

Tips on ... Job applications

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Many people find the prospect of filling in job application forms daunting. Here are a few general tips on what you should do to put yourself ahead of the rest.

Read all the information sent to you – With most job application forms you will also get lots of other information about the organisation and department you have applied to, job description, person specification. This is there to help you in your application. Make sure you read all the information that is sent and be sure that you know what is required before filling out the form.

Do your research – Make sure you know all about the organisation that you have applied to join. Make sure you know how the organisation fits into the sector as a whole. Check out their website and do as much research that you can afford to do.

Draft your response – Never write straight on to the application form. It is better to photocopy it and draft the non-straightforward replies in rough before doing the actual application. Only use the appropriate jargon where needed but do not use it for its own sake.

Answer all the questions on the form – When looking through your application forms, the panel will be checking for certain things (e.g., education, skills, previous work experience, outputs). Do not add any extra

or unwanted information unless you are absolutely positive it will strengthen your case. If a particular question is not relevant to you or your background always remember to write in “not applicable”. To those reading your application it may look as though you’ve forgotten to answer it or couldn’t be bothered.

Give relevant examples – Make sure that you read the job description and person specification carefully. If they ask for ‘essentials’ and ‘desirables’ make sure these are highlighted in your covering letter or in an appropriate section on your CV. If they ask for someone who can work on their own initiative or who is a good team worker then give explicit examples.

Make the most of your personal statement and/or covering letter – Given that all application forms for a particular organisation are uniform, your covering letter and/or personal statement needs to stand out from other applicants. This is the place to address each point in the person specification. Although you need to give explicit information and examples it shouldn’t be overlong. A couple of A4 sheets will usually suffice. The main function of the application form is to get you in a position to get interviewed. If possible, try to get a bit of yourself/your personality into your application.

Choose the right referees – This will almost certainly be a supervisor or lecturer from university and/or the most recent employer that you had. Always ask your referee beforehand if you can use them as the last thing they want is for one to turn up out of the blue without warning – particularly if it’s something that needs to be done urgently. By giving forewarning your

referees are more likely to give a considered and more comprehensive assessment.

Beware the online application form – Nowadays more and more organisations are using online forms. One of the reasons for doing this is so that optical eye scanners can detect certain words on the application form. It is therefore very important to make sure that you mention the right words from the job description and person specification because this will give you an advantage.

Re-read everything that you submit – It is surprising how many people do not bother to re-read their application in detail. Make sure all the spelling and grammar is OK. Make sure what you have written is as concise as it can be and try to avoid repetition unless different questions require you to give the same or similar answers. Try to act as if you are on the panel who have just read lots of applications and ask yourself whether you would give yourself an interview based on what's in front of you. If the answer is 'no' then add in the missing components. Also, turn the job and person specifications into checklists and cross each thing off with what is on your application form.