

A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE: A CRASH COURSE IN CAREER SEEKING

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From research to resumes, strategy to specifications, integration to interviews, the entire process of obtaining your ideal job or internship is covered in this book. Learn about researching companies, managing your online image, how to cast yourself in terms of accomplishments, using the $A = V + D + O$ formula, getting your resume out there and customizing it to get a better response, and all the tricks to successful interviews. Designed especially for the undergraduate or graduate student, this guide covers a lot of material unique to the student seeking process. So, read on and learn all the things you've never heard before in a career seeking guide!

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INTRODUCTION

Most resume guides treat the resume as the “ultimate piece of paper” and focus almost exclusively on how to hone this single sheet to perfection. In this guide, however, I’m going to treat the resume as what it is: just one piece of a large concerted advertising campaign designed to get you your ideal job or internship. No matter how well you perfect your resume, it will only lead you to success if you do the research to target it, spend the time to market it, and carry through on personal appearances.

The job seeking process is like a large political campaign, and you are one of the candidates. The resume is your campaign advertisement, but as you know from any election, ads just tell the facts (and only a carefully-selected set of them at that), with personality and the in-person interview playing a much larger role in most people’s minds. Even if you don’t have a lot of previous work experience, remember that an election is not always won purely on experience: sometimes character and personality can take the prize at the end of the day.

This guide is broken into six sections, which take you through the entire job-seeking process from start to finish. You’ll find a brief description of each section below, but there is a tremendous amount of material crammed into this guide, so I would recommend that you read each section completely to get the most out of the content here. I wish everyone the very best of luck in their job or internship hunt and I hope this guide provides you with a lot of valuable advice. Just remember, the most important part of the process is to always think positive. Just like the Little Engine That Could, if you put your mind to it and always keep a positive attitude on the process, you will overcome the obstacles placed in your path and ultimately be successful in your search.

Research

Research forms the backbone of the successful job-seeking process. You must research companies you are applying to, research possible contacts to send your resume to, and even research other resumes to discover how your competition is portraying themselves. This section will focus on the basics of research and give you some helpful tips and techniques.

Preparing for the Seeking Process

There’s a lot to be done before you hand out your first resume, including managing your *online image*. Do you really want a potential employer thumbing through all of those photos on Facebook or reading drunken wall posts? Yes, recruiters *do* rely on Facebook,

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MySpace, and other social networking sites to get a better feel for the *other side* of candidates. The preparation process also involves coming up with your *core competencies* and deciding the overall strategy for how you portray your skills and experiences to potential employers. Work through this section to come up with your strengths and how to sell them.

Writing the Resume

Once you've got a handle on your online image and come up with a strategy of how to best tailor your resume around your unique strengths, it's time to actually write the resume itself. Learn all about the do's and don'ts of successful resume writing, including the magic *ACCOMPLISHMENT = Action Verb + What You Did + What the Outcome Was* formula.

Reaching Out / Advertising Yourself

Remember, a resume isn't a ticket to a new job; it's just a paper advertisement that highlights your ideal candidacy for that position. Making the perfect resume is just half the battle. You must relentlessly get that resume in front of potential employers. If you belong to various student societies on campus, many have resume books they offer recruiters, and some departments have their own resume books as well. Submit your resume to these databases to maximize the chances of a recruiter coming across it. Think of this process like trying to sublet your apartment: you have to put a LOT of advertising out there, talk with friends and contacts, and "get the word out" to get your name in front of as many people as possible. This section focuses in greater detail on this process and the various outlets available to you. Cover letters, thank-you letters and other important auxiliary correspondence are also covered here.

The Interview

If all goes well, your research, customized resume and advertising have paid off and you've been invited to an interview with a company! What should you do to prepare for the interview, and what can you expect? Learn the answers to these questions, along with tips for figuring out what kind of interviewer you have and how to react (or not react) in certain interview situations.

Wrap Up

A few closing remarks about the job-seeking process, along with a few things to avoid, and a short section on video resumes.

SECTION 1: RESEARCH

RESEARCHING COMPANIES

Research is a critical piece of the job search process and you will need to spend a fair amount of time researching the companies you are applying to. There are three primary areas you will focus your research on:

- **Researching Possible Contacts.** As mentioned later in this guide, if you are applying to a company whose researchers publish in various academic journals, search those journals for possible contacts. Many companies list contacts on their web site for their specific divisions, or have white papers or project pages about their larger initiatives, with a list of project personnel. If you contact the manager of a particular project in a company and emphasize that your resume makes you an ideal candidate for an internship on that project, you are much more likely to be noticed than an anonymous resume sent to the human resources department. Sometimes, even if no internships are available, a manager might create a position for an especially promising individual.
- **Researching Company Divisions and Product Lines.** Most companies expect that you walk into an interview with a basic understanding of what the company does, its major organizational divisions, and its larger product lines. This is especially true when applying for a fulltime position. You don't need to know every detail about a company, but if you are applying to a marketing company and it has a separate division that does movie trailer work and you are interested in that area, you should walk into the interview knowing everything you can about that division. Most of the information you will need to gather at this stage comes from a company's website, so you won't have to look far, but you should take your time and read through as much as you can. It may also help you decide whether this company is really right for you.
- **Researching an Industry.** Some of you may already have your dream companies in mind, but what if they don't have any available positions, or if you aren't quite sure yet? Maybe there's a smaller company out there that you've never heard of that would be an even better fit for your particular personality and skillset? Industry research refers to compiling a list of companies in your discipline, along with key demographic information about how close of a fit you think they would be to what you are looking for. A good start here is to search job databases like Monster.com and see what companies are advertising for people in your major. For the intrepid, there are also many specialty publications like Hoovers™ that the UIUC Library subscribes to and are available for searching online that list companies by industry, together with key vital statistics (maybe you prefer a smaller company) and contact information. Industry research can also help you uncover companies that don't recruit on your particular campus. Just because a particular company doesn't recruit on your campus doesn't mean they don't accept people from your school. If there is a company you are

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interested in, check their website for internship and job openings and send an email or letter to a recruiter with your resume.

RESEARCHING RESUMES

Most of the research you will do for job seeking is related to learning more about companies, but you can also learn a lot by researching what your competition lists in their resumes and what kinds of skills the company you are applying to is looking for.

Advertisements

If you are applying to a particular advertisement, then you will already be doing some amount of customization on your resume to integrate specific keywords and language from the ad. However, a single ad gives you only a limited amount of information, much like a single newspaper issue only gives you a small snapshot of what happened that week. Most companies have job board sections of their websites, so log on and take a look around at what other kinds of ads they have. Also search large job boards like Monster.com and other databases where you can find many different advertisements by that company. Oftentimes you will find trends in a company's ads, such as a recurring emphasis on time management, or candidates with international experience. While these may be present in your ad as well, knowing that they appear in multiple ads from this company lets you know that those are *particularly important* qualifications for that company, and so you should emphasize them especially strongly in your resume. Even if the only advertisements you can find are for fulltime positions and you are applying for an internship, the same rules apply. Internships are treated by most companies as gateways to fulltime positions, so the more you can cast yourself in the light of what they are looking for in fulltime positions, the stronger your resume will be in their eyes.

The Competition

In the introduction to this guide, I told you that the job search process is much like a political campaign. The big difference is that in a campaign, you know who the other candidates are and what they are touting as their major selling points. In the job-seeking arena, however, you are on your own and flying blind. Instead of touting your core values and reacting/countering your competition's claims, you have to focus exclusively on emphasizing your strengths to win over your audience.

Nevertheless, there is much to be learned through the power of internet search engines. In this day and age, many students and professionals alike post their resumes online to their websites, where they are indexed by the major search engines. Using Google, you can take a look through these resumes and get some ideas of how people with possibly similar experiences and skillsets cast themselves.

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You can find other resumes at your school by typing “site:uiuc.edu resume” into Google. This will return every document on any site that ends with “uiuc.edu” (such as NetFiles) that has the word “resume” in it. Of course, this will also return countless resume-help web sites like the UI Career Center, but scroll through the results and you’ll find plenty of actual people’s resumes. Try adding keywords for your major or specific research areas like “site:uiuc.edu resume computer science” or “site:uiuc.edu resume stm”. You might have to search through the results a bit to find some resumes, but this can help you get a feel for what people at this university are putting in their resumes.

Drop the “site:uiuc.edu” to get a broader feel for what people outside the UI are listing on their resumes. Play around with different combinations of keywords to target resumes listing certain keywords. Of course, your resume is your chance to be unique and stand out from the crowd, so you don’t want to just copy phrases from other people’s resumes, but it can give you ideas of how to express certain skills or experiences, as well as give you an idea of what some of your competition are listing on their resumes.

SECTION 2: PREPARING TO SEEK

IDENTIFYING YOUR “CORE COMPETENCIES”

The first step on the journey to your perfect job or internship is to identify your strengths. Known in industry jargon as “core competencies”, these are the traits that you will want to emphasize to potential employers. Perhaps you are good at rallying people together and acting as a team leader, or maybe you are really good at creative problem solving under pressure. Whatever your strengths are, it’s important that you come up with a list of your top attributes to write on that resume.

I want you to pause for a moment as you’re reading this guide and take out a piece of blank paper. Now, write down as many positive things about your skills, personality, and character that you can think of. Are you a people person? Are you good under pressure? Don’t worry about putting them in order for the moment, just get them all written down. Give a sheet of paper to a couple of close friends and ask them to do the same. Sometimes we have a very different idea of our strengths than our friends do and they may identify traits that we hadn’t really thought about. Now, go back over that list and come up with 10 or 20 that you think are your strongest traits. Those are your *core competencies*.

Now, I want you to get out a separate sheet of paper and write down all of the jobs you’ve ever had, no matter how small. They don’t need to be paid jobs, so you should write down everything from a fulltime job at a company related to your interest area to volunteer work with a local school. Put down anything and everything that shows experience doing *something*. Next to each job, write down as much detail as you can remember about what you did at that job. Make sure to include even the smallest of tasks. Perhaps you tutored math to high schoolers, but as part of that, you also sat in

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class with them and took notes. Make sure that you write down that you took notes for them, as you might discover that perhaps this is a trend in the jobs you've had and that you may be very good with detail, an important skill for most employers.

