

## Example Application Form Answers

This document provides sample answers to some of the questions often found in application forms. These include questions designed to find out about your skills (or competencies), and your motivations for applying. There is also a section at the end of the document about how to complete the 'Additional Information' section that some applications require.

In most cases, the examples firstly provide a weak answer and then a 'better' answer to the same question. There are then some comments which explain the relative strengths and weaknesses of each answer, to help you understand what makes a 'good' answer.

**IMPORTANT:** you should NOT simply copy the style of these answers – after all, they do not relate to your experiences. Instead, use the information to help you follow best practice when completing application forms. You should also use the other resources on writing applications provided on our website [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob/applications](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob/applications)

### Skills questions with example answers

Some questions ask for examples of when you have used particular skills, or 'competencies' that the employer believes to be necessary for the job concerned. The following 'Skills questions' are typical of many questions posed in online and paper-based applications highlight examples of good and bad practice

#### 1. Team working

***Give an example, from outside of your studies, of when you have worked in a team. What was your role and what did you contribute to the team's performance? (200 words)***

Answer A) I am on the Committee of the University Drama Society and last semester we had to organise a Community Event. We met to decide who was going to do what and I was given the task of getting enough money for the event. My Father is a member of the Chamber of commerce and he put me in touch with some of his friends and I managed to generate £200 sponsorship money. As a team we met together regularly to discuss progress. The event was a big success and the rest of the team appreciated me getting together this amount of money. (102 words)

*-This answer is too short, with not enough detail - What is the purpose of the event? How was it judged to be a success? You should always write close to the word limit, but don't include repetitious or irrelevant material just to reach the count, it all has to be meaningful content*

*-It says very little about her role and how it contributed to the team's performance. Does not talk very much about team working*

*-Referring to getting help from her father and saying "I was **given** the task of..." does not make her sound very dynamic*

*-Spelling and grammatical errors*

Answer B) As a committee member of the Drama society I recently worked with the other members to organise a Community Event. Our aim was to run some workshops for local primary school children. The group met initially to plan and allocate tasks. My role was to generate the funds for the event. I established a plan for this task with a time-line of what I had to do and by when. I contacted the local Chamber of Commerce who put me in touch with local companies and I managed to generate £200 sponsorship money which covered our costs and enabled us to

have money to be used for prizes. Our group met weekly to discuss progress and stayed in touch in the interim via Facebook. This ensured that if one team member was having problems completing their tasks on time then others could provide additional support.

The event was a great success with very positive feedback from the pupils and teachers. The team members said that they appreciated me taking on the task of raising funds, as this was something that no one else wanted to do, and that the prizes had significantly contributed to the success of the event.

(199 words)

*-The answer is a good length - close to the word limit*

*-It answers the question and focuses on team working*

*-Uses the STAR structure*

*-Clearly explains **her individual** role and how it contributed to the team*

*-Gives clear details of the outcome*

*-No spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors*

## 2. Time Management

**Describe a situation where you have had to manage your time to achieve your goals. How did you achieve this?**  
(250 words)

Answer A) In my first year I was studying for my degree course in French, which included a major group project, and I had a part-time job at Sainsburys and I was also playing cello in the University Orchestra. I had also joined the University lacrosse team and been told that if we were to be successful we would have to train twice a day and every weekend. I found that all this were a lot of demands on my time and caused me quite a bit of pressure.

I made sure that I always did my academic work first and always got my work in on time. I decided to prioritise lacrosse and gave up my job at Sainsburys and playing in the orchestra. In my final year we won the inter-university lacrosse first team trophy at the national competition and I achieved a 2:1 in my degree. (147 words)

*-This answer is too short - if they say they want 250 words, then this is what you should write but don't include repetitious or irrelevant material just to reach the count, it all has to be meaningful content*

*-It does not talk in much detail about how time was managed*

*-It isn't very positive ("caused me quite a bit of pressure"....."been told that")*

*-Spelling and grammatical errors*

Answer B) In my first year, I joined the University Lacrosse club and was selected for the First Team. We decided that in order to be fully competitive we would need to train twice a day and every weekend. I realised that in order to achieve this goal and not adversely affect my studies I would need to be disciplined and focused. At the beginning of each semester, I scheduled every training session, match, lecture, seminar and essay in my diary. When the morning sessions ended at 9am, I went to lectures or the library. The fact that I had to finish at 5pm in order to return to training meant that I was far more focused. If we were away at weekends I learnt not to waste any time and took my work with me and read whenever I could.

