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Letters and Employment Correspondence

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CHECKLIST for Usability of Letters

We often have good reason to correspond in a more formal and personal medium than a memo or email message. A well-crafted letter is appropriate in situations like these:

- To personalize your correspondence, conveying the sense that this message is prepared exclusively for your recipient.
- To convey a dignified, professional impression.
- To act as a representative of your company or organization.
- To present a reasoned, carefully constructed case.
- To respond to clients, customers, or anyone outside your organization.
- To provide an official notice or record (as in a letter announcing legal action or confirming a verbal agreement).

Because a letter often has a persuasive purpose, proper tone is essential for connecting with the recipient. Because your signature indicates your approval—and responsibility—for the contents of the letter (which may serve as a legal document), precision is crucial.

This chapter covers three common letter types: inquiry letters, claim letters, and letters of application, along with résumés. Other types are discussed in Chapters 23 and 25.

ELEMENTS OF USABLE LETTERS

The conventional arrangement of workplace letters allows recipients to locate what they need immediately (Figure 18.1).

Basic Parts of Letters

A typical business letter has six parts:

HEADING AND DATE. If your stationery has a company letterhead, simply include the date a few lines below the letterhead, flush against the right or left margin. On blank stationery, include your return address and the date (but not your name):

154 Sea Lane
Harwich, MA 02163
July 15, 20xx

Use the Postal Service's two-letter state abbreviations (MA for Massachusetts, VT for Vermont) in your heading, inside address, and on the envelope.

INSIDE ADDRESS. Two to six line spaces below the heading, flush against the left margin is the inside address (the address to which you are sending the letter).

Dr. Ann Mello, Dean of Students
Western University
30 Mogul Hill Road
Stowe, VT 51350

Whenever possible, address a specifically named recipient, and include the person's title. Using "Mr." or "Ms." before the name is optional. (See page 281 for avoiding sexist usage in titles and salutations.)

NOTE *Depending on the letter's length, adjust the horizontal placement of your return address and inside address to achieve a balanced page.*

SALUTATION. The salutation, two line spaces below the inside address, begins with *Dear* and ends with a colon (*Dear Ms. Smith:*). If you don't know the recipient's name, use the position title (*Dear Manager*) or, preferably, an attention line (page 416). Only address the recipient by first name if that is the way you would address this individual in person.

Dear Ms. Smith:

Dear Managing Editor:
Dear Professor Lexington-Trudeau:

No satisfactory guidelines exist for addressing several recipients simultaneously. *Gentlemen* or *Dear Sirs* implies bias. *Ladies and Gentlemen* sounds too much like the beginning of a speech. *Dear Sir or Madam* is old-fashioned. *To Whom It May Concern* is vague and impersonal. Your best bet is to eliminate the salutation by using an attention line.

NOTE *For international audiences, an inappropriate salutation is highly offensive. In France or England, for example, a person's title should be used in the greeting, as in "Monsieur le Professeur Larrouse" (Sabath 164); in England, "Dear Madam" and "Dear Sir" continue to be acceptable for people not known well by the writer (Scott 55). Whenever possible, learn about your recipient's culture and preferences beforehand.*

LETTER TEXT. Typically, your letter text begins two line spaces (returns) below the salutation. Workplace letters typically include (1) a brief introductory paragraph (five or fewer

lines) that identifies your purpose and connects with the recipient's interest, (2) one or more body paragraphs containing details of your message, and (3) a concluding paragraph that sums up and encourages action.

Keep the paragraphs short, usually fewer than eight lines. If a paragraph goes beyond eight lines, consider using a bulleted or numbered list to make the paragraph readable. (In the letter on page 421, notice that the body section is divided into four questions for easy answering.)

COMPLIMENTARY CLOSING. The closing, two line spaces (returns) below the last line of text, should parallel the level of formality used in the salutation and should reflect your relationship to the recipient (polite but not overly intimate). These possibilities are listed in decreasing order of formality:

Respectfully,
Sincerely, (*most often used*)
Cordially,
Best wishes,
Warmest regards,
Regards,
Best,

In a modified block letter (Figure 18.2), align the closing with your heading or the date. In a full block letter (Figure 18.3), position the closing flush against the left margin.

SIGNATURE. Type your full name and title on the fourth and fifth lines below and aligned with the closing. Sign in the triple space between the closing and your typed name.

Sincerely yours,
Martha S. Jones
Personnel Manager

If you are representing your company or a group that bears legal responsibility for the correspondence, type the company's name in full caps two line spaces below your complimentary closing; place your typed name and title four line spaces below the company name and sign in the triple space between.

Yours truly,
HASBROUCK LABORATORIES

L. H. Fong
Research Associate

NOTE *To save space, sample letters in this chapter often show only the letter text, with heading, date, inside address, salutation, closing, and signature omitted. Your own letters of course would include these basic parts, as well as any needed specialized parts discussed below. See Figures 18.1 and 18.7, for example.*

Specialized Parts of Letters

Some letters require one or more of the following specialized parts. (Examples appear in the sample letters in this chapter.)

ATTENTION LINE. Use an attention line when you direct a letter to a specific department or position within an organization but don't know the recipient's name.

Glaxol Industries, Inc.
232 Rogaline Circle
Missoula, MT 61347

ATTENTION: Director of Research and Development

Drop two line spaces below the inside address and place the attention line either flush with the left margin or centered on the page.

SUBJECT LINE. Typically, subject lines are used with memos, but if the recipient is not expecting your letter, a subject line is a good way of catching a busy person's attention.

SUBJECT: Placement of the Subject Line

Place the subject line below the inside address or attention line with one line space before and after it. You can underline or highlight the subject to make it more prominent.

TYPIST'S INITIALS. If someone types your letter for you (common in the days of typewriters but rare today), your initials (in CAPS) and your typist's initials (in lower case) appear below the

typed signature, flush with the left margin.

JJ/pl

ENCLOSURE NOTATION. If you enclose other documents with your letter, indicate this one line space below the initials (or writer's name and position), flush against the left margin. State the number of enclosures.

Enclosure
Enclosures 2
Encl. 3

If the enclosures are important documents such as legal certificates, checks, or specifications, name them in the notation.

Enclosures: 2 certified checks, 1 set of KBX plans.

DISTRIBUTION NOTATION. If you distribute copies of your letter to other recipients, indicate this by inserting the notation "Copy" or "cc" one line below the previous line (such as an enclosure line). The "cc" notation once stood for "carbon copy," but no one uses carbon paper any more, so now it is said to stand for "courtesy copy."

cc: office file
Melvin Blount

c: S. Furlow
B. Smith

Most copies are distributed on an *FYI (For Your Information)* basis, but writers sometimes use the distribution notation to maintain a paper trail or to signal the primary recipient that this information is being shared with others (e.g., superiors, legal authorities).

POSTSCRIPT. A postscript (typed or handwritten) draws attention to a point you wish to emphasize or adds a personal note. Do not use a postscript if you forget to mention a point in the body of the letter. Rewrite the body section instead.

P. S. Because of its terminal position in your letter, a postscript can draw attention to a point that needs reemphasizing.

Place the postscript two line spaces below any other notation, and flush against the left margin. Because readers often regard postscripts as sales letter gimmicks, use them sparingly in professional correspondence.

Design Factors

Although several formats are acceptable, and your company may have its own, the two most popular formats for workplace letters are *modified block* and *block*.

In the modified block form, the first line of a paragraph is not indented. Paragraphs are separated by a line space. The return address, complimentary closing, and signature align at page center (Figure 18.2).

In the block form, every line begins at the left margin (Figure 18.3). This form is popular because it looks businesslike and eliminates the need to tab and center.

These additional design factors make workplace letters appear inviting, accessible, and professional:

QUALITY STATIONERY. Use high-quality, 20-pound bond, 8¹/₂" × 11" white stationery with a minimum fiber content of 25 percent.

UNIFORM MARGINS AND SPACING. When using stationery without a letterhead, frame your letter with 1 ¹/₂-inch top and side margins and bottom margins of 1 to 1¹/₂ inches. Use single spacing within paragraphs and double spacing between. Vary these guidelines based on the amount of space required by the letter's text, but strive for a balanced look.

HEADERS FOR SUBSEQUENT PAGES. Head each additional page with a notation identifying the recipient, date, and page number.

Adrianna Fonseca, June 25, 20xx, p. 2

Align your header with the right-hand margin. See page 64 for an example.

NOTE *Never use an additional page solely for the closing section. Instead, reformat the letter so that the closing appears on*

the first page or so that at least two lines of text appear above the closing on the subsequent page.

THE ENVELOPE. Your envelope (usually a #10 envelope) should be of the same quality as your stationery. Place the recipient's name and address at a fairly central point on the envelope. Place your own name and address in the upper-left corner. Single-space these elements. Your word processor likely has an envelope printing function that will automatically place these elements. (See your printer's operating manual for instructions.)

INTERPERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN WORKPLACE LETTERS

In addition to presenting an accessible and inviting design, an effective letter enhances the relationship between sender and recipient. Interpersonal elements make a *human* connection.

FOCUS ON YOUR RECIPIENT'S INTERESTS: THE "YOU" PERSPECTIVE. When speaking face-to-face, you unconsciously modify your statements and expression as you read the listener's signals: a smile, a frown, a raised eyebrow, a nod. In a telephone conversation, a voice provides cues that signal approval, dismay, anger, or confusion. In writing a letter, however, you might forget that a flesh-and-blood recipient will be reacting to what you are saying—or seem to be saying.

A letter conveying a "you" perspective focuses on content important to the recipient and shows respect for that person's feelings and attitudes.

To achieve a "you" perspective, ask yourself how the recipient will react to what you have written. Even a single word, carelessly chosen, can offend. In trying to correct a billing error, for example, you might feel tempted to write this:

Our record keeping is very efficient, so this is obviously your error.

Such an accusatory tone might be appropriate after numerous failed attempts to achieve satisfaction on your part, but in your initial correspondence it would be offensive. Here is a more considerate version:

If my paperwork is wrong, please let me know and I will send you a corrected version immediately.

Instead of hastily judging the recipient, this second version invites a response.

USE PLAIN ENGLISH. Workplace correspondence often suffers from *letterese*, those tired, stuffy, and overblown phrases some writers think they need to make their communications sound important.

Humbly thanking you in anticipation of your kind assistance, I remain Faithfully yours,

Instead you might simply write this.

I would appreciate your help.

Here are a few of the old standards with some clearer, more direct translations.

