

MAKING AN APPLICATION

Practical guidance for your next career move | Updated October 2026

A strong application helps an employer understand what you can offer and why the role interests you. This guide will help you prepare clear, relevant and accurate applications, with confidence.

1. BEFORE YOU APPLY

- Read the advert, job description and person specification. Check the essential requirements, location, working pattern, salary range and closing date.
- Research the employer and identify two or three reasons the opportunity appeals to you. Match the key requirements to examples from your experience.
- Choose the correct application route. This may be an employer website, job board, email or recruitment consultant. Follow the instructions for that vacancy.
- Update your CV, check your contact details and prepare your employment dates, qualifications, notice period and availability.

2. COMPLETING APPLICATION FORMS

Read the whole form before you start. Draft longer answers separately so you can check them, then paste them into the correct fields. Save your progress where possible and allow time for any tests or assessments.

- Answer the question asked and stay within word or character limits. Use specific evidence rather than general claims.
- For competency questions, use STAR: explain the Situation, your Task, the Action you took and the Result. Make your own contribution clear.
- Keep dates and details consistent with your CV. Check information imported automatically from an uploaded CV.
- Complete required fields. Use “Not applicable” only when appropriate and permitted; do not invent an answer to satisfy a mandatory field. Ask the recruiter if a question is unclear.

Accuracy matters. Be truthful about your experience, qualifications and achievements. Check any declaration before submitting and keep a copy of your answers.

ANSWERING COMMON QUESTIONS

3. SALARY AND AVAILABILITY

Consider the advertised range, the responsibilities and the overall package. If asked for expectations, give a realistic range or say you are open to discussion where the form allows. Make clear whether you mean annual salary or an hourly or daily rate.

If asked about current pay, distinguish basic salary from bonus, commission and benefits. Do not round up or combine these into an unclear figure. If you prefer not to disclose it, ask whether you can discuss your expectations instead. Give an accurate notice period and realistic start date.

4. REASONS FOR LEAVING

Keep your explanation brief, factual and professional. Focus on what you are looking for next, without criticising previous employers. Suitable wording might include “seeking progression”, “fixed-term contract completed” or “role made redundant”, where accurate. Do not disguise a dismissal or redundancy as a voluntary move if asked directly.

5. GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT

There is no universal two-month rule. Follow the application instructions and account for gaps where requested or where this helps explain your career history. A short, honest explanation is usually enough: for example, caring responsibilities, study, travel, job searching or a career break.

Mention relevant learning or transferable skills where helpful. For health-related breaks, share only the personal detail you feel comfortable discussing; ask the recruiter for support if you are unsure how to explain the period.

6. INTERESTS AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

Interests are optional unless requested. Include genuine activities that add useful context or demonstrate relevant skills. Avoid inventing hobbies or judging an interest simply because it is unusual.

Keep your CV focused on your suitability. Unless specifically needed for a legitimate purpose, leave out information such as your date of birth, marital status, National Insurance number and passport details. Follow any anonymised recruitment instructions.

7. SUPPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

If you need an adjustment to take part in the recruitment process, contact the employer or recruiter early. Explain what would help, such as an accessible format, an alternative way to apply or an adjustment to an assessment. You do not need to include detailed medical information in your covering letter.

COVERING LETTERS & MESSAGES

8. WHEN TO INCLUDE A COVERING MESSAGE

Include a covering letter when requested. If it is optional, use it when you can add relevant information or explain your interest in the role. If the employer says not to include one, follow that instruction. A short email or portal message may serve the same purpose.

Aim for three or four concise paragraphs, usually no more than one page unless instructed otherwise. Add evidence and motivation rather than repeating your CV.

- **Opening:** name the role and reference, explain why you are applying and introduce your relevant background.
- **Evidence:** connect two or three key requirements to your experience, using a brief achievement or example.
- **Motivation:** explain why this employer and opportunity appeal to you. Be specific and sincere.
- **Close:** thank the reader, refer to your CV if attached and welcome a conversation. Include your contact details.

Illustrative example - adapt to your own experience

Dear Hiring Manager,

I would like to apply for the HR Administrator position. My experience supporting recruitment, maintaining employee records and coordinating onboarding would allow me to contribute to your team.

In my current role, I introduced an onboarding checklist that helped managers complete key steps consistently and gave new starters a clearer first-week plan.

I am particularly interested in the opportunity to support your growing HR function. Please find my CV attached. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experience meets your requirements.