Finally, I want you to take these two lists and use them to summarize each of your job experiences in terms of your core competencies. Pick the elements from all of those jobs/internships/volunteerships/etc that really encapsulate your best skills and characteristics. In the next section we'll look at how to write these on your resume to get the greatest effect.

MANAGING YOUR ONLINE IMAGE

To answer the question that all of you are probably wondering at this moment: **YES, COMPANIES REALLY DO LOOK AT FACEBOOK.** In fact, online background checks are a standard part of many companies' hiring process and it's imperative that long before you begin handing out resumes you take a determined look at your *online image*.

Most companies do extensive online research on potential candidates, searching their names online, checking social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, and (especially for fulltime positions in some fields) conducting criminal background checks. There are even independent contract companies that specialize in doing social network site checks of candidates for companies. Many college students these days have personal websites where they share a plethora of information about themselves and students often ask whether that URL should be listed on their resume. The short answer to this is that if your website contains any personal information *whatsoever*, including photographs, books or movies you like, political candidates you support, etc, *don't include it on your resume*. Only a website that is 100% professional and expands upon your resume should be included. If you are a graduate student or research-intensive undergraduate and have an extensive list of publications or presentations that you include on your website, or profiles of projects you have worked on, including your URL on your resume can be an excellent way of getting this extra information in front of a recruiter.

Before beginning the job or internship-seeking odyssey, lock down any and all personal information that you can find about yourself. Search for your name on Google, Facebook, MySpace, and other sites. Even if you haven't personally uploaded any incriminating photos onto Facebook, a friend may have, and tagged them with your name, so detag those images. Lock your Facebook profile so that only friends can see your information, and that *includes* locking your friends list so that outsiders cannot do a "View Friends" on your profile. Even if your profile is locked, but a recruiter views your friends list and finds a long list of a hundred profile photos of people binge drinking or engaged in other questionable activities, they are likely to group you into that setting and potentially look upon your resume less-favorably. This process can take a substantial amount of time, especially if you use social networking very heavily for communication, so I would advise beginning at least a month or two before you start handing out resumes.

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I really cannot emphasize enough how important this step of the process is, or how many promising internship or job candidates lost their chance at their dream position because of an unflattering Facebook profile.

SECTION 3: THE RESUME

DEFINITIONS

Before we really delve into the resume-writing process, it is important that you understand a few basic definitions. Having a better grasp of the differences between these key topics will make it easier for you as you try and represent yourself in the single page of your resume.

A Vita versus a Resume

One of the first distinctions you must have clear is the difference between a *vita* and a *resume*. You've probably heard the term *vita* thrown around before or come across a professor's 10-page publication list on his or her website. A *vita* is essentially the complete opposite of a resume. Instead of carefully hand-selecting the most important elements of your experience and condensing them onto a single page, a *vita* is intended to be an exhaustive list of every related job you've ever had, every award you've ever won, and every publication or presentation you've ever authored. You might think of it as a "professional work autobiography" and its use is almost exclusively limited to the academic domain. Length is no issue with *vitas* and it is not uncommon to see *vitas* of 25 pages or more for established long-term faculty. A resume, on the other hand, is intended to be a short one-page "highlights" sheet that lists your brightest points. A large portion of the art that goes into making a resume is figuring out how to cram all of those incredible skills and experiences that define you into just a single sheet of paper.

SKEing: "Skills" versus "Knowledge" versus "Experience".

An important mistake that many job-seekers make on their resumes is confusing *skills*, *knowledge*, and *experience*. These are three very different concepts, and it is important that you understand how to separate them to get the greatest impact out of your resume.

- **Skills.** Skills are your innate or learned talents that you may or may not have applied in a previous job. Many skills are innate or personality-based. Perhaps you are really good at walking into a room and meeting everyone there. That is a skill that makes you very good at networking. Even if your job doesn't require networking as part of your everyday duties, being good at meeting people means you are likely to play well as part of a team, which is very important in the increasingly-globalized workforce. You may not have always used your skills. Perhaps you are a computer science major, but you are very good at artistic

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- design. That could prepare you for user interface design, making you an even more attractive candidate to some companies, even if you've never applied those skills in a previous job. Sometimes you may not even realize you have a particular skill. Maybe you always keep your cool under pressure, no matter how grave the situation. That is a very important part of being a leader.
- **Knowledge.** Knowledge refers to the assemblage of information you have learned over time. As a university student, you are gaining a tremendous amount of knowledge through your courses, opportunities available to you on campus, and, of course, your internships and other jobs. You may not have applied this knowledge before (especially if you are a freshman or sophomore who hasn't had any internships yet), but the more knowledge you accumulate, the greater your potential in the eyes of a recruiter. Of course, it is important that you have the necessary skills and motivation to be able to effectively *apply* that knowledge.
 - **Experience.** Experience is the set of working situations you have been through in which you have *applied* the first two concepts. Skills and knowledge combine to define your *potential*, but not everyone is able to live up to their potential, and so it is your experience that separates you in the eyes of a recruiter as someone who has a track record of execution. This is often one of the most crucial differentiators when you enter the workforce, as it shows that you not only have the necessary skills and knowledge, but that you have been successful in *applying* them to real-world situations. A company recruiter who sees two resumes, one with a smorgasbord of classes relating to that company's industries, and another with summer internships at companies in those areas, is much more likely to pick the one with the internships, because that candidate has experience applying that classroom knowledge to the real world. There is a big jump from simply learning something in class to its real-life application, and experience sums up all of that *hands-on* learning that occurs when you enter the workforce.

"Accomplishments" versus "Requirements"

Resumes are all about what you have *accomplished*, and recruiters want to see what you have done in all of your experiences, not read a paragraph from the job description of your internship. This is an important distinction: when writing about previous work experience, don't write about what your job duties were, but rather how *you* met or exceeded those expectations. Perhaps you were an intern assigned to reviewing copyedit for a marketing plan, but you ended up contributing so much that you were made a part of the actual design team. That would be something to emphasize front and center in your description of that job experience.

Cast all of your experiences in terms of accomplishments. Don't put on your resume "Responsibilities included giving instructions to 10 other interns", as that simply repeats the duties you were assigned as part of that job, without saying whether you were actually successful in doing all of those things. A CEO could well list "Had to make company more profitable each year" on his or her resume, but that doesn't give any clue on whether she was actually successful at it. Instead, always cast your previous experience

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in terms of *what you actually accomplished*. Emphasize the positive aspects and those key traits like leadership. While both of the statements below describe the same internship, which sounds better?

- *Responsibilities included giving instructions to 10 other interns*
- *Team leader overseeing 10 other interns, supervised day-to-day progress, task assignment, and time management for group.*

THE BASICS

Resumes are all about standing out from the crowd, but you have to stand out in a GOOD way! A resume is a formal business document and as such it should conform to the standards for such materials, which means plain, simple, elegant presentation. There is a lot to know about you, and on your resume you get to select the best parts, just like introducing yourself to someone new! Since a resume is a very short document, it's important that each word be very carefully selected to have maximum impact on your audience (the recruiter). Two people with the exact same experiences and skillsets can have very different job-seeking experiences if one has a very clean, elegant, and strategic resume that highlights her skills, while the other has a mishmash of bulleted lines. Resumes have several required components, but you get a lot of flexibility in how you compile and present that information, and that's your opportunity to shine and emphasize what *you* think are the most important things for a recruiter to see.

General Stylistic Tips

- **Layout and Formatting.** Only in the creative disciplines (art and design, architecture, etc) should your resume act like a portfolio and reflect your inner artist. Resumes should be simple, formal, and elegant. Print them on standard white paper (avoid colored or scented paper and avoid cardstock). Even though a resume printed on neon yellow cardstock with a strong scent of pine will certainly stand out in a pile of resumes, a recruiter is likely to think that you spent more time on presentation than content and will probably discard the resume. In fact, to some recruiters, fancy paper may be seen as the candidate believing his resume cannot stand on its own and hence needing to "game" the system to get it noticed. Larger companies tend to scan incoming resumes using large document scanners to load them into their internal resume databases, and cardstock can often jam in those scanners, resulting in your resume simply being discarded. Similarly, scented papers, or those with unusual colors or textures can also scan poorly.
- **Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation.** Typographical and grammatical errors have placed many a resume on the fast track to the trash can. Keep in mind that "Spell Check" and "Grammar Check" only go so far in catching mistakes, and you really need to have another pair of eyes go over your resume and look for any problems. As a recruiter, even a single mistake on a resume gives me pause about this person's attention to detail. After all, if they can't produce a single page with

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correct spelling and grammar, especially one this important to their career, how are they going to do in a day-to-day office setting?

- **Avoid Abbreviations.** Avoid any and all abbreviations, even those of your institution. A recruiter at a job fair on campus might guess that “UIUC” stands for “University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign”, but if that resume gets uploaded into a resume database back at the office and is found by another recruiter in the company, the acronym will hold little meaning. Similarly, classes, terminology, etc, should all be spelled out. If a company is extremely familiar with a particular technology (such as STM for a materials engineering firm, or CAD for a design firm), it *may* be ok to use acronyms when space is at a premium, but always keep in mind that not everyone is going to know those acronyms and sometimes acronyms have very different meanings to different companies in different industries.
- **Pick a Font and Stick with It.** Your entire resume should be in a single font and size. Times New Roman at 11 or 12 point, and Arial at 10 or 11 point are good choices. Avoid *artsy* fonts, as those can be hard for a human to read and are completely illegible to the automated resume scanning systems. Don't change fonts or text size in different sections of your resume, everything should be uniform across the entire document. The only piece of text on the entire resume that should be a different size is your name and address at the top of the page.
- **Bold Important Elements.** Bolding is a good way to draw attention to particular skills or positions in your resume. In your list of awards, you might bold the name of the award, with the short descriptive text after each award in standard formatting.
- **Reverse Chronological Order.** Each section of your resume should be in reverse-chronological order. This means that jobs you have held should be ordered with the most recent first, descending down the page to the oldest. This helps recruiters see your most recent job experience first, since most students progress through their college years by landing more and more prestigious jobs and internships. Awards, leadership, and other sections should also all be in reverse chronological order.
- **Section Formatting.** Just as you should keep the overall format and fonts the same across the entire document, you should follow the same indenting and formatting conventions within each section. If your experience section is a list of organizations with an indented list of positions you held at that organization under each, then you should maintain that formatting for all entries in the experience section. It is confusing to have one entry that is different and lists a position up top and the name of the company indented underneath. It can be ok to change your layout between major sections like Experience and Awards if you feel you can better emphasize one section using a different style, but try to maintain consistency across a resume and always keep styles the same *within* a section.

