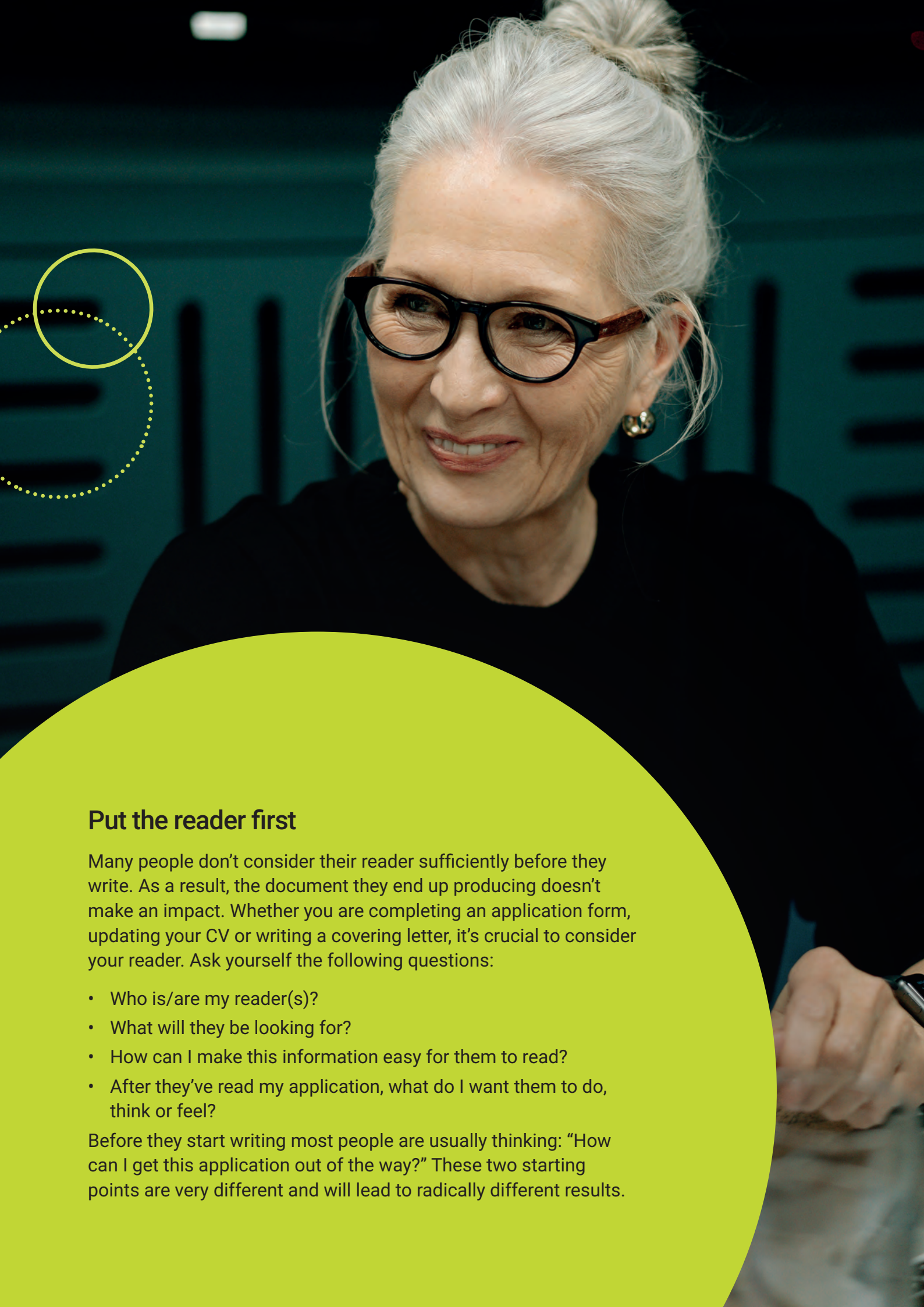# THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT:

Getting the job

Put the reader first

Many people don't consider their reader sufficiently before they write. As a result, the document they end up producing doesn't make an impact. Whether you are completing an application form, updating your CV or writing a covering letter, it's crucial to consider your reader. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is/are my reader(s)?
- What will they be looking for?
- How can I make this information easy for them to read?
- After they've read my application, what do I want them to do, think or feel?

Before they start writing most people are usually thinking: "How can I get this application out of the way?" These two starting points are very different and will lead to radically different results.

Understanding the LSE system

LSE, like most universities, will assess your application for a job based on how well you can show that you meet the requirements of the role. These requirements are laid out in what's called a person specification. This is a summary of the qualities needed to perform the job and in the HR world they are called competencies. LSE uses 14 competencies in total, but seven of them are much more commonly used.

Top seven	Additional seven
Communication • Convey basic factual information clearly and accurately • Convey information in the most appropriate format • Explain complex information to non-specialists	**Investigation, analysis and research** • Following standard procedures to gather and assess data • Collating and analysing data from a range of sources • Establishing models and setting the context for research projects
Teamwork and motivation • Contributing actively to a team • Motivating others in a team • Providing leadership and direction	**Sensory and physical co-ordination** • Basic levels of co-ordination, dexterity and physical effort • Applying skilled techniques and co-ordinating sensory information • High levels of dexterity, where precision is essential
Liaison and networking • Passing information on promptly • Mutual exchange of information with internal and external contacts • Influencing developments through contacts	**Work environment** • Handling dangerous equipment or substances • Regular travel between sites • Working outdoors
Service delivery • Reacting appropriately to requests for advice or information • Actively promoting the services of the institution to others • Setting overall standards of service offered	**Pastoral care and welfare** • Awareness of support services available locally and nationally • Giving supportive advice and guidance • Formal counselling on specific issues

