

A

Developing a Career Search Strategy

The average person changes jobs seven times during a lifetime. Most likely, you will reevaluate your work situation on a regular basis. The following information will help you plan and manage your career.

The Career Planning Process

Career planning activities may be viewed using the following steps:

- 1} *Personal assessment*—to determine interests and values, and to identify talents and abilities.
- 2} *Employment market analysis*—to assess geographic, economic, technological, and social influences on employment opportunities.
- 3} *Application process*—in which you prepare a résumé and create a cover letter.
- 4} *Interview process*—in which you practice your interview skills, research the organization, and send a follow-up message to the organization.
- 5} *Employment acceptance*—when you assess the salary and other financial factors as well as the organizational environment of your potential employer.
- 6} *Career development and advancement* —in which you develop plans to enhance career success behaviors and build strong work relationships.

Career Activity 1

For each of the six steps of the career planning process, write: (a) a goal you have now or might have in the future and (b) an action you might take regarding this career planning area.

did you know?

More and more employers are using credit reports as hiring tools. Federal law requires that job applicants be told if credit histories are being used in the hiring process. You can check your credit report at www.annualcreditreport.com.

Using Career Information Sources to Identify Career Trends

Whereas careers have dwindled in some sectors of our economy, opportunities in other sectors have grown. Service industries that are expected to have the greatest employment potential in the 21st century include computer technology, health care, business services, social and government services, sales and retailing, hospitality and food services, management and human resources, education, and financial services.

Many career information sources are available; these include:

- 1} *Print and other media sources*, such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, which provides detailed information on many occupations. The employment and business sections of newspapers also publish articles on various career topics.

- 2} *Online sources* are available to assist you with all aspects of career planning. Consider a Web search to gather information about résumés, effective interviewing, or creating a career portfolio.
- 3} *Informational interviews* are very effective for obtaining career information. A planned discussion with a person in a field of interest to you will help you learn about the job duties, required training, and the person's feelings about the career. Most people like to talk about their work experiences. Before the interview, plan to ask questions such as:
- How did you get your current position? Did other jobs lead to this one?
 - In what ways do you find your work most satisfying? What are your main frustrations?
 - What tasks and activities are required in your work?
 - What are the most important qualifications for working in this field? What training and education are needed?
 - What advice would you give a person who is considering this type of work?

Career Activity 2

Locate a career information source. Prepare a brief summary of key ideas that could be valuable to you in the future.

Obtaining Employment Experience

Most people possess more career skills than they realize. Your involvement in school, community, and work activities provides a foundation for employment experiences. The following opportunities offer work-related training:

- 1} *Part-time employment* can provide experience and knowledge for a career field.
- 2} *Volunteer work* in community organizations or agencies can help you acquire skills, establish good work habits, and make contacts.
- 3} *Internships* allow you to gain experience needed to obtain employment in a field.
- 4} *Campus projects* offer work-related experiences to help you obtain career skills through campus organizations, course assignments, and research projects.

did you know?

Résumés often include vague words such as "competent," "creative," "flexible," "motivated," or "team player." Instead, give specific examples of your experiences and achievements to better communicate these capabilities.

Career Activity 3

Create a list of your work, volunteer, and school activities. Describe how each could apply to a future work situation.

Identifying Job Opportunities

Some of the most valuable sources of job information include:

- 1} *Job advertisements* in newspapers and professional periodicals are a common source. However, since over 60 percent of jobs may not be advertised to the public, use other job search activities as well.
- 2} *Career fairs*, on campus and at convention centers, allow you to contact several firms in a short time. At a career fair, you will be asked a couple of questions to determine if you qualify for a longer interview. Prepare for job fairs by being ready to quickly communicate your potential contributions to an organization. Knowing something about the organization will help distinguish you from other applicants.
- 3} *Employment agencies* match job hunters with employers. Often the hiring company pays the fee. Be wary when asked to pay a fee in advance. Government employment services may be contacted through your state employment service or state department of labor.
- 4} *Business contacts* advise people about careers. Friends, relatives, and others are potential business contacts. *Networking* is the process of making and using contacts to obtain and update career information.
- 5} *Job creation* involves developing a position that matches your skills with organizational needs. As you develop skills you enjoy, you may be able to create a demand for yourself.
- 6} *Other job search sources* include (a) visits to companies to make face-to-face contacts; (b) business directories and Web sites to obtain names of organizations that employ people with your qualifications; and (c) alumni who work in your field.

