Application Forms

The purpose of application forms is to help employers select the best candidates for the job by assessing certain skills. They often do this by asking for examples of things that you have done in the past or how you would deal with a specific situation.

Types of Application Forms
- Online
- Downloadable Word documents
- Paper

What are Employers looking for?
Employers are usually trying to find out about three things:
1. Competence – do you have the skills or potential to do the job?
2. Motivation – do you really want to do the job? Are you enthusiastic about it? Do you want to work for *this* company?
3. Fit – will you fit in with the team/organisation?

Top Tips: Before you Start
- Get organised – check you have all the information you need and have your up to date CV to hand – dates, grades etc.
- Allow enough time – application forms generally take 4-6 hours to complete. Check the closing date and leave yourself enough time.
- Read the instructions/questions carefully before you start.
- Refer to the advert, job description and person specification – watch any videos and complete examples before starting.
- Research the company thoroughly – read the website and investigate the industry they operate in.
- Relate your research to what you have to offer and why you want to work for this company.
- Brainstorm your skills, experience, aptitudes and qualities, and how these relate to the employer's requirements.
- Some employers may use a screening system – so ensure you meet the requirements before you apply.

Top Tips: Completing the Form
- Follow instructions carefully.
- Keep your log in details safe – use a sensible username/email address.
- Tailor your application to each employer; matching your skills to their specific requirements.
- Answer all the questions fully – keep your language formal.
- Prepare a draft of your answers in Microsoft Word – this will ensure your spelling and grammar are correct and that you stick to word counts.
- Consider bringing your application form draft to the Careers Service at a Quick Query Advice Session.
- Check your spelling and grammar before submitting.
- Keep your answers relevant and use a variety of examples.
- Do not omit things because you assume the employer will not be interested – include part time work, voluntary work and hobbies and interests.
- Emphasise the most relevant items – even if you think they are obvious.
- Keep a copy of all your answers for reference.

Types of Questions
Questions usually fall into the following categories:
- Biographical Information – sometimes this is included in a separate 'equal opportunities section'.
- Questions About Your Experiences – education and qualifications, work experience, interests and hobbies.
- Career Focus Questions – reasons for applying to the post, future aspirations, career choice, knowledge of the role, company and industry.
- Competency Based Questions – questions that require you to give real life examples of when you have demonstrated a particular competency or skill.
- Personal Statements / Open Ended Questions – see below.

Answering Competency Based Questions
- When you answer competency based questions, make sure that you give evidence and that your answer is structured clearly. A useful tool is CAR:
  - **C** – Context – describe the situation
  - **A** – Action – what did you do?
  - **R** – Result – what was your outcome?
- You should use specific situations from your life as examples, rather than your imagination, when answering this type of question.
- Use a wide range of examples from your academic, work and life experiences.

- Ensure you analyse or reflect on how you behaved and responded within a given situation in the past.

Personal Statements/ Open Ended Questions
Some application forms have open ended questions for example: 'Provide information to support your application' or ask for a 'Personal Statement' or 'Additional Information'.
To answer these:
- Use heading or separate paragraphs to highlight the different sections of your answer.
- Say why you are interested in the job.
- Refer to the person/job specification in detail and explain how you meet these requirements

With supporting statements it is important to read the person /job specification in detail, as this will give you the clues to what skills and qualities the employer is looking for, and therefore what you will need to include in your statement. You need to address the key criteria that are asked for or required in the person specification and job description, especially if these are said to be essential rather than just desirable. Some applications, for example, nursing or teaching jobs, may have specific requirements in their personal statements.

Additional Sections
If the application is online there may be additional questions or sections to complete. These can include:
- Commercial awareness/ Business acumen questions – designed to test your knowledge of the company, industry or business practices.
- Psychometric tests – designed to test knowledge, abilities and personality traits. These can be aptitude tests for numerical, verbal or diagrammatical ability or personality based tests.
- Situational Judgement tests – are a type of psychological aptitude test that assess judgement required for solving problems in work-related situations.

If you have a disability you should contact the recruiter in advance of completing any timed online tests so that they can make suitable adjustments. To help you prepare for these, the Careers Service has a Highlights Information Sheet on Psychometric Tests and also runs practice sessions throughout the year.

Referees
You will normally be asked to provide the name and contact details of two referees. The University will provide you with an academic reference the other can be either a work reference or a personal reference from someone who has known you at least 5 years. It is vital to ask permission of your referees before you include them. It may be useful to give them a copy of your CV or application form and details of the job you are applying for as you may then get a more tailored and relevant reference.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Many forms have a section asking about ethnic origin and disabilities – this does not form a part of the selection process and is not generally seen by the recruiter. This information is requested by the company to monitor the equality of their recruitment processes.

Sample Questions and Answers
Q: Describe a situation where you have worked as part of a team to achieve something. How were you involved and what did you learn?
What they are looking for**:**
Evidence you can work as part of a team
Evidence you are able to make a contribution on an individual level
Analytical skills. Reflecting on a work – based task, can you learn from the experience and apply this to your career?
What you might say:
"During peak season at Dixons I worked with my store colleagues to meet branch sales targets set by head office. It was important that all members of the team were positive and remained enthusiastic even though the shop was very busy. I contributed by meeting all of my personal targets and helping my colleagues close sales. I learnt that helping out team members rather than simply focusing on my own goals improves productivity and makes for a happier work environment."

Q: What factors have influenced your choice of career and why do you wish to join us?
Do not just make a list of your reasons. Instead think of a few factors, perhaps three or four, and expand them with supporting evidence. Look through the company website and ask yourself what attracts you to this area of work or this company – is it the training programme, the products made, the reputation etc. If you are finding this difficult, question whether the job or company is right for you.

Further Information and Resources

AGCAS DVD 'Your Job's Online' *shows two graduate employers short-listing candidates from their application forms (29 minutes, available to view in the Careers Service)*

Prospects www.prospects.ac.uk The UK's official graduate careers website.
Target Jobs www.targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice
Totaljobs www.totaljobs.com/careers-advice
Select Simulator www.selectsimulator.com - *this website offers you the opportunity to practice online application forms.*

Further resources such as hardcopy literature and DVDs are available in our careers library and electronically on our website