

6 Tips for Filling Out Job Applications

Does the thought of filling out yet another job application make you cringe? Maybe it's not your favorite thing to do, but it's a necessary evil completely worth your full attention and effort. Being sloppy, inaccurate—or worse yet being dishonest—can cost you a job. Breeze these six quick tips to keep your job applications in tip-top shape.

1. **Look the application over line-by-line first.** We know it's tempting to grab that pen and go to town, but it's best to read through the document first. See what's being asked of you and what you might need to complete it fully (job start and end dates, titles, salary history, or even documents like your driver's license, social security card, etc.). Make sure that you have plenty of time to fill it out. The last thing you want to do is rush through it and make mistakes.
2. **Don't leave any blanks.** Think an employer won't notice if a tidbit of info is missing from your application? Think again. Leaving information off sends a poor message, making you look sloppy or dishonest. Make sure that you have provided all the information that's being asked of you. It might require a little effort on your part, but a fully completed application is the best route to go.
3. **Be accurate.** You might have a terrific memory, but don't rely on that. Employers often verify seemingly insignificant application details (like hire start and end dates and salary history) and even a slight discrepancy can cost you a job. It's crucial that all of your information is 100% accurate and that your application information matches your resume perfectly. Don't guess on details! Call your former employer if needed. Better yet, create a document for your own keeping to house this information so you can go back to it whenever needed.
4. **Answer conviction-related questions carefully and honestly.** You might have done something in your past that you're not proud of, and it can be tempting to avoid sharing that in hopes of landing a job. But trust us, it's best to be honest from the get-go. Make sure you read conviction questions closely—sometimes employers ask if you've ever been convicted of any crime, and other times you only have to disclose certain types of crimes or convictions that occurred within specific time periods. Lastly, if you've had your record expunged, you should still disclose that as your record will likely still show up on a background check.
5. **Keep it neat.** You'd be surprised how something as simple as your handwriting might impact a hiring decision. Employers have to wade through stacks and stacks of job applications. If yours is neat and tidy, and all the information is easy to glance through, you'll likely have a leg up on the competition. Sloppy handwriting can not only make your application hard to read, but it can cause an employer to judge your personality as careless or worse.
6. **Proofread.** Then proofread again. Might sound like a no-brainer, but you wouldn't believe how many people fly through applications and turn them in with glaring errors. Giving your completed application a full read-through a few times when you're feeling alert and focused is worth every minute of your time. Better yet, ask a friend or family member to proofread for you as well. If you find a mistake, clean it up as tidily as you can. Making large strikethroughs or scratching out information can look sloppy and distracting. That's why it's best to read through it carefully from the start and answer with accuracy to avoid errors before they happen.