

Application Forms & Online Applications

Careers & Employability Service

www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

This document is available in alternative formats – Please contact careers@mmu.ac.uk for details.

Application Forms

The application form is the most critical part of job-hunting success and is used by employers to decide who will be invited for interview. Often the same selection criteria and application forms are used for work experience and placement opportunities. Employers can receive up to 100 applications for one job so from their perspective and with limited time and resources, they often use the application forms to act as a screening device sifting out unsuitable candidates at the first hurdle.

There is no standard application form – most are tailor made by employers (many are now on-line), but all will contain certain standard features. As well as the information contained here, look at: www.prospects.ac.uk/links/jobapplications

Many small and medium-sized employers (SME's) prefer to receive a CV and covering letter so check with them what is required. You may receive an application form that is not designed for graduates, with some questions not giving you the opportunity to describe vacation work, interests or even degree details. It is a good idea to insert an additional sheet and a detailed covering letter when this is the case.

WARNING - completing application forms can be time consuming so leave plenty of time!

Online Applications and Security Concerns

If you are completing an online application or have provided details of Social Networking Sites, you need to consider the following:

- Does the online vacancy email address contain the name of a company or just the service provider?
- Completing the online application form – take extra care if you are using a public computer, internet café, a laptop or Wi Fi to make sure your details are secure.
- Destroy old copies of CVs and application forms.
- Make sure the website is secure when providing personal details. Encrypted sites have “https” in the URL, security certificates or a padlock image www.getsafeonline.org.uk
- If you advertise your website or use social networking sites to promote your work, if for instance you are a writer, musician or artist then make sure that the link is secure to reduce the possibility of falling victim to I.D theft see www.getsafeonline.org.uk. It is also important to check you have full intellectual property rights over your work online look on the Intellectual Property Office's website www.ipo.gov.uk.

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Linked in, Bebo, MySpace and Twitter, are growing in popularity because you can share information, pictures and videos with other people via the web instantly.

- Increasingly people are choosing to use their sites to look for jobs or promote their work and to set up professional networks. In some cases employers have been known to use networking sites to look up potential employees as well as using it as a recruitment aid. **Be mindful of this**, is the information you upload suitable viewing for potential employers!

The Information Commissioner's Office provides guidelines on the safe use of networking sites. To find out more about the various sites, types of personal information you provide, the purpose of using social networking sites, the security and control you have over your words and images you upload on sites see

www.ico.gov.uk or

http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/practical_application/social_networking_v04_final.pdf

Have you got what the employer is looking for?

You need to show that you meet the demands of the job. To do this you need to demonstrate an understanding of: the organisation, the industry or sector generally, the job role and the skills and personal attributes required. You then need to match your skills and job expectations with the prospective employer's requirements.

How to do this: Gather together all the information you have about the job – look at the job description or person specification. The questions on the application form will also give you clues as to what the employer sees as important. List these down and then write an example of how you meet them.

Top Tips

- Answer each question fully and properly
- Photocopy the application form and use as a dry run. Always draft out answers before you write them onto the form
- Present clear evidence that you possess all the skills and qualities wanted – don't simply claim that you have them
- Give prominence to your strengths (what you can offer the employer) and play down your weaknesses (areas in which you need training and experience). Always demonstrate your achievements
- Complete the whole form -never write "see attached CV". If it is being computer scanned this will result in immediate rejection. It also gives the impression that you take short cuts for an easy life, as the recruiter will have to wade through your CV to find the relevant parts
- Be creative, imaginative and set yourself apart

Avoid

- Poor layout
- Bad, indecipherable handwriting – if you have neat, attractive handwriting use it, if not word process.
- Poor spelling, American spellings and poor grammar - ask a friend to proof read it, don't rely on your own judgement
- Leaving questions unanswered
- Unexplained gaps in dates
- Coffee stains and fingerprints- handle the application form with respect
- Smoking as smells linger

- Massaging the facts - the way that job applications are structured makes it hard to evade the truth i.e. you are usually asked to give the results of all examinations taken, not just the ones you passed.

Key Sections

Education

Always start in reverse chronological order, with details of your most recent academic achievement first. Include dates, title of qualification and award classification. If there is room on the form, provide brief details of modules/units you have studied, remember to relate these to what the employer may be looking for. If you are asked to provide details of UCAS points you can check your qualifications on www.ucas.ac.uk there is also a section on how international qualifications compare to UK equivalents.

Employment

Start your employment history in reverse chronological order, starting with the most recent first. Include dates, job title, name of company/employer and their location. Provide brief details of your main job duties, and highlight skills gained such as communication, teamwork, leadership, motivation, empathy, resilience, flexibility, delegation of tasks etc.

