

# Applying to Temp Agencies

You've picked an agency - now you have to apply for a spot on the team. It's not as easy as just walking in unemployed and being handed a job (or, placement in temp jargon). The people at the agency have to decide whether they want you to represent their company.

Make an appointment at the agency and prepare yourself accordingly. "Be professional and dress as if it's a 'real' interview," said Jacqueline Johnson, who has more than 10 years of experience temping in Washington, DC, Boston, Mass., Nashville, Tenn., and Northridge, Calif.

Bring a resume with a detailed work history and contact information for references. Although agencies definitely look at candidates' work history and skills to determine a proper fit, the interview is considered the key to getting a good placement. The career counselors who conduct the interviews are usually the same people who decide what assignment you'll be offered. Strive to make a good first impression - it can only pay off in the long run. "I've established a rapport with the counselors," said Johnson, "They look out for you, get you the best jobs and the best pay."

## **Communicate your interests to the agency**

Perhaps most important, let the counselors know what type of position you are interested in, where and when you are available, and how many hours a week you are interested in working. "Tell them what you don't want, too," added Johnson. "You need to be honest about your expectations and limitations."

If an agency doesn't seem to be interested in your preferences, share your concern or look elsewhere. You want to avoid getting an assignment that is neither enjoyable nor lucrative. As a temp, Scott Verrastro learned the hard way about the importance of communicating with the agency. "The first agency I registered with hardly ever tried to find me a job, and never actually asked what I want to do, or what might be good for me," he said.

Trained in music literature, Verrastro had been looking for something in the music industry or journalism. Eventually he left that agency after a few days of mind-numbing data entry. The second agency he registered with did much more legwork - they asked him more detailed questions and quickly found him a suitable position. He has been on that assignment for nearly a year.

Also, you want to be sure the agency you choose will intervene if you are having any trouble at work. As a temp, you should feel comfortable voicing any concerns to your agency. A good agency will make sure you're happy and not allow a company to mistreat you.

## **After the interview come the tests**

The interview isn't the only thing you'll want to ace. If you receive a possible placement from an agency, not only must you complete all the legal paperwork (don't forget to bring proof of U.S. citizenship or a work visa), but you may also have to take a number of composite tests.

Depending on the placement you seek, you could be quizzed on any number of skills, including computer desktop basics, intricate PowerPoint presentations, and telephone transfer systems.

Prior to the interview, you should determine what skills you have to offer. The more versatile your skills are, the more jobs you'll have to choose from. If you have more refined computer skills, you may have the potential of earning more money. Most agencies will test your computer and typing skills. They not only want to make sure your skills match what you said on your resume, but also want to determine what you have to offer a company.

"One of the drawbacks is the paperwork and extensive testing," said Johnson. "It's three or four hours the first time you go in. But once you get past that, it's cool." However, most agencies use the same computer-based test, so you may become a point-and-click pro after a day or two of interviewing at agencies.

### **Ask questions and read the fine print**

Before you take your first placement, you have to look at all the details and decide if the job is really what you are looking for. From there, you must carefully read all materials provided by the service. As with any legal document, make sure you read and understand everything before you sign. Find out your contract responsibilities, specifically, ask if there is a minimum number of hours you must work a week or if you qualify for overtime pay.

Other important issues to consider are what the company is willing to pay, travel distance from your home as well as what their time frame is for the position. If the company is only looking for someone for a couple weeks and you are looking for something longer, do not be afraid to turn them down. Remember, the agency is taking a cut of your pay so they are really working for you.

It is also important to know how much notice the agency requires should you decide to quit. Agencies normally need only a few days as opposed to two to several weeks making it more practical to sign a contract with a temp agency than with a company.

Also, find out what benefits your agency offers. Do you receive vacation pay after a certain number of hours? Is there a health insurance program? A 401(k)? Not only does understanding your responsibilities and benefits help you make the most of your temporary employment, it can also provide you with insight into your professional goals.