



DEVELOP

Speculative Applications

Speculative Applications

The most conventional way to find a new job role or work experience is to look at advertised positions. A speculative application is another approach whereby you proactively contact an employer to enquire about non-advertised opportunities. Estimates suggest more than 60% of positions are not advertised. Employers generally welcome initiative and proactiveness, so don't be afraid to contact them through a speculative approach.

A speculative application usually requires sending an employer a CV and a speculative letter. This booklet will help you write a speculative letter. For support with your CV please visit our [CV Support webpage](#).

In this booklet:

- When to use speculative applications
- Who to contact
- How to contact an employer
- How to write your speculative letter: preparation, structure, example letters

When to Use Speculative Applications

A speculative approach is more effective with some employers and sectors than others. Typically it works better with small to medium sized employers (SMEs) who often expect and encourage it, such as the creative sector. Large national and global employers already have established graduate and work experience schemes, so are less likely to accept speculative applications. However, unless they state they do not accept speculative applications it is always worth trying with nothing to lose and a potential opportunity to gain!

Speculative applications can work well for finding the following:

- 1 Local part time jobs
- 2 Work experience opportunities such as: internships, placements, project work, shadowing and volunteering
- 3 Graduate jobs (not schemes) with SMEs
- 4 Graduate jobs and work experience in sectors where employers don't always advertise job roles, such as arts and creative, charities, NGOs, marketing, advertising and media
- 5 Jobs with employers of interest who are not currently advertising suitable roles

Who to Contact

Start by writing a list of industry sectors and employers you are interested in. Use the following to help you create your list:

- 1 Search engines and maps, such as Google, to find employers in your preferred location. For example search for 'PR agencies Lincoln UK'
- 2 Business directories such as yell.com for employer listings
- 3 Past employers you've worked or volunteered for and employers you've had contact with through Careers Fairs, industry events, etc.
- 4 Employers of interest you've come across when searching advertised jobs
- 5 Family, friends, tutors and other academic staff for employer recommendations
- 6 [Lincoln Connect](#) to find a mentor and have a conversation about potential employers
- 7 [LinkedIn](#) to search for employers, to reach out to contacts for recommendations and to find employers who have hired university [Alumni](#)

Remember

When searching try to get a named person and their contact details to personalise your approach and increase the chance of speculative success. If you can't get a named person, send your application to the HR or Recruitment Manager.

How to Contact an Employer

Your choice of contact will depend on accessibility to the employer and personal preference. Below are three approaches. It is essential you research the employer first so you can clearly state why you are interested in them and what you can offer them. Always be professional in your approach. For in-person and phone approaches offer to send a CV and letter as a follow-up.

Email Applications



The most common speculative approach

- Address application to a named contact
- Attach CV and letter to email. In the email include a brief message stating who you are, what the email is about and the documents you have attached
- If letter is short, for example half a page asking for a shadowing opportunity, write it in the body of the email instead of a separate document. Attach CV
- Follow up email with another email or a phone call a few days later to ensure your application has been received and to begin a conversation

Phone Calls

A quick and direct approach

- Find an appropriate person to call, such as the HR or Recruitment Manager. Details can often be found on social media sites. Alternatively call the general enquiries number and ask for details of an appropriate person
- Write a brief and compelling script beforehand of what you want to say. Include: who you are, what you are looking for, why you have chosen them and what you can contribute (relevant skills, knowledge and experience). This is often referred to as an 'elevator pitch'



In-Person



Might be a planned or unplanned interaction with an employer

- Planned: Prepare and practice a script as for phone calls above. Prepare hard copies of tailored CV and letter to hand over
- Unplanned: Practice your 'elevator pitch' for future unexpected interactions with employers. Take their contact details, then send them a tailored CV and letter after meeting them

How To Write Your Speculative Letter

Letter Preparation

To make your letter stand out it needs to be tailored to each employer. Generic applications will most likely be ignored. Clearly show an understanding of the organisation, your enthusiasm and the value you bring. This requires research and reflection. Ask yourself the following four questions to help you prepare:

1. What exactly am I asking the employer for?

Do you want work experience, a part-time job or a graduate job? Are you open to various types of work experience, such as shadowing, project work, and internships, etc. Be as clear as possible about what you are asking for.

2. What style of writing should I use?

Use a style appropriate to the sector and employer you are contacting. The legal sector usually requires a more formal style whereas creative industries may expect a less formal approach. To help you decide which style to use look at the writing style the employer uses on their web and social media pages.