Career Activity 4

Using one or more of the sources of available jobs, select a position that you might apply for in the future. How well do your qualifications match those required for the job?

Developing a Résumé

Marketing yourself to prospective employers usually requires a résumé, or personal information sheet.

Résumé Elements

This summary of your education, training, experience, and other qualifications has these main components:

- 1} *The personal data section* presents your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address. Do not include your birth date, sex, height, and weight unless this information applies to a specific job qualification.
- 2} *A career objective* is designed to clearly focus you to a specific employment situation. Your career objective may be omitted from the résumé and

communicated in your cover letter. Also, consider a summary section with a synopsis of your main skills and capabilities.

- 3} *The education section* should include dates, schools attended, fields of study, and degrees earned.
- 4} *The experience section* lists organizations, dates of involvement, and responsibilities for previous employment, relevant school activities, and community service. Highlight computer skills, technical abilities, and other specific competencies. Use action verbs to connect your experience to the needs of the organization. Focus this information on results and accomplishments.
- 5} *The related information section* may include honors, awards, and other activities related to your career field.
- 6} *The references section* lists people who can verify your skills. These individuals may be teachers, past employers, supervisors, or business colleagues. References are usually not included in a résumé; however, have this information available when requested.

did you know?

A combination résumé blends the chronological and functional types. With this format, you first highlight skills and experience relevant to the position. This is followed by your employment history section which reports specific experiences that match the requirements for the job.

Résumé Preparation

An effective résumé must be presented in a professional manner. Many candidates are disqualified by poor résumés. Limit your résumé to one page. Send a two-page résumé only if you have enough material to fill three pages; then use the most valid information to prepare an impressive two-page presentation.

