

8 Communicating your value



“So tell me a little about yourself.”

Such a simple question, but how do you answer it when you are trying to impress a hiring decision-maker for a job, or an internship, or a spot on a research team, or even a role in a community-service project? Don't worry: if you've already taken time to critically reflect on your experiences, strengths, and goals, and done the work of systematically researching the position, the organization, and the career it connects to, then together with your broad and deep “T-shaped” liberal education experiences at UW-Madison, you'll have plenty to say as you summarize your **career narrative** from chapter 1.

Education journalist Jeffrey Selingo, in his recent book *There Is Life After College* (2015), suggested that this career narrative should answer the following kinds of questions:

- What do my work and study experiences in college say about me? Do they reveal my core interests and passions?
- What kind of working environments do I enjoy and do well in?
- What failures did I experience in college, and what lessons did I learn from them?
- What kind of job would give me a sense of fulfillment? Where do I want to be in five years?

If you're taking a SuccessWorks course, you've already gotten started on this process. Our students create initial résumés and LinkedIn sites right away, honing them bit by bit as they proceed with their critical self-reflections and their career and industry research, and then use these to present a two-minute practice introduction speech on the last day of discussion section. This chapter provides some background on those three most common modes for communicating your value in your career search: in a concise résumé or web posting, through a more open-ended narrative cover letter, and in a realtime, face-to-face discussion.

Building a résumé or web site

If you've followed the advice in this student guide, you've already assembled all of the raw materials for your résumé or web site: you've reflected on your reasons for being in college (chapter 2), you've inventoried your strengths (chapter 3), you've developed some very specific Challenge-Action-Result statements (chapter 4), and you've pushed yourself beyond your comfort zone in some "Wisconsin Experience" activity (chapter 5). The more precise (and quantitative) you can be with the bullet points that you list on your résumé and web site, the better.

But while a web site might summarize your "greatest hits" from this list, don't think of your résumé as simply a laundry list of all of these items; instead, each résumé that you send out to a prospective employer should be a targeted subset of everything you could possibly say about yourself, emphasizing your preparation and enthusiasm for each particular job that you apply for (Crosby & Liming 2009).

Résumés fall into several basic styles:

- **chronological order** List your education and most relevant experiences (both paid and unpaid) with the most recent ones listed first. This style demonstrates upward growth in skill and knowledge.

- **skills categories** In this format you do not list your jobs in reverse-time order, but rather you bundle them into several categories of skills. Only use this for very specific kinds of jobs or industries which demand this format.
- **hybrid chronological and skills** This style combines qualities of chronological and skills résumés. Review your most relevant paid and unpaid experiences for themes, then create 1-3 skill categories and list experiences in reverse chronological order within the categories.
- **graphic chronological and skills** A hybrid résumé which uses graphic techniques and artistic design to communicate experience and skills visually. Only use this for graphic-design oriented industries, and only if you are confident in your visual design skills.

Regardless of which style you choose, make sure your résumé includes the following basic elements:

- Your **contact information** including email, professional web site (if any), telephone number (one with voice mail), and physical address.
- Your **education history** including institutions with their location (city/state), dates attended, and degrees earned or in progress. While you should include your GPA if it is outstanding, you don't have to include it unless the employer specifically asks for it (Terhune & Hays 2013).
- Your **paid and unpaid work history** including organization, location (city/state), dates employed, your title, and a basic description of your responsibilities.
- Selected **non-work experiences** or **additional skills** that you think are relevant, especially unique volunteer, civic, or personal accomplishments.

As you list experiences and skills on your résumé, try to use ideas from your reflections and specific numbers from your CAR statements to succinctly describe each experience. Try to have each bullet point on your résumé answer an employer's questions, like "How does this demonstrate that you are willing and able to work here?" or "How would this add value to my organization?" (And be honest; never exaggerate your accomplishments.) A good way to do this is to try to combine an action verb with a short description of what you did, how you did it, and the result (just like a CAR statement).

