

# Speculative Letters

## WHY USE THIS APPROACH?

Making speculative applications to employers can be a highly effective strategy for finding different types of work opportunities. Using this approach could significantly widen the range of opportunities that are available to you: it is often estimated that over half of vacancies that are filled are never advertised. So adding this approach to your job seeking strategy could increase your chances of success.

Some advantages to making speculative applications:

- For some job sectors making speculative applications is a must. For example within some sectors where competition for opportunities is high jobs are rarely advertised eg media jobs.
- This approach can be useful for finding vacation work, work shadowing or work experience opportunities as these are less likely to be advertised or may be created for the right candidate.
- A speculative approach could reduce the competition you face as you might be considered for a forthcoming vacancy before it is advertised or an employer may create a position if they like what you have to offer.
- It is a useful way to find very specific types of vacancies. For example, if you have a limited geographical area within which you'd like to work or you would like to work in a very specialised field.

## WHAT RESPONSE CAN YOU EXPECT?

Making speculative approaches can lead to success. However, you may need to persevere as you may find that you need to make a number of approaches before you achieve a positive response.

Bear in mind that not all organisations can accept speculative applications due to their recruitment policies, this is particularly the case for large organisations.

Although you may not receive an immediate job interview/offer you may still receive a valuable response: you may make a new contact who could be useful in your job search, you may be told about current or future jobs to be advertised, or the organisation may keep your CV on file should a suitable vacancy arise.

An important factor for success when using the job seeking approach, therefore, is to be persistent and resilient. Don't give up!

## TAKING THE RIGHT APPROACH

You will want to ensure that your speculative letter has the best chance possible of grabbing the attention of the employer. The following steps will help you to achieve this:

### **1. Do your research before you start writing**

Start by short-listing employers to contact. Look for employers who have suitable types of roles. Web directories are a good tool for finding employers by searching for specific fields of interest, for example Yahoo, classified directory <http://dir.yahoo.com> and UK Internet Yellow Pages [www.yell.com](http://www.yell.com). It is sometimes helpful to look at employers' vacancy pages: even if they have no suitable roles currently it will give you an idea of the types of areas they recruit to. You could also consider the organisation size. It is sometimes better to target medium sized employers as large employers may not accept speculative applications and small employers may not recruit as often. Location may also be a factor in your search.

### **2. Tailor your approach to the specific employer**

Find out all you can about an employer before you write to them. A letter that is tailored to that employer is far more likely to succeed. You should be able to demonstrate in your application the reasons why you want to work for that employer.

An employer's website is often useful for finding out more about the work that a company does and its structure and background. You could also read company profiles on graduate careers websites such as Prospects [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) and Target Jobs [www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk). Check also for relevant articles in sector journals/magazines - many are available for reference in your careers service.

You will want to write your letter to a named contact within the organisation. This could be someone that you have met at a fair or careers event or you may need to find the appropriate contact through the website or by telephoning the company. If you have had previous contact with the organisation, for example at a careers fair, you should mention this in your letter as it will demonstrate your continued interest in the employer.

### **3. Show the employer what you have to offer**

When making a speculative application think of it as presenting a business proposition: what will the organisation gain by employing you? Give good evidence of your suitability for the type of work you are hoping to do, highlighting examples of your knowledge, skills and experience. Examples from your work experience, part time work, voluntary work, university research projects and university societies are all useful for demonstrating that you have competencies of value to the employer.

### **4. Clearly establish your goal**

Make it clear what you are aiming to achieve from your

approach. This could be, for example, a permanent job, some work experience or even a meeting to increase your knowledge of the employer/sector. Be careful, however, not to limit your options too much for example, an employer may not have a vacancy at present but may be able to offer some short term work. When wording your letter you should aim, therefore, for a balance between making a focussed approach and being open to potential opportunities that may be on offer.

#### **5. Get some feedback on your letter**

It is useful to get some feedback on your letter before you send it. If you visit your Careers Service a careers adviser can help you look at your letter from the employer's perspective and give you some guidance on improvements you might make.

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

- *How to Analyse and Promote your Skills for Work*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2000
- *How to Get a Job You'll Love*. Lees, John, 2007
- *What Color is Your Parachute?*, Bolles, Richard Nelson, 2006
- [www.targetjobs.co.uk/general-advice/articleview-15a\\_10.aspx](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk/general-advice/articleview-15a_10.aspx) a useful article outlining a good approach to writing speculative letters

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