

Chapter 12

Taking Control of Your Future

Where Are You Now?

Assess your present knowledge and attitudes.

	Yes	Unsure	No
1. I have a good understanding of my career options.			
2. I have a good understanding of the work-related skills I will need in my chosen career and a plan to get them.			
3. I know where I can get useful information about careers.			
4. I have created a transferable skills inventory.			
5. I have a written up-to-date résumé.			
6. I know how to prepare an effective cover letter.			
7. I have both professional and social networks.			
8. I have discussed my career objectives with my academic advisor.			
9. I am comfortable in interviews.			
10. I have chosen my major based on the job market.			
11. I have chosen my major based on my personal interests.			

Where Do You Want to Go?

Think about how you answered the questions above. Be honest with yourself. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your preparation for your future at this time?

I'm adrift (no idea)					I have a clear direction and plan to get there				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

In the following list, circle the three most important areas in which you think you can improve:

- Following my dreams to successful employment
- Networking for employment
- Completing informational interviews
- Completing employment interviews
- Writing résumés
- Researching potential employers
- Writing effective cover letters
- Researching and choosing a college major

- Researching potential careers
- Understanding the financial implications of career choices
- Defining short-, medium-, and long-term plans for career development
- Discovering my transferable skills
- Addressing required work-based skills

Are there other areas in which you can improve your career planning? Write down other things you feel you need to work on.

How to Get There

Here's what we'll work on in this chapter:

- Learning how the employment market has changed over the past ten years and what that means to you
- Discovering your roles and your dreams
- Choosing a major
- Working with your faculty advisor
- Learning the difference between jobs and careers (there is a difference)
- Exploring career options
- Learning what work-based skills and transferable skills you really need
- Transferring to a four-year college
- Building your experience base
- Writing résumés
- Writing cover letters
- Completing informational interviews
- Interviewing for a job
- Networking for employment
- Preparing your life-work plan

A Journey Begins...

If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.

- Yogi Berra

This popular saying attributed to Yogi Berra suggests that we should have a pretty clear picture of where we are headed. And college, for most of us, is the last step toward a fulfilling and exciting career. But the fact is that the employment market and job-seeking techniques have changed significantly over the past ten years and will continue to change; it is not as easy as it once was to map out a clear career path. However, a clear direction can still provide enough flexibility to respond to the changing needs of today's

job market. In fact, building flexibility into your career plans is a requirement for achieving a successful career.

Consider the ways in which the job market has changed—and what it may mean to your planning:

- You will likely be employed by many organizations in your lifetime. The idea of working for a single employer is no longer the rule but rather the exception. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor found that on average, people hold close to eleven jobs between the ages of eighteen and forty-two. U.S. Census Bureau, “Table 597. Average Number of Jobs Held From Ages 18 to 42: 1978 to 2006,” *U.S. Department of Labor: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 2007*, <https://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2010/tables/10s0597.xls> (accessed July 13, 2010). This trend means today’s graduates need to be very flexible in their career plans and that they should make an effort to identify and develop transferable skills in order to navigate the changing employment market.
- Five years from now, you may be working in a job that doesn’t even exist in the present. As new technology accelerates and national and global priorities (such as going green or national security) take on a new sense of urgency, new needs are identified and new jobs will be created to fill those needs. Think about this: five years ago, a search engine optimization (SEO) specialist was a job in only a handful of Web-centric companies. With the meteoric growth of Google, SEO is now a common role in just about any marketing department—and a job in relatively high demand. In the same way, the aging population has created new opportunities in elder care, the events of 9/11 has created a whole new category of jobs in homeland security, and new discoveries and approaches in science have created fields like biotechnology and nanotechnology. Today’s students and job hunters must become lifetime learners to keep up with new trends.
- The physical location of a job is no longer as important as it once was. Other than jobs that require you to serve customers in a specific location or region or jobs that require specialized equipment (as in manufacturing facilities), companies increasingly have off-site employees who stay connected via the Internet. This means that students and job hunters should be able to demonstrate the ability to work independently and produce results without consistent, direct personal supervision.
- The growth of job posting sites online has created a glut of applicants for most posted positions. You have access to millions of job opportunities via the Web, but so do hundreds or thousands of other job seekers. Each employer must cull through hundreds of résumés received for each job posted on the Web. Strategies for standing out in this crowded field become very important.

These factors combine to create a job environment that is different from what most people might expect. The way you prepare for a career needs to be more flexible and more personalized. Technology will play an important role in your career development. Linking your demonstrable skills to the needs of a job will be a key to your success. This chapter will help set you up for this challenging environment.

12.1 The Dream of a Lifetime

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Use your life mission to inform career decisions.

2. Understand how you are already on your way to fulfilling your dream.
3. Work with changing life objectives and goals.

Throughout this book, we have covered many techniques for *how* to get things done effectively: how to study, how to read, how to take notes, how to manage your personal finances or your social life. This last chapter challenges you to really think about the *why*. Why did you decide to attend college? Why is it important to you?

We all have life goals or objectives—some are clearer than others, but they are there. You may think of your objectives in terms of finances (to hold a job that allows you to be financially independent, for example), or perhaps your goals are more personal (to be married and have a family). They might be specific (pay off my student loans within three years of leaving college) or very general (to do good). Regardless of what they may be, they are all important because they influence the decisions you are making today about your future.

Understanding what motivates your goals and aspirations is essential because you are then better able to prioritize your thoughts about the future and identify new options that you may not have thought of before that will bring you fulfillment. Beware of accepting dreams others may have for you as your own (“I want to finish college to make my parents proud” or “I want to complete my associate’s degree because my boyfriend says I can get a better job”). These are not necessarily bad dreams to pursue, but they will lead to genuine fulfillment only if they are *your* dreams.

EXERCISE 1: MY DREAM MACHINE

In the table that follows, list the four or five most important dreams you have for your future. Include your personal, professional, and economic goals. Now take some time to think about *why* these dreams are important to *you*. Revisit your answers frequently over the next week or two and fine-tune them. What do they tell you about what is important to you? How are they linked to each other?

