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**HOW TO SUCCEED AT
WRITING APPLICATIONS
(Part III: APPLICATION FORMS
AND PERSONAL STATEMENTS)**

**Учебно-методическое пособие
по дисциплине «Перевод официально-деловой
документации»
для студентов 2 –го курса
специальности 45.05.01 «Перевод и переводоведение»
дневной формы обучения**

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How to succeed at writing applications (Part III: Application Forms and Personal Statements): учебно-методическое пособие по дисциплине «Перевод официально-деловой документации» для студентов 2 курса специальности 45.05.01 «Перевод и переводоведение» / сост. М. В. Браглина. – Севастополь: Изд-во СевГУ, 2015. – 22 с.

Цель методического пособия: научить студентов составлять на английском языке пакет документов, необходимый для поступления в ВУЗы Великобритании и/или для трудоустройства, в соответствии с современными требованиями делопроизводства страны изучаемого языка; применять критическое мышление при написании и/или переводе резюме, заявлений, сопроводительных писем. В пособии подробно анализируются аутентичные образцы данной документации.

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UNIT 3. APPLICATION FORMS AND PERSONAL STATEMENTS

1. Outstanding Application Forms

Learn how to become a STAR applicant as we share our top tips for answering some of the most common types of application form question.

1.1. How to Approach Application Forms

Application forms come in different formats – most commonly online - but there are still a few organisations which prefer you to complete a paper copy.

Most employers use their own application forms so that they can compare all candidates on the same basis, asking questions which are most appropriate to that organisation.

If you are applying for undergraduate study in the UK, you are likely to use the UCAS application form, which is a standard form across all universities and colleges.

Most universities and colleges offering post-graduate courses will use their own form so that they can get information about you that is most relevant to them.

Basic principles

Whatever the format, the basic principles of approaching application forms are the same.

Application forms consist of a mixture of factual sections (personal details, qualifications, work experience etc.) and sections based on the other selection criteria, where you will be required to write about yourself in a way that demonstrates your skills, knowledge and experience.

Unless instructed otherwise, list your qualifications and work experience in reverse chronological order (with the most recent activity first).

Before you start

Before starting to complete your application form, make sure you do sufficient research to understand the job role or the course and the competencies required, as we did in Unit 1. Write your application in relation to these. Always keep in mind the person reading it. Think about what they are looking for; make it easy for them to put your application on the 'invite to interview' pile!

Read all the instructions carefully and follow them exactly. Some questions may have several parts to them, read it carefully and make sure that you answer all parts. Complete ALL sections of the form, don't leave something blank just because you don't know how to approach answering it. Your form will be instantly rejected. If the question really isn't applicable to you, you should write 'N/A' (not applicable).

‘Sell’ yourself to the employer or the admissions tutor. It isn’t time for false modesty but make sure that you don’t go too far and tip over into arrogance. Remember what we said about positive thinking and positive writing in Unit 1.

Ensure that you use good English language throughout and check all spelling, grammar and punctuation. This is vitally important as many applications are rejected on this basis alone.

Don’t cut corners

Don’t be tempted to ‘cut and paste’ information and answers across from previous applications. Employers and admissions tutors can usually tell when this is done as your answer won’t exactly match the question that they asked. Even worse, applicants sometimes leave the previous organisation’s name or a different course title in the application! You can use a previous application as a prompt but write a new answer for each question.

Take plenty of time over the application. A good application takes a long while to complete and rushing an application will simply be a waste of your time. It might take you a whole day to complete your first application form properly but hopefully your efforts will be rewarded with an interview or an offer on a course!

1.2. Writing Applications – What Not To Do

Experienced recruiters and admissions tutors from a wide range of employment sectors provide their insights on how you can go wrong with an application form and reasons they would potentially reject someone at the application stage.

To summarise, in order not to be rejected, make sure you:

- customise your application to the organisation or institution you are applying to
- show enthusiasm as to why you really want the job or course
- meet the essential criteria. Some recruiters will place emphasis on academic achievement whilst others will be looking for particular skills, knowledge and experience
- give complete answers and provide convincing examples
- check your spelling and grammar

Task A. Share Your Best Tips.

Based on your own experience what would be your best tip for writing successful application forms?

This could be as an applicant or as a potential recruiter. Share your ideas using the discussion with your group fellows.

1.3. Dealing with Competency Based Questions

Application forms, particularly for jobs or work experience, often include a series of competency based questions which require applicants to provide detailed answers based on personal experience to demonstrate a skill or quality required in the job.