Top seven	Additional seven
Decision making	**Coaching, development and instruction**
• Own work and immediate team • The organisational unit as a whole • Future development of the institution	• Induction of new colleagues • Giving guidance or advice to peers on specific aspects of work • Mentoring, coaching and appraising performance of direct reports
Planning and organising resources	**Teaching and training**
• Planning and organising own work • Organising the work of others • Future development of the institution	• Providing instruction to students new to a particular service or area • Delivering internal training courses to colleagues • Assessment and teaching of students
Initiative and problem solving	**Knowledge and experience**
• Selecting a course of action from available options • Resolving problems when an immediate solution is not apparent • Dealing with complex problems which could have significant repercussions	• Sufficient experience to carry out day-to-day tasks • Breadth of knowledge or experience to act as a point of reference for others • Capacity to act as an authority in a given field

Under each heading are some descriptions of the kinds of things you might have to demonstrate for each competency. You can see from this list that a particular competency can be assessed at different levels of complexity. This is because certain jobs only need basic skills whereas others need those qualities to be much more advanced. Notice under each heading how the examples usually become more complex. Under "Knowledge and Experience", for instance, the requirement of the third bullet point is much greater than the first.

When managers and HR staff at LSE create person specifications, they will think about the requirements of the job and use these categories to show a candidate the skills they need. A person specification also indicates whether a particular quality or "competency" is essential (E) or desirable (D). If you don't meet the essential critieria it's unlikely you will be shortlisted. See the following example, which was taken from a co-ordinator role in the HR division at LSE.

Example Person Specification

Competency	Evidence	E/D
Knowledge and Experience	• Experience in drafting documents, eg, policies and procedures, for a range of audiences	E
	• Experience in project coordination across a range of areas	E
	• Excellent IT Skills. Proficiency in Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook and using the Internet for research purposes	E
Analysis and Research	• Experience with researching and analysing data, produce recommendations/findings highlighting relevant points to inform decision making and policy formulation	E
Planning and Organising	• Ability to successfully coordinate different projects that have conflicting deadlines	E
	• Experience of independently preparing action plans from meetings and coordinating follow-up	E
Service Delivery	• Experience of setting up systems and processes to support service delivery	E
Communication	• Excellent verbal and written communication skills	E
	• Ability to communicate developments of policies/procedures effectively to a range of audiences	E
	• Examples of having conveyed complex information to less knowledgeable groups or individuals on the phone and face-to-face	D
Liaison and Networking	• Examples of influencing decisions and developments through effective liaison	E
Initiative and Problem Solving	• Ability to work autonomously	E
	• Ability to actively contribute to all stages of project development and implementation	E
	• Evidence of having discussed customer needs to establish, and deliver, the best solution available	E
Teamwork and Motivation	• To be a pro-active and supportive team member	E

(E) Essential: requirements without which the job could not be done.
(D) Desirable: requirements that would enable the candidate to perform the job well.

All vacancies at LSE also come with a job description. Whereas the person specification will show you which personal qualities and skills you need to do the job, the job description shows you the duties and responsibilities of the job. Below is a section of the job description for the same role.

Example Job Description

Researching and Drafting

To research, draft and edit policies and procedures, particularly in relation to trends in Reward in the Higher Education Sector.

- As part of the policy development process, to analyse findings, propose options and revise drafts incorporating feedback from HR managers

- To use a range of media, including the internet and specialised HR and Higher Education publications for research purposes

- To assist with the preparation of benchmark data relating to Reward

Project Coordination

- To timetable yearly project plans, and implement appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

- To manage the diaries of the HR Managers, ensuring Reward Team objectives are flagged for action in a timely fashion

- Supporting the HR managers, to coordinate project time frames to ensure project outcomes are delivered successfully and to deadline

- To organise meetings of the Framework Agreement Implementation Group, including producing agendas and minutes, ensuring the preparation of draft papers and coordinating follow up between meetings

- To coordinate activities relating to Equal Pay Audits within the Reward Project by organising appropriate data collection

Administration

To assist the HR Managers in the review and development of systems and processes within the Reward Team, making best use of all available technologies.

- To assist the HR Managers in developing reports to monitor impact of Reward Initiatives

- Maintaining effective electronic and paper record systems in support of on-going activities, to ensure easy access and retrieval by the HR Managers

Dissemination of Information

To consult with various groups within the School informally and formally on specific issues, for example, policy change and development.

- To effectively communicate agreed policy and procedural changes to a wide audience on behalf of the HR managers

Making your statement of application stand out

To apply for support jobs at LSE, you will need to send a CV and complete a statement of application. This is a bit like a covering letter, except your aim should be to really address the qualities on the person specification. Anything between one and two pages is about the right length. You don't need to send a covering letter as well as the statement of application. Do not just send your CV without the statement of application.

Can I just send in my standard cover letter?

