



## COMPLETING JOB APPLICATIONS

**DISCLAIMER:** *The information contained in this document is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute, nor should it be construed as legal advice on any subject matter.*

The first step in any hiring process is completing a JOB APPLICATION. Most employers use an online application process, but some still require job seekers to complete a paper job application. The following tips will help you successfully complete both online and paper job applications.

Employers use the job application to collect and manage important information from applicants. This information is used to organize the hiring process, select applicants for an interview, and to ensure that the hiring process is standardized, consistent, equitable, and legal. Most employers will ask applicants to complete a job application in addition to submitting a resume.

The information you supply on a job application will be used in the post-offer, pre-employment background check, so it is very important to answer ALL questions accurately and honestly.

**Preparing to Apply:** Before you begin applying for jobs, gather the information you'll need to complete applications. This commonly includes:

- **Previous Work History:** Names, addresses and phone numbers of previous employers as well as your supervisor's full name. Your job title, list of responsibilities/accomplishments, starting/ending salaries, and employment dates in month-year format.
- **Education Information:** Required educational information includes the name of the college you attended, its location, your major, the type of degree you earned (Technical Diploma, Associate, Bachelor's, Master's, etc.) and dates you attended school. Some organizations may even ask for your GPA or an official transcript.
- **References:** Most employers require you to provide 3 or more *professional* references. A reference is someone who can attest to your skills and work ethic. Supervisors, instructors, advisors, and coaches are some potential references. Provide the reference's full name, job title, place of employment, phone number, and email address.
- **Other:** You may be asked to provide or complete the following:
  - Technical skills
  - Certifications
  - Military Experience (including your form DD214)
  - Assessments relevant to the job. This could be a skills-based assessment or a series of supplemental questions.

**BONUS TIP:** Consider filling out a sample application with your information and keeping it as a reference to use each time you fill out a real application. This will allow you to apply for new positions more quickly.

**Completing the Application:** A job application is a **legal document**. When you sign it, you verify that everything you have said is true. Answer each section honestly and as completely as possible. Prior to hire, the employer will perform a **background check** to verify the information you provide. Lying on your application could result in loss of the offer or constitute grounds for discharge later in employment.

1. **Read and follow instructions carefully:** Most employers provide FAQs or application instructions on their "careers" web page to help you navigate the application system and process. Read these closely to set yourself up for application success!
2. **Take Your Time:** Online applications can be lengthy, so set aside an hour or more to complete the process.
3. **Answer each question completely and honestly:** Carefully review each section and answer each question as completely and honestly as possible before moving on to the next section. Most online applications allow you to review and edit before submitting.
  - Do not skip questions or leave answers blank. If a question does not apply to you, respond with "not applicable" or "N/A."
  - Fully complete the Work History section. Do not simply upload or attach your resume, you must do both: complete the work history section and submit your resume as directed.
  - Be consistent. Make sure your job application responses match the information on your resume; job titles and dates of employment should be consistent. Update your resume as needed.

4. **Connect to the job and the employer:** Your resume, cover letter, and LinkedIn profile are all aligned with the job and employer you are pursuing. Your job application information should do the same. Emphasize skills and accomplishments that are most relevant to the job you are applying for.
5. **Pay attention to detail:** Review your online application to ensure it is **error free** and you are satisfied with your responses. When completing a paper application, photocopy the document and create a rough draft. When you are satisfied with your responses neatly print your answers. Use your best handwriting – sloppy penmanship suggests sloppy work! Use only black or blue ink to complete the handwritten application.
  - **PRO TIP: Proofread** your application (online or paper) before you submit. Ask someone you trust to review the application for errors, misspellings (example: “college” and not “collage”), and content.
6. **Carefully consider your salary requirements:** Most employers request your salary requirements. Employers often use this question as a screening device, and you don’t want to be eliminated from consideration based on your answer. Do not give a specific number. Instead, research the salary range for that type of job and answer the question with the range. For example, writing “\$32,000 to \$38,000” is more effective than “\$36,000.” You could also say “open” or “negotiable,” but a range is better.

**Answering Difficult Questions:** Depending on your background, some application questions can be difficult to answer. Below are some tips for answering the most challenging questions.

**Reason for Leaving a Previous Job:** Most applications ask your reason for leaving a past job. If you left of your own accord to take a different job, you can answer by saying you “resigned for a better opportunity.” If you left because the job was not working out, you can say you were “seeking a better fit.” Do not say, “the boss was a jerk” or “the company was dysfunctional” even if those things were true in your mind. Negative comments about a past employer will reflect poorly on your application and likely put you in the “no” pile.

