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Letterkenny Institute of Technology

CAREERS SERVICE

I AM A CURRENT STUDENT AND I WANT TO:

Gain more information about applications and interviews:

Applications Forms

Some employers, particularly the larger companies, still insist on using their own application forms and, in these cases, they often provide the Careers Service with a limited supply for distribution to students. If an employer specifies an application form, you have no option but to comply if you want your application to be considered. The rationale used is that standard company application forms make it easier for employers to compare applicants according to the stated job requirements.

Some application forms are on-line but many employers still use paper versions which must be typed or hand-written. Completing these forms can be very time-consuming but it's worth taking some trouble to ensure that you make a good impression and achieve the desired result, i.e. an invitation to interview.

Helpful hints for completing application forms:

- Prepare by reading the company recruitment literature.
- Copy the blank form and experiment with the copy.
- Read the complete form before writing anything.
- Follow instructions, e.g. 'Complete in black ink/block capitals'.
- Answer all questions asked, providing evidence to support your answers.
- Draft answers to open questions before committing to paper.
- Confine yourself to the space allocated.
- Check the appearance of the form - first impressions count.
- Check spelling and grammar or get a friend to check it for you.
- Copy completed form and keep in anticipation of an interview.
- Be sure to sign the form, if required.

Curriculum Vitae

A Curriculum Vitae (CV) or Resume is a document summarising the relevant aspects of your career to date. This is normally a 2-page document which can be presented in a variety of formats.

All CVs, however, cover the following areas:

Personal Details: Name, address, telephone number, e-mail address

Education: Dates and details of universities attended and degree results

Main subjects studied and details of major projects

Leaving Certificate results and dates

Work Experience: Details of any work experience in reverse chronological order i.e. the most recent first.

Details should cover: dates, name of employer, duties or responsibilities.

Include Co Op experience, summer work, part-time work and voluntary work.

Skills: Mention specific skills not already covered e.g. Computer skills - listing packages used, Language skills, Driving licence.

Interests and Achievements: List interests, hobbies, involvement in clubs and societies, awards, etc.

Referees: If you don't have space to list names and addresses of two referees, (one academic and one work-related), then state that 'references can be provided on request'.

Remember to ask permission of referees in advance.

Tips and guidelines for CVs:

- Restrict yourself to 2 pages
- Develop a format to suit your needs
- Keep it simple and concise
- Use action words and bullet points
- Avoid gaps
- Allocate space according to importance of the information
- Place most relevant information first for maximum impact
- Check spelling and punctuation
- Make sure it looks well - first impressions count.

Cover Letter

When sending a CV to an employer it should be accompanied by a cover letter. As the letter is the first document to be read, it is initially as important as your CV. The purpose of the cover letter is to highlight the key points in your CV and to emphasise your interest in the job and the company. It is important to address the letter to the appropriate person, by name. If necessary, telephone the company in advance to check the name of the Personnel Manager or whoever would normally handle applications. Then you can follow up the letter with a telephone call to that person.

Key points for cover letters

Length: Restrict yourself to one side of an A4 page

Presentation: Use good quality, white paper

The letter should be typed

Check your spelling and grammar

Contents: Introduce yourself and explain why you're writing

Why the company? Explain why you want to work for that particular company.

Why you? Highlight the relevance of your qualifications and experience to the job.

Why the job? Explain why you want that particular job

What next? Request an interview or suggest that you will follow up with a telephone call.

Succeeding at Interviews

Interview preparation

A successful interview is a two way process:

1. The interviewer finds out whether you match their requirements. These vary from job to job but typically include:

- your intellectual qualities
- your level of enthusiasm
- your ability to get on with people
- your ability to express yourself
- whether you will fit into the organisation

2. You get the chance to assess the organisation - are they offering what you want?

Remember: First impressions count: smile, be friendly and open. The interviewer is on your side: they're hoping you'll be a good candidate.

Before the interview

Preparation for an interview is essential and your efforts will pay handsome dividends in terms of your confidence and your ability to deal effectively with the questions asked.

Find out key information about the organisation:

- read the employer's literature
- look at their video (if available)
- talk to friends and contacts
- You should know roughly the number of employees and turnover, the main locations and products.

