



# INFORMATION BOOKLET

## “WRITING A JOB APPLICATION”

*Note: To be used in conjunction with the “Guidelines for Job Applications” information brochure.*



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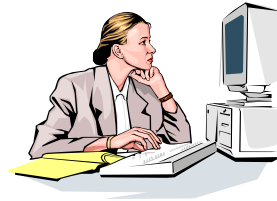
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# ***WRITING A JOB APPLICATION***

## **Components of the Application:**

The application consists of.

- a covering letter
- an application form
- a statement of your claims against the selection criteria
- other information you might wish to provide



## **Addressing the Selection Criteria**

When writing your application, it is imperative that you address the selection criteria of the job for which you are applying. These criteria identify the level of skills and knowledge you would need in order to perform the duties of the job effectively.

There will be several criteria for each job, and they are usually divided into two categories - essential and desirable. In order to be considered for the job, you must possess all the **essential** skills and knowledge and, where applicable, it will be advantageous if you also meet the **desirable** criteria.

Applications must make a statement about each criterion. Some criteria require greater explanation than others, but you should be as succinct as possible.

It is important to realise that one of the essential criteria for all promotional positions is ‘*proficiency in communication for a range of specific purposes and audiences in written forms*’ so applicants will be expected to convey information in their application clearly and succinctly. As a general rule, you should limit your comments on any one selection criterion to half a page or less.

As an applicant, the onus is on you to demonstrate that you meet the selection criteria. This means that you must list each criterion separately and then state your claims under each one. This is very different from a traditional CV where your work experience is simply listed in chronological order. For example, if one of the criterion is ‘*organisational ability*’ you would need to extract from your employment history any evidence which helps demonstrate that you possess that particular skill, and then present the information clearly under the criterion heading.

When making your claims against the criteria, it is important to include relevant examples of how you have performed in the past. Merit selection is based on a belief that the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour, so selection panels will feel much more confident about predicting your ability to perform in a job if they can ascertain how you have performed in previous positions. It is not sufficient for you to simply state that you possess certain skills or experience. Panels require specific and relevant examples of these skills.

When writing your claims against the selection criteria, it is helpful to provide answers to as many of the following questions as possible:

- \* **When, where** and **how** have you used that particular skill, knowledge or experience?
- \* How did you **gain** that skill, knowledge or experience?
- \* How often and how effectively have you **applied** that skill, knowledge or experience?
- \* How did you **judge the effectiveness** of your performance?

## **Addressing the selection criteria**

If one of the selection criteria is **knowledge** of a particular topic, rather than possession of a **skill**, it would be wise to demonstrate your knowledge by briefly discussing the topic. In this way, the panel can be under no illusion that you possess the knowledge. For example, if you are required to demonstrate knowledge of a particular Act of Parliament, you can briefly summarise the purpose and operations of the Act and its relevance to the working environment. You could also mention how you have applied this knowledge in your work.

Any skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the selection criteria can be used in support of your application. For example, if you designed professional development activities whilst working for another company, you are quite entitled to use that as evidence of your skills and experience. Furthermore, you could legitimately cite a skill which you gained whilst performing a role outside the work environment. For example, you may have demonstrated organisational and liaison skills as president of a community group.

It would be helpful in this case, however, to cite another example where you used those particular skills within the work environment.

Having drafted your application, it is advisable to seek a second opinion on it from someone who knows your work well. Often applicants overlook some of their skills because they take them for granted, and occasionally basic errors or omissions go unnoticed by the applicant, but are picked up by observers.

Applications should be on good quality paper. They can either be typed or handwritten, but typed applications are preferred.

Ensure that your name is on each page of your application.

If you are granted an interview, you may wish to give your referees a copy of your application so they are aware of the claims you have made.

## Summary

- Make sure you meet at least the essential criteria for the position.
- Address each selection criterion separately, and provide concrete examples where possible.
- Write clearly and succinctly.
- Ensure you have presented yourself in the best possible light, but be honest.
- Seek a second opinion on your application.
- Provide a copy of your application to your referees (if you are granted an interview).
- Submit your claims against the selection criteria, CV, together with your *Application form* before the closing time and date.

## CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW

During the interview you will be asked questions that relate to the selection criteria. Some of these are specific (such as 'Can you expand on your experience') and others are general (such as 'Could you tell us why you are interested in this particular position?'). The general questions are normally 'warm-up' questions designed to make you feel at ease and to allow you the opportunity to talk about your motivation for the job and what you can offer.



