winning graduate applications

inspiring achievement
Flinders University’s Bachelor degree programs aim to produce graduates who:

- ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE
- CAN APPLY THEIR KNOWLEDGE
- COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY
- VALUE ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR
- ARE COLLABORATIVE
- CAN WORK INDEPENDENTLY
- CONNECT ACROSS BOUNDARIES
# WINNING GRADUATE APPLICATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Application forms are commonly used by Graduate Employers in both the private and public sectors, usually in an online format, and occasionally in hard copy. They are used for Graduate Recruitment Programs, and you may also encounter them when applying for Vacation Work Programs. The employer has constructed them according to skills-based criteria in order to standardise, and add efficiency to the application process.

The questions range from straightforward items (personal details, education & qualifications, employment, referees) right through to targeted questions that are designed to challenge you to reflect in detail about your skills and achievements. You may have to comment about yourself or career motivations, or give a specific example to demonstrate a skill. For example:

• Give an example of when your personal contribution to a task or project led to a positive outcome.
  o What did you do that was different to others?
  o What else could you have done to improve on the outcome?

These questions take time, and careful planning. To do so effectively means you will have to spend time analysing your experiences.

At all times, keep in mind that the WAY you fill out the form itself reveals a great deal to an employer:

• How effectively you can communicate in writing.
• Whether you can follow the instructions on the form (you’d be surprised…).
• How well you can demonstrate that you match the employer’s requirements.

Your goal in responding to the application questions is to give a clear picture of yourself and your skills to the employer, so you can convince them that you are the ideal candidate for the job.

We have other booklets available covering all aspects of graduate job search. You may wish to obtain your free copies of our booklets from the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre, or download them from our website: www.flinders.edu.au/careers/student/

• Creative Job Search
• Writing Your Application - CV and cover letters
• Addressing Selection Criteria
• At the Interview
• Assessment Centres & Selection Tests
• The booklet, ‘Networking - going proactive’ is also available to be downloaded from our website

2. FLINDERS UNIVERSITY GRADUATE QUALITIES
As a result of successfully pursuing your studies at Flinders University, you will have developed program-specific professional competencies as well as being able to demonstrate a range of qualities.

Flinders University’s Bachelor degree programs aim to produce graduates who:

• are knowledgeable
• can apply their knowledge
• communicate effectively
• can work independently
• are collaborative
• value ethical behaviour
• connect across boundaries.

More information about the Graduate Qualities, including descriptions is available at: www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities/.

As you conduct your self-assessment and review your educational experiences, consider how you may both demonstrate and draw on these qualities as you embark on the next step in your career.

We are proud that so many Flinders graduates identify with, and can be distinguished by, these distinctive academic, professional and cultural characteristics.” (Flinders University Graduate Qualities statement www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities/graduate-qualities_home.cfm)

3. APPLICATION FORMS AND SELECTION CRITERIA: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Graduate applications can involve either responding to selection criteria, or responding to specific questions about your skills (‘Describe a time when …’). There are subtle differences in each form of application.
Compare the selection criterion - ‘Demonstrated project management skills’ and the application form question - ‘Provide an example of a time when you had to manage a complex project’. In your response to the selection criterion, you may present a few examples; for the application form question, you will describe one example as requested, within the word limit.

4. HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER…?

Here are some examples of questions taken from recent online Graduate Application forms:

• What personal qualities and abilities do you possess that will set you apart from other applicants? Please use specific examples to demonstrate this.

• In applying for this role, what do you feel will be your greatest challenge?

• Describe a time where you had to prioritise competing demands on your time. How did you manage and what did you learn from this situation?

• Please describe two different achievements which have given you the greatest sense of satisfaction and why.

• Describe a situation in which you were required to adapt to change. How did you deal with this? Please state the situation, your actions, and the outcome.

• Result Focus.
  Briefly describe a time when you have gone above and beyond the call of duty to achieve a goal or complete a task. In your answer, you may wish to consider the following:

  1. In what ways did you go further than what was expected of you?

  2. Why did you feel it was necessary to exceed expectations in this instance?

• Cultivating and Supporting Productive Working relationships.
  Describe a situation that demonstrates your ability to build rapport and foster productive working relationships with a person, team or group. In your answer, ensure you have addressed the following:

  1. What were the circumstances – what led to the development of a working relationship between you and the other person, team or group?

  2. In this specific situation, what factors did you need to consider when building rapport and maintaining the relationship?

  3. How did you address these factors? How did the other person, team or group respond to your actions?

  4. In what ways was your relationship productive?
• Research and analysis.

Have you had experience using research and analysis to formulate solutions to a problem or support a theory? If Yes, please describe a specific example of your experience, stating the research you undertook, the type of analysis you performed and the solutions/results you achieved.

• Some application forms may also have some ‘technical’ criteria, for example:

Only graduates with qualifications in Law should answer the following question: Outline any work you have performed as a student, or as an employee, in statutory interpretation, case analysis or policy development.

5. SKILLS

Marketing your skills on the application form

So, you’ve just clicked on the application form and are poised over the keyboard ready to type your way to the interview…STOP.

Before you go near an application form there are a few things you need to do first. You are about to market yourself to an employer using their form…This means that you must analyse your skills and achievements across all spheres of activity - academic, work, extra curricular, etc. What evidence can you offer an employer that you can do the job? What examples of your skills are you going to use?

The principles of marketing your skills

1. Understand the skills required by the employer. Read the recruitment literature, study the application pack/web site, and find out as much about the employer as possible. Research the job, so you have a clear idea of what it involves. In the case of graduate programs, read graduate testimonials and so on.

2. Identify what skills you have to offer.

3. Match your skills against the employer’s requirements. How can you make connections between your knowledge/skills/abilities and the job or program? On a piece of paper, draw a line down the middle and on one half of the paper write the heading “What they are looking for” and on the opposite half put the heading “Evidence”. Under the first heading, use your research on the organisation and the job to list the skills, qualifications and experience that the employer is looking for. Opposite each item under ‘Evidence’ you should think of at least one experience from your work, study, community or extra curricular activities that demonstrates that particular requirement.

For example: teamwork
You notes might include - being part of a committee or a sporting team, working on a group project, being one of the organisers of an event. 
4. Produce evidence of your skills that will enable you to convince the employer of your suitability.

6. GENERAL TIPS FOR APPLICATION FORMS

- Organise the relevant information such as transcripts, dates of employment, details of referees etc well in advance of the Graduate Recruitment Season. Once you have collected this information, keep it together so you can refer to it quickly - you might set up an applications file where you can keep copies.

- Where the form asks for the Academic Transcript, it is usually acceptable, in an online application, to use the unofficial transcript. At some point in the recruitment process, however, you will need to provide the official copy.

- Usually you will be able to preview the application form. Read the form through carefully so you know exactly what information it asks for and where you are required to put it. Decide which examples of your skills you will use for each question.

- Some application forms have a space headed “supporting statement” or “other relevant information”. Never leave this space blank - it gives you the chance to add to your case to be considered and is often seen by the employer as the most significant section of the form. This is where you get the chance to let your personality shine through and to give a clear picture of what you are like as a person. See page 20.

- Use positive and specific words to describe your activities and interests, rather than vague terms and worn out clichés. Express yourself clearly and don’t use jargon.

- Explain your role in clubs, societies & associations, work experience, and casual jobs. Don’t just list what you have done. Show how these activities will translate into the skills sought by the employer.

- Don’t undersell yourself - focus on your achievements, what you did.

- Make sure that you respond to all parts of each question and don’t leave any questions unanswered. If the question is not applicable to you, write ‘Not Applicable’.

- If possible, get someone to check your draft answers before finalising the application.

7. FAQs

How far back can my examples go?
Not having any recent examples to use for your answers doesn’t look good. Try and draw examples from different parts of your life - recent work experience, coursework, extra curricular activities, and achievements.
How to cover up weak points?
Don’t highlight anything you think is a weak point, and don’t refer to anything you know is a flaw. Another angle is to use examples where things have not gone according to plan in your life to demonstrate your problem-solving skills, determination, and motivation. It is perfectly all right for you to admit to some errors and inexperience as long as you can show you have learned from your mistakes and demonstrate how you have developed. You can also offer credible explanations for any of these issues. See pages 19-20 for more ideas.

8. ELECTRONICALLY SPEAKING: THE ON-LINE APPLICATION FORM

To thrive in the online environment, your application will need to include key words that the employer is likely to be looking for. Many of these key words can be found in the organisation’s mission statement, key objectives statement or their graduate recruitment literature.

With e-applications in general, students need to exercise caution. Graduate recruiters frequently comment that the speedy, informal nature of email is not conducive to accurate applications. Here are some tips to avoid the pitfalls!

BEFORE YOU START...

Email address
Your email address is the primary method of contact for online applications so in many ways it is more important than your name!! Ensure that this is correct, current, reliable, and accessible. Also ensure that it sounds professional. Enter two if possible (e.g. University account and a Personal account).

Internet Access
Ensure that your choice of Internet access (Home/Library/University) will provide you with uninterrupted online access for the entire application process.