THE NAME AND ADDRESS SECTION

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The very top of your resume should be your name and contact information. Your name should be large and bold, but should still be in the same font (Times New Roman or Arial) as the rest of the resume. This is the only text that should be in a different size than anything else on the page. You should list both your on-campus and home contact information (including telephone numbers and email addresses). A recruiter might not contact you until the summer or might find an older resume of yours from a corporate resume database, so having home contact information means that he or she can still get in touch with you, even if you have moved to a new location on campus or are home for the summer.

SUMMARY AND MISSION STATEMENTS

You'll see a lot of discussion about the *Summary Statement* and the *Mission Statement* (also known as the *Objective* or *Goal Statement*) on career websites. Some disciplines absolutely expect to see one or both of these at the top of resumes (especially business-related industries), while it is optional in others. If present, this will appear immediately under your name/address information, at the top of the resume ahead of all other sections. The mission statement should appear before the summary statement if both are used. The purpose of the summary statement is to give you three or four sentences to briefly sum up your skills, knowledge, and experience thus far and emphasize one or more pieces of your career. Most online resume databases don't allow a second attachment for a cover letter, so your summary statement becomes your cover-letter-in-miniature in those cases.

Often called the "sell window" or your "branding statement", your summary statement can be one of the most important parts of your resume, summarizing the entire document in a few sentences. If you've done three internships at a particular company, with increasing levels of responsibility, your summary statement might note "Extensive coursework in process optimization, with three years of internships applying studies to product assembly lines, with increasing responsibility from process documentation to line oversight of 10 people." All of that information is contained in your resume, scattered across your education and work experience sections, but in your summary statement, it is all there for the recruiter to see at a glance, summarized in the best possible light. Not everyone includes a summary statement, so this can also help you stand out.

Another benefit of the summary statement is that, unlike the rest of your resume, it is relatively free-form: there is no proscribed structure or format it has to follow. You basically get a few free sentences to put the hardest sell you can on your resume. It is also your best opportunity to incorporate industry or position-specific keywords (such as when replying to an advertisement). Employers like to see an evolution of your skills and responsibility over time and your summary statement is an ideal place for you to portray your resume as such.

Having a mission statement is a more dangerous proposition for non-tailored resumes. If you are customizing your resume for each company you are applying to, the mission statement can be a great way to summarize those sections of your cover letter that say

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why you think *that particular company* is the best fit for you (while the summary statement says why *you* are the best candidate for that company). Be very specific here, perhaps you are looking “To extend my extensive coursework in specialized product marketing to the medical industry with an internship at a leading products company with a reputation for innovative marketing strategies.” Of course, just as cover letters have to be carefully-tailored for each company, it is very hard to make a generic mission statement that will work for every company you are applying for. In fact, a mission statement can be a liability if you plan on handing your resume to many different companies without significant customization. A recruiter can easily spot a generic statement and it may not translate well to that particular company’s product lines or way of doing business. You also have to be very careful about over-customization. If your objective statement says you are looking for a position as a geologist, but the company only has openings for a geophysicist at this time, it may not consider you for the other position. On the other hand, if you just have a summary statement and it notes that you have extensive coursework in geophysics, then even if they don’t have the position you are looking for, they might take note of your coursework experience and suggest that you apply for their geophysicist position. In other words, a mission statement can be a powerful tool on a customized resume to really drive home your match with that company. On the other hand, even if you are after a particular position, an overly-tailored mission statement can harm your chances of getting a different position in that company if you don’t get the original one.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Your work experience is one of the most important parts of your resume, as it spells out to a potential employer how much experience you’ve had translating your knowledge and skills into real life situations. It also gives that company a set of “ground truths” for evaluating your capability. If you’ve had internships at several major firms, that strongly suggests to a recruiter that you really are as good as your resume says, or, conversely, that even if your resume appears weak, the fact that those companies hired you suggests that there is more to you than your resume reveals. If you have a summary and/or mission statement, your work experience should appear immediately beneath those sections, otherwise it should be the top section of your resume. Rather than calling this section “Work Experience”, it is often more useful to simply title it “Experience” on your resume, so that you can integrate nontraditional jobs like volunteerism, internships with professors on campus, etc.

Accomplishments

The key to the successful experience section on a resume is to remember that each bullet you put down is an *accomplishment*. Common types of accomplishments revolve around the following themes:

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- Solved a significant technical or creative challenge. (Invented an algorithm or came up with a marketing slogan).
- Improved resource utilization (efficiency/productivity), reduced costs, improved communications, etc.
- Improved the condition of others (volunteer work), resolved conflicts, facilitated teamwork or group cohesion, etc.
- Gained valuable in-the-field experience to apply your skills and knowledge (this is great to put down for internships).

Accomplishment statements will be both qualitative and quantitative. A qualitative statement is any statement that does not cite a particular number or metric by which improvement / advancement may be measured. Perhaps you “Improved inter-office communication through implementation of departmental bulletin board.” There is no way for an external reader (the recruiter) to determine from this statement just how much you improved communication. A quantitative statement would say “Improved inter-office communication through implementation of departmental bulletin board, saving 10 person-hours per week requesting information in a 100-person department.” The second statement cites actual metrics and lends considerable credibility to the statement.

When writing your accomplishment statements, you may find the $A = V + D + O$ formula to be useful:¹

ACCOMPLISHMENT = Action Verb + What You Did + What the Outcome Was.

As discussed in Section 2, to help you come up with your list of accomplishments, make a list of everything you remember doing while you worked at that company. This could run from the mundane, such as attending Monday group meetings every week, to the more important, like working on a design team for a product. Put down as much detail as you remember. Next, evaluate each of these and ask yourself *why* it was important. Come up with a list of what you consider to be the most important things that you did while at that company that best underscore your skills and experiences as they relate to the position you are applying for.

Each of those accomplishments needs to be summarized and shortened into a single sentence for your resume. Start off each accomplishment bullet with an action-related verb like “Oversaw”, “Optimized”, “Mediated”, “Designed”, “Improved”. That catches the reader’s attention and draws attention to the particular skill/experience that was emphasized by this accomplishment (remember, ask yourself *why* it was important and *why* you are listing it on your resume). Next, ask yourself *what* exactly did you do as part of this accomplishment? If you “conducted research”, what kind of research did you conduct? If you “worked on the marketing plan”, what was your role? Finally, what was the outcome of all of this? In other words, what did you *accomplish*? If you did research at this job, perhaps you “Optimized efficiency of 20-person assembly line through

¹ Dawson, Kenneth M. & Dawson, Sheryl, N. (1988). Job Search: The Total System. John Wiley & Sons.

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introduction of feedback-controlled rate control, resulting in labor savings of 10-person-hours per week.” If you worked on a marketing plan, perhaps you “Served as document coordinator, taking detailed notes at all meetings and ensuring that all materials were archived for project staff” or “Led team of 3 interns developing collegiate thrust of \$1.7M product marketing plan.” Write all statements in the past tense and avoid the use of pronouns like *I* or *we*. There are a number of sources of action verbs to use on your resume. The book [2500 Keywords To Get You Hired](#) (McGraw-Hill, 2002) is a good start, while http://www.quintcareers.com/action_skills.html has a large list of action verbs broken into categories like Communication/People skills, Organizational skills, Teaching skills, Creative skills, etc.

If you had multiple key accomplishments at a particular company, summarize those through a series of short sentences. Avoid the use of long flowing paragraphs. They take longer to read and force you to break from the $A = V + D + O$ formula. Remember, this is a *highlights reel* here, not a *play-by-play*.

What Kind of Experience Should be Included?

Part of the reason for calling this section just *Experience* instead of *Work Experience* or *Volunteer Experience* is so that you can blend all of your experiences together into a cohesive whole. Everything is game, from fulltime paid positions to parttime jobs, internships, co-ops, volunteer work, even unpaid informal work in a professor's lab on campus. Of course, you don't have room to *include* all of these positions, but all of them are candidates for being listed on your resume. If you don't have a lot of experience related to your field, focus on jobs that emphasized character or leadership. Summer lifeguarding in highschool probably isn't directly relevant to the position you are currently applying for, but it demonstrates leadership and responsibility, reinforcing those skills on your resume.

Multiple Jobs/Internships at the Same Company

A common question that arises in the experience section is how to handle multiple jobs or internships at the same company. If you have worked at a company several times (such as a series of summer internships), you might be tempted to list the company multiple times on your resume to emphasize that you've been there that many times. *DON'T*. This is visually confusing (it can look like you copy-pasted text and forgot to change it) and makes the recruiter have to look harder at your resume to understand what exactly you are conveying (in many cases, the recruiter will simply toss the resume and start reading the next one instead). Rather, list the company once, and then list each of the periods you have worked there. While its good to have experience working at multiple companies, if a recruiter sees that you interned at the same company several years in a row, that immediately provides you a lot of credibility, in that it tells him or her that this other company liked you enough to keep bringing you back. If you have been invited back for the next semester or summer, list on your resume “Summer 2008 (Invited)” or

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“Fall 2008 (Invited)” to emphasize that you have even been invited back for the coming summer/semester as well.

What To Do If You Don't Have a Lot of Work Experience

If you are an underclassman, you probably don't have a lot of work experience yet, so how do you address this in your resume? One way is to move some of your related coursework forward to the experience section if it required certain job-related skills (related coursework is usually listed under the Education section of your resume). For example, maybe an ECE course had a lab with it that required innovative thinking or a marketing class required you to develop a portfolio of various pitches. Putting coursework under experience is really only acceptable for underclassman resumes, but can help pad out that section and make the recruiter realize that you feel your experiences in those courses went beyond the run-of-the-mill and contributed to your preparation for a position at his or her company.

Another approach is to break experience into two sections: Research Experience (which would appear first) and Work Experience (appears second). Put courses and work related to your discipline in this first section, and put general jobs in the second. This can really emphasize your field-related jobs (such as an internship) and ensure that it isn't buried in the rest of your non-related job experiences. The trick is to always cast each job in terms of some skill, knowledge, or experience that it imparted in you that has prepared you for the position you are applying for. Even a summer job as a coffee barista should be cast as a position that taught you to “Maintained extreme attention to detail while multitasking under continual pressure.” A recruiter may not be personally familiar with what a particular job entails and so it is important to her that a barista is responsible for remembering many fine details about each order, juggling those orders all at the same time, and keeping everything flowing smoothly, fulfilling a non-stop assembly line of orders. Even if you don't have a lot of paid work experience, volunteer positions can showcase important skills and experience.

