



**JOHNSON, MIRMIRAN & THOMPSON**

*Engineering A Brighter Future®*

*An Employee Owned Company*

*Career Guide  
for  
College Students*



JMT Internship Program

# Table of Contents

Mastering a Career Fair_____	1
Cover Letter Guidelines_____	6
Resume Writing_____	10
Sample Interview Questions_____	16
Assessing a Job Offer_____	19
Engineering Careers _____	21

# Mastering a Career Fair

## *Why Attend a Career Fair?*

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- **Networking:** Meet new people—recruiters, other job-seekers, career professionals—to add to your network of contacts
- **Internships/Jobs:** For college students, this goal is the most common for attending a career fair – to establish contacts to obtain an internship for an upcoming semester or summer, or a full-time position upon graduation.
- **Gain Experience:** Even if you are not actively seeking an opportunity, there is nothing like gaining valuable experience in mastering the art of working job fairs – especially if you are typically shy. More experience will increase your confidence!

## *Preparing for Career Fair – Checklist*

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- Identify and research prospective employers
  - Identify key employers that match your industry/culture/location and other defined preferences
  - Learn key facts about each of them so that you can showcase your knowledge to the recruiters
  - Research companies using the organization’s website, news organizations, and internet searches. Become familiar with their:
    - Organizational Structure
    - Key Products/Services
    - Organizational Culture and Values
    - Types of Intern/Job Opportunities Available
  - Be prepared to articulate your knowledge about the company in addition to why you’re interested in them
- Prepare your resume
- Rehearse elevator speech
- Practice typical interview question responses
- Develop list of questions to ask recruiters
- Decide on proper career fair attire
- Get organized the night before

# Mastering a Career Fair

## *Mapping Out a Career Fair Strategy*

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- One of the reasons for obtaining the list of organizations that will be attending the career/job fair is so that you can prepare a strategy
- Map your route of organizations you plan to visit, in priority order...But-
  - Consider a visit to perhaps a less appealing employer first....practice & polish your skills before it really counts!
- Time permitting – consider returning to the booth to thank recruiters again as you make your way out of the fair

## *Know Why You're at the Career Fair*

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- Have an answer to the question a recruiter may ask you, “Why are you here? or What are you looking for?”
- Practice the above question(s) – **more than once!**
- Sharpen & clarify your response
  - There is no one **RIGHT** answer. But there is an answer that is **RIGHT** for you.
  - Put a positive & goal-directed spin on that answer  
*Example:* I'm a first-year engineering student taking advantage of the career fair to learn about the diverse and broad opportunities available.

## *Preparing Your Resume*

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- Make sure your resume is polished and error-free
- Have several copies on-hand and readily available (ideally, placed in a portfolio or sturdy folder)
- Bring a resume – even if you're a first-year student gathering information & exploring possibilities

# Mastering a Career Fair

## *Rehearse Your Elevator Speech & Responses to Common Questions*

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- You'll have a very limited amount of time to make an impression on each recruiter so the key is to develop and rehearse your elevator speech.
- As the name implies, an elevator speech is a relatively short – typically 30 seconds to a minute (though sometimes as long as a few minutes) – commercial that job-seekers use in a variety of situations (career fairs, networking events, job interviews, info interviews) that succinctly tells the person you are giving it to both about yourself and your objective(s).
- It's a wise idea to prepare and practice responses to typical interview-type questions. You don't want to memorize your responses, but you also don't want to seem as though you have never heard the question before.
- Your elevator speech is a great response to use when the interviewer asks one of the most common questions of all: "Tell me about yourself."
- Practice enough to be articulate and natural. Take breaths, and observe the interviewer – be sure to give them opportunities to comment and share as well.

## *Ask Questions!*

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- Just as with any interview situation, you should always prepare a few questions to ask the recruiters you meet at career fairs. You won't always be able to ask them, but asking questions demonstrates your interest, so it is always a good decision to have a few thoughtful questions to ask. **(And you never want to be in a position where you are asked if you have any questions and you decline.)**
- Avoid asking really obvious questions or questions you could easily answer from visiting the organization's website.

## *Sample Questions*

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- Can you describe a typical day for someone in an entry-level or internship position?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing your company?
- What are the greatest challenges facing your company?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?
- What are the steps involved in your company's hiring process? What are the timelines?