Yours faithfully,
[Your name]

For a formal letter, use "Yours sincerely" when addressing a named person, and "Yours faithfully" when the recipient is unnamed. A professional email may end with "Kind regards".

9. ADAPTING YOUR APPROACH

Speculative enquiry: explain why that organisation interests you and the type of work you could contribute to. **Networking:** explain the connection and make a clear, courteous request. **Recruitment agency:** include target roles, locations, working pattern, preferred contract type, salary expectations and availability. Agree a sensible next step rather than promising repeated calls.

CHECKS & REFERENCES

10. RIGHT TO WORK IN THE UK

You will need to demonstrate your right to work before starting employment. The correct route depends on your nationality and immigration status. This may involve eligible original documents, an approved digital identity service or the Home Office online service using a share code.

British and Irish citizens can usually use a passport or other accepted documents. Applicants with an eVisa generally use the online share-code process. Ask the recruiter which route applies to you and use the current GOV.UK guidance. A driving licence alone does not prove a right to work in the UK.

11. OTHER PRE-EMPLOYMENT CHECKS

Depending on the role, an employer may verify qualifications, professional registration, employment history or other relevant information. Ask what will be checked, why it is needed, how to provide it securely and whether an offer is conditional on satisfactory results.

Criminal record checks depend on the role and jurisdiction. In England and Wales, standard and enhanced DBS checks are restricted to eligible roles; not every role in finance, care or security requires the same check. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate systems. Follow the specific disclosure instructions and seek advice if unsure what you need to declare.

If driving is part of the job, ask what licence checks are needed. If using your own vehicle for work journeys, confirm the required insurance cover with the employer and your insurer; ordinary commuting cover may not be sufficient.

12. REFERENCES

- Ask potential referees for permission before sharing their details. Check their current job title, organisation and contact information.
- Choose referees who can comment appropriately on your work or study. An HR department may provide factual confirmation of job title and employment dates.
- Tell your referees about the role and when they may be contacted. Follow the employer's instructions on the number and type of references required.
- If your current employer does not know you are applying, explain this and ask for references to be taken at an agreed stage. Do not assume they will wait until after an offer.

Protect your information. Check that the employer or recruiter is genuine before sending identity documents. Use the agreed secure process and ask why sensitive information is needed. Do not include bank details or identity-document copies in a general job application.

BEFORE & AFTER YOU SUBMIT

13. YOUR FINAL APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- The employer name, role title and job reference are correct.
- Your answers address the selection criteria with clear, truthful examples.
- Your CV and form agree on dates, qualifications and experience.
- Spelling, grammar, contact details and document filenames are checked.
- The correct files are attached, using the requested format and file-size limit. Open each attachment to check it.
- Any portal preview or imported CV information has been reviewed.
- You have followed word limits, declarations and submission instructions.
- You have saved a copy and left time to submit before the deadline.

14. ONLINE APPLICATIONS AND WRITING TOOLS

Use a clear CV layout with standard headings. Where a recruitment system extracts your details, check the resulting fields rather than assuming they are correct. Use relevant language from the advert naturally and only where it accurately describes your experience.

Writing tools, including AI, can help you organise ideas or proofread. Follow the employer's rules, check every statement and keep your own voice. Do not invent achievements or use assistance for assessments where it is prohibited. Avoid entering confidential employer, client or personal information into public tools.

15. KEEPING TRACK AND FOLLOWING UP

Record each application, the version of your CV used, key contacts, deadlines and agreed next steps. Save confirmation emails or reference numbers. Check your spam folder and voicemail. If no timescale is given, allow a reasonable interval before one polite follow-up. Use any feedback to improve future applications.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

[Application forms](#) - National Careers Service

[Covering letters](#) - National Careers Service

[Employment gaps](#) - National Careers Service

[Right to work](#) - GOV.UK

[DBS eligibility](#) - GOV.UK

[Recruitment adjustments](#) - GOV.UK

Guidance checked 28th October 2026. Requirements may change; follow the live guidance and vacancy instructions. Your Halecroft consultant can help you prepare and clarify the process.

APPLICATION TRACKER

Use one record for each opportunity. Print or copy this page as needed.

Employer / agency

Role title / job reference

Contact name and details

Vacancy link / closing date

Date applied / CV version used

Salary / location / working pattern

Status / next action / date

CONTACT AND PROGRESS LOG

Date	Contact / action / outcome	Next step / due date

Keep this record secure, particularly if you add private contact details or sensitive notes.