

Yorkshire Graduate
Recruitment Fair **ygrf**

INSIDERS GUIDE **eBook**

University of Leeds

June 2011

INSIDERS GUIDE

SOAR TO SUCCESS WITH RECRUITERS' TOP TIPS ON APPLICATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

This information was collected from organisations who attended the Yorkshire Graduate Recruitment Fair in June 2011.

We asked them to tell us their top tips for success in applications, and to share with us one genuine question they asked during an interview and what they looked for in a good answer.

This "*insider information*" will be invaluable to you when applying to these organisations and others. It could help you gain the advantage over other applicants, as well as improving your job-seeking skills.

These tips are relevant to all your applications and interviews. The recruiters who supplied them are all professional and experienced, used to dealing with hundreds (if not thousands!) of applications.

Don't waste your time by making silly mistakes at the application stage or leaving your interview preparation to the last minute. Use all the resources available to you – thorough preparation and research is vital. Remember, there is always help available from your own HE Careers Service. See the back page for details.

Contents by Job Sector (click to go to page)

Actuary / Insurance / Pensions

PwC – PricewaterhouseCoopers	34
Prospects	36

Administration

Mountbatten Institute	33
---	----

Advertising / Marketing / Public Relations

ASDA	13
The Co-operative Group	18
Enterprise Rent-a-Car	21
European Training Services	22
Explore Learning	23
HSBC	27
ITW	29
Jaguar Land Rover	30
Matchtech Group Ltd	30
Next	34
Prospects	36
SThree	39
Unilever	42

Buying / Selling / Retailing

ASDA	13
The Co-operative Group	18
Enterprise Rent-a-Car	21
Explore Learning	23
HSBC	27
IBM UK Ltd	27
Jaguar Land Rover	30
Majestic Wine	30
Michael Page International	32
Next	34
Prospects	36
SThree	39
Unilever	42

Conservation / Environment

European Training Services	22
Matchtech Group Ltd	31

Consultancy Services

Towers Watson	41
-------------------------------------	----

Creative Arts / Design

European Training Services	22
--	----

Education

CPA Australia	18
Deloitte	19
Explore Learning	23
Prospects	36
Raleigh International	36
Teach First	41

Engineering

Accenture	11
AEM Futures	12
BJSS Ltd	14
Borgwarner	14
ITW	29
Jaguar Land Rover	30
Matchtech Group Ltd	31
Raleigh International	36
SRG – Science Recruitment Group	38
SThree	39

Finance

ACCA – Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	10
Accenture	11
Borgwarner	14
CIMA – Chartered institute of Management of Accountants	18
CPA Australia	18
Deloitte	19
FDM Group	24

HSBC	27
IBM UK Ltd	27
ICAEW – Institute of chartered accountants on England and Wales	28
Jaguar Land Rover	30
Mountbatten Institute	33
PwC - PricewaterhouseCoopers	34
Standards Chartered	38
SThree	39

General Management / Business Operations

Accenture	11
ASDA	13
Borgwarner	14
The Co-operative Group	18
CPA Australia	18
Deloitte	19
Enterprise Rent-a-Car	21
Explore Learning	23
ITW	29
Majestic Wine	30
Mountbatten Institute	33
Next	34
PwC - PricewaterhouseCoopers	34
Raleigh International	36
SThree	39
Unilever	42

Health / Social Care

BW Penman	15
Chase Search and Selection Ltd	15
Childline – Yorkshire and North East	16
EMIS – Egton Medical Information Systems	21
Raleigh International	36

Human Resources / Recruitment

Graduate Recruitment Bureau	25
Graduate-Jobs.com	25
Graduate Yorkshire	26
HSBC	27
IBM UK Ltd	27
Michael Page International	32

Milkround.com	32
Sagar Wright	37
SRG – Science Recruitment Group	38
SThree	39
TARGETjobs.co.uk	40

Information Technology

2e2 (Uk) Ltd	10
BJSS Ltd	14
Deloitte	19
FDM Group	24
IBM UK Ltd	27
Jaguar Land Rover	30
Matchtech Group Ltd	31
Prospects	36
Standards Chartered	38

Law Enforcement / Security

The Army	13
--------------------------------	----

Legal

The College of Law	17
Deloitte	19
Mountbatten Institute	33
Prospects	36
Raleigh International	36

Manufacturing / Processing / Production

ITW	29
---------------------------	----

Media / Publishing / Journalism

European Training Services	22
--	----

Science / Research and Development

AEM Futures	12
BW Penman	15
Matchtech Group Ltd	31
SRG – Science Recruitment Group	38

Transport / Supply Chain / Logistics

[Unilever](#)42

Universities

[Aberyswyth University](#)10
[The College of Law](#)17
[Edge Hill University](#)20
[Goldsmiths, University of London](#)25
[The University of Sheffield](#)44

Voluntary / Charity

[Restless Development](#)37

Contents by Companies Alphabetically (click to go to page)

2e2 (Uk) Ltd	10
Aberyswyth University	10
ACCA – Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	10
Accenture	11
AEM Futures	12
The Army	13
ASDA	13
BJSS Ltd	14
Borgwarner	14
BW Penman	15
Chase Search and Selection Ltd	15
Childline – Yorkshire and North East	16
CIMA – Chartered institute of Management of Accountants	16
The College of Law	17
The Co-operative Group	18
CPA Australia	18
Deloitte	19
Edge Hill University	20
EMIS – Egton Medical Information Systems	21
Enterprise Rent-a-Car	21
European Training Services	22
Explore Learning	23
FDM Group	24
Goldsmiths, University of London	25
Graduate Recruitment Bureau	25
Graduate-Jobs.com	26
Graduate Yorkshire	26
HSBC	27
IBM UK Ltd	27
ICAEW – Institute of chartered accountants on England and Wales	28
ITW	29
Jaguar Land Rover	30
Majestic Wine	30
Matchtech Group Ltd	31
Michael Page International	32
Milkround.com	32
Mountbatten Institute	33
Next	34
PwC – PricewaterhouseCoopers	34
Prospects	36
Raleigh International	36
Restless Development	37

Sagar Wright	37
SRG – Science Recruitment Group	38
Standards Chartered	38
SThree	39
TARGETjobs.co.uk	40
Teach First	41
Towers Watson	41
Unilever	42
The University of Sheffield	44

2e2 (UK) Ltd

Their Top tip for completing an application form

Take your time, and ensure that your spelling and grammar is perfect. You may only get one chance to apply for that dream job, so make sure it counts. Sloppy application forms don't set a good first impression. You can maximise your chances of success by writing out what you want to say in a Word Processor, and getting someone to proof read what you have written, giving you a second opinion before you fill out the application form.