# Mastering a Career Fair

## *Dressing Yourself for the Fair*

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- Students should dress appropriately for all interviews, including career fairs.
- What is “**Dressing for Success?**”
  - Find out in advance about the expected attire
  - **It always means** being very well groomed (pay attention to hair, fingernails, teeth, breath, make sure your clothes are stain and wrinkle-free, and that your shoes are clean & polished)
  - Error on the side of being conservative in your wardrobe (casual business attire is not happy hour attire)
  - Keep jewelry to a minimum and wear little or no cologne/perfume
  - Have a tissue on hand to dry sweaty palms and/or foreheads

## *The Night Before the Career Fair*

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- Gather everything you will need for the career fair:
  - Resumes
  - Portfolio (or a folder to hold everything)
  - Pens
  - Notepad
  - List of pre-typed questions and/or company background info for quick reminders
  - Breath mints, **NOT GUM!**
- Don't forget to plan your attire – and then make sure you get a good night's sleep

## *Success at the Career Fair*

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- Make a great first impression:
  - Smile (even if you're nervous)
  - Use a firm handshake (practice!)
  - Pay careful attention to eye contact and body language
  - Maintain a positive & enthusiastic demeanor
  - Use a natural but forceful tone of voice (especially if you are soft spoken)
  - Turn off your cell phone!

# Mastering a Career Fair

- Approach recruiters with **confidence & initiative** (don't wait for them to wave you over or make the first move) Wait patiently if a recruiter is occupied, or return in a few minutes
- Obtain contact information and inquire about the next steps in the hiring process
- Be sure to collect business cards or other contact information
- Jot down notes after you walk away from the recruiter (they'll be very helpful for writing follow-up thank you or cover letters)
- Try to arrive as early as possible (recruiters are more refreshed and enthusiastic)
- Keep your hands free for shaking
- Navigate the Career Fair solo (this is not the forum for a social group)
- Exhibit impeccable manners!
  - Don't overstay your welcome – especially if there are students waiting at the booth
  - Always Always Always – ***Thank the recruiters for their time!***

## *After the Career Fair*

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- **Send a thank-you letter** - typed, email or handwritten (if exceptionally neat). Thank them again for their generous time, enclose another resume and remind them of your strengths, skill-set, and interests.
- Keep in mind – recruiters may be contacting you on your cell phone. Ensure you're prepared for the call before you pick-up. Also, be mindful of content and tone of your voicemail message!

## *Reminders – What Impresses Recruiters*

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- Confidence (through verbal communication, body language and facial expressions)
- Positive energy
- Genuine interest and curiosity
- Well-groomed appearance
- Evidence of preparation in advance of the fair
- Manners

# Cover Letter Guidelines

## 1. Keep It Short

The ideal cover letter is about half a page long, and never exceeds one page. A concise letter demonstrates that you are focused and have strong communication skills. Aim for two to four brief paragraphs.

## 2. State The Position

The recruiter who reads your letter may be hiring for several posts. While candidates who e-mail their resumes often include the job titles in the subject line of their e-mails, if the recruiter prints a letter out before reading it, such information is lost. Clearly state the job title in the first paragraph of the letter, preferably in the first sentence.

## 3. Explain Why You Want The Job

Candidates should always answer the question, “Why do I want to do this work?” Ask yourself how the position fits into your overall career plans and what you find exciting about the particular sector. A genuine show of enthusiasm and knowledge will set you apart from those sending generic form letters

## 4. Clearly Describe Ways You Will Contribute

This is one point many job seekers find tricky. You should never claim experience in your cover letter that isn’t reflected on your resume. At the same time, your cover letter shouldn’t simply restate your resume. When you explain the ways you will contribute, refer to an experience or skill on your resume to show how you will add value to the company.

## 5. Clearly Describe Ways You Will Contribute

After carefully reading the job description, write a paragraph outlining one or two specific examples of how your skills and experiences will fit the company’s needs.

## 6. Don’t Say You’re Not Qualified

Even if you think the position is out of your reach, your job is to convince the recruiter you are qualified. If the recruiter thinks you’re unqualified, a confessional letter is not going to get you an interview. Keep the letter positive by focusing on your transferable skills and unusual accomplishments.

## 7. Keep The Tone And Content Professional

Don’t be a comedian, don’t get really personal, and don’t beg for the job.

## 8. Tell The Reader What You’re Going To Do Next

Too many job seekers never follow up after sending a resume. Clearly explain in your letter the manner in which you will follow up and when you will do so. If the job post lists a phone number, indicate you will call within a specified time to arrange an interview. If not, consider calling anyway, unless the post specifically requests “no calls.” You may also consider a follow-up e-mail if you sent your resume electronically.

