

Although entering into a career and searching for a job may seem daunting and impossible, remember that when you started college, completing your degree probably felt the same way. By relying on your own knowledge and skills and the advice of trusted professors and advisors, transitioning from an undergraduate to a professional will soon feel far less intimidating. This chapter provides some ideas and hints not only for looking for a potential employer but in applying and interviewing for a job.

### **Looking for a Job**

In the age of the Internet, looking for a job is easier than ever. While you might have a specific opening or job type in mind, young job seekers should also keep an open mind about the types of opportunities available. Some may appear to be “beneath you,” but in these cases, getting a foot in the door in a lower-level position can be helpful. You may come to understand your employer and their needs better and how you can help them in fulfilling their goals. You can also get a broader handle on the contours and rigors of the job to ensure that that particular line of employment is what you are looking for. Finally, you may become interested in something other than what you originally started out wanting through that initial position. Of course, this does not mean that you shouldn't aim high, just that you should be open minded as you head out of college and into a career.

There are various websites and sources available for young job seekers with a political science degree. If you are looking for a job in the federal government, your first stop should be USAJobs.gov. USA Jobs is the destination for applying for all federal positions other than the Foreign Service. Not only can you search available opportunities, you can and should post your résumé to the site, which will allow agencies to recruit you directly. At the time of this writing, the federal bureaucracy has a program for recent college graduates who have graduated within two years (or six years for military veterans). The recent-graduates program provides a position along with specialized career training that can lead to a permanent position within the bureaucracy. The program allows graduates to transition from college into a career path in government. For information on this and other job opportunities for recent graduates, visit <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students>.

Additionally, when looking to apply to the federal government, keep in mind that agencies often give priority to certain classes of individuals, including military veterans and their spouses, individuals with disabilities, and minorities. Be sure to highlight any potential hiring advantage you may have on both your résumé and USA Jobs profile.

The only federal employment not listed on USAJobs.gov is that of a Foreign Service officer (FSO). Becoming an FSO is an arduous process, as outlined previously, and includes the completion of the Foreign Service officer test and submission of a personal narrative as initial steps. For further information on this process, as well as instructions on how to register for the test, visit <https://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/officer>.

Once again, working in Congress does not necessarily mean only working for a member of the House or Senate on her or his personal staff. Staffers and assistants are needed to help committees across Capitol Hill and fill the ranks of associated congressional organizations, like the Congressional Budget Office and the Government Accountability Office. The House of Representatives career page can be found at <http://www.house.gov/content/jobs> and offers information on employment with members and other House offices. The Senate's website is [https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/visiting/h\\_multi\\_sections\\_and\\_teasers/employment.htm](https://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/visiting/h_multi_sections_and_teasers/employment.htm). For careers with the CBO, visit <https://www.cbo.gov/about/careers/jobs>, and for the GAO, visit <http://gao.gov/careers/index.html>.

If you wish to work for a state or local government or government agency, the search process can be a bit more convoluted. Most every state has a website like USA Jobs, which can provide information on available job openings and directions for applying. Once again, however, requirements for state employment do vary from state to state. For example, in Oklahoma, you must first apply through their employment website for available openings, and if you meet the basic requirements, you may be asked to complete a merit examination. Florida, on the other hand, does not have a requirement for such a test. No matter the state in which you are applying, be sure to completely understand not just the requirements for the job in which you are interested but what you must complete in order to be considered for it.

### State Government Employment Websites

Alabama	<a href="https://personnel.alabama.gov">https://personnel.alabama.gov</a>
Alaska	<a href="http://jobs.alaska.gov">http://jobs.alaska.gov</a>
Arizona	<a href="http://www.hr.az.gov/AZStateJobs">http://www.hr.az.gov/AZStateJobs</a>
Arkansas	<a href="http://www.arkansas.gov/jobs">http://www.arkansas.gov/jobs</a>
California	<a href="https://jobs.ca.gov">https://jobs.ca.gov</a>
Colorado	<a href="https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dhr/jobs">https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dhr/jobs</a>
Connecticut	<a href="http://das.ct.gov/employment">das.ct.gov/employment</a>
Delaware	<a href="http://delawarestatejobs.com">http://delawarestatejobs.com</a>
Florida	<a href="https://jobs.myflorida.com">https://jobs.myflorida.com</a>
Georgia	<a href="http://team.georgia.gov/careers">http://team.georgia.gov/careers</a>
Hawaii	<a href="http://dhrd.hawaii.gov/job-seekers">http://dhrd.hawaii.gov/job-seekers</a>
Idaho	<a href="https://dhr.idaho.gov">https://dhr.idaho.gov</a>
Illinois	<a href="http://work.illinois.gov">work.illinois.gov</a>
Indiana	<a href="http://www.in.gov/spd/careers">http://www.in.gov/spd/careers</a>
Iowa	<a href="https://das.iowa.gov/human-resources/state-employment">https://das.iowa.gov/human-resources/state-employment</a>
Kansas	<a href="http://admin.ks.gov/services/state-employment-center/sec-home">http://admin.ks.gov/services/state-employment-center/sec-home</a>
Kentucky	<a href="https://careers.ky.gov">https://careers.ky.gov</a>
Louisiana	<a href="http://www.civilservice.louisiana.gov">http://www.civilservice.louisiana.gov</a>
Maine	<a href="http://www.maine.gov/bhr/state_jobs">http://www.maine.gov/bhr/state_jobs</a>
Maryland	<a href="http://www.dbm.maryland.gov/jobseekers/Pages/jobseekersHome.aspx">http://www.dbm.maryland.gov/jobseekers/Pages/jobseekersHome.aspx</a>
Massachusetts	<a href="http://www.mass.gov/portal/employment/finding-a-job">http://www.mass.gov/portal/employment/finding-a-job</a>
Michigan	<a href="http://www.michigan.gov/mdcs/0,1607,7-147-6876---,00.html">http://www.michigan.gov/mdcs/0,1607,7-147-6876---,00.html</a>
Minnesota	<a href="https://mn.gov/mmb/careers">https://mn.gov/mmb/careers</a>
Mississippi	<a href="https://www.mspb.ms.gov">https://www.mspb.ms.gov</a>
Missouri	<a href="http://www.mo.gov/work/job-seekers">http://www.mo.gov/work/job-seekers</a>
Montana	<a href="https://statecareers.mt.gov">https://statecareers.mt.gov</a>
Nebraska	<a href="http://statejobs.nebraska.gov">http://statejobs.nebraska.gov</a>
Nevada	<a href="http://nv.gov/employment">http://nv.gov/employment</a>
New Hampshire	<a href="https://das.nh.gov/hr">https://das.nh.gov/hr</a>
New Jersey	<a href="http://www.state.nj.us/nj/employ">http://www.state.nj.us/nj/employ</a>
New Mexico	<a href="http://www.spo.state.nm.us">http://www.spo.state.nm.us</a>
New York	<a href="https://www.ny.gov/services/employment">https://www.ny.gov/services/employment</a>
North Carolina	<a href="http://www.nc.gov/jobs">http://www.nc.gov/jobs</a>
North Dakota	<a href="https://www.nd.gov/category.htm?id=95">https://www.nd.gov/category.htm?id=95</a>
Ohio	<a href="http://careers.ohio.gov">http://careers.ohio.gov</a>
Oklahoma	<a href="https://www.jobaps.com/OK">https://www.jobaps.com/OK</a>
Oregon	<a href="http://www.oregon.gov/employ/pages/default.aspx">http://www.oregon.gov/employ/pages/default.aspx</a>
Pennsylvania	<a href="http://employment.pa.gov/SitePages/Home.aspx">http://employment.pa.gov/SitePages/Home.aspx</a>
Rhode Island	<a href="http://www.apply.ri.gov">http://www.apply.ri.gov</a>

