

The Jobseeker's Guide to Cover Letters Resume Writing and Interviews

Provided by

Employment Services

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Office of **HUMAN
RESOURCES**



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Cover Letters

The cover letter is your chance to sell yourself to a potential employer as the best candidate for a specific position. Therefore, it can be just as important as your resume. The important thing to remember is that your cover letter serves a separate function from your resume and should not be used to repeat the details of your resume, such as work history, education, or personal objectives. The resume is about you, your experience and your skills. The cover letter is about what you can do for the employer.

An effective cover letter should accomplish three things:

1. **Introduce yourself**

The first paragraph needs to grab the hiring manager's attention. Say exactly why you have sent your resume; you are interested in the company and you want to fill a need they have.

Demonstrate your interest by indicating any connections between the employer and yourself. Don't just mention the job position; describe what the company requires from that position.

If you were referred to the company by a mutual friend or associate, mention them; the hiring manager may feel more obligated to respond to your letter.

2. **Sell yourself**

In the second part of the letter briefly state the skills you bring to the table that will specifically meet the employer's needs. Don't go into great detail, as your resume should take care of that. Use this section to highlight how you will use your skills and experience to benefit the company.

3. **Make a plan**

Close the letter by indicating what you would like to happen next. Don't leave the ball in the employer's court! Tell the employer where you can be reached (either by phone or e-mail). Indicate that if you don't hear from them within a week or so that you will follow-up with a phone call to make sure they received your resume and cover letter. Be assertive but polite.

Formatting Cover Letters

There is no one "official" format for cover letters but listed below are some basic rules to keep in mind when composing a cover letter:

- A three line block in the top right hand or left hand corner of the page should contain: your home and street address, city, state and zip code, and the date.
- A second three line block, flush left, one space below the date and one space above the greeting should include: the addressee's full name and address, including city, state and zip code.
- Use a colon, not a comma after the greeting.
- The greeting should address a specific person in a formal matter (i.e. Dear Mr./Ms. Doe not Dear Jane).
- If you do not have a specific name, address the letter to "Hiring Manager," or Human Resources Manager".
- A line of space should separate paragraphs; indentation is not necessary.
- You may use bullets and bold print in the body of your cover letter to organize and highlight information however, do so conservatively.
- The closing should read "Sincerely," followed by your signature underneath, then your full name in print underneath your signature.

Cover Letter Writing Tips

Your cover is an example of how well you communicate therefore how you write it is as important as the message it delivers. Listed below are tips to help you make your cover letter look and sound professional.

- **Be natural**
Use simple, uncomplicated language and sentence structure. Write, as you would speak. Be formal but don't be stiff. As with your resume, use action words to create dynamic sentences.
- **Be specific and get to the point**
Your cover letter must be intriguing enough to get the reader to look at the resume, but should be only an introduction to the resume, not a repeat of it. Make sure you answer the question, "Why should I hire this person?" Respect the employer's time – make sure every sentence has something to do with explaining your interest in the company.
- **Be positive and confident, not arrogant**
Don't complain about your current work situation, your manager or your co-workers. Don't sound like you are begging for a position. Tell them you are qualified for the job.
- **Type your letter and proofread**
If you send a similar letter to several companies, make sure that you change all customized statements accordingly. Check carefully for grammar and spelling mistakes. Typos and grammatical errors say a lot about the kind of work you do. Don't depend entirely on the spell-check function of your word processor – it won't catch everything.
- **Package it nicely**
Print your resume and cover letter on the same paper stock; the uniformity will look professional. Use only printers that produce neat, readable text with no stray marks or smudges. Make sure you sign it otherwise employers may feel like you've sent a form letter.
- **Keep one for yourself**
Make a copy of each letter sent, and keep it for future reference.

1040 North Shore Dr.
Columbus, OH 43201
March 1, 2002

Mr. John Employer
Hiring Manager
The Ohio State University
2231 North High St.
Columbus, OH 43201

Dear Mr. Employer:

Sally Smith, the Director of the Sister Cities Program in the Office of the Mayor, has called to my attention the vacancy for a Study Abroad Coordinator in the Office of International Education. I want to work in the international education field because I believe that studying abroad is essential to academic learning and global understanding. My education, teaching and personal experiences have qualified me for this position.

Living in diverse countries and cultures myself, I have taught French as a Foreign Language in France, Finland, Canada and the United States. I also lived in Spain during my childhood. As a result of my international experience, I have acquired cross-cultural communication, mediation and language skills and I am very flexible and adaptable to change.