## 9. Proofread

Again. Using spell checker is not enough. Many recruiters will dismiss even the most qualified candidate if there is one typo in the cover letter or resume. Reread your letter two or three times, and then give it to someone else who knows a thing or two about good writing. Even if your letter is free of typos, poor grammar also makes a bad impression.

## *Cover Letter Format*

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Your Street Address  
City, State Zip Code  
Telephone Number  
Email Address

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Dr. First Name Last Name  
Title  
Name of Organization  
Street or P.O. Box Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear MR./Ms./Dr. Last Name:

**Opening Paragraph:** State why you are writing; how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph:** Mention what you are currently doing and then tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does. (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Paragraph:** Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

# Cover Letter Guidelines

## *Cover Letter Etiquette*

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Job seekers often spend countless hours developing their resumes and then treat their cover letters as an afterthought. This can be a critical mistake; the cover letter can help your resume get noticed. Think of a cover letter as your resume's cheerleading section. **To make the best impression, follow these etiquette rules:**

***Say No to the Cover Letter Cop-Out:*** The first rule of cover letter etiquette is to send a cover letter – always. It doesn't matter if the hiring manager didn't ask for it or you're too busy to write one. Its proper business etiquette to accompany a resume with a cover letter, and it gives you the opportunity to help sell yourself for the position.

***Be Concise:*** Busy hiring managers don't have time to wade through letters that could pass for dissertations. Get to the point as expeditiously as possible, and break any paragraphs seven lines or longer into short, easily digestible ones.

When emailing your cover letter, brevity is even more important. The nature of email calls for concise communication, in part because it's harder to read on screen than on paper. However don't fall prey to the one-line cover letter that some job seekers try to pass off. It goes like this: "Please see attached resume, and thank you for your time and consideration." You should be able to write a convincing cover letter in a few brief paragraphs.

***Keep it Professional but Friendly:*** While a resume is generally a formal document, cover letters give you a chance to reveal your personality. Not only do you want to show that you're a good fit for the position, but you also want the reader to like you. Appropriate use of humor, combined with a friendly and professional tone can help endear you to the hiring manager.

***Get Personal:*** Whenever possible, address your letter to a specific person. If a job posting doesn't include a person's name, do some research to find out who the correct person is. Try calling the employer (but do respect ads that state "no phone calls"), and ask a receptionist for the hiring manager's name. Keep the salutation professional by using "Dear Mr. Jones," not "Dear Jim."

***Focus on the Employer's Needs:*** If every other sentence of your letter begins with "I" or "my," you need to change the focus. Research the employer and find out what types of problems managers are facing, qualities they look for in employees and their future goals. Then use your letter to prove that you are the answer to their problems. The most compelling letters demonstrate what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you.

***Be Original:*** Your cover letter will stand out if you employ some creativity. For example, you could include a brief summary of your toughest sale or most challenging project. You could incorporate excerpts of performance reviews to highlight your record of success. Or, you could create two columns in your letter to demonstrate precisely how you meet the employer's requirements:

**Your ad specifies:** Five years' experience in IT.

**And I deliver:** Six years of superior-rated performance in network design administration.

# Cover Letter Guidelines

***Proofread:*** Cover letters should be free of errors, so thoroughly proofread them before sending. If proofreading is not your strong suit, get help from someone with meticulous proofreading skills. If you're customizing a cover letter that you use for many positions, remove any placeholders; this will prevent embarrassing errors such as "I would be delighted to be your next." And one last tip: whatever you do, please spell the hiring manager's name correctly.

Following cover letter etiquette can be time intensive, but the reward is worth it: More calls for interviews and a greater chance of securing a new position.

## ***Cover Letters & Email***

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When emailing your resume, send a shortened version of your cover letter. The nature of email makes it important for your letter to be concise. You still need to be compelling and showcase your main selling point to prompt the hiring manager to read your resume, but you can accomplish this in a couple of paragraphs.

## *Purpose*

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A resume is a brief, concise document that presents, and effectively sells, your most relevant and positive credentials for employment, admission to graduate school, consideration for a scholarship or fellowship, or other professional purpose.

An employer will usually spend 20 to 30 seconds reviewing your resume, so the content of your resume must be clear, concise, and targeted to the type of job for which you are applying.

