



# The Job Test Prep Guide to Law Firm Application Forms



# Welcome To Our Guide

Welcome to JobTestPrep's guide to law firm application forms. We have compiled this guide by gathering together all the advice and guidance we have found from law firms themselves. We have then organised this information in a way that helps you tackle the questions you will come across not just in application forms but throughout the entire law firm application process.

The application form is one of the most important parts of a job application as it is the first time most firms will have heard from you, and it is the point at which the greatest number of applications is weeded out.

Most law firm applications ask you to input your information according to the format they have set rather than allowing you to attach your CV. With an application form, the firm is able to ensure they get the information that they want from you. Each form asks for a lot of information, and can be overwhelming. Some questions are confusing, and ask you to provide a lot of detail, or research in order to write your answer.

All application forms contain the usual education and work experience questions, but many of them also ask open ended questions or contain space for a covering letter. Your task is to ensure that the application form you submit tells them enough to want to take your application to the next stage. The questions on an application form are an opportunity for you, the candidate to put your case to the firm to hire you.

Law firms are pretty good at giving information about what it is they are looking for. Using this information, we have built this article and arranged it under headings for the different types of question you will come across on application forms.

We hope you find this guide useful and best of luck with your application.

**The team at JobTestPrep**

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We are always happy to hear your comments, so please do not hesitate to drop us a line.

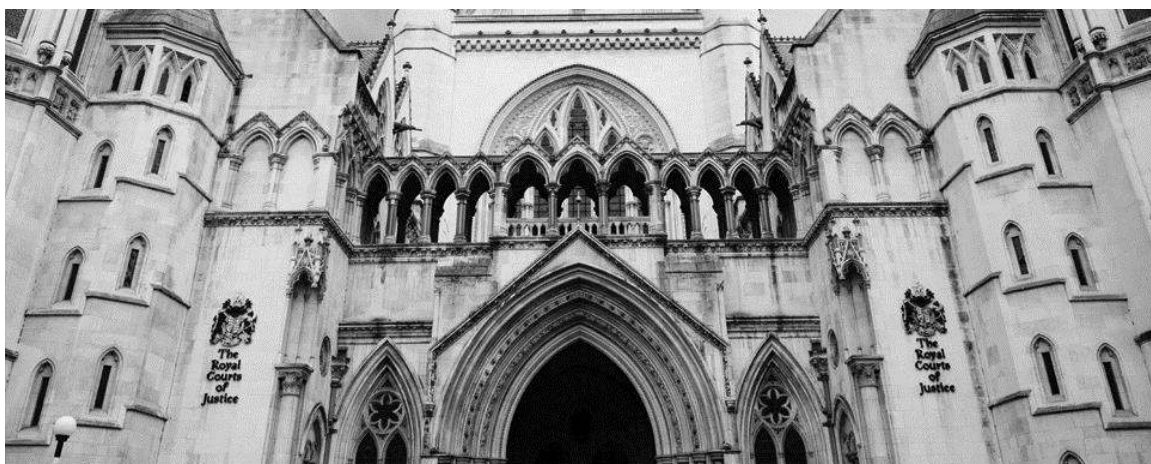
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# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
Before You Start.....	4
Common Questions.....	5
About You Questions .....	6
Commercial/ Business Questions .....	8
Work Experience .....	9
Word Limits .....	9
Covering Letter.....	10
At the End .....	11
In Summary.....	11
Further Resources.....	11



# Before You Start

When applying to a firm, look to see if they have any advice booklets on how to fill in the application form. This is them telling you what they expect to see in your application, so make sure you listen.

## Something to Think About

Herbert Smith Freehills advise applicants to think about the following before they start on their application forms:

- What do you enjoy/ dislike?
- What are you good at?
- What have you done before and what did you enjoy about it?
- Do you enjoy teamwork or working on your own?
- Do you want to embark on further study?
- Are you prepared to travel/ be flexible?
- Do you want to work for an organisation that other people have heard of?
- In what sort of environment do you feel most comfortable?
- For what size of organisation do you want to work?
- How much training and development support do you want from your employer?
- Do you want a structured development programme?
- And most importantly, why do you want this job?
- Do your research before you start the form.

## Tips Before You Start

- **Research** the company you are applying to before you start filling in the form.
- Ensure you **know the core values**, skills or competencies the firm are looking for before you start.
- **Follow the instructions** on the form!
- You want to work in law. Surely you understand that **evidence is key!** Back everything up with evidence as far as you can.
- Use the form as an **opportunity** to demonstrate your **enthusiasm** for working with this firm.



## Things To Remember Whilst Completing the Form

- **Tailor your form** to the company you are applying to, using your research findings.
- **Prepare answers** fully before putting them in the form. When putting them in the form, be careful of any automatic format changes.
- Take care with your **spelling and grammar**. Poor spelling or grammar do not create a favourable impression, and can be interpreted as a lack of attention to detail- a core skill for any lawyer.
- **Be true to yourself** - you will be asked about the information on your application form further down the process.
- **Elaborate** where you have space. For example, explain why your second year exam results are so much better than your first year results- the issues you identified and corrected, which led to a better performance second time around.

