



## ***WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU...***

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### ***WHAT IS A CAREER?***

A career is more than just a job, “work,” or even an “occupation.” It includes your progress through life, your growth and development in vocational and avocational areas of life. You will certainly need that polished resume, letters of introduction, a practiced “pitch” for your interviews/chance introductions, and other products that show you at your best: this is the guide to help you do just that.

Designing a career in which you are happy and successful starts with **DISCOVERY**: a thoughtful reflection, assessment (of your skills, values, and interests) and generation of ideas for your future. Your schooling, training, and career research will help you identify areas that you may want to **EXPERIENCE**: interim employment (seasonal and part-time) and other experiential learning activities help put this into context. However, you also need to roll up your sleeves and intentionally **CREATE** materials that introduce and showcase the brand called YOU. You are the CEO of yourself. These items are essential to getting the capability to **ACTIVATE** opportunities (such as applying to jobs, etc.) The Career Success Center is here to help and we have created this guide to get you started on the **PATH TO CAREER SUCCESS**.

This guide is a supplement of the Western Connecticut State University Career Success Center’s comprehensive website, [www.wcsu.edu/careersuccess](http://www.wcsu.edu/careersuccess). In this guide, you will find tools to help you understand:

- How to create cover letters and résumés
- Tips to capture the attention of hiring managers and Human Resource staff
- Interview techniques
- Instructions to use the career tool, Optimal Résumé™

Before you begin using this guide, you will need to create an account with Optimal Résumé™.

### **To Create Your Account**

1. Log into [wcsu.optimalresume.com](http://wcsu.optimalresume.com) and click “**New User**” located at the top right corner of the page.
2. Insert your WCSU email address and hit “**Continue**.”
3. Complete the registration process and remember your user name and password for future access.

The **Document Center** is the main hub of all the tools you can access. To start a new document, or practice new interview questions, simply click “**Document Center**,” at the top of your page, and choose the tool you would like to create.



## **COVER LETTERS 101**

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There are several types of letters you will need to create throughout your career. The one that is the most important is the cover letter. According to research, the average professional position has about 300 applicants. It is critical that you grab the employer's attention in your cover letter. The following technique begins with a powerful opening and focuses on filling the employer's needs. There is no need to reiterate everything you have on your résumé. Only include highlights that will bring you positive attention. Remember, the cover letter does not get you the job. It is only meant as a tool to make the employer want to read your résumé or pick up the phone to invite you in for an interview.

- Show how your background fits a particular job posting
- Describe your interest in a particular firm or type of company/employer
- Expand upon statements from your résumé that are relevant
- Demonstrate that you have done your homework on the company and how you would be an asset

Use the skills and accomplishments you have acquired to prove you are the right person to do the job. However, getting the first job right out of college can seem daunting when you have little to no work experience. College students worry about their lack of experience and skills, whereas, every student has acquired some skills during their time in college.

Common skills to consider when writing your cover letter and résumé are:

- Computer Skills
- Communication Skills (verbal, writing)
- Research Skills
- Time Management Skills
- Organizational Skills
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Dealing with Ambiguity
- Good Work Ethic
- Customer Service
- Initiative
- Leadership Skills
- Problem-Solving skills
- Teamwork
- Decision-Making Skills

Whichever skills you possess, you must be able to support your claim. If you say you have good researching skills and understand computer applications, you must be able to back up those qualities with examples.

You should possess at least 70% of the skills required to be considered a good candidate.

With a little strategy, and practice, you will be creating professional looking cover letters and résumés before you know it. Here are some techniques to get you started:

1. Take the job description and highlight or circle the requirements, skills, and keywords that are important.
2. Analyze the job description and think about how you meet their needs.
3. Create a worksheet and write down how you qualify. On one side, list their keywords and requirements. On the other side, list how you qualify.
4. Translate your qualifications into a letter.
5. Personalize it – address how your skills and accomplishments will fulfill the employer’s needs.

**HELP WANTED**

**ENTRY LEVEL MARKETING /  
ADVERTISING**

Looking for a talented and hardworking person who wants to begin their career with a fast-paced company. Our ideal employee will be a self-starter, with strong organizational, and leadership qualities. Job duties will include, but not limited to, website development, company branding and writing reports and presentations.

Must have outstanding verbal & writing skills, able to prioritize and work independently with minimal supervision, advanced computer skills, and can handle pressure while prioritizing and managing time efficiently.

Qualified candidates can email their cover letter and résumé to [ABCInc@gmail.com](mailto:ABCInc@gmail.com). No phone calls please. EEO employer.

