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SPECIAL EDITION

ALERT

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CONVERTING YOUR CAREER AMBITIONS INTO REALITY

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Success can be defined as the achievement of a particular goal. Most law students want to achieve success not only in their chosen career but also in life generally. The essential ingredients for securing a job at your chosen organisation have not really changed and probably will not change for the foreseeable future.

This article provides useful guidance on how to ensure that you market yourself professionally on paper and in person to your chosen organisation.

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It always starts with paper

In applying for a position, you will need to submit various (and sometimes differing) documents as part of the application process.

The standard documents usually required by organisations are the following:

- cover letter (or letter of motivation);
- curriculum vitae (or CV);
- proof of identity;
- proof of completion of secondary education (usually in the form of a grade 12 certificate); and
- latest university academic transcript.

These documents comprise your application on paper and provide recruiters with a first look into you as a potential employee of the relevant organisation(s). In our digitized world, most organisations prefer to accept applications through an online application portal or via email.

We provide some guidance in preparing your paper application under separate headings below.

Cover letter

This is the first document that the recruiter will see. You must ensure that it is addressed to the correct individual (responsible for recruitment) and organisation. If you, like most law students, are applying to multiple organisation(s), you must double check that your cover letter is addressed correctly.

The subject line of the cover letter should expressly state what opportunity you are applying for and the year for which you would like to be considered (eg Articles of Clerkship – 2019).

The body of your cover letter should include a brief motivation as to why you applied to the particular organisation and why believe your particular character traits/personality will suit the organisation. It should not include any information that is already included as part of your CV.

Keep your cover letter short and concise yet interesting, to entice the reader to want to know more about you (no longer than 1 – 2 pages in length).

CV

Your CV is essentially a summary of yourself and your history to date. It must include the following information: biographical details, education background and employment history.

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It is important that you highlight relevant achievements in your CV. These can relate to education, sport, culture, university involvement and community work.



In terms of biographical details, you must at least include your full name, date of birth and contact details. If you would like to add a photograph of yourself - head and shoulders - this is acceptable provided that the photograph is appropriate.

Your educational information must include basic information about where you completed your secondary education (name of institution and year completed) and tertiary education (name of institution, name of degree, year enrolled). You do not need to include the names of the subjects passed (as this is included in the certificates you will attach as supporting documents). You are also able to list any academic achievements from your final year of secondary education (eg Head Prefect at High School) and tertiary education (eg subject prizes) in this section.

If you have achievements outside of your education background, you can list these under a separate heading.

It is important that you highlight relevant achievements in your CV. These can relate to education, sport, culture, university involvement and community work.

If, as a student, you are engaged in formal employment, you must include this information (name of employer, position and period of employment) in your CV. This includes part-time work.

In terms of references, these should be included in your CV. You should try to limit your references to between 1 and 2

people. Your references should be able to attest to your character (either in a work, academic or social context).

When structuring your CV, you can be creative in how you go about it. The only guidance we offer is that it must remain professional, clear and error-free. Like the cover letter, it is advisable to keep your CV as short (1 – 2 pages) as possible, whilst providing enough information to allow the recruiter to make an informed decision about how they would like to proceed with your application.

Preliminary questions in an interview usually centre on your cover letter and CV. Therefore, you must be prepared to answer questions on anything you include in these documents.

Supporting documents

Most organisations will also require certain documents in support of your CV. As a start, you should have clear and legible scanned copies of your identity document (or passport), grade 12 certificate and university academic transcript(s) attached to your application.

You must make sure that you supply the latest version of your university academic transcript. If you fail to do so, this may prevent an organisation from being able to consider your application.

If, for whatever reason, you are unable to supply a required document, you must inform the organisation in your application on paper (this can be dealt with in the cover letter).

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If the organisation is impressed with your application on paper, you will be contacted to attend an interview. This is great news for you as it demonstrates that the organisation has identified you as a potential employee.



Before submitting your paper application, review your documents carefully to ensure that they do not contain any errors or oversights. If possible, it may be useful to ask a friend or family member to review your paper application before submission.

After submitting your paper application, the relevant organisation(s) will consider your application and (hopefully) inform you of how they would like to proceed with your application.

Time to interview

If the organisation is impressed with your application on paper, you will be contacted to attend an interview. This is great news for you as it demonstrates that the organisation has identified you as a potential employee. It is a step in the right direction.

Before you attend the interview, you must ensure that you are prepared. Well, as prepared as possible. There will be some uncertainty regarding the nature of the questions that will be posed in the interview. However, you can expect to be asked questions relating to your background, your reasons for choosing your specific degree(s) and your interests outside of your studies. You should also conduct some background research into the company at which you will be attending the interview (their website is a great place to start).

In answering questions, you must try to remain calm and respond with confidence. Preparation (in advance) and punctuality will also assist you in managing your nerves.

In the interview, you should avoid proffering strong or one-sided views on controversial issues (such as politics) unless specifically challenged by the interviewer to do so.

In terms of dress code, you present yourself as formally and professionally as possible. It is definitely better to dress formally than casually.

By their nature, interviews are designed to assess whether you are suitable for a particular position in a particular organisation. It is an opportunity to market yourself confidently to the organisation.

Be ambitious!

Job-seeking is a nerve-wrecking and time-consuming process. It requires diligence and perseverance. You cannot afford to be complacent at any stage in the application process. You should see this as an investment in your future.

In order to achieve the success you seek, be ambitious. Securing a job at your chosen organisation starts and ends with you. We encourage you to take note of the guidance provided in this article to assist you in converting your career ambitions into reality.

For more information about our law firm and our offering to law students, please visit www.apply4law.co.za.

#CDHAmbitious

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