As a teacher and advisor, I have provided academic advising for students from diverse cultural backgrounds who are interested in pursuing business majors. I have excellent organizational skills and a strong commitment to facilitate student success with their academic careers. In addition, I am familiar with the resources available at The Ohio State University that can address the individual needs of students. In both my current position as well as in previous positions, I have developed and implemented a variety of programs to meet student needs or interests.

My caring attitude, interpretive listening skills and calm demeanor have helped me to gain the respect and trust of my students. My research indicates that Ohio State values these qualities. If you need any additional information to consider me for this position, you can reach me via e-mail at xxxxxxxx or by telephone at xxxxxxxxx. I will follow-up with your office next week to see if an interview can be arranged.

Sincerely,

Joanne Jobhunter

Resume Writing

An effective resume is a concise summary, an organized snapshot, of your background, skills and accomplishments. It is an introduction and your initial contact with potential employers. A good resume will attract the attention of the hiring manager and secure a job interview.

Think of your resume as a promotional brochure about you. You need to show a potential employer what you have accomplished and where your experience lies. *Your strategy should be to emphasize the experience and skills that a particular employer is looking for.*

Your resume is also an example of your communication and organizational skills. A well done resume is itself another reminder of what kind of valuable employee you would be. Likewise, a sloppily produced resume is a terrific way to get yourself taken out of the running before it even starts.

Basic Purposes Served by a Resume

1. Compiling data for your resume enables you to take stock of your background and experiences and clearly identify accomplishments.
2. Effective mailing piece in a direct-mail job search campaign (along with a cover letter).
3. Helpful when you answer a want ad in writing or in person.
4. Send to employers that interest you after you have researched an organization.
5. Serves as an information sheet for those who know you and want to recommend you to a potential employer.
6. Reinforce a personal contact you have already established with an employer
7. Present to a professional association or community organization.
8. Will make use of resume when you apply for an internal position through Employment Services or for an external position.

Selecting Your Resume Format

With so many different employment experiences possible, there is no single resume template that works for everyone. There are, however, generally accepted ways to arrange the information on your resume to present it in the best light.

Basically, there are three types of resumes: Chronological, Functional or Combination, and Creative.

The following information provides a description of each type of resume, information about the basic sections of the resume depending on the type you are writing, and samples of each type.

Chronological Resume

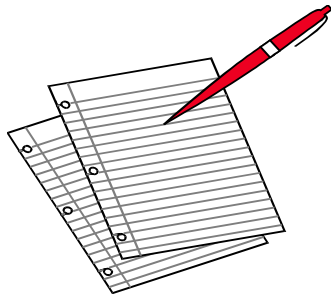
This is the most common resume style and one that many employers prefer. In the chronological format, the emphasis is placed on employment experience. The applicant's job history is presented in reverse chronological order, with the most recent jobs placed at the top of the list. The chronological format is easy to organize, write, and read.

The chronological resume is good if your recent job experience is relevant to the job you are applying for, and you want to stay on a similar career path. Potential employers can easily see what you have done, and how you have progressed and garnered experience.

Despite its popularity, there are some reasons why the chronological format may not be right for you. If you are just entering the workforce from school, a resume like this may actually highlight your lack of experience. You may have held jobs recently that have no relevance to the position you are applying for. If you are re-entering the workforce after a substantial absence, this resume will highlight your recent inactivity. Any large gaps in your recent employment history will be evident, and you may be asked about them.

Likewise, a job history full of briefly held jobs might lead a potential employer to question your ability to remain employed. A long employment history at a single company will reveal your age to some extent, something you may not feel comfortable doing.

A chronological format is best used when your career direction is clear and the job objective is directly in line with your work history.



Format Example for Chronological Resume

Name

Home Address

Street Address
City, State and Zip
Area Code and Phone Number
E-mail Address
Number

Work Address

Place of Employment
Street Address
City, State and Zip
Area Code and Phone

Career Objective

Brief description of the type of position for which you wish to be considered. If you are unwilling to relocate, your geographic preference should be listed in this section.

Summary of Qualifications (not necessary if you have related work experience)

Brief description of skills obtained through school, work, hobbies, activities, etc. *as it relates to your career objective.*

Education (most recent listed first)

Name of College/University, Technical/Vocational, and/or High School, dates attended, degrees received, and major field. List significant information about related coursework relevant to the career objective. Also, include any relevant information about thesis, related research work, field experience, workshops and seminars, special skills, etc. (NOTE: May want to list this section after work experience section).

