

How to Apply for a Job – 14 Effective Tips

So you've spent hours and hours browsing the internet looking for the perfect job opportunity. Maybe you've found it, and you're wondering how to ace the application – nice one. Or maybe you're getting frustrated because no good jobs for your skillset are being advertised.

This article should help with both scenarios.

Over the last two years I've gone through hundreds if not thousands of job applications, resumes, and cold emails. And I've built up an internal list of things I look out for in a job application: potential red flags, but also the things that signal someone could be a great hire.

So, in this article I'm going to give you 15 tips for how to apply for a job, even if you don't follow the standard application process.

1. Find the Third Door

If your dream job is something traditional like being a doctor or lawyer, it's kind of obvious what you need to do:

1. Work really hard at school and university
2. Follow the path that's laid out for you from there (junior positions → senior positions).
3. Be generally impressive and do good work.

There's no real 'shortcut' to success, or a legit way of skipping the queue. You just have to grind. And most people take that approach to every job. They think it's a grind, where you have to wait in line with your CV and job application.

But actually for most jobs there are a bunch of ways to skip the queue, and get a great job ridiculously early in your career. [Alex Banayan](#) talks about this in his book [The Third Door](#).

Usually you do this by making contacts, building interesting things, being active on the right social media... and by cold emailing.

2. Learn to Cold Email

A lot of great jobs, especially if they're specialised and well-paid, won't be advertised online like on LinkedIn or Indeed. And if they are advertised, you'll be competing against hundreds of other people.

So my third piece of advice is to *always take the initiative*. Send a cold email or DM to your potential dream employer without waiting for them to advertise a job. That way, you can skip the queue.

But don't be pushy, or beg for a job. It's a bit like dating. You don't DM someone you've never met saying 'would you like to be my girlfriend': you have to be a bit more subtle. Show you're interested in working together, make a solid value proposition, then let them make the next move.

And don't take it personally when someone doesn't answer. Assume they're like you: busy, occupied, distracted. So try again later. It's amazing how often a second try works.

3. Be an opportunist

This is how my old Personal Assistant [Elizabeth Filips](#) got her job. She simply DM'd me on Instagram, after I said I was looking for a PA.

She didn't [get the job](#) because she was insanely qualified: she got it because she had a good vibe, offered value, saw my post on social media, and had the guts to send an opportunistic DM.

So, keep tabs on people or companies you'd like to work with (or for) by following them on social media, reading their newsletters. Then you can jump on any job openings, or a CEO saying on [Twitter](#) 'damn, our YouTube thumbnails really aren't that good'. For really interesting companies, you're probably doing this already. You want to get inside their head and understand what they like, what they need, and how you can potentially add value.

👉 4. Make it Easy to Say Yes

Do anything that makes it easy for the employer to say 'yes' to you. This is lesson 101 on how to apply for a job that isn't advertised.

Elizabeth did this really well. She said 'I know you don't know what you want from this PA thing, and it's an experiment. But let's try it for a month. And if you don't like my services, we don't have to carry on, no hard feelings.'

And I thought, okay, cool. This seems very reasonable.

So basically, do anything that makes it easier for the employer to say yes to you, so you get your foot in the door. And once you have your foot in the door, perform really well! Now you've potentially got a job that's way more interesting than a random thing you applied for on [LinkedIn](#).

🔧 5. Build a Portfolio

If you want to get a great job, the first step is often to build your portfolio.

One way to do this is by getting *another* job where you get paid to create cool stuff. That will build your skills and portfolio. And *then* you'll stand a much better chance of landing your dream job. You'll also make some decent money.

This is what most creative people have to do. Like [Johnny Harris](#), who [landed an amazing job](#) working for [Vox YouTube channel](#), writing scripts and doing motion graphics, and now has his own channel with 2.7M subs.

A great way of getting this kind of experience is by interning or doing a junior role at your dream company. That gives you the opportunity to prove that you fit in and can do a decent job. And when your dream position opens up, the boss can easily promote you without going through a long hiring process to find a new person.