Their genuine interview question

What would you describe as your biggest weakness, and how are you trying to improve in that area?

Their advice

Be honest and don't say what you think the interviewer wants to hear. Everybody has weaknesses, and the interviewer is trying to determine whether you have a good appreciation not only for what your strengths are, but also where you have room for improvement. By being honest about those areas that you think you could improve upon, and telling the interviewer how you are working to improve in those areas, you will gain a lot more credit than by making something up.

Things go wrong in the business world which can create challenging situations. It is OK to make a mistake, but it is important that when something does go wrong, people are honest so that mistakes aren't repeated. Honesty is a much valued asset in the business world, and this question gives you an opportunity to demonstrate that you can be trusted and relied upon.

ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Make sure relevant academic references are included within the application.

ACCA – ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERED CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANTS

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Attention to detail - give yourself plenty of thinking time to digest exactly what it is a Graduate Recruiter is asking you to answer, or reveal. Unfortunately, there are no generic approaches you can rely on when filling out an application form even if you think you are applying for similar roles! Every company and organisation is different in their ethos, their values and their working culture and they certainly like to be different from their competitors. You need to stand out, and you need to make a connection with your own personality and the expectations of the company you are applying to. So it is essential that you can express evidence of the experiences you have had from appropriate contexts in clubs, societies, voluntary work, work placements, etc, which offer an insight into the employable skills like teamwork, communication, problem solving and commercial awareness.

An interview question you could ask:

Taking into account the job description, the requirements and the benefits on offer to me - what will you expect from me?

Their advice:

It can often be quite easy for a Graduate to overlook how 'they' will actually fit into the organisation they want to work for. It is important that you take into account what is being offered to you in a Graduate Scheme, but in return, so you feel comfortable with this, you should also be able to demonstrate to an employer why you actually want to work for their organisation, what interests you have in their values and how you think you will fit into their working culture.

An interview is definitely a two-way process, and most of the time an employer will want to know how you feel about working for them. If you're unsure about this, or want to dive into something deeper you may only really get one chance to ask! This question may seem like its proposing a form of rhetoric, but it is very likely that the person interviewing you isn't going to be this simple-minded so you can at least use it as an opportunity to make a connection with them and their expectations.

ACCENTURE

Their top tip for completing an application form:

To give an application form the time, effort and consideration it deserves. Some students think it's a formality but it's used to significantly filter down applications allowing only the most driven for the role being invited to interview.

Their genuine interview question:

Who do you think are our key

competitors? **Their advice:**

We're looking for someone who demonstrates knowledge of the industry, listing multiple competitors and discussing how we compete with them. We're also interested in hearing what candidates think differentiates us from our competitors and what our USP is.

AEM Futures

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Two main areas are time and honesty. There is no point in rushing applications and leaving a lot of grammatical errors. Give yourself the time to gradually complete the application; in this way you can improve the structure of your answers which in turn will improve your application. Secondly NEVER lie on an application. Why portray yourself as something you are not? Many students that have applied to us have not filled in the correct information, have lied in order to make themselves look better, and made many grammatical errors - all of these will give an organisation more reason to dismiss your application straight away.

Their genuine interview question:

Can you describe to me a time when you worked in a team and what role you played?

Their advice:

When answering this question it is very important to consider a real

example of a team you have worked in. I would also expect the answer to include the role and responsibility that you had in the team, which shows that you are capable of working alongside others, as well as being able to lead and enthuse others to work. Your answer should show that you are a team player and not a dictator.

THE ARMY

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Only include truthful information in your application form. Integrity is a vital part of any application process whether applying for a job or career. The Army expects its potential officers to be open, honest and truthful in all they do. For a candidate to get it wrong at the first hurdle will have a very negative impact on later selection.

Their genuine interview question:

What leadership experience have you had?

Their advice:

Many candidates have not thought through an answer to this question prior to coming to interview, despite having some good examples in their CV. I would expect a good answer to include an understanding of what leadership is and to be supported by 1 or 2 good examples in which leadership has been exercised, either as part of a team, or in a position of responsibility.

Good leadership is often best seen in adverse circumstances so don't forget to include these examples.

ASDA

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Check, check, and check again! With applications that require a lot of content it's so easy to forget the basics. Always use spell-check and still proof read it all again before sending the application through. Also double-check your contact details as they are crucial!

Their genuine interview question:

A question will come up around how ASDA does something and what the candidate's opinions and suggestions are on it. This will be relevant in some way to the role.

Their advice:

In all scenarios what we are looking for is evidence that the candidate knows the company and has done their research. Awareness of how the role they have applied for will affect our core business, our stores, will also be demonstrated.

BJSS Ltd

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Solid English, no chronological gaps and include grades. Your CV should demonstrate your desire to work in a software engineering environment – show what you have done outside of University.

Their genuine interview question:

When you are developing a piece of software, how do you know when you have 'finished'?

Their advice:

In a strong candidate, I'd be looking for an answer that covered key points like:

- All the requirements have been satisfied
 - The software has been thoroughly tested for positive **and** negative test cases
 - The code is well commented
 - Their code compiles cleanly with no errors or warnings
 - Any necessary documentation has been written or updated
-

BORGWARNER

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Ensure that all of the information requested is fully completed, that handwriting is legible and that spelling and grammar are correct. It's very important to make a good first impression.

