Application forms

Many employers require applicants to complete application forms, either printed or on-line via their website. Some ask for the sort of information usually required in a CV; however, you should not write, 'see CV attached', rather complete these forms in full, answering all questions.

Other application forms can be much more complex and include questions that require you to describe situations you have been in, how you handled those situations and what the outcomes were. Your response to these types of questions demonstrates your knowledge, skills, abilities and personal qualities to a prospective employer, including your self-awareness skills.

For example:

- What is your proudest achievement and what skills have you gained from it?
- Describe a leadership experience you have had, and what you learned from it.
- Describe two of your qualities that you consider important or special and why.
- What are your goals for the next three years?

Use the STAR principle (see page 19) to answer these questions. Think carefully and write a draft before submitting the form. Write using active verbs (see page 28 for a list of action verbs), I/me sentences and positive language. Don't skip questions. Fill out the form completely and answer the questions thoroughly. Incomplete or missing information could be a reason for screening you out. Gathering all necessary information and preparing documents can be very time consuming. Some sites won't allow re-entry into your application, so ensure you finish it in one sitting and allow yourself up to two hours.

Job applications can be electronically scored, where letters are automatically generated and successful applicants are invited to attend an assessment centre. For more information and practice tests aimed at graduates read the assessment centre information on pages 36–38 and visit ***www.shldirect.com.***

Whether making a written or on-line application, make sure you follow the instructions and include the keywords from the selection criteria provided. Always keep a copy of each application form you complete to refer to if you gain an interview, and also in case you are faced with similar questions on another company's form. When a detailed form is provided, it may not be necessary to provide a cover letter.

Useful hints and tips for completing online applications:

- Start the process early – this takes time!
- Ensure you have affordable and reliable access to the internet. It may be preferable to use the access provided at the university. If you leave it too late the competition for access to the site may cause the system to crash.
- Review the organisation's website, vacancy description, and application form to get an overview of what they require.
- Research the organisation: What skills are they seeking? Do you meet the selection criteria? What type of person is an ideal 'fit'? What has been happening in the organisation?
- Tailor every application to the needs of each organisation.
- Print out the application form to use as a draft. Complete responses off-line and cut and paste. Edit as you would for a paper application.
- Give full answers with plenty of detail, using examples from your academic, personal or work experience.
- When describing activities, include dates, the number of people involved, the frequency and your work and personal gains.
- Ask someone else to read your responses and to give you feedback from an employer's point of view.
- Use the spell checker or proof read thoroughly.
- Try to find out how the organisation will search and select applications. Will they use keyword searches or a backend tool that scores responses (e.g. distinction results will score higher than passes and 3 years of part-time work will score higher than 1 year)?
- Use professional business language in any telephone and email contact with the organisation.
- Ensure your email address, voice mail messages, and social media profiles and interactions reflect the professional image you want to convey.
- Save regularly when you are completing the application. If you experience technical difficulties with the website, don't hesitate to contact the organisation. Also advise UC Careers of any issues encountered if your application is made through their services.
- Save a copy of each application you submit and make a note of any contact you have made with the organisation in relation to your application.
- Normally you will receive an email acknowledging your application. Save the record of acknowledgement just in case there is a problem. If you haven't received an email and you would like to know that they have received your application, feel free to contact the company and talk to them directly.