Imperial College London

Application forms

WHAT IS AN APPLICATION FORM?

Many recruiters use an online application form instead of a CV and cover letter. The advantage for them is that it makes it easier to compare one applicant with another. This is especially useful when recruiting larger numbers, as is typical for graduate recruitment.

WHAT TO EXPECT?

Application forms are usually completed online through the organisation's website (make sure to remember your password!).

There will usually be sections for:

- Factual information such as your contact details, degree subject, dates, employment, work experience etc.
- Questions about your motivation, experience and competencies skills
- Information related to equality and diversity, which will be retained by HR but not passed on to the selectors

Unexpected IT issues sometimes cause delays, so aim to submit the form well before the deadline.

HOW TO ANSWER TYPICAL QUESTIONS

Motivation questions

Examples: Why do you want to work for this organisation? Why have you chosen this department/role?

Recruiters need to know that you understand the role and organisation you have applied for and are a good fit for them. This is to reassure them that you are going to be committed to the job and value the opportunity they are offering. A good answer will link your knowledge of them to your knowledge of yourself.

To prepare for these questions, read about the job role and department/scheme you have applied for. Find out what they are aiming to achieve as an organisation and what their values are. Reflect on why you have chosen to apply to them and explain how you have researched them. Highlight any actions you have taken to deepen your knowledge, for example self-learning, meeting recruiters at events, extracurricular activities, options you have chosen in your course that relate to them or work shadowing/internships.

Competency questions

Example: **Give an example, from outside of your studies, of when you have worked in a team. What was your role and what did you contribute to the team's performance? (200 words)**

Many graduate recruiters will use the concept of 'competencies' (sometimes called 'behaviours') in their recruitment. Examples of competencies are teamwork, resilience, time-management, persuasion. There are many others. Each role that is advertised will have its own set of competencies. Some questions on an application form are designed to assess how successfully you have demonstrated the relevant competencies in your past – with the expectation that your past behaviour predicts how you will behave in the future as an employee.

To prepare to answer these questions you should read the job advert and the recruitment pages on the employer's website thoroughly to understand the competencies for the role you are applying to and **how they are being defined**. Then pick examples demonstrating these competencies from your experience (academic, extra-curricular, sports, volunteering, work experience, internships). The best examples will be recent, where you personally had an impact and where there was a good result. Try to pick a varied selection of examples – not all from your academic study.

Use the STAR technique (see table) to write your examples.

S	T	A	R
Situation	Task	Action	Result
Briefly describe the situation	What were you trying to accomplish?	What specific actions did you take to create success?	What was the result of your action?

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Vague answers are not convincing to the reader. To avoid this, be specific about the details. For example, state the number of people in a team or the frequency of your meetings. Give enough detail for the reader to be able to picture exactly what you did.

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- Confusion about who did what is frustrating for a reader. Be clear about your own personal input.
- Make sure that the story you are telling really does give evidence about the exact competency they have asked for and not something else.

EXAMPLE OF AN ANSWER USING STAR

Give an example, from outside of your studies, of when you have worked in a team. What was your role and what did you contribute to the team's performance? (200 words)

In my second year I was part of a team of four running a comedy event on campus to raise money for a local children's charity. I volunteered to be in charge of event marketing. We needed to get an audience of at least 100 people to reach our fundraising target. I planned a marketing campaign using Facebook and designed posters and flyers. I persuaded a local printer to print them for free and got an item into the student newspaper about the event. I liaised closely with other team members to coordinate the timing of our marketing so that all the details of the event were available to give the marketing maximum impact. We kept in touch regularly through our What's App group. I contributed ideas for good venues and caterers to my team members. On the day I organized a group of students to go around our campus telling people about our event. We had an audience of 173 on the day and this led to us exceeding our fundraising target. As a direct result, one of our team invited me to be on their student society committee to market their events for next year.

Open questions

Some application forms provide only one free text box and ask you to write about how you fit the person specification or job description. You should structure your answer with sub-headings based on the person specification/job description, grouping items together sensibly. Under each heading provide evidence based on your previous experience and achievements that you fit their requirements. Be specific (avoid vague words like 'several') and state the results and impact of what you have done. Don't forget to include any evidence that you have excelled or shown initiative.

TIPS

- Allow plenty of time before the deadline. The forms can take longer than you expect
- If you will be completing lots of application forms, create a reference document with all your factual information so you can quickly input to each form
- Keep to any word limits
- Check spelling and grammar
- Save a copy of your answers in a separate file. When you hit 'send' you may not be able to see your answers again and you will need to remind yourself of them before an interview.
- Use the 'any other info' section to explain unclear elements of your experience e.g. repeating a year due to ill health etc. Try to include something positive which will reassure the recruiter. For example, 'Following this temporary set-back I learnt to be very resilient and my grades have since improved to a mark of 68%.'

FURTHER SUPPORT

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Careers Service website**: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/applications
- **Bookable appointments** with Careers Consultants: book through JobsLive*
- For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure
- **Reference books** - including: 'Ultimate Cover Letters', and 'Ready Made Job Search Letters', available in the Careers Service, level 5 Sherfield Building
- **Careers Service events** - each year we plan talks and workshops which are designed to enhance your chances of success in the application process - for details, see JobsLive*

* www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive