



Application form tips

A job application may look like an innocent bit of paper, but don't be fooled! It can be a ticket to a promising career...or food for an employer's waste bin. Much depends on your attitude and creativity in filling out the perfect job application.

Apply for the right job.

That is not to say that you can't stretch the walls of your experience and try something a little outside your present job situation, but if you've been a retail store manager for ten years with absolutely no background in IT, applying for a corporate IT position is probably not your best bet.

How creative can you be with names, dates, and addresses?

Much of the information seems set in stone. But there are plenty of areas where you can slant the odds to your favour. The trick is to interpret, brainstorm, and customise. Show why you are a match for the job.

Before we get to the creative part, let's look at the black and white. There may be fewer of these parts than you think. Of course, you must write your name, address, and phone numbers correctly. Be absolutely neat and clear. Give all requested information and leave no blanks. When finished, you will proofread the whole form to be sure it is neat and errorless. After all, you wouldn't want to be eliminated for something silly-and make no mistake, employers are all too ready to weed you out just to reduce the pile of papers!

Now, for the creativity. You must show that you are eminently qualified for the job, and to do this, you must customise your answers to any question that allows it. Make sure you understand what is being asked. Just think about the employer's real reason for wanting the information. Don't get carried away with data that is strictly red tape (e.g., for purposes of identification, etc.). The areas in which you have the most creative freedom are open-ended requests, such as "Describe any skills that apply to the position" or "Summarise any related experience." On these, you can really capitalise on your strengths. Some areas are partially open-ended. For instance, you may be required to fill out an education chart, including schools, courses, and dates, as well as a similar chart for previous jobs.

Customising your Job Application

Though you should always be honest on forms as well as in interviews, there are ways to enhance your attractiveness to a prospective employer. In fact, often you will give a much truer and multi-dimensional picture of yourself by following these customisation steps. The problem is that we are so familiar with ourselves, we tend to downplay our skills and experiences! Attempt to see yourself from another perspective, in terms related to the requirements of this job.

- 1) **Learn all you can about the job tasks.** Read the job description and/or advertisement. Look up the company website if they have one. This can give you additional insight as to job expectations—ones that might not be explicit in the ad. If you need more information, don't be afraid to call the company. Just be friendly and polite, and have clear questions when you call.
- 2) **List all the necessary skills for this job.** Include everything you have learned about it. Put requirements in order of importance.
- 3) **Brainstorm:** Get a big piece of paper. Using the list of skills, think of all the talents and abilities you have that match. Don't censor yourself! Write everything you've done that uses that skill or related skill. Think of all jobs, paid or volunteer, and even personal activities that use these skills. If teaching is a preferred experience, think of times you have instructed someone, on any level. Granted, just showing your nephew how to tie his shoes probably won't impress; for now, write it anyway—it may jog other memories.
- 4) **Organise:** Now group the skills and experiences to see what best applies to the job as a related skill. For example, if you have been an informational speaker in any formal or semi-formal situation, especially multiple times, this can apply as teaching experience. Let's say you gave regular reports to your gardening group and showed members how to pot plants.
- 5) **Write:** Word your description in a way that highlights the important job skill. If the job requires experience teaching, mention that you have presented informational workshops and given hands-on instruction. If there is room, include evidence of favourable results or positive feedback. At first, write it out without worrying about length and grammar. When you have all the important information, cut it down to a clear and concise summary of your strengths in that area. Do this for each skill.

After completing these steps, try adding the information to a disposable copy of the application form. Make sure what you write in each section is proportional to the amount of space you have and is directly relevant to the given question. If possible, forget it for a day. When you read it again, you should be in a better position to judge it impartially. Pretend you are the employer under the gun to find the best applicant for the job. Are there errors? Where could you improve it? Think about the kinds of questions it will raise for the employer. (You will need to anticipate these and be prepared with an answer, when you interview, that puts you ahead of the crowd.)

