



BEGINNING YOUR CAREER SEARCH

James S. O'Rourke IV

BEGINNING YOUR CAREER SEARCH

James S. O'Rourke IV

Associate Professor of Business
University of Notre Dame

The Eugene D. Fanning Center for Business Communication
College of Business Administration
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana



PRENTICE HALL, Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458

Acquisitions Editor: *Donald J. Hull*
Assistant Editor: *John Larkin*
Production Editor: *Joseph F. Tomasso*
Manufacturing Buyer: *Arnold Vila*



© 1998 by Prentice Hall, Inc.
A Simon & Schuster Company
Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458

All rights reserved. No part of this book may
be reproduced, in any form or by any means,
without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

ISBN 0 - 1 3 - 7 9 0 3 1 2 - X

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*
Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

INTRODUCTION

Beginning your career search can be a frightening, frustrating, and very stressful experience. Many college and university students, in spite of many years of study and thoughtful reflection, still aren't completely certain who they want to work for, what they want to do for a living, or even what they hope to be when they graduate. That's the bad news. The good news is that virtually everyone makes it through the career search experience healthy, sane, and fully-employed.

Transforming yourself from an aspiring student with career ambitions to a full-time professional with an employer, a regular paycheck, and some reasonable prospects for advancement isn't easy. You can do it -- literally millions of young men and women do each year.

This little book may be of some help. In here, you'll find some straight-forward, practical advice on how to write a resume that works. You'll see what to avoid in your resume and how to correspond with a prospective employer. Employers take everything you write very seriously, so you'll want to pay special attention to the section on introductory, cover letters and follow-up, thank-you letters.

Equally important is knowing who you want to work for (and why). This book contains some advice on researching the companies you most want to work for. This research will be especially helpful, not only in locating the ideal firm to begin your career with, but also during job interviews. Employers think it's particularly important for job applicants to know a great deal about the company *before* the interview process ever begins. This book will show you how to find that sort of information, and how to use it to your advantage during an interview.

You'll also find helpful suggestions on how to conduct yourself during an interview: what to wear, what *not* to wear, what to bring with you, greeting an interviewer, nonverbal skills, and how to listen carefully to what's being said.

Hundreds of interviewers were asked what they're looking for in professional job candidates. The same interviewers were asked what turns them off when they're speaking with job applicants. You'll find their responses, along with a reasonably complete list of questions you should be prepared to answer. This book also talks about questions you do not have to answer, as well as questions you might want to ask your interviewer.

Specific suggestions on what to do *after* the interview are also here, along with an updated list of the reasons job interviews fail. You'll find a thorough discussion of new interview techniques, including critical-incident or behavioral-based interviews. We'll give you some ideas on how to negotiate with a company once you're offered a job.

If you're concerned about your writing skills, you'll find sample letters of application and several follow-up, thank-you letters. These are authentic letters, written by business students just like you. Those same students have also agreed to share copies of their resumes. No matter what your academic or work background, you're likely to find samples that will help you draft that first letter and put together a resume that best represents your skills, experience and potential.

Even if you're a year or more away from graduation, the best time to get started on your career search is right now. After all, the sooner you get started, the better your resume will look, the greater the list of potential employers, and the better your chances will be. Remember, your professors, friends, and family are all pulling for you and will likely be a great help as you begin to think about your career. But writing that resume, drafting those letters, and finding just the right employer is up to you.

Good luck with your search and best wishes as you embark on a new career.

J.S. O'Rourke
Notre Dame, Indiana

BEGINNING YOUR CAREER SEARCH

Table of Contents

Introduction	vii
Writing a Résumé that Works	01
How to Write a Résumé	04
What to Avoid in Your Résumé	05
Writing an Introductory Letter	06
Writing a Follow-Up, Thank-You Letter	07
Researching the Companies You Most Want to Work for	08
Beginning your research	
Preparing for your interview with useful information	
Strategies for Successful Job Interviews	11
Interviewing for a Job	11
Goals of an interview	
Planning for an interview	
The Day of an Interview	13
What to wear	
What <i>not</i> to wear	
What to bring with you	
Greeting Skills	
Nonverbal Skills	
Listening Skills	
Interview Objectives	16
What Are Interviewers Looking for?	17
What Turns Interviewers Off?	18

Questions You Should Be Prepared to Answer	19
Questions You Do Not Have to Answer, Unless You Want to	20
Handling illegal or unethical questions	
Questions you might want to ask	
Wrap-up skills	
After the Interview	23
Behavioral-Based Interviewing	23
Reasons Interviews Fail	26
When You're Offered a Job	28
Sample Letters of Application	30
Sample Follow-Up, Thank-You Letters	36
Sample Undergraduate Résumés	39
Sample Graduate Student Résumés	45

WRITING A RÉSUMÉ THAT WORKS

Many college students and even some experienced professionals think that a résumé is just a summary of the jobs they have held, along with a brief description of the duties of each position. This is a popular misconception that can make it difficult for soon-to-be college graduates and those already in the workforce to know how to start writing their own résumés. Other popular misconceptions include a long-held belief that there is *one acceptable format* and *one acceptable method* to follow when writing a résumé.

The truth is that there are numerous formats you can use, and any method you have used for gathering information about yourself will work. Just keep in mind that what you are doing is creating a marketing tool, a piece of print advertising, and the product you are marketing is yourself. This is not the time for you to be modest or self-deprecating; it is a time when blowing your own horn is most appropriate.

What, then, is a résumé? It is simply a document that gives potential employers an overview of who you are, where you've been, and where you hope to go. Its purpose is not to get you a job, as many people assume, but to get you an interview. Your goal is to entice a prospective employer into wanting to find out more about you in a personal interview, not to tell him or her everything about you in a couple of pages -- an impossible task, even for the most experienced professional.

Another bit of useful information about résumés is that the average recruiter spends only thirty seconds scanning a résumé. A sloppy or excessively wordy résumé will be quickly recycled in the paper bin. This means that the content and layout of your résumé should be concise and attractive; learn to place your white space, bullet points, bold print, and underlines to take your readers' eyes to the information you especially want them to read.

Résumé writing should be clear and articulate; information should be easily accessible, and errors in spelling and grammar should be corrected long before the final copy is printed. Most career counselors suggest, and employers prefer, using a quality plain white or off-white bond paper. They also recommend that you limit the length of your résumé to one or a few pages at most.

The three C's -- *clarity*, *conciseness*, and *correctness* -- the keys to writing an effective résumé. Avoid the common mistake of starting each line of experience with "Responsibilities Included:" or "Duties Entailed." This is also not the time to write complete sentences, despite what your English teachers always said about subjects and verbs. Instead, using an outline-type format for writing, start each sentence with a descriptive action verb that tells, as specifically as possible, what it was that you did or accomplished in each position you plan to list.

What exactly constitutes work-related experience? Anything you have done that has prepared you to be effective in your field, regardless of the title you held while you were doing it. This includes both paid and unpaid (volunteer) experience that clearly relates to your current career objectives. It would include summer jobs that may have no obvious connection to your career but indicate that you are reliable, punctual, hard-working, and have leadership potential. It also includes your on-campus involvement with organizations, activities and sports, along with special projects you may have completed as class assignments, such as senior seminar papers and honors projects.

A barrier that blocks many students from getting started on their résumés is not knowing what they are looking for in a first job, and not knowing what skills, qualities, and characteristics employers are looking for in prospective job candidates.

If you don't know what you want in a job or haven't clarified your career goals, forget the résumé for now. Instead, get to a résumé workshop and schedule an appointment with your campus career and planning director. Remember, if you don't know where you're going, you probably won't get there. If you don't know what's important to you in your career and in your life's work, you can't begin a job search. If you don't know what skills and personal qualities you have to offer an employer, you're unlikely to find a truly satisfying career.

Of course, that isn't necessarily all bad news, since many of us learn more from our mistakes than we do from our successes, and our first job often bears little resemblance to our later jobs, anyway. It just means you're taking an unnecessarily circuitous route to the career satisfaction you really want.

On the other hand, if what's stopping you is not knowing what employers want, consider the findings of *The College Placement Council*. They surveyed college recruiters to find out what skills and personal qualities are most essential for new employees. Here is a list of sixteen attributes mentioned most frequently:

- *An ability to communicate effectively:* in speaking, writing, and listening.
- *Intelligence:* measured not by GPA, but an ability to generate ideas and solve problems.
- *Self-confidence:* measured by a willingness to take risks and undertake new experiences and projects.
- *Willingness to accept responsibility:* to accept a task and to take criticism when you make mistakes.

