

JOB APPLICATION

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy.

Norman Vincent Peale



Introduction to Applications



Don't lose your application motivation

So you're applying for jobs. Your CV and cover letter are primed and ready to go.

But then, all of a sudden you see those dreaded words...

'Please fill in an application form'.

Now, for many of us, this daunting request is enough to stop our motivation in its tracks – we all know that these forms can be lengthy and repetitive.

However, at **Stonebridge College**, we have a few tips and tricks up our sleeve to make the whole experience less painful and more likely to reap the results you desire.



But why are applications important?

Now you may be wondering why you need to send off an application form as well as a CV?

Well, although a CV is an essential part of the recruitment process, an application form allows the employer to collect more consistent, relevant and in-depth information from each candidate. It also makes it easier for employers to draw comparisons between applicants. Now although that's good news for employers, it makes it a little harder for the rest of us.



While some recruiters may be focused on education and employment history, others will be assessing the candidate's personality and verbal reasoning abilities. Therefore it's impossible to know who's looking for what. This means that you must maintain high quality, well-written answers throughout every application. Thankfully, we've designed this booklet to help you do just that!

Enjoy!

First Things First

Thanks to the internet, modern jobseekers are inundated with sites, agencies and forums, giving them the power to hunt down opportunities which would otherwise be outside of their social and geographical spheres. While this is great news for many of us, it can be difficult to know where to begin looking. Thankfully, here at Stonebridge we have a few pointers to help you get started and organise the process.

Where to look

Recruitment sites

The internet is a veritable breeding ground for job ads; however, if you do not direct your search, you could be wading through posts for the rest of your life.

Instead, if you head over to a recognised recruitment website, such as **indeed.com**, **monster.com**, or **totaljobs.com**, you are able to use advanced searches to narrow down the results and find that perfect position.

Note: Most industries have industry specific recruitment sites where employers can post. For example, health care staff may have more success looking on the NHS website.



Company websites

If you have a particular company in mind, or there is an organisation you've always dreamed of working for head straight over to their website.

In most cases companies will list their current vacancies on their site and provide you with advice on how to apply.



Among your friends

As the old saying goes, 'it's not what you know, it's who you know.'

Now this may not be the most conventional method nowadays, but asking among your close friends or wider circles of acquaintances could provide you with a couple of much needed leads.



Offline

Yes, we know this sounds old school, but some recruiters still favour the old systems.

This is why it's worth checking newspapers, notice boards, shop windows and even asking in person. You never know, it may just work.



First Things First

Let them come to you

If the job hunting is wearing you down, how about turning the tables and letting the jobs come to you?

Nowadays, recruitment is a massive industry, meaning that there are actually people being paid to find you a suitable position

All you need to do is either set up an account on **LinkedIn**, or register with some recruitment agencies, specify what you're looking for, and then sit back and let the offers roll in.



Set yourself goals

Jobseekers should view applying for jobs as a job itself. The process can often be long and disheartening, but if you set yourself regular achievable goals, it can help you stay motivated.

For example, you could set yourself the goals of sourcing and applying for 10 jobs every week.



Keep organised

When you're applying for a lot of jobs, it's easy to get mixed up and forget important details, dates and titles of the jobs you have applied for.

This is why we recommend keeping an organised chart, listing important factors like the job title, the company name, the date you applied and the closing date. If you're unsure, you can use our pre-made table on the next page to start you off.



Before You Get Started

Now that you've got your motivation in check, you know where to look for the right jobs, and you have a set goal for the jobs you want to apply for, let's tackle those big bad application packs.

Before you get started, make a check list with the things you will need for applying. This will make the process a lot smoother and there is such a satisfying feel to ticking things off. You may think that you know things like address and date of birth, which of course you do, but trying to recollect your past three employers' addresses will prove annoying, especially on a timed application.

Start by collecting all the contact information:

Make a note of your personal details: Name, contact details, current employer's address, National Insurance Number, references – you may think this is simple enough to write down, but when you have to fill it in 10 times, copy/pasting will save you a lot of time. You will not find a job application that doesn't ask for these details.

Check if the application is timed.



If you don't have everything prepared ahead, you won't have much time to think about things and look up addresses, or names.

If it's a physical form make sure you have extra copies at hand.

There's always a chance for a spelling mistake, or the wrong coloured pen (go for blue or black, unless fuchsia is specified on the form).

