



# Table of Contents

Define your goals -----	3
Getting organized before your job search -----	8
Networking -----	11
Navigating the job description -----	13
Getting organized prior to your interview -----	16
Preparing for the interview -----	19
Seniors and/or second career folks -----	22
Applying for remote / online jobs -----	25
Looking for employment during a recession -----	27
Wrapping up -----	29



## Define Your Goals before Job Hunting

Job hunting, especially if you really need a job right away, can be very stressful. One of the mistakes that's easy to make is to rush in (especially if you are desperate) and end up in a job that ultimately disappoints. To help avoid that, it's a good idea to take a moment (and a few deep breaths) and define your goals before job hunting.

How do you do that? Let's take a look at how to identify your goals, and how to specify them.

### Putting Goals in the Driver's Seat

First, try getting into the goal mindset. It's been said that your goals should direct your job search, not the other way around. Sometimes, we take what we can get and then find ourselves building up a career we never really wanted and may not be qualified for ultimately. So put your goals in the driver's seat and let them steer your job search.

### Proactive, Not Reactive

Another component of the goal-setting mindset is to be proactive. If you wait for an employer to advertise his or her need for help, you may be waiting a while. Some sources suggest that the majority of job openings are never advertised to the public.

So, a proactive approach is to search out the company or employer for whom you want to work rather than waiting for them to search for you. Get your mind in a proactive stance and get ready to search for employers that fit your criteria and will help you further your career goals, and contact them.

Now that you have the proper mindset, let's look at some specific goals to help you on your way.

### **What Are Your Skills?**

Take an honest look at your skills. Let this be an exercise that is not influenced by what you think an employer would want; you're not filling out an application or writing a resume yet. This is intended for you to really see what you're good at - write down anything you are able to do, from childcare to cooking, writing to data entry. There are no "right" skills here. You may even surprise yourself!

### **What's Your Experience?**

Now you can take a look at what experience you have. It doesn't have to be job-related; raising a family, helping with community service, or organizing a church event are all relevant experiences. Write down a list of these experiences.

## **Connect**

Now connect your skills with your experiences. You might see career ideas opening up that you hadn't thought of. Is one of your skills cooking? Do you have experience preparing food for a community event? Maybe you could be a meal coordinator for a facility like a hospital or nursing home, or maybe you want to open a restaurant. Make connections between your skills and experience, and you will be well on your way toward defining your career goals and job hunting accordingly.

## **Prepare Yourself Mentally and Emotionally for Your Job Search**

When you think of preparing for a job search, you may visualize gathering paperwork and making lists. While these are components of preparing to look for a job, it's important not to neglect the mental and emotional preparation that is also necessary. Here are some tips for getting ready mentally and emotionally for your job search.

## **Rehearse**

Go ahead and anticipate some of the questions the interviewer will ask, or that you think he or she will ask. If possible, find out from others what kinds of questions tend to be asked at this company, and find out as much as you can about the company. You can determine their values and goals, and figure out much of what they are looking for in an employee.

When you rehearse, you might want to do so before a mirror. This helps you prepare your mind for the interview, and understand how you are perceived by others.

## **Relaxation Exercises**

Relaxation exercises help prepare you both mentally and emotionally. They help you get your attention focused, centered, and calm. Deep breathing is one such exercise; meditation takes it a bit further along the preparedness scale. Doing these kinds of exercises before your interview can help get your mindset in the right place, and your emotions calmed down.

## **Remember - It's Not Personal**

One of the ways to prepare yourself for your interview is to recognize that you might not be accepted for the job. After all, not everyone who applies lands the position; it's just a fact of life. So before your interview, go over how you will respond if the answer is no.

Have some steps planned out and some practical things you can do in the face of rejection. This can help ease the emotional upset that comes from getting a "no" answer. Make sure, though, that you don't take this too far - you don't want to go in with a defeated attitude or with the idea that you "know" you won't make it. This is just a preparatory attitude - just in case you don't get the job, you have a plan. This may make you more relaxed anyway, and you won't appear desperate to the interviewer.

