

Job vacancy analysis

Contents

Introduction.....	1
The job vacancy analysis.....	1
The telephone call.....	4
Questions.....	6
Telephone script.....	7
Job vacancy analysis.....	8

Introduction

When you're trying to write a good response to a job you've seen advertised, a job vacancy analysis is an indispensable tool. That analysis forms the basis for your letter of application.

Your letter and your CV together constitute your personal selling document. You sell yourself by ensuring that your letter and your CV match the requirements specified by the employer (i.e. the customer). In order to identify precisely what the employer wants, you should start by making a job vacancy analysis. You use your job vacancy analysis to dissect the job vacancy, as it were: you take the advertisement apart and discover what information it yields, and what information you're still missing. The job vacancy analysis forms the basis for your letter.

Once you have completed the analysis, writing your letter only requires you to find the right phrases to put together your findings from the job vacancy analysis. A job vacancy analysis should be performed in a number of steps, which are explained below.

The job vacancy analysis

To perform a job vacancy analysis, you should complete a series of steps, using the form on page 9. It's useful to have that form ready when reading this description.

Step 1: Take a job advertisement and read it carefully. Next, make a note of all information in that advertisement in columns 1 and 2 in the diagram. You can list the information under any of 3 headings: 'job specifics', 'job requirements' and 'information about the firm'. As you see, this breakdown is generally used for advertisements. Job requirements in turn are divided into 'experience', 'education', 'personal characteristics' and 'other'. Once you have recorded all the information from the advertisement in the list, you should examine the completed diagram carefully.

Step 2: In the third column, 'qualities', you can list your 'qualities': what you have to offer for the position in question. Employers aren't interested in *all* your qualities: the firm is looking for particular qualities, which you itemised carefully in the previous step. Use the third column to specify which of the required qualities you possess. Use your CV. Columns 2 and 3 contain the same categories and headings: 'experience', 'education', 'personal characteristics' and 'other'. The second column lists what the firm is looking for, and the third column shows what YOU have to offer to meet their requirements. Here and

now is where you match the vacancy to your qualities, this is where you transpose your CV to the vacancy.

If you lack certain job requirements, you can put forward compensatory factors. For example, if you don't possess the managerial experience required, you can offer your extensive experience as coordinator or chair instead. If a particular specialisation is required and you graduated with a different specialisation, you may have completed a thesis, internship, motivation etc. in or for the necessary specialisation. Similarly, you shouldn't forget to put forward your personal characteristics as compensatory factors. You may not possess the relevant managerial experience, but instead your age and life experience (foreign internship) may give you an innate authority. You may not have the necessary experience, but you're young, you've recently completed your studies, you're highly motivated to work and you're familiar with the latest theories and notions. You can also argue that your volunteer work, hobbies, interest and leisure activities provide compensatory factors.

Step 3: At the bottom of the diagram you're asked to specify your motivation. In fact, two motivations are needed: one for the position (why you want that particular job, what appeals to you in the work), and one for the organisation (why you want to do the job at that particular organisation). The handout 'Application letter' provides more detailed information about the importance of these two motivations in your application letter. On the form for the job vacancy analysis, you should brainstorm your two motivations and note key words in the bottom column.

Step 4: You have now completed the form as much as possible. However, there will be certain things that you notice, and questions you will ask yourself. For example, the advertisement might not specify any personal characteristics. You will notice this immediately, because in column 2, the field for personal characteristics is glaringly empty. Similarly, you won't have been able to list your own personal characteristics, simply because you can't infer from the job vacancy analysis what type of person they're looking for. If you don't know what kind of person the organisation wants, you might randomly put forward several personality traits. However, it's more advisable to discover precisely what characteristics the employer is looking for. Your own guesses might be completely off the mark.

Similarly, information about the job itself is often described in very summary terms, if not missing entirely. The vacancy simply states that they're looking for an 'economist' or 'accountant', followed by the job requirements, as if every economist then knows what his or her work will involve or every accountant does exactly the same job. Here, too, you should be careful not to impose your own interpretation of what the position entails. It's good to think about what you imagine you'll be doing, but you should always check the facts, to make sure that you know what the job involves.

