?

The Interview

Things I need to remember:

- First impressions count
- Think carefully before answering
- Answer positively and enthusiastically
- Try to build rapport
- Include my own questions at the end

Questions

What might they ask me?

- Open-ended questions – how, when, what, why
- Answers to prepare:
 - my knowledge
 - my skills and attitudes in relation to the job
 - my potential
 - my interests
 - my aspirations

What could I ask them?

- Questions on:
 - terms and conditions and policies
 - the department, the future of the company
 - the interview process, any unclear areas

USEFUL LINKS

- <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/crs/> (University site devoted to Contract Research Staff with the provision of various links to include those which you might find useful in locating jobs outside of the University)
- <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/cppd/calendar.shtml> (a listing of staff development activities within the University for the current academic year)
- <http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/> (Cambridge Careers Service) (advice on writing/updating your CV, to access you will be required to Register)
- <http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/students/work/cvlayout.asp>
- <http://jobs.ac.uk> (on-line recruitment service)
- <http://www.cvs.ac.uk> (promotion of careers in UK research)
- www.cam.ac.uk/jobs (Temporary Employment Service TES)