## *Preparation*

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One-page resumes are preferred for most entry-level positions. Two-page resumes are acceptable if the information on both pages demonstrates the skills and/or experience relevant to your profession. Resumes should highlight skills and accomplishments that meet employer qualifications, excluding irrelevant information and experiences. Well-designed resumes will be visually appealing and free from any spelling, typographical, punctuation, or grammatical errors. All resumes should be written concisely in an organized format that presents the most important information first.

Employers who read individual resumes spend very little time on each resume—in most cases, only twenty to thirty seconds. Many large employers are now using optical scanning machines and various software programs to assist them with this initial review.

If your resume has a typo or grammatical error, it will probably jump off the page to an employer, and this is a way to weed you out of a candidate pool. Your resume may be the only chance you get to make an impression, so make it a good one.

## *Types of Resumes*

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Information related to skills and experiences can be presented in a chronological format, a functional format, or a combination of the two. Each format has its advantages and disadvantages. To select the type that best supports your strategy, review the following descriptive information and resume samples.

### ➤ *Chronological Resume*

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- In the chronological resume, job history is organized chronologically with the most recent job listed first. Job titles and employers are emphasized and duties and accomplishments are described in detail. A chronological resume is easy to read, and can highlight career growth. It is suited to those whose career goals are clearly defined and whose job objectives are aligned with their work history.

# Resume Writing

## ➤ *Functional Resume*

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- In a functional resume, skills and accomplishments developed through work, academic, and community experiences are highlighted. Your skills and potential can be stressed and lack of experience or possible gaps in work history de-emphasized.

## *Constructing Your Resume*

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Categories of information you include on your resume should include:

### ➤ *Contact information*

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Begin your resume with your name by capitalizing and using bold type.

- Include street address, city, state, and zip code; current and permanent (if necessary)
- Include a phone number(s) where you can be reached 9am-5pm
- Include your e-mail address

### ➤ *Career/Job Objective*

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The purpose of the objective statement is to inform the employer of your career goal and targeted interests. The statement should describe the focus of your job search. Briefly indicate the sort of position, title, and level of responsibility sought and, if applicable, the area of specialization sought for management or supervisory positions. If your resume is broader, relay the most relevant objective in an accompanying cover letter. A good objective includes type and/or level of position, type and style of organization, and skills/qualifications. Language should be specific and employer centered not self-centered; avoid broad or vague statements.

#### *A career/job objective is advantageous when:*

- You want to specify your interests and where you would fit in the organization
- You want to present the impression of a focused, self-confident person.

#### *A career/job objective is not advantageous when it is:*

- Too broad and meaningless, reflecting indecision
- Too exclusive, eliminating you from jobs for which you might be considered.

**Objective is optional for chronological resume, but required for functional resume.**

### ➤ *Qualification or Experience Summary*

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A summary of qualifications can condense an extensive background by emphasizing experiences and accomplishments in brief keyword phrases. The qualifications summary is accomplishment-oriented and provides an overview of your work experience. It can also serve to summarize relevant academic, volunteer and leadership experience for those who have limited work experience. A summary is most appropriate for someone with substantial

# Resume Writing

experience, for someone who is changing careers and wants to demonstrate transferable skills, or for someone with a varied background. For someone with less substantial experience:

- Identify 3-6 key achievements that support the objective
- Summarizes relevant work experience and accomplishments that support the objective

## ➤ *Education*

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If your education relates to your objective and is within the past three years, it should be the first section. If not, education should follow the work experience section of your resume. In reverse-chronological order, this section includes the schools you have attended, dates of graduation or dates of attendance, as well as degrees sought or completed.

- Start with your most recent degree or the program in which you are currently enrolled. List other degrees or relevant education in reverse chronological order.
- Highlight your degree by using bold type or capital letters.
- If the degree is relevant to your job objective, begin with degree emphasis, followed by university, location of university, and date of graduation or anticipated date of graduation.
- If degree/program is not directly related to current job objective, begin with the university, followed by the location, degree emphasis, and graduation date.

If you are within two semesters of graduation, do not use “expected” or “anticipated” with year of graduation.

- **Should I include my GPA?** If you are uncertain about including your GPA, ask a Career Services advisor for recommendations based on your individual circumstances.

## *Educational Highlights*

This section is most effective when you have experiences from your education that are impressive and/or directly relate to your objective. Adding this section is useful when you have developed skills and specific knowledge through education and related activities rather than work experience. This section can be used to highlight coursework, scholarships and honors, research, study abroad experience, leadership and student activities that complement your objective.

- An alternative to highlighting courses is to list the skills and knowledge acquired through important courses and research.
- You may want to describe thesis, research or design projects, etc.

