How to prepare for applying on a form application

We may be living in the digital age, but one part of the job search that hasn't gone away is the application form. Even after you've pieced together the perfect résumé, you can still find yourself staring at a form application and wondering how to put your best foot forward when you've only got a few text fields to complete.

The truth is that many jobs you'll apply for today will require applications. It's a company's way of getting standard information from every applicant and ensuring uniformity and fairness for all who apply. If you aren't prepared or don't fill out the form accurately, you could end the process before it even begins.

Here are some tips to make sure you ace the form application step:

Prepare common answers ...

Submitting an application may be the first thing you do for some job opportunities, but other times you might not get the application until you go in for an interview. If that's the case, make sure you're prepared so you can fill out the form quickly and completely.

In a Microsoft® Word document, create a list of information that's often requested in an application, and make sure the list is easily accessible whenever and wherever you may fill one out. Consider emailing the list to yourself so you have it when you're on the go.

Some common fields on an application may include:

- Name
- Address
- Email address
- Phone number
- Social Security number
- Driver's license/state ID
- Employment history (e.g., names and dates of positions held, reasons for leaving)
- Education and experience (e.g., schools attended, degrees, graduation date, skills acquired)
- Salary
- References
- Ability to upload or copy/paste a résumé

... But don't assume all applications are the same.

If you're filling out an application for what seems like the millionth time, you may go on autopilot and answer questions the same way on each form. Make sure to read each new application thoroughly, because there may be a few questions either worded a different way or asking for different types of information than the previous application you just submitted.

Tackle tricky questions.

While most questions on an application are pretty standard and straightforward, some may be a little trickier to answer than others. One such culprit is the salary question. Whether the form asks for current salary, salary range or salary minimum, make sure you're being accurate and that you're comfortable with the number you include.

"It's best to include your minimum expectation for compensation," says Emily Hofer, chief human resources officer at Arise Virtual Solutions Inc., a work-at-home business process outsourcing company. "This needs to be something you can be comfortable with and will accept … do not sabotage yourself by including a low number, thinking you can negotiate up when the offer comes in … this only leads to distrust later in the process."

So how do you determine that number? "When the always fearful 'desired salary' question comes up, the applicant should use salary index sites … to get an idea [of] what 'Job X' is worth," says Joshua Siva, author of *BOLD: Get Noticed, Get Hired*. Siva also suggests calculating your expenses and financial goals and determining a number that, if offered, is one with which you'd be happy, you'd have enough to get by financially and you'd be able to live comfortably.

Stand out.

It may seem nearly impossible to stand out on a form application, but you can find small ways to impress. Show that you've done your research on the company by including some thoughts in a "comments" or "additional information" section, if available. For instance, you could say something like, "I noticed the company just won business with X beauty company. I have seven years of experience working with beauty and lifestyle clients."

Finding small ways to personalize the application will help you rise above the rest of the applicant pool.