



# Application Forms

An application form has one main purpose:

**TO GET YOU AN INTERVIEW**

## Why Application Forms?

**Q Why would an employer ask for an application form rather than a CV?**

A Comparison is easier as CVs will be presented in different formats and may not contain the same information from all prospective applicants.

A The EMPLOYER gets the information they want, not what you are prepared to give them.

A Security – on most forms you are asked to sign a statement declaring that the information you have given is correct otherwise you can be dismissed.

A There is no obligation on a CV. (This is why you are sometimes asked to complete a form once you have been offered the job).

This is why you should NEVER return a blank form with your CV attached.

**Q Why is it important to answer every question.**

A It shows you have taken the time and trouble to fill it in properly.

A Because it shows you have understood the form.

A It shows you have nothing to hide.

A There are no doubts left in the minds of the employer.

The recruiter is in complete control over the information gained – this makes the screening process more manageable and fair. Direct comparisons can be made between your responses and everybody else's.

You may have noticed a trend towards competency based application forms. These include questions about the skills you will need to perform the job and will give a clue as to what areas will

also be discussed at interview. These sections require specific examples of situations you have faced at work or in your leisure time.

#### EXAMPLE: TEAM WORKING

Please tell us about a time you performed in a team either at work or in leisure time. Try to cover: a short description of the team and its goals; your role in the team; how you realised that other team members needed motivating; what exactly you did; what was the result?

#### EXAMPLE RESPONSE

In undertaking my Queen's Scout award I was part of a small group. I volunteered to be group leader for the planning of a gruelling five-day expedition to the Cairngorms. This involved assessing my team's capabilities and building morale within the group. I did this through arranging fitness and map reading tests, and stressing the benefits of completing the award and the sense of fulfilment we would all get.

Due to unforeseen weather conditions, we became lost and one of the team became rather tearful. I comforted the individual, and carried their pack for a while until we found our way again. Whilst on the expedition I built closer relationships between other members of the team by encouraging people to take on tasks together, such as finding wood for the camp fire. The result was successful completion of our fifty-mile hike.

Other typical competencies could include:

- Customer Focus
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Organising/Planning

Think about instances when you have demonstrated the skills needed to be successful in these areas.

What specifically did you do? What was the result?

## Hints and tips

Before you complete your application form, bear in mind some of the most common mistakes. In a recent survey, the following vital dos and don'ts emerged:

- ✗ Never simply substitute with your CV. If employers issue application forms it is for the reasons stated on page 1. It is acceptable to include your CV when you return the form, unless you are specifically asked not to. Never respond to a question on the application with the phrase "See attached CV".
- ✗ Never leave blanks. Always respond in some way, even if it's with a dash or "not applicable".
- ✓ Always read the whole form carefully before filling it in.
- ✓ Always photocopy the blank form.

- ✓ Always ask someone else to check what you have written.
- ✓ Jot down your initial thoughts on rough paper. Often it can be useful to do this over a few hours, coming back to the page each time you think of something else.
- ✓ Allow plenty of time for completion of the form.
- ✓ Honesty is the best policy. If you mislead or exaggerate you are certain to be found out and this does your relationship with a prospective employer no good at all.
- ✓ Transfer to the original neatly and carefully using black ink.
- ✓ Take a photocopy of the completed form.
- ✓ Send the original with a covering letter.
- ✓ Regard 'other information' sections as an opportunity to sell yourself. Emphasise your achievements, skills and strengths.