Their genuine interview question:

Can you provide an example of one of your key work achievements to date?

Their advice:

We would be looking for how the individual organized their work; who they involved; their organisational, time management and interpersonal skills; any technical aspects; the outcome; and the learning they achieved from the experience. Good communication and motivation should also be evident in how the answer is portrayed.

BW PENMAN

Their top tip for completing an application forms:

Attention to detail in spelling and grammar, it is not possible to get the job at the application form stage but you can be ruled out very quickly!

Their genuine interview question:

Why do you want to work for us?

Their advice:

Research the company through the internet, through current employee's, through customers. Order brochures where possible, research their competitors and from your findings show them and tell them how excited you are to work for them because of everything your research has produced and above all let them see that you are passionate about working for them. If you do all of the above you are guaranteed to stand out.

CHASE SEARCH AND SELECTION Ltd

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Be accurate and spell check – do not use text-speak! Make sure that the overall impression is professional – the more care you take to complete the form, the more strongly you will come across as a serious applicant.

Their genuine interview question:

What do you think you can bring to this role / job / team and why have you applied for this role?

Their advice:

I am looking for someone who has the confidence to sell themselves based on their experience to date. As graduates are just starting out on their career journey, their skills will be transferable.

Hopefully the applicant will have a good idea of some of the skills needed for the role they are applying for and show they have the potential to develop within the organisation. It is also a real bonus if the applicant has researched the role they are applying for to get a realistic idea of what the job involves.

I am also looking for someone who is genuinely committed to the job and organisation – rather than seeing it as a stop-filler for something else. Again, thorough research is paramount – be enthusiastic!

CHILDLINE – YORKSHIRE AND NORTH EAST

Their top tip for completing an application form:

One top tip ChildLine would give to its applicants is to be clear about what you were doing and when you were doing it in your personal history section, avoiding repetition and overlap.

For example, if you were travelling for a period of time, be specific about where you were and for how long.

Their interview advice:

We're not looking for experience or qualifications; we're looking for people who can be honest about how they feel and behave, are committed to supporting children and young people, and who have a willingness to learn new skills.

CIMA – CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANTS

Their top tip for completing an application form:

A very obvious one, but highly important, is spelling and grammar. One mistake is acceptable – after all, we are all human. But when there are two mistakes, it becomes a bit of a worry. Three mistakes and your job application will automatically be filed in the ‘not suitable’ pile. The reason for this is that you have not taken the time and trouble to make sure there are no errors on your application form and this would lead to me question your commitment and even your ability to perform the job you are applying for.

Their genuine interview question:

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Their advice:

Prepare this in advance by identifying three or four key strengths. Adjust these to fit with what you perceive the interviewer is looking for and back them up with practical examples. Explain how your strengths have benefited previous employers. Where possible you should disguise your weaknesses as strengths. For example, if you say that you’re not feeling challenged, ensure you demonstrate a proactive approach to keeping yourself motivated.

THE COLLEGE OF LAW

Their top tip for completing an application form:

This may sound trite and obvious but ANSWER THE QUESTION! Too many students look at a question, e.g. about commercial awareness, and effectively use the entire word count to write all they know about the subject rather than specifically answering the question posed.

If the firm/company ask about an occasion when the applicant has demonstrated commercial skills, describe an occasion when you did just that and keep it concise. Flowery, ornate language is waffle and it comes across as such!

Their genuine interview question:

*Why are you applying to **this** particular firm/company/organisation?*

Their advice:

Here the interviewer is seeking not only to establish how articulate you are, but also how well you have researched the firm. Know about their areas of expertise, their specific USP's, and the particular appeal that they consequently have for you. You need to be able to tie in your particular strengths, such as good team working ability or brilliant communication skills, and link them to the firm's own outstanding strengths, showing that together you will be a winning combination.

It really boils down to doing your research prior to the interview - make sure you know not just the particular firm but the market in general, what their rivals are doing, and any recent developments that they have undergone.

THE CO-OPERATIVE GROUP

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Make sure that you complete all sections of the form, especially those sections which are free text, as this is where you are given the chance to stand out from the crowd.

Also have someone else, whether it be a friend, parent or your careers service, proof-read your application form. This should help to minimize spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.

For the behavioural sections make sure you structure your answer well. We recommend using the STAR technique – splitting your answer in to 4 sections: Situation, Task, Action, and Result - this ensures you will be providing the right level of detail.

Their genuine interview question:

Give me an example of a time when you have won others over to your plan or point of view?

Their advice:

Your answer should show the following:

- Ability to create a logical or factual argument

- Ability to think about the best strategy for influencing different individuals – e.g. are they motivated by time-saving, therefore is their argument or reasoning focused on this
 - Ability to adapt influencing approach if their original method isn't being successful
-

CPA AUSTRALIA

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Read the job application carefully!

Your answers should reflect the sentence structure (jargon or technical terms) around the competencies of the job description, advert and/or candidate brief. For example, if the advert talks about relationship and leadership skills, then you would respond using this terminology, rather than stakeholder and supervisory skills. Finally, remember that where the application is concerned less is more; you want to do enough to get an interview. The interview stage is then when you will sell yourself, by demonstrating not just your technical ability, but emotional and social intelligence, which are equally as important as your intellect.

Resources to help:

To get an understanding of the four core competencies that employers are looking for and the knowledge to develop those skills, please check out the CPA Australia Career Guidance system on our website, it is a free resource available to graduates: www.cpaaustralia.com.au/cgs

For information on how to write a killer CV, check out our You Tube account: <http://www.youtube.com/cpaaustralia>

Best book to read, to increase emotional intelligence and personal awareness - Stephen Covey - the 7 habits of highly effective people.

An interview question you could ask:

In this role, how do you see me adding value to your organisation and how do you see the organisation adding value to me?

