

Guide to...

Making Speculative Applications

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Introduction

This guide is for anyone who wants to make the most of a range of strategies for securing a part-time job, work experience, placements, internships or a graduate position. Incorporating a speculative approach into your job search helps to broaden your options for securing an opportunity to gain valuable experience and develop your skills.

In addition to reading this guide, you are advised to review the **'Guide to CVs'** and the **'Guide to Cover Letters'** to help make effective applications.

What is a speculative application?

A 'speculative application' means sending a tailored CV and covering letter to an employer, asking whether they have any opportunities they might consider you for, even if they are not currently advertising. You can use a speculative application to enquire about work experience, internships or volunteering opportunities as well as graduate positions.

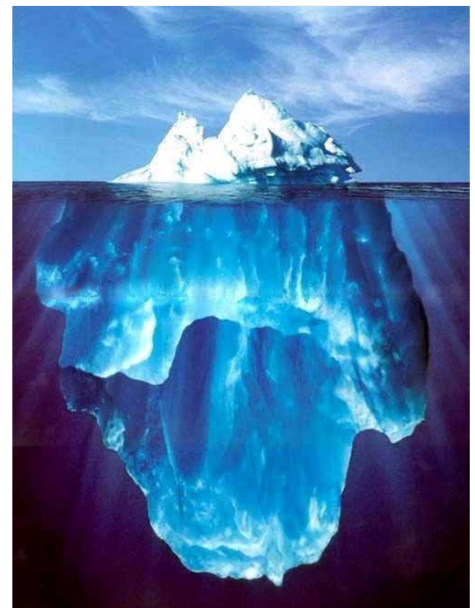
The benefit of a speculative application is that you can target an employer that you are particularly interested in working for, with the aim of securing yourself an opportunity that will allow you to gain valuable experience and enable you to develop your skills.

Why are speculative applications beneficial?

The Hidden Job Market

The so-called 'hidden job market' refers to the large number of job openings that are not formally advertised.

It's estimated that around 70% of opportunities aren't formally advertised. This creates an 'iceberg effect' meaning that of all the job openings that organisations are seeking candidates for – only 30% of those will be filled as a result of formally advertised positions that are 'visible' to all (e.g. through advertisements on press and employer websites).



"I tweeted [the company] a few times and eventually emailed and asked if I could work in their Content and Editorial Department. They were happy to meet with me despite there being no job openly available, and I was extremely lucky that they were open to adding a new member to their team."

BA (Hons) Study of Religions with English Literature, 2012 Graduate

Put simply, a speculative approach:

- Increases your chances of securing the opportunity you want, as you are broadening your job search and not relying solely on opportunities being advertised;
- Enables you to highlight your key skills, experience and qualifications that will get you noticed;
- Demonstrates to an organisation how committed and motivated you are to work for them.

In addition, a speculative approach can add particular value when:

- You want to target smaller organisations that do not recruit on the open market regularly;
- You want to secure an opportunity in an industry that relies heavily on 'word-of-mouth' to recruit and, therefore, only formally advertises a small number of vacancies;
- You have identified an area of work that is very competitive and you need to be more proactive with how you secure an opportunity;
- You are seeking an opportunity that uses very specialist skills and knowledge;
- The type of industry you want to work in is very niche (and there may be few organisations that do the work you are interested in);
- You are looking for an opportunity in a specific geographical area.

How do I know who to approach?

In order to make a speculative application you need to be clear about two things:

- What organisation(s) are you interested in working for?
- What types of opportunities are you interested in securing?

It may be the case that the organisation directly reflects the type of opportunity you are looking for. For example, if you wanted to work as a secondary school teacher and were seeking to gain relevant work experience, you would obviously start by researching secondary schools before narrowing your research to decide which particular schools you might wish to approach.

Alternatively, you might be interested in working in human resources. Considering nearly all types of employers will have a human resources department, you will need to carefully consider what *type of organisation or sector* you are interested in approaching. For example, you might like the idea of working in human resources for a charitable organisation, so you could begin your research with this criteria in mind.

To identify organisations you might want to approach, you could also consider:

- Employers or visiting speakers that have come onto campus – you may have had talks from specific organisations within your course or heard from an employer as part of a careers event or workshop
- Professional associations that provide lists of business members (see Prospects: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles> for professional associations linked to specific types of roles and industry sectors)
- Business directories such as yell.com (e.g. you could search “*graphic design agencies in Bath*” or “*environmental companies in Oxford*”)
- For local creative organisations, you might wish to search Creative Bath’s (<https://www.creativebath.org/directory/>) or Bristol Media’s (<http://www.bristolmedia.co.uk/directory>) business directories.