## Common Questions

Many application forms ask what look like the same questions. However, each company you apply to is unique, and is looking for slightly different information. What fits for one firm may not fit for another.

**Some of the common questions you can expect to see on an application form, and later on down the application process are:**

- Why have you chosen the law?
- Why have you chosen to apply to work with us?
- Which other firms have you applied to work with, and why?
- Tell us about any positions of authority or responsibility you have had.
- Tell us about your most significant achievements.
- Give three examples of work experience relevant to a career in law. (Eversheds)
- Provide four examples of positions of responsibility you have held. (Eversheds)

Almost every application form you fill in will have a combination of these questions. The temptation will be to take the answers from one form and copy them straight into the next form. However, all recruiters will tell you that this is a real no no. They want evidence that you have researched the firm, and you need to have that show in your answers. Think about why you want to apply to this firm, and of any detail you can that will show why this firm is different. Research could include speaking to current trainees or staff at open days or law fairs, and including what you got from that in your application forms.



### Some advice from recruiters:

- Berwin Leighton Paisner advise that you think about **what your achievements say about you**. Do they show you to be adventurous, or to take on new challenges?
- **Use examples** from your studies, work experience, or your past to illustrate your answers. **Back up your answers** to explain **why** you are good at something, don't just say that you are good at something.
- Try to **include the specific criteria** they are looking for in your answers. Use your own examples to show how you fit those criteria.
- Freshfields remind you to **use your own words**. Anyone can use a cliché.

## About You Questions

These questions are usually open ended questions that have a different angle to them, and are less common than the questions above on an application form. These questions ask for more information about your personality and it may prove difficult to find the balance in answering them.

### The following questions are all on one or more application forms:

- Tell us why should we employ you?
- What's your biggest regret?
- Tell us about your weaknesses.
- Please outline your interests, hobbies and travel experiences. (Berwin Leighton Paisner)
- What has been your most significant achievement to date, and why?
- Aside from work and study, what motivates you and why? (Burgess Salmon)

### Berwin Leighton Paisner's advice blog to candidates gives the following advice:

- Be **honest** about what your weaknesses are.
- Be **original** - "I'm a perfectionist" is an answer that everyone gives, you want to show that you are different.
- Be **balanced**. List a weakness, and say what you are doing to correct it.
- Think about why you chose the path you took, why you regret it, and what you have learnt from the experience.
- Do your research before you start to answer the question.

In these questions, law firms are looking for more information about your personality. They want to know about you. But there is also a deeper side to questions that probe your interests, hobbies and activities. If you can balance a life between carrying out other activities and getting good results in your degree, you can show evidence of being organised and can handle stress, both of which are core skills for lawyers.

These questions are about selling yourself. Freshfields advise that you provide evidence wherever you can for your achievements. So if you trained up for and ran a marathon, name the marathon (but giving your time is too much information). If space is short, the evidence is enough without giving any more detail about how it taught you discipline and sticking power, and whatever else.

## Competency Questions

Competency based questions are designed to measure how your skills measure up against the skills that the firm feel are important for their lawyers.

### Some competency questions currently in use on application forms are:

- Key to being a successful trainee at Simmons & Simmons is being able to build positive relationships with a variety of clients and colleagues from different backgrounds. Please describe a relationship you developed with someone which you found to be challenging. Explain why this was the case and what steps you took to ensure it was a success.
- As a trainee at Simmons & Simmons you will need to effectively manage your time and juggle competing priorities in order to meet client expectations. Please tell us about a time when you have had to adapt quickly to change/ learn quickly in a new environment. How did you manage this? What did you find most challenging about this process.
- At Simmons & Simmons we look for people who are highly motivated and can take the initiative to deliver a high quality of service to our clients. Tell us about a time when you have had to show real determination to complete a challenging task/ project. What did you specifically do to achieve it? What obstacles did you have to overcome?
- Give an example of a time when you have had to deal with conflict and pressure. What key obstacles were you presented with and how did you overcome them? (Berwin Leighton Paisner)
- In order of importance, what are the main skills demonstrated by a successful lawyer in a commercial law firm? (Burgess Salmon)

The questions you are being asked tell you a lot about what the firm are looking for in the people who work with them. What they are also looking for in these questions is how you can provide evidence of where you have met these competencies.

Herbert Smith Freehills recommend that you take a look at the competencies and skills the firms are looking for before approaching these questions. They suggest you write these skills on a blank piece of paper, and then list your examples of where you have demonstrated these skills in the past. They are looking for more recent situations, not examples that are very out of date, and these examples should come from every part of your former experience, including non-law work, academic studies, personal interests and more.



The **STAR method** is a recommended way to organise your answer to competency questions. The STAR method involves painting a picture of what your skills are, through examples of where you have used them in the past. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Activity and Result. Organising your answers with STAR will help you ensure you do not miss anything out. See our [STAR interview preparation pages](#) for more advice about using this technique.

**Simmons & Simmons provide some advice for answering competency based questions:**

- Think about referring to a different aspect of your experience in each answer.
- Read the question and work out what it is really asking you to give information about.
- Try to give context to illustrate your answers and demonstrate how you have the competences they are asking for.
- Answer every part of the question with an example.