Action verb + what you did, how you did it, and the result

<i>Good Resume</i>	<i>GREAT Resume</i>
Expanded Spanish communication skills through collaboration with Spanish-speaking employees	Collaborated with 7 Spanish-speaking colleagues to increase store efficiency and decrease merchandise order errors by 10%
Developed organizational and leadership abilities by leading committee meetings	Led bi-weekly committee meetings of 8 members by facilitating discussions and monitoring goal progression; planned semester fundraiser resulting in \$2,000 raised for Special Olympics
Attended bi-weekly sessions to become a Leadership Ambassador	Participated in bi-weekly professional development sessions on leadership, teamwork, and goal-setting that led to certification as a Leadership Ambassador

(SuccessWorks, 2019)

Note that you do not have to include an “objective” statement on the résumé — you should save that for your cover letter. And there is no need to spend precious space on your résumé to declare “references available upon request” at the bottom; just bring a list of references with you to any job interview.

Format is just as important as content in a résumé. Until you have built up a substantial work or education history, try to keep your résumé to one page, and use a consistent, readable font throughout (for example, 12 point Times Roman). Adequate margins and the occasional blank line separating sections helps to make your résumé readable. And if you are submitting your résumé electronically, you should submit it as an Adobe “.pdf” file (which stands for “portable document format”) unless the employer specifies a different kind of file format, like Microsoft Word (“.doc” or “.docx”). In general, exporting as a “.pdf” file is a more reliable way to preserve your careful formatting.

Finally, don’t forget the three “musts” of résumé-writing:

1. **Don’t get too personal.** “Do not disclose your health, disability, marital status, age, or ethnicity. This information is illegal for most employers to request” (Crosby & Liming 2009). This may affect whether you choose to include a photo with your résumé. While photos are expected parts of online job sites like LinkedIn, candidates usually omit photos from résumés (though for jobs in other parts of the world, photos along with résumés are more customary).
2. **Include relevant keywords** that connect to the job and industry you are targeting, since so many résumés these days are pre-screened by computer matching algorithms called **applicant tracking software** (Pierson 2006; Vilorio 2011; Selingo 2015). Enterprise Rent-A-Car, for example, uses software to “sort through volumes of candidates, generally

50,000 a month, and identify those who meet five or so minimum requirements” for their management training program (Bernard 2016).

3. **Proofread your résumé twice** — and have someone else proofread it for you as well — because just a single typo or spelling mistake can be enough to remove you from consideration when the average employer receives hundreds of responses for a single open job (sometimes spending as little as 30 seconds on their initial screening of each résumé) (Crosby & Liming 2009).

We’ve included a few examples of effective and ineffective résumés below. Remember that at UW-Madison, professors and advisers are more than happy to look over your résumé and provide advice, often providing drop-in, on-demand help through your major department. And you can always bring your résumé to the peer advisers at **SuccessWorks!**

SuccessWorks peer advising team, 2019-2020



SuccessWorks, 2019

Chris Badger

1234 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53706, 608-555-1234, cbadger@uwalumni.com, linkedin.com/ChristopherBadger

Education

University of Wisconsin – Madison

Bachelor of Arts, May 20xx

Double Major: Psychology and Spanish

Certificate: Business

GPA: 3.2/4.0, Psychology GPA: 3.4/4.0, Spanish GPA: 3.5/4.0

Honors: Dean's List (2 semesters), Chancellor's Scholar

Relevant Coursework: Financial Accounting, Grant Writing, Advanced Spanish Conversation

Leadership and Communication Experience

Badger Herald

Communications Intern

Reporter

University of Wisconsin - Madison

September 20xx - Present

April 20xx - Present

- Gained valuable media knowledge while honing writing and interviewing skills; write two feature stories per week
- Interacted effectively with fellow staff members and community members, gaining access to exclusive stories

Letters & Science Career Services

Peer Advisor

University of Wisconsin - Madison

September 20xx - May 20xx

- Effectively worked with professional staff to create new resources for the office, including information on negotiating job offers, different styles of interviewing, and guides for choosing graduate school programs
- Advised students individually on improving their resumes

Noodles & Company

Assistant Manager

Madison, WI

May 20xx - December 20xx

- Arranged scheduling for staff of 35 involving great attention to detail and mediation of conflicting requests
- Entrusted with interviewing, hiring, training, and evaluation of staff, requiring excellent interpersonal communication skills

Cross-Cultural Experience

Atwood Community Center, Volunteer, Madison, WI

August - December 20xx, May 20xx - Present

- Coordinated events for local children on celebrating all cultures
- Led workshops to help students learn more about their own culture

