

Starting Points: Making applications

Application forms are one of the top methods that employers use to select candidates for a range of jobs and the following tips and advice will help you produce a cracking application for any role.

What do application forms include?

Application forms could be online or paper-based forms and usually look for you to demonstrate several skills, so often ask a variety of questions.

Section	Description and tips
Personal details	Your name and correct contact details with professional email address
Education and qualifications	Don't forget to include any relevant modules, training or memberships (e.g. IET, BCS or BPS).
Work history	Include your achievements - focus on things <i>you did</i> , not only as a team. Keep the job description in mind and highlight relevant aspects of your roles. Don't forget to include relevant unpaid work.
Competency questions	These can vary, examples include: "why do you want to work for us?" or "give an example of when you have worked in a successful team". Use the 'STAR Method' (overleaf) to give detailed examples of your skills.
Personal / supporting statements or 'additional information'	This is the key part of your application and needs to closely follow the job description. Keep to the word count (or about one A4 page) as many employers will automatically cut off at the limit.
Interests / achievements	Try to be specific and creative keeping the role in mind - hobbies related to the role are a bonus (e.g. an IT grad who creates websites in spare time)
Special circumstances	Some forms allow you to mention anything that might have hindered your results or should be taken into consideration (e.g. dyslexia or a disability). You don't have to put anything here if you would prefer not to.
References	2-3 references; usually previous employers and academic tutors.

Five step guide to perfecting your application

1. Give yourself TIME:

Application forms can take anywhere from 2-15 hours to complete (this includes your research time), but start early, get it checked by an adviser and don't waste time on rushed applications.

2. Research:

Research the company, the role and the industry; the more you know the better your application will appeal to the recruiters. Use their website, the internet (including news and social media) and check out our '*Researching Employers*' guide for tips.

3. Use the job description:

Make sure you can tick off and evidence all key points - this is what employers will be doing to decide who makes it onto the shortlist.

4. Be accurate:

Employers will reject applications with spelling and grammar errors. Check and double check.

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5. Use the STAR method to clearly answer questions:

After researching the role and company, it will be easier to see *why* they may ask particular questions on an application form. Use the STAR method to evidence your examples.

Using the STAR method

- The STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method is the best way to structure your answers and personal statement to ensure you are giving the **evidence** you need.
- Just like a lawyer in court, you always need to provide evidence to support your claims.
- The more detail you give, the better the 'mental picture' you will give the employer; if they can picture you in the role you describe, they will also be able to picture you in their advertised role.

Question: Tell me a time when you have delivered excellent customer service Instead of: <i>'When I worked in a shop I had to deal with angry customers' try....</i>	
Situation	Briefly outline the situation you were in <i>"When I was working as a Sales Assistant at Company X..."</i>
Task	What was your task? Be specific, help to give the reader a 'mental picture' <i>"...I was approached by an angry customer who wanted to make a complaint to a senior manager about a faulty washing machine."</i>
Action	This is the most important section - give specific details of what, how and why you took this action <i>"I took ownership of the situation by gently asking the customer if we could move to a quieter part of the room so he could tell me about the problem. By giving him time and space to vent his frustration and anger, I gave him the opportunity to calm down. I then suggested two different options for resolving his complaint (a full refund or a replacement) so that he felt that he had some control of the situation."</i>
Result	What was the outcome? What did you learn? Be specific (e.g. figures or evidence of your impact) <i>"The customer chose one of the options and said he would be happy with this. He gave me 10 out of 10 on his evaluation form for excellent customer service and decided he would not make a complaint to senior management. This feedback led to a promotion to Senior Assistant"</i>

Tackling personal statements

Personal statements are a way to show employers that you have the skills and experience they want. This space can be used like a cover letter (see our Starting Points leaflet on *'How to write a covering letter'*). However, it is often better to use the **headings** for each point on the person specification and use the STAR method to give a detailed account of your experience of that skill.

ALL APPLICANTS - other information in support of application

Please outline your relevant experience, skills and abilities – gained both in and out of work – demonstrating how you meet the skills/experience detailed on the person specification/role outline. Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Excellent Written Communication Skills

As a Sales Assistant at Company X, I needed excellent written communication skills when writing annual stock and sales reports for senior managers. I analysed store data and used the statistics to show the store had increased profits by 28% from last year. This was then succinctly summarised using a mixture of graphs (using MS Excel) and text (using MS Word) avoiding jargon so as to be accessible to local and regional managers. The report was very well received and was put forward for discussion in the AGM due to its clarity and thought-provoking nature.

Want to talk it through?

Contact Careers and Employment for further advice and support:

Phone: 0114 225 3752

Email: careers@shu.ac.uk

For further career planning resources, go to <http://careerscentral.shu.ac.uk>

This information is available in alternative formats on request.