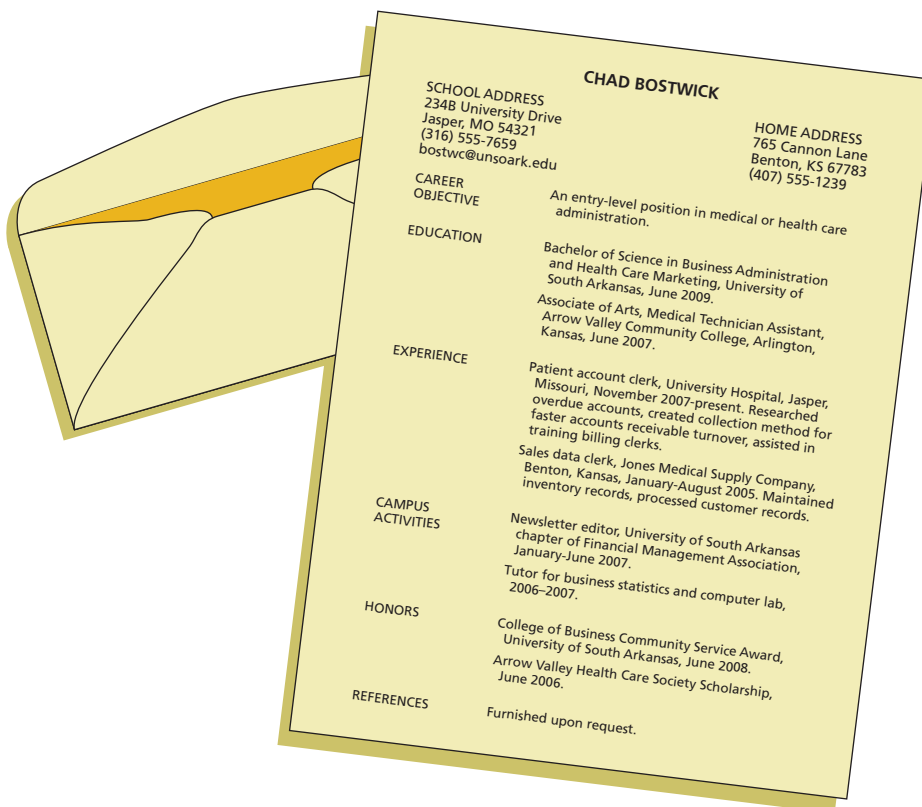


Exhibit A-1

Sample Résumé

One key to successful résumé writing is the use of action words to demonstrate what you have accomplished or achieved. Examples of strong action words include:

- Achieved
- Administered
- Coordinated
- Created
- Designed
- Developed
- Directed
- Edited
- Facilitated
- Initiated
- Implemented
- Managed
- Monitored
- Organized
- Planned
- Produced
- Researched
- Supervised
- Trained
- Updated

Other words and phrases that commonly impress prospective employers include foreign language skills, computer experience, achievement, research experience, flexible, team projects, and overseas study or experience. Instead of just listing your ability to use various software packages (such as Excel or PowerPoint), describe how these tools were used to research information or to present findings for a specific project. For best results, seek assistance from counselors, the campus placement office, and friends to find errors and suggest improvements.

Career Activity 5

Outline the main sections of a résumé that you might create for a job offer the next couple of years. Conduct a Web search to find a résumé format that you might use.

Creating a Cover Letter

A *cover letter*, designed to express your interest in a specific job, accompanies your résumé and consists of three main sections:

did you know?

The *Q letter* (Q for qualifications) provides a side-by-side comparison of your experiences and abilities with the job requirements. The two coordinated lists allow you to be quickly rated as a viable candidate for the position.

- 1} The *introductory paragraph* gets the reader's attention. Indicate your reason for writing by referring to the employment position. Communicate what you have to offer the organization. If applicable, mention the name of the person who referred you.
- 2} The *development paragraphs* highlight aspects of your background that specifically qualify you for the position. At this point, elaborate on experiences and training. Connect your skills and competencies to specific organizational needs.
- 3} The *concluding paragraph* should request action. Ask for an interview to discuss your qualifications in detail. Include your contact information, such as telephone numbers and the times when available. Close your letter by summarizing your benefits to the organization.

Create a personalized cover letter for each position addressed to the appropriate person in the organization. A poorly prepared cover letter guarantees rejection.

In recent years, job applicants are increasingly using a *targeted application letter* instead of a résumé and cover letter. After researching a position and company, you can communicate how your specific skills and experiences will benefit the organization. Once again, your goal is to emphasize achievements and accomplishments so you will be invited for an interview.

Exhibit A-2

Sample Cover Letter



Career Activity 6

Select a potential job. Create a cover letter for that position. Conduct an online search to obtain additional suggestions for effective cover letters.

Career Portfolios

In addition to a résumé, many job applicants prepare a *career portfolio*. This collection of documents and other items provides tangible evidence of your ability and skills. A career portfolio may include the following items:

- 1} *Documentation*—a résumé, sample interview answers, a competency summary, and letters of recommendation.
- 2} *Creative works*—ads, product designs, packages, brand, promotions, and video clips on DVD.
- 3} *Research project samples*—research findings, PowerPoint presentation, Web site designs, marketing plans, and photos of project activities.
- 4} *Employment accomplishments*—published articles, sales results data, financial charts, and news articles of community activities.

A career portfolio can present your abilities and experiences in a tangible manner. In addition, these materials will communicate your initiative and uniqueness. The cover page of your portfolio should connect your ability to the needs of the organization.

An electronic portfolio can be developed on a Web site, with graphics and links. Be sure your home page is not cluttered and is organized to quickly find desired information. Consider sending a CD with your Web site files along with your résumé.