- Sector Skills Councils (some industries have Sector Skills Councils which monitor developments in a sector and may contain information about organisations within that sector). Go to: <http://fiss.org/sector-skills-council-body/directory-of-sscs/>
- Reading newspapers, listening to the radio, reviewing online articles or watching TV – take notice of organisations that get mentioned (for example, if you have an interest in getting into TV work, take notice of programmes you like watching to see what production companies were involved)
- Using LinkedIn to search for organisations
- Job websites are useful to find out about different organisations (although a particular organisation may not be advertising the type of opportunity you are currently interested in, your awareness of that organisation means you can explore what they do in more detail and consider a speculative approach)
- Speaking to friends and family about organisations they work for

“I began searching for graduate HR positions before Christmas of my final year. I continued to apply for others in the New Year and had a couple of interviews that were unsuccessful. I attended [a] Careers Fair...and spoke to the [company] representatives – including my now-manager, to whom I gave a copy of my CV. I now work as an HR Advisor with the company”.

BA (Hons) Business and Management, 2015 Graduate

I know the type of experience I would like to gain...

Start by generating a shortlist of organisations that interest you. If they are not currently advertising the type of opportunities that interest you, then you can start to prepare a speculative application.

Perhaps start with a list of your top 10 organisations you would like to target. As part of making a speculative application you will need to know who in the organisation you are going to contact; be clear about what you are asking for; and tailor your application to the organisation.

A named contact

Before you begin to spend time putting together a speculative application, it is good practice to identify who in the organisation you could address your cover letter to. Addressing a cover letter to ‘Dear Sir/Madam’ is unlikely to get the consideration it deserves, whereas a cover letter addressed to a named contact is, at the very least, likely to be read. Remember some organisations may get a number of speculative approaches a week, so make sure yours stands out by demonstrating you have done your research to address the application to the right person.

Some organisations may clearly state on their website who you can address enquiries about opportunities too, however, if this information is not available, you will need to pick up the phone and call them. It can be daunting to do this, but with a little preparation it will benefit your speculative application. Before you pick up the phone, consider your ‘opening script’ to introduce yourself and explain why you are calling. You might say something like:

“Hello, I wonder if you could help me. My name is Amy. I’m currently studying Business & Management at Bath Spa University and am really keen to explore opportunities for summer work experience with your organisation. I would like to send a speculative application. Who would be the best person for me to email my enquiry to?”

If they are happy to give you a named contact to send your speculative application, ask for the person's name, job title, and their preferred method of receiving a speculative application (e.g. by email or post). Do summarise back the information you have been given and ensure you have accurate information (e.g. the correct spelling for a person's name).

Sometimes an organisation may say they do not accept speculative applications, and in such a case you will need to accept this. However, take the opportunity to ask them if they would have some advice on getting started in that industry or role or if they could recommend other similar organisations you could approach.

Be clear what you are asking for

For an organisation to receive an unexpected CV and cover letter, you will need to grab their attention and be clear what it is you are asking for. The first paragraph of your cover letter should convey why you are writing.

Think about what *you* are asking for. You could ask for:

- A graduate position (paid)
- A work placement or internship (paid or unpaid)
- A part-time job (paid)
- Volunteer experience
- The opportunity to work shadow someone in their role
- The opportunity to meet for an 'informational interview' (this involves meeting with someone who does the type of job/career that interests you to find out more about working in a particular role or sector) – you might like to refer to our '**Guide to Networking**'.

Are you enquiring about a placement opportunity? Are you looking for graduate position? Are you seeking a part-time job? For example,

"I am writing to enquire about any opportunities for a work placement at [name of organisation] during this coming summer vacation. I am available during June, July and August."

Do be mindful that employers may be interested in you as a candidate but may not be able to offer you exactly the type of opportunity you are looking for. You may need to be flexible in terms of when or for how long you take up an opportunity. For example, you might be interested in a 4 week summer placement, but the employer might only be able to offer you two days of work shadowing. Do consider any opportunities that come your way, as they might be enough to get your 'foot in the door' and express an interest for future opportunities.

Tailoring your application

To make a speculative application effective, you *must tailor* it to the organisation and the type of opportunity you are looking for. In your cover letter, it is vital that you can clearly demonstrate why you are interested in working for that particular organisation. Research the organisation's website and social media channels to find out or understand:

- How the organisation operates
- The organisation's aims
- What projects, initiatives or plans it has in place

- Whether there are any plans for growth or expansion
- Who their competitors are
- Any recent news items
- The type of jobs they have available and the people they recruit

Try to avoid just telling the organisation what they already know about themselves and instead be specific and/or express opinion, for example;

“I was particularly interested to read about your new project initiative, Green Fingers, working with schools to teach children the importance of the environment. My interest in environmental educational initiatives was the focus of my dissertation in which I analysed research data to identify what makes such initiatives a success”.

For further information about creating an effective CV and Cover Letter please see the **‘Guide to CVs’** and **‘Guide to Cover Letters’**.

How do I follow up my application?

About two weeks after sending your speculative application, it is good practice to follow up with a phone call to the organisation if they have not already contacted you. In fact, you may decide at the end of your cover letter to say something like:

“I would be grateful if you would consider my application. I intend to follow up this speculative application with a telephone call within the next two weeks”.

When following up, do ask to speak to your named contact (the person you addressed your cover letter to). Tell them who you are and why you are telephoning. You might say something like:

“Hello. My name is Amy Potter. I’m a Business & Management student and I recently wrote to you asking if there were any opportunities for work experience over the summer vacation with your company. I am just calling to see if you have had the chance to consider my speculative application.”

