

SECTION 2

JOB SEARCHING BASICS IN THE U.S.

Whether you have been in the U.S. for one year or for many years, life as a student is different from that of a full-time employee (often referred to as “the real world” by Americans). One of the most important skills to use in your first few months at work is observation. The workplace has its own culture, which can vary from company to company even in the same field.

Resume and Interview Tips
Elevator Speech
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RESUME AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

Just as there are cultural differences in education systems and social life, there are cultural differences in what an employer expects during the interview process. This guide is designed to help international students in the U.S. understand what these cultural differences may be, help them create a U.S. appropriate resume, and prepare for a successful interview process.

Resume

A resume for a U.S. employer (often called a “CV” in other countries), is a concise, attractive marketing tool that summarizes job skills, experiences, and academic background relevant to your employment goals. It is NOT a detailed chronological list of academic and formal work experience.

You SHOULD Include

- Full Name (*given name, family name*)
- Contact Information in the U.S. (email, phone #)
- Education (*highest degree first*)
- Relevant Experience (*most recent first*)
- Leadership Experience (*optional*)
- Honors & Awards (*optional*)
- Languages (*other than English*)

**Find resume guides and samples: at careernetwork.msu.edu/resources-tools/resources.*

You SHOULD NOT Include

- TOEFL Score
- Photograph
- Immigration Status
- Age
- Hometown/Home Country
- Marital Status
- Race/Ethnicity
- Religion
- Personal Interests or Hobbies

Interviewing

The most difficult thing for many international students during the interview process is “selling themselves.” The U.S. is a highly individualistic, direct culture where employers expect you to show confidence in yourself and enthusiasm for the job. To do this, you must openly discuss your goals and accomplishments in order to convince them you are the best candidate for the job. Some international students feel boastful and disrespectful when trying to discuss their qualifications in such an individualistic manner, but this is a situation where it is important that you practice expressing yourself confidently without sounding arrogant. Learning to find the appropriate language is often difficult, so it is very important that you take advantage of practice or “mock” interviews with Career Services.

You SHOULD

- Be on time
- Maintain eye contact
- Anticipate questions regarding ability and experience
- Openly discuss your accomplishments
- Be direct and give specific examples that demonstrate your experience
- Be prepared to discuss your strengths and weaknesses
- Research the organization
- Follow-up your interview with a thank you note
- Interview guide and sample questions: <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/jobs-internships/interviewing/interview-questions.html>

You SHOULD NOT

- Be late
- Disclose age, race, marital status (*it is illegal for them to ask you such personal questions*)
- Answer questions indirectly
- Avoid responding to questions that require to you talk about your accomplishments and personal career goals
- Treat anyone you meet differently based on education, job title, sex, age, etc. (*politeness and respect are shown to all employees a candidate meets, whether a receptionist or CEO*)

THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

An elevator speech is a 30 to 60-second introduction that is a concise, well-practiced marketing message about your professional self. Think of it as a personal commercial! Whether you're on the phone, in person at a networking event, or informally chatting with a friend or relative, you will have a "ready-made" answer to these kinds of questions:

- Tell me about yourself?
- What are you hoping to do when you graduate?

Clarify Your Job Target

Know what type of experience or position you are looking for and tailor your pitch to be relevant to your goal.

Put it on Paper

Write down one or two highlights you'd like a potential employer to know about your skills, accomplishments, and experiences.

Format it, Practice it!

While there are a few skills and experiences to highlight in your pitch, practice ways to customize it for particular situations. Be sure to rehearse and get feedback from others.

Say it With Confidence

Remember to maintain eye contact and be calm. Avoid sounding overly rehearsed.

Incorporate Follow-Up Questions to Continue the Conversation

Your elevator pitch is often the start of a conversation. Consider how you might end your statement with a question about the company, opportunity or the person with whom you are speaking.

Who are you?

What do you do?

What are you looking for?

Common Mistakes

Lack of confidence in what you have to offer.

"I don't have a lot of experience yet."

Lack of focus or goals.