Freelance Spanish Tutor, Madison, WI

May - August 20xx and 20xx

- Worked with four high school students to prepare them for international study trips
- Helped students improve Spanish conversational skills

University of Wisconsin Study Abroad, Selected Participant, Oaxaca, Mexico

January - May 20xx

Skills

Computer: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint (proficient), Microsoft Access, Adobe Page Maker and Photoshop (familiar), Comfortable using both Windows and Mac operating systems

Languages: Spanish (highly proficient), French (conversational)

Sample: what NOT to do on a resume

Nikhil Shah

Room 1000, International House, 500 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10027, USA.
Tel: 1- 646-222-2222 Email: hotstuff@hotmail.com

EDUCATION

Columbia University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, New York, NY
MA in Statistics (I expect to graduate in May of 2009)
Course Works: Mathematics of Finance, Stochastic Process, Time Series Analysis, Management of Extreme Financial Events, Game Theory

University College London, University of London, United Kingdom
BS in Economics, June 2008
1st Class Honors Obtained

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Economics Summer Program, July - August 2004

Professional Experience

Morgan Stanley UK Ltd, London, UK, Summer 2008
Intern, Credit Derivative Operations Support

- Liaised with colleagues in other departments
- Responsible for prioritizing client requirement
- Responsible for preparing trade confirmation for various types of Credit Derivatives
- Responsible for obtaining structured product training

ABN AMRO ASSET MANAGEMENT (ASIA) LTD, HONG KONG, SUMMER 2007
Intern, Financial Controlling Support

- Prepared balance sheets and P&L reporting; enhanced the efficiency of the division
- Prepared presentation materials for senior management
- Assisted team on various projects

ABN AMRO ASSET MANAGEMENT (ASIA) LTD, HK, JUNE – AUG 2005
Summer Intern, Product Development and Operations Support

- Collaborate with Product Development, Operations and IT teams to update database system
- Implement database system for Product development and Operations departments

Logistics Information Network Enterprise Limited, HK, May – Aug 2006
(Logistics member of the Hutchison Port Holdings Group)
Intern, Accounting & Finance, Logistic Management Support

- Provided consistent support for daily logistics process
- Worked proactively to follow up on issues for the departments; contributed to the productivity of the team

Skills

Fluent in English, Cantonese and written Mandarin.
Proficient in MS Office (Word, Excel, Outlook, Access, Power Point), Stata, Visual Basics

Activities

Volunteer: Cultural Hour Event (two hundred member audience at International House), New York, 2008; Trainee, New Jersey Marathon for April 2008.

*****References:** Available when requested

Fonts: Avoid “fancy” fonts. Use same font throughout the resume. There should be no period after the name.

E-mail: Use a professional e-mail, preferably your Columbia address.

Pronouns: Do NOT use first person pronouns, such as “I” and “we.”

Font Size: Keep font size and font type consistent throughout resume. “Coursework” should be singular.

Consistency: This is imperative on the resume. Do not indent one line where you have not indented others with the same information.

Spelling: Mistakes are inexcusable.

Descriptions: Avoid using the same passive phrase repeatedly. Instead, use action-oriented verbs to begin phrases. Be more descriptive and specific with tasks.

Dates: Be consistent in displaying dates. Seasons can be appropriate for seasonal positions. If abbreviating months, use same format for all.

Titles/Bullets: Titles should be consistent; if you use italics for one title, use italics for all. Bullets must be aligned throughout.

Languages: If applying for positions in the US, do not include English as it is assumed. If applying abroad, it can be appropriate.

Products: PowerPoint is one word, with no space.

References: Do not list references on the resume. There is no need to have a line indicating references are available. It is assumed.

(Columbia University 2015)

adrienne robenstine

GRAPHIC DESIGNER • MARKETER • CREATIVE VIRTUOSO

123.456.7890 
a.robenstine@gmail.com 

I AM A GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Pre-press, digital and offset print production.
Web design, creation, maintenance and flash animation.
Deadline driven and oriented.
Comfortable working in high pressure situations.
Cohesive brand identity and logo creation.
Innovative and on the cutting edge of technology.
Extensive marketing budget management.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

SELF EMPLOYED *Geneva, Ohio*

Graphic Designer, Marketing Professional, Photographer

2007-Present Worked various projects including logo design and reconstruction, business cards, brochures, wedding invitations, direct mail pieces and postcards. I have worked with such clients as Wente Vineyards of California, The Q Arena, Heidelberg Distributing Company and many others. Helped develop cohesive marketing plans to increase business and revenue.