Their advice:

This is a fantastic question, as it will give you some instant feedback on how your interview is going so far, and how successful you have or have not been in ticking all the employer's boxes. It will also give you feedback

for improvement, but above all, it will highlight for you where the employer thinks you are lacking and then you have the opportunity to respond accordingly.

As the interview is a two way street, you need to be comfortable that you will be joining the organisation that will be right for you.

DELOITTE

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Before you start the application – Research!

Before you get near to making an application, ask yourself honestly if you really want to work for Deloitte and, if the answer is “yes”, ask yourself why.

Read our website as thoroughly as possible. A good knowledge of Deloitte will be a help to you should you make it as far as the interview stages and it will give you the information you need to choose a Service Line - Audit, Tax, Consulting or Corporate Finance.

The decision not to take applications further can be down to a number of reasons. Remember, our criteria are not just based on academic qualifications - the responsibilities and developmental experiences you've had whilst at university, alongside your own career motivation, are also important to us.

Their genuine interview question:

Talk me through a time when you have had to make a presentation to an individual or a group.

Their advice:

You'll be expected to provide an example, and then be probed for further information in respect of the example you've provided to the interviewer. You may be asked to explain:

- What the presentation involved
 - What was the purpose of the presentation
 - Who or what you were trying to influence or inform
 - How you structured your presentation
 - What feedback you got
-

EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY

Their top tip for completing an application form:

When filling out your personal statement for a PGCE or Masters programme get as many people as possible to read it before submitting your application as they may come up with something you hadn't thought of. Also, type up your answers into a Microsoft Word document ,and ALWAYS spell-check before copying and pasting into the form. Bad spelling and grammar can be a reflection of a lack of care and attention.

Their genuine interview question: *Why do you want to be a Teacher?*

Their advice:

This seems like such a simple question, but this can throw so many people at interview.

You have spent so long preparing for your interview and thinking of examples of your work you may have not thought of the fundamental question. Have a 3 line sentence prepared for this so you can answer the question immediately with no hesitation.

EMIS (EGTON MEDICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS)

Their top tip for completing an application form:

It is amazing how many people miss sections out or do not provide full information. For example our application form, under “previous employment”, asks for “job title” and “description of duties”, many applicants provide the title but no explanation of the role and duties undertaken.

I think that it is important for applicants to explain how they are suited to the role they are applying for (again this is a section on our form which often lacks detail). Where possible I recommend going through the job description / specification point by point and addressing each requirement and how as an applicant you fit each one. This will take time but demonstrates initiative and enthusiasm which will make your application stand out from the 200 or so others received.

Their genuine interview question:

What do you know of the company/role?

Their advice:

Applicants are never going to know more about the company / role than the interviewers and whilst it is ok to have questions to ask, you should be prepared and have done your research if you wish to look at all interested, and not like you have applied on a whim with no real awareness of what you are applying for.

ENTERPRISE RENT-A-CAR

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Read the application form and complete it in full. A lot of candidates give insufficient detail especially when matching their achievements and experiences to the core competencies for which the company is looking. Remember to use the STAR (Situation, Task, Action and Result) technique to fully answer any behaviour interview questions which the company asks on their application form.

Their genuine interview question:

Describe one of the most difficult communication situations you have encountered to date. How did you prepare? What did you learn from it?

Their advice:

Remember to use the STAR technique to keep focused on your answer and answer the question in full. Don't be afraid to use dates, times, names, places and to be specific. Most candidates can tell me about a situation but struggle to explain what they actually did and how exactly they overcame the challenge. Very few manage to tell me what the result of their actions was to them, their clients/customers/colleagues and the business.

EUROPEAN TRAINING SERVICES

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Our application consists of three parts – the form, your CV and a covering

letter. Most importantly, please make sure that your application is honest, personal and relevant. Take your time to think of reasons why you would make a good candidate and which transferable skills or qualities you have, giving detailed examples of these. Try to avoid the third person, as this is rather impersonal and we would prefer to hear directly from you. Language skills are very important so check our website in advance to see which level is needed for each destination. Please provide us with a personal email address other than your university one so that we can still reach you even after your studies.

Their genuine interview question:

Why would you like to participate in the Leonardo programme?

Their advice:

Although this is a work placement programme, the experience as a whole offers many other challenges. For this reason, your motivation to both work and live abroad in another country for 3 months is our main criteria. If you are passionate about a country, its language and culture, make that very clear to us. Think carefully in advance about your reasons for applying, what you would like to gain from the experience and how it fits in with your future plans.

EXPLORE LEARNING

Their top tip for completing an application form:

The best advice that we can give is to spend time on your application form. Don't rush it as this is the only chance you'll get to impress your potential new company. If you've rushed your application form it will be obvious and immediately gives the impression that this may be one of many jobs you're applying for and does not reflect well on your potential standard of work. Above all employers will want to see that you are taking your application seriously, that this is *the* job for you and that you are willing to put the effort in to get it. Employers will have taken great care designing their application forms in order to help candidates to put their best foot forward. For example, our application form will ask you for experience within four main areas that are vital within the role we recruit for, customer service, face to face marketing/promotion, leadership and experience of working with children. The questions are structured so that they focus on direct experience but

also what skills you think would be important. This means that if you find that you have less experience in a certain area, you can focus more on the skills that you think would be important.

Sometimes recognizing these skills can be just as important as having the experience.

Their genuine interview question:

What motivates you about working in a team and how do you like to be led?

Their advice:

We ask this question as it is quite open and hopefully allows the candidate to answer fully and honestly.

We are really trying to get a sense of whether the candidate will fit into one of our teams and how they will help to drive performance within a team. It allows us in part to assess how they would take constructive advice and direction, and therefore whether they have managerial insight and the ability to be trained easily as well as being someone that will relish responsibility and the opportunity to progress through the company.

A good candidate will recognize the importance of team work and should highlight the importance of having common goals and vision when working in a team towards the same targets.

When asked to reflect on how they like to be led we would hope that the candidate will focus on the positive ways that they have been managed in the past rather than reflect on any negative experiences they may have had, this helps us to see how they will fit into our existing teams and provides an insight into how they would want to be perceived as a manager as well.

