

Application Forms

For many vacancies, employers may have far more applicants than they can possibly interview. Recruiters will usually research what they are seeking in a candidate and draw up a person specification with precise selection criteria.

Application forms are written to enable you to illustrate that you have the appropriate skills, personal qualities, experience and the potential to be successful. This applies to applications for courses as well as for jobs.

All too often candidates fail to do themselves justice when completing the application form and as a result don't make it onto the shortlist. Want to improve your chances of getting an interview? Read on . . .

This leaflet can be downloaded in pdf format from our website – **www.careers.brad.ac.uk**. If you require this leaflet in any other format, please ask at the help desk in the Careers Service.

What is the purpose of an application form?

Preparation

To give yourself the best chance of making a really effective application, start off with some initial preparation:

1. Ask yourself what you have to offer this employer.

Struggling to come up with more than a couple of ideas? Take a blank sheet of paper and under the following headings list everything that you have done in your life, e.g.

- University/School/ College
- Work/Placement/Voluntary Experience
- Significant Achievements
- Community Involvement
- Membership of Clubs/Societies
- Leisure
- Travel
- Family Responsibilities

If you are still struggling, talk to your friends and family about the different activities you've been involved in across different aspects of your life.

Now the critical bit – for everything you have done think about what you can demonstrate as a result of that experience, i.e. what you have learnt about yourself, what skills you developed, personal achievements etc. *For example*, working as a Sales Assistant might have developed your ability to communicate with different people, work under pressure at busy times and handle difficult customers or complaints. A group project in your second year may have enabled you to demonstrate that you could work within a time-scale, set and meet objectives and work as a member of a team.

This knowledge about yourself will also be useful when preparing for interviews, so investing some time now will almost certainly pay off in the future.

2. Ask yourself what you know about the job and the employer.

If the answer is 'not a lot', how can you persuade the employer you have the skills and qualities they are looking for? Read the job specification, or other information provided about the job carefully, and research the occupation. What is it exactly that the organisation will expect you to do? How can you demonstrate you have the skills that they require within your application? Try and make the employer's job as easy as possible by clearly showing how you match their criteria.

3. Research the organisation.

Why do you want to work for this organisation specifically? Employers realise you would be foolish to apply to only one employer. However, they do expect you to do more than regurgitate the brochure. You need to find out enough about them to show that your interest is more than superficial.

Visit the employer's own website. Read the vacancy/job advertisement, and obtain any other relevant literature available such as the company's brochure and the annual report. Check to see if the company is attending any of the events we organise on campus or if they are going to a local careers fair. If you are having difficulty finding information, contact the organisation and ask them to send you some.

Filling in the application form

Now you've got all the necessary information together, it's time to tackle the form itself.

If possible, allow yourself several hours, and expect to have to come back to it. The first page of any application form usually asks for personal details and the next sections often follow:

Education

Present your qualifications in a way which displays your best results prominently, for instance, by listing your highest grades of each set of examinations at the top of each list. Write down your qualifications in reverse chronological order i.e. the most recent first.

Some forms ask you to give your UCAS points, and if this is not easy for you to do, because of the qualifications you have studied, contact the employer to confirm how to proceed.

Employment/Work Experience

Use reverse chronological order for your list, unless the instructions on the form ask you to do otherwise. When writing about what you did in each job, describe your duties and responsibilities bearing in mind any links you can make with the skills the employer is asking for. Include information about voluntary work too.

Make the most of this section by drawing attention to particular achievements you have experienced at work.

If you have insufficient space for all your jobs, group similar jobs together or summarise your experience.

Interests/Responsibilities

Include what you have gained from your leisure interests and make sure you refer to any responsibilities you have undertaken in connection with your hobbies e.g. Vice Captain of the university netball team, course representative.

Bring out any relevant skills which will be useful in the job. Are there any other achievements you have experienced in other aspects of your life which you could include here too?

Disclosing Disability

Some application forms ask you if you consider yourself to be disabled. Visit www.prospects.ac.uk/equal_opportunities_diasbility.htm for information about factors to consider about disclosing disability.