Things to Watch Out For

You should be especially careful when listing work experience with organizations of particular political, religious, or cultural focus. In an ideal world, we would all be evaluated strictly on our professional experience, but unfortunately the real world is far from ideal, and it is best to eliminate any possibilities that a recruiter's hidden biases might impact your chances of getting the job you are applying for. This is not to say that you shouldn't list them on your resume if they are strongly relevant, but if they only contribute a minor amount to your work experience, you should weigh whether it might be better not to include them.

EDUCATION

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Since you are all currently enrolled in an academic institution, your resumes will reflect that you are seeking a particular degree. The education section, which appears under experience, is a relatively short overview of what degree you are pursuing, your progress to-date, and any relevant coursework specifics. Say something along the lines of “Pursuing a degree in Marketing – Expected Graduation May 2010”.

The GPA

Your education section should always include your current GPA, as many recruiters use this as a measure of how well you are doing in your studies, especially for undergrads. There are a number of ways of calculating GPA, such as *cumulative*, *semester*, and *major*, and you should use whichever is highest. There is one notable exception to the GPA rule, and that is if it is so bad that it would become a liability. A resume that lists a GPA of 2.5 / 4.0 will likely be discarded without further review by some recruiters. In those cases, it is actually a better idea to simply not include the GPA and instead really emphasize your experience. NEVER put a paragraph on a resume trying to explain away a bad GPA (“My poor GPA reflects a family illness that distracted me during midterm exams.” or “I am a poor test-taker, but do very well on homeworks and lab assignments.”) If you are applying to graduate school (where GPAs hold especial weight), then you might take the opportunity to include an enclosure letter that explains your poor GPA or GRE/LSAT/MCAT/etc scores, but as a general rule of thumb, you should not draw any attention to poor grades. A recruiter is less likely to toss a resume that doesn't include a GPA, but has strong work experience, than a resume that has a poor GPA. A bad GPA stands out like a flashing neon sign. Of course, even a perfect GPA doesn't guarantee you the job, as most recruiters are looking for someone who is more than “book smart” and has a proven track record of being able to *apply* all of the things he or she learns in school.

Coursework

In most cases, the education section will also include a line that briefly highlights your coursework that is relevant to the position you are applying for or to the company in general. This is where you bolster your on-the-job experience with the academic knowledge that you have learned while at school. Course names vary by school, so this section should not list each class you've taken by name (“ADV 494: Persuasion Consumer Response”), but instead should briefly summarize key topical highlights of your courses. For an advertising major, your resume might have “*Course Work Includes: Advertising Effectiveness Measures, Mass-Mediated Persuasion, Multimedia Ad Design, Public/Private Sector Interfaces, Theories of Creativity, Business Processes in Advertising*”. Each school's curriculum is slightly different, and students often have considerable flexibility in the specific subgenre of their field that they specialize in, so listing out the major topics you have learned about in your classes gives a recruiter an idea of where you are focusing your energies. As discussed in the Experience section,

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however, if you are an underclassman with little in the way of internship or job experience, you may sometimes find it useful to move some of this material forward to your experience section under limited circumstances.

Software Expertise

Most people will put software proficiencies under their Education section. Nearly every field has its own set of software packages that it emphasizes. Engineering disciplines each have their own highly-specialized design and simulation packages, while marketing fields emphasize desktop publishing and editing suites. In this day and age, I expect all candidates to have basic proficiency with Microsoft Word and Excel, as even your local garbage collector has to enter information back at the main office using these tools at the end of each shift. Instead, I want to know about any unique software skills you may have. Are you an ECE major and know one of the major simulator packages? List it! Are you a marketing major and know InDesign, DreamWeaver, and QuarkExpress? List them! Put any domain-relevant tools first, so your resume should say “*Software Experience: InDesign, DreamWeaver, PowerPoint, Excel, Word*”, with InDesign first and Word last. Knowing a particular software package, even if you only have basic experience with it, can be a value-add for a recruiter, as it means less work to train you on those tools. If you have worked extensively with a particular software package, you might also put “(Proficient)” beside it in your list to let the recruiter know your expertise with that particular program.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

No matter what position you are applying for, the successful job seeker in today's market must truly be a man or woman of the world. In most industries you will be asked to work with colleagues of a different nationality, culture, or language than yourself. In order to succeed, you must be able to look past these differences and find points of commonality to facilitate your collaboration, rather than emphasizing your differences. Employers, especially large multinational corporations, look very favorably upon any experience that points to a broader appreciation of diversity on the part of the candidate. If you have ever participated in a Study Abroad program or lived in another country, emphasize those on your resume. If you speak languages other than English, make sure that they are listed prominently as well. Even if you thought the ACME Marketing Firm was a strictly US-based operation, it might have contractors in other countries where your language skills could come in useful. Companies will often prioritize candidates with international or language experience, putting them at the top of the pile, even if the position they are hiring for does not include an international component. This is because by studying or working in a foreign country, you have demonstrated your ability to adapt to unfamiliar environments and be successful. List any international experience, whether it is study abroad or languages, under its own section on your resume and call it *International/Language Experience*. This makes sure that it catches the recruiter's eye.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is such an important trait in today's workforce that you should usually break leadership-related experience into its own section on your resume. Companies look for leaders and the character traits they embody: dependability, motivation, able to pull teams together and make them function as cohesive units. Whether you are applying for an introductory management position, or a line engineering position, leadership potential is a crucial trait that is taken into account by nearly every company. There are many kinds of leadership, but a few of the major manifestations are:

- **Self-Motivation.** An employer doesn't want to have to constantly suggest the next thing for you to do. If you are tasked with taking notes at design meetings and you go beyond that to make a searchable database in Access with the meetings ordered by date, that's an example of self-motivation. It means you have the vision and energy to take instructions and not only carry out what is expected of you, but go beyond the call of duty.
- **Self-Sufficiency.** It's important to ask questions when you aren't sure about something, but a leader must be able to think on his or her feet and not require constant direction. This is often a product of experience, being able to figure out up front what questions to ask and get the necessary clarification before the project begins.
- **Dependability.** All good leaders are dependable. A manager can assign a set of tasks to a team leader and walk away with the assurance that those tasks will be carried out right on schedule without any further oversight necessary.
- **Keeps Cool Under Stress.** Every organization faces times of stress and a good leader must be able to keep his or her cool no matter what the situation.
- **Motivates Others.** In order to be a leader, you have to be able to round up others, get them to believe what you do, and make them work together to achieve that shared goal. This takes real people skills and not everyone is a good enough salesperson to bring others onboard. Successful direction can't be dictated from above, it must be infused into those tasked with carrying it out.

In particular, self-sufficiency and dependability are character traits that transcend leadership. Even if you are not the team leader, a company must still be able to rely on you to carry out instructions without further intervention and come back with the task done correctly and on schedule. A company doesn't need every person to act in a leadership role at every moment. There are always going to be times when a leader needs to be able to be a follower and play well with the team. It's important to emphasize that you can also work as part of a larger team, even if you aren't the one giving direction.

Make sure that descriptions of leadership experience emphasize your leadership role. If you had any kind of directing role in a team, don't just say "worked with planning committee", say "directed archival operations for planning committee" to make it clear that you had a position with responsibility. If you think back to many of your non-work-related activities, such as volunteer jobs you have had, I'll bet you can think of many

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ways those jobs had leadership components built into them. Hence, the Activities section of many resumes can often be recast as your Leadership section.

Military Experience

If you are ROTC or have served in the military at any point in your career, make sure to emphasize that front and center on your resume. Don't hide this under Leadership, make this its own header on the resume and title it *Military Experience*. Even if you were not an officer, holding any position in the military shows that you have strong discipline and can operate successfully in a team environment.

REFERENCES

References are an important part of the application process for many jobs and internships. These are people who can vouch for your experience or character and act as your salesperson when talking with a potential employer. References can be faculty or TAs of classes you've had, or supervisors at previous jobs and internships. Never list your references directly on the resume itself. It is actually not even necessary to list "References Available Upon Request" on your resume, as that is simply assumed in this day and age. While it may seem obvious, it's always a good idea to talk with the people you plan on listing as references before giving their names to a recruiter. It gives your references a heads-up to expect being contacted, lets them refresh their memory about you and remember your strengths, and helps to makes certain that they mention those strengths in the call/email/letter. If you need letters of reference, it is always important to give your references as much time as possible. Asking them on Monday if they can write you a letter by Wednesday is never a good idea. If two of your references know each other well, you might let each know that the other person is also writing you a letter, which lets them know to talk to each other and think about the detail they each mention in their letters.

SECTION 4: GETTING YOUR RESUME OUT THERE

JOB FAIRS

The "job fair" is often a major source of employment and internship opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. There is no substitute for "face time" when it comes to making an impression on a potential employer, so exploit career fairs to their fullest potential. Whenever you talk with a recruiter, always try to get his or her card, or at least her email address. When you get back to your dorm or apartment, send him or her a thank-you email for meeting with you at the career fair, and remind her about your key strengths that you think make you the ideal candidate for the job. Keep this note short and formal, almost like a cover letter. The goal is to get your name in front of that

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recruiter one more time. If recruiters are staying on-campus for interviews afterwards, getting an email from you will remind them of your name and might just increase your chances for an interview. At the very least, it shows you are motivated, attentive to detail, and interested in their company, not just robotically handing out resumes to anyone who will take one.