Don't risk it with handwriting, even if you were a calligraphy champion. Put everything in capital letters to make sure your application does not get rejected because the recruiter squinted so much.



Past employment:

Note down details of your past three relevant jobs – the name of the company, job title, date range of the positions you held, a summary of responsibilities and achievements.



Educational background and academic achievements

Just like with the details of your past employment, is good to have this info saved somewhere.

If the application is online, make sure you have a steady connection.

Save at every stage. The last thing you want is to be halfway through, take a break, and then come back to find yourself logged out due to inactivity.

Before you sit down, make sure you take a quick look at the company you plan to apply for.

Take in details like the brand voice, their values, how they present their team and what their social media approach is. Try to get as close as possible to that tone.



Remember, that application form is going to be the first impression the recruiter / future employer gets of you. Sloppy, messy and child-like is not really you, right?

General Tips

Get to know the employer.

Make sure you read the question and actually answer what is asked of you, rather than what you think is asked of you.

You'd be amazed how many people fail to fully read the question and lose the answer halfway through.



Stay away from one word answers.

The form is your chance to tell a story of achievements, lessons and hard-work.

You cannot summarise these with a "yes" or a "no" answer.



At the end, do a little keyword optimisation.

Check the job description and first make sure your examples are relevant to the position you're applying for and then scan for certain keywords.

Does the role require a "team-player", or a "self-motivated, independent worker"? Will you have to generate revenue, or is the role more strategic? Make sure your examples include some keywords that answer those requirements.

Stick to the word count if you have been given one.

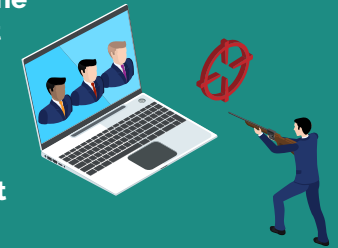
It's a trap easy to fall for, but most employers would class that as attention to details.

Once you've finished, go over it and refine it.

Use active verbs (*achieve, accomplish, reach, inspire*) and descriptors (*consistent, determined, engaged, focused*) to show you are a dynamic, motivated, hands-on type of employee.

Have some repetitive info saved at hand to make the form-filling easier. But never bulk-apply for jobs!

Make sure each application is tailored to fit the company and the employer. At some point you will have to answer the question "Why do you want to work for us?". It is best to start the application with that answer in mind.



Don't presume that the form will have integrated spell-check.

Download a free app like Grammarly and let it work its magic.



Remember! Nothing you read here is reinventing the wheel. In fact, nothing about getting a job is earth-shattering, or else hardly anyone would be able to do it. These are simple, basic tips that most recruiters and career-advisors will offer. They are also the ones that we are the quickest to forget in our efforts to sound special, stand-out and impress potential employers. We get it. It's easy to forget the basics. But seriously now, it will make the difference between getting the job or not.

Form-Filling

Let's get down to business! You've already got a template to help you keep track of the applications you've filled in so far. There is also a template coming up to help you answer competency-based questions. But first it's time to help you with those repetitive details, for a quick copy & paste job when you'll need it.

Just fill this in, save it somewhere and have it ready when you start going through those application packs. We guarantee it will reduce your work and stress significantly.

Personal Information

First Name	<input type="text"/>	Address	<input type="text"/>
Last Name	<input type="text"/>	City	<input type="text"/>
Date of Birth	<input type="text"/>	Postcode	<input type="text"/>

County	<input type="text"/>	Phone Number	<input type="text"/>
National Insurance Number	<input type="text"/>	Email Address	<input type="text"/>

Education

School Name	Years Attended	Qualification Name	Grades Earned
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Additional Training & Qualifications

Add any other qualifications, on the job training or courses you feel may be relevant to the job.

Employment History

Employer Name & Address	Position & Brief Responsibilities	Dates Employed	Reason for Leaving
		From	
		To	

Employer Name & Address	Position & Brief Responsibilities	Dates Employed	Reason for Leaving
		From	
		To	

Employer Name & Address	Position & Brief Responsibilities	Dates Employed	Reason for Leaving
		From	
		To	

References

Reference Name	Title	Relation to the candidate	Phone	Email

Other Activities & Interests

Make a note of activities and interests relevant to the position you are applying for. If not, emphasise aspects such as learning, drive, team-work, or creativity.

Competency Based Questions

What should you look out for?

When filling out a job application form, you are bound to run into some competency-based questions.