"I have a lot of interests and don't want to limit myself."

NETWORKING TIPS

Get Out of Your Comfort Zone

Challenge yourself to attend networking and social events to talk with people. If English is not your first language make the effort to interact with English speakers and use your 'Elevator Speech'! Attend OISS Coffee Hour (<https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/about/feature/weekly-coffee-hour/>), which is held each Friday from 4-6pm in the International Center.

Understand Cultural Differences

Take the time to understand and address different business cultures and how to network. When networking at events and social gatherings, be aware of language cues and general etiquette. For example, in U.S business culture, it is appropriate to speak about yourself and your qualifications.

Be Proactive Online

When searching for opportunities, use credible resources for employment information, industry trends, and business culture in the country you are seeking employment. Connect with industry professionals using social media: Use Twitter and LinkedIn to also participate in news articles and posts written. Don't forget to be cautious of language choice when posting or writing to professionals.

Be an Active Listener

It's important to be an active listener when networking. When seeking information about a certain job, career, or industry, it is important to show sincerity and interest. Take brief notes on the key points. Remember to ask for business cards or contact information and be sure to follow-up afterwards a thank you email, or connection on social media. *Tip: Write what you talked about and when/where you met on the back of their business card.*

Don't be Discouraged

Building your network takes a lot of time and energy. Not everyone you reach out to will necessarily respond to you. Don't take it personally, and don't give up! Move on to the next person. More often than not, people are more than willing to speak to students.

INFORMATIVE INTERVIEW

What is Informal Interviewing?

Informational interviewing entails finding individuals in your field of interest, and asking them questions regarding their work that will eventually help you in determining whether or not that a particular field of work is a good “fit” for you. At the same time, you begin a new relationship with someone who can begin to mentor and advise you along your chosen path.



Objectives of Informational Interviews

To Learn More

If you hope to find what a specific career path has to offer, what the positives and negatives are within an organization’s culture, or which academic major will prepare you best for a selected career path -- why not ask the people who already working within that field?

To Build Relationships

USA Today posted the question, “*How did you find your present position (jobs)?*” Almost 70% of those surveyed claimed that they were able to obtain their position because of someone they knew. In other words, most of us attribute our career success to personal relationships. The earlier you start building relationships with people in your field of interest, the stronger they will be. This can significantly improve your professional network you’ll use when you actually begin your job hunt.



Where Do I Start?

Informational Interviewing is a networking process. On the following page is a guide for making contacts and gathering information from them. As you go through the process, focus on obtaining information relevant to your career objectives while building lasting relationships. The sooner you begin, the more prepared you will be to make career decisions pertaining to internships and full time positions.



INFORMATION INTERVIEW PROCESS

1 Network Through Friends and Family

You will be amazed at how many contacts you may be able to make through existing relationships. Ask, “Who do you know that...” and be sure to obtain contact information. Let your friends and family members know that your intent is to contact this person to learn more about their career field. MSU Alumni, your professors and advisors, and LinkedIn are also useful in helping you identify people you may wish to meet.

2 Schedule Meeting

Call or e-mail the new contact and let them know that:

- **You are an MSU student studying (your academic field)**
- **Your friend/advisor/etc. suggested that you contact them for career advice**
- **Ask if they have 30 minutes available to talk about their background and experience** you have about the field in which they work (face-to-face appointments are best, but a phone conversation is fine)
- **You can even invite them to coffee!**

3 Write out Your Schedule

Remember, you are the interviewer so be prepared. Make a list of questions that you have. Be sure to show a substantial interest in the career field and the organization. For example, you may want to ask:

- **What has been your career path?**
- **Can you describe a typical work day?**
- **What do you like best/least about your job/company?**
- **Sample questions can be found on the Career Services Network**

Final Three Questions

4 Once you are ready to end the discussion (keep an eye on the clock, you only asked for 15-30 minutes!), ask three final questions:

- **Would you be open to reviewing my resume?**
- **Who else do you know that might give me further insight into this field, and can I contact them?**
- **Would you mind if I kept in touch with you?**

5 Follow-Up

Make sure to show your appreciation for their time. Send a thank you note or email and let them know what you learned. As you continue to study the field, approach your new contact with questions that come up, and as you strengthen the relationship ask if they know of any opportunities to gain experience.