It's easier and quicker to do this, but it's frustrating for the reader who wants to see how you meet the job's requirements. Therefore it's really important that you base your statement of application on the competencies required in the job and provide examples from the past of where you have shown that particular ability. Use the job description to see the context in which that ability is needed and try and choose examples that are as relevant as possible.
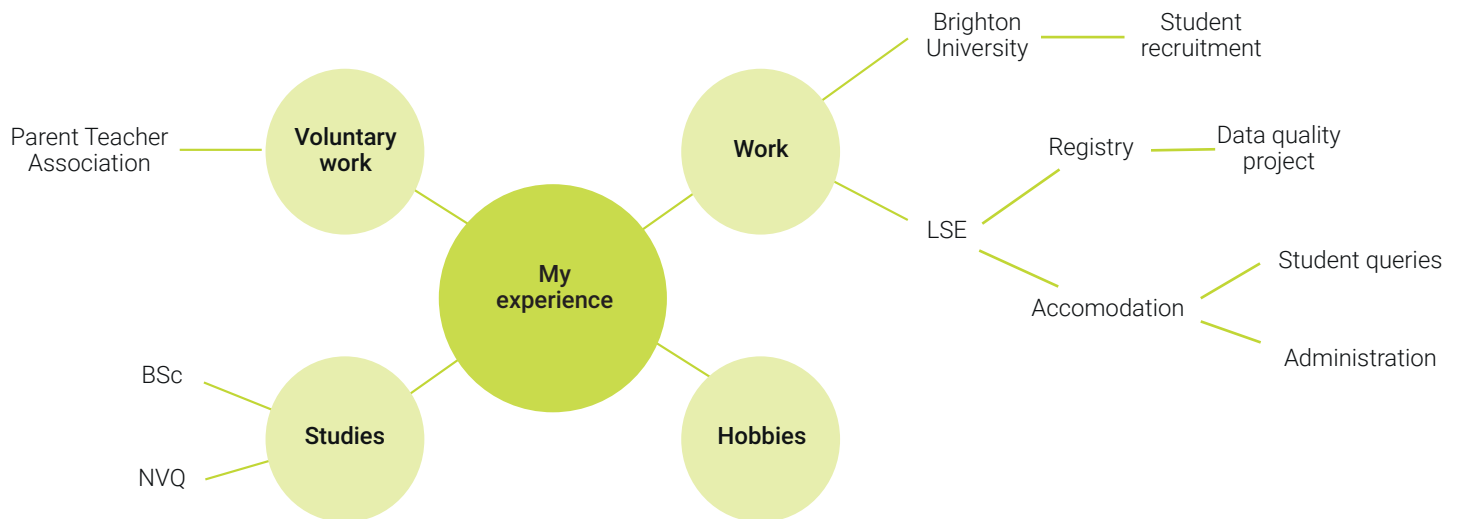
When you are applying for a job, remember that recruiters are trying to assess competencies and not necessarily experience. For instance, you can have developed organisational skills from many different areas of life, not just work. So think broadly in the first instance and then develop each category. For instance, in the example below, the "Work" category has been developed to a certain extent. You could go further here, and break down the different elements of "student queries", "administration" and "data quality project". Develop all the branches as fully as you can or want to. By the end, you should have a really comprehensive view of all the things you have done that might be useful for both applications and interviews.

Step 1: brainstorm your experience

It's a good idea to brainstorm all your experience once you have looked at the competencies. This will give you an overview of what material you have got to choose from and which examples you are going to choose. An effective way of doing this is a mini mind map, or spider diagram (see following page for an example).

Put the central idea or theme in the middle of the mind map and come up with a few main categories of experience. Although relevant work experience is probably the most useful when you are applying for a job, remember that recruiters are trying to assess competencies and not necessarily experience.

Mind map showing "My experience" at the centre connected to:
- Voluntary work — Parent Teacher Association
- Work — Brighton University (Student recruitment); LSE — Registry (Data quality project), Accomodation (Student queries, Administration)
- Studies — BSc, NVQ
- Hobbies

Step 2: choose relevant examples

You should know by now what the competencies are for the job you are interested in. Now you can choose which examples from your own experience you are going to use. If possible, use examples gained in a similar context to the job you are applying for. Use recent examples within the last five years, unless an older example is especially relevant. Try to vary your examples so that you don't look one-dimensional; you'll also make it more interesting for your reader.

Step 3: group the competency headings – optional

When you make your statement of application, you should use headings which specifically address the competencies (eg, one heading for communication, one for planning and organising and so on). However, If there are a lot of competencies and you have lots of examples, your application could become very long and tedious. If that's the case, group a few competencies together in a single heading, especially if they are similar. For instance, in the person specification above, you could probably group "Communication" and "Liaison and Networking", or perhaps "Service Delivery" and "Planning and Organising".

Step 4: write your examples

The important thing when you write your examples is to be focused, specific and concise. Avoid general statements and use specific examples from the past.

Remember that recruiters assess your communication skills by the quality of your written application too. So, errors in grammar, confusing sentences or a messy format will seriously harm your chances.

Notice in these examples below how the information is relatively specific; the reader can easily imagine what you have done in the past. The examples used also satisfy the needs of the person specification. You can also use bullet points rather than paragraphs, but be careful that your document doesn't have a busy or cluttered feel which bullet points can sometimes create.

Analysis and research

When I worked for Brighton University's student recruitment office, I carried out a mini-research project. I collected statistics about the students who applied to study there in the previous five years. Using Excel, I then analysed the data according to various criteria: student gender; ethnicity; country of origin and age. I produced a report about this which really informed the marketing plan for the University.

Communication

I currently work as an accommodation assistant at LSE. On a daily basis, I answer student queries about their housing issues face-to-face, on the phone and via email. I also run introductory group sessions for new students to answer any questions they have about their student accommodation for the year.

Once a month, I also represent the accommodation office at a staff-student consultative forum. This is an official meeting where staff respond to student concerns and inform the students of any new developments or policies. I also prepare a written report in advance of the meeting which the students and other staff members read.

What if I have a disability?

LSE Careers has **an excellent FAQ** on what is good to know for students with disabilities looking to apply for jobs. The guidance is just as applicable to staff.

The Open University also has **a very helpful guide** to disclosing a disability during the application process.

When you are looking for work, adverts and application forms may include the '**disability confident'** symbol. This symbol means the employer is committed to employing disabled people and you'll be guaranteed an interview if you meet the basic conditions for the job .