I was very successful in adapting to this schedule. I found that under pressure I studied more effectively, and my work was of a higher quality. In addition I learnt the value of time management and developed the discipline to stick to a routine. I discovered that it was possible to succeed at both my studies and my sport. I sometimes had to say no to other social activities in order to achieve my primary goals but I felt that this was worth doing.

In my final year we won the inter-university first team trophy at the national competition and I achieved a 2:1 in my degree. (246 words)

*-The answer is a good length – close to the word limit*

*-It answers the question and focuses on time management and achieving goals*

*-Uses the STAR structure*

- It is positive and the writer indicates that he/she understands what is meant by time management
- No spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors

### 3. Planning skills

**Describe a challenging project or activity which you have planned and taken through to a conclusion. What was your objective, what did you do and what was the outcome? Include any changes you made to your initial plan (150 words).**

Answer A) As a member of my university's Music Society I helped with a visit to the Albert Hall for some of the Choir. I arranged a bus and hotel for anyone wishing to go. I promoted the event by putting up posters across the campus and e-mailing everyone in the Society. I set a deadline for payment from anyone wishing to go. Based on this I arranged the appropriate transport of a mini-bus and made a cheap price booking. I had to change my plans as more students wanted to go than had said they did at first. I ordered a larger bus and arranged extra space with the hotel. The visit was a success as it went well and everyone enjoyed it, and we made a profit from a raffle (130 words).

- Uses a STAR format and answers all elements of the question.
- Some use of good vocabulary but tends to be a bit simplistic in wording
- Repetitious style, e.g. number of sentences start with 'I...' and repetition of phrase, e.g. '..anyone wishing to go'.
- Lack of specific detail makes it a bit vague and lacking in evidence of the complexity of the task, e.g. a visit for 'some of the choir' could have meant only two or three people originally taking part.

Answer B) As a member of my University's Music Society I helped organise a visit to the Albert Hall for twenty five people. My role was to arrange travel and accommodation for anyone wishing to take part. I promoted the event by using posters across the campus and e-mailing Society members, emphasising the main benefits of the visit. I also set a deadline for payment to create an efficient cash-flow. Based on this I arranged a mini-bus and negotiated a reduced rate booking at a small hotel.

As an additional ten students expressed an interest after the deadline, I decided to change my plans. To cope with this, I ordered a larger bus and secured extra accommodation with the hotel. The visit was a huge success receiving positive feedback and staying within our budget, while generating £25 revenue for the Society from a raffle held on the trip (146 words).

- Uses STAR format; answers all elements of the question.
- Uses positive/action words in places.
- Uses an advanced level of vocabulary and varies the style of writing to make it interesting
- Includes specific information such as figures for revenue generated, and number of students involved.

#### 4. Problem solving

**Describe a difficult problem you have solved. What was the problem? How did you analyse and solve it? What did you learn from the experience? (200 words)**

Answer A) I have recently faced significant problems submitting assignments on time for my course. Although I have always met deadlines in the past, this year I have had major personal demands on my time, including the need to work part-time to fund my studies and, as I am a mature student living at home, having to provide care for my elderly parents. This began to affect my studies, leading to missed academic deadlines for a key assignment.

To solve this, I took the following steps:

- Discussed and agreed an extension for the most pressing assignment with my personal tutor.
- Restructured my hours with my employer to allow time to complete the remaining assignments on time, and work additional hours after my assignment deadlines had passed.
- Liaised with other members of my family to share 'caring' duties and got help from a community centre.

As a result, I passed the relevant module.

In retrospect, I would have planned ahead better, and discussed the situation with the relevant parties sooner. (170 words).