MONT GRANITE, INC. *Solon, Ohio*

Marketing Director & Graphic Designer

2010-2011 I handled the marketing efforts and graphic design for their 5 different locations. I created a company wide cohesive brand appearance, designed and maintained all internal print publications as well as creating ads and advertising in several publications. I designed a 10' x 10' tradeshow booth and organized and presented at several tradeshow in all of their markets. Researched new technology and applied social media marketing to all divisions. Installed QR Code marketing into all print ads as well as on all employee business cards. Created a state of the art website including an extensive material search and database. Developed an industry first way of scanning granite slabs to reproduce material for homeowners to look at in their home.

PIP PRINTING & MARKETING SERVICES *Mentor, Ohio*

Art Director / Graphic Designer

2008-2010 Worked as the head of the Graphics Department. Designed all pieces as well as running pre-press and production. Designed a variety of pieces ranging from Business Cards, Brochures, Menus, Postcards, Catalogs, Direct Mail pieces, etc. I created an archival system for client files and ran server back up for secure file storage. I created, edited and laid out as well as editing and manipulating photographs for full color 150 page book by a local author. Installed and maintained social media marketing.

PORATH PRINT SOURCE *Cleveland, Ohio*

Graphic Designer

2007-2008 Worked with several high level clientele such as local radio stations and charitable organizations. Created unique designs for business cards, brochures, calendars and direct mail pieces. Prepared files for digital and 4-color print production including outputting color plates and running color tests. Gained valuable experience in pre-press machinery. Maintained file archival and storage.

PORTFOLIO AND REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST



The University of Akron
Class of 2007

Major: Graphic Design
Minor: Professional Photography & Marketing

EDUCATION

MEMBERSHIPS
NAPP • AIGA • CDPUG

COMPUTER KNOWLEDGE

Proficient in both
Mac and Windows
operating systems.



Adobe

Acrobat
After Effects CS6
Dreamweaver CS6
Flash CS6
Illustrator CS6
InDesign CS6
Photoshop CS6
Premiere Pro CS6

Quark

QuarkXpress

Microsoft

Excel
Powerpoint
Word

SOFTWARE

SCAN ME 

Once you have a résumé that you are proud of, you can post it online to various web sites and job boards, and you can use your résumé as a template for creating your own web site or filling in career information on a service like LinkedIn. But remember, the web allows room for more space and supplemental materials than just a single sheet of paper. You might consider enhancing your online résumé through an **electronic portfolio** — an online record of your academic, artistic, workplace, or service accomplishments — in the following ways:

- Upload **letters of recommendation** you have received (but make sure your recommenders agree to have their references posted in this way first).
- Upload copies of university **course assignments** or other intellectual products that you are particularly proud of, to use LinkedIn as a sort of electronic portfolio showcasing your best work.
- Upload copies of **work projects** that you are proud of — but be careful! Make sure to receive permission first. Instead, you may want to create a "mock up" of a work project that you're proud of, to indicate the scope of what you've done without revealing proprietary or personal information from your previous employer.

Here at UW-Madison, we have several tools available for creating such a portfolio. You can use our learning management system, Canvas, to create an “ePortfolio” from your main account screen. Or you can use the UW’s subscription to Google Sites to create an online portfolio using that service.

In any case, don’t let your online presence go “stale” — any time you update your printed résumé, update your online materials as well.

Writing a cover letter

According to the career experts at the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, “Sending a résumé without a cover letter is like starting an interview without shaking hands” (Crosby et al 2009). But writing a cover letter is a lot harder than shaking hands, unfortunately. If you find that writing is a challenge, remember that cover letters often conform to an expected format or genre that is rather straightforward. For example, one career guide recommends a simple three-paragraph structure (Basalla et al 2015):

1. “**Introduce yourself** and express your interest in the job.” (A good rule of thumb is that the very first sentence should clearly state why you are writing and what specific position you are applying for.)

2. “Highlight two or three particularly **relevant pieces of experience** that you know, based on your research [...], will be of interest to the employer.” (Think of these as little stories — your CAR statements can help here.)
3. “**Close** by saying that you'll follow up within a week.” And make sure to express thanks for the reader's time!

