



# How to complete **Application forms**

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## Welcome

**Welcome to this edition of *How to complete application forms*.**

Our careers consultants have pooled their collective wisdom and sought advice from key employers to produce this guide.

The booklet is organised into accessible sections for you to focus on particular aspects of the application process, but reading it through entirely before you start your applications may save you time and effort in the long run. We hope you find it useful.

Finally, don't forget that LSE Careers offers application form seminars throughout the year as well as face-to-face guidance appointments. Just go to the careers website for up to date information: **[lse.ac.uk/careers](https://lse.ac.uk/careers)**

On behalf of LSE Careers I wish you every success.



**Jenny Owen**  
Director, LSE Careers



# Before you start

## Why employers use application forms

Application forms allow recruiters to ask all candidates the same questions, making them as fair and objective as possible. They also offer you the opportunity to expand upon who you are and what you have done to demonstrate you fulfil the 3 Cs which all employers look for:

- The Competencies to do the job
  - the skills, qualities or attributes
- The Commitment to do the job
  - the energy, drive or enthusiasm
- The Cultural fit to work within the organisation
  - a shared belief in the values pursued by the organisation.

Typically CVs restrict you to telling prospective employers about selected highlights from your career. Application forms offer you the scope, with open-ended questions and personal statements, to make the best first impression you can.

“Don’t underestimate the importance of getting the basics right. Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation are absolutely vital”.

**Adam Askew**, BBC

## Make time to apply

No matter how outstanding your qualifications and experiences, failing to set aside adequate time to research, draft and proof your application form will leave an employer with doubts about your motivation and commitment to join their company.

Just as there are no hard and fast rules about how much time you should set aside to write an essay, the amount of time needed to complete each application form will vary. But the basic principle remains – don’t leave your application until the last minute!

## Read the instructions

Application forms are a simple way for employers to test your ability to accurately follow instructions and write concisely. Before you start writing check to see whether the organisation you are applying to has provided any specific instructions on how to complete the application form and make sure you follow them, otherwise your application will stand out for the wrong reasons.

**Top Tip**

The **Back to basics** section of this booklet (page 24) covers some of the questions we get asked the most at LSE Careers about the more technical aspects of completing an application form. For example, “There isn’t enough room on the form! What should I do?” or “Should I type directly onto the form or cut and paste from another draft document first?”

## What employers are looking for

Most applicants find it relatively easy to complete their personal details and qualifications but lose inspiration when they are asked to write about themselves in more depth. Often this is because they don’t know enough about the organisation, the job or their own skills to begin constructing an answer.

## Research the organisation

Researching what the employer does, what they have to offer and what competencies they are looking for involves more than simply reading the recruitment literature.

Visiting the organisation’s website and reading their annual report are good places to start to find out more about:

- The organisation’s structure and culture
- Their current projects, campaigns, products or clients
- Their long-term strategies.

Find out whether the organisation has received any media coverage recently in either the national or trade press.

**Top Tip**

Ask LSE Careers if you need help finding suitable websites, newspapers and magazines to help with your research.

Investigate the organisation’s main competitors. Also consider developments within the sector, for example changes in the law, the merger of two competitors, etc, and the potential impact on the organisation.

Attending employer presentations, careers fairs and open days will provide you with opportunities to network with current employees. Try to find out more about their day-to-day work, training and promotion opportunities within the organisation and typical career development.

Talk to employees from different divisions of the same organisation, as well as from their competitors, to see how their job roles and career paths may differ. This will help to ensure you are applying to the company or specific division that best matches your skills, motivations and future plans.

“Take every opportunity to attend events held by companies you are thinking of applying to – interacting and talking to people who are currently working in the business is the best way to get a feel for the culture, work and environment that you will be exposed to. This will really help you make informed decisions as to where to apply and the knowledge you gain will help you enormously during the application process”.

**Jenny Fraenzel**, BDO Stoy Hayward LLP

## Understand the job

Most organisations will provide you with a job description, which will give you a basic outline of the tasks you will be expected to undertake. Some organisations will also provide a person specification to explicitly identify the skills you will need to complete these tasks.

Use this information to check that you meet the employer’s essential criteria for qualifications and experience. This will help ensure that you are targeting jobs at the right level. If the organisation asks for a postgraduate qualification in economics, do you have one? If not, is there a more appropriate entry-point into this organisation for you?

**Top Tip**

Use the job description and person specification as checklists to self-assess your application. Have you provided clear examples to demonstrate you have all the relevant competencies mentioned in them?

Identify your skills

Your research so far into the organisation and job you are applying for should give you a clear idea about the competencies required by the employer. Now you need to be equally clear about the competencies you have to offer. Do they match?

Remember: successfully completing an application form requires you to do more than simply list your achievements. In order to persuade an employer that you are the ideal candidate, you need to prove with specific evidence.

You can find lots of useful self-assessment tools in the Career planning section of our website.

Tips for skills auditing

- Avoid relying too heavily on examples from a single job or activity
- Identify transferable skills, ie, skills that can be taken from one job, activity or sector to another
- Think broadly about the skills you have developed through:
  - academic study
  - previous employment
  - volunteering
  - travelling
  - through student societies
  - other extracurricular activities
- Think about which examples are the most interesting, relevant and illustrative of your abilities to the employer.

Conduct a skills audit

Below is an example of how a simple skills audit might look but remember this table is not an exhaustive list of skills or examples!

