

Things to remember when tackling application forms

Time

Often, an application form can take a lot of time to complete, it is therefore important that you give yourself enough time to complete the form well. If you think you will be applying for a lot of graduate or placement opportunities then it is wise to create a list at the start of the academic year of who you are interested in applying to and their deadlines so that you can plan your time effectively. Remember, you will also need to balance the time taken for these against your academic commitments. Often, we recommend that you choose to complete fewer forms well than try to rush in a lot of applications that you don't have the time for.

Write new answers

Don't make the mistake of copying and pasting answers from previous applications that are not relevant or refer to a different employer.

Word count

It is important that you stick to the word count provided on the application form. As well as making sure that you don't write too much, you also need to ensure that you write enough. If an employer has allowed 500 words for an answer and you only write 300 when most applicants would have written to the maximum, it will look like you have less to offer.

Spelling and grammar

It is essential that your application form is written perfectly, it represents the standard of your work. Partly, giving yourself enough time will help with this, as you can save your application and then check over it later to make sure that it reads well. You can also type up answers in Word so that they are spell checked and then paste them into the online application form, although this wouldn't catch everything, such as writing 'costumer' rather than 'customer'.

Tests

Before you send off an application it is wise to check whether the employer is likely to send you some online tests to complete. Most large employers do explain their recruitment process on their website and you can find out more information at thestudentroom.co.uk and glassdoor.co.uk. If you will be sent tests you need to make sure you are prepared before you submit your application. Have a look at our Psychometric Tests leaflet for more information.

Disability

If you have a disability and you think that it will impact your ability to complete the application form or online tests, then you can contact the employer to discuss your adjustment needs. You can also often declare your disability on the application form itself which can be a good idea if you think that you will require reasonable adjustments at an interview or assessment centre.

Our support to you

We can check your applications in person or online. To find out more please visit hud.ac/careers

What is a supporting statement and when will I need one?

Writing a supporting statement is an alternative way of applying for a role compared to sending in a CV and cover letter. An advert will state if you need to apply using a supporting statement. If this is the case, the employer will provide an information pack about the job role which will include a Person Specification or similar. This is a list of attributes required for the role, and in your statement you will need to show that you meet all of the essential criteria, as well as any desirable criteria as well. This method of applying is very common in some sectors, especially Healthcare, Education and Charities.

Here is an example of a Person Specification

Attribute	Essential	Desirable	How Assessed
Education			
A degree in any subject	•		Application, Certificates
Experience			
Experience communicating with the public	•		Application, Interview
Successfully organising a project from start to finish	•		Application, Interview
Using databases		•	Application
Experience in a similar role in the past		•	Application, Interview
Skills			
Strong interpersonal skills	•		Application, Interview
Ability to work in a team	•		Application, Interview
Ability to remain organised under pressure	•		Application, Interview
Creative problem solving and initiative	•		Application, Interview

What is the employer looking for?

The great thing about this method of application is that you can easily see what would make the employer's perfect candidate. When you submit your application, the statement will be more important than any other parts of the form that you fill in, such as details of your employment history. The statement will be read against the Person Specification and a score will be given for each of the separate criteria and then added up. The applicants with the highest totals will then be shortlisted for interview.

How should I approach writing my statement?

A very important consideration for your statement is the **structure**. It makes most sense to cover each point of the Person Specification in the same order that it has been listed by the employer.

You can even use the same headings that they have to section out your statement, such as Education, Experience, Skills, or use each criterion as mini headings within the text. The benefit of this is that it is incredibly easy for the employer to follow and mark what you have written. In most cases, this is the best way to structure your statement.

Sometimes however, this isn't the best choice if the Person Specification has some similar points that you want to use the same piece of evidence for or if you have a very small word count. For instance, in our example, you may think it would be sensible to group 'Experience working with the public' with 'Strong interpersonal skills'. To do this successfully you need to make sure that you include pointer sentences at the start or end of paragraphs. This allows the reader to easily spot that you are meeting more than one requirement with one example. Here is an example of a pointer sentence: 'As well as demonstrating that I have two years' experience working with the public, this also shows how I developed my strong interpersonal skills'.

Do not be afraid to use the same **language** as the employer in your statement. Using the same phrase to start a sentence as they have used in the Person Specification will make it easier for the employer to spot that you are writing about something relevant. For instance, 'I have a strong ability to work in a team, which I have developed through...'

As well as using their terminology, make sure your language remains positive in the statement. Avoid phrases like 'I believe', 'I had to' or 'I was required to'.

The **length** will depend on the employer and the number of criteria in the job specification. Some employers, like the NHS, have a word limit that you will need to work to. For the NHS this limit is 1500 words. Many other employers will not give a word limit. When this is the case you need to balance properly covering all of the criteria against not writing too much.

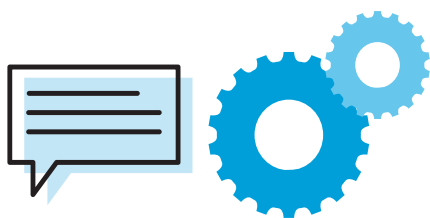
A good check is to ensure that you only ever give one example for each of the criteria. If you have a lot to offer, a summary sentence can help, such as: 'I have worked in a team on university projects and in my part time role in a coffee shop, however, most recently I have worked in a team of five in my Secretary role for my University Student Society. In this team....'

Your **examples** from work experience, volunteering, extra-curricular activities, internships, placement years and university will of course be the bulk of what you write about in your statement.

Think carefully about which examples you choose; you want them to be most relevant to the tasks you would be responsible for in the job you are applying for.

When writing about your examples ask yourself:

- Does this allow the employer to picture me working in a similar way to this new job?
- Have I included information on positive results or learning points from what I have done?
- Can the reader see how I have done something, rather than just that I have done something?
- Could I include more numbers in here, such as efficiencies, profits, audience size, number of people seen, timescales and so on?



Here is an example taken from an application for a nursing position.

Example attribute: ‘Experience of multi-disciplinary team working’

‘My current role as staff nurse on the acute stroke unit has a strong multidisciplinary approach as many of the patients have very complex care needs following their stroke. I work closely with the medical team, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and dieticians to ensure patient care is co-ordinated and all the care needs of patients are fulfilled. I ensure that I have thorough knowledge of the patients so that I am able to contribute to decision-making regarding in-patient care and discharge planning at the weekly multidisciplinary meetings. I strongly believe that effective multidisciplinary working is vital in providing holistic care as no one profession can meet all the care needs of a patient and their family alone.’

How we can help

Our professionally qualified Careers Advisers have lots of experience of checking personal statements. You can book an appointment online or if you do not live nearby you can send us your application online and we will be able to offer advice on your statement in writing. Visit: careers.hud.ac.uk

This publication is also available online – should you like to have it in an alternative format please contact us.

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