These are often the most important questions on the application form and will require thought and reflection. They are not designed to be easy to answer and are a real opportunity for you to ‘stand out from the crowd’. The recruiter will ask you to give an example of a time when you have demonstrated a particular competency, or skill. The thinking behind this approach is that, if you can demonstrate how you have used such a skill or competency in the past, you are likely to be able to use that skill effectively in the future.

Here’s an example of a competency based question: **“Describe a time when you had to work under pressure to meet a deadline. What did you do?”**.

It is fairly obvious that this question is looking for evidence of how well you work under pressure and how well you can manage yourself and your time in order to meet tight deadlines. Some questions may be less obvious. When this is the case, take time to consider the question and what competencies are being sought.

1.4. Use and Try Out STAR

Use the ‘STAR’ technique to help you structure your answer:

‘STAR’ (Situation, Task, Action and Result) can help you provide a concise and effective answer to competency based questions.

- **Situation** - provide some brief details about the situation you were in when you used your competencies so that the reader can understand the context of the example.
- **Task** - outline what your objective or purpose was during that situation, again, to put your answer into context.
- **Action** - describe what you did in that situation and how you approached it.
- **Result** - state the outcome, for example: Were the objectives met? What did you learn/gain from being in

Try out STAR

Here are three sample competency based questions using STAR and our analysis of the answers (See Enclosure 1) .

Often, there is a word limit for your answer, so write as close to this as possible without going over it. However don’t include repetitious or irrelevant material just to reach the word count, it all has to be meaningful content.

Use examples of situations taken from your education, work experience, voluntary work, and spare time activities. Examples that are recent (i.e. within the last two or three years) are best. Try to choose examples from different parts of your life to illustrate that you are a well rounded person. Don't use the same example over and over again as it implies that you don't have much life experience to offer.

As we have mentioned before, recruiters do not expect candidates to have climbed Everest or delivered a talk at the United Nations! They expect examples that are appropriate to your age, level of experience and opportunities open to you. Sometimes an excellent example can be obtained from a very ordinary situation.

1.5. Understanding Strength Based Questions

Strength based questions focus on what you enjoy doing rather than simply what you can do.

A number of recruiters are beginning to introduce 'strength based questions' into their application forms, although they are more likely to be asked at the interview stage.

Be prepared to be open and honest but also make sure you come across as positive and enthusiastic. Consider your academic achievements, your work experience and where you are active in other activities including sport and leisure. Think about what you enjoy and why; this will help you to understand your strengths and what you want out of a career.

Types of questions that are looking for strengths include:

- Describe something that you learnt recently.
- What activities come naturally to you?
- How do you define a good day?
- What does success mean to you?

Task A. Have a Go at a Strength Based Question.

Strength based questions in application forms are looking to find out what kind of activities engage you and energise you. They seek to assess your personal attributes, identify your abilities and look for genuine pride in what you do.

How would you answer this strength based question? **“Which do you prefer - starting a task or finishing a task?”**

In answering this strength based question, you could make use of the STAR technique to help you to provide an example of when you have particularly enjoyed starting or finishing off a task. Try to go beyond just telling us about that situation though, think more deeply about why you enjoyed starting or finishing the task. How does this situation demonstrate your preference? How does preferring to either start or finish a task play to your strengths?

Share your comments (in no more than 100 words) in the discussion. Once you have written your comment, you may wish to comment on the answers of others.

1.6. Answering Motivational Questions

Motivational questions are designed to check how serious you are about applying for a particular job or course and how much you genuinely want to be part of that organisation or institution.

Hence, common questions on application forms include:

- Why have you decided to apply to us?
- Why are you interested in this particular job or course?

These questions are assessing your knowledge of the sector and current developments within it, the job role or course and the individual organisation or institution. It is also checking your motivation for applying, which is very important. They are also looking at whether you can make a connection and a match between who you are (i.e. your skills, qualities, experiences and motivations) and what they are (i.e. their needs, requirements and opportunities).

You will obviously need to thoroughly research the sector, job role or course and the organisation / institution to be able to answer it properly, as we saw in Unit 1.

If you are applying for a job you may wish to consider some of the following in your answer.

- The job role and key activities and why these appeal
- Core business activities
- The organisation's values / ethics / culture and how these fit in with your own
- Training and development
- Opportunity for career development

If you are applying for courses you may wish to include in your answer:

- Structure and type of course
- Department's strengths
- Teaching quality
- Innovative research currently being undertaken

Recruiters value motivation very highly so work hard at getting this across. To test that you are genuinely interested, recruiters may also ask questions such as: 'Please tell us about a current topic under discussion in our area of work or research that interests you and how it could impact on our organisation or institution.'