The skills required by this organisation are...	Examples demonstrating these skills could include...
<b>Communication skills</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• verbal skills</li><li>• written skills</li><li>• presentation skills</li><li>• listening skills.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• writing essays, dissertations or articles for <i>the Beaver</i></li><li>• speaking to clients and preparing reports at work</li><li>• networking at careers events</li><li>• involvement in mentoring.</li></ul>
<b>Teamwork</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• building relationships</li><li>• supporting others</li><li>• negotiation skills</li><li>• setting aims and achieving shared objectives.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• volunteering projects</li><li>• being a member of a sports team or student society, etc</li><li>• undertaking group projects as part of your degree or at work.</li></ul>

The skills required by this organisation are...	Examples demonstrating these skills could include...
<b>Leadership and decision-making</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• managing conflict</li><li>• delegation</li><li>• sensitivity to others’ needs</li><li>• taking responsibility.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• being on the committee of a student society, etc</li><li>• making career management decisions in your personal life</li><li>• project management at work</li><li>• mentoring.</li></ul>
<b>Problem-solving</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• identifying or anticipating problems/areas for improvement</li><li>• using logical or lateral thinking to find solutions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• resolving customer complaints</li><li>• designing a simple database to more effectively manage client contacts for a charity, society, small business, etc.</li></ul>
<b>Organisation and planning</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• time and resource management</li><li>• handling pressure</li><li>• meeting deadlines.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• planning an overseas trip</li><li>• organising an event</li><li>• balancing your study and a part-time job.</li></ul>
<b>IT skills</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• using software packages in a variety of contexts</li><li>• using the internet and email.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Word, Outlook, etc</li><li>• PowerPoint</li><li>• SPSS, Excel, etc</li><li>• Dreamweaver, FrontPage, etc.</li></ul>
<b>Creativity</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• innovative ideas</li><li>• making improvements.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• raising money for charity in an unusual way</li><li>• improving your productivity/motivation, eg, starting a study support group with friends, etc.</li></ul>
<b>Numeracy</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• descriptive statistical skills</li><li>• inferential statistical skills</li><li>• budgeting.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• academic study</li><li>• practical experience on an internship</li><li>• handling stock or cash at work.</li></ul>

The skills required by this organisation are...	Examples demonstrating these skills could include...
<b>Commercial awareness</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>identifying new opportunities</li><li>effectively promoting products/services</li><li>thinking strategically beyond the boundaries of immediate team.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>not simply reading the <i>FT</i>, <i>Times</i> etc but being able to analyse current affairs and relate them to the particular company or role</li><li>involvement in entrepreneurship ventures, eg, LSE Generate competitions and awards <b><a href="https://www.lse.ac.uk/Generate">lse.ac.uk/Generate</a></b></li><li>assisting customers and closing sales in a part time retail job.</li></ul>
<b>Personal qualities</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>reliability</li><li>self-motivation</li><li>proactivity</li><li>adaptability/flexibility.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>demonstrating a “can do” attitude by working late to complete a project</li><li>standing in for a sick colleague at a meeting, etc.</li></ul>

Conduct a values audit

This is in order to examine what really motivates you and whether the organisation and job you are applying for is a good match. The table below is an example of how a simple values audit could look.

Things that motivate me are...	What does the job/organisation offer?
<b>Learning new things and variation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In-house training courses?</li><li>Opportunities for secondments?</li></ul>
<b>Sociable working environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Open-plan working environment?</li><li>Coaching and mentoring networks?</li></ul>
<b>Working on written projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Report writing for senior management and media?</li><li>Opportunity to contribute to professional journals and in-house publications?</li><li>Responsibility for departmental website?</li></ul>
<b>Time off to pursue outside interests/spend time with family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>25 days annual leave?</li><li>Flexible working hours?</li><li>Typical working week 35 hours?</li></ul>

“You are usually asked why you would like to work with the organisation: ensure you do not paraphrase from the website but that the recruiter sees you have really thought about what the programme involves, the things you like about the organisation, and why you would like to join”.

**Rachel Kershaw**, Teach First

Plan and draft

There are quite simply no shortcuts to completing an application form – only ways to manage the time you spend on them more effectively.

Don’t be tempted to passively copy answers you have used on previous applications and certainly don’t send in a CV instead. This suggests to an employer that you lack commitment and enthusiasm for this job. A well researched, planned and drafted application is better than a hundred rushed applications.

Tips for planning and drafting:

- Set time aside for each application form – if necessary, incorporate this time into your diary or study timetable in order that you don’t miss the deadline!
- Use a photocopy or print out of the application form to make rough planning notes and then to draft your responses
- Give yourself a break between drafting and reviewing your answers. You will be refreshed when reviewing your application and find it easier to spot any errors or omissions
- When reviewing your answers think about what you have learnt from this booklet about the content, language and structure of a successful answer – visit the Application checklist section (page 26).

Overall have you successfully demonstrated that you have the Competencies, Commitment and Cultural Fit?

Language

You are being invited to write in your own words so your ability to write concisely and coherently is being assessed.

The way you write about your experiences is nearly as important as the activities themselves. Write confidently about your achievements using professional, active and positive language.

However, avoid using jargon that cannot be clearly understood and if you use any abbreviations you should explain them.

What is professional, active and positive language?

This means using language that gives the reader the impression that you make things happen and that you are in control. It highlights the fact that you have analysed the competencies required and your own experiences, and identified a match.