- *Initiative:* an ability to learn an operation and work with minimal supervision.
- *Leadership:* an ability to motivate and direct the activities of others.
- *High energy level:* a willingness to work hard and display enthusiasm, especially when the going gets tough.
- *Imagination:* the ability to solve problems and come up with innovative ideas.
- *Flexibility:* a receptiveness to new ideas and a real capacity for change, often on short notice.
- *Interpersonal skills:* the ability to get along well with others and bring out the best in them, even when they are very different from yourself.
- *Self-knowledge:* the ability to realistically assess your own capabilities and limitations.
- *An ability to handle conflict:* good stress management skills.
- *Goal-orientation:* the ability to set and achieve meaningful goals.
- *Competitiveness:* as measured not only by athletic achievements, but also by academic and organizational success.
- *Vocational skills:* specific, technical skills required in your field.
- *Direction:* a sense of career and goal-orientation.

Do these skills sound familiar? They should -- most of them are the ones you've been developing throughout your education. There's no doubt about it -- you have what employers want.

The next step is to look at what you've been doing for the last five-to-ten years that will prove you possess these important attributes. Take a note pad, some sharp pencils, a copy of your college transcript, and find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Use the top sheet of paper to identify the skills you possess that you would want a prospective employer to know about. These skills may be job-specific (technical skills), related to many professional areas of work (transferable skills), or qualities / characteristics / working styles you have (personal management skills).

Use the next sheet of notepaper for each of these headings: education, work experience, volunteer work experience, and activities / organizations. Now, list under the appropriate heading everything you can think of that you've done that would indicate your abilities. At this point, it might be wise to include *all* of your experience; don't start eliminating possible entries for the résumé until later.

Unless you did something genuinely spectacular in high school or preparatory school, such as serving as class valedictorian or student body president, you should limit your entries to your college education and extra-curricular activities. These note pages, along with your college transcript, will serve as worksheets as you develop your formal résumé.

HOW TO WRITE A RÉSUMÉ

- Keep it brief. Two pages tops; one page preferred.
- Include all relevant work information, including companies and dates of employment. Omit street addresses and names of your supervisors.
- Speak in terms of specific accomplishments. Use concrete examples; quantify if possible. Use parallel form.
- Use action verbs to describe your skills and achievements:

analyzed	designed	improved
arranged	distributed	maintained
conducted	generated	trained
- Keep it honest. Don't puff up, cover up, or mislead regarding your accomplishments or compensation. If you weren't in charge, say "assisted . . ."
- Target your résumé for a particular job. Use a word processor to prepare different résumés for different jobs.
- Study models. Experiment with arrangements. Use as few headings as possible. Consolidate.
- Consider including a *Summary of Qualifications* at the beginning.

- *Make it look good.* At the very least, your resume should feature: Quality paper, quality printing, judicious use of white space, standout headings, correct grammar, and correct, conventional spelling.
- Write it yourself. No one knows you as well as you do.

WHAT TO AVOID IN YOUR RÉSUMÉ

In response to changes in our culture, technology, and employment, the fashion in résumés has changed. Today's busy human resource directors are looking for easy-to-read documents that reveal achievements and skills immediately. Some information is no longer considered important.

Here is a list of information you **should not include**:

- *Photo.* Employers want to avoid any possible hint of discrimination.
- *Personal information.* Don't include hobbies, church affiliation, marital status, statements about your health, or other personal matters.
- *Salary requirements.* Why price yourself out of a job or show that you're willing to work at bargain rates?
- *References* or a statement that "references are available on request." List them on a separate sheet and offer them at the interview.
- *Long paragraphs.* Use short statements or bulleted items.
- *Empty assurances.* All applicants think they are good, honest, loyal, ambitious, and "people oriented." Demonstrate these qualities through concrete examples on your résumé and during an interview.
- *Precise chronology of your life.* You do not have to account for every year of your life since you graduated from high school. Job applications may require this information, but not résumés.
- *Hobbies and outside interests.* Exception: Those that relate to professional interests or show traits an employer wants. Avoid listing any dangerous or time-consuming activities.

- *Date of résumé preparation* or date available to begin work. Both indicate how long you have been looking for a job. Exception: when looking for seasonal work.

