



# APPLICATION FORMS

Many employers produce their own application forms which they may make available as a hard copy but, most commonly for graduate jobs, on-line via their website. Since this is the point where the highest proportions of candidates are screened out in the selection process, it is crucial to know what the employer is looking for.

It is a time consuming exercise at first to fill out application forms so **allow plenty of time before the deadline to get it right**. Once you have completed a few you will see that the questions are similar and so the time taken to fill them out decreases.

If you are asked to also submit a Curriculum Vitae (CV) pay equal attention to both as you never know whether one may be circulated without the other. For resources on writing CVs visit our website: [www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue/skills.html#cv](http://www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue/skills.html#cv).

## Before you start

- Research the employer and job function, and make sure you understand exactly what you are applying for. The Careers Advisory Service can advise you on employer research
- List the employer's requirements for their ideal candidate – these will include various transferable skills and possibly technical skills or knowledge. **Decide what evidence you can provide for each skill**
- Before filling in your application form properly write a draft version, perhaps in Word, to avoid mistakes.

## Practical points

- Follow the instructions carefully. Things to look out for include: word limits on answers, limits on the time you can keep your application open before submitting and only being able to apply for one line or area of work when several are on offer
- Remember to keep a note of passwords
- Check you can save your work and go back – ideally work on a copy offline at first. **This will enable you to have a copy for when you are invited to interview**
- If it's a paper form don't add extra sheets unless you are invited to
- Check for mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation
- Complete all the sections in the form, writing N/A (not applicable) if appropriate
- Don't attach your CV to a form (unless this is requested) and never say "see my CV for full details"- your application will be rejected
- Look for a section which enables you to provide additional information about, for example, different types of qualification to those requested, or a misfortune that has affected your academic performance if this is your situation
- **A Careers Adviser can provide feedback on your answers before you send it off. Make sure you allow sufficient time to make any amendments suggested**
- Note that closing date means *final* date –employers may begin short listing candidates as soon as applications arrive and fill posts before the closing date. Shorter deadlines of up to six weeks from being first advertised indicate the employer may not be short listing before the closing date.

## Tricky questions

An application form will ask you to answer a variety of questions. Apart from all the factual stuff you have to copy over from your CV there could be questions asking you to demonstrate particular skills relevant to the role or asking you about your motivation and interest in the job. When tackling questions, remember that employers typically want to gain an insight into your motivations, skills and personal attributes, and to discover how you cope in a variety of situations. Also they want YOU to be able to identify where you and the job and organisation are a good match.

Remember:

- There are no right or wrong answers only good and bad ones
- Work out why they are asking the question
- Give specific examples and evidence not generalised answers
- Answer the question that has been asked not the question you would like it to be
- Vary your examples so they come from different areas of your life
- Draw on your most recent experiences and achievements, wherever possible
- Keep within any word limit given
- Give answers that help the employer to decide if they would like to meet you for an interview.

## What evidence to use

Remember that potential employers are not just interested in your academic background. Using examples from your **interests and activities** help the employer to judge your suitability for the job; they provide clues to your personality and motivation. They also distinguish you from other candidates, so are a good way to get your application remembered. They can be useful if you need to indicate ways you have shown initiative or competence.

Make sure you utilise **any work experience** no matter how casual. It gives you an opportunity to show personal transferable skills such as working in a team with a wide variety of people, learning about work disciplines, dealing with clients and developing your communication skills.

Almost all employers now require people who can work well as a **part of a team**. Your course may have given you the opportunity to participate in a project where teamwork was essential, or you may be able to use examples of co-operation with others in your social activities or from your work experience. The employer will be looking for evidence that you are **flexible** enough to adapt to the common aims of a group, **persuasive** enough to influence the group where appropriate, and **single minded** enough to see the task through to its conclusion. As a potential manager you may have to demonstrate **leadership**. It is important to understand the difference between teamwork and leadership skills. You might find it useful to attend a teamwork workshop. Relevant workshops may be available via our *MyFuture* events programme (see [www.bath.ac.uk/careers](http://www.bath.ac.uk/careers) for details) or via the *SORTED* programme of events run by the Students Union.

The ability to **communicate** is similarly always required. There are many communication skills – it isn't just one skill. Clarify what the employer means, e.g. persuading, negotiating, listening, writing, summarising key points, gathering information...it means a lot more than socialising well with your friends (although that's important too!). In your working life you will be asked to communicate ideas, company policy or perhaps negotiate with people you have never met before. You may have to give a presentation about a technical subject to a non-specialist, and your ability to communicate across levels will be important.

## Motivation questions

Examples include:

***Why have you applied for this role and this organisation?***

**Describe any aspect of your course of particular interest to you and/or of relevance to your application.**

**What qualities do you possess which make you suitable for a career in...?**

Before you attempt to answer the question, find out more about your employer. Carry out some research so you are able to confidently demonstrate your understanding of what you are applying for as well as your motivation. Detail to focus on includes:

**The job/position.** Find out exactly what the job involves, so you can explain why you could do it well and why it interests you.

**The organisation/company.** Be well informed about the organisation so you can explain why you want to work for them and what you can offer them. Look at their products and clients, structure, culture, recent business activity. Explain how this is relevant to you.