Common Areas of Questions

There are two types of questions: factual and essay

Factual Questions

The first few pages of the application form tend to ask for general biographical details focusing on personal and academic areas. You should produce a master copy for reference.

It is important to make this section look neat and tidy. If you have taken a number of GCSE's in different months simplify them to e.g. summer 2008. It is also acceptable to give the dates of vacation work as summers. If you have untraditional academic qualifications i.e. Access course or an overseas qualifications explain these and indicate their equivalence to more traditional GCSE and A' level qualifications.

Avoid putting in academic failures unless specifically asked to do so and never assume an employer will know what your degree is. Be willing to amend your degree title slightly to match it to the demands of the job. Remember that degrees with the same title can differ greatly in content and structure so let the employer know the finer details by highlighting relevant modules, by explaining the mix of theoretical and practical projects, dissertation topics, field work courses and any specific technical skills/techniques gained; the space devoted to each will vary with the type of degree discipline. If the job is unrelated to your degree subject it is important to highlight the transferable skills you have acquired.

Follow instructions e.g. print personal details or list most recent qualifications first, demonstrate your attention to detail by noticing all the instructions given - **This Is Part of the Assessment!**

Competency based Questions – Essay Style

These are behavioural or competence based questions, designed to give you the opportunity to give evidence that you meet the selection criteria. Answers should reflect a balance between your studies, work experience, interests and other activities. Some typical questions are:

- What has been the most personally rewarding aspect of your time at University?
- What appeals to you most about the career for which you have applied?
- What other careers have you considered and why?
- Describe briefly some of the main events of your life and indicate how they have influenced your development

There are no textbook answers to this type of question and they are not easy to answer – but if you have a good concept of the job, you should have an awareness of responses that are more likely to be favourable. Avoid banal statements and rather than just describing a situation try instead to analyse it; it is your ideas, perceptions, attitudes, interests and motivations that are important. Remember the employer is trying to match your skills to the job requirements so you need to give examples of experiences that allow you to display specific skills by relating examples to your own personal development.

When answering questions you may find it helpful to follow a structure i.e.

- Give a brief overview of the situation
- Identify the key problems, challenges and obstacles you faced
- Describe your approach- how you tackled the situation
- Review the skills and qualities used or acquired
- List the results, achievements and success from both the situational and personal perspective

Decide which evidence is most relevant (bearing in mind the job and organisational requirements) and give it prominence - more space or putting an example first. Using notes and bullet points to emphasise key points makes it easier for the recruiter to read. This is especially good for questions on interests, activities and vacation work.

Top Tip: use the same bank of examples on each application form changing the emphasis, as the questions require.

Themes of Questions and How to Answer Them

Dissertation

Explain why you chose it, what you liked, disliked and why. The employer is unlikely to know about the detail of your degree so make sure the language is pitched properly, be enthusiastic and briefly discuss the conclusions/results and their significance and or relevance.

Significant Achievements

This does not have to be a major event like leading an expedition to the North Pole, it can be a minor experience so long as it shows your own personal development e.g. coping with a friend's or relative's bereavement indicates you have counselling and

caring skills or taking over in the manager's absence during holiday work shows your potential for management. Other achievements can be demonstrated through your degree study e.g. working to targets, leadership, project management, developing ideas, showing initiative etc.

Employment and Work Experience

Although interested in what you did the employer will be more interested in what you learnt and achieved from the experience i.e. your relationship with other employees, the supervisors and management of the organisation and any responsibilities that you were given or assumed. It does not matter if your work experience is unrelated to your career interest (though it would be excellent if it were) just make sure that you identify the skills, knowledge and experience you acquired. If you have had lots of experience then simplify the details, i.e. concentrate on the last five years or highlight the most relevant and summarise the others regardless of their chronological order.

Hobbies and Interests

Try to present a balanced view of yourself by mixing themes i.e. team activities with independence and competitiveness whilst also being sociable and fun. Include organising, leading or group activities that show initiative, creativity or intellectual development. State length and depth of involvement and think about why you are involved, how you contribute, what satisfactions you gain, what skills and abilities you have acquired (particularly with people) and how have you changed through the experience.

Responsibilities

Indicate and explain types of responsibility you have had i.e. organising social events, negotiating sponsorship for a fund raising event etc. If you have never had a formal position of responsibility identify occasions when you have taken responsibility even if only on an ad hoc base, which will indicate, you are ready and able to be responsible.

