

Hints on how to read job adverts, write a covering letter and complete applications

This factsheet will give you some ideas about how to write an effective covering letter or application that will address specific job adverts and present yourself in a strong light.

Reading a job advert

Make a note of the following details – you will need to refer to them in your cover letter or initial communication with the employer:

- Job title – this sounds obvious but it is very important to get right, especially if you are sending out lots of applications using a jobsite such as *Jobsite* or *Monster*.
- The company's name, brand and/or logo – you can use these for your research into what the company is, what it does, what its values are, who its customers are, and so on.
- Hours of work – is it full-/part-time, or shift work?
- The salary
- The job description/person specification – this tells you what skills, knowledge and attitude the employer is looking for. You will find key words and phrases that you can match in your application.
- Contact details to send your application to. This may be either an email or postal address, and your application will usually be sent to a particular person or department.
- The closing date for applications.

Your covering letter

The letter or email you send with your CV is your opportunity to grab the attention of the employer and get them interested in reading more about you. Here are some things you should consider when writing an effective letter:

- This is also your chance to tell the employer what specific skills/experience/interest you have that could be useful to them. Show the employer what value you can add to their business.
- Have a 'draft' copy saved on your computer so you can adapt it each time you apply for a job.
- Make sure your spelling and grammar is correct. If an employer spots an error, they won't look at your CV. This includes getting the name of the company you are applying to correct!
- Don't just copy generic paragraphs from another covering letter – the employer will spot this, you need to tailor it to the role you are applying for as much as possible.

What to include in your covering letter:

- Address it to a named person if possible, if not use 'Dear Sir/Madam'.
- Tell them why you are writing to them.
- Explain what interests you about the job.
- Point out your key skills, experience and/or qualifications that are relevant to that particular job.
- Explain why you want to work for the company and what you can bring as an individual.

- End the letter with a positive, expressing your willingness to discuss your application at interview.

Stand out from the crowd:

Think about particular skills and knowledge you have that others might not. Include these on your cover letter (if they are relevant to the job) to give yourself an advantage. For example:

- Do you get on with people really easily? Do people come and ask for your advice often?
- Are you a social media whizz?
- Are you always on time and/or well organised?
- Are you brilliant with technology: mobile phones, iPads, computers?
- Maybe you're good at carrying out research using the Internet, magazines, television, your social network. Do you enjoy doing this type of work?
- Have you had some previous work experience, a Saturday job or done some voluntary work that involves talking to members of the public? Any experience like this is really useful and important to an employer – this includes having a 'good telephone manner'.
- Have you ever played a team sport? Think about the skills and behaviours you have gained: dedication, reliability (turning up for training/matches), motivating others (if you've just lost a game!) organising and leading others.

Style of your covering letter:

- Make sure the letter is typed and is in the same font and size as your CV.
- One page of A4 only – it doesn't need to be too long - three or four paragraphs is acceptable.
- Keep to the point – don't waffle.
- End the letter with 'Yours faithfully' or 'Yours sincerely' and sign your name (type it if you are sending it electronically).

Completing application forms

When you are completing an application form, whether it's online or in a paper format, you must make sure that you check it thoroughly before sending it. Why not get someone to check it for you? Once it's been sent, you won't have an opportunity to change it.

Online application forms:

Companies may ask you to register yourself on their website and apply for their vacancy online. This is becoming more and more popular, so you need to make sure that you complete all sections before you press the submit button:

- Many organisations filter by grades (GCSE's or UCAS points) during the first stage of the application – make sure you meet the minimum requirements otherwise you might waste your time by filling in the rest of the application.
- Check your online application form for spelling and grammar before sending it. If you are unsure of how to spell a word, use a dictionary to check it because not all sites will have a spell-check facility.
- If you are having problems submitting your application, don't just hope for the best. There is always a helpline number or email address to contact. This will ensure that your application is received properly and on time.
- The company will probably have a lot of online applications to sift through, so you need to make sure that yours will stand out from the other applicants'.
- Use the contents from your CV to complete any 'skills' section.
- Don't forget about the draft covering letter you have written. It's a good idea to use this on any additional information spaces that the online application has.

Applying for an apprenticeship

If you are keen to continue learning, alongside working, then you might consider doing an apprenticeship. The steps you need to take for applying for an apprenticeship are slightly different to other jobs. There is an Apprenticeship website that allows you to search, view and apply for Apprenticeships online: www.apprenticeships.org.uk

A step by step guide on how to apply can be found here: www.apprenticeships.org.uk/Be-An-Apprentice/Applying.aspx

What do employers say?

As part of research conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), employers said that they noticed the following issues when it came to some young people's CV's and application forms:

- People had either not read or understood the eligibility criteria for the job – meaning their applications were irrelevant
- Answers on application forms are often formulaic, so they don't show any originality
- Candidates don't know how to make themselves stand out via their CV or application
- Some applications show a lack of clarity around the role being applied for
- Poor knowledge of the organisation being applied to – applicants have not done any research
- Young people unable to 'sell themselves' positively and in an employer-appropriate way via their CV or application form
- Some young people appear to just expect to be able to just walk into their dream job

By following the helpful hints in this handout you will avoid some of these common mistakes and be more likely to be asked to attend an interview.