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Workforce Series #5

Filling Out a Job Application

By Carolyn Clague, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Extension Youth Development / 4-H Specialist

Applying for a Job

When you apply for a job, it is usually not possible to simply walk in and talk to the employer about a job opening or position. Many employers ask people to complete an application form. The information you provide on the application helps the employer decide whether to contact you further. From the completed application form, the employer will learn about your qualifications, employment history, writing skills, ability to follow directions, and how serious you are about obtaining the job. It is important that you fill out the application form carefully.

The Application Form

You start making impressions from the moment you ask for a job application. You should look sharp, wear clothes that are neat, pay attention to cleanliness and grooming, and have good posture, accompanied by a sincere smile. You should know about the employer and be able to state clearly the kind of job you qualify for, such as file clerk, cook, warehouse worker, etc. Carry your own pen and pencil. Be prepared to complete the application on location and possibly have an interview with the employer immediately thereafter. It is best to go alone without spouse, children, friends, or parents.

Completing the Application Form

If the application form requests you to use black ink, then don't use a blue-ink pen. If you are asked to either print or type, do it. Be sure that you are writing or typing your answer on the correct line.

Your identification: Usually write your last name first. Use your full legal name, not a nickname. If your name has recently changed or is about to change due to marriage or divorce, use the name you will be known by at work, but make a note including your previous name.

Date of the application: Write the number of the month first, followed by the date and the year.

Your address: Write only what is asked for on each line. "Address" means the number of your house and /or apartment and the street name, city, state, and zip code.

Your telephone number: Write the area code and number.

Your social security number: Memorize your number and carry your social security card only when you need to show it to apply for a job. Store it in a secure place rather than always carrying it with you so that you are less likely to be the victim of identity theft.

Job title: Be specific. If you are seeking a particular job advertised in the newspaper or elsewhere, give the exact title and/or job number assigned. Sometimes you might be willing to work at whatever is available, or there may be two or more jobs that interest you. If possible, you should state the title of each job.

Number of employment hours: Full-time usually means 35 hours a week or more. A part-time job varies in the number of hours but is usually 20 hours or less. Full-time jobs with a major employer usually carry benefits such as insurance, but part-time jobs and jobs with small companies often do not carry benefits.

Pay you expect to receive: This figure will be based on what the employer normally pays for the job. Find out in advance what the employer pays for this type of position or what the job usually pays in your location. The South Dakota Department of Labor publishes a wage survey on their website [http://stats.bls.gov/oes/2000/oes_sd.htm]. The information is both statewide and region-specific. One-Stop Career Center (OSCC) may have the information in a printed copy. (However, this information may be a year old by the time OSCC has collected and printed the data.) A good salary calculator on the web is [<http://www.salary.com>]. Another source is America's Job Bank [<http://www.ajb.dni.us/>].

When you can start: If you are working now, write the amount of notice you must give at your present job (such as two weeks). Keep in mind that few employers are willing to hire someone who would quit a job without giving notice. If you are not working presently, you can write "immediately."

Hours available to work: Write the days and times that you are available. If you are available for any shift, write “open / available any time” or “flexible”. If you are not available during certain parts of the day, or during the night or weekends, then give this information. Give yourself the best possible chance of getting the job by making yourself available as much as you can. You may be able to change inconvenient hours later on.

Question of overtime: If you can work overtime, you become a more desirable employee. But if you absolutely oppose it or cannot do so, then write “no” in the space. If you are not sure, then write “possibly.”

Where you heard about the job: Name the newspaper in which you found the ad or the person who told you about the job. If you were advised of the job by an agency, write “employment agency” or “job center.”

Whether or not you can travel: This usually refers to travel between one job site and another in the local region. If you are limited in how far and for how long you can travel, write, “yes: local only.” If you cannot drive, your answer to this question will be “no.” If you have a license but do not have access to a personal vehicle, indicate this on the application form.

Driver’s license: If you have a current license, specify which state and which type, such as car, motorcycle, truck, commercial, etc.

Your age: If the employer asks your age or birth date, it is an illegal question unless the position has a bona fide occupational qualification. But the employer can ask if you are *over* a certain age such as 18. The employer may not be allowed by state law or by insurance regulations to hire people under the age of 18.

Your citizenship: You don’t have to be a citizen for most jobs, but you do have to be eligible to work in the United States. If you are not a U.S. citizen, bring your alien registration card (“green card”) with you when you apply and write the registration number in the space provided.

Questions about your legal status: Be honest. You may be tempted to lie about legal problems in the past. Do not do it—it is not worth the consequences! People who have had legal trouble in their past do get hired, but if you lie you could lose your job later. With everything on computers today, there is very little that can be kept hidden. Telling the truth about a problem in your past does not automatically exclude you from a job—especially if the employer is impressed with you now.

Your physical condition: The employer is not allowed to deny a disabled person a job unless the person is physically unable to do that particular job.