## Visualization

Visualizing yourself in a successful position with the company helps get your mind ready for success. Get a good mental picture of what your position will look like. Visualize interactions with co-workers in the hall; imagine the smell of the office and the sound of typing on your computer; imagine talking to a satisfied client or customer on the phone.

Mentally visualize the sensory experience of the job you want, whether you're applying for a job as a waitperson or executive. It's said that positive visualization actually enhances your chances of success.

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## Getting Organized before You Begin Your Job Search

So you're ready to start your job search! Are you organized? While most people acknowledge that it's important to be organized for an interview, it's easy to overlook the importance of getting organized before you even get to the interview point. Taking an organized approach can help you stay focused and reduces wasted time and energy. Here are some suggestions and tips for getting organized before your job search begins.

### Create a Spreadsheet

If you prefer to do this on paper or on a different type of software, that's fine, too. The point is to keep a record of where, when, and how you applied to various jobs. On this spreadsheet, you can include slots for the following information:

- \* Company/prospective employer name and contact information
- \* Hiring manager's name and contact information
- \* Date you applied
- \* How you applied (online, by mail, etc.)
- \* Position name/title



- \* Follow-up date

- \* Impressions of the company (this can be your personal opinion and impression of the company, or something unique about them to help jog your memory)

- \* Requirements for the position

- \* Anything else that will help you stay organized, such as driving directions, building description, etc.

## **Manage Your Resumes**

As you apply for various jobs, you will be tweaking and fine-tuning your resume to fit that position - you'll want to emphasize your skills that are relevant to that job. That means you can end up with several different versions of your resume.

To help handle this large number of files, consider setting up folders in your word processing software to keep them straight. Depending on how many different jobs you're applying for, create a folder for each job field or each prospective employer. If you are applying strictly for sales jobs, for instance, then you might want to organize your folders by prospective employer. If you are applying for various jobs with different skill sets, such as a marketing, editor, and secretary, you could organize your resumes by job type.

## Email

Email inboxes can get cluttered fast. Before you start your job search, get your email set up to handle the correspondence between you and your prospective employers. Create a general folder for correspondence relating to your job search, and nest subfolders under this heading that are named for particular companies or job types. Don't forget to label and file outgoing emails as well.

As you prepare yourself beforehand, you can save yourself a lot of trouble and streamline the job search process. Hopefully, you will increase your chances of success, too.

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## Job Search Preparation: Networking

Networking is a key component to preparing for your job search. If you've ever heard it said that it's not what you know but who, then you've heard a reference to networking. Although you may know about the importance of networking, you might not know where to begin, or how to go about it. Here are some networking tips for your job search preparation.

### Begin with the Familiar

Sources say that it's best to begin with those who you know, and who are fairly close to you. That takes a great deal of pressure off, and helps you begin your networking on familiar ground. Also, close acquaintances and friends can be honest with you about your approach.

### Informational Interviews

Networking is intended to be a learning experience. Conducting informational interviews is one way to learn a great deal without pressuring the other person. When you do an informational interview, you are just speaking with someone who is successful in a field that you would like to enter. If you want a career in restaurant management, for instance, you can conduct informational interviews with restaurant managers to get their take on things. Make it clear that you are not searching for a job at that time; you are just gathering information.

In this kind of interchange, you will be asking the questions for the most part. As you meet with the professional in your chosen field, bring along a notebook and take notes on what the person tells you. And him or her questions about hours, work level, first steps he or she took to get started, and other pertinent questions.

## **Make Them Comfortable**

It's important to make the networking partner feel at ease and comfortable. Keep the talk at a casual, friendly chat level, as if you are just having lunch with a friend (which you are!).

## **Be Memorable**

...in a good way. The point to successful networking is to have professionals remember your name and have your contact information handy if they hear of a position or job in the field, or if they want to take on an apprentice or a trainee. So make sure you leave them with your phone number, email, and website address (because you will have a website - see below).