My dreams for the future	Why they are important to me

Since you were a child and first definitively stated, “When I grow up I want to be a _____,” you have been making decisions in order to fulfill your dreams. Most likely you are in college today as a step toward fulfilling a lifetime goal. But very few of us are still passionate about our childhood dream. As we grew up, we discovered new options; were influenced by people we met; or perhaps even learned that being a fireman, nurse, circus clown, pro baseball player, or princess is not all we thought it might be. Your evolving life dreams may continue even today and should be embraced. But for most people, the motivators behind the dreams—the answers to “Why they are important to me” in Exercise 1—change very little over time. If as a child you wanted to be a princess so your kingdom would have a kind ruler, today you may want to be a teacher to help children learn—and both of these dreams, at their core, are motivated by the desire to help others.

Take a close look at your “importance” statements in Exercise 1. What do they tell you about the direction you want to take in your life? What are your priorities? Will some dreams need to be put on the back burner while you pursue others? Using your dream statements as a guide, write a two- or three-sentence mission for yourself. You don’t need to share it with anyone, but you should refer to it a few times a year and ask yourself, “Am I living up to my mission?” and “Am I taking the right steps toward this mission?” You may also want to fine-tune it as you progress.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The world is changing quickly around you, but your dreams and aspirations may provide a sense of direction in unknown territory.
- The reasons dreams or aspirations are important to you are as important as the dreams themselves and are likely to be more consistent than your literal dreams.
- A mission statement can be very useful in helping you to make important personal decisions, but it needs to be considered often and fine-tuned as needed.

12.2 Career Exploration

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define the difference between a job and a career.
2. Identify the primary types of work and which you are best suited for.
3. Learn how to explore work options.

A **job**: yes, it’s something you would like to have, especially if you want to pay your bills. A job lets you enjoy a minimal level of financial security. A job requires you to show up and do what is required of you; in exchange, you get paid. A **career** involves holding jobs, but it is more a means of achieving personal fulfillment. In a career, your jobs follow a sequence that leads to increasing mastery, professional development, and personal and financial satisfaction. A career requires planning, knowledge, and skills. If it is to be a fulfilling career, it requires that you bring into play your full set of analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills to make informed decisions that will affect your life in both the short term and the long term.

What Do You Want to Do When You “Grow Up”?

The Department of Labor defines 840 occupations in its Standard Occupation Classification system U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *U.S. Department of Labor: Standard Occupational Classification User Guide 2010*, http://www.bls.gov/soc/soc_2010_user_guide.pdf (accessed July 13, 2010).—and new occupations are being created at an ever-faster rate. Just ten years ago, would anyone have imagined the job of a social media marketing specialist? How about the concept of a competitive chef? As new careers develop and old careers morph into almost unrecognizable versions of their original, it’s OK if you aren’t able to pinpoint exactly what occupation or career will be your lifetime passion. However, it is important to define as best you can what field you will want to develop your career in, because that will help dictate your major and your course selections.

The process of career exploration can be a lot of fun, as it allows you to discover a world of possibilities. Even those students who have a pretty clear idea of what they want to do should go through this process because they will discover new options as backups and occasionally a new direction even more attractive than their original choice. The career exploration process involves four phases.

Phase A: Who Am I?

Getting to know who you are—who you *really* are—is the first step. As in Exercise 1, be careful to base your self-discovery on what you think, not what Auntie Ethel always said about you or the hopes that Dad had for you to join in the family business. This is all about *you*.

You are a unique individual with a distinct combination of likes, dislikes, personality traits, and skills. But you are not so different that you can’t be identified with certain personality types, and those types may help you narrow your career choices. Visit your campus career guidance or placement office. They will likely be able to offer you a variety of tests to define your personality type; you can also find tests online at Web sites such as SuccessHawk (<http://www.successhawk.com>) or many of the job board sites.

Many of these tests are based on the career theory developed by Dr. John Holland. Holland defined six categories of people based on personality, interests, and skills:

1. **Realistic.** These people describe themselves as honest, loyal, and practical. They are doers more than thinkers. They have strong mechanical, motor, and athletic abilities; like the outdoors; and prefer working with machines, tools, plants, and animals.
2. **Investigative.** These people love problem solving and analytical skills. They are intellectually stimulated and often mathematically or scientifically inclined; like to observe, learn, and evaluate; prefer working alone; and are reserved.
3. **Artistic.** These people are the “free spirits.” They are creative, emotional, intuitive, and idealistic; have a flair for communicating ideas; dislike structure and prefer working independently; and like to sing, write, act, paint, and think creatively. They are similar to the investigative type but are interested in the artistic and aesthetic aspects of things more than the scientific.
4. **Social.** These are “people” people. They are friendly and outgoing; love to help others, make a difference, or both; have strong verbal and personal skills and teaching abilities; and are less likely to engage in intellectual or physical activity.
5. **Enterprising.** These people are confident, assertive risk takers. They are sociable;

enjoy speaking and leadership; like to persuade rather than guide; like to use their influence; have strong interpersonal skills; and are status conscious.

6. **Conventional.** These people are dependable, detail oriented, disciplined, precise, persistent, and practical; value order; and are good at clerical and numerical tasks. They work well with people and data, so they are good organizers, schedulers, and project managers.

EXERCISE 2: WHAT'S MY TYPE?

Using the descriptions above, choose the three types that most closely describe you and list them in order in the following table. Most people are combinations of two or sometimes three types. Then list the specific words or attributes that made you think you fit in that type description.

	Occupational type	Words and attributes that closely describe me
Primary type (the one I identify with <i>most closely</i>)		
Secondary type		
Tertiary type		

Note: Your Holland occupational code is made up of the initials of the three personality types you selected, in order.

Phase B: What's Out There?

Once you have determined your occupational type, you can begin to explore what types of careers might be best suited to you. Exercise 2 is a rough beginning to find your occupational type, but you should still seek out more detailed results through your career guidance or placement office or by taking the Self-Directed Search (SDS) online through sites such as SuccessHawk (<http://www.successhawk.com>).

The SDS will provide you with a profile of careers you might want to consider, but if you have not taken the SDS, your career guidance or placement office is the best place to start, as is the Department of Labor's Occupation Exploration site at <http://www.bls.gov/k12/index.htm>.