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South Carolina	<a href="http://www.admin.sc.gov/humanresources/applicant-information/career-opportunities">http://www.admin.sc.gov/humanresources/applicant-information/career-opportunities</a>
South Dakota	<a href="http://sd.gov/employment.aspx">http://sd.gov/employment.aspx</a>
Tennessee	<a href="https://www.tn.gov/hr/topic/employment-opportunities">https://www.tn.gov/hr/topic/employment-opportunities</a>
Texas	<a href="http://www.twc.state.tx.us/jobseekers/job-search">http://www.twc.state.tx.us/jobseekers/job-search</a>
Utah	<a href="http://statejobs.utah.gov/jobseeker">http://statejobs.utah.gov/jobseeker</a>
Vermont	<a href="http://humanresources.vermont.gov">http://humanresources.vermont.gov</a>
Virginia	<a href="http://jobs.virginia.gov">http://jobs.virginia.gov</a>
Washington	<a href="http://careers.wa.gov">http://careers.wa.gov</a>
West Virginia	<a href="http://www.personnel.wv.gov/job_seekers/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.personnel.wv.gov/job_seekers/Pages/default.aspx</a>
Wisconsin	<a href="https://wisc.jobs/public/index.asp">https://wisc.jobs/public/index.asp</a>
Wyoming	<a href="http://ai-hrd.wyo.gov/human-resources-division/job-seekers">http://ai-hrd.wyo.gov/human-resources-division/job-seekers</a>

If you are considering a career in teaching, again, it is nearly impossible to provide one set of guidelines for how to go about looking for and applying for a position. Once you have decided where you would like to teach, call or visit the website of the school district in which you would like to apply. Additionally, schools can be quite helpful in directing you to appropriate resources. Teach for America, the program where you can volunteer to teach in an underserved school district for two years, requires an online application and interview. If you are interested, you must apply the year before you wish to begin teaching. For more information, visit [teachforamerica.org](http://teachforamerica.org).

Aggregation websites such as [GlassDoor.com](http://GlassDoor.com), [Indeed.com](http://Indeed.com), and [Monster.com](http://Monster.com) are excellent sources of job opportunities from private businesses, interest groups, think tanks, and related organizations. Like USA Jobs, they also offer you the ability to post your résumé. [LobbyingJobs.com](http://LobbyingJobs.com) also offers listings specific to lobbying and interest groups, but the search results are likely to be far more limited than what you would encounter on these larger sites.

Should you be interested in a job with a specific organization, you can always visit their own website. Some example organizations include the following:

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|-------------------------------|---|
| – Brookings Institution       | <a href="https://www.brookings.edu/careers">https://www.brookings.edu/careers</a>   |
| – American Heritage Institute | <a href="http://www.heritage.org/about/job-bank">http://www.heritage.org/about/job-bank</a>                               |
| – Freedom House               | <a href="https://freedomhouse.org/content/career-opportunities">https://freedomhouse.org/content/career-opportunities</a> |
| – RAND Corporation            | <a href="http://www.rand.org/jobs.html">http://www.rand.org/jobs.html</a>   |
| – United Nations              | <a href="https://careers.un.org/lbw/Home.aspx">https://careers.un.org/lbw/Home.aspx</a>                                   |
| – World Health Organization   | <a href="http://www.who.int/employment/vacancies/en">http://www.who.int/employment/vacancies/en</a>                       |

- World Bank <http://web.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=8453982>
- International Red Cross <https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/jobs>
- CARE International <http://www.care.org/careers>
- Doctors Without Borders <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/work-us-0>
- Greenpeace <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/about/jobs>
- American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org/careers>
- National Rifle Association <http://careers.nra.org>
- PETA <http://www.peta.org/about-peta/work-at-peta/search-jobs-peta>

For academic-related positions, two excellent resources are APSANet.org, the official website of the American Political Science Association, and the Chronicle of Higher Education, at [chronicle.com](http://chronicle.com). To access APSA's ejobs listing, you will need to join APSA; however, student rates are available. The APSA job listing is the primary listing of academic political science positions across America. The Chronicle of Higher Education also provides a comprehensive job listing; however, their listings can include most every academic field and not every political science position will appear.

Finally, when looking for a position, the social-media site LinkedIn can also be helpful as a resource. LinkedIn allows you to post your resume and personal profile and "link" with professionals both in and out of your field. While this can be an excellent resource for finding potential employment, keep in mind that ultimately LinkedIn is a social-media site, and you should be careful about what you post on your profile. (See the Social Media box for further information.)

## Preparing an Application

Depending on the field you wish to enter, employers are likely to require different components for an application. To that end, you should read job postings carefully and prepare everything that an employer wants and nothing extraneous. This will put extra pressure to ensure that you communicate your potential value in the elements that an organization does request. And although every application will be different, there are several parts that will be held in common that you should have prepared including a résumé, cover letter, letters of recommendation (or names and contact information for personal references), and potentially a portfolio of your past work. This section will outline some of the key fundamentals that go into preparing each of these items.