Your software
Check the application guidelines in relation to browser version, java, etc as you may need to upgrade or use alternate versions to complete your application.

Research on the company
Most organisations using online applications will include all the information that you need to know about them on their website – ensure you check it out prior to applying.

Find out the closing time and date
DO NOT start to upload your application on the last available day, as the site may be slower due to increased traffic (as other people frantically try to complete their applications as well). The application may also be longer and more detailed than
expected, requiring more time, and research. Also, if you do encounter any technical difficulties, you may not be able to complete your application by the deadline and miss out!

**Read instructions thoroughly**

Ascertaining the requirements of the application – does it have to be completed in one sitting or can it be done over time in separate sittings? Does it require the completion of extended answers (requiring prior research and planning)?

**DURING THE APPLICATION …**

**Read all the text and instructions**

Text and instructions are used sparingly throughout the online application process and exist to assist you in completing the application successfully – so read them carefully! Strictly adhere to maximum word or character counts where these are imposed. This is easier to do on your computer as you have the 'Count' button to use on many forms.

**Answering the questions**

Start noting down ideas. If you can, preview the form and think about your responses to the questions without time pressure. You can work on it as a draft and properly check your spelling and grammar before you complete it on-line.

**Treat it like a formal document**

Just because the application is online does not mean it can be written like an email to a friend. Ensure that your grammar and punctuation are correct. Remember that many online forms don't have a spell check. Prepare any long answers in a word processor, spell check the document then copy and paste it into the application form. Always proof read.

> “Avoid merely cutting and pasting answers from another application form – they may appear generic or worst still, may mention the wrong employer.” Will Blott, Graduate Recruitment Manager for Unilever, GradCareers 2009, Hobsons.

**Save Save Save**

Save as you go along! If you don't, you could get really frustrated. If you have the option to register your name; save your work, and have a break. When you return to your form later, it will be easier to spot any errors.

**Complete all sections**

Make sure you look out for pull-down lists. If none of the choices matches you, make sure you fill in the 'other' section. An incomplete form will not create a good impression and may cast doubts on your competence. An asterix usually indicates that a question is mandatory, and some systems will not allow you to submit your application until you have completed all mandatory questions.
Online Tests
You may be required to undertake a timed test online. Make sure you’re focused and prepared. For more information, see the booklet: ‘Assessment Centres & Selection Tests’.

If you have computer problems or the website is not functioning correctly or you don’t understand the process, contact the organisation either by email or phone (use the phone if the closing date is less than 48 hours away!).

WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED...

Make sure you print off a completed copy of your form for your records before you send it off. You may not be able to view the form again once it has been submitted. Your answers could be referred to at the interview, so you will need to re-read it before the interview.

Make sure that you click "Submit"!

9. TIPS FOR PAPER APPLICATION FORMS

• These are much less commonly used compared to online forms, however you may encounter them for some Graduate Nurse/Midwifery Programs, and in other contexts.

• Make a photocopy of the form and use this for your rough draft. This will help you to ensure that you can actually get the information into the space allocated, and that you don’t make mistakes on the good copy.

• Don’t try to cram tiny writing into the available space. Use the amount of space given to answer a question as an indication of the significance attached to that question.

• Follow all the instructions exactly. If you are asked to write in block capitals, or blue or black ink, then do so. Failure to follow simple instructions won’t impress an employer. Rather, it tells an employer something about your attention to detail and ability to follow directions.

• Keep it neat. Keep all paper clean. Above all, be legible. The employer may photocopy the form.

• Attach all documents requested. Failure to do so can hold up or jeopardise your application. Any attachments should be clearly labelled e.g. Question 6: My Career Goal. Don’t leave them guessing!

• Make sure you get your job application to its destination by the due date. Late arrival may result in your application not being considered.

• Photocopy the completed application to keep for your records. You will need to re-read it if you get a job interview.
10. THE QUESTIONS AND HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THEM

Personal details
If you indicate a vacation and a term time address, be clear about when you want each used. Include mobile phone, email and fax details if you have them.

Education
Consider how you could order things so that the best grades you have received or the courses most relevant to the job are at the top of the list. The selector/s will notice any gaps - so if you changed courses, do record it. Be creative about how you could group related courses, or courses where you got the same grade.

Employment and Work experience
Make sure your job title is meaningful - if you didn’t have one, summarise your position, e.g. clerical officer. Try to quantify your achievements and use positive language.

Include all paid and unpaid work; voluntary work, practicum placements, and any work in a family business.

Include employer details and dates, consider the activities and responsibilities involved and any training courses attended. In some applications, you may have a word limit, e.g. 100 words, for each employer.