Compare your application form with the employer's job description. Think of examples from your own experience (education, work experience, leisure activities and interests) to demonstrate that you have the necessary skills. Make a list.

Expect routine questions about your motivation and decision-making process but be prepared for more awkward questions too. If you have apparent time gaps in your life history, think how to explain them. Prepare some questions to ask the interviewer. Consider a practice session before your interview (contact the Careers Service to arrange a mock interview).

Make sure you arrive on time, reread your application form and notes and then relax.

Dress in a way that conforms to the norms of the organisation.

The interviewer's questions

During a first interview, the employer will explore several areas to assess how well you fit their requirements. They are likely to ask questions about areas such as:

- Intellectual abilities and educational record
- Personal achievements and motivations
- Motivation and commitment
- Knowledge of the vacancy
- Knowledge of the organisation
- Communication skills

Remember there are no correct or incorrect answers - the interviewer is watching, feeling even, how you're saying things and how you're coming across.

Keep these points in mind:

- Be positive. Even when things have gone badly for you try to think positively about what you have learnt from the experience. Think of the optimistic response.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Never offer derogatory information about yourself.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer while you are talking.
- Be ready to recognise the simple question calling for a brief answer.

- Don't pretend to know something you are ignorant of, or try to answer a question you haven't understood. Ask for clarification.
- Speak clearly and not too fast.
- Don't fidget - try to avoid mannerisms.

Some frequently asked questions

Introductory information:

Tell me about yourself?

How do you think a friend/colleague/employer would describe you?

What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

How has college changed you?

What are your hobbies and interests?

Third level education:

Why did you choose to go to your college or university?

Why did you choose your course?

Do your results accurately reflect your ability?

Were you involved in extracurricular activities?

Do you plan to pursue further studies?

Education and work experience:

How can you relate your education experience to this job?

What have you learnt from your previous work experiences?

What can you offer us?

Why should we hire you for this position?

Organisational knowledge:

What do you know about this organisation?

Why are you leaving your present position?

What features of your most recent position did you like the most/least?

What were your most recent contributions while in your most recent position?

What criteria are you using to evaluate potential employers?

Can you work under pressure and to deadlines - provide examples

What type of work environment do you like best?

Can you give me an example of when you had to deal with conflict in the workplace?

Career goals and aspirations:

What are your career goals and aspirations?

How do you plan to achieve these goals?

Where do you see yourself in five years or ten years from now?

What are your salary expectations?

Situational questions:

If you could start your career again, what would you do differently?

If you could change any part of your college experience what would it be and why?

If you had six months free with no obligations or financial constraints what would you do?

If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for in a candidate?

Your questions to the interviewer

At the end of your interview you will probably be given the opportunity to ask some questions of your own. Of course these will depend on the course of the interview but here are a few possibilities:

Is it possible to switch job functions - is it your policy to encourage this to happen?

What would a typical careers pattern be for a young graduate entering....?

Why is your company so successful - what would you say is the secret?

Is your firm planning a new programme of expansion or are you entering a period of consolidation?

How do you see the company performing over the next few years?

If all your prepared questions have been answered, say so. If there was some relevant point on your application which hasn't been covered, mention it now. Make sure you find out the nature and probable timing of the next step.

Telephone interviews

Increasingly, employers are using telephone interviews to screen applicants for positions. This practice is used very common for positions which require telephone contact with customers. You should prepare for a telephone interview as carefully as for a personal interview. Here are some tips to help you:

- Select a comfortable and private place for the telephone call
- Have your CV at hand
- Have company information close by and know it!
- Have a pen and paper
- Advise flat mates re answering the phone. Make sure they take messages.
- Be prepared for the usual interview questions.

Online application forms

In order to deal with huge numbers of applicants, a growing number of employers are now developing online application systems. Online applications provide employers with a quick and efficient means of pre-interview screening. Some online applications may even link applicants to personality screening tests, aptitude tests or company information.

When completing an online application form, remember to:

- Print off a copy of the form and read through it thoroughly
- Prepare your answers and cut and paste them into the form
- Proof read the form for grammatical or spelling errors
- Print off the completed form to ensure the layout and overall appearance of the form is satisfactory
- Save a copy for future reference

Assuming you are happy with your completed application, submit the form.

For some advice on applying online contact the Careers Service.