Career Activity 7

List the various items (be specific) that you might include in your career portfolio.

Online Application Process

Many organizations require online applications involving some of these activities:

did you know?

Identity theft can occur using an online résumé. Do not put your Social Security number on your résumé. Thieves will often contact you and pretend to be a prospective employer in an effort to obtain other personal information.

- 1} *Online applications*—in addition to the basic application, you may also be asked to answer some preliminary questions to determine your suitability for the position available.
- 2} *E-résumés*—when posting your résumé online or sending it by e-mail, be sure to (a) use a simple format, avoiding bold, underlines, italics, and tabs; and (b) attach no files that may be difficult to open. Remember that an Internet résumé is impersonal, so do not overlook other job search methods—phone calls, ads, job fairs, and personal contacts.
- 3} *Cyber interviewing*—many organizations conduct screening interviews using video conferencing. Others require that you post preliminary interview responses online. These “e-interviews” may involve questions such as: “Would you rather have structure or flexibility in your work?” and “What approach do you use to solve difficult problems?” Online interviewing may also be used to test a person’s ability in job-related situations. For example, an applicant may be asked to respond to tasks such as those that an investment broker or customer service representative might encounter.

Career Activity 8

Go to a Web site that posts résumés. Obtain information on the process involved in posting your résumé online.

The Job Interview

The interview phase is limited to candidates who possess the desired qualifications.

Preparing for the Interview

Prepare by obtaining additional information about the organization. The best sources include the library, the Internet, observations during company visits, analysis of company products, informal conversations with employees, and discussions with people knowledgeable about the company or industry. Research the company’s operations, competitors, recent successes, planned expansion, and personnel policies to help you discuss your potential contributions to the company.

Another preinterview activity is preparing questions you will ask during the interview, such as:

- What do employees like most about your organization’s working environment?
- What challenges might be encountered by new employees?

Exhibit A-3

Common Interview Questions

Education and Training Questions

What education and training qualify you for this job?

Why are you interested in working for this company?

In addition to going to school, what activities have helped you to expand your interests and knowledge?

What did you like best about school?

What did you like least?

Work and Other Experience Questions

In what types of situations have you done your best work?

Describe the supervisors who motivated you most.

Which of your past accomplishments are you proud of?

Have you ever had to coordinate the activities of several people?

Describe some people whom you have found difficult to work with.

Describe a situation in which your determination helped you achieve a specific goal.

What situations frustrate you?

Other than past jobs, what experiences have helped prepare you for this job?

What methods do you consider best for motivating employees?

Personal Qualities Questions

What are your major strengths?

What are your major weaknesses? What have you done to overcome your weaknesses?

What do you plan to be doing 5 or 10 years from now?

Which individuals have had the greatest influence on you?

What traits make a person successful?

How well do you communicate your ideas orally and in writing?

How would your teachers and your past employers describe you?

What do you do in your leisure time?

How persuasive are you in presenting ideas to others?

- What training opportunities are available to employees who desire advancement?
- What qualities do your most successful employees possess?
- What actions of competitors are likely to affect the company in the near future?

Successful interviewing requires practice. Use a video or work with friends to develop confidence when interviewing. Organize ideas, speak clearly and calmly, and communicate enthusiasm. Prepare specific answers regarding your strengths. Campus organizations and career placement offices may offer opportunities for interview practice.

When interviewing, keep in mind that proper dress and grooming are vital. Dress more conservatively than current employees. A business suit is usually appropriate. Avoid trendy and casual styles, and don't wear too much jewelry.

Confirm the time and location of the interview. Take copies of your résumé, your reference list, and paper for notes. Arrive about 10 minutes earlier than your appointed time.

The Interview Process

Interviews may include situations or questions to determine how you react under pressure. Answer clearly in a controlled manner. Career counselors suggest having a “theme” for interview responses to focus your key qualifications. Throughout the interview come back to the central idea that communicates your potential contributions to the organization.

