

COUNTY OF ORANGE: COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATION

Getting Started

Writing *any* document involves a process. The particular process of writing an effective application usually involves considerable time and effort. There will likely be *several* revisions before you perfect your application. Follow the steps below to get started:

- Obtain an understanding of the job you are seeking.
- Make a list of your education and training that are relevant to that job.
- Make another list of your skills and experience that are relevant to the job.
- Brainstorm on specific accomplishments that illustrate your qualifications for the job.

A worksheet is provided in Appendix A to help you as you complete these steps.

OC RECRUITMENT PROCESS

County Employment Process Overview

Like most public agencies, the County has a structured process in which employment applicants must participate. An overview of this employment process is provided below.¹



Minimum Qualifications Screening - Staff Specialist

Intro

This form is a sample for training purposes only. It shows the basic minimum qualifications screening for a small sub-set of the minimum qualifications for Staff Specialist at the County of Orange. Each submitted application is screened for minimum qualifications. For this exercise five (5) minutes will be given to screen the application for the five minimum qualifications listed below.

#	MQ	Meets	Does Not Meet
1	Three years of experience demonstrating knowledge and abilities of position or combination of experience and education.		
2	Uses basic principles of mathematics including percentages, means, medians, and other elementary statistical measures.		
3	Office procedures, methods, and equipment including computers and applicable software applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, and databases.		
4	Communicates effectively in English both orally and in writing; summarize data, prepare, present recommendations, compose narratives for reports.		
5	Work independently with minimal supervision.		

Application Appraisal Panel - Staff Specialist

Intro	<p>This form is a sample for training purposes only. It shows the basic formula and grading criteria for how Application Appraisal Panels are scored. Each application that meets Minimum Qualifications is screened and scored on the same criteria. For this exercise five (5) minutes will be given to each application to score three (3) desired qualifications.</p>	
Desirable Qualification	Strong communication and presentation skills.	
Scale	Criteria	
1	No listing of qualification.	
2	Listing of communication or presentation skill.	
3	Listing of both communication and presentation skills.	
4	List intermediate level of communication and presentations skills.	
5	Lists strong communication and presentation skills.	
Score		
Notes		
Desirable Qualification	Outstanding organizational and coordination skills	
Scale	Criteria	
1	No listing of qualification.	
2	Listing of organizational or coordination skill.	
3	Listing of both organizational and coordination skills.	
4	List outstanding level of organizational and coordination skills. With no examples.	
5	Lists outstanding organizational and coordination skills. Provides examples.	
Score		
Notes		
Desirable Qualification	Ability to analyze data, draw conclusions, and make recommendations.	
Scale	Criteria	
1	No listing of qualification.	
2	List one of the three areas (analyze data, draw conclusions, make recommendations)	
3	List two of the three areas (analyze data, draw conclusions, make recommendations)	
4	List all of the three areas (analyze data, draw conclusions, make recommendations)	
5	List all of the three areas. Provides detailed examples.	
Score		
Notes		

DESCRIBING WORK EXPERIENCE

Properly articulating your work experience is one of your most challenging and important tasks as you develop or revise your application. The following section presents information to help you effectively describe your work experience.

Resume versus Job Application

Generally, the same information about your qualifications appears on your resume and a job application. However, to be effective, the way the information is presented differs dramatically. Statements about work experience on the job application need to include more specifics. Statements about work experience on a resume are more focused and concise, emphasizing accomplishments or results achieved. The example below illustrates a statement on a resume versus job application.

Resume: *Implemented four statewide public relations campaigns for radio and print media that resulted in a 40% increase in program participation.*

Application: Implemented four statewide public relations campaigns for radio and print media to promote the agency's "Healthy Living" program. Designed all print advertising materials using Adobe Photoshop. Composed the scripts for the radio advertisements. Selected and worked with diverse media outlets to produce the pieces. Designed metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign, which resulted in a 40% increase in program participation.