Blow your own horn, but do it politely

Stick to the facts. If you have won awards and commendations, by all means list them. Writing that the boss told you he'd never seen a better mail-sorter is second-hand information that the employer can get when he calls your references.

Leave no spaces blank

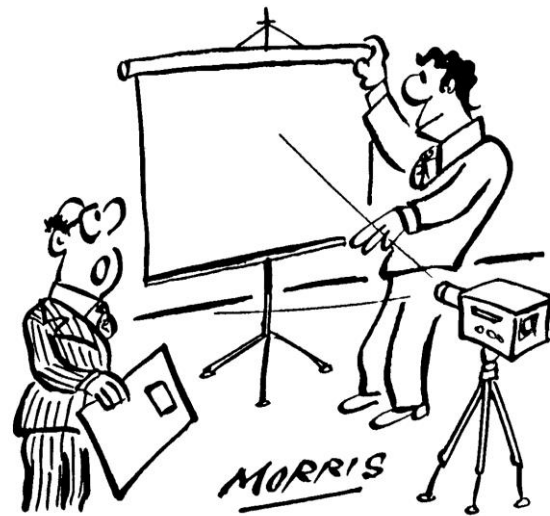
If a particular question doesn't apply, draw a neat line through the empty space or write "N/A", but don't give the employer the impression that you simply didn't bother reading every question.

...and Finally

Proofread your application and write or, better, type the final information in the appropriate areas. Give it a final once-over and you are almost ready to fire it off to the appropriate person. If you are mailing it or e-mailing it, write a cordial letter introducing yourself and stating briefly what job you are applying for and, why you want it, and why you are qualified. Even if you must deliver it in person, it never hurts to write a cordial note of introduction.

The most important part of the job application is your effort. The more applications you file, the better chance you have of getting a job. If you are in a highly competitive field, quantity won't be as important as quality. Find the one thing that sets you apart from the competition and stress that clearly in every application. Be confident, be honest, and expect to spend as much time looking for a job as you did working at your last one, and you will have the success you have earned.

When you have double checked both the application and the letter, send them off or deliver them in person. Now you will need to start preparing for the interview, which will surely follow the employer's receipt of your perfect application!



"Your CV will be sufficient, Mr. Cooper."

Application form – example questions

"Describe a situation where you worked as part of a team to achieve something"

What you have to remember here is that the main thing the reader is looking for is team-working ability. Don't worry too much about the example you use, as long as it shows you worked within a team to complete something.

"Describe a situation where you implemented change"

Again, it is not the question you have to concentrate on but ask yourself - what is the reader looking for? With this example, they will be looking for good organisation, planning and maybe analytical skills. If possible, try to aim your questions to fit these areas.

"Give an example where you overcame a difficulty/problem" - this question is looking for your problem solving abilities. When answering this question, attempt to show the stages you went through to solve a problem and how you implemented the solution - do not worry too much about the example you use - it is the problem solving skills the reader is looking for.

"Where do you see yourself in 5 years?" Or maybe "what are your career goals?"

These questions are looking for your commitment and enthusiasm to the job. As we mentioned in our interview tips, try to mention something positive but not too unrealistic. For example; maybe you are considering training courses to help you perform your job as effectively as possible and eventually progress within the company.

"Are you willing to relocate?"

Obviously your answer to this question will be dependent upon your individual aims and needs but being flexible in your preferred location obviously hands you an increased possibility of receiving employment. It may also be worth remembering that you could always relocate later if it is not possible to do so now.

"Please provide further information in support of your application".

This section is your last chance in the form to tell the reader why they should select you for an interview. Use this space to tell the reader what interests you about the position and the skills you have that complement it. In addition to this, tell the reader of any previous experience/achievements you have had that are in any way related to the job you are applying for!

Application form equal opportunities

We often get asked if it is important to complete the Equal Opportunities form normally located at the back of the application. This is primarily used to show the employer's commitment towards equality and your answers on this form will not be used to decide whether you get the job. If you feel uncomfortable answering this question just leave it blank.