

## CAREER PLANNING

# Job Search Process

### Job Applications

Why do employers use job applications? Many employers use applications as a way of standardizing the information they obtain from all job-seekers, including some things that you would not normally put on your resume. Your goal is to complete the application as completely and honestly as you can -- all the time remembering that the application is a key marketing tool for you in the job-hunting process. Remember that some employers will use your application as a basis for deciding whether to call you for an interview. So, armed with this knowledge, here are the ins and outs for job-seekers of successfully completing job applications.

**1. Arrive prepared with the information you need.** Be sure to bring your resume, social security card, driver's license, etc. You probably will also need addresses and phone numbers of previous employers, as well as starting and ending salaries for each previous job. It's always better if have too much information than not enough.

**2. Read and follow instructions carefully.** Always take a few minutes to review the entire application. Some applications ask for information differently -- and all have specific spaces in which you are expected to answer questions. Think of the application as your first test in following instructions.

**3. Complete the application as neatly as possible.** Remember how important handwriting was in school? Neatness and legibility count; the application is a reflection of you. Consider submitting it online, if possible. If completing it by hand, be sure to use only a blue or black pen -- and consider using an erasable pen or taking some 'white-out' to fix minor mistakes. Don't fold, bend, or otherwise mar the application.

**4. Tailor your answers to the job you are seeking.** Just as with your resume and cover letter, you want to focus your education and experience to the job at hand. Give details of skills and accomplishments, and avoid framing your experiences in terms of mere duties and responsibilities. Show why you are more qualified than other applicants for the position. Include experience from all sources, including previous jobs, school, clubs and organizations, and volunteer work.

**5. Don't leave any blanks.** One of the reasons employers have you complete an application is because they want the same information from all job applicants. However, if there are questions that do not apply to you, simply respond with "not applicable," or "n/a." Do not write "see resume" when completing the application (but you can certainly attach your resume to the application).

**6. Don't provide any negative information.** As with any job search correspondence, never offer negative information. Your goal with the application is to get an interview. Providing negative information (such as being fired from a job) just gives the employer a reason not to interview you. If asked about a specific circumstance, be truthful.

**7. Always answer questions truthfully.** The fastest way for an application to hit the trash can is to have a lie on it, but that doesn't mean you need to give complete answers either. For example, many applications ask your reason for leaving your last job. If you were fired or downsized, you should try to be as positive as possible and leave longer explanations for the interview; some experts recommend writing "job ended" as the reason you left your last job.

**8. Do not put specific salary requirements.** It is way too early in the job-seeking process to allow yourself to be identified by a specific salary request. You don't want to give employers too much information too soon. In addition, employers often use this question as a screening device -- and you don't want to be eliminated from consideration based on your answer. It's best to say "open" or "negotiable."

**9. Provide references.** Employers want to see that there are people who will provide objective information about you to them. Pick your references carefully -- and make sure you ask if they are willing to be a reference for you before you list them. Where do you get references? Consider past employers, teachers, family and/or friends. Most young job-seekers have a mix of professional and character references, while more experienced job-seekers focus on professional references who can speak of your skills and accomplishments.

**10. Proofread your application before submitting it.** Once you've completed the application, sit back and take a moment to thoroughly proofread the document, checking for all errors -- especially typos and misspellings.

**One final word.** Be prepared for all kinds of job applications, from simple one-page applications to multi-page applications; and some will be clean and crisp copies while others will appear to be photocopied a few too many times. Regardless, take your time and do the best you can, always keeping in the back of your mind the goal of the application -- getting you an interview. If you have not heard from the employer within a week of submitting your application, you should follow-up with the employer.