

# Apprenticeships, internships and graduate programmes -

Application and interview tips



drax





# Careers at Drax

Apprenticeships, internships and graduate programmes offer excellent pathways into your career. They help you get valuable work experience, develop skills, build your knowledge and meet people.

Competition for places can be tough, though, so it's vital:

1. **Your application** shines a light on your skills, enthusiasm and suitability
2. You can show these traits in person **at your interview**

Let's look at some top tips for helping you prove you're the right candidate for the opportunity...





# Application

## Do your research

Research is crucial to establish if the opportunity's right for you. It's also vital for helping you confidently answer the application's questions. Well-researched answers show initiative and enthusiasm, and the things you learn will help when it comes to your interview.

- Research the company thoroughly. Understand:
  - What it does
  - Who its competitors are and what it is that makes the company different
  - What it's striving to achieve
- Study the programme and what it covers. Maybe you have a clear idea of what you want to do, and you've found a programme to match. Or perhaps you're not sure yet, so you'd prefer to do a more general programme simply to get experience of different business areas. Look into what you'll cover – it'll help you make the right decision for you (read the [Pick the right programme](#) section for more on this).
- Focus on the business area you'd be working in. Showing knowledge that's relevant to the role in question will make your application stand out.
- Find links between the company's purpose and values and your own. If there are matches, focus on these in your application.
- If you're able to connect with employees from the company (see the [Networking](#) section), ask them what it's like to work for the company.
- Sign up to company career portals and register for newsletters and job alerts.

## Pick the right programme

It's important that you're honest with yourself. If you're excited about the opportunity and you're confident you're well-suited to it, that'll come across in your application.

Ask yourself some questions before you fill out your application:

- Do I agree with the company's purpose and values? Do they match my own?
- Is the opportunity right for me? Does the content of the programme match my interests and career goals?
- Is the programme focused enough on what I want to do, or general enough to give me a broader experience if I haven't got a specific career direction in mind yet?
- Do I have the skills and attributes required?
- Is the opportunity practical for me in terms of both hours/schedule and location?
- Ignoring what other people are doing, is this what I want to do?

# Network

Building your network can help you pick up knowledge you can use in your application. But it's a good career habit to get into anyway – often 'who you know' can make all the difference.

- Use LinkedIn to build your network with individuals from the industry. You might learn something from them that'll help in your application.
- If suitable, connect with employees from the company you're applying to. You can ask them about what it's like working for the company, or for insights about their business area or specialism.

## Take your time

**Give yourself enough time and focus to complete your application. Don't rush it!**

- Write, check and submit your application over a few days rather than in one go.
- Have somewhere quiet and free from distractions to work on it.
- Check, double check and triple check! Weed out any spelling or grammar mistakes.
- Ask someone to read through your application – they're likely to spot something you haven't!
- Don't forget you'll need to spend time updating your CV and writing a covering letter – the next section has more tips on this.

## Give details

**To sell yourself, be specific!**

Whether you're preparing your CV, writing a covering letter or filling out an application (or all three!), employers love details.

- Make sure your CV's up to date with all your experiences and shows your current contact details.
- Write a covering letter. Sometimes you'll be asked to submit one with your application, but it's a good idea to send one either way. A covering letter gives you even more chance to sell yourself. Tailor it to the role you're applying for, and use examples (expand on the ones on your CV, or use new ones) that show your skills and your suitability.
- Write about your strengths, what makes you unique and why you're suited to the programme.
- Give specific examples from your work or study projects. Also think about relevant experiences from your home life and leisure activities.
- Be honest – don't invent or exaggerate.
- Focus on quality rather than quantity.
- As well as checking your contact details are up to date, make sure they're professional. Include:
  - Your email. Don't use novelty address (iliketoparty.com for example.)
  - Your telephone number(s). Set up voicemail and check your messages.
  - Links to your LinkedIn profile and any work or portfolio websites. Don't link to your social media accounts.







# Interview

## Prepare

There's a lot you can do in advance of your interview to help you on the day.