Your answers have to be concise as recruiters often specify a word count.

Task A. How should you answer motivational questions?

To demonstrate our top tips in action, we have taken a typical motivational question and given our best practice answer.

“What attracts you to this job and tell us what makes you suitable?”

We have then analysed our answer to show you exactly what makes this a good response.

Please review carefully **Enclosure 2** and save it as part of your portfolio.

2. Brilliant Personal Statements

Faced with a blank page on which to write about yourself? With the help of employers and admissions tutors we explore how to write a brilliant personal statement.

Getting started with personal statements

Personal statements can be one of the most daunting aspects of an application form as you are faced with a blank page on which to write something relevant about yourself, your interests and your motivations, in order to convince the recruiter or admissions tutor that you are the right person for the job or course.

Although some employers use them on their application forms, personal statements are most commonly associated with applications for study.

To help you fill in the blank space, there should be clear instructions on the form about the content required and these should be followed exactly. In terms of the structure of the statement, there are usually no rights or wrongs about how to do this, although some recruiters may ask you to write in a certain format.

If there are no specific instructions, then you may choose to write it as a piece of text, with headings or paragraphs, or under bullet points that match those of the job specification or requirements of the course.

Whichever structure you choose, don't make the employer or admissions tutor have to guess or hunt around for your skills, qualifications or experience; make it easy for them to see that you have what they are looking for.

For example if:

- the job description asks for experience of customer service, then give an example of why and when you have developed this skill
- part of the course that you are applying for includes project work then describe where you have gained experience of this in the past

Why do you want to do the job or study this subject?

Remember to say why you are attracted to the job and the organisation somewhere in your statement. If you are applying for a course via UCAS tell them what interests you about the subject. If you are applying for further study directly to an institution, you may also mention why you are interested in them. You could make an impact by starting your personal statement with this information in your first paragraph.

Tie in the job or course with your longer term career aim if you feel it is relevant. You do not need to be too specific, demonstrate your interest and motivation in having thought about how you may develop in future.

Don't make the statement too long with superfluous detail, but neither should it be too short. There is no perfect length, although some recruiters will set a word count, but be sure that there is enough detail so that you feel you have given a good account of yourself without boring the reader.

You don't have to include everything you have ever done; the skill in writing a good application is selecting the criteria that is most relevant.

Task A. Study our supporting material on writing personal statements for job or courses, depending on what you are applying for (**Enclosure 3, 4**).

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Приложение 1.

Examples of Competency Based Questions Using STAR

Competency based questions using STAR

Problem solving

Describe a difficult problem you have solved. What was the problem? How did you analyse and solve it? What did you learn from the experience? (200 words)

Answer

I have recently faced problems submitting assignments on time for my course. Although I have always met deadlines in the past, evidenced by my first class marks in the first year, this year I have experienced major personal demands on my time. These included needing to work part-time to fund my studies and having to provide care for my elderly parents. This began to affect my studies, leading to missed deadlines for a key assignment. I recognised early action was necessary to solve this so I:

- ☐ prioritised the main tasks needing completion
- ☐ discussed and agreed an extension for the most pressing assignment with my personal tutor
- ☐ restructured my hours with my employer to allow time to complete the remaining assignments on time, and work additional hours after my assignment deadlines
- ☐ liaised with other members of my family to share 'caring' duties, and organised help from a community centre

As a result, I passed the relevant module with a merit and have ensured better future care for my parents. In retrospect, I would have planned ahead better by identifying possible future difficulties. I also know the importance of communicating my position to others and seeking help when necessary. (200 words)

Analysis

- ☐ Describes a relevant situation for the question asked and answers all elements of the question.
- ☐ Uses positive/action words e.g. restructured, liaised and prioritised.
- ☐ Uses short sentences with effective use of bullets.
- ☐ Clear about the outcome with evidence of success.

- ☐ Implies that the problem has been solved and will not occur in the future.