Resumes

Job fairs severely limit your ability to customize your resume. Rather than being able to tailor your resume to target each particular company, most candidates heading to a job fair will usually just print out 20 copies of the same generic resume. A couple of tips to stand out among the crowd:

- **Make a List and Customize.** Most job fairs will publish a list ahead of time of all the companies that will be recruiting at the fair (if they don't, you can usually email the organizers to get a list). Skim through this and find the companies you are most interested in, and prepare custom resumes for each to hand to them during the fair. Seeing a customized resume tailored to that company will mean even more to a recruiter at a job fair who is going through a long list of generic resumes. Just make sure that you give the *right* version of your resume to each recruiter!
- **Tailor by Theme.** If you can't get a list of companies at a job fair ahead of time, or you aren't really certain what companies you might be interested in, another way you can customize your resume is to break your interests into several "theme areas" and make several versions of your resume tailored to each of those themes. For example, perhaps you are a computer science major, and you're not sure if you are more interested in operating system design or in computer graphics, make two versions of your resume, customized for each of those two topic areas, and hand out as appropriate.
- **Always Pack a Generic Resume.** Customizing your resume can give you a crucial edge with companies you have tailored for, but what if you arrive at the fair and see a company that you've never heard of before, and when you learn about them, you think they are the perfect fit, even though they don't match any of your customized resumes? In that case, you can quickly run back to your dorm/apartment and print off a more tailored version (ask the recruiter if he/she will be there when you get back). A better idea, however, is just to pack some generic non-tailored resumes that summarize your skills and experience in broad terms that would work for any company, to have as backups for these unexpected finds.

FIRST CONTACT

As they say, "first appearances are everything" and that is all the more true when it comes to job seeking. The five minutes you spend introducing yourself to a recruiter can

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often be the make-or-break moment when it comes to job fairs, cold calls, and other forms of “first contact”. At a job fair, you are likely one of hundreds of students that recruiter will talk to throughout the day, so you have to make your pitch stand out from the masses.

- **Practice your pitch.** This seems like a simple one, but you have less than a minute to catch the attention of a recruiter at a job fair and no more than five minutes to really sell yourself. Your pitch is also known as your “elevator speech”, as it’s sort of like getting on an elevator with someone and you have to explain yourself and your project to that person before the elevator reaches its next floor. You have a lot of incredible skills and experiences that make you unique and you could probably go on for days describing all of these to a recruiter. At a job fair, though, you have less than 60 seconds to sum up a lifetime. It’s important to really identify those skills and experiences that you think would stand out the most to this particular company. Practice your pitch over and over with friends and get it down to perfection. Remember, you want to appear polished and professional when you deliver that speech to a recruiter, not stumbling over every fifth word.
- **Pre-Hire Internships.** Sometimes positions are restricted to junior or senior standing. At some companies, internships act as “trial employment” and allow the company to gauge how well you would fit in, with a strong possibility of a permanent position if you work out. In those companies, internships are often reserved for students near graduation. If you are not yet close enough to graduation, but you think you have strong relevant experience, it may still be worth talking with the recruiter and seeing if you can convince him/her that you have a unique set of skills/experiences such that that company should make an exception for you.

Emailing a Recruiter

When sending an email to a recruiter, treat it like a formal written letter. No fancy fonts, backgrounds, imagery, etc. Use formal language, correct spelling, grammar, and capitalization. A recruiter is going to see your email first and open your attachments based on that, so many people will make the email itself the cover letter, or at least make it a condensed one-paragraph summary version of the highlights of the cover letter. Whichever tact you take, your goal with that email is to make the recruiter interested enough to open your attachments, instead of just deleting the email outright. The subject line is a key piece of an email contact, as most people tend to skim email from unknown senders based on subject line. If you are sending an email following up on a meeting with the recruiter (even if that “meeting” was just talking with her briefly at the job fair), make sure your subject line reflects that, as she is more likely to open a subject line that says “Re: Following Up from UIUC Engineering Career Fair” than she is one titled “internship”. If you are replying to an advertisement, mention that in the subject line, such as “Replying to ad in Society of Women Engineers mailing list regarding Omaha, NE, internship”. If you are simply emailing a recruiter out of the blue, use something

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that is formal, yet is designed to draw her attention like “Internship in Physics Simulation in Computer Graphics Division”. Even if there is no such available internship, you are making it clear that you have taken some time to learn about their company and what it does, and so the recruiter is more likely to at least open that email and read its contents.

Unsolicited Contact / Cold-Calling

Sometimes the best way to get your foot in the door at a company is to find someone who has a supervisory role in a particular group you want to work at and email her directly. If you are applying for a research-related field, check if there are journals in your area (many academic journals are now available online in fulltext searchable form through the UIUC Library). Search those journals for the name of the company you are interested in to see if there are any papers authored by people within that company. Most research papers have email and other contact information for their authors. If you are really interested in that group, try emailing one of the authors directly and ask if he/she knows of any available positions. Say something along the lines of “I read your paper XYZ in Journal XYZ and I am very interested in applying some my background in XYZ in your company. I was wondering if there are any available positions in your group? I have attached my resume to this email for your consideration.”

When sending an unsolicited email to someone within a company, always attach your resume to the email. If I get a one-line email that asks “Hi, I’m a sophomore in engineering, and I was wondering if you have any jobs available in your company”, its going right into the delete bin, but if the email shows that the person has researched my company and has some potentially useful skills, and a resume is attached that allows me to quickly take a deeper look at that person, I’m likely to at least forward it along to someone else in the company if I don’t have an open position, but only if it has a resume attached. I’m not going to take any actions to learn more about you unless your initial presentation package suggests to me that you are worth my time to consider further. A resume lets me very quickly evaluate whether you might have some potential relevance to my projects. Similarly, I’m not going to waste anyone else’s time by forwarding them an email that doesn’t have a resume attached to it. If I send an email to someone, I am, in some regards, vouching for that person, saying that I think they might be of interest, and I will only do that if I have a resume to evaluate. In some cases, even if there are no positions available, a manager might create a new temporary position to bring someone onboard that really impresses her.

Replying to Advertisements

When replying to an advertisement (such as a posting to your society’s mailing list, on a campus job board, or the company’s website), make sure to mention that you replying to that specific advertisement in your cover letter. It shows the company that you are contacting them at *their* request (via the advertisement) and that you could fill a need they have right now. Read through the advertisement very carefully and look for ways to

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incorporate its language into your resume. If an ad is for an “assembly line optimization internship” and you change your “classes” section on your resume from “optimization” to “assembly line optimization” (assuming that your course taught something that could vaguely be called assembly line optimization), you have just increased your chances of winning that internship. Similarly, look at other ads put out by that company and see if there are general patterns for the kinds of skills that company looks for. This can be used to further tailor your resume to really sell yourself to that company.

Even if the deadline for a position has passed, you might still send your resume and mention in your cover letter “I realize the deadline for this particular position has passed, but I think my background and skills, as evidenced by the attached resume, make me ideally suited for this type of position and I would appreciate being considered if any future positions similar in nature become available.” Sometimes, after hiring someone, the company realizes they need a second person, and if your resume is the most recent to arrive, you might just get the job. At the very least, your name will be added to the system.

THE COVER LETTER

If your resume is your advertisement, then your cover letter is your advertisement's advertisement. Its job is to get the recruiter interested enough to actually read through your resume. The cover letter is the first thing that he or she will see if you are mailing your resume, and will either entice him to read your resume to learn more about you, or will put your resume on the fast path to the wastebin. Think of a cover letter much like an interview. It doesn't go into the level of detail of your resume, but rather summarizes and draws things together and, *most importantly*, it targets *that particular company* and says how you heard of them and why you think *that company* is a good match for you. Unlike your resume, it is *OK* to use pronouns on your cover letter.

Your cover letter should begin by stating how you heard of the company, whether you are replying to an ad, following up on a referral, or simply “cold-calling.” Maybe you start off with “As a chemical engineering student, I have been particularly interested in innovation applications of petrochemicals and have structured my coursework around this application area. As the leading company in the novel application of petrochemicals, I believe an internship at the Acme Chemical Company would allow me to apply my classroom knowledge at the very cutting edge of innovation.” Praise the company and make them feel that you have a lot of respect for their market position and the things they do. After all, there's a reason you're seeking out this particular company, and it better not be just because you've applied to every other company!

After the introductory paragraph, summarize the key highlights from your resume. The format of a cover letter is largely unstructured, so you have some extra room to expand upon the things you think are the most important for a recruiter to see up front about yourself. This is also a good opportunity to tell the recruiter things that didn't make it into your resume or to *synthesize* the contents of your resume. Perhaps you've held a

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series of leadership roles in your student organization of increasing importance. While those titles may be listed on your resume, a recruiter might not immediately pick up on that, so emphasize it in your cover letter with a line that says “Starting as a freshman, I have emphasized increasing my leadership experiences, holding three different positions of increasing responsibility in the Society for Student Societies, increasing from Assistant Vice President to President.” Showing continued improvement and character evolution are important traits that a recruiter looks for, as they show strong potential for continued future development.

As President John F. Kennedy once said “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” Similarly, in a cover letter, don’t overemphasize the benefits you will receive from the internship or job (such as “I will gain new knowledge to further my potential in the field of computer graphics.”), but rather how you will benefit the company (“My extensive coursework on high-frequency field theory, coupled with an internship at ACME Field Devices Corporation gives me a unique set of experiences to bring to a position at your company.”). Yet, it is important to achieve a balance here when applying for internships, since they are designed to be learning experiences. You should list at least one or two things that you hope to achieve through this internship. The above statement could therefore be tweaked to say “My extensive coursework on high-frequency field theory, coupled with an internship at ACME Field Devices Corporation gives me a unique set of experiences to bring to a position at your company. Given [the name of the company]’s established track record of innovation in high-frequency devices, this internship would allow me to expand my understanding of real world applications of these technologies in the context of an industry pioneer.”

Salutation / Addressing the Recruiter

The more personal a cover letter is, the more evident it is that you have taken the time to reach out to this particular company and are interested in them in particular, and hence the more likely the recruiter is to want to learn more about you. This carries down even to the salutation. Think about letters you personally have received in the mail. A letter that begins “Dear Sir or Madam” is obviously a generic form letter, sent out to a large number of people, whilst one that begins “Dear Ms. Jane Smith” at least shows that the letter is addressed to you personally and (for many people) you are more likely to read at least the first few lines. Therefore, if you know that a particular recruiter will be reading your resume, or if you are addressing it to a particular person, you should always address the cover letter to that person and use their name. Use “Ms.” when addressing a female, never “Mrs.”, and if you aren’t sure about the person’s gender (such as with a foreign or gender-neutral name), *never guess*, just address it to the person’s full name (“Dear Matty O’Conal”). Also, even if a recruiter introduces himself or herself with a nickname (Bill), but his or her card lists a fullname (William), use the full name in correspondence with that person. Even if you know the person very well, formal correspondence along the lines of a cover letter should always use the person’s full name. If you receive a reply back from the recruiter by email and it is signed with a nickname, feel free at that point to then address further emails to the recruiter using that more informal salutation.