Online application forms

Applying online is increasingly the norm in graduate recruitment and some employers only accept electronic applications. Online applications need to be completed with the same amount of care as paper based application forms. First impressions created by good presentation, accurate spelling and well written sentences make a strong impact.

There are advantages and disadvantages to applying online. Advantages include:

- You can apply equally easily from anywhere.
- Once you've pressed submit, your application form is delivered and you will receive an acknowledgement, usually by e-mail, and if you're clever you can save and adapt your answers to other difficult questions, but make sure that you do adapt them really well to fit the particular question – it's easy to spot an answer that has been used on a different form without being revised.

The disadvantages include:

- Poorly constructed forms or application system e.g. you may not be able to make changes to earlier answers, or the boxes for your text may not be big enough.
- Instructions can be poor and confusing.
- You might lose the lot if you're unlucky, some systems won't let you save or print a copy to keep.
- You might have no opportunity to explain things which are important, such as having a different type of entry qualification, being a mature student, having a disability, or having poor exam results.

You will need to spend the same amount of time planning your approach as if you were completing a paper application and follow the same advice.

There are particular features of electronic forms however, which you should be aware of:

- Check to see if there are any online help or guidance notes for applicants. If you do get stuck there is usually a FAQs (frequently asked questions) page or helpline number you can ring.
- If you are given a username and password, make sure you keep a record of it.
- Don't apply to more than one function with the same employer if you are told to choose just one area. You may be rejected automatically for not following instructions.
- Be prepared that some systems do not allow you to return to earlier pages.
- You may be able to save your work and go back to it later, but this isn't always a good idea; even if there are no technical problems, you can forget your line of thinking.
- As all communication will be via email, make sure you check your email regularly and remember to use an appropriate e-mail address.

Hints and tips for online applications

- Print off a copy of the form, or note down the headings, sections and questions. You will then be able to plan your application offline.
- Create a Word document to write your answers for the form, separating each section by a line-break. Retain this information and cut and paste it into the form.
- Some forms will let you write as much as you like. Resist the temptation. Give them sufficient relevant information to make them want to interview you but don't waffle. In most applications, however, there is a strict instruction with regard to the number of words/characters required (Word/Character Limit). If there is a limit do not exceed it, but aim to use as much of the space as possible, to do yourself justice.
- Despite the informality of the Internet, spelling and grammar are important, and you should check carefully for errors before sending the document. Note that not all electronic applications have a spell check facility.
- Save your answers. Some systems do not allow you to print or save a copy, so keep records of the questions and your responses, you will almost certainly be able to re-use them in other online or paper applications but make sure you adapt them to the questions!
- Scanning software may be employed to search for keywords in areas such as job skills, job titles and educational achievement. Think carefully about the way you describe your interests and activities and use them to evidence key skills. If an electronic application form asks you to demonstrate your organisational skills, for example, make sure you include the word 'organise' in your reply.

The bottom line is that the success of your online application is dependent on the preparation you do beforehand and not on your technical or IT skills!

Tackling difficult questions

Application forms are increasingly asking questions that relate directly to the competencies required to do the job. Sometimes these are stated explicitly; sometimes you have to read between the lines. Often the question has several parts to it. These questions are designed to let you “sell” yourself, demonstrate that you possess the skills and personal qualities that the employer is looking for, and to interest or impress them enough to invite you to interview. These questions are often referred to as **Competency Based Questions**. The following structure will help you to frame your answers.

Think of the following question:

“Describe a situation where you have worked as part of a team. What was your role? What did you do? How did you overcome problems? What was the outcome?”

Essentially each question (such as above) can be answered by using the same approach as shown below. The percentages (in brackets), are shown as a guide for approximation only.

a) Situation (~15 – 20%)

Here, you are effectively setting the scene in order to describe your behaviour in the particular scenario. What was going on? What was the problem?

b) Behaviour (~60 - 70%) – what and how YOU as an individual did.

