

Careers Success Toolkit Application forms

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Student Services

Application forms

Introduction

Finding a job requires time and effort, particularly in a competitive job market. To be successful, you will need to develop a number of job hunting skills – such as researching careers information, job hunting creatively and presenting yourself effectively in writing and in person.

Careers Success Toolkit has been written to help you develop these skills. These guides follow the selection process, with sections on job search strategy, putting together a persuasive CV and application form, and interview techniques. Within each guide there are references to other sources of useful information. Many of these resources are available in the Student Service Centre in Gateway House. If you are a graduate and are no longer living near the University, investigate the resources of your local public reference library, and/or the nearest university careers service.

Careers and Employment Support offers a number of services to help you with your job hunt. These include:

- Information on occupations and employers
- **DMUworks** – an online vacancy database linked to our website **dmu.ac.uk/careers**
- Job vacancy bulletins such as Prospects Today
- Employer events such as our annual Leicestershire Student and Graduate Fair and employer presentations on campus.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of your job hunting strategy, there are Careers Advisers available at the Student Services Centre, Ground Floor, Gateway House between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

If you are no longer living near the university you may want to use our **E-guidance** service. Logon to dmu.ac.uk/careers and follow the email link to a simple form for you to complete with your query. A member of the Careers Team will get back to you with advice and information.

Completing an application form is usually the first stage in a selection process. Unfortunately many people do not get beyond this stage because their application does not convince the selector that they are worth interviewing. Many employers will ask you to complete an application form, rather than to send in a CV. You also usually have to complete forms when applying for courses. This section concentrates on job applications, but much of the advice is also relevant for applications for courses.

When designing your CV you have the freedom to include any information you want to, and structure it as you like. The application form imposes a structure on your information and tells you the details that the employer is interested in. This can mean that a well prepared and neatly presented application will take time to complete. See this time as an investment in your future because unless your form argues your case successfully, you will not convince the selector that you are worth interviewing.

To gain an interview you must give evidence that you are suitable for the post and to do this you need to start by analysing what the employer is looking for, and what you have to offer.

Analysing the job

To get an idea of what is required you can read through the vacancy advert, the job description, information on the employer and general material on the occupational area. For example, here is a job advert:

Commercial Analysts

Up to £20,000 pa plus bonus and benefits, Nottingham.

If you're ambitious, motivated and keen to sharpen your commercial and analytical skills, take a closer look at our organisation – one of the UK's leading energy suppliers. Here we're offering you the opportunity to make a key contribution to an integral part of our world class business.

In a maturing retail market, high quality analysis is playing an increasingly important part in meeting our goal of securing 5 million customers by 2009. As a result, we're now looking for highly numerate graduates to join our Regulation and Forecasting team.

To succeed, you must be able to distil commercially beneficial information from complex data. In addition, it's essential that you combine your excellent team and individual skills with a logical problem solving approach and experience of developing spreadsheets.

We offer the opportunity for early management responsibilities, so you must be able to liaise with staff at all levels. The ideal candidate will be self-motivated and able to work to tight deadlines under pressure.

In return you'll find an excellent opportunity to develop your career within a highly progressive team culture. What's more, you'll enjoy extensive benefits – including share options, a pension and a generous bonus scheme.

Even on the basis of these few lines, you can start to build a picture of the sort of person the company is looking for. The ideal candidate will have:

- Abilities – including interpersonal and communication skills, ability to work under pressure, ability to solve problems and make decisions
- Skills – numeracy, computing skills
- Personal qualities – self motivation, enthusiasm, leadership.

Some of these factors will be essential, whilst others may be desirable. In addition to your personal qualities and abilities, the employer may also be looking for relevant knowledge or work experience.

The guide on CV preparation gives another example of analysing a job description.

Self-marketing

Having identified your strengths and abilities the next challenge is to package the information using positive and persuasive language. In order to market yourself successfully you have to identify your unique selling points and demonstrate an understanding of the needs of the employer.

What are your unique selling points?

Knowledge

- An awareness of business issues
- An understanding of financial management
- Technical knowledge and skills

Interpersonal skills

- The ability to communicate appropriately and effectively
- The ability to work as a member of a team

Cognitive skills

- Problem solving
- Appraising and analysing information
- Questioning facts
- Flexible and creative

Eliminators

Finally, remember that besides looking for evidence of your suitability, the selector is also watching for reasons to eliminate you, to reduce their pile of application forms to a manageable size. Many applicants eliminate themselves – don't let this happen to you. Avoid:

- Illegible handwriting – write clearly and neatly
- Untidy or confusing presentation
- Spelling and grammatical errors, including punctuation
- Carelessness, eg not following instructions, putting the wrong job title
- Answering questions inadequately or leaving them blank. Put n/a or not applicable if that is the case.
- Unexplained gaps in dates or inconsistencies in your application
- A negative impression, eg Unfortunately, I'm afraid that; It was only
- Lack of detail and vagueness.

Filling in an application form

Having analysed the vacancy, identified your strengths and highlighted your unique selling points, you are ready to complete the form. Firstly read through the form to ensure you put information in the right sections. Note how much space is allocated for each subject – this can give you an indication of what the selector is attaching most importance to. Write your first draft out in rough or preferably a photocopy of the form.

Forms usually have sections covering the following areas:

Education and qualifications

Include sufficient details. Forms may ask what you have got out of university or what you have enjoyed the most. You can talk about study and assessment methods (eg group work, presentations) which demonstrate transferable skills, plus subjects you have studied.

