

SUPPORTING STATEMENTS

What is a supporting statement?

A supporting statement is often found as part of an online application form. The role that you are applying for will have a list of selection criteria (the person specification), and your supporting statement is your opportunity to explain the employer how you meet the criteria. It will be marked against the criteria to determine which candidates to take forward to the next stage, often an interview.

Some employers will use an alternative title for a supporting statement; some might refer to it as a 'personal statement', or 'additional information (in support of your application)'. Usually the application form will outline what they expect with a phrase such as 'please outline your skills and experience in relation to the criteria for this post'. If it's not clear what the employer requires, you could choose to get in touch with them to clarify this before you complete your application.

If you're writing a personal statement as part of an application for postgraduate study this is slightly different: there is specific advice on our *Personal Statements for Postgraduate Applications* information sheet.

Writing to the criteria

Address all their criteria systematically:

- If possible, work through the criteria in the same order the employer used in their specification – they will probably be using this same list to mark applications, and keeping the order the same makes it really easy for them to work with.
- You could explore whether you could use their criteria as mini headings.
- If there are too many criteria and a tight word limit, you could address groups of related criteria with similar evidence.
- Mirror their language. It's OK to repeat the phrase that the employer has used in the selection criteria. This is what they'll be reading to find, so by using the phrase you'll help them locate the evidence for your candidacy.

Using examples

Don't just state that you have the skill or experience (e.g. 'Interpersonal skills are one of my strengths'). Prove that you have the skills by giving evidence for each criterion:

- Focus on the aspects of the example that are transferable into this new role, the details of the broad approach you took and the skills/abilities involved.
- Consider whether you could include numbers to add context of size/scale/scope (e.g. rather than 'developed positive working relationships with my team', could you say, 'developed positive working relationships with all 12 of my team members').
- Keep all language positive.

For example, if you're applying for a management graduate scheme, as evidence for interpersonal skills you might say:

'I employed tact and diplomacy, explained complex information clearly, developed rapport with colleagues and customers and defused tensions during stock shortages, as part of a team of 4 supporting over 200 customers a day.'

Rather than:

'I had to challenge customers returning items without receipts, regularly told customers about the confusing store card loyalty scheme, got on well with shop floor staff and calmed down angry customers when we ran out of ice cream.'

If you have the space and a relatively short list of criteria, you could choose to give STAR examples for each competency they're looking for – see more about this in our *STAR Technique* information sheet.

If you don't have an example

If you don't have evidence for a criterion, don't just ignore it, or (even worse!) apologise. Avoid starting sentences with a negative, such as: 'Unfortunately, I don't have experience of...'

Instead, outline the indirect or related evidence that you do have.

For example, if you're applying for a job which has a criterion 'experience of a sales environment', and you've not worked in that area before, you could instead highlight that you have experience of related aspects of a sales environment:

'As someone who regularly uses communication and influencing skills as an ambassador for the University with prospective students, works to targets in my part time delivery role, and has a track record of achieving results in my academic work, a sales environment allows me to continue to combine these skills.'

Managing the wordcount

Some employers will have a word limit, and you can use this to balance your statement. For example, if the limit is 1500 words and there are 15 criteria you need to address, you know that on average, you should be spending around 100 words giving your evidence for each criterion.

If there is no word limit, and you have lots of experience, there can be a temptation to write a lot! However, if the statement becomes too long, it's unlikely that employers will have time to read carefully all the way to the end, and this can result in you losing marks. Instead of giving **all** the possible examples, try using a sentence to summarise the range of your evidence, before focusing on one particularly relevant example. If you're drafting your statement in Word, try aiming for around 1 or 2 sides of A4 with single line spacing.

Final checks

Most online application forms don't have a spelling and grammar check built in, so your final stage should always be:

- Copy and paste your statement into Word and run spelling and grammar check.
- Do a human proofread too! Ideally get a friend to read it too, sometimes they'll spot errors that you've missed.
- Save a copy on your computer – you might not be able to access the application form after you've submitted it.