**The sector.** Get up to date with any issues affecting the sector in which the organisation/company works or trades. Demonstrating an increased level of awareness is very attractive to an employer.

Don't just repeat facts, make this research personal e.g. "From meeting current employees at your presentation I was very impressed by..." or "I have particularly enjoyed xxxx module on my course because .....and was excited to read about your xxxx project in this area."

## Competency questions

Employers are looking for evidence that you have the skills they are seeking. 'Competency-based' questions ask for a specific example of where you demonstrated the particular skills or competencies the employer is seeking e.g.

**When have you worked as part of a successful team? What did the team achieve and how did you ensure success?**

A poor answer would be:

*"In a team project for my course some team members didn't turn up for the meetings that we had. We all picked up the work that the other people did so that we could finish in the end we achieved 65%. I ensured success by making sure that all the work was covered no matter what - that's what is important."*

A better answer would be:

*"My tutor recently assigned me to a team of 7 to develop a business plan for a fictitious business. We had two weeks to complete the project.*

*We had not worked together before so we brainstormed our ideas to see how to split up the project and decide who had the most relevant background for each area. During this initial time together I listened carefully to others and contributed ideas. I also used my social skills to build a rapport with members of the team which was important given that we didn't know one another. This helped us work more effectively together straight away and everyone felt they could contribute. I volunteered to pull together a plan of everyone's responsibilities and deadlines. The impact of this on the team's success was that it kept us on target to complete the project and also made sure that any issues were resolved quickly. We worked through any problems together and ensured that there was regular communication throughout.*

*On reflection, the fact that we all took time to ensure we understood our objectives and met regularly to support each other in our individual tasks aided our success. I also feel I personally contributed to the team's success by being a reliable team member; completing all of my tasks as agreed, as well as consistently being on time for meetings. Overall we worked well together and achieved an overall result of 65%."*

Another question you might be asked is: **From your personal, work or academic experience, please give an example of a challenge that you have set yourself and describe how you have gone about achieving it?**

This can seem an intimidating question if you feel that you have not faced anything challenging in comparison with others. Focus on explaining why it was a challenge for YOU. The employer is looking for an answer that is complete and tackles each part of the question, gives evidence that you can overcome barriers and implement solutions. They DON'T want to see emphasis given to a group's achievements rather than your contribution ("I" becoming "we").

**What has been the hardest decision you have had to make? What factors did you take into consideration?**

Give a clear analysis of the problem you faced and how you weighed up the pros & cons. A few facts e.g. budgets, deadlines, targets, time scales will help enliven it. Make sure you talk about consequences & repercussions and if you made a contingency plan.

## **Get a gold STAR**

A good response to any competency question gives a clear description of the task or activity and the background against which it was undertaken. You will need to describe how the task/activity was carried out and what the outcome was. This can easily be remembered by **STAR**:

### **S – Situation**

Briefly give background to the situation

### **T – Task**

What was your (and team's) purpose, task or responsibility

### **A – Action**

What did YOU do, how did you do it and what effect did your actions have? How did you identify and respond to problems or changes

### **R – Result**

What was the outcome: real facts and figures can be very persuasive. What were the reasons for your success and what did you learn? Would you do it differently next time?

The ability to **reflect** on the experience can make the difference between a good answer and an excellent answer – some questions ask for the reflection but it can be a good idea to add it anyway if the example is appropriate. Reflection is usually about what you learned from an experience and how that changed your approach, behaviour or ideas afterwards.

## **The personal statement or further information in support of your application**

Sometimes an application form includes a blank page asking for your "personal statement" or "further information in support of your application". It's up to you to design a structure which includes answers to the key questions which are unsaid – e.g. *why do you want the job*, and *what makes you the right candidate*. You could plan to divide it into paragraphs, one covering what skills and experience you have got which make you a strong candidate, one about what attracts you to the job, and one about what attracts you to the employer. The key part is the section on *what have you got to offer?*, in which you should stress your strengths, experience and achievements that are relevant to the post.

## **Style of writing**

You have very little space to make an impression, and you can create a much more punchy and effective image by using an "active" rather than "passive" sentence form e.g., "*I organised a raffle*", not "*a raffle was organised*". Ruthlessly cut out anything that doesn't contribute constructively to

the point you want to make about yourself, e.g. “*every term on my course we have to take a seminar. My seminars have included....*” This can be cut to “*I led a seminar every term on...*”

Concise writing style helps create the impression that you are well organised and contributes to the sense of enthusiasm which you need to demonstrate!

## Finally

- Check your spelling
- Check your grammar
- Put yourself in the employer's shoes and re-read your draft replies to the difficult questions. Are these the responses you would be looking for? Is this a candidate you would want to invite for interview?
- Check the instructions about how, when and where to submit the application
- Take the opportunity to get some early feedback, particularly with your first few applications, to ensure you have understood what you need to do. Many students seek feedback only after being unsuccessful with their applications to their preferred employers. Some graduate employers will ask you to wait a year before you reapply.

## Further information

Check for more resources in our catalogue on our website:

[www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue/skills.html#application](http://www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue/skills.html#application)

Workshops are run by careers advisers and employers. They are advertised in the *MyFuture* events diary on our website.

Careers Advisory Service

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