## Questions and answers

Here are examples of typical sections found on application forms together with possible responses:

SECTION	RESPONSE
Reasons for leaving	Major organisational change involving numerous redundancies, including my position. This has given me an opportunity to consider new and interesting challenging roles, which is why I am interested in the job you are advertising. <i>(Potential employers just want to know if there was a negative reason for your specific redundancy and whether, as a result, you are bringing any negative 'baggage' with you).</i>
Last salary	Falls within a salary band of between £x and £y <i>(Give yourself negotiating room).</i>
Health	Mention health problems only if they are significant in relation to the job. <i>(At this stage you just want to get an interview).</i>
Supporting statement	Highlight key skills and strengths with examples. <i>(Here's a chance to highlight your relevant skills, strengths and achievements in relation to those required for the job).</i>

## Personal statements and additional information

This is the most important part of the form and must be filled in. Try and fill the space available on the form. This is the part where you “sell yourself” so study the advert carefully. Find out the sort of person you think they are looking for, use this space to tell them how you meet the requirements for the job. Show the employer what skills and experience you have that will be relevant for the job you are applying for.

**Q** What does “selling yourself” mean?

**A** It means matching your skills and abilities with the requirements of the employer.

**Q** What are my skills and abilities? Analyse what they are. Are they:

**A** PRACTICAL – good at DIY, able to use machines, handicrafts, using office equipment, able to use tools.

**A** COMMUNICATION – Listening, speaking confidently on the telephone, good at selling/ negotiation, writing reports.

**A** ORGANISATION – can I manage time, controlling a budget, administration.

**A** MANAGERIAL – able to supervise staff, motivate a team, organise rotas, delegation.

**A** NUMERICAL – accounts, statistics, analysis.

**Q** WHAT ARE MY ACHIEVEMENTS? Think about previous jobs. What are you really proud of? Think of specific tasks you have done that in some way made a positive contribution to the company. The key is to be able to show a prospective employer what you could potentially do for them.

**Q** WHAT ARE MY STRENGTHS? Look at yourself and your personality and think about how you approach work. Are you able to work under pressure or able to keep to a strict deadline? Do you have a conscientious approach? Are you reliable, always on time for work? Are you able to use your own initiative and work well in a team? These are the attributes an employer likes in a prospective employee. Think about what your strengths are and how to convey them in your application.

## Selling your benefits as well as your features

The employer not only wants to know what your skills and experience you have but how you can benefit them. So you must not just say what your features are but what are their advantages. This will help make a good impression and show how you are different from all the other applicants.

- A feature is the property of the product.
- A benefit is what the feature gives the buyer.

For example, the feature of a secretary is that she can type, the benefit is that she is able to produce work to tight deadlines. An inspector has experience in quality checking but his excellent eye for detail means that more faults are noted and customer satisfaction maintained.

✓ MATCH YOUR BENEFITS TO WHAT THE EMPLOYER IS LOOKING FOR.

## In summary

Your application form is a selling document and you are completing it for one reason only – to get an interview.

If you have been asked to complete an application form – do just that. You should NEVER return a blank form with your CV attached to it. You have not done what the employer has asked for and your application is likely to be rejected.

- **TAKE A PHOTOCOPY FIRST.** You only have one chance to get it right. Make any mistakes on a photocopy.
- **ANSWER EVERY QUESTION.** Make sure every box is completed even if it doesn't apply to you. If that is the case strike a line through it or write "nil" or "N/A" (not applicable).
- **MAKE SURE IT IS NEAT.** Fill in the form using printed block capitals. Complete in pencil first and then go over it in ink (don't forget to rub the pencil out).
- **FOLLOW ALL INSTRUCTIONS.** Read the form before filling it in and do whatever the instructions say. For example, complete in black ink, start with your most recent job first, etc.
- **SEND A COVERING LETTER.** Write the same sort of letter as if sending off a CV and draw the recruiter's attention to your relevant experience. (see "Covering Letters" section of our Jobsearch Manual.)
- **BE POSITIVE.** Do not put down anything that could be viewed as negative. For example in Reason for Leaving Section, instead of "bored with job" say "wished for a job offering more scope and variety".
- **COMPLETE THE SECTION MARKED "ADDITIONAL INFORMATION"** or something similar. This is the most important part of the form and must be filled in. Try and fill the space available on the form. This is the part where you "sell yourself" so study the advert again. Find out the sort of person you think they are looking for and use this space to tell them how you meet the requirements for the job. Show the employer what skills and experience you have that will be relevant for the job you are applying for.