GUIDE ON JOB APPLICATIONS

- How to successfully apply for a job in Germany

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT JOB APPLICATIONS

Applying for jobs is different from country to country. In this guide we will talk about the standards for **Germany**. Like in every application procedure, the goal is to persuade the employer that you are the perfect candidate for the job, and eventually **get invited to an interview**.

First you have to ask yourself: *How good is my German language?* If you have problems estimating your language skill, you can visit https://europa.eu/europass/de/common-european-framework-reference and look it up at the self-assessment grid. If your German is **NOT** on the B2 level, we would recommend you to write your application in **English**. Otherwise the employer might only consider you because he thinks you are speaking and understanding German **fluently** but during the interview, he will discover that your speaking-level is not appropriate.

The structure of the application folder is also important for the company. You always start with your cover letter, followed by the CV and end with your attachments. Make sure that – if you are **not** sending it via e-mail – the paper is not wrinkly or dirty and in a specific paper application folder. You can get these at any stationery store.

Some employers might ask you in their advertised vacancy to share your salary expectation with them on your cover letter. This is a difficult situation. You don't want to demand too much but also not undersell yourself. Make a **realistic** offer (annual gross income) in which you **consider the factors involved**, like your qualification, the size of the company, the sector, the location/federal state etc.

Calculate **possible negotiations** as well. If the employer does not explicitly ask for a salary expectation, better ask towards the end of the interview. The situation there leaves more room for discussion and you can read the facial expressions and gestures of the employer.

1. The layout

Imagine you work at the human resources (=HR) department. 30 people are sending you their applications for the job you advertised. You open up the applications and each and every one of the candidates is using the same template. Would be pretty boring, wouldn't it?

Avoid using common templates in word or **websites**, where **you only type in** your information and get out your "perfect" CV right away.

Try for example to split the CV and arrange your personal information on the one side, your experience/education/skills etc. on the other side

2. The length of the CV

The length of the CV should **never go beyond two pages**. "As much as necessary but as short as possible" is a common principle regarding German CVs. Put yourself in the position of the employer. There are 30 people applying for the job. Would you really want to read 3-4 pages about 30 applicants, or would you want a short summary so you can assess quickly if someone could be the right person for the job?

If you are e.g. applying for an internship while studying for your master's degree, your **high school diploma and the time you went there is not needed** in your CV. You can on the other hand use it, if you don't have a lot of work experience to fill in blanks.

In general, one has to decide what could be **important** or **interesting** to the future employer. Your time in elementary school probably isn't.

3. The anti-chronological order

When reading an application, HR is mostly interested in **the current situation** of their applicant – less about their first job ten years ago or to which elementary school they went to. To show them the latest information about yourself, write your CV in an anti-chronological order. Start with your current job or degree and **work yourself backwards through time**.

Whether you should start with your professional experience or your education depends on your current situation. If you're not having a lot of professional experience and you just have graduated, you should start with your education. If you have a lot of professional experience and your graduation was years ago, start with your professional experience.

4. Personal Information

In your CV you specify your **name, address, e-mail address and your phone number**. At an earlier time, you had to specify more than that. By now the HR is not that interested in your private life. Personal details like your birthday or your nationality **can** be listed, but you **don't have to**. Your marital status, confession or information about your family/partner is **not relevant** in your CV. If you have a LinkedIn (or similar) profile – link it!

5. Hard skills

Your hard skills or professional expertise are very important in any application procedure. They can also be defined as the **measurable competences**. The employer wants to know, how good you are in your field and if **your skills match their idea of a perfect candidate**. There is only one problem: you probably do not have the same level of experience at every skill.

To solve this problem, you can scale your level of experience in different ways (like you see on the left). This gives the employer the opportunity to **efficiently compare your competences** with the required one.

6. Soft skills

Soft skills are **methodic, social** and **personal competences** that you own. They can be an essential component to a successful application.