Letterese

As per your request
Contingent upon receipt of
I am desirous of
Please be advised that I
This writer
In the immediate future
In accordance with your request
Due to the fact that

Plain-English

As you requested
As soon as we receive
I want, I would like
I
I
Soon
As you requested
Because

Be natural. Write as you would speak in a classroom or office.

NOTE *Communications expert Laura Gurak notes that “in the legal profession (and others), certain phrases such as these are known as ‘terms of art’ and connote a specific meaning. In these cases, you may not be able to avoid such [elaborate] phrases” (Gurak and Lannon, 2nd ed. 202).*

FOCUS ON THE HUMAN CONNECTION. As you plan and write, answer these questions:

- *What do I want this person to do, think, or feel?* Offer a job, give advice or information, follow my instructions, grant a favor, accept bad news?
- *What details and emphasis does this person expect?* Measurements, dates, costs, model numbers, enclosures, other details?
- *To whom am I writing?* When possible, write to a person, not a title.

- *What is my relationship to this person?* Is this a potential employer, an employee, a person doing a favor, a person whose products are disappointing, an acquaintance, an associate, a stranger?

ANTICIPATE THE RECIPIENT'S REACTION. After you have written a draft, answer the following three questions, which pertain to the effect of your letter. Will the recipient feel inclined to respond favorably?

- *How will this person react?* With anger, hostility, pleasure, confusion, fear, guilt, resistance, satisfaction?
- *What impression of me does this letter convey?* Do you seem intelligent, courteous, friendly, articulate, pretentious, illiterate, confident?
- *Am I ready to sign my letter with confidence?* Think about it.

DECIDE ON A DIRECT OR INDIRECT ORGANIZING PATTERN. The reaction you anticipate should determine the organizational plan of your letter: either *direct* or *indirect*.

- *Will the recipient feel pleased, angry, or neutral?*
 - *Will the message cause resistance, resentment, or disappointment?*

The direct pattern puts the main point in the first paragraph, followed by the explanation. Be direct when you expect the recipient to react with approval or when you want to convey immediately the point of your letter (e.g., in good news, inquiry, or application letters—or other routine correspondence).

If you expect resistance or if your recipient is not from the United States, consider an indirect pattern. Give the explanation before the main point (as in requesting a pay raise or making a controversial recommendation such as increasing the number of credits required for an undergraduate degree).

Research indicates that “readers will always look for the bottom line” (*Writing User-Friendly Documents* 14). Therefore, a direct pattern, even for bad news, may be preferable—as in complaining about a faulty product. But whenever you must give bad news, don’t just blurt it out:

Your application for admission to the Program has been denied.

Instead, try to give information recipients can use, and do this inoffensively:

Unfortunately we are unable to offer you admission to this year's Program. This letter will explain why we made this decision and how you can reapply.

NOTE *Whenever you consider using an indirect pattern, think carefully about its ethical implications. Never try to deceive the recipient—and never create an impression that you have something to hide.*

For more on direct versus indirect organizing patterns, see page 388.

INQUIRY LETTERS

You may have questions about a product, service, a procedure, or some other item. Before you write, do your homework so that you can ask the right questions. A vague request (“Please send me all your data on . . .”) is likely to be ignored.

A Sample Situation

You are preparing a report on the feasibility of harnessing solar energy for solar heating in northern climates. After learning that a nonprofit research group has been experimenting with solar applications, you decide to write for details.

Keep the inquiry short and to the point. Follow the direct approach and state clearly at the outset what you are requesting and why. Maintain the “you” perspective.

In the body of your letter write specific and clearly worded questions that are easy to understand and answer. If you have multiple questions put them in a numbered list, to help readers organize their answer and to increase your chances of getting all the information you want. Consider leaving space for responses below each question. (For more than five questions, consider using an attached questionnaire.) Provide multiple ways for the recipient to reach you: email, fax, phone, surface mail.

INQUIRY LETTER

As a student at Evergreen College, I am preparing a report (April 15 deadline) on the feasibility of solar energy as a viable source of home heating in northern climates.

While gathering data on home solar heating, I encountered references (in *Scientific American* and elsewhere) to your group's pioneering work in solar energy systems. Would you please allow me to benefit

from your experience? I would appreciate answers to these questions in particular:

1. At this stage of development, do you consider active or passive heating more practical? (Please explain briefly.)
2. Do you expect to surpass the 60 percent limit of heating needs supplied by the active system? If so, at what level of efficiency and how soon?
3. What is the cost of materials for building your active system, per cubic foot of living space?
4. What metal do you use in collectors, to obtain the highest thermal conductivity at the lowest maintenance costs?

Please write your answers in the spaces provided and drop the return envelope in the mail. If an alternative way to respond is more convenient, here is my contact information: phone—555-986-6578 (collect); fax—555-986-5432; email—agreene245@hotmail.com.

Your answers, along with any recent findings you can share, will enrich a learning experience I hope to put into practice after graduation by building my own solar-heated home. I would be glad to send you a copy of my report, along with the house plans I have designed. Thank you.

If your questions are too numerous or involved to be answered in print, you might request an interview (if the respondent is nearby). Karen Granger, the next writer, sought a state representative's "opinions on the EPA's progress" in cleaning up local contamination. Anticipating a complex answer, she asked for an interview.

LETTER REQUESTING AN INFORMATIVE INTERVIEW

As a technical writing student at the University of Massachusetts, I am preparing a report evaluating the EPA's progress in cleaning up PCB contamination in New Bedford Harbor.

In my research, I have encountered your name repeatedly. Your dedicated work has had a definite influence on this situation, and I am hoping to benefit from your knowledge.

I was surprised to learn that, although this contamination is considered the most extensive anywhere, the EPA still has not moved beyond conducting studies. My own study questions the need for such extensive data gathering. Your opinion, as I can ascertain from *Standard Times* articles, is that the EPA is definitely moving too slowly.

The EPA refutes that argument by asserting they simply do not yet have the information necessary to begin a clean-up operation.

As both a writer and a New Bedford resident, I am very interested in your opinions on the EPA's progress. Could you find time in your busy schedule to grant me an interview? With your permission, I will phone your office in a few days to ask about arranging an appointment.

I would deeply appreciate your assistance and I would gladly send you a copy of my completed report.

Whenever you seek a written response to an inquiry, include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the reply.

Telephone and Email Inquiries

Unsolicited inquiries via telephone, email, or fax can be efficient and productive but also unwelcome and intrusive. A traditional letter implies greater respect for the recipient's privacy and provides a certain distance from which that person can contemplate a response—or even decide not to respond.

One alternative is to inquire by traditional letter and to invite a response by phone (collect), fax, or email, if your recipient prefers. Or, if you must inquire via telephone or email, consider this suggestion: Establish a brief initial contact in which you apologize for any intrusion and then ask if the respondent is willing to answer your questions at a convenient future time. In this or any communication, never sacrifice goodwill in the interest of efficiency.

Claim Letters

Claim letters request adjustments for defective goods or poor services, or they complain about unfair treatment or the like.

Routine Claims

Routine claims follow a direct organizational pattern, because the claim is backed by a contract, guarantee, or the company's reputation. State the request or problem in your introductory paragraph; then explain in the body section. Close courteously, restating the action you request.

Make the tone courteous and reasonable. Your goal is not to express dissatisfaction but to achieve results: a refund, replacement, apology. Press your claim objectively yet firmly by explaining it clearly and by stipulating the *reasonable* action that will satisfy you.

Explain the problem in enough detail to clarify the basis for your claim. Explain that your new alarm clock never rings instead of merely saying it's defective. Identify the faulty item clearly, giving serial and model numbers, and date and place of purchase. Then propose a fair adjustment. Conclude by expressing goodwill and confidence in the company's integrity.

The next writer asks directly how to return his defective skis for repair. The attention line directs his claim to the appropriate department. The subject line, and its reemphasis in the first sentence, makes clear the nature of the claim.

ROUTINE CLAIM LETTER

Attention: Consumer Affairs Department

Subject: Delaminated Skis

This winter, my Tornado skis began to delaminate. I want to take advantage of your lifetime guarantee to have them relaminated.

I bought the skis from the Ski House in Erving, Massachusetts, in November 1983. Although I no longer have the sales slip, I did register them with you. The registration number is P9965.

I'm aware that you no longer make metal skis, but as I recall, your lifetime guarantee on the skis I bought was a major selling point. Only your company and one other were backing their skis so strongly.

Would you please let me know how to go about returning my delaminated skis for repair?

Arguable Claims

When your request is in some way unusual or debatable, you must *persuade* the recipient to grant your claim.

Use an indirect organizing pattern for an arguable claim. People are more likely to respond favorably *after* reading your explanation. Begin with a neutral statement both parties can agree to—but that also serves as the basis for your request (e.g., “Customer goodwill is often an intangible quality, but a quality that brings tangible benefits”).

Once you've established agreement, explain and support your claim. Include enough information for a fair evaluation: date and place of purchase, order or policy number, dates of previous letters or calls, and background.

Conclude by requesting a *specific action* (a credit to your account, a replacement, a rebate). Ask confidently.

The next writer employs a tactful, reasonable tone and an indirect pattern.

ARGUABLE CLAIM LETTER

Your company has an established reputation as a reliable wholesaler of office supplies. For eight years we have counted on that reliability, but a recent episode has left us annoyed and disappointed.

On January 29, 2005, we ordered five cartons of 2.0 megabyte KAO diskettes (#A74-866) and thirteen cartons of Epson MX 70/80 black ribbon cartridges (#A19-556).

On February 5, the order arrived. But instead of the 2.0 MB KAO diskettes ordered, we received 1.4 MB 3M diskettes. And the Epson ribbons were blue, not the black we had ordered. We returned the order the same day.

Also on the 5th, we called John Fitzsimmons at your company to explain our problem. He promised delivery of a corrected order by the 12th. Finally, on the 22nd we did receive an order—the original incorrect one—with a note claiming that the packages had been water damaged while in our possession.

Our warehouse manager insists the packages were in perfect condition when he released them to the shipper. Because we had the packages only five hours, and had no rain on the 5th, we are certain the damage did not occur here.

Responsibility for damages therefore rests with either the shipper or your warehouse staff. What bothers us is our outstanding bill from Hightone (\$1,049.50) for the faulty shipment. We insist that the bill be canceled and that we receive a corrected statement. Until this misunderstanding, our transactions with your company were excellent. We hope they can be again.

We would appreciate having this matter resolved before the end of this month.

