CAREER Resource Guide
Symplicity Jobs and Careers
Your Career Center on the go!

- **Schedule** an appointment with your career advisor
- **Explore** and apply for jobs

- **Connect** with employers
- **Sign-up** for Career Center programs
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Chapter 1: 
Academic and Career Exploration

HOW TO CHOOSE A MAJOR
When considering a major, think about what YOU want. This is YOUR choice, and it will initially help determine YOUR path in life. Choosing a major can be a complicated, anxiety-invoking experience, but it doesn’t have to be. Consider that some students:

• Select a major because they want to use it to prepare for a specific job, career, or industry.
• Select a job, career, or industry and then choose the major that will best meet their career goals.
• Select a major because they enjoy it but never intend to use it in a future career. Many jobs are open to students regardless of major. Any major can be a springboard to graduate or professional school.

Tools and strategies to help choose a major:

• Enroll in IDS 106, the Career Center’s Career Choice course.
• Review the list of majors at Illinois State online at IllinoisState.edu/Majors to learn about yourself, explore major and career options, and learn when and how to apply to a given major.
• Take a career assessment offered through the Career Center to learn more about yourself and possible major or career options. For example, utilize FOCUS, an online self-guided career and educational planning tool located at CareerCenter.IllinoisState.edu/FOCUS, to assist you with identifying your interests, values, personality, skills, and leisure activities.
• Network with professors, career and academic advisors, professionals, friends, relatives as well as Illinois State alumni to better research careers and majors.
• If considering graduate school:
  - Visit the Graduate School Guide.
  - Attend the Career Center’s Graduate School Series offered each semester to explore if it is the right fit and to review the application process.
• Schedule an appointment with your career advisor using Hire-A-Redbird.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS
Informational interviews are highly recommended when exploring majors or careers. They can provide first-hand experience from someone in the major, field, or industry you are considering and may greatly assist you with your decision. The key to having a useful informational interview is to be prepared and to follow these steps.

Step 1:
When looking for a company or professional to contact it is important to use all of your resources. Some prospective resources are professors, co-workers, peers, or LinkedIn. Once you have found an interviewee, find the best way to contact them. Remain professional and clearly describe your goals as well as the medium in which you would like to conduct the interview. Informational interviews can be conducted by email, phone, video conference, or in person. All forms are beneficial. It is simply a matter of what method works best for you and the contact.

“I wasn’t sure what I wanted to major in. But the IDS 106 Careers Course, taught by a career advisor, provided great tools and resources that helped me to learn more about careers and to select a major.”

—Logan Ingersoll, ’19
Step 2:
Once the interview is set up, it is important to follow through and make sure you approach the interview with professionalism. This includes the way you dress, how prepared you are, and how you carry yourself throughout the process, similar to an actual job interview. Bring questions to show the interviewee that you are interested in their experience, and ensure that your questions and concerns are addressed. Remember that even though this interview is providing you with more insight on the professional and the individual’s experience with their profession, the questions need to remain from a more professional development standpoint, not about their personal life. Some examples of professionally appropriate questions are:
• What challenges do people in this position or industry face?
• What types of training programs or opportunities exist for new hires?
• Would you describe some typical entry-level positions within the organization or industry?

Step 3:
Come prepared with enough questions to fill the allotted time, which is recommended to be 25-30 minutes. Once the interview is complete, send a thank you note to make a lasting impression. Thank you notes should be professional and specific to the experience. Notes that are handwritten or via email are a more appropriate way of reaching out to the individual than a text message or phone call. Handwritten notes are also a more personal method to show appreciation to the individual for taking time to assist you.

Use these steps when conducting informational interviews to ensure that you have a positive experience, gain the information you need to make your decision, and help build your professional network.
THE CAREER PROCESS

Career exploration is not always a linear path. It is common for college students to change majors and careers as they reflect on their experiences and interests. Schedule an appointment with your career advisor using Hire-A-Redbird at IllinoisState.edu/HireARedbird to discuss your options and where you are at in this process.

- Begin the job search 6-8 months prior to graduation
- Meet with a career advisor to discuss the college to career transition
- Conduct a job shadow by spending a day observing a professional where they work
- Tailor your resume based upon research conducted
- Seek out internships, positions of leadership, and part-time work to enhance your transferrable skills
- Explore the University’s “Academics” web page and narrow majors based upon your FOCUS assessment results to eliminate majors that are not a good fit
- Conduct informational interviews
- Take the FOCUS assessment
KEYS TO ACADEMIC AND CAREER SUCCESS
The keys to academic and career success will help you unlock your success at Illinois State and in your career. They include academic achievement, transferable skills, experiences and involvement and networking. The chart below provides examples for how to explore, expand, execute and embark on your career regardless of where you are at in the career process.
Chapter 2: Developing a Résumé and Cover Letter

RÉSUMÉ BASICS

The résumé is a key marketing tool that helps build your personal brand and markets you to an employer. It is a vital part of the job search, providing important details of your qualifications, background, and what you can offer an employer—all in a concise format.

“Résumés are what allow you to stand out among applicants and sell your experiences.”

—Joseph Goodman, professor of Management and Quantitative Methods

Style and Formatting Tips

- Font: Choose an easy-to-read black font in 10-12 point size.
- Format: Present information under each header and section in reverse chronological order: most recent experience first. Stay consistent in the way you present your experiences.
- Image: Customize your résumé to each job or application purpose. A one-résumé-fits-all approach is generally not the most effective.
- Layout: Use bullets, bold text, italics, and capitalization sparingly to call attention to the most important information.
- Length: For undergraduate students and recent college graduates, use a full one-page résumé.
- Paper: Use 8.5” x 11” résumé-quality paper in a neutral color to print your résumé, cover letter, and references page.
- Professionalism: Eliminate all typos and misspellings by having multiple individuals proofread your résumé.
- Spacing: Use margins of 0.5” to 1” on all sides with appropriate, but not excessive, spacing.
- Templates: Avoid résumé templates as they tend to be difficult to edit and do not easily allow for changes as your résumé evolves with your experiences.

Heading and Section Tips

- Heading titles should highlight specific skills and experiences. Below is a list of possible headings you could use in your résumé if you have applicable experience:
  - Education
  - Objective/Career Summary
  - Relevant Course Work
  - Work Experience
  - Related Experience
  - Clinical Experience
  - Observation Hours
  - Internships/Externships
  - Activities/Leadership Experience
  - Academic Honors/Awards
  - Community Service/Volunteer Work
  - Skills & Certifications
  - Military Service
  - Languages
  - Professional Development/Memberships/Affiliations
  - Technical Knowledge or Skills

Writing Bullet Points

Unlike other professional writing, résumés require writing about your experiences and skills in concise bullet points—it is not recommended to write in paragraphs or complete sentences. These should highlight the skills you gained from each experience more so than just listing a duty or task you completed.

Tips for writing strong bullet points:
- Start with an action verb (visit Action Words, page 7), then add details.
- Bullet point = action word + skill + how/why
- If you are currently in the role or experience, use the present tense of the verb. If including something from the past, use past tense.
- List bullet points in order of importance that you want an employer to see.
- Look at a job posting or description for “qualifications and job duties” to match your bullet points to what the position requires. Be sure to use language in your bullet points that you see listed in the posting or description.
- Quantify your bullet points if applicable (e.g., specify how many employees you trained, how much you increased attendance, or how much of a budget you managed).
**Improved bullet points**

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<td>Worked the cash register</td>
<td>Provided customer service in an efficient and courteous manner and handled financial transactions with accuracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helped with various marketing projects</td>
<td>Assisted marketing chair on a campus-wide campaign to promote Homecoming event to 15,000 students and alumni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Took care of children at daycare</td>
<td>Created developmentally appropriate activities for five special needs children</td>
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**Action Words**

**INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION/PEOPLE SKILLS**

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Source: adapted from livecareer.com

“There’s only so much time to look at a résumé. So focus on clarity and being concise and really driving your main points across.”

—Dayna Schlenker, talent acquisition specialist, MarcFirst
### Creative Skills

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### Data/Financial Skills

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### Helping Skills

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### ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

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### MANAGEMENT/LEADERSHIP SKILLS

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“The Career Center helped me prepare for internship fairs by doing résumé reviews and giving great advice. I used that to get a summer internship with Caterpillar, which then led to me receiving my full-time offer. ISU and the Career Center prepared me for my career after college.”