Individualizing Job Description Language

One of your goals in describing your work experience is to show how you have contributed beyond just "getting the work done." A common resume mistake that impedes the achievement of this goal is to include statements that are similar to, or exactly copied from, a job description. These statements usually begin with phrases such as **duties included**, **responsibilities included**, or **responsible for**, followed by highly generic descriptions of work performed.

This is a mistake because these statements describe your position, not what you did to impact the position. The example below illustrates a statement that echoes a job description along with a revised version reflecting individualized performance of the same work.

Job Description: ***Duties included** analyzing, evaluating, and improving the efficiency of internal administrative operations.*

Individualized: Designed and conducted a multi-department study for the Board of Supervisors that evaluated the return-to-work program, which led to transformations that enhanced compliance with federal guidelines.

To individualize your work experience statements, 1) do not use introductory phrases from a job description such as those highlighted in bold above, 2) consider the job description an *informational* document that can help you frame your individual work experience, and 3) include specific reference to the impact you made in the positions you have held. The next section describes a method for structuring your work experience statements to help individualize them.

Recommended Structure

An effective statement about a work experience is structured to include three elements: the **Action**, **Context**, and **Benefits**. These three elements are described below.

ACTION

Each work experience statement should begin with an action word that describes a specific action you took. Although a single statement can include multiple action words, the action word that begins the statement is the one that will be emphasized most to the reader. Ensure that it is the most important action you want to highlight as you structure the statement.

A list of action words is provided in Appendix C. The list is not exhaustive, and we recommend that you use additional resources to identify other appropriate action words for your work experience statements. Keep in mind, however, that some action words can be vague or unclear (e.g., facilitated). Choose strong action words that help the reader clearly understand the work you performed.

CONTEXT

The context provides information to help the reader frame the action you took to better understand it. The context addresses questions such as the following:

- What was the project/assignment for which you performed the action?
- Under what conditions or circumstances did you perform the action?
- What issues or challenges did you face in performing the action?
- How did you perform or carry out the action?
- With whom did you interact as you performed the action?
- How often did you perform the action?

BENEFIT

The benefit provides information about the outcome or result of your action. It addresses the question, “Who or what was impacted by your action?” Although the benefit could be described in a generic way, the best way to describe the benefit of your action is to describe it in relation to the accomplishment(s) you achieved. Accomplishments provide information about the meaningful outcome or result of your action in a qualified and/or quantified manner.

Accomplishments help the reader project the value you provide in your current or previous position to the value you could provide in the target job opportunity. Below are some broad

examples of accomplishments to prompt your consideration of your past work experience:

- Resolving a problem
- Increasing customer satisfaction
- Saving time, money, or resources
- Enhancing your employer’s image
- Developing more efficient processes
- Enabling managers to make more informed decisions
- Completing a significant number of activities (e.g., customers served, transactions processed, cases closed)

The next page illustrates several statements that follow the CHALLENGE-ACTION-RESULT structure.

Note: Reviewing your past performance evaluations, work logs, work status reports, and letters of recommendation can help you identify or recall information to use in statements that follow this structure.

Examples

Recommended Work Experience Statement Structure

Key: **(A)** = Action **(C)** = Context **(B)** = Benefit

Original: *Facilitated training for staff*

Revised: **(A)** Created and delivered **(C)** a multi-module project management training for 200 entry-level analysts **(B)** which achieved a 98% participant post-test pass rate

Original: *Trained administrative staff*

Revised: **(A)** Trained **(C)** four new administrative personnel on office procedures **(B)** resulting in an organized and efficient administrative team within two weeks from their hire date

Original: *Attended group meetings and recorded minutes*

Revised: **(A)** Recorded **(C)** weekly meeting minutes using a laptop computer and **(A)** compiled them **(C)** in a Microsoft Word-based file **(B)** for future organizational reference

Original: *Updated departmental files*

Revised: **(A)** Scanned **(C)** hardcopy files and **(A)** created **(C)** an electronic retrieval data file with instruction guide **(B)** which increased efficiency by 10%

Original: *Hired employees for a restaurant*

Revised: **(A)** Recruited, hired, and trained **(C)** more than 20 employees for a restaurant with \$2 million in annual sales, **(B)** contributing to a 100% retention rate after 90 days despite a 40% industry average turnover