For more information on describing work experience, please refer to the booklet: ‘Writing Your Application’.

Computer Skills
Include word processing, databases, spreadsheets, and specialist packages comprising graphics or statistics, and be specific. Basic student experience of…/Professional experience of…/Sound working knowledge of… If you are an Information Technology student, more information may be required here.

Languages
Include all languages you can speak, read or write. State your current standard in a way that is applicable to work, e.g. Bilingual-fluent, Able to translate reports etc.

Other certificated skills
For example: Coaching certificates, First Aid, Child Safe Environments - Mandatory Reporting, etc.

Extra curricular activities
For example: involvement in clubs/societies etc - what responsibility was involved?
Geographical Location
Be honest if there is one or more location you really want to work in, but being flexible in your preferred location will maximise your chances of getting the job. What is your priority - location or job? Remember it may be possible to transfer to your preferred location later.

Hobbies
This question gives you the chance to demonstrate that you are a well-rounded candidate who has more to offer than academic ability. Your leisure activities may also give you a chance to show skills and qualities that are not evident elsewhere. Single words like sport and music do not convey much. Say what you actually do, for example:

- Play football for a local club and coach their junior squad (20 x 12 year olds).
- Play the viola in an amateur string quartet, giving three fundraising concerts a year to support the XYZ Charity.
- Global community development (subscribe to AusAID’s Focus magazine).

Additional information
Follow the instructions. Be specific about your skills - try to anticipate the skills the employer wants.

Referees
Select them carefully to ensure they are relevant to the employment context and ask for their permission. Keep your referees up to date with where you are at with your applications and give them a copy of your CV.

Workplace Equity and Diversity questions
This is also referred to as Equal Opportunity Information and is usually optional. Your answers may have no bearing on your application. But if you object, don’t fill it in. For example, there may be questions where you may indicate aspects such as, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, whether you are from a non-English speaking background, or whether you have an ongoing disability, etc.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU
See pages 4-5 for examples of these questions. Now we will look at what these questions are really asking, the art of responding to them, and some sample answers. Use the examples to give yourself an idea of how you might start tackling the questions but don’t just copy them. Remember, you want to stand out as an individual (not as one of the many other students who have read these examples).
Stage 1: Identify possible examples of your skills
You may find a particular example can be presented differently to show a number of skills, but do try to draw on a range of examples. Make notes on several examples from a wide range of activities including employment and extra-curricular activities. Also, you can make a lot out of a little - i.e. casual work in a bar - it’s all work experience.

Stage 2: Read the Question… carefully!
Usually these questions have several parts and you must respond to each part, e.g.: Give an example of when you have had to lead a group of people. Describe what happened and include any difficulties you encountered and how you dealt with them.

To prepare, you will need to identify an example that will enable you to respond to all parts of the question.

You will need to think about the context, what you did, and the outcomes. Especially where these show a specific achievement or what you learned from the experience.

Generally an answer with more verbs that show explicitly what you did will be better than one with fewer.

Stage 3: Structure the answer
You will usually have tight word/character limits, so you must get to the point quickly and succinctly. Eliminate excess words.

Rather than:
"In my third year of a Business Studies degree I had to do a course placement and I went to the Human Resources department at....".

Instead write:
"My third-year Human Resources placement at … involved …"

Be positive about your achievements but don’t exaggerate the truth.

11. THE WINNING FORMULA

The questions on application forms typically ask you to ‘Provide an example of a time when …’ or ‘Describe an example of …’

Structure your answers using the ☆ STAR ☆ Method
This is a method you can use to develop examples of skills that illustrate your successes. Review each situation noting who was involved, what your role was, the order of events, and the outcome (see prompt questions below). In this section we have 3 examples that illustrate how you can use the STAR method to respond to application form questions. Word limits on application forms can range from 150 words to 300, 500 or even 1000 characters. The 3 examples below show you
examples of 150, 200, and 250 word responses and the level of detail you can encapsulate within them.

**S: Situation**

**T: Task**

**A: Action**

**R: Result**

**Situation or Task**
- Where? When?
- What was the situation/ context?
- What were the circumstances surrounding…?
- What was the specific task?

**Action**
- Exactly what did you do?
- Describe specifically how you did that?
- What did you do first? Second?
- Describe your specific role in this situation
- What steps did you take?
- Did you encounter any obstacles?