Boost your CV

Most universities and public sector recruiters will ask for some kind of personal statement, based on the competencies in the person specification. Some may also want a CV. If you address the competencies with specific examples and prepare a CV which outlines some relevant skills and experience, then you should find that the number of interviews you get will increase. Many opportunities in local government still require you to complete an application form.

Think relevant experience, think skills, think clear layout. In a nutshell, that's what you have to do to create a good CV. Although there isn't one "right" way of compiling a CV, there are some top tips you should know.

1 The basics

Get started with the right headings

Your CV should have the following sections, not necessarily in this order:

1. Personal details
2. Work experience
3. Education
4. Specific skills (such as languages or IT)
5. Interests and activities (optional)
6. References

It's not *War and Peace*

Most recruiters will probably get bored if your CV is longer than two pages. If your CV is three or four pages, you are probably listing lots of information vertically, waffling, or not using space efficiently.

Most recruiters will probably get bored if your CV is longer than two pages.

## 2 Making an impact

Keep it relevant

Who says that education must always come before work experience? If your previous work experience is really relevant or eye-catching, then put that section first. After you have been working for a few years, this section usually comes first anyway, unless for some reason your education is the more relevant. Busy managers and HR staff will not always make it to the second page of your CV if there's nothing relevant on the first. Be brutal with your pruning. If it's not relevant, delete it.

The devil is in the detail

Whether you are explaining education, work experience or hobbies and interests, give enough detail so the reader can get an idea of the scope of your activities. Describe your work activities by listing achievements and responsibilities. If you worked in a team, how big was the team? If you were responsible for a budget, how much money was involved? Being too general when describing experience is one of the biggest CV sins.

Get skilled up

You could of course be in the position of having valuable experience that's not directly relevant. That's where transferable skills come in handy. Transferable skills are the abilities or aptitudes you have developed in one context but which can be applied to another. Let's say you have got some experience in student recruitment but you want to work in the alumni office. You could argue that you have developed a good understanding of student needs, skills in marketing, the ability to research and analyse data, the ability to work under pressure and so on. All of these are valuable skills to have in many jobs at LSE. So sometimes on a CV, you can have a section outlining relevant skills for a job. One note of caution about using skills: always use evidence to back up your claims. Try and resist the temptation to simply list lots of skills without saying how you developed them.
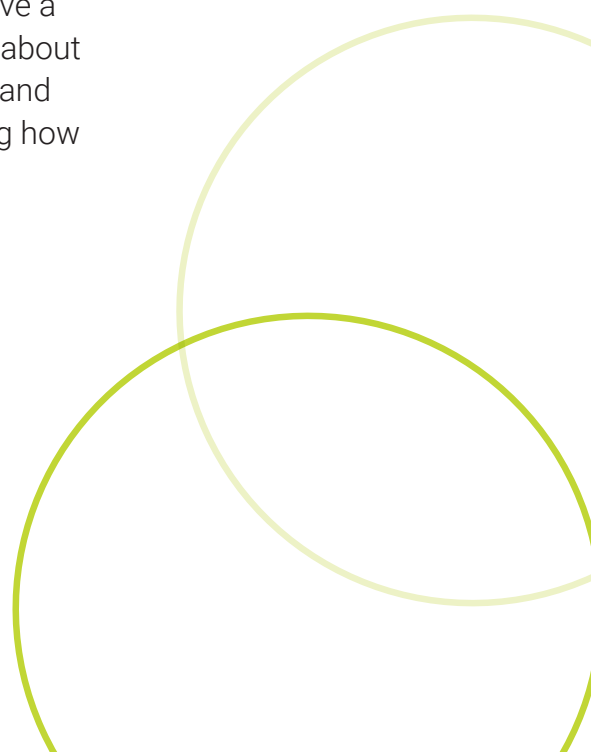
TOP 5 CV errors

1. Not considering your reader before you start
2. Not targeting your experience to the job you are applying for
3. Describing duties rather than achievements
4. Vague information with no specifics about your experience. "Worked in a team of seven" is better than offering "Developed teamwork skills" for example
5. Errors in grammar and punctuation; poor formatting

Avoid the following clichés and misused words:

- I want to work for a dynamic and challenging organisation
- Great interpersonal skills
- I am a great team player (or any other vague, unsubstantiated claim)
- Leverage
- Going forward
- Utilise
- Deliverables
- Add value to

Make it a work of art

Have clear distinct sections for the information. Check and re- check for spelling and grammar errors and don't simply rely on a computer spell checker. Present the information in a consistent manner.

Ready-made CVs

Many word processing packages contain templates of CVs. They can be helpful to get you started, but a CV is your personal document and you need to say what you want to meet the needs of a particular job. Recruiters can spot this sort of "manufactured" or ready-made document a mile off.

CVs within an email

Sooner or later, you'll have to email your CV to someone. The best way is to attach it as a document – the layout will be destroyed if you send it as text within your email. But remember to virus scan your document before sending it.

Your personal profile

Some CVs have a "personal profile" or a section called "career objectives" at the top. This gives employers a snapshot of your personality, career to date and aspirations. Some employers like them whereas others find them bland and irritating, particularly if they make generalised claims. Personal profiles are appropriate if you have quite a lot of work experience and/or if you want to change career. If you want to mention your career objectives but don't like the idea of a personal profile, stick them in the covering letter.

Are you photogenic?

Including a photograph on CVs is a much-debated topic. Whatever your view, it's always going to be a bit of a gamble, irrespective of how nice the photo is. It's all very subjective. You could remind a recruiter of someone they know and that might not be a good thing! If you do choose to put a photo on your CV, make sure it is of good quality because your CV will be photocopied. And ask an honest friend the extent to which you are photogenic. If you are not getting anywhere with your current photo-less CV, it might be worth experimenting, but it is a gamble.