RÉSUMÉS AND JOB APPLICATIONS

Attractive jobs are highly competitive. Large companies typically receive a flood of résumés for a mere handful of openings. Whether you are applying for your first professional job or changing careers, you must market your skills effectively. Your résumé and letter of application must stand out among the competition.

Employment Outlook in the Twenty-First Century

In today's workplace, the name of the game is *change* (as page 12 shows in detail). The U.S. Labor Department estimates that "a typical 32-year-old has already held 9 jobs" (Conlin 170). What this means is that the typical "employee" is becoming someone who works for various employers just long enough to complete a particular project (Bolles 141). These "free agents" will increase from 26 percent of the U.S. workforce in 2000 to an estimated 41 percent by 2010 (Conlin 170).

In addition, more and more jobs (ranging from accounting to reading x-rays) are being “outsourced” to other countries that have far lower labor costs. Other jobs (such as programming or processing) are being automated, in many cases.

Whatever your major, the message is clear. (a) expect multiple employers and careers; (b) expect to rely on skills that involve working well with others, being flexible and adaptable to change and life-long learning, and having a talent for creative problem solving. (For more on these twenty-first century skills, review page 12.)

NOTE *Although email and online job listings and résumé postings have provided new tools for job seekers, today’s job searches require the same basic approach and communication skills that people have relied on for decades.*

Prospecting for Jobs

Begin your employment search by studying the job market to identify careers and jobs for which you best qualify.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS AND APTITUDES. Beyond the portable skills mentioned above, what specific qualities can you bring to the job search?

- What skills have you acquired in school, on the job, through hobbies or other interests?
- DO YOU HAVE SKILLS IN LEADERSHIP OR IN GROUP PROJECTS (AS DEMONSTRATED IN EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS, OR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES)?
 - Do you speak a second language? Have musical or artistic talent?
 - Do you have communication skills? Are you a good listener?
 - Do you perform well under pressure?

Besides helping focus your search, answers to these questions will be handy when you write your résumé and prepare for interviews.

RESEARCH THE JOB MARKET. Launch your search early. Don’t wait for the job to come to you. Begin by scanning the Help Wanted section in major Sunday newspapers for job descriptions, salaries, and qualifications. The Web provides an endless resource for job seekers. Check out, for example, the Bureau of Labor statistics at <www.bls.gov>. (For more on

Internet job sites, see pages 441-43). Also, consult specific resources such as these (increasingly available in electronic versions):

- *Fortune*, *Business Week*, *Forbes*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or trade publications in your field—for the latest developments and the big picture on business, economy, or technology. Articles about specific topics and companies can be searched in the *Business Index*.
- *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and its quarterly update, *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor—for occupations, qualifications, employment prospects, and salaries.
- *Almanac of Jobs and Salaries*, *Dun's Employment Opportunities Directory*, or *Federal Career Opportunities*—for government and private-sector organizations that hire college graduates.
- *Moody's Industrial Index* or Standard and Poor's *Register of Corporations*—for company locations, major subsidiaries, products, executive officers, and assets.
- Annual reports, for a company's subsidiaries, financial health, innovations, performance, and prospects. (Many libraries collect annual reports.)

Ask a reference librarian to suggest additional handbooks, government publications, newsletters, and magazines or journals in your field.

Launch your search well before your senior year to learn whether certain courses make you more marketable. If you are changing jobs or careers, employers will be interested in what you have accomplished *since* college. Be prepared to show how your experience is relevant to the new job.

You might also register with an employment agency. A fee is payable after you are hired, but employers often pay this fee. Ask about fee arrangements *before* you sign up. Also, consider investing in a *career coach*, an expert in preparing job seekers for their quest.

LEARN TO NETWORK. Do all the *networking* you can. Former recruiter Brad Karsh offers recent graduates this advice: "Your best chance of getting a job is through someone who knows someone. Use your college alumni network. Find out who is working in the field you want to enter, and call them" (qtd. in Fisher, "I didn't" 178). Karsh also advises that you consult family friends about whom they might know. (For more advice, visit

Karsh's job-search Web site for recent grads at <www.jobbound.com>.

Here are additional suggestions for networking:

- Visit your college placement service. Openings and job fair notices are posted there; interviews are scheduled; and counselors provide job-hunting advice. Sign up for interviews with recruiters who visit the campus. Go to job fairs.
- Speak with people in your field to get an inside view and practical advice.
- Seek advice from faculty who do outside consulting or who have worked in business, industry, or government.
- Look for a summer job or internship in your field; this experience may count as much as your academic credentials.
- Do related volunteer work. (Visit <www.volunteermatch.org> for organizations that seek volunteers.)
- Register with agencies that provide temporary staffing. Even the most humble and temporary job offers the chance to make contacts and could be a way of getting your foot in the door.
- Join a professional organization in your field. Student memberships usually are available at reduced fees. Such affiliations can generate excellent contacts, and they look good on your résumé. Try to attend meetings of the local chapter.

Notice that several job-search methods in Figure 18.4 include talking with people and exploring useful contacts.

Once you have a clear picture of where you fit into the job market, you must answer the big question asked by all employers: *What do you have to offer?* Your answer must be a highly polished presentation of yourself, your education, work history, interests, and skills—in short, your résumé.

Preparing Your Résumé

The résumé is a summary of your experience and qualifications. Written before your application letter, the résumé provides background information to support your letter. This information supplies an employer with a one- or two-page reference. The letter will emphasize specific parts of your résumé and will discuss how your qualifications fit the requirements of a particular job.

Employers generally spend fifteen to forty-five seconds initially scanning a résumé. They look for an obvious and

persuasive answer to this question: *What can you do for us?*
Employers are impressed by a résumé that

1. looks good (conservative, tasteful, uncluttered, on quality paper);
2. reads easily (headings, typeface, spacing, and punctuation that provide clear orientation); and
3. provides information the employer needs for deciding whether to interview the applicant.

Employers generally discard résumés that are mechanically flawed, cluttered, sketchy, or hard to follow. Make your résumé perfect.

Most résumés organize the information within these categories:

- contact information
- job and career objectives
- education
- work experience
- personal data
- interests, activities, awards, and skills
- references
 - portfolio (if applicable)

Select and organize material to emphasize what you can offer. Don't just list *everything*. Don't abbreviate, because some people might not know the referent. Use punctuation to clarify and emphasize, not to be "artsy." Try to limit your résumé to a single page, as most employers prefer. (Of course, if you are changing jobs or careers, or if your résumé looks cramped, you might need a second page.)

Begin your résumé well before your job search. Your final version can be printed for various similar targets—but each new type of job requires a new résumé that is tailored to fit the advertised demands of that job.

NOTE

Never "invent" credentials. Your résumé should make you look as good as the facts allow. Distorting the facts is unethical and counterproductive. Companies routinely investigate claims made in a résumé, and people who have lied are fired.

CONTACT INFORMATION. Include your full name, mailing and email address, and phone number (many interview invitations and job offers are made by phone). If you use an answering machine, be sure to record an outgoing message that sounds professional. If you anticipate an

address change after a certain date, include both your current and future addresses and the date of the change.

JOB AND CAREER OBJECTIVES. Spell out the kind of job you want. Avoid vague statements such as “A position in which I can apply my education and experience.” Prepare different statements to focus on the requirements of different jobs.

The key to a successful résumé is the image of *you* it projects—disciplined and purposeful, yet flexible. State your immediate and long-range goals, including any plans to continue your education. If the company has various branches, include “Willing to relocate.”

Intensive-care nursing in a teaching hospital, with the eventual goal of supervising and instructing.

One hiring officer for a major computer firm offers this advice: “A statement should show that you know the type of work the company does and the type of position it needs to fill” (Beamon, qtd. in Crosby, *Résumés* 3).

NOTE

*Below career objectives, you might insert a summary of qualifications (Figure 18.6). This section is vital in a computer-scannable résumé (18.8) but, even in a conventional résumé, a “Qualifications” section can highlight your strengths. Make the summary specific and concrete: replace “proven leadership” with “team and project management,” “special-event planning,” or “instructor-led training”; replace “persuasive communicator” with “fundraising” “publicity campaigns,” “environmental/public-interest advocacy, and “door-to-door canvassing.” In short, allow the reader to **visualize** your activities.*

EDUCATION. If your education is more substantial than your work experience, place it first. Begin with your most recent school and work backward, listing degrees, diplomas, and schools attended *beyond* high school (unless the high school’s prestige, its program, or your achievements warrant its inclusion). List your major, minor, and selected courses that have directly prepared you for the job you seek. If your class rank is in the upper 30 percent and your grade point average is 3.0 or above, list them. Include schools or specialized training during military service. If you finance

part or all of your education by working, say so, indicating the percentage of your contribution.

WORK EXPERIENCE. If your experience relates to the job you seek, list it before your education. Start with your most recent job and work backward. Provide dates and names of employers. Indicate whether the job was full-time, part-time (hours weekly), or seasonal. Describe your exact duties in each job, indicating promotions. If the job was major (and related to this one), describe it in detail, and give your reason for leaving. Include military experience. If you have no paid experience, show your potential by emphasizing your education (including internships and special projects) and by writing an enthusiastic letter.

NOTE

Complete sentences are unnecessary in résumés. They take up room best left for emphasis on your other qualifications. Use action verbs (supervised, developed, built, taught, installed, managed, trained, solved, planned, directed) to stress your ability to produce results. If your résumé is likely to be scanned electronically, list key words as nouns (leadership skills, software development, data processing, editing) immediately below your contact information. (See page 446.)

PERSONAL DATA. An employer cannot legally discriminate on the basis of sex, religion, race, age, national origin, disability, or marital status. Therefore, you aren't required to provide this information or a photograph. But if you believe that any of this information could advance your prospects, include it.

PERSONAL INTERESTS, ACTIVITIES, AWARDS, AND SKILLS. List hobbies, sports, and other pastimes only if they are *relevant* to the position; memberships in teams and organizations; offices held; and any special recognition you have received. Include dates and types of volunteer work. Employers know that people with well-rounded lifestyles are likely to take an active interest in their jobs. List work-related skills, say, in foreign language, typing, first aid, or computers. Be selective: List

only those items that reflect the qualities employers seek.

REFERENCES. List three to five people *who have agreed to provide* strong, positive assessments of your qualifications and personal qualities. Some references will be asked to provide letters or email responses. Some will be asked to complete reference forms. Other requests will be made by telephone calls from employers doing reference checks. In any case, it's a good idea to keep your own file containing letters from each of your references.