Examples include:

<b>Coordinated</b>	<b>Implemented</b>	<b>Redefined</b>	<b>Analysed</b>
<b>Established</b>	<b>Formulated</b>	<b>Trained</b>	<b>Negotiated</b>
<b>Simplified</b>	<b>Persevered</b>	<b>Advised</b>	<b>Enhanced</b>
<b>Encouraged</b>	<b>Expanded</b>	<b>Resolved</b>	<b>Budgeted</b>
<b>Addressed</b>	<b>Presented</b>	<b>Conceived</b>	<b>Allocated</b>
<b>Streamlined</b>	<b>Initiated</b>	<b>Scheduled</b>	<b>Coached</b>
<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Distributed</b>	<b>(Re)Organised</b>	<b>Administered</b>
<b>Promoted</b>	<b>Launched</b>	<b>Influenced</b>	<b>Developed</b>

Don't overcomplicate what you are saying by trying to use too many of these type of words – use them carefully and in the correct context to demonstrate that you've got what it takes. Be careful to avoid words like “basic”, “just”, “adequate” or “limited”, as they can create a negative overall impression.

**Tips for language**

- Beware of simply mirroring the same language as in the recruitment literature and company website
- Write in a simple and direct way using short sentences
- ‘Market test’ the language you have used by getting feedback from a careers consultant or a professional currently working in your chosen field
- Show evidence of having dissected and analysed the different requirements.

“Remember to use positive action words which demonstrate your competencies and the impact you had”.

**Maddie Smith**, LSE Careers Consultant

“Attention to detail is an essential skill which we look for evidence of during the application process. Don't slip up at the first stage by submitting forms with spelling and grammatical errors, and make sure you spell the name of the firm you are applying to correctly! Even if you have the best grades and fantastic work experience, it's all about creating the right impression so accuracy is just as important”.

**Caroline Lindner**, Norton Rose Fulbright LLP

**Types of questions and how to answer them**

Application form questions typically fall into a few distinct types. Over the next few pages we will look at some of the more common types, along with suggestions for how you should approach your answer.

**Competency-based questions**

Competency-based questions are used by a wide variety of organisations from different sectors. In this section you will learn:

- What competency questions are
- How and why employers use them
- What techniques you can adopt to improve the quality of your answers.

**What is a competency question?**

Competency questions focus on your skills or personal qualities.

Typical competencies include “teamwork”, “motivation”, “leadership”, “commercial awareness” and “creativity”.

**“Tell us about a time when you worked in a team, what was your role and what did you achieve”** is a typical example of a competency question.

When you see a question that starts with **“Tell me about a time when...”** or **“Give me an example of...”** then it is a sure sign that you are being asked to demonstrate a particular competency.

“Think about the relevancy of your examples against the competencies being assessed. Ensure that you have given yourself enough time to do the application justice”.

**Selina Suresh**, Civil Service Fast Stream

“Know your audience: use all available resources to find out precisely what your target firm/department is looking for and how you fit”.

**Tero Paasu**, Proctor and Gamble

**How do employers use them?**

These types of questions are based on a psychological theory which asserts that how you have behaved in the past will predict how you behave in the future. Subsequently employers see this type of question as a robust and fair way of assessing applicants on their current abilities and potential to fulfil the role they are recruiting for.

They will often assess your application against:

- **Competency frameworks**, which list the key competencies they expect their staff to have
- **Behavioural indicators**, which specify in detail the different levels of performance they expect at each competency.

Your first experience of competency-based assessments is likely to be on an application form but you can also expect to come across this type of question in interviews. Later, when you are employed by an organisation, competencies will continue to be used in your appraisals, as a tool to manage performance and personal development.

Top Tip

Use the model Skills Audit in the **Before you start** section (page 4) to identify the particular competencies this employer is looking for and how you have demonstrated these requirements throughout your life.

### Answering competency questions

There are a number of straightforward strategies you can use to increase your chances of successfully answering competency questions:

- **Draw on all areas of your life**

Over the course of an application form use examples of achievements from across your academic study, work and extra curricular activities to create the impression of a well rounded, balanced individual.

- **Be precise and give ONE example**

In most cases questions are phrased along the lines of ‘Tell me about a time when...’ or ‘Give me an example of...’. Here the employer is looking for you to give detailed evidence of a particular competency by giving **one** precise example of how you have demonstrated that skill, rather than a variety of different examples.

- **Quantify**

Throughout your answer, try to quantify what you did and the outcome where you can. This will help the employer to understand your contribution and assess your impact.

- **Break down the competency**

Show a thoughtful understanding of what the competency means. For example, if it is a question about teamwork, does your answer show that you have a good understanding of what it means to work successfully in a team? Have you shown that you co-operated with others, listened to their concerns, compromised where necessary, encouraged, supported and negotiated?

- **Use a clear structure**

In order to get the right emphasis in your answer, use the following structure (STAR).

Area to cover	What to include	How much emphasis on this area?
Situation	<b>Brief background</b> Give a brief introduction to the event so the reader knows the context.	10 per cent
Task	<b>What did you have to do?</b> Specify what you had to do.	10 per cent
Action	<b>What did you do?</b> Give plenty of detail about what you did, how you did it and what skills you used.	70 per cent
Result	<b>What was the outcome?</b> What happened in the end? Be specific and quantify where applicable.	10 per cent

As you can see, the emphasis is on what **YOU** actually did and how this relates to **YOUR** ability in a particular competency.

“Structure is important: you will be one of thousands that are applying, ensure you articulate your message concisely and with purpose throughout the application process”.

**Laura-Jane Silverman**, LSE Careers Consultant

### Common mistakes in competency answers

LSE

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Application form

Before completing please read the notes at the back of the form.