Work experience

Include details of part-time and vacation work, placement experience, voluntary and home-based work, as well as any permanent positions. Again, in addition to your duties and responsibilities, employers are interested in what you got out of the experience so indicate the insights you gained, your achievements and the skills you developed. Even the most boring and routine jobs will have taught you something about the world of work, so be positive, and keep in mind the selector's criteria.

Mature students with a lot of work experience may find it difficult to fit all of their information on a form that has been designed with less experienced graduates in mind. You need to be creative in the way you use the form, or add an extra

sheet. Avoid just attaching your CV – complete the form as fully as possible.

Interests and activities

Your answers to questions on interests, activities and positions of responsibility will give the selector insights into your personality, motivation and achievements. Think about the impression you are making. Try to think of ways in which you have shown initiative, or social or organisational skills, not only in organised clubs and societies, but also informally in your spare time activities, eg in organising a holiday for a group of friends, participating in team sports, or voluntary work.

Career choice

This is a crucial section. The questions will be phrased in a variety of ways but are basically asking 'why do you want this job, and why should we give it to you?'. Look back over your job and self-analysis and give evidence in your answer of your knowledge of the occupation; why you are interested in it; your knowledge of the company; and why you are attracted to this post and evidence of your relevant skills, abilities and personal qualities.

Other questions

Some forms have more difficult questions and require greater thought, for instance:

- Q. Describe a situation where you have:
- Argued the case for a point of view that challenged other people's opinions in an important situation
 - Backed your own judgement and taken an important decision even though there was some initial risk involved

- Used your initiative to take responsibility for solving a significant problem
 - Organised and planned an activity, task or project outside your academic work.
- Q. What are your major strengths and weaknesses?
- Q. What are your three most important achievements?
- Q. Briefly describe the image you feel you portray to others.

Electronic applications

The Internet is used increasingly by graduate employers in the recruitment process and applicants need an awareness of its potential for identifying vacancies and making applications. The main ways you can use it are as follows:

Finding company information and vacancies

Most large graduate recruiters now have a website and some may restrict vacancy advertisements to this media to limit applications to the IT-aware. Not surprisingly, the Internet is particularly relevant to engineering and IT job applicants, but all applicants to large employers should be checking out the company's website. This approach to sourcing vacancies and information increasingly extends to small and medium-sized companies making company websites an essential stop for initial research. The vacancy pages of newspapers and journals (eg *The Guardian*, *The Times Higher*, *New Scientist*) may also be available online.

Making online applications

In addition to publishing their graduate recruitment brochures on the website, some employers reprint their application form. This allows applicants to complete and return it via email or print off and complete a paper version to return by post. If sending a CV by email, you should add the usual covering letter and send a paper copy by post as a back-up.

Job search websites

Applicants can use the Internet to explore job search sites, developed by several national recruitment consultancies. They feature employers who pay for site space and give access to searchable vacancy lists and online applications.

Sites such as De Montfort University's DMUworks details searchable local and national vacancies. To access this site follow the link from the Careers DMU website at **dmu.ac.uk/careers**

As with all recruitment consultancies, job search websites should not charge applicants for registering details or matching with employers.

Scanned CVs

Computer programs may scan application forms or CVs submitted electronically. This is either for processing and storage of data or, less frequently, to select for interview. A small number of UK companies use software to search for keywords and phrases matching their selection criteria.

An employer may inform you if your CV is to be scanned, in which case follow their instructions with care, using standard typefaces, avoiding use of borders and focusing on key skills.

Finding websites and using them

The best way to develop the full potential of the Internet for job search and applications is to have a go. You can start by using the PROSPECTS website at prospects.ac.uk to search for graduate employers and use 'hot links' to explore other sites.

Also refer to the section on job hunting in *The Graduate Career Handbook* by Shirley Jenner available at Student Services.

Self-assessment questionnaires

Some organisations will ask you to complete a self-assessment questionnaire prior to a traditional application form. These forms are designed to challenge your motivation to apply by asking you to undertake an in-depth analysis of your skills, aptitudes and interests. They are intended to make you think about yourself, the job and the organisation before committing to the formal application process.

Self-assessment is sometimes encouraged at other stages of the selection process. For example, the Civil Service will encourage you to practice by using on-line self-assessment tests available on other websites in preparation for their qualifying tests. This also helps to indicate whether you are likely to succeed.

Help with application forms

It can be helpful to ask someone to check over the form for you. This could be a Careers Adviser, friend, or family member. A DVD, *Looking Good on Paper*, is available from The Careers Service and gives further helpful tips and advice.

Careers Service Guide 6: Apply For Jobs is available to take away from Student Services.

Action words

Think positive – use action words!

You can help to create a positive impression when describing your experiences by using strong action words. Below are some verbs that emphasise skills:

accelerated	evaluated	organised	structured
accomplished	expanded	originated	supervised
achieved	expedited	participated	supported
adapted	facilitated	performed	taught
administered	found	persuaded	tested
advised	generated	pinpointed	trained
analysed	handled	planned	translated
approved	identified	presented	utilised
arranged	implemented	produced	won
calculated	improved	programmed	worked
communicated	increased	proposed	wrote.
compiled	influenced	proficient in	
completed	initiated	proved	
conceived	instructed	provided	
conducted	interacted	recommended	
contributed	interpreted	reduced	
controlled	launched	reinforced	
co-ordinated	lectured	reorganised	
created	led	researched	
decided	liaised	revamped	
delegated	maintained	reviewed	
demonstrated	managed	revised	
developed	mastered	scheduled	
designed	mediated	selected	
directed	modified	set up	
effected	motivated	simplified	
eliminated	negotiated	solved	
established	operated	streamlined	