- Here you need to provide or demonstrate competency or characteristics of effective behaviour. Be sure to convey the actions you took in the light of the situation.
- Be specific and stay focused on you – say what YOU did, not what “Imran” or “John” or “we” did.
- Use positive language to reflect your achievements.
- Quantify/qualify your statements/answers, for example:
I was responsible for handling and resolving up to 50 queries per day
Handling cash and credit transactions of up to £5K per week.
Responsible for a project worth £10,000
Line management and supervision of a team of 5.
- Avoid making vague statements that may sound good but provide no specific information about what you did such as *“the project team created a plan.....”*
- Avoid giving opinions about a situation or task as these provide no information about what you did.
- Avoid making theoretical statements such as *“I would do...”* or *“I always....”* as these provide no information about what you actually did.

c) Outcome (~15 – 20%)

- Indicate clearly the results of your actions. Was the problem solved? What about skills gained? Did you meet the targets?
- It is recommended that you choose examples with positive outcomes. However, should you not meet the aims/objectives, state what you’ve learnt from the experience. E.g. “I know I have learnt from my mistakes and have become a more confident and self assured person as a result.”

Another alternative structure is the acronym STAR – Situation, Task, Action and Result – similar to above but instead of “Behaviour” put “Task” and “Action”. Sometimes the letter “D” is added at the end (STAR D) – D denotes “what you would have done differently”.

Some questions, e.g. “Describe your most significant academic achievement” have no right or wrong answer, and you could refer to any aspect of your life for your answer. This particular question is aimed at finding out what motivates you, or what you value. It is not the example that you give that is important but what your answer brings out about your qualities.

Application Form top tips

- Make several copies of the original form on which to practise.
- Read through the entire form before you write anything.
- Follow any instructions, e.g. write in black ink, continue on a separate sheet.
- Don't cram too much text into a small space, or write only a couple of lines in a box obviously meant for more.
- Use short sentences, paragraphs or bullet points.
- Check spelling and grammar. Don't waffle. Stick to what is relevant and never tell lies.
- Keep to the word limit given.
- Never leave a section blank unless it is obviously inappropriate to you. 'Not applicable' or a line through it is a good idea.
- Don't enclose your CV, unless asked to do so, and make sure any attachments have your name on them.
- Keep a copy of your form. It will be essential at the interview stage.
- Take advantage of our resources, listed at the back.

A good and bad example

Question: "Give an example of an occasion when you have handled disagreements or conflict"

A) Poor Answer

"I have a part-time bar job in a hotel and on many occasions I have had to deal with difficult customers. Sometimes a customer's behaviour has been so loud and offensive that I have refused to serve them.

I have always remained polite when doing this and have explained why I have refused.

I have usually calmed people down and got them to accept the situation, but occasionally I have called the manager to deal with the customer. "

B) A Good Answer

During my part-time work in a large local hotel I had to deal with a difficult situation involving a customer who wanted a drink after last orders had been called.

The man became rude and offensive after I told him that I could not serve him as last orders had been called five minutes ago. His behaviour was affecting other guests, and I could see the embarrassment being caused by his shouting and foul language.

I knew that he was a speaker at an important conference being held in the hotel and, to keep things discreet, I tried to deal with this without calling security. I calmly repeated the fact that I could not serve him and offered him a soft drink as an alternative. I also told him that in his hotel room his mini bar would be stocked with drinks.

The man continued to shout and referred to his position as a key speaker at the conference. I politely told him that I could not make exceptions to the bar rules and that if he continued to behave in that way I would have to have him removed from the bar.

On hearing this, the man quietened down and accepted the situation. I offered to organise an early morning telephone call for him the next day to give him enough time to get ready for his conference presentation. The following morning the man passed me in the hotel and apologised for his behaviour in the bar.

Writing a personal statement

Some application forms leave a large empty space at the end for you to “sell yourself”, in terms of your suitability for the job or course. You might be asked to “provide evidence in support of your application”, including your reasons for applying. This type of section is usually found on application forms for postgraduate courses and on some job application forms.

This part of a form is extremely important and it is a chance to present your strengths to the reader and to show why you are a good candidate. As this is usually a substantial section, take time to plan it so that your information comes across effectively.

Give your statement a clear structure, possibly using sub headings based upon the wording of the question, to enable the reader to see that you have addressed their criteria.