# Resume Writing

## ➤ *Employment Experience (Chronological)*

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- Begin with your current/most recent position and work backward, chronologically.
- Devote more space to recent employment.
- If your job titles relate to your current job objective, start each position description with job titles. If not, begin with the organization.
- Follow job title and organizational information with the organization's city and state.
- Use the first and last month and year to describe dates of employment.
- Describe the last three to five positions in detail. Summarize earlier positions unless relevant to your objective. Within each listed position, stress the major accomplishments and responsibilities that demonstrate your competency

## ➤ *Employment Experience (Functional)*

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- Use two to four sections to summarize each area of functional skill or expertise.
- Develop the functional skill headings based on the skills you want to market to employers
- And/or that are most related to your targeted objective.
- Describe your skills in short phrases and place under the appropriate functional skill categories.
- Rank the phrases within each category and place the most important skill or accomplishment first.
- Do not identify employers within functional skills sections.
- List a brief history of your actual work experience at the end of the section, giving job title, employer and dates. If you have had no work experience or a very spotty work record, leave out the employment section entirely or summarize the nature of your jobs without providing specific details. If you do this, be prepared to discuss your specific jobs in more detail at the job interview.
- Both chronological and functional resumes must be succinct, emphasizing your experience and accomplishments. Resumes are often your first introduction to the employer and dramatically impact the screening process. Invest the time to create an excellent marketing tool- your resume- to increase job opportunities and career advancement.

## ➤ *Technical Skills*

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If you're just starting out, you may want to place a greater emphasis on education and internships and consider placing the technical skills list below the experience section. Some examples include:

- Computer skills: software applications, languages, hardware, operating systems
- Foreign Language skills: specific level of fluency and ability to read and write as "basic," "intermediate," or "advanced"

# Resume Writing

## ➤ *Extracurricular Activities, Community Service, Professional Association*

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- List of significant positions of responsibility; include title, name of organization or team, dates, leadership roles, achievements, and transferable skills that are relevant

## *Resume Checklist*

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The following checklist has been designed to assist you in writing your resume. This checklist reflects the expertise of the Human Resources staff developed through reviewing thousands of resumes, discussing selection criteria with numerous employers, and gathering input from a wide range of career professionals.

### ➤ *Appearance*

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- Is it inviting and easy to read; not too much information; uses appropriate font styles and font size (10-14 pts.)
- Use adequate margins to incorporate enough white space, particularly between selections, to facilitate skimming text; create visual impact using bullets, boldface, underlining, italics, and font sizes to emphasize key words
- Printed on high quality (16-25 lb.) bond paper

### ➤ *Organization and Format*

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- Appropriate format includes keyword phrases of profession
- Presents strongest qualifications first
- Appropriate length: 1 page for every 6-10 years of work experience

### ➤ *Writing Style*

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- Begins sentences or phrases with powerful action verbs
- Short paragraphs mostly under five lines; short sentences
- Brief, succinct language; no unnecessary words
- Absolutely free from grammatical, spelling, punctuation, usage, and typographical errors

## *Additional Resume Categories*

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To add relevant information to your resume that focuses on special knowledge or skills, consider the following resume headings:

RELATED PROJECTS  
PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS  
TRAINING  
INTERNSHIP  
EXPERIENCE ASSETS

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION  
HONORS  
TRAVEL  
LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES  
SCHOLARSHIP

INTERESTS  
QUALIFICATIONS  
SUMMARY PRESENTATIONS  
PUBLICATIONS  
REFERENCES

# Resume Writing

*Proofread, Proofread, And Proofread!*

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## **Does your resume:**

- Include only relevant information?
- Use action verbs?
- Stress skills and accomplishments over duties?
- Make qualifications evident?
- Include specific info: figures, dates, and numbers?
- Support your purpose/objective?

## **Appearance Evaluation**

- Attractive layout?
- Headings highlighted?
- White space?
- Style appropriate?
- Font size readable?
- Length appropriate?
- Important items stand out through spacing and/or highlighted?
- Consistent placement of information (e.g. dates)?

# Sample Interview Questions

## *Typical job questions asked of recent college graduates*

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Here is a list of sample interview questions college seniors and recent grads can expect, especially at first, more traditional interviews. Prepare answers to these questions, but don't memorize your answers so that you come off sounding like a robot; in other words, be prepared for these questions and have an outline or script ready, but don't worry about remembering your answers word-for-word.