Select references who can speak genuinely about your ability and character. Choose among former employers, professors, and respected community figures who know you well enough to speak *concretely* on your behalf. Do not choose members of your family or friends not in your field.

A lukewarm letter of reference is more damaging than no letter at all. Don't simply ask, "Could you please be one of my references?" This is hard to refuse, but a person who doesn't know you well or who is unimpressed by your work might write a letter that does more harm than good. Instead, make an explicit request: "Do you know me and my work well enough to write a strong letter of reference? If so, would you be one of my references?" This second version gives your respondent the option of declining gracefully or it elicits a firm commitment to a positive recommendation.

Letters of recommendation are time-consuming to write. Few people have time to write individual letters to every prospective employer. Ask for only one letter, with no salutation. Your reference keeps a copy, you keep the original for your personal dossier (to reproduce as necessary), and a copy goes to the placement office for your placement dossier. Because the law permits you to read all material in your dossier, this arrangement provides you with your own copy of your credentials. (The dossier is discussed later in this chapter.)

NOTE *Under some circumstances you may—if you wish to—waive the right to examine your references. Some applicants, especially those applying to professional schools, as in medicine and law, waive this right in concession to a general feeling that a letter writer who is assured of confidentiality is more likely to provide a balanced, objective, and reliable assessment of a candidate. Seek the advice of your major adviser or a career counselor.*

If the people you select as references live elsewhere, you might make your request by letter:

LETTER REQUESTING A REFERENCE

From September 19xx to August 20xx, I worked at Teo's Restaurant as a waiter, cashier, and then assistant manager. Because I enjoyed my work, I decided to study for a career in the hospitality field.

In three months I will graduate from San Jose City College with an A.A. degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management. Next month I begin my job search.

Do you remember me and my work enough to write a strong letter of recommendation? If so, would you kindly serve as one of my references?

Please address your salutation "To Whom It May Concern." If you could send me the original letter, I will forward a copy to my college placement office.

To update you on my recent activities, I've enclosed my résumé. If I can answer any questions, please contact me by phone (collect) at 214-316-2419 or by email at jpur@valnet.com.

Thank you for your help and support.

NOTE *Opinion is divided about whether names and addresses of references should appear in a résumé. If saving space is important, simply state, "References available on request," keeping your résumé only one page long, but if your résumé already takes up more than one page, you probably should include names and addresses of references. (A prospective employer might recognize a name, and thus notice your name among the crowd of applicants.) If you are changing careers, a full listing of references is extremely important.*

NOTE *If you don't list references on your résumé, prepare a separate reference sheet that you can provide on request. Beneath your personal contact information, repeated from the résumé, list each reference, including the person's title, company address, and contact information (Crosby, "Resumes"6).*

PORTFOLIO. As concrete evidence of your skills, organize copies of the relevant work you've done in a leather or leatherlike notebook. Depending on the nature of the work, the portfolio might contain sample documents you've written or edited (such as reports, articles, or manuals) or other evidence of your job-

related skills (such as engineering drawings or software documentation). Portfolios are obviously more appropriate for jobs that generate actual writing or visual samples than for those that don't—more appropriate, say, for graphic artists or marketing specialists than for resort or hotel managers. If you do have a portfolio, indicate this on your résumé, followed by "Available on request." (See the suggestions for preparing a portfolio on page 448.)

Organizing Your Résumé

Organize your résumé to convey the strongest impression of your qualifications, skills, and experience. Depending on your background, you can arrange your material in reverse chronological order, functional order, or a combination of both.

REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION. In a reverse chronological résumé you list your most recent experience first, moving backward through your earlier experiences. Use this arrangement to show a pattern of job experience or progress along a specific career track (as in Figure 18.5).

FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATION. In a functional résumé, you emphasize skills, abilities, and achievements that relate specifically to the job for which you are applying. Use this arrangement if you have limited job experience, gaps in your job record, or are changing careers.

COMBINED ORGANIZATION. Most employers prefer chronologically ordered résumés because they are easier to scan. However, electronic scanning of résumés (page 443) calls for a more functional pattern. One alternative is a modified-functional résumé, which preserves the logical progression that employers prefer but which also highlights your abilities and job skills (as in Figure 18.6).

NOTE *The résumé is not the place to bring up the topic of salary. Wait until your interview, or later.*

Using a word processor and laser printer, you can make changes to suit various jobs and have a perfect document for each version. Make each version neat, attractive, and error-free.

NOTE *The importance of proofreading your résumé cannot be overstated. By relying solely on your computer's spelling checker you might end up expressing pride in receiving a "plague" instead of a "plaque," in receiving a "bogus award" instead of a "bonus award" or in "ruining" your own business instead of "running" it.*

A Sample Situation

Imagine that you are a twenty-four-year-old student about to graduate from a community college with an A.A. degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management. Before college, you worked at related jobs for more than three years. You now seek a junior management position while you continue your education part-time.

You have spent two weeks compiling information for your résumé and obtaining commitments from four references. Figure 18.5 shows your résumé.

Preparing Your Job Application Letter

Include a cover letter with each résumé you send. In the words of one employment expert, "Sending a résumé without a cover letter is like starting an interview without shaking hands" (Crosby, *Résumés* 12).

YOUR IMAGE. Your application letter complements your résumé by explaining how your credentials fit this particular job and by conveying a sufficiently professional persona for the prospective employer to decide that you warrant an interview. Your letter can also highlight some specific qualifications or skills. For example, you may have "C++ programming" listed on your résumé under the category "Programming Languages." But for one particular job application, you may wish to call attention to this item in your application letter.

You will note on my résumé that I am experienced with C++ programming. In fact, I also tutor C++ programming students in our school's Learning Center.

TARGETS. The letter should never be photocopied. Although you can base

letters to different employers on the same model—with appropriate changes—each letter should be prepared anew.

Sometimes you will apply for positions advertised in print or by word of mouth (solicited applications). At other times you will write prospecting letters to organizations that have not advertised but might need someone like you (unsolicited applications). In either case, tailor your letter to the situation.

NOTE *Write to a specific person—not to some generic recipient such as “Director of Human Resources” or “Personnel Office.” If you don’t know who does the hiring, phone the company and ask for that person’s name and title, and be sure you get the spelling right.*

THE SOLICITED LETTER. Imagine that you are James Purdy (Figure 18.5). In *Innkeeper’s Monthly*, you read the following advertisement and decide to apply.

RESORT MANAGEMENT OPENINGS

Liberty International, Inc., is accepting applications for several junior management positions at our new Lake Geneva resort. Applicants must have three years of practical experience, along with formal training in all areas of hotel/restaurant management. Please apply by June 1, 20xx, to

Sara Costanza
Personnel Director
Liberty International, Inc.
32 Apex Way
Lansdowne, PA 24135

Now plan and compose your letter.

INTRODUCTION. Begin by naming the job you’re applying for and where you may have seen it advertised. In one sentence, identify yourself and your background. If possible, establish a connection by mentioning a mutual acquaintance who encouraged you to apply—but only if that person has given permission.

BODY. Without merely repeating your résumé, focus on the qualifications you can bring to this specific job:

- *Don’t come across as a jack-of-all-trades.* Relate your qualifications specifically to the job for which you are applying.

- *Avoid flattery*: “I am greatly impressed by your remarkable company.”
- *Be specific*. Replace “much experience,” “many courses,” or “increased sales” with “three years of experience,” “five courses,” or “a 35 percent increase in sales between June and October 2002.”
- *Support all claims with evidence, to show how your qualifications will benefit this employer*. Instead of saying, “I have leadership skills,” say, “I was student senate president during my senior year and captain of the lacrosse team.”
- *Create a dynamic tone by using active voice and action verbs*.

WEAK Management responsibilities were steadily given to me.

STRONG I steadily assumed management responsibilities.

- *Trim the fat from your sentences*.

FLABBY I have always been a person who enjoys a challenge.

LEAN I enjoy a challenge.

- *Express self-confidence*.

UNSURE It is my opinion that I have the potential to become a successful manager because . . .

CONFIDENT I will be a successful manager because . . .

- *NEVER BE VAGUE*.

VAGUE I am familiar with the 1022 interactive database management system, and RUNOFF, the text-processing system.

DEFINITE As a lab grader for one semester, I kept grading records on the 1022 database management system, and composed lab procedures on the RUNOFF text-processing system.

- *Avoid letterese*. Write in plain English.
- *Be enthusiastic*. An enthusiastic attitude can be as important as your background, in some instances.

CONCLUSION. Restate your interest and emphasize your willingness to retrain or relocate (if necessary). If the recipient is nearby, request an interview; otherwise, request a phone call, stating times you can be reached. Your conclusion

should leave the impression that you are someone worth knowing.

REVISION. *Never* settle for a first draft—or a second or third! This letter is your model for letters serving in various circumstances. Make it perfect and do not exceed one page.

After several revisions, James Purdy finally signed the letter shown in Figure 18.7.

As an additional example, here is the letter composed by Karen Granger in her quest for a summer internship.

INTERNSHIP APPLICATION LETTER

Dear Mr. White:

I read in *InternWeb.com* that your company offers a summer documentation internship. Because of my education and previous technical writing employment, I am very interested in such a position.

In January 2007, I will graduate from the University of Massachusetts with a B.A. in English/Writing. I have prepared specifically for a computer documentation career by taking computer science, mathematics, and technical writing courses.

In one writing course, the Computer Documentation Seminar, I wrote three software manuals. One manual uses a tutorial to introduce beginners to the Apple Macintosh and *Microsoft Word*. The other manuals describe two IBM PC applications that arrived at the university's computer center with no documentation.

The enclosed résumé describes my work as the intern technical writer with Conway Communications, Inc. for two summers. I learned local area networking (LAN) by documenting Conway's LAN hardware and software. I was responsible for several projects simultaneously and spent much of my time talking with engineers and testing procedures. If you would like samples of my writing, please let me know.

Although Conway has invited me to return next summer and to work full-time after graduation, I would like more varied experience before committing myself to permanent employment. I know I could make a positive contribution to Birchwood Group, Inc. May I telephone you next week to arrange a meeting?

Sincerely,

THE UNSOLICITED LETTER. Ambitious jobseekers do not limit their search to advertised openings. (Fewer than 20 percent of all job openings are advertised.) The unsolicited, or prospecting, letter is a

good way to uncover possibilities beyond the Help Wanted section.