Personal statements for job applications

Organisations which tend to have a personal statement section in their application forms include many public sector organisations such as local authorities and the NHS, but private sector companies do have them too.

A typical example of what you are asked to write is:

“In this space please give your reasons for applying for this job and additional information showing how you meet the person specification, including relevant skills and experience.”

What should I include?

Think about what you can bring to the job, paying close attention to the employer’s requirements. The person specification should be kept in mind when you write your statement so that your content is relevant. Some suggestions to include in your statement are:

Your reasons for applying for the job

If you are asked to give your reasons for applying for this job, this can be a good starting point for your personal statement. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the job, your motivation to do that kind of work and your interest in that particular organisation. Keep the focus of your answer on what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you. This means concentrating on what you can bring to the job, rather than writing about your hopes of a huge salary and frequent trips overseas to exotic locations!

The relevance of your studies at university

Your degree subjects might be directly relevant to the job, in which case do capitalise on this and emphasise any modules which are particularly useful. If your degree is not relevant, there will still be “transferable skills” you have developed on your course which the employer is likely to be interested in. See the section below on “skills” for more about this.

Your work experience, including voluntary work

This is important to refer to, even though you will have recorded this on another part of the form. Experience in the workplace will have given you an appreciation of employers’ perspectives, their business needs and their expectations of their employees. Draw attention to any particular achievements and responsibilities you have experienced at work, unless you have written about these in some detail already elsewhere on the form.

Skills

Providing evidence of the skills the employer requires is usually a key part of a personal statement. Make sure that you complement rather than duplicate any sections you have filled in about your skills in “competency based questions”. Give examples of when you have used the skills, but do not go into as much detail as you would in the competency based questions sections, if these occur on the form.

Interests and Responsibilities

These can show you to be a well rounded person and can also provide evidence of some of the personal qualities and skills the employer is looking for. State what you have got out of hobbies rather than just listing them e.g. have you been able to show leadership ability through your interests, taken part in team based activities or shown initiative?

Final Points

Keep to any word limits and check to see if you are invited to continue on a separate sheet. Avoid long, complex sentences and be clear and concise. Use positive language and express your enthusiasm for the job. Check your draft statement for spelling and grammatical errors and give it to a friend to read too as it is easy to miss your own mistakes.

Sample Personal Statement

The following statement gives an example of how you might complete the large empty space at the end of a form in which you have to “sell yourself”, in terms of your suitability for the job. Take care to answer the question directly with clear supporting information so that you are backing up your claims with actual evidence. In this case the applicant is asked to write about why they have chosen to apply for this kind of work and to refer to the Key Criteria which will have been given stating the skills and other criteria of relevance to the job.

Question: “Why have you chosen to apply for this particular type of work? Please demonstrate how you meet the Key Criteria.”

“I believe that training as an Audiologist will give me an opportunity to join a healthcare profession, to which I feel I can make a real contribution. My passion to work in the NHS has developed through the many placements I have experienced in various parts of the NHS as well as extensive experience of working in other public sector organisations such as local government.

I have always found that I have a genuine care and concern for patients during my work experiences, such as in St Mark’s Hospital’s Audiology Department, by listening diligently and wanting to know more about their problems. During my month here I found that Audiology is a satisfying and challenging area of work and I enjoyed the practical aspects of the job and the use of scientific knowledge in assessing patients and finding appropriate solutions to hearing difficulties.

I enjoy interacting with others and am able to work well under considerable pressure, which I have been faced with on a weekly basis during my time as a Sales Adviser. My positive personality has allowed me to handle uncomfortable situations at work in a calm, collected manner, for instance dealing successfully with complaints from customers. My ability to speak three different languages and communicate effectively with people of all ages, will help me to fulfil the requirements of the job further.

My interpersonal skills, including my communication skills, have been developed through working with others on group projects, giving presentations and also through my Personal and Professional Development module. This module has also allowed me to reflect on my actions and write notes in an orderly, accurate and clear manner. Feedback from members of my project group showed that I am thought to be good at co-operating with others and this will be important when working in a multi-professional environment in hospitals.