—Zach Schwabb, ‘18
### RESEARCH SKILLS

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### TEACHING SKILLS

| Adapted | Conducted | Encouraged | Guided | Motivated | Tested |
| Advised | Coordinated | Evaluated | Individualized | Persuaded | Trained |
| Collected | Critiqued | Explained | Informed | Simulated | Transmitted |
| Coached | Developed | Facilitated | Instilled | Stimulated | Tutored |
| Communicated | Enabled | Focused | Instructed | Taught |

### TECHNICAL SKILLS

| Adapted | Conserved | Developed | Operated | Remodeled | Studied |
| Applied | Constructed | Engineered | Overhauled | Repaired | Upgraded |
| Assembled | Converted | Fabricated | Printed | Replaced | Utilized |
| Built | Debugged | Fortified | Programmed | Restored |
| Calculated | Designed | Installed | Rectified | Specialized |
| Computed | Determined | Maintained | Regulated | Standardized |

Source: adapted from livecareer.com

“Do not feel uncomfortable to highlight your achievements. We want to see what you have done.”

—Hannah Bickes, recruiter, Decatur Memorial Hospital
TRANSFERABLE SKILLS
Transferable skills, often called soft skills or competencies, are skill sets you fine-tune and develop in one experience and transfer to another. Transferable skills can be gained anywhere—classes, jobs, internships, volunteering, working with faculty, etc. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the most desirable transferable skills employers from all industries seek from candidates are as follows. When in doubt on what to put on your résumé, include experiences where you have used these skills.

Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers

RÉSUMÉ CHECKLIST
Use this checklist to be sure your résumé is ready to go.

Is your résumé:
• Free of spelling and grammar errors?
• Devoid of personal pronouns (e.g., I, we, me, my)?
• A good reflection of how your skills and experiences relate to the job?
• One full page (this is a common expectation for entry-level professional positions without much professional work experience and a bachelor’s degree)?

Does your résumé:
• Use consistent formatting for dates, job titles, etc.?
• Display your most relevant qualifications near the top of the page under appropriate section headings?
• Highlight all relevant experience?
• Use action verbs to describe experiences?
• Use key words from your area of discipline and/or a job posting to describe your experiences?
• Demonstrate an understanding of the position you are seeking and/or the needs of the employer?

“Employers can train people for specific aspects of a job, but they depend on universities to foster transferable skills, such as written and oral communication, critical thinking, and intercultural competency.”

—Anthony Crubaugh, associate professor, Department of History

“Any sort of experience that shows creativity or leadership skills is important. If somebody has summer camp I know they worked with people and they had to do a lot of creative problem solving…”

—Daniel Sutter, recruiter, Morton Buildings, Inc.
COVER LETTER SAMPLE

REGGIE REDBIRD
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Mai Gerajobe
Human Resource Director
ABC Incorporated
1234 Avenue
Bloomington, IL 61704

Dear Ms. Gerajobe:

If you do not know or wish to assume the contact’s gender, you may use the person’s full name: Dear Mai Gerajobe. Always try to find the name of a specific contact person. If this information is not in the job description, call the organization and ask who is in charge of hiring or who supervises that particular department. Ensure that you have the correct spelling of the individual’s name. If you are applying through an online application system and no contact is provided, perform an exhaustive search of the organization’s website to locate a direct contact or call the organization. If these efforts prove to be unsuccessful, substitute one of the following: Dear Human Resources Professional, Dear Hiring Manager, Dear Search Committee Chairperson, etc.

Opening paragraph: Why you are writing? Are you applying for a specific position? Do you want to know if specific types of positions are—or will be—available? Mention how you learned about the position or organization. If referred by a faculty member, relative, or employee, note his or her name here.

Second and consecutive paragraphs (body of the letter): Why are you interested in and qualified for the position and/or organization? Avoid lengthy paragraphs of more than five or six lines. Keep your sentences simple and to the point, but vary your sentence style. Outline your qualifications, strengths, accomplishments, and the benefits you can offer the organization. If you are applying for a specific position, identify keywords/phrases in the job description and relate your skills to what they are looking for. (For example, if the position requires good customer service skills: “I have had more than four years of experience in customer service and was selected to train several new employees on…” ) You may want to refer to your résumé in this or the closing paragraph.

Closing paragraph: Close asking for a response. It may be as simple as “I look forward to meeting with you to further discuss my qualifications and interest in the position.” You might repeat your contact information for emphasis. Thank the employer for his/her time and consideration of your application materials.

Sincerely,

REGGIE REDBIRD
Reggie Redbird

COVER LETTER CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

A cover letter:

• Accompanies your résumé and is sent in response to specific job vacancy postings
• Introduces you and explains why you are the most suitable candidate for the job and organization
• Emphasizes what you can offer the employer, not what the employer can or should offer you

• Demonstrates that your qualifications fit the requirements of the position
• Provides examples of skills, abilities, and top qualities
• Shows you have researched the position and organization
• Demonstrates your writing ability

Create a unique letter for each job application to relate relevant accomplishments.
A curriculum vitae (CV) is biographical information about one’s educational and professional background. The origin of the term is Latin and means “the course of one’s life or career.” Individuals with a Ph.D., M.D., J.D., M.A., M.S., M.F.A., or M.S.W. often use vitae, as well as some individuals with a B.A., B.S., and/or professional experience. The document is used primarily for educational institutions, applications for professional (academic or administrative) positions, admissions to a professional- or graduate-level program, and/or for professional positions in which advanced levels of education and experience are required. Most B.A. and B.S. graduates in business, industry, government, and education (K–12) positions do not require a CV.

A two-page résumé is not a vitae, though two pages can constitute a vitae. It is not just the length of the document but the specific information within it that creates this difference. There is not a specific way to construct a vitae nor one way to format it, but there are a few standard guidelines. The document should be well-organized, intuitive, and error free.
Name and Contact Information
This should be on the first page; the following pages should include name and page number in the same header or footer location throughout the document. There is no need to type “vitae” on the first page.

Professional/Career/Vocational/Research Objectives
A brief sentence stating general goals or paragraph sharing both short- and long-term goals.

Education
List the names of universities, colleges, and professional schools attended in reverse chronological order, with the most recent or important first. Include degrees awarded and in-progress, diplomas, certificates, dates of graduation and/or attendance, major, minor, emphasis, and concentration details. Include strong GPA(s), where appropriate.

Thesis/Dissertation Abstract
A summary of a thesis or dissertation, full title, and date of completion are helpful in conveying specialized knowledge gained from advanced degrees. Some disciplines (such as chemistry or psychology) have specific editorial formats for abstracts.

Honors/Achievements/Awards
List and describe departmental, athletic, and dean’s list awards; scholarships and fellowships; and community and professional awards in reverse chronological order or order of relevance. Briefly describe why you received the award.

Course Work
List courses in groups, with course titles and descriptions where appropriate. Do not list course numbers or abbreviations.

Research Interest(s)
Be as specific as possible regarding the description and scope of your research interest(s).

Research and/or Laboratory Experience
Provide detailed descriptions of experience and the ways in which this fits into a profession or a laboratory’s ongoing research. Give the title of each project and information concerning its actual or potential publication. List the names and titles of professors or supervisors.

Teaching Interests and Experience
Describe teaching, tutoring, and group learning experience. Include whether or not you have written the syllabi, what texts were used, and the level of the class instructed (freshman, sophomore, graduate level, etc.).

Instrumentation Experience
Include computer hardware, photographic, and/or audio-visual programs with which you have technical competency. Include equipment model numbers where appropriate.

Special Skills
List foreign and computer languages, computer software (including edition or version information, where pertinent), leadership, organizational, and analytical skills.

Publications/Presentations/Works-in-Progress
These include works authored or co-authored with faculty or other colleagues. Provide appropriate bibliographic descriptions (list unpublished manuscripts only if they are being considered for publication). Artists and musicians should provide descriptions of works-in-progress. Provide detailed descriptions of presentations, particularly those on behalf of academic societies and professional associations. List title, organization name, location, and date in reverse chronological order.

