

# Job Hunting Guide

This guide is divided into two sections. The first part is "Writing Your Resume," which begins below, followed by "Progressing in the Job Search." "Writing Your Resume" covers developing a personal inventory of your skills and accomplishments, choosing the appropriate resume type, and writing tips that allow you to put it all together in a manner that will help you get that interview. In the second section, you will learn how to uncover job openings, prepare for interviews, and the appropriate methods of following up after the interview.

## PART I: WRITING YOUR RESUME

The most important step in the job search process is the preparation of your resume. Your resume determines whether you progress to the next step in the process -- the interview. A common mistake many job seekers make is not spending enough time developing their resume. Instant Resume helps you create a professional looking resume, it's up to you to write a professional sounding resume!

The basic steps in the resume writing process are:

1. Personal Inventory
2. Choosing a Resume Type
3. Writing
4. Reviewing
5. Updating

The Inventory step, which many job seekers skip over, helps you identify your skills, interests, personal qualities and accomplishments. Taking a personal inventory helps to insure that nothing important is left out of your resume, and it can assist you in developing your career objective. Even if you already know your objective, we recommend that you work through the following sections; however, if you choose to, you can skip to "Your Objective" later in this section.

### Personal Inventory

The majority of job seekers cannot identify "what they want to do." Taking the time to analyze your skills, interests, and personality will enable you to narrow your job search scope and write a good resume. A focused resume allows employers to determine where you could fit into their organization and it allows you to get the job you really want!

#### Skills

First, create a list of all the skills that you possess; these should be ones you have used both in the work place and those you have used outside the work place. Your inventory should include skills you currently use as well as those that you have employed in the past. Remember, don't restrict your list to job-related skills!

The general criteria for defining an item as a skill is that when you apply it, there is a measurable result. A skill list could include the following:

Writing, Research, Communicating, Organizing, Teaching, Making decisions, Traveling, or Reading.

After you complete your list, you should expand upon each skill. This expansion should include several more specific examples/definitions of the skill and specific ways in which you've used it. Under the topic "Organizing," one example for each skill could be the following:

### Skill

Directed team  
Supervised tasks and people  
Balanced personal tasks

### Statement

Organized practice schedule for little league team  
Supervised Quality Assurance staff during testing of new release  
Managed political campaign

At the end of this exercise, you will have uncovered numerous skills you may have forgotten or didn't even know you had!

### Interests

Generally, you shouldn't include interests on your resume; however, your interests can help you focus your job search on positions you would enjoy. This list should include activities or ideas that excite and challenge you, as well as those areas you're interested in learning about. Take the time to compile a complete and accurate list.

For example, an interest list could include the following:

Writing, Sailing, Reading, Volunteering, Working with children, Women's history

### Personal Qualities

In addition to skills and interests, there's another group of attributes that help define you -- your personal qualities. Some of these items should be included in your resume, as they help define qualities that aren't obvious from your skill set. Be honest when you compile a list of your personal traits, but don't be modest. It's important to do an accurate assessment.

A personal traits list could include the following:

Hard working, Communicative, Adaptable, Intelligent, Assertive, Determined

### Accomplishments

The previous lists you've compiled required you to look inward and examine your skills, interests, and personal traits. The focus for this list is outward as you determine how your actions have impacted the "world" favorably. The most important and relevant accomplishments in this list will be incorporated into your resume.

The general criteria for defining an accomplishment is a measurable result produced or created out of your involvement in that activity. For example, an accomplishment list could include the following:  
Increased fund raising for college scholarships by 30%, Complied with new federal regulations on time and under budget, Instituted employee training program, Balanced household budget, Completed MBA program while working full time

### Your Objective

The exercises you completed in previous sections identified your skills, interests, personal traits, and accomplishments. By reviewing these lists and linking your interests with your skill set, you can arrive at the most important piece of your resume -- the Objective.

Your resume should be targeted at the most obvious needs of a particular job (your objective). If you don't identify an objective, your resume becomes too general and your qualifications won't "fit" a position. Remember, in most cases, an employer is interested in filling a specific position.

Your objective should be a specific job description or title in a given field. For example, software engineer, technical writer, and project manager are all objectives. An objective can either be a specific title or a short sentence outlining the position and your goals. The following are sample objectives:

A. Interested in obtaining a management position in Marketing coordinating several complex marketing projects simultaneously and where there would be opportunities for long-term growth.

B. Seeking a challenging administrative position in public relations and communications offering growth opportunity, while utilizing my planning, organization, and follow-through skills.

Once you determine your objective(s), it becomes easy to determine what information should be included in your resume.

## **Choosing a Resume Type**

For the best results, you should select the resume type that reflects your experience and the demands of your objective. There are three standard resume types which are described below.

### **Chronological Resumes**

A chronological resume lists work experience in reverse chronological order, starting with your present (or most recent) experience. A brief description of each position is also included. This type of resume works well if you have a consistent work history and have not switched jobs or careers often. You can focus your achievements by providing a summary of your qualifications or a short accomplishments section.

For a sample, open TECHCHR.RSM in Instant Resume.

#### **Advantages**

1. Traditional and conservative; therefore, widely accepted
2. Clearly shows what your responsibilities were in each position
3. Highlights the chronology of your professional development
4. Is easy to read and follow

#### **Disadvantages**

1. Obscures significant achievements or abilities
2. Does not capitalize on relevant, nonprofessional experience
3. Makes it difficult to compensate for special problems, such as career changes, a job-hopping history, or inexperience in your desired field

### **Functional Skills Resumes**

A functional skills resume highlights your skills and accomplishments, rather than your work history. This format lists your accomplishments and skills at the beginning of the resume, without necessarily relating them to specific positions. The positions you have held are listed at the end of the resume, without descriptions, in reverse chronological order.

