

EMPOWER Employment Skills Workshop

Mentors' Guide

Sample Answers to Workshop Activities

Mentors can also use this information during the mentoring sessions privately.

This document contains helpful information found on the internet and which is appropriate for the Australian work environment.

Activity 1: Employment Search and Applications

Choose one of two questions, A or B, below. Take 15 minutes for paired discussion

- A. What questions should a job applicant ask herself? - How might this affect her online response to an employment vacancy ad?

Questions to ask yourself:

1. What is a self-assessment and how do I complete this when looking for a job? (Make a checklist of experiences, capabilities, and preferences – what are you good at?)
2. What do I **want** to do, and what **can** I do? (Write shortlists of your **best skills** and **occupations** of interest). In other words:
 - what is my employment goal?
 - What do I want to achieve, now and in the future?
 - 'Shortlists' means reducing numbers of job types and preferences to encourage personal focus.

Very important question –

3. Am I a good fit for the job? How do I know? Does my mentor/adviser agree or have other thoughts to guide me?

When I complete the application form online, I must make sure that:

- the strongest qualities listed by me in my self-assessment are used to match with the requested criteria in the advertisement
- my job preferences are used to match with the requested characteristics of candidates in the advertisement.
- I will do this by carefully identifying **key words** in the job description that appear to be very important to the employer, and saving these in my rough notes before finalising the application.
- It is best to prepare any written work in a draft form first, for checking and changing to improve my chances of being invited for an interview.
- While doing this I will seek help and advice from someone more experienced with Australian cultural work practices and successful job applications so that my presentation can be improved before submission.

B. How do we learn about improving our employment chances? What are some common mistakes when submitting a job application? A clue – what do you always include? What information do you avoid giving?

With help, I can conduct Web searches using **keywords** to learn about employer preferences in the field of work covering the advertised vacancy. Keyword range should include:

- name of the employing organisation for historical background searching;
- name of work position by type as well as within the named employer organisation;
- use of words taken from the job description.
- This search will reveal information to make me more informed about the job for which I am applying – e.g.
 - performance expectations
 - average pay and conditions,
 - career development opportunities for advancement,
 - public reputation of the employing organisation and more.

- This will help with the 'tone' of my application. I have to think about the benefits I will bring to the job.
- Cover letters, such as text in an email, can break away from the more rigid formality of forms and should best serve to show my personality, my knowledge of the job and of the organisation. I become a person, not a form. But some modesty is important so I must not overdo it!

Common Mistakes

Not checking for grammatical or spelling errors – including 'typos' such as automated computer system spellcheck errors which change the meaning of the word.

Failure to have someone else proofread ALL PARTS OF the DRAFT APPLICATION to detect/correct mistakes or poor quality of written English. While employers do have an understanding of difficulties with English as a second or additional language, it is a reasonable expectation that an applicant from a refugee/migrant background will seek help from someone equipped to improve the quality of the application. Failing to do that will be obvious to experienced readers, and is likely to harm interview and job prospects.

Providing wrong or falsely based information - about your history, experience, qualifications, etc.

Not following the defined requirements of the advertised position - to try and get the job to fit you, and not the correct way round.

Not asking your referee if they are happy to support you -

You must first have their agreement to provide a testimonial about you; and they must also be truthful. Simply naming a reference source without prior agreement can prove embarrassing for you and your referee. Employers are entitled to call the referee and speak to them. It is always preferable for a referee to be able to comment in terms of your suitability to fill the vacant position.

Including personal details that might create bias:

You do not have to provide details about:

Age	Disability/Impairment	Gender
Illness	Industrial activity	Marital status
Parent or carer commitment	Physical features	Political affiliation/preference
Pregnancy or potential pregnancy	Race	Religious affiliation/beliefs

These topics can result in bias.

It is best to be mindful of this when:

- You complete an application form provided by the hiring organisation. Large business usually know the legal requirements. However, smaller businesses may be more prone to making mistakes as they may not have experienced human resources staff.
- You provide a) a self-generated cover letter and (b) personal documents as attachments such as a resume.

THIS ADVICE APPLIES TO ALL FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT APPLICATIONS COMMUNICATION – MOST ESPECIALLY FOR JOB INTERVIEWS.