### **Job Interview Questions for New Grads:**

- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- Why did you choose your college—and are you happy with your choice?
- What are your long-term career objectives—and how do you plan to achieve them?
- What's more important to you—the work itself or how much you're paid for doing it?
- What are the most important rewards you expect to gain from your career?
- What do you expect to be earning in five years?
- What do you expect to be earning after your graduate?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What are your majors and minors?
- Why did you choose the courses you took?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you think your favorite professor would describe you? Your least favorite professor?
- What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project or job?
- What was your most memorable classroom experience?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
- Why should I hire you?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- How do you define success?
- What qualifications do you have that will make you successful?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this company?
- How are you going to make a contribution to our company?
- What are two or three accomplishments that have given you the most satisfaction—and why?
- What was your favorite class—and why?
- What was your least favorite class—and why?
- What changes would you make in your college?
- Do you have plans to continue your education?
- What skills have you acquired from your internships and part-time jobs?
- Describe your favorite professor or favorite supervisor.

# Sample Interview Questions

- Do you think your grades are a good indication of the type of employee you'll make?
- What's your GPA? Are you happy with it?
- What have you learned from your experiences outside the classroom?
- Do you feel you work well under pressure?
- Why are you interviewing for this position?
- What can you tell us about our company?
- What interests you about our products?
- What do you know about our competitors?
- What criteria are you using to choose companies to interview with?
- What are your expectations regarding promotions and salary increases?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Are you willing to travel for the job?
- How much training do you think you need before you can make a contribution to the company?
- Describe one of the biggest mistakes you made in college?
- What did you learn from your mistakes?
- What other jobs/companies are you considering?
- If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for in a new college grad?
- How well do you work with people? Do you prefer working alone or in teams?
- Have you ever been in a group project where there were difficulties? How were these issues resolved?
- How would you describe your leadership skills?
- How well do you adapt to new situations?
- Which is more important: creativity or efficiency? Why?
- What's the most recent book you've read that's not been a class assignment?
- What kinds of things or skills did you learn from these activities?
- Do you think college changed you as a person? If so, how?
- Have you ever tutored an underclassman?
- What have you accomplished that shows your initiative and willingness to work?
- If you were to start college over again knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?

# Sample Interview Questions

## *Questions You Can Ask at the Job Interview*

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Job-seekers need to ask questions in job interviews; here's a list of some questions you can ask your prospective employer.

*Toward the end of most job interviews, the interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask questions. You **must** ask at least one question; to do otherwise often signals the interviewer that you don't really have any interest in the job or the company. On the other hand, do not ask questions where the answer is obvious or readily available—or when the topic has already been thoroughly discussed in the interview. And **never ask about salary and benefit issues** until these subjects are raised by the employer.*

### Questions you might ask at a job interview:

- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- Can you discuss your take on the company's corporate culture?
- What are the company's values?
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization? Of your department?
- What is the organization policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
- Are lateral or rotational job moves available?
- Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
- Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
- How is this department perceived within the organization?
- Is there a formal process for advancement within the organization?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?

# Assessing a Job Offer

Before you accept an offer, you need to determine the merits of the offer itself, including long-term career growth, salary and benefits. It will be important to evaluate the financial state of the company. You may have to do some research using the Internet to gain insight into the company's recent financial performance. With smaller, private companies, you may have to base your assessment on what you learned when you were being interviewed or ask professionals in the industry for their opinions of the company.

In order to assess an offer properly, divide the proposal into three different components and ask yourself the following questions as you assess the job offer:

- The job itself
- Career implications
- Salary, perks and benefits

## ➤ *The job itself:*

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- Do the actual tasks that are to be performed daily appeal to you?
- Are you likely to find this job challenging after a few months or a year?
- Is the level of responsibility consistent with what you want?
- Are the working conditions reasonably pleasant and conducive to quality work?
- Do you think you'll enjoy working with your supervisor and coworkers?
- Will taking this job obligate you to any major change in your life-style (more traveling, longer hours or commute, etc.) that could impact the quality of your life?

## ➤ *Career implications:*

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- How does the job fit into your overall plan? Will it enable you to move forward with your career goals?
- How interested are you in the company's business or industry?
- What are the career prospects in this industry or business likely to be in five years?

## ➤ *The salary benefits and perks:*

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- Is the compensation package (including what you're likely to earn in bonuses and commissions, if applicable) high enough to cover your basic living expenses?
- Is the compensation package competitive with what other companies in this field are paying for similar work?
- How does this package compare to the income you're currently earning or were earning in your last job?
- Does the benefits package give you adequate health coverage, based on your current needs? What percentage of the benefits package (if any) will you be expected to pay for in the event that you're hired?
- How generous and attractive are the perks (assuming that the company is offering perks such as a company car, tuition reimbursement, vacation and stock options, etc.)