Your letter should have a beginning paragraph stating the qualities you bring to the table. The second paragraph should have highlights of your experience and the third paragraph should be the closing. You do not need to reiterate everything in your résumé. You just want to tease the reader a little to make them want to turn the page and continue reading – or call for an interview.

It may take longer to create customized letters and résumé but they will work faster for you than if you send out generic cover letters and résumé. Your professional documents should be unique and original – they should speak to the employer and highlight you as a SUPERSTAR.

### EXAMPLE WORKSHEET

JOB REQUIREMENT/KEYWORDS	HOW DO I QUALIFY?
Fast-paced	Worked at McDonalds
Self-starter, work independently	Classes – required to work within deadlines and follow strict research guidelines; GPA 3.7
Website development, branding, marketing	Internship – Kept company intranet updated and accurate. Logged hundreds of hours researching marketing trends, branding techniques related to website development then presented the findings to the advertising staff - required to write weekly reports.
Strong communication skills: writing, verbal	Internship - Wrote weekly reports and presented minutes at weekly meetings
Time management skills - Can prioritize and is organized	McDonalds – Had to prioritize and be organized to survive working at McDonalds
Computer skills	Worked with Microsoft Office applications: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, Outlook
Leadership skills	Acted as shift leader and trainer at McDonalds

# COLONIAL CHUCK

123 Main Street, Danbury, CT 06810 ▪ (555) 555-5555 ▪ [c.colonial@gmail.com](mailto:c.colonial@gmail.com)

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April XX, 20XX

ABC, Inc.  
555 Church Street  
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear Mr. Smith (or Hiring Manager):

I am interested in the entry level marketing/advertising position with ABC, Inc. I have a strong foundation in marketing and website development and I'm able to focus on a task with proven reliability to get the job done. My strong verbal, writing and interpersonal skills, with the ability to thrive in fast paced environments, has always been an asset to former employers.

Highlights of my experience:

- Advanced computer skills. Experienced with Microsoft Office applications: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, Outlook
- Exceeded at writing clear, marketing pieces, and weekly reports and presentations
- Have logged hundreds of hours researching marketing trends, branding techniques, and topics related to website development, marketing, and advertising
- Acknowledged to be quick, accurate, and thorough in my research abilities

While working as a team member and leader at McDonalds, I have developed strong organizational and time management skills. Therefore, I can handle pressure while prioritizing and managing time efficiently. I work well on my own, but always contribute to the team as a whole. I have developed work habits that will make me successful – attention to detail, pride in doing good work, excellent telephone and interpersonal skills, plus good conflict resolution abilities.

I have attached my résumé and I would like the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the contributions I can make to your company. I can be reached at (555) 555-5555. I appreciate your time and consideration and I look forward to your call.

Sincerely,

*(Sign your name here.)*

Colonial Chuck

## **RÉSUMÉS 101**

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You will find that employers are most interested in knowing if you can achieve results. Therefore, you want to assert yourself as the best person for the job by highlighting results you produced. To do this, you must use examples that demonstrate the skills you have and tie them to what the employer needs.

When describing your responsibilities and accomplishments you want to:

1. Optimize key word usage in your RÉSUMÉ by always utilizing a job description:
  - a. Read the entire job description and identify which words and phrases are critical to describing the position and its requirements/qualifications.
  - b. Once key words are identified, insert them into the RÉSUMÉ and show how they relate to your experience.
2. Stick to 10 to 12 point size fonts such as Arial, Tahoma or Calibri and only use black color ink.
3. All margins should be no larger than one inch on all sides of the document.
4. Do not include any pictures or graphics of any kind.
5. Emphasize results rather than job duties.
6. Use action verbs. They create a picture in the employer's mind of you doing the work.
7. Stay away from subjective information like, "good communicator, detailed-oriented, hard-working, organized, etc." Instead, use examples of your accomplishments to prove you have these attributes. Ex., "Provided an exceptional customer experience by pro-actively seeking out customers in need and answering their questions, while working at Stop & Shop grocery store." This is better than writing, "Worked with customers."
8. Include keywords and nouns (action verbs) that are relevant to the field in which you are applying.
9. Be as concise as possible. Avoid generalities. Instead of saying you "work well under pressure," give a specific example of a high-pressure situation where you worked well.
10. Complete sentences are not necessary. Action phrases are acceptable.
11. Never use pronouns such as I, you, me, us, he/she, his, her, them, or their.
12. Highlight specific achievements. Employers want to know your accomplishments and results in:
  - a. Leadership
  - b. Saving money
  - c. Solving problems
  - d. Enhancing performance
  - e. Improving products or services
  - f. Saving time

**TIP:** Follow the site-specific directions for submitting your RÉSUMÉ. Always follow directions and follow-up when you say you will.

