

When first impressions really count

Advice from ULCS: It sometimes seems that applying for a job is almost as hard work as the job itself. Linda Murdoch offers advice to make the process less painful.

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¹ It has been said that getting a job is a job in itself, and it's no less true for being a cliché. The job hunting, the application filling, the interview; even the thought of it is hard work. But help is at hand – and below are some tips on how to *bag* that dream job.

Forms

² These can seem incredibly tricky if you are new to them. Most are 'competence based', meaning that the job in question has been analysed to establish a list of required competencies you would need to do the job. The questions require you to give examples of how you display these competencies. You cannot answer these questions well by simply claiming that you have the competencies, you have to explain what you did in order to prove that you have them.

³ First, do your homework! Find out what skills and competencies the employer wants for this job and write them down. You'll find this

information in the material sent to you by the employer and probably on their website. Then you can *set about* the task of identifying what you've done that matches these competencies.

⁴ The examples you use from your experience need not be earth-shattering. A 'difficult decision' can be something as simple as working out which course to pursue. An example of teamwork can be how you and your friends organised a holiday or a surprise birthday party. The employer is not really interested in the issue or event itself, but in what you did and what you learned from it.

⁵ Always read the instructions thoroughly before you start. Too many applicants fall at the first hurdle because they have failed this, the most important of tests. Do not be tempted to send more sheets of information than are requested. This can irritate the employer and if they have lots of candidates, can lead to you failing to reach the next *round*.

⁶ Keep a copy of the form so that you can remember what you wrote. It is likely that at least some of your answers will form the basis of the interview should you get one. Spellcheck your application form and let at least one other person read it to make sure it makes sense before you *submit* it.

CVs

⁷ A CV is a short document highlighting your relevance to a particular job. Each CV is different as each job requires different skills, abilities and experience.

⁸ The most important word in the vocabulary of a CV writer is relevance. When deciding what to put in the CV, ask yourself the question, 'is it relevant to what they want in the criteria for the job?' If it isn't either leave it out or make it relevant. For example, working in a bar or a shop may not seem directly relevant to many jobs, but working under pressure and dealing with customers is.

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Article

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‘The most important word in the vocabulary of a CV is relevance’

⁹ Make sure that the most important information is on the first page. A CV should be no more than two pages long and if an employer is reading 50 or 60 CVs, their attention tends to *fade* after the first 30 seconds. Never offer negative information on a CV, and always use action verbs (analysed, managed, presented, initiated, contributed) to describe what you’ve done. Use action adjectives (accurate, determined, hard-working, self-reliant) to describe yourself.

¹⁰ Accompany each CV you send with a covering letter of one page. The purpose of the covering letter is to introduce the best points of the CV for the job in question, NOT a summary of the CV itself. Above all, tell the truth. Never put anything on a CV or application form that you wouldn’t be prepared to defend in an interview.

Interviews

¹¹ Interviews are *nerve-wracking* but an unavoidable rite of passage to getting a job. Prepared for properly, they can be enjoyable and rewarding. First the interviewer will want to satisfy him or herself of the following three points:

¹² Can you do the job? In your preparation for the interview you should be prepared to prove that you fulfil all of the essential and some of the desirable criteria; the qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience specified for the job, often on the person specification. This means preparing a list of examples that you can *rhyme off* in the interview, which prove that you meet the criteria.

¹³ Will you do the job? This is about your motivation to do the job. You may have all of the essential requirements to do the job in question, but whether you will do the job well is down to how much you want to do it and how much you will enjoy it. If you enjoy it then the employer will get value for money.

¹⁴ Will you fit in? Would people enjoy working with you or would you seriously damage morale by being around?

‘Interviews are nerve-wracking but an unavoidable rite of passage’

¹⁵ Before you go into the interview, make sure you can answer questions such as, ‘What is your greatest weakness?’ A good *approach* is to admit a real weakness (which does not affect the job), then describe how you overcome it by using strengths which are relevant. For example, overcoming nervousness at public

speaking by extensive preparation and organisation. Another question you may face is, ‘Why do you want this job?’ This is your not-to-be-missed opportunity to tell them what is special about you and why you are suited to this job. Prepare by listing your unique selling points beforehand, with some good examples to bring them to light.

¹⁶ At interviews, remember to dress appropriately. This will put you at ease and create the right impression with your interviewers, which is crucial for getting an interview off on the right footing. If you are unsure about what is appropriate for this sort of organisation, take a trip to the organisation’s offices during lunch and see what its employees are wearing. Opt for a smart version of this.

¹⁷ Don’t be late for your interview. Whatever excuse you give, it creates the wrong impression. If you are a habitual latecomer, organise your time and transport to arrive an hour earlier. Always take a contact telephone number with you and call ahead if you suspect the slightest delay.

¹⁸ Don’t ask questions about money, holidays or other perks of the job at the interview as it creates the wrong impression, as does asking questions whose answers you should already know from the literature the company has sent you. Be careful, an inappropriate question can destroy a perfectly good interview!

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