This type of resume works well if your professional experience does not reflect the full range of your abilities or if your background is limited. Special situations in which a functional skills resume is particularly appropriate include: student, recent graduate, career change, job-hopping history, or lack of higher education.

For a sample, open BUSFUN1.RSM in Instant Resume.

#### **Advantages**

1. Calls attention to your achievements and highlights your unique qualities
2. Lets you indicate skills and accomplishments not necessarily related to previous employment
3. De-emphasizes special problems, such as lack of work experience or career changes
4. Forces you to take inventory of your strengths and weaknesses, and thus provides extra preparation for the interviewing process

### Disadvantages

1. Does not clearly delineate your work experience; many employers prefer to see the chronology of your professional experience
2. Might serve as flag to employers that you are trying to hide a career or experience weakness by using this format
3. Is sometimes difficult to read and follow

### Combination Resumes

A combination resume combines the advantages of chronological and functional skills resumes. It features skills and accomplishments, but also clearly displays your work history and includes a brief description of each position.

## **Writing Your Resume**

After you've taken a personal assessment and identified your objective(s), and determined which resume type is right for you, you're ready to begin writing! At its most basic, the resume is an easy-to-read presentation of your skills and accomplishments. The goal of your resume, to convince an employer to grant you an interview, should be considered as you begin writing.

### The One Page Rule

In general, regardless of your experience, your resume should not be more than one page long. Employers typically screen hundreds of resumes for a single position, taking less than a minute or two to decide whether you are placed into the "Yes" or "No" pile. Often only the first page of a multiple page resume is read, therefore having a one page resume helps to ensure that all the important information is communicated. However, as with every rule, there are exceptions -- and it's up to you to make that determination. Remember, the more clear and concise your resume is, the better your results.

If you have difficulty trimming your resume to the one page limit, try the following space saving tips:

1. Eliminate repetition: If you performed the same functions in two or three different jobs, only explain your most recent position in detail.
2. Shorten sentences: Remove useless text from your resume. For example, replace: "I was promoted to the head of the department within six months of hire" with: "Promoted to head of department six months after hire."
3. Eliminate implied information: For example, if you are a college graduate, you don't need to include information about your high school education.
4. Highlight recent employment: If you have a long employment history, you can summarize early experience with a summary line. For example, "1980 -- 1985 A variety of positions in the software industry."

### Experience Inventory

Regardless of the resume type you selected, you should compile an inventory of relevant data. From this inventory, you will locate the key points to include in your resume. You should include information about the following aspects of your life in your inventory:

Full and part time jobs, Education/training, Volunteer work, Technical knowledge, Professional organizations, References

In general, each section should include:

1. Relevant dates: Dates of employment or date of graduation
2. Organization information: Employer's, school's, or organization's name and location

3. Skills and accomplishments: Graduated Magna Cum Laude, or promoted to head of department six months after hire
4. Awards: Received the Cleo for print advertisement in 1992

### **Employment History**

The material you include in this section of your resume is the most important to a potential employer. In a chronological resume, this section dominates the resume; in a functional skills resume, many of the skills and accomplishments you include will flow from your employment history.

#### *Draft*

Employer: Williams Corp.

Dates of employment: 1986 to present

Title: Marketing Buyer

Responsibilities: procurement support for Marketing and Sales, prepared recommendations for managers and team leaders, managed printing of promotional tools for Sales and Marketing, \$300,000 cost savings in overhead.

#### *Resume*

Williams Corporation  
Marketing Buyer

Atlanta, GA  
1986 -- Present

Provided creative procurement support for Marketing and Sales programs by leading, planning, and negotiating the acquisition of required materials and services. Analyzed and prepared recommendations for managers and team leaders. Managed all aspects of printing promotional tools created to support Marketing/Sales goals and objectives. Initiated and delivered \$300,000 cost savings in the past year.

### **Education**

The importance placed on this section depends on two issues:

1. How long ago you graduated
2. The importance of education in your field

If your objective doesn't require specific educational requirements as a primary qualification for employment and you completed your degree at least five years ago, this section should appear at the end of your resume. If specific educational requirements are necessary for your objective or you haven't been out of school for five years, it should appear at the top of your resume. This section should include information about your college education (only include high school or trade school information if you haven't received a higher degree) and any other relevant course work.

#### *Draft*

School Attended -- Clemson University

Degree -- B.S. in Marketing Management

Date of degree -- 1983

Courses in management and accounting

#### *Resume*

Clemson University  
Bachelor of Science in Marketing Management

Clemson, SC  
1983

Additional courses in management and accounting.

### **Volunteer Work**

Generally, you should not include a volunteer position in your resume, but, the relevant skills you utilized in that position can and should be included. However, if your position is related to your objective, you should include the position in your Employment section.

### **Technical Knowledge**

Depending on your objective and your skills, this section may or may not be relevant. Generally, a technical section includes information about specific skills you have; such as computer knowledge and operating specific types of equipment.

#### *Draft*

- Studio cameras
- Video cameras
- Audio consoles
- Turntables
- Tape machines

#### *Or*

- PC, Mac, DOS and Windows experience
- Desktop publishing software (PFS:Publisher, Express Publisher)
- Integrated processing software (PFS:WindowWorks)

#### *Resume*

Technical Summary

Proficiency with: studio cameras, video cameras, audio consoles, turntables, and tape machines.