Unsolicited applications do have drawbacks: (a) You can waste time writing to organizations that have no openings, and (b) you cannot tailor your letter to specific requirements. But there also are advantages: For advertised openings, you compete with legions of applicants, whereas your unsolicited letter might arrive just as an opening materializes. Even employers with no openings often welcome and file impressive applications or pass them to another employer who has an opening.

Because an unsolicited letter arrives unexpectedly, you need to get the reader's immediate attention. Don't begin: "I am writing to inquire about the possibility of obtaining a position with your company." If you can't establish a connection through a mutual acquaintance, use a forceful opening:

Does your hotel chain have a place for a junior manager with a college degree in hospitality management, proven commitment to quality service, and customer relations experience that extends far beyond textbooks? If so, please consider my application for a position.

Address your letter to the person most likely in charge of hiring. (Consult company Web sites or the business directories listed on page 426 for names of company officers.) Then call the company to verify the person's name and title.

NOTE

For samples of all types of job-related letters (applications, pay raise requests, and so on) see the free, online version of 200 Letters for Job-Hunters by William S. Frank at <www.careerlab.com/letters/> (Bolles 61). While these samples give some ideas for approaching your own writing situation, never borrow them wholesale; many employers will spot a "canned" letter immediately—either because employers themselves may have read the book or because someone else has tried submitting the same borrowed sample!

ELECTRONIC JOB HUNTING

The computer and the World Wide Web continue to improve the quality and speed of contact between jobseekers and employers. Beyond ease and efficiency, electronic job hunting offers real benefits:

- You can search for jobs worldwide.

- You can focus your search by region, industry, or job category.
- You can research companies comprehensively from many perspectives.
- You can create your own Web site, with hyperlinks to samples of your work, employment references, or other supporting material.
- You can search “passively” and discretely (say, while employed elsewhere) by specifying preferences for salary, region, types of industry, and then receive an email message when the service provider identifies an opening that matches your “profile” (Martin, “Changing Jobs?” 206).
- Your search can be ongoing, in that your résumé remains part of an active computer file, until you delete it.

NOTE *Keep in mind that even the largest job-posting sites represent only a fraction of all jobs available; don't overlook traditional job-hunting sources listed on page 426 and in Figure 18.4.*

Online Employment Resources

Most major companies recruit on sites such as these:

- *Career Mosaic* at <<http://www.careermosaic.com>> provides lists of “hot” jobs, direct access to employer Web sites, free posting of résumés, online job fairs (at which you might chat with an interviewer online), career advice, and domestic and international job listings.
- *CareerPath.com* at <<http://www.careerpath.com>> posts job listings from major newspapers nationwide, and enables jobseekers to post résumés free.
- A Web search via *Yahoo!* or *HotBot* of the linked categories “Business and Economy: Employment: Jobs” yields job listings in specific fields or locations, company profiles, employers who hire in particular specialties, sites on which résumés or onscreen application forms can be posted free, and templates for creating online résumés. One limitation of using a keyword search of major search engines or directories is the countless number of “hits” you would have to sift through. For a far more efficient alternative, consider the gateway sites discussed below.
- *College Grad Job Hunter* at <www.collegegrad.com> focuses on entry-level job hunting for students and recent graduates.
 - Gateway sites for job hunters offer countless targeted resources that have been organized for easy navigation and evaluated for usefulness (Bolles 10–11).

Two highly regarded gateway employment sites are *The Riley Guide* at <www.dbm.com/jobguide/> and *JobHunt: A Meta-list of Online Search Resources and Services* at <www.job-hunt.org>.

Electronic recruiting centers such as careerWEB match applicants with employers in engineering, marketing, data processing, and technical fields worldwide. Countless specialized sites include *Boston Job Bank*, *College Grad Job Hunter*, *Eurojobs On-line*, *HiTechCareers*, *Hospitality Industry Job Exchange*, *Jobs in Atomic and Plasma Physics*, and *Positions in Bioscience and Medicine*.

Major companies such as Johnson & Johnson, Boeing, John Deere, and IBM—to name a few—post openings on their own Web sites. You can visit a company's site, learn about its history, products, and priorities, search its job listings, email your résumé and application letter, and arrange an interview.

NOTE *For a company's real story, look beyond its Web site (for which information has been selected to paint the rosiest possible picture). To see what industry analysts think about the company's prospects, consult an impartial research site such as Hoover's Online at <<http://www.hoovers.com>>. Here, in addition to relatively objective financial and management profiles, you can access recent articles about the company (Martin, "Changing Jobs?" 208). For more on researching a company, see pages 426 and 450.*

Web sites maintained by professional organizations offer additional job listings, along with career advice and industry prospects. Some sites also allow for posting of interactive, hyperlinked résumés.

- Society for Technical Communication <<http://www.stc-va.org>>
- International Television and Video Association <<http://www.itva.org>>
- Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers <<http://www.ieee.org>>

For internship postings and related information, go to *InternWeb.com* at <www.internweb.com>, *RisingStar Internships* at <www.rsinternships.com>, and *InternshipPrograms.com* at <www.internships.wetfeet.com/home.sap>.

NOTE *Record each date and site at which you post an online résumé (or fill out an onscreen application) so you can keep*

track of responses and edit or delete your material as needed (Curry 100).

Electronic Scanning of Résumés

Countless large and midsize companies scan résumés electronically. Electronic storage of online or hard copy résumés offers an efficient way to screen applicants, to compile a database of applicants (for later openings), and to evaluate all applicants fairly.

An optical scanner feeds in the printed page, stores it as a file, and searches the file for keywords associated with the job opening (nouns instead of traditional “action verbs”). Those résumés containing the most keywords (“hits”) make the final cut (Pender 120).

How to Prepare Content for a Scannable Résumé

Using nouns as keywords, list all your skills, credentials, and job titles. (Help Wanted ads or postings are a good source for keywords.)

- *List specialized skills:* marketing, C++ programming, database management, user documentation, Internet collaboration, software development, graphic design, hydraulics, fluid mechanics, editing, surveying, soil testing.
- *List general skills:* teamwork coordination, conflict management, oral communication, report and proposal writing, problem solving, troubleshooting, bilingual in Spanish and English.
- *List credentials:* student member, Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, board-certified in Medical Technology, B.S. Electrical Engineering, top 5 percent of class.
- *List job titles:* manager, director, supervisor, intern, coordinator, project leader, technician.
- *List synonymous versions of key terms (to increase the chances of a hit):* procurement *and* purchasing multimedia *and* hypermedia. Web page design *and* HTML management *and* supervision (McNair 14). If you lack skills or experience, emphasize your personal qualifications: *analytical skills, energy, efficiency, flexibility, imagination, motivation.*
- *Indicate willingness to relocate and travel (if you are truly willing to do so):* This is especially vital in any résumé for the global marketplace.

NOTE *Don't hesitate to make your scannable résumé longer than your hard copy version (but no more than three pages total). The longer the résumé being scanned, the more hits are possible (McNair 13).*

How to Design a Scannable Résumé

For designing a résumé that can be scanned effectively, experts offer the following suggestions:

- *Keep the print standard and simple.* Scanners work best with standard typefaces such as Optima, Courier, Futura, Helvetica, or Times. Depending on the font, choose a type size ranging from 10 to 14 points. Avoid small print. For example, you might use 12-point Helvetica for headings and 12-point Times Roman for body text (McNair 13).
- *Avoid fancy highlighting.* Use **boldface** or FULL CAPS for emphasis. Avoid fancy fonts, italics, underlines, bullets, slashes, dashes, parentheses, or ruled lines (Pender 120).
- *Arrange lines that the scanner can differentiate.* To indent, use the space bar instead of tabs. Instead of allowing lines to “wrap around,” end each line by hitting the Return key (Le Vie 11).
- *Avoid a two-column format.* Multiple columns can be jumbled by scanners that read across the page.
- *Do not fold or staple your pages.* Submit the unfolded résumé in a large envelope.

You might submit two versions of your résumé: one traditionally designed and one scannable—or include a keyword section, as in Figure 18.6 on page 435. Or you might submit a version via email and bring hard copies to the interview. Figure 18.8 shows a scannable version of Figure 18.6.

Electronic Résumés

Online versions of hard copy résumés can be submitted as email or hypertext.

EMAIL RÉSUMÉS. You might submit your résumé directly as email text or attach a file containing a version formatted for hard copy. Check with the recipient beforehand. Not all systems can receive or decode attached files—so when in doubt, paste your résumé directly into your email message (and reformat as needed).

One way to ensure that your résumé can be read by any computer is to create an ASCII version (or “text file”). Select “Save As Text Only” from your desktop menu, and reformat your ASCII page as needed (Robart 14). When you do send an ASCII version of your résumé, career expert Martin Kimeldorf suggests that you include at the end a sentence like this: “An attractive and fully formatted hard copy version of this document is available upon request” (qtd. in Bolles 60).

NOTE *When submitting a résumé in electronic form, always include a cover letter, either as an email document or as an attractively formatted attachment. If you do send these documents as attachments, be sure they can be translated by the recipient’s software. Indicate the software (and version) used in composing the résumé and cover letter, or ask the employer to specify the desired software (Robart 13). When in doubt, send your material as email text, or include an ASCII version as an additional attachment.*

HYPERLINKED RÉSUMÉS. Consider placing a hyperlinked résumé (which might include an online portfolio containing a personal statement, blueprints, writing samples, or indicators of your talents) on your own Web site or that of your school or professional society (Krause 159-60). Figure 18.9 shows a hyperlinked version of Karen Granger’s résumé (Figures 18.6 and 18.8).

You then include the address for your hyperlinked résumé on your hard copy or scannable résumé. Some employers refuse to track down a résumé on a Web page, so be sure to provide other delivery options as well (Robart 13–14).

NOTE *Be sure your hyperlinked résumé can download quickly. Keep in mind that complex graphics and multimedia download very slowly.*

Protecting Privacy and Security When You Post a Résumé Online

Indiscriminate posting of résumés as Web pages or on job boards can be hazardous to your career or your welfare. If you already have a job, your present employer could discover that you’re looking elsewhere. Even more important, placing certain types of information about yourself on the Internet can jeopardize your personal safety.

Your safest bet is to limit the contact and personal information that you list on your personal home page. Job expert Richard Bolles suggests including only your email address and phone number; home and work addresses and names of past employers and references can be supplied *after*

a potential employer has contacted you by phone or email (60). In a hyperlinked résumé, withholding information about employers, schools, or training programs is often impossible. But personal contact information and names of references can still be protected, as shown in Figure 18.9.