## Social Media

While most people use some form of social media, whether it is Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram, if you are looking for a job or think you will be looking for a job in the future, you should bring a level of caution to what you are posting. With the Internet today, there is little in the way of privacy or regulating who will see what you are writing and doing. At the end of your time in college, you may come to find things on your social-media feeds that you would not want potential employers seeing or reading. Given this, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Do not post anything that might make a bad impression. If you wouldn't want your parents seeing it, you wouldn't want an employer seeing it either.
- Do not post embarrassing photos or stories.
- Do not post anything inflammatory or controversial.
- Make sure your privacy settings are at the highest level; allow only the people you want to see what you are doing.
- Search for yourself in a search engine and address any search results that may be potentially harmful to your application.
- Whenever you post anything, always assume that *everyone* can see it.

## Résumés

Résumés provide a quick snapshot of your work and educational experience. When preparing your own, you are likely to find multiple templates or examples from which to work; there is no one perfect or standardized version that a résumé should be in. However, in general, your résumé should be clean, succinct, and absent any fancy fonts, images, or styles. These stylistic elements will keep your résumé free from clutter and communicate professional polish to employers.

Excellent résumés will all contain the same sections: a heading with your name and contact information, your career objectives, education, relevant work experience, and other professional experiences. The heading should contain your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address. If you are relying on an e-mail address from your college or university, you should get an outside e-mail address that includes your name, not a nickname. Do not include any social-media accounts; you may consider building a personal *professional* website, and if so, this would be the place to include the Web address. (More on personal websites appears under the heading “Other Application Elements.”) See Figure 3.1 for an example résumé.

The next section allows you to lay out, in brief, your own career goals. As with most of the other sections on the résumé, this section should be brief and contain only one or two bullet points, putting a premium on your clarity and succinctness. If you include this section, the challenge is to be specific enough to speak to the

**FIGURE 3.1**  
**Sample Résumé**

John Q. Public  
123 Main St.  
Anywhere, Any State 12345  
(555) 555-6789  
[johnqpublic@email.com](mailto:johnqpublic@email.com)  
[www.johnqpublic.com](http://www.johnqpublic.com)

**CAREER OBJECTIVES**

- To assist public officials in serving the public and making public policy
- To use my knowledge of education policy to better the educational system

**EDUCATION**

BA, Political Science, University of America, Washington, D.C.

- Graduated May 2017 with university honors
- Minor in Public Policy
- Emphasis on education policy and research methods; proficient in SPSS and Excel

AA, General Studies, College of America, Washington, D.C.

- Graduated December 2014

**WORK EXPERIENCE**

Substitute Teacher, Local School District, Washington, D.C., 2014–Present

- Served as a substitute teacher for high schools, specifically filling in for history and government teachers.
- Worked with local government teachers on a redesigned curriculum focusing on the end-of-course exam.

Internship with Representative Smith, U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C., January–May 2016

- Interned with Representative Smith’s main congressional office.
- Responsible for liaising with constituents and legislative assistants.
- Assisted with a streamlining of office systems to respond to constituents 50 percent faster.

**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

- President, College Democrats, University of America, 2016–2017
- Volunteer, Education Interest Group, 2016–Present
- Presented “Education: The Role of the Federal Government” at University of America’s Undergraduate Research Showcase, December 2016

position or field you are applying to but not so specific that the statement will have to be redone for each successive application. An example of too general a statement might be, “A career that is fulfilling, rewarding, and challenging” while too specific would be “A position with the lobbying department of Lockheed Martin.” Instead, something akin to “Assisting organizations with their government relations needs” would be more appropriate.

The first major section of a résumé should concern your educational background. This should be organized by degree, especially if you have multiple degrees. With each degree, list the institution, graduation date, and major; only include your GPA if it was quite high. You should also include any academic honors that you received, such as *cum laude* or honors designation. A final bullet point should highlight specific skills, certifications, and training that you received. Make sure to include any statistical skills (including software programs you may be familiar with), languages, or professional certifications (for example, a teaching license or certificate).