#### *Or*

Technical Summary

Proficiency with: PC, Mac, DOS, and Windows software, concentrating in desktop publishing and integrated processing software (PFS:Publisher, Express Publisher, or PFS:WindowWorks).

### **Professional Organizations**

You should only include a list of professional organizations if they are relevant to your current objective. For example, the Society of Technical Writers and the Boston Computer Society.

### **References**

Your references should not be included in your resume; it is assumed that you will provide references when they are requested. However, before you begin submitting your resume, you should contact potential references and verify their ability to provide a positive reference.

### **Resume Tips**

It's now time to put together all the information you've accumulated! If you have two or more objectives and they are in the same general field, one resume will be sufficient. If your objectives are diverse, you should create a separate resume for each objective.

#### **Resume Guidelines:**

##### *Do*

1. Keep sentences and paragraphs short
2. Use active tense and action words
3. Use bulleted statements where appropriate
4. Use amounts or dollar values where they enhance the description of what you accomplished
5. Put your strongest statement first, and work down from there
6. Check your resume carefully for spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors

### *Don't*

1. Include pictures
2. List references
3. Include salary information
4. Use "I," it is implied throughout
5. Include hobbies, unless they clearly relate to your objective
6. Use jargon

### **Chronological Resumes**

1. Begin with your present or most recent position and work backwards. Place more emphasis and devote more space to recent positions.
2. Only include your last four or five positions. Earlier positions should be summarized unless they are very relevant to your objective.
3. Within each position, stress your major accomplishments, especially those that relate to your objective.
4. In general, if you graduated within the past five years, the Education section should appear at the top of your resume. If you graduated over five years ago, the Education section should appear at the bottom of your resume.

### **Functional Skills Resumes**

1. Use separate section headings to highlight skill sets.
2. List the sections and accomplishments in order of importance. Those sections and the accomplishments within those sections that are most related to your objective should appear first.
3. Include all relevant accomplishments or skills -- remember, they don't have to be related to employment experience.
4. In general, if you graduated within the past five years, the Education section should appear at the top of your resume. If you graduated over five years ago, the Education section should appear at the bottom of your resume.
5. Include an Experience section at the end of your resume that lists: Dates of employment, Employer, and your title.

## **PART II: PROGRESSING IN THE JOB SEARCH**

This section is about the finer points of navigating the job market. Competition for jobs is often fierce. A well-constructed resume improves your chances of being picked from the pile of resumes that companies receive daily, but it is far from a guarantee.

Getting a job takes active pursuit. When looking for a new job:

1. Educate yourself about job hunting tactics, and put into practice the recommended strategies. Read books and articles about how to locate jobs, how to interview, and how to improve your interpersonal skills. Look into Adult Education courses in your area -- they often offer job hunting seminars.
2. Be prepared to devote as much time to job hunting as you would to a full-time job. A mistake many job seekers make is that they do not look hard enough.
3. Consider your job search an educational experience. You can learn a lot about yourself, about careers, and about other people while you are looking for a job. You can also learn a great deal about your own profession when you see what other companies consider to be important.

### **Uncovering Job Openings**

There are many avenues you can pursue when looking for a job in addition to the normal responses to classified ads, unsolicited submissions to companies, and networking with friends and colleagues. Actively use as many of the following as you can.

### **Employment Agencies and Executive Search Firms**

Having a professional recruiter represent you can be one of the best ways to get an interview. The recruiter can directly discuss your best selling points with the employer. He or she lends the credibility of a third party to the interview process. Remember, getting a job is, in reality, practicing sales. You are the commodity being sold and the employer is the customer. A headhunter is a professional salesperson, skilled at selling applicants.

There are two types of professional recruitment companies: Employment Agencies and Executive Search Firms.

#### **Employment Agencies**

Recruiters at employment agencies are paid on commission by the hiring company. The recruiter talks to a manager or to Human Resources and gets a list of requirements for the position. The recruiter then contacts people they have already interviewed or whose resumes they have on file.

After interviewing potential candidates, the recruiter sends the resumes of the best candidates to the manager. If the company eventually hires one of these candidates, the recruiter earns a fee which is calculated on a percentage of that individual's expected first-year salary.

The industry standard is from 15% to 20%. For example, if a marketing manager is hired for \$60,000, the recruiter might receive a commission of \$12,000. This is usually paid in installments over a ninety day period. If the applicant should leave the position before ninety days, the recruiter does not receive all of the money.

#### **Executive Search Firms**

Executive search firms differ from regular employment agencies in that they are hired to work directly for the company. They absorb many of the duties of a Human Resources department by finding the proper applicants, interviewing them, narrowing down the number of applicants, and above all, maintaining confidentiality. A recruiter may know that a top executive of a company is leaving before anyone else does, even before the executive knows.

It often takes a long time to find a replacement for an individual in a high-level position or in a highly-specialized field. The necessary skill set may be difficult to find. An executive search recruiter specializes in finding such individuals without making the search public. Often the recruiters themselves come from specialized backgrounds that give them insight into hiring for a particular field.