This is very similar to the advice that LinkedIn offers students for creating cover letters: “Bring your skills and qualifications to life by putting your career path in story form. Develop a strong opening paragraph that outlines your strongest skills. Next, describe how those skills map to the role you're applying for. Finally, describe where your skills, personality and unique talents will take you.” (LinkedIn, 2018)

The cover letter serves another purpose besides introducing you and your value to the organization: it is a mini test of writing skill and collegiality. Remember, as we saw in chapters 2 and 4, complex communication skills are among the most desired attributes of new hires by employers, regardless of major. A well-written and pleasant cover letter demonstrates that you have mastered those skills yourself.

You should always try to address a cover letter to a named individual rather than to an unnamed “hiring manager” or “to whom it may concern.” If you've researched the organization and job that you're applying for, you should be able to come up with a specific person to contact. Make sure to spell the person's name correctly and to use their correct job title! And if you've already made any other social networking connections to this organization — attended a recruiting presentation through a student professional group, talked to a hiring representative at a career fair, or held an informational interview with an employee in the area you're interested in — make sure to mention that as well.

Suggested cover letter format

	Today's Date
	(Ms. or Mr.) Name of Recruiter Title of Recruiter Company Name Company Address City, State Zip
	Dear (Ms. or Mr.) Name of Recruiter or Dear Hiring Manager,
Intro	<p>Your opening sentence should create interest on the part of the reader—write something about yourself that stands out. Next, tell the employer why you are writing the letter, the exact title of the position you are applying for, as well as your background information (major, year, university). Give information to show your specific interest in the company. Do you have similar values? What appeals to you about their mission statement? If you have any personal connections, this is the place to include any company contacts you communicated with. In your last sentence, be sure to road map the rest of your letter and mention that what specific skills you will discuss.</p>
Body	<p>Your middle paragraph(s) should expand on the specific skills mentioned above to strengthen employer interest. Use one or two meaningful stories from your academic background, work experience, or involvement in activities that will show the reader why you should be considered as a candidate. Be as specific as you can about the skills you have that match the position but remember to show them, not tell them. Expand on what you have mentioned in your resume. If the employer is looking for a candidate with leadership skills, prove to them that you are a leader with active language and details. You may show your leadership experience by, for example, discussing how you coordinated an event for 200 pre-business students with a committee of 12, etc. Don't list all of your accomplishments, duplicate your resume, or make the reader try to guess what you would be interested in or how you are uniquely qualified. Tell the employer what you can do for the organization and why this particular organization interests you. It is very important to offer value to the employer, so that it what you should end with!</p> <p>(The body of the cover letter may be anywhere from one to two paragraphs depending on the relevant content you would like to include.)</p>
Closing	<p>In your closing paragraph refer to your enclosed resume and ask for action. Express your unique interest and reinforce how your qualifications match the position. Be flexible to their schedule and encourage them to contact you at (phone number) or (email), but do not mention interviews—they will reach out to you if you are a qualified candidate. Lastly, be sure to express your gratitude and appreciation for considering you.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p>

(SuccessWorks, 2019)

Besides clearly explaining why you'd be a good fit for the position, the cover letter works a bit like an interview: it demonstrates to the reader whether or not you've researched and understood the organization you're applying to. This is one reason that you should never use a generic cover letter; just like with your résumé, always tailor it to each particular opportunity. One effective trick is to go back through your cover letter and highlight all of the words and terms that appear in the original job advertisement or position description that you are applying to, to demonstrate congruence between what the organization needs and what you are claiming to offer.

Sample cover letter with key aspects from job advertisement highlighted

September 23, 2013

Amy Capes
Senior Recruiter
Target Stores
1090 73rd Avenue North East
Fridley, MN 55432

Dear Ms. Capes:

I am writing to express my interest in the Executive Intern position with Target Stores for Spring 2014. I learned of this position through my career advisor and am very enthusiastic about expanding my knowledge of the retail environment at a company as well-known and respectable as Target. I have always had a **strong interest in a career in retail**, and I believe my educational background, prior experience, and passion for the industry make me an exceptional candidate for the Executive Intern position.