- g. Managing a crisis
- h. Increasing profits or services
- i. Achieving more with fewer resources, etc.

13. Include quantifiable results where possible; such as numbers, dollar signs, and percentages. (i.e. supervised a staff of 15, increased sales by 20%, handled up to \$15,000 daily, etc.) Don't say "very short time," say "one hour." Don't say "long report," say "300 page evaluation report." Don't say "managed staff," instead, say "managed a sales staff of twenty."

14. Pay attention to your verb tenses. Past experiences should be written in past tense verbs and present experiences should be written in present tense verbs.

### ***IN PLACE OF THE OBJECTIVE...***

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The very top section of your résumé is the most important section simply because this is the first place employers look when they receive your résumé (see résumé example on page 13). Typically, it is called the "**Profile**" section or "**Summary of Qualifications.**" It should NOT be called an **OBJECTIVE**. Forbes researched over 3,300 companies and learned that while looking at this part of the résumé, employers spend an average of 6.28 seconds reading before deciding if you have what they are looking for.

Therefore, you need to use three (3) to five (5) short, concise phrases to add power to your résumé. These phrases, or statements, need to focus the hiring manager's needs in order to grab their attention. Think of the most important qualities, achievements, and abilities you have to offer in relation to what is included in the "requirements or qualifications" section of any job description and use that as your starting point. These things will change from job to job, therefore, customizing each résumé you send out is vital to the success of being called for an interview. Without qualifying yourself for each position, the employer will have no idea what you have done, and what you can do for them, if hired.

It is important to understand that your résumé is not about what YOU want. It is about what you can OFFER the employer. Take what you have done in the past and relate it to how you can help the employer.

If you are having trouble thinking of your accomplishments, then think of problems you have solved and consider examples of the things we know employers look for. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers are most interested in the soft-skills (competencies) that you can provide as an employee. By understanding and having examples that demonstrate how you have used these skills, you are more likely to have a successful interview and a higher chance of finding a job/career.

Listed below are the eight competencies (which most job descriptions require) that are associated with "CAREER READINESS." Having examples on your résumé of how you have demonstrated these skills, are crucial to the success of whether or not you are scheduled for a job interview.

The 8 Competencies are:

1. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
2. Oral/Written Communications

3. Teamwork/Collaboration
4. Leadership
5. Digital Technology
6. Professionalism/Work Ethic
7. Career Management
8. Global/Intercultural Fluency

**TIP:** When writing bullet points, do not use periods. Bullet points are not sentences and do not need periods.

#### **CRITICAL THINKING/PROBLEM SOLVING**

- Established inventory management system that helped reduce inventory levels from 3% to 0.2% in 2007, while increasing by 41%
- Implemented product design changes that resulted in fewer rejects
- Reduced quarterly operating expenses by 35 percent

#### **ORAL/WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS**

- Represented and promoted WCSU during Prospective Student Day, Orientation and Alumni Day, engaging future students, parents, alumni, and other visitors
- **Gave study tips, answered questions, helped calculate math problems, assisted in deciphering professors lectures and prepared students for upcoming tests**
- **Trained incoming interns by creating 50-page guidebook with vivid and detailed instructions**

#### **TEAMWORK/COLLABORATION**

- Part of a major team effort to develop new business of over \$100 million; leveraged internal partnerships and increased communication among sales teams
- Worked with children, staff, and parents to develop plans for children experiencing difficulties; identified natural supports and provided referrals and advocacy with outside services, monitored ongoing progress

#### **LEADERSHIP**

- Successfully kept all delinquent accounts under 5 percent each week
- Developed a new employee training that increased employee retention by more than 80 percent
- **Coordinated three fundraising events for local shelters which raised over \$8,000 (20% over goal) and greatly improved community awareness**

#### **DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

- Increased followers on social media by 150% on average (Twitter, G+, Facebook, and LinkedIn), resulting in \$45,000 in increased sales via the Internet and significant increase in brand awareness
- **Authored exhibit script and app materials, recorded and edited original material, and collaborated with a staff of 5 to develop exhibit and app**
- **Introduced Google Documents infrastructure to coordinate project tasks between offices to increase efficiency**

#### **PROFESSIONAL/WORK ETHIC**

- Consistently earned 5 out of 5 stars [list the specific awarding authority] for outstanding guest services
- Adhered to departmental controls and regulations maintained ethical conduct at all times
- **Achieved record-high ratings on customer satisfaction surveys from an average of 89% to 96%.**

#### **CAREER MANAGEMENT**

- Collaborated with a team of five technicians in caring for and examining animals; Monitored up to 20 sick animals and prepared conference room and contributed to weekly staff meetings of 35
- Implemented a marketing strategy that directly increased quarterly sales by 25 percent
- **Worked with Dr. Barry Kripke to write the grant proposal for a new fusion reactor**

