

A guide to writing

EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR JOBS

Most jobs in the public and voluntary sector will ask for a supporting statement or personal statement attached to your application form.

‘Please use the space below to describe how your skills, knowledge and experience relate to the requirements of the role and for any other information you consider relevant to your application’

What are employers looking for?

A statement that will engage the employer and encourage them to give your statement a second look and consider inviting you to interview will show evidence of:

- Clarity of thought
- Enthusiasm
- Ability to write clearly and persuasively
- Some knowledge about the organisation
- Some awareness of what the job will entail
- Details about how you can contribute to the organisation

Your task is to

- explain why you want the job – your interest in and attraction to the organisation This could be based on your knowledge of the organization from personal contact, or from research you have done about the organisation and the work it is involved with.
- demonstrate how you would be suitable and how you can contribute

Tips for effective statements

- Align your statement closely to the job specification and job description. **Job or person specifications** list essential and desirable qualities and qualifications they ideally would like in a candidate (see example below). The shortlisting process looks for people who meet, or come close to meeting all the qualities listed as ‘essential requirements’. The **job description** lists the duties and responsibilities of the post.

Example Person Specification

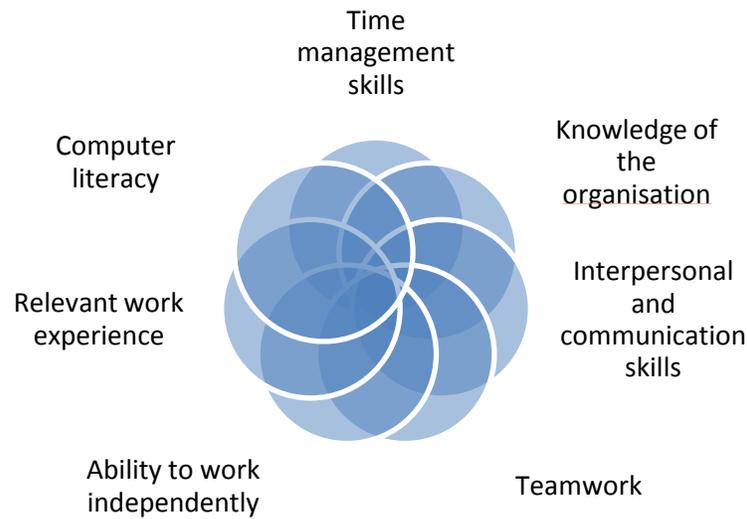
Essential	Desirable
Self motivating	Relevant business public or third sector experience
Excellent presentation skills	Degree or above
Ability to take initiative and seize opportunities appropriately	Aptitude and experience with web-based technologies
Excellent people skills	Awareness of public sector environment and organisation structure
Enjoys challenge and uncertainties	
Able to deliver high quality work to tight deadlines	
Personable with good social skills	
Experience of producing timely progress reports	

- Use the skills and knowledge you have gained from your degree, extracurricular activities and work experiences. You need to interpret and reflect on your skills and experiences, not just list them.
- You need to give very specific examples to back up your claims (see examples below). It is not enough to state you possess a certain skill e.g. teamwork. You need to explain why you think you have a good level of skill.
- Make the selection easy for the employer. In public sector many managers have to read forms squeezed into their normal working day or in the evenings after work.

So what many employers prefer is...

- about one page of A4. Two at the most.
- concise text – business style rather than essay style, using grammatically correct English
- well structured text. The use of headings closely aligned with the ‘person specification’ can make the text easier to read for the employer. Under the headings you could use bullet points or prose, depending on your preference. If you prefer not to use headings, use the opening sentence to refer to the part of the specification you are addressing.

Example headings



How can you effectively do this?

- Digest all the information provided by the employer and research the employer e.g. on the web
- Make a list of 6 – 8 headings . Use the person specification to do this.
- Under each heading write 2 or 3 bullet points. For each give a specific example of where you have developed the skill/knowledge in question. If possible, make the examples directly relevant to the tasks listed in the job description.
- You need to give very specific examples to back up your claims (see below).
- Add an introduction to your statement, including comments about why you are interested in the job and in the organisation and your reasons for applying. You could also include any other points you want to make but have not been able to explain elsewhere on the form.

Example 1: excerpt from a personal statement

For a job with a Housing association which emphasized the need for good team players in the person specification:

- ‘In the second year of my degree I carried out a piece of research with a small team of five into the area of student housing. The outcome was a series of recommendations to meet the needs of students and offer support when dealing with landlords. As a group we worked well together, holding weekly meetings and maintaining communication electronically in between meetings. One person became ill at a crucial time and I offered to reorganise the tasks to ensure the project met the deadline. We received a good mark for the project (68%) and the work was forwarded to the University’s Accommodation Office to be included in a review of their services.’

This examples uses the CAR technique: The applicant describes the **circumstances** of the event or situation, he/she outlines their individual contribution to the situation (**action**) and relevant outcomes are mentioned (**results**). This candidate explained why he/she thought the team worked well together, rather than just stating that they did. This technique can be useful in application forms, CVs and interviews.

Once you have drafted, redrafted and refined the statement, ask someone else to read it, to give their opinion of the structure and flow of the statement.

Help from the University’s Careers Network

- You can ask an adviser in the Centre to comment on your personal or supporting statement and make suggestions for improvements.
- You can book an appointment to see an adviser on the day you want to come
- You can email your statement or other queries via the website
- Details of opening hours and services offered are on <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/careers>

Further resources

Personal statements for job applications:

<http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/output/page775.asp>. University of London online publication 'Personal Statements'.

<http://www.careersteer.org/chapters/14.html>. Advice on writing statements is from this US based careers guidance site.

<http://www.careers.salford.ac.uk/students/phd/blog/?p=1175>. A University of Salford careers blog aimed at postgraduate students.

<http://www.derby.ac.uk/careers/applying-for-jobs/personal-statements>. A University of Derby careers publication.

Personal statements for further study:

www.essex.ac.uk/careers See the 'Further Study' section of the site for information on writing personal statements and two sample statements

www.kent.ac.uk/careers Go to 'Applications and Interviews', then 'Applications and interviews for postgraduate study including writing a personal statement' for advice on writing personal statements

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01> American university website offering advice on writing personal statements for postgraduate study including sample statements and advice from admissions tutors

<http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/index.htm> American university resource for writing personal statements including sections on brainstorming and common blunders