The SDS and other career guidance tests are based on Holland's work. Holland studied people who were successful and happy in many occupations and matched their occupations to their occupational type, creating a description of the types of occupations that are best suited to each personality type. Just as many individuals are more than one personality type, many jobs show a strong correlation to more than one occupational type.

Table 12.1 Occupational Options by Type

Ideal Environments	Sample Occupations	
Realistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured • Clear lines of authority • Work with things and tools • Casual dress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractor • Emergency medical technician (EMT) • Mechanic • Military career

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on tangible results or well-thought-out goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Packaging engineer
Investigative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonstructured • Research oriented • Intellectual • Work with ideas and data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharmacist • Lab technician • Nanotechnologist • Geologist • College professor
Artistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonstructured • Creative • Rewards unconventional and aesthetic approaches • Creation of products and ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising career • Architect • Animator • Musician • Journalist
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative • Collegial • Work with people and on people-related problems/issues • Work as a team or community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher • Geriatric counselor • Correctional officer • Coach • Nurse
Enterprising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical business environment • Results oriented • Driven • Work with people and data • Entrepreneurial • Power focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales manager • Banker • Lawyer • Business owner • Restaurant manager
Conventional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orderly • Clear rules and policies • Consistent processes • Work with systems to manipulate and organize data • Control and handling of money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auditor • Insurance underwriter • Bank teller • Office manager • Database manager

Use the occupational code you defined in Exercise 2 to identify careers you might want to consider. Your career guidance or placement office should be a good resource for this activity, or you can check out Gottfredson and Holland's *Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes* in the reference section of your library.

Use the Department of Labor's O*Net (<http://online.onetcenter.org/find>) to get a deeper understanding of your occupation. For each occupation, O*Net lists the type of work, the work environment, the skills and education required, and the job outlook for that occupation. This is a truly rich resource that you should get to know.

Phase C: What Factors Might Affect My Choice?

You may now have a list of careers you want to explore. But there are other factors you will need to take into consideration as well. It is important to use your creative thinking skills to come up with alternative "right" answers to factors that may present an obstacle

to pursuing the right career.

- **Timing.** How much time must I invest before I actually start making money in this career? Will I need to spend additional time in school? Is there a certification process that requires a specific amount of experience? If so, can I afford to wait?
- **Finances.** Will this career provide me with the kind of income I need in the short term and the security I'll want in the longer term? What investment will I need to make to be successful in this field (education, tools, franchise fees, etc.)?
- **Location.** Does this career require me to relocate? Is the ideal location for this career somewhere I would like to live? Is it somewhere my family would like to live?
- **Family/personal.** How will this career affect my personal and family life? Do friends and family members who know me well feel strongly (for or against) about this career choice? How important is their input?

Phase D: Where Do I Go from Here?

It may seem odd to be thinking about life after school if you are just getting started. But you will soon be making decisions about your future, and regardless of the direction you may choose, there is a lot you can do while still in college. You will need to focus your studies by choosing a major. You should find opportunities to explore the careers that interest you. You can ensure that you are building the right kind of experience on which to base a successful career. These steps will make your dreams come to life and make them achievable.

Start by developing a relationship with the counselors in the career guidance or placement office. All too often students engage these counselors only near the end of their college days, when the pressure is just on getting a job—any job—after having completed a degree. But these counselors can be of great help in matching your interests to a career and in ensuring you are gathering the right kind of experience to put you at the top of the recruiting heap.

Keep in mind that deciding on and pursuing a career is an ongoing process. The more you learn about yourself and the career options that best suit you, the more you will need to fine-tune your career plan. Don't be afraid to consider new ideas, but don't make changes without careful consideration. Career planning is exciting: learning about yourself and about career opportunities, and considering the factors that can affect your decision, should be a core part of your thoughts while in college.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The right career for you depends on your interests, your personality, and your skills.
- Defining your occupational type may confirm career choices you have already made and open entirely new options for you.
- Career planning is an ongoing process involving knowing yourself, knowing about career options, and understanding the context in which your decisions will be made.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Using your occupational type, identify a career opportunity you might be suited for that you have not yet considered. Now write a paragraph on what life might

be like if you were to pursue that career.

2. Name the six Holland occupational types, and then circle what each type likes to work with:

1.	data	ideas	people	process	tools
2.	data	ideas	people	process	tools
3.	data	ideas	people	process	tools
4.	data	ideas	people	process	tools
5.	data	ideas	people	process	tools
6.	data	ideas	people	process	tools

3. Visit O*Net (<http://online.onetcenter.org/find>) and look up one of the careers you may be considering. What kinds of things does O*Net tell you about a career?

12.3 Choosing Your Major

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how your major is important to your career.
2. Understand why majors are not important to a career.
3. Practice skills for selecting a good major.

Choosing a college major can have a big impact on your career choices, especially if you are following a technical or vocational program of study. After all, it's hard to become a pharmacist if you study computer networking. But students often get too anxious about choosing a major or program of studies. Certainly many two-year students have a very clear idea of what they are studying and the job they expect to land after completing their degree, and you probably feel confident enough in your choice of program of study to make the investment for tuition in that program. But there is no need to panic over your choice of major or program of studies:

- Your choice of major or program will be important only for your first job after college; most people change careers (not just jobs, but careers) five times or more in their lifetime, so there is no possible major that will cover that level of flexibility.
- Many majors and programs share foundation courses with other majors, so you can usually change your major without having wasted your time in courses that will be unrelated to your new major. Chances are that if you change your major, it will be to something similar, especially if you have completed an occupational interest survey as recommended earlier in this chapter.
- Most students change their major at least once, and many will change majors two or three times before they graduate.
- If a change in major does cause a delay in completing your degree, it may be a good investment of time to follow a career path you are truly happy with. Before making a decision, consider the factors outlined in phase C of [Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Health"](#), [Section 10.2 "Activity and Exercise"](#). Use your creative thinking skills to find a second right answer to any dilemmas a delay like this may cause.

While these thoughts might remove some of the stress of making the choice, there is no doubt that it is not always easy to make your choice. The following tips may make it a little easier...and perhaps fun!