Professional Associations/Learned/Scientific Societies
Include role, level of involvement, offices held, and group membership duration. Some examples include the American Chemical Society, Modern Language Association, and American Psychological Association.

Work Experience
This can include full-time, part-time, internship, volunteer, summer, and on-campus experience—listed together or separated by type. You may also separate by order of significance. Include the job title as designated by the company, the company or organization name, location (city, state), type of organization, dates, job duties and responsibilities, and promotions.

Community Service
List civic memberships, volunteerism, and each role, level of involvement, and office held.

Background
This is a space to include information for graduate and professional school applications (e.g., prolonged residence abroad and/or unusual educational work experiences). Do not include information on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or political preference.

Co-curricular Activities
List all campus programs and may include role, level of involvement, and offices held.

Interests
List related, professionally applicable avocations where appropriate.

Travel
Include descriptions and length of visits for extensive domestic or international travel where applicable to course work or specific research.

References/Recommendations
References should be those willing to be contacted without direct communication from you and are completely optional.
IDENTITY-BASED RESOURCES

If you are a part of an identity-based population such as those listed below, please consider these additional points when developing your résumé, searching for a job, interviewing and/or deciding which job is the right fit for you.

Veterans
- Focus on transferable skills that you have gained during your enlistment that can be applied in the civilian workplace (visit Transferable Skills page 11).
- Translate your military experience in a cohesive and coherent manner that civilians could understand.
- Consider adding a Military Experience section to your résumé, to highlight your skills and accomplishments. You could also add an Honors and Awards section.
- Tailor each military job description on your résumé to the specific civilian job to which you are applying.
- Classify your military experience on a résumé as a related military experience and unrelated military experience.
- Networking is just as important for a military veteran as for any other student. Build your network, including fellow veterans. Consider joining veterans groups as well as LinkedIn and Twitter groups specifically focused on veterans. Visit the Veterans Guide for a list of resources.
- Visit the Career Center’s Job Search Sites to access job boards specific to this population.
- Schedule an appointment with your career advisor using Hire-A-Redbird to discuss your unique situation.

International students
- While important, your sponsorship status does not have to be the first thing you mention to an employer. Allow the employer to get to know you first. Sell your skills and abilities. By doing this, the employer gets to know you and your skill set. If you are identified as a strong candidate, the employer might offer to sponsor you.
- Focus on your unique skill set that sets you apart from the rest of the candidates, such as foreign languages and global/intercultural experiences.
- Perfect your English speaking skills by practicing the language and by utilizing different resources and student organizations at Illinois State University.
- Consider employers with an international focus or presence in other countries.
- Pursue industries that are currently in high demand in the United States.
- Share with an employer the various benefits of hiring an international candidate such as ability to adapt to new cultures and environments, flexibility, and speaking more than one language.

Career Center resources
The Career Center has a number of career resources available specifically for international students. They include:
- International Students Guide—Access common cultural standards in the United States, a list of frequently asked questions, and other resources for international students.
- Cover letter and résumé samples—Review sample documents that follow generally accepted American standards.
- GoinGlobal—Visit this new online career tool kit specifically focuses on the career needs of international students. View career guides, H1B1 information, global job listings, and much more.
- International Student Career Series—Learn about variety of career topics specific to international students. Topics vary each semester.
- Career advisors—schedule an appointment with your career advisor through Hire-A-Redbird to discuss your unique situation.
**Student-athletes**

- Focus on transferable skills you have developed through the athlete experience that can be applied in the workplace (visit Transferable Skills, page 11).
- Consider adding an Intercollegiate Athletics section on your résumé to highlight your experience.
- Include your athletic experience on your résumé in the same way as academic achievement, campus involvement, or work experience. Relay your role on the team and what you accomplished as a student-athlete and as a part of that team.
- During an interview, showcase your skills, abilities, and career goals by referencing your athletic experience such as leadership roles, ability to analyze situations, offer solutions, make decisions, and show creativity in difficult situations.
- Relay your athletic experience with using “STAR” method on page 28.
- Consider the job interview as a competition where the best candidate wins.
- Schedule an appointment with your career advisor using Hire-A-Redbird to discuss your situation.
- Visit Marketing Athletic Experience.

**Individuals who identify as being a part of the LGBTQ community**

**Finding an inclusive workplace**

- Use the Corporate Equality Index (CEI), a list published annually by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. The CEI scores companies on LGBTQ workplace inclusion. Note that the CEI is geared toward medium- to large-sized companies, so will likely not list a organization with fewer than a few hundred employees. However, the index still lays out standard policies and benefits to look for in any inclusive employer.
- Research the organization to which you apply. What are their core values and mission? Do they list any Diversity and Inclusion initiatives on their website? Has the organization released any LGBTQ-inclusive marketing? Also, keep an eye out for anti-discriminatory and anti-harassment policies at the organizations you are applying to. This can help you determine the organization’s espoused values, climate and culture. If the organization does not list these policies publicly, consider reaching out to their human resources department, either through email or anonymously over the phone.
- Use LinkedIn to connect with someone from the organization to gain an insight into the organization’s culture. If the organization has a Pride group or diversity team, these employees may have the best insights into their culture around LGBTQ issues.
- If you feel comfortable, use time during the interview process to ask any clarifying questions you may have about the research you conducted on the organization. Or, if you cannot find information about their core values or policies of diversity and inclusion, or are concerned with outing yourself during the interview process, ask general questions like “What are your organization’s core values?” or “What are your policies around diversity and inclusion?”
- Watch out for red flags. Has the organization received any bad press around LGBTQ inclusion or more general diversity? Search for the organization’s Glassdoor reviews online to identify if there is any mention of a lack of diversity.

**Navigating the job search and transitioning from college to career**

- Ask yourself, “How important is it for me to be out at work right now?” This is an essential question that will guide your approach. Disclosing your gender or sexual identity with others during the job search and at work is your own personal decision. That choice depends on your own comfort and interest in sharing that information. Some prefer to be out and visible during the job search and at work, while others prefer to remain private. There is no right or wrong answer. It is your personal decision.
- If you do decide to come out during the job search or at work, there is no particular timeline necessary for this. You may choose to disclose during the interview, you may wait until after work begins, or you may decide not to reveal that information at all. It is your personal decision.
- Remember that including your involvement in LGBTQ-focused student organizations on your résumé may indirectly out you (or the reader may make assumptions). If you decide not to come out on your résumé, you can still add your student organization experience. Instead of listing the name of the organization (i.e., Pride), you could instead call it “Student Organization,” and then list the dates and role in the organization along with your bullet points describing your skills/experience.
- Consider the location. Dependent upon the state, it may/may not be illegal to base hiring choices on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Visit the Career Center for additional job search resources for the LGBTQ community.
- Schedule an appointment with your career advisor using Hire-A-Redbird to discuss your unique situation.

Source: University of Vermont Career Center, uvm.edu/~career and Out & Equal Workplace Advocates
An individual who has a physical disability

- As an applicant, you are not required to disclose a disability at the time you apply for a job, even if you later need a workplace accommodation. It is up to you to determine the best time; there is no right answer. For example:
  - **Pre-interview:** Particularly helpful if it is a visible disability or if you’ll need accommodations for your interview. Also, if you have had a long-term chronic illness that may explain a gap in work history.
  - **During interview:** If you feel comfortable, educate the employer about the disability. Relay that it will not prohibit you from successfully completing job tasks. You can address your disability while answering interview questions, such as elaborating on your adaptiveness, flexibility, teamwork, or challenges.
  - **Post-interview:** If you have been offered the job, make sure to be open about what accommodations you may need.

- Consider if you will need any accommodations. Read the job description carefully and identify any tasks that may require an accommodation.

- Focus on your strengths and abilities rather than your disabilities. For example, on your résumé relay additional languages (American Sign Language) or skills (braille), as well as leadership in student organizations that are related to the disability.

- Your request for a reasonable accommodation can begin as soon as you have been offered an interview, or you can wait until the interview or after a job offer has been made. Once you choose to disclose, being specific about the accommodations with your (potential) employer can be extremely helpful.

- Visit the [Job Accommodation Network (JAN)](https://www.jan.org) and the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)](https://www.eeoc.gov) for more information about accommodations. The EEOC enforces Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations.