Work Experience (most recent listed first)

List position title, company or university and description of duties, tasks performed, responsibilities, accomplishments, and dates of employment. This section may indicate your full or part-time work experience, summer jobs, volunteer experiences, extended research/study projects and graduate assistantships.

Activities

Hobbies, organizations, memberships and other pertinent information.

Special Skills

If you have other skills or experiences significant to your career objective that may not be easily organized or included under another heading, you might want to include them here.

Personal Data

Optional

Reference

Furnished upon request

JANE R. RESUME
1234 Jobhunting Lane
Columbus, OH 43201
614/123-4567

OBJECTIVE: Sales/Marketing position in the Information processing industry with opportunity to solve customer problems with company products and services

EDUCATION: **THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**
B.S. in Business Administration, August 2001
Majors: Information Systems and Marketing

EXPERIENCE: **R.G. BARRY CORPORATION, Pickerington, Ohio**
Administrative Assistant, Human Resources, September 1996 – present

- Employed automation to improve office productivity and information processing using personal computer and word processor.
- Developed skills for high-level executive contact through reporting relationship to company officer.
- Administered retirement and profit sharing plans; computed and communicated benefit information to recipients; initiated benefits; communicated with retirees and solved their pension problems; interacted with plan trustees, actuaries, and auditors; and prepared semi-annual benefit eligibility reports.
- Prepared and delivered pension benefit presentation to plan personnel during plant shutdown.

ADRIA LABORATORIES, INC., Dublin, Ohio
Marketing Administrative Secretary, July 1993 – September 1996

- Developed system and instruction manual for automating unit/dollar product forecasts utilizing personal computer and trained secretaries to use system.
- Created manual and implemented procedure for quarterly plan of action and promotional material shipments to sales force.
- Designed and implemented system to monitor and control budgetary expenditures employing personal computer.

COLLEGE OF THE REDWOODS, Eureka, California
Senior Secretary, Academic Services, September 1990 – July 1993

- Organized and coordinated student registration programs and activities.
- Created newsletter and pamphlets designed to recruit and retain students and to promote counseling services.
- Selected, trained, scheduled, supervised, and evaluated office staff.

SKILLS: Programming ability in COBOL, Pascal and Assembler languages
Proficient in the use and application of personal computers and word processing

REFERENCES: Available upon request

Functional/Combination Resume

Functional Resume

In this non-linear format, your skills and achievements are emphasized. Your employment history is summarized or avoided all together. Your skills and previous relevant experience (including educational experience) are presented at the beginning of your resume. They are organized so the employer can see how your skills relate to the job position you are applying for. (In a chronological resume, employers may simply be looking at the jobs you have held previously to see if you have the experience that they are looking for.) It may take more effort to write a functional resume, but you are free to highlight your talents instead of your recent job experience.

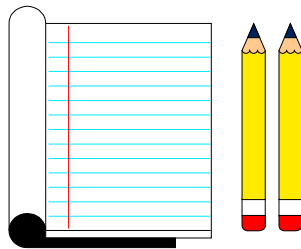
The functional resume can be particularly effective if you have held a number of similar positions; it will allow you to highlight your skills rather than itemize what might be a redundant looking job history.

But the functional resume may also raise concerns in some employers' minds as to whether you are withholding information. This doesn't mean that functional resumes are ignored or that they can't be effective. But an employer looking for a clear job history may be put off by the functional format, especially if you've used a functional resume to hide your inexperience or a long gap in your employment history.

If you don't have any problems with the reverse chronological format, use it instead. If you still like the idea of the Functional format, you may want to make it more acceptable by combining it with the chronological format and creating a combination resume.

Combination Resume

The combination resume is simply a functional resume with a brief employment history added. Skills and accomplishments are still listed first; the employment history follows. You need to reveal where you worked, when you worked, and what your job position was. This will ease an employer's worries about your experience, and it still allows you to emphasize your talents and how you would use them for the job you are applying for.



Format Example for a Functional or Combination Resume

Name

Home Address

Street Address
City, State and Zip
Area Code and Phone Number
E-mail Address
Number

Work Address

Place of Employment
Street Address
City, State and Zip
Area Code and Phone

Career Objective (be as specific as possible)

Brief description of the type of position for which you wish to be considered. If you are unwilling to relocate, your geographic preference should be indicated in this section.