You should make notes of the questions arising from the job vacancy analysis. As such, Step 4 involves phrasing questions based on your job vacancy analysis. Use the form on page 4 (telephone script) to write down your questions.

Step 5: It's now time to make a telephone call to obtain the answers to your questions and to ask for information about the matters that are unclear.

More information about the topics and structure of the telephone conversation is presented in the next section of this handout.

Step 6: You now complete your job vacancy analysis by adding the information obtained during the telephone conversation. Next, you examine the diagram and decide whether or not you have enough points of reference and feel sufficiently motivated to actually write an application. If you decide not to apply, your work for that application ends here and now, and you can start looking for a new job opening.

Step 7: You've decided to apply for the position, and set about writing your application letter. That letter will be relatively simple to compile: use the information from the job vacancy analysis. Your application letter should include two important elements: your motivation (both for the position and for the organisation) and what you have to offer for the position (your sales pitch). The substance of these two elements is listed in the job vacancy analysis. Your motivation is listed in key words at the bottom of the diagram. When you write the letter, all you need to do is turn this information into proper sentences. To sell yourself, you use the information listed in column 3, which presents precisely the qualities that you possess (and perhaps compensatory factors) for that particular position. Here, again, all you need to do is put the information in running sentences, and the essence of your letter is ready. Use this approach to make sure that you don't supply too little, too much, unnecessary or irrelevant information.

Basically, the thinking for your letter is done during the preparation, during the job vacancy analysis. Writing the letter is a matter of rephrasing the information from the analysis in sentences. With a proper letter of application, most time and effort is spent on the preparation, on performing the job vacancy analysis.

The telephone call

Structure

- You start by introducing yourself. This introduction may involve more than simply stating your given name and surname. You might explain where you work and/or what your current job is. If you don't have a job, but graduated recently, mention your degree programme, your specialisations and experience from placements, research and/or projects. What matters is that you should provide information about yourself that will interest the other person. This will make the person you're talking to curious about you, and will increase his or her willingness to answer your questions seriously.
- The telephone is an intrusive medium. Before you ask your questions, always check first whether it is a convenient time for the other person to answer your questions (Is this a good time to call? Do you have a few minutes?). If necessary, explain how much time you think you'll need (10-15 minutes). If it isn't a good time, ask when you can phone back.
- Make sure that you keep the initiative, never agree to have the other person call you back: you never know when that will be, or even whether you will indeed be called. Moreover, there is a possibility, particularly with mobile telephones, that you will be called back at a time that you're not prepared. That might create a bad first impression. Allowing yourself to be phoned back almost automatically places you at a disadvantage.
- Next, explain why you're calling. When you're responding to a specific vacancy that will be immediately clear. Specify what vacancy you're phoning about, and explain through what channel you found it. Firms sometimes advertise multiple job vacancies at the same time in different media.
- Your questions pertain to matters from the advertisement that are unclear to you (job vacancy analysis). They may concern the work (often poorly described) or the job requirements (consisting of work experience, education, personal characteristics and 'other' requirements). Similarly, the information provided about the organisation may also give rise to questions. Basically, you're asking for the information that you need in order to determine whether the job suits you, and to write an application letter properly compiled for that specific job.
- DON'T start with your most difficult question, e.g. if you're inquiring about a part-time position while you're in fact looking for a full-time job, or if the job advertised is for a senior position while you're at junior level. They might be looking for someone with a vocational degree, but you have a university background. Start by asking some other questions first. Try to learn all there is to know about the position and the environment:
 - What is a typical working day like?
 - What is the focus of the position?
 - What is the critical success factor in the position?
 - How was the opening created? (There is a difference between jobs that have just been created and existing jobs opening up as a result of replacement or expansion.)
 - Try to learn about the environment in which you'll be working (how large the department is, how many people work there, how the workload is divided, with which department does 'your' department cooperate, etc.).