Work experience follows your education. The key in this section is to include only those positions that are relevant to your application. If, like many college students, you worked part time for a restaurant or retail store, this may not be necessary to include. However, if you completed any internships or did significant volunteer work with a relevant organization, those positions should be included. Like education, each work experience should be written on its own and include where you worked (including actual geographic location), your position, dates of employment, and a brief description of what your job entailed. This is not the place to elaborate on what you were expected to do and how that relates to future employment, but you should have two to three sentences emphasizing and highlighting your accomplishments and skills gained. You may also wish to include important accomplishments or awards from your employer.

Finally, you can add any other activities that may be relevant. This would include any major research papers or projects that you presented, published, or worked with faculty members on. Any volunteer or extracurricular work that may be directly relevant to the job you are seeking should also be included, for example work in student government, the student newspaper, or other collegiate organizations or activities. Some people may also include a list of personal references with their contact information, but this should only be provided upon request, especially if you intend to post your résumé somewhere public, like a website.

In years past, a general recommendation was to keep a résumé to a page in length; this does not necessarily have to be the case. Use as much space as you require to ensure that all of your education, work, and experience are showcased, however, do not include extraneous accomplishments, such as an intramural sports championship. Be relevant and extensive in what you include, but also make it concise and easy to read for a potential employer who may have to sort through hundreds of other résumés.

If you are considering an academic profession, there is a special form of résumé called a curriculum vita, or CV for short. CVs include much of the same information as a typical résumé does but place a greater emphasis on scholarly employment and research activities. Most CVs typically highlight education first and then specific academic positions and experience followed by research. If you are applying for a graduate program in law or political science, a résumé will typically suit your purposes.

### Cover Letters

Cover letters are an important component of most applications but are unfortunately often overlooked by applicants. A cover letter introduces you to a potential employer and highlights the skills and talents that you can bring to a job. It brings attention to important parts of your résumé and gives an employer a sense of who you are. You should pay special attention to this element and tailor each cover letter for every job you are applying to.

**FIGURE 3.2**  
**Sample Cover Letter Heading**

<p><b>John Q. Public</b></p> <p>123 Main St., Anywhere, Any State 12345 (555) 555-6789 johnqpublic@email.com</p> <p>May 31, 2017</p> <p>Mrs. Jane Smith, Chief of Staff Office of U.S. Representative John Doe 456 Public Avenue Washington, D.C. 56789</p> <p>Dear Mrs. Smith,</p>
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Overall, a cover letter should be professional in nature. This is quite different from the academic tone that you might have used in preparing papers as an undergraduate. Use of the first person is acceptable, as you should be arguing why you are the best person to fill the position you are applying for. Your writing should be clear and succinct, and the letter should be formatted as a proper business letter (see Figure 3.2). Above all, make sure to proofread your letter to ensure that it is

grammatically correct. Do not use informal language or text speak. You are trying to make the best first impression you can, and grammatical errors communicate that you are either sloppy in your writing or are not aware of it, ideas that are harmful to your job prospects.

Prior to preparing a cover letter, create a template for your own personal letterhead. This can be done easily through templates already created in word-processing software like Microsoft Word, or you can design your own. In any case, make sure that your letterhead does not distract from the overall purpose of the document. It should be clear and simple and communicate who you are, your address, and your contact information. Once you have completed this, you can use it to send out your cover letters on.

When you prepare a cover letter, make sure to address it to a specific person. If the job posting gives a point of contact, address it to that person; if not, look to see who might be in charge of the human-relations department or even the head of the department you would be working in. Try to avoid addressing the letter to some vague entity. The first paragraph of the cover letter should introduce yourself and inform the addressee as to what position you are applying for and where you found the position posted. Employers are likely to have multiple job openings, so it will be important to specify exactly which one you are interested in. This is also the place to give a brief idea of why you are qualified for the position you are interested in. If you think of this as a personal essay, this sentence will be your thesis statement on which you will elaborate throughout the rest of the letter.