I have also gained excellent marks in my laboratory reports, through modules such as Mechanisms of Disease and Immunology. My accurate use of laboratory equipment during practicals, shows my dexterity and attention to detail. Other modules such as Statistics have helped improve my analytical and numerical skills, and I ended year 2 with the overall average mark of 76%.

The commitment that I have to Audiology, my relevant skills and the realistic understanding that I have about the nature of the work make me an excellent candidate for this opportunity.

Writing a personal statement for postgraduate courses – taught Masters courses, diplomas and certificates

Application forms for postgraduate courses commonly include a large space on the final page where you are asked to write a personal statement or asked to provide “evidence in support of your application”.

Sometimes you are given more detailed instructions about what to include in this section, such as in the following example on an application form for taught Masters courses:

“Please give details of any other experience/information which you consider to be relevant to your application and a statement explaining why you feel qualified to study for the degree and how you expect to benefit from it.”

This part of a form is very important and you must use it to show why you are a good candidate for the course. Make sure that you pay close attention to what you are asked to cover in the section. The structure for your personal statement will be determined by what you are asked to include. Divide your text into paragraphs to make it easier for the reader to absorb the information and check that it flows logically. It can be effective to use sub headings to highlight the different components of the statement.

It is likely that the following information will be relevant for you to include:

Your reasons for wanting to do the course.

Writing about what appeals to you about the course will help you to show your motivation to study this subject. The admissions tutor wants to know why this course interests you. Have you studied relevant modules on your current course which have given you a taste of this subject that you want to develop? Or is this a new area of study for you which would give you the chance to take up a fresh academic challenge? Show that you have researched the course and are aware of any recognition it has received for its merits.

What interests you about this particular university.

Show that you know what the university’s strengths are and be able to say why you would like to study there.

Your academic skills.

These could include projects you have done, extended essays and research skills. It could also be relevant to include information about IT skills, data handling skills and knowledge of any related subjects. Write positively about what you have done well and highlight your strengths.

Your other transferable skills.

There will be a range of “transferable” skills that you will have developed in activities apart from your academic studies, which you can bring to a postgraduate course. These might include skills such as team working, time management, analytical skills and planning skills. Think of others that you have gained too. Write about how you have used these skills so far and how you see them helping you in your postgraduate studies.

The relevance of any work experience you have had.

Any paid or voluntary work you have experienced, whether it has been part time, full time or vacation work, will have equipped you with valuable skills. The relevance of this experience might be direct or indirect, so think broadly about how you can use this in your personal statement.

Your career aims

You might not have a clear idea of what your career plans are at this stage, however do include some information about what your thoughts are and how the course will help you to achieve your aims. Some postgraduate courses will have very clear connections with a particular type of work, and if you are applying for one of these show that you have researched your options and know how the course will equip you to apply for jobs in this field.

Final Points

Take care to write good English with accurate grammar and punctuation. Be positive and enthusiastic, so that your strengths and desire to do the course come across effectively.

This section of the form really gives you the chance to put yourself across as a “rounded” person and should give the reader a clearer picture of why you have applied for the course, what makes you a suitable candidate for it and what you hope to get out of it. End it with an upbeat conclusion, which leaves the reader with the impression that you will be a well informed, keen and committed student with much to offer.

Applications for research degrees (eg MPhil, PhD)

If you are applying for a research degree, rather than a taught postgraduate course, you will usually be asked to include an outline research proposal as part of your application. It is important to discuss your research ideas with your intended supervisor at the university you are applying to, before writing this. It is also recommended that you seek advice from a member of the academic staff who currently teaches you, to gain his or her opinion on your proposal.

Depending on the type of subject you are aiming to research, your application may need to include some or all of the following:

- Title of proposed thesis
- Any links to ongoing research projects
- Why you wish to pursue this area of research
- The methods of research proposed (e.g. survey, case studies)
- A plan and a timetable of work

There will probably be notes or guidelines produced to help you to complete the personal statement section of the application form, so do refer to these to make sure that you include all the information that is required.

Including a covering letter with an application form

If you are sending your completed application form through the post or as an attachment, it is a good idea to include a covering letter, particularly if there is something relevant to your application that is not covered on the form.