What an executive recruiter does best is what earned them the nickname of headhunter. They actively pursue candidates who are currently working in other companies (usually competitors) and try to hire them away to work for the client company. When trying to select which recruiters to work with, take these tips into consideration:

1. Look for an agency that specializes in your particular field. These agencies know the industry well, have good contacts in the field, and will not be as likely to send you to interviews outside of your interest area or competence level.
2. Watch the Help Wanted ads. Agencies that run the same ad week after week are probably trying to build up a list of candidates without currently having positions to fill. It is still a good idea to send in your resume, but be aware that a response may not come for some time.
3. Many agents will try to match you only to jobs identical to those you have already had. This is the easiest and surest type of placement to make. If you want to make a move up, or if you are switching careers, you need an agent who will be your advocate.



A good agent will plug your strengths and focus on your transferable skills. If your career goals are unrealistic, the agent should tell you, but if he or she tries to push you into applying for positions that do not interest you just to make a sale, find another agent.

4. Only use agencies that do not require you to pay a fee.

5. Remember, the employment agent who impresses you with his or her integrity, competence, and pleasantness, will probably also impress a hiring supervisor. Many companies are deluged with calls from employment agencies wanting to do business.

Companies often assign their business on the basis of personality -- they give the job opening to the recruiter they like the most. Do not let yourself be represented by an agent who is less professional than you are.

When you do go to an agency, dress well and conduct yourself as you would for any interview. Be honest with the recruiter about your qualifications and your needs. A good agent can be a valuable collaborator, giving you feedback about how you present yourself and tips about how you should present yourself to a particular employer.

Call the recruiter regularly after your interview. Employment agencies often see hundreds of people each week. Your recruiter will probably work on your resume for a few days, and then move on to new applicants as they come in. A recruiter is more likely to remember you if you keep in touch.

Use more than one agency. Most recruiters base their business on a few strong company contacts that keep them busy. No one recruiter is going to know about all available job openings. Make sure the agency checks with you before submitting your resume to a company. Never let more than one agency represent you for the same position.

#### **Business Journals or Business Sections of Local Papers**

Watch your local papers and peruse business journals for news about companies moving into your area. If a large company with corporate headquarters elsewhere is moving in, contact corporate headquarters to set up an interview. If it is a small company, find out whom to contact (try your Chamber of Commerce for information), and get in touch as soon as possible.

Watch for news about people who have been hired or promoted. If any of those people pertain to your field or have an interesting business outlook, offer your congratulations, and mention that you would be interested in working for him or her.

#### **Professional Associations' Publications and Premier Events**

In some professions, advertising is done primarily in professional journals. Find out which professional journals cover your field (ask your librarian), subscribe, and apply for any positions that interest you.

Some associations also hold events covering particular issues and call for papers from their members as well as from the general public. If you have an interest in the topic or experience in the area, this is a great way to expand your horizons. By submitting a paper, you can focus your research skills and become an active participant with others in your field. This form of networking might also reveal previously unpublished employment possibilities.

#### **Trade Shows and Job Fairs**

Job Fairs provide an excellent means of contacting potential employers. Companies that participate in job fairs are usually serious about finding new employees. To participate in a job fair, a company has to make substantial financial investment; it has to pay a fee for a booth, design a display, and pay their personnel to attend the fair. A member of Human Resources is usually there, but many times it is the hiring managers who interview at a fair.

Job fairs let you make personal contact with the company and gather information before you get called in for an interview. Most booths have a supply of handouts about the company including annual reports and product sheets. Trade shows and conventions offer many advantages. You meet potential employers in a non-interview situation, allowing you to be more relaxed, and you are provided with an opportunity to meet potential employers face-to-face. This lets you make an impression before being screened and also offers you the opportunity to do extensive networking; you can find out who can help you get the position you really want in your field.

#### **Personnel Offices of Companies, Schools, etc.**

Large organizations often post openings "internally" before advertising them. In fact, some organizations hardly ever advertise outside (especially hospitals and universities). All job openings are posted on a bulletin board in the personnel office. In addition to saving the expense of advertising, this gives current employees the opportunity to apply for better positions within the company.

If you are interested in a particular organization, call to find out if they publicly post openings. If they welcome visits, do so often for new listings may be posted daily. Some companies incorporate their computer technology by maintaining electronic bulletin boards where you can both review and apply to via your modem. Other organizations may publish a weekly listing of openings, which you can receive by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

#### **College Placement Offices**

If you are a student, take advantage of your college placement office. Placement offices usually offer a range of services: career counseling, listings of job openings, and pre-arranged interviews. In prearranged interviews, a representative of the company comes to your school at a set time in an effort to recruit employees from college campuses.

You can arrange an interview simply by signing up. It is a great opportunity: the interview is often guaranteed (usually you cannot get screened out before the interview stage); and the company is looking for people straight out of college, rather than high level professionals with more experience than you have.

#### **Other Sources**

1. State and Federal Employment Offices. All the services are free and as employers are not charged a commission by these agencies, it is cost efficient to use them often. This means you may have a better chance of being noticed, and consequently of being interviewed.
2. Professional Registers. A register is a publication listing openings in a particular field, usually published several times a year. Some types of registers publish resumes for employers to review.
3. The Yellow Pages. Use the Yellow Pages as a reference source to find out what businesses exist in your field. You can pre-screen using the Yellow Pages: call up personnel offices and ask if they plan to be doing any hiring in the near future; ask what they specialize in; who is the person in charge of hiring, etc. Build a network of contacts using the Yellow Pages. Ask everyone you call if they can recommend someone who might be of help to you. The Yellow Pages also gives the most comprehensive list of employment agencies in your area.

### **Getting Your Foot in the Door**

Many large companies screen all applicants through a central personnel office. The job of the personnel officer is to screen out all "inappropriate" applicants so that the hiring supervisor does not have to be bothered with them. If personnel decides that you are inappropriate, you won't get an interview.