A cover letter should demonstrate to the employer that you have done your research on the position and the organization and how you can benefit them. Identify two to three major points that you can focus the body of your letter on. For example, if you are applying to work with a member of Congress on her or his staff, think about the types of responsibilities you might be given: dealing with constituents, researching and working on policy issues, and perhaps even working with other members and their staffs on different projects. As a political science major, you will be well prepared and versed in research and writing. You may elaborate on these skills and how they can benefit the member as she or he compiles information on different policy issues and comes up with potential legislative solutions. You could emphasize your communications and teamwork skills that will enhance the member's ability to work across the Congress on broad policy issues. Use specific evidence, where possible, to support these arguments. Was there a research project that you worked on that you presented on campus or elsewhere? Did you work through a student organization on a service project that enhanced your community? Bringing to bear specific examples will help support your assertions and give a potential employer a sense of what you bring to the table.

As with any good essay, a conclusion is necessary. Conclude by reiterating your strongest point or qualification for the job; for example, you might say that your previous experience as an intern or volunteer in a member of Congress's office combined with your political science background will allow you to hit the ground

running and contribute to the policy goals of the representative. Politely request an interview and that you be considered for the position. Be sure to thank the addressee for his or her attention and note that you are looking forward to hearing back.

Once again, do your best to personalize the cover letter for each job you apply to. If you submit a more generic cover letter, the employer will be likely to think that you are not that interested in the position or do not care enough to speak directly to what his or her job position requires. It may take extra time and effort to complete, but a proper, well-written cover letter enhances your first impression and communicates your interest in the job.

### **References and Letters of Recommendation**

At some point in the application process, you will be asked to either provide a list of references or a set of letters of recommendation. These are an important element that serve to support the contentions of your cover letter and reiterate the skills and talents that you bring to a position. Do not wait until you are asked for these to begin thinking about who might be willing to serve as a reference. Professors, advisors, and previous employers are all excellent examples of references that you should consider. Do not ask friends or family to serve as references unless the application specifically asks for them; employers will want someone who can be an independent source of information about you. That doesn't mean, however, that you should ask someone to be a reference that you think will give a negative recommendation. Certainly, you should only ask individuals who (1) know you and can speak to your work and accomplishments and (2) are willing to endorse your job application.

When letters of recommendation are called for, be sure to give your references enough notice and plenty of time to complete them. Provide the reference with the name of whom the letter should be addressed to and their address, especially if the letter is to be mailed. (If it should be e-mailed or delivered via an online system, let her or him know that as well.) Always give your reference a due date; you can politely remind her or him to write and send the letter as that date approaches. Finally, you may wish to provide your reference with your résumé and a personal statement that he or she can use in writing the letter. This will allow him or her to reference specific items and provide supporting evidence for your accomplishments and abilities.

### **Other Application Elements**

While a résumé and a cover letter are the two most important and requested elements of an application, some employers may request additional supporting documentation. These elements include writing or work samples, a portfolio of past work, unofficial transcripts, or personal statements. You do not necessarily need to have these prepared in advance of an application, but you should, at a minimum, identify what you may be able to gather to complete the application process.

Unofficial transcripts may be the easiest of these to obtain and have at the ready; leading up to graduation—but especially after graduation, when the degree you have earned will appear on the transcript—order a copy from your school's registrar. Be aware that there is a difference between official and unofficial transcripts; official transcripts usually must be sent by the school to the employer and have been unopened prior to them arriving. If you request a transcript and then open it, it will be considered unofficial but will often be sufficient for the application process. Once you have this transcript, scan it using a high-quality document scanner, and save it as a PDF. This will allow you to quickly add it to your application packet.

For portfolios or samples of past work and writing, think back to some of the assignments you worked on as an undergraduate. Was there one that best exemplified your writing skills, be it an argumentative brief, position paper, or summary of a policy area? Was there a research paper that was especially good? If you have taken a research methods class, a research paper might have been required of you; this could serve as one of the examples in your portfolio or even as the writing sample itself. As always, for any work you may be considering including, go back over it with an eye toward clarity and writing. Check for grammatical errors and perhaps consider having a professor review it for you.

