



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Trinity Careers Service

YOUR GUIDE TO MAKING GREAT APPLICATIONS

**In-depth
Guide**



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Start your journey now!

➤ INTRODUCTION

So, you're ready to start applying for jobs and role opportunities but not sure where to begin?

Application processes can seem daunting, but with research and preparation, you will increase your application success rate.

In the age of AI being leveraged more in student recruitment, our expert guidance on CVs, application forms, cover letters, and building a professional online presence in this guide -plus the services our team offers- hopes to support you every step of the way.



➤ FIRST STEPS



Step 1: Identify what the employer is looking for (job criteria)

The first step in the application process is to identify the criteria or skills required for the role. The employer will often clearly outline what they are looking for in the job description or person specification using key words or phrases.

If there is no clear job description, or if you are speculatively applying, you will need to create a list of criteria that you think would be related to the role.

Ways to do this include looking at job descriptions for similar jobs, researching the company and its employees through LinkedIn, talking to current or previous employees in your network, and reading the companies' websites and publications to get a sense of their work, their culture and their values.



Step 2: Demonstrate that you match the job criteria

You now need to reflect on examples from your experience (academia, clubs, societies, part-time work, volunteering, work experience or shadowing) which provide evidence that you match the criteria that are required.

For example, if the job requires that you have team-working, communication and presentation skills, and an ability to work on your own initiative, you need to reflect on your experience to date and think of examples which demonstrate how you acquired these skills. Where possible try and use examples that:

- Are specific and relevant to the role to which you are applying
- Draw on your most recent experience where possible
- Show that you were proactive and highlight your achievements (quantitative outcomes and results from these skills)

Create a list of these examples; these will form the basis of all stages of the application process as you embark on your job search.



TIP

While a lot of the information and examples that you have will be applicable across a range of roles, ensure you tailor your application to the specific role to which you are applying.

Demonstrate to employers that you have spent time considering why you want the role, and why you want to work in this company.



★ Step 3: Understanding AI in Recruitment: What You Need to Know

There's been a lot of discussion lately about the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in recruitment. While it's true that some larger companies are starting to explore AI technologies for tasks like sourcing or initial engagement, most employers are not yet using AI to screen candidates.

What is much more common is the use of Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)—software that helps employers manage the recruitment process. Some organisations, especially those handling high volumes of applications, use AI functionality within the ATS to perform the first round of screening. This is typically based on how well your CV and application match the job description.



It's crucial to review the job description carefully and reflect the same language in your CV and cover letter. This doesn't mean “stuffing” your CV with keywords—it means making sure your skills and experiences are described using the employer's terminology, where it applies truthfully to you.

Later on, we explore more in-depth techniques on ensuring your CV is ATS-friendly.



TIP

Employers are increasingly using AI to interact with potential candidates and offers personalised communication with the latest chatbot technology. Using such chat functions can be a great way to quickly find out more information about the company or position on offer.

Now that you've created your long list of job criteria, with personalised examples of these criteria or skills, and you've also refined them to be ATS-friendly, let's explore the application formats you will be showcasing your examples to make you stand out to the employer.

➤ CREATE YOUR CV(S)

Your CV is an essential part of any application process as it showcases your qualifications, skills and experience. Here's some useful guidance on how to present and structure your CV:

- Tailor your CV to each company: Familiarise yourself with the job description and incorporate some of the employer's language from the job description when referring to skills in your CV to show relevance.
- A standard CV in Ireland and the UK should not exceed two A4 pages.
- Include relevant skills, competencies and experience on first page of your CV, if possible, to attract employers' attention. It takes about 6 seconds for employers to decide on your CV.



- Choose accessible language – the recruiter reviewing your CV may not come from the same background, choose simple language that matches the terms in the job description (if you are coming from a science or technical background).
- Give your CV file an appropriate name to your file when sending your CV as an attachment.

The following sections should be included in a successful CV:

- **Personal details:** Full name, current address, accessible contact number (usually your mobile number), a professional email address and your LinkedIn profile URL, or your Github if relevant.