Personnel people are rarely trained in the positions that they are filtering candidates for. As a result, they use formulas to review resumes. They get so many applications that they have to be very systematic about reviewing them. If your qualifications do not reduce to a nice formula, you are not going to make it. You may be perfect for the position, the hiring supervisor might adore you if he or she met you, but it will never happen because personnel will screen you out.

If you haven't been greeted with a form letter saying thank you but others (more closely) qualified have been chosen for an interview, call to find out the status of the job. Be specific and ask if it is okay to send your resume directly to the hiring manager. Some supervisors are as annoyed as you are by the bureaucratic workings of a personnel office. Perhaps, they will admire you for your initiative.

On the other hand, a manager may be thankful for personnel relieving him or her of the time-consuming task of taking phone calls and answering questions about a job. If you meet resistance in your inquires, apologize, do not leave your name, and go back through the company's prescribed channels.

### **Informational Interviewing**

When you can't find an advertisement that interests you, continually feel under qualified for certain positions, or might like to utilize your current skills in a different field, informational interviewing is the answer. With this form of interviewing, you attempt to meet with individuals who hold positions you are interested in obtaining. The following are some points to keep in mind:

1. You should begin a job search by deciding what field interests you. Make appointments to talk to people working in the field. Do not go with the idea of looking for a job. Instead, go with questions about the field or about the company.

Try to determine how you might fit in, what you would most like to do. Do your homework before speaking to people. Find out whatever you can about the work and the company. Ask questions that were not answered in the materials you read.

When you are a job seeker, you are on the defensive; the employer is on the offensive. But when you meet someone in an "informational interview," the footing is more equal.

2. Ask everyone you meet to provide you with names of other people with whom to talk. Remember: you are not looking for a job offer yet. Do exhaustive grassroots research on your field. You will get an inside view of the profession.

3. If you start by talking to people at a lower level in the organization and working your way up, you will be prepared when you meet the person with hiring power.

4. When you finally determine exactly where you want to be and what you want to be doing, go after it. Make an appointment to meet with someone who has the authority to hire you. Tell that person how you could be of help to the company.

Discuss a problematic situation of which you have become aware in the organization, and tell the interviewer how you could help to resolve it. But be diplomatic -- you are not there to educate the interviewer who might not appreciate your analysis of the organization. The situation you present does not have to be of major proportions. It could be as simple as a team of writers not having enough time to schedule and track work through the print cycle perhaps you can become their scheduler.

People you have met in informational interviews may well remember you later when an opening occurs.

### **Contracting -- The Permanent Position Alternative**

Contracting or temporary work can be one of the most effective tools available for finding a permanent job. Many companies have discovered that it is more cost-effective to hire consultants to do many jobs that

were previously performed by employees. Contractors generally make a higher salary than permanent workers but they do not receive benefits. Benefits generally comprise more than 40% plus of an employee's actual income. Although this "pay" may be invisible to the employee, the company has to foot the bill for it. By hiring a contractor, this overhead is removed.

This can provide an excellent gateway into a permanent job. Many companies like to hire "temp to perm." This gives the company a chance to see your work for a few months and decide if they really like you. Likewise, it gives you, the contractor, a chance to see what the company is really like and if you want to take a permanent position there.

No matter how much interviewing and information collecting you do on a company, you cannot know what it is like to work there -- until you actually work there. Also, if you do contract work at a company and a permanent position opens up in the future, you have a much greater chance of getting it. The managers know you, you will have an internal reference and you are familiar with the company and its procedures.

Contract positions are usually easier to acquire than permanent positions. The interview process is not as long or as strenuous, but it still helps to be prepared. Many companies hire contractors directly, in which case you would follow the same job hunting procedures as for a permanent position but state that you are looking for a contract position.

There are also numerous agencies that handle contract openings. Some of these companies are divisions of regular employment agencies, others handle nothing but contract work. Contract agencies are listed in the Yellow Pages under Employment -- Temporary.

## **Preparing for the Interview**

Although interviewing can be a nerve wracking experience, be thankful that you were selected as a possible candidate. As difficult as most people find being interviewed, it is a skill that can be acquired. The candidate that appears confident and relaxed is the most likely to get the job. Here are some important points to remember:

1. Chances are the person interviewing you has not done this very often. Human Resources personnel are skilled in interviewing but usually do not know much about the particulars of the job. Managers know what their needs are but are not skilled in determining if you can meet those needs.
2. Do your homework. Before the interview, try to find out as much about the company and the position as possible. If you are answering an ad, call Human Resources and request information about the company; visit the library and see if the annual report is on file and if any articles have been written on the company.

If you got the interview through an agency, talk to the recruiter before the interview and glean as much information about the company and the manager as possible. The recruiter may have company information and product sheets that you can study. Also, if the recruiter has spoken to the manager directly, you may be able to get an idea of what the manager really wants to see instead of just what is written in the job description.

3. Try to qualify from your recruiter or from Human Resources how viable a position this opening is. Has money already been approved for the requisition or is the company window shopping? Why is the position open? Did somebody leave (and why) or is there too much work for the current staff? How far behind is the work currently? Is the need critical? How long have they been looking for someone to fill this position? How many other candidates have interviewed for the position (or are going to interview) and what kind of reaction did they evoke?

## **Practicing Your Interview Technique**

If this is your first interview with the company and you are only meeting with one person, the time allotted

should be no more than an hour. The night before develop 10 questions about the company's outlook, its product, the work environment and your position. Prioritize, memorize, and practice your commentary during the presentation.