- Describes a relevant situation for the question asked and answers most elements of the question.

- Uses positive/action words in several places, e.g. restructured, liaised, prioritised

- The 'Action' part of the answer is concise with effective use of bullets, but second sentence of the answer is too long and confusing.

- Bit vague about the outcome. Has the problem been solved or merely 'managed'? Will it occur again and affect the applicant's future study or employment?

- Could be more effective in demonstrating that he understands how to anticipate & avoid similar problems in future.

- Fails to use the available word count.

- Use of the term 'significant problems' in the first line may create an unnecessarily negative impression. Avoid volunteering too many weaknesses.

Answer B) I have recently faced problems submitting assignments on time for my course. Although I have always met deadlines in the past, evidenced by my first class marks in the first year, this year I have experienced major personal demands on my time. These include needing to work part-time to fund my studies and having to provide care for my elderly parents. This began to affect my studies, leading to missed deadlines for a key assignment.

I recognised early action was necessary to solve this so I:

- Prioritised the main tasks needing completion.
- Discussed and agreed an extension for the most pressing assignment with my personal tutor.
- Restructured my hours with my employer to allow time to complete the remaining assignments on time, and work additional hours after my assignment deadlines.
- Liaised with other members of my family to share 'caring' duties, and organised help from a community centre.

As a result, I passed the relevant module at 2.1 and have ensured better future care for my parents.

In retrospect, I would have planned ahead better by identifying possible future difficulties. I also know the importance of communicating my position to others and seeking help when necessary. (200 words)

- Describes a relevant situation for the question asked and answers all elements of the question.

- Uses positive/action words e.g. Restructured, liaised, prioritised.

- Uses short sentences with effective use of bullets.
- Clear about the outcome with evidence of success.
- Implies that the problem has been solved and will not occur in the future.

## 5. Interpersonal skills

**Describe a time when you have had to communicate with a range of different people to achieve a particular goal. Outline the task, the people you dealt with, and the outcome. (100 words)**

Answer A) In my work experience at Burke's Property Lettings, I worked in a cross-departmental team carrying out a review of customer service.

To do this I:

- independently scheduled and conducted a series of client interviews
- undertook over 100 contacts via both telephone and face-to-face interviews
- organised the collation and recording of the interviews from our department , writing a section of the final report
- presented my results to senior colleagues.

The outputs were used to develop improved working practices. (82 words)

- Not a bad answer. Describes a relevant example, with concise statements and some business-style, positive vocabulary.
- Evidence of communicating with customers and senior colleagues.
- However, uses fewer words than the word count allows.
- Repetition of the word 'interviews' in the bullets weakens the writing style.
- The answer lacks a clear objective as to the purpose of the review, and the applicant's own role.

Answer B) In my work experience at Burke's Property Lettings, I worked in a cross-departmental team carrying out a review of customer service. The aim was to provide a report to support management decisions about future delivery.

To do this I:

- independently scheduled and conducted a series of client interviews
- undertook over 100 phone and face to face contacts
- organised the collation and recording of the findings from our department, writing a section of the final report
- presented my results to senior colleagues alongside staff from other departments.

The outputs were used to develop improved working practices. (99 words)

- Relevant example, presented in STAR format with clear outline of the Task and its Objective.
- Concise statements and a business-style and positive vocabulary.
- Evidence of communicating with customers and colleagues at different levels.
- Uses the available word count well.

## 6. Leadership

**Describe an occasion when you have had to lead a team of others to achieve a goal. Identify the qualities that enabled you to fulfil the task. (125 words)**

Answer A) In my current job, I am responsible for organising the rota for all part time staff member's in the customer service department. I need to ensure the department is adequately staffed at all times and ensure customer's needs are met.

I achieve this through my ability to:

- Communicate with all colleague's, both face-to-face and by keeping a written staffing rota.
- Help other staff when they have problems or have customers who have questions.
- Knowing how to deal with difficult people. I often have to sort out customers with complaints or colleagues who need help with customers.
- Talk to colleague's to solve specific shop-floor problems.
- Resolve individual staffs' preferences for working hours through discussion and clear agreement, frequently negotiating compromises. (124 words)

- This answer provides some evidence of organisational ability and communication skills, but fails to really convince that this is an example of leadership.