- **Layoffs & Downsizing:** Being laid off means your job ended because of business conditions, not because of your performance. “Laid off”, “Downsized” or “Workforce reduction” are all acceptable reasons you can provide.
- **Discharge for Cause:** If you were fired from a job, you must answer this question **honestly** and thoughtfully. Just because you were discharged does not mean the employer won’t interview you. The employer may simply be testing your honesty more than anything else. Do not say, “fired” or “terminated,” instead choose “discharged - willing to discuss.” This shows honesty, ownership, and openness. If the application only allows for a checkmark, use your cover letter to address the issue and express your willingness to discuss it during the interview. Be brief – a short, general explanation is best. *See an Employment Advisor for additional guidance and coaching.*

**Gaps in Employment:** What if you didn’t work for a while? Gaps in employment happen for many reasons – layoffs, parenting, family needs, travel, a gap year, health issues, education, relocation, etc. – and are generally not an obstacle unless you have a history of gaps. Be truthful about your work history. Consider briefly explaining the gap in your cover letter, keeping your tone positive. Example: “I chose to step away from my career to focus on family.” If you used your gap to expand or apply your job skills, describe how you did this. Still have concerns or questions? [See an FVTC Employment Advisor for guidance.](#)

**Disability:** The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) protects disabled persons from discrimination in [employment](#), including hiring. In most circumstances employers covered by the ADA are required to make [reasonable accommodation](#) for qualified applicants unless it imposes an undue hardship on the business and/or its ability to operate.

- **When to Disclose a Disability?** You are not required to disclose your disability—whether you share this information with a potential employer is a personal decision. If you can navigate the hiring process *and* perform the essential functions of the job without an accommodation, then you probably don’t need to disclose. If you need an accommodation(s) or other ADA protection, then you **DO** need to disclose in order for the employer to provide an accommodation. How you time your decision to disclose depends on the nature of the job, hiring process, and your disability. In other words, this is a question unique to you. [FVTC Employment Advisors are happy to meet with you](#) to discuss strategies for job search, application completion, hiring process navigation and when and how to disclose a disability and request an accommodation.
- **Additional Resources:**
  - [FVTC Disability-Related & Educational Support Services](#)
  - [FVTC Diversity & Inclusion Services](#)
  - [disABLEDperson, Inc.](#) is a leading search engine for people with disabilities
  - [Abilityjobs.com](#) is a leading job search engine for people with disabilities
  - [Wisconsin Workforce Development - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation](#)



**Criminal History:** Wisconsin state law protects workers from workplace discrimination because of a criminal arrest or conviction record under certain circumstances. However, it is not employment discrimination under the law when an employee's criminal arrest or conviction is substantially related to the employment. An arrest or conviction is "substantially related" to a job when there is some overlap between the nature of the job and the circumstances of the offense. For example, a theft related conviction is substantially related to a cashier position. A drunk driving offense is substantially related to a position as a truck driver. However, a drunk driving offense is probably not substantially related to a cashier position.

**Can employers ask about criminal history on a job application?**

- An employer may ask whether an applicant has any pending charges or convictions, as long as the employer makes it clear that these will only be given consideration if the offenses are substantially related to the particular job. An employer cannot legally make a rule that no persons with criminal conviction records will be employed. Each job and record must be considered individually.
- It is best to answer all questions on an application as honestly and fully as possible and to offer to explain the circumstances of the conviction to the employer.
- Be sure you understand the specifics of your criminal history. There is a difference between a misdemeanor and a felony. Misdemeanors are often not looked on as harshly as felonies.

Additional information and guidance are available at <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/er/civilrights/discrimination/arrest.htm>

**Recognizing Illegal Questions:** Although rare, some applications may include illegal questions that seek information that is not relevant to your ability to do the job. This includes questions about:

- Age or date of birth – NOTE employers may ask "Are you 18 years of age or older?"
- Demographic information including race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation  
NOTE: Some employers including government, federal and state contractors, and educational institutions are required to obtain this information to ensure that hiring practices are fair and equitable. You may be asked to provide this information in a document separate from the application. You are not required to disclose this information.
- Religion
- Family or marital status
- Health or medical conditions – see disability above
- Citizenship – NOTE: Employers can decline to offer H1-B visa sponsorship for a specific job opportunity.
- Credit history or Social Security Number – employers may include credit history in a post-offer background check if it is job-related.