Methodic competences are all competences about learning and mastering certain methods, like presentation skills or the competence of solving problems a structured way.

Social competences show how well you interact with other people, e.g. teamwork or having a good knowledge of human nature.

Personal competences are about dealing with yourself. Examples for that are self-confidence or self-discipline.

To stand out from the crowd you could e.g. present your soft skills by using icons.

Time Manage-ment	*Communica-tion Skills*	*Problem-solv-ing compe-tence*	*Stress man-agement*	*Persistence*

If you mention your soft skills in your cover letter, you have to substantiate them with examples. Don't just mention them.

THE APPLICATION PHOTO

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

The first thing HR does is look at your CV, where they see your picture immediately. So, ask yourself: **How do I want to be perceived?** Obviously, you want to make a good first impression. Whether you do or not depends on various factors like your clothing, the background, the quality etc.

The most important thing about the clothing is to **dress for the job you want**. If you apply e.g. for a job at a bank you certainly should wear at least a shirt and tie. A little architectural firm on the other hand does not expect you to come to work in suit and tie every day. The outfit you wear on the picture can therefore be a little more casual, but should also be clean and not wrinkled.

Another important aspect is the background. Make it a **neutral one** (e.g. at a professional photography studio [they know the German standards and print it out in the right size and quality. You can get it digitally as well.]) so it does not draw away the attention from you. Pictures from your great vacation at the beach or random selfies will **definitely not help** you get the job.

The final touch of the picture is the way you look into the camera. Please ensure that you really **look into it** (directly or – even better – in the half profile) **and smile**. Showing your teeth while smiling or not is up to you.

These four pictures show you two proper application photos (one more casual than the other) and two pictures of how you should not do it.

✓ *Professional studio photo (1)*	✓ *Photo outside the studio (2)*
✗ *Selfie (3)*	✗ *Vacation photo (4)*

THE COVER LETTER

1. Form and structure

1. Your address

2. The company's address

3. Place, date

4. Subject line

5. Salutation

6. Introduction - **Arouse the HR's interest** in your person. Don't start your introduction like "With great interest I saw your job advertisement". Be creative, stand out from the competition. You could e.g. refer to one of your skills which shows **your connection to the company.**

7. + 8. Main Part – What did you do in the past? Also substantiate **the hard and soft skills** with **examples** or **suitable experience**. Show the company **why you are the perfect fit** for their company. Where do those skills come from? For example: Has your analytical thinking improved due to a university project you participated in? Mention it!

9. Call-to-Action – Tell them, **when you are able to start** working. Also thank them in advance for an invitation to a job interview. **IMPORTANT**: Don't use the subjunctive. ("I'm looking forward to a personal interview", **NOT** "I would look forward to…")

10+11. Signature – sign it with your name and add your **digital signature**.

2. Checklist cover letter

☐ **Have I searched for the responsible contact person and addressed my application to them?**

☐ **Did someone else read through my application? (spelling mistakes or errors in the formatting are not desirable)**

☐ **Is my cover letter not longer than one A4 page?**

☐ **Did I specify the motivation behind my application?**

☐ **Does my cover letter match my CV?**

☐ **Have I put in the right address of the company?**

☐ **Does the date match the date on the CV?**

☐ **Am I referring to the right job advertisement/job title in the subject line?**

☐ **Are my sentences short but precisely?**

☐ **Have I signed my cover letter?**

☐ **Did I use examples to prove my skills?**

☐ **Have I avoided meaningless phrases?**

☐ **Have I referred to the company?**

☐ **Is my cover letter not just a summary of my CV?**

3. Wording examples

<u>3.1 Introduction</u>

Do your best to make your introduction catchy so that the HR-department get animated to read more about you. Also try to make the first reference to the company.