- The phrase 'my current job' fails to specify what kind of employment the applicant is referring to.

- Frequent incorrect use of apostrophe will count against this candidate.

- The style of the final bullet point statement is inconsistent with the style of the others, and does not follow on from the lead statement before the bullets.

- The phrase 'Knowing how to deal with difficult people' does not explain the necessary qualities, and has a negative tone.

- The topics covered by the bullet points overlap so could be seen as repetitious. They also swap between different themes rather than follow a logical progression.

Answer B) In my current job at Sainsbury's, I am responsible for organising the rota for all part time staff in the customer service department. I need to ensure the department is adequately staffed at all times and that colleagues meet customers' needs.

I achieve this through my ability to:

- Communicate with all colleagues, both face-to-face and by keeping a written staffing rota.
- Provide a point of contact when staff members' preferences for working hours need resolving.
- Achieve decisions through discussion and clear agreement, frequently negotiating compromises.
- Ensure all staff members know where to find me when faced with issues regarding staffing or customer issues.
- Advise colleagues faced with shop-floor problems and successfully resolve customer questions and complaints. (121 words).

- The applicant provides evidence of leadership by using terminology which clearly indicates how he or she supports colleagues.

- Good use of bullets to quickly and effectively summarise their role.

- Grammatically correct and maintains the same style throughout the bullet points.

- Positively worded when describing the challenges presented by customers and colleagues.

- The bullet points add additional information and follow a more logical order.

## Motivations questions and example answers

'Motivations questions' seek to get an insight into what drives you, particularly your reasons for applying for the job and to that industry, and why you want to work for that employer.

### 1. Motivation/Suitability for the Industry – What makes you suitable for this type of business?

**Example question:** *Please indicate how your interests, skill and abilities demonstrate your suitability for this sector. (Accountancy and Finance) (max. 280 words)*

**General advice:** To answer this question you need to:-

- Show that you have clear understanding of the sector- do some background research before starting to write your answer. (You will find Prospects website [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) useful for this)
- Think about everything you have to offer – (qualifications, work experience, interests/activities, qualities etc) and **relate** them to the sector. Show them why you think that there is a good match between you and, in this example, Accountancy and Finance
- Be specific in your answer and give examples

Answer A) In my childhood, I started showing interest in my father's employment which was accountancy. When I entered secondary school, it was no surprise that I had an affinity for mathematical subjects. Then I realised that 'money makes the world go round'. So when I was about to enter University for my undergraduate studies, I chose to study for a Business and Management degree. I have studied for a variety of modules related to banking, accountancy and finance throughout my degree. I have some work experience in an areas related to business and accountancy. I am determined to contribute to the goals of your company through the application of my business and management skills and knowledge in general, and accountancy and finance in particular. (123 words)

*-This answer is too short, general, vague and clichéd*

*-Not enough detail about degree subject*

*-Doesn't say what the work experience is*

*-Spelling and grammatical errors*

Answer B) I am a numerate, analytical, well organised person and enjoy finding realistic solutions to financial problems. The modules I have studied include accounting, financial management and economics and next semester I am looking forward to modules in auditing, taxation and corporate finance. I feel I have a sound understanding of the basic systems involved in financial and management accountancy as well as their application and issues arising from them. I am most proud of my ability to relate this knowledge to real life applications.

My third year project on Corporate Governance has brought together many disciplines related to finance and accountancy, which I am finding extremely rewarding. From this I have learnt to adapt my skills to areas I have not encountered before.

During my vacation employment with Aviva I have enjoyed relating to customers via email and telephone and working to solve their problems in relation to their insurance queries. This has further developed my communication, commercial awareness and problem solving skills. It has also given me insight into the financial management of a major company.

