

Employment Applications

Employment applications are an important part of your job search. Some employers require the application as the first step in the selection process. Others may not require it until later. No matter when the application is requested, it's an important job search tool. It provides an opportunity to sell your qualifications. The completed application may be the first impression the employer has of you.

The employment application is used to obtain information about your qualifications and to compare you to other applicants. Companies may receive hundreds or even thousands of applications each year. Therefore, they look for ways to reduce the number of applications they will read thoroughly. The employer screens out many applicants based on various factors in the application. You need to do everything possible to create the perfect application. Following are some general guidelines for completing applications.

Provide Visual Impact

It's a good idea to make a copy of the application in case you make a mistake. Fill out the application completely, neatly and with no errors in grammar or spelling. Print clearly in black ink, don't use abbreviations, and respond to all questions. Use N/A (not applicable) if the section doesn't apply to you. This shows the employer that you made an honest effort to fill out the entire application; you didn't overlook anything.

Follow Directions

Read the entire application before you complete it. Pay close attention to what's being asked and how you're expected to respond. Read and respect sections that say, "Do Not Write Below This Line," or "Office Use Only." These sections may give insight into the evaluation process.

Be Positive

During your job search you want to present a positive, honest picture of yourself. Avoid any negative information. Look for ways that show you're the right person for the job. Think of what you'd look for in an employee if you were an employer.

Be Honest

You must be truthful on an application. The information you provide may become part of your permanent employment record. False information can become the basis for dismissal. Provide only the information the employer is seeking or is necessary to sell your qualifications.

Illegal Questions

Applications may contain questions that are tricky or even illegal. These may include questions about age, gender, disabilities, health, marital status, children, race, arrests or convictions, religion and workers' compensation. Read the application first so you can plan your answer. You need to decide how you'll respond. If the question doesn't bother you, answer it. If it does bother you, you may want to use N/A or a dash (--). Keep in mind you may get screened out by having too many of these responses.

Many applications have limited space to display your skills, experience and accomplishments. Increase your chances of gaining an interview by carefully selecting what you'll include on the application. Display your qualifications that meet the specific needs of the job. Read the job

description carefully. Advance knowledge of the employer, its products or services, and especially the skills needed to do the job will help you choose the appropriate information to include.

Position Desired

Employers won't try to figure out where you fit in their organization. If the job is an advertised job or if you're looking for a specific position, enter that job title in the blank space provided. When you aren't applying for a specific position, state the name of the department in which you wish to work. If you're interested in more than one job, fill out more than one application.

Job Gaps

If you have job gaps in your employment history, be sure to think of positive ways you were spending your time while unemployed. Make your answer short, simple and truthful. Examples include managing and maintaining a household, attending school and providing childcare. If you were volunteering for an organization, be sure to state the name of the organization and the type of work you were doing. This will prepare you to answer questions regarding your job gap.

Salary Requirements

When asked about salary requirements, it's best to give a salary range or to respond with "negotiable." Use one of these responses even if you know the wage. You never know what the future holds, and you could negotiate a higher salary. Remember that questions about salary may be "knockout" questions used to reduce the number of applicants.

Reasons for Leaving

Carefully choose your words when responding to this question. Negative responses may provide a swift way for the employer to eliminate your application from consideration.

When stating why you left a job, it's important to avoid using the words *fired*, *quit*, *illness* or *personal reasons*. These responses may reduce your chances of being hired. Always look for positive statements. If you respond with, "Will explain at the interview," you can expect to be called on to do so. Often there are better ways to respond. Think of a way you can put your reason in a positive light. Examples-- Returned to school to learn new skills or To find a job that more closely matched my skills.

Fired

Don't use the term fired or terminated. Find a phrase that sounds neutral such as "involuntary separation." You may want to call past employers to find out what they will say in response to reference checks. When contacting former employers, reintroduce yourself and explain that you're looking for a new job. Ask what they will say if they're contacted for a reference check. If you were terminated, you may want to request that this employer simply verify your dates of employment, your job title and describe your job duties. You may also consider having a confidante call and ask for a reference, then report to you what's said. In the future, if you're faced with being terminated, you may request that the employer's record documents a mutually agreeable reason for separation, and explain you're concerned that a record saying you were terminated may have a negative impact on your employability.

Quit

If you quit your job, be prepared to offer an explanation. If you quit under less than favorable conditions, avoid saying anything negative about the employer. You may want to use the term

resigned or voluntarily separated which implies you followed proper procedures in leaving the job. There are many positive, valid reasons why you may have quit your job. You should be prepared to explain the reason on the application and/or in the interview.

Other reasons for quitting a job include volunteer work (state what kind of work and with whom you did volunteer work), starting your own business or raising your family. In all of these cases, you need to assure the employer you're now fully ready to assume the responsibilities of the job.

Laid off

If you were laid off from a job due to no fault of your own, tell the employer the circumstances. Phrases you might want to use include lack of work, lack of operating funds, temporary employment, seasonal employment, company closed, plant closing, company downsizing, a corporate merger, etc.

Quit for a better job.

This response includes-- leaving for advancement potential, leaving to work closer to home, leaving for a better work environment or leaving for a career change. If you quit for a better job, there shouldn't be a long break in employment; your employment history should support the statement.

Quit to move to another area.

In this case, you quit without having another job. You may have moved to be nearer to your family, to an area with greater economic potential, to an area better suited for raising children, etc. Be careful not to use this reason for more than one employer on your application-- it might appear you aren't a dependable or stable employee.

Quit to attend school.

If you use this reason, the education listed on your application and/or resume must agree. Preferably, your school program is consistent with your career goals. You should assure the employer any continuing school activities won't interfere with the job.