- Visit the Career Center’s [Job Search Sites](https://careercenter.illinoisstate.edu) to view job boards specific to this population.

- Schedule an appointment with your career advisor using [Hire-A-Redbird](https://careercenter.illinoisstate.edu) to discuss your unique situation.

**Sources:** National Association of Colleges and Employers, and thebalancecareers.com.

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An individual who is on the autism spectrum

In addition to the resources found in this guide, visit the [Career Guide for Students with Autism](https://careercenter.illinoisstate.edu).

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“We host plenty of ISU student-teachers so the way I identify candidates is just having genuine conversations with them. There are a lot of things that you can read on their résumé but once you’re able to have a face-to-face conversation, talk about different experiences that you had, talk about how they would handle situations. Be humble. I think sometimes a lot of candidates feel like they need to know all the answers, but you don’t have to because even as principals or as administrators we sometimes don’t know the answer either. That is where the whole team aspect comes in.”

—David LaFrance, principal, Bloomington Public Schools District 87
JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES

There are several job search strategies to find internships and jobs. Use as many as you can during the search process, and customize them to what you need.

Sources: naceweb.org, businessinsider.com

ONLINE JOB BOARD POSTINGS

HIRE-A-REDBIRD—As Illinois State’s interactive job vacancy tool for students, alumni, and employers, it is useful for identifying part-time, full-time, and internship opportunities.

JOB BOARDS—Online job boards are frequently updated, so use them for current job listings. The Career Center’s website has several online job boards by industry and population.

ONLINE RESEARCH

Visit an organization’s website to learn about them. Research a variety of them and compare their organizations’ cultures. Check out their core values and mission statement, usually found under ‘About Us’. Also, follow their social media to keep up with their events, job postings, and culture.

LINKEDIN/SOCIAL MEDIA

A thorough LinkedIn profile can connect you with people from previous experiences or within your desired field. Include all of your past experiences, educational background, and affiliations, as a recruiter may share something in common with you. With over 3 million jobs listed on LinkedIn, learn how to use it as part of your job strategy. Visit the Power of LinkedIn on page 19.

CONSIDER OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Other ways to connect with employers are to request an informational interview (visit Informational Interviews, page 2), participate in a job shadow, apply for a part-time job, or volunteer. Each experience helps to build your network and shows your interest in an organization while allowing them to observe your work ethic.

MAKE CONNECTIONS—NETWORK

Talk with everyone you know to develop connections. Have career-related conversations with your family members, classmates, friend’s parents, professors, classmates, or supervisors; as they might know (or know of others who know) about opportunities that aren’t formally posted. Don’t forget about social media. Post that you are conducting a job search and ask for leads.

INTERNSHIPS

Employers often consider candidates they know or who have a reputable source who can vouch for them. Treat your experience as if it were an interview. Internships are one way to build connections, and may help you and the employer decide if you are a good fit for a full-time position.

58% of internships convert to a full-time job

Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers

ON-CAMPUS RECRUITING

This is a common way for recruiters to connect with students and graduates. Take advantage of events such as professional panels, career fairs, and other career-related events.

80% of jobs are not listed as formal job postings

“People who apply, then make respectful follow-up calls (rather than doing nothing or sending an email) nearly always get an interview with me. Don’t hound me, or leave me voicemails saying how great you are, but if it’s a job you are interested in, don’t be afraid to pick up a phone and ask. This doesn’t work in all situations, but it really does with entrepreneurial companies, privately owned businesses, and sales or business-development-focused jobs.”

—Jeffrey H.R.W. Girling, managing vice president, Paine Wetzel Commercial Real Estate
THE POWER OF LINKEDIN
You may not realize it, but employers are watching you online! What does your profile communicate about you? Use LinkedIn to define your professional digital identity.

What is LinkedIn?
LinkedIn is the largest professional networking site in the world, with 600+ million users. It is a free way to build your unique professional brand identity to employers.

How can LinkedIn help me?
• Connect with people in your dream company or job.
• Find alumni in any city around the world in order to access their professional network.

Where do I start?
Visit LinkedIn.com (the system will walk you through creating a profile) and add as much information as you can and fill out as many sections as possible.

How do I make my profile great?
Add pictures. Be sure to include a cover photo and a professional headshot complete all sections and include full descriptions/bullet points.

What do I do after creating a profile?
• Grow your network by searching for friends, family, neighbors, high school teachers, old coaches, etc.
• Connect with alumni, company recruiters, professionals with your dream job.
• Join the conversation by joining groups related to your specialized interests, following companies and influencers, receiving job/internship postings, and engaging with their professional content (i.e., like, comment, and share).

Where can I get help with LinkedIn?
Visit the Career Center during drop-in hours, or schedule an appointment with your career advisor using Hire-A-Redbird.

90% of recruiters use LinkedIn regularly to identify candidates

“I knew using LinkedIn would be a great way to build my network, but I needed help creating my profile and navigating the media platform. My career advisor at the Career Center was a great help with LinkedIn and answering all my questions!”
—Kiera Thielen ’19

“LinkedIn is really an extension of the student’s personal brand and an extension of the student’s résumé.”
—Kayla Portwood, university relations manager, GROWMARK
MAKING NETWORKING EVENTS WORK FOR YOU

Networking events are your opportunity to meet directly with employers from a variety of organizations, learn about their companies, gather information, and learn about their hiring processes. To achieve these goals, you need a plan of action to ensure you use your time effectively and maximize your interactions with employers.

Before the event
1. Research employers. Learn in advance about the employers who will be attending an event. For example, the list of registered employers attending a Career Center career fair will be posted prior to each fair and can be viewed on the Symplicity Jobs and Careers app as well. Develop a prioritized list of employers you are interested in so your visit will be expedient and focused. Visit the website of each employer to research important company information and take notes.

2. Identify your target organizations. Based on your research, prioritize the organizations on your list to determine who to meet first. This will help you make the best use of your time.

3. Prepare a 30-second commercial. Interaction with employers is limited, so maximize your time with them by promoting yourself in an appropriate way to ultimately answer the question, “why should we hire you?”

Sample introduction/30 second commercial
- 5 seconds—greeting:
  “Hello, my name is _______."

- 5 seconds—educational background:
  “I’m majoring in (or I’m graduating in ___ with a degree in) _______. Consider including an area of concentration or your minor.

- 5-10 seconds—description of interest:
  “I am especially interested in _____ opportunity with your company/organization because of my experience ______. “ This can include mention of a related internship, summer job or class, or research project.

- 5-10 seconds—strengths and accomplishments related to your job target:

- Highlight your strengths or achievements using your own words. Convey your message naturally without sounding rehearsed.

- 5-10 seconds—summary or goal statement:
  State reasons you would be a good fit for the position or organization. Show you have researched the company thoroughly by sharing a personal career goal that aligns with the mission statement of that specific institution.

30-Second Commercial Example
Using the information above, prepare and practice a brief 30- to 60-second commercial or introduction to use when meeting employer representatives.

Be sure to practice your introduction with a friend or career advisor so you sound conversational and spontaneous. Also, bring several résumés printed on high-quality résumé paper when attending networking events.

“Career fairs do work! I wish I would’ve used these resources more during my freshman, sophomore, and junior years. They are really there to help.”
—Andrea Kuhn, ’18

During the event
1. Be professional and polite. Professional business attire (visit page 19) is expected and sets the tone for your interaction with employers. Approach employers with confidence and reasonable assertiveness. Smile as you meet with representatives and act politely.

2. Use your time well. When it is your turn to speak, use your “commercial” to introduce yourself. Have relevant questions reflecting your knowledge about the employer, because that will reflect your interest in the company. Ask for a business card to follow up on prospective leads.

After the event
1. If applying for a job, complete the online process as soon as possible. Many employers require completed digital applications to proceed to a formal interview.

2. Send a thank-you letter or email within 24 hours to employers who interest you. In each message, remind your new contact where you met them and reiterate your interest in them, their company, and/or a position discussed.
BUILD YOUR NETWORK AND GAIN EXPERIENCE WITH INTERNSHIPS

What is an internship?
According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, an internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting.