Application for the post of: Trainee management consultantRef. no. LSEMC1

Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills

Tell us about a time when you worked in a team. What was your role and what did you achieve? (200 words)

My last internship position was at Ex-cast economic consultancy. This is a small, specialist consultancy that works with a number of high profile clients such as Goldman Sachs, CSFB and Deutsche Bank. The company has experienced growth of over 20% year on year for the past 5 years and is considered a market leader in its sector. I worked in a dynamic team and was exposed to a number of different departments including sales, marketing and personnel. The team worked extremely effectively together. We worked on a wide variety of different projects which allowed me to use my interpersonal skills to the fore. In sales I liaised frequently with senior executives and this improved my communication skills to a great degree. I also carried out extensive research and analysis where I honed my communication skills to a considerable degree. The internship was successful and showed my commitment and loyalty to the sector.


Emphasis is too much on Ex-cast and not enough on the candidate

Overall the language is vague and, at 152 words, this answer is too short

Mentions skills but provides little evidence to back them up



### Common mistakes in competency answers continued



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# Application form

Before completing please read the notes at the back of the form.

Application for the post of: Trainee management consultant

Ref. no. LSEMC1

## Flexibility

Describe a time when you had to adapt to a change in order to achieve a better outcome

I worked as an intern in the marketing division of a large marketing company. The company has been very successful over the past 3 years and has grown at an average rate of 37% per year. The company has been developing its online marketing operations and has been increasing its share of this market.


I was initially told that I was going to be working for the group marketing director – the group marketing director has been in the position for two years and won ‘Marketing Professional of the Year’ in 2005. Unfortunately I was assigned to a graduate trainee and wasn’t able to become involved in senior level negotiations. However I was able to complete an overhaul of the company’s client database – which was very satisfying.

Provides too much background information about the company they worked for and not enough about their individual actions

The candidate sounds extremely negative about their experience

**Vague description of the task. Fails to go into any detail about how they adapted to the change or the overall result**

### Examples of competency questions and answers



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## Application form

Before completing please read the notes at the back of the form.

Application for the post of: Trainee management consultant Ref. no. LSEMC1

### Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills

Tell us about a time when you worked in a team. What was your role and what did you achieve? (200 words)

I was an intern at Ex-cast economic consultancy for six weeks in the summer of 2011. I worked in a team of four, headed up by a senior partner.

I attended meetings with my colleagues where we divided tasks according to our experience and skills. The major project we worked on was for CSFB where we were asked to analyse and extrapolate trends in the ethical healthcare sector. Given my background in economics my role was to research one FTSE company in particular. I set about this by researching who the major investors and senior executives were and then approaching them to arrange meetings where I interviewed them. I fed this information back to my team by weekly presentations and then amended my analysis according to feedback from other team members. In the last week of the project all the team's research was pooled into a final report. My role here was to proof read the final draft, correcting any errors and checking back with other team members to ensure all statistics were accurate.

The project was completed two days ahead of schedule and was considered successful by CSFB who have commissioned Ex-cast for further projects.

Provides lots of detail on what they actually did and you can see this candidate working well in a team

**The outcome is precise and quantified**

Here the emphasis is on a specific time when this candidate worked in a team – successfully providing one precise example to demonstrate this competency

### Top Tip

Read the Personal Statement section (page 19) to find out more about the type of language to use to sell yourself on an application form.



## Examples of competency questions and answers continued

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### Application form

Before completing please read the notes at the back of the form.

Application for the post of: Trainee management consultant Ref. no. LSEMC1

**Flexibility**

Describe a time when you had to adapt to a change in order to achieve a better outcome

During my internship with Company Z, I was initially asked to collect and analyse information to help the company adjust its marketing strategy to target individuals for graduate programmes. As I was nearing completion of the this task the MD asked me to develop my analysis by researching the experienced-hire market as well. There was only one week left on my placement but I was determined to succeed.

I set up meetings with several McKinsey strategy consultants to understand the requirements from the clients' perspective. I collated the results and followed up on the information given.

These interviews were a significant part of my final internship presentation, which was attended by the MD, the Head of Recruitment and the Head of Operations. My internship report now forms the basis of an ongoing project to target experienced-hire candidates in the company.

Language is clear, active and positive

The candidate clearly explains the task, how the task changed, how they responded to solve the issue, and concludes by illustrating the results of their work

Demonstrates determination, initiative and an ability to build successful working relationships

## Motivational questions

### What is a motivational question?

Motivational questions enable employers to find out more about whether you can and will do the job, and whether you will fit successfully into their organisation.

In order to do this, they may ask questions which probe your understanding of the role, organisation or industry and your career objectives.

Employers also want to be reassured that you have thought through why you want to work for their company and why the role interests you.

Typical questions might include:

- Why do you want to work for KPMG/Boots/BDO etc?
- What differentiates us from our competitors?
- How and why have you reached the decision to apply for this career discipline?
- Where do you see yourself in x years' time?
- What are the major challenges facing the retail/telecommunications/automotive industry/city firms in the next five years?

Motivational questions can also be used to **assess whether you have the energy, drive and enthusiasm** to actually do the job.

Finding a candidate who is genuinely enthusiastic about joining their organisation is important to recruiters.

“Motivation” may even be identified in the job description or personal specification as a required competency. To assess that you have these qualities employers may ask you to give details of your main extra-curricular activities and interests to date. What have you contributed and what have you got out of them?

“Tailor each application to the firm you are applying to. We are all different – the best candidates recognise this and demonstrate their research in the answers to questions about why they want to work for the firm. Read widely using a variety of publications and sector press to build up your knowledge about firms and trends within the market. And take every opportunity to meet firm representatives on campus – they are the best people to talk about their roles, work, and provide an insight into the working culture”.

