

# Application forms

## Why do employers use application forms?

Application forms are used by employers, particularly medium to large sized organisations, and education and research institutes for postgraduate or professional study, as a way of finding out more about potential candidates and ensuring the information they require is standardised. Application forms are usually accessed via an online portal and completed/saved in stages, though a few organisations still use downloadable MS Word documents, which you complete and then email to the recruiter.

The application forms are used to gather the information about you that they need so that they can process your application, assess whether you meet their requirements, and monitor their processes to ensure that they are fair. Make sure that you refer to the job advert/job description/person specification when you are completing the form as it will help you to understand what they are looking for and therefore ow to write your answers.

Once received the applications may be screened manually by a recruiter or hiring manager, or automatically using AI software which identifies key words. Either way the screening process is checking you meet the criteria on the advert job description/person specification.

## What does an application form include?

* **Role applied for** – include any job reference codes that are requested.
* **Name and contact information** – use capital letters at the start of names, addresses and postcodes e.g. Charles Lee, 10 Sunny Lane, Reading, Berkshire RG6 9UR.
* **Sections may include:**
  + Eligibility to work in the UK
  + Disability disclosure – additional support/resources may be available
  + Extenuating circumstances – given to explain if expected results were not received
  + Criminal conviction disclosure – 'spent' convictions not required
  + Professional membership
* **Education and qualifications** – start with the most recent first and include your full course title and secondary/high school qualifications. Expected/predicted grades can be used.
* **Employment/work experience** – can include paid and unpaid work, starting with the most recent first.
* **Questions** – usually competency (behaviour) or strength based, which may have a word limit.
* **Personal statement/additional information** – structured and tailored free text paragraphs showing your interest and suitability for the job/course.
* **Referee contact details** – usually two named individuals, one academic and one professional. PhD applications, research and academic roles may require three referees.
* **Equal Opportunities** – most organisations collect demographic data about applicants so that they can check their processes are fair. This data is not used in the screening process.

## Hints and tips for writing a successful application

* Submit your application well before the closing date, applications may not be accepted after the date has passed, and some roles, such as popular internships, placements and graduate schemes may close before the advertised closing date if large numbers of applications are received.
* Save or screenshot the job advert, job description and person specification as these will not usually be available after the application closing date. Keep a list or log of your applications and when you submitted them, apps such as Trello or Excel may be helpful.
* Do your research before attempting the form. Research the organisation, the job role/course and other relevant information so you know why you want the role and exactly what the recruiter is looking for.
* Draft answers in Word/Google Docs/Pages and get them checked by a friend, family, or a careers consultant, as you complete them.
* Complete all sections – if any parts are not relevant, put ‘Not Applicable’ or ‘N/A’ as it shows that you have read the form properly. If you are not sure about the content of any section, check with a careers consultant. Still provide information and examples, even if they are included in an attached CV, and always give honest answers.
* Follow all instructions carefully. Read the form carefully from start to finish and follow any specific instructions including word counts, as writing succinctly is a skill.
* Show how you meet the entry requirements and criteria by using examples from your life. Use can a range of examples including your studies, hobbies, sports, music, travelling, and part-time or voluntary work. Structure your answers using the [STAR](https://www.reading.ac.uk/essentials/Careers/Applications-and-interviews/STAR-technique) (Situation, Task, Action and Result) technique will ensure they flow.
* Make it clear which experience you are referring to e.g. “In my Marketing Intern role at *Ad agency*, I...”
* Pay close attention to detail. This is expected by all employers, so check the final version for typing errors, misspellings and poor grammar. Use UK English spellings if applying in the UK. Ask a friend to proofread your documents for you.
* Show your motivation and enthusiasm. Personalise and tailor your application to show why you are applying for this company and for this role as employers want to employ people who want to work for them.
* Attach any required documents, such as a CV, ensuring they are clearly titled with your name or initials and what the document is e.g. jo\_bloggs\_CV\_July\_2023.
* Keep a copy of your application. When it comes to the interview stage, it is very useful to remember what you have told the employer and the information provided may form the basis of their questions.