FDM GROUP

Their top tip for completing an application form:

The biggest advice I could give a student regarding completing an application form is tailoring the answers they provide. There are no generic answers or rules to filling out an application form even for similar roles.

Every company will be looking for slightly different things as companies differ in their approach, values and beliefs. Therefore the student needs to look at the job specification and tailor their answers to what the role entails and what the company is looking for in the right candidate. You will need to use relevant examples to demonstrate the skills the employer is seeking as this is the first filtering process.

Their genuine interview question:

What do you know about FDM Group?

Their advice:

We would expect candidates to talk confidently about the research they have conducted into our company and the role they had applied for. They must demonstrate they have read our website and other sources of information and must convey they have digested the information and are not just repeating back our company history. The candidate must express a passion for the role and the company and demonstrate why they think this role is suitable for them. Excellent candidates will also have looked into our competitors and will be able to highlight our unique selling point.

GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**Their top tip for completing an application form:**

Do exactly what you are asked. This could relate to content, word count, providing contact details for referees, or a cover letter (either the unrequested addition, or lack of) to name just a few.

Failure to give the organisation what they ask for will mean an instant rejection at worst, or a delay to your application (if you're contacted for the missing details) at best.

Their genuine interview question:

Why do you want to study at Goldsmiths?

Their advice:

We're looking to see that the applicant has done their research and know exactly what they're talking about. It is also a good opportunity for us to see if a candidate is genuinely interested in what we have to offer.

GRADUATE RECRUITMENT BUREAU

Their top tip for completing an application form:

You might want to take a look through our tip of the week blog which posts the tip that we write and email out to our users every Monday:

<http://weeklygraduateadvice.blogspot.com/>

Their genuine interview question:

Why should we hire you over all the other graduates with your degree?

Their advice:

Questions like that are great to test how candidates can sell themselves and how they measure success/achievement. To answer this, candidates should have already thought prior to the interview what their key strengths are (relevant to the role) and how they meet competencies set out by the company in their job brief. They should think of examples, working or otherwise, where they meet these competencies.

GRADUATE-JOBS.COM

Their top tips for applications:

Always provide a custom written (from scratch) covering letter for each job application.

A genuine interview question:

You have told us your strengths but what do you feel are your weaknesses?

Their advice:

Take a weakness and turn it into a positive, e.g. "I have no/little office experience, however I am a very quick and keen learner who can fit into new situations very quickly and efficiently so I do not see this to be too much of a problem."

GRADUATES YORKSHIRE

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Applicants often don't use the person specification/job description to their advantage and full potential. The person specification and job description outline what the role entails, as well as the experience and skills required. We recommend that candidates go through each point on the personnel specification and job description and evidence in their application how they meet each one.

Their genuine interview question:

What preparation have you done for today's interview?

Their advice:

We're looking for more than just looking on the website which anybody can do. We want candidates to research the sector, the industry, our competitors as well as practicing competency-based interview questions. They really need to go the extra mile in order to distinguish themselves from other candidates.

HSBC

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Focus on grammar and spelling. You would be surprised at the number of mistakes made at this crucial stage of the application process. Before any application is submitted ensure the wording has been run through a computer spell-check and ensure that you have written the correct firm's name within the application form. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to ruin a well-constructed application form if people confuse company names!

Their genuine interview question:

What attracted you about this graduate programme?

Their advice:

This is a question often asked at our organisation. We are looking for a genuine interest in the business area, enthusiasm and flexibility, as well as a passion to succeed. We are not expecting 'the finished product' but someone with potential who will provide innovative ways of looking at potential challenges.

IBM UK Ltd

Their top tip for completing an application form:

- **Spelling Errors** - get someone to proof read your application where possible
- **Eligibility** - check that you are eligible for the graduate scheme before applying (IBM look for a 2.1 and a valid work visa)
- **Quality of application** - if submitting multiple applications be careful when copying and pasting e.g. "I want to work for Microsoft..." when applying to IBM.

Their genuine interview question:

What is it about this organisation that made you decide to apply for the position?

Their advice:

What we are looking for here is evidence that the candidate has completed their research and is clear on the reason *why* they want to work for our company.

INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES (ICAEW)

Their top tip for completing an application form:

If you have not had relevant work experience to the role you are applying for remember to include any work experience you have gained on your CV and in your applications. Nowadays employers are looking for more than just academics, so although you may not think working as a treasurer for your university sports team, teaching English abroad or working in a local pub or shop is not relevant, think again. Spend time thinking about any transferable skills you have developed such as leadership, time management, dealing with difficult people, and how these skill sets could benefit your future employer. Accountancy firms are looking for skills such as commercial awareness which you may well have developed, often without realizing it, through part time or casual employment. Students often

do not include this in their CV's so employers just see a list of grades on a CV and wonder how a potential employee will be able to balance work and study for their three year training contract. Referring to past roles can also help students to answer interview questions.

Their genuine interview question:

Describe a company you think is doing well or badly and explain why.

Their advice:

There is no right or wrong answer for this question but it really is about commercial awareness, an area that many graduates fall down on. Before the interview think about two companies and do a mini SWOT analysis thinking of three strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for each company. This will help you answer the question. Think about a big global company and then a smaller company you may have had worked for part time. If going for an accountancy interview it could be worth looking at the share price of your company (if applicable) and also the public perception of the company as the employer may go on to ask you what do you think they could do differently and what changes you would make if you were in charge.

ITW

Their top tip for completing an application form:

When completing application forms ensure your contact details are appropriate. The email address you set up years ago to keep in touch with your friends may not be appropriate to give to potential employers. Look at your email address with a fresh pair of eyes and think about whether it generates an impression about you that you would rather not be judged on by a prospective employer. A new generic email address based around your name might be worth creating if you're currently a naughtylittleminx@somehost.com or partyman@somehost.co.uk (these are actually quite tame examples from some I've seen!). Along a similar line if you put your mobile number down on your C.V. remember calls coming in may be from prospective employers and not just your friends. Always answer in a clear and polite manner and not like you've just woken up (even if you have) and when the caller identifies themselves the worst thing you can do is say 'who'? If our company is one you genuinely want to

work for we assume you are waiting for our call with bated breath so it's a little disappointing to realize you can't remember who we are in amongst all those other applications. It may mean we have a last minute change of heart about inviting you to that interview.