**Caroline Lindner**, Allen & Overy

### Answering motivational questions

- **Show that you have done in-depth research**

The **Before you start** section (page 2) provides advice on the best resources to use to when researching the job, organisation and sector. The research you do will really help you refine your choice of job/ employer and help you to respond well to application form and interview questions.

**Top Tip**

If you have met an employee at an LSE event mention this to show that you are committed to learning more about the organisation. Don't just rely upon the company website and recruitment brochures!

- **Translate your research into successful answers**

Don't answer the questions in a predictable and formulaic way. For example, don't say *“I want to work for your organisation because of the enlightening and informative talk last month at the LSE that demonstrated your friendly and open culture”*.

Instead it sounds much better to say, *“I want to work for Company X because of your two recent acquisitions in mainland China, where I will be able to utilise my knowledge of both the culture and language, as explained by John Watts at the LSE presentation last month”*.

**Top Tip**

Use the Values Audit in the **Before you start** section (page 6) to identify what motivates you and how this matches the job, organisation and sector.

- **Provide individual, original answers**


When demonstrating your levels of energy, drive and enthusiasm, think about what motivates you and how you cope with difficulties and obstacles.

If you are asked to give an example use one precise example that is relevant to the question being asked. This could be an example drawn from any area of your life – from a travel experience, an extracurricular event or a project at work.

### Common mistakes

**Fails to provide any specific reasons to show how they have come to the decision that they want to be a consultant**

**The candidate groups together all their work experience and describes their internships in very broad terms**



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## Application form

Before completing please read the notes at the back of the form.

Application for the post of: Trainee management consultantRef. no. LSEMC1

**Career choice**

Why have you chosen a career in consulting?

I have proven my commitment to a career in consulting by completing summer internships at First Consultants, Best Consultants and Square Mile Consultants. At all these firms I worked in teams with other interns and had regular contact with clients. I really enjoyed the nature of the project work we were given, particularly implementing the changes we recommended.

I have always wanted to be a consultant because I have a strong interest in the workings of business, which I have developed through buying Management Consultancy Today and getting the Financial Times everyday. Studying management at university has also taught me many of the complex business concepts I will need to be a consultant. Ideally I would like to use my knowledge of business and interest in technology to improve the efficiency of companies and provide them with the best business solutions. I am keen to gain experience of the diverse activities that make up this type of large consulting project.

**The candidate talks about having commercial awareness but this sounds too generic**

**This candidate may buy the right publications but nowhere in this answer do they demonstrate that they actually read them and have done research into what this role entails**

Example of motivational question and answer

Identifies why consulting and why consulting at this particular company – they have clearly done their research by identifying precise information about the company's business practices

The candidate also uses an example from their extra-curricular activities to demonstrate transferable skills and personal attributes – including creativity and determination

LSE

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POLITICAL SCIENCE

### Application form

Before completing please read the notes at the back of the form.

Application for the post of: Trainee management consultantRef. no. LSEMC1

Career choice

Why have you chosen a career in consulting?

I am very keen to pursue a career in management consulting. The wide range of projects , strong client interaction and great mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis are only a few of the reasons why this area appeals to me. LSE Management consultants has especially captured my attention with its strength in the private equity business and its innovative approach to business growth through being the only company to accept equity in the company as a payment method. LSE Management consultants enjoys an excellent reputation in the market and recent press coverage confirms a very sound financial base. I believe this implies everyday tasks that are diverse, challenging and according to recent coverage in press, highly prosperous.

During my internship with Consultants Y, I worked on a project that involved developing a regression model for a pharmaceutical company launching a new product. I particularly enjoyed successfully applying my quantitative skills in a real-life business scenario. On the other end of the spectrum, I also take pleasure and succeed in working with people and creating new ideas. As the President of the Women in Business Society, I used my creative and entrepreneurial flair to organise events that would expand my fellow students' understanding and awareness of industry across a myriad of disciplines. I introduced the 'What Women Want' series of events, that were the first of their kind at LSE, with the whole day focusing on a specific industry. I organised 'Women in Banking' and 'Women in Consulting' days, both of which were attended by over 100 students and in which top companies in the arena participated. I believe the combination of my specialist technical skills, excellent communication skills and analytical approach would make me a valuable asset to the company.

Gives the employer very specific examples of some of the key competencies required for the role and shows a proven ability and enthusiasm for this type of work

Personal statements

The personal statement does not have to be daunting providing you adhere to some simple principles with respect to: **content, structure and language**. In fact, it affords you an excellent opportunity to demonstrate your unique qualifications, skills and experience without the format restrictions of the rest of the application.

What is the purpose of personal statements?

- Personal statements help organisations to find out more about you and your suitability for a particular role
- They provide you with the opportunity to present your motivation, work experience, extra-curricular activities, skills and qualifications in the best possible light
- They provide scope for you to distinguish yourself from the other applicants and to emphasise the connections between the requirements of this job and the benefits you offer.

Completing a personal statement

Before you begin

Follow the same principles mentioned in the **Before you start** section (page 2) and throughout this booklet: research, research, research!

Using the job description and the personal specification as your guide, try to visualise the employer's ideal candidate for the role and then ensure your answers demonstrate that you are that candidate!

