



Application and Interviewing Tips
Seattle Department of Human Resources (SDHR)
(updated 11.24.15)

This document highlights general tips that may assist applicants with the application and interviewing process. This information is solely for educational and developmental purposes.

APPLICATION TIPS

- **Prepare:** Read and re-read the job description thoroughly so you have a clear understanding of the job's responsibilities and requirements when you're completing the application. Use the job posting qualifications as your guide by listing your work experience and achievements that best demonstrate the skills needed for the position.
- **Job Duties** – When listing your job duties in your application, you will have the most success with listing your duties as bullet points rather than in paragraph form. It is much easier to read for a recruiter, making all of your accomplishments easier to pick out.
- **Impact Statements** – Rather than stating a job duty like “ordering office supplies,” you want to show the impact of that statement, or the ‘so what?’ “Ordering office supplies” becomes “Ordered and monitored inventory of over \$50,000 in office supplies for 75-person office.” Similarly, “Scheduled interviews” can become “Coordinated the availability of 5 interviewers to successfully schedule and execute up to 40 candidate interviews per week.” Another example could be “Contracted with shipping vendor,” becomes “Negotiated new contract with shipping vendor, resulting in 30% savings from previous year.”
- **Supplemental Questions** – Always be sure to read through the supplemental questions in a job posting very carefully and answer them thoughtfully. These questions are usually written specifically for the position by the hiring manager and are used to make selections about which candidates will be moving forward. Also make sure to carefully read for any special application instructions. For example, some jobs ask you to attach a resume and cover letter documents, while other jobs do not.
- **NeoGov Application System Tips** – NeoGov is the City of Seattle’s application system. Below are some tips when using that system.
 - If you need to attach a file, close the file first, and then attach it. Neogov will not attach open files.
 - Save often. The application times-out every 30 minutes.
 - All City of Seattle jobs close on a Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. Do not wait until the last moment to enter in your application. **Late applications cannot be accepted.**

RESUME

- **Formatting** – Your resume should be easy to read and find information on, which means being able to read it from top to bottom very quickly. Recruiters often receive up to 500 applications for one position, so to make your resume stand out, you need to make the information easy to find. If you gained experience in a particular skill at multiple jobs, you may want to consider a summary section at the top of your resume that highlights your total years of experience doing that work.

- **Font** – Choose an easy-to-read font and stick with it—do not alternate fonts as it is more difficult to read.
- **Size** – Resume font should be a uniform size, with the exception of your name at the top of the resume.
- **Employment Dates** – List your employment dates first (both start and finish).
- **Job Duties** – List your job duties in bullet-point form to make them easy to read (see information above regarding impact statements).
- **Length** – Your resume does not need to fit on one page, but it should also not be longer than two to three pages, depending on how much experience you have.
- **Organization** – You should organize your information by what is most relevant to least relevant, which means you could break your work history into two sections: Related Professional Experience and Other Work Experience, etc. In addition, format your resume based on the qualifications that are featured in the job posting. If your education is the most relevant to the posting, make sure to list it first in your resume. However, if certain certifications or work experience is more important for the role, then make sure they are listed first in your resume.
- **General** – Writing a strong resume is not something that comes naturally to most. If you have the resources, you may want a friend to assist you, or take a class online or at a school, if possible. You'll learn more information, like the above-mentioned tips, and get practice with writing impact statements and organizing your information.

INTERVIEWING

- **Presence** – This is one of the harder skills to focus on, as people are often very nervous in an interview. It's important to try to make eye contact with each person in the room (this doesn't need to be constant eye contact, but just attempting to occasionally make contact with each person in the room). In addition, you want to sit up straight and try to keep any nervous habits to a minimum, as they can be distracting to your interviewers (things like tapping a foot, playing with a pen, coughing, etc.).
- **Content** – Here are few things to keep in mind regarding content:
 - **Details** – You will want to make sure to provide enough detail in your answers to give your interview team a solid sense of your knowledge and experience. While being concise is definitely a good trait in interviews, you also need to provide enough context for your interviewers to get to know you and your work style. For instance, if you are asked about why you are interested in a position, you'll want to give a bit of information that touches not only on your interest in the role, but also on the experience you have that has prepared you for it. You'll also want to make sure that you're providing detailed information in your examples, which should follow a narrative. This brings me to the next topic:
 - **Work Experience Stories** – think of about 6 – 8 work situations that you've been in that you could use to answer several interview questions. This way, when you're asked a question, you'll be able to easily pull one of those stories from your memory to use it as an example. The reason that this is an effective way to answer a question is that you're able to give the full context of a situation and your accomplishments within that situation, which makes you stand out from other

candidates. For example, if you are asked about the largest project you have managed, you'll want to provide context for your specific role in that project, and the impact it would have. An example of how to tell that story in an impactful way is to think about answering every question with a beginning (brief summary of the problem that needs to be solved and the breadth of the project), a middle (what you did to solve that problem), and an end (the results or impact of your work). So, using the example of managing a project, you could tell a story like this: "3 years ago, my company conducted an analysis on the cost of shipping charges we had paid over the last several years. They determined that, by scheduling more shipments to go out together, we could decrease the cost of shipping by 20%, which would save the company over \$50,000 dollars every year. I acted as a project manager to coordinate with other employees on creating a database to schedule shipments. I managed the relationship with our employees as well as the software designer we contracted with and prepared all of the contracts and specifications they needed to get the work done. Through my work, we got the database up and running 4 months ahead of schedule, which saved us an additional \$25,000 in contractor fees." To break that example down, here are the 3 parts:

- **Beginning:** 3 years ago, my company conducted an analysis on the cost of shipping charges we had paid over the last several years. They determined that, by scheduling more shipments to go out together, we could decrease the cost of shipping by 20%, which would save the company over \$50,000 dollars every year.
- **Middle:** I acted as a project manager to coordinate with other employees on creating a database to schedule shipments. I managed the relationship with our employees as well as the software designer we contracted with and prepared all of the contracts and specifications they needed to get the work done.
- **End:** Through my work, we got the database up and running 4 months ahead of schedule, which saved us an additional \$25,000 in contractor fees.

This style will allow you to better express your accomplishments in a succinct way.

- **Have an answer to every question** – Even if you are asked a question that you don't think applies to you, you should always find a way to relate the question to another experience that would demonstrate the same knowledge. For instance:
 - **Weaknesses** –In an interview, you want to make sure that you are portraying yourself in the best possible light, but you want to make sure that you are still being genuine as well. While you may be an incredible worker, there is always something that we can improve on. One thing you want to do when someone asks about a weakness is provide a real weakness, but also how you're addressing it. For instance, perhaps you are someone that takes longer to get things done because you get too absorbed in the details. You could say something along the lines of "I find that I get distracted by the intricate details in a project, and a lot of time can go by because I'm so absorbed in the work. In order to make sure I stay on track, I set a schedule for myself that ensures I don't neglect other important tasks." This answer demonstrates that you recognize a weakness in your work habits, but also that you've found a way to cope with it.

In addition to considering the above tips, applicants should visit seattle.gov to become more familiar with all of our City offices and departments, and then sign up for job alerts through seattle.gov/jobs—you'll receive email notifications every time a position is posted that meets your interests. You can also follow us on LinkedIn and Twitter (@SeattleCityJobs). If you find a particular department that you're interested in, visit seattle.gov to find the employee directory and see if you can set up an informational interview with someone in that department who may work in the area you'd like to pursue working in.