Qualifications (or may want to use the heading Professional Skills or Related Skills)

List three or four functional skills in order of importance. The skill most related to your present job objective should be listed first. Within each skill area, stress the most directly related accomplishments, results produced and tasks performed that indicate that you do indeed possess each stated functional skill.

Employment History (or may want to use the heading Professional Experience or Work Experience)

List position title, organization, institution or company, and dates of employment

Education (or may want to use the heading Education and Training)

Name of College/University, Technical/Vocational School and/or High School, dates attended, degrees received, and major field. List significant information about completed coursework relevant to the career objective. Also, include any relevant information about thesis, related research work, field experiences, workshops and seminars, special skills, etc.

References

Furnished upon request

JOE A. RESUME
9876 Employers Circle
Columbus, Ohio 43201
614/456-7890

JOB OBJECTIVE

To obtain a position as Assistant Director for Conferences and Institutes at The Ohio State University.

**PROFESSIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS****Administrative/Management**

- Recruited and oriented speakers for 150 meetings with youth and adult audiences
- Negotiated and selected meeting sites, meals, and equipment for 31 conferences
- Determined needs of clientele through written and telephone surveys, personal contacts, and direct observation
- Recruited business and community leaders for advisory board
- Implemented working agendas with committees and organizations
- Initiated fund raising ideas and marketing approaches with local foundation
- Raised \$75,000 through fund raising projects

Communication/Public Relations

- Wrote and edited weekly news releases, brochures, and monthly calendar of events
- Promoted 11 banquets and numerous large group meetings
- Conducted numerous committee meetings by teleconference
- Designed copy to promote educational and fund raising events
- Responded to inquiries and provided information to various community agencies

Supervision

- Supervised up to five full-time staff members
- Guided staff members in goal setting
- Developed and conducted staff training
- Implemented written and verbal procedures to measure level of staff performance

**EMPLOYMENT
HISTORY****University of Iowa**

Cooperative Extension Service
 4-H Extension Specialist, 1997 – present
 County 4-H Agent, 1995 – 1997

Franklin County

Department of Parks and Recreation
 Recreation Leader, 1993 – 1995

**PROFESSIONAL
AFFILIATIONS****National Association of Extension 4-H Agent**

Events, Coordinator, 1997 Conference
 Senior Newsletter Editor, 1996 – 1997
 Hospitality Committee, 1996 Conference

EDUCATION

University of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia
 Bachelor of Science, June 1993
 Majors: Community Recreation and Home Economics

Resume Writing Tips



Keep it concise

Employers have lots to do, so don't make the mistake of asking them to read through an unnecessarily long resume. A long, wordy resume will put off someone who is already short on time. Resumes should be one page, if possible, and two if absolutely necessary to describe relevant work experience.

Make your words count

Your use of language is extremely important; you need to sell yourself to an employer quickly and efficiently. Address your potential employer's needs with a clearly written, compelling resume.

- Avoid large paragraphs (over six or seven lines).
- Use action verbs such as “developed”, “managed”, or “designed” to emphasize your accomplishments.
- Don't use declarative sentences like “I developed the...” or “I assisted in ...”; leave out the “I”.
- Avoid passive constructions, such as “was responsible for managing”. It's not only more efficient to say “Managed”, it's stronger and more active.
- As you edit your material, keep in mind your intended purpose. Eliminate unimportant details. Communicate your strongest skills first.
- When selecting a chronological format, use present tense in referring to activities in which you are currently engaged. Anything previous to current activity must be referred to in past tense. When using a functional resume format all of the accomplishments in the Qualifications section should be referred to in past tense.
- Do not include statements that you cannot document.

Make the most of your experience

Potential employers need to know what you have accomplished to have an idea of what you can do for them.

- Don't be vague. Describe things that can be measured objectively. Telling someone that you “improved customer satisfaction” doesn't say much. Telling them that you “cut costs by 20%, saving the university \$3800 for the fiscal year” does. Employers will feel more comfortable hiring you if they can verify your accomplishments.
- Be honest. There is a difference between making the most of your experience and exaggerating or falsifying it. An employer (if not immediately then during the interview process) can easily spot a falsified resume, and if it doesn't prevent you from getting the job, it can cost you the job later.

Don't neglect appearance

Your resume is the first impression you'll make on a potential employer, and a successful resume depends on more than what you say; how you say it counts as well.

- Check your resume for proper grammar and correct spelling – evidence of good communication skills and attention to detail. Nothing can ruin your chances of getting a job faster than submitting a resume filled with (easily preventable) mistakes.
- Avoid the use of slang, professional jargon and trite expressions. Do not use abbreviations (except for your middle initial). Employers who must try to interpret what you are saying probably will not bother.