### Preparing for the Interview

- ◇ Do your homework on the position. Make sure you clearly understand the duties of the job and the relevance of the selection criteria.
- ◇ The questions you will be asked in the interview relate to the selection criteria so you can often predict the nature of the questions. This will help you in preparing your answers. In doing so, try to think of concrete examples you can use to back up your claims, but be careful not to use the same examples in all your answers or the panel may think your experiences have been rather limited. When thinking of things you could have done better, identify what you learned from your mistakes and whether you have changed your behaviour as a result. You should try to turn all questions in the interview to your advantage.
- ◇ Practice your interview.

- ◇ Think up one or two brief questions to ask the panel at the end of the interview. It is standard practice for candidates to be invited to ask questions. This is your opportunity to clarify anything you may be unsure about. Try to ensure that your questions are relevant to the position, and that the panel members are the appropriate people to ask. It is advisable to avoid asking questions which indicate that you are more interested in the perks of the job than the job itself. Your time in the interview would be better spent conveying an enthusiasm for the job.

## **During the Interview**

- ◇ Be enthusiastic about the job, your previous achievements and what you would do if given the job.
- ◇ When answering questions, try to provide concrete examples of your achievements. In doing so, explain the situation you were in, your particular role, the task in hand, the action you personally took, and the result. For example, if you want the panel to know that you are very effective in liaising with parents, it would be helpful to cite an example of how you handled a difficult situation with parents and what the positive outcomes were.
- ◇ Try to let the facts speak for themselves and be honest. If you do not know the answer to a particular question, say so, because if you mislead the panel, you will almost certainly not get the job.

- ◇ Do not be put off by panel members recording what you say - this is necessary to help jog their memories.
- ◇ Ensure you maintain eye contact with **all** panel members.
- ◇ Take time to think about your answers. The Selection Panel does not expect immediate responses from you.
- ◇ Be yourself. Many applicants feel that they must be intense and serious in interviews, but if that does not suit their normal personality, it can produce anxiety. It is worth remembering that occasionally humour and casual conversation can be quite appropriate in interviews, but be wary of becoming too familiar with the Panel.
- ◇ Seek clarification from the panel if you do not understand a question, or if you aren't sure whether you have provided the Panel with the type of information they require.
- ◇ Assume that the panel members know nothing about you. Even if you know one or more of them, answer their questions in the same detail as you would if they did **not** know you.
- ◇ You will be encouraged by the panel to provide complete answers to questions, but be careful not to talk too much. Be as clear and concise in your answers as possible. You can always add to your answers if the panel indicates that more information is required.

Thank the Panel at the end of the interview. A small courtesy such as this is likely to leave a favourable impression

## **SOME KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN WRITING YOUR RESUME**

- ◇ Your resume is not a life history. It should contain sufficient information to describe your skills and accomplishments and create a picture of substance, depth and capability. There is no "set rule" for length of a resume but two to three pages (depending on years of experience) should be sufficient to capture the important information. When preparing a chronological resume, it is a good idea to provide more detail on the most recent experience (last 5 years) and less detail on experience prior to that. Normally, experience gained more than ten years ago should be summarised to a **line** or two describing only the Job title or functional area you worked in.
  
- ◇ Draw on your past experience to describe what **you have achieved** rather than what your responsibilities are. They are not the same thing. If a number of applicants for the same job listed only their duties or responsibilities in their resume, a selection panel would not be able to make any distinction between them. Highlight your particular capabilities by expanding on specific achievements that reflect your initiative, follow-through, problem solving, leadership or team skills. Make sure your resume is results oriented by using action verbs such as achieved, initiated, supervised, improved, created, participated in, etc... to describe what you have done.

- ◇ When describing achievements, quantify where appropriate. How many people did you supervise? How much money was saved, what was the size of the budget, how many customers were served or enquiries resolved. Quantifying your claims will give a much better idea of the scope of your job or project.
  
