What is a speculative application?

A speculative application involves sending a CV and covering letter to an employer asking whether they can offer jobs or work experience, without a position being advertised.

Why send a speculative application?

- Many employers do not advertise - especially in fiercely competitive areas such as journalism, broadcasting and publishing – they use speculative applications and networking
- Small employers may not recruit graduates onto a formal graduate scheme
- Work shadowing tends to be ad hoc and from speculative applications
- Employers may create a work experience opportunity if the speculative application stands out
- University research projects often consider speculative applications

Steps to a successful application

1) Find a contact at the organisation – your application is far more likely to be considered if directed at a named person. Ways you can find a contact:
   - Network with alumni – alumni from St Andrews work at leading organisations all over the world. Use LinkedIn, Saint Connect and academic staff to identify key contacts. Refer to our website section “Network with Alumni” for more information.
   - Network with students – for work experience/work shadowing make connections with your peers who have spent time in an area of interest to you – join relevant societies eg The Saint (for journalism), Investment Society (for investment banking), attend internship events arranged by your School President and the Careers Centre.
   - Visit job sites which advertise positions in the type of work you are interested in - refer to the Careers A-Z section of our website for details. Although these positions may be for more experienced staff they may give HR contact details for you to use.

2) Get your application read – the key to being successful is to create the perfect email subject line. It doesn’t matter how good your CV and covering letter are if your email isn’t opened. Make sure the subject line is relevant and the message is clear to the reader. If you have found their details through a contact who has a personnel connection with this person make sure you mention this eg “Professor Brown recommends I contact you in regard to summer opportunities”, “Suzy Golding recommends me – a bilingual student with strong social media skills”.

3) CV

- One page in most cases
- Include a “Career Aim” or “Personal Profile” at the top as your CV may be passed around the company to see if there is any interest in taking you on. Keep the profile specific to you and feature your key skills eg “Penultimate year English student who is a high academic achiever combined with skills in marketing and journalism looking to secure a position in digital marketing this summer”.
- Be selective with your CV - “relevance and brevity” are the key guidelines to follow. People are busy - they want to be able to assess in a few seconds if you will fit in with the company and have the (potential) skills they are looking for. Find elements from your academic qualifications, past work experience and extra-curricular activities showing evidence you have skills they want eg communication, leadership, team player.
- Don’t just list duties, but highlight achievements, quantify your impact where possible eg “Introduced a social media campaign which increased membership by 50%”. 

Social Media – Twitter, FB, LinkedIn – many companies have a social media presence which you can use to find contacts.

Local area – use sites like www.yell.com to identify companies in a specific geographical location.

Cold call – phone the organisation and ask for a key contact’s name, email address and direct line.
4) On-line additions

- **Links** - most CVs will be browsed electronically so you can include website links to any documents, blogs or videos which highlight your skills and experience which are relevant to the role. You can also include hyperlinks to organisations you have worked for, especially if they are not well known.

- **Video CV** – this will allow you to show your personality in a way not possible on a written CV. This is more suited to sectors which highly value creativity and visual skills such as the media, marketing and sales. Like everything to add benefit to your application it needs to be done well, for inspiration check out the videos in ‘Me in a minute’: https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/meinaminute/

- **Social media** – if you are an active user of social media and the content promotes your skills and interests in your chosen sector and gives a professional impression, include links in your CV.

5) Covering letter

- This is your opportunity to set out a case of why they should employ you. You need to show you have done your research and are able to outline why you want to work for that specific company (their clients, the good experience a previous student has had there, the innovative work they do, opportunity to work with a specific person) and outline the skills you have to offer which match the company’s needs.

- Try to avoid the impersonal “Dear Sir/Madam” and find a named person, eg the MD if it’s a small company or, if larger, a head of department or person in HR.

- Stick to four paragraphs at the most – here are some guidelines for the paragraph content:

1. Explain why you are writing and that you are enclosing a CV. Explain your current position eg penultimate year, recent graduate and what you are looking for. Try and be specific about the opportunity but flexible about the length of time – as a day’s work shadowing could expand into a summer’s work experience if they like you. eg “I am looking to gain experience in digital marketing and I am open to any opportunity from a day’s shadowing to a summer placement”.

2. This is the “why them” paragraph. Explain clearly why you have singled out this organisation to write to. This is your chance to show you have done your research eg “My motivation for applying is the innovative way your organisation uses digital marketing, your latest You Tube viral hit for Guinness which has reached over 3.5 million ….”.

3. This is the “why me” paragraph. Explain the relevant skills and experience you have which would benefit them. Don’t just repeat information on your CV - expand on it eg “As you can see from my CV I have actively been involved in creating marketing campaigns for local charities using social media……”.

4. Suggest you will follow up your letter by telephone within, say, a week. Also give dates of your availability and your openness to being contacted. eg “I am available throughout June and July. If you require any further information do not hesitate to contact me”.

Visit ‘The application process’ section of our website for further advice on making speculative applications.

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/careers

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