I have been a committee member and treasurer of Sheffield University Sailing Club for over 2 years. This has given me the chance to develop my team working, leadership and negotiation skills and I have learnt to be very well organised and to work under pressure. It has given me the opportunity to put the learning from my course into real situations. I am particularly proud of the fact that we won the 'Best Run Club' Award at the Annual Student Union Society's Presentation Event and that I personally raised £3000 worth of sponsorship from local companies and organisations. (276 words)

*-This answer is a good length. You should always write close to the word limit, but don't include repetitious or irrelevant material just to reach the count, it all has to be meaningful content*

*-It gives full details of the course, work experience and extra-curricular activities and relates everything to the question. Also it includes details of key achievements that are likely to be of interest to the recruiter*

*-No spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors*

## **2. Motivation for this employer / organisation – Why do you want to work for us?**

**Example question: *Why have you chosen to apply to our firm?***

***Research Assistant, Independent financial research organisation (max.150 words)***

**General advice:** To answer this you need to:

- Find out as much as you can about the organisation to demonstrate a genuine interest in working for them.
- Show that you have a clear understanding of aspects such as; what the organisation does, the training and development it offers, and its values and ethos.
- Persuade them that their values and approach to their business match yours.
- If you have spoken to someone in the organisation to find out more about them, refer to this in your answer using that person's name.

Answer A) I have long wanted to work for such an esteemed organisation as FDT Limited. I would be able to apply the theories and knowledge gained on my degree and learn more about financial analysis in the real world.

The opportunities you would provide for my career development are also attractive to me. The training outlined on your website looks interesting, and would no doubt lead to me being an expert that others could rely upon.

Being a good team player and problem solver means I would fit in well with FDT's approach to business and its clients, which I have demonstrated throughout my experience. In my current job at a local supermarket I help others on a daily basis by offering advice and have received good customer feedback for this which shows reliability and the ability to communicate. All of these are important to what FDT's analysts do for your clients. (151 words)

*- This answer is too general and doesn't indicate any real insight into the organisation.*

*- Although the applicant refers to the training provided by FDT Ltd, it is too vague (e.g. the training looks 'very interesting') and could be written with any organisation in mind. Remember, if you could substitute the employer's name with another and the statement would still be true, then your answer is likely to be too general.*

*- There is too much emphasis on what the candidate would get out of working for FDT, and not enough about what they can actually contribute.*

*- Referring to your relevant skills and knowledge is a good idea, but the information given is very basic and unconvincing in terms of how it equips the applicant for the role and the organisation.*

*- The answer attempts to flatter the employer but sounds false. Terms like 'esteemed organisation' should be avoided.*

*- Do not exceed the word count, even by one word. It suggests you cannot follow instructions.*

Answer B) Having studied aspects of the financial markets throughout my degree, I am aware of the vital importance of reliable data and analysis for successful investment decision-making. I am therefore attracted by the idea of working for a firm with a reputation for high quality financial forecasting.

By regularly following the financial news both for my studies and my own interest, I know how FDT's provision in this regard has contributed to its clients' performance, while being identified with a successful firm with clients in over 90 countries would also help satisfy my career aim to develop a global expertise in this field.

Following research into your organisation and the sector in which it operates, I recently held a telephone discussion with one of your senior analysts, Ms. Luisa Lopez, who further convinced me of FDT's ambitions, making your organisation one I would definitely like to be part of. (148 words)

*- This answer clearly states specific aspects of the employer's business that the applicant finds attractive, and explains why these aspects appeal.*

*- The applicant includes activities from their experience that shows they share the organisation's values and approach to its products/services.*

*- The answer shows how the position and business relate to the candidate's career objectives.*

*- It uses language that shows enthusiasm and interest with no spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.*

### 3. Motivation/Suitability for the job – Why do you want to do this type of work?

**Example question: ‘What attracts you to this job and tell us what makes you suitable?’  
Marketing & Communications Assistant, with a local Sports Association (max. 100 words)**

To answer this you need to:

- show that you have a clear understanding of the job you are going for
- describe how it suits your interests and motivations
- explain why you consider yourself to be a strong candidate