**Result**
- What was the result?
- How did that work out?
- What problems/ success resulted from…?
- What feedback did you receive?
- What did you learn?
- What might you do differently?
Working in teams
Just about every work situation now requires people to work in teams. Employers want to find out not only what experience you have of teamwork, but also whether you recognise and understand the benefits and problems of teamwork. So let’s use the STAR method to respond to the questions below:

Describe a time when you worked in a team to achieve a deadline. (150 words)

Situation
• Outline the context: i.e. the team you were in - final year project, team’s purpose, number of people in the team, etc.

Task
• What was your role?

Action
• Then think about your actions, especially what your contribution to the team was, e.g. took all responsibility for scheduling a series of meetings and setting deadlines, or analysed all statistical data collected into an Excel report. How did you go about this?

Result
• Then talk about the result: e.g., the team received a distinction for the presentation of the project.

Here’s how these notes could look as a finalised answer:

Describe a time when you worked in a team to achieve a deadline (150 words).

My teamwork skills are demonstrated through participation in 12 group projects at university. A key example is when I worked in a team of 6 students, with a timeline of 4 weeks to complete a major project exploring the links between ageing and health. My role was to collate the research undertaken by the team and integrate this into the final report. This involved liaising with and supporting each team member, and reporting on progress at each meeting.

The effectiveness of this strategy was apparent when two team members left unexpectedly due to illness, as I could rapidly review the tasks remaining and reallocate these amongst the group. I used my negotiating skills and ability to foster enthusiasm to ensure we functioned cohesively to deliver the project report by the designated deadline. I also coordinated the team’s project presentation to the class (50 students) and we achieved a credit grade.

Influencing/communication
Describe how you achieved a goal by influencing the actions or opinions of others. What were the circumstances? What did you do to make a difference? How do you know the result was satisfactory?

The employer is looking for evidence that you are:
• able to identify the key people to influence
• aware that different approaches work with different people and able to select an appropriate presentation style
• a good communicator.

**Here's an example of an answer:**
In 2010 I was a member of a 6 person committee that organised a barbecue for the Enterprising Engineers and Scientists Club. The event was important as it was combined with a membership drive.

My role was to coordinate and deliver brief promotional talks to eight lecture classes of up to 200 students in the 2 week period before the barbecue.

I liaised with the Lecturers concerned to explain the Club’s purpose and to negotiate the time needed for the talk. The presentations consisted of introducing the club and myself, selling the event and clearly outlining the key benefits of club membership for students. To prepare for this presentation I drafted my talk and delivered several practice runs including one in front of the committee to ensure that I covered all the points and that the presentation ran to time. I used the feedback from the committee to improve the content of my talk. As this was a promotional presentation, I aimed to deliver the presentation in an upbeat and energetic manner, using eye-catching PowerPoint slides. I also designed a flyer and distributed this at the lectures to reinforce the key points of the presentation.

As a result of the planning and preparation stages, and my interest and enthusiasm for promoting the club, my verbal communication was confident and effective. The success of this promotional campaign saw 150 students attend the BBQ (the best attendance in the 3 years of the club’s existence), and we increased our membership by 40%.

**Planning, implementation and achieving results**
Describe a challenging project you have planned and taken through to its conclusion. (200 words)

Human resources staff are looking for evidence that you are:
• proactive and the type of person that can make things happen
• able to set realistic goals for yourself and to measure success
• flexible and adaptable in your approach.

Describe a challenging project you have planned and taken through to its conclusion. (200 words)
My project management skills are well demonstrated through the completion of a major research project for my Honours Degree and volunteering at CommunityCare.
where I developed a grant submission. The latter experience involved developing a project plan setting out the major milestones of the grant submission project and developing a GANT Chart to outline the time frames for each milestone. Phases I was responsible for in this 10-week project included: identifying the funding sources, background research (qualitative and quantitative data, and accessing Census data), budget preparation and writing the proposal. I also coordinated and conducted 10 semi-structured interviews of key stakeholders including consumers, allied health representatives and community groups in this timeframe. I delivered 2 presentations to the CommunityCare team on my progress and used their feedback to hone the final report. The Fundraising Officer approved my proposal and it was submitted to the funding body. The grant submission was successful and CommunityCare was awarded $5000 for new equipment to support community programs. As a result, I gained valuable experience in managing complex projects, developed extensive community networks and further deepened my understanding of this sector. This has confirmed my goal of working in the field of health services policy.

Try to think of examples that are original and relevant - this will probably impress a Human Resources officer who is desperately seeking inspiration. Nothing can substitute for your own examples of situations you have experienced.

12. SOME MORE EXAMPLES

This section contains some basic examples (each could need further development and expansion) of some typical skills covered in an application form. Tips on what the recruiter is looking for in your response, and ideas on how to go about responding are provided.