Some standard questions for any company and position could be:

1. When would the position begin?
2. What is the most important aspect of the position?
3. How would I spend my time during a typical day?
4. To whom would I report?
5. Who would report to me?
6. Is this a new position? If not, where is the person who had the position before me?

Always try to end the interview with:

1. Have we addressed all of your interests?
2. Do you have any concerns about my qualifications?
3. What is the next step in this process?

Note: If the interviewer asks what are your salary requirements, turn the tables and ask "What do you think my qualifications are worth?"

### **Interview Attire**

Studies show that the first thing the interviewer reacts to when he or she meets you is your appearance. How you present yourself says a lot about you as a person and as a prospective employee. Dressing appropriately for an interview is a statement of maturity and a display of respect for your prospective employer. If you want to get hired, pay careful attention to grooming and dress.

Dressing for an interview is a specialized art. You should not look dowdy, flashy, or glamorous. Here are some guidelines:

1. Dress conservatively (a navy blue suit with a white shirt is standard in business).
2. Dress neatly and carefully. Avoid an overabundance of perfume or aftershave lotion; some people are allergic to them.

In all cases, make sure your attire is a show of respect for the interviewer and can only make the best impression. By arriving early you can check your appearance in your car or before entering the office.

### **During the Interview**

Remember employment is a two-way street. You will be spending more waking hours with these people than you will with your family. So try to get a good "feeling" for the company in the interview.

As the opportunity presents itself, take charge of the interview as much as possible with your prepared questions. This not only shows that you are interested in the position, but also gives the interviewer a break from having to invent all the questions. If you can "turn the tables" during the interview and be the one asking the questions, the manager may actually be relieved, because he or she has the answers.

However, you should be prepared for the stock questions, such as: What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What are your goals five years from now? These questions are just trying to determine:

1. Can you handle the job effectively?
2. Do you have a positive, enthusiastic attitude?
3. Are you a responsible, mature adult who can be loyal to and reflect well on the company?

Almost any question the interviewer asks you is camouflage for one of these three basic questions. You must have the basic qualifications for the job or you would not have been invited. The interviewer must determine if you have some defect that does not show up in the resume, a flaw that would render you useless or embarrassing on the job. Are you lazy? Are you passive? Are you a troublemaker? These are

the things the interviewer is trying to find out. Understanding the basic goal of interview questions allows you to answer appropriately.

### **Can You Handle the Job Effectively?**

You may be drooling over this job; you may think it sounds fantastic. Chances are that the interviewer does not agree with you. It is a sad fact that every job has some hidden problem, and you can be certain that the interviewer knows what it is. Maybe there is too much pressure, maybe the job is very boring, maybe you have to work with a difficult person. The interviewer already assumes you have the essential qualifications. Now he or she is trying to find out if you could handle the special problem.

1. Your job is to find out what the hidden problem is, and to convince the interviewer that you could handle it. How? Get the interviewer to tell you about the position before you answer any questions. This may not be easy to do. The interviewer might begin shooting questions at you as soon as you sit down. Try to redirect the questions.

For instance, if you are asked: "Have you done anything like this before?" you can respond, "Yes, I have. But I could be more specific if you tell me a little more about the position and what you are looking for." If the interviewer asks: "Can you work under pressure?" answer, "Yes, I have worked under pressure in all of my positions. But I could address the question more fully if you tell me about the type of pressure that this position entails."

2. Be prepared to talk about your accomplishments. The best way to comfort an anxious interviewer is to convince him or her that you performed well in a similar position before. Before you go to the interview, review your previous achievements. Think of some anecdotes to illustrate how you handled difficult problems.

### **Do You Have a Positive, Enthusiastic Attitude?**

The interviewer is no fool. He or she figures that if you are enthusiastic about the position, you will work hard at it. You will not quit in three months. You will not try to form a union of disgruntled employees. You will be a pleasant colleague. If you can convince the interviewer of your enthusiasm, you will probably get hired before candidate X, who is twice as qualified as you are, but lacked enthusiasm.

If you are naturally subdued, you will have to stretch yourself. Enthusiasm is essential to success. Here are some tips:

1. Find out everything you can about the company and the position before the interview. Employers will probably ask you, "What do you know about our company?" If you say, "Uhhh, nothing," you have struck out. Let interviewers know that you are well-informed. They will think you are applying for the position with your eyes wide open, and that you know what you want. They also will see that you are conscientious and concerned enough to do research ahead of time. You are telling interviewers that you have done your homework.

At some point during the interview, you will undoubtedly be asked if you have any questions. Always ask a question! Even if you don't really have any questions, come up with one anyway. Repeat something the interviewer said to you earlier. It shows that you have been listening intently. If you have done background research, you can prepare intelligent questions ahead of time.

2. Be communicative. If you are interested in the position, let it show. Do not turn into a mouse because you are afraid of being too pushy. Convey your interest in a businesslike, but enthusiastic fashion. Tell the interviewer verbally and by your tone that you want the job.

### **Are You a Responsible, Mature Adult Who Can Be Loyal to and Reflect Well on the Company?**

Reassure interviewers by letting them know that you have handled your past business dealings in a mature and balanced fashion. When asked why you left your previous positions, give positive reasons: a better opportunity elsewhere, a decision to continue your education, a move to another area.

1. Do not talk about the horrors of your last job! Even if your last boss was a neanderthal, don't complain. You don't want to give the impression that you have problems getting along with people, particularly with supervisors.