Unlike other questions on the form, these questions have been specifically designed to draw on your problem solving experience and test your ability to do the job. You can usually spot these questions by the way they are phrased.

Look out for the following tell-tale sentence starters:

- Provide an example of a time when...
- Describe a situation where...
- How would you react (in a given situation)...



Which competencies are important?

Obviously, every application form will have its own individual way of phrasing these questions. And, depending on the company, the employers will be looking for different things from the answers.

However, in general employers seem to take an interest in the following list of competencies:

- Adaptability
- Communication
- Initiative
- Leadership
- Organisation
- Problem solving
- Resilience
- Self-awareness
- Teamwork



Do not be afraid if you aren't instantly able to think of an example for each competency. The chances are you already have bags of experience to draw upon. (Note: You don't always have to use examples from the office.)

Feel free to draw on your personal experience outside work. Once you have thought of a selection of scenarios which portray you in a good light, we can help you with the rest.

Competency based questions

The STAR Method

When answering these questions it's good to stick to the **STAR Method**.

STAR is an easily memorable acronym, which stands for:

Situation: Here you should write one sentence providing contextual details about the time you're referring to.

Task: Next, add one sentence about what it was you needed to achieve. Who was your team? Why were you doing it?

Action: Now you should include two or three sentences about the steps you took and anything else notable that you did.


Result: Finally, you should consider what you achieved as a result of your actions. Include one sentence detailing the positive results.




Remember to be specific

Another thing to remember when answering these kinds of questions is to provide specific examples.

For example, if the form asks you to give an example of a time you've worked well as part of a team, you may write:

 *"In my last role as a waiter at a busy restaurant, I was required to work together with my colleagues and the kitchen staff to make sure the food came out on time and the customers were happy."*

However, a much better answer would be:

 *"Whilst working as a waiter at a busy restaurant, teamwork was essential to get the job done. On one busy Saturday night when we were booked to capacity, the team and I agreed to arrive early to make sure everything was prepared. We used this time to develop an action plan and assign each other individual duties for the evening. During the evening we regularly communicated with each other and the kitchen and by the end of the night we had countless happy customers. We also received a number of positive reviews on Trip Advisor."*



Competency Questions Practice

Before you start filling in applications, we advise that you **take some time to practice your responses**. First of all, we suggest that you grab a piece of paper and a pen and make a note of the times you have demonstrated the following competencies:

(Adaptability, communication, creativity, initiative, leadership, organisation, problem-solving, resilience, self-awareness, teamwork)

Once you've done that, why not have a go at answering the following competency questions using the STAR method.

Notes:

1. Describe a time when your **(communication)** abilities benefited you at work.

Situation:

Task:

Action:

Result:

Choose a competency to fill the space. Once you've answered the question, how about choosing another competency and practicing another answer?

2. Provide an example of a situation in which you were faced with a conflict in the work place. How did you deal with the problem? What was the result?

Situation:

Task:

Action:

Result:

3. Tell us about a time when you successfully led a team to success.

Situation:

Task:

Action:

Result:

4. Describe a time when you demonstrated effective time management skills.

Situation:

Task:

Action:

Result:

5. Describe a situation which called for your creative and original input?

Situation:

Task:

Action:

Result:

Psychometric Tests

What are psychometric tests?

Nowadays, many employers add another layer to the job application process (Yes, that's right! Another one!).

This section of the application is generally referred to as a **psychometric test**.

Now, if you haven't heard of a psychometric test before, you should know that **this is an umbrella term for a number of different test styles that have been designed to assess your specific abilities and characteristics**. Usually you will be required to complete this test immediately after filling out the application form.



But why are these tests necessary?

- Psychometric tests are used because they allow the employer to test each candidate objectively and by doing this they remove the risk of unconscious bias.
- These tests level the playing field for candidates from different educational backgrounds.
- The tests are reliable indicators of future job performance.

What should you look out for?

There are a number of different kinds of psychometric tests. The type of test you will be asked to complete strongly depends on the role you are applying for.

However, we have outlined a selection of tests for you to be aware of. We have also included some links to third party websites where you can practice these tests for free!

Good luck!



Remember: Try not to worry when you see the word 'test'. For the most part, these tests just require a little common sense and for you to be yourself. If you're right for the job, then you'll pass.