- ◇ Don't be modest about your claims. Many people underestimate or fail to give themselves credit for their accomplishments. Remind yourself that it is healthy and admirable to sell yourself to a new employer by emphasising your achievements and the tasks that you have completed well. Below are some examples of achievements to help you recall your own:

### **Examples of achievements:**

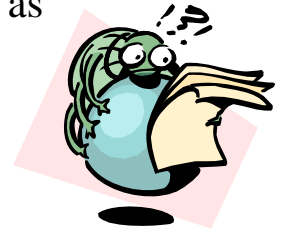
- Putting together an Annual Budget
- Solving a difficult problem
- Serving on a committee, either in the workplace or community
- Juggling a variety of tasks
- Mediating a dispute
- Writing an important or influential report
- Motivating staff to accept difficult and challenging roles
- Speaking to groups or chairing/running a regular meeting
- Establishing rapport with people
- Recruiting and interviewing new staff
- Working in a team to manage a project/complete an activity
- Organising a conference
- Developing, running or promoting a training program
- Introducing a new idea or process
- Mentoring new staff

- ◇ Be accurate about your claims. If you contributed to a project rather than managed it or participated in a team effort rather than directed the team, be factual about the extent of your involvement
- ◇ Never apologise for skills you don't have. Emphasise the skills and attributes you do.
- ◇ Don't use abbreviations, jargon or describe your experience in language that is not understood widely.
- ◇ Avoid excessive detail about education and personal information.
- ◇ Give your resume to a friend or colleague whose judgement you trust to check writing style and accuracy.
- ◇ Your completed resume should create a good impression on first sight. Use of bold print, capitals or centering will give headings emphasis and dot points can summarise key information.

If you have had the opportunity to compare resumes you will know that: candidates with similar claims for a job can appear more or less qualified depending on what they say (or don't say) and how well they say it; a candidate stands a better chance of being selected if his or her resume is written with the employer's needs in mind. The content and design of a resume can determine whether the applicant is shortlisted or overlooked.

# HOW TO ADDRESS THE SELECTION CRITERIA

When writing your claims against the selection criteria, it is helpful to provide answers to as many of the following questions as possible:



- \* When, where and in what position have you used that particular skill, knowledge or experience?
- \* How did you gain that skill, knowledge or experience?
- \* How often and how effectively have you applied that skill, knowledge or experience?
- \* How did you judge the effectiveness of your performance?

*(Refer to page 3 for more information on this topic)*

## EXAMPLES

### ***ABLE TO WORK IN A TEAM ENVIRONMENT***

#### **Applicant 1**

I enjoy working in a team environment.

In my present employment my contribution to the team helps in the promotion of a happy, and successful working environment.

I have a friendly disposition and get on well with people.

#### **Applicant 2**

In 1995 when in year 12 I was elected as a student councillor. My work required me to communicate the concerns of my fellow students to the school administration. I was responsible in conveying the academic, social and emotional needs of students and more importantly to help maintain a harmonious environment within the school.

As a councillor, my work was always conducted as a team effort, working towards a common goal. I have also learnt and fostered team skills in various sporting areas. My involvement in the coaching of junior sports has further developed my team work skills.

I have an excellent background in leading and working in a team environment. My experience as student councillor enabled me to play an active role in a team where cooperation was an essential element in achieving goals.

***ABLE TO WORK IN A TEAM ENVIRONMENT***

**Applicant I**

***WHAT THE APPLICANT MEANT TO IMPLY***

In my present employment as Staff Officer I have developed an excellent command of people skills. My work in this area is concerned with implementing and promoting new systems in administrative procedures.

Recently I was successful in leading and implementing a new payroll system which involved the support and cooperation of other staff members. I played an active role in conveying the requirements of Management to other staff members within the organisation.

***ABLE TO UNDERTAKE A RANGE OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL TASKS.***

**Applicant 1**

I have experience in administrative and financial tasks.

My present employment requires me to undertake the duties and responsibilities of Office Manager.

I possess the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with a range of administrative and accounting assignments.

**Applicant 2**

In 1993 I undertook further studies, on a part time basis, to improve and upgrade my administrative and accounting skills.

This knowledge has assisted me in my role as Administrative Officer with my present employer.

I am responsible for maintaining personnel records for all staff and must ensure that all changes to documentation are accurate and current.

I have experience in accrual accounting and I am responsible for preparing the annual budget for our organisation. I also possess word processing skills and I am familiar with the Excel spreadsheet software package.

***ABLE TO UNDERTAKE A RANGE OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL TASKS.***

***WHAT THE APPLICANT MEANT TO IMPLY***

**Applicant 1**

As Officer Manager for a small building company for the past three years, I have been able to enhance my accounting and management skills.

My duties involve compiling monthly financial statements and preparing the budget for the following financial year.

Apart from my accounting experience, my duties also require me to undertake various administrative tasks. In my capacity as Office Manager, I supervise 10 staff, liaise with clients, recruit staff, attend to correspondence and am responsible for the adherence to company's policy.

In all my administrative and financial tasks I display a professional approach to my duties. I am organised, conscientious and accurate. Senior management was impressed with my performance last year and I was awarded Employee of the Year.



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