Have a look at the CV, on the next 2 pages:

Jane Doe
25 Stoneleigh Road,
London SE19 2ED

Tel: 01234 567890

janedoe@hotmail.com

Career History

2021 to date

Senior Accommodation Officer, LSE and administrative staff within LSE

- Managing the departmental and Hall budgets (totalling £100k), monitored debtors and maintained accurate financial records

2019 to 2021

Accommodation Assistant, LSE

Part of the accommodation office team at LSE.

- Dealt with student enquiries face-to-face, on the phone and by email
- Processed over 3000 student applications for accommodation
- Updated student records on a regular basis
- Worked successfully in a team of eight, and supported other team members when necessary

2017 to 2019

Student Recruitment Assistant (part-time), University of Brighton

- Carried out a wide-range of administrative and support functions for this busy department.
- Organised 15 focus groups to see why they chose to study at the university
- Attended recruitment events and answered prospective students' questions
- Updated and maintained the department's webpages
- Responded to student emails and telephone calls
- Liaised with other departments such as accommodation, registry and careers to solve student problems

Jane Doe

Tel: 01234 567890 – janedoe@hotmail.com

Relevant Training and Professional Qualifications

2024	**Currently studying for the L5 Operational Manager apprenticeship via LSE**
2020	**Introductory certificate in Management (CMI), equivalent to NVQ level 3**
2017	**Customer care course (University of Brighton)**

Education

2014 to 2017	**BA in English Literature, University of Brighton (2:1)**

- Improved my research skills and my ability to write clearly and effectively
- Made 15 presentations to other students over a three-year period
- Elected as student representative on the English department's staff-student liaison committee
- Successfully completed a 10,000 word dissertation on the Victorian novelist Wilkie Collins

Talk about useful skills/experience you gained from your studies – not just academic content.

Hobbies and Interests

I play table tennis competitively three times a week for my local club and play in the Women's British League team.

References available on request

Don't write a shopping list of hobbies, eg, yoga, tennis, golf, reading, salsa. Instead, pick one or two and go into more detail.

If you have space, you can put the contact details of two referees on the CV. Or you can say they are available on request.

Private sector jobs

It's much more common for private sector employers to ask you for a CV and covering letter. As with any job, try and tailor your CV to the needs of the role and then, in your covering letter, make a strong case for your suitability.

ICME: an easy formula for good covering letters

There are four parts to a good covering letter, outlined below.

Introduction (5-10 per cent)

- You observe business letter formalities (dates, subject headings, Dear Sir or Madam etc)

- You give a clear, concise opening, outlining who you are and what you want

Capability (40-45 per cent)

- You outline your skills, qualities, experience or potential – backed up with focused examples from your CV – and make clear how they relate to the job you are applying for

Motivation (40-45 per cent)

- You show real motivation for, and understanding of, the role

- You are specific about why you are interested in that sector, role, division or function

- You give very clear reasons why the organisation appeals to you

- Most importantly, the language and examples you use are free of clichés and generalisations

Ending (5-10 per cent)

- The letter ends on an upbeat note, without being over-the-top or pushy

- You sign off correctly. If you start the letter with Dear Sir or Madam, you should end with Yours faithfully. In all other cases, it is Yours sincerely

Most important are the "capability" and "motivations" sections. They are the heart of the letter and what will get the attention of the reader. They are equally important, too, and you should spend about the same amount of space on each. The percentages in the brackets represent how much detail and space to devote to each section.

Usually, covering letters are up to one page long. If it's a statement of application based on competencies, it's fine to go up to two pages.

Let's imagine that you are interested in a job at King's College London and they don't want a statement of application matching the competencies. Instead they want just a CV and covering letter. The role is departmental manager for the English Language and Literature department. In preparation for writing the covering letter, you have looked at all the information provided about the role and you have done some research about King's College and the English department.

See how the example on the following page follows the ICME structure.

Human Resources King's College, London Strand
London WC2R 2LS

15 March 2024

Dear Human Resources

Departmental Manager (English Language and Literature)

I would like to apply for the above position which you recently advertised on jobs.ac.uk. Please find my CV enclosed for your consideration.

Since 2017, I've been working at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) where I was promoted from accommodation assistant to my current role of senior accommodation officer. In this position, I have a wide range of management and administrative responsibilities including line-managing nine staff, overseeing budgets of nearly £100k and organising office procedures. I have also built up strong relationships with academics and administrative staff at LSE. My time in student recruitment at the University of Brighton has also given me in-depth experience of working directly with students, dealing with their questions professionally and understanding their needs. I believe these qualities – management skills, the ability to build relationships with staff at all levels, and significant experience of working with students – are equally important for managing an academic department.

Working at LSE has been a brilliant experience, but I'm now ready to apply my skills and experience to a different setting. I've always been interested in becoming a departmental manager because I particularly enjoy working with both academic staff and students. The organisational nature of the role also appeals to me. I'm especially interested in joining the Department of English Language and Literature for two main reasons. First, the department has an extremely good reputation both within King's and outside. (I noticed that the recent RAE assessment exercise found 70 per cent of the department's research as "internationally excellent" or "world-leading"). Secondly, the fact that I studied English Literature at university would allow me to relate to the students easily as well as understand their needs. I would also be comfortable with the language and terminology used in course materials, handbooks and reading lists.

I'm very excited by this opportunity and would very much welcome the chance to discuss my suitability further at an interview.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Doe
25 Stoneleigh Road, London SE19 2ED
Tel: 01234 567890
Janedoe@hotmail.com

✓ **Introduction**. Brief, to the point. No waffle.

