

TAILORING YOUR APPLICATION

How can you adapt your application for a specific role and organisation?

Getting your application right gives you the best chance of making it through to the next stage of the selection process.

Applications can require many different types of document:

- CV
- Cover Letter
- Personal Statement
- Application Questions

Whatever form of document is requested, employers want to know that you are

- **Motivated** – show why you are interested in this particular role and organisation.
- **Competent** – ensure that you address the criteria with relevant examples
- **Compatible** – demonstrate an understanding of the organisation's culture and values and show how these align with you own
- **Commercially Aware** – demonstrate an understanding of the company and the industry in which it operates

RESEARCH

To tailor an application effectively you need to understand the role and organisation you are applying to, as well as the skillset and experience you will bring to the position.

Dissect the job description

Ensure you fully understand the requirements of the role. Look for clues within the person specification. Pull out the key criteria written into the job description, so that you can start matching your own experience. Take note of the language used and mirror this in your application. If there is little available information, then research likely criteria from similar roles on LinkedIn – or use Prospects Job Profiles.

prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles

Build commercial awareness

Employers will also expect you to demonstrate an understanding of the company and the industry in which it operates. Don't just limit your research to the company website.

- Follow the company's social media pages such as LinkedIn and Twitter.
- Increase your understanding of the wider sector by looking at industry publications. Explore professional bodies' websites and social media.
- Use apps to keep up to date with what is happening in the news on a local, national, and global level.

Additional Resources

Industry Reports

essex.careercentre.me/Resources/IndustryReports

Target Jobs

targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/skills-for-getting-a-job/what-commercial-awareness

Bright Network

brightnetwork.co.uk/academy/course/commercial-awareness

REFLECT

Identify the relevant skills and experience you offer

Having identified the skills required for the role – and the values the company looks for in its employees – you now need to consider your own skillset, experience, strengths, values, motivation style, and goals. Think back over all you've done in the last few years; what have you learned about yourself and how have you grown?

- Work experience – both paid and voluntary
- Academic studies
- Extracurricular activities and interests
- Positions of responsibility
- Professional Development activities

Examples from these experiences will be used to support and add credibility to the statements in your application. Gather relevant examples that demonstrate your suitability for the role, whilst including sufficient detail and facts and figures. Remember to think in terms of transferable skills and experience! For example, being a sports team captain is evidence that you have demonstrated leadership skills.

Consider your motivation and fit for the organisation.

It is also important to take some time to think through why you are applying for this specific role, in this particular organisation. What key points of interest did you identify in your research?

Additional Resources

Career Assessments – understand your motivations, strengths, preferences, and values.

essex.careercentre.me/AssessmentCentreTool

LinkedIn Learning – self-evaluation and development modules.

essex.ac.uk/student/learning-technologies/linkedin-learning

RELATE

The final stage brings it all together. Use your examples of the experience, skills, and attributes identified in your self-reflection and align these with the criteria you've found through your research into a specific role within a particular organisation. This will help you avoid clichés and generalisations, ensuring your application is as unique as you!

When completing your application, organise and present your information so that employers and digital Applicant Tracking Systems can easily see that you are motivated, competent, and compatible.

- Keep presentation clear and uncluttered.
- Use dynamic language to bring your application to life.
- Mirror the wording used in the job description.
- Use a succinct, professional – rather than academic – style of writing and edit your points carefully.
- Structure your personal statements and cover letters in a clear, logical manner. For example, use “signpost” sentences at the beginning of paragraphs and place “linking” sentences at the end to assist your reader in identifying key points.
- Use the **STAR** technique to structure your evidence.

Additional Resources

- brightnetwork.co.uk/academy/module/how-develop-business-writing
- targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/cvs-applications-and-tests/big-guide-cv-writing-make-our-template-your-own
- prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs/write-a-successful-job-application
- prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs/example-questions-and-answers

WRITE CLEARLY AND CONCISELY

'I am currently in my second year at the University of Essex, where I am studying for a Psychology degree'. (20 words)

Becomes:

'I am a second-year psychology student at the University of Essex'. (11 words)

Remember: **same information, fewer words.**

USE THE STAR TECHNIQUE

Evidence against criteria: Leadership skills

Situation (10%):

- 2nd year
- Student Ambassador
- Working with secondary school pupils to promote University

Task (15%):

- Lead class
- Organise activities
- Engage pupils

Action (50%):

- Set out expectations
- Showed interest in more withdrawn pupils
- Interactive delivery

Result (25%):

- Enthusiasm of class
- Completed tasks
- 90% to go on to HE

Example:

During my second year, I developed my leadership skills by working as a Student Ambassador. Working with secondary school pupils to promote higher education, I had to lead from the front on five 40-minute sessions: organising activities, setting targets, delegating tasks, and making decisions. They were challenging sessions, but by setting out expectations early on I was able to respond promptly and firmly to disruptive behaviour. Then, by delivering interactive and challenging activities, such as quizzes and debates, I motivated the class to take part and the pupils achieved the tasks within the given timescale. A survey at the end of the session showed that 90% of the class planned to go on to Higher Education as a result.

FURTHER SUPPORT

For more information, advice, and support with applications, email careersinfo@essex.ac.uk or visit careerhub.essex.ac.uk to book an event or 1–1 appointment.