#### **GLOBAL/INTERCULTURAL FLUENCY**

- Selected for freshman year experience; worked in two rural communities building a ceramic water filter for residents as well as developing the frame work for an after school education program for children ages 5 to 10

Below, you will find ways this section can be formatted:

#### ***PROFILE***

Well-developed field research competence with adolescents, teens and other populations; Created an after school program for under privileged students in an inner city setting; Exemplified innate ability to understand and motivate children in a learning environment; Planned and implemented the 7th grade math curriculum while interning; Fluent in Spanish and Italian

OR

#### ***SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS***

- Well-developed field research competence with adolescents, teens and other populations
- Created an after school program for under privileged students in an inner city setting
- Exemplified innate ability to understand and motivate children in a learning environment
- Planned and implemented the 7th grade math curriculum while interning
- Fluent in Spanish and Italian

#### ***USE STRONG ACTION VERBS***

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By beginning each bulleted statement with a strong ***ACTION VERB***, this helps to highlight your successes and allows the reader to get a sense of your skills. It is a good idea to vary the action verbs on your résumé to demonstrate the vocabulary of a college graduate. A list

of action verbs are included, on the next page. However, the internet offers a wide section of verbs if one Googles **“Action Verbs,”** if you would like more ideas.

### **YOU LED A PROJECT...**

If you were in charge of a project or initiative from start to finish, skip “led” and instead try:

- Chaired
- Controlled
- Coordinated
- Executed
- Headed
- Operated
- Orchestrated
- Organized
- Oversaw
- Planned
- Produced
- Programmed

### **YOU SAVED THE COMPANY TIME OR MONEY...**

Hiring managers love candidates who’ve helped a team operate more efficiently or cost-effectively. To show just how much you saved, try:

- Conserved
- Consolidated
- Decreased
- Deducted
- Diagnosed
- Lessened
- Reconciled
- Reduced
- Yielded

### **YOU ENVISIONED AND BROUGHT TO LIFE A PROJECT...**

If you actually developed, created, or introduced a project into your company? Try:

- Administered
- Built
- Charted
- Created
- Designed
- Developed
- Devised
- Founded
- Engineered
- Established
- Formalized
- Formed
- Formulated
- Implemented
- Incorporated
- Initiated
- Instituted
- Introduced
- Launched
- Pioneered
- Spearheaded

### **YOU INCREASED EFFICIENCY, SALES, REVENUE, OR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION...**

Along similar lines, if you can show that your work boosted the company’s numbers in some way, you’re bound to impress. In these cases, consider:

- Accelerated
- Achieved
- Advanced
- Amplified
- Boosted
- Capitalized
- Delivered
- Enhanced
- Expanded
- Expedited
- Furthered
- Gained
- Generated
- Improved
- Lifted
- Maximized
- Outpaced
- Stimulated
- Sustained

### **YOU CHANGED OR IMPROVED SOMETHING...**

So, you brought your department’s invoicing system out of the Stone Age and onto the interwebs? Talk about the amazing changes you made at your office with these words:

- Converted
- Customized
- Influenced
- Rehabilitated
- Remodeled
- Reorganized
- Streamlined
- Strengthened
- Upgraded

## YOU SUPPORTED CUSTOMERS...

Because manning the phones or answering questions really means you're advising customers and meeting their needs, use:

- Advised
- Advocated
- Arbitrated
- Coached
- Consulted
- Educated
- Fielded
- Informed
- Resolved

## YOU PROVIDED RESEARCH...

Did your job include research, analysis, or fact-finding? Mix up your verbiage with these words:

- Analyzed
- Assembled
- Assessed
- Audited
- Calculated
- Examined
- Explored
- Forecasted
- Identified
- Interpreted
- Measured
- Qualified
- Quantified
- Surveyed
- Tested

## YOU WROTE OR COMMUNICATED...

Was writing, speaking, lobbying, or otherwise communicating part of your gig? You can explain just how compelling you were with words like:

- Authored
- Briefed
- Campaigned
- Co-authored
- Composed
- Corresponded
- Counseled
- Critiqued
- Defined
- Documented
- Illustrated
- Lobbied
- Persuaded
- Promoted
- Publicized

## YOU ACHIEVED SOMETHING...

Did you hit your goals? Win a coveted department award? Do not forget to include that on your résumé, with words like:

- Attained
- Awarded
- Completed
- Demonstrated
- Earned
- Exceeded
- Outperformed
- Reached
- Showcased
- Succeeded
- Surpassed
- Targeted

