

JOB APPLICATIONS

Your application is an advertisement of YOU. Employers use them as screening devices in addition to or instead of a resume. Unlike resumes, the application forms give the employers information about prospective employees in a standardized form that will be the same for all job applicants. How you fill out an application can make a big difference on whether or not you get the interview/job.

In order not to be eliminated by a poorly written or wrongly completed job application, here are some application do's and don'ts:

- Know how to spell the job, organization, and information for the job you are applying for.
- Create a fully completed job application and/or personal data sheet ahead of time that you can use as a template during your job search process. If you bring this template with you when you apply for a job, you will have previous employers' names, addresses and phone numbers, as well as your dates of employment and job duties and responsibilities at your fingertips. Be prepared to list work documentation, such as your social security number and your driver's license number.
- If at all possible, take your job applications home with you to fill out. Make a photocopy of the application form so you'll have two of them in case of mistakes. It is best to type your application, or print it very neatly in black ink. If you will be completing your application at the employer's place, bring your own fine-point pen. You may need to write small, because there is not a lot of space on most applications. Never use pencil to complete an application. There shouldn't be any mistakes or crossed-out sections on your application; ask for a fresh application and start over. If you *have* to change something, use white-out. If you are completing an application on-line, it is especially important to work from a template, since some on-line application programs do not allow you to go back to already completed sections. You want to make sure that there are no mistakes or omissions.
- Avoid giving not enough, too much, or vague information. Read all instructions carefully, be sure you know what is asked of you, and be as clear and concise as you can be. Tailor your answers to the particular position you are applying for.
- Don't leave any blank spaces, and don't write "see attached resume." There are reasons why employers want a completely filled out application form for each prospective employee. If the category doesn't apply to you, put "not applicable" or "N/A." For possible problem areas, such as having been fired from a previous job or having been convicted of a felony, see the next section.
- You don't ever want to lie on your job application (or your resume, for that matter), but that doesn't mean that you have to supply negative information up front. In the category "reason for leaving job," you want to list something positive, such as "opportunity for advancement." If you were fired or downsized, you can simply write, "job ended." If there is a box in which you are asked whether or not you were ever fired from a job, and the answer is "yes," make sure that you include the statement, "will explain during interview."

- In the box in which you are asked to list your required salary, the suggestion is to write "negotiable," or "open." You don't want to eliminate yourself by asking for too high or too low a salary. Do your research, and know what this type of position generally pays in your geographical area. The same goes for listing your beginning and ending salary for previous positions. If you believe that listing your previous salary will eliminate you from the current competition because it was either too low or too high, you can put something like, "will discuss during interview." Use your discretion. Some employers insist on having a completed salary history.
- As far as a criminal record is concerned, employers cannot ask the question if you were ever arrested, only if you were ever convicted of a crime. Lying about a previous conviction is ground for immediate dismissal if you are ever found out. You can either take a chance with leaving this question blank, or you can say, "will explain during interview." Make sure that you have a good explanation for your criminal record (I was young and foolish, and fell in with the wrong crowd) and show how you have been rehabilitated (I have changed my life. I haven't missed a single class since enrolling in college).
- Make a photocopy of your completed application for your own records. Make sure that the information on your application and your resume doesn't contradict each other. Proofread your application several times before turning it in. Don't forget to sign and date your application. A lack of a signature can cause your application to be eliminated as "incomplete."
- Always dress appropriately when going to an employer to fill out an application. You may be called in for an interview immediately, and you want to make a good impression.