



Applying for Work in Germany

What does a job application look like in Germany?

A written job application consists of a cover letter, curriculum vitae and copies of the most important certificates and references; samples of work may also be required. A photo is generally still required in Germany for a complete application. Your prospective employer may already have specified what they want in terms of documents in the job advert.

For online applications – which are also becoming more common in Germany – you will need to send your documents as compact PDF files. Find out about your desired employer – the Internet makes this easy for you. The job advertisement will tell you whom to write to. If no name is mentioned, find out on the company's website or give them a call. For want of a better alternative you could always resort to the very general "Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren" ("Dear Sir or Madam"). Particularly with speculative job applications; however, you should make the effort to find out the right person to contact.

Be clear as to why you would like to work in Germany

The cover letter should comprise one DIN A4 page and should briefly and concisely explain why you are looking for a job, why you are interested in the work offered and why you consider yourself the most appropriate person for the job. Try to point out why you want to work in Germany. Conclude the letter with the hope of being able to introduce yourself in person – and of course with: "Mit freundlichen Grüßen" ("Yours faithfully").

In Germany, the curriculum vitae, which should be no longer than two pages, lists your education and training, professional experience and the successes you have achieved. The sequence should be in reverse order, i.e. the latest data should be written first. Although most personnel managers are quite proficient in English, it is better to write in German.

Always begin with your contact details and then structure your CV according to your school and vocational education and professional experience. The CV should be clearly laid out with complete information. Do not simply list the corresponding years for your previous occupations (e. g. 2001–2005) – you need to list the months as well (e. g. 01/2001– 06/2005). You will also need to list periods of unemployment and other periods when you have not worked (e.g. due to military service, illness, sabbaticals, etc), since gaps in your CV will be viewed critically.

At the end, it is a good idea to list the languages in which you can communicate well. The usual categories are: 'Muttersprache' (native speaker), 'verhandlungssicher' (business fluent), 'fließend' (fluent) and 'Grundkenntnisse' (basic knowledge).

The person reading your application will also want to learn about you as an individual. Thus your personal interests can also project a positive image of yourself. For instance, you can highlight your social commitment.

Your certificates and references provide testimony to your expertise and experience. You will need to include all certificates in your application that qualify you for the job for which you are applying. If job references are not common in your home country, it is best to state that in the corresponding sections of your CV. Do not forget to include all any further training certificates confirming participation in any courses and/or seminars. Depending on the situation (for example, when applying at smaller companies), it is worthwhile having your references and certificates translated into German.

When you make an application, you are advertising yourself

Normally it is sufficient to provide your school-leaving and university certificates, as well as references or certificates of employment from companies or establishments where you previously worked. However, if you have any other aces up your sleeve – such as other certificates, awards, foreign internships – then do not hesitate to include them. After all, when you make an application, you are advertising yourself.

It is a good idea to include a certificate supplement describing your vocational qualifications. The Europass certificate supplement (www.europass.cedefop.eu.int) outlines the course content and the typical range of occupations accessible with each certificate. It also includes information on the type of vocational training, the grade scale and the knowledge, skills and competencies you have acquired. The Europass website also provides useful templates that enable you to structure your CV and describe your language skills and international work experience in an internationally comparable style. This enables you to shape your application in a more informative manner.

If you have an academic background, it is worthwhile contacting your university or college first. These will frequently provide you with more detailed information and explanations of the certificates. If you include these with your job application, this will help your prospective German employer make a more precise assessment of your skills and expertise.