Their genuine interview question:

What are your expectations for this role?

Their advice:

In your answer we would be looking for you to demonstrate you have thought about how this particular role will provide you with the opportunity to learn and develop in the direction you want your career to take. It's your opportunity to show us that our role is one that fits into your career plan, that you can see the benefits of working for our organisation and that this specific role is one you really want as it will provide you with an opportunity to gain valuable experience. The biggest mistake people make when answering this question is to forget about development and focus on their salary and benefit expectations. This question is definitely not meant to be an opener to talk about money!

JAGUAR LAND ROVER

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Ensure you spend time thinking about answers for any competency questions you are asked. Ensure the answer is specific for that particular question and you go into an appropriate level of detail. You should also consider running your answers passed your careers centre to ensure you are on the right track.

Their genuine interview question:

Describe a time when you have been part of a new team and had to encourage the group to work towards a shared goal

Their advice:

You should consider how you integrated with the team, How you ensured that everyone in the team contributed, What the benefits of working collectively were. When answering competency questions you should ensure you answer reflects your personal role. Consider using the STAR

model - Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

MAJESTIC WINE

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Check spelling and grammar.

Their genuine interview question:

“Explain what differentiates Majestic from other retailers”

Their Advice:

Be able to explain what differentiates Majestic from other wine retailers. Also, be yourself, show you are interested and smile.

MATCHTECH GROUP Plc

Their top tip for completing an application form:

For online application forms - always use Microsoft Word to make a copy before submitting. This way you can spell check and make sure that word counts are accurate.

Make sure that you read all instructions carefully, for example, when asked to use block capitals or black pen. Employers use application forms to compare students/graduates on a "like for like" basis so these little details are important.

Their genuine interview question:

Give me a scenario where you have worked as part of a team to achieve a common goal. What would you do differently next time if faced with a similar situation?

Their advice:

Competency based questions are used to try and get the interviewee to think about a situation and how they can demonstrate that particular competency; these are often based around soft skills that students/graduates may have developed. Often, employers will be looking for reflection and review from previous performance also.

MICHAEL PAGE INTERNATIONAL

Their top tip for completing an application form:

At Michael Page International our application form is designed to give us, the employer, a true picture of you. It helps us to identify if you have the attributes that will make you a successful recruitment consultant. We're not looking for the 'right' answer – we want you to give a true reflection of who you are and what you think. We would always give the same advice to anyone filling in our application form – be honest with your answers and focus on letting your personality shine through. We read many application forms every day, so one that gives us a feel for the person behind the words has a much stronger chance of success at this stage.

Their genuine interview question:

What other companies have you applied to?

Their advice:

Applicants often misunderstand why we are asking this question. You are not giving away any personal information that we can use against you. We are simply trying to gauge if you have a genuine interest in the recruitment industry and an understanding of what this career entails. Finding out more about your job search strategy and rationale helps us to do this. We want to see you taking an interest in our competitors - we're not trying to trip you up by admitting you are applying elsewhere. We understand that you cannot afford to 'put all your eggs in one basket' and actually prefer you to have taken a wider view of what the market has to offer you so you can make educated career decisions from there.

MILKROUND.COM

Their top tip for completing an application form:

It sounds obvious, but ensure all spelling and grammar is correct. Make sure you use relevant examples to back-up your answers, this gives the employer a vision of how you will work for them and is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your capabilities.

If you are applying for different job roles with a variety of companies then

do not be tempted to just reel off the same answers. They are different for a reason, so take time to think carefully about what qualities and experience the employer is expecting you to bring to the role and then promote yourself the best way you can.

Their genuine interview question

What made you apply for this job role?

Their advice:

Employers need to know you are enthusiastic and have a genuine passion for the role and working for the company. Demonstrating strong background knowledge of the company will support this. Recent graduates may not have all the experience required for specific roles, however don't let this stop you from applying; assure the employer that you're keen to learn and will take the necessary steps to do so to get you closer to that dream job.

MOUNTBATTEN INSTITUTE

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Attention to detail! Ensure your CV and covering letter are free of spelling and grammatical errors and that they are adequately formatted. Applications that are hard to read or riddled with mistakes are unlikely to get very far.

Their genuine interview question:

How do you juggle multiple deadlines?

Their advice:

A good answer would include an appreciation of the challenge involved in handling multiple deadlines, an example of a time the candidate has experienced this in the past and a technique for dealing with them, e.g. making lists, using Outlook calendar.

NEXT

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Ensure that you have fully researched both the company and our competitors, as well as the role you are applying for. Also take your time when filling in the application, and make sure you double-check it, and are happy with it, before you press that submit button.

Their genuine interview question:

Why do you want to work for Next?

Their advice:

To answer this question we are looking for the candidate to really demonstrate their enthusiasm and desire to work for Next. They will need to show that they have fully researched the company and understand Next's present and future aspirations. If they can draw from any experiences working either within Next or a retail environment this would also be beneficial.

PwC (PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS)

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Remember: first impressions count. The application form is a major opportunity to sell yourself. Before you complete the form, gather the things you'll need:

- Full and accurate details of your university courses and exam results
- Secondary education exam results
- Details of any work experience and employment you've had
- Your preferences for where in the country you'd like to work

Then, while you're completing the form, remember the following:

- Read and follow instructions carefully
- Proof read everything you write
- Check your grammar and spelling
- Be concise - you can elaborate at interview
- Don't repeat statements you've read in our brochures and website

- Don't be vague or lie about your achievements - we'll check your academics at a later stage in the process anyway

Their advice:

Do your research:

We will expect you to be able to talk coherently and confidently about PwC, the position you're applying for, the business world in general and yourself. The more you know about these things, the more prepared you'll be - so you'll have to get researching.

