

Troubleshooting

General points

Sometimes, you know in advance that you have a problem applying for a job. This can be a problem that has often arisen, such as being considered too young or too old, or it can be a problem specific to that particular job. Maybe you don't have quite the same qualifications as the ones they are asking for, or your experience is not what they would be anticipating.

It is still worth applying if:

- you have the skills and qualities that are right for the job, even if these are not conventionally expressed;
- you have more skills, qualifications and experience than they are looking for;
- you have the key skills or qualities that they are asking for, but are lacking one of the minor ones;
- you have used some key skills and experience in previous jobs, but need to include other interests to supply the rest;
- you have the right skills and experience, even though you didn't acquire them in paid employment;

- you have the majority of the skills requested, and are in the process of acquiring the rest;
- you have a wealth of experience, but lack formal qualifications;
- you have the experience, and are in the process of acquiring the formal qualifications to back it up.

Adopt an analytical approach. Before you write, put yourself in the employer's position and think about why there might be a problem. Why does your prospective employer, rightly or wrongly, believe that your age, experience, or whatever, will be a difficulty for them? What is it about the job that requires these specific qualities? When you can answer these questions, you can make sure that you cover them adequately in your letter. By anticipating what the reader may be thinking, you can highlight your strongest points, and emphasise those that answer the reader's doubts.

Sometimes anticipated problems are based on stereotypes. You can do a lot to correct the impression that you may give by being, say, under 20 or over 50, by adjusting the tone of your letter and carefully selecting the information that you include.

If you are coming from a very different background, one of their worries might be whether you will fit in. Try to assess the style and tone of the organisation from the way they present themselves, and aim to match this in the presentation of your letter and CV. Use key words where you understand them, but don't include industry jargon unless you are absolutely sure of its meaning and usage.

Try to put things in their terms. The easier it is for the reader to understand what you are telling them, the more likely they are to be sympathetic to your application. Explain your qualifications or experience and give some idea of what each means in practical terms so that the reader has the clearest possible picture of you and your qualities.

Above all, it is very important to emphasise all the points where you match their requirements, rather than dwelling on those areas where you don't. Include any back-up information

that will help you to reassure them that you are the right person for the job. Give them all the information you can that will help them to form a favourable opinion of you.

It may also be appropriate to give some idea of why you are applying for this vacancy, even though you may be somewhat at a disadvantage compared to other candidates. You may be able to put a strong case for yourself by showing how this job fits with your past experience and future ambitions. You may also be able to demonstrate a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm for the position.

What you need to get across

Think about including the following points in your letter:

- your strongest points;
- all the things that contradict any preconceived ideas or fears the reader may have;
- all the points that match what they are looking for;
- all the skills, qualities, qualifications and experience that make you suitable for the job;
- what these mean in terms of actual duties and responsibilities;
- how you will fit in with the organisation;
- your reasons for applying for this vacancy;
- any positive qualities that you can bring to the job that are special to you – for example, you may be younger than they require, but you can bring enthusiasm, flexibility, and a willingness to learn.

The older applicant (over 45)

- When an applicant is, like John, over the age of 45, you might anticipate that an employer would worry that:

- his skills aren't up to date;
- he is too set in his ways – he'll find it hard to adapt to a new company;
- he'll resent being told what to do, perhaps by younger people;
- he'll be slow.

John answers many of these worries in his e-mail.

- Although he doesn't state his age, it will be clear from his CV.
- The tone of his letter is confident and energetic, giving a good impression of his character.
- He brings in his major achievement with his current employer early in the letter. A reduction in production costs will interest most companies.
- The achievement he chooses subtly underlines his familiarity and competence with new technology, as well as indicating the level of responsibility that he could bring to the job.
- The letter also underlines that his achievements are recent, not many years in the past.
- He uses active, vigorous words like *challenge*, *opportunity*, *pioneering*, *dynamic*. These give an energetic tone without trying to sound too youthful. He has also mined the job description for important key words.
- He gives a logical and understandable reason for looking for another job at this time. He sounds positive about finding another, similar organisation to work for, and emphasises that he will be continuing, rather than winding down, his career.
- He takes care to mention that his present company value him enough to offer him a job at the new site even though he is unwilling to take up their offer.

- He shows his initiative by undertaking further training to keep his skills up to date and broaden his understanding. He also indicates that he appreciates that keeping up with developments is important. This answers any concerns the reader might have that he thinks 'he knows it all' already.

A303/AJB Industrial Production Engineer

John Lynne [jlynne@anyisp.co.uk]

To: ajbillings@lakestuart.com

Dear Mr Billings

I am contacting you to apply for the above position currently posted on Engineering Online.

As a fully qualified professional engineer with a comprehensive background in industrial production, I believe I fit the requirements stated in your advertisement very well.

I am currently employed by Mono Engineering. My most recent achievement with them has been to play a key role in the installation of the pioneering Formoss production system as part of a cost-cutting exercise earlier this year. To date, the system has resulted in a 10 per cent reduction of production costs.