More information can be found on these websites:

<https://www.seek.com.au/career-advice/illegal-interview-questions-what-employers-have-no-right-to-ask>

<https://www.reogroup.com.au/2019/05/illegal-job-interview-questions-that-no-employer-should-ask/>

What to do if illegal questions are asked by your interviewer

An interviewer may be innocently mistaken in unlawfully asking such questions. At the other extreme, the interviewer on very rare occasions may be simply ignorant of the law or reckless about breaching these legal protections. IT IS NOT YOUR CONCERN TO IDENTIFY OR CHALLENGE REASONS WHY THE LAW IS BEING BROKEN. Your main interest in the interview is to remain polite and respectful. Pointing out the illegality is not recommended as it may embarrass both you and the interviewer. A simple response would be to say (words to this effect): *“I am not sure I can answer that. I have been advised that I should be prepared to talk only about matters which relate to my ability to do the job for which I am applying. My hope is that you will understand and respect how much I depend upon good independent advice”.*

Other useful tips

1. Email applications – keep the subject line simple

Applicants must use accurate and brief subject headings for all emails and documents including digital attachments. Choosing simple subject headings, and job advertisement references (reference numbers) for individual forms of documentation will ease the screening process and limit fault-finding on the part of the prospective employer.

2. Social Media - remove any posts that may be perceived negatively

It is now very common for staff in hiring organisations and recruitment agencies to scan social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many more, to find more, especially 'hidden' information about job applicants. One key element is a search for personality traits that are indicative of workplace cultural fit or misfit indicators. **A wise step for applicants is to review and as necessary, edit/delete personal social media postings which may be negatively perceived in an employment context.** Sophisticated algorithms (automatic assessment systems) are used by major corporations as part of this risk management process. It might be sensible to ask a trusted family member or personal acquaintance to help eliminate social media postings that can create doubt.

3. Think about whether the job already has been filled.

If a job is posted January 15th and the closing date for applications is January 22nd, you can pretty much assume the company already has someone in mind – usually an internal candidate – for the job.

These hiring managers are simply trying to justify to their superiors that they've considered other candidates when in fact they've already made their mind up. Applying in situations like this is probably a waste of your time.

4. Use keywords intelligently.

Some larger organizations use automated applicant tracking systems to filter applications based on selected criteria. That's why you should think carefully about how you incorporate keywords – that appear in the job posting – into your cover letter and resume.

For example, a candidate applying for a Communications Advisor position might use the following keywords: *writing, social media, communications, public relations, employee communications, media relations, and marketing.*

Even if your resume is reviewed by a real person reading it, using keywords and phrases will increase your chance of being selected for an interview.

5. Sending your resume as an email attachment.

When sending your cover letter and resume as an email attachment, you should save your documents as PDFs to protect the format. They will then arrive in the same format as you sent them. You should also label your documents so they make sense to the recipient. Use:

Cover Letter – Your Name

Resume – Your Name

It's always a good habit to send a copy of your email submission to yourself for your own records. To do so, simply bcc yourself.

6. Be smart when completing online applications.

Some online applications require you to fill out every field. This can sometimes pose a problem. For example, if the online form asks your salary history – which is best discussed later in the interview process – you should insert \$1 or \$10, or any number to show you're not about to reveal your salary history until you've learned more about the job you are applying for.

The same applies for references. Just insert "Relevant references provided at a later date."

A last piece of advice: Do all your writing first in a Word doc (or similar program) where it is easier to pick up typos and other mistakes. Once satisfied, cut and paste it into the form. This will help ensure your written comments are clear, concise, and error free.

7. Use your personal connections even when applying online.

When applying to an advertised posting, where you know no one at the company, ask your personal connections if they know anyone at the company and would they be willing to give you a warm introduction.

You can be sure that if a senior manager asks the HR department to “keep an eye open” for a resume from you, your submission will be given more attention than if nothing was said.

Likewise, if you do happen to have a good contact at the company, you might consider contacting that person directly with a cover letter and resume and bypass the online process.

8. Wait a few days before applying.

Why? What usually happens is that a large number of people respond the first day a job is posted. On the receiving end it is natural to conclude that most of these applicants have put no time into preparing their application and to determine if they are the right fit. As a result, the application tends to be taken less seriously.

9. Make sure you are a good fit.

This may seem obvious but the more specific your skills and background match the listed requirements, the greater the chance you have of being selected for an interview. If you believe you are a close fit, obtain as much information about the company as possible before responding; then customize your cover letter to show how you closely match the company’s needs. If you do this well, you will stand out from other applicants.

