

Health Education North West

Completing Application forms

Before I start to explain the most effective way to complete your job application form, it is probably best that explain the purpose of them. If you have an understanding why they are used, then your chances of success will no doubt increase.

During my career I scored literally hundreds of application forms. The vast majority, I have to say, were very poor. Too many people spend too little time on their application form. Here are just a few examples of why people fail to pass the application form stage:

Failure to follow instructions

With your application form you should receive some form a 'guidance' notes. These will provide clear instructions on how you should complete the form. If you cannot follow instructions on an application form, then there is little chance that you will follow instructions in the job. I was once doing mass recruitment for Tesco, the hiring manager made a remark that has imprinted in my memory to this day. They essentially said that if they can't be bothered to fill in the form the way it was instructed then I can't be bothered to read it. I know another industry, but the principles are essentially the same.

Writing and Communication Skills

Managers want employees who can perform job duties with competency, but they also want people who can write and communicate effectively as well. Use the additional comments section to show off your writing skills, using complete sentences and paragraphs if space permits. Check for correct spelling and usage of words using a dictionary. Normally, the white paper is the document that conveys your writing skills, as a part of a total application packet submission. Maximise use of the additional comments space on the application, since this is often the only criteria that you are being scored on.

Whatever you do, make sure you get a third party to read through your application form for errors before you submit it. In fact, if you are serious about the job you are applying for, you may decide to pay a proof-reader to check over the form for you. An application form that is riddled with errors will be rejected.

Failure to meet the 'essential' criteria

Within the guidance notes or person specification for the role you are applying for, there will sometimes be a list of 'essential' and 'desirable' criteria. Make sure you match the essentials and also try to add as many desirables as possible.

Failure to provide suitable evidence

You will notice that, as you progress through this guide, I will encourage you to provide 'evidence' of where you meet the requirements of the job you are applying for at every opportunity. Let us assume that one of the skills required to carry out the job you are applying for is that of 'customer service'. If this is the case it is imperative that you provide some form of previous experience or qualifications in this area. This will demonstrate to the assessor that you already have some essential skills to carry out the job competently.

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“The purpose of an application form is to initially assess whether or not you have the skills, qualities and attributes to perform the role. If you do, then you will be invited to attend either an assessment or an interview.”

GOOD RESPONSES, POOR RESPONSES AND THE STAR PRINCIPLE EXPLAINED

During this brief section of the guide, I want to provide you with an example of a poor response and a good one. I will also explain the principle that I use when responding to ‘situational’ application form questions. Situational questions are questions which require you to provide an example of where you have been in a specific situation, what you did whilst in that situation and also what the end result was.

Q1. Provide an example of where you have worked effectively as part of a team?

Sample response – ‘poor’

“If I was to work with other people then I believe I would have the right skills to do the job correctly and professionally. I would always make sure I performed to a high standard and would work hard to get on well with other people”.

The above example response is poor because it is ‘generic’ and it also does not answer the question. Apart from being grammatically incorrect, the person talks about what they would do if they worked with other people as opposed to providing evidence of where they have worked with other people.

Sample response – ‘good’

This is where you come in, the space is yours to practice. Remember the STAR method.

Situation
Task
Action
Result

What to Write in the White-Spaces

- Provided with some white space, it can be tempting to go on – and on – but stick to the space provided or the word count given.
- Don’t write a highly detailed chronological version of your career to date, (remember, you can elaborate in the interview), just pick out examples of skills or achievements that are relevant to the job. Less is more with personal statements, so stick to delivering the main, relevant messages.
- Although do not make claims you can’t prove. If you make an assertion, always back it up with evidence, such as “patient waiting times decreased by 15% under my supervision.”
- If the application ends up looking a bit too long and you just cannot edit it anymore, use subheads to flag things up and to make it easier to read.

Specifics

Carry out an exercise of finding out what the job specifications are and then clearly identify how you meet these. This could be showing that you have the required knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences of doing required knowledge.

Job-Opening Relevancy

The Trust wants to know additional details that make you qualified for the job opening, especially compared with other applicants. For example, a hiring manager might be impressed by a paediatrician who has done research on asthma in young children. This research involves elements that can be applied directly into practice. The application contains personal and professional information about you, but almost everything must tie back to how your experiences can benefit the employer or patients.

The Structure and the First Paragraph

I can not tell you how important the first paragraph is. It is your opportunity to get a good first impression and captivate the reader. The key is to summarise succinctly how you match up to the essential criteria in the job specs. Then use every other paragraph to elaborate in further detail with actual examples of how you meet the criterions for the role.

Keywords

I strongly believe that if you use positive keywords and phrases when completing your application form your chances of success will increase. The reason for this is simple. As human beings we naturally respond in a positive manner to certain words and phrases and we also react negatively to others. Not sure what these keywords could be, look in the job specifications they are usually listed there.

Tips:

- Read the entire application form first before attempting to complete it. It is important that you obtain a copy of the guidance notes that accompany the form. These notes will normally provide you with some important tips on how you are expected to complete the form.
- Have at your side a copy of the person specification and job description
- Make sure you match the '**essential**' criteria when completing the form. This is how you will be assessed.
- Before you complete an application form, read through the person specification, job description and guidance notes and use a highlighter pen to highlight the important areas and skills that you need to match.
- If there is a word count on the form do not go over it.
- Always try to provide 'evidence' of where you match the qualities being assessed.