Finally, provide some information about yourself too. Make sure that the person you're talking to becomes interested in you. Once you have their interest, it will be less dangerous to ask the more sensitive questions, and they will be more inclined to consider your application despite the fact that your profile doesn't match their ideal profile. If you start with your sensitive question, conversely, they might answer resolutely that the opening is indeed for a part-time job or a senior position or someone with a vocational background. At that moment, most organisations will not display much flexibility in abandoning their preferred profile, which is logical since they know nothing about you. If you have aroused their interest, however, and they want to interview a particular applicant, they're generally more willing to be flexible. Sometimes, positions are created specifically for callers/applicants with whom the interviewers develop a particularly good rapport; the quality of the telephone conversation is an important factor.

- Try to create a dialogue. One way to do that is by responding to the replies you receive. This also allows you to give more information about yourself ('That sounds very interesting, we discussed this at length during a practical on ...'). Try to ensure that the conversation becomes more than a question-and-answer session. However, this is not something for starting job hunters: it requires some practice and experience.
- At the end of the conversation, thank the person you spoke to for his or her time, information and trouble. You may repeat his or her name: some people are sensitive to that. If applicable, state that you will be applying for the position.

What to bear in mind when making your phone call

- The time of calling: as a rule, you'll have the greatest chance of getting through early in the morning or the afternoon. That are the moments that most people are at their desk to prepare for meetings or appointments.
- The advertisement will generally state the name of the person who should be contacted for information about the job. However, that person might be unavailable and you might speak to someone else. Make a note of the person you're speaking to. You'll need his or her name to thank them at the end of the call, and in your application letter, if you write one after having made the call.
- Make sure to call from a quiet place where you cannot be disturbed: no children shouting or dogs barking in the background, switch off your cell phone and make sure that there isn't any noise from the television or radio in the background, make sure your flat mates know not to disturb you, etc.
- Have ready: pen and paper (to make short notes of the answers), list of questions (telephone script), job vacancy analysis, planner (for if the person wishes to arrange an interview immediately, or to find a time that you can call back) and your CV (you may be asked questions about your educational background and work experience, which you can then simply read off from your CV).
- Your telephone call creates first impressions: you have an impression about the firm, and the person you speak to has an impression about you as a person. That's why it's important to prepare your telephone call well. The quality of the call will be taken into account in the selection. Records are generally kept of who called. Calling always creates a good impression, as it demonstrates that you're taking the application seriously. But people will know if you're calling purely for the sake of calling. You

should actually have relevant questions, otherwise you'll be wasting other people's time needlessly, which is never appreciated.

Questions

You should start by considering what questions you have, based on your job vacancy analysis.

The following list serves as an indication of the type of questions you might ask. However, you shouldn't simply use this list as it is, since these questions don't always apply. You should also only ask questions about matters that truly interest you: don't call simply for the sake of calling.

- o What precisely does the job involve?
- o Could you tell me more about what responsibility A/B/C involves?
- o The job description specifies a number of responsibilities. Which of those are the most important?
- o How is the time divided over the various responsibilities, i.e. how much of the time is spent on responsibility A, B,C?
- o Your advertisement doesn't say anything about the job involving such-and-such. Is that work not part of the job?
- o Do you have a more detailed job description, and could you send it to me?
- o Your advertisement specifies a number of personal characteristics. However, could you tell me what kind of person you want for your team?
- o What are the most important qualities that you're looking for?
- o What are the hard and soft requirements for this position?
- o I'm taking this application very seriously, and I'd like to write a good application letter. Could you send me more information about your firm or the position, the department, your products/services? (The information you ask for depends on what you're interested in, and what information you feel is missing. Don't ask for too much detail, since more isn't always better.)
- o Don't ask about salaries, leave days/reduced working hours or fringe benefits. Organisations prefer applicants to choose them based on the job (intrinsic values) rather than for interesting pay and fringe benefits (extrinsic values).
- o Etc.

Telephone script

Name of organisation	
Name of contact	
Letter to be addressed to	
Telephone number	

Opening line:

Questions about:

The job

The organisation

The job requirements

a. necessary work experience

b. education requirements

c. necessary personal qualities

d. other requirements

Closing line:

Job vacancy analysis

1. Job:	2. Job requirements:	3. Your qualities and compensatory factors
	Experience Education	Experience Education
The organisation and the department:	Personal characteristics Other	Personal characteristics Other
Motivation: Y Why this job: Y Why this organisation:		