## ***BUILD YOUR BULLET POINTS***

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On the next page is a worksheet meant to help you create bullet points, or examples, of how you have been a benefit to any past employer. You will want to begin with a strong action verb. You can use any of the verbs listed above or use one of your own. Remember, you want to talk about how you have been an asset to the employer and what you have accomplished, even if all you accomplished was taking out the garbage. There is always a way to write your achievements to showcase your worth. You can use this equation to start:

**ACTION VERB + SKILL/TASK + IMPACT/RESULT YOU HAD = BULLETED PHRASE**

# CREATE BULLET POINTS

## How to create the perfect BULLET POINT and tell your story

Start with a powerful action verb, include what your task was or what skill you accomplished or acquired, and end with the impact or result you made. Remember, it is all about what you have done in the past and how you are going to help the employer if they hire you. Do this for every short concise phrase or bullet point you have on your résumé.

**ACTION VERB + SKILL/TASK + IMPACT/RESULT you made = BULLETED PHRASE**

ACTION VERB	SKILL/TASK	IMPACT/RESULT
What did you do?	What was the situation?	What did you accomplish?

NOW, BRING IT ALL TOGETHER AND BUILD YOUR BULLET POINT IN THE LINES BELOW...


# Resume Checklist for Career Success

Use a job description (or relevant aspirational job description) to direct your unique resume. WCSU encourages you to consider Optimal Resume formats: <http://wcsu.optimalresume.com>

## Formatting

- Borders are even and spaced ½ to 1-inch on all sides
- Format for Applicant Tracking System (ATS): Arial, Tahoma or Calibri font and no lines; minimize caps/bold/italics
- Main sections should be 10-12 pt. font size; dates are in same month/day format
- Only include information for no more than 12 – 15 years so you don't risk looking old and outdated
- Must be completely error free:** check for grammar/typos

## Header/Contact Information

- Name includes first and last name; All CAPS; 14-16 font and bold
- Format is clear, spaced and neat; address is current; email address is professional looking; use Gmail accounts
- Phone number is a direct line, formatted like (203) 123-1234; ensure answering message is professional sounding and there is no music playing at any time
- LinkedIn profile address is added and customized as some version of your full name; no numbers or miscellaneous letters should be included

## Profile/Summary Statement

- Brief; written in bullets or short concise phrases; no sentences
- Must give a short/concise snapshot of your experience and skills/qualifications that match the job description; each job is different so each resume you send out should be customized for the position in which you are applying
- Include the impact or what you have improved; what distinguishes you from everyone else?

## Education

- If you are a student and have no relevant experience, place directly under your **Profile/Summary**
- Spell out degrees and include major/minor, grad date (use "anticipated" if not yet graduated)
- Add university city/state; **no high school and no community college if credits transferred**
- If GPA is above 3.0 state so, on a scale of 4.0. Ex. "GPA 3.0/4.0"
- List upper level coursework and international study if relevant; honors received upon graduation; Do not list introductory courses everyone is required to take

- Include certifications or 3<sup>rd</sup> party training achievements

### **Experience**

- Experiences match format (student: reverse chronological; Gaps in resume: Functional or Hybrid)
- Employer/Location/Date information differentiated from bullet points by bolding or text size increase
- Experiences listed are relatable, applicable or transferable in some way to position desired (see below)
- Each entry under the Experience section must include company's name, city/state; no zip code
- Bullet format: begin with powerful verb + brief description of work accomplished + impact/result/why
- Each bullet is concise description of activity and achievement; include most impactful career skills; Do NOT include menial job duties/tasks

### **Additional Skills/Technical Skills**

- Add Languages spoken/written; software knowledge, qualifying if relevant
- Exclude irrelevant personal information
- Don't list subjective opinions: Must have examples to list for the skills you include

### **Clubs, Organizations, Professional Affiliations, Volunteer, Sports, etc.**

- Add if relevant and supportive of skills helpful to job to which you are applying
- List offices/leadership held within organizations
- This section is not required if there is no space available for it on the page

### **Other Miscellaneous**

- Did not use any pronouns such as, "Me, My, I, I am, Our, Their," etc.
- Use consistent verb tense; If experience was in the past, use past-tense
- Spell out acronyms and abbreviations that are not universally known
- Check punctuation usage; appropriate use of capitalization; no periods at end of phrases/bullets
- Do not put your references or other people's names on your resume
- Do not add "**References available upon request**" at the end of your resume
- Should be no longer than two pages, max; if there is a second page, must meet the half-way mark...if not, must condense info on second page back to one page***

