



# ADVICE AND TIPS ON APPLICATION FORMS

## INTRODUCTION

Graduate application forms are *meant* to be challenging. They are designed to make you, the candidate, think hard about yourself and your suitability for the opportunities on offer. They can be completed online (most common), or be downloaded as paper copies.

## WHERE TO FIND APPLICATION FORMS

Register for the University of Dundee Careers Service Job Shop's online Vacancy Database as a starting point.

Most companies have a link to their on-line application form from their website. You will also find links to application forms on some general recruitment websites, such as <http://www.prospects.ac.uk>

## PREPARATION

- Your application form is not just about providing information, but about persuading the employer, through the case you make on the application form, to take you through to the next stage of the selection process.
- Gather as much information about the employer and the post as possible through the job description, person specification, brochure, or web site, and work out exactly what they are looking for.
- Read any instructions on the 'do's and don'ts' of filling in the application form carefully and, if possible, read through the entire form so that you are clear what is required of you. Ideally you should take a copy to work on as a draft, thinking about your answers to the questions before filling it in for real.
- Consider what evidence you can use to demonstrate that you match the required skills, experience and qualifications. This can come from all aspects of your life, including your course, work experience, interests or voluntary activities. Think carefully about where on the form you can use this information to its best advantage and remember that any examples you use will have to stand up to discussion at interview.

## COMPLETING THE FORM

- Frequently on line systems will start with some form of questionnaire. This is intended to give you guidance on the opportunities that you are eligible for. You should definitely answer these questions honestly as it will save you wasting time later on.
- Some questions are compulsory; you cannot access the next page without completing them. If you are having difficulty with this you should be able to save the form and return later. It is, anyway, a good idea to save the application regularly as you fill it in. This will mean you don't have to start again in the event that you have computer problems.
- Don't give the employer easy reasons to reject your application - pay attention to your grammar and spelling. Because it is on the web it is very easy to fill in the questions like an email, using abbreviations and missing punctuation, but this is not acceptable.
- Be aware that the space provided for a question can indicate its importance to the employer, so be sure to use this effectively.
- Presentation is important. On a paper form, use a draft copy to be sure that your information will fit into the spaces provided legibly. Use bullet points and underlining to highlight information and break up chunks of text. On an on-line form, ensure you edit your answers to meet any word limits.
- Use positive and specific words to describe your activities and interests and avoid vague responses and clichés. Be sure to use key words that relate to core skills and criteria outlined by the employer. These may be picked up by software packages that some employers use to scan and sort on-line applications.
- If a question is not applicable, say so. Do not leave empty boxes.
- Ideally, get someone else to read through your final draft answers to ensure you have made no mistakes.
- **Your Careers Adviser can provide advice on how to make the most of your skills and experience in constructing your answers, but they do not offer a proof reading service!**

## APPLICATION FORM QUESTIONS

All application forms contain questions that require a lot of thought and some questions are perceived as more difficult than others to answer:

### 1) Motivational Questions

For example: *'What attracts you to this job?'* or *'What do you have to offer this position?'* These require you to demonstrate your motivation, job knowledge and to **match** your abilities to the employer's needs. A strong answer will take research and thought as to what pieces of your evidence best demonstrate the employer's requirements.

Here is an example:

**Explain why you have applied for the job function(s) that you noted on the first page. Offer evidence of your suitability (e.g. courses undertaken, work shadowing, skills, strengths and experiences). Emphasise why you consider yourself to be a strong candidate.**

"I am attracted to museum work and believe I am suited to it for the following reasons: I would like to use my knowledge of history in a practical, creative way, helping others to enjoy the subject as much as I do. My work experience in the Heritage Centre, along with my degree studies have given me an interest in how history is presented to a wide audience, and, finally, working on projects such as my dissertation, have helped me to become a good organiser of my time and of projects generally. I could put this skill to good use in planning and scheduling exhibitions."

### 2) Competency-based Questions

These require you to demonstrate skills such as leadership, communication or problem solving that are important to the employer and for the job being applied for. A useful framework (STAR) to build your answers around is:

1. **Situation** - set the scene
2. **Task** - brief description
3. **Action** - describe what you did (showing the skill in action)
4. **Result** - the outcome - and what you learnt.

Here are two examples:

**Describe how you have achieved a goal through influencing the actions or opinions of others. What were the circumstances? What did you do to make a difference? How do you know the result was satisfactory?**

"In my role as course representative I was asked by my fellow students to raise their complaints regarding the course textbook. I gathered comments from the class and made notes for myself in order to present my case clearly. At the staff/student meeting I put across the views of the class and dealt effectively with comments made by some of the staff. The fact that I had prepared my argument thoroughly made it possible for me to convince others that the book be withdrawn."

**Describe a difficult problem that you have solved. State how you decided which were the critical issues. Say what you did and what your solution was. What other approaches could you have taken?**

"I was helping with a student production of 'West Side Story'. A few days before the first performance I realised that ticket sales were low. There was little time available and we needed a certain number of tickets to cover our costs. I decided to take a quantity of tickets and go round the halls of residence and student flats to sell them. By talking directly to people I was able to make quick sales and sold enough to make a profit. I could alternatively have put up more posters, but the method I used brought quicker and more direct sales."

Careers Service

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