I am currently a **senior** pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Retail from the School of Human Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Through my coursework, I have learned a lot about general business, but also about theory and practice as it relates to the retail environment. I have developed a greater understanding of the industry through my **involvement with the Student Retail Association**, in which I have had the opportunity to network with peers and professionals in the field. I am currently the **Vice President** of the student organization and have had many opportunities **to provide innovative ideas** and collaborate with the leadership **team** to provide meaningful experiences for others within the organization. I am also an active member of Badger Acts of Kindness, a student organization dedicated to performing acts of kindness on campus and in the community. I have demonstrated my ability to prioritize and multitask by maintaining an active role within these organizations, working 25 hours per week, and maintaining a 3.89 GPA within my major courses and an **overall GPA of 3.61**.

While I have been working in the service industry for six years, my interest in retail truly peaked when I took my current position with Anthropologie. I have been employed as a Sales Associate there for nearly three years and have learned a great deal about retail environments through this role including sales, **human resources, inventory management, and guest services**. My **communication skills** have dramatically improved due to the need for me to provide exceptional customer service to all guests of the store, and I have excelled at **working on a team** through my role in helping train and **oversee other Sales Associates**. The skills and knowledge I have gained have solidified my passion for retail, so I look forward to the possibility of furthering my career with Target. Please view my enclosed resume for additional details on my professional experiences.

I am genuinely excited about the Executive Intern position with Target and hope to discuss my qualification with you. Please contact me at 608-555-7862 or heartcarri@wisc.edu if you need additional information or if you wish to set up an interview. I appreciate you taking the time to review my materials and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

(UW-Madison School of Human Ecology)

Students often wonder how long a cover letter should be. In general, a one-page cover letter that highlights relevant information from a résumé is appropriate. However, if you have a particular connection to an organization (like a previous internship experience) or a unique accomplishment that is relevant to the position (such as a previous college project), you may want to go into a bit more detail to make that clear to the reader.

Remember, in the end, the goal of a cover letter is to “reduce the risk of employing you by showing that you have done similar work before, that you have the relevant skills, that you understand the mission, and that you are eager to be a part of this group” (Basalla et al 2015).

Talking about yourself in person

All of the written and online efforts to communicate your value really have a single goal: to get you a job interview with a hiring decision-maker where you can demonstrate your excitement and experience in person. But an interview is by definition an impromptu and imperfect situation. For example, Selingo (2015) reminds us that “At most companies, this is a highly subjective process, done mainly by managers with no experience or training in interviewing or hiring.” Expectations for how many interviews are appropriate, and what form those interviews will take, vary across different occupations, industries, and organizations. And these norms change over time, as well — Google “once administered up to 25 interviews for each job candidate,” but today they only interview each candidate four times (Thompson 2016). How do you prepare for such an unpredictable situation?

Interviewing, just like public speaking, can be nerve-wracking. But also like public speaking, you can practice your interviewing skills and improve them. For example, a succinct introduction — what we might call a **personal brand pitch** (as we saw in chapter 6) or an **elevator pitch** (from the idea that you quickly narrate it to a decision maker when you happen to find yourself standing on the elevator with her) — can set the tone for a productive interview, especially when the first question is an open-ended one like “Tell me a little bit about yourself and why you want this job.”

One trick for organizing your introduction is what Kathryn Minshew, CEO of *The Muse*, calls **the present-past-future formula**: “first you start with the present—where you are right now. Then, segue into the past—a little bit about the experiences you’ve had and the skills you gained at the previous position. Finally, finish with the future—why you are really excited for this particular opportunity” (Minshew 2016). She offers this example:

Well, I’m currently an account executive at Smith, where I handle our top performing client. Before that, I worked at an agency where I was on three different major national healthcare brands. And while I really enjoyed the work that I did, I’d love the chance to dig in much deeper with one specific healthcare company, which is why I’m so excited about this opportunity with Metro Health Center.