- **Follow your dreams.** Your first instinct in choosing a field of study is probably based on your dreams and life experience. Make sure you base your choice on your own dreams and interests and not those of a parent, spouse, or friend.
- **Make it fun.** What do you like to do for fun? What kinds of magazines do you read? What Web sites are bookmarked on your computer? What kinds of volunteer work have you done? What do the answers to these questions tell you about the kind of career you would enjoy?
- **Build on your skills.** A good choice of a program of study is not based exclusively on your likes; it should also consider your skills. What courses did you “ace” in high school? Consider also courses that you found challenging in which you learned a lot (it’s hard to keep a level of determination to tackle a tough subject if you don’t enjoy it). What do these courses tell you about what you are skilled at studying?
- **Ask around.** Find people who are following the courses of studies you are considering. Ask them what they like and dislike about their majors. If you can find recent graduates with that major, ask them about the value of their major.
- **Two is better than one.** Talk to your faculty advisor about a double major or a combined program; that is an effective way of preparing yourself for the uncertainties and options of future employment. Think about declaring a minor if your college allows it.
- **What makes you unique?** If you have a major that you’d like to pursue that is not offered at your college, find out if you can plan your own major. This option is especially attractive if you want to combine two seemingly different disciplines into a major (Dance and athletics? Sociology and film? Women’s studies and economics?).
- **Be open to change.** Once you have selected a major, don’t panic if it turns out to be the wrong choice; consider it a step toward finding the right program for *you*. Repeat the major selection process, but carefully consider what you learned from your original major choice. Why was it not the right major? (Did it not match your interests? Was the workload too heavy? Were the courses too tough?) What do you know now that you didn’t know when you made your first selection that you should consider in making a new choice?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is no need to panic over the choice of a major or program of studies.
- Most students will change their major during their college years.
- Many people work and have successful careers in disciplines they did not major in.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. How is your choice of major important? Why do you want to be sure you do a good job selecting one?

2. What are some of the reasons you should not panic over the choice of major?

12.4 Getting the Right Stuff

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explore the benefits of a four-year college education.
2. Understand the difference between work-based skills and transferable skills.
3. Learn how to use jobs, internships, and volunteering.

What do you need to launch a good career? Employers will look at your education, skills, and experience. Making sure you have the “right stuff” in these three areas is what you should focus on in your college experience.

The Transfer Ticket

Are you in a two-year program or community college? Perhaps you decided to attend your college to save some money or to be able to explore a career before committing to a four-year program. Now you may find that a bachelor’s degree is worth pursuing because it appears to be a requirement for the kind of career you want or because you will be able to boost your income opportunities. If you are thinking about transferring to a four-year program, be sure to follow these steps:

1. Find out about the transfer program at your college. Most two-year colleges have a program designed to make sure you have the right kind of general education courses, electives, and courses related to your major so that you can transfer seamlessly into a junior year at a four-year institution.
2. Make sure your credits are transferable. Each four-year college or university has its own policies about what kind of credits it accepts. If you are considering one or two particular four-year colleges, find out about their transfer policies as you lay out your plan of studies. These policies are typically described in the college catalogs. Read them carefully to ensure you can transfer most if not all of your credits.
3. Talk to your advisor. Now. If you haven’t met with your advisor to discuss your ideas about transferring, do so soon. Your advisor will be a great help in formulating a plan of studies that meets your requirements for your associate’s degree and maximizes your transferable credits.
4. Does your college have **articulation agreements**? These agreements between your college and four-year institutions define specific requirements for transferring and make it easier for you to transfer from your college to the bachelor’s program in a four-year school.

If you are in a four-year college already but think your career objectives might be better filled in a program at another college, you should also go through steps two and three as soon as possible. It can save you a great deal of time, money, and heartbreak.

Skilled Labor

The second requirement for employment is skills. Many of the skills you will need are career specific: we call those **work-based skills**. These include knowing how to use equipment that is specific to your career and mastering processes that are used in your

field. While some of these skills are learned and perfected on the job, you may be in a vocational track program (such as for homeland security officers, nurses aides, or paralegals) where you are learning your work-based skills.

These are not the only skills you will need to be successful. The second set of skills you must have are called **transferable skills** because they can be used in almost all occupations. These include thinking skills, communication skills, listening skills—in fact, most of the skills for college success we have been stressing throughout this book are transferable skills because they are also key to success in life. This skill set is very broad, and your extent of mastery will vary from skill to skill; therefore, you should identify those skills that are most important to your career objective and develop and master them. Review your occupation profile on O*Net (<http://online.onetcenter.org/find>) to determine which skills you need to prove to potential employers you have mastered.

EXERCISE 3: TRANSFERABLE SKILLS INVENTORY

In the list of forty transferable skills that follows, *underline* five skills you believe you have mastered and then describe specific ways in which you have used each skill successfully. Then *circle* five skills you think are important to your career that you have not mastered yet. Describe specific steps you plan to take to master those skills.

Active listening	Decision making	Negotiating	Researching
Active learning	Editing	Observing	Selling
Analyzing	Evaluating	Organizing	Speaking a second language
Budgeting	Forecasting	Perceiving Feelings	Supervising
Coaching	Goal setting	Persuading	Teaching
Communicating	Handling a crisis	Planning	Teamwork
Consulting	Handling details	Problem solving	Time management
Creative thinking	Manipulating numbers	Public speaking	Training
Critical thinking	Mentoring	Reading	Visualizing
Customer service	Motivating	Reporting	Writing

Skills I have mastered	Examples of how I used them

Skills I still need to master	How I will master them

Going over the list in Exercise 3, you will find that you have at least some experience in many of them, but you probably haven't thought that much about them because you use them in so many ways that you take them for granted. It is important to think about all your activities and consider the skills you have applied successfully; your transferable skills inventory is larger than you may think. For example, if you volunteer as a big brother or big sister, you have skills in active listening, mentoring, time management, and probably coaching. If you have written a college paper, you have skills in visualizing, researching, communicating, and writing.

Be aware of the ways you develop and master transferable skills. Keep a list of them, and update it every month or two. That will be a valuable tool for you as you work with your career development and ultimately with job applications.

