



Application Form

Guidance

Introduction

Application forms are an essential part of the job market and are the gateway to employment. A good application form will stand you in good stead and enable you to get an interview, whereas a poor one will almost certainly ensure you won't be hearing back.

There are various aspects to completing an application form well, and this guide will help you understand the key features to make yours stand out against the rest.

Whilst it is very good practice to have an up-to-date CV, in practice, you will likely use a CV more as a point of reference than a tool with which to apply for jobs and secure an interview. Most employers want to see that you have taken the time to complete an application for THEIR job and that you possess the right skills or experience. Very few employers nowadays will interview you on the basis of a CV or will even want to see your CV. Indeed, some will state categorically that they do not want you send them your CV! So, having a good CV, unfortunately, isn't the end of the story.

This is why it is SO important to learn how to fill in an application form in a way that will give you the best possible start in the dreaded job-hunting process as we've all been there.




The Job Description and Person Specification

Below is a shortened example of a job description and the person specification for a role at the Students' Union.

The job description is to give you an indication of what to expect should you get hired, and can help to see any areas where you already have experience, which you can write about later.

Help Centre Assistant Job Description

 University of Wolverhampton
Students' Union

Purpose of the post

To support Help Centre staff in providing a frontline service for student queries, as well as administrative support.

Main Duties and Responsibilities

1. To be a first point of contact for students visiting the service for advice and support, offering basic advice and information and referring their case to an advisor where necessary.
2. To support the team to maintain accurate administrative records and statistical data.
3. To help ensure continuous development of the service to meet student need and provide feedback and suggestions on how the service can be improved.
4. To assist in the delivery of on-line services
5. To help provide statistical and other information for the elected officers to support their campaigns and initiatives.

General Tasks and Responsibilities

1. To work to the Core Aims of the SU in carrying out your duties.
2. To remain up to date with the SU's policies and procedures and identify and undertake relevant training, to enable continuing professional development, where resources allow.
3. To adhere to the SU's Health and Safety and risk assessment procedures, ensuring implementation and monitoring as appropriate;

The importance of the application form is no better illustrated than below; every single point on the person specification will be tested through the application form.

You must treat the person specification as your go-to-guide on what to write in your application. This is what they want from their future employee, so you need to show how you can meet all of the requirements!

Person Specification			
You should be able to demonstrate in your application	Essential	Desirable	Tested By
QUALIFICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE			
Degree or equivalent qualification	✓		AF
A good knowledge of current issues affecting HE students		✓	AF/I
WORK RELATED EXPERIENCE			
Experience in the area of frontline customer service		✓	AF/I
Experience of working within a democratic structure or organisation		✓	AF/I
Experience of supporting others		✓	
Experience of administrative work	✓		AF/I
SKILLS AND ABILITIES			
Excellent written and oral communication skills	✓		AF/I
High standard of computer literacy and keyboard skills	✓		AF
Ability to establish good working relationships with a wide range of individuals	✓		AF/I
Ability to work as part of a team and on your own initiative, without close supervision	✓		AF/I
Excellent organisational skills, including the ability to plan and prioritise work	✓		AF/I
Ability to take a constructive and co-operative approach to solving problems	✓		AF/I
Proven to maintain accurate systems and records	✓		AF/I
Innate ability to pay attention to detail and ensure high standards	✓		AF/I
Ability to analyse and interpret data and take appropriate action as a result	✓		AF/I
PERSONAL QUALITIES			
Approachable and empathetic	✓		AF/I
Flexible and able to adapt to change	✓		AF/I
Willing to work unsocial hours / weekends when required	✓		AF/I
Self-motivated and enthusiastic	✓		AF/I
Committed to equality of opportunity and the democratic structure of the SU	✓		AF/I

AF = Application Form

I = Interview

The Form

The application form will usually be split into a number of sections. There are some sections which need no explanation, such as;

- Personal details
- Education and qualifications
- Training attended

However, other areas such as those below are where it is make or break for your application:


- Employment History
- Suitability for the position
- Additional information

Carry on reading for help on these sections of the form!



Employment

They will often ask you to talk about your current or most recent employment. In this area you should talk about your main duties, any notable achievements, and the skills you have learned.

	
Employment History	
Current or most recent post Employer Name: Address:	Position Held: Dates of employment: Current/Final Salary: <i>Please state hourly rate and number of hours for part-time roles.</i> Reason for leaving:
Give a brief description of the duties, scope and responsibilities of this role	

You will also be asked about your employment history, as you can see below.

Dates from-to	Name of Employer	Position Held	Summary of Main Duties	Reason for leaving
<p>This section looks small doesn't it? That's because it only requires you talk about the main points from your employment. Too often employers see pages worth of text crammed into these little boxes. Keep it short, but keep it effective.</p>				
<p>Below are some examples on how to complete this section</p>				
<p>Jan 2011 – Oct 2013</p>	<p><u>Wetherspoons</u></p>	<p>Bar assistant</p>	<p>Frontline customer service. Cash handling. Housekeeping duties.</p>	<p>Lack of progression</p>
<p>Sept 2013 – May 2014</p>	<p>University of Wolverhampton Students' Union</p>	<p>Course Rep</p>	<p>Listening to student body and analysing feedback. Liaising with lecturers and Students' Union. Managing conflict and developing interpersonal skills.</p>	<p>Leaving university</p>

Suitability for the position

The 'suitability for the position' section of the application form is the really key bit and your chance to sell yourself to the employer. The other sections of the application form have been quite limited and have asked for basic information, but this is the chance to elaborate on why you are the best person for the job!