In telling your career story in this way, you should strive to be conversational, but clear. It is important to remember that your interviewer will likely not share your experiences, so be careful not to make assumptions about how someone else might interpret the meaning and value of your various courses, volunteer roles, or previous jobs. As author Meg Jay suggests, you want to remember that in a formal interview, you’re not simply chatting with one of your “strong ties” (from chapter 6), but rather trying to explain yourself to a new “weak tie” who will share less of your own background: “Because close-knit groups of strong ties are usually so similar, they tend to use a simple,

encoded way of communicating known as **restricted speech**. Economical but incomplete, restricted speech relies on in-crowd colloquialisms and shortcuts to say more with less.” But “Weak ties, on the other hand, force us to communicate from a place of difference, to use what is called **elaborated speech**. Unlike restricted speech, which presupposes similarities between the speaker and the listener, elaborated speech does not presume that the listener thinks in the same way or knows the same information. We need to be more thorough when we talk to weak ties, and this requires more organization and reflection.” (Jay 2012)

In her book *Put College to Work*, Kat Clowes (2015) has a nice description of how to approach this kind of conversation in the context of a career fair:

Remember to practice your spiel beforehand, so it flows off your tongue and seems (and feels) natural. Don't try to do it all in one breath; make it conversational. You might comment about the company and a little of your research first and then offer your hand to introduce yourself. At that point, the person in the booth will ask what you're majoring in and the second part of your elevator pitch will happen naturally. If they then ask about your experience, you follow up with the third part of your pitch. Give it time and practice. You don't want to sound like an eager kid at a birthday party, trying to recite everything you've done that day. Keep it relaxed and try not to be nervous. Remember, you're pitching your personal brand.

As we've seen in chapter 4, after your introduction, the job interview will probably involve a series of **competency-based questions** (also sometimes called **behavioral questions**) to help the interviewer decide whether you would be a good fit for the job. Here are some example questions to expect:

- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get across an important point.
- Give me an example of a time you had to make a difficult decision.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.

The various “challenge-action-result” statements you prepared earlier (see chapter 4) should help you answer these kinds of questions well.

.....
ONLINE RESOURCE

**30 Behavioral Interview Questions
You Should Be Ready to Answer**

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/30-behavioral-interview-questions-you-should-be-ready-to-answer>
.....

No matter what kinds of questions come up, remember that in many ways the job interview is not really about you — it is about the employer. You are being evaluated not only on the basis of how you might fill an already-identified employer need, but also on the basis of how you might add value to an employer in surprising and unexpected ways. This means that you need to demonstrate that

you understand the employer’s mission, history, and goals. In short, you have to ask good questions. As one of the leaders of Google explains it, “People who ask good questions are curious, smarter, more flexible and interesting, and understand that they don’t have all the answers — exactly the type of smart-creative characteristics you want.” (Schmidt et al 2014) How do you make sure you come to an interview with good questions? That’s where all of the research from chapter 7 comes in. But while preparation can help, in the end, describing yourself and your value succinctly and communicating your interest and enthusiasm for an employer are skills that must simply come from practice, practice, and more practice.

Finally, just like after a career fair event or an informational interview (chapter 7), make sure to write a thank you letter to your interviewer. As SuccessWorks explains, a thank you letter “establishes goodwill and expresses appreciation and can strengthen your chances for being hired for the position. Everyone who helped you in any way should get a thank you letter — networking/informational interview contacts, references, and job interviewers. If it’s not possible to send a thank you letter to everyone you met during an interview, send a thank you letter to your host or the highest ranking manager you met, extending your appreciation to everyone else.” And make sure to send any thank you letter within 24 hours of your interview — this is your chance to add any extra information you want to leave with the hiring decision-makers.

Here’s an example of a typical thank you letter:

123 University Avenue
Madison, WI 53715

July 6, 20xx

Dr. Craig Foster, Director
Technical Design Group
Raleigh Engineering Systems, Inc.

1357 Sedgwick Avenue
Newport, VA 23607

Dear Dr. Foster:

I want to thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the associate engineer position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your research and design work. My enthusiasm for the position and my interest in working for RES were strengthened as a result of the interview. I am confident my education and cooperative education experiences fit perfectly with the job requirements, and I am sure that I could make a significant contribution to the organization. I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and your staff. You provide the kind of opportunity I seek. Please feel free to contact me at (608)555-1234 or kjohnson@wisc.edu if I can provide you with any additional information. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Johnson

How hiring really happens

All of these communication strategies are necessary in a successful job search — and they remain necessary after you land that first job, as your career unfolds through new opportunities in different organizations with different expectations. But not all job searches proceed through the same process, and not all hiring happens in the same way. This is especially true in the highest-demand jobs, occupations, and workplaces. At Google, for example, where senior leadership tells managers that hiring is “the single most important thing you do,” only 0.2 percent of applicants are hired — an acceptance rate “1/25th that of Harvard University” (Schmidt et al 2014; Thompson 2016). And most organizations, unlike large global firms like Google, do not plan very far in advance for their hiring needs (Selingo 2015). In other words, even for employers, the hiring process is still more art than science.