Are You Ready for a Test Drive?

Are you frustrated by the fact that even entry-level jobs require some experience? Experience is the third set of qualifications employers look for, and it's the one that often stumps students. Relevant experience is not only important as a job qualification; it can also provide you with a means to explore or test out occupational options and build a contact list that will be valuable when networking for your career.

But how can you gain relevant experience without experience to begin with? You should consider three options: volunteering, internships, and part-time employment.

Volunteering is especially good for students looking to work in social and artistic occupations, but students looking for work in other occupation types should not shy away from this option. You can master many transferable skills through volunteering! Certainly it is easy to understand that if you want to be in an artistic field, volunteering at a museum or performance center can provide you with relevant experience. But what if you want to work in an engineering field? Volunteering for an organization promoting green energy would be helpful. Looking for a career in homeland security? Do volunteer work with the Red Cross or the Coast Guard Auxiliary. With a little brainstorming and an understanding of your career field, you should be able to come up with relevant volunteer experiences for just about any career.

Internships focus on gaining practical experience related to a course or program of study. Interns work for an organization or company for a reduced wage or stipend or volunteer in exchange for practical experience. A successful internship program should create a win-win situation: the intern should add value to the company's efforts, and the company should provide a structured program in which the student can learn or practice work-related skills. Internships are typically held during summers or school vacation periods, though on occasion they can be scheduled for a set block of time each week during the course of a regular school term.

Once you secure an internship (usually through a normal job application process aided by a faculty member or the career guidance or placement office), it is important to have a written agreement with the employer in which the following is stated:

1. The learning objective for the internship
2. The time commitment you will invest (including work hours)
3. The work the company expects you to do
4. The work your supervisor will do for the college and for the student (internship progress reports, evaluations, etc.)

This written agreement may seem like overkill, but it is critical to ensure that the internship experience doesn't degrade into unsatisfying tasks such as photocopying and filing.

Remember that a key objective of your internship is to develop relationships you can use for mentoring and networking during your career. Befriend people, ask questions, go the extra mile in terms of what is expected of you, and generally participate in the enterprise. The extra effort will pay dividends in the future.

Part-time employment may be an option if your study schedule provides enough free time. If so, be sure to investigate opportunities in your field of study. Ask your instructors and the career guidance or placement office to help you generate job leads, even if they are not specifically in the area you want to be working in. It is valuable and relevant to hold a job designing Web sites for an advertising agency, for example, if your specific job objective is to produce event marketing. The understanding of how an advertising agency works and the contacts you make will make the experience worthwhile.

If you are lucky enough to have a job in your field of study already and are using your college experience to enhance your career opportunities, be sure to link what you are learning to what you do on the job—and what you do on the job to what you are learning. Ask your supervisor and employer about ideas you have picked up in class, and ask your instructors about the practices you apply at work. This cross-linking will make you a

much stronger candidate for future opportunities and a much better student in the short term.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Employers look at candidates who have the right education, the right skills, and the right experience.
- Progress in many career opportunities is enhanced by more advanced education; you should work, however, to make sure the education you are already getting counts.
- Be sure you can identify and show mastery in transferable skills as well as work-related skills.
- Experience through volunteering, internships, and part-time jobs will illustrate to potential employers that you can work in your chosen field, but it is also instrumental to help create a network of colleagues to enhance your career development.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Read the famous “fence whitewashing” story in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (<http://www.inspirational-short-stories.com/tom-sawyer-fence.html>). What transferable skills does Tom demonstrate? What work-related skills does he demonstrate?

2. Why is having a written internship agreement important?

12.5 Career Development Starts Now

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand that career development is not a process that occurs only when you are searching for a job.
2. Know how to get organized for career development.
3. Use resources for career development.

Think of developing your career as if you were working in a start-up venture, because in a sense, you are. The product you are developing is yourself as a professional. While you

are focused primarily on product development during your college years, you need to “seed” the market during this period as well so that when the product is ready (when you get your degree), the market will be ready to accept you. If launching a career means getting your first postcollege job, the time to start preparing is now, not six months (or six weeks) before you graduate.

Start by organizing yourself. Set aside some physical space dedicated exclusively to career development and job hunt work. It can be as small as a corner on your desk or an accordion file, but it should be a place where you can keep and access your records whenever you need them. Organize some digital space as well. Create a file for all your career-related documents on your computer. Make sure you have a backup using an online service or at least a thumb drive or other external storage device.

Get and keep two notebooks to use during your career exploration. One is for recording and tracking phone calls, and the other is for general notes. Similarly, on your computer, create a folder in your browser’s bookmark menu to use exclusively for keeping track of Web sites of good resources, interesting companies, and leading ideas from your targeted occupation. In your contact management system or personal directory, flag those individuals who may be of use to you in your exploration and search. Create group folders for them in your social networking sites. There may not be many people in those groups and directories now, but as you go through the processes described in the rest of the chapter, those numbers will multiply, so it will pay to have a system in place to identify your key professional contacts starting now.

A second step in getting organized is understanding your financial picture. If you think of yourself as a business, you are investing both time and money in your college degree, and you should have a clear picture of how and when your investment will begin to pay off. Project your cash flow and prepare a personal budget and live within it (see [Chapter 11 "Taking Control of Your Finances"](#)). Paying off student loans on an entry-level salary can be a challenge without the discipline of following a budget.

Start identifying resources that you can use to explore and select an occupation and to help land that first (or next) job in your career. Every student will have his or her own list of favored resources. For some it may be a Web site like the Department of Labor’s site or SuccessHawk (<http://www.successhawk.com>). Others may want to include a counselor at the college career guidance or placement office or their faculty advisor. You may want to add an alumnus who has been helpful or a relative who already practices in your target occupation. Most important, identify these resources and record them in your “notes” notebook, creating your own personalized reference guide.

Set goals for yourself to guide you in your process. Especially since career planning is an ongoing, long-term process, it is important to set short-term, attainable goals to keep making progress toward a fulfilling occupation. The goals should be simple, everyday steps that keep you moving in the right direction, such as “investigate metallic arts sculpture as a business by Friday” or “make an appointment to see a counselor at the guidance office by Tuesday.” As you proceed through the process of investigation, decision making, networking, selection, and application, these goals will become even more important.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Career exploration and job hunting are not short-term projects but processes

that continue over time.