Planning Implementing and Achieving Results

These types of questions are designed to draw out examples of behaviour in planning and achieving - your ability to set goals for yourself and others. Try and show that you have ability to:

- Keep focused on an objective and avoid distractions
- Think strategically and analytically
- Be proactive and results orientated

Influencing, Communication and Teamwork

Give examples that show:

- Ability to accurately assess who are the key people to influence
- Recognition that you have used different styles and approaches with different people
- Ability to influence without causing resentment
- Can choose and select an appropriate form of communication
- Recognise different roles needed for a team to work well
- Goal and achievement orientated

Analysis, Problem Solving and Creative Thinking

Give examples that show:

- Ability to break a problem down into its main elements in a logical way

- Evaluate options and make decisions
- Ability to come up with novel and innovative ideas

Specific Skills

Try and include:

- IT skills giving details of programmes and applications you can use
- Driving licence
- Languages – stating degree of fluency

Career Choice

Make sure you convey the following points:

- What attracts you to the career
- How it matches your interests, education, experiences and personal qualities
- Particular familiarity with the job through work experience, connections and/or your research
- What is attractive about this employer, how are they distinctive in terms of product/ service, organisation, broad image, training and customers

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form

This is intended to ensure that recruitment procedures do not discriminate. These forms go to the human resource/personnel departments and do not play a part in the selection procedure

Disclosure of Disability

This may be asked on an application form with space for you to enter details. If you decide to complete this question it may be a good idea to include a more detailed explanation of any requirements and/or 'reasonable adjustments' in the covering letter. More details on how, if and when to disclose a disability are available from the career service.

Disclosure of a Criminal Record

This is a standard question on many application forms, especially in relation to working with vulnerable children or adults. If you are unsure of how to disclose any cautions, reprimands or unspent convictions, you could try attaching a covering letter to explain the circumstances. For further advice before completing this section look at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination or www.nacrodisclosures.org.uk

References

It is usual to be asked for two, one should be academic and the other from someone professional who can provide a character reference. Choose someone who knows you well and respects you. It is important to ask them first and if you get through to interview give your referees a copy of our application forms so they can choose to comment on salient facts about you. Provide details of their name, job title, address, phone and email contact details.

It is impossible to cover all potential questions that may be asked on an application form. It is a good idea to draft out your responses and arrange a careers interview where the careers adviser will be able to assess your answers and comment constructively.

On line Applications

87% of all graduate advertisers now use on- line recruitment.

Web based applications can make the entire process quicker and cheaper for students/ graduates and employers. However on line applications are deceptively easy to complete, you need to plan your approach to them every bit as carefully as you would do a paper application; in particular you should read all the instructions carefully and review the application form as a whole before you start.

Here are some hints on how to approach them:

- Print off the form or save it else where if you can and fill it in off line, though some on-line applications have time limits and do not allow you to do this
- Read it through thoroughly and work out what your main strengths are and where you will include them on the application form
- Give full answers to every section , all the questions have been asked for a reason
- Prepare any long answers beforehand
- Write using 'word' so you can check spelling and grammar, then cut and paste onto the application form but remember using spell check is no replacement for good honest proofing – boasting of your 'exceles' eye for detail is unlikely to impress
- Avoid making statements without backing them up - simply claiming to be an 'excellent team player' is weak in comparison to saying ' I demonstrated my skills within a team when I worked for the university radio station'
- Remember to "sell" yourself/ your skills and use "power" words (see handout on CV for a list of these)
- Check you applications as many times as you can bear and then ask your friend to check it
- Print out completed copy, some employers may print the forms off too so its important that it looks good when printed
- Keep a print copy as you will want to review it if invited for interview
- Check deadline details, time as well as date - online application forms are automatically withdrawn at the deadline
- Make the company aware of any significant developments after the deadline by adding information through the online application home page or by contacting company directly

Some vacancies will require that you electronically send a CV and e-mail to apply, make sure that you do not fall into the trap of being too "chatty" or informal on your e-mail, remember this is still part of the total selection process and how you will be judged.

Always research the job before you apply, that you have the key skills and experience required and have made this very clear in your CV and e-mail

To practice online applications you can go to: www.selectsimulator.com

Blunders to Avoid

- Using text speak
- Using unnecessary capital letters – it makes it look as if you are SHOUTING
- Inappropriate use of lower case letters as it appears too casual
- Fun email addresses / or details of social networking site
- Spelling and grammatical errors
- Non specific examples to competency based questions

Final Consideration

Do you have an accurate picture of what the employer is looking for? If you do not meet the specification you may need to reconsider whether or not it is worth applying. A quick telephone call to the firm to clarify whether they would consider you may be a good idea in this instance. You may be better devoting your time and effort to jobs where you clearly meet the criteria. Always remember selection is a two way process!

Useful links:

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/cv/difficultapplications.htm>

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/commercialawareness.htm>

<http://www.totaljobs.com/careers-advice/cvs-and-applications/application-forms-two>