Personal statements may be one of the most difficult components to think about and include. Some employers may ask for a more specific version of a personal statement, such as a five- or ten-year plan or a statement about your previous work experiences. For a personal statement intended for an application for employment, you should include information on your education, skills, abilities, and talents and how they might contribute to making you an excellent professional in your field. You may also use this to discuss overall career or education goals. As this is a personal statement, you can also use this as an opportunity to discuss your own personality and characteristics to make your application more personal and more memorable. This might include a discussion of a particularly defining event in your life or how you have been personally touched and affected by the field that you want to enter. Do not, in any case, make this a slapdash affair; put some thought and effort into writing a good personal statement to best exemplify you as a unique individual who could be helpful in whatever it is you choose to do.

Much of this discussion has focused on the traditional elements of an application; the preparation of résumés and cover letters is not a new exercise for job seekers. However, given the technology now available, some candidates have taken advantage of it to make themselves more widely known or better publicized. One of the easiest ways to do this is through a personal website. Creating a personal website is easier than ever and does not require an in-depth knowledge of coding or website construction. Instead, sites like Squarespace.com and GoDaddy.com offer tools through which you can build your own website based on templates or other design elements. These websites do require nominal fees, so be sure to research and compare to get the best cost for what you want to do.

To be sure, a personal website, particularly if the intention is to gain employment, is *not* a blog or a deeply personal chronology of your life. Instead, you are using the tools of the Web to put forward a professional face and showcase what you have to offer. Get a Web address based on your name. No personal pictures, Twitter or Facebook feeds, or commentary should be included. Rather, include your resume, a brief biography, and some examples of your work. Make sure to outline the profession that you are seeking, but also keep it broad enough that someone may be able to envision you in a position other than what you most desire. Follow the guidance in the social-media box to make sure that potential employers are getting the best information about you, not the information that may make you appear as a less-than-desirable candidate.

## The Interview

Having submitted your application and all of the required documents, the next step is ideally the interview. Since many of the applications you are likely to submit will be via an online system, it is always a good idea to e-mail the point of contact not only to ensure that she or he received all of your materials but also to reinforce yourself as the ideal candidate given your education and experience. Always be polite, but you can remind her or him that you are available for an interview at her or his earliest convenience.

### Proper E-Mail Communication

Today's main form of communication has moved away from pen, paper, and snail mail to electronic communications in the form of e-mails. Unfortunately, many people take e-mail to be an informal means of communicating; they use improper greetings, poor writing, informal language, and text-messaging shorthand. When using e-mail for job interviews and other professional obligations, messages should be written in a formal manner. When writing formal e-mails, especially e-mails in the course of job hunting, you should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Always include a descriptive subject line. Do not leave it blank or allow “no subject” to be the entry.
- Include a proper greeting, such as “Dear Mr. Smith.”
- Do not use informal language or text speak.
- Always use spell check to correct any spelling errors.
- Proofread your e-mails before sending.
- Include a closing along with your name (e.g., “Sincerely”).
- Don't use an e-mail address with a nickname or other informal name.
- Do not include anything in e-mail that you would not say to the individual in person. E-mails often remain saved for quite some time.

## Preparation

The key to any successful interview is to be prepared. While you will be ready to discuss your background and experience, you should spend time researching the company or organization, including its mission and the position you are applying to. This demonstrates to the employer that you are interested in them and gives you another opportunity to state how you can be helpful to them as they carry out their operations. Be familiar with who you are interviewing with or might be working under. During the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions, so this is something else that you should be prepared for. Think of some possible questions ahead of time, but do not focus them solely on the material aspects of the job, such as the pay, vacation, and other benefits. Ask about the responsibilities you would be expected to take on, the working environment, and opportunities to improve and enhance the organization's operations. This again demonstrates a sincere interest in working for that potential employer. At the end of the interview, plan on asking the interviewer what the next steps in the hiring process are and when you can expect to hear from him or her. Reiterate that you can provide any additional information as the employer requires it.

Many colleges and universities have career centers that can help you prepare for interviews, including doing a mock interview. If possible, participate in one of these practice sessions to get a feel for what a professional interview might feel like and encompass. You are likely to be asked questions that you haven't thought of, so feeling your way through thinking on your feet will be helpful. The career counselors will also be able to give you feedback on your performance so that you can improve your interviewing skills.