You can also build a good portfolio by finding jobs on freelancer websites like [Upwork](#) or [Fiverr](#). You might even get some unexpected job offers.

📄 6. Shorten Your Resume

This is maybe the most standard advice I give when I give advice on how to apply to a job: keep your resume short and sweet, 1 or 2 pages max.

I can't emphasise this enough. Focus on the most impressive stuff on your CV and cut the rest. It's better to have two impressive achievements than two impressive achievements and three weak ones.

Most people try to stick in every single detail from their life. But unless the job calls for it, no one cares that you worked behind a bar for 3 years when you were at uni, or that you got a B in your History GCSE.

Maybe you have loads of experience in various things but it's not all relevant. Well, there's no harm having multiple CVs, or tailoring your CV to the job you're applying for. Send the CV that highlights the most important skills and experience you have for that specific role.

When I look at a clean, 1-page CV with maybe 6 main points on it I feel a sense of relief. It shows the person applying cut out all the unnecessary information.

□ 7. Lead with Value

With any application, but especially cold emails, you want to lead with value*. * Make it clear what problems you can solve for the business you're applying to. This is way more interesting to the person reading than a list of your experiences and motivations.

I get emails every day saying "Hi I love your stuff, I think I'd fit in and I have a great skillset, do you think you could offer me a job?". Those emails *don't* provide value, or give me a way to judge how good the person really is at their job. So they generally get ignored.

Write a super easy to read, play-by-play guide of how you'll help the company. Then follow it up with a short paragraph about your experience and why you applied. Now you've got the perfect cover letter structure.

🏆 8. Go Above + Beyond

The best applications show that the candidate went *above and beyond*. So I'd suggest that, if possible, you do something for free so you can show your work.

- If it's a creative job, make something specific: write a YouTube script, edit a video, design a thumbnail. Then include a link in your cover letter.
- If you're an accountant, link to a spreadsheet you designed.
- If you're a PR person, sketch out an ad campaign you think would work for the brand.

Someone applying for my writing internship drafted a whole mock issue of my [Sunday Snippets newsletter](#), about dealing with midlife crises. This stuff is gold, and will usually get you an interview.

😎 9. Match the Vibe

Make sure the tone of your cover letter fits how the company usually communicates. If it's [Goldman Sachs](#), formal is OK. But if you're applying to work with a young startup, or a media company like mine, keep it more casual.

Start your email with "Dear Ali", "Hi Ali", or "Dear Ali Abdaal's team" or "Hey Ali and team". Or even better, find out which person on the team will be reading your application, and address it to them.

Don't write "Dear Sir/Madam/to whom it may concern". It gives a weird, formal vibe and shows you haven't spent more than a minute watching or reading my stuff.

💩 10. Don't Bullshit

This goes for any type of application, just don't bullshit. Look at this application for example:

RE: Content Writer

Dear Sir/Madam

It would be a privilege to contribute to the growth and future successes of your company. I'm an alumni of National School of the Arts (high school), and I graduated from [REDACTED] University with a Bachelor of Social Science having double majored in [REDACTED]

I enjoy innovation and love to experiment with different ideas. I am known for inspiring and devising original, thought-provoking concepts. I have cultivated skills in news writing, editing and social media through diverse experiences. These talents, along with my passion for this field, align with the qualities you desire. I excel in a workplace that promotes a culture of consensus-driven and high-energy teamwork.

I have an artistic eye and a strong work ethic, but I also like to foster an element of fun. I offer experience in critical thinking, motivation, observation and prior experience as a freelance Junior writer for [REDACTED] tions, a spotlight feature writer for [REDACTED] which is an online news platform, and I also run my own creative blog, thus I strongly believe that my creative talents along with my prior education and experience in journalism and research will prove to be a valuable resource for your organisation.