I have greatly enjoyed my time with Mono; they have provided challenge and the opportunity to develop along with their growth into new markets. Sadly, however, the company will be moving its operations to northern France over the next two years. Although they have offered a placement on the new site, I feel that family commitments oblige me to remain in this country if possible. Consequently, I am looking for a similar dynamic organisation with which to continue my career.

As you will note from the CV that follows, I have recently been updating my technical skills at Redford University with an advanced Computer Assisted Design and Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) course arranged by the Industrial Institute. I have attended many of their courses and seminars and find them

an excellent way of keeping up with new developments in the industry.

I should be very pleased to discuss any points with you further, and look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Yours sincerely

John Lynne

Tel: 00000 000000

The younger applicant (under 25)

- With a candidate who is, like Robert, under 25, a prospective employer might be worried that:
 - he doesn't have sufficient experience;
 - he lacks responsibility and dependability;
 - he is under- or over-confident;
 - his communication skills might not be fully developed, and he may have difficulty getting on with people.

Robert has answered these points in his letter.

- Robert doesn't draw attention to his age in his letter, but it will be apparent from his CV how old he is.
- He lets his positive qualities, his skills and experience, speak for him, rather than emphasising his one drawback.
- The tone of his letter is friendly and mature.
- He uses words such as *character*, *experience*, *dependable* and *reliable* that give a sense of steadiness and stability without sounding too pompous for someone of his age.
- He emphasises his major strength – his existing professional driving skills. He emphasises that, although he is young, he has been driving for four years, has a lot of experience, and has a clean licence.

- His next major strength is his voluntary experience with the over-sixties' club. This suggests his ability to be patient and careful, and to get on with people very different from himself. Although this is not experience he has gained in paid employment, it is highly relevant to the vacancy for which he is applying.
- The fact that he does voluntary work also shows his willingness to work and his involvement in the community, important for someone in this sort of job.
- He describes himself as friendly and outgoing, requirements stated in the job advertisement and rephrased in Robert's own words.
- He gives a very good reason for applying for this job, and underlines his commitment and enthusiasm. The voluntary work that he does backs up his stated desire to work with people. So, too, does the fact that he has the initiative to read the *North & East Health Care Report* for vacancies.

53 Hillcroft Avenue
St Agnes Hill
Norwich
NR11 6LM

Tel: 00000 000000

14 February 2009

Ms Alice N Murray
Personnel Manager
St Agnes Patient Services Trust
St Agnes
Norwich
NR7 7SS

Dear Ms Murray

Ref: PT/3 Driver, Patient Services Transport Driver

I would like to apply for the position of Outpatient Transport Service Driver as advertised in this month's *North & East Health Care Report*.

I believe I have the character and the experience that you are looking for to fill this vacancy. I am an experienced driver with a full, clean licence, who also has good communication skills and relates well to people.

As you will see from the enclosed CV, I have been with Eastville Deliveries as a driver since acquiring my licence four years ago. During this time, I have also worked as a volunteer driver for the Wallwell over-sixties' club, a role that I have greatly enjoyed.

I am a friendly, outgoing person who is also dependable and reliable – I think Eastville would agree that my work record with them has been excellent. I am now, however, looking for a post with more contact with the public and feel that your advertisement offers just the opportunity that I am looking for.

I very much look forward to discussing my application with you in more detail, and I hope to hear from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Robert Catskill
Enc CV

Changing career

- When considering an applicant like Shirley, who is changing career, an employer might worry that:
 - she doesn't have the right skills and experience for the job;
 - she wouldn't understand what the job entails;
 - she wouldn't fit in with the organisation, having come from a different background;
 - the career change is a whim, and she will change again, or go back to her old job.

Shirley has answered many of these worries in her letter.

- She concentrates exclusively on the skills and experience that she has that match those required by the job. These are drawn from her voluntary work and the course that she is about to complete.
- She emphasises that she has both practical experience and theoretical knowledge, and this suggests that she will understand what the job requires.
- The content of her letter emphasises what she has learned and how she has developed. It suggests that these will be things that she will also encourage others to do. This could be an important part of the work she is hoping to do.
- She makes it very clear that she is starting a new career rather than looking for a different job. She has spent time and effort undergoing training and getting the necessary experience to qualify her for this.

30 May 2009

Mrs Janice Dean
Senior Co-ordinator
The Drake Trust
PO Box 7
Netherton
SX99 2QS

Dear Mrs Dean

I am writing in answer to your advertisement in today's *Woodhill Gazette* requesting applications for the position of Social Support Worker for young people with learning difficulties.

I believe that I have the skills and qualities that you are looking for. I am outgoing and open-minded, with many years' experience of relating to people with patience, respect and consideration. I am actively involved in the adult literacy and numeracy course at Woodhill Adult Education Centre and have experienced at first hand many of the problems that these young people face.

I am about to complete a one-year City & Guilds Counselling Skills course at the same Centre, and I am interested in the opportunity that this vacancy offers to complement my studies with real experience. I greatly enjoyed the course, which I feel has given me the chance to enlarge my interpersonal skills and competencies. It has, especially, given me an insight into the way that people can grow and develop.

I very much look forward, now, to taking these skills into the workplace in a professional capacity with an organisation offering the opportunity to work in my area of special interest.