3. What do I know about the employer?

Research the employer. What do they do? What are their needs, future plans and challenges? Who are their clients and competitors? Now think about how you can personalise this information in the letter to show your strong interest in them. Avoid simply stating facts.

4. What does the employer want from me?

Research skills, experience and knowledge that will be of value to the employer. See requirements for other roles the employer advertises, similar roles advertised by other employers and job profiles containing skills lists, such as those on [Prospects Job Profiles](#). Always emphasise in your letter what you can do for the employer, not what they can do for you!

How To Write Your Speculative Letter

Letter Structure

Now use your research to write your tailored letter. If sending your letter as an attachment to your email, include contact details as shown in our example letters on P. 9 and P. 10. Address the person you're writing to by name. If unsure whether to use first or last names consider any established relationships, formality levels and company culture. If you don't have a named person use 'To the HR Manager' or 'To the Recruitment Manager'. Do not write 'Dear Sir/Madam', or 'To whom it may concern'.

Below is a recommended letter structure broken down into 5 sections/paragraphs. On the following 2 pages are example letters using this structure.

1

Introduction

Briefly but clearly tell the employer who you are and why you are writing. Tell them the type of role or experience you are hoping to gain with them.

2

Why Them?

Show you have done your research into the employer and why you are interested in them. For example services they offer, clients they work with, projects they're working on etc. Briefly suggest how you could make a contribution to their work.

3

Why You?

Highlight key skills, experience, knowledge and education you can bring to the workplace. Put them in context of how you could use them and be a valuable addition.

4

Additional information

Provide additional information if needed. This may include availability, dates, hours you can work, course placement or internship requirements, etc.

5

Closing

Finish on a positive note by thanking the employer for their time and consideration and inviting them to contact you for a follow up.

Example Letters

Example Speculative Letter for Work Experience

123Branding&Design
St Mark's Square
Regent Street
Bristol
BS8 4HR

3 Fake Street
Lincoln
LN6 7TS
raziabalyan@gmail.com
07111 111 111

April 20, 2023

Dear Ms Williams,

1 I am a third-year Graphic Design student at the University of Lincoln wanting to explore different career paths within graphic design. I am writing to see whether 123Branding&Design is able to offer me any work experience, whether that would be a few hours shadowing one of your team, a short-term project or an internship opportunity.

2 I am particularly interested in gaining experience with your organisation because I admire how you create innovative bespoke solutions for your clients. I particularly liked your project on the rebranding of ABCXConstruction which I found in your online portfolio. You champion new approaches to design and have built a strong reputation within the sector.

3 I have attended several industry events including Viscom Paris International Trade Fair. These were a great opportunity for professional development and to network with people from the industry. I have been selected by my course to design and set up webpages to promote university events (<https://www.lincoln.ac.uk/home/>). From these experiences I have developed creativity, brand awareness, web design and software skills. Additionally, I can bring a willingness to work hard and learn quickly. Please find these skills evidenced in my portfolio of work at www.raziabalyan.co.uk, including a project for ZZZConservation, which I achieved a high distinction for.

4 I am available to start at a time that suits you and am very flexible with hours over the next four months.

5 Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you about any opportunities you may have.

Yours sincerely,
Razia Balyan

Example Speculative Letter for Part-time Work

ABC Hotel
Castle Square
Lincoln
Lincolnshire LN5 2SR

5 Fake Street
Lincoln
LN6 7TS
Carlosgarcia@gmail.com
07222 222 222

20 July 2023

To the Recruitment Manager,

1

I am a University of Lincoln business student keen to find part-time work in the hospitality sector. I am enquiring about the possibility of work at ABC Hotel in areas such as front of house, housekeeping, events or food and beverage.

2

I am aware Lincoln's rich history and heritage draws tourists from all over the world. I have a genuine interest in the tourism sector from my own travels and understand how important good customer service is to the success and reputation of a hotel. I believe I can actively contribute to ABC's high service standards and excellent reputation as a hotel accommodating tourists and events.

3

I have over 3 years of experience in customer-facing retail and restaurant roles from which I have gained strong interpersonal, organisation and problem-solving skills. My Lincoln Award employer project work has given me teamwork experience with people from a range of backgrounds. I enjoy the energy of the hospitality sector and work well in fast-paced environments. My strong work ethic means I can effectively manage work whilst I study.

4

I am available to begin work immediately and am available on weekends and evenings during term time, and additional hours during the holidays.

5

Thank you for your consideration, I look forward to hearing from you and discussing work opportunities at ABC Hotel

Yours faithfully,
Carlos Garcia

Equality, Diversity and Job Seeking

The Equality Act 2010 states that the following nine characteristics are protected within the law: age, disability, gender reassignment/identity, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex or sexual orientation. This means jobseekers and employees who belong to one or more of the protected characteristics should not be discriminated against.