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While it may seem like a minor detail, including someone's title can give you a slight edge under certain circumstances. When writing a cover letter directly to a researcher at a corporate research lab (as opposed to a recruiter), you could use "Dr.," while if you are writing to a person at a university (such as applying for a job in a campus lab), use "Professor". Professor is more prestigious than Dr., so always use it when addressing a faculty member. Even if you don't know if someone is a professor or a Dr., but they are in an environment where many people are professors/PhDs (such as on a campus), go ahead and just address him as Professor or Dr. Even if he isn't, he will be flattered to be addressed as such.

It is important, however, to understand the difference between "title" and "rank". If you look up a new professor in the online directory, he or she will usually be listed as an "Assistant Professor" or perhaps "Adjunct Professor", "Associate Professor", etc. This is just his rank and should *not* be included (ie, you should say "Dear Professor Johnston", not "Dear Assistant Professor Johnston"). Administrative titles, on the other hand, *should* be included ("Dear Vice Chancellor Romano"), but omit the rest of the title (not "Dear Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Romano").

Just as resumes should be tailored for each company and use action verbs, so too should cover letters. When uploading your resume to an electronic resume database, keep in mind that some systems only allow a single file to be uploaded, meaning that your resume cannot have an associated cover letter. In this case, as noted earlier, you can include a *Mission Statement* that acts as a three-sentence cover letter.

Introduction

The introductory paragraph is the most important, as a recruiter will usually make a decision to keep reading or not based on the contents of the first few sentences. Say why you are contacting the company (in response to an advertisement, a referral, heard about them through a job fair, etc). The first few sentences should be grabbers like "your company would provide an ideal environment in which I can leverage my creative problem-solving skills and contribute to your continued success." Use something that emphasizes that it will be a win-win for both of you if the company gives you the job.

Details

Either in the introductory paragraph, or in the next paragraph, emphasize specific details in the cover letter that directly apply to the position you are applying for. As mentioned earlier, if you are replying to an advertisement, try to incorporate language from that advertisement into your cover letter. Don't say you have relevant "skills" or "experience", enumerate those skills and experiences that make you the ideal candidate for this position. Anyone can say they are the ideal candidate for a position, and the

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cover letter should give enough examples of detail that the recruiter thinks highly enough of the person to read the enclosed resume.

Conclusion

Your conclusion paragraph should note that you will be in touch, but also give the company the necessary information to contact you if they are particularly interested. If you are applying to a particular position, you might say “I have enclosed my resume which highlights the strong contribution I would make to this position and will be contacting you shortly to follow up.” If you are cold-contacting a company, use something more general like “I have enclosed my resume which highlights the strong contribution I would make to your company and will be contacting you shortly to explore possible opportunities.” End by saying “Should you have any questions in the meantime, please contact me at” If responding to an advertisement, you might say something like “I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this position and my qualifications with you in person.”

Getting a Referral

If you know someone at a company, talk with that person to learn more about the company, and, most importantly, ask if they can give you a referral. Depending on their position, they might talk to their immediate supervisor and recommend you as a potential candidate, or send a note to someone they know in the hiring office, suggesting your name. This immediately places your resume at the very top of the pile, and some companies actually offer monetary rewards or other incentives to employees that refer a friend who ends up being hired by the company, so you might both end up winning! If a friend does mention your name to a manager or recruiter, address your cover letter to that manager/recruiter directly and make sure to mention that so-and-so referred you to him, to remind the recruiter that you have been vouched for by someone within the company. However, as mentioned later in Things to Avoid, never make up a referral or dress up a resume to make it seem as though it is a referral, as those are usually caught and will result in your being blacklisted at that company.

TIMING AND PRESENTATION

Getting your resume seen is like an attention war in that every little advantage can help. If you are emailing your resume, send it in the middle of the morning, an hour or two after the company has opened, on a Tues, Weds, or Thurs. Don't send it in the middle of the night, as it is likely to be lost in the morning email catchup. With the large amount of email spam that deluges inboxes everywhere, your resume might be accidentally deleted if it appears in between a long line of advertisements for Viagra and invitations from deposed Nigerian finance ministers to transfer millions of dollars to the bank account of your choice. Sending your resume in the middle of the morning makes it much more

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likely that a recruiter will see it as it comes in, and is therefore more likely to take a look at it. If you send it late in the afternoon, a recruiter might leave it until the next day and end up forgetting about it. Of course, some companies have automated systems that scan for attachments that look like resumes and simply upload them to central resume databases, so time of day may not matter as much in some cases, but always assume that a human may be taking a look at your resume, and schedule things accordingly. Send your resume as a PDF attachment if at all possible, as some email systems block Word files from unknown email addresses due to virus risks.

If sending your resume by snail mail, you can't control the time of day it arrives, but, again, try to have it arrive in the middle of the week. Resumes that arrive on a Friday will likely be left until the next week and possibly lost, while resumes that arrive on a Monday could be lost in all of the rest of the weekend mail. Remember that yours is probably just one of thousands of resumes that this company receives each month, and so you want to maximize the potential that it will be seen amongst all of the others.

A final word on the presentation is to not get overly creative with the mailing process. Some career counselors will suggest adding a stamp saying "Confidential" or "Urgent" to the top of the envelope to increase the chances of a recruiter reading the resume. However, in most cases, this will actually only annoy the recruiter and might actually lessen your chances.

ELECTRONIC RESUME DATABASES

Many companies now utilize specialized electronic resume databases to manage the deluge of resumes they receive, while universities and job search boards offer their own databases for candidates to post resumes. If you remember nothing else from this section, make sure that you post your resume in either Adobe Portable Document Format (.pdf) or Microsoft Word (.doc) format. A PDF version of your resume is the best, as nearly every resume database system today can handle PDF files, but some email systems and a few resume databases may not allow Word files due to virus risks. Never upload a resume in any other file format, as most recruiters will not open a strange attachment in an unfamiliar file format. Also, while you may have Microsoft Publisher or Adobe InDesign on your computer, the recruiter trying to look at your resume may not. It is OK to design your resume in Publisher or InDesign, but make sure to convert it to a PDF file before you send it out to a recruiter or post it to a database.

Another small tip with resume databases is to change the Document Title of your file. If you are writing your resume in Word, choose "Properties" from the "File" menu and fill out those fields. In Acrobat, choose "Document Properties" from the "File" menu. Many resume databases will use the document title of the file to name the resume in search results. If you post your resume online, search engines will also use this title as the name of the file when they return it. Your resume will look a little less polished if it appears in search results as "Microsoft Resume Wizard" or "Untitled Document".

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Never insert hidden keywords in the margins of your resume (such as using white text on a white background). The idea behind this cheat is that resume search engines used to rank resumes based on the number of times they contained a particular keyword. So, a resume that mentioned “user interface design” 10 times would rank more highly than a resume that mentioned it only 3 times when a recruiter searched for possible candidates. This was a common tactic with web pages in the pre-Google era to boost search rankings as well. Nowadays, however, resume database systems look for these kinds of cheats and either delete or severely penalize resumes that use them. Instead, use important keywords in your Summary section at the top of the resume. Some resume search databases actually rank keywords more highly if they appear in the Experience section of a resume,² so it is important to note that vocabulary and language use must be considered across your entire resume, not just in any single part.

ATTITUDE

The most important part of the entire job-seeking process is to keep a positive attitude. If you walk into an interview or talk to a recruiter and think to yourself that you can't possibly get this job, then you won't. Negative energy comes across very clearly in your words and mannerisms. Even if you aren't sure you really want this job or internship, convince yourself that you do for the purposes of talking with the recruiter: *you can always decline an offer received, but you can't accept an offer you never get!* Even if you think there is no chance in the world that you could possibly be picked for a particular position, if you walk into that interview room with your head held high and radiating positive energy, that will come across very clearly to the interviewer. Even if you don't end up with the position, that recruiter is likely to remember you and possibly recommend you for other positions in the company.

SECTION 5: THE INTERVIEW

Success! Your resume was good enough that it landed you an interview with a recruiter. A single sheet of paper can hardly sum up the incredible person that you are, so your in-person (or phone) interview is your chance to really sell yourself! Despite what you may have read in a self-help book, the interview is *NOT* a time for you to get to know the company and the company to know you. You should walk into the interview knowing everything you need to know about the company and the position you are interested in. It is your job during the interview to tell the company what it wants to hear and convince it that you are the best candidate for the position. The interview is your opportunity to talk about strengths and experience that didn't make it onto your resume, or that you feel are particularly relevant to the position you are applying for. If the recruiter brings up weak points (such as GPA), the interview is also your opportunity to explain those issues away and convince him or her that your *current strengths* overshadow any possible *past weaknesses*.

² <http://executivejournal.com/jobhunting/resumes/20070306-needleman.html>

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Types of Interviews

There are many different formats used for job and internship interviews, and it's important to think about how to respond in each situation. In some cases you may be given a choice between several interview styles, and you should pick the one that makes you the most comfortable. In other cases you may be subjected to a series of interviews in different formats. Most interviews involve just a single interviewer, but sometimes multiple interviewers may be present, such as someone from human resources to evaluate character and corporate fit and someone with a technical background to evaluate skills. In these situations, it is very important that when you answer questions, you address your responses to the entire group, and continue to spread your eye contact evenly across the group. Make sure for all in-person interviews that you make eye contact with your interviewers. Never stare directly for long periods, as that can be interpreted as hostility, but make sure to give the person a healthy dose of eye contact to convey confidence and positiveness towards the position and interviewer.

You may have heard of something called a *behavioral interview*. Most interviews incorporate some degree of behavioral content, which is designed to evaluate your personality and character. For example, instead of just asking you questions about points from your resume, a behavioral interview might ask you a question like "Have you ever failed at a project and how did you recover from that?" or "You are the manager of a large team delivering an important product to a client, and two days before delivery, you find out that you won't be able to complete a critical piece of the product. What do you do?" Another classic question is "What do you think will be the most difficult or challenging part of this position?" Many of these questions revolve around problematic events, to get a better feel for how you might deal with the inevitable difficulties that arise in any business. Finally, an interviewer might also ask you questions like "What do you think of my interview style?" or "How do *you* think this interview well?" These types of questions are designed to test both interpersonal and character skills, to see how you respond to the interviewer.