Behavioral interviewing, also called *competency-based interviewing*, is frequently used to evaluate an applicant’s on-the-job potential. In these questions, you might be asked how you would handle various work situations. Behavioral interview questions typically begin with “Describe . . .” or “Tell me about . . .” to encourage interviewees to better explain their work style.

In *situational interviewing*, you are asked to participate in role-playing, similar to what may be encountered on the job. For example, you might be asked to resolve a complaint with a customer or negotiate with a supplier. This interview experience is used to evaluate your ability to work in various organizational environments.

Avoid talking too much, but answer each question completely maintaining good eye contact. Stay calm during the interview. Remember, you are being asked questions about a subject about which you are the world’s expert—YOU! Finally, thank the interviewer for the opportunity to discuss the job and your qualifications.

did you know?

In *situational interviewing*, candidates for a sales position may be asked to interact with a potential customer. Prospective employees for Southwest Airlines participate in a “job audition.” This starts the moment they apply, with extensive notes from the initial phone call. During the flight to the interview, gate agents, flight attendants, and other company employees are instructed to pay special attention to the candidate’s behaviors. Thus, the candidate is being observed constantly, in situations similar to the job setting. The process also includes giving a talk to a large group. Bored or distracted audience members are disqualified. This selection process has been shown to reduce employee turnover and increase customer satisfaction.

After the Interview

Most interviewers conclude by telling you when you can expect to hear from them. While waiting, do two things. First, send a follow-up letter or e-mail within a day or two expressing your appreciation for the opportunity to interview. If you don’t get the job, this thank-you letter can make a positive impression to improve your chances for future consideration.

Second, do a self-evaluation of your interview performance. Write down the areas to improve. Try to remember the questions you were asked that differed from your expected questions. Remember, the more interviews you have, the better you will present yourself and the better the chance of being offered a job.

Career Activity 9

Have someone ask you sample interview questions and then point out the strengths and weaknesses of your interview skills.

Job Offer Comparison

The financial aspects of a job should be assessed along with some organization factors.

- 1} *Salary and financial factors*—your rate of pay will be affected by the type of work and your experience. The position may also include employee benefits. These include insurance, retirement plans, vacation time, and other special benefits for employees. Many organizations offer recreational facilities, discounts, and other advantages for workers.
- 2} *Organizational environment*—while the financial elements of a job are very important, also consider the working environment. Leadership style, dress code, and the social atmosphere should be investigated. Talk with people who have worked in the organization. Advancement potential might also be evaluated. Training programs may be available. These opportunities can be very beneficial for your long-term career success.



did you know?

The main factors college graduates consider when choosing an employer are enjoyment of the work, integrity of the organization, potential for advancement, benefits, and job location.

Career Activity 10

Prepare a list of factors that you would consider when accepting a job. Talk to other people about what they believe to be important when accepting a job.

Career Strategies in a Weak Job Market

In recent years, obtaining employment has been more difficult for many job seekers due to the economic downturn. What actions would be useful to take when attempting to seek employment or maintain your current position? Consider the following:

- Acknowledge stress, anxiety, frustration, and fear. Eat properly and exercise to avoid health problems.
- Assess your financial situation. Determine sources of emergency funds to pay needed expenses. Cut unnecessary spending.
- Evaluate your current and future employment potential. Consider work and community experiences that you have which are not on your résumé.
- Maintain a focus with a positive outlook. Your ability to communicate confidence and competency will result in more job offers.
- Connect with others in professional and social settings.
- Consider part-time work, consulting, and volunteering to exercise your skills, develop new contacts, and expand your career potential.

An ability to obtain and maintain employment in difficult economic times will serve you in every type of job market.

Key Web Sites for Career Planning

www.careerjournal.com
www.ajb.dni.us
www.monster.com
www.bls.gov/oco

www.rileyguide.com
www.careerbuilder.com
www.careerfairs.com
www.businessweek.com/careers