

In this interview, Tim Crowden gives great insight into how to write that winning job application

You've probably read article after article about how to prepare a winning job application. And you've probably looked at all sorts of singing and dancing proformas that promise to make your document look pretty.

There is no doubt that a polished application needs to be easy on the eye and easy to read. But the content is far more important—the words that persuade the reader to put you on the interview shortlist.

Advice on how to construct a good application

When a client comes to me seeking advice on how to prepare and write a winning job application, I suggest they focus on five simple steps.

Step 1. Make sure there's a fit

As you start to prepare your application, you should read a little about the organisation. I always encourage applicants to go to the website and read about the organisation, including the key pages in the annual or corporate report, any statements by the CEO, and the organisation's vision, mission and values. If you know someone who works in the organisation, ask them out for a coffee and have a chat to them.

Do you like what the organisation does and its' future plans? And do your values align with their values?

Once you have done that, ask yourself "why do you want this job?" This question could be one of the interview questions—it is designed to elicit your values, your strengths and your understanding of the position and the company. By the end of your answer, the interviewer should be thinking "this applicant fits here".

Once you have this step nailed, you will also be more enthusiastic about writing a focused and job winning application.

Step 2. Create a clear message about who you are

If you want the recruiter to read more than the first few paragraphs of your application, make it clear who you are so they can visualise you a bit better.

I always ask my clients "What's the one idea you want to get across about yourself?"

I ask them to write down a few options and work it into a clear and straightforward sentence. Then I ask them to place it at the top of their application, just under their name.

"I've seen applications that begin with a series of long and overly descriptive sentences. They are a jumble of ideas, and provide a blurry, unfocused picture of the applicant".

The clearer your message, the more likely the recruiter will read on and take your application seriously.

Step 3. Develop a message for each job you've had

The third step is to consider each of the jobs you've had, and write a one-sentence message about **your role** in that position (not just a description of the position). Put it just under the title of the job it's referring to and make sure it aligns with your overall message.

Create a clear message for each job you've held. You will have a set of interlocking messages, one main message and a supporting statement for each job. Now read it carefully to ensure it is balanced and connects to the requirements of the position.

Step 4. Dot-point your achievements

Fourth, create a set of dot points for each job you've held, showing your accomplishments and how they met the strategic outcomes of the organisation and your role within it.

- All dot points should start with a verb or action word.
- They should be as specific as possible about the impact of the programs you've developed, led and managed.
- The bullets above all have quantifiable results or clear outcomes. Running a successful project is not the main outcome – you should include what did the project deliver and what difference did it make.

Once you have done this, read them carefully to ensure it is balanced, shows all your key skills and experiences.

5. Proof-read your application (and then proof-read it again!)

Proof-read your application (and then proof-read it again and again!). You're unlikely to be considered for interview if the employer finds your text is poorly worded or has spelling mistakes or other errors.

So here are the final checks that I encourage my clients to do before they submit their application.

- Check the length of the sentences (are they too long?). It is a good exercise to try and shorten each sentence so the message is clear without being abrupt.
- Proper names are not picked up by spell check, so you need to look particularly closely at them (imagine your chances with an employer who sees his or her company's name mis-spelled).
- Look for ways to eliminate jargon. If you are using acronyms, have you spelt it out in full the first time you used it?
- Look for superfluous words (e.g. "very") or wishy-washy phrases (e.g. "I believe I can").
- Do you start each sentence with the word "I"?
- Am I over-selling myself, or am I under-selling myself?

The final check is read it out loud, or ask someone else to read it (and don't get angry if they make suggestions or changes 😊).

By applying these five steps, your application will be focused and get you through to the next step of the recruitment process