Dwell on the positive. If your last boss was ruthlessly demanding, say, "She was a perfectionist," not "She was impossible to please. If you bad mouth a past employer, your prospective employer will assume that he or she will receive the same treatment.

2. Be prepared for "red flags." The interviewer may discover that flaw in your background cleverly buried in your resume. Be prepared. Were you fired? Tell the truth if asked directly. It is not the end of the world. A good interviewer can sense a lie. Omit detrimental information if you want, but do not tell outright lies. If interviewers catch you lying, they will not trust you with keys to the office.

You can diminish the impact of problems in your background by presenting them in a positive light. If you were fired, talk about how much you learned from the experience. Do not discuss the details, how unfair the employer was, or how you suffered. Rather, convey the attitude that it was an unfortunate and isolated occurrence in the midst of your otherwise successful career. If there is a gap or inconsistency in your work history, let the interviewer know why that occurred, perhaps the economy was bad, and that you are looking for a long-term commitment.

### **Interview Etiquette**

Your appearance gives the first impression, but your manners and general comportment become critical immediately afterwards. The combination of these factors -- appearance, manners, and overall comportment -- form the basis for the interviewer's hiring decision. The interview has its own code of honor. Learn the rules, wear the right clothes, and always be polite and respectful.

Rule #1. Arrive early. If you are running late, you are going to be frantic. If you are frantic, you will not be at your best; in addition, the interviewer will be annoyed. No one likes to be kept waiting. The interviewer will assume that if you are not on time for this first meeting, you will not be on time for work either. Plan to arrive ten or fifteen minutes early. Take a trial run before the interview to see how long the trip takes, check your directions, and ascertain whether there are detours or construction that might cause delays.

Rule #2. Project a professional image while you are waiting for the interview. Do not smoke, chew gum, or listen to your radio. It's best to try to find some company literature to read. Breathe deeply to calm yourself down. Take off your coat and organize your belongings. When the interviewer arrives, you will be poised and prepared.

Rule #3. Be ready for the handshake. You are probably going to have to shake the interviewer's hand, so dry your palms if they are sweaty. You do not want to offend the interviewer. Bring a tissue with you, or go to the bathroom and run your hands under water.

Having a firm handshake is very important. It may sound ridiculous, but interviewers can form a poor opinion of a candidate based on a weak or clammy handshake. If you are not experienced at shaking hands, find someone with whom to practice.

Rule #4. Come prepared. Carry your resume with you. The interviewer might not have a copy handy. Bring a list of your references.

Rule #5. Do not sit until you are invited to do so. When you do sit, try to position yourself at a diagonal to the interviewer rather than directly in front. It is less confrontational. However, if the interviewer starts to explain something or wants to show you something, lean towards him or her. This shows you are paying attention.

Rule #6. Do not wear your coat into the interview, and do not hold your purse or briefcase on your lap. You do not want to look like you are ready to fly out the door.

Rule #7. Do not yell or whisper. Try to match the volume of your voice to that of the interviewer.

Rule #8. Watch your gestures and facial expressions. Do not make nervous or jerky movements. Do not run your hand through your hair or stroke your face. Do not tap your fingers, crack your knuckles, spin your ring, yawn, or swing your leg. Smile, but do not smile the entire time. Relax your forehead and the muscles around your eyes. Don't look puzzled. If the interviewer is talking rapidly, jot down your concern on a pad and ask it at an appropriate time.

Rule #9. Make eye contact. Look directly at the interviewer when answering or asking a question.

Rule #10. Do not try to read papers on the interviewer's desk.

Rule #11. If the interviewer introduces himself or herself with a first and last name, use the last name when addressing them. If the interviewer is a woman, do not ask if it is "Mrs. or Miss." Many women find the question offensive; it could be "Doctor." Try to find out ahead of time. If you are sure she is not a doctor, use "Ms."

Rule #12. Do not talk too much, do not talk too little. Your responses to the interviewer's questions should be concise, but not monosyllabic.

Rule #13. Watch your language. Do not curse, even if the interviewer does. And do not use obscure five-syllable words to impress the interviewer; no one likes to feel intellectually inferior.

Rule #14. Be natural. It may be difficult when you are trying to follow all these guidelines, but being natural is probably the most important rule. It is better to come across as a confident candidate with your shirttail hanging out than as an impeccably groomed candidate who is visibly uncomfortable or nervous.

### **Salary, Benefits, and Promotions**

Of course you want to know what salary the company is offering. But don't ask this in the first interview. Nor should you ask detailed questions about benefits, or you will give the interviewer the impression that you care more about compensation than about the opportunity the position offers.

Most interviewers say they want to see some ambition in a candidate. However, it is not wise to ask too many questions about future growth. The interviewer wants to know that you can be satisfied in the current position.

Always get the employer to extend the initial offer. If it is more than you had originally anticipated, you are well off. If you state that you are looking for a price lower than they anticipated, chances are they will not offer you more. Good recruiters can be very helpful at this stage. They spend most of their work day negotiating deals. The more money you get, the bigger their commission.

### **Following Up -- Thank You Letters and More**

The quest for the job does not end when you leave the interviewer's office. The battle ends only when you have an offer or contract in hand. So if you want to get hired, keep fighting for the position, even after the interview. If an agency sent you on the interview, always call the recruiter immediately afterwards. Try to give the recruiter an honest assessment of how the interview went and what you think the manager thought your strong and weak points were. The better informed the recruiter is about what to expect when talking to the manager again, the better your chances are of being properly marketed. Also ask the recruiter if it's appropriate to send a thank you letter directly or through them.