Remember the individual you are speaking to may receive lots of phone calls or emails in a day, so you may need to remind them when you submitted your speculative application, how you submitted it and what it was that you were asking for. Always, always, be polite and positive. If they tell you they don’t have time to speak to you – thank them for their time and ask if there is another day/time they would be happy for you to call back.

If you follow up and the organisation says they would like to meet you, then prepare as you would for a formal interview – you may wish to refer to **‘Guide to Interviews’**.

If the organisation says there are no opportunities available, you might consider:

- Asking the company if they would keep your details on file for the future;
- Asking the company, if they did have opportunities coming up in the future, where they might typically advertise these and whether they would give you any additional advice about making a successful application;
- Asking if there is someone in the organisation who is willing to talk with you informally about working in that sector or type of role – do refer to **‘Guide to Networking’**.

- If the person you have spoken to has been really helpful (short of being able to offer you an opportunity) you might consider asking them if you can keep in touch and consider connecting with them on LinkedIn. Consider anyone you speak with to be a potential future contact who may then notify you when an opportunity does arise.

Alternative ways of making a speculative approach

This guide predominately refers to making a speculative application by sending a CV and cover letter by email to a named contact within an organisation you would like to gain experience in. Other approaches could include;

Telephone

Making a phone call, rather than sending an email, may be beneficial as it is harder for the recipient to ignore. Of course, they may be busy and suggest you email them, but an initial telephone call would give you the opportunity to introduce yourself and potentially respond to any questions. It also has the potential to demonstrate your genuine motivation and interest. However, do always respect the person you are calling. You may ask at the beginning of your conversation *“Is now a convenient time?”* or *“Do you have a few minutes to speak with me?”*. If your call is not convenient to them right now, suggest you could call back another time that suits them. Make sure you always thank them for their time.

Face-to-face

Approaching an employer face-to-face can really demonstrate clear motivation and effort. Often people find it easier to have a verbal conversation in which they can build some rapport, rather than relying on written words to communicate. However, it is important to consider the appropriateness of this for some employers. For example, large companies may require advance agreement of visits. Also be prepared that as employers won't necessarily be expecting you to approach them this way, you may find that it's not convenient and instead they may encourage you to email them. Alternatively, you could approach an individual within an organisation to ask if you can meet with them for an informal discussion about their role and working in their particular sector. Assuming you feel you are able to build a good rapport you could also use this opportunity to enquire about potential opportunities. Please see our **'Guide to Networking'**.

Social Media

With the increasing use of online professional networks, such as LinkedIn, you may decide to enquire about opportunities using social media. Potentially, this could be a more time efficient approach and may be less intimidating for some people. However, it is essential to develop relationships before you ask about opportunities.

Post

Given that most methods of communication tend to be electronic, an approach by post might mean that your request is more carefully considered. It can be easy for individuals to ignore emails, but most people are likely to open any post they receive. Depending on the employer and the type of opportunity you are interested in, an approach by post could be more appropriate. Perhaps, for example, you want to send a 3D version of your CV to a design agency that focuses on branding.

Keep a record

As you are likely to need to send out more than one speculative application to try and secure an opportunity, do keep a record of your speculative approaches. You could keep a record of:

- The organisation (including website link and their key contact details);
- Any telephone contact you had with them in advance of your application (e.g. keeping a note of when you spoke to the organisation, who you spoke to and, briefly, what was discussed);
- The named contact (the person you addressed your cover letter to);
- How you approached them (by post or email);
- A copy of your tailored cover letter and CV;
- Follow up telephone calls (when they were, who you spoke to and the outcome).

Be resilient

Be prepared that you might need to send out a number of speculative applications before you secure an opportunity. Despite your best intentions and following all the advice in this guide, don't expect all organisations to reply to your initial request. You may need to persist in trying to follow them up, but if you get no response after a couple of calls then you may have to accept that the organisation is not interested in offering any opportunities at that time. Whilst this may be frustrating, do remember that an organisation is not obliged to offer you an opportunity. Instead, review the progress you have made in trying to secure an opportunity and focus on the next organisation you wish to approach. In the end your resilience and ability to bounce back from setbacks will pay off.

Additional resources

- Prospects – How do I write a Speculative Application? <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/applying-for-jobs/how-to-write-a-speculative-job-application>
- Target Jobs – Making Speculative Applications for Graduate Jobs <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/applications-and-cvs/271429-making-speculative-applications-for-graduate-jobs>

Further Support from Bath Spa Careers

If you would like further support from Bath Spa Careers & Employability go to bathspa.ac.uk/careers to see the ways in which you can access our service, including workshops and events, appointments and to access our extensive range of resources.

You can also contact Careers Reception on 01225 875525 or at careers@bathspa.ac.uk.

Please note that Bath Spa Careers does not endorse particular organisations.

(This guide was last updated in Summer 2019).

GET A HEAD START

We're here to help you get a great start to your career. We're open all year round, so come and visit us in the Careers Space, book an appointment, or get in touch.

Careers Space, SL.G04
Steward's Lodge

careers@bathspa.ac.uk
01225 875525

www.bathspa.ac.uk/careers

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