Communication skills

Describe a time when you have had to communicate with a range of different people to achieve a particular goal. Outline the task, the people you dealt with, and the outcome. (100 words)

Answer

In my work experience at Burke's Property Lettings, I worked in a cross-departmental team carrying out a review of customer service. The aim was to provide a report to support management decisions about future delivery. To do this I:

- ☐ independently scheduled and conducted a series of client interviews
- ☐ undertook over 100 phone and face to face contacts
- ☐ organised the collation and recording of the findings from our department, writing a section of the final report
- ☐ presented my results to senior colleagues alongside staff from other departments

The outputs were used to develop improved working practices. (99 words)

Analysis

- ☐ Relevant example, presented in STAR format with clear outline of the Task and its Objective.
- ☐ Concise statements and a business style and positive vocabulary.
- ☐ Evidence of communicating with customers and colleagues at different levels.
- ☐ Uses the available word count well.

Leadership

Describe a time when you have led by example. (150 words)

Answer

I developed my leadership skills by completing the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award which included a group expedition in the Lake District, lasting over five days. Nominated as team leader with responsibility for plotting our

route, I also motivated the team and planned what food to eat to maintain energy levels.

On one day, we had heavy rainfall and one of the team developed painful blisters and was struggling to walk. Rather than see him fail the expedition, I persuaded the others to share out the contents of his heavy rucksack and made sure that we all slowed down to his walking pace so that we stayed together. I then kept the team motivated by offering chocolate treats every few miles.

On that day we walked for over 15 miles, successfully navigated our way across rugged country and reached our camp-site by the evening. (144 words)

Analysis

- ☐ The applicant provides evidence of leadership by using terminology which clearly indicates how he or she supports colleagues.
- ☐ Positively worded when describing the challenges presented on the day.
- ☐ Grammatically correct and maintains the same style throughout.

Приложение 2. Example of a motivation question

What attracts you to this job and tell us what makes you suitable?’

Marketing & Communications

Assistant, with a local Sports

Association (max. 100 words)

To answer this you need to:

- ☐ show that you have a clear understanding of the job you are going for
- ☐ describe how it suits your interests and motivations
- ☐ explain why you consider yourself to be a strong candidate

Answer

I am excited by the idea of representing the Association in its dealings with the media and local community. I have studied Media Relations as part of my degree and particularly enjoyed researching sports sponsorship in my final year.

The position involves using my writing skills which I used when producing press statements that secured greater local press coverage for my amateur lacrosse club.

Helping to develop a strong marketing strategy is another attractive feature of the post, as I am fascinated by the way in which different organisations develop and maintain their image. (94 words).

Analysis

This answer demonstrates the candidate has found out about the role and explained why they find specific elements of the job attractive.

It indicates relevant activities that the applicant has got involved with, showing skills and knowledge that would be of relevance to the post.

The answer uses language that demonstrates enthusiasm and interest in this work.

It is a good length for the maximum word count which requires concise but effective statements.

You should always write close to the word limit, but don't include

repetitious or irrelevant material just to reach the count, it all has to be meaningful content.

No spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

Приложение 3. Writing personal statements for courses

The personal statement provides a blank page for you to write about yourself. Hence, it is often the most difficult part of the application to complete. It is also the most crucial. This is your opportunity to clearly and concisely tell the admissions tutor exactly why they should choose you!

This document provides an outline of how you might tackle putting together a personal statement.

General hints and tips

Your statement will help the admissions tutor to obtain more information about your suitability for the course on offer. Think carefully before you write anything and decide what will be your unique selling points.

Admissions tutors won't have long to read your statement so start with a strong opening paragraph to grab their attention. Try to be original in what you write throughout your statement and make sure that it is relevant.

Why this course? Why here?

If you are applying for a course to a number of institutions through UCAS (Universities and Colleges

Admissions Service), obviously, you can't go into detail about why you want to study at one particular institution. Instead, state what you really like about the subject. You may wish to describe how your interest in the subject has developed and provide examples of course work that you have enjoyed and excelled at.

If you are applying to individual institutions, show that you have investigated details about the course or research and that you are motivated to pursue it. For example, is the programme noted for a specialism, or highly regarded for its training? Explain how you became interested in this area. What have you learnt about it and what insights have you gained? You should state why you wish to study at this particular institution. Does it have a reputation in your field? Is the mode of study appealing? Are there specific academics or research staff you wish to work with? Are there other reasons for choosing this institution?

Your career / academic goals

State your career aims or specific academic goals, and show how you think your course or postgraduate research will help you achieve these. You will be demonstrating your commitment to do well in your studies. Ensure your goals are realistic and you have given them serious consideration, providing evidence of what has inspired you.