- **Education and qualifications:** presented in reverse-chronological order.
 - If you are looking to show your in-depth knowledge about any particular subject, include your projects or thesis which evidence this.
 - Show your overall grades and the breakdown of subjects within your degree relevant to your application, but don't include all your subjects. List the four or five modules that are most relevant to the role.
 - Leave out your Junior Certificate but include your Leaving Certificate
- **Employment history:** presented in reverse-chronological order.
 - Include employment dates, your job title and the name of the organisation you worked for in each role.
 - Emphasise both what you have learned and how you have made a difference to your employer, and talk about achievements at the workplace. Quantify where possible (e.g. "Taught English to groups of up to 25 adult learners")

- Emphasise the skills gained in each job and make it clear where you demonstrated these skills.
- If you have several different work experiences you can consider dividing your experience into 2 sections: Relevant Work Experience (highlight first) and Other Work Experience.
- **Volunteering:** presented in reverse-chronological order.
 - Include dates you were involved, a role title, and the name of the organisation for each position.
 - If you have demonstrated transferrable skills in your volunteer work make sure to explain this, with supporting evidence.
- **Interests and activities**
 - Mention any positions of responsibility that you have held in societies or clubs in College or in any outside organisations.
 - Outline any tasks you undertook which provide evidence of skills development.



- **Referees:** You do not need to provide your referees on your CV (unless specifically asked to do so), you can include “Available upon request” in this section.
 - However, referees listed on a CV where space allows adds weight to a CV.
 - Get permission before you use someone as a referee and include referees name, job title, employer and location and indicate “referee contact details available upon request.”
 - We advise international students to list an Ireland based referee (e.g. a Trinity academic or boss from part time or volunteering experience) as it can be helpful to localise yourself to a prospective employer.
 - For jobs in the private sector, you can include academic or work references, for recent graduates include one of each. For postgraduate study programmes you are likely to require two academic referees.



- **Optional CV sections:**

- Career Objective / Personal Profile: Reference your relevant experience briefly including highlighting key skills and confirm your interest in a particular job or employment sector. This section should not be more than 4 or 5 lines long.
- Skills Profile: A list of concrete skills, such as language or technical skills. Avoid listing generic skills such as teamwork and communication skills unless you also provide evidence of where these were developed.





A **chronological CV** summarises your experience and background, usually, in 2 pages. List duties, achievements and skills gained after each work experience or educational qualification. Use active verbs e.g. led, completed, achieved, awarded etc.



Academic CVs are used in applications for research, teaching or lecturing positions. This type of CV often includes details of research interests, research experience, funding, teaching experience, publications and conference presentations.



Technical CVs should highlight your technical skills in a skills section, and then demonstrate where you have applied these skills in projects and other experience. These CVs are typically one page, or 2 pages maximum.



US style CV (Resume) - All relevant information is presented on one page, including: education, projects, work experience and other extra-curricular activities. This style of CV is also the preferred format for applications to investment banking firms.



A **Skills based CV** is best used in cases of career change where you have significant work experience. A skills-based CV helps to categorise your work experience and education according to your skills and capabilities.



Europass CV has been developed as part of the Europass European initiative, to help people make their skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe, thus facilitating the mobility of both learners and workers.

★ CV gaps

Gaps in your CV refer to periods when you were not in formal education or employment. It's important to address these gaps openly and positively, rather than leaving them unexplained.

If you took time off to travel, care for a family member, focus on your health, or pursue personal development, include this in your CV. Briefly explain the reason and, where possible, highlight any transferable skills or experiences you gained during this time—such as communication, organisation, or cultural awareness.

Avoid leaving large unexplained periods, as this can raise questions for employers. Instead, provide a clear timeline that shows how you have used your time productively, even outside of work or study.