Suitability for the position

As part of the job description we have described the person specification for this vacancy. Please use this space to explain how you meet each of our criteria in turn, with examples. If the position you are applying for requires you to submit evidence of your previous work, attach it with your application or provide links to it online.

Remember the 'Person Specification' (PS) we've included above? This is where you will need it the most. You should aim to address every point you can on the PS in a concise and effective manner.

Also, make sure you read the instructions given by the employer. Many organisations will now give very helpful guidance on how to fill in their particular application form. They may want you to refer to other things, not just the person specification so always take the time to know exactly what they want.

Everything you say should be backed up by an example. Just as in an essay you would find sources and evidence to support your theories, back up your statements by providing explicit examples.

Remember! Don't just recite the PS word for word. All that shows is that you are capable of mastering copy and paste.

A common mistake that is made is just making blanket statements e.g., 'I can work with a wide range of individuals'. This won't get you very far. What you need to do is explain why think or know you are good at something, with an example. Instead, say something more along the lines of, 'I have demonstrated in my previous job roles that I am able to build relationships with different people quickly and effectively. An example of this is when I.....'

You should also try to use different examples – it gets boring if you refer to the same job you had over and over again. It may have been a job which is similar to the role you are applying for or something you have done outside of the workplace e.g. helping at a kid's camp, but using different examples shows you have wider experience, can adapt to different situations, and that you recognise your own transferable skills. If you only have only had one job, and therefore can't refer to other past jobs, then use other examples. If you are still struggling, have you thought about volunteering or work placements as a tool to increase your experience? If you have, come and visit us at Volunteer Central. Whatever happens, don't highlight inexperience and NEVER say that you can't do something or aren't very good at it!

The best personal statements will also not only give examples of how you can do something but will detail the outcome of your input. So, as a result of you demonstrating initiative in a certain way, the outcome was that there was a specific improvement or benefit.

GOLDEN RULE : USE EXAMPLES!

The below statement is from the person specification, read on to see how to make it apply to your experience.

Experience in the area of frontline customer service

Good examples

- My time working at my local pub has given me a wealth of frontline customer service experience in busy, high pressure environments. My welcoming and helpful approach towards customers at all times ensured I received a number of positive reviews on customer surveys. This resulted in me being awarded employee of the month.
- I have developed strong customer service skills from my time working in a receptionist role, in which I was the first point of contact for all customers, and would represent the business to the public. I dealt with a wide range of customers and queries and would need to use my initiative in finding out information I didn't automatically know. For this reason, I decided to develop a document of FAQs to ensure I could help customers more quickly and effectively, which other members of staff have since utilised.

Bad examples

- I have experience in the area of frontline customer service.
- I will be great at frontline customer service because I think I will really like it as I am friendly.
- I don't have any customer service experience
- I think I would be good at customer service or I wouldn't be applying for this job (yes, we have seen that more than once!)



