WHAT DO I WRITE IN A JOB APPLICATION?

Many graduate employers prefer to use application forms as part of the graduate recruitment process. Forms are easier to compare because, unlike CVs, they follow an identical format for each applicant.
Your application should demonstrate:

- your understanding of the company and job requirements
- your suitability (knowledge, skills and experience) and enthusiasm for the role

We'll be looking at:

- completing 'easy' information correctly
- answering competency questions and writing personal statements
- common pitfalls and employer expectations
- the importance of preparation

Preparation
Let's begin by looking at how to prepare for your application. A good analogy would be to think of an exam paper. This usually involves reading carefully through all the questions, processing the information, structuring your answers and only then, putting pen to paper. Using this same systematic process will serve you well when completing application forms. Rather than viewing the application form online and being tempted to jump straight in answering questions - STOP! Read the form through from beginning to end, including all the instructions given. Many employers comment that applications often appear ill-prepared as if they have been completed in a hurry - and therefore land straight in the bin.

Top tip Remember to take as much time preparing an electronic application as you would a paper-based one. Because application forms have tick boxes, it can be tempting to treat them like any other online transaction. Before you write anything on an application form, you must gather as much information as you can on three things:

- the job
- the employer
- yourself – qualifications / knowledge, skills and experience

Once you have an understanding of the job and what's involved, the employer and what they want, and yourself and what you can offer, you will be in a better position to answer the questions on the form in a meaningful and appropriate way.

The job: is there a job description or person specification (or full course information if it's an application for further study)? Find out as much as you can about what is required in terms of qualifications, skills, qualities and experience

The employer: look closely at their website. Find out as much as you can about them - what they do, who their clients are, their aspirations and their challenges

Yourself: do you have any contacts who work there and could give you some insights?
Consider what you have to offer: look at all your activities and achievements and match your skills and qualities to the requirements of the role:

- your qualifications
- your previous and present jobs
- your work experience and work placements
- your achievements/prizes
- your interests/ travel
- your involvement in societies and/or sport

Completing the following exercises (5xp) will help you with this step:

Skills and Qualities Self-Assessment: https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/bea/activity/1005/
Employability Self-Assessment: https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/bea/activity/821/
Workstyle Personality Questionnaire: https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/bea/activity/822/

Completing the Form
The first part of the form usually asks you to provide information such as your contact details and education. It can be tempting to speed through these sections as they are not particularly challenging, so watch out for ACCURACY. You must also make sure you correctly follow the application instructions!

- if a section ISN'T applicable for you, write 'not applicable' or 'N/A'
- if it says 'complete in capital letters', make sure you do
- if it says 'complete each section' then do so!

Make sure that you capitalise on any space you are given on the form in this section. For example, in the Employment History section, you might only have space for employer and dates, but if you have space, include responsibilities / skills gained.

Compare these two examples:

Sales Assistant	Sales Assistant
Served customers, handled cash and maintained stock levels.	Responsible for advising customers, requiring problem solving, organisation and stock control.
	Handled large sums of money, ensuring that a correct balance was achieved at the end of trading for the day.

The information given in the second example is much more effective at demonstrating your employability and your potential.

Competency Questions and Personal Statements

You might be asked what are known as competency based questions. These usually ask for examples of a time when you have used a particular skill or strength. When recruiting for a post, an employer will identify the JOB then draw up a list of CORE COMPETENCIES that are required to perform the duties of the role. These usually include a mix of knowledge, skills and personal qualities.

- Job Role
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Qualities

Examples of typical skills and competencies are teamwork, communication, ability to work under pressure and commercial awareness.

Core Competencies

The application will then ask for evidence of where you might have demonstrated these competencies in the past. Some examples of competency-based questions are:

- Give an example of a time when you have had to deliver results under pressure
- Give an example of a time when you have had to influence people
- Describe a time when you have had to solve a difficult problem

If you have demonstrated a skill in one situation, the chances are that you can use that skill in other settings - so you can draw on experience from any area of your life:

- part-time work
- volunteering
- academic study
- sports/societies

However, it is important to refer to a PRECISE occasion, rather than presenting your skills in a very general way. BE SPECIFIC! Graduate recruiters understand that you possibly won't have lots of directly relevant work experience at this stage – they are looking for evidence of your transferable skills. A good way to approach answering competency based questions is to use the STAR technique - SITUATION, TASK, ACTION, RESULT:

- outline the SITUATION - what was the setting? Were you working alone or as part of a team?
- what was the TASK or challenge? This could be a work task or project, an incident to be resolved or a problem to be solved
- what specific ACTION did you take? Describe the process and your reasoning
- what was the RESULT/outcome? Was it good or bad, and what did you learn?