- Organization is key to an effective process and sets you up for success.
- Setting goals will keep your actions organized and keep you moving forward in a long-term process.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. What are three things you should do to get organized for the process of career development?

2. Why is it valuable to have two notebooks to work with instead of just one?

3. Why is setting a goal important in this process?

12.6 The Power of Networking

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn how to develop a network.
2. Keep track of your contacts.
3. Attend conferences and trade shows.

There is some wisdom in the saying that it's who you know that brings success in getting a job. Consider the following:

- It is estimated that only 20 percent of new jobs and vacancies are advertised or posted.
- A Web posting for a job typically yields over 150 applicants for a position.
- Sixty to eighty percent of jobs are found through personal contact and networking.

What exactly is **networking**? In its simplest terms, it is the process of engaging others in helping you reach an objective. Three words in this definition deserve a closer look:

1. **Process.** Networking is something that doesn't happen casually but requires thought, planning, and deliberate activity.
2. **Engaging.** You are looking to have others do something for you—give you

information, guidance, other contacts, or perhaps a recommendation.

3. **Objective.** You need to be clear about your purpose for networking—it is not merely to collect people’s contact information but to further your career development.

The process of networking involves three basic phases: prospect identification and management, making contact, and follow-up.

Student FAQs

- **I won’t graduate and be in the job market for a couple years. Do I need to work on résumés and networking now?** Yes, absolutely! Even though you aren’t yet graduating from college, there are many benefits to starting now. As a student, you are likely to be applying for part-time jobs, internships, and even volunteer positions. Networking is a process of building relationships, and the strongest relationships are built over time. Having a good network will help identify interesting and relevant opportunities. Having a résumé that summarizes your strengths and skills will give you an advantage over other candidates who apply without a résumé, because job application forms rarely give the opportunity to highlight your strengths. Furthermore, a résumé is an updated record of your skills and experience; it makes sense to capture your accomplishments as they happen and will save you a lot of time in the future.
- **I don’t have any work experience. How can I write a résumé?** You may not have any work experience, but you do have experience and skills. Focus on your transferable skills, and list examples of how you have used them. Think of organizations you have been involved in and volunteer work you have done. It is OK to include high school accomplishments; you can replace them with college accomplishments as you gain them. It is also OK to include your GPA, particularly if it is over 3.0, because that helps show you are disciplined and organized.

All Contacts Are Equal, but Some Are More So Than Others

The first phase involves identifying whom you should be speaking to and pinpointing the people who can introduce you to them. This is like the game Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon applied to your own life. Whom do you need to speak to? That really depends on your objectives. If you are trying to learn about an occupation, it can be just about anyone involved with that field. If you are in the process of trying to land an internship or a job, you want to reach the person who will make the hiring decision.

Your objective also defines how you get started with your networking. In the first case, you might want to start with people you met at an industry conference; in the job-specific case, you’ll want to think about whom you know in that company or who might know someone in that company. If you don’t have any contacts who fit that description, whom do you know who lives in the town in which the company is based or in a nearby town?

Your success in this phase of networking will be driven by the quality of the candidates (those who can directly influence your ability to reach your objectives) as well as the quantity (those who will lead you to the most contacts). This is why there is no such thing as a bad contact.

As important as having contacts is your ability to access those contacts when you need

to. That is where contact management comes into play. Don't be caught wishing you could call someone you met three weeks ago...if you could only remember what you did with their business card! There are countless ways to keep track of contacts, from writing names in an address book, to keeping a Rolodex, to using a computer-based contact management system. Choose a system you feel comfortable with—comfortable enough to use regularly. A sophisticated system that has all the bells and whistles is no good to you if you can't use it.

Let technology help you in this endeavor. Your computer, PDA, or smartphone probably has features for capturing contact information and retrieving it based on keywords, and most will even connect with your calendar for scheduling and reminders. Consider Web-based applications such as those offered by SuccessHawk (<http://www.successhawk.com>) and networking sites focused on professional networking, such as LinkedIn. Whatever your choices, invest the time to learn to use them well; you'll be very glad you did.

Building a network requires consistent work, and a strong network will take time to achieve. That is why we recommend you start building your professional network now—even early in your college career. Your network should include anyone who might have a connection that will help: family, friends, neighbors, past and present coworkers, bosses, people you met through associations and clubs (especially business associations), alumni from your college, and acquaintances you have met via online networking.

When you capture your contact data, use relevant keywords to help you search your database and shape your contact activity. One of the most overlooked pieces of information that you should be sure to capture is the source of the contact. That's what turns a "cold call" into a "warm call"—and it helps engage the prospect. If a friend introduced you, be sure to note that friend's name; if you met at a party, note the name of the host and the occasion; if you met at a conference, note the conference and date. You should also use other keywords so that you can quickly find the contacts that will be most effective for each of your objectives; keywords might describe the area of specialization, organization membership, or type of contact (family, friend, colleague, etc.).

Personal Contact

Being in the right place at the right time has much less to do with luck than with the art of personal contact. Contacts are everywhere, and you don't know when you might turn one to your advantage. You may feel a little awkward following these tips at first, but with practice you will become quite adept at meeting new people and adding them to your network.

- Be prepared. If you are going to a conference, a party, or even a class, know ahead of time which people or kinds of people you want to meet. Be prepared with topics you can steer your contact toward so you don't spend two minutes awkwardly talking about the weather and then slink away.
- Be confident. Prepare and learn a short introduction for yourself. Be factual, don't brag, and give enough information about yourself to prompt your contact to ask questions.
- Be curious. The best way to get contacts to want to know you is to show you want to know them. Observe them before you step up to them. Is there something unique about them, the way they are dressed, or perhaps what you may have overheard that you can ask about? "I couldn't help but notice that lovely necklace;

is that from a local designer?” or “You have such an interesting accent; do you mind if I ask where you’re from?” After you ask the question, listen actively to keep the conversation going.