There are few better ways to gain professional experience and build your résumé than through an internship. Internships are professionally supervised work or service experiences that include intentional learning outcomes designed to provide real-world experiences in your field of study.

Quick facts about internships
• May be full-time or part-time
• May be paid or unpaid
• May be for-credit or not-for-credit
• May be on or off campus
• Generally a one-time experience with a duration typically lasting 14-16 weeks

Internships at Illinois State
• 41 percent of undergraduate programs at Illinois State require internships (professional practice) for graduation
• Academic oversight of internships is handled by each academic department
• Each academic department has an assigned internship coordinator who oversees for-credit internship experience
• Tuition and fees are assessed for all credit-bearing internships
• Professional practice courses at Illinois State are coded 198, 298, 398, or 498
• Only credit-bearing internships will appear on your official transcripts

Career Center internship resources and services
• Internship fairs
• Hire-A-Redbird, an online posting site where employers list available internship opportunities within their organizations
• One-on-one career and/or internship advising
• Résumé and cover letter critiques
• Networking events
• Interview preparation
• Free résumé paper and business card printing

Outcomes of internship programs
• In 2018 job offer rate for graduating interns was 59 percent
• The conversion rate (number of accepted offers/number of graduating interns) is 46 percent

How recruiters find interns
On average, they begin recruiting eight months prior to the start date. For example, if you want a summer internship then you would start looking in September. Employers favor career/job fairs and on-campus recruiting as the best recruiting techniques for interns.

Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers 2018 Internship & Co-op Survey Report Executive Summary

“Accepting an internship at Enterprise was very rewarding. It helped me to grow both professionally and personally. I recommend them to anyone going into their junior or senior year because you truly learn a lot about teamwork, time management, the real world, and about how a company’s culture really can affect you.”
—Nicole Betcher ’19

“Anybody who is lucky enough to have an internship, specifically in social services, gets to learn about what you are going to do eventually before you actually dig into it. That has two benefits: first, if it’s really not a good fit for you you’re going to find out; second, if it is a great fit for you, the chances are 99 percent you’re going to be offered a job after an internship.”
—Karry Baracani, human resource employment analyst, Chestnut Health Systems
Chapter 4: You Landed the Interview ...
Now What?

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS
Today three main types of interviews exist: phone, web-based, and on-site/in-person interviews.

**Phone interview**
- Phone interviews are typically used as initial screening interviews to narrow down a large candidate pool.
- Since the employer interviewing you cannot actually see you during this interview, have materials in front of you during the interview, such as your résumé, the company website, and even the job description to help you target your interview responses.
- Phone interviews can sometimes be difficult and awkward since you cannot see the employer you are speaking with. To improve the conversation, actually stand and smile while responding to questions to bring energy to your voice. You can also ask “Did that answer your question?” or “Would you like me to elaborate?” after your first few responses to help signal that you are finished speaking while also allowing an employer to ask a follow-up question if necessary.
- Be sure to have the contact information of the employer you will be speaking with and be ready to begin the interview 10 minutes prior to the scheduled interview time in case they call early.

**Web-based interview**
- Web-based interviews are continuing to be utilized more and more today, often in place of an initial phone interview.
- Unlike a phone interview, an employer can see you during the web-based interview so remember to dress professionally in business professional attire. Also make sure to eliminate any distractions, such as noise, or clutter in the room where you will be conducting the webcam interview. Find a blank wall or area to conduct your interview so that the interviewer will focus on you and not your surroundings.
- Just like the phone interview, be sure to have the employer’s contact information in case you encounter technological difficulties, and be ready for the interview 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start time.

**On-site interview**
- On-site or in-person interviews require you to interview at the organization where you will potentially be working. If you have not been to the organization before, consider doing a test drive prior to the interview to be sure you know where to go. Also, allow time for traffic, and arrive 15 minutes prior to your scheduled interview time.

- Bring extra copies of your résumé and cover letter, and leave any electronic devices in the car that could be a distraction. Just like with the webcam interview, be sure to dress in business professional attire.
- Remember to be friendly and polite to everyone you encounter at the organization. You never know whom an employer might ask to provide an opinion about their interaction with you that could affect their hiring decision.

**Additional types of interviews**
Each of these interviews can occur within the three main interview types.
- Screening interviews are just as important as any other interview and are typically conducted as a phone or webcam interview.
- One-on-one interviews are the most common type of interview.
- Panel interviews involve multiple people interviewing you at the same time. Try to direct your answer to the person who asks you the interview question, while also maintaining eye contact with the whole group.
- Luncheon/dinner interviews are most importantly still an INTERVIEW. An employer is likely observing how you handle social situations, so try to eat light/easy-to-eat foods so you can still have a conversation and avoid alcohol.
- Second interviews typically will be longer and possibly involve more people.
PROFESSIONAL ETIQUETTE TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING AND NETWORKING

According to the national Association of Colleges and Employers, Job Outlook 2019, 94.5 percent of employers deem professionalism/work ethic as very to extremely essential in new hires. Therefore, it is important when networking or interviewing with potential employers that you use professional etiquette. How you present yourself to others can have an impact on your professional relationships, can damage your personal brand, and could potentially prevent you from getting a job. Interviewing includes not only what you say but also your nonverbal behavior, which can influence the interviewer’s first impression of you. This speaks to your professionalism.

General tips on professional etiquette

Tips can be applied to both an interview and network setting:
• Arrive at least 15 minutes early for interviews and on time for meetings and events.
• Give a firm handshake with good eye contact when introducing yourself, and do not forget to smile.
• Maintain direct eye contact when having a conversation, but avoid staring (having eye contact about 65 percent of the time is effective). Smile frequently. Look alert and interested. Sit with good posture and body positioning.
• Be aware of tapping of feet, playing with your hair, nervous laughter, and other habits that can be a distraction from what you are saying.
• Keep the conversation going by asking appropriate questions and avoiding controversial topics.
• Use your manners (please, thank you, etc.).
• Greet people by their titles and last names unless told differently.
• Have a positive attitude. Be friendly and respectful. Enter every interview and networking opportunity with an open mind.

Dining Etiquette

It is possible that you could be asked to a lunch/dinner interview and/or business meeting over a meal. It is important in those situations to follow common etiquette rules. If you are too informal, you could jeopardize your chance at a job or other business dealing.

Tips for making a great impression
• Wait to sit until your host/hostess does so.
• Follow the dress code (usually business casual or business professional).
• Place your napkin in your lap when you sit down.

• Order something that is easy to eat, and do not order alcohol (especially at an interview).
• Wait to eat until everyone has their meal.
• Chew with your mouth closed.
• Sit up straight and do not put your elbows on the table.
• Do not put your cell phone on the table. You should probably put your phone on silent or leave it in the car or at home.
• Put your napkin on the chair if you leave the table temporarily, and put your napkin beside your plate when you are done eating.

Basic guidelines for dining

Many people are unsure of the rules for eating and drinking in public.
• Follow the “outside in” rule when using utensils, so start at the farthest point from the food and work your way inward.
• Taste your food before you use salt or pepper.
• Pass the salt and pepper together.
• Dip your spoon away from you when eating soup.
• Pass items to the right.
• If you are ever unsure of what to do, follow the lead of the host/hostess.

If you are at a lunch/dinner interview, typically the interviewer will pay for your meal. However, it is always a good idea to bring extra money for your meal and the tip just in case the interviewer does not pay. Remember that no matter what type of interview you are at, it is still an interview. It might be a good idea to have a snack before the interview. You may not have a lot of time to eat because you will be answering interview questions. If you follow professional etiquette, the focus will be on your skills and abilities for the job and not your table manners.
Writing Etiquette

The majority of employers are looking to hire candidates with strong communication skills, which includes the ability to write in a professional manner. Your correspondence with employers during the interview process could have an impact on whether or not you are hired for a position. This is especially true if your correspondence contains grammatical errors and/or an unprofessional tone.

Tips for corresponding with potential employers by hard copy or electronically

• Write in a clear, concise manner. Readers should have no doubt by the third sentence what your purpose is for writing.
• Always carry a professional tone. Do not use slang or abbreviations.
• Be honest and sincere.
• Write naturally and sincerely avoiding overuse of the personal pronoun “I”.
• Use white or off-white paper or background.
• Margins: Use standard margins (1” to 1 ½”) on all sides of the document.
• Font: Use an easy-to-read font, no smaller than 11 point.
• Proofread, proofread, and proofread again.