WRITING AN INTRODUCTORY LETTER

An introductory letter is often called a cover letter. Such letters can serve many purposes. For example, they can:

- accompany your resume to inquire about possible job openings;
- respond (along with your résumé) to a want ad;
- accept, reject, or show interest in a job following an interview;
- explain your career interests, job focus, or other issues that aren't immediately obvious in your résumé.

Your cover letters should be:

- one-page, printed on a high quality, laser printer;
- prepared on white or off-white bond paper;
- absolutely free of any typographic, spelling, or grammatical errors;
- addressed to a person rather than a company or division.

Writing a cover letter isn't really difficult. In the first paragraph, give the reason you are writing. You might be interested in the industry, or in a specific kind of work. You may be responding to a want ad, or referred by someone who knew about a job opening. Gear your reason(s) for writing the letter to the interests of the person who will read it. The fact that you are unemployed or about to graduate from college and need a job should *never* be included in a cover letter, résumé or interview.

In the second paragraph, respond to the employer's question, "Why should I hire (or even interview) this person?" Describe in more detail any aspect of your résumé that demonstrates:

- your interest or experience in this type of work, industry, or related area;
- your qualities as a worker; be specific, quantify where possible;
- how your education will help you in this job or with this firm.

In the third and final paragraph, let the reader know if you intend to call for an interview, or if you will wait to be contacted. "I look forward to hearing from you" is a positive approach. Be certain to include information about when, where, and how a prospective employer may contact you.

One final tip: check the message on your answering machine. If it's a typically "cute" undergraduate message, dump it. Put a professional response in its place.

WRITING A FOLLOW-UP, THANK-YOU LETTER

The interview is not the end of your job search. You absolutely must maintain contact with each potential employer, demonstrating that you are grateful for their time, that you enjoyed meeting and speaking with them, and that you are actively interested in employment with their firm.

During the concluding minutes of an interview, establish a timeline that you can follow. Make sure you leave the interview with the recruiter's name, title and phone number. Ask for his or her business card. Also, learn when you can expect to hear from him or her, and when he or she expects to hear back from you.

Send a thank-you letter within three days of the interview. Include the following information in the letter:

- *First paragraph:* Thank the interviewer for the interview. Mention the date and location of the interview and include the title of the position for which you interviewed.
- *Second paragraph:* Restate your interest in the position and the company. Mention anything that you think was especially important from your conversation with the recruiter. Show a willingness to provide any additional information and/or clarification of your skills and background.
- *Third paragraph:* Say that you look forward to hearing from him or her and conclude with a positive statement.

Based on the timeline developed, follow up with the interviewer. For example, he or she may have said they would get back to you in a week; if you haven't received a call or letter, respond with a letter of your own. Don't be overeager, but do stay in contact. Write first, then follow up with a phone call. Be polite but persistent.

Keep looking. Don't stop your search because an interview with one company went well. Continue to network, send letters / résumés and look for opportunities to interview. Your goal is to have several job offers and then to select the one that suits you best.

RESEARCHING THE COMPANIES YOU MOST WANT TO WORK FOR

Finding the right job involves more than just deciding what you're good at, or what you'd be happiest doing each day. It also involves finding out as much as you can about the firms and organizations you're considering. Just as they want to find out all about you, so you should want to find out all about them.

Why should you research the firms you plan to apply to or interview with? There are two reasons, really. First, the more you know about a company or an organization, the easier your decision will be. Second, employers expect you to research them, and they'll be looking for evidence that you've done your homework.

Employers expect you to research them for a number of reasons. Your investigation helps a prospective employer to determine your level of interest and enthusiasm. Careful research will demonstrate your understanding of an effective employment interview. Finally, if you thoroughly research a company *before* you interview with them, it leaves a favorable impression on that employer.

Beginning Your Research

Here are a half-dozen rules of thumb for researching companies you think you might like to work for:

- Publicly-owned companies are usually easier to find information about than privately-held firms. Finding detailed information on Ford Motor Company, for example will be substantially easier than finding information on Cargill, the agricultural consortium, because Ford is publicly-held. All public companies are required to file documents with the Securities Exchange Commission and a number of sources are available to help you learn more about such companies. *Business Week* magazine publishes an annual directory of the world's top 1,000 corporations; *Fortune* magazine publishes a similar guide to the nation's 500 biggest companies.
- Corporations as a whole are generally easier to find information about than their subsidiaries or divisions. While you'll find information easy to come by on Ford Motor Company, you may find that gathering information about the Ford Light Truck Division is not as easy. The company's web site (in this case, www.ford.com) will provide you with information the company thinks you might wish to know. The company's Public Information Division or Investor Relations Office would be another good place to begin. You may even consider writing to or calling the company to ask if they could provide information for you.