Emergency contact: Name a person who is in the local area, knows you well, and can usually be reached at the

telephone number you provide. This could be a family member, friend, or neighbor. You can also provide a former employer’s address and phone number. Use your best judgement given your situation.

Your college background: If you have attended some college, you should list any individual courses you have taken. If you have not attended college, write “N/A” (not applicable) in the space.

Subjects you have studied: Be sure to list any courses or other training that are relevant for the job and state when you took them. Include also special skills you may have developed that would relate to the job.

High school: If you have attended more than one, write the name of the most recent one or where you graduated. “Subjects studied” means the track you were in: academic (college prep), business, vocational, or general. If you left prior to graduation, give the last full year you completed. If you have a General Educational Development (G.E.D.) diploma, then specify.

Other education: If you have taken special courses (computer literacy, first aid, child care, etc.) or attended conferences or seminars, you should share this information.

Other activities: Other activities that may interest a potential employer are church activities (list without naming the church), leader of a youth group, coach for local sports team, Neighborhood Watch, volunteer at the local shelter, volunteer at a school, member of a committee or board, volunteer at hospital or museum, etc. This shows that you are involved and interested in your community and area.

Your past employment: List the dates, job title, and description of responsibilities of your most recent job first and work backward. Make sure you have the complete addresses and phone numbers (you can check them in the phone book or on the Internet) and bring the information with you when you apply.

Job title and duties: Give as much detail as space allows. Remember to include any skills or duties that relate to the job you are seeking.

How long you have worked: Unless it was a summer job or was the only job you have had, don’t list a job that lasted less than three months.

Your supervisor: Give the name and phone number of the person who can actually report on how you did in a previous job on a daily basis.

Your wages: Be sure to write whether the amount was per hour, per week, per month, or per year. Use the last amount paid. For a seasonal job (e.g., road construc-

tion), give the approximate time period.

Why you left employment: Be honest in your response. If your reason for leaving is complicated, make positive statements without lying. If you did not relate well with your supervisor, you could truthfully write, “no possibility for advancement.”

Previous employers: If your present employer does not know you are looking for a new job, you can ask the prospective employer not to contact your employer. But it is best to allow your prospective employer to contact your current employer. If you say no, it looks like you “must have something to hide.”

Military service: Employers see your commitment to the military as a part of your work record; do include your military service.

Your references: Choose people who can confirm that you are reliable, honest, and hard-working and who are willing to communicate what they know about your character. Obtain permission from your references prior to listing them on the form. Assume your references will be contacted. Never use anyone’s name as a reference unless you have asked the person for permission. Be sure to include current address, phone number and e-mail address for each reference.

What About a Resume?

Usually you will need to submit a resume with your job application. A resume is a summary of your work and life experiences. It is usually less detailed, but more personalized than an application form. A job application gives the facts about your employment history; it does not provide the opportunity to describe your personality or your goals. Remember, unless otherwise instructed by the employer, you should never write “See resume” in place of thoroughly completing the application form.

What About a Cover Letter?

A cover letter—a letter you attach to your application explaining who you are and why you are applying—is necessary only if you are including a resume, or if you are applying by mail. It is not necessary when you are applying for a job in person.

Letters of Recommendation

People sometimes submit their application with a list of references or letters of recommendation already attached. A reference could be an instructor, a former employer, a former supervisor, or someone else who can communicate your character. A reference should be someone you have talked to or met with recently. You

may need to update your the person about your recent accomplishments. It is wise to give the person your resume when requesting him or her to serve as a reference or write a letter of recommendation. Be sure each reference can comment positively about your future potential in the job you are seeking. A letter of recommendation should be typed on business letterhead whenever possible. The letter should include a telephone number where the person can be reached during the day. Most often references will send their letters directly to the potential employer using the address you have provided.

More Tips on Completing the Application

When you have any personal contact with the employer, demonstrate your seriousness about working by dressing neatly and being clean and groomed. Do not chew gum or smoke and do not carry beverages with you.

Preview the job application before starting to write to make sure you are responding to the question(s) correctly and in the space provided. Answers that are sloppily written or crossed out leave a negative impression. Print neatly, using a pen; fill in every question and if a question does not apply, write “N/A”. This means that when you are finished, there should be no empty blanks. If you pick up an application to be returned later, you can ask for two copies of the application or ask permission to make a copy in the event you make a mistake on the original copy.

When you complete a job application it is helpful to bring with you an updated personal data sheet that includes dates of education and employment, salaries, supervisors’ names and addresses, and other general information. Your resume won’t include such details, so you need to prepare a separate data sheet to have this information at your fingertips when completing application forms. Update the information for every job as this will save time and effort.

Submit the application to the person who gave it to you. Be polite and friendly and say “thank you” before you leave. Remember this person will have something to say about the impression you have made. If you are polite and friendly, that may be passed on to the hiring manager or employer.

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