







**NOTE!** If you are cutting and pasting answers from previous job applications, check that you've adapted the form for the job you are currently applying for – the last thing you need is to paste in text that is relevant to a different job.



## Activity 1: Finding vacancies

Have a look at some company websites for vacancies and compare their application processes. What do they have in common? What are the main differences?

Some big companies to try include: BAE Systems, Rolls Royce, Boots, Greggs, House of Fraser, Marks and Spencer, Next, Sainsbury's, Subway, Tesco, Bank of Scotland, Lloyds Banking, Aviva and RBS.

## Online Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

Most large companies now use online job application systems, known as Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), to manage their vacancies and job applications.

For some companies you have to complete online aptitude tests, quizzes or questionnaires as a screening process before you even reach the application form. What you have to do depends on the type of job and industry, but could include numeracy, verbal reasoning and personality tests. There is more information on this in [10: Selection tests](#).



You usually apply through the company's main website, although some have a dedicated careers site. You need to register or create an account before you can apply. These details will normally allow you to track your application online.

Some employers may ask you to upload your CV in addition to the application form, so make sure you can access it from the computer you are using.

Most of the systems are easy to use; the screen layouts are well-designed and there are clear instructions for every step in the process.



## Things worth knowing

1

Some systems use software to scan application forms or CVs for keywords. The keywords they scan for are often the names of skills, qualities or tasks mentioned in the job description. So read the descriptions with care and use them where possible. Applications including the right keywords are more likely to get through the screening process and not be rejected at the first hurdle.

2

If you're applying for a 'customer service assistant' job and have relevant experience as a 'sales assistant' use the job title the employer uses instead.

3

Take a note of the company values, and any other words or phrases that describe what is important to them as an organisation. Why? Because it helps if you describe yourself in the words they use to describe what's important to them.

4

Every system is slightly different. It can take anything from around 30 minutes to an hour to complete an online form.



## Using online application systems

### Things to keep in mind.

- **Keep a note of your registration details** – this is usually your email address and password.
- **Keep a note of your application reference number** (if you are given one) – you may need it to track your application.
- **Using an email that includes your name** will help the employer to make the connection between you and your form.
- **Don't use the back arrow on your browser** or you might lose some, or all, of your work!
- Employers use application forms to help them choose who to interview, so **it's worth taking your time to get it right**. When you are filling in the form remember that it will be one of many. Make sure your form doesn't let you down.



## Before you apply...

- ✓ **Read the instructions carefully** on how to use the application system before you begin.
- ✓ **Research both the company and the job** well in advance before you log on to the application system.
- ✓ Before applying for any part time jobs, **know in advance which days and times you would be prepared to work.**
- ✓ **Gather together all the information you need to apply.** This includes information on the employer, the job description, qualifications certificate, your National Insurance number, your CV and cover letter.
- ✓ If you need to upload a CV, **check which file formats the system accepts.** A standard Word document is usually fine.
- ✓ Some systems ask you to **create a short online personal profile.** Copying and pasting relevant information from your CV and cover letter may help you here.

## Completing the application form



In general, follow the basic rules for filling in any application form.

- If you can, **view or print out the whole application form before you apply.** Use it to help you prepare your answers.
- It can easily take an hour, or more, to complete an online form. So **make sure you have enough time to complete it** without being rushed or interrupted.
- **Remember to save your work** as you go along. Some systems save it automatically, but not all.
- **Some systems have a time limit or 'time out' feature,** where you are logged out automatically after a certain amount of inactivity.
- **Online forms often don't have a spellchecker** so you might want to copy and paste text from a Word document which has been checked.
- **Be careful if you are copying and pasting text** in from your CV or another application form.
- **Avoid** using symbols other than bullet points, multiple font types and use tabs instead of tables.
- **Some online forms may ask you what your salary expectations are.** If you are unsure what to put, you could check our job profiles which contain pay information. Go for the entry level rate.
- Finally, many ATS's let you **save out a copy of your application** once it's finished. The information is handy if you get an interview or for the basis of any future applications!

# SECTIONS IN TYPICAL APPLICATION FORMS



## Personal details

Fill this section in as accurately as you can. Include the postcode in your address, your telephone number and your email address.



## Qualifications

If you were in education in the last few years, you would detail the secondary schools and colleges you've attended. Start with the most recent and work your way back. Include the name of the school or college, and the dates you attended.

If you've been out of education for quite some time, you don't need to include all the learning and training you've ever done. Highlighting your most relevant and recent qualifications and training courses is enough.



## Work experience

All experience matters – paid and unpaid. Note all relevant experience you've gained: work placements, part time work, voluntary work and even life experience (such as being a family caregiver).

Employers want to know about any previous experience because you may have developed skills which could be useful in the workplace.



## Interests

Don't write one word answers. This tells the employer nothing about you. Try to make it sound as if you are really interested in what you do in your spare time.

Look below at how an interest can be developed.

I go swimming ...

Why? – It's fun and you get plenty of exercise

When? – Most weekends and some evenings

Where? – The local pool

Use this simple memory jogger to help boost your answers. There is no need to use all the headings noted above, just pick whatever helps improve your entry in this section of the form.



## Further information

This section is the most difficult. Employers are most interested in this section. This is your chance to 'sell yourself' as the best candidate for the job.

Concentrate on what you can do, not what you can't. Ensure that you read the job description and person specification and include:

- why you want to work in that type of job
- your relevant skills and personal qualities
- why you think you'd be good at the job
- your career goals, if relevant.

The activities you completed on Identifying your skills and personal qualities (1: All about you) and Matching your skills to a job (7: Match your skills to a job) will help you with this.



## Declaration

Some application forms have a declaration statement. You must be sure that all the information you have given is correct before you agree to this.

## Cover Letter



When you send off the application form, accompany it with a cover letter. In this, you might like to highlight a couple of points that illustrate your suitability for the job.

You can see the example in [8: Writing a cover letter](#).

### Finally...

- Read the entire form carefully before you start, and make sure you follow any instructions. For example, use BLOCK CAPITALS when asked, or use black ink.
- Keep things simple. Use the same type of font throughout and make sure it's easy to read.
- Complete all of the sections. If a question doesn't apply to you just write in 'Not Applicable' or N/A.
- Check your spelling, grammar and punctuation. If possible, get someone else to check your draft copy before you complete the final version.
- Make sure you get the form in by the closing date.
- Contact your referees, the people who are providing you with a reference, to let them know that the employer might be in touch.



### Activity 2: Completing an interactive application form

Practise filling in a form on your computer using the sample application form in [Activity 2](#).

Now you know how to complete application forms, and you have completed Step 2, you can move on to

[10: Selection tests](#)

Or [click here](#) to return to the main screen.