## Commercial/ Business Questions

Many commercial law firms will include questions on their application forms to test your commercial or legal thought processes. They are not looking for the finished article in these questions, but for the evidence that you have the potential to be a commercial lawyer.

**Examples of current questions include:**

- BLP acts for clients across a wide range of industry sectors. Choose one of these industry sectors and highlight two key challenges that they are currently facing.
- As a leading UK law firm, what do you think are the main challenges and opportunities that Burges Salmon will face over the next 5 years?
- Tell us about a recent economic or business news article or story you have read or heard about. Please tell us your opinion on this and why it interested you. (Burges Salmon)

Herbert Smith Freehills **define commercial awareness** as “the ability to view situations from a commercial or business perspective.” Furthermore in order to use your commercial awareness, you need to think about all the key players and options in the case in order to come to your conclusions.

All law firms suggest that you can improve your commercial awareness by reading newspapers, listening to the news, following up on the stories behind the headlines you have come across, and paying attention to the business world around you.



Equally important is researching the firm's current or recent activities. If they are currently involved in a big case, it looks good if you can show you not only have been following the case, but you have also been thinking about the implications of the case on a range of stakeholders.

## Work Experience

With no CV attached to the application form, the form itself is the only opportunity you have to present your previous work experience and how it has helped you acquire new skills, and improve your application.

Some application forms provide space for you to present this information - make sure you use it. Some forms will ask you to include this softer information in the covering letter, or in an actual question contained on the form.

As in a CV where you list all forms of work experience, the application form asks you to list all your work experience as well. Non-law work experience is valuable if you demonstrate how you have gained transferable skills which will improve your abilities as a lawyer. What skills did you learn through your previous work experience? For example, did you work with customers, work within a team as part of your day to day role, or communicate regularly with customers and other people outside your team?

## Word Limits

Many application forms place word limits against the questions that they ask. These word limits can look tricky especially when you have a lot you want to write. This is deliberate, the firms want to see that you can give over information clearly and concisely without the need to waffle. Going over the word limit because you "have one last great idea I must put in" will not win you marks, and besides many online forms will simply stop accepting new words when the limit has been reached.

**Here we will look at some tips you can use:**

- Use simple language and simple words. These can actually take up less words than more uncommon or fancier words.
- Plan your answer in advance, reread it and edit to ensure it says what you want it to say, most importantly within the word limit.
- Don't repeat anything that has already, or could be better used, in the answer to a different question.



# Covering Letter

Some firms ask for a covering letter as part of the application form. This can be word limited, but even if not, it is still important to keep the letter clear and concise. Much of the information they are looking for in a covering letter could be included in other forms as an open ended question. Most law firms are looking for evidence that you have researched them to come through in this section.

## The type of information required in a covering letter includes:

- Why you have chosen to work in this type of law?
- Why you have chosen to work with the firm?
- How your skills make you a good candidate.
- Your other interests and skills, and how they improve your application.

Freshfields application form asks for an 800 word personal statement. Their guide, "The Perfect Application" tells you what to include or not include. For example, anything that can be found somewhere else on the form (even your name) should not appear in the personal statement.

In addition, Freshfields advise that you write simply and directly. Avoid cliches. Structure your statement, make it clear and easy to read. Pay attention to detail, including spelling and grammar. Keep your sentences short.

## What should go in is:

- Why I want to be a lawyer?
- Why I want to apply to Freshfields?
- Examples of how past experience (positions of responsibility, challenges, past work experience) has given you the core skills they are looking for.
- Any interests you have (outside law), any sporting or other achievements.

Baker & McKenzie advise that before you start writing your covering letter you should read up on the firm, list some of the key points you want to include in the covering letter, and make sure you include them. Remember to tailor your letter to the firm, and why you have chosen to apply to them.

JobTestPrep's website contains tips for you to use when writing a cover letter. See how these pages can [help you write your letter](#) here.

## At the End

- **Proof read** your application form. Even better, have someone else proofread your application form.
- **Keep a copy** of your application form, you will need it later.
- **Learn from unsuccessful applications** and continue to improve your form each time.
- Many firms recommend you **apply early** as they assess applications on a rolling basis. Applying early means you can learn from any mistakes, you have less pressure on you whilst you are writing the form, and you can have more choice on interview and vacation scheme dates.

## In Summary

This article has used the advice given on many law firm websites and pulled it all together in one place under key headings. The application form is often the part of the application process that people take for granted, however putting the effort in at this stage is valuable. It is the first time the firm will have come across you, and you want to make this first impression a good one.

We hope you have found this article useful, and good luck with those application forms.

JobTestPrep – January 2014

## Further Resources

If you found this article useful, check out our other products including:

- [BCAT](#) and [Watson Glaser](#) practice tests
- [Situational Judgement Test](#) practice papers
- [Verbal Reasoning Test](#) practice tests
- [Skype based interviews](#)
- [Online Interview Preparation](#)
- [Law Firm Application Guide](#)