Answer A) Having completed a Media-related degree, this job would be an ideal first step for me. It would provide me with the right kind of experience to develop a career in the field of Public Relations, which has long been an ambition of mine, and why I chose to study aspects of this work. As well as completing many written assignments to a high standard, I have excellent oral communication skills, am able to relate well to different people, writing articles and reports for my sports club which were published in our local newspaper. (93 words)

*-The candidate’s information about their career aims and relevant experiences is valid but doesn’t show real insight into specific aspects of the job.*

*- The statements about their skills are not really backed up with evidence and not detailed enough.*

*- This job requires strong writing skills, but this answer is too general and doesn’t convey real ability.*

*- The candidate isn’t particularly convincing when trying to communicate a genuine desire for this job, as the vocabulary and style fail to excite the reader.*

Answer B) I am excited by the idea of representing the Association in its dealings with the media and local community. I have studied Media Relations as part of my degree and particularly enjoyed researching sports sponsorship in my final year.

The position involves using my writing skills which I used when producing press statements that secured greater local press coverage for my amateur lacrosse club.

Helping to develop a strong marketing strategy is another attractive feature of the post, as I am fascinated by the way in which different organisations develop and maintain their image. (94 words).

*- This answer demonstrates the candidate has found out about the role and explained why they find specific elements of the job attractive.*

*- It indicates relevant activities that the applicant has got involved with, showing skills and knowledge that would be of relevance to the post.*

*- The answer uses language that demonstrates enthusiasm and interest in this work.*

*- It is a good length for the maximum word count which requires concise but effective statements. You should always write close to the word limit, but don’t include repetitious or irrelevant material just to reach the count, it all has to be meaningful content.*

*-No spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.*

## General Advice on Personal Statement/Additional Information Sections

Many applications have a 'blank page' section which will have different titles/headings such as 'Personal Statement' or 'Additional Information'. (In many ways it is very similar to the Personal Statement you had to complete when you applied to University.)

It is the **key** section on the application form. There will usually be clear instructions at the top.

The following rules/guidelines will help you complete this section.

- Read the instructions very carefully and follow them exactly. Give them what they ask for
- Always keep in mind the person reading it. Make it easy for them to put you on the 'Invite to Interview' pile! If you have difficulty doing this, imagine it is you five or ten years on running your own department or business, what would you expect to see in an application?
- If there is a job description and job specification read them through carefully highlighting the key points
- The person specification is the vital document. This details the qualifications, experience and qualities they are looking for. You must write your answer/statement in **very close relation** to the person specification
- There are no right or wrongs about how to structure the statement. You may choose to write it as a piece of text with paragraphs or under bullet points to match those on the person specification. However if there are a lot of items on the person specification you may opt to group the items and use these as **headings** in your statement (e.g. Qualifications, Communication Skills, IT skills etc). However, whichever structure you choose, don't make the reader have to infer or hunt around for your skills/qualifications/experience, make it easy for them to see that you have what they are looking for
- Don't miss things out. If, for example, they say the applicant must be able to use a particular computer program, then tell them that you can, preferably with an example of when you have used it
- Say why you want the job, including what attracts you to it and the organisation
- Remember the person reading it has a lot of applications forms to get through so don't make it too long with lots of superfluous detail. However, don't go to the opposite extreme and make it too short. There is no perfect length because it will depend on the job. It should be enough to sell you to the employer without boring them. You don't have to include everything you have ever done the skill in writing a good application is selecting the relevant things for the particular job. Also the purpose of the application is to get you to the interview, you can expand on points at the interview
- Sell yourself, if you don't no-one else will. It isn't a time for modesty, but don't tip over into arrogance
- Always write a new personal statement for each job. Don't be tempted to re-cycle an old application just changing a few details, employers can always tell
- Take time over it. It takes a long time to write a good application, but it is worth the effort
- Always proof read it and check spelling, grammar and punctuation. If your application contains no errors then it is already better than many of the others. You may wish to get a friend to check it, also don't forget you can book an appointment to have it reviewed at the Careers Service. Print off the personal statement and bring it as a paper copy