If you are currently unemployed and job searching there are things that you can do to fill the time between jobs:

- Opportunities such as volunteering, charity fundraising, online courses, adding to your hobbies and finding new interests are all valuable talking points when you meet with employers. They can also provide evidence of developing your soft skills and showing your potential for future leadership.
- Expand your knowledge through online courses, visit Springboard courses, Fetch courses and HEA and check out short, accredited learning experiences such as Trinity's micro-credentials.
- Build contacts in areas of interest, get active on LinkedIn, attend relevant webinars and events and consider seeking a mentor.





Some common reason for CV gaps and how to explain them

- **Illness:** Explain how you used your time given your limitations due to illness. Perhaps you did some voluntary work or were involved with a hobby? Did you keep up to date with industry trends and news? Confirm that you are ready to return to work. Show how you are a good fit for the role in question.
 - Example: I was unable to work/study due to an illness. I'm better now and ready to restart my career. I feel I am a good fit for this role because....
- **Family caring responsibilities:** Explain that you were needed to deal with a family situation but that has now resolved itself or you have put other supports in place. State that you are now ready to give your full commitment to work and reiterate your skills and experiences as they relate to the role.
 - Example: I had to take some time to care for a family member. I've now put some extra supports in place so that I can fully refocus on my career. I believe this position would be a good fit for me because...

- **Travelling:** Focus on why you decided to travel and the value of this experience. Emphasise your increased cultural awareness and new perspectives gained. Be clear that you are ready now to resume your career.
 - Example: I decided to take some time out to travel so I could expose myself to new cultures and places. During my time away I learnt many valuable lifelong lessons. I'm now ready to focus on my career and believe this position would be a good fit because...

Make your CV ATS-friendly

As mentioned above, some larger employers use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to do the first screening and ranking of applications, before any human inside the organisation reviews your CV. Here's how you can ensure your CV is ATS-friendly:

- Avoid using CV templates with complex formatting, as ATS are often not able to properly parse the information from these CVs.

- Stick to commonly used formats like .doc or .pdf, as some ATS systems may face difficulties with less conventional file types such as Overleaf or Canva CVs. Create a CV in Word and save it to a pdf to submit it in a manner that an ATS can easily read.
- A CV written in plain text, with clear headings and information, is much easier for an ATS to read.
- ATSs can struggle with intricate layouts, graphics or unconventional fonts. Use a simple and clean format with standard fonts.
- ATS tend to “read” information in your CV from left to right and from top to bottom, so use plain formatting and avoid columns, graphics, or tables in the background.
- They are also looking to calculate your experience so include the full span of your experience e.g. May 2023-August 2023 instead of Summer 2023 and give the full length of your degree as opposed to just the year when you will complete it.



- Websites such as [jobscan.co](https://www.jobscan.co) and [resumeworded.com](https://www.resumeworded.com) enable you to check if your CV can be accurately parsed by ATS for free.
- NOTE: When using these websites, remove your name and contact details from the document before submitting to protect your personal information.
- While optimising your CV for ATS is essential, don't solely rely on it. Human recruiters will also review your document. Strike a balance between ATS optimisation and crafting a compelling narrative about your skills and experiences to make your CV effective for both automated and human aspects of the hiring process.



➤ **CREATE YOUR PROFESSIONAL ONLINE PRESENCE**

Social media is rapidly changing the way students look for work. Businesses are increasingly looking up candidates online at various stages in the recruitment cycle, and the search results that come up when you put your name into a search engine can work against you, or really boost your chances of securing your next job.

If you're job hunting, it's a good idea to spend some time working on your online presence.



★ Why Every Student Should Be on LinkedIn

LinkedIn isn't just for seasoned professionals—it's a powerful tool for students to build their personal brand, connect with industry professionals, and discover job opportunities.

“97% of HR and staffing professionals use LinkedIn to recruit new talent”

A well-crafted profile can significantly boost your visibility and employability. Whether you're looking for internships, graduate roles, or simply want to explore career paths, LinkedIn helps you stay informed, showcase your skills, and grow your network—before you even graduate.