Special considerations when using electronic communication

• Use a subject line that reflects the subject of your message. Avoid verbiage that is common in spam (i.e. “Thank You,” or “Great Opportunity”) and consider the hidden reader—those who may get your message forwarded to them. Usually subject lines are left intact when forwarded.
• Include a signature that has your full name and comprehensive contact information (street address, phone number, LinkedIn address, E-portfolio address, etc.).
• Avoid emoticons and electronic acronyms (e.g., BTW, etc.).
• Use greetings like you would in a letter (ex. Dear Jane, Good Morning Dr. John) and include a closing (ex. Sincerely, Best, Thank you).
• Use exclamation points sparingly, if at all.
• Keep emotions in check if you find yourself upset. Remember—would you say this to the person’s face or be embarrassed if this message was read to someone whose opinion matters to you?
• Use urgent flagging sparingly and be careful using “reply all.”
• Resist the urge to use all uppercase or lowercase letters. All uppercase comes off as if you are screaming. All lowercase comes off as if you are passive or insecure.
• When attaching documents to a message, follow directions given on file type and size requirements.
• Respond to emails in a timely fashion.
• Read emails carefully, and use spell-check before sending.
DRESSING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Clothing

Two-piece matched suit separates are always appropriate. Skirt-suits with bottom hems falling between 2” above or below the knee or a business pantsuit are acceptable. Make sure your tie, when knotted, comes to the middle of your belt buckle. Bright ties bring focus to the face, but a simple pattern or solid color is best.

Everything about your ensemble should be clean, well-pressed, and professional. Choose solid colors (navy, blue, tan, gray, burgundy, black, or beige) and tightly woven fabrics. Wear polished shoes with dark socks high enough to not show skin when you sit down and cross your legs.

Don’t forget to open the tacked vents at the back of the jacket if the suit is new. Shoes should be closed-toe and closed-heel with low to moderately high heels. Dark leather, low-heeled options are the best choice.

Accessories

Match your shoe and belt color—don’t mix black and brown. Natural-colored hosiery or opaque tights that best match your suit color are wise to wear with pant- or skirt-suits. Remove visible body piercings including nose, eyebrow, or multiple earrings in one ear.

Keep jewelry to a minimum. The Rule of 13 is helpful here; if you count more than 13 accessories—including buttons, bracelets, rings, earrings, and watches—you risk overwhelming with your outfit. Small stud earrings are preferable to oversized earrings that tend to have a lot of movement, which can be distracting.

Body/facial

Facial hair should be neat and clean. Use perfume or colognes sparingly. Fingernails should be neat, clean, trimmed, and not excessively long. Conservative nail polish colors are a good choice—avoid unusual colors, such as green, blue, or lavender.

Opt for light and natural-looking cosmetics. Hair should be clean, trimmed, and combed or styled. Cover visible body art with clothing if possible. Do not chew gum, candy, or carry cigarettes.
“With résumé help and interview coaching from the Career Center, I was able to apply for and received an internship and two different jobs to help me pay for school. After graduation, I will attend grad school as a research graduate assistant as a part of the swine team. I owe my success to my faith, family, and help from the staff at ISU.”

—Wade Hutchins ’19

“Know something about where you are interviewing, and have some kind of knowledge about the position you’re interviewing for. The biggest thing with us is eye contact and actually paying attention to who you are speaking with. Don’t try and say what you think they want to hear, and make sure what you’re telling them is honest and about you rather than trying to fool someone. Speak promptly, and don’t talk like you would talk to your friends. Be professional.”

—Detective Sgt. Rodney Sullivan, Rantoul Police Department

INTERVIEW PREPARATION TIPS

- Know when, where, and how the interview is to be conducted (in-person, phone, web-based). If you are not clear on these details, be sure to ask when scheduling the interview.
- Know the full name of the company and the correct pronunciation of the interviewer’s first and last name. If you are not told whom you will be interviewing with when scheduling the interview be sure to ask.
- Have knowledge about the company (review their mission, vision, values, and goals), and be prepared to answer, “What do you know about our company?” Review the job posting. Based on these knowledge points, critically think of what questions they could ask you.
- Note the transferable skills that employers across all industries seek in candidates (see Transferable Skills, page 11); you may be asked questions based upon these skills as well.
- Prepare responses with examples, and relate your comments to the employer’s needs (i.e., instead of just saying you are a team player give an example of when you were a team player and how that example is relevant to the position).
- Get ready to emphasize your strengths and goals. Stress your achievements. Prepare to be positive about everything and everyone.
- Prepare questions to ask the employer ahead of time to determine if the position is suitable for you. Remember—you are interviewing them just as much as they are interviewing you. Ask about job duties early in the interview so you can target your abilities to the job. As the interview progresses, ask questions about the company to show your interest and help you decide if you really want to work for them.
- Have thank you notes ready, whether it be hard copy notes or an email, and be prepared to send them within 24 hours of the interview. Relay your appreciation for the interview as well as what you enjoyed. If you are interested in the position, relay that.
- Practice, practice, practice! Whether it is with a roommate, parent, friend, or partner practice answering questions. Also, use InterviewStream, the Career Center’s free online mock interview software program where you can record your answers and play them back to observe your nonverbal behaviors.
- Meet with your career advisor to discuss these strategies and more.
INTERVIEW WITH CONFIDENCE WORKSHEETS

Two types of questions you are likely to be asked in a job or internship interview include, “Tell me about yourself,” and a behavioral query, such as, “Tell me about a time you worked on a team.” With the former question, the employer is looking for you to articulate your interest in the position and industry—and to offer information about relevant skills and experience you bring to the position. With the latter question, the employer seeks your perspective on your behavior or handling of a specific situation, understanding past behavior predicts future behavior. In preparing to answer both questions, it is important to spend time reflecting on your experiences and be able to articulate not only what you did but also how these experiences influenced your career direction, workplace behavior, and occupational attitude.

Tell me about yourself

For this question, consider an answer that provides some relevant background information about your interest in the field or position, in addition to your experience. This could be a brief story about events that have shaped your motivation to pursue the opportunity for which you are interviewing. Draw upon your answers to all or some of these questions to create a complete response:

• How did you become interested in this industry or job function? What classes, internships, books, or other engagements piqued your interest in this field?
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

• What have you done in this field to pursue or explore this interest? Alternatively, what solidified your initial curiosity?
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

• What experiences and accomplishments have given you the skills the employer is looking for? (These may include activities, leadership, internships, jobs, or volunteer opportunities you’ve taken part in.)
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

• Why does this position interest you?
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Prepare your answer

Now that you have done some self-reflection, prepare your answers. Remember interaction with employers is limited, so maximize your time with them by promoting yourself in an appropriate way to ultimately answer the question, “Why should we hire you?”

SAMPLE SCRIPT

• 5 seconds—Greeting: “Hello, my name is _______”
• 5 seconds—Educational Background: “I’m majoring in (or I’m graduating in May with a degree in) ______,” perhaps including an area of concentration or your minor.
• 5-10 seconds—Description of interest: “I am especially interested in ______ opportunity with your company/organization because of my experience ______,” which can include mention of a related internship, summer job or class, or research project.
• 5-10 seconds—Strengths and accomplishments related to your job target: Whatever highlights or strengths you select, use your own words. Convey your message naturally, without sounding rehearsed.
• 5-10 seconds—Summary or goal statement: Reasons you would be a good fit for the position or organization. Show you have researched the company thoroughly by sharing a personal career goal that aligns with the mission statement of that specific institution.

EXAMPLE

Hello, my name is ____________. I am currently a junior, majoring in communication and working part-time as a supervisor at my university’s Student Fitness Center. This role has enhanced my communication, management, and leadership skills. In addition, I had an internship over the summer with ABC Company where I worked in a team environment on a variety of marketing and website development projects. I recently read an article about your company’s plans for business growth in the Northeast, and I’m interested in learning more.
Behavioral questions/STAR Method
Behavioral questions usually start with “Tell me about a time when ...” or “Give me an example of a time or experience when ...” The interviewer is looking for a concrete example that demonstrates a specific skill or quality that will make you an asset to their team. It is very important to provide particulars rather than to speak in generalities. It is useful to think of the answer to this kind of question as a story with a specific structure that relays not only the experience, but also what you learned from it.