- Make your resume easy on the eyes. Use normal margins (1” on the top and bottom, 1.25” on the sides) and don’t cram your text onto the page. Allow for some breathing room between the different sections. Avoid unusual or exotic font styles; use simple fonts with a professional look.
- Experiment with the arrangement of headlines, captions and text to find the best total appearance. Use capital letters, bold face type, and underlining to guide the reader’s eye.
- Be consistent in the use of visual techniques. For example, do not use indentation in one section and underscoring in the next.
- Use standard, non-textured, fine-grained paper in white or ivory. Keep in mind that textured and dark colored paper may not copy well when the employer makes copies to pass around to other participants in the hiring process.
- If you need to copy your resume, make sure your copies are clean and clear. A poor copier can ruin even the best looking resume. Use only copiers maintained for professional copying.

Target, Target, Target

Emphasize what you can do for an employer. Be specific. If you are going after more than one job opening, customize your resume accordingly. It helps to tailor your resume for a specific position. Remember to only include the experience that is relevant to the job.

Eliminate superfluous details

Unnecessary details can take up a lot of valuable space on your resume.

- Don’t mention personal characteristics such as age, height, marital status, and religious beliefs. This is information that employers may not legally solicit from you, and they would probably be more comfortable if you don’t volunteer it yourself.
- Never list expected salary on a resume.
- List your hobbies and interests only if you can relate them to the position you’re applying for. If you need room to describe your work experience, avoid this altogether.
- The phrase “References available upon request” should be left off if you need room to describe your work experience. Most employers assume you have references they may contact, and will request them if there is a need to do so.
- Avoid the “Objective” statement – your objective should be clearly articulated in your cover letter. If you do include an objective, be specific. Vague statements such as, “Looking to utilize my marketing skills” or “seeking a rewarding position” add nothing to a resume and may in fact make you appear insincere.



Electronic Resumes

An electronic resume is simply your resume in format that can be sent over e-mail or the Internet. The advantage to having an electronic resume is simple – you can respond via e-mail or the Web to job openings posted all over the world. No faxing or mailing necessary. More and more organizations are asking applicants to e-mail their resumes in reply to job advertisements.

If your resume is on a computer or floppy diskette, you already have it in electronic format; that’s not to say, however, that it’s in the most useful format. While it’s true that most e-mail systems can accommodate document attachments – be they in Word, WordPerfect, Quark or otherwise – it won’t be true that every person or organization to whom you’d like to send such a document is willing or able to receive it in that format. Plain text (also called ASCII Text or MS-DOS Text) is universally accessible, and in many cases required.

Avoid the Ten Most Common Resume Writing Mistakes Listed Below!



1. Too long (preferred length is one or two pages)
2. Disorganized – information is scattered around the page and hard to follow
3. Poorly typed and printed – hard to read and looks unprofessional
4. Overwritten – long paragraphs and sentences – takes too long to say too little
5. Too sparse – gives only bare essentials of dates and job titles
6. Not oriented for results – doesn't show what the candidate accomplished on the job
7. Too many irrelevancies – height, weight, sex, health, marital status are not needed on today's resumes
8. Misspellings, typographical errors, poor grammar – resumes should be carefully proofread before they are printed and mailed
9. Tries too hard – fancy typesetting and binders, photographs and exotic paper stocks distract from the clarity of the presentation
10. Misdirected – too many resumes arrive on employers' desks with little or no apparent connections to the organization – cover letters help avoid this

Interviewing

Preparing for a Job Interview

There are many steps to take to prepare for an interview. An organized candidate will make a strong impression on the employer and will feel confident in their interview. Follow these simple steps to becoming an experienced interviewer!



Research the Company and the Position

The more you know about the company and the job you are applying for, the better you will appear in the interview. An interviewer, will be impressed by your interest and motivation, and you will be able to explain what you can do for the company

Find out as much key information as you can about the company, its products and its customers. If possible, talk to people who work at the company. There may be other sources of information on the Web, especially if the company is publicly traded. Search for the following:

- Office locations
- Products and services
- Customers
- Competitors
- Philosophy
- History
- Recent news
- Financial information, including salary and stock

Prepare for the Actual Interview

- Practice your answers to the attached common questions. Likewise, prepare a list of questions to ask the employer. Most interviews follow this pattern: First, you answer questions about your experience and qualifications, then you ask questions about the job.
- Rehearse your interview with a friend. You should be able to convey all pertinent information about yourself in 15 minutes. Tape yourself to check your diction, speed, and body language.
- Prepare your interview materials before you leave. Bring several copies of your resume, a list of references, and if appropriate, any work samples. Make sure they are all up-to-date.
- Dress professionally and comfortably. When in doubt, dress conservatively.