✓ **Capabilities.** Show how your experience/ skills are related to the job you are going for. Be specific.

✓ **Motivation.** Identify some reasons why you are genuinely interested in this particular role. Again, be as specific as you can.

✓ **Ending.** Brief, positive, upbeat but without being pushy.

Refer to the following checklist before submitting any applications:

My statement of application...	My CV...	My covering letter...
Addresses all the essential criteria on the person specification and some "desirables" if possible	Prioritises information relevant to the job	Follows a logical structure such as ICME
Uses headings for the main competencies	Where possible, includes achievements rather than just duties	Is no longer than one page
Uses specific examples rather than general statements	Quantifies the information presented – for example, worked in a team of 4; managed a budget of £15k	Refers to relevant specifics in my CV
Is free of clichés, jargon or needless technical language	Is either one page or two pages and not something in between	Gives equal detail and space to the "capabilities" and "motivation" section
Is no more than two pages long	Has a clear, consistent layout with plenty of white space and no underlining	Is free of clichés, jargon or needless technical language

If you can honestly agree with all of these statements, then your written applications will be better than those of many other applicants.

Improve your interview skills

What to expect at LSE

At LSE, the process is very fair. Just as your application is assessed against transparent criteria, so will your interview performance be. It's common practice for you to be interviewed by two/three interviewers. Interviewers will often take it in turns to ask you questions and it's normal for them to take notes so they remember what you said during the interview.

If you are an internal candidate, it's usual for your current or future manager to be on the panel. Sometimes candidates feel a bit awkward in this situation and almost feel silly giving detailed examples which your manager already knows about. Interviewers have to assess your performance on the day so treat internal interviews as if you were going for a "new" job elsewhere.

Panel interviews at LSE can also move quite quickly because the interviewers will have prepared their questions beforehand. Don't be afraid to take some time to think about the questions before giving your response. You can always ask to come back to a question later on if you get really stuck.

For some positions, you might have to do an additional assessment exercise. This gives the recruiters a chance to see if you are suitable for all aspects of the job. For instance, if the job you are applying for involves a lot of one-to-one interaction with students, then you may be asked to do a short role play. Similarly, if the job involves a lot of writing, you may be asked to write a short letter or email. Many jobs at the School involve computer work so you may also be given an IT test. You will be told beforehand if there are any additional assessment activities. The interview process will be the same whether you are an internal candidate or not.

Competency-style questions

As we saw in the section on making good applications, there are the top seven competencies that LSE uses to assess its candidates. Competencies are simply qualities or skills that you may have. Usually, interviewers will ask you questions about things you have done in the past, but sometimes you might be asked what you would do in a given future situation. The table below lists the top seven competencies and gives an example question for each.

	Competency	Example question
1	**Communication**	Can you give us an example of where you have had to simplify complex information?
2	**Teamwork and motivation**	Describe a time when you have helped a team reach a common goal.
3	**Liaison and Networking**	How do you meet people working in similar roles to your own?
4	**Service delivery**	How would you deal with a situation where the person you are dealing with is being particularly difficult?
5	**Decision making**	Which kinds of decisions are the most difficult for you at work and why?
6	**Planning and organising resources**	How would you prioritise your work to meet conflicting deadlines?
7	**Initiative and problem solving**	Give us an example of when you had to solve a complex problem at work.

There are many possible questions an interviewer could ask you about a particular competency; the list above shows just a few examples. Interviewers at LSE are trained to probe for evidence with follow-up questions if they feel they need more information. Example follow-up questions, in relation to communication, are given below:

Main question:

Can you give us an example of where you have had to simplify complex information?

- **Possible follow-up questions:**
- How did you simplify the information? How did you check their understanding?

Answering competency questions

Be specific, be focused, be concise. Interviewers are looking for specific examples from your experience. The most common mistake candidates make is giving general, vague or even waffly answers.

Below is a dialogue between a candidate and an interviewer about teamwork. The first example shows the candidate giving an average-to-poor answer. The second answer is much stronger, although not perfect.

Dialogue 1 (average-to-poor answers)	
Interviewer:	Can you give me an example where you achieved something as part of a team?
Candidate:	Umm…a couple of weeks ago we had to send out information to all the postgrads. We had to make sure they all received the info within a tight deadline. It was important to work as a team.
Interviewer:	How did you go about doing that as a team?
Candidate:	We divided the work up and each took responsibility for different things. I looked at the list and chased things up.
Interviewer:	And what was the outcome?
Candidate:	Things worked out fine in the end.

In reality, the interviewer might probe a bit more here to look for further evidence.

Dialogue 2 (strong answers)
Can you give me an example where you achieved something as part of a team?
Two weeks ago, I worked on a project where I was part of a team of 5. We had to collate and send out information to all the postgraduate students. My role within the team was to ensure each member was aware of their responsibilities and to ensure that the contact data we were using was accurate and to prevent duplication of material being sent. It was very important that each student received the information at exactly the same time.
How did you go about doing that as a team?
We sat down together as a team to breakdown the responsibilities. We each agreed to take on specific tasks and I co- ordinated the project to ensure everyone completed their job. In the end, the project went very well – each student received just one copy of the information and we managed to meet the tight deadline.

Again, the interviewer might probe a bit more here if needed.

In the second dialogue the candidate answers in a much more detailed way. For instance, he mentions how many people were in the team and what specifically the project was. He also says what his role was in the team. The interviewer would still want to know more, but at least it gives them a clearer picture of the candidate's experience.

Are you motivated?

