

# Careers and Employability Service

## Top Tips for Effective Applications

### Before you start:

- It's about YOU. Remember you are trying to stand out from the crowd. Show your enthusiasm and understanding of the job and organisation as well as your ability to do the role. What are the 'stories' you want to talk about at interview?

### Preparation:

- Set aside dedicated time for completing application forms – success comes from quality not just quantity
- Research the opportunity thoroughly using the company website and graduate literature, as well as searching the web for press reports or company profiles. Check "About Us" sections on their company websites.
- Take time to consider all your experiences and achievements, not just academic ones. Most employers are looking for well-rounded individuals with extra-curricular interests as well as academic achievement
- Consider what is behind each question on the application form. What skills, qualities and behaviours are they seeking? What specific examples could you use to demonstrate these skills? Essential requirements will score more highly than desirable ones

### Plan your answers

- Use a range of examples to highlight your abilities
- For competency questions, evaluate which situation provides the most evidence to demonstrate the required behaviours or skill
- For situational judgement questions, keep in mind the business context, the company values and any competencies or attributes they have emphasised to help you work out your answer. There may be more than one acceptable answer, but usually there is one which best fits these factors
- Keep to any word limit. Be concise and avoid jargon. Be specific about your experience and motivation, and what draws you to the company
- When completing an application, think ahead to the interview. What questions might the employer ask? How would you respond? What do you want to talk about?

### Techniques to help:

- Use active verbs to help create an impression of dynamism but do not repeat yourself
- Use short sentences/paragraphs which are easy to follow, one idea per paragraph and state the key information in the first sentence
- Answers should be based on evidence from your experience
- Use the terms and language of the job description or person specification to show you understand what is required
- Use the **STAR** technique when answering situational or competency-based questions. Describe the **Situation**, **Task**, **Action** and **Result**. Most of your answer should be focused on your **actions**

**Allow time for review:**

- If you make mistakes on your application, the employer will think that you are the type of person who will make mistakes in your job
- Proof-read your application. A top tip is to read your answers out loud; it can often highlight grammatical errors and poor phraseology
- On-line application systems do not have spell-checks. Check and re-check spelling and grammar. Use Word to draft your answers
- Try to avoid submitting just before the deadline, allowing 24 hours before the final proof-read. Last-minute submissions can result in careless mistakes

**Personal statements:**

- Personal statements or answers to open questions should be clearly structured and planned out, a specific handout can be downloaded from the Careers website  
<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/students/application-support/application-forms.page>
  - Using sub-headings which match the person specification can help with the structure.
  - Bullet points will help you keep focused and concise

**Preparing for the next stage:**

- Always keep a copy of your application. You may be asked about what you wrote at interview and re-reading your application will help you prepare for questions
- Another advantage is that when you leave a gap before re-reading your application, it is easier to assess it objectively. Doing this can help you produce a stronger application

**Extra Tips from employers:**

- Making a good first impression is vital
- Once you have completed the application in full, there is an option to print. We recommend you take advantage of this, proof-read your application and then click to submit. You may spot different errors by reading from print
- Some systems will log you out automatically, SAVE your answers periodically
- Show that you know which company you are applying to, and don't misspell our name, or use an answer with a different company name

**Disclosing disability:**

- We have supporting information on the Disability & Dyslexia page of the website, <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/students/groups/disability-and-dyslexia.page>
- Our 'Disability, Disclosure and Employability workshop' explores your rights under the Equality Act 2010 and possible disclosure at application, interview and in the workplace. Workshops are advertised and places can be booked via [mycareer.soton.ac.uk](http://mycareer.soton.ac.uk). Please contact Careers on 023 8059 3501 or email [careers@southampton.ac.uk](mailto:careers@southampton.ac.uk) for further information.