For women:

A straightforward business suit is best

Wear sensible shoes

Be moderate with make-up and perfume

Wear simple jewelry

Hair and fingernails should be well groomed

For men:

A clean, ironed shirt and conservative tie are a must

A simple jacket or business suit is a good idea as well

Shoes should be polished

Face should be clean-; facial hair should be neatly trimmed

Use cologne or after-shave sparingly

- Bring a pen and notepad to jot down any information you may need to remember.

Types of Job Interviews

There are different types of job interviews you may participate in during the hiring process. Here are the major ones and tips on how to handle them.



Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are merely screening interviews meant to eliminate poorly qualified candidates so only a few are left for personal interviews. You might be called out of the blue, or a telephone call to check on your resume might turn into an interview. Your mission is to be invited for a personal face-to-face interview. Some tips for telephone interviews:

- Keep your resume and any notes you have already taken about the company handy.
- Eliminate any background noise – background noise can be very distracting and imply that you are disorganized.
- Make sure you have a notepad and pen so you can jot down notes and any questions you would like to ask at the end of the interview.
- Be prepared to think on your feet.
- Avoid salary issues. If you are asked how much money you would expect, try to avoid the issue by using a delaying statement or giving a broad range. If they tell you the salary range and ask you if it is acceptable, answer honestly.
- Push for a face-to-face meeting. Sell yourself by closing with something like, “I am very interested in exploring the possibility of working with your company. I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you in person so we can both better evaluate each other.”

Screening Interview

A screening interview, similar to a telephone interview, is meant to weed out unqualified candidates. Providing facts about your skills is more important than establishing rapport. Interviewers will work from an outline of points they want to cover, looking for inconsistencies in your resume and challenging your qualifications. Screening interviews usually focus on your credentials (verify education, work history, etc.)

One-on-One Interview (Face-to-Face interview)

In a one-on-one interview, it has been established that you have the skills and education necessary for the position. The interviewer wants to see if you will “fit in” with the company and how your skills will complement the rest of the department. Your goal in a one-on-one interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer and demonstrate to them how your qualifications will benefit the company. Provide specific example of your past performance.

Committee/Group/Panel Interview

Committee interviews are a common practice. You will face several members of the company/organization who have say in whether you are hired. When answering questions from several people speak directly to the person asking the question; it is not necessary to answer to the group. In some committee interviews, you may be asked to demonstrate your problem-solving skills. The committee will outline a situation and ask you to formulate a plan that deals with the problem. You don’t have to come

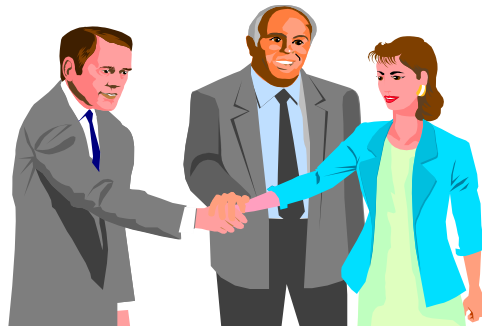
up with the ultimate solution. The interviewers are looking for how you apply your knowledge and skills to a real-life situation.

Multiple Interviews

Typically an organization or company will have you meet with more than one person in the department. Although your interviews will be conducted one-on-one, you will meet with many different people throughout the day. Most savvy interviewers will not ask you the same question(s) repeatedly, however there are times when interviewers do overlap their questions. They generally are looking for two things; First, consistency in your answers. If you provide both interviewers with the same examples and information, make sure you are honest and consistent. Second, some interviewers want to confirm a particular skill. They may ask you the same question in hopes that you will provide a second example of that skill.

Lunch Interviews

The same rules apply in lunch interviews as in those held at the office. The setting may be more casual, but remember it is a business lunch and you are being watched carefully. Use the lunch interview to develop common ground with your interviewer. Follow his or her lead in both selection of food and in etiquette. Also, don't automatically salt and/or pepper your meal before tasting it. An interviewer might view you as one that jumps to assumptions or conclusions without having all the facts.