Think about investigating the following sources of information:

- Our brochures and website (careers and corporate)
- The financial media (press, television, internet)
- Relevant professional bodies (especially if they offer a qualification you're interested in pursuing)
- Anyone you know who works for PwC (or a similar firm)

Don't just give them a quick glance the day before your interview. Examine them, understand the issues and keep yourself up to date!

Improve your business awareness:

Your interest and awareness of business will be assessed during the selection process and isn't something that can be developed the night before an interview! We want to see candidates who can talk about a business issue that interests them, and who can have a sensible discussion about the topic in an interview.

Online, number logical or verbal reasoning:

These online tests help to determine your numerical, logical or verbal reasoning ability. Don't worry; they're nothing to be afraid of.

- You can practise taking these test before you sit the real thing; make sure you get plenty of practise in
- The test will be timed and you should work as quickly and accurately through the questions you are presented with
- Ensure you read each question carefully and that you understand what's required before committing yourself to an answer, especially where multiple choice answers appear similar

PROSPECTS

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Whether you're just beginning your job hunt, or are already making applications, make sure you visit Prospects.ac.uk. As the UK's official provider of graduate careers information and advice, you'll find a range of tips and tools to help you with every aspect of your career planning including: job-hunting tips; options with your subject; Prospects Planner ('what jobs would suit me?'); advice on applications, CVs, covering letters, interviews and assessment centres.

Their advice:

Our careers advice is provided by careers professionals from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services – the people behind your careers service – so you can rest assured that the content on our website is accurate, helpful and bang up to date.

As well as visiting Prospects.ac.uk, if there's one thing we can't stress enough, it would be to go to your university careers service. As well as

providing careers advice, careers advisers can look over your CV (for free!) and help you prepare for that all-important interview. And don't forget, you can go to your careers service for help for up to three years after you graduate.

For more information go to Prospects.ac.uk/careers

RALEIGH INTERNATIONAL

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Think about why your application will stand out over anyone else's. Everyone has a degree and A-levels so think about what have you achieved outside of your academic experiences that make you unique.

Their genuine interview question:

What steps have you taken in the last 3 years to improve your personal development?

Their advice:

We want to hear from people who have shown initiative and have taken steps to improve their potential. This can be anything from taking courses to develop their skills at work or pushing themselves in a particular hobby or interest. It is about showing us that you are looking to seek new opportunities and put yourself outside your comfort zone.

RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

Their top tip for completing an application form:

If you've only written a line or two for each answer, we'll assume that you didn't put much effort into your application, and you will not make it to the next stage of the selection process. Express clearly why you want to take part in International Citizen Service. Tell us about yourself and how taking part would impact on you. Do plenty of research into Restless Development and what we are all about. Again, if you don't illustrate that you know about our organisation, then we'll assume that you have not taken this opportunity seriously.

Their genuine interview question:

What kind of thing do you think you could do to raise awareness of development issues on your return to the UK?

Their advice:

Be creative! We're looking for people who are enthusiastic about coming back from their International Citizen Service programme and telling their friends, family, local community and beyond about the development issues that they have seen and experienced. Your ideas need to be realistic, but must be engaging and have real impact.

SAGAR WRIGHT

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Use the job and person specification provided by the employer to full advantage. Make sure that the information included in the application form mirrors both the essential and desirable requirements for the job. This will

prove that the applicant can fulfill the requirements of the role, and should maximise the chances of securing an interview.

Their genuine interview question:

How would your friends describe you?

Their advice:

Most people answer this too honestly – i.e. they say what their friends would *actually* say about them. “Ditsy”, “likes to have a laugh” and “grumpy” are all responses we’ve heard to this question! Essentially, this question is an opportunity to sell yourself – i.e. to describe yourself in the best possible light, tailored to the specific job applied for. Think about what the interviewer wants to hear - would they prefer to hear “*my friends would say I’m extremely hard working, tenacious and driven to succeed*” or “*nice, friendly, a bit ditsy and always up for some fun*”?!

SRG – SCIENCE RECRUITMENT GROUP

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Get to the point of the questions – applicants often spend too much time waffling and not actually answering the question.

Their advice

Make sure you have researched the company, not just turned up and make sure you have thought about what skills you have and how they match the employer’s needs.

STANDARD CHARTERED

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Attention to detail – make sure you spell the company name correctly! Ensure you answer the question being asked and don’t just plagiarise from the web. Know about the kind of work we do and deals we’ve been involved in. Show us why you want a career in banking and with us specifically.

Their genuine interview question:

Can you give me an example where you have worked on a complex project or piece of work? Who was involved? What was the outcome?

Their advice:

Give us an example that shows you have taken the lead and how you planned it. You should also include how you worked with others on the project and managed your time (indicating team skills and time management). Always show examples of how you have worked to tight deadlines and coped under pressure (e.g. if something was given to you at the last minute). Always remember to answer the question that is being asked, if you have to digress, ensure you return to the question being asked of you.

STHREE**Their top tip for completing an application form:**

Prepare thoroughly, support answers with good solid examples and demonstrate employable skills such as teamwork, communication and any achievements. Have good attention to detail, accurate spelling with an overall professional impression.

Their genuine interview question:

What do you want to achieve out of a career?

Their advice:

We expect candidates to have a good understanding of the role, why it interests them and their expectations on what our organisation can offer them. We are looking for candidates that have the confidence to sell themselves and show they have the potential to develop within the organisation. Candidates should understand the positives and negatives of our working culture/environment and why they want to work for our organisation.

TARGETjobs.co.uk

Their top tip for completing an application form:

What's Plain English and why should I use it in my applications?

According to the Plain English Campaign, 'Plain English is presenting information so that in a single reading, the intended audience can read, understand and act upon it'. Yours is not the only application in the pile and recruiters just don't have time to spend trying to work out what you have to tell them.