Including a covering letter also gives you the chance to draw out some of the key information provided in your application form, and expand on why you are a suitable candidate and why you want to work for the organisation. See our leaflet '*CVs and covering letters*' for information on how to write and present a covering letter.

Obviously, if you are completing your form online, where there is no mechanism to send a letter, you do not usually have this option, and do not send a letter if you are explicitly asked not to do this.

Persuasive applications

Think about the number of application forms a recruiter for a job or course has to read! Make your points come across clearly and effectively by using positive and active language in your application.

The following words convey a sense of action and result. Consider how you might include these words to make your writing have an impact on the reader.

| | | | |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Achieved | Distributed | Keen | Quantified |
| Adaptable | Effective | Launched | Reacted |
| Administered | Efficient | Led | Recommended |
| Advised | Eliminated | Liaised | Refined |
| Analysed | Enabled | Managed | Repaired |
| Arranged | Encouraged | Maintained | Represented |
| Assessed | Engineered | Mediated | Researched |
| Broadened | Ensured | Minimised | Resourceful |
| Built | Established | Modernised | Resolved |
| Capable | Evaluated | Monitored | Responded |
| Collated | Expanded | Motivated | Restored |
| Communicated | Experienced | Negotiated | Revamped |
| Competent | Expertise | Networked | Reviewed |
| Completed | Facilitated | Operated | Significant |
| Composed | Flexible | Organised | Simplified |
| Consistent | Focussed | Participated | Solved |
| Consulted | Generated | Performed | Specialised |
| Controlled | Goal -oriented | Persuaded | Streamlined |
| Co-ordinated | Guided | Planned | Strengthened |
| Created | Hard-Working | Presented | Successful |
| Customer Focused | Helpful | Proactive | Supervised |
| Dedicated | Honest | Processed | Thorough |
| Delegated | Identified | Produced | Trained |
| Demonstrated | Implemented | Productive | Transformed |
| Designed | Improved | Proficient | Trustworthy |
| Determined | Influenced | Profitable | Undertook |
| Developed | Initiated | Programmed | Unsupervised |
| Devised | Instigated | Promoted | Valued |
| Diagnosed | Instructed | Proposed | Versatile |
| Diligent | Interacted | Provided | Volunteered |
| Directed | Introduced | Qualified | Willing |

Resources in Career Development Services

Appointments with Advisers

Once you have a draft copy of your application form, we recommend that you arrange to see a Career Development Adviser for feedback on what you have written. To arrange this please telephone us on 01274 234991, call in to arrange an appointment or email us at careers@bradford.ac.uk. If you need all of your application checking you will need to book an appointment in advance; if you need help with just one or two questions, a 20 minute appointment with a Duty Adviser will help and these are booked on the day. Please contact us by telephone, email or by calling in, to arrange to see a Career Development Adviser.

Information Room

We have a wide range of application form and job-seeking resources in our Information Room in Student Central including leaflets and guides (eg.AGCAS Applications, CVs and covering letters)

Workshops

- We also regularly run workshops on a wide range of topics including completing application forms. See the events calendar on our website for details of the current programme.

Internet

- www.careers.brad.ac.uk - useful information about application forms; sample CVs
- www.careers.brad.ac.uk/employability – useful information and examples of how to use the STAR technique in evidencing your employability skills
- www.careers.brad.ac.uk/destinations/ - additional section on our website that has great resources for helping you with your application forms, particularly the web video *Your Job's Online* (AGCAS) (Note: you can get to the site directly by clicking on the Destinations link in the Interactive Resources section of the website, but you will need to use your Bradford e-mail login as this resource is for our students only.)
- www.prospects.ac.uk – Applications, CVs and interview pages
- www.selectsimulator.com – a website which prepares you for online job applications
- www.kent.ac.uk/careers/cv/pgcestatements.htm - examples of personal statements for Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) applications

Equality and Diversity

- Additional advice on job seeking with regard to equal opportunities issues can be found at www.prospects.ac.uk/equal_opportunities.htm
- The equality section of our website also has further resources and information on a range of equality issues - www.careers.brad.ac.uk/employability/equality-issues/index.php