- **Phone.** This is often the first-level screening interview in that it requires very little resource expenditure on the part of the company. In some cases a company may call you out of the blue if you gave them your resume at a job fair or they found it in a database, but usually they will set a time for the interview. Always try to find a landline that you can call in from. Landlines are more reliable and you don't have to worry about a battery dying, interference, etc. If you must use a cellular phone, make sure to charge the battery all of the way before the interview. Pick a quiet location and make sure that you will not be disturbed. If you have to use your dorm room or apartment, talk to your roommate ahead of time to arrange to have the room to yourself during that period and put a sign on your door so that interruptions can be avoided. Also, make sure to confirm what *time zone* the time you agree on is in. There's nothing worse than setting a call for 3PM and then

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missing the call when it turns out the company ment 3PM Eastern Standard Time and you were thinking in Western Standard Time.

- **Screening Interview.** This interview is usually with a member of the company's human resources or recruiting staff and is intended to review your basic qualifications and evaluate your fit in the overall corporate culture. Usually very little technical detail will be asked about your former employment, and the focus will be on character and personality. This type of interview is often used in on-campus interviews to quickly weed through a large number of candidates to retain just the most promising ones.
- **Group Screening Interview.** When processing a very large number of candidates for several related positions, a company may elect to interview multiple candidates in parallel. This can be as small as 2 people to as large as 20 or more people in a conference room with an interviewer. The interviewer will usually rotate between several questioning styles, sometimes asking each person a question in turn and other times asking a question to the group and seeing who responds. When questions are asked to the group, it is important to balance that fine line between barking out an answer to every question and appearing dominating, and sitting quietly and not being heard.
- **Hiring Interview.** After potentially passing through a phone and/or screening interview, you will usually end up in what is known as a "hiring" or "selection" interview in which the person you would actually be working for interviews you and evaluates you on your technical skills, character, and other traits with specific regards to the position and group you would be working with.
- **Situational Interview.** Rather than a sit-down conversation in a conference room, a situational interview will usually be in a work setting, perhaps at the lab or desk where you might be working. You will be asked to perform some task related to your job, such as writing a program, evaluating a marketing plan, or writing efficiency observations about an assembly line. The idea here is to take you outside of the carefully-scripted environment of the formal seated interview and get you to actually perform a job-related task so that the interviewer can see you in action.
- **Stress Interview.** These are described in more detail later in this chapter, but these are usually onsite interviews where you are placed in extremely stressful situations, often sleep deprived, and evaluated on your ability to maintain your composure and perform even under conditions of severe adversity. These interviews tend to be favored by certain engineering professions. In particular, the interviewer will attempt to make you as uncomfortable as possible to try and make you lose your cool. An interviewer might appear disinterested or hostile to your responses (such as "well, I'm not sure about that response, but OK, keep going"), accept a phone call or other interruption during the interview, or otherwise make the interview appear as if it has gone south in a big way. The key to remember here is that the very fact that you are sitting in that interview chair means the company is interested in you, and, as noted earlier, the interview process has nothing to do with truth and everything to do with stageplay. Your interview is a dance, and it's your job not to lose your footing.

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- **Social Interview.** This type of interview is also described in more detail a bit later, but usually revolves around a lunch, dinner, or evening outing in which the company is evaluating your ability to interact socially with potential peers. By placing you in a more familiar and comfortable environment, the company is also trying to get you to let your guard down so they can more accurately evaluate your personality.
- **Peer Interview.** This is similar to a social interview, but still occurs within the company's offices. You will usually have some form of screening or hiring interview prior to this one. In a peer interview, you are introduced to members of the group you would be working with to see how you might interact with them. In some cases you are asked to solve a problem while they watch and you are allowed to ask them questions for help. In other cases, the group of you works on a problem together as equal peers, to see how you would function in that team. It is important to really let your teamwork and leadership skills shine here, but be careful that you don't appear to domineering.

Before the Interview

When you get an interview invitation, you don't just pat yourself on the back and wait around until the appointed time. No, there is much to do to make sure that you walk into that room as prepared as any human could possibly be, armed with every piece of information and strategy you can come up with!

- Talk to friends that have interviewed for that company in the past and find out more about the process. Companies vary considerably on the kinds of interview tactics they use. Engineering companies may ask you to solve a series of puzzles or problems in your field, such as writing a program for a computer scientist or optimizing a bridge design for a civil engineer. A marketing firm might present you with a hypothetical product line and give you 5 minutes to come up with a pitch. Many companies use variations of personality tests to examine how you react to certain situations and gauge your ability to fit within their corporate environment. Companies tend to constantly change the specific questions they ask, but asking your friends what questions they got can help you prepare for the kinds of questions you might be asked.
- It should be obvious, but dress *professionally*. Even if the job you are interviewing for is in the field and will involve wearing jeans and boots, you need to dress business professional for the interview itself. NEVER reduce your dress level in the interview or waiting room, even if the interviewer is dressed more casually, even if he or she invites you to (such as commenting that the office has a very casual dress code). For men, if you are wearing a tie and jacket and the interviewer is only wearing a dress shirt, DON'T take off your tie and don't remove your suit or sports coat. Women wearing a suit jacket should also keep it on at all times. You should leave the room exactly the same way as you entered it.
- Show up 15 or 20 minutes early. There's no better way to sink your chances for a job than to be late to an interview. All kinds of small emergencies can happen

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when you go for an interview, and arriving a few minutes early ensures that you have the time to deal with them without being late. Sometimes an interview room is in an odd location and you might have to wander around the building for a few minutes to find it, or you might get to the assigned room and find a sign that interviews have moved to a nearby building. Once you find the room, you want time to survey your surroundings, take a deep breath, and collect yourself and your composure.

- Don't fidget. Keep your legs firmly planted on the ground or modestly crossed. Keep your hands in your lap. Don't play with clothes, papers, pens, hair, or other items.
- Spit your gum out before the interview: it is unprofessional to chew gum during any formal business interaction.
- Turn your phone off. Turn your cellular phone off the moment you arrive at the door for your interview. It is highly unprofessional for your phone to ring either in the waiting area or during the interview itself.
- Bring a copy of your resume to the interview to give to the recruiter. He/she should already have a copy, but it makes you look prepared if you bring a second copy to give out. If you think you might have difficulty remembering what you wrote in certain places in the resume, you might also bring a copy to have in front of you, but if you keep having to refer back to your resume to answer questions about your experience, awards, etc, you look unprofessional and unprepared (not to mention the fact that it looks as though you may not have been fully truthful on your resume).
- *Memorize your resume.* I cannot stress this point enough. An interviewer will almost always ask you clarifying questions about various points on your resume, both to learn more about those bullets and to test your responses. If you are asked to talk more about your internship at the ACME Marketing Firm in the Summer of 2002, and you have to look down and skim your resume before answering, that is a sure-fire sign to the interviewer that you either aren't prepared for the interview, or that additional reference checking may be in order to verify what you wrote.
- *Know what position you are applying for.* If you are applying for a specific position, *read* the job description. If you are applying for a general internship, search that company's website to learn more about what interns do. There is nothing more fatal to a candidate's prospects than when it becomes apparent to the recruiter that this person has not even bothered to read about the position he/she is applying for.

During the Interview Itself

Your resume got your foot in the door and the company believes you have the technical skills and experiences to be a potential candidate. The interview is the real test, however, of whether you have the personality for the job and fit in well with the corporate culture.

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- You're not there to learn more about the company. By the time you walk into the office for your interview, you should already know everything there is to know about its processes, product lines, etc by researching its web site and other available sources. If the interviewer mentions that the company has a simulation division that might mesh well with your skills down the road, you shouldn't be caught off guard and wonder "what simulation center?". Instead you should be able to say "Yes, I read about your simulation center, it is based in XYZ, what kind of lateral opportunities are there to transfer to that center down the road?"
- You're not there to be truthful and open, and neither is the interviewer. You are both salespeople there to put the brightest shine on the product you are selling and dancing around the negatives that may come up. If there are particular weak points in your resume (i.e., a bad GPA), be prepared to discuss them in the interview and have very good responses ready. But, at the same time, *don't bring those negative points up*. If the interviewer raises a question about one of your weaknesses, you have to answer truthfully, but in a sugar-coated way). Don't attempt to beat the interviewer to the punch by bringing a weakness up. If you bring it up preemptively, it is obvious that you consider it a weakness, while if you let the interviewer bring it up and you have a good response, it shows that you recognize its existence, but don't believe it will affect your ability to fulfill the requirements of this position.
- Just like with your resume, *every word counts*. Don't say something if it isn't designed to help you win the job. If a recruiter asks you about a class you listed on your resume, *don't* mention that you really hated that class because the professor always talked too fast: it's not relevant to the discussion at hand, and won't help you get the job (and, in fact, may actually *hurt* your chances). Instead, focus on how the class taught you the key nuances of that topic, and that the faculty member formerly worked in the field for 20 years in industry and so the class moved beyond the theoretical to teach you some of the practical aspects and how that makes you particularly well prepared for this position.
- There are certain key questions that you know will be asked in the interview, such as "why are you interested in this position" or "tell me more about your background." The responses to these questions should not be a disjointed list of thoughts, but rather a well-orchestrated, semi-memorized script, akin to the leading role in a play. Each sentence should set the stage for the next one, just as in the interview as a whole, each response should build upon the last, painting a cohesive picture of you as a successful candidate, rather than a discombobulated amalgamation of one-off answers. Remember, an interview is like any other public performance: you are on stage and performing for an audience and hoping that you do well enough that they will select you for the job. Find some videos on YouTube™ of the presidential debates and watch how the candidates answer questions. You'll notice they don't answer questions independently: *each response builds upon the last and sets the stage for the next*.
- Never ever ever badmouth a previous employer. Everyone has problems with their boss or disagreements with company policies. Check this baggage at the door; for the purposes of your interview, you adored every boss you've ever had, and every company you've ever worked for was the epitome of utopia.