Providing good evidence of competencies shows your ability to do the job. It means you have the skills, experience or potential to do what's needed. But you can be good at something and not really enjoy it and not necessarily be motivated to do it either. Some people are very good with spreadsheets, for instance, but they don't necessarily like doing them!

So as well as your abilities, interviewers are also looking for evidence of your motivation to do the role you are applying for. Will you get out of bed each morning and be excited about doing it? Below are some examples of motivation questions, along with a tip on how to answer each one:

How does this position fit in with your career plan?
Tip: come up with a coherent rationale.

What do you look for in a job?
Tip: choose things that are important parts of the job you are applying for.

Could you tell us about why you applied for this role? *Tip: say how your experience and skills are relevant for the role; say why you are motivated to do it also.*

What do you do when you have quiet periods at work?
Tip: don't say, "sit around and take it easy". Focus on what you could do like planning for next term or asking your manager if there's anything you could help with.

How would you like to see your career developing over the next few years?
Tip: most interviewers like a mixture of ambition and commitment to LSE, but don't make it seem like you want to be in charge of everything after a week!

If you could change any part of your current job, what would it be and why?

Tip: don't pick something that's also going to be part of the job you are applying for. This question is trying to get at what you really like and dislike doing at work so it's easy to trip yourself up here.

The key thing about answering these questions well lies in two things: enthusiasm and preparation. Enthusiasm because interviewers really want to see that you are motivated to do the job; preparation because it's important to have really found out as much as possible about the role, the department and to have come up with some convincing reasons why you want the job.

Other tricky questions

Below are some examples of common questions, along with a tip on how to answer each one:

Tell me about yourself

Tip: don't launch into a long, rambling monologue. Focus on some specific things that reflect your ability and/or motivation to do the job you are applying for.

Tell us a little about your strengths and weaknesses at work

Tip: pick strengths that show you in a good light and ones that are relevant to the job you want. For weaknesses, try and avoid core skills like organising and communicating – and focus on how you are improving in that particular area.

What's the reason that you left/are planning to leave your current position?

Tip: focus on what you are looking for now, as opposed to what is wrong with your current role or organisation. Never criticise previous colleagues or your boss.

Other ways to improve your performance

Once you understand the system, have a sense of how interviewers will be assessing you and the kinds of questions you might encounter, you are in a good position. But it's only half the battle. There are other aspects of preparation and performance that you need to consider.

Be prepared

For interviews at universities, you usually know the competencies you will be asked about during the interview. They are the ones on the person specification. It's a good idea, therefore, to have two examples of each competency prepared in advance. For example, if you know that teamwork is a big part of the job you are going for, think of a couple of specific examples from the past where you have worked as part of a team. Prepare two examples for each relevant competency, but don't script out your answers – just jot down some key points; otherwise your answers will sound wooden.

You'll also show your motivation by really preparing for the job. If you are offered an informal chat about the role, then take the opportunity. You'll find out more about the role which will help you with your preparation and it's a chance to show the interviewer you can communicate well on the phone or Zoom or Teams – assuming you can!

> Don't script out your answers – just jot down some key points; otherwise your answers will sound wooden.

Things you can do to prepare:

- ☑ Talk to people in the department
- ☑ Talk to users of the service if appropriate and possible
- ☑ Take a thorough look at the department's website
- ☑ Think about future challenges for that department. Sometimes a department's strategic plan is available through their website
- ☑ Look at the websites of similar departments in other organisations
- ☑ If possible, build up a rounded picture of the day-to-day reality of the role before you go for the interview
- ☑ Think about how the department fits in with the organisation as a whole
- ☑ Double check the location of the interview and give yourself plenty of time to get there. If it's online, check your connection and equipment beforehand and find somewhere quiet to sit.

Good introductions and endings are crucial

It's been proven that people remember the beginnings and endings of things, more than they do bits in the middle. This is called the primacy and recency effect. This is also true of interviews. Assessors are very receptive to you at the beginning and end of your interview but have to work harder to focus in the middle. However, your performance tends to be the direct opposite of this: you are nervous at the start and also a bit anxious at the end. In the middle you tend to relax a bit. It's only human.

It makes sense, then, to really work on your beginning and endings – because that's usually when you'll be most nervous and fidgety.

Your performance is best in the middle; this is when an interviewer's attention is at its lowest.

Some ways you can make a good first impression include:

Dress appropriately

Find out how people dress in the department/organisation you are interested in. Then go to the interview a bit smarter than that. Even if you are an internal candidate, it's good to show you are serious about the position by dressing smartly.

Be pleasant to everyone

It sounds obvious ,but many people forget that the whole department is often consulted before making decisions, not just interviewers. Making an effort to be pleasant to the receptionist, for instance, could make all the difference on a close decision.

Introduce yourself

Most interviewers will break the ice and say something like… "Hello, you must be… [your name]". If they don't, take the opportunity to introduce yourself.

Make good eye contact (and without staring)

This is important, especially when you shake hands at the start. But don't go overboard. For panel interviews, give the majority of eye contact to the person asking the question, but look at the other panelists now and again, in as natural a way as possible. If you are Autistic and find this difficult, check out *these community tips* from the National Autistic Society.