Forward Planning

*Please describe a time when you have devised a plan for yourself or for others to reach a desired goal. How did you ensure your plan achieved the end result?*

- Choose an example such as a project group in which you participated for your course or work placement, a fundraising activity, or examples from other areas of your life.

- Briefly describe the project, explain what your role was, what you did and say why it worked. For example, a fundraising event…

“I was part of a project team that organised a fundraising event for the Hoffmann Foundation. My role was to organise meetings, motivate the team, and ensure that we achieved our targets. I did this by calling an initial meeting, brainstorming ideas so everyone felt involved, then agreeing with the others on an action plan. I was responsible for monitoring the action plan; as part of this I included future meetings to check on what everyone had achieved. These meetings allowed the team to identify some problems, and I was able to adjust the targets accordingly, while still staying on schedule. Without these meetings, our aim would not have been achieved. The event went ahead as planned and raised $…”
Customer Focus
*Please describe a situation where you have demonstrated that you have provided a service to others. What did you do?*

Provide a brief description of what you did, what your role was, and explain what was achieved. An example might come from having worked in retail, or from any experience in serving customers. You can also think of ‘service’ in its broadest sense, e.g. fund raising, advising/helping someone.

Communicating and presenting information
*Think of an occasion where you were required to explain something complex to two or more people who were unknowledgeable on the subject. Who was your audience? What did you need to explain? What difficulties did you experience in getting your thoughts across? What were their reactions?*

Employers want to know whether you can:

- convey new or complex or technical information to a non-specialist audience
- persuade them to your point of view
- identify their needs, or agree on common ground.

Leadership Skills
*Please describe a situation where you have led a group of people? Describe the result.*

"As captain of the University women's football squad, I prepared the team for the Inter-University cup. After the squad's trials I selected a team and organised a club committee. As chairperson I coordinated the development of a comprehensive training schedule, which required consultation with Committee members and liaison with the team. To develop the team members' skills I initiated training sessions in partnership with other local football clubs. The result was the team reaching the semi finals - the first time we reached the finals in five years."

Analysis, problem solving and creative thinking
*Describe a difficult problem that you have solved. State how you decided what were the critical issues. Say what you did and what your solution was. What other approaches could you have taken?*

The employer is looking for evidence that you are aware that there are a number of solutions to any one problem and are able to:

- approach a problem in a logical manner and break it down into manageable chunks
- evaluate and prioritise tasks
• generate innovative solutions
• take a flexible approach
• demonstrate initiative and creativity.

**Drive and initiative**
*Describe an occasion when you demonstrated determination to complete a challenge.*
"As a member of the University Hall Committee I worked in a team to develop an Annual Hall Fundraising ball. We set ourselves a goal of raising $1000 for Anglicare to work with homeless youth. As a key member of the team my role was to develop a theme, plan and coordinate venues/acts, liaise with caterers, the Dean of Hall, the Management Committee, Residence staff and work to a budget. Acting on a limited budget it was a challenge to ensure that we provided good entertainment and yet made a profit. We had over 250 people attend and the ball made a profit of $2,000."

**Self-management and focussing on results**
*Describe a situation where you had to achieve a goal or personal objective within a limited time frame and tell us how you went about it.*

The employer is looking for people who can:

• focus on achieving results
• be pro-active in taking responsibility for getting things done
• be clear about objectives and how to achieve them
• work to a plan and modify it where appropriate
• adapt to and take advantage of new ways of doing things.

**Career Choice/Choice of Graduate Program or Employer**
*Explain what attracts you to the type of work you are applying for.*

*Please tell us your reasons for choosing (this Department), what are you looking for in a Graduate program, and what will you bring to the organisation.*

*Motivation: What is your most compelling reason for seeking a position within our Graduate program? Please explain how it would meet your personal career plan better than similar positions in other government departments.*

*What special skills or strengths could you bring to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts? What do you hope to achieve by working in the Australian Public Service?*
The employer wants to know how well you understand the skills and qualities required for the job. What evidence can you provide, from any area of your life, to show that you have those skills and qualities?

This is also an opportunity to say why this job is the next logical step in your career - demonstrate that you have really thought out why you want the job and have an awareness of your ability to make a contribution to the work of the organisation.

*Explain what attracts you to this organisation.*

The employer wants to know that you have a genuine interest in, and commitment to work with them.

You can demonstrate this through your:

- interest in the field of work in which the organisation is engaged
- knowledge of the broad goals, aims, objectives of the employer
- understanding of how your studies apply, what contribution you can make, how your values align with those of the organisation
- awareness of what the organisation’s Graduate Recruitment Program could mean to you in terms of your career development (but don’t appear selfish, also consider how you can contribute to the organisation’s needs and goals).