As the interview approaches, think ahead, and plan carefully. You should dress in business clothes, including a suit and tie for gentlemen and a business suit for women. While this dress code may appear limiting and conservative, feel free to show some personality, whether that is in the tie or lapel pin for men or the color of a blouse or scarf for women. Women should always remember to wear pants or a skirt that reaches the knees and that the clothing is not too tight or revealing. Makeup should not be distracting but used to highlight a natural appearance. Similarly, both men and women will not want a distracting hairstyle or color. You may use body fragrance, but it should not be overwhelming.

Another aspect to plan ahead about is transportation to the interview. Make sure you have a reliable means of transportation and a backup if necessary. Plan on arriving early, not merely on time. Consider any possible traffic or road construction as you think about the amount of travel time that will be required.

## At the Interview

Today, interviews are not solely conducted in person but can be done via the phone or even Skype. If you are participating in a phone interview, try to utilize a landline so as to minimize any chance of the phone call being dropped or being affected by a

bad connection. Make sure to take it in a quiet place without distraction and without any extraneous noise. If an employer asks for an interview via Skype or Facetime, treat it as you would an in-person interview. Be appropriately groomed and dressed, but also, choose the background you will be appearing against carefully. You do not want anything distracting or that could send a less-than-ideal message. If possible, make sure the background is a solid color and that the lighting in the room is sufficient for your needs. Practice using Skype. Chances are that the feed will freeze, but continue to respond to questions normally; the interviewer will let you know if they missed any of what you said. If you find yourself uncomfortable with seeing either yourself or the other person on Skype, simply place small sticky notes over the faces so as not to be distracted.

Once at the interview, be confident but not overly so; cocky responses may send a message to the employer that you think you are too good for them or that they are beneath you. Employ a firm handshake, and make eye contact. Having done your research about the organization and thought about how you may be of service to them, answer all questions to the best of your ability, but be honest. If you are asked whether you can do something out of your skill set—for example, Web design—tell the interviewer that while you cannot currently perform that task, you are willing to learn. If you are taken on a tour of the facilities, ask questions, and be involved. Active listening is sometimes more important than talking, so use the interview as an opportunity to learn more about the organization. Do not continuously look at your watch or your cell phone; your cell phone should either be off or on silent so as not to interrupt. Support your argument about why you would be an excellent hire with examples of work that you have previously done. Remember to ask your questions throughout the interview but especially at the end. It is acceptable to have a brief list of what you would like to ask, but do not make the list too distracting.

Given that you will be applying for a position that has something to do with your political science degree, politics is likely to come up in conversation. This is a touchy subject not just in your interview but in general; today, much of the population tends to be polarized and partisan. Make a distinction between jobs that are explicitly partisan, such as working for an elected official or partisan polling operation, and those that are not, such as teaching or lobbying. Be comfortable with discussing politics in interviews for political jobs, but do not appear overtly extreme or angry. Even in a political position, you will need to demonstrate that you can work with people from the other side of the aisle, so while it may be acceptable to express an opinion, do not appear close minded either. If you are applying for a nonpolitical job, take it as an opportunity to show that you are aware of political arguments from both the right and the left. If you want to be a lobbyist, you will probably have to meet with both Republicans and Democrats, so an awareness of all sides of an issue will serve you well.

An often overlooked part of the interview is collegiality. Collegiality refers to your ability to get along and work well with others. Since you will be working with other people and as part of a team, those who are considering hiring you must feel

comfortable with you professionally. To that end, ask questions that demonstrate you are interested in the other people you would be working with. Don't be overly personal and ask about families, children, and the like, but take the opportunity to show potential employers that they should be comfortable with you personally—not just with your skills and abilities but with you personally.

Once the interview is over, do not post about it on social media. The company and the interviewer may be checking your social-media feeds, and you do not want to appear either overconfident or to be gossiping about the interview. The next day, you can send a thank-you e-mail to the interviewer showing appreciation for her or his time and perhaps stating something about the company that you found to be exciting or intriguing. If you have thought of any additional questions based on the interview itself, this would be the place to ask it.

At the end of the day, you're either going to get the job, or you won't. While the position might have been one that you desired, try not to take it personally if you don't get it. There might have been absolutely nothing wrong with your interview or your performance; the company may simply decide to go in another direction. The fact that you got as far as the interview stage demonstrates the organization's belief that you are at least qualified for the job. At the end of the day, you can always consider an interview practice for the next one.