Applying for a Job

Filling Out a Job Application

Applications are pretty straightforward. Someone hands you a form and you fill in the blanks. Now think this over a little bit. What this means is that you give the employer information structured in exactly the way the employer wants it whether it makes you look good or not. Remember that employers use job applications to screen for qualified persons to interview for their job openings. If a job application does not make a favorable impression, the applicant may never even get an interview with an employer. Sometimes there are questions that are difficult to answer and others that are embarrassing. You can always attach your résumé to an application. That is your way of packaging information to your advantage.

Copy your application before you begin typing on it. Make a rough draft on the copy so your final copy looks as neat as possible. The piece of paper represents you and should look as professional as possible.

Type the application. This may be hard to do as we increasingly move the typewriter to computer environments. However, your goal is to have all your application materials look as professional and polished as possible. Handwritten application materials look unprofessional when compared with carefully typed materials. If an application cannot be typewritten, then it should be neatly printed using black or dark blue ink.

Completely fill out the application. No doubt you will have some of the same information on your résumé or in your cover letter, but the employer may view those as supplemental materials. Be thorough on your application in the event your other materials are only scanned. All spaces need to be completed and accurate. If a question does not apply, then "N/A" for *not applicable* should be written in the blank. The names and titles of former supervisors and their addresses along with zip codes and current telephone numbers need to be included. People listed as references should be informed ahead of time. Even though space on most applications is limited, all but the most common abbreviations need to be avoided—so potential employers will understand them. Correct spelling and proper English is essential. Employers value writing skills. Misspellings and grammatically incorrect sentences give a poor impression of abilities. Action verbs should be used to describe experiences. Sentences should begin with verbs, not with "I."

Keep a copy. Copy all the finished applications so you have easy access should you need them again. Be sure your information is accurate. Remember that there are now people who do nothing but check the truthfulness of applications and résumés.

Sample Job Application

Name _____ Social Security Number _____
Street Address _____ Telephone _____
City/County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
E-mail Address _____
Valid Driver's License: Yes ☐ No ☐ State _____ License ID Number _____

Education

Highest grade completed _____ Did you graduate? Yes ☐ No ☐ Year _____
Name of High School _____
Street Address _____
City/County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
Name of College/University/Vocational School/Other _____
Street Address _____
City/County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
Years Attended _____ Did you graduate? Yes ☐ No ☐ Year _____
Degree/Certificate Received _____

Employment Experience

1. Job Title _____ Duties _____
Employer _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Employer/Supervisor's Name _____
Salary (start) _____ Salary (finish) _____ Dates: From _____ To _____
Reason for leaving _____

2. Job Title _____ Duties _____
Employer _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Employer/Supervisor's Name _____
Salary (start) _____ Salary (finish) _____ Dates: From _____ To _____
Reason for leaving _____

References

Name _____ Relationship _____ Phone _____
Street Address _____
City/County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Name _____ Relationship _____ Phone _____
Street Address _____
City/County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

What Should Your Cover Letter Do for You?

A cover letter should accompany each résumé. The cover letter should sum up what an applicant has to offer and serve as an introduction to the résumé. It should answer the questions—Why should I hire you? It should grab the employer's attention and point out why you, above all other applicants, should be contacted for a personal interview.

The following guidelines will help when writing a cover letter.

YOUR ADDRESS (Do not put your name here)
TODAY'S DATE

Mr/Ms EMPLOYER'S NAME (If you don't have one, get one!)
TITLE
COMPANY'S NAME
ADDRESS

Dear Mr/Ms EMPLOYER:

First Paragraph

This is the "why I'm writing you" paragraph, which immediately tells the employer the position for which you want to be considered. This paragraph is short—usually 2-3 sentences. Points to cover:

- Why you are writing and which position you are applying for.
- How you heard about the position is irrelevant unless it is a mutual contact or recruiting program. Do not write, "I learned of this opportunity through the Career Services Office."
- Show from your research why you are interested in this position or organization. The goal is to make a connection—do this *briefly* and *specifically* or leave it out; sweeping statements will not work.

Second Paragraph

This is the "why I'm qualified" paragraph. Highlight some of your most relevant experiences and qualities as they relate to the position for which you are applying. Choose 2-3 points you want to make about specific experiences/accomplishments or about general qualities you have exhibited, and provide specific examples to support those points. This paragraph will change according to the job/employer for which you are applying. This is usually the longest paragraph of the letter. You may break this paragraph into two if it looks too lengthy or if your points work best in separate paragraphs. Points to ponder:

- The first sentence should be a hard-hitting opener. It is a quick introduction, which is accomplishment-oriented and directed at the skills and qualifications needed for the job/industry.
- The body of the paragraph should provide evidence to back up what you've just claimed. List city-specific jobs/internships/activities/projects and accomplishments associated with those experiences.

- Use your résumé to come up with some specifics, but NEVER reiterate passages from your résumé word for word.
- Discuss why what you did is important to the employer. Relate the facts to the job. *Strong examples are important!*
- The final sentence is a summary of what you've discussed above. It's a good idea to mention the position title and company name to bring the reader to the specific job in question.

Final Paragraph

This is a short 2-4 sentences paragraph. You should refer to the enclosed résumé, request an interview, and let the reader know what will happen next (contact them within a specific period of time unless it is a recruiting program). It is *vital* that you thank the reader for his/her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Signature

Your Name

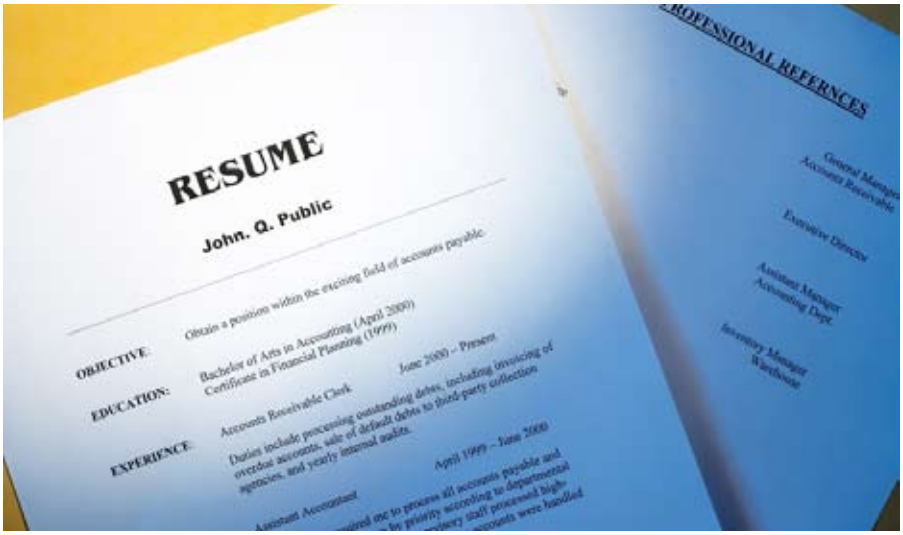
Enclosure(s)

Most employers will have potential employees fill out a work application when applying for a job. Employers use this application to select people to interview for job openings. This application represents you and should be filled out very carefully.

Make sure you write clearly and neatly, giving correct information about your education and skills. Also, indicate the type of positions for which you are applying.

Usually an employer will require applicants to list the names of three people to serve as references regarding education, skills, and character. Permission must be obtained from people before listing them as references. If possible, names of relatives should not be used. Listing teachers, former employers, and good friends is preferred. For each reference, the person's name, address, telephone number, and occupational title should be given.

Résumé



Hundreds of résumés cross employers' desks every working day. Each has about 10 seconds to make an impression on the employer. How can you make sure it is your résumé that catches the employer's attention?

A résumé is a concise summary of your qualifications and experiences targeted to a specific job or career goal. A résumé is your opportunity to create a first impression that highlights your strengths to an employer. From this first impression, the prospective employer will decide whether or not to interview you.

Be sure your résumé is:

Well-written	No spelling or grammatical mistakes. Keep it clear and concise. Have someone proofread your résumé before you give it to an employer.
Proper Length	No more than two pages
Attractive	Typed and professional in appearance. An employer should be able to glance over the résumé and read the main points.
Relevant	Include only information having to do with the job you are seeking or your career goals.
Personalized	There is no one correct way to write a résumé. Use the style and format that best reflects your needs and accomplishments.
Appropriate	Information and format must conform to employer expectations. An artist, for example, may appropriately include graphics, while a banker probably should not.
Balanced	Include only data that will help you get an interview. Eliminate any information that may not act in your favor such as age, religious affiliation, etc. Always ask yourself the question, "Will this bit of data help get an interview?" If not, do not use it.

Before the résumé is written, time should be taken to do a self-assessment on paper—an outline of skills and abilities as well as work experience and extracurricular/social activities. The assessment makes it easier to prepare a thorough résumé.

The Content of a Résumé:

All of the contact information should go at the top of a résumé.

Name	Avoid nicknames
Address	Use a permanent address: Parent's address, a friend's address, or the address to be used after graduation if attending school, in the military, or if relocating.
Telephone	Use a permanent telephone number and include the area code.
E-mail	Add an e-mail address. Many employers will find it useful.
Website address	A website should be included if the Web page reflects a person's professional ambitions.
Objective or Summary	An objective tells potential employers the sort of work a person is hoping to do. Be specific about the job wanted. For example: To obtain an entry-level position within a financial institution requiring strong analytical and organizational skills. Tailor the objective to each employer targeted/every job sought.
Education	New graduates without a lot of work experience should list their education information first. Alumni can list it after the work experience section. The most recent education information is listed first. Degree (A.S., B.S., B.A., etc.), major, institution attended, minor/concentration should be included. Grade point average (GPA), if it is higher than 3.0, needs to be included. Academic honors should be mentioned.
Work Experience	The employer should be given a brief overview of the work that has taught a person skills. Action words are used to describe job duties. Work experience is included in reverse chronological order—that is, putting the most recent job first and work backward to the first relevant job. Included are: • Title of position • Name of organization • Location of work (town, state) • Dates of employment • Description of work responsibilities with emphasis on specific skills and achievements
Other Information	Some addition information might include: • Key or special skills or competencies • Leadership experience in volunteer organizations • Participation in sports
References	Be sure to ask individuals if they would be willing to be a reference for you prior to mentioning their names to prospective employers. Names of individuals are not usually listed on the résumé, but a list of at least three references should be available at the interview. This list should include name, title, employer, address, business and home telephone number. A note may be made at the bottom of the résumé: "References furnished upon request."

Résumé Checkup

Once the résumé has been written, it needs to be reviewed and critiqued by a career counselor or other knowledgeable person. Certain steps can be followed to ensure quality:

Content	Run a spell check on the computer before anyone sees the résumé. Have a friend (preferably an English major) review grammar. Have another friend proofread. The more people who see a résumé, the more likely that misspelled words and awkward phrases will be seen and corrected.
Design	The following tips will make a résumé easier to read and/or scan into an employer's database: • Use white or off-white paper • Use 8½- x 11-inch paper • Print on one side of the paper • Use a font size of 10 to 14 points • Use non-decorative typefaces • Choose one typeface and stick to it • Avoid italics, script, and underlined words • Do not use horizontal or vertical lines, graphics, or shading • Do not fold or staple the résumé • If the résumé must be mailed, it should be put in a large envelope

Curtis L. McIver

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Objective

Seeking employment with an association as lobbyist or legal advisor.

Experience

Virginia Tradesman's Association
Consultant, 2003-present

- Advise association membership on legislative issues.
- Promote association's goals and objectives.
- Supervise staff of 25 researchers and 5 writers.
- Meet with elected officials on behalf of association.
- Serve as expert witness in legal cases.

Manufactured Housing United
Legal Advisor, 2000-2003

- Advised union as to legal rights and practices.
- Represented clients in lawsuits and initiated legal action.
- Drew up legal documents.

Education

St. Kyle's University
Juris Doctor Degree, Law, 2000
Graduated Magna Cum Laude

St. David's University
Master's Degree, Business Administration, 1998
Graduated Summa Cum Laude

Aikman Polytechnic Institute
Bachelor's Degree, Business Administration, 1996
Graduated Summa Cum Laude

Other information

- Member of American Bar Association
- Member of Virginia Bar Association
- Certified Building Official

Membership/license

- Virginia Driver's License
- Virginia Bar Association Certification
- Member of the American Bar Association

Special award

- Phi Beta Kappa

References—Available upon request

Interviewing

Although an interview is a stressful experience, consider it a form of recognition and an opportunity to gain something valuable without risking anything but time. Leaving nothing to chance will be an important advantage!

Before

Prepare a job search kit

Collect a folder of things that may be needed. This is where a personal portfolio could come in very handy! Include:

- ★ Birth certificate
- ★ Social Security card
- ★ Work permit (if applicable)
- ★ Driver's license
- ★ Diploma
- ★ Personal data sheet with previous employment information
- ★ Several copies of your résumé
- ★ A copy of the job application. Make sure it is neat and complete.
- ★ Letter of introduction
- ★ Letters of recommendation
- ★ Samples or portfolio of work, if appropriate
- ★ A black pen in case forms need to be completed or a test is given
- ★ Paper to take notes

Just as a picture speaks a thousand words, so does a sample brochure, photograph, or technical prototype. If you have samples that demonstrate your relevant skills, bring those samples to the interview in a briefcase or small bag. When the appropriate question is asked, refer to your samples as a way of showing your talent. The act of showing the interviewer something tangible will change the pace of the interview and make a memorable impression about your achievements. By the way, don't bring a sample if it's larger than what you can carry in one hand or more elaborate than what can be taken out of its case and presented in ten seconds or less. Your portfolio should make you look good, not clumsy.

Prepare for the interview

- ★ Get clear direction to the interview site and arrive on time—or early—for your meeting.
- ★ Attitude—Think positively and like a winner!
- ★ Outfit—Wear appropriate, pressed, and clean clothing.
- ★ Neatness—Have a comb, brush, and cosmetics to touch-up.
- ★ Body Scent—Smell good! Too much perfume or aftershave can be offensive.
- ★ Hair—Needs to be clean and combed.
- ★ Breath—Check breath before interview.

Self-knowledge

- ★ How do your education, training, knowledge, skills, and abilities relate to the specific job?
- ★ What makes you different and better for the job than other people?
- ★ What are your goals and objectives, including what you're looking for in a job and/or career?
- ★ What is your previous work experience?
- ★ What are the names of previous employers, addresses, kinds of businesses, and telephone numbers?
- ★ What are your dates of employment?
- ★ Who can give information about your performance?
- ★ What are the reasons you gave up or lost your previous position(s)?
- ★ What were the elements of your job(s) you like the best/least and why?

During

REMEMBER—your interview starts the minute you walk in the company's front door and lasts until you exit that door. So, keep your best foot forward from start to finish.

To Do's

- ★ Prepare mentally (it's okay to be nervous).
- ★ Shake hands firmly
- ★ Smile, especially when you first meet the interviewer. That first impression will stick in the manager's mind for a long time.
- ★ Try to have good posture that shows you're alert and focused. Avoid negative body language. In other words, don't cross your arms over your chest, don't clench your fist, don't clutch your purse or briefcase tightly, or do anything that might indicate insecurity, hostility, or resistance to change.
- ★ Know the name(s) of the person(s) conducting the interview.
- ★ Listen carefully to everything the interviewer says, and ask questions when you don't understand something. Understanding each question will help you give the best response.
- ★ Take time to collect your thoughts before answering the questions clearly, concisely, and honestly.
- ★ Maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- ★ Give a good reason for hiring you.
- ★ Don't discuss your personal, domestic, or financial problems or criticize former employers.
- ★ Be positive and enthusiastic; show interest.
- ★ Thank the interviewer(s) before leaving.

What kind of questions will be asked? Some typical questions and ways they might be answered.

Respond with answers based on PAR (Problem, Action, Result): What was a problem you faced? What action did you take to solve it? What was the result?

- ★ **What can I do for you? What kind of work are you looking for?** These two questions should never come up if you walk right in, shake hands, introduce yourself, and tell something about the position you are looking for.
- ★ **Please tell me something about yourself.** Take a little time and think up a brief "me" commercial that includes your positive points and work history. Talk about your skills, abilities, experience, background, and goals that you have accomplished—anything that qualifies you for the job opening. Don't discuss family, hobbies, or anything that is not directly related to the job.
- ★ **Can you provide good references?** Call your references to be sure that they will give you a very positive reference and also suggest some strengths that they could emphasize to the employer.
- ★ **What do you want to be doing five years from now?** Answer that you'd like to be working for their company in a position of responsibility.

- ★ **Why did you leave your last job?** You should always answer this question as positively as you can. Never say anything bad about your last employer. If you quit your job, why did you quit? Was it because of downsizing, trying something different, or a career change? You may have to be a little creative if there was personality conflict. Be careful in replying, because employers are hesitant to hire someone who cannot get along with others. A point to remember: some employers feel that someone who can discuss their former employer positively, even though they may have been fired, is worth hiring.
- ★ **What would your last employer say about you?** List all of your transferable skills that pertain to the position you're applying for.
- ★ **What are some of your strengths?** You should have your strengths in mind and provide some positive examples to prove them.
- ★ **What is your biggest weakness?** Never admit a weakness; turn a potential perceived weakness into a strength factor whenever possible.
- ★ **Why should I hire you when I've interviewed people with much more experience than you have?** You should answer that you can't speak for the other people interviewed, but emphasize your strengths and that you really want to work for the company.
- ★ **What are you looking for in a starting salary?** You should ask what they pay for someone with your experience or what they pay someone in this position.

What questions should I ask?

- ★ What are you looking for in the person you hire for the position?
- ★ What are the possibilities of advancement in this organization?
- ★ What are the job duties and responsibilities?
- ★ Is there anything else you need to know about me in order for me to be fully considered for the job?
- ★ When is a decision to be made?

After

What about a thank-you letter?

The day after the interview, write a thank-you letter expressing appreciation to the interviewer for taking the time to see you. Type neatly on your personal stationary.

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June 1, 2008

Mr. George E. Seymour
Accounting Department
Wintergreen Insurance Company
301 West Rothmyer Street
Seymour, New York 01247

Dear Mr. Seymour:

Thank you for the interview and tour of your company last week. I am impressed with the layout of the individual workstations for the claims clerks and word processors. During the interview, you stressed the necessity for accuracy in the computer programming process. It is obvious the design of your work area lends itself to this type of work. I know I could work efficiently in your environment.

Wintergreen Insurance Company will be the ideal company to launch my career as a computer programmer. I will be available immediately to begin work with your firm. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Connor Roraback
Connor Roraback

If you don't hear from the interviewer within two weeks, call or write to politely remind him/her that you are still interested in the job. Ask when a hiring decision will be made.

How do I decide on a job offer?

If you are among the fortunate to be offered a job, there is some information you may want to check before accepting it. Do not hesitate to ask for information to help make an intelligent decision as to whether to accept the job.

Organization

- ★ Are the goals of the business or agency compatible with your beliefs?
- ★ Are the immediate future prospects of the business relatively secure and stable, or is bankruptcy, or a merger possible?
- ★ Does the business fluctuate with the growth and decline in the economy?

Work

- ★ Where is the job located?
- ★ What are the work hours?
- ★ How does it fit into the overall operation of the organization?
- ★ Does it fully utilize my abilities and interests?
- ★ Is travel involved? If so, how much?
- ★ How much turnover of personnel is there in the organization?

Opportunities

- ★ What are the training opportunities?
- ★ What are the opportunities for challenge and expansion of job duties?

Salary and Benefits

- ★ What is the starting salary?
- ★ How often and under what circumstances can a raise be expected?
- ★ What is the complete package of benefits?
- ★ How financially secure is the retirement system?

How do I deal with rejection?

Someone else got that job you really wanted. This is disappointing, but remember that most people receive many more noes than yeses when seeking a job. What is important is that you stay with your job search. You may feel discouraged, but don't quit until you succeed. And succeed you will!

Could it have been any of the following that caused you not to be hired?

- ★ Lack of clear career goals and purposes. Or maybe you have chosen the wrong goal: your goal doesn't match your skills or the job market.
- ★ Inability to express information clearly.
- ★ Failure to look interviewer in the eye; no confidence or poise.
- ★ Poor personal appearance.
- ★ Asking uninformed questions about the job or the company.
- ★ Unwilling to start at the bottom.
- ★ Sloppy application form.
- ★ Arriving late for the interview.

How do I keep my new job?

You now have a job. It may not be the perfect job, but you will be able to develop the skills and experience that lead to a better one. Keeping a job takes just as much, if not more, effort than getting one. Some hints:

Do good work

- ★ Learn your job and do it well, every day.
- ★ Make yourself invaluable.
- ★ Lean a skill that few people in your workplace know.

Be dependable

- ★ Be on time. If you say you'll be somewhere, be there. If you say you'll do something, do it.
- ★ If you must take a day off for family or personal reasons, arrange it ahead of time with your boss.
- ★ If you're too ill to work, call your boss and explain as soon as you know you can't come in.

Keep a good attitude

- ★ Don't always wait to be told what to do. Look around, see what needs to be done, and do it. Be willing to do more than you are asked to do.
- ★ Be polite and respectful to your co-workers, supervisors, and customers.

Be helpful

- ★ If a supervisor needs you to help a co-worker on a project, don't hesitate. Not only is it great to be known as a helpful person, but you'll learn a few things and become an even more valuable employee along the way!

Be a team player

- ★ Support your co-workers; encourage others to succeed; and use your strengths in the workplace.

Dress for success

- ★ Pay attention to how you look and dress. Keep your hair and general appearance neat and well groomed.
- ★ Wear clean and pressed clothing that is right for your job.

Don't waste time or resources

- ★ Limit your personal phone calls and conversations with co-workers.
- ★ Take your breaks at the scheduled times.
- ★ Act responsibly; treat equipment and supplies as if you had bought them yourself.

Keep your emotions under control

- ★ Out-of-control anger or over-the-top dramatics are not professional and could cost you your job.

Be diplomatic

- ★ Use tact when discussing problems with others and choose your timing when everyone is calm.

Treat everyone with respect

- ★ Be honest. Stay positive. Your co-workers are your teammates. Mutual respect is the key to a healthy working environment.