Original: *Moved the office supply process from a paper to electronic system*

Revised: **(A)** Simplified the office supply process **(C)** by creating an electronic supply request form that replaced the hard-copy form **(B)** which reduced workload for the procurement section by 12%

Original: *Elevated the division's efforts to "go green" and help the environment*

Revised: **(A)** Wrote **(C)** feasibility study for a file sharing program **(B)** that was ultimately adopted, **(B)** helped reduce paper waste by 27%, **(B)** and contributed to a 15% division budget surplus

Original: *Composed a speech on industry innovations for the department head*

Revised: **(A)** Composed **(C)** speech on industry innovations for the department head to deliver at the regional conference **(B)** that led her to being invited to speak at the national conference

We acknowledge that it may not be feasible to structure every work experience statement in this manner; however, work toward the goal of having your work experience statements reflect this structure.

■ FINISHING STEPS

The last steps in the process of developing or revising your application involve the finishing touches to produce a final product that is ready for readers. These steps are as important as the previous steps to presenting your qualifications in the best possible manner to be received and understood. The next section of this *Guide* provides recommendations on finalizing your application.

Self-Review Checklist

Use the following checklist to pose questions to yourself about your application and some of the major elements of effective applications described in this *Guide*. You should answer “yes” to each question presented. If you are hesitant to answer “yes” to any question, continue refining your application.

Does your application...

Overall Appearance

- look professional?
- appear inviting and easy-to-read?
- make an immediately favorable impression?

Organization

- emphasize your strongest qualifications first?
- utilize a style that is appropriate based on your background?
- have an appropriate number of pages based on your work history?

Content

- highlight your qualifications in your own words, instead of listing duties found on the job bulletin or on a job description?
- provide examples that are relevant to the job opportunity?
- emphasize transferable skills and focus on accomplishments?
- exclude embellishments or exaggerations about your qualifications?
- omit personal details (e.g., interests) unrelated to job qualifications?

Language

- use action verbs to begin phrases?
- use active rather than passive voice?
- have concise phrases instead of complete sentences?
- omit personal pronouns, unfamiliar acronyms, and jargon?
- exclude spelling, grammatical, and typographical errors?

Design

- have adequate margins and font size(s)?
- use clearly distinguishable section headings?
- incorporate mechanical techniques and visual aids sparingly?
- appear well-balanced with enough white space for easy reading?

Another activity is to search online for applications in your field and critique them. Putting yourself in the mindset of a reviewer can potentially give you “fresh eyes”.

External Review

After you conduct your own review, ask two people to review your application. The first person should be someone who knows your work and can point out qualifications you may have forgotten to include (e.g., specific projects and accomplishments). The second person should be someone who is not familiar with your work. This person will have the distance to be able to point out confusing statements that may also confuse your readers. Revise your application as needed based on their feedback.

Appendix A

Work Experience

Provide information about your work experience below. Refer to your performance evaluations, work logs, work status reports, and letters of recommendation to help you recall information to include.

Note: Do not worry about phrasing this information as you would on your application. You will refine this information when you begin writing your actual application.

Job Title #1: _____
Employer: _____ **City**
and State: _____ **Start**
Date (month and year): _____ **End Date (month and year):** _____
No. Supervised: _____ **Level of Employees Supervised:** _____
Field: _____ **Industry:** _____
(e.g., human resources, accounting, information technology)* (e.g., government, banking, retail, non-profit)*

Major tasks, duties, and responsibilities:

Knowledge, skills, and abilities used:

Results, successes, and accomplishments:

Tools, equipment, and software used:

Major type(s) of work performed (e.g., leadership, change management, customer service, administrative support)*

Appendix B

Action Words

Management/Leadership/Decision-Making

administered	directed	increased	recruited
advocated	elected	initiated	reorganized
analyzed	eliminated	inspected	replaced
appointed	emphasized	instituted	represented
approved	enforced	led	restored
assigned	enhanced	managed	reviewed
attained	enlisted	merged	scheduled
authorized	established	moderated	secured
chaired	executed	motivated	selected
considered	formed	operated	sponsored
consolidated	founded	organized	staged
contracted	generated	overhauled	started
controlled	governed	oversaw	streamlined
converted	handled	pioneered	strengthened
coordinated	headed	planned	supervised
decided	hired	presided	
delegated	hosted	prioritized	
determined	improved	produced	
developed	incorporated	recommended	