***Use this equation for all of the bullet points you include (See worksheet on page 12):***

**ACTION VERB + SKILL/TASK + IMPACT/RESULT YOU HAD = BULLETED PHRASE**

# COLONIAL CHUCK

123 Main Street, Danbury, CT 06810 ▪ (555) 555-5555 ▪ [c.colonial@gmail.com](mailto:c.colonial@gmail.com)

## SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Recent graduate who maintained a 3.8 G.P.A. while working full-time
- Clocked over 500 hours utilizing Microsoft Office Word, Excel and PowerPoint
- Collaborated as the Basketball team captain and promoted leadership skills
- Recognized as Who's Who Among College Students, 20XX
- Class President, 20XX to 20XX

## EDUCATION

Western Connecticut State University, Danbury, CT

**Bachelor of Science Degree in Marketing;** Minored in Psychology

Expected date of graduation: 20XX – G.P.A. 3.8/4.0

**Coursework:** Consumer Behavior, Marketing Management, Marketing Research, Microeconomics, International Business, Industrial Marketing, Social Media in Marketing

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Marketing Assistant/Intern, ESPN, Bristol, CT** 20XX – Present

- Track competitive information and prepare business proposals for marketing staff
- Send out media kits to new clients and perform follow-ups
- Handle heavy phone lines and interact directly with clients
- Implemented a tracking system for monthly expenses and travel arrangements
- Organize weekly sales staff meetings and set up conference calls for outside office
- Mastered Microsoft Office Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook and Publisher skills

**Production Assistant, Media Productions, New York, NY** 20XX

- Coordinated makeup and wardrobe for commercial and infomercial productions
- Collaborated on identifying wardrobe themes and coordinated wardrobe selections with set designers

**Assistant/Intern, SMART Magazine, New York, NY** 20XX – 20XX

- Contacted leading manufacturers to obtain sample merchandise
- Assisted the Fashion Editor at photo shoots and organized clothing and accessories for use
- Wrote captions and explained new seasonal fashion trends
- Directly assisted in transforming and writing the "Makeover" feature for the magazine
- Selected subjects, coordinated photo shoots, and collaborated with the Style Team

## AWARDS/ACHIEVEMENTS

- Recognized as Who's Who Among College Students for 20XX
- Class President, 20XX – 20XX

## **INTERVIEW 101**

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### **CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE HIRED...**

Those are words we love to hear. Whether it is our first job offer, or 20<sup>th</sup> job offer, hearing those words, "YOU'RE HIRED," is music to anyone's ears. However, not everyone is born with the understanding of what it takes to ace an interview. This guide will cut the confusion and outline the process so anyone can be more successful. In addition, we have included instructions to the Optimal Résumé™ Interview Builder to help you practice.

With a little strategy and understanding, you will be having successful interviews, like a pro, in no time. Please utilize Optimal Résumé™ at [wcsu.OptimalRésumé.com](http://wcsu.OptimalRésumé.com), where you can practice over 1,200 sample interview questions. Locate the **Document Center** and select the **Interview Type**, **Length/Format**, and **Interviewer**. When you are done, click **Continue Interview**, at the bottom of your screen.

We hope this new tool will help you prepare and feel like a confident interview pro. If you would like to meet with one of the Career Experts in the Career Success Center, you can also schedule an appointment by going to the **Career Experts** section in **WestConn Works** at [www.wcsu.edu/westconnworks](http://www.wcsu.edu/westconnworks).

There are several types of interviews which are designed to assess your skills, motivation, ability, and fit. To be successful at interviewing you must anticipate the questions, and practice. Most interviewers will use a combination of interview techniques and types. Understanding the various styles of interviews and their purpose will help you feel in control and give you a sense of confidence.



### **COMMON INTERVIEW TYPES**

**Traditional:** Designed to see how well you can elaborate and provide support for the information provided on your résumé. Questions might include:

- Determining your level of interest and knowledge in the job or the company
- Ascertaining your abilities and developmental areas
- Explore how you might handle hypothetical situations in the work place

**Behavioral:** Employers believe that past performance predicts future performance. They will ask you to describe real situations you have encountered and how you handled them. Typically, how you handled past events is most likely how your personality will handle future events. Some examples include:

Tell me about a time...