Structure

As with any formal writing exercise, structure is crucial. Here are some things to consider:

- Read the opening question carefully and ensure you have identified everything it is asking you, for example:

1

Please use the following space to give us any information supporting your application, tell us why you have decided to apply for this position and provide evidence of any educational, employment and extracurricular activities which demonstrate that you have relevant skills for the role

2a

2b

Here it is important to address all the areas in the question:

- 1 Motivations – use the **Motivational question** section (page 12) to tackle this style of question
- 2 Competencies – this question is asking you to
  - a provide the best examples from all your experiences, and
  - b ensure that they are targeted to demonstrate how you meet the needs of this particular role

“Don’t ramble. Bullet-point your answers and clearly tie them into the job description. If there are 300 applications, the last thing someone wants to see is 12 pages of densely written type with no obvious structure”.

Nick O’Shea, Director of operations, Resolving Chaos

What happens if there are no clues about structure in the question?

Irrespective of the format of the application, employers will still shortlist against structured criteria. You will need to describe how your skills, abilities, knowledge and experience match the job as well as your motivation. If the only question is an invitation to write a supporting statement, you must make sure you have covered all these areas. In the absence of any formal structure requirements ensure the personal statement has a clear introduction, middle section and end.

Top Tip

One of the safest ways to ensure you have adequately covered all the competencies from the job description and/or personal specification is to use the competency headings, or other headings from the job description, to structure the statement.

What happens if there are 40 competency headings in the person specification and you only have 500 words in which to cover them?

As well as being assessed against a competency framework, you will also be assessed on your ability to analyse the different competencies, to make connections between them and to communicate your message concisely in writing. Examples of competencies that can potentially be merged include “teamwork and motivation” with “leadership” or “organising and planning” with “project management”.

Look for opportunities to group different competencies and provide examples for all the new competency headings you have established.

Content

It is important to consider the priorities for each section and to arrange the content for maximum impact. Most importantly, as with your essays, make sure you answer the question.

The Introduction

Grab attention with the opening sentence to convince the employer to read on. Tone and style will vary according to the sector you are applying to but always ensure you:

- Make the first paragraph your best
- Make the employer read on by providing a clear purpose and direction at the start, signposting any structure you will follow
- Make sure your tone and style is appropriate to the sector.

The middle section

- Use detailed supporting paragraphs to make confident statements about your skills and achievements, and link them to this role
- Select evidence appropriately (including skills, experience, qualifications and motivation) to demonstrate that you are the ideal candidate – but don’t write your life history!
- Quantify your successes where possible and appropriate
- Ensure all competencies in the job description have been addressed
- Use simple model outlined in the **Competency-based questions** section (page 9) to help you structure your personal statement by putting emphasis on what YOU actually did and how this relates to YOUR abilities
- Don’t be afraid to use the personal pronoun “I”.

The conclusion

To leave the employer with the best impression make sure you don’t neglect the conclusion. Use it to:

- make the final link between your individual profile of skills, knowledge and experience, and the job to confirm you are an excellent match for their requirements
- promote your enthusiasm for the job and this organisation
- bring together the different strands of your supporting paragraphs
- make your application distinctive.

# Biographical details

Recruiters use this section as a way of building up a picture of you and your experience so try to ensure that this part is as accurate and as full as possible.

A spelling error or a typing mistake can make the difference between being in the “yes” or “no” pile.

## Common FAQs when completing your biographical details include:

### Personal details (eg name, address, contact details)

**I have a term-time address and a home address, which one should I include?**

If you know when you are likely to be called for an interview, then include the address where you can be contacted at that point. If you are not sure, then put two (or more addresses) down but remember to include when you can be contacted at each.

**Should I put down my LSE email address or my personal one?**

Ideally you should use your LSE email as this gives the organisation a very quick and easy way to see that you are a bona fide LSE student. However the important point to remember is that you should put down an account you check on a regular basis but make sure that you use a professional sounding email address.

### Education (higher education, secondary education; scholarships, awards and prizes)

**Should I list all my module results gained as part of my degree?**

This is usually made clear on the online form. If you don’t have a breakdown of your results so far, try and get one from your department. If that isn’t possible, just include as much information as you can. If you only have space to include a small number of your subjects, then choose the ones that are most relevant or show you in the best light!

**I have overseas qualifications and they don’t appear on the drop-down list provided on the online form. What do I do?**

Recruiters make an effort to include as many different qualifications as possible. Usually there is an ‘other’ option which you can select and then fill in the details in free text. If this isn’t an option, get in touch with the graduate recruitment department of the organisation concerned.

Don’t be tempted to translate your overseas qualifications into what you think is the UK equivalent.

**I’m a mature student from overseas and I don’t have an accurate record of my secondary education results**

In the first instance try to contact the institution(s) you studied at to see if you can obtain copies of your certificates or a transcript of your results. If this is impossible it is best to contact the employer direct and seek their advice.

**How much detail should I use to describe my scholarships and academic awards?**

Always stick to a prescribed word limit, but make sure you say what the award or scholarship is for. For instance, merely writing “the D A Williams Scholarship” is meaningless; it is much better to write “the D A Williams Scholarship, awarded for academic excellence in Politics”.

**I’m still awaiting my final grades, but I am asked for a predicted result. What should I write?**

Don’t leave it blank. Try and put down something that’s optimistic but realistic, based on your grades so far or your tutor’s assessment.

### Work experience

**How much detail should I go into when listing my work experience?**

Generally, you should give the title of your experience and brief details of your achievements and responsibilities. Make sure that the job titles and descriptions that you use are easily understandable to someone not familiar with the organisation you worked for. It is important to follow any guidelines you are given on how much detail to go into in this section – if you are in any doubt, book an appointment to speak to a careers consultant here at LSE Careers.