## **An Online Presence**

To network in today's world, you need an online presence. It's a good idea to join social networking sites and to set up a blog or website. This makes you accessible to anyone who might want to look into what you do a bit further. It's an easy reference to tell people your site's address, too.

## It's in the Details - How to Navigate a Job Description

Before applying for a job, it's important to understand fully the details of the job description. You can glean information from the "small print" that many others may miss, giving you an edge. Discerning the details of a job description helps you tailor your resume to meet the needs you find "hidden" in the description language. Here are some tips for getting at the details and understanding them.

### Character Traits

Look carefully at the job description. Does it list character traits like "honest" or "hard working"? Those things might be assumed for any job, but the fact that the employer listed them means that those traits are important. It could also mean that those traits were lacking in the previous employee.

If you possess traits that are listed in the description, don't just list those on your resume. (Don't just write, "I am hard working and honest.") Instead, think of examples of times when you were hard working and honest, and note those. For instance, you might point out a time when you noted a mistake that would have been in your favor had you been quiet about it (honesty), or write down an experience where you offered to work overtime (hard working).

It's important to demonstrate, not just recite, those traits that will make you a good fit for the job.

## Seemingly Unrelated Skills

Buried in the job description, there may be details about skills or traits that don't seem to relate to the job at hand. Don't overlook these - they are in the description for a reason. Maybe the employer is looking for someone who pays attention to detail, and just the fact that you saw this fine print and acknowledged it in your resume by providing examples might put you in their favor.

## Ask about Details

If the job description is vague, then by all means ask your prospective employer about specifics. Make a comprehensive list so you don't have to ask questions multiple times, and sit down with him or her to discuss your list. Your employer might have been waiting for someone like you who can take something nebulous and clarify it - that might be one of the skills they are looking for! So don't fear that you will look ignorant if you ask questions, as long as they are clear and relevant.

## Watch Out for "Growth" References

Some companies express their lack of budget in language like "opportunities for growth." This may mean that you'll be working weekends as the only employee in a company that can't afford another worker! It also may mean that it truly is a great opportunity. Just be watchful that you don't get duped by this phrase.



## Getting Organized for Your Job Interview

Organization is foundational for a successful job interview. Even if you don't land the position, if you're organized you can still have a successful interview by making a good impression on your interviewer. You'd be surprised how making good impressions and connections can ultimately benefit your job search, even if you don't get that particular job.

Of course, being organized ups your chances at landing the position, especially if your interviewer is looking for organizational skills. Actions speak louder than words! Having documents, paperwork, and so forth in order will help your interview go a lot more smoothly. Here are some tips for getting organized for your job search.

### Customize Your Resume and Cover Letter

Form letters and resume formats are fine to start, but tweak your information to make sure it fits that particular job. You have various experiences in your life, some of which might be relevant to this job and some which may not be. You'll want to emphasize those skills that have something to do with the position you are applying for.

For instance, you may have a lot of administrative experience but you're applying for a leadership position. Look back on your experiences and think of times you've been a leader - Scouts, leading a school group, etc. - and emphasize that experience over the administrative experience.



Sources point out that thinking of your employer's needs and how you can meet them is a key mindset in preparing effective resumes and cover letters.

## **Have Your Own Copy**

As you get ready for your interview, have copies of everything you've sent to your prospective employer. He or she will probably have your resume and cover letter, but bring your own copy, too. This helps keep you focused on the interview at hand, especially if you are applying for more than one job. Bring along a copy of any correspondence you've had with the prospective employer, too, such as emails and letters both to and from the employer.

## **Calendar**

If you use a paper calendar, make sure you have it ready and updated. The same is true for an electronic calendar - make sure it's up and running and current.

## **Prepare for Tough Questions**

Make yourself some notes and place them in the binder or folder you're bringing to the interview (of course you will have all of your paperwork in a binder or folder!). Only you will be seeing this, of course, but make some notes for yourself about some tough questions you might encounter. Before

the interview, practice these questions and bring along brief notes to prompt you as to your answer.