- When you dealt with a difficult person
- Achieved an important goal
- Had to work with limited resources

### **COMMON INTERVIEW FORMATS**

**Phone:** Just as important as the face-to-face interview and should not be discredited.

Things to remember while interviewing via phone are:

- Dress as if it is a face-to-face interview
- Have your résumé and a notepad handy
- Prepare for no interruptions and know who will make the call and when
- Answer the phone professionally

**Email:** It is paramount that you check your spelling and use proper grammar:

- READ the e-mail sent by the employer and follow instructions carefully
- When you reply to an e-mail, remember to include your last name in the subject line so they can easily refer back to you
- Remember to check your email regularly and always respond in less than 24 hours

**Skype/Virtual:** The virtual interview is becoming more and more prevalent. Some things to remember are:

- Understand and have your technology set up prior to the meeting
- Keep the background professional and neat looking
- Look professional and well groomed. Remember to wear pants in case you stand
- When you reply to an e-mail, remember to include your last name in the subject line so they can easily refer back to you

### **UNDERSTAND THE S.T.A.R. METHOD**

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In today's job market, employers believe past performance is the best indicator of future performance. These are called behavioral interviews or situation interviews. During the interview, you could be asked to provide specific examples that highlight skills necessary for the job. **When answering, leave out any negative information.** In order to shine and stay on track, we recommend that you use the "**STAR**" method when answering:

**ST** for **situation/task**, **A** for **action**, and **R** for **result**

The average person has three to five positive work related stories they can refer to talk. Those stories can be used to answer almost any interview question if formed properly. They should be stories that show your professionalism and can incorporate any of the "**Competencies**" that employers seek, which was discussed on page 7. The key is to be short and concise, without rambling.

#### **EXAMPLE:**

**Question:** Have you ever lead a team before?

**Situation/Task:** "Yes; a relevant example being at my last company, where I was initially a software developer, on a team of six. We developed a new finance module for our core accounting product. The project was critical as launch dates had been set with a lot of sales

and marketing investment riding on the product being ready. However the project was behind schedule, when our team leader unfortunately became ill, and had to leave."

**Action:** "I was the captain of my college's baseball team and I loved the challenge and responsibility of leadership, so I volunteered to fill in. By using my technical analysis skills, I spotted a few small mistakes that were causing sporadic errors and slowing us down. Therefore, I negotiated with our product director, and got a small bonus incentive for the team – approval for two pizza evenings. With that, we could pull a couple of late night shifts to correct the coding and catch up with the critical project landmarks."

**Result:** "Though this took us 1.5% over budget, the software was delivered on time with a better than target fault tolerance. The project was seen as a great success as the additional project cost was minimal compared to the costs of delaying the launch, and the negative affect on our product branding. The team members were delighted with the extra bonus and as a result, I was officially promoted to team leader."

### THIS IS HOW YOU BECOME A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW "STAR."



Use the acronym **STAR** as a framework for your response. This process can be used for any interview style or group of questions.

**S** = Describe a **SITUATION** that you had to deal with.

**T** = Talk about the **TASKS** that were involved.

**A** = Describe the specific **ACTIONS** you took as part of a team or individually.

**R** = Summarize the **RESULTS** you achieved, quantify whenever possible.

### TOP TEN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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When answering, it is ok to take a second to articulate a response. This shows confidence and maturity. One main tip to remember is that it is not about what you want. It is always about what YOU CAN DO FOR THE EMPLOYER. By understanding how you can help the employer fulfill their goals, you can begin to formulate answers that demonstrate you are the best person who can get the job done.

Here are 10 interview questions to get you started:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why should I hire you?
3. What is your greatest strength/weakness?
4. Why do you want to work for this company?
5. If I were to talk to your teachers/former employers, what would they say about you?
6. Tell me about a time when you showed initiative.
7. Describe a situation where the client was not happy and how did you handle it?
8. Tell me about a time when you went the extra mile.
9. Give me an example when you failed at something and what did you learn from the experience?
10. Describe a time when you had a difficult decision to make and how did you arrive to your conclusion?

## ***ANALYZE***

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You must determine how your skills relate to the needs of the company and the requirements of the job. Do this by asking probing questions and analyzing the job description. By also understanding what skills, traits and education an employee would have, will help you anticipate what would be expected of you if hired.

- Analyze the job description for a list of knowledge, skills, and abilities desired by the employer
- Create a side-by-side visual of your knowledge, skills, and abilities and show how they relate to those the employer seeks
- Always be able to explain any skills gap you may have and what you are, or have planned, to do to build those needed skills

## ***RESEARCH***

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Gathering information about a company and understanding yourself are keys to help you answer interview questions effectively. Being prepared also alleviates stress and nervousness. Here are the main things that you will need to understand before you walk into the interview:

### **▲ Research the company**

- Visit the company's website to learn what they are about and their mission statement.
- Know what type of service they provide and who their competitors are.
- Read press releases, look at their business information on LinkedIn, talk with your professors and do Google searches.



### **▲ Research the position**

- Familiarize yourself with the position in which you applied.
- Research what type of salary this position is pays.

Feeling in control is one way to keep your cool in stressful interviewing situations. If you can anticipate uncomfortable situations, you can easily manage the stress they cause. With a little research and preparation you can avoid any stress and less likely to sabotage yourself in the interview.