Some résumé-posting sites are more private than others. On a site such as *E.SPAN* at <www.espan.com>, for example, you can conceal your contact information and your name. Moreover, you must give permission (via email) before the résumé can be sent to an employer who requests it (Imperato 197). Other sites offer similar options for anonymity while some offer no privacy at all. Find out which is which by checking the site's privacy statement.

SUPPORT FOR THE APPLICATION

An employer impressed by your résumé and cover letter will want answers to these three questions: How highly do other people think of you and your work? What evidence can you show as proof of your skills? How well do you communicate orally? These questions will be answered, respectively, by your dossier, portfolio, and job interview.

Your Dossier

Your dossier contains your credentials: college transcript, recommendation letters, and other items (such as a scholarship award or commendation letter) that document your achievements. An employer impressed by what you say about yourself will want to read what others think and will request your dossier. By collecting recommendations in one folder, you spare your references from writing the same letter repeatedly.

Your college placement office will keep your dossier (or placement folder) on file and send copies to employers. Always keep your own copy as well. Then, if an employer requests your dossier, you can make a photocopy and mail it, advising your recipient that the placement copy is on the way.

NOTE *This is not needless repetition! Most employers establish a specific timetable for (1) advertising an opening, (2) reading letters and résumés, (3) requesting and reviewing dossiers, (4) holding interviews, and (5) making an offer. Timing is crucial. Too often, dossier requests may sit on someone's desk and may even get lost in a busy placement office. Weeks can pass before your dossier is mailed. In these situations the only loser is you.*

Your Professional Portfolio

An organized, professional-looking portfolio shows you can apply your skills and makes you stand out as a job candidate. Also, the portfolio gives you specific achievements and skills to discuss during job interviews.

To prepare a portfolio that shows you at your best, follow these suggestions:

- *Collect materials relevant to the job.* Gather documents or graphics you've prepared in school or on the job, presentations you've given, and projects or experiments you've worked on. Possible items: campus newspaper articles, reports on course projects, papers that earned an "A", examples of persuasive argument, documents from an internship, visuals you've designed for an oral presentation, and so on. Once you've gathered your samples, select those that relate specifically to the job you seek.
- *Sort your materials according to the major requirements of the job.* If requirements include desktop publishing, editing, and marketing, select two or three items for each category (a brochure you've designed, pages from a manual you've edited, slides from an oral presentation, and so on).
- *Assemble your portfolio.* Encase each page in its own clear plastic envelope and arrange your items in a portfolio-type notebook (found in office supply or art supply stores). Place your résumé first, followed by a table of contents giving the title of each item and one or two brief sentences about the item's purpose and audience. Use divider pages to group the items into categories. Add, remove, or reassemble items for various job requirements.
- *Make copies as employers request.* When an employer requests the portfolio before the interview, send a photocopy. In case you need to leave a copy after your interview, bring one along with the original, bound portfolio.

As you create your portfolio, seek advice and feedback from major professors and other people in the field. For portfolio advice, go to <www.talent-net.com> and <www.prospring.net>.

Employment Interviews

An employer impressed by your credentials will arrange an interview. The interview's purpose is to confirm the employer's impressions from your application.

Interviews come in various shapes and sizes. They can be face-to-face or via telephone or video conference. You might meet with one interviewer, a hiring committee, or several committees in succession. You might be interviewed alone or as part of a group of candidates. Interviews can last one hour or less, a full day, or several days. The interview can range from a pleasant chat to a grueling interrogation. Some interviewers may antagonize you deliberately to observe your reaction. Unprepared interviewees make mistakes like the following (Dumont and Lannon 620):

- know little or nothing about the company or what role they would play as an employee
- have inflated ideas about their own worth
- have little idea of how their education prepares them for work
- dress inappropriately
- exhibit no self-confidence
- have only vague ideas of how they could benefit the employer
- inquire only about salary and benefits
- speak negatively of former employers or coworkers

Careful preparation is the key to a productive interview

Prepare by learning about the company in trade journals, industrial indexes, and other resources listed on page 426. Request company literature, including its annual report. Speak with people who know about the company. Visit the company's Web site and, for a more objective view, check sites such as <www.careermosaic.com> for "insider" information about a company. Also, do a keyword search (using the company's name) of business magazine Web sites such as <Fortune.com>, <Forbes.com>, or <BusinessWeek.com> for articles about a company's financial health, working conditions, environmental record, chance of merger (which often means big layoffs), or some impending crises (an automaker's tire recall, for example), and the like. Once you've done all this ask yourself, "Does this job seem like a good fit?"

NOTE *Taking the wrong job can be far worse than taking no job at all—especially for a recent college graduate trying to build solid working credentials.*

Once you've learned enough to decide that you actually want to work for this employer, prepare—and practice—specific answers to the obvious questions:

- *Why does this job appeal to you?*

- *What do you know about our company?*
- *What do you know about our core values (say, informal management structure, commitment to diversity or the environment)?*
- *What do you know about the expectations and demands of this job?*
- *What are the major issues affecting this industry?*
- *How would you describe yourself?*
- *What do you see as your biggest weakness? Biggest strength?*
- *Can you describe an instance in which you came up with a new and better way of doing something?*
- *What are your short-term and long-term career goals?*

Plan direct answers to questions about your background, training, experience, and salary requirements.

Prepare your own list of *well-researched* questions about the job and the organization; you will be invited to ask questions, and what you ask can be as revealing as any answers you give.

NOTE

Being truthful during a job interview is not only ethical but also smart. Companies routinely verify an applicant's claims about education, prior employment, positions held, salary, and personal background. Say you have some past infraction such as a bad credit rating or a brush with the law or some pressing personal commitment such as caring for an elderly parent or a disabled child. Experts suggest that it's better to air these issues right up front—before the employer finds out from other sources. The employer will appreciate your honesty and you will know exactly where you stand before accepting the job (Fisher, "Truth" 292). For more on applicant screening, see page 440.

The Follow-Up Letter

Within a day or so after the interview, send a thank-you letter. Not only is this courteous, but it also reinforces a positive impression. Keep your letter brief, but try to personalize your connection with the reader (Crosby, *Employment* 20):

- Open by thanking the interviewer and reemphasizing your interest in the position.
- Refer to some details from the interview or some aspect of your visit that would help the interviewer reconnect in his/her mind with you specifically. (If you forgot to mention something important during the interview, include it here—briefly.)

- Close with genuine enthusiasm, and make it easy for the reader to respond.

James Purdy (page 433) sent Sara Costanza this follow-up letter:

Thank you for your hospitality during my Tuesday visit to Greenwoods resort. I am very interested in the restaurant-management position, and was intrigued by our discussion about developing an eclectic regional cuisine.

Everything about my tour was enjoyable, but I was especially impressed by the friendliness and professionalism of the resort staff. People seem to love working here, and it's not hard to see why.

I'm convinced I would be a productive employee at Greenwood, and would welcome the chance to prove my abilities. If you need additional information, please call me at (214) 316-2419.

NOTE

Employment expert Olivia Crosby offers these suggestions: Instead of email, send hard copy, either in a business-letter format or as a tasteful, handwritten note. Write to each person with whom you spoke or to the person in charge of the group interview. Be sure to spell each person's name correctly and to proofread repeatedly (Employment 20).

Letters of Acceptance or Refusal

You may receive a job offer by phone or letter. If by phone, request a written offer, and respond with a formal letter of acceptance. This letter may serve as part of your contract; spell out the terms you are accepting. Here is Purdy's letter of acceptance:

I am delighted to accept your offer of a position as assistant recreation supervisor at Liberty International's Lake Geneva Resort, with a starting salary of \$44,500.

As you requested, I will phone Bambi Druid in your personnel office for instructions on reporting date, physical exam, and employee orientation.

I look forward to a long and satisfying career with Liberty International.

You may have to refuse offers. Even if you refuse by phone, write a prompt and cordial letter of refusal, explaining your reasons, and allowing for future possibilities. Purdy handled one refusal this way:

Although I was impressed by the challenge and efficiency of your company's operations, I must decline your offer of a position as assistant desk manager of your London hotel.

I have taken a position with Liberty International because Liberty has offered me the chance to participate in its manager-trainee program. Also, Liberty will pay tuition for the courses I take in completing my B.S. degree in hospitality management.

If any future openings should materialize at your Aspen resort, however, I would again appreciate your considering me as a candidate.

Thank you for your interest in me and for your courtesy.

EXERCISES

1. Bring to class a copy of a business letter addressed to you or a friend. Compare letters. Choose the most and least effective.
2. Write and mail an unsolicited letter of inquiry about the topic you are investigating for an analytical report or research assignment. In your letter you might request brochures, pamphlets, or other informative literature, or you might ask specific questions. Submit a copy of your letter and the response to your instructor.
3. a. As a student in a state college, you learn that your governor and legislature have cut next year's operating budget for all state colleges by 20 percent. This cut will cause the firing of young and popular faculty members; drastically reduce admissions, financial aid, and new programs; and wreck college morale. Write a claim letter to your governor or representative, expressing your strong disapproval and justifying a major adjustment in the proposed budget.
b. Write a claim letter to a politician about some issue affecting your school or community.
c. Write a claim letter to an appropriate school official to recommend action on a campus problem.
4. Write a five hundred to seven hundred word personal statement applying to a college for transfer or for graduate or professional school admission. Cover two areas: (1) what you can bring to this school by way of attitude, background, and talent; and (2) what you expect to gain in personal and professional growth.
5. Write a letter applying for a part-time or summer job, in response to a specific ad. Choose an organization related to your career goal. Identify the exact hours and calendar period during which you are free to work.
 6. Most of these sentences need to be overhauled before being included in a letter. Identify the weakness in each statement, and revise as needed. For example, revise the accusatory "You were not very clear" to "We did not understand your message."
 - a. Pursuant to your ad, I am writing to apply for the internship.
 - b. I need all the information you have about methane-powered engines.
 - c. You idiots have sent me a faulty disk drive!
 - d. It is imperative that you let me know of your decision by January 15.
 - e. You are bound to be impressed by my credentials.
 - f. I could do wonders for your company.
 - g. I humbly request your kind consideration of my application for the position of junior engineer.
 - h. If you are looking for a winner, your search is over!
 - i. I have become cognizant of your experiments and wish to ask your advice about the following procedure.
 - j. You will find the following instructions easy enough for an ape to follow.
 - k. I would love to work for your wonderful company.