The above tips were taken from <https://www.geraldwalsh.com/blog/how-to-properly-respond-to-advertised-job-openings/>

Activity 2: Role play activity

Handouts for this topic will be given out separately.

Please help your mentee develop answers to the interview questions on the handout.

Activity 3: Managing outcomes – Job offers and rejections

This is an Open Discussion exercise

Consider the following circumstances – each describing a different outcome following a job interview, and from this, a small sample of questions to be thought through as part of your decision making process. Join us in a general discussion, with your response.

- A. You attend two separate interviews and receive a job offer; firstly by email. You then receive a postal package the next day. This contains company literature, and a signed paper copy of the job offer for your acceptance signature. Also enclosed is a job description which requires your confirmation signature. You are very pleased to know that this position is available to you. Your formal acceptance is required within fourteen days from the date of the email.
What action should you take and why?

- B. You knew that you were on an interview shortlist of only five candidates. One employment position was open. You believe you did well in the interview. A little more than two weeks have passed when you receive an email. The hiring manager is polite, thanks you for applying and wishes you well. But you were not successful. What steps can you take to cope with your disappointment? How can you ensure that this experience has not been wasted?

In very simple terms, we generally expect one of two outcomes – a job offer, or rejection. But the reality is that there are other possibilities.

The emotional strains accompanying this entire process, and often the prior experience of preparing and submitting a high number of applications without success, can tend to allow self-doubt to invade the thoughts of job applicants. Whether it is the excitement of receiving a job offer for the first time, or the feeling of deep disappointment upon receiving a letter of rejection, applicants are urged to stay calm and 'in control', as many choices still remain in the follow-up period after an interview.

If you are successful

The next task is to give careful consideration to the detail within the employment offer. Although the potential employer must not be kept waiting too long to receive acceptance of the job offer, it is acceptable to take up to three days before either saying yes or no. During that time however, it is vital that the opportunity is taken to (a) politely ask for clarification in writing about the position and working conditions if these are not known or are unclear; and (b) discuss the offer with close family, including consideration of changes in personal routines, affected by days/hours of work and (for example) home to work travel arrangements – and much more.

Occasionally, depending mostly on the level of qualification and responsibility associated with the vacant position, a decision to appoint someone is not made based on just one interview. Some organisations may ask applicants who have 'passed' the first interview to take some form of test.

If you are not successful

When a letter or other message of rejection is received, that recommended air of calm is doubly important. Lack of success is NOT FAILURE. Having been invited for interview is a strong sign of the appeal of the applicant and should be seen as encouraging. The experience however is likely to be emotionally tainted with questions in the mind of the unsuccessful applicant. These should be used to help decide on next steps.

One piece of advice - Always write a respectful thank you letter/message to the person who conducted the interview on behalf of the employing organisation. Even better – include complimentary comment in the letter to demonstrate your personal qualities, and in doing so you may make enough of a positive impression to open up unexpected opportunities. Some employers,

knowing that they will have seen more than one good candidate while wanting to fill a single vacancy, keep shortlists of unsuccessful 'likeable' applicants in reserve in case of future need.

Asking for feedback:

It is fairly common for rejected applicants to want feedback – effectively asking “Why not me? What should I do to improve my chances?” – And more along similar lines. Many organisations are reluctant to respond to such requests, for a number of reasons. The time-cost of continued communications, the sensitivity of personal reactions and over-reaction; and the wish to remain respectful and neutral all combine to make it less likely that written feedback will be forthcoming.

For organisations during times of a slow economy it is not unusual to have to screen hundreds of applications, to then decide who to interview for just one position. The resounding message from post- interview rejection must always be 'it is not personal'; and always 'keep trying, don't give up'.

It is however wise and useful to review the application experience, and in the case of rejection after interview, to focus on what occurred in that setting. A lack of success does not automatically justify making big changes to interview presentation and technique. Rehearsing and constantly improving performance will bring positive results.

Web sources - Advice about responding:

To a job offer

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/how-to-accept-a-job-offer>

<https://www.lifehacker.com.au/2013/05/how-to-accept-and-decline-job-offers/>

<https://www.roberthalf.com.au/blog/jobseekers/second-thoughts-can-you-change-your-mind-after-accepting-job-offer>

To a rejection

<https://www.roberthalf.com.au/career-advice/find-job/job-rejection>

<https://www.australiancareersservice.com.au/industry-news/dealing-rejection-bounce-back-dont-get-job>