## References

Many times, the interview is the time to talk about references. If your resume has "references available upon request" at the bottom, then make sure you have all your references' contact information ready. Check with your referees beforehand and let them all know you are going in for an interview, and give them a heads-up that they may be contacted. Then bring the information along in printed format, so you can just hand your interviewer the information on a sheet of paper.

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## How to Prepare for a Job Interview

Once the application process is underway, you may find yourself called in for an interview. Congratulations! But are you ready? Do you feel like you're prepared? Even if you do feel prepared, it never hurts to evaluate and see if there are any tips you can use. Here are some ideas to help you prepare for a job interview.

### Research the Company

Prospective employers are more impressed by candidates who know something about their company. Find out everything you can about their business, including a little history. If you can find out the bios of the company's leaders, all the better. Find out their mission statement, their goals, and other relevant information. Try to connect this knowledge with interview questions, too.

### Practice

You may feel silly doing this, but it's important. Look for possible interview questions, and really think about ways you've handled situations in the past. Interviewers are taking a more "behavioral" approach to job interviews these days, which means they are looking for examples of your ability to engage in certain behaviors (such as quick decision making) that would benefit the company. They tend to ask you for examples and present scenarios rather than just asking you to describe what you're good at.

## **Honest Answers**

Sources say that you really shouldn't try to fudge your way through an interview. You may get caught in the middle of your tall tale, which can be embarrassing (and may lose your chances at the job). After all, you really don't know just what the interviewer is looking for with his or her questions, so pulling out a textbook-style answer that you think he or she wants to hear may not be the best answer at all.

## **Timeliness**

It's very important to be on time for a job interview. Make sure you leave your house early enough to arrive on time and get yourself settled and "centered" before you're called back to interview. Some prospective employers will not even go through with the interview if you're late.

## **Be Prepared**

You'll want to bring a calendar, electronic or otherwise, and a pen and paper to take notes. This not only shows preparedness; it prevents the awkward situation of having to ask your interviewer for a pen and paper.

## Turn It Off

Make sure your cell phone or other electronic device(s) is/are turned off. You don't want your phone going off in the middle of an interview.

## What Makes You Unique?

Think of this as your "selling point." What is it about you that makes you stand out? While you don't want to appear to be self-centered, it's good to recognize your strengths in general as well as the particular strength(s) that qualify you for this specific job. Make sure you think this through before the interview.

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## Tips for Job-Hunting Seniors / Second Career Folks

In today's economy, many older people are finding themselves in need of a job. If you are a senior looking for work, you might feel out of the loop. It helps to have some idea how to go about job hunting as a senior, because it is different from job searches as a young adult. Here are some tips to get you back into the world of work and hopefully increase your chances of success.

### Update Your Resume

Seniors may find that their resume is extremely long after their years of experience. Consider going over your resume with someone who is an expert or experienced. He or she can help you pare it down to include relevant information and highlight pertinent skills and experience. Even if you don't go with an expert, do your research to find out what modern resumes look like and what employers want.

### Practice

How can you practice the job-hunting process - from sending out a resume to getting an interview - without endangering your chances of success? One thing you can do is apply for a job you're not interested in, or that is not a good fit. That may sound odd, but think of it as training ground. You can practice interviewing skills without so much pressure. Another good

way to practice is to have a friend or family member ask you interview questions.

## **Look at Temp Firms**

Temp agencies are a good way to get your feet wet. A lot of temporary job firms are more interested in your experience than your age, and it's not unlike another form of practice. If it's a temporary job, you can learn from it even if you are moving on.

## **Stay Competitive**

One important way to stay competitive in the job market is to update and build your skills. There are learning communities on the internet specifically geared to get you up-to-date on important skills like computer knowledge and organizational skills. Also, friends and family members can help you brush up on your skills or learn new ones that are necessary in today's workforce.