# Engineering Careers

## *Engineering Careers*

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Engineers solve problems: how to build the strongest possible bridge using the materials available; how to set up layout and work processes of the factory floor to maximize output and efficiency; how to create the most efficient, bug-free software possible to instruct a computer to process certain tasks; how to create an airplane that flies farther using less fuel; and so on.

Engineers helped create the car you drive, as well as the processes and machinery that extracted the petroleum that fuels it from far beneath the Earth's surface. They helped create the highways and bridges on and over which you drive that car on the way to work. They helped create the building which you work, the HVAC system that keeps that building warm in the winter and cool in the summer, and the power grid that delivers energy to that building. They helped create the innards of the computer on your desk, and the network to which your computer is attached. And engineers may well have helped create the processes your employer uses to go about its business.

As the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics puts it, "Engineers apply the theories and principles of science and mathematics to research and develop economical solutions to technical problems." Typically, engineers specialize in one particular area of engineering; engineering specialties include aerospace, agricultural, architectural, biomedical, chemical, civil, computer software, electrical, environmental, geological, industrial, marine, materials, mechanical, nuclear, and petroleum engineering.

There are about a million and a half engineers in the United States. Among the largest engineering specialties, in terms of the number of engineers practicing them, are computer software engineering, electrical and electronics engineering, civil engineering, mechanical engineering, and industrial engineering, including health and safety engineering.

### ➤ *What You'll Do...*

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Engineers apply mathematic, scientific, technical, and design knowledge to address problems and tasks faced by businesses and governments. Engineering may involve developing new processes, such as environmentally sound methods of waste disposal, or designing new products, such as a lighter, stronger, and more flexible plastic.

A fundamental part of engineering is the practical application of specialized scientific knowledge. For example, an engineer might apply his or her understanding of how fluids react in high-pressure, low-gravity environments to design a hydraulic system for an earth-orbiting satellite. Whether the end result is a product or a process, engineers need to consider safety, reliability, and cost-effectiveness. If something they've created isn't safe, reliable, or cost-effective, their product isn't going to fly in the marketplace.

Engineering is a career based on logical, systematic problem solving, generally in high-tech, industrial, or scientific fields. Because there are an infinite variety of problems to be solved in each of those fields, engineers have developed a number of specialties. They may specialize in electrical networks, machines or mechanical systems, chemical compounds, airplanes or spacecraft, or software or computer systems. The rapid expansion of computer networking

# Engineering Careers

technologies has created vast new opportunities for engineers in computer-related fields, who include software engineers (also known as programmers), Web developers, and specialist in information networks.

Engineers are often the crucial link between goals and reality. Once a company or government agency decides that it needs a certain product or process, the next step is for an engineer or team of engineers to create it as efficiently as possible within a budget. Engineers can have a hand in all phases of development, from idea conception, design and development, implementation, testing, production, and maintenance to sales and customer support.

Manufacturers employ engineers to design and develop products such as consumer and industrial electronics, fabricated metals, machine tools, chemical compounds, transportation equipment, aircraft, communication equipment, and space vehicles. Engineers also develop the production processes necessary to create those products, from designing the machinery to designing the factories where the machinery is operated.

Besides manufacturing, some engineers test and inspect products and structures to increase cost-effectiveness or safety. Such engineers typically engage in more service-oriented careers, often working for firms that contract their services to other businesses or government agencies. For instance, engineers may be hired to test the stress limits of metal used in automobiles, evaluate the structural integrity of buildings, or develop a cheaper process for producing corrective lenses.

## ➤ *Who Does Well?*

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Engineers need to be able to work in teams. In school, engineers learn to attack a problem by breaking it down into small, independent parts, sometimes called modules. Breaking problems down in this systematic way helps divide the work among team members. An experienced engineer usually serves as supervisor, ensuring that all team members coordinate their parts and communicate effectively within their teams and with others who will apply their work. Communication is also important in order to help engineers understand the needs of those who will use the finished products of their work—folks who usually aren't engineers.