Virtually every book on job hunting advises you to write a thank you letter after an interview. And virtually every job seeker chooses to ignore this advice. It may be the biggest mistake in the entire job campaign.

Suppose you are the interviewer. You are very impressed with two candidates; in fact, you cannot decide between them. You check references. Both have excellent references. Both have excellent backgrounds. Both interview very well. Maybe candidate A interviewed a little better than candidate B. You are thinking about offering the position to A. But then the mail comes and there is this wonderful thank you note from candidate B. It says, in essence, that he'd love to work with you, he's excited by what the company is doing, he's willing to work hard, and he reminds you that he has specialized training. You had forgotten about that training. And then he calls. "Have you made up your mind yet?" he wants to know. He assures you he does not want to be pushy. He just wants to know if he got the job so he can get started as soon as possible.

How can you resist the enthusiasm of candidate B? Would you have the heart to turn him down? If you have not heard from candidate A at all, you may assume that he is not really interested in the job.

A thank you letter accomplishes several things:

1. Lets the interviewer know that you follow through on what you start.
2. Impresses the interviewer with your good manners and proper appreciation.
3. Shows the interviewer that you are very interested in the position.
4. Reminds the interviewer of your special qualifications, or points out qualifications you forgot to mention in the interview.

#### A Sample Thank You Letter

You can vary the following in a million ways. Just let the interviewer know that you appreciate the time he or she took to meet with you. If the interviewer was particularly helpful to you, say so. Remind the interviewer of one or more of your strengths, let him or her know you are still enthusiastic about the job, and sign off.

For example:

September 28, 1993

John Tenniel  
Snark Publications  
974 Bandersnatch Lane  
Sudbury, MA 01776

Dear Mr. Tenniel,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. I found our conversation about the constraints of illustrating for the current market to be very informative. I would like to have the opportunity to work with you. My five years as an illustrator for the daily newspaper market has given me good experience in dealing with the pressures of producing quality materials in a short space of time.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours truly,

Robert Southey

Send the letter immediately after the interview. Promptness impresses. After several days, the interviewer might begin to forget you and might not be able to match your letter to your face. So get that letter in the mail immediately after your interview.

### **Calling After the Interview**

If you are really dying to know the status of the search several days after your interview, why not call and ask? There may be some employers who will consider you to be pushy, but most will probably appreciate your enthusiasm. It certainly beats anxiously waiting for the verdict.

If the interviewer told you he would let you know in a week, and more than a week has passed, you should definitely call. The delay may not be what you think. Maybe you are the final candidate, but there is some problem setting the salary. Maybe the interviewer is having trouble getting through to your phone. Or, maybe it is what you think: someone else was offered the job. If so, you might as well find out now so you can get on with your life.

### **Keeping a Positive Attitude**

Job hunting is like fishing: no matter how enticing a line you put out, there is no guarantee of catching anything. Sooner or later, you are bound to get rejected.

Rejections come in many forms. There are nice rejection letters and insulting rejection letters, form letters, and personal notes. Sometimes you get a "sorry we do not want you" phone call; sometimes you never hear from the company at all. The most common rejection, though, is the form letter: "You were one of many qualified applicants. We chose someone else. We'll keep your resume on file."

The first few times you get rejected are probably the hardest. You may feel angry, hopeless, or puzzled. If you have been looking for a job for some time, you may have received enough rejection letters to wallpaper your bedroom, but don't despair.

Rejection is never easy. It could lead to a crisis in self-confidence. Is everyone else better than you? Did you make all the wrong choices in your education and career? Do you lack poise, are you dull, can the interviewer tell how depressed you are? If you are unemployed, you may already feel depressed and unproductive. This makes rejection even harder to bear.

Job hunting tests your mettle, your persistence, and your belief in yourself. You have to keep at it, even when you feel totally depleted. You have to present yourself as a self-confident and enthusiastic person even when you feel completely useless.

There are no easy answers, but there are some things you can do to make it a little easier for yourself:

1. Remember that you are not alone. Do not take rejection personally. Tell yourself over and over again that all job hunters face rejection. It may help to join a support group for job hunters. If there isn't one in your area, you might consider forming one.

2. Keep up a daily routine. Even if you are unemployed, it is important to maintain discipline in your life. Get up early, go out for a walk, eat your meals, and organize your time as efficiently as you would if you were working.
3. Exercise. It will help you feel better about yourself. It will give you energy. It will give you courage. It will take your mind off your troubles.
4. Volunteer. If you are not working, spend a little time each week doing something useful in the community. It will look better on your resume than doing nothing, it will make you feel better, and it is a great way to network.
5. Read books about job hunting. They will remind you that what you are going through is normal. They might give you good ideas for new avenues to pursue.
6. Dress nicely. Act as though you have a great job. This is not self-deceit; it is self-preservation. If you take good care of yourself, you will be far less susceptible to despair.
7. Above all, do not give up. Keep sending out resumes. Keep following up job leads. Keep up your good humor. You will definitely get a job sooner or later.

### **Additional Resources**

"What Color is Your Parachute?" by Richard Nelson Bolles. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 1992.

"The Only Job Hunting Guide You'll Ever Need" by Kathryn and Ross Petras. Poseiden Press, New York, 1989.

"Not Just Another Job" by Tom Jackson. Times Books, New York, 1992.

"The Damn Good Resume Guide" by Yana Parker. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 1986.

"The Perfect Resume" by Tom Jackson. Doubleday, New York, 1990.