Suppose you were applying to Government of South Australia Graduate recruitment register (www.graduate.sa.gov.au/). You would need to conduct research to understand the role, scale and purpose of the SA Public Sector. The above website refers to a work environment that encourages personal growth and the growth of the state and making South Australia a great place to live and work. How does this relate to you and your career? When commenting on your interest in working for particular government departments, what can you find out about each department's history, objectives, vision, mission, business functions and priorities? Why does this interest you and how does it relate to your knowledge, skills, experience and career objectives?

Understanding the employer and being able to connect this to yourself and your values is a great way to show your initiative, drive and enthusiasm to work for them.

**How to respond to challenging questions**

Sometimes you’ll be asked to respond to questions with an example of when you made a mistake, experienced challenges, or were not successful in your endeavours. For example:

*Describe a situation in which you have had to overcome a difficult setback or personal or professional challenge.*
Provide an example where you were part of a team that wasn’t producing the required outcomes. How did you go about getting the team back on track? What would you do differently at the beginning to ensure this didn’t happen again?

Describe a situation that demonstrates your ability to learn from your mistakes and take responsibility for your actions.

The employer is trying to gauge your ability to respond to difficult situations or criticism, to take responsibility for your own performance, and learn from both positive and negative experiences. And they’ll be getting a sense of what you define as difficult or challenging. You need to show that you are resilient in the face of difficulty, and that you are motivated and have the initiative to put in the work or effort necessary to overcome the challenges. In terms of emotional intelligence, can you maintain professional behaviour in the face of less than professional behaviours from others?

Have you ever had a major assignment that had to change direction at the last minute? Or been in a team where the interpersonal dynamics didn’t work out? Or you realised you have been on the wrong tack with something? Or have you ever over committed yourself – perhaps in your enthusiasm to participate or contribute? Perhaps you missed a deadline due to difficult circumstances. Everyone’s journey is unique, and you need to consider your experiences carefully, to select an appropriate example.

Your response could demonstrate your ability to engage in ethical reflection on your actions, your honesty, integrity, ability to admit mistakes and trustworthiness.

Be honest; explain the situation, how you handled it, and the lessons you learned as a result and how you may do things differently now. Try to put a ‘positive spin’ on the situation, or choose an example where you were more the victim of circumstances out of your control, but were able to navigate your way through the difficulty.

13. WRITING THE SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Supporting statements are a feature of some Graduate Program applications, vacation work recruitment processes, and even some postgraduate course applications and scholarships.

You may be asked to comment on your skills/experience and motivation to join the graduate program or you might be asked to write a summary highlighting any other skills or interests. You could be asked about your career goals. You may have a word limit, or if the application is in paper form, the need to keep the response to the space provided (without resorting to really tiny writing/font). This process is quite different to responding to selection criteria and the typical questions on application forms.
Example: Repatriation General Hospital
2009 Transition To Professional Practice Program Application Form (Nursing)
Please answer each of the following questions.

1. Please outline why you have selected the Repatriation General Hospital to undertake the Transition to Professional Practice Program?

2. What do you hope to achieve from participating in The RGH Transition to Professional Practice Program?

3. Please write any relevant information about your experience, strengths, interests etc, which you feel will be of benefit to the Repatriation General Hospital and will support your application.

Writing a Supporting Statement in a Job Application

A good supporting statement will combine knowledge of, and interest in, the organisation with pertinent information about your skills and attributes, supported by examples.

Your interest in the organisation
Discuss your interest in the organisation either at the outset or at some point in the statement by:

• referring to the work they do (that you also enjoy and have capacity for)

• referring to experiences/events/news items, that were instrumental in your being particularly interested in this organisation (meeting employer representatives at a Careers Fair, undertaking vacation work, or a WorkReady Placement in that organisation etc)

• referring to recent organisational initiatives/trends of special interest to you

• ensuring that the statement contains an indication of the contribution you would hope to make to the organisation (on the basis of your degree, skills, special knowledge, attributes etc).

Your Skills and attributes

• Discuss how you demonstrate the skills and attributes required by the employer. Provide evidence.

• Highlight aspects of your degree of relevance to the organisation (specific topics, placements, technical skills).

• Allude to any significant achievements, perhaps in support of your attributes of determination, motivation, commitment, leadership (etc).

• Show the breadth and diversity of your experience and transferable skills.
Ideally this will give some sense of the kind of person you are.

Don’t just focus on your wants and needs. Relate your interests, skills and attributes to organisational needs and tasks.