**Should I include my unpaid/voluntary/‘non-relevant’ experience?**

Yes. Even though some of your experience might not be in the sector you are now applying for, it is still useful in terms of the skills you have developed and giving the employer an idea of the range of different things you’ve become involved in.

### Interests and extra-curricular activities

**Should I put all my extra-curricular activities down?**

This is an important section where recruiters look for evidence of what you’ve achieved outside of your studies and work experience. Generally, they are more impressed by a significant involvement in one or two activities, rather than a superficial involvement in many. For instance, being President or Treasurer of one LSE Society would carry more weight than simply being a member of five or six different societies.

Give enough detail to show the scope of your responsibilities and achievements (or the depth of your interest if it’s a hobby) without exceeding the word limit.

### Ill health, criminal convictions and extenuating circumstances

**I have experienced a period of ill health. Do I have to declare it on my form?**

If you are asked to tick whether you have experienced any health conditions from a list, then it is advisable to be up front about anything relevant in your medical history. Sometimes, though, there is a general question which asks something along the lines of “Have you suffered from any medical condition which could affect your work performance?” Here it is down to your own judgement – if you are unsure, speak to your GP.

**I have a criminal conviction. Do I need to disclose this?**

It depends on how long ago the conviction was and what you’re applying for. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974) protects ex-offenders from declaring a previous conviction once it has been ‘spent’ (ie once a certain amount of time has passed). Some professions, however, are exempt from the act, including some jobs working with children or vulnerable people as well as some areas of government, law, banking and finance. Always seek professional advice if you are unsure.

# Back to basics FAQs

## Technical questions

### I can't save my application form; do I need to keep a copy?

It is always a good idea to keep a copy of your application form if you can. If you can't save it, either print it out, or copy and paste your answers into Word (if you didn't draft in Word in the first place) and save them.

### The application form won't print properly – it prints with bits missing. Does this mean they won't receive everything?

No, quite often forms are designed to be reviewed online but not printed, so the organisation should receive it in its entirety. However sometimes forms are designed to only accept a certain number of lines or words, so make sure you have kept to the word limit.

### Should I type directly onto the form or cut and paste from another draft document first?

It is always a good idea to draft your answers (particularly to the longer questions and personal statement) in Word and then cut and paste them into the form. This will allow you to check the spelling and grammar of your answers. A few online forms are timed (this will always be made clear at the start) and don't allow you to cut and paste your answers. In that case, it is still worthwhile drafting the answers first before starting to fill the form in. Most online applications don't have spell checkers.

### I can't type directly onto the form and my handwriting isn't very clear, what can I do?

If the form is in PDF format then certain PCs in LSE have PDF writers that will allow you to type your answers.

### I need to send my application form as an email attachment. How should I do this?

Just save the completed form and attach it to your email, giving the job that you are applying for as the title to the email. The body of the email should be a short, formal letter, which gives the area you are interested in and states that the form is attached. You don't need to give the date or your address, but avoid slipping into a chatty email style.

### Do I need to write the email like a cover letter even if I have already written a personal statement?

Rarely. If you are faced with a generic application form which does not allow you to show your strengths then you can use the body of the email as a longer covering letter. Use your common sense about this, if you have already completed an extensive form, or written a comprehensive personal statement, then you do not need to say any more.

### I can't get the online application form to work properly. Is it OK to submit a CV instead?

That might not be wise – you would be advised to contact the company and tell them you are having technical difficulties with the form. Using the wrong format in applications is the easiest way to be rejected!

## Filling it in

### Do I have to answer all the questions on the form?

Yes you do! The available space is a key clue to how much information they want, so stick to the space unless they specifically invite you to send additional information. Organisations like to see that you can stick to a brief, so try to give them the information they want in the format and quantity that they want.

### There isn't enough room on the form! What should I do?

It is easier to write everything rather than be selective about what you write. However condensing extensive information into an easy to read summary is a key employability skill. Only attach separate pages if specifically invited to do so and even then, think about the amount of information that you are asking busy recruiters to read.

### Can I get the grammar and spelling checked on my application form answers at LSE Careers?

We are always happy to advise on the content of your form and would strongly advise you to go to a applications form seminar initially. However, we will not check your grammar and spelling. Organisations use written applications as a way to check for your level of English, so they want to see that it was written by you. The LSE Language Centre may be able to check your English for a fee.

### I'm going on holiday/travelling soon. Should I state this on the form?

It is always wise to tell organisations that you are applying to if you're going to be away during the time that they may be interviewing.

### Why do they include a section on Equal Opportunities monitoring? Will it count against me if I don't fill it in?

It is important to recognise that selectors won't see your Equal Opportunities monitoring form. The form is used after the event to check that the process has been fair and that no group is excluded unfairly. Diversity is very important to all major employers and Equal Opportunities monitoring is a good indicator that the organisation has good practice in this area.

"Word limits are there for a reason and you should be guided by them. If we say 250 words, we expect to see this level of detail. The best answers include relevant details and are well structured, clear and concise. If the question has several parts to it, make sure you address each part – this will show your attention to detail!".

Caroline Lindner, Norton Rose Fulbright LLP

## After you have submitted

### I think I've made a mistake on the form I submitted. Can I do anything about it now?

That depends on the error. If it is a simple spelling or grammatical error then probably not. You could try emailing them, but that would just draw attention to your error. However if it is an error of fact (eg you gave incorrect exam results), then you should certainly contact them.