RESOURCE

LinkedIn for Students: 7 Ways to Make Your Student Profile Stand Out • Grow Your Personal Brand On LinkedIn

If you're not on LinkedIn, or you are on LinkedIn but aren't sure that you're using it to its full potential, the Careers Service offers LinkedIn sessions where our team of PhD students are here all year round to help build your LinkedIn Profile.



RESOURCE

[Book your LinkedIn Profile Review on MyCareer](#)



Clean up your digital footprint

It's so important to be mindful of the photographs and text that you share online. At the very least, take a look at any existing social media profiles you might have, and think about what message they send to employers.

Put your name into a search engine and see what results come up – is there anything you wouldn't want an employer to see? Take control of your online presence by spending some time reviewing and, where necessary, improving the privacy of your Facebook profile, so that employers can't read any posts that might undermine your professional image. Do also check the privacy settings on photographs and ensure that nothing incriminating is in the public sphere. If you're on Twitter, read through your tweets and consider deleting any that might create a negative impression.

Whichever online platform you use, be it blogging or Instagram or an online forum, always think before hitting "post". If you suspect that the item you're about to share could be a bit too edgy for some employers' tastes, think twice before clicking.

➤ APPLICATION FORMS

Many recruiters use online application forms, so knowing how to fill them in and stand out from other candidates in the selection process is a crucial skill.

As an applicant, it is essential to spend time researching your potential employer and paying attention to the specific requirements outlined in each job description.

Here are insights about the typical sections contained in application forms, and advice on how to complete one to your advantage:



Key sections

Before inviting an applicant for an interview, employers want to find out more about the person's background, skills, knowledge and interest in the role. Application forms usually request:

- Personal details
- Education and qualifications
- Employment and work experience
- Personal interests and achievements
- Additional information
- Motivation and/or competency-based questions
- References

Types of questions

Motivational questions

These questions require you to demonstrate your motivation for, and knowledge of, the job. Typical questions in this category include:

- What attracts you to this job?
- What qualities do you think you can offer?

- Explain how your interests and experiences might make you a strong candidate?
- Why would you like to work in this company/industry?
- What are your career ambitions?

Competency-based questions

Competency-based questions are aimed at finding out how a candidate would behave in different situations that arise in the workplace. Employers use these questions to find out how you have behaved in similar situations in the past, so that they can understand how you would deal with different scenarios that are likely to arise in the role. You will be asked to present evidence of how you have dealt with a range of situations in the past, and will be expected to provide examples to support your answer.

You will find that the competencies in the application form will be taken from the job description, so familiarise yourself with the job description before you apply to help you tailor your answers.

Answering application form questions

Application forms provide an opportunity for you to demonstrate your motivation and enthusiasm for the role and to highlight your relevant skills, experience and interests.

It is useful to apply the CAR model when answering the questions as it helps you to tell the whole story about how you demonstrated your competencies. The CAR model stands for:

- Context – Introduction to the scenario you wish to talk about
- Action – What was your responsibility? What kind of skills did you use/demonstrate/develop?
- Result - What was the outcome of this scenario? What did you learn? How would you do this differently next time?

Example A:

Question: “Can you provide an example of a time when you had to complete several projects within a short period of time?”

Answer:

Context: When I was studying Chemistry at Trinity College Dublin, I had to submit a number of assignments with strict deadlines and attend compulsory lab workshops as part of the programme.

Action: I used my organisational and time management skills to prioritise my work by putting together a list of all the deadlines and allocating time towards each assignment. I considered the complexity and length of the various assignments and calculated that I had to start some assignments ahead of time allowing some time for review and quality.

Result: As a result of my time management, I successfully submitted all my assignments on time, and achieved full attendance at all lab workshops and managed to achieve a 2.1 in my final year.



☆ Example B:

Question: “Give me an example of a situation where you worked as part of a team and describe the role you played?”

Answer:

Context: As a volunteer at community-based charity, I was responsible for managing and running events for underprivileged children. I was asked to organise an event to celebrate multiculturalism in the community and was given only 4 weeks to coordinate and run the event.