**Example**

*Explain why you have applied for the Graduate program. Offer evidence of your suitability (e.g. courses undertaken, skills, strengths, experiences). Emphasise why you consider yourself to be a strong candidate.*

This question gives you the opportunity to argue your case. You may have a word limit, for example, 250 words. It is worth working out first, on a separate sheet of paper what you want to achieve with your answer. For example, it might be to convince the employer that you:

- have a longstanding interest in the field of work
- possess the skills the employer wants
- have a good insight into the nature of the work.

These points could provide the basis for 3 paragraphs. Focusing on 3 or 4 points is a good way of shaping your answer.

**Organise the evidence**

Working on a separate sheet of paper you might:

- assemble the facts that support the 3 points
- choose the material that is the most telling
- plan how you could use the material in the 3 paragraphs.

**Finally**

- write about 100 words on each point
- edit to get it to 250 words
- ensure it fits comfortably in the space provided.

**Points on writing good text**

Your ability to communicate in writing professionally will be crucial. Consider the following points:

- Avoid sentences that are long and complex.
• Use a balance of shorter and longer sentences.
• Avoid using over-complex words.
• Use words that are economical and descriptive, positive and specific.
• Refine your statement in successive drafts.

Write a statement of no more than 250 words in support of your application

“I am excited about the opportunity to work with RehabSA to assist individuals with disabilities to access and maintain meaningful vocational experiences, whilst also contributing to the development of more inclusive communities. I first became aware of your leading role in this field in 2009, after reading a report in The Advertiser (20/8/09) outlining your success in placing people with disabilities in full-time work.

As a result of my long-term commitment to this field I undertook the Bachelor of Disability and Community Rehabilitation. Topics on: Employment and Disability; Vocational Assessment; and Evaluation and Job Placement have developed my knowledge and skills in areas that are highly relevant.

Through my course placements and extensive volunteering in the community sector, I have worked effectively with clients, employers, carers and multidisciplinary team members. For example, at the Disability Employment Agency (DEA) I provided assistance to jobseekers and employers including: career planning, vocational counselling, pre-employment training, job search and placement and on the job training and support. I have also volunteered in the "Out & About" program, assisting young adults with an intellectual disability in social, educational and recreational activities.

These experiences have fostered my ability to utilise person-centered planning, and to work collaboratively with multiple stakeholders. In addition, my interpersonal and communication skills have been developed to a high level as a result of three years part-time customer service and hospitality employment. Therefore I can offer high levels of professionalism and commitment coupled with the empathy, rapport, and sensitivity critical to this role.”

14. THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF REJECTION

• Examples drawn from the same part of your life (for example, your degree studies only). This gives the impression that you have only one significant experience in your life so far. Use examples from a range of areas of your life.
• Not enough factual evidence/too much detail.
• Rambling and wordy answers. Clear statements, backed up with examples will enable an employer to assess your capabilities against their criteria.
• Not answering all parts of the question.
• Irrelevant answers that don’t address the skill in question. Ensure that the information you provide is relevant to the question.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: Graduate Development Program (GDP)
Handy Hints For Preparing Your Application
Things that will detract from your application:
• incomplete fields
• incomplete sentences
• poor spelling, grammar and punctuation
• not providing appropriate examples when answering questions
• using the same example for several questions
• not fully answering the question/selection criteria
• no research into, or awareness of DAFF’s functions/roles
• no apparent motivation/interest to work in DAFF.
www.daff.gov.au/about/jobs/graduate/apply/hints

15. CONCLUSION, RESOURCES AND SOURCES

Use the questions on the form as opportunities to market your skills to the employer - to show how your unique package of personal qualities, knowledge, skills and abilities makes you the ideal person for the job.

Initially, completing application forms will take time. On the plus side, once you have done a few, you may be able to adapt them for future use rather than starting from scratch each time. The reality is that these forms tend to ask the same things in slightly different ways. However, always try to individualise your application and target it to the specific employer.

Booklet
The booklet on Selection Criteria (‘Addressing Selection Criteria’) may be of particular interest as this provides further examples of describing your skills, using evidence.

Video
Videos on job search skills are also available to be viewed at the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre:
‘Your Job’s On-line’ (25 minutes) – it shows 2 major employers selecting graduates using only their electronic applications and includes the following sections: Answer the question; Evidence; Activities and Interests; Marketing yourself; Common mistakes; Summary).

SOURCES

CAREERS AND EMPLOYER LIAISON CENTRE

Visit us at the Student Centre, Level 3
Tel: 8201 2832
Email: careers@flinders.edu.au
www.flinders.edu.au/careers/student

CRICOS Registered Provider Flinders University
CRICOS Provider Number: 00114A