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- Two popular questions historically have been “tell me what your greatest strength is” and “tell me what your greatest weakness is.” The answers to these questions vary by person, but be especially careful about the second. Never say that you simply don’t have any weaknesses, but at the same time, DON’T be candid either. Certain responses have become almost cliché over the years, like “My greatest weakness is that I work too hard for my employer.” Not only is this response *overly* canned, but it doesn’t put a positive spin on the issue. Whenever you must discuss something negative in an interview, you must think of a good way to somehow cast it in a positive light. Rather than “work too hard,” you might say “I can sometimes become so enveloped in my work such that I don’t spend enough time with friends and family.” While this would seem to again be a negative, there are really two pieces to this statement: a positive/neutral beginning that casts you as a hard, dedicated worker, and a negative end that suggests you have to be careful about your work/life balance. Since many employers have elaborate programs in place to help employees manage their work/life balance, this statement is really a positive in the eyes of most interviewers.

It Takes Two to Tango

An interview isn’t only a one-sided affair. While the interviewer is busy gauging your every action, you can be busy doing the same, and using those insights to give you a competitive advantage by subtly tailoring your responses to what that particular interviewer is looking for. Watch your interviewer’s reaction to your responses. Some interviewers will show little reaction, while others may frown or nod at specific responses. Similarly, the interviewer’s overall attitude gives you insights into what he/she is looking for and allows you to subtly tailor your responses accordingly. Watch out for the following four major types of interviewer:

- **The Character Interviewer.** Appears very laid-back, asks how school is going, asks a few informal questions before beginning the interview. Likely more interested in your character and how you will fit in with the company than in how well your particular skills at this moment mesh with the position. Emphasizing your character and leadership will help you win over this type of person.
- **The Performance-Under-Pressure Interviewer.** Begins the interview very promptly, interrupts any response that goes on for more than 15 seconds, and charges down a list of questions. More interested in your ability to perform under pressure than in any particular skills or even general character. Companies that value extreme work schedules will often employ one of these interviewers at some stage in your interview process to see how you operate under stress. This interviewer may also ask questions in a pointed way or otherwise appear combative or hostile to try and unnerve you and see how you react. Emphasize skills like time management and leadership experience keeping teams focused on deadlines and never lose your cool, even if the *interviewer* seems to have become an *interrogator*.

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- **The Skills-You-Have-Today Interviewer.** Focuses heavily on your technical background, asking you detailed questions about software programs you know, skills, specific experiences, etc. Primarily interested in your current knowledge as you sit in the interview chair. This person likely has a position for which he/she needs someone that can hit the ground running with little additional training. Emphasize specifics with this person, focusing on coursework, knowledge, and on-the-job experience.
- **The Technical Interviewer.** Focuses not on your current set of learned skills, but rather on your ability to apply those skills creatively and on your general thought processes. Interviewers in this class will test your knowledge in subtle ways, such as asking “how do you see XYZ evolving over the next 5 years?” or “What would you do to improve this chair?” This type of question tests your understanding of the topic extensively, forcing you to draw upon all of your knowledge of that area and its trends to creatively project your understanding forward, testing your ability to *think* and *apply* your knowledge rather than simply *regurgitate* what you learned in a class. A quote from the founding days of the University of Illinois, “the old school trains the student to express his thoughts clearly and effectively, the new school gives him some thoughts to express”³ describes this interview style very effectively. As the first President of the University of Illinois once noted rather colorfully, “it does not make any difference how much good stuff is in a jug, if the stopper is driven so tight it cannot be drawn the whole thing is almost worthless.”⁴ It is important to remember that most of these questions have no single correct answer and the interviewer is interested not in the answer you give, but rather in the process you use to discern that answer. If you are asked how many marbles fit in a schoolbus, or what character you would be in a particular movie, the focus is on how you came up with that answer and why, not the answer itself.

Onsite Fly-Out Interviews / Stress and Social Interviews

Onsite interviews in which a company flies you out to its offices are both a blessing and a curse. The fact that the company is spending money to fly you out to them indicates they are extremely interested in you and you are very close to landing the position you are interested in. However, it also places you in a very precarious position in that you are essentially completely in the company's hands. At the height of the dot-com rush, there was a relatively well-known software company that had a very unique interview process designed to see how well candidates were able to cope with extreme stress levels and operate in both social and professional settings. Flights were scheduled to arrive in the late afternoon, around 4-5PM. A car took you directly from the airport to the company's headquarters and directly into the interview process, so that you did not have time to go to the hotel and refresh or relax before the interview. Interviews would continue into the

³ Charles Wesley Rolfe, class of 1872, quoted in Powell, Burt E. *The Movement for Industrial Education and the Establishment of the University*. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1918) – p. 318

⁴ ABID.

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early evening and involved a series of puzzles, personality tests, and staged engineering problems that you would have to solve, sometimes in a small group with engineers from the company. Around 9-10PM you would go with the recruiters to a local bar where you would meet up with more engineers from one of the groups that you might be working with. Drinks were free and you would be at the bar until 2AM, with interviews beginning the next morning at 6AM and continuing through the day until late afternoon, when a car would take you back to the airport for your flight home.

This elaborate process was extremely successful for this company and allowed it to identify the most promising candidates who had the character to fit well with a company that prided itself on 7-day workweeks and 16-20 hour days. I mention this example in particular for the social component, in which candidates were taken out into a social setting. While this company favored bars for the more fluid interaction they afford, business dinners are a more common form of this method. The key here is that a candidate is placed into a social environment in which he or she feels more relaxed and is more likely to act “normal” and relax her guard, offering recruiters a better gauge of character. The candidate’s ability to interact with others in both professional and social environments is also measured by this interview process, offering yet another personality measure. By keeping candidates in a constant “on” state, with only a few hours of sleep the second day, this company was also able to gauge how well they could deal under pressure and with high-stress situations. If you are invited to an onsite interview and find yourself taken out to a social environment, keep in mind that the company is not simply being nice to you. Perhaps you are taken to dinner and you are excessively rude to a waiter who makes a mistake with your order: that offers the recruiter a side of your personality that you would have been very careful to contain back in the office. You are being interviewed the entire time you are there, whether you realize it or not, whether in a conference room or at a restaurant, so always keep on your toes and never let your guard down.

The Post-Interview Process

Once the interview is over, send a thank-you letter or email to the interviewer for the opportunity. This puts your name in front of the recruiter once again and shows that you pay attention to details. Use this as an opportunity to remind the recruiter of your top strengths and include any additional details that you weren’t able to include on your resume and didn’t have a chance to bring up during the interview. Think of it as a “recap” on your entire election campaign. Much like with a cover letter, this should still be a formal letter or email, addressed directly to the recruiter using his or her full name.

If you are notified that you were not selected for the position you applied for, you should still send a letter thanking the company for their consideration, and asking that they keep you in mind if other similar positions become available. This shows that you are still interested in the company and, for some recruiters, may make you stand out in their mind.

SECTION 6: WRAP UP

If you've made it all the way through this guide, you should be in pretty good shape as you toss your hat into the ring to begin your next job or internship hunt. Remember that your resume is just your advertising material, its job to get a potential employer interested in you as a person, but, like any advertisement, it is only useful if people see it. Finding a job or internship is really like an election campaign and involves a lot of work, researching companies, working contacts, mailing resumes out, and attending job fairs. Keeping a positive attitude is the most important part of the interview and in-person process: no matter how many rejections you get, there's always another opportunity waiting right around the corner, so keep your head up! Remember that nothing worth getting ever came easy and that the end reward is worth all of the time and energy you put into the process!

Things To Avoid

- **Never Lie.** NEVER EVER EVER lie on a resume. You can dress up an accomplishment to make it sound even better, but never entirely fabricate something or stretch the truth too far. If it is uncovered, it can be disastrous for your employment at that company. Let's say you lied on your resume and said you worked for a particular company for an internship. Assuming that the company you are applying for doesn't call that company and catch your lie, it can still come back to bite you down the road. Let's say you lie when applying for an internship and it goes well and you end up with fulltime employment at that company when you graduate. Four years down the road, the company you said you worked for contacts your new company about a possible business deal. Your manager sees that you worked for that company, and asks you to be the lead on working with them, mentioning to the other company that you used to work there. When things unravel, you will likely be fired from your current job and blacklisted from many other companies when they call your former manager. In fact, more than 96% of companies check references and/or degrees/credentials.⁵
- **Don't fake anything.** Some people try to make their resume look like it has been approved by someone else in a company by printing their resume and then writing in pen somewhere at the top or in the margin something along the lines of "This one looks really promising – John" in the hopes that a hiring manager will think that your resume was singled out by someone in the company who has vouched for it. As silly as it sounds, these kinds of "creative" job-seeking tactics are actually not as rare as you would think, but companies have become more alert to them and will permanently blacklist someone they catch doing this. Furthermore, it tells the recruiter that this candidate feels that his resume is so weak that he must resort to "gaming the system" to have any chance at all of being considered.

⁵ <http://executivejournal.com/jobhunting/resumes/20060322-soltis.html>

A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE: A CRASH COURSE IN CAREER SEEKING

By Kalev Leetaru

Video Resumes

I'm not going to really talk much about video resumes here, but since some of you have probably heard of them, I want to at least briefly touch on the subject. With the growing popularity of video sharing sites like YouTube™, and the wide availability of basic video capture equipment (most point-and-shoot digital cameras and cell phones can take video now), the video resume is beginning to appear with more frequency. A video resume takes time and effort on the part of a recruiter to view, and many will simply discard it in favor of a paper resume that they can skim in just a few seconds. In a creative profession, like marketing, however, it might be more acceptable and help you stand out. Use with caution and talk with friends, faculty, and career counselors in your department as to whether they would recommend a video resume for your field.

The key with a video resume is to keep it short and keep it PROFESSIONAL. Treat it just like a paper resume, don't highlight unrelated hobbies or include video of you running at a track meet if those skills aren't related to your job. Also, if you don't have access to the necessary equipment or video editing software to make the video look polished, you're better off not using a video resume, as there is nothing more painful to watch than a poorly-shot video with grainy images and inaudible sound. On the other hand, a slick presentation with professional editing and a great script could give you that extra edge over the competition.

Perhaps the most famous video resume application of all time was Aleksey Vayner's *Impossible is Nothing*. Not only is a perfect example of things to avoid in a video resume, it provides an excellent case study of *what not to do* across the entire resume process. From falsified references to fake companies and plagiarized material, Aleksey's "job history" has become "history". Search for "Impossible is Nothing" on Wikipedia to learn more about this excellent example of everything to avoid in your own resume.