STAR Method
One way to structure your story is captured by the mnemonic “STAR,” which stands for: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Situation: What was the situation, problem, conflict, or challenge you were facing?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Task: What task(s) did you identify to respond to this situation or solve the problem?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Action: What action did you take?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Results: What lessons did you learn, what skills did you gain, and/or what qualities did you develop through this experience that will help you contribute to the prospective employer’s team in the position for which you are interviewing?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Remember that an employer wants to know if you have certain transferable skills and qualities that will help you be effective in the job.

STAR METHOD EXAMPLE
Can you tell me about a significant problem you solved?
(S) This semester I was involved in a group project and presentation for an Introduction to Communication class.
(T) We needed to complete the project, but we had a group member who procrastinated for the first portion of the project. As the second step deadline approached, it was making some students nervous. People were upset with this group member and getting angry.
(A) I went to her in person and explained that we needed her part before our next meeting. While I knew she was a good student and did good work, because she was working with a team, things needed to be done further in advance not only for her group’s peace of mind, but also so that we could organize the presentation based on everyone’s information. She still thought it was unreasonable that everyone wanted the project so early, but she complied after she heard why it was important to the team and how it could affect her grade in the class.
(R) As a result, she submitted her contribution with enough time for everyone to be comfortable when it came time to present, and she and I continue to be friendly toward each other.
COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The most frequently asked question in any interview is “Tell me about yourself.” Visit Tell Me About Yourself, page 27 for how to answer this question.

Goals: personal and professional
• What are your short-term career objectives?
  • What are your long-term career objectives?
  • When and why did you establish these goals?
• How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
• What are the most important rewards you anticipate in a career?
• What qualities do you admire most in others?
• How do you determine or evaluate success?

Skills and abilities
• What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
• What do you do for fun?
• If you were describing yourself, what five words would you use?
• What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
• What is the most important lesson you have ever received in or out of an educational environment?
• What frustrates you the most? What was your greatest disappointment?
• Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make. How did you navigate it?
• What kinds of people do you find difficult to work with? How do you usually deal with conflict?
• Give me an example of a problem you solved and how you solved it.

Education
• Tell me how you chose your major. Why did you select the college or university you attended?
• Describe your most rewarding college experience.
• Which academic subjects did you enjoy the most? Why?
• Do you think your grades are a comprehensive indication of your academic achievement?
• What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
• How have your education and/or training prepared you for this job?
• Do you have plans for continued study or an advanced degree?

Questions about the target job
• How qualified do you feel to perform this position? Why?
• With which aspects of the position do you feel most comfortable? Which aspects seem least comfortable? Why?
• What would you look for if you were hiring a person for this job?
• Why should we hire you?
• Why are you interested in this position? What about this job appeals to you most?
• What do you know about this company? What about our company interests you most?
• In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
• For which part or parts of this position would you need additional training?
• Are you willing to travel? Do you have a geographical preference? Why? Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?

Management effectiveness (for use in supervisory positions)
• Describe your management style.
• Describe your leadership style. How do you motivate others?
• How would you go about establishing rapport with your staff?
• What qualities should a successful manager possess?
• What do you consider to be your greatest strength as a manager? What do you perceive to be your greatest shortcoming? Why?
• How do you delegate responsibility? Give me an example.
• Tell me about a rewarding supervisory experience you had.
• Tell me about a negative supervisory experience, the reasons surrounding it, and how you moved forward through that challenge.
• How would your staff describe you?
Most recent position

• What are your key responsibilities or objectives in your current or most recent position?
• Describe a typical day in your most recent job.
• What have been your major accomplishments while in this position?
• What impact have these accomplishments had on the organization?
• What aspects of your current position do you enjoy most? What aspects did you enjoy the least? Why?
• What aspects of your supervisor’s management style or philosophy do you appreciate? Which would you change? Why?
• If we talked to your current supervisor, references, or co-workers, how would they describe your performance?
• Why do you wish to leave your current position? What factors have led to this decision?

General work experience

• Tell me about your past work experience.
• Of the positions you have held, which did you enjoy the most? Which did you enjoy the least? Why?
• What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
• How do you work under pressure?
• Describe the kind of supervisor you like to work for.
• What have you learned in previous jobs that you can transfer to this job?
• Tell me about the most challenging or interesting job you have had. How have other positions you’ve held compared?
• Describe an innovative change you implemented in your last job.
• Using specific examples, how do you contribute toward an atmosphere of teamwork?

HANDLING ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Employers are permitted to ask questions based upon a bona fide occupational qualification. This means that employers can ask applicants if they have a valid driver’s license, the ability to stand for periods of time, or a required degree if such qualifications are necessary to perform a given job and are essential to the operation of the employer’s business.

Most employers know not to ask applicants direct questions about race, religion, age, or other protected categories, but other illegal questions may not be as obvious. Employers are guided by federal and state laws that prohibit the invasion of an applicant’s privacy and attempt to guarantee equal employment opportunities for individuals. Federal anti-discrimination laws prohibit an employer from eliminating an applicant based upon race, color, sex/gender, age, national origin, religion, or disability.

Most states have adopted their own anti-discrimination laws that protect the protected categories and may also protect additional individuals. Several states’ anti-discrimination laws include sexual orientation as a protected class. Employers must also navigate laws and regulations that seek to limit their ability to pry into an individual’s personal history.

If asked an illegal question you have three options:

• You can refuse to answer, which is well within your rights. If you choose this option be mindful of your word choices and tone—you could be seen as being difficult or argumentative.
• You can answer the question, and you are free to do so. Remember, though, that you are giving information that is not relevant to the job. In addition, unbeknownst to you, you may be giving the “wrong” answer in the eyes of the employer so it may actually hurt your chances.
• You can think quickly and discern what the employer is actually trying to find out. For example, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” could be answered as “I am authorized to work in the U.S.”
### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry Area</th>
<th>Illegal Questions</th>
<th>Legal Questions</th>
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| **Age**                     | • May not require an applicant’s age, date of birth, or for records to prove his/her age.  
• Year of graduation from high school. | • An employer may ask whether an individual meets the minimum age requirements set by law. “Are you over the age of 18?” is an appropriate question. |
| **National Origin/Citizenship** | • Are you a U.S. citizen?  
• Where were you/your parents born?  
• What is your “native tongue”? | • Are you authorized to work in the United States? |
| **Race/Color**               | • All questions regarding a person’s race/color will be deemed illegal under state and federal law. | • None |
| **Religion**                 | • Any question with regard to an applicant’s religious beliefs, denomination, or any questions that indicate religious customs or holidays observed. | • After an individual is hired, an employer may inquire about religious accommodations. |
| **Marital/Family Status**    | • Are you married?  
• With whom do you live?  
• Do you plan to have a family?  
• What are your child-care arrangements? | • Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?  
• Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? |
| **Personal**                 | • How tall are you?  
• How much do you weigh? | • Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job? |
| **Disabilities**             | • Do you have any disabilities?  
• Please complete the following medical history.  
• How is your family’s health? | • Are you able to perform the essential job functions?  
• Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job related functions? |
| **Arrest Record**            | • Have you ever been arrested? | • Have you ever been convicted of _________? |
| **Military**                 | • If you’ve been in the military, were you honorably discharged? | • In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve?  
• What type of training or education did you receive in the military? |

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QUESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

The employer should provide an opportunity for you to ask questions at or near the end of the interview. By asking questions you are showing an employer that you are interested in their position. This is also your opportunity to find out more about the company/job to see if it will be a good fit for you. Remember, you are interviewing them just as much as they are interviewing you.

Tips:
• Always prepare questions to ask before the interview.
• Some of the questions may be answered during the course of the interview, before you are offered the opportunity to ask. If so, you can simply state, “I was very interested in knowing about … but my questions were already addressed during the interview.” You could ask for additional clarification if applicable.
• Do not ask questions that are clearly answered on the employer’s website or in any literature provided by the employer in advance.
• Do not ask about salary or benefit issues until the employer raises those subjects.
• Do not ask a question unless you are interested in the answer.