Thank you note and email source: <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/resources-tools/thank-you-letters/index.html>

MANAGING YOUR DIGITAL IDENTITY

Your online identity or “brand “ is any online information that exists about you, whether you created it or not. Social networking sites, including Facebook, are part of your public image. The material you post and the things you write will influence an employer’s or graduate schools’ impression of you, for better or for worse. Employers, graduate schools, and other programs use social media sites in their recruitment and selection processes. Know what is out there with your name on it. If you can search for it, so can someone else.

Check Your Current Online Identity

Review your public email address(es): Is each address professional?

Google yourself: Are you comfortable with an employer or graduate school seeing what you found?

For each social networking site (Facebook, Twitter, etc): Would you be comfortable if someone else were to see your profile, photos, groups and comments? Are you tagged in any photos online?

If you’ve posted your resume online: Are you comfortable with the privacy policy where your resume is posted? You may want to omit your street address and phone number for safety and privacy.

If you have your own website: Are you comfortable with an employer or graduate school seeing what you’ve written, posted and/or compiled?

Clean Up Your Online Identity

The next step is to target potential problems you’ve identified and clean them up.

Identify the easier areas to address first, like your own social media profiles or website, then tackle the tougher ones like contacting friends regarding the embarrassing photos in which you are tagged.

There are some pieces that are a part of the public record and can’t be removed, like police logs and newspaper articles.

Build Your Online Identity or Brand

Now that you know what’s out there, and have worked to clean up your image, you are ready to begin proactively building your brand with intentionality.

The simplest step you can take to guarantee that the first Google link with your name on it is professional is to create a LinkedIn profile.

LinkedIn is a great way to professionally display your skills, accomplishments and your goals while building meaningful relationships.

Creating a professional online presence can help you find a job!

SOURCE: <https://www.pomona.edu/administration/career-development/how-to/networking/managing-your-online-identity>

PRESENTATION TIPS

Before the Presentation

Understand the content.

- Know your audience and create your presentation accordingly
- Know the key points you want your audience to take away

Design your slides well.

- Have a simple background with less detailed text and more bullet points in each slide

Use visual aides.

- Visuals aides help your audience understand better
- Use high resolution images to avoid blurry pictures during the slide show
- When using graphs, tables and charts, the simpler the better, don't forget to label them

Choose the right fonts.

- Large and Simple fonts are easier to read
- Use Serif Fonts (e.g. Times New Roman) for printouts and Sans Fonts (e.g. Arial) for projector/computer screens

Spellcheck and proofread

- Typos make the presentation look bad, make sure you check the presentation and any handouts you may have.

Ensure that your formatting is consistent

- Check headings, subheads, alignment, placements, and fonts on each slide
- Don't use more than 2 fonts

Practice, Practice, Practice!

- Present to yourself or with someone
- Arrive early to run a check on the video or audio in your presentation location

During the Presentation

Be prepared.

- Have water available for yourself
- Make sure the room is well-lit
- Have a backup plan for delivering the presentation if all of your audiovisual materials become unavailable. Do not rely on technology!

Have a strong introduction.

- Smile and introduce yourself
- Make a concise explanation of the purpose of the presentation

Present confidently.

- Focus on delivering your message, not on how you feel
- Talk to your audience, not at them
- Never read your presentation slides word for word.
- Occasionally move from one spot to another, stop, and then continue to speak. Don't pace!

Let the audience ask questions.

- If you are unsure of how to answer, do not create a false answer! Offer to look into it further and follow-up with them, or direct it to the rest of the audience (do any of you have experience with this? How would you answer this?)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Networking Tips

<http://nyuwassermanblog.career.admin.nyu.edu/2013/10/networking-tips-from-international-nyu-alumni/>

Informational Interviewing

www.careernetwork.msu.edu