### Will it make a difference if I submit my application form early?

Some organisations don't start reviewing applications until after the deadline, others will review them on a rolling basis. You often won't know which is the case, so there may be an advantage to be gained from submitting your application early.

### Should I follow up my application form with a phone call or a letter?

Probably not at this stage. Some, although not all organisations, notify you electronically. But there would be chaos if every applicant rang to check! You are more likely to annoy someone than to gain anything.

### How long will I have to wait to hear back from the employer after I've submitted the form?

Again this varies and can depend upon whether the company waits until the deadline before reviewing applications. In most cases you should hear within a month or even two of the application deadline, but there is significant variation in this area.

### I submitted my application a while ago and haven't heard anything back yet. Can I contact the company to chase it up?

If more than six weeks has passed since the deadline for applications, then a polite, short email saying that you are still very interested in working for the company, and that you look forward to hearing from them can do no harm.

### I think that my application has been unfairly rejected; what can I do about this?

That depends on what grounds. In the first instance come and talk to a careers consultant.



# Application checklist

So your application form is finally complete – now it is time to review the work you have done to see whether you have given yourself the best chance of making it to the next round of the recruitment process, and a step closer to the job you want.

Content

☐

Have you adequately researched yourself, the role and the sector before you started completing the form? Have you used this information to inform your answers and target your application?

☐

Have you used a range of examples drawn from all aspects of your life: extra curricular, work experience and your studies?

☐

Have you mentioned any prizes you have won or relevant overseas experience that may help your application stand out?

☐

Do the examples you have selected clearly demonstrate your skills and professional goals? Do they show evidence of analysing what you did and how you did it rather than simply providing a list of experiences?

☐

Are your answers accurate, confident and concise? Do they adhere to any word limits that may apply?

☐

Have you answered all sections and addressed all the elements of the job description/ person specification?

Structure

Generally

☐

Do your answers follow the STAR structure?

See page 10 for more explanation about how to get the right emphasis in your answer

☐

Does the opening paragraph capture the reader’s attention?

In particular for personal/supporting statements:

☐

Have you made it easy for an employer to read and make a quick judgement that you meet the requirements of the role?

eg using competency headings to structure your statement.

Structure (continued)

☐

Have you concluded enthusiastically and avoided clichés?

Language

☐

Have you demonstrated energy, drive and enthusiasm in your answers?

☐

Have you avoided any unnecessary duplication and typos?

☐

Have you used active, positive, professional language?

☐

Have you avoided mirroring the language found in the organisation’s recruitment literature?

Overall

☐

Have you proof-read and reviewed your application?

☐

Have you sought feedback from friends, family, colleagues or a careers consultant?

☐

Have you made your application interesting to read and distinguished yourself from other candidates?

☐

Overall have you successfully demonstrated that you have the 3 Cs – Competencies, Commitment and Cultural Fit?

Top Tip

Don’t get caught out copying examples from any of the resources you have used to do your research – including this booklet!

If you’ve read it, the employer has probably read it too and will be able to spot a generic answer a mile away.

# Further resources

The following materials are available in the LSE Careers Resources Area. This is located on the 5th floor of the Saw Swee Hock Student Centre. Drop in to the Resource Area and ask our Student Experience Co-ordinator if you need help finding any information.

- Get that job!: the complete, thorough, hands-on guide to the whole recruitment and selection process, Andy Gibb
- How to get the best graduate job: insider strategies for success in the graduate job market, David Williams, Phil Brown and Anthony Hesketh
- The Times readymade job search letters: every type of letter for getting the job you want, Lynn Williams

**Our website**  
Check the application form pages on the LSE Careers website for the latest news, events and online resources and information.  
**lse.ac.uk/careers** > CVs, cover letters and application forms > Application forms



Click on the “Resources” link in the left hand menu for a list of useful websites to help with writing an application form.



# Struggling with your application form?

## Have you...

### ☒ read this application forms booklet?

This booklet aims to give you the knowledge and skills to work independently on your application forms.

### ☒ investigated further resources?

The **Resources** section of this booklet (page 27) provides a selection of resources recommended by and available from LSE Careers.

### ☒ attended an application form seminar?

Application form seminars run regularly throughout the year. These are one-hour lunchtime seminars run by LSE careers consultants, which we recommend attending before seeking one-to-one careers advice.

Visit the events section of LSE CareerHub at **careers.lse.ac.uk** to find out where and when the next seminar will be and book your place.

### ☒ visited the Language Centre?

LSE Careers does not proofread applications for spelling and grammar therefore please do not book an appointment with a careers consultant if you want English language advice. Instead visit our colleagues in the Language Centre. Find out about their proof-reading services at **lse.ac.uk/Depts/language/AdditionalServices.htm**

Once you have looked at these resources, if you are still struggling with a specific question, consider booking an appointment via **careers.lse.ac.uk**



## Contact details

LSE Careers is open:

Monday-Friday, 10am – 5pm

Telephone number: +44 (0)20 7955 7135

Address:

LSE Careers

Floor 5, Saw Swee Hock Student Centre

1 Sheffield Street

London WC2A 2AP

General enquiries email: [careers@lse.ac.uk](mailto:careers@lse.ac.uk)

Website: [lse.ac.uk/careers](http://lse.ac.uk/careers)

## How to complete an application form

**Edited by** Sarah Maltby and Maddie Smith, July 2013.

The School seeks to ensure that people are treated equitably, regardless of age, disability, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation or personal circumstances.

This brochure can be made available in alternative formats, on request. Please contact: LSE Careers.

Design: LSE Design Unit ([lse.ac.uk/designunit](http://lse.ac.uk/designunit)).