Making a Good Impression

Before the interview:



- ❑ Be on time. Being on time (actually you should arrive 15 minutes prior to the start of your interview) is usually interpreted by the interviewer as evidence of your commitment, dependability, and professionalism.
- ❑ Be positive and try to make others feel comfortable. Show openness by leaning into a greeting with a firm handshake and smile. Don't make negative comments about current or former employers.
- ❑ Relax. Think of the interview as a conversation, a chance to meet with someone new and tell them about yourself. Remember that the interviewer is just as nervous about making a good impression on you. They are trying to sell you on the position and the company.

During the interview:

- ❑ Show self-confidence. Do not be modest or shy. Show them your strengths. Make eye contact with the interviewer and answer their questions in a clear voice. Try to establish rapport from the beginning.
- ❑ Remember to listen. Communication is a two-way street. If you are talking too much, you will probably miss cues concerning what the interviewer feels is important.
- ❑ Reflect before answering a difficult question. It is okay to take 20 seconds to think of a relevant, thoughtful example. Don't show emotion if you can't think of something right away. Interviewers want examples with meaning rather than the first irrelevant example you come up with. If after some time you still are unable to come up with an applicable example, ask the interviewer if you can come back to the question later in the interview. Hopefully as you continue your discussion, you will think of an example for the previous question.
- ❑ If a question seems unclear to you, ask the interviewer to clarify the question. For example, "Just to clarify, you are looking for an example of...".
- ❑ If you are unsure how to answer a question, you might reply with another question. For example, if the interviewer asks you what salary you expect, try answering by saying, "That is a good question. What are you planning to pay your best candidate?"
- ❑ When it is your turn, ask the questions you have prepared in advanced. These should cover any information about the company and job position you could not find in your own research.
- ❑ Do not ask questions that raise red flags. Too many questions about vacation and/or sick leave may lead the interviewer to believe that you are more interested in taking time off than working. If you do ask these questions, make sure the interviewer understands why you are asking these questions.
- ❑ Show your interest in the position. Display your initiative by talking about what you could do which would benefit the company, and by giving specific details of how you have performed these tasks in the past.

- ❑ Avoid negative body language. An interviewer wants to see how well you react under pressure. Avoid these signs of nervousness and tension:
 - Frequently touching your mouth
 - Faking a cough to think about the answer to a question
 - Gnawing on your lip
 - Picking your fingernails
 - Swinging your foot or leg/wiggling in your seat
 - Tight or forced smile
 - Folding or crossing your arms
 - Slouching
 - Avoiding eye contact
 - Picking at invisible bits of lint



After the Interview



- ❑ End the interview with a handshake and thank the interviewer for their time. Reiterate your interest in the position and your qualifications. Ask if you can telephone in a few days to check on the status of your application. If they offer to contact you, politely ask when you should expect the call.
- ❑ Send a Thank You letter (not note) immediately after your interview. It will serve as a reminder to the interviewer concerning your appropriateness for the position, so feel free to mention any topics discussed during the interview. If the job contact was made through the Internet or e-mail, send an e-mail thank you note immediately after the interview, then mail a second letter by post timed to arrive the week before the hiring decision will be made. The letter should be set-up as follows:
 - Begin by thanking the interviewer and saying how much you enjoyed meeting with him or her.
 - Tell the interviewer how excited you are by the prospect of working in the target position at this particular company.
 - Review interview highlights and selling points.
 - Establish closure; reiterate your understanding of when you expect to hear from the employer again.
- ❑ Follow up with a phone call if you are not contacted within a week of when the interviewer indicated you would be.

Joanne Jobhunter
1234 Main Street
Columbus, OH 43201
614/123-4562
E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Ms. Emily Employer
Personnel Manager
The Ohio State University
2231 North High Street
Columbus, OH 43201

Dear Ms. Employer:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the position of assistant sales manager. I was greatly impressed by the intelligence and energy of everyone with whom I spoke at your offices, and I was very grateful for the warm reception and the sincere interest shown in me.

The prospect of working at The Ohio State University is very exciting. You have forged a great team and I would be thrilled to become a part of it.

I was delighted by our conversation, particularly by the prospect of creating a special incentive program. As I mentioned, I was instrumental in designing just such a program for Smith Widget, which resulted in a 26 percent increase in order volume within two quarters after its introduction. That experience taught me a great deal, which I hope I will have the opportunity to apply at The Ohio State University.

Thank you again for the interview. I look forward to hearing from you, as you mentioned, before the end of the month.