If you have trouble developing questions, consider the following:
• What opportunities are offered for personal and professional growth?
• What is a realistic time frame for advancement?
• How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
• What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
• What makes your firm different from its competitors?
• How would you describe your corporation’s personality and management style?

• What are some of the skills and abilities necessary for someone to succeed in this position?
• What kind of work can I expect to be doing the first year?
• How would you describe the work environment?
• Why do you enjoy working for this company?
• How important does upper management consider the function of this department or position?
• Could you explain your organizational structure?

JOB OFFER AND SALARY NEGOTIATION

The negotiation process

Step 1. Receiving the offer
This may occur on the phone or in written form.
• Remember to be enthusiastic and gracious no matter what the details of the offer may be. An appropriate response is, “I am delighted you have extended me this offer.”
• Request all terms in writing so you have as many details as possible to consider.
• Understand when they expect you to get back with them. Don’t allow yourself to be rushed into giving an immediate answer. Take time to thoroughly research the details of the offer and contemplate your response. A professional way to handle pressure is, “I’m sure you understand this is a major decision for me and I want to have time to think it through carefully.”
• Always get the offer in writing.
• Know who to call back for more information.
• Thank them for the offer: “Thank you so much for calling and presenting me with this opportunity. I look forward to discussing with you further after I have had time to consider it.”

Step 2. Evaluating the offer
This is the time for you to reflect on the things that are important to you in a career.
• Review your values and career goals and determine if this is a company you would like to work for. Consider your potential title, opportunity for advancement, company reputation and culture, and ability to work with supervisory staff.
• Determine the minimum you would need to make this job offer acceptable. Weigh trade-offs you would be willing to make, such as better medical leave in conjunction with a lower salary.
• Do as much research as possible to create the rationale you intend to use to support your request for salary or benefit increases.
• Prepare an agenda for your next conversation with the employer so you will appear confident and knowledgeable.
• Do not negotiate more than two or three major issues.
**Step 3. Negotiation**

Now it is time to call the employer back and discuss your decision. You can also use this time to negotiate salary and benefits.

- Approach this matter in a conversational manner. This is a discussion where both you and the employer have the opportunity to talk and be heard.
- Don’t expect a resolution during this step, as it is simply an information exchange. It is likely that the company will have to get back to you with the answers to your questions, especially if they intend to revise their offer.
- An appropriate leading statement would be, “I really appreciate your offer and have spent time thinking about it. I have a few questions and concerns that will help me make my decision.”

- Be direct and listen carefully to the information that is given. State your question first, then listen.
- Be honest. Don’t suggest that you have other offers if you don’t. However, you should contact other organizations with whom you interviewed to give them a chance to match or compete with the offer.
- This is the time to find out how flexible they are with their offer. Some companies are not allowed to negotiate, which will be obvious in their responses to your questions.
- Negotiate salary based on the cost of living in the city in which you will be living and working. Many internet sites can provide this information. Research salaries of comparable jobs within similar organizations and know your market value to strengthen your negotiating position.
- Show you have done your research and justify your requests as confidently as you can. Close the conversation with courtesy: “Thank you for taking the time to listen to my requests and concerns. I look forward to hearing back from you.”

**Step 4. Company response**

Again, be as courteous as possible: “Thank you very much for the information. I really appreciate your getting back to me so quickly.”

If the revised offer is not what you expected, feel free to state that fact: “What you offer is not what I was hoping for, but I certainly understand,” “Could you tell me why _____?” or “That will help me a lot in my decision, thank you,” are all appropriate responses.

- Let the company know when you will get back to them. Be gracious. You have already taken time to think about the offer and company, so aim to respond within one or two days: “I need another day to think about the offer. Thank you for your patience as I make my final deliberation.”

**Step 5. Your decision**

- If possible, you should accept the position in-person instead of through email or voicemail.
- If you are accepting, you want to do so as soon as possible to demonstrate your enthusiasm for the opportunity. Taking a long time to respond indicates to an employer you are not serious about the position even if you genuinely are.
- If you are declining the offer, do so respectfully, courteously, and in a timely manner. You do not want to tarnish your rapport with the company. You also do not want to negatively impact the company’s impression of your school for the sake of future students: “This was a difficult choice, but I have decided I will not be accepting your offer. I was impressed by the people I met and truly appreciate that you have extended me this opportunity.” Remember that you do not need to give them a reason for declining the position.
UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF COMPANY BENEFITS

Candidates often focus solely on the salary of a position while undergoing the job search. While salary is certainly important, other benefits that employers pay out on behalf of their employees should also be considered. Salary plus these benefits is called the Total Compensation Package. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the average Total Compensation Package for a typical job is 68.3 percent wages/salaries and 31.7 percent benefits. Therefore, for a position that has an annual salary of $40,000 that employer is also spending approximately $18,565 annual on that employee’s benefits with a Total Compensation Package of $58,565. Below are the most common company benefits.

Health insurance
Diligently review the health insurance benefits that employers offer—some pay 100 percent of the monthly premium of their employees while others require employees to pay each month. Other costs that vary include out-of-pocket costs for procedures and office visits as well as purchasing additional health insurance for your partner and/or dependents. Employer-provided health insurance could save you thousands of dollars each year.

Dental and eye insurance
Dental and eye insurance policies are typically separate from health insurance policies. Usually they provide basic coverage. Like health insurance, some employers pay 100 percent of the monthly premium for the dental policy and eye policy while others may require employees to pay each month. Typically if you need additional care (i.e. outside of a basic dental cleaning/X-rays or eye exam) the employee will pay a portion (if not all) of the costs. Like health insurance benefits, diligently review these as well—especially if you or your dependents have ongoing or extensive dental or eye care needs.

Life insurance
Usually employers offer a life insurance policy for free equal to one year of an employee’s salary. Often employers offer additional life insurance at a discount. Individuals often increase their life insurance when they increase their assets and/or number of dependents. Be mindful when reading these policies as well—some additional life insurance offered by employers is only valid when employed by them; you may not be able to move the policy to your next employer.

Disability insurance
This insurance provides an income in the event of a long-term disability. Like other insurance policies these too can vary.

Prescription drug plans
These plans typically are separate from health insurance plans and can also vary. Usually employees are required to pay a co-pay each time they pick up prescription medicine. If you or your dependents take ongoing medications these plans too can save you a lot of money each year.

Retirement/employer match plans
Many employers match employee contributions to their retirement to some degree. Usually the matching has guidelines and limitations. Like insurance policies, these vary from employer to employer. It is also important to be aware of when you would be vested as an employee. This is a legal term that means when you would have access to your entire retirement fund (i.e., the employer match), not just the monies that you contribute. When an employee is vested can vary from company to company—for some companies it is a little as a couple years while others are as much as 10 years.

Flexible spending accounts
If you have a health plan through a job, you can utilize a flexible spending account. Regulated by the government, these accounts allow you to set aside untaxed dollars for certain out-of-pocket medical expenses. You would essentially be saving the money you would pay on taxes for those medical expenses.

Sick and vacation time
Most companies provide some type of sick and vacation time to their employees. The amount of time and polices for use vary from company to company. Usually the number of vacation days is determined by the position level within the company and how long the employee has worked at the company.

Tuition reimbursement
This is an especially important benefit for those who envision additional education. Companies are not required to provide this benefit and thus set their own guidelines and expectations.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor, News Release, December 14, 2018
Nothing is more satisfying than watching students graduate...

Except hearing about their career success!

Encourage other Redbirds in their career journey. Share your career success, such as finding a job or internship or being accepted into graduate school. Select stories will be used to promote Redbird career achievements.

CareerCenter.IllinoisState.edu/StateYourSuccess
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- Find and apply for full- and part-time jobs and internships/professional practice experiences
- Find and sign up for on-campus interviews with employers from a variety of industries
- Upload resumes and cover letters for recruiters to find you
- View upcoming career and networking events and find out which companies are attending, what positions they’re seeking to fill, and what majors they’re most interested in
- Find average hiring salaries
- Access GoinGlobal—an online career tool kit for international students or those seeking internships or full-time employment abroad

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