Make the match against the course specification

State clearly and provide evidence of how you match the course specification, using the information you have gathered as part of preparing to apply. This can be an ideal opportunity for you to demonstrate your relevant skills, attributes and specific knowledge.

Write about your studies to date, including any relevant projects, essays or presentations. Use it to demonstrate study skills or transferable skills that you have such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving or others that are necessary for the course.

Write about relevant academic experience to date, including any projects, dissertations or extended essays. Use it to demonstrate study skills, research skills and/or transferable skills that are necessary for course. If applying for postgraduate research, include details of any papers you have written.

Work experience

Some institutions will expect you to have already undertaken a period of directly relevant work experience. Provide details, including what you have learnt and how you feel you have developed as a result. Even if you don't need specific prior experience, think about the recent work experience you have done including placements, vacation work, student jobs, volunteering, work shadowing, membership of clubs/societies, etc. What skills have you developed as a result that would be relevant to your application?

Things you haven't had chance to tell them about in other parts of the form

You might also use this section to set out experiences that you feel are of 'secondary' importance ie, things that are still relevant but which you haven't written about earlier in the form as they are not as important.

For example, you might write about interests, leisure pursuits or

volunteering that are not directly relevant to the course but where you have developed some pertinent transferable skills.

You may be asked to provide other specific information. For example, if you are applying for postgraduate study, you may need to include a 'research proposal'. If you aren't sure what information you should provide, contact the institution's admissions team to clarify matters.

Finally

Be clear and concise when you write, keeping within any word count, and make sure you check for spelling and grammar – admissions tutors will also be reviewing your writing ability.

Incorporate sub-headings or bullet points if you feel it is appropriate.

Try to end on a high note with a positive concluding statement. You could re-iterate your motivation and commitment or, if you have one, provide a relevant and memorable fact about yourself. It is vital that your writing is impressive.

Get a second opinion. Show it to friends and family and, ideally, someone who is knowledgeable about the course you are applying for, such as a working professional or course tutor.

Keep a copy of your statement – you will need it if you are called for interview.

Приложение 4. Writing personal statements for jobs

Some employer's application forms have an 'additional information' section where you are encouraged to write about yourself. This usually takes the form of a whole blank page and may or may not have guidelines about how to fill it. Hence, it is often the most difficult part of the application to complete. It is also the most crucial. This is your opportunity to clearly and concisely tell the employer exactly why they should choose you!

This document provides an outline of how you might tackle putting together an additional information section or personal statement.

General hints and tips

Your statement will help the recruiter to obtain more information about your suitability for the job on offer.

Specific guidelines about what to include may be provided or you might simply be asked for 'evidence in support of your application'. Either way, use the opportunity to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Think carefully before you write anything and decide what will be your unique selling points.

Employers won't have long to read your statement so start with a strong opening paragraph to grab their attention. Try to be original in what you write throughout your statement and make sure that it is relevant. Include all the information asked for. If you are not given specific instructions about content, you should aim to include the following:

Why you've decided to apply for the job

Describe what motivates you and attracts you about the job. Show that you have a realistic understanding of what is involved and can draw parallels with positive experiences you have already had, even if these have been in different settings.

Why this organisation?

Say why you want to work for this particular organisation, for example this might be related to its clients, ethos, reputation or staff development policy. Draw on the research you have done in preparation to apply – don't just make it up! Be honest about your reasons (although don't just say that the

salary appeals!) and try to write concisely.

Make the match against the job description

State clearly and provide evidence of how you match the job description, using the information you have gathered as part of preparing to apply. This can be an ideal opportunity for you to demonstrate your relevant skills, attributes and specific knowledge.

Things you haven't had chance to tell them about in other parts of the form

You might also use this section to set out experiences that you feel are of 'secondary' importance ie, things that are still relevant but which you haven't written about earlier in the form as they are not as important.

For example, you might write about interests, leisure pursuits or volunteering that are not directly relevant to the job but where you have developed some pertinent transferable skills.

Finally

Be clear and concise when you write, keeping within any word count, and make sure you check for spelling and grammar – recruiters will also be reviewing your writing ability.

Incorporate sub-headings or bullet points if you feel it is appropriate.

Try to end on a high note with a positive concluding statement. You could re-iterate your motivation and commitment or, if you have one, provide a relevant and memorable fact about yourself. It is vital that your writing is impressive.

Get a second opinion. Show it to friends and family and, ideally, someone who is knowledgeable about the job you are applying for, such as a working professional or course tutor.

Keep a copy of your statement – it is likely to be referred to at interview.