- l. As per your request I am sending the country map.
 - m. I am in hopes that you will call soon.
 - n. We beg to differ with your interpretation of this leasing clause.
 - o. I am impressed by the high salaries paid by your company.
7. Write a complaint letter about a problem you've had with goods or service. State your case clearly and objectively, and request a specific adjustment.
 8. *For Class Discussion:* Under what circumstances might it be acceptable to contact a potential inquiry respondent by email? When should you just leave the person alone?

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

1. Form groups according to college majors. Prepare a set of instructions for entry-level jobseekers in your major, telling them how to launch their search. Base at least part of your advice on your analysis of Figure 18.4. Limit your document to one double-sided page, using an inviting and accessible design and any visuals you consider appropriate. Appoint one group member to present your final document to the class.
2. Divide into groups and prepare a listing of five Web sites that jobseekers should visit for advice about cover letters and résumés, including online postings. Include a one-paragraph summary of the material to be found on each site. Compare the findings of your group with others in your class. In addition to sites mentioned in this chapter, here are other sources where you might begin:

Web Resources for Résumés and Cover Letters

<www.jobsmart.org/tools/resume>
 <www.rileyguide.com>
 <www.eresumes.com>
 <www.quint.careers.com>
 <www.damngood.com/jobseekers/tips.html.60>

Note: Expand your search beyond these sites.

3. Divide into groups and prepare a Web site guide for entry-level jobseekers in your field, based on answers to questions like these:
 - “Where can I find listings for job opportunities in our state or region?”
 - “Where can I find listings for internships in our field?”
 - “What Web site focuses on jobs in our field?” (such as hi-tech)
 - “Where can I find listings for temporary or contract work in our field?”

Once you've identified ten likely questions, list one site that could answer each question. For example:

<www.craigslist.com> for jobs in a particular region
 <www.4work.com> for internship opportunities
 <www.firsttuesday.com> for hi-tech jobs
 <www.workflex.monster.com> for contract or temporary jobs

Note: Expand your search beyond these sites.

Report your findings in a memo to your instructor and classmates.

When to send a letter instead of a memo or email

Street address City, state, zip Month, day, year

FIGURE 18.1 A Standard Design for a Workplace Letter

Name and position

Company name

Street address

City, state, zip

Typical salutations

The shape of workplace letters

Complimentary closings

The signature block

Signature block representing the company

FIGURE 18.2 Modified Block Letter

FIGURE 18.3 Block Letter

An attention line can replace your salutation

A subject line can attract attention

Typist's initials

Enclosure noted

Enclosure named

A postscript

Subsequent-page header

A needlessly offensive tone

A tone that conveys the "you" perspective

Letterese

Clear phrasing

Plain-English translations

Questions for connecting with the recipient

Questions for anticipating the recipient's reaction

Questions for organizing your message

When to be direct

When to be indirect

Blunt and impersonal

A "you" perspective

18.1

For more model

letters visit

[<www.ablongman.com/](http://www.ablongman.com/)

[lannonweb](http://www.ablongman.com/lannonweb)>

States the purpose

Makes a reasonable request

Presents a list of specific questions

Leaves space for response to each question

Provides complete contact information

Tells how the material will be used, and offers to share findings

Why inquiries via regular mail may be preferable

Etiquette for telephone or email inquiries

States problem and action desired

Provides details

Explains basis for claim

Courteously states desired action

Establishes early agreement

Presents facts to support claim

Offers more support

Includes all relevant information

Sticks to the facts—accuses

no one

Requests a specific adjustment

Stipulates a reasonable response time

18.2

Online career sites change quickly.

Stay current at

[<www.ablongman.com/](http://www.ablongman.com/)

[lannonweb](http://www.ablongman.com/lannonweb)>

A glimpse at your job future

Identify your assets

Know what is available

How to make contacts

FIGURE 18.4 How People Usually Find Jobs

Source: Tips for Finding the Right Job. U.S. Department of Labor.

What employers expect in a résumé

Résumé categories
 Statement of career objective
 How to choose references
 How to request a reference
 Emphasize your assets

FIGURE 18.5 Résumé for an Entry-Level Candidate (Reverse Chronological Arrangement)

18.3

For more model
 résumés visit
www.ablongman.com/lannonweb

18.4

Learn about formatting electronic résumés at
www.ablongman.com/lannonweb

FIGURE 18.6 Résumé for a Summer Internship Candidate (Modified-Functional Arrangement) Because this applicant is seeking a position in writing and editing,

she indicates that her writing portfolio is available.

The application letter can accentuate items on the résumé

How to compose a persuasive application

FIGURE 18.7 A Sample Cover Letter for a Job Application Purdy wisely emphasizes practical experience because his background is varied and impressive. An applicant with less practical experience would emphasize education instead, discussing related courses, extracurricular activities, and aptitudes.

Begins by stating purpose

Identifies herself and college background

Expands on background

Describes work experience

Explains interest in this job

Drawbacks of unsolicited applications

Advantages of unsolicited applications

Spark reader interest

Opens forcefully

CONSIDER THIS How Applicants Are Screened for Personal Qualities

As many as 25 percent of résumés contain falsified credentials, such as a nonexistent degree or a contrived affiliation with a prestigious school (Parrish 1+). A security director for one major employer estimates that 15 to 20 percent of job applicants have something personal to hide: a conviction for drunk driving or some other felony, trouble with the IRS, bad credit, or the like (Robinson 285).

With yearly costs of employee dishonesty or bad judgment amounting to billions of dollars, companies use preemployment screening for integrity, emotional stability, and a host of other personal qualities (Hollwitz and Pawlowski 203, 209).

Screening often begins with a background check of education, employment history, and references. One corporation checks up to ten references (from peers, superiors, and subordinates) per candidate (Martin, “So” 78). In addition, roughly 95 percent of corporations check on the applicant’s character, trustworthiness, and reputation: they may examine driving, credit, and criminal records, and interview neighbors and coworkers (Robinson 285).

The law affords some protection by requiring employers to notify the applicant before checking on character, reputation, and credit history and to provide a copy of any report that leads to a negative hiring decision (Robinson 285). Once an applicant is hired, however, the picture changes: more than 50 percent of companies provide personal information to credit agencies, banks, and landlords without informing employees, and 40 percent don’t inform employees about what kinds of records are being kept on them (Karaim 72).

Beyond screening for background, employers use aptitude and personality tests to pinpoint desirable qualities. A sampling of test questions (Garner 86; Kane 56; Martin, “So” 77, 78):

ℓ *Ability to perform under pressure*: “Do you get nervous and confused at busy intersections?”

ℓ *Emotional stability and even temper*: “Do you honk your horn often while driving?”

ℓ *Sense of humor*: “Tell us a joke.”

ℓ *Ability to cope with people in stressful situations*: “Do you like to argue and debate?” “Are you good at taking control in a crisis?”

- ℓ *Persuasive skills:* “Write a brief memo to a client, explaining why X [stipulated on the test] can’t be done on time.”
- ℓ *Presentation skills:* “Prepare and give a five-minute speech on some aspect of the industry as it relates to this company.”

These tests may be given online, before an applicant is considered for an interview.

Above all, most employers look for candidates who are *likable*. One employer checks with each person an applicant speaks with during the company visit—including the receptionist. Another employer has candidates join in a company softball game (Martin, “So” 77).

Benefits of online job searches

18.5

For more on electronic job hunting visit

<[www.ablongman.com/
lannonweb](http://www.ablongman.com/lannonweb)>

A sampling of job sites on the Web

Professional organizations on the Web

How scanning works

Keywords to list on a résumé

Making a scannable résumé computer accessible

18.6

Keep up with the
evolving conventions
of electronic

résumés at

<[www.ablongman.com/
lannonweb](http://www.ablongman.com/lannonweb)>

PREFERRED FORMS OF RÉSUMÉS FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES

Purpose

- ℓ *For applying via traditional mail, fax, or email attachment; and for job interviews*
- ℓ *For translation by any computer*
- ℓ *For use as a Web page or as an online posting on a Web site job board or database*
- ℓ *For applying via email*

Preferred Form

- *Attractively formatted and highlighted word-processed document, or scannable version, or both*
- *ASCII (text only) file*
- *Hyperlinked document with links to materials supporting your application, or ASCII version, or both*
- *Direct pasting into email, or word-processed attachment, or ASCII version*

FIGURE 18.8 A Computer-Scannable Résumé Notice the standard print and the absence of fancy highlighting.

FIGURE 18.9**The First****Page of a Hyperlinked Résumé**

Links connect to various types of information, including several links to Karen's writing portfolio. For security reasons, personal contact information is limited to the applicant's phone number and email address.

18.7

For some examples of portfolio formatting visit www.ablongman.com/lannonweb

How to prepare a portfolio

How people fail job interviews

How to research an organization

Questions to expect in a job interview

GUIDELINES for Surviving a Job Interview**The Face-to-Face Interview**

1. *Get your timing right.* Confirm the interview's exact time and location.

Give yourself ample time to get there. Arrive early but no more than 10 minutes or so.

NOTE *If you are offered a choice of interview times, choose mid-morning over late afternoon: According to an Accountemps survey of 1,400 managers, 69 percent prefer mid-morning for doing their hiring, whereas only 5 percent prefer late afternoon (Fisher, "My Company" 184).*

2. *Don't show up empty-handed.* Have a briefcase, pen, and notepad. Have your own questions organized and written out. Bring extra copies of your résumé (unfolded) and a portfolio (if appropriate) with examples of your work.

3. *Make a positive first impression:*

- Come dressed as if you already work for the company.
- Learn the name of your interviewer beforehand, so you can greet this person by name—but never by first name unless invited.
- Extend a firm handshake, smile, and look the interviewer in the eye.
- Wait to be asked to take a chair.
- Relax but do not slouch.
- Keep your hands in your lap.
- Do not fiddle with your face, hair, or other body parts.
- Maintain eye contact much of the time, but don't stare.

4. *Don't worry about having all the answers.* When you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and relax. Interviewers typically do about 70 percent of the talking (Kane 56).