## ***INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE***

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Let's face it, first impressions either MAKE or BREAK any meeting. Be prepared and look professional and you have a better chance of making a good first impression and acing the interview.

### ▲ **Be On Time**

- Being late, even just a couple of minutes, is starting off on the wrong foot and you're making the interviewer wonder if that's the way you'll treat clients, prospects, and fellow employees.
- Make sure you have the right address and a reliable route to the interview.
- Travel the route a day or two early so to anticipate any traffic snags.
- Linger in your car or a coffee shop if you arrive more than 10 minutes early. By arriving too early, you risk creating an awkward moment.

### ▲ **What to Bring**

- Extra copies of your résumé
- A notepad or professional binder, and a pen
- A list of three to four references and information you will need to complete an application if asked

### ▲ **Dress for Success**

- For both men and women, wear a two-piece suit in a conservative color (black, navy, gray or brown) with a dress shirt/blouse/tie that is a neutral shade and not too tight.
- Do not wear anything you would wear to a club.
- Wear clothes that are clean and pressed; without rips, stains, missing buttons, animal hair, or tags.
- Several days prior to the interview, assure yourself that your suit and shoes are clean and ready.

### ▲ **How to Greet the Interviewer**

- Address the interviewer by name whenever possible. If they have a name such as Robert, for example, don't assume it is ok to call them Bob.
- Your handshake should be firm and never limp.

### ▲ **Interview Etiquette**

- Turn off and put away cell phones.
- Maintain positive eye contact and smile when it is appropriate.

## ***DURING THE INTERVIEW***

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During the interview you should always be aware of your nonverbal body language. This speaks volumes and can help you project a positive, confident persona, and sincere interest in the job.

- Pay attention to nonverbal communication. Watch for cues that the interviewer is connecting with you.
- Do not ask personal questions. The interviewer is not your buddy. Do not become chummy with them during the interview.
- Do not let your guard down and provide unnecessary personal information.
- Respect the interviewer's space. Do not place anything on their desk or take anything from their desk without permission.
- Never be the first to talk about salary or benefits.

## ▲ Questions to Ask the Employer

You will always be asked if you have any questions. It is preferred to have a list of five to seven prepared questions to ask at the end of an interview. Asking questions is an opportunity to additionally demonstrate your intelligence, concern for the company and your enthusiasm. Those who ask questions show to be hired more than those who do not ask questions.

Some sample questions may be:

1. What are your primary goals or objectives?
2. Would there be training and how many days would it typically take to complete?
3. How would you judge my success within the first 30/60/90 days?
4. Who are the other people I would be working with?

Things to keep in mind:

1. Do not be the first person to talk about salary or benefits.
2. It is ok to ask for a follow-up interview with the higher managers, or ask for the job.
3. It is your job to convey during the interview how YOU CAN HELP THE EMPLOYER ACCOMPLISH THEIR GOALS.

## ***THE FOLLOW-UP***

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- Understand what their hiring process is and what will happen next.
- Ask if it is ok to call within a certain timeframe. Do follow-up when you say you will.
- If you are offered the position on the spot it is acceptable to ask for a day to think about it.
- Make sure you get business cards of the people you spoke with so you can send a thank you email or a written letter within 24 hours.
- In the thank you letter, reaffirm your interest in the position and retouch upon the reasons why you are the best candidate for the position.

## ▲ When You Follow-Up

- Always call when you say you will. If you do not, they will assume you are not interested anymore.
- If you call and they do not answer, leave a message with your phone number.
- If you do not hear back, call again within two to three days. If they do not answer, again, leave a message and your phone number.
- After the second message, if they do not respond, take that as a sign that you did not get the job.
- Once the hiring process is over, that is when it is safe to reach out on LinkedIn and request a connection. It is always good to keep in touch in case something else comes up. Connecting before then is too soon. Wait!!

Finding a job can be arduous. ***DO NOT give up!*** The career search is a full time job and can take anywhere between two and ten months. For help, please remember the Western Connecticut State University Career Success Center is here to help all students and alumni. Please visit WestConn Works at [www.wcsu.edu/westconnworks](http://www.wcsu.edu/westconnworks) and choose "Career Experts," on the left side, to schedule an appointment with a Career Counselor. We look forward to seeing you!



## Connect with us on WESTCONN WORKS

[www.wcsu.edu/westconnworks](http://www.wcsu.edu/westconnworks)

By launching your WestConn Works account, you will have access to job, and internship postings, campus events and career resources that will help you find employment.

**Office Hours:**

Mon – Fri 8:30 to 4:30

**Drop-In Hours:**

Mon – Fri 9:00 to 4:30

## CONNECT WITH US



Western Connecticut State University – Career Success Center (Group)



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