- Familiarise yourself with your CV, your covering letter and the content of your application.
- Remind yourself of the company's values and be ready to say how you demonstrate them.
- Spend some time thinking of further real-life examples of when your experiences have matched the role's requirements. Make notes you can refer to.
- Prepare answers to questions the interviewer's likely to ask you. Be specific with these answers – use the STAR technique:
  - Situation – describe the event or situation you were in.
  - Task – explain the task you had to complete.
  - Action – describe the specific actions you took to complete the task.
  - Result – close with the result of your efforts.
- If your interview is going to take the form of an assessment day, practise beforehand. You'll be able to find practice tests to work on in advance. You can ask your employer contact for guidance on what'll be included in your assessment day.
- Prepare questions to ask your interviewer. These might be related to your research, the opportunity, the business area you'd be working in or the company as a whole. Remember an interview's a two-way conversation – it's for you to find out about the opportunity as well as the employer to find out about you!
- Test any technology you'll need. Whether it's your laptop or tablet, make sure everything's working and you can access what you'll need on the day.
- Prepare a copy of your CV, your covering letter and any notes you've made to take with you.
- Make sure you've eaten well and have had a good night's sleep.
- Plan your interview travel route.



# Present your best self

Your interview or assessment day is your opportunity to show the company your research, your knowledge and your suitability for the opportunity. Enjoy it!

- Be smart and look professional. First impressions count, so make sure you're dressed suitably and feel comfortable.
- Be punctual. Leave plenty of time for travel to make sure train delays or traffic jams don't make you late.
- Stay calm – be yourself. Staying calm is easier said than done. But remember that you've got this far based on how suitable you are for the opportunity – so the interviewer wants you to succeed.

## Video

Video interviews are increasingly popular. They cut out travel time and they're environmentally friendly.

Our tips for face-to-face interviews are relevant to video interviews as well. You might also be asked to video yourself answering set questions and email the resulting file through to your company contact. Either way, there are some tech factors to consider in making sure you present your best self via video.

### Lights!

- Set up your lighting. Have some soft light casting on you from the front so you're clearly visible.
- Be careful if you're facing a window that you don't become washed out on the video display.
- Avoid sitting directly in front of a window, or you'll become silhouetted.

### Camera!

- If you're doing a live video interview, make sure your device is fully charged or plugged in.
- Raise your computer, tablet, or phone so that it's at eye level or just slightly above.
- Find a quiet area with no interruptions or distractions.
- Check your background. Is the area behind you appropriate for a video?
- If you're using a device where you receive notifications (text messages, email notifications, chat windows), make sure these features are turned off.

### Action!

- Have notes, reminders and your CV visible at eye level so you can quickly sneak a glance to help you.
- If you're recording yourself, think of three to five key things you want to get across in your video and practise!
- Finally, be yourself. Video gives you more control – so personalise your video to give the company a true representation of who you are!

## Assessment centres

Assessment centres allow companies to assess a number of candidates at the same time, and in team-working contexts.

### Activities might include:

- Case studies
- Group discussions
- Individual interviews (see our tips earlier in this section!)
- Presentations
- Psychometric tests
- Role play
- Social events
- Written tests

As suggested earlier, ask your employer contact for a run-down of the session's agenda. You should also be able to find example tests. These will give you a better idea of what to expect on the day and give you a chance to practise beforehand.

### On the day:

- Try to be confident and assertive during all exercises.
- Be friendly and polite with everyone you meet – whether candidate or assessor.
- Make sure you understand the requirements of each task by quickly digesting the brief. Ask questions if you're not sure about anything – this'll show that you're keen to understand and not afraid to speak up. Revisit the brief once you understand the overall challenge to help you stay on track.
- Engage in group discussions but don't talk over others. Include others in group work and celebrate good ideas.
- Focus on you. Put your key skills forward and don't worry if others are tackling things differently.
- Stay calm. Don't dwell on any mistakes you feel you've made. Instead concentrate on performing well in the next task.
- Remember that you're always being assessed.



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