In his recent book *The Unwritten Rules of the Highly Effective Job Search*, career consultant Orville Pierson (2006) described three basic types of hiring:

- Through **gathering an applicant pool**, where a job is advertised and résumés are collected and screened to select interview candidates. While Pierson estimates that about 25% of all hiring happens this way, this strategy is most effective “for candidates looking for the same kind of work

they are currently doing or did in their last job” and “who also have strong credentials that can easily be displayed on paper”.

- Through **creating a new position**, where you approach your current employer and together build a new job based around your skills, interests, and aspirations. This is a wonderful, entrepreneurial way to grow your career by demonstrating a new way that you can add value to an organization that you’re already a part of; however, Pierson estimates that less than 5% of hiring happens this way.
- Through **hiring an already-known candidate** who didn’t apply through an open applicant pool, but who also hadn’t previously had a permanent position with the organization. Since Pierson estimates that roughly 75% of all hiring happens this way, he recommends a simple strategy: ““Most people set up a job search to look for job openings,” but “most hiring decisions happen before there is an opening.” Thus, “You need to talk to people who are NOT hiring right now.”

Pierson’s description of the hiring process is of course based on his own experience in the world of business personnel management, and even though his estimates of how often different types of hiring processes occur will vary depending on industry and occupation, the key point is that all of your networking, information-gathering, and communication strategies should ideally reinforce each other, because there’s never only one possible path to your next opportunity.

The most important advice to remember with respect to the hiring process is to take advantage of your campus resources while they are available to you. In a recent survey of corporate recruiting trends by scholars at Michigan State University, a survey of over 4,000 employers revealed that while many are now turning to vendors like LinkedIn in order to assemble pools of possible job candidates, their main tool for recruiting was still simply “posting a job announcement in places where candidates can easily find it,” especially “the organization’s website and the college or university’s career management system.” (CERI 2017). So make sure to go to career fairs and interview days. On-campus recruiting, sponsored by your college career services office and/or your major department, is still an important route to that first job. However, on-campus recruiting has changed dramatically over the decades. As Jeffrey Selingo (2015) described, “In the 1980s, campus recruiting was dominated by three primary industries—manufacturing, retail, and finance—and a few big corporations controlled each of those sectors.” But now there are a wider variety of smaller employers, “each of them recruiting fewer students, and all have specific needs and different timetables for students to keep track of.” Even for those big employers, though, the diversity of their hiring needs has increased. According to a top manager from consumer goods giant Procter & Gamble, in one recent year they hired students from 86 different majors at a single university (Selingo 2015). As we saw in chapter 5, this is good news for flexible, adaptable liberal arts and sciences majors.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the different strategies that job candidates generally use to organize a résumé? What are the risks and benefits of each?
2. What is “applicant tracking software” and what does it mean for the way you should construct your résumé?
3. What is an “electronic portfolio” and why might a job-seeker want to create one?
4. What are the three basic parts of a cover letter and how specific should they be?
5. What is an “elevator pitch” and why is it useful to have one? Describe an effective strategy for crafting such a pitch.
6. What estimated percentage of hires are made as a result of outside applications to job ads versus hires made as a result of inside recruiting of candidates already known to the organization?

READ MORE ABOUT IT

Richard N. Bolles, *What Color is Your Parachute?* 2015 edition (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2014). A well-known, best-selling career guide that has been continuously published (and updated) since 1970.

Bill Coplin, *10 Things Employers Want You to Learn in College* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2012). Good insight into the language that employers respond to in résumés and cover letters.

Hannah Morgan, *The Infographic Résumé* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014). Nice resource for students in statistical or graphic design fields who would like to use more visuals on their résumé.

Orville Pierson, *The Unwritten Rules of the Highly Effective Job Search* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006). A how-to job search guide by a career consultant insider.

Dan Schawbel, *Promote Yourself: The New Rules for Career Success* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013). A how-to job search guide by a consultant who draws on the “strengths” Gallup research.