Does 'I am contacting you with regards to the position advertised by yourselves' sound like the way you usually talk? How about 'I am writing about the job you advertised'?

Save time and space

Plain English helps you to use this space effectively. Get rid of long clauses ('having worked in...'), repetition, and any other waffle. Adjectives and adverbs – words that describe nouns or verbs – aren't normally necessary in a job application. Buzzwords and clichés are so over-used that you lose nothing by cutting them. Replace 'Involved with the implementation of projects' with 'Implemented projects' and you cut your word count instantly. It sounds better, too.

Verbs are your friends

When you're writing about your work experience, verbs – words that say what you have done – are the most important ones. Put the verb near the beginning of the sentence. And make sure your verbs have punch: the easiest shortcut to plain English is to use 'active' verbs. 'Our team launched a new product' (active) is snappier than 'a new product was launched by our team' (passive).

Avoid these:

- beneficial
- consequently
- required
- prior to
- in addition
- established
- implemented
- in connection with

- facilitated
- please find attached/enclosed

Use these:

- useful
 - so
 - needed
 - before
 - also
 - set up
 - carried out
 - about
 - helped
 - I attach/enclose
-

TEACH FIRST

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Get in touch with the graduate recruiters. They are happy to help you dissect what is needed in the application and can give you some tips and hints!

Their genuine interview question:

Give an example of when you've lead a team?

Their advice:

In that answer we are looking for an explanation of the situation, actions taken, how they interacted with people and the achievement.

TOWERS WATSON

Their top tip for completing an application form:

Ensure you take the time to think about and complete the answers to the questions on the application form thoroughly. Check your spelling, grammar and punctuation before you submit your application. Some candidates rely

on their CV rather than answers to the application questions and ignore the fact that these questions are an important part of the selection process.

Their genuine interview question

Tell me about a time when you have worked in a team to achieve something?

Their advice:

We want a candidate to answer a question using an example of a real situation that they have been in. They should avoid answering the question hypothetically by saying "If I was in the situation I would do this..." They need to demonstrate how they have effectively achieved an outcome by working collaboratively. This can either be in a work situation, or in an academic environment.

Employability skills

Based on the Association of Graduate Recruiters' annual survey, these skills are the ones most frequently sought after by recruiters:

Communication

The ability to get your message across and convey your ideas and thoughts effectively, either verbally or in writing, is a key skill recruiters look for.

Teamworking

Working collaboratively with others from a wide range of backgrounds is a key requirement in most occupations. Use your experiences to show a recruiter that you are a good team-player.

Initiative and Problem Solving

Recruiters will look for evidence that shows how you personally react to a problem and how quickly and effectively you find a solution.

Planning and Organising

This includes proving that you can work out how to schedule resources, including your own time, to meet differing objectives. Use your experiences to prove that you can multi-task effectively (do more than one thing at once!).

Leadership

Have you the motivation to lead others to achieve targets? Can you influence others? Do you bring out the best in people by supporting them? Prove that you can take on the challenge of leadership!

Adaptability/Flexibility

Change is a key element in the world of work - Prove to a recruiter that you can quickly adapt to new situations and have the mental flexibility to cope with the challenge of change.

Commercial Awareness

All recruiters look for those who can understand the commercial priorities

and economic factors which affect their business. This knowledge is essential whether you want to work in the public or private sector.

Ongoing Development

The willingness and commitment to carry on learning and developing is crucial. Recruiters look for people who learn quickly and seek out opportunities and new experiences to continually improve themselves.

UNILEVER

Their top tip for completing an application form

We ask some competency based questions. Every part of our recruitment process is linked to our competencies which are:

- Growth Mindset - Taking positive attitude towards Unilever's future by emphasising on innovation and challenging the status quo
- Accountability & Responsibility - Delivering on what you say, setting clear expectations for self and others, guiding and helping others along the way
- Consumer & Customer Focus - Focusing on the needs of the customer and consumers
- Bias for Action - Being decisive and making tough decisions without wasting time on bureaucracy
- Building Talent & Teams - Cultivating team work to ensure collaboration whilst working to increase diversity and help to coach, develop and improve others

When answering any competency based questions look at the competencies and see what experiences you have that display this competency. These could be from your personal life, university, work experience, club, society, travel etc. For example when looking at our consumer and customer focus competency, work out who was the customer in your example situation – if you organized a ball for your society, the customers would be the students who were attending.

Their genuine Interview question:

Why are you interested in working for Unilever and the FMCG industry?

Their advice:

Business motivation and your reasons for applying to a company like

Unilever is something that we are very interested in hearing about. What was your motivation for applying? Why are you interested in working for the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) sector and also why have you applied for your specific business area e.g. finance, supply chain, marketing etc.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Their top tip for completing an application form:

A good postgraduate application will show evidence of research into both the course and the institution providing it. Writing bland, unsupported statements or quoting at length from the prospectus is neither original nor impressive.

Compare the course you are applying for with courses offered by competitor institutions, and consider what it is that makes the Sheffield course appeal to you. Is there a particular specialisation that interests you, modules that are not offered elsewhere, an academic you would like to work with, or links to industry?

Draw attention to specific and relevant achievements that support your application. Evidence of a visit to the institution or that you have spoken with a course tutor (and current students of the course) before applying won't go amiss either. There's a monthly opportunity to visit The University of Sheffield to find out more studying here, information about your course, a chance to talk to course leaders and take a tour of our facilities.

Book online at: www.sheffield.ac.uk/postgraduate.

Their genuine interview question:

Why do you want to study this course at Sheffield?

Your University Careers Service can help ...

Your University Careers Service should be your first stop when looking for careers advice and job-seeking resources. If you want your CV checking, don't know how to complete competency based application forms, worried about what to say at interview contact your Careers Service. They can, and will, help!

You can find information and contact details on all University Careers Services from: www.prospects.ac.uk (click on the Careers Advice tab)

INSIDERS GUIDE

University of Leeds

June 2011
