Applications & Cover Letters

Gill Lambert
Maths Careers Consultant
What do you want to get out of the workshop?
What sorts of questions do you get on application forms?
Types of question

• **Information:** personal details, qualifications, previous employment, references etc.

• **Skills/competency-based:** team working, leadership, problem solving etc.

• **Motivation:** Reasons for applying – could also include commercial awareness

• **Open-ended:** Use this space to demonstrate how you meet the criteria for this job

• **Unusual:** What type of biscuit would you be and why?
You are the recruiter!

You have applications from 3 candidates, with 2 questions: one about their motivation to work for the company the other is a teamwork competency question.

Your task is:
1) to read and score each application, giving each question a mark out of five and each candidate a total out of 10.
2) to write down on a post it note things you liked and didn’t like in each answer.
Drowning under a mountain of paper by net_efekt reproduced under Creative Commons 2.0
You are the recruiter!

Motivation Questions:
What is good?
What is bad?

Competency Questions:
What is good?
What is bad?

What did you score?
Good Motivation Answer

I was inspired by the opportunities at Citi when I heard Jean-Luc Barnardi talk at my University. I was impressed by his explanation of the accessible culture at Citi, the rotational nature of the graduate programme and the fact that new graduates make decisions from the early in their careers.

Another attraction is that Citi is a global bank, operating in over 100 countries, and I understand from your video entitled ‘Summer Internships’ that there is often an opportunity for overseas travel early on in a graduate’s career. With my multicultural background, having lived in France, Singapore and the UK, I would work well in this environment.

I see that there is a proposed merger between Citibank International and Citibank Europe. If this goes ahead it would give the opportunity for graduates to establish themselves at the very beginning of this newly formed organization.

(148 words)
Motivation questions should

- Make use of the full word count
- Show understanding of aspects such as: what the organisation does, the training and development it offers and its values and ethos
- Persuade them that their values and approach match yours
- Be tailored
- Include how the position and business relate to the candidate’s career objectives
- Use language that shows enthusiasm and interest
- Have no spelling or grammatical errors
Motivation questions should

Bonus points for:
- information from employees,
- metrics,
- news items,
- significant events,
- research beyond the superficial,
- future plans
Sources of Information for Motivation Questions?

- Statutory Accounts
- Google news
- Jobsites:
  - wikijob
  - thestudentroom
  - thejobcrowd
  - insidecareers
- Speak to a current employee on the graduate scheme
Video


How to Research a Company

How to research a company
Competency questions should

1. Address the question
2. Make use of the full word count
3. Describe the behaviours that the candidate used to demonstrate the competency: e.g. team working, performing a role, co-ordinating the team, checking others are on task etc
4. Explain the situation and task
5. Describe the outcome
6. Describe how their skill with the competency contributed to the outcome
7. Be phrased using positive language
8. Have no spelling or grammatical errors
Unpacking Competency Questions:

Use the STAR technique

- S  Situation
- T  Task
- A  Action
- R  Result
Competency questions: Breaking it down into STAR

*Describe a time when you instigated change to solve a problem.*** 
(75 words)

*(S)ituation / (T)ask:* During my Masters, I *identified* the need for a change in seminar times since my year group were missing careers slots due to time-table clashes.

*(A)ction:* I put my case in writing to two academic staff, *explaining* the situation and *suggesting* more convenient times. I followed this up in person and was invited to the next staff meeting. After protracted *negotiation*....

*(R)esult:* a revised timetable was introduced and students were able to take full advantage of the careers offering. (74 words)
Applying STAR

Have a go at drafting your own story, using this framework, for one of the following competencies:

• Communication
• Teamwork

Swap answers with another person – each feed back two things they have done well, and one thing that could be improved.
Covering Letters

• For smaller employers the application is a CV & covering letter

• Covering letter format

• Can be adapted for speculative applications
Content & Style

• Use business layout

Mr. B. Taylor
Londra
25-32 Freeman Street
London, EC1 YHG

Dear Mr. Taylor
Policy Assistant - Londra
Content & Style

3 paragraphs:

1. Introduction

2. Why you want to work for them & why you want the role

3. Why they should choose you: your skills & experience
1. Introduction

I am writing to apply for the above position as advertised in The Guardian on 15 July. I am currently completing a Masters degree in Urban Geography at St. John’s University. Please find enclosed my CV as requested.
Content & Style

2. Why you want to work for them & why you want the role

I am interested in a career in policy because, as a student in London, I have been able to observe London’s rapid economic development first-hand and have become fascinated by the way in which various legal, political, economic, cultural and social factors combine to shape the city. My Masters dissertation has focussed on the impact of the economic development of Canary Wharf on the surrounding residential areas. For this project I collected a large amount of data, including quantitative data such as financial reports, and qualitative data including interviews with local residents. I was able to analyse this data effectively and draw conclusions about the relationship between economic and social development.

Having thoroughly researched the sector, I am drawn to London by your focus on economic development issues and their impact on London’s economy. I attended your forum event on 15 January, which helped me understand how you work in partnership with a range of organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. This appeals to me as I believe the solution to sustainable economic development lies in collaboration.
Content & Style

3. Why they should choose you: your skills & experience

I have had experience of the processes involved in creating policy in my capacity as a volunteer researcher with the London Disabled Forum. My research informed the Forum’s response to a government policy consultation and I developed important key skills such as the ability to communicate effectively in writing, and to work in partnership with other organisations. In addition, I gained an insight into Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety, as these issues regularly impact on members of the Forum. Working at the Students’ Union bar further enhanced my ability to communicate verbally with customers and colleagues.

I have had extensive experience of developing and managing projects. In my role as Events Secretary for the University Economics Society, I organised our annual awards ceremony and dinner. This involved securing funding and sponsorship from local businesses, sourcing speakers and inviting guests. I also ensured that the event ran smoothly on the day by giving all Society members clear tasks, such as greeting guests at the door, managing the audio-visuals and distributing refreshments. I used IT to manage the project, by creating a spreadsheet which summarised the tasks and was updated as required. This enabled me to see at a glance the status of the project. The event was a great success, and was featured on the home page of the University website. We also raised £1600 for the Society through ticket sales.
Use the “Knowledge Bank” on QM Plus to get advice sheets on CVs and Cover Letters

For a careers 1-2-1, ring 020 7882 8533

Any questions?