Advice for job applicants from graduate employers

Before you apply

- Remember, your previous work experience doesn’t always have to be an exact match for the role you are applying for. The skills you’ve gained as a result of your experience are more important. Many skills are transferrable between jobs and sectors.

- Research the firm. What do they produce? Who are their competitors? What is their ‘mission statement’? What other business functions do they have? It’ll help you establish if the firm is a good fit for you and your knowledge can often pay off in cover letters and at interview.

- Look carefully at your social media profile – remember nothing is truly private. Employers do sometimes look at Facebook/Twitter accounts and inappropriate content can count against you.

- Be realistic about salary expectations. Many graduates seem to over-estimate how much they are likely to earn. Don’t be greedy!

- Read and follow the application instructions given by the company – many won’t accept applications that are not in the correct format. If it asks for an application form only, don’t submit a CV and a cover letter.

Writing applications

- Don’t write generic ‘one-size-fits-all’ applications. You need to tailor each application to the company and the role. Employers can easily spot a ‘cut-and-paste’ application and those candidates are rarely successful.

- Demonstrate a genuine interest in the company and the role. This doesn’t mean writing cheesy statements of flattery (e.g. “Your company is very impressive”) but identifying specific things about the company or role that interest you (e.g. “I was very interested in your recent television marketing campaign for X because…”).

- Be interesting – recruiters read hundreds of CVs and interview scores of people. What makes you memorable?

- Take your time over applications – it’s better to do 10 good applications than 30 poor ones.

- Keep cover letters punchy. You need to explain your interest in the firm and why you’d be a good fit for the role, but don’t waffle. Employers don’t have time to read it.

- Check, check and recheck your spelling, punctuation and grammar! Employers expect flawless business English. One mistake will mean your application is rejected.

Interviews

- At interview, recognise you’re in a professional environment (don’t play with your phone or chew gum, speak professionally and dress appropriately).

- Remember, interactions with staff outside the interview room are also important. Staff from around the organisation might be asked for their first impressions of you. Candidates have failed at interview for speaking inappropriately to the person on reception or the gate.

- Candidates need to find a balance between modesty and arrogance. Be confident about your skills and achievements but accept that you are starting at entry level and will not be an expert on everything. A good candidate wants to continue to develop and learn.

- When giving examples of your experience in competency questions – think about using the STAR format (you can find more information about this online).
STAR stands for:

**Situation** – what was the overall situation you were in?

**Task** – what goal did you need to achieve to make the situation better?

**Action** – what did you do to achieve this goal?

**Result** – how did the situation change as a result of your actions?

**General advice**

- Previous work experience is key to finding graduate employment. Many companies now use competency-based questioning in application forms and interviews (this means they expect you to explain how your skills and knowledge fulfil the requirements of the role). Work experience provides you with examples that help you answer competency-based questions effectively. Lack of experience shines through.

- If you struggle to find the role of your dreams, temporary or contract work through an employment agency can often be a good stepping stone to something more permanent. Many companies now hire people on a temporary basis first to assess their performance, before offering a permanent contract.

- Don’t be put off by rejection – you will get knockbacks but it’s important to develop resilience and keep going.