## **Emphasize Your Experience**

Did you know there are companies that seek to employ seniors because they value your experience? Groups like AARP offer a comprehensive list of such companies. When you apply for jobs, make sure you emphasize your life experiences that are relevant to the position, from parenting to running a household to skills honed in prior job experience. Many seniors have been leaders in their children's schools and





## How to Prepare for an Online Job Application

In the modern world, working online is becoming more and more common. There are perks for the employer and the employee - employers do not have to provide office space, parking, or office equipment; employees do not have to drive to work, buy a new wardrobe, or use gasoline to go to work. With computers and online connections becoming so commonplace, online jobs are becoming equally common.

So how do you prepare for a job online? Here are some tips.

### Consider a Website or Blog

You can simply submit resumes online, but if you have a specific skill set you can offer (and anyone searching for a job does!), then consider setting up a website or blog that has pertinent information for prospective employers to peruse. Such a site would include samples of your work, a compelling home page with an overview of your skills and experience, and contact information.

### Focus and Refine

When you are looking for an online job, consider looking for a company for which you want to work and contacting the hiring manager. This is a different approach than applying for job postings. Targeting a specific company and offering your skills helps refine your search to include only

those types of jobs you really want, and those employers who are most likely to want you. You may find a page on the company's website where you can fill out a form and provide a profile.

## **Social Networking**

If you're going to be working online, then it may pay to have an online presence. Online groups like LinkedIn are helpful for exchanging business and contact information (not unlike the way people exchange business cards in real life).

In addition to the general social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook (you can do a professional page on Facebook in addition to or instead of your personal one), take a look at job boards that target your niche. For instance, there are job boards geared toward freelance writers, editors, and web designers. Join one of these that matches your skill set.

## **Don't Shy Away from Videos**

Have you thought about doing a video resume, or augmenting your text resume with a video? This can act as a precursor to an interview; prospective employers can see your demeanor, what you look like, your speaking style, and so forth. Consider preparing a video resume. You can post this on your website, and also send it round to various prospective employers.

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## Tips for a Successful Job Search in a Recession

Searching for a job tends to be stressful no matter what the economy is like. But during a recession, it can be nerve-racking. The competition is stiff, and there are no guarantees of success. Even without guarantees, though, there are some things you can do to increase your chances of success. There are still companies, businesses, and individuals who need employees. Here are some tips for a successful job search in a recession.

### Expand Your Horizons

This may seem like vague advice, but apply it to various areas and you'll see its benefit. For instance, expand your definition of a "good" job, and open your mind to possibilities like temporary jobs and online work. Even freelancing is something you can consider if you start to expand your horizons a little bit. Before beginning your job search, take some time to expand your thinking box - or, even better, think outside of it! So approach things with an open mind.

### Be Willing to Settle (to an extent)

You may be a very intelligent person who would love a job that challenges your intellect, but during tough economic times it doesn't always pay to be picky. Remember, you can take a less-than-ideal job and still keep up your search for that perfect job. At the same time, you don't want to apply for a job that is so out of your league that you won't perform well at it.

## Why Do They Want You?

Also known as "selling yourself," figuring out why a company would want to hire you helps you get a grip on your strengths. You have something to offer a company, and it's important to lay hold of what that is. A good business relationship meets the needs of both parties - your need for a job is met and the company's need for an employee is met. So think through what you specifically can offer. Your unique experiences and outlooks can bring a fresh appeal to an interviewer who may be tired of the "same old strengths" that everyone touts (like being a "team player").

## Lists

Building on the point above, make lists of your strengths and weaknesses, and take this a step further. List not only what these strengths and weaknesses are, but how you will talk about them during an interview.

For instance, maybe one of your strengths is making people feel comfortable. Write this on your list, then make notes about how that particular skill applies to this job you're applying for. Note how you'll talk about it and what you'll say. The same goes for weaknesses - if you are asked about these, cite examples of how you overcame that weakness in the past, or ways that you work with or around that weakness.