I look forward to an interview with you and the opportunity to create and grow as your new writer

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

The person is either bullshitting, or doesn't understand that they need to give specific examples to back up claims like 'I am known for inspiring and devising original, thought-provoking concepts'. If you're a famous philosopher, sure, you can say that. But if you're a randomer writing a job application, don't bullshit.

Also avoid lots of stilted language like "Notwithstanding" or 'to this end, I have endeavoured to further my capabilities', and sentences with loads of adjectives, like "The scintillating quality of your phenomenal videos is what prompted my earnest application to your excellent company".

Finally, no weird cliches like 'I have a burning passion for education'. This sort of thing makes you sound like a teenager pretending to be an adult.

🤔 11. Don't Be Over-Enthusiastic

When some people apply to a job they're just way too enthusiastic, and it comes across as unprofessional. It's good to show *some* enthusiasm, just don't go overboard.

The most extreme examples say stuff like "*I'm ecstatic to be applying for this role, this is the opportunity of a lifetime*", or "*I feel like I was born to do this job, I will leave my home and family to work with you in London*".

Just mention what you like most about what the business you're applying to. And be specific so you doesn't come across as insincere.

Cristian, my editor (aka Zooc on the team chat), finds too much enthusiasm *really* annoying:



Zooc 14 days ago



What worked for me is getting to the point fast, not writing thousands of words about how excited I am and what a fantastic person my childhood friends and family consider me to be.

Starting with what I can do for the person I'm applying to instead of listing my extensive experience (or fluffing up my qualifications) tends to work. Maybe a play-by-play of the benefits the employer would gain by having me on, followed by a short paragraph of work experience.

Sounding like a giddy excited child is just not my jam but I've seen that in other applications. I would personally not hire a person who just exudes enthusiasm and excitement like a kid on Christmas because I find that tiring to engage with and in the end it's just a demonstration of "the halo effect", but for a company. Makes the person sound really needy. Rather find out how much work I can offload to that person and whether it's gonna get done well and on time and whether I can have a discussion with them without wanting to strangle them.

I'd also suggest tailoring the application to the person's interests instead of using a complete cookie cutter application that works for anyone. Suggest how you could help with whatever side-gigs the employer has, even if competence is not 100% in those areas.

And definitely no "dear sir", no excessive ass-kissing, no over-the-top lavishing of praise. (edited)

✖ 12. Double-Check Your Spelling

At the risk of sounding like a Grammarly ad... check your spelling and grammar super-carefully before sending off your cover letter. Ideally, get someone else to proofread your application.

If you make mistakes, it'll either seem like:

- a) you either don't know how to write properly, or
- b) that you're sloppy, even with the important stuff.

When you're applying for a job, even one mistake in a perfect application can raise question marks.

🎬 13. Create a Video

You don't need to be a videographer and editor to be able to send in a video application. Just record a Loom, or film a video your phone saying "hey I've made a quick video to accompany my application, here's what I'd bring to the team".

It's a very quick way of showcasing your personality and standing out from the 1000 other people who applied, and getting the employer to see you as a human being instead of 'Candidate no.125'. It also shows you really care about the job, and you're willing to put in some time for your application.

★ 14. Do an Amazing Job

Do your job really well, make solid connections in your industry, and you'll never need to apply for a job again. That's because two things will happen:

1. First, you'll hear through your contacts about random specialised jobs that aren't advertised anywhere. Like 'oh I heard [YouTuber Matt D'Avella](#) needs a new video editor". And you can contact that person to let them know exactly how you'd solve their problem, potentially landing yourself a job without having to compete with anyone.
2. Secondly, and this is how a LOT of people get their dream jobs; that person who has a problem that needs solving might have heard about or seen your work. And they might reach out to you directly.

Word-of-mouth is the best marketing. Once people start to say "Timmy (or whatever your name is) is a sick music producer", landing a job will get easier and easier.

That's it – my complete guide on how to apply for a job. Follow this advice, work on your skills, and hopefully, you'll ace your next application.