I would welcome the occasion to discuss my application with you further and hope to hear from you in the near future.

I enclose my CV as requested.

Yours sincerely

Shirley J Pope
Enc CV

Lacking specific qualifications

- This is a job at a 24-hour recovery and repair garage. The advertisement asked for someone who was preferably a motor mechanic, or trained in motor vehicle repairs.
- Guy has no formal training, but is currently doing a very similar job at a smaller place for less pay and with less prospect of promotion.
- Guy rang the company to ask if it was still worth making an application even though he lacked one of the things they asked for. Hardy Vehicles said that they wanted someone with a knowledge of mechanics who would be able to talk intelligently to customers and maybe offer advice over the phone. They thought it would suit someone with mechanical skills who was trying to move into the customer service and management side of the business. Hardy's suggested that, if he wanted to apply, they would consider his application.

- Although not trained, Guy has picked up sufficient technical information from his current job to feel that he can answer the company's requirements. He has a good practical understanding of the business from the work that he is currently doing.
- He also feels that, as an experienced receptionist, he can actually offer them a better service than could someone new to this type of work.
- His letter concentrates on his skills with customers. He emphasises his knowledge and experience, and highlights his success to date. He has greatly improved customer loyalty at Lowe & Co – something in which most employers would be interested.
- Guy's letter picks up every point in his favour. It also emphasises his ambition and determination – he is interested in training and career development. This is in line with Hardy's statement that they are looking for someone who wants to develop further.
- Although he can't give them exactly what they want, Guy makes sure that he puts across what he *can* offer them with confidence and assurance. He may persuade them that the skills that he has would be of value to Hardy Vehicles, as long as he can adequately compensate for his lack of formal training.

144 Uddingley Hill
Four Miles
Kent
KN7 2AW

Tel: 00000 000000

10 March 2009

Mr Andrew King
Manager
Hardy Vehicles
Willings Road
Willington
Kent
KN1 1MM

Dear Mr King

Re: Central Service Receptionist

Please find enclosed my CV in application for the above position as advertised in yesterday's *Willington Journal*.

As you will see from my career details, I have extensive experience of customer service and reception work, and appreciate what a vital link customer reception is between the customer and the workshop.

I am a confident, friendly communicator with a mature and responsible outlook. I am currently employed by Lowe & Co, where my aim is to provide a quality service to clients. My greatest achievement to date has been to increase the number of customers returning for a second time by more than half.

During my time at Lowe & Co I have developed an appreciation for, and a good practical understanding of, the motor vehicle trade. In addition, I am well used to working shifts as I currently work a similar rota system and find it no problem.

I am keen to find a company offering full training and career development opportunities, and am, consequently, most interested in the vacancy that you have to offer.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Guy Sheppard
Enc CV

Lacking specific experience

- Weber Foods are looking for a delivery representative – someone who can deliver to existing clients, and also look for new clients and extra sales as they make their round. The job is mainly that of a delivery driver, but they have stated that some sales experience, though not essential, would be preferred.
- Ross is currently a delivery driver, but has no sales experience. He does, however, realise that he uses the skills that he would need as a sales representative in the voluntary work that he does – tact, persuasion, confidence, etc.
- Ross's letter focuses first on his skills and experience as a delivery driver. He emphasises the degree of responsibility that he has had, and his ability to organise himself and be self-motivated. These will be useful attributes in the job for which he is applying.
- He stresses his reliability and dependability, and describes himself as personable and confident. These are key words taken from the advertisement and rephrased by Ross.
- He goes on to highlight his work with the public and his skills in this area. He not only shows that he has the relevant experience, but also demonstrates that he understands and appreciates the skills needed.
- Ross closes with a statement of how happy he is in his present job, but that he is looking for a more challenging position. He sounds enthusiastic and motivated.

To see what happens as a result of Ross's letter, see Chapter 16, *Answering job offers*.

9 Old Meadow
East Inglestone
Gloucestershire
GL9 1VB

Tel: 00000 000000

3 July 2008

Mr Simon Jake
Personnel Manager
Weber Foods plc
Frow Trading Estate
Gloucester
GL11 7XC

Dear Mr Jake

Please find enclosed my CV in application for the position of Delivery Representative as advertised in today's *Gloucester Informer*.

I believe that I have many of the personal qualities that you ask for, along with an excellent driving record.

I have been a delivery driver with Hogg Supplies for the past five years, where I have organised my own round and been fully responsible for both planning and delivery on my route. During this time I have consistently and reliably performed my duties to the satisfaction of both Hogg and their customers alike.

I am self-reliant and dependable, as well as being personable and confident. I am well used to dealing with the public in my voluntary role as fund-raiser for the East Inglestone Children's Charity. As this entails approaching businesses and individuals for financial support, I have developed tact, persistence and the powers of persuasion over the years.

Although I have been very happy with Hogg, I am now looking for a position with more responsibility and greater scope for development. I believe that your vacancy offers just the opportunity that I am looking for in order to advance my career.

I would be very happy to discuss my application with you further and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Ross Walker
Enc CV

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.