Different tests

Some tests are designed to test your skills and aptitudes, whilst others are designed to test logic and personality. Examples of these kinds of test include:

Numerical reasoning test: This would be used to test your basic mathematical abilities. It may also signal to the employer how well prepared you are to interpret data, charts and graphs.

Practice here: www.numericalreasoningtest.org

Verbal reasoning test: This kind of test has been designed to test how you interpret written information. In these tests it is important to stay calm and read carefully before answering.

Practice here: www.verbalreasoningtest.org

Logical reasoning test: A test like this aims to assess a person's logical abilities. These tests can be quite tough and often require candidates to find patterns in pictures or diagrams.

Practice here: www.123test.com/logical-reasoning-test

Situational judgment test: A test like this will provide the candidate with a number of examples of workplace scenarios. The candidate will then be required to choose which course of action to take from a list of multiple choice style answers.

Practice here: www.situationaljudgementtest.org.uk

Personality test: These tests have been designed to assess your behaviour and attitude towards work. They also determine whether the candidate aligns with the company ethics and morals. Before completing these we recommend doing some research on the company and its employees.

Practice here: www.practiceaptitudetests.com/personality-test

To Stand Out or Not to Stand Out?

Job application forms are typically standard. There is a reason for that as well. Most will be run through an applicant tracking system (ATS) to screen for educational criteria, relevant amount of employment history, or anything else easy enough to filter out through an automated system. Only after you passed the computerised checks, your form will go through to a human pair of eyes.

So if it's all standard, how are you going to set yourself apart from the sea of candidates that will have more or less the same qualifications and/or employment record? Should you try anything clever, or would a "well-behaved" application stand more chance of being selected?

In the end, it is all subjective; to you, to the industry, company and position. **If you're a risk-averse person applying for an accountancy position, it doesn't matter the company is a whacky creative advertising agency for the entertainment industry.** Your approach will be tailored to the formality of the job.



Standing out in a positive way

This can be done subtly as well. Here are a few examples:

Tailored answers to the company you apply for – if you can also drop a reference to information you uncovered in your research, such as “as the company released information about its decision to approach a new market, my previous experience doing market research in a past job should prove useful...” that is a great way to stand out.

An online course – shows initiative, willingness to learn and a desire for self-development.



A blog to discuss a hobby, or simply to express yourself in writing – you have a great example of excellent communication, independent work and passion.

An engaged social media following – showcases skills like digital acumen, an eye for social media and public interaction.

As for the wrong way to stand out...

Bragging about things that are completely irrelevant – such as: “my girlfriend says my superpower is drinking without passing out”, “you should hire me because my dog thinks I'm lovable”.

Trying to be funny – for example: “My fortune cookie said, ‘your next interview will result in a job’, and I like your company in particular.”;

Careless spelling and not addressing the questions asked – sure ways to get your job application quickly dismissed.

Copy / pasting a job application you used in the past and not correcting the name of the company – the people reading your application will not be too impressed you don't know what company you are applying for.

Proofing

So you've written your application, you've filled in all the boxes and now it's time to click send and relax, right?

Wrong! Before you submit your application, it needs to go through some rigorous proofing. Application forms **NEED** to be an error-free zone. Even one tiny spelling mistake could mean the difference between being offered an interview and having your application thrown in the trash. So, once you've completed your form, go back through it a few times and check the following details:

Format

Are your answers in the correct format? Has the form specified how you should write the date, or have you been asked to write in capitals?



Tone

Does your tone reflect the tone of the company. Are you remaining polite and professional throughout your application?

Structure

Have you structured your answers properly. Do they meet the word count? Have you made use of the STAR method?



Spelling

Have you made any careless spelling mistakes? If the application form is online, there may not be a spellcheck function. Try word processing your answers first, or download Grammarly.



Correct Information

Is all of the information you have provided correct? Are all of your answers consistent with each other?



Individuality

Have you advertised your individual selling points. Will your application make you stand out from other candidates who are applying for the role?

Application Form

Here is an example of a completed application form.

There are plenty of mistakes included in the copy. Have a read through and see which ones you can find based on what you've learnt so far. You can check your answers on the next page.

Personal Details

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SECTION IN BLOCK CAPITALS.

Name: EMMA BRADFORD

Address: 123 Example Avenue,
Derby, Derbyshire, DE1 EFG

Position applied for:
TEACHING ASSISTANT

Employment History

Name of Company and Role	Date From (mm/yyyy)	Date To (mm/yyyy)	Duties	Reasons For Leaving
Angelo's Bar and Grill - Waitress	January 2016	July 2018	My duties included taking orders, managing bookings, making drinks, and keeping the restaurant area clean and tidy.	Didn't like the job or the company.