- Large, nationally-known or international corporations are always easier to find information about than local or regional firms. Again, Ford is a company that's known world-wide for its motor vehicles. Excel Industries, on the other hand, is not as well known. Excel manufactures window systems for the automotive industry and Ford happens to be one of their best customers. Excel Industries is a public company, though, so if you're persistent, you'll find what you need in some of the directories listed below.
- Information found in a library may be somewhat dated, perhaps as much as several months or years old. If you're interested in historical data about a company, a bound volume in your local library might be a good place to start.
- Current periodicals, journals and electronic databases are more likely to have fresh information. The *Dow Jones News Retrieval System*, for example, will list everything that's been printed in recent years in the *Wall Street Journal*. If you've heard that Excel Industries is planning to expand or to produce a new line of automotive products (useful information to know if you hope to interview with them), the *Wall Street Journal* story about Excel's plan would be available on-line in most college and metropolitan libraries.
- No single library will have everything you need. You should consider visiting public libraries as well as your school or college library, chambers of commerce, government offices, trade associations, and other sources. Information is expensive to maintain and libraries often specialize in certain kinds of information, so you will have to look carefully as you conduct your research.

Preparing for Your Interview with Useful Information

If you're hoping for a job interview with a particular company, the *minimal research* necessary would include the name, industry, and size of the organization; its reputation within the industry; the firm's principal products or services; and its office or plant locations.

A more thorough job of research would separate you from other job seekers and would probably include the name, pronunciation, and title of your interviewer; the regional or branch office locations of the company; its industry position, market share and profitability; the company's annual earnings; its recent growth, including mergers and acquisitions; the company's organizational structure; any training expected or required by the firm or the industry; and, of course, the company's principal competitors.

Bill Goodwin, Manager of Human Resources at Bayer Corporation's North American Headquarters in Pittsburgh, says "If you don't know anything about us, you can't get an interview. It's as simple as that. We would expect you to know about our business, our products, and something about our industry. Beyond that, it's up to you." What sorts of things would impress him? "I'm not impressed if you know yesterday's closing stock price of Bayer Common," he said. "But I would be very impressed, for example, if you knew that we just purchased the organic chemical business, ChemDesign. I would be impressed if you knew that we just invested \$170 million in an advanced polymers processing plant in Baytown, Texas." Why would he be impressed? "Two reasons," he replied. "First, it tells me the applicant is paying attention to the company and to the business. Second, it's flattering to have someone confirm what you already believe about your company. We think it's a great place to work, and when others come in here and tell us *why* it would be a great place for them to work, we're impressed."

Research Sources. It would be nice to know all that -- and, perhaps, more--but where do you find such information? A number of readily-available sources will help. You might begin with reference books, such as the *Directory of Corporate Affiliations*, *The I & S Index of Corporations and Industries*, *Dun's Million Dollar Directory*, or *The Thomas Register of American Manufacturers*. To find financial information, you might try *Standard and Poor's Register*, *Moody's Industrial Manual*, *Moody's Bank and Finance Manual*, *Moody's Municipal and Government Manual*, or *Moody's Transportation Manual*. Other comprehensive references include the *Value Line Investment Survey*, and *Standard and Poor's Analysts Handbook*.

If you're looking for current information about business or investment activity involving a company you've targeted, try *Advertising Age*, *Business Week*, *CPA Journal*, *Dun's Review*, *The Economist*, *the Federal Register*, *Financial World*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Nation's Business*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Personnel Management*, *Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*, or *USA Today*. Unquestionably, the most valuable day-to-day tool for understanding business people and the way business is done in the United States is *The Wall Street Journal*. Reading it once won't give you much insight, but reading it each market day will provide you with a comprehensive understanding of commerce, industry, finance, and business issues in this country and abroad.

You should also consider other sources of information about industries and companies you're interested in, including corporate annual reports; corporate magazines, newspapers, and newsletters; product brochures; corporate news releases and public announcements; stock research reports; and on-line databases, such as the Public Affairs Information Service (PAIS). You might also consider speaking with current or former employees of the companies you're most interested in.