

# Supporting Statements - job applications

## WHAT ARE THEY?

When applying for jobs the employer sometimes asks you to complete a supporting statement, this could be online or paper-based. This is a large blank space on the application requiring you to explain how you meet the job specifications (see the image to the right). *Scary!* But don't worry, this help sheet explains how to overcome the fear and write a great statement. Employers can be helpful in these situations by offering instructions, and it is important that you follow them carefully, e.g: "*In this space, please give your reasons for applying for this job and additional information showing how you meet the person specification, including relevant skills and experience.*"

### Further Information

Please read the job description and person specification and, using examples, show how your knowledge, skills and experience meet each of the essential requirements of the person specification.

This image is the “*supporting statement*” part of Petroc’s application form.

## THEIR IMPORTANCE

The statement is one of the most important parts of your application; it plays a major role in deciding if you will be invited for interview. So, it is crucial that you write about how you have the right motivations, related experience, potential, and skills required to be successful in the job. To help you with this you can find clues in the job advert, job description and person specification; if you don't have this then contact the employer and ask for the information. Many employers, especially in the public sector, use a shortlisting grid to score each criterion in the person specification and then compare you with other candidates. The higher the score the more closely you match their requirements and the higher chance you have of getting to interview.

## BASIC RULES

- Fill the space provided, at least 90%.
- Adhere to any stated word limits; employers want to see if you can write succinctly and clearly.
- Structure your statement with paragraphs i.e. it should not be solid text, so that it is easier to read.
- Use headings. **TOP TIP:** re-use the headings from the person specification to structure the personal statement.
- Don't overuse bullet points.

## PREPARING TO WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Writing a good personal statement may take much longer than you think, especially if the list of essential and desirable criteria is long (not uncommon with employers such as the NHS). Employers are looking to see how seriously you take the job application as this is a strong indication of your motivation.

- Make sure you fully understand the nature of the role by reading through all the job information.
- Conduct some employer research so you can demonstrate your interest in the organization (this may include phoning for more information if invited or even arranging a visit).
- For each skill, experience or personal quality in the person specification try to identify relevant evidence from previous work, hobbies/interests or voluntary work.
- At this point, you need to be honest with yourself, ask how much of the criteria can you provide evidence for? If you can for most of it (75% or more), then you're ready to start writing! Anything under 75% makes it more challenging to get an interview.
- Employers are looking for concrete, recent and relevant examples; relevant work experience is

always best, but persuasive examples can also come from voluntary, extra-curricular, academic, gap year or sporting experience. The key thing is that you can show their relevance to the job.

## DESCRIBING YOUR EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS

Unless there are specific instructions about structuring your statement, you will need to find the most efficient way of doing this. A useful structure is:

- **Opening Section** – Start with a strong opening paragraph to grab the reader's attention, e.g. why you are interested in the job (**TOP TIP**: talk about duties of the job you will enjoy and why).
- **Middle Section** – This is where you outline how all your relevant experience meets the person specification. You can do this by re-using the headings from the person specification to create headings in your statement, and then give examples from your experience of how you meet these. **Look at the example on the right**
- **End Section** – Finish by tying together the various issues / strengths you've raised and reiterate your interest and suitability for the job.

## THE LANGUAGE OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Think of the large numbers of application forms a recruiter has to read. To stand out you need to write in a way that is engaging, positive and purposeful.

- Use good active language and describe your experience in terms of relevant, quantifiable achievements where possible
- Choose strong positive language, never draw attention to negative aspects of your application e.g. "Although I have no direct experience in...."
- Get the tone right, it's a 'personal' statement so you should convey your enthusiasm and personality without sounding too chatty; try not to be overly formal.
- Avoid subjective, unsubstantiated claims "I feel I have excellent communication skills", "I believe I am hardworking and reliable", back up your claims with examples.
- Make your points clearly and succinctly; get to the point – *tell them what you've got and where you got it*. E.g. "*I developed excellent communication skills in my role on the Service Desk at [company] resolving often complex customer complaints ...*"

### Useful sentence starters

Try to vary your sentences so they don't all begin 'I have... I can... I am'. Here are some examples:

- Whilst working as a [job title] at [company], I gained valuable experience in [activity relevant to the job].
- My [x,y,z] skills have been developed through [specific experience].
- In my role at ... I...
- My ability to .... is demonstrated by my experience whilst working as [ ] where I was required to regularly ...
- During my time at / as ... I successfully [created / implemented / generated / designed ...ie. specific achievement], demonstrating my strength at [ ]...

### Finally, before sending your personal statement

- Proofread : Ask someone to proofread the statement, and check for spelling mistakes.
- Advice: Ask Petroc's Careers Adviser to act as the "recruiter", they will cross-reference your statement with the job details and provide you with an objective critique.
- Keep a copy: ... to remind yourself of what you have written.