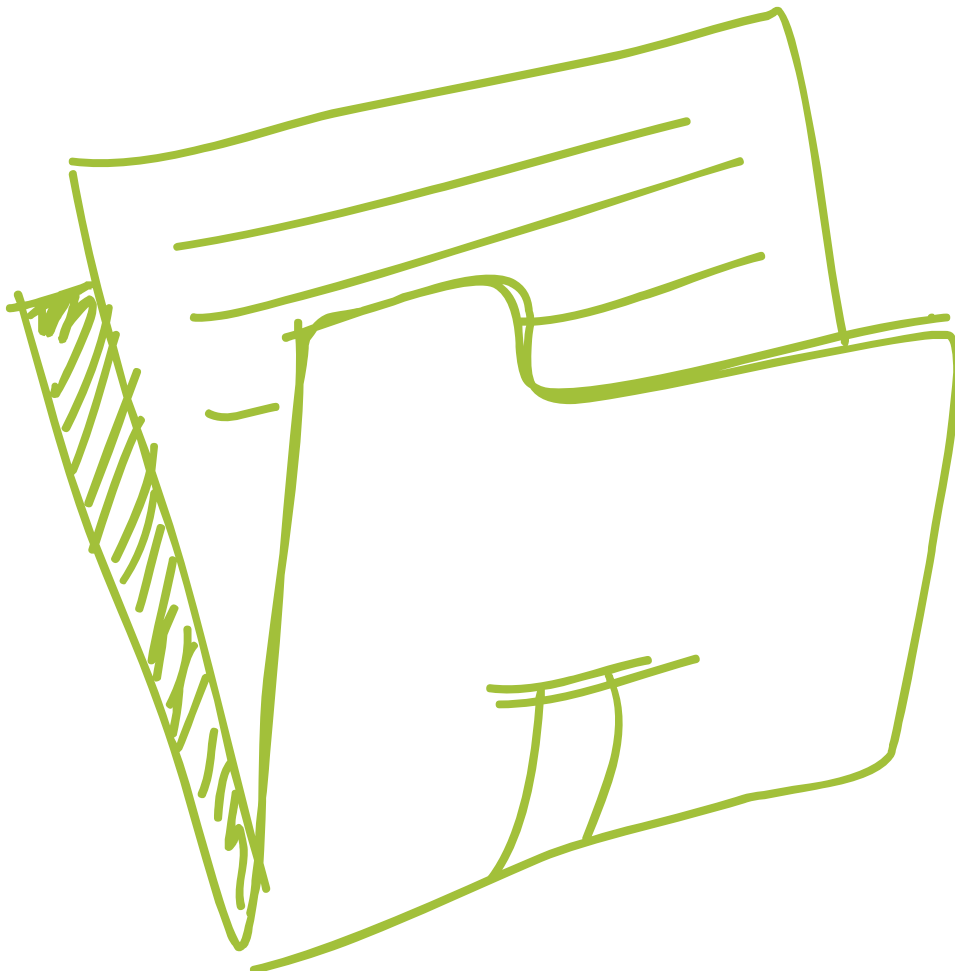
Scoring and Matrices

It is also important to know why we are telling you to do all of this. Most shortlisting panels will operate and make decisions on who to interview by using a scoring or matrix system. So, each point on the person specification will be given a mark. For example:

- 0 - no reference made to the particular skill or requirement
- 1 - reference made to the requirement but no example given
- 2 - reference made to the requirement and example given
- 3 - reference made to the requirement given and good example/s provided with outcome

Whether you get above or below a score determined by the panel, will affect whether you get an interview or not.

And finally, for the personal statement, ALWAYS make reference to the job you are applying for and why you want the job and feel that you can contribute. Don't just talk about what the job will do for you but what you can also do for that organisation. They will see many application forms and this always helps the shortlisting panel to see that you have thought about the job and are genuinely interested.



Additional Information

In this section you can provide any information that you think would be relevant to the job, but haven't found anywhere to put it yet.

We've talked about why you're good for the job in line with the person specification. Now talk about why you're good for the organisation. This is your bit for the employer to realise that you are an interesting and engaging individual who they would want in their workplace. Someone who does other things outside of work, but has the personality and personal qualities to make them an asset in the workplace.

The typical line that both you, and every other applicant will write:

I like to read.

Do you actually...?

If so, be more specific! Talk about your passion for certain types of books or authors and how it links to your other interests, or how you plan to build on your passion for books. If you can't expand on it, then don't put it in! You can guarantee every other candidate has put it in anyway.

Do you like going to the gym? Talk about your future fitness aspirations! Are you training for a marathon? Have you played sports competitively?

Are you part of any societies? What have you done with that society? What do you plan to do?

If, at the end of all this you still have nothing to write, then maybe it's time you did something about it!

The key points to remember:

- Follow the instructions on the form. There are many employers who will throw an application form straight into the bin for reasons as small as not writing in capitals when asked.
- Do your research. Research shows an interest in the organisation, and tells them you want THEIR job, not just any job.
- Use examples. Don't talk about you will do, talk about what you have done.
- Include outcomes. Show there was a positive effect of your involvement in a workplace or other setting.
- Put the effort in. It is easy for an employer to pick out those applications where someone has copied and pasted from other applications they have done, or just copied the information straight from their CV. A key consideration to remember is that if you can't be bothered to spend the time on an application, why would a potential employer take the time to read it?
- Make it as easy as possible for the panel when they are scoring you. Address each point of the person specification in turn. Don't expect the panel to trawl through various parts of your form to find the skill or experience they are looking for. They won't. Put yourself in their shoes – shortlisting can be a very long-winded and mundane task.
- Show a bit of personality. But don't go over the top. The best applications show a touch of character and enthusiasm.
- Check your length! If your application is too long, the panel will get bored and you will appear as someone who can't be concise. If it's too short, it looks like you haven't gone to much effort. A couple of pages for a personal statement is plenty.
- Check your application. Spelling mistakes and sloppy writing show carelessness and a lack of attention. In a job market where being computer literate is an essential requirement; don't fall at the first hurdle. Don't use different fonts throughout the form as that's tell the panel that you have likely cut and paste from a previous application form, and also don't pay attention to detail. DO NOT hand write forms! It will often help to have someone else read through your application to offer a fresh perspective.

There are a number of services around the university which you can utilise to help in any stage of the career ladder:

**The Workplace
Careers
Volunteer Central**

And as a final note, please remember that an application form has the sole purpose of getting you an interview. Once you have secured an interview, the panel won't really refer to your application and will just use it as a guide when they meet you.

For guidance on interview techniques, please see our [Interview Guidance Pack](#).