

Job Application Forms

An application is the first impression that the recruiter will have of you and is your opportunity to convince them of your ability and motivation for the role. Follow these tips to increase your chances of being selected for the next stage.

An application form is like an essay; it requires planning, research, and time to do properly. Think of it as an example of your written communication skills and attention to detail.

Your answers will reveal how far your competencies match the job description and person specification, and what you know about the industry and organisation.

Each application form will be different, some have a series of questions and others may ask you for a statement on why you are right for the role. Respond as precisely as you can and keep to their word limit.

Understand what they are looking for

In order to sell your skills effectively, your answers will need to match the requirements of the job. Highlight the abilities and skills the employer is looking for as mentioned in the job description and person specification so you can relate your responses to the job, the organisation, and the kind of person they are looking for.

Once you know what they want, you can provide examples of your skills and experience to show you meet their requirements. Look at the language they use to describe the role. If they use phrases like “team player” and “results focused”, think about how you can build these phrases into your response to show that you’ll fit in.

Be specific and back it up with evidence

Make it easy for employers by providing evidence of how you meet their requirements with your relevant skills, knowledge and experience. If you just make general statements about yourself, it can be difficult for the reader to work out how accurate these statements are.

Think through your experiences carefully and find the best example to highlight each skill required. Work experience, volunteering, part-time work, extra-curricular activities, and your studies can all be useful sources of examples.

STARR (Situation, Task, Actions, Result/Reflection) is a handy acronym to use to structure examples of how you have demonstrated a particular skill.

Situation	Briefly outline the circumstances that led to your action.
Task	Explain exactly what the task, problem or goal was.
Actions	Give a step-by-step explanation of what you did (to show the skills you’re giving evidence of)
Result & Reflection	Outline what happened as a result. Be specific, this will show your effectiveness in using that skill.

As a rough guideline, 10% of your answer should be background information (Situation and Task), 80% explaining what you did (Actions), and 10% for the final Result. Sometimes you might want to add Reflection to your answer, e.g. what you learned from the situation and what you would do differently.

Make it clear which criteria you are providing evidence for. You might list all the criteria and address each individually or, if there are themes, group criteria together under headings and provide an example that evidences a few at the same time.

Know who you are applying to

To gain a competitive edge in your application, show the depth of your knowledge about who you are applying to.

A good place to start your research is their company website, and social media. Find out more about them and what makes them different to their competitors. Using these details allow you to provide informed responses that demonstrate your knowledge of the sector (also known as commercial awareness).

When asking questions such as “Why are you applying to us?” employers are looking for answers that show what it is about them that stands out for you. Whatever your reasons are, they want to know why it is important to you.

Avoid generic statements that can be said about a lot of companies. If your answer still applies with a different organisation’s name it isn’t specific enough.

While it is important to get across your motivation for the role and organisation, avoid language which sounds like you’re just trying to flatter the company such as “I relish the chance to hone my business skills”.

Be precise, specific, and genuine about what attracts you to the role and the organisation. Highlight their accomplishments and show that you care enough to have done some research about them.

Keep your writing simple and professional

You might think that using long words from the thesaurus will make your language sound impressive, but this often results in answers that sound awkward and are difficult to read.

Employers are impressed by written communication that is clear, concise, and professional. Keep your sentences short and write simply but without informal language and colloquial phrases.

Use positive, active phrases that put you at the centre of the action and demonstrate what you achieved. “I delivered” or “I influenced” for example.

Avoid phrases such as “I believe”, “I hope” or “I imagine” as they suggest that you doubt your own ability.

Final tips

One mistake can be all it takes for an application to be rejected. Don’t rely on your computer’s spellchecker! Read through your application carefully and ask someone else to check it for any errors you’ve overlooked.

Pay particular attention to the name of the organisation and the role you are applying for. Employers mention how applicants commonly misspell the company name or even cite the wrong company in applications.

Make sure you’ve addressed all the essential sections of the form as gaps may mean your form is rejected.

Be aware of the deadline and submit your application in plenty of time. Keep a copy of the form, as you’ll want to review it if invited to interview.

This resource is available in alternative formats.

Please contact your careers service or email careersgroup@careers.lon.ac.uk