## ➤ *Requirements*

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Most companies require job applicants to have a bachelor's in an engineering field from an institution accredited by the Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET), though sometimes graduates with related degrees may qualify. A degree in math or physics—or better yet applied math, applied physics, or computer science—is sometimes sufficient to get an entry-level position. Engineering programs vary from school to school, but generally offer one year of core engineering courses, followed by three years of classes in a specific major. Some students need five or more years to complete all the requirements, which is not unusual.

If the engineer's work affects life, health, or property, or if he or she contracts to serve the public, state laws require the engineer to obtain a state license. The laws vary from state to state, but the process typically requires an engineering degree from ABET-accredited school, and a certain number of years of experience (usually four). The engineer also needs to pass two

# Engineering Careers

exams prepared by the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES): the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) examination of the Principles and Practice of Engineering (PE) examination.

Quality assurance and quality testing engineers may be required to pass specialized training and certification programs and become Certified Quality Engineers or Certified Software Quality Engineers.

Beyond these requirements, aspiring engineers should be interested in math and science, enjoy complex problem solving, and have good organizational and communication skills, both oral and written. Engineering problems often requires a team effort, so a good engineer needs to be able to work within a team—whether as a member or a leader.

From a competitive standpoint, future engineers would also be wise to consider gaining international experience as our increasingly globalized environment demands engineers with cross-cultural competencies. Today's engineers are now called upon to collaborate seamlessly with culturally and geographically diverse engineering teams as they design and improve products and systems that are marketed and implemented around the world. International experience can be obtained in a myriad of ways including acquiring foreign language skills, studying and/or working and volunteering abroad, and engaging in activities and organizations with a multicultural focus.

## ➤ *Job Outlook*

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Engineering jobs in general are projected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to increase at about the same rate as the growth in jobs overall between 2004 and 2014. However, the projected growth rates for certain engineering specialties during that time vary widely:

Computer software, biomedical, and environmental engineering job opportunities are all projected to grow at a rate far in excess of the growth of jobs overall.

Job opportunities in agricultural, chemical, civil, computer hardware, electrical, electronics, health and safety, industrial, materials, and mechanical engineering are all expected to grow at a rate faster than the overall jobs growth rate.

Job opportunities in aerospace, marine, and nuclear engineering are expected to grow at a slower rate than overall jobs growth.

Job opportunities in aerospace, marine, and nuclear engineering are expected to grow at a slower rate than overall jobs growth.

Job opportunities in nuclear and petroleum engineering are expected to decline.

Even in engineering specialties with low projected employment growth rates, there should be ample opportunities for fledgling engineers in coming years. Among other factors, retirements among baby boomers will lead to opportunities in the larger engineering specialties.

# Engineering Careers

One key for engineers is ongoing education. Materials and technologies are changing so rapidly these days that only those who are up to speed on the latest trends in their fields will be assured of strong job prospects.

## *Career Tracks*

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Professional societies recognizing more than 25 engineering specialties and new ones continue to develop with advances in science and technology. Engineers tend to refer to themselves by qualifying the type of engineering work they do, such as “mechanical engineer” or “civil engineer.” You might think of these specialties as families, since many of them break down into narrower subspecialties. Choosing one specialty doesn’t preclude you from working in another field; crossing over is fairly common.

The following are descriptions of some of the most common engineering specialties to give you an idea of specific career opportunities.

### ➤ *Electrical Engineering*

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Electrical engineering is one of the biggest engineering fields, and includes such areas as power systems and transmission, circuitry and communication, and several subspecialties including industrial robots, telephone switching systems, microprocessors, and digital broadcasting. Electrical engineers might design computer chips, circuit boards for audio equipment, broadcast systems for cellular phones and televisions, or power stations and citywide electric-utility services.

### ➤ *Mechanical Engineering*

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Mechanical engineers create, develop, and run machines, manufacturing systems, engines, energy systems, pipelines, robots, refrigeration equipment, and other mechanical tools. Mechanical engineers apply their knowledge of mechanical systems to create new machines and improve old ones. They may, for instance, develop a machine that makes it easier to harvest crops or manufacture semiconductors. Or they may create a new way to design cars. In improving old machines and creating new ones, mechanical engineers need to make sure the machines run safely and efficiently.

### ➤ *Civil Engineering*

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Civil engineers build or improve roads and bridges, dams and irrigation systems, water treatment processes, erosion techniques, and public transportation systems. Civil engineers also test buildings to make sure they are structurally sound, particularly large institutional ones. The term “civil engineering” essentially indicates projects related to public works; the work itself may involve principles of mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, or other specialized fields. While most civil engineering jobs are with government agencies, some are with service firms that contract with government and businesses.