- *"In a few weeks I will be proud owner of the "bachelor of arts" title and graduate in architectural engineering. Now I would like to actively apply the specialist knowledge I gained in practice such as my entrepreneurial spirit. Throughout my internship at the xxx-office I utilized and improved it as I accompanied the manager and got to know a lot about internal processes."*
- *"Your public annual report and related company goals for the coming year indicate that your company plans to expand overseas. I would like to support you with my fluent business English and pronounced knowledge of the market and ensure that the xxx office has a successful start.*

<u>3.2 Main Part</u>

In the main part you tell them about your hard and soft skills. If there are any skills mentioned in the job advertisement, don't be afraid to use them.

SOFT SKILLS	HARD SKILLS
• *"In order to retain customers in the long term, I proposed and implemented a project at my last employer to increase customer satisfaction. I had a lot of fun doing this project on my own. In the end, I was able to increase customer satisfaction by 17 percent."*	• *"During my studies I took several voluntary seminars, e.g. for adobe programs like Photoshop and InDesign, on an advanced level. The certificate for that can be found in the attachments."*

- *"During my studies, I was ready to focus completely on it in order to achieve the best results. Only when I know that I have done my best, am I also satisfied with myself.*

- *"I have several years of experience in multinational companies on the European financial market, which gave me the opportunity to develop my knowledge of reporting and financial analysis."*

3.3 "Call-to-action"

In the final part, the "call-to-action", the attention of the HR increases again. Therefore, formulate the final sentences with a healthy level of self-confidence and politely ask the employer to take action.

- *"From June 28th, 2021 I will be available at your convenience. I look forward to an invitation to a personal meeting. "*
- *I am available from June 28th, 2021. I look forward to convincing you of my abilities and my motivation in a personal conversation.*

THE ATTACHMENTS

The order of the attachments is pretty simple. First comes **your latest** degree certificate. (If you have a master's degree put this first, otherwise your bachelor's degree. **Whichever is the most up-to-date one.)** After that you can put the certificates in an **anti-chronological order**, like you did in your CV.

If important certificates are written in a **foreign language** like Russian or Chinese, you should let them get **translated professionally**. If they are written in **German or English**, you can add them **without translating**.

APPLICATION VIA E-MAIL

The employer wants your application via e-mail? That is no problem. You just have to keep a few things in mind:

- ***The e-mail***

Sending an e-mail instead of an application folder is very common nowadays. But one has to remember that **the e-mail per se is NOT the cover letter**. Look at this example.
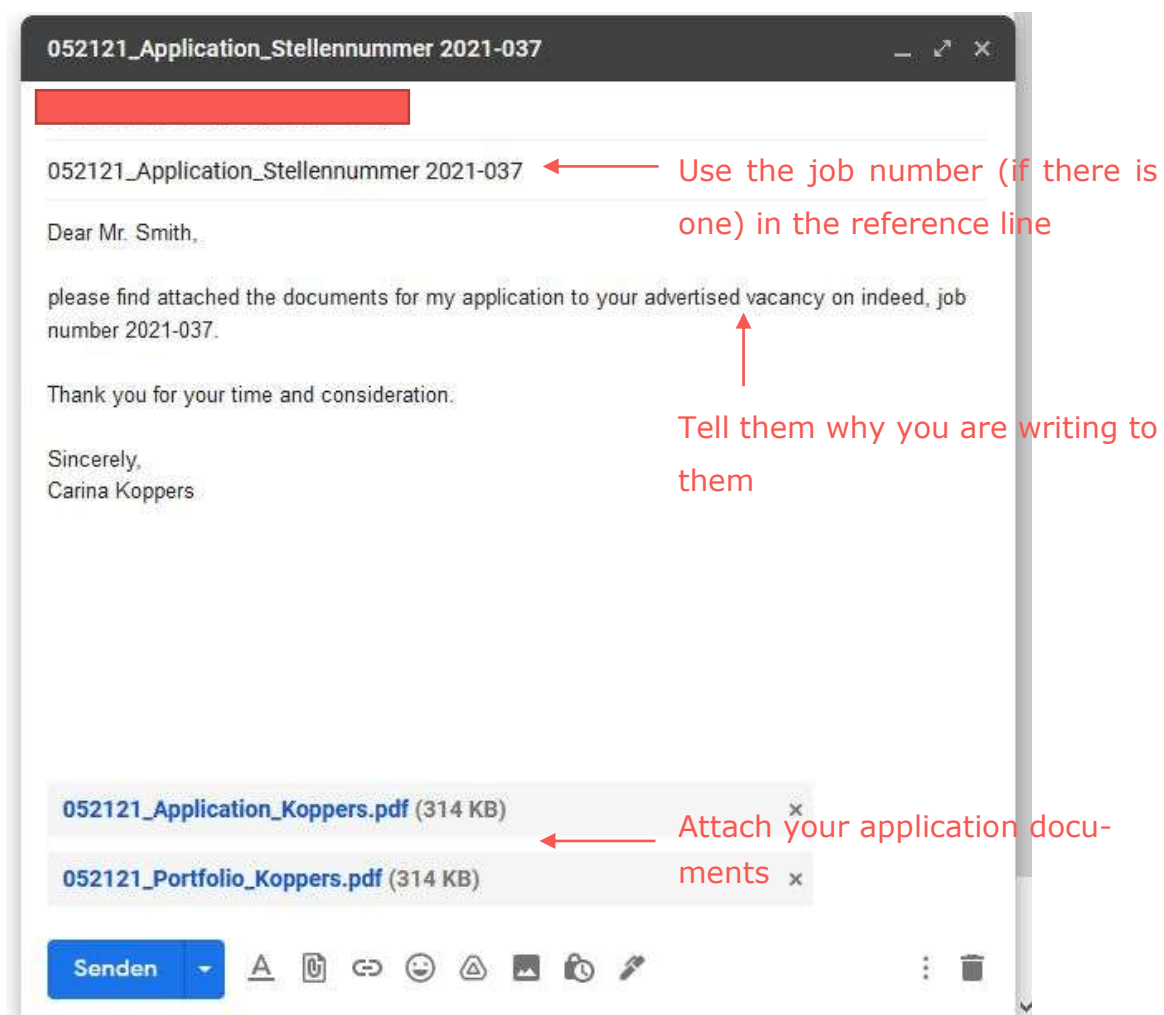
The e-mail itself plays the role of the application folder.