Make sure that the bulk of your answer (around 70%) focusses on ACTION, and make sure you describe what action YOU took. It can be tempting when discussing a team scenario to refer to 'we' rather than 'I', which doesn't help the employer see what YOU can do.

Personal Statements

Often application forms require you to submit a personal statement to support your application. In your statement you should say:

- WHY you are interested in the job AND the organisation
- evidence of the skills and qualities you can bring to the post

Remember to make the link between what you can offer and what the employer is looking for. Many applicants make the mistake of emphasising what they can GET from a company, forgetting to say what they can contribute themselves. If the post has a person specification, make sure you address ALL the points listed, providing examples of your skills in practice. Write in an engaging manner, using positive and proactive language - remember that you want to hold the employer's interest! Try to draw on different experiences from your life when providing evidence. HOW you present the information is important too - consider using paragraphs, sub-headings and bullet points to break up the text.

Interests and Activities

This section gives the employer an idea of you as a person - what interests, motivates and inspires you. The interests section, therefore, can be another forum for providing evidence of the skills you are offering - again think of the skills required and match your interests to suit. For example, rather than simply saying that you competed in a triathlon, you might add information about how you went about planning your training schedule, or the amount you raised for charity.

References

You are usually required to provide details of two referees when submitting applications.

- One referee should be academic - e.g. your personal tutor or supervisor. An academic referee can comment on your academic results and ideally also knows you well enough to comment on your personal attributes.
- Your other referee would typically be an employer. If this is not possible, then try to choose someone in a professional position who is NOT a family member! This could be someone who has supervised you in some way, e.g. a volunteer/church leader, a sports coach/tutor.

Make sure that you contact your referees in advance, and let them know what type of role(s) you will be applying for and why. This will help them construct a more relevant reference for you.

make sure your referees are relevant to the opportunity you are applying for, recent and willing - always check before adding someone as a referee, and make sure you have their correct contact details.

Online Assessments and Tests

Regardless of the role you are applying for or the sector you wish to work in, it's highly likely that you'll be asked to complete a number of profiling assessments and competency tests, either as a standard application requirement, or if you are being considered for interview.

As a Bangor University student you have access to an exclusive Graduates First account, where you have full access to a wide range of paid-for assessments, tests and games used by graduate employers.

You'll be able to see how you perform against employer benchmarks, and improve your understanding and your scores – you can also practice interview questions and get feedback on your performance.

You can claim 5xp for each submitted assessment or test – find out more here:
https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/bea/category/3/

Log in with your student ID and password to get started! https://www.graduatesfirst.com/university-career-services/bangor/

Disability Disclosure

An employer could ask you to disclose your disability, which means they want you to tell them how they can help you at work. Deciding to disclose your disability to an employer is a matter of personal choice. You are under no legal obligation to do so, and it's for you to choose if and when you disclose. Go to www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person/employment for more information and guidance regarding what to consider if/when disclosing a disability.

You can always speak to a Careers Adviser if you have any concerns about this (https://targetconnect.bangor.ac.uk/home.html to make an appointment)

CHECKLIST

1	Have you read through all the information sent to you, researched the job role and employer?	
2	Have you matched your skills and qualities to the requirements of the opportunity / course and thought of specific examples to back up what you claim?	
3	Have you read through the entire form (if you can)?	
4	Have you checked what you have written for accuracy and against instructions given?	
5	Have you taken a copy of what you have written?	
6	Have you asked your referees for permission to use them and told them you are applying for jobs / a course?	

RESOURCES

https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/applications-and-cvs/271653-application-planner-quick-tips-for-graduate-job-hunters

https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/applications-and-cvs/271309-the-graduates-guide-to-job-application-forms

https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/applications-and-cvs/271665-research-employers-essential-preparation-for-graduate-applications

https://www.grb.uk.com/careers-advice/graduate-job-applications

https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs