



## Successful Applications

Employers use application forms to get an idea of your knowledge, skills, attributes and experience in a format they can compare with other applicants. It's the only information they have about you and on which they'll decide whether to interview you. There's a lot of competition for placements and graduate jobs so you should be prepared to put in time and effort to write strong and convincing applications.

### Types of applications

**With questions:** Applications where you are given a series of questions or statements which ask for details about your skills and experience.

**With personal statements:** A number of organisations (especially for healthcare, public and voluntary sector jobs) will ask for a personal statement or provide an open question such as 'Please tell us what we need to know to progress your application'. Employers are looking for evidence that you can write clearly and concisely as well as judging your ability to choose the information which is most relevant to the role and your ability to do the job.

### Before you start

- Do you meet the basic requirements for the job?**  
 Most employers provide details about the requirements for the role in terms of qualifications, skills, experience and attributes. If you don't meet most of the required criteria, then consider whether or not it's worth spending time completing the application. If you're unsure, speak to a GCU Careers Consultant for advice.
- Research the role and employer**  
 Be really clear about why you are applying for the job. Employers will have provided information about the role in the advert, website or job information pack. Use this information to research the job, company, its culture, values and the industry or

sector. If you are still interested in the position, have a think about what you can bring to the job.

- Provide evidence**  
 Do you have the qualifications, skills, attributes and experience being asked for? If you do, can you provide detailed evidence to support this? Reflect on the experiences that have developed your skills such as part-time jobs, a previous career (even if it's not relevant to what you're studying now), voluntary work and university course work and projects.
- A perfect match**  
 It's really important to adapt each application to every job you apply for. Employers don't want 'cut and paste' applications that have been used for other jobs. In a competitive job market, they'll be looking out for the applications that have been well researched, planned and targeted to that particular job and employer.
- Use positive language (active or action verbs)**  
 These create a strong impression of achievement, ability and activity. For example rather than "I was a class representative" you could write, "I was elected class representative by my fellow students and reported their views at the formal staff/ student consultative meetings".

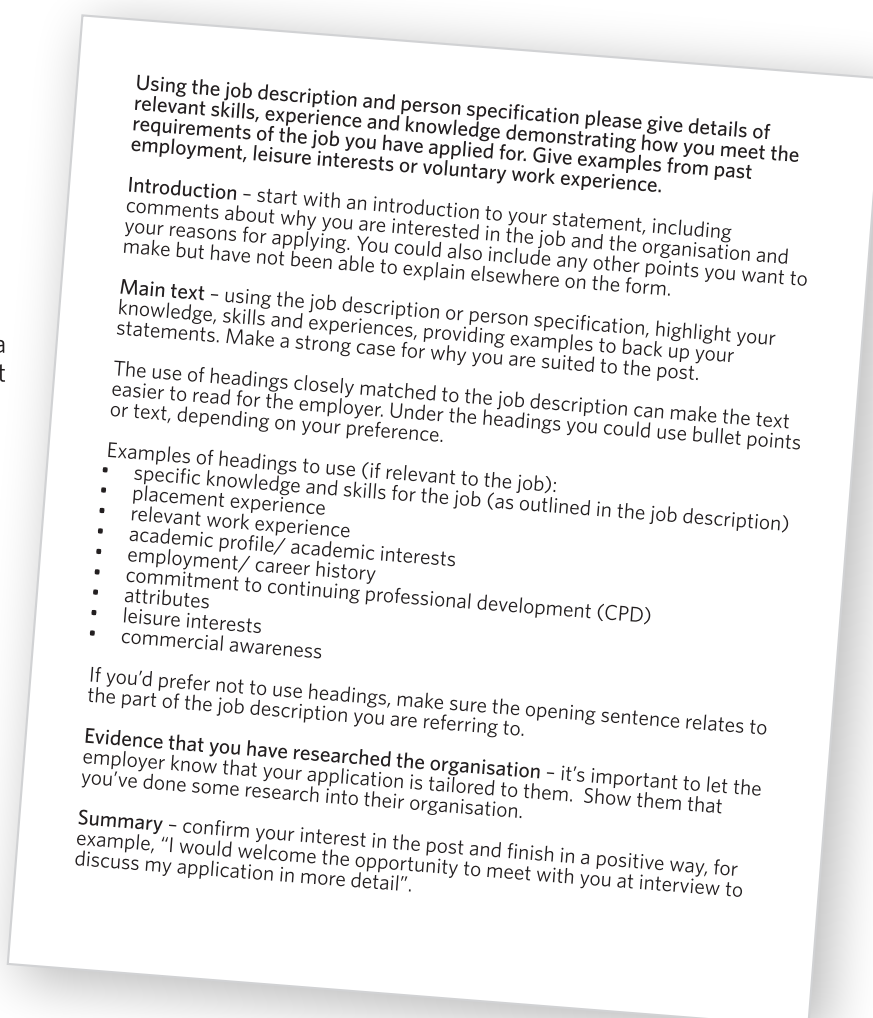
Some examples of active or action verbs include:

achieved	persuaded
analysed	prepared
demonstrated	presented
developed	produced
evaluated	recommended
formulated	reported
generated	researched
handled	resolved
initiated	scheduled
implemented	solved
improved	specified
investigated	strengthened
maximised	succeeded
negotiated	supported
planned	trained

## Applications with a personal statement

Personal statements are used by some employers especially for healthcare, public and voluntary sector jobs, and involve an open question, for example:

Example structure for a personal statement



## Structuring your answer

If there aren't guidelines on what to include in your personal statement, areas you might want to include are listed below. There is no set order of when to mention what but starting your personal statement with your most relevant information is advised.

## Personal statements for postgraduate study

If you are applying for a postgraduate course, you will often be asked to provide a personal statement in support of your application. Check carefully what information you have been asked to provide and the amount of space (or words) that you can use.

Here are some key areas to consider including:

- Why you are interested in the course
- When did you become interested in this field of study?
- What appeals to you about the structure of the course or the choice of modules? Did you attend an open day or talk to lecturers?
- Why you want to study at the university - has it got a strong reputation in this area of research?
- Academic resilience to complete the course
- Your academic knowledge, interests and achievements
- Your interest in continuing professional development (CPD) and accreditation with a professional body (if relevant)
- Other academic skills relevant to the course, for example IT skills, relevant scientific techniques, analytical and research skills
- Relevant skills and experiences gained from work experience, volunteering and extra-curricular activities
- Your career aims - how will this course help you achieve them?
- **Be honest** - employers will check all results and statements of achievement during the recruitment process.
- **Additional information** - only attach additional information such as a continuation of your CV or qualifications transcript if asked to do so.
- **Grammar, spelling and punctuation** - check carefully for mistakes as attention to detail gives employers an important message about your professionalism.
- **Save or photocopy the application** - to review and use as part of your interview preparation. If you can't print an online form, make a note of your answers to important questions.
- **Closing dates** - make sure you submit your application on time. Sometimes submitting ahead of the closing date can be an advantage.
- **Sound enthusiastic** - make your application interesting to read. Find the right words to describe your experiences and to let your personality come through.
- **Answer all questions in full** - leaving sections blank gives a negative impression. If a question genuinely does not apply to you, say it is not applicable or write N/A.

## Examples of postgraduate personal statements

Prospects website: [prospects.ac.uk/personal\\_statements\\_for\\_postgraduate\\_applications.htm](https://www.prospects.ac.uk/personal_statements_for_postgraduate_applications.htm)

## Practical tips for all applications

- **Follow all instructions carefully** - failure to do this gives the impression that you may not be able to pay attention to detail in your work either.
- **Word or character count** - if they ask for a specific word or character count, make sure you are close to the maximum amount and not over.

▪ **Prepare your examples**

An effective technique to use when answering questions on applications is the STAR technique:

**Situation (10% of your answer)**

Explain the situation that you were in. Keep your description short and get straight to the point for example: 'during my degree' or 'as the team supervisor in a bar'.

**Task (20%)**

Briefly explain what you had to do, and what the success criteria was. If you were working in a group explain what the overall task of the group was but be clear about your own role.

**Action (50%)**

This is the most substantial part of any example and you need to include:

- What you did
- Why you did it
- How you did it
- What skills you used

Use 'I' not 'we' as this is about your role in the task and how you affected the outcome.

**Result (20%)**

Consider your example and think about the impact you've made. Be prepared to explain:

- What happened as a result of the actions you took?
- What you would do differently or improve?
- What conclusions did you reach?

**Applications with questions**

Employers ask different types of questions depending on what they're looking for. Ask yourself 'why are they asking me this?' and 'why are they asking me this in this way? Work out what they want to know and make your answer relevant to the question.

**Examples of competency based questions**

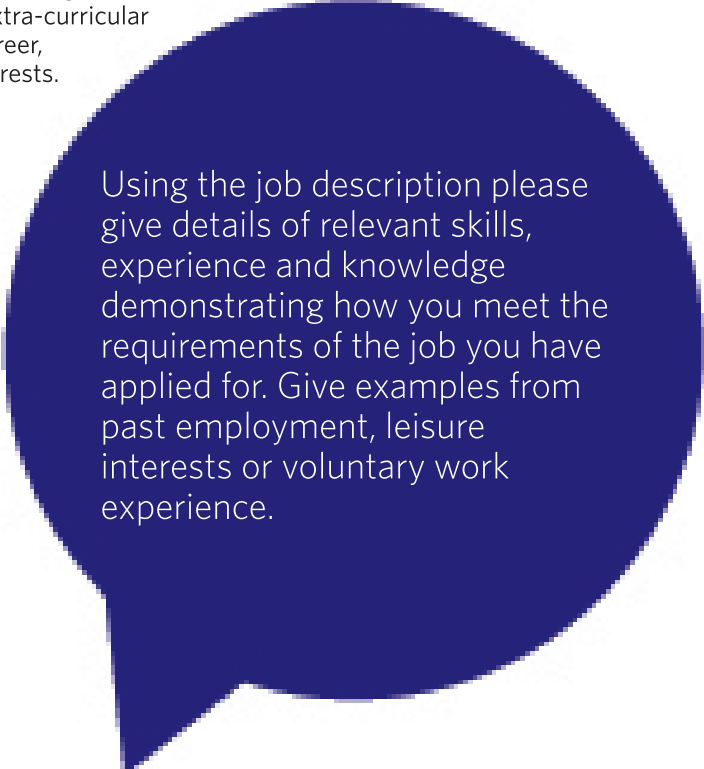
Competency based questions are designed to get you to give evidence of your skills relating to the job description and person specification. Competency based questions often start with the following phrases:

- Give me an example of a time when...
- Describe a situation where you...

Below is a small selection of competency based questions.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS	WHAT ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?
Provide an example of where you overcame a problem. Given the chance, what would you do differently?	Problem solving skills. Evidence that you can analyse a situation, come up with the right solution and implement it well.
Describe a time when you had to deal with a conflict within your team.	Diplomacy? Empathy? Good communication and team working skills? Do you back away from arguments or do you take a leading role in resolving them?
Give an example of when you have worked with others as part of a team. What was the activity and what was the outcome?	Provide your own answers:
Give an example of how you provided service to a customer beyond their expectation.	Provide your own answers:
Provide an example of a situation where you have taken on the role of leader, describe the skills you used and the results that were achieved.	Provide your own answers:

**Top tip:** when answering competency based questions give examples from a wide range of scenarios to make your answers varied and interesting for example work, study, extra-curricular activities, a previous career, voluntary work and interests.



### Advice and guidance

Our professionally qualified Careers Advisers can help with your career planning and study options, including advice on job search, CVs and applications, interviews, selection tests and assessment centres. We offer a number of ways to speak to a Careers Adviser – book online via the Careers Service website [gcu.ac.uk/careers](http://gcu.ac.uk/careers)

**Careers Clinic (15 minutes):** For quick career enquiries that will focus on:

- Sections of your CV, covering letter, application, personal statement or LinkedIn profile
- Understanding aspects of the recruitment process ( applications, interview techniques, assessment centres and tests)
- Part-time, internship and placement job search

Change of course or withdrawal

Please be realistic about what can be discussed during a 15 minute clinic session.

### Careers Appointment (45 minutes):

These can be used to explore your career options and for in-depth discussions on:

- Detailed review of only one of: CV, covering letter, application, personal statement or LinkedIn profile. Please bring a paper copy to your appointment.
- Career planning and decision making
- Further study, including postgraduate options and applications
- Graduate job search and recruitment process
- Work and Study abroad

### Practice Interview (45 minutes):

Designed to give you the chance to practice your interview skills and receive feedback to help you prepare for the real thing. You will be asked to email your CV or application as a Word document at least 3 working days in advance of the appointment, along with the relevant job description.

### Resources and further information

You'll find lots of useful information on the Careers website [gcu.ac.uk/careers](http://gcu.ac.uk/careers)



Contact us:  
Careers Centre  
Campus Life Lounge, George Moore Building  
W: [gcu.ac.uk/careers](http://gcu.ac.uk/careers)  
Blog: [gcu-careers.wordpress.com](http://gcu-careers.wordpress.com)  
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