Action: I put together a group of 6 people to work together on the event. I started with a planning meeting and ensured that everyone knew the purpose of the event and based on the tasks at hand and people’s strengths and interests I allocated roles. I took the lead role, ensuring that everyone knew what had to be done and supporting them to progress with their work.



Result: Thanks to the team effort we had a successful event attended by over 100 people from the local community, and we received very positive feedback from attendees. It was the first time the charity had run this type of event and because of its success this has become an annual celebration.

Top Tips

- Familiarise yourself with what is needed in each section so you can decide what evidence or example is best suited in each instance.
- Answer all the questions. If a question does not apply to you, make this clear by writing n/a (not applicable) in the box so the employer will not think you have simply forgotten to answer.
- It is important to stay within their stated word limit. Do not write too little – if the word limit is 250 words you should write at least 200 words in that section.
- Reflect on why a question is being asked in the context of the specific role and answer it accordingly

Top Tips

- Write formally, avoid abbreviations and especially text speak.
- Draft your answers first to make sure they fit in the space available.
- Proofread and spell check before you submit your form.
- You may be completing multiple applications to tight deadlines - although you may be busy, it is essential to tailor each application to the company (and to double-check that you have included the correct company name!).
- Get someone to read over your answers and give you feedback to give yourself the best possible chance of making a good impression.
- Keep a copy of your form so that you can review it in advance of an interview.

There is often the option to explain any extenuating circumstances, for example, if you feel your academic grades aren't as good as you would like them to be, or if you have a gap in your CV. Make use of this option where relevant.

➤ COVER LETTERS

A cover letter is a brief email or letter where you emphasise your relevant skills, experience and motivation for the role. Here are insights about how to present and structure your cover letter:

Format

- A standard cover letter is either written in the body of an email, or sent as an attachment, as an A4 page. If you are sending it as an attachment convert it to PDF so that the formatting remains the same.
- Your cover letter should be short and to the point, approximately three to four paragraphs long, and no longer than one page.
- Include your address and the date on the top right-hand corner, and the employer's address on the left-hand side
- Always address the cover letter to the recruiter/member of staff named in the job description. If there is no name given, you can address your email or letter to "Dear Hiring Manager".

- Make sure to include the full, correct job title of the role to which you are applying. If there is a vacancy code mention this also, either in the subject title of your email, or in the body of the cover letter.
- There is no need to conclude by sharing your email address or mobile number in the cover letter, these details are in your CV.

Content

- Your cover letter should strike a balance between outlining why you match their criteria, and why this role and this company are of particular interest to you.
- Tell the employer why you are suitable for this job by outlining your skills and experience. You can draw on your educational background, work experience, volunteering and other extra-curricular activities to provide evidence of your suitability.
- Focus on the skills, competencies and experience specified in the job description and make sure that you refer to them in your paragraphs.

- Avoid generic statements such as “I have excellent communication and time management skills”. Always provide evidence for any statement you make.
- For example, you can say “I have demonstrated excellent communication skills through regularly participating in debates held by the Hist Society in college, and through numerous class presentations”.
- Employers are interested to know why you chose them amongst others, and how you see yourself fitting into their company’s culture.
- Use a closing paragraph to reiterate your interest in the role.
- Avoid saying "I am available for interview at your convenience" as this is a given.

RESOURCES

- [Sample covering letter](#)
- [How to write a cover letter](#)
- [Template CVs and example cover letters](#)

★ Book your in-person or online CV, cover letter and LinkedIn profile session

Trinity Careers Service also offers an in-person or online CV clinic, cover letter and LinkedIn profile session where our team of PhD students are here all year round to help build your CV and LinkedIn Profile.

This is a 15-minute meeting with a CV Reviewer who will review one document and give you feedback. These clinics are held in-person in the Careers Service and virtual via MTeams.



RESOURCE

[Book your Cover Letter Review on MyCareer](#)