Sincerely,

Joanne Jobhunter

Common Job Interview Questions

By practicing common interview questions, you'll become more familiar with your own qualifications and will be well prepared to demonstrate how you can benefit an employer. Think about how you would answer the following questions:

- “Tell me about yourself”
- “Why do you want to work here?” or “What about our company interests you?”
- “Why did you leave your last job?”
- “What are your best skills?”
- “What is your major weakness?”
- “Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?”
- “What are your career goals?” or “What are your future plans?”
- “What salary are you expecting?”
- “What have I forgotten to ask?” or “What have we not talked about that you might like to add?”

Many employers like Ohio State have gone to a behavioral based interview style. The questions you will be asked by an interviewer will require you to provide real-life examples of what you have done in the past. Employers are looking for specific examples of how you performed in the past. Frame your answers in the context of situation (describe the situation); action (what action(s) did you take); and result (what was the outcome). Listed below are some additional questions you may want to think about prior to your interview.

Your Qualifications

- What can you do for us that someone else can't do?
- What qualifications do you have that relate to the position?
- What new skills or capabilities have you developed recently?
- Give me an example from a previous job where you've shown initiative.
- What have been your greatest accomplishments recently?
- What is important to you in a job?
- What motivates you in your work?
- What have you been doing since your last job?
- What qualities do you find important in a co-worker?

Your Career Goals

- What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- How will you judge yourself successful? How will you achieve success?
- What type of position are you interested in?
- How will this job fit in your career plans?
- What do you expect from this job?
- Do you have a location preference?
- When could you start?

Your Work Experience

- What have you learned from your past jobs?
- What were your biggest responsibilities?
- How does your past experience and/or skills relate to this position?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?

Your Education

- How do you think your education has prepared you for this position?
- What were your favorite classes/activities at school?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Do you plan to continue your education?

Vital Questions to Ask in an Interview

Applicants should be prepared to ask relevant questions at the end of each interview. This is an important opportunity for you to learn more about the employer and the position, and for the employer to further evaluate you as a job candidate. The information received in an interview will assist you in making an intelligent career choice.

Prepare at least five good questions. Although you may not have time to ask all of them, you should at least be prepared to ask relevant questions during the interview. Your questions should indicate your interest and that you have read and thought about the employer and the position. For example, you might start with, “I read in Business First...”.

Don’t ask questions that raise warning flags. For example, asking, “Would I really have to work weekends?” implies that you are not available for weekend assignments. If you are available, then rephrase your question in a more positive light.

Clarify. It’s okay to ask a question to clarify something the interviewer said. Just make sure you are listening. There is a difference between asking someone to clarify a specific point and asking someone to re-explain an entire subject. Listed below are sample questions to ask during the interview.

1. What are the department’s/company’s strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
2. How important does upper management (your supervisor) consider the functions of this department?
3. Are there any weaknesses in the department that you are working on improving? What is the organization’s plan (mission) for the next five years and how does this department fit in?
4. Could you explain the organizational structure to me? (What is the reporting structure in this department? What are acceptable channels of communication? Ask for an organizational chart)
5. How will my performance be measured? By whom?
6. What are the day-to-day responsibilities of the job?
7. Could you describe your management style and the type of employee who works well with you?
8. What are some of the skills and abilities you see as necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
9. What is the company’s policy on providing seminars and workshops so employees can keep up with or acquire new skills?
10. Are there any restraints or cutbacks planned that would decrease the budget?
11. What particular computer equipment and software do you use?
12. What is your training/orientation process like?

Common Job Interview Mistakes



- Arrive late for the interview.
- Indicate you are late because the directions you were given were not good.
- Look disheveled and inappropriately dressed.
- Slouch in your seat.
- Don't maintain good eye contact with the interviewer.
- Do your company research at the interview by asking, "What do you do here?"
- Don't make a connection between your skills and the needs of the employer.
- Brag about how great you are, but neglect to cite evidence of your accomplishments.
- Respond in an unfocused, disorganized, and rambling manner.
- Remain low-key and display no enthusiasm for the job.
- Answer most questions with simple "yes" or "no" answers.
- Appear desperate for a job – any job!
- Call the interviewer by their first name or worse yet – the wrong name.
- Give memorized responses, forgetting parts in the process.
- Badmouth your current or former employer.
- Ask, "How am I doing? Are you going to hire me?"
- Blurt out in the beginning of the interview, "I need to make xxxxxx amount of money. I hope this job pays at least that much!"
- When asked, "Do you have any questions?" reply "No".