- ***The files***

While writing an application, the number of documents accumulate. It is important for you to **assemble the multiple documents into one file**. (For that you can use e.g. a pdf converter, that helps you put them all together) *For architects and designers:* Your portfolio should be an extra file. Keep in mind that there is a maximum file size.
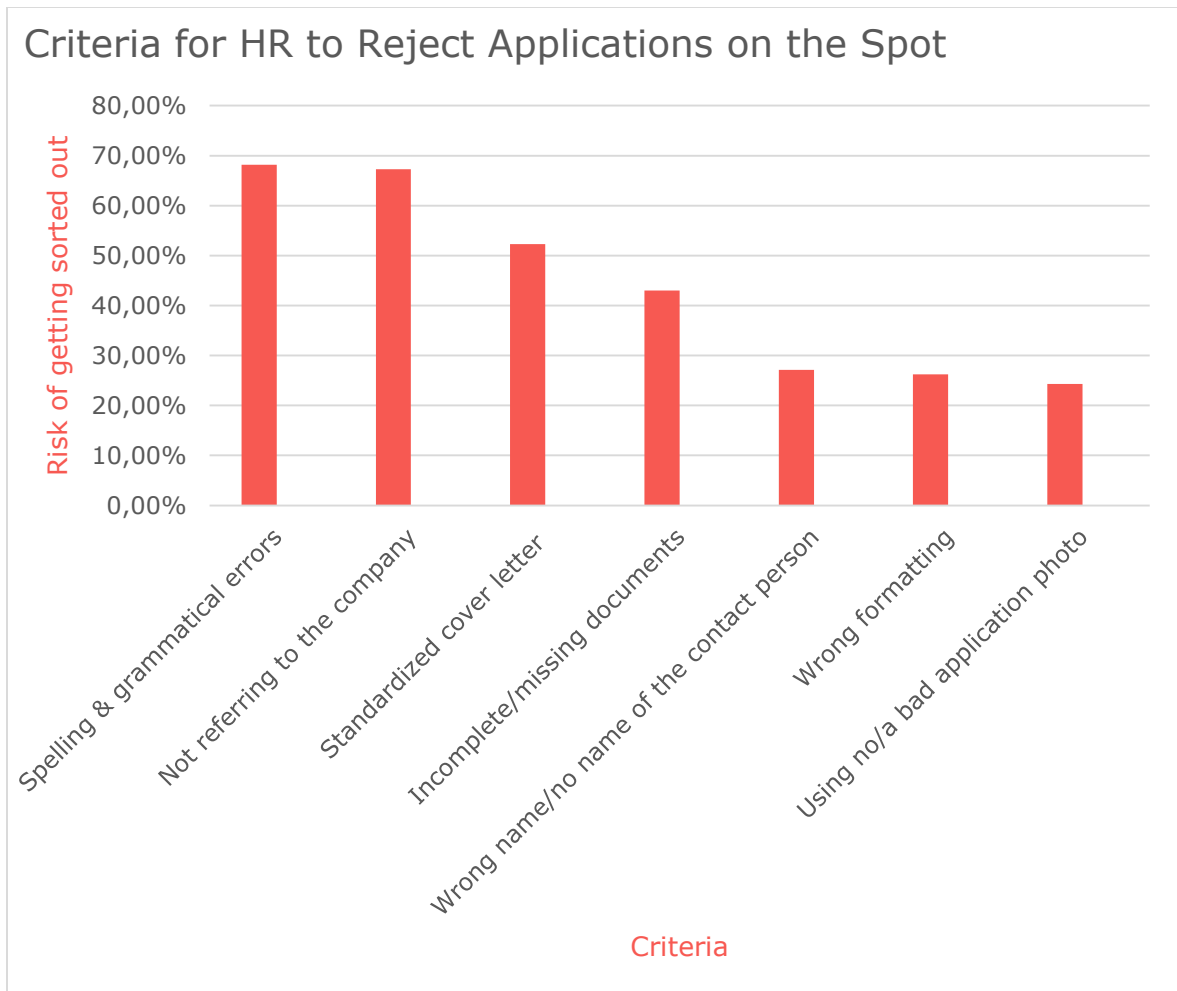
- ***The arrangement***

Arrange the files like you would in a casual application folder. **Start with your cover letter, your CV and then the attachments.**

10 MOST COMMON APPLICATION MISTAKES

While applying for a job, there are a few mistakes you should avoid. The 10 most common mistakes are:

1. Standardized cover letters

2. Using the wrong name of the business/contact

3. An incomplete application

4. A bad application photo

5. No statement on your availability

6. Unclear or irretrievable attachments

7. An unserious e-mail address (e.g. loverboy90@gmail.com)

8. Not mentioning the job reference number

9. Set phrases/meaningless phrases

10. Using the subjunctive in the last sentence

The Ruhr university in Bochum did some research in 2015. They asked those responsible for the HR about criteria on the basis of which they sort out applications without even reading them.

Criteria for HR to Reject Applications on the Spot

Risk of getting sorted out

- 80,00%
- 70,00%
- 60,00%
- 50,00%
- 40,00%
- 30,00%
- 20,00%
- 10,00%
- 0,00%

Spelling & grammatical errors
Not referring to the company
Standardized cover letter
Incomplete/missing documents
Wrong name/no name of the contact person
Wrong formatting
Using no/a bad application photo

Criteria

Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2015