- Be prepared (part 2). Have a good supply of personal cards to give out to contacts; that will prompt them to give you their contact information, too. You don’t have to be in business to have “business cards.”
- Be courteous. If someone you know comes up to you while you are speaking with a contact, introduce them; if you see that the contact is getting antsy, tell them you enjoyed meeting them and then move on. Don’t trap them!
- Be prepared (part 3). Set yourself up for networking success by discreetly writing a word or two on the back of their card to jog your memory in the future. “World-class rodeo clown” will certainly help you remember who Jack Smith at Triangle Financial was.

Make the Call

What you say in your networking calls or e-mails will depend largely on the objective of your networking effort. (Is it to learn about an occupation or industry? Seek a job-shadowing opportunity? Ask for a job?) But some networking basics and elements of etiquette apply to all contacts:

- **Be mindful of your contact’s time.** Keep your calls and e-mails courteous but brief. If you are calling, ask if it is a good time to talk.
- **If this is a first contact, tell the contact where you got his or her name.** “I was referred to you by our friend Janet Smith” or “My colleague Richard Stewart suggested I call you” or “I heard you speak at the International Genius Conference” (remember the contact source information in your contact database?). This turns an interrupting cold call into a warm call with an interested individual.
- **Be specific about how the contact can help you.** Know what you are asking for and do so directly. Don’t be shy.
- **Use your network for more than just asking for jobs.** It is a great vehicle for learning about new trends in the industry, for launching “trial balloons” for ideas or concepts you are developing, and for seeking advice on practical aspects of your occupation.
- **Help others in your network.** Networking is not a one-way endeavor. Be willing to offer your assistance whenever you can; the fact that you are still in college doesn’t mean you can’t be of value. You may be able to get an introduction to an instructor for a person in the industry or help that person’s daughter learn about your college.

Care and Feeding of Your Network

Much of the success of your networking efforts depends on what you do after you’ve hung up after a call or received an e-mail reply. The first step is to **thank your contact** for his or her help. Do this right away; any thank-you after twenty-four hours of your contact can be considered late. Find a reason (not just an excuse) to **keep in touch** with people in your network. If you read an article people in your network would be interested in, send them the link. If you run across a problem one of your contacts might help you with, don’t be shy—give him or her a call to **ask for help**. If you meet someone you think a contact would like, make introductions. **Send a follow-up note of thanks** to a person who gave you a particularly productive lead. Let him or her know what you were able to accomplish. People like to know they are on a successful team. Finally, if a person in your

network asks you for help, **do what you say you will do.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Networking is an ongoing process that involves identifying and managing prospects, making contact, and following up.
- All contacts are good contacts.
- Common courtesy and follow-through are the catalysts of good networking.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Give yourself twenty minutes to list one hundred people you know. (Remember the idea of grouping items to commit them to memory in [Chapter 4 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering"](#)? You may want to think of groups first and then see how quickly you can draw up the list.) Now give yourself another twenty minutes to write one or two words next to each name to describe how he or she could help you network.

2. List three things you should do whenever you contact someone for the first time.

3. Describe two things you can do to overcome shyness and network effectively in a person-to-person setting.

12.7 Résumés and Cover Letters

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the purpose of a résumé.
2. Describe the elements of successful résumés.
3. Know how to prepare a good cover letter.

A **résumé** is basically a summary of your experience. Just as an advertiser will invest a lot of resources to condense the essence of his or her product into a thirty-second ad for the Super Bowl, condensing the essence of your experience onto one or two pages can be a challenging task. Fine-tuning, updating, and rewriting your résumé will become an ongoing process as you move through your career, and it is not too early to prepare one now. The purpose of a résumé is to get you invited for an interview. Unfortunately, too often a résumé is a reason to exclude a candidate. Poor grammar, misspelled words, lengthy listings of irrelevant experience, and messy formatting motivate hiring managers

to move quickly to the next candidate.

There is no such thing as a perfect format for a résumé, though hiring managers and recruiters generally agree on the following principles:

- A short résumé is generally better than a long one. One page should usually be enough—two pages if you have a lot of experience.
- Focus on your accomplishments, not just the positions you held. Your résumé should point out your strengths. Use dynamic verbs (see “101 Action Verbs” below).
- Include numbers. Be sure to include dollar amounts and percentages that support achievements. For example, you might write “Reduced costs by 20 percent.” Keep track of your accomplishments in your “notes” notebook so that you don’t have to go back and recreate history when you are revising your résumé.
- Use keywords. Most recruiters and hiring managers look for résumés online and review submitted résumés with software that looks for keywords.
- Keep information easy to find. Use the standard convention of a reverse chronological listing of experience, starting with your current or most recent job and moving backward in time, unless there is a valid reason for following a different format (a function-based résumé might be appropriate if you need to cover two or more long periods of unemployment).

Deciding what to include in your résumé is where most of the work comes in, because it is in the careful wording of the body of your résumé that you can really sell yourself for a position. Ideally, you should review your résumé for each position you are applying for, particularly to include any accomplishments that you would not include in your “general résumé” but that are relevant to that particular job. Your résumé should include these elements:

- **Header.** Include your full name and complete contact information. Be sure that you use personal (home) phone number and e-mail address, not your work contact information.
- **Objective.** Include a short one- or two-sentence summary of the kind of position you are looking for. Some résumé writers now recommend replacing or following the objective with a listing of skills, particularly when you are going to post the résumé online, because that provides a great opportunity to include keywords. Look to your list of transferable skills to populate this kind of list.
- **Résumé body.** Starting with your current or most recent job, internship, or volunteer position, list your experience in reverse chronological order. Each entry should include the title, the name and location of the company, and the dates you held the position. This should be followed by your major achievements in that position. Use strong action verbs and a quantitative measure for achievements. Look for things that will show that you are a better candidate than others. Consider accomplishments such as the following:
 - Being promoted
 - Gaining expanded responsibilities
 - Being recruited by a former employer or boss, or being asked to follow him or her to another company
 - Having your accomplishment copied by other departments or, even better, by other companies
 - Recruiting and training others
 - Receiving awards and recognitions, including speaking at conferences, writing, or

being written about (if these are easily found online and you are short on space, omit these types of accomplishments, because you will be googled)

