

## What are they?

A speculative application is an application to an employer to enquire if there are any potential jobs, placement or work experience opportunities within their organisation which have not been advertised. Thorough research is usually required to write an effective application as you are aiming to attract the attention of a busy person who has not advertised a job vacancy.

## Why are they useful?

A high proportion of graduate level jobs and placements are never advertised. Some employers never need to advertise because they receive speculative applications. Some don't advertise because they don't recruit enough graduates to justify it. Instead, they may use recruitment agencies or word of mouth to fill vacancies. So, speculative applications can be a great method of accessing hidden opportunities.

Speculative applications are particularly useful if you wish to work in a specific geographical area. For example if you know that you want to work in the West Midlands, making speculative applications can increase your chances of finding something suitable in the area.

A carefully crafted speculative application can also persuade an employer to recruit a graduate for the first time. Some companies don't even decide they have a vacancy until an impressive speculative application arrives telling them all about the relevant skills and expertise that could be brought to the business. Be prepared to spend time on your speculative application if you want it to be successful.

## How do I make a speculative application?

### Step 1: Analyse yourself

- What skills, interests and motivations do you have and how do they impact on your choice of future career? For example, would you prefer to work in a team-based situation or would you rather have more autonomy? What work experiences and personal qualities do you want to sell to prospective employers? **Prospects Career Planner** is an online career guidance tool which may help you to answer some of these questions about yourself. It can be accessed for free on the Graduate Prospects website: [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), - go to **Jobs and work experience, What job would suit me.**

### Step 2: Research jobs and companies

- Establish what different jobs actually entail by making use of careers information, web searches, job advertisements and Careers Centre employer events. Go to the Find a Job section of the Careers+Placements website [www.aston.ac.uk/careers](http://www.aston.ac.uk/careers) .

### Step 3: Contact the company

- **Is it worth applying?**  
First of all it makes sense to contact the company/organisation directly to find out whether it is worth applying speculatively.
- **Speak with the recruiter or hiring manager where possible**



Secondly, speaking with the recruiter can reveal insider information about what kind of person or skills they need within the company. The employer may reveal that they are missing someone with say, a particular programming language and you can use this information to tailor your application appropriately. Furthermore, use this contact with the employer as an opportunity to build rapport with the person over the phone (preferably the hiring manager) and sell some of your skills. If you feel nervous about doing this over the phone, prepare a loose script or bullet points to refer to during the conversation.

- **Get a named contact**

Thirdly, never underestimate the importance of a name when it comes to speculative applications. A covering letter addressed, “Dear Sir/Madam” is likely to end up in the rubbish bin. Find out the name of the person responsible for recruiting the position you are interested in. Ideally, try to get hold of their email address as an emailed application has more chance of a reply.

- **Network via LinkedIn**

LinkedIn gives you access to a network of more than 49,000 Aston alumni, staff and students. Many of these potential connections will be happy to help you and if they are not in a position to offer you the sort of work opportunity you are looking for they may well be able to offer useful advice or suggest other people to contact.

#### Step 4: Construct a targeted CV and covering letter

- Avoid the temptation to write a generic CV and covering letter where only the name of the employer is altered. This sort of mail merge approach is unlikely to impress employers. On the other hand a well-researched application, tailored to the specific company, sector and/or job you are interested in is much more likely to lead to an interview and save you time in the long run.
- In other words, even though it is time consuming you should write a different speculative covering letter for each employer that you approach.
- The CV can also be adjusted, changing the order of your education and employment to match with each employer’s requirements. You can choose to emphasise different aspects of your work experience depending upon the role for which you are applying. For example, if your role was as a customer assistant in a shop and you are applying for general management schemes, try to emphasize where you have taken on leadership or management duties e.g. trained new staff.

For an example of a speculative covering letter go to

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/cvs-and-cover-letters/cover-letters/speculative-cover-letter>

#### Step 5: Keep records of what you have sent, to whom and when

- Be organised. Keep copies of everything you send out together with a record of dates and contact details. Consider creating an excel spread sheet to help you track your progress.

#### Step 6: Follow up 10-14 days later with a polite phone call

- Make a quick phone call to establish whether your speculative application has been received. This may be the point to ask to speak to the hiring manager but if it is not a good time, ask for advice as to when to call again to discuss possible opportunities further.

#### Step 7: Follow up 21-28 days later with another polite phone call



- Don't be too disheartened if you don't hear anything back immediately. Remember that busy employers may not have time to reply to you even if they are interested. Follow up speculative applications after 10-14 days with a polite phone call. If the company has no suitable vacancies you can enquire about any future opportunities coming up and find out more about how the organisation typically recruits.

**Step 8: Persevere**

Repeat the process if necessary. Remember that you may need to send more than a hundred speculative applications but just one job offer could launch your future career!