Have some water beforehand

It's easy to get a dry mouth when you are feeling nervous, so have some water beforehand. Interviewers will often offer you a drink at the start. It's fine to accept, but it's safer to drink it once you feel more relaxed. Otherwise you'll be shaking the plastic cup or clinking the cup and saucer!
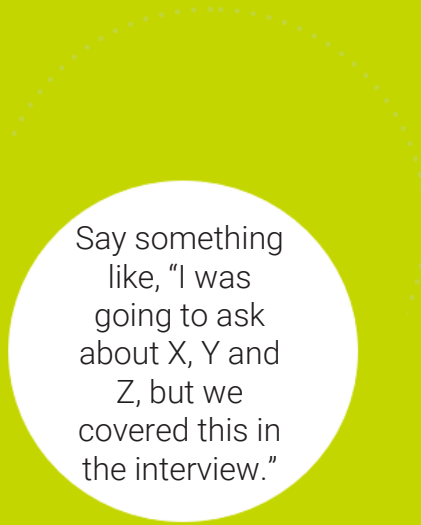
Ask good questions, but not too many

You will usually be given a chance to ask questions at the end. This is your final chance to impress so avoid questions about flexible working, holidays and salary. You are in a much stronger position to deal with these kinds of things once you have been made an offer. Also avoid questions to which you should already know the answer after having done your basic research. Ask things you genuinely want to find out and which show a real interest in the role and organisation. Topics you could ask about include: training and development opportunities; how you'll be assessed; the team you'll be a part of; the future development of the role and department.

Don't ask any more than three questions; two is probably the right number. If your questions have already been answered during the interview, don't simply say you haven't got any questions. Say something like, "I was going to ask about X, Y and Z, but we covered this in the interview."

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Reaffirm your enthusiasm about the opportunity

Sometimes, although not always, an interviewer might ask you if you have anything final to add. If this happens, simply restate your enthusiasm for the role without sounding desperate!

How are you using your body?

According to a very famous study, 55 per cent of communication is received through body language. The implications of this for interviews are obvious: how you look, your gestures and other non-verbal language are very important. Good body language is really about avoiding extremes for example, making eye contact without staring or making a gesture with your hand for emphasis without wildly gesticulating.

Going for interviews at other universities or the private sector

The vast majority of universities will use competency-based interviews. The style of job descriptions and person specifications may vary, but recruiters will still be looking for evidence of relevant qualities.

In the private sector competency interviewing is also very common but you may encounter different styles of questions. In small organisations, the interviews might be quite informal and not as

structured as in larger organisations. What's more,
you might encounter more unusual, or sometimes more
"aggressive" questions, especially in tough areas of work such as
investment banking.

Here's a selection of questions:

When did you last fail?

Who else have you applied to?

What makes you better than the other candidates?

Sell me this pencil

How many nappies were used in the UK last year?

What business stories have caught your eye recently?

Who would your dream client be and why?

How would you invest £1m in the economy at the moment?

Some of these questions seem scary, but part of the battle is not
to panic. Take your time and trust your judgement. Whatever sector
the job you are going for, the important thing is good preparation.
Think about the requirements of the role and you'll understand why
a certain question is being asked. Some questions are deliberately
difficult to see how you react to pressure and whether you can think
on your feet. If these are requirements of the job, then the questions
are legitimate.

> Some questions are deliberately difficult to see how you react to pressure.

It's not all about interviews

As mentioned earlier, you may have to do other things as part
of a selection process. All the assessors are trying to do with
these exercises is to see if you can do the job you are applying
for. Therefore the vast majority of selection exercises will be
related to the job in some way. Think about this beforehand. The
most common type of selection exercises are group exercises,
psychometric tests, written tasks and presentations.

Psychometric tests

There are two main types:

- Aptitude tests, which assess your abilities
- Personality questionnaires, which give a profile of the kind of
person you are

Psychometric tests can be used at various points in the selection
method. Sometimes they are used as the second stage of selection,
increasingly now as an online test, after the candidate has

successfully completed the first written stage of their application and as a basis to determine which candidates are invited to interview. Sometimes they are used further on in the selection process, for instance as part of an assessment centre, possibly after a first interview stage. Universities don't usually use these as part of recruitment, but they are more common in graduate-level jobs and in the private sector.

Written Exercises

Although written exercises take a variety of forms, there are some general principles which apply and some useful steps you could take to prepare:

- Normally written exercises will be conducted under timed, test conditions – so pace yourself
- Make sure you read and follow all instructions carefully
- Be careful with your grammar and spelling
- Ensure you know how to set out a business letter correctly
- Comprehension and doing a précis or sumarising is an important part of many written exercises, so practise reading newspaper and magazine articles quickly and summarising their main points

Presentations

Oral presentations are a common assessment tool, especially for jobs where you will be expected to give formal presentations as part of the role. Whatever the subject of your presentation there are some basic principles to bear in mind:

- Keep to the brief
- Rehearse beforehand
- Structure your talk carefully
- Ensure you have a clear, effective introduction and conclusion
- Consider your audience and pitch your talk according to their level of knowledge and experience in your topic
- If you are allowed visual aids, make good use of them, but don't overuse. For instance, if you are using slides, the slides should just contain highlights or signposts for your talk, not all the detail
- Ensure you don't block the audience's view of visual aids and don't use the screen as your notes. This will result in your talking to the screen, rather than to the group
- Produce handouts to give to your audience
- Use prompt cards as an aide memoire, but do not read your presentation out word for word or learn it off by heart and recite it. Both these approaches will make your talk sound stilted and wooden
- Use anecdotes and examples, which often give life to a presentation, but be cautious about telling jokes since the audience may not share your sense of humour

Group exercises

Whatever form a group exercise takes there are some basic principles to remember:

- Participate actively in the group, but don't dominate
- Listen and facilitate, encouraging quieter team members to contribute and building on others' ideas
- Bring structure to the exercise and ensure the group doesn't digress. You will probably have a set amount of time for your exercise, so time-keeping is important
- Express yourself clearly and succinctly. Avoid waffling or making a comment just for the sake of speaking
- Try to think beyond the obvious. Suggest different angles or approaches to the problem or question in hand
- Present coherent arguments that aim to persuade others of your point of view; but don't be stubborn. Be prepared to negotiate.

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