Questions

1. Describe a time when you faced conflict in the work place. How did you deal with the situation? (200 Words)

During my previous role as a waitress at a popular Italian restaurant, I was tasked with taking and organising the bookings during the Christmas period. On a busy evening when the restaurant was almost full, a group of four arrived. We had no record of their booking, but they insisted that they had made one. After I informed them that there was no record of their booking, one woman got very angry. I immediately went to find my manager and then continued with my work.

About you

2. What other interests do you have outside of work?

(100 Words)

In my spare time I like reading and hanging out with friends.

Personal Details

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SECTION IN BLOCK CAPITALS.

Name: EMMA BRADFORD

Address: 123 Example Avenue,
Derby, Derbyshire, DE1 1FG

Position applied for:
TEACHING ASSISTANT

This should be written in block capitals.

There are three spelling mistakes in this section.

Both dates have been written in the wrong format.

The tone of this response is not very good. Even if it is true, applicants should be wary of critiquing previous roles.

Employment History

Name of Company and Role	Date From (mm/yyyy)	Date To (mm/yyyy)	Duties	Reasons For Leaving
Angelo's Bar and Grill - Waitress	January 2016	July 2018	My dutes included takin orders, managing bookings, making dinks , and keeping the restaurant area clean and tidy.	Didn't like the job or the company.

Firstly this section is too short. Applicants should always aim to meet the recommended word count. This word count is there to give people an idea of how much detail is expected.

Secondly, the response does not stick to the STAR format. The situation, task and action are provided, but the result is not included.

Thirdly, the example itself is not very good. The applicant does not come across as a good problem solver. It is important to choose examples which show you in a good light.

Questions

1. Describe a time when you faced conflict in the work place. How did you deal with the situation? (200 Words)

During my previous role as a waitress at a popular Italian restaurant, I was tasked with taking and organising the bookings during the Christmas period. On a busy evening when the restaurant was almost full, a group of four arrived. We had no record of their booking, but they insisted that they had made one. After I informed them that there was no record of their booking, one woman got very angry. I immediately went to find my manager and then continued with my work.

This section has been included to give applicants a chance to stand out.

However, in this instance, the applicant has not made the most of this opportunity.

When a question like this comes up, applicants should make an effort to think outside the box and focus on what makes them different from everyone else.

They should also aim to meet the word count.

About you

2. What other interests do you have outside of work? (100 Words)

In my spare time I like reading and hanging out with friends.

And Finally...

Right, so you're almost there! There are just a few more things we wanted to flag up before you go...

Make sure you've supplied the correct information:

Now we know it may be tempting to embellish a little here and there, but when filling out a job application it's really important to tell the truth.

If you are successful in getting the job, and your employers later discover any discrepancies in your application, this may lead to the termination of your contract.

Don't worry about supplying personal information:

At the end of the application form the employer will usually ask the applicant to provide details of their gender, age, religion, sexuality etc.

This may seem irrelevant to your application, but you should know that employers are not allowed to judge you on this information.

It is only used to make sure the company itself is not being discriminative during the hiring process. If you really aren't comfortable supplying the information, there is usually an option you can select saying you'd 'rather not say'.

Make sure your contact details are correct:

This may go without saying, but it is vital that your contact details have been written down correctly. A missed digit in a phone number or an incorrect letter in an email address can really mean the difference between failure and success.

If an employer likes your application, but can't get in touch with you, there will be plenty of other applicants out there who have supplied the correct contact information.



Note down the closing date:

Most applications have a closing date. This is usually the date when employers stop taking anymore applications and start inviting people to interviews. Many employers do not contact unsuccessful candidates.

Therefore, by keeping track of when they close, you are able to gauge whether or not you've progressed to the next stage.

Send it off:

Once you've proofed your work, checked your answers and supplied any additional information, you're pretty much done.

All you have to do now is press the all-important send button, and then sit back and wait for a response!



If you've followed all of our advice and you have the right qualifications and experience, then the odds are in your favour!

But remember, this stage of recruitment process is tough, and there are plenty people just like you applying for the same jobs. Whatever happens, don't get disheartened! If you keep applying then you WILL get the job you want!

GOOD LUCK!