To find out more information about disclosure and your rights visit-

- TARGET jobs equality and diversity - <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/finding-a-job/equality-and-diversity-issues-and-your-graduate-job-hunt>
- University of Lincoln Careers & Employability - <https://uolcareers.co.uk/students-graduates/equality-diversity/>

Equal Opportunities monitoring forms

When you apply for a job, you may be asked to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form, which is separate to the rest of your application. This is not seen by the recruitment panel and will not have an impact on the rest of your application. Once an appointment has been made, the data will be used solely by HR to make appropriate changes to the recruitment process to try to ensure more applications from underrepresented groups are received in the future.

Disclosure and Discrimination in the application process

The Equality Act 2010 provides the right to not be directly or indirectly discriminated against. You are not legally required to disclose your protected characteristics to an employer.

If you feel you have been discriminated against during the recruitment process the following websites might be of help:

- Citizens Advice- <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>
- ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)- <https://www.acas.org.uk/>

Careers Support

The Careers & Employability Service aims to support individual queries regarding equality and diversity. Whilst this page gives general advice it may not answer your specific concerns. If you have any concerns or questions about the impact your protected characteristics may have on your job applications or employment then please book a careers guidance appointment.

AI Usage in Speculative Approaches

The Pros - How AI Can Support Your Approach

- **Research employers** - use AI to help you do initial research into employers you want to approach
- **Tailor your speculative letter/email** - use AI to provide key information to help you tailor your speculative letter, for example why you are approaching this employer
- **Prepare for a follow-up conversation or interview** - If the employer wants to meet you, use AI to help you prepare for a conversation or interview, for example what questions to expect. Use our mock [Interview Review Tool](#) to practice common interview questions and build confidence

The Cons - How AI Can Negatively Impact Your Approach

- **Authentic voice** - there is a lack authenticity, personality, passion and your own thoughts if AI is used to write your speculative letter for you
- **Generic letters** - Straight copy and paste from AI means employers will receive generic speculative letters, many of which are immediately rejected
- **Language issues** - AI may generate inappropriate language or terminology for an entry-level/graduate level candidate, for example referring to management-level experience
- **Competence gap** - skills, experience and knowledge included in a letter written by AI may be assessed at a follow-up conversation or interview with the employer and may highlight a competency gap between what was written and what has been experienced

Top Tips If Using AI in your Speculative Approach

1. **Review, revise and personalise** - use your unique voice and your own examples
2. **Use clear and precise prompts** - e.g. use the PART (Persona - Action- Requirements - Task) model to ensure AI is providing you with relevant and accurate information
3. **Check for accuracy**- AI can produce incorrect facts and figures!
4. **Protect your data** - use Copilot for data protection, data is not saved and not used to teach the AI

See our [AI and Job Applications webpage](#) for more detail on the above points to help you decide whether to use AI, and if so how to use it effectively.

Get support from your Careers & Employability Service

What we offer

- **Careers Clinic**
Our Skills Advisers are available to support you with all aspects of job search or the recruitment process for any role; part-time, placement, work experience or graduate. Careers Clinic runs Monday-Friday 1pm - 4pm.
- **Careers Guidance**
Our Careers & Employability Advisers offer 1:1 appointments to support you exploring your Career options and planning.
- **Career Events**
We have daily events running to provide information and support your development; some are run by our expert Adviser team and others by employers. All events are advertised here; www.uolcareers.co.uk/events
- **Lincoln Award**
Our employability award is designed to support you in developing and learning how to demonstrate your employability skills. At the end of the award you get the chance to put your learning to the test in our Assessment Centre Experience! Each one is partnered with an employer and students find the opportunity to practise and the feedback they receive invaluable. Full details can be seen here; www.uolcareers.co.uk/lincolnaward
- **Vacancies**
CareerLinc is our online portal where all vacancies are advertised; part- time, placement, work experience and graduate roles. All students are already set up on the system so simply use your University log-in to get started! www.careers.lincoln.ac.uk
- **Campus Jobs**
Our Student Employment Agency which advertises all jobs for the University on campus; from admin to retail, one off roles to ongoing part-time jobs, find out more here; www.uolcareers.co.uk/students-graduates/jobs-employment-options/campus-jobs/
- **Online Resources**
We have our own Careers & Employability online learning pathways on LinkedIn Learning. We also provide many other online Career Resources. More information can be seen here; www.uolcareers.co.uk/students-graduates/online-resources-and-learning/



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