5. *Avoid abrupt yes or no answers—as well as life stories.* Keep answers short and to the point.
6. *Don't answer questions by merely repeating the material on your résumé.* Instead, explain how specific skills and types of experience could be assets to this particular employer. For evidence, refer to your portfolio whenever possible.
7. *Remember to smile often and to be friendly and attentive throughout the interview.* In the end, people hire the candidate they **LIKE** the best!
8. *Never criticize a previous employer.* Above all, interviewers like people who have positive attitudes.
9. *Be prepared to ask intelligent questions.* When asked if you have questions, focus on the nature of the job: travel involved, level of responsibility, typical job assignments, opportunities for further training, types of clients, and so on. Avoid questions that could easily have been answered by your own prior research.
10. *Don't be afraid to allow silence.* An interviewer may simply stop talking, just to observe your reaction to silence. If you have nothing more to say or ask, don't feel compelled to speak. Let the interviewer make the next move.
11. *Take a hint.* When your interviewer hints that the meeting is ending (perhaps by checking a watch), restate your interest, ask when a hiring decision is likely to be made, thank the interviewer, and leave.
12. *Display etiquette and restraint.* If you are invited to lunch, don't order the most expensive dish on the menu; don't order an alcoholic beverage; don't smoke; don't salt your food before tasting it; don't eat too quickly; don't put your elbows on the table; don't speak with your mouth full; and don't order a huge dessert. In short, remember this adage: "There's no such thing as a free lunch." And try to order last. For more on dining etiquette go to www.epicurious.com/c_play/cO2_polite/polite.html.
13. *Send a follow-up letter.* As soon as possible, send a brief thank-you note (page 453).

The Telephone Interview

As a screening device, many employers interview candidates initially over the telephone. (The interviewer(s) will usually phone beforehand to arrange a mutually convenient time.) A phone interview gives you the chance of making a good first impression by speaking from your home turf and having notes, questions, and other backup materials organized within easy reach. A few guidelines (Crosby, *Employment* 20–21; Ford, "Phone" 19):

1. *If you have "call waiting," disable it temporarily, to avoid beeping and interruptions.* On most phones, you can disable this feature by pressing *70 as soon as the call has been connected.
2. *Arrange all your materials where you can reach them.* Have your list of questions, job description, talking points, résumé, pen, paper, and anything else you might need. Tape things on the walls, spread them on the floor, or whatever works for you.

3. *Sit in a straight-backed chair or remain standing.* These postures may help you speak more emphatically and confidently. They are also likely to keep you more attentive and businesslike than if you were lounging in a comfy armchair.
4. *Identify the interviewer clearly.* Ask for the interviewer's name (spelled) and contact information, including email, and a mailing address to which you can send a thank-you letter.
5. *As the interview ends, encourage further contact.* Restate your interest in the position and your desire to visit the organization and meet people in person.
6. *Send your thank-you letter as soon as possible.*

(continues)

Guidelines (continued)

What to say in a follow-up letter

Refresh the employer's memory

Accept an offer with enthusiasm

Decline an offer diplomatically

18.8

For more job hunting resources visit

[www.ablongman.com/
lannonweb](http://www.ablongman.com/lannonweb)

CONSIDER THIS How to Evaluate a Job Offer

Fortunately, most organizations will not expect you to accept or reject an offer on the spot. You will probably be given at least a week to make up your mind. Although there is no way to remove all risks from this career decision, you will increase your chances of making the right choice by thoroughly evaluating each offer—weighing all the advantages against all the disadvantages of taking the job.

The Organization

Background information on the organization—be it a company, government agency, or nonprofit concern—can help you decide whether it is a good place for you to work.

Does the organization's business or activity match your own interests and beliefs? It will be easier to apply yourself to the work if you are enthusiastic about what the organization does.

How will the size of the organization affect you? Large firms generally offer a greater variety of training programs and career paths, more managerial levels for advancement, and better employee benefits than small firms. Large employers also have more advanced technologies in their laboratories, offices, and factories. However, jobs in large firms tend to be highly specialized—workers are assigned relatively narrow responsibilities. On the other hand, jobs in small firms may offer broader authority and responsibility, a closer working relationship with top management, and a chance to clearly see your contribution to the success of the organization.

Should you work for a fledgling organization or one that is well established? New businesses have a high failure rate, but for many people, the excitement of helping create a company and the potential for sharing in its success more than offset the risk of job loss. It may be just as exciting and rewarding, however, to work for a young firm that already has a foothold on success.

Does it make a difference if the company is private or public? A private company may be controlled by an individual or a family, which can mean that key jobs are reserved for relatives and friends. A public company is controlled by a board of directors responsible to the stockholders. Key jobs are open to anyone with talent.

Is the organization in an industry with favorable long-term prospects? The most successful firms tend to be in industries that are growing rapidly.

Where is the job located? If it is in another city, you need to consider the cost of living, the availability of housing and transportation, and the quality of educational and recreational facilities in the new location. Even if the place of work is in your area, consider the time and expense of commuting and whether you can use public transportation.

Where are the firm's headquarters and branches located? Although a move may not be required now, future opportunities could depend on your willingness to move to these places.

It is usually easy to get background information on an organization simply by telephoning its public relations office. A public company's annual report to the stockholders tells about its corporate philosophy, history, products or services, goals, and financial status. Most government agencies can furnish reports that describe their programs and missions. Press releases, company newsletters or magazines, and recruitment brochures can also be useful. Ask the organization for any other items that might interest a prospective employee.

Background information on the organization may also be available at your public or school library. If you cannot get an annual report, check the library for reference directories that provide basic facts about the company, such as earnings, products and services, and number of employees.

Stories about an organization in magazines and newspapers can tell a great deal about its successes, failures, and plans for the future. You can identify articles on a company by looking under its name in periodical or computerized indexes such as the *Business Periodicals Index*, *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, *News-paper Index*, *Wall Street Journal Index*, and *New York Times Index*. It will probably not be useful to look back more than two or three years.

The library may also have government publications that present projections of growth for the industry in which the organization is classified. Long-term projections of employment and output for more than two hundred industries, covering the entire economy, are developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and revised every other year—consult the current *Monthly Labor Review* for the most recent projections. The *U.S. Industrial Outlook*, published annually by the U.S. Department of Commerce, presents detailed analysis of growth prospects for a large number of industries. Trade magazines also have frequent articles on the trends for specific industries.

Career centers at colleges and universities often have information on employers that is not available in libraries. Ask the career center librarian how to find out about a particular organization.

The Nature of the Work

Even if everything else about the job is attractive you will be unhappy if you dislike the day-to-day work. Determining in advance whether you will like the work may be difficult. However, the more you find out about it before accepting or rejecting the job offer, the more likely you are to make the right choice. Ask yourself questions like the following.

Does the work match your interests and make good use of your skills? The duties and responsibilities of the job should be explained in enough detail to answer this question.

How important is the job in this company? An explanation of where you fit in the organization and how you are supposed to contribute to its overall objectives should give an idea of the job's importance.

Are you comfortable with the supervisor?

Do employees seem friendly and cooperative?

Does the work require travel?

Does the job call for irregular hours?

How long do most people who enter this job stay with the company? High turnover can mean dissatisfaction with the nature of the work or something else about the job.

The Opportunities

A good job offers you opportunities to grow and move up. It gives you chances to learn new skills, increase your earnings, and rise to positions of greater authority, responsibility, and prestige.

The company should have a training plan for you. You know what your abilities are now. What valuable new skills does the company plan to teach you?

The employer should give you some idea of promotion possibilities within the organization. What is the next step on the career ladder? If you have to wait for a job to become vacant before you can be promoted, how long does this usually take? Employers differ on their policies regarding promotion from within the organization. When opportunities for advancement do arise, will you compete with applicants from outside the company? Can you apply for jobs for which you qualify elsewhere within the organization or is mobility within the firm limited?

The Salary and Benefits

Wait for the employer to introduce these subjects. Most companies will not talk about pay until they have decided to hire you. In order to know if their offer is reasonable, you need a rough estimate of what the job should pay. You may have to go to several sources for this information. Talk to friends who were recently hired in similar jobs. Ask your instructors and the staff in the college placement office about starting pay for graduates with your qualifications. Scan the Help Wanted ads in newspapers. Check the library or your school's career center for salary surveys, such as the College Placement Council Salary Survey and Bureau of Labor Statistics occupational wage surveys. If you are considering the salary and benefits for a job in another geographic area, make allowances for differences in the cost of living, which may be significantly higher in a large metropolitan area than in a smaller city, town, or rural area. Use the research to come up with a base salary range for yourself, the top being the best you can hope to get and the bottom being the least you will take. An employer cannot be specific about the amount of pay if it includes commissions and bonuses. The way the plan works, however, should be explained. The employer also should be able to tell you what most people in the job earn.

Also take into account that the starting salary is just that, the start. Your salary should be reviewed on a regular basis—many organizations do it every twelve months. If the employer is pleased with your performance, how much can you expect to earn after one, two, three, or more years?

Don't think of your salary as the only compensation you will receive—consider benefits. Benefits can add a lot to your base pay. Health insurance and pension plans are among the most important benefits. Other common benefits include life insurance, paid vacations and holidays, and sick leave. Benefits vary widely among smaller and larger firms, among full-time and part-time workers, and between the public and private sectors. Find out exactly what the benefit package includes and how much of the costs you must bear.

Asking yourself these kinds of questions won't guarantee that you make the best career decision—only hindsight could do that—but it will probably help you make a better choice than if you act on impulse.

*Source: Excerpted from U.S. Department of Labor. Tomorrow's Jobs. Washington, DC, GPO, 2000.
(continues)
Consider This (continued)*

◆ **CHECKLIST for Usability of Letters**

(Numbers in parentheses refer to the first page of discussion.)

Content

- ◆ Is the letter addressed to a specifically named person? (412)
- ◆ Does the letter contain all the standard parts? (410)
- ◆ Does the letter have all needed specialized parts? (416)
- ◆ Have you given the recipient all necessary information? (39)
- ◆ Have you identified the name and position of your recipient? (412)

Arrangement

- ◆ Does the introduction immediately engage the reader and lead naturally to the body? (412)
- ◆ Are transitions between letter parts clear and logical? (772)
- ◆ Does the conclusion encourage the reader to act? (412)
- ◆ Is the format correct? (417)
- ◆ Is the design acceptable? (411)

Style

- ◆ Is the letter in conversational language (free of letterese)? (419)
- ◆ Does the letter reflect a “you” perspective throughout? (418)
- ◆ Does the tone reflect your relationship with the recipient? (274)
- ◆ Is the recipient likely to react favorably to this letter? (420)
- ◆ Is the style clear, concise, and fluent throughout? (244)
- ◆ Is the letter grammatical? (Appendix C)
- ◆ Does the letter’s appearance enhance your image? (340)

For more exercises, visit
www.ablongman.com/lannon