Communication/Interpersonal

addressed	debated	interpreted	publicized
advertised	defined	interviewed	reconciled
arbitrated	described	involved	recruited
arranged	developed	joined	referred
articulated	directed	lectured	reinforced
authored	discussed	listened	reported
clarified	drafted	marketed	resolved
collaborated	edited	mediated	responded
communicated	elicited	moderated	solicited
composed	enlisted	negotiated	specified
condensed	explained	observed	spoke
conferred	expressed	outlined	suggested
consulted	formulated	participated	summarized
contacted	furnished	persuaded	synthesized
conveyed	incorporated	presented	translated
convinced	influenced	promoted	wrote
corresponded	interacted	proposed	

Analytical/Research

analyzed	evaluated	interpreted	searched
clarified	examined	interviewed	solved
collected	experimented	invented	summarized
compared	explored	investigated	surveyed
conducted	extracted	located	systematized
critiqued	formulated	measured	tested
detected	gathered	organized	
determined	identified	researched	
diagnosed	inspected	reviewed	

Technical

adapted	debugged	operated	restored
applied	designed	overhauled	solved
assembled	determined	printed	specialized
built	developed	programmed	standardized
calculated	engineered	rectified	studied
computed	fabricated	regulated	upgraded
conserved	fortified	remodeled	utilized
constructed	installed	repaired	
converted	maintained	replaced	

Teaching/Training

adapted	developed	informed	taught
advised	enabled	instilled	tested
clarified	encouraged	instructed	trained
coached	evaluated	motivated	transmitted
communicated	explained	persuaded	tutored
conducted	focused	set goals	
coordinated	guided	simulated	
critiqued	individualized	stimulated	

Finance/Fiscal/Budget

administered	balanced	developed	prepared
adjusted	budgeted	estimated	programmed
allocated	calculated	forecasted	projected
analyzed	computed	managed	reconciled
appraised	conserved	marketed	reduced
assessed	corrected	measured	researched
audited	determined	planned	retrieved

Persuasion/Influence

arbitrated	marketed	promoted	served
convinced	mediated	publicized	sold
dissuaded	negotiated	resolved	solicited
explained	persuaded	secured	

Creativity/Innovation

acted	designed	illustrated	planned
adapted	developed	initiated	revised
authored	devised	instituted	revolutionized
began	directed	integrated	revitalized
combined	displayed	introduced	shaped
composed	drew	invented	solved
conceived	entertained	modeled	
conceptualized	established	modified	
condensed	fashioned	originated	
created	formulated	performed	
customized	founded	photographed	

Helping/Advising/Collaborating

adapted	collaborated	familiarized	referred
advocated	comforted	fostered	rehabilitated
aided	contributed	furthered	represented
answered	cooperated	guided	resolved
arranged	counseled	helped	settled
assessed	demonstrated	instilled	simplified
assisted	diagnosed	insured	supplied
attended	educated	intervened	supported
cared for	encouraged	mentored	tutored
clarified	ensured	motivated	volunteered
coached	expedited	prevented	

Organization/Administrative/Detail

approved	distributed	ordered	routed
arranged	executed	organized	scheduled
catalogued	filed	planned	screened
categorized	formalized	prepared	set up
charted	generated	processed	submitted
classified	implemented	provided	supplied
coded	incorporated	purchased	standardized
collected	inspected	recorded	systematized
compiled	logged	registered	updated
coordinated	maintained	reorganized	validated
corrected	monitored	reserved	verified
corresponded	obtained	responded	
disseminated	operated	reviewed	

Accomplishments

achieved	improved	resolved	succeeded
completed	led	surpassed	transformed
created	pioneered	restored	won
expanded	reduced	revised	
exceeded	reorganized	spearheaded	