101 Action Verbs

Here are the kinds of verbs that help “sell” you to potential employers. Expand on this list to find good verbs specific to your accomplishments by doing an Internet search for “action verbs for résumés.”

acted	delegated	implemented	persuaded
adapted	demonstrated	improved	planned
advised	designed	increased	prepared
analyzed	developed	influenced	prioritized
arranged	devised	informed	produced
assembled	diagnosed	initiated	promoted
assessed	directed	inspected	publicized
assigned	edited	instituted	recruited
attained	educated	instructed	rehabilitated
authored	enabled	integrated	represented
balanced	encouraged	introduced	researched
budgeted	engineered	invented	reviewed
built	enlisted	investigated	revitalized
calculated	established	lectured	scheduled
chaired	evaluated	managed	set goals
coached	executed	marketed	shaped
collected	fabricated	mediated	solved
communicated	facilitated	moderated	spoke
compiled	forecasted	motivated	stimulated
computed	formulated	negotiated	strengthened
conceptualized	founded	organized	supervised
consolidated	generated	originated	trained
contracted	guided	overhauled	translated
coordinated	identified	oversaw	upgraded
counseled	illustrated	performed	wrote
created			

The Finishing Touches

Once you have written the body of your résumé, review and discuss it with people you respect. Ask them what stands out, what puts them to sleep, what turns them off, and whether anything is missing. Make sure your résumé is “short and sweet” and that it demonstrates your strengths. Be sure you can support every point you make on your résumé during an interview.

Great résumés are a combination of a business document, marketing piece, and personal preferences. Expect conflicting opinions from others and don’t get hung up on them; the final decision is yours.

Finally, here are some tips on format. Name your résumé file clearly. Don’t give the file

the name “résumé” or “My Résumé.” Include your name, abbreviated job title, and company name in the file name. For example, if Victor Smith applies for a marketing project manager job at XYZ Company, his résumé file might be named *VictorSmith-MktPM-XYZ.doc*.

Choose your document formatting wisely. Use a readable font! You have approximately thirty seconds to make an impact on the person reading your résumé, and nothing turns off a reader faster than a résumé that is difficult to read.

- Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman, should be no smaller than eleven points, and sans-serif fonts, like Arial, should be no smaller than ten points.
- Try to keep margins at one inch all the way around.
- Print your résumé on a high-grade, bright white paper. Do not use cream-colored paper or paper with visible fibers, as these papers can confuse scanners and optical character recognition software that employers may use to digitally store and search résumés.

Cover Letters

The purpose of a **cover letter** is to entice the recipient to read your résumé. There is no better way to entice someone to read further than to demonstrate that you fit his or her needs. A successful cover letter should emphasize how your knowledge, skills, or experiences make you an ideal candidate.

When writing a cover letter, look over the job posting carefully. What are the keywords in the posting? Underline or highlight them. Think about how your experience and skills are related to those keywords. What examples can you give in short sentences? Now you can begin to write.

Be sure to state what job you are applying for and why in your opening paragraph. If you don't hook the reader here, you will not be considered for the job. This is where you begin to show that you are a unique and qualified candidate. This, in marketing terms, is your selling proposition. Write this paragraph two or three different ways and then choose the best. When you are happy with your opening paragraph, add one or two paragraphs that illustrate your proposition from the opening paragraph.

Remember that your cover letter also demonstrates your communication skills. Be clear, be concise, and be careful. You won't have another opportunity to make a first impression. Be sure your spelling and grammar are correct. Did you double-check the spelling of the company name? Read the document; look for mistakes your spellchecker won't catch (like the word “you” instead of “your”). Put it down for a while and then reread it again.

Keep your formatting simple. Often you will have to copy and paste your letter and résumé into a predetermined form on a company's Web site. You are likely to lose formatting conventions such as tabbing, tables, and bulleted lists.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The purpose of a résumé is to secure an interview.
- A good résumé is action based and focused on accomplishments.
- The purpose of a cover letter is to entice the recipient to read your résumé.

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Explain some of the ways a résumé could block consideration of a candidate. What are some strategies for ensuring this doesn't happen?

2. List your top three accomplishments to date. What were the key transferable skills you used in achieving them? Do both the accomplishments and the skills play a prominent role in your résumé?

Accomplishments	Transferable skills

3. Write your résumé. Everyone should have one. They are useful not only to apply for jobs, but also to secure internships and to explain who you are to your network. If you are a student who has no work experience, what kinds of accomplishments can you use to illustrate your skills?

12.8 Interviewing for Success

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn the types of interviews.
2. Know how to prepare for an interview.
3. Be successful in an interview.

In a job search, nothing is more exciting or more intimidating than an interview. Reaching the interview stage means that you are in serious consideration for the position, and the pressure feels cranked up. In this section, you will learn how to prepare yourself to “ace” this process.

Types of Interviews

In the process of exploring occupations and landing a job, you will likely participate in a

variety of interviews. They are defined by their objective:

- **Informational or networking interviews.** Informational interviewing is particularly useful in helping you explore career options. This is an interview that *you* have requested to learn about a particular job, company, or industry and how best to present yourself to potential hiring managers. An informational interview also gives you an opportunity to create a positive impression. Be sure to get referrals, leads, and recommendations for other networking contacts.
- **Screening interviews.** Generally conducted by a representative of the company's human resources department or a recruiter, a screening interview is used to determine whether you are qualified or overqualified to do the job. This initial interview is often conducted via telephone. As the name implies, the objective of this interview is to find reasons to remove, not include, people in a candidate pool. Do not consider it lightly just because someone other than the hiring manager is conducting it.
- **One-on-one interviews.** In a one-on-one interview, the interviewer asks a set of questions to learn if you have the knowledge and skills to handle the job for which you have applied. The hiring manager conducting the one-on-one interview also wants to get a sense of what it would be like working with you and how you would fit in the organization. It is also used to learn how you behaved in past situations as a predictor of how you are likely to behave in the future. Expect to be asked "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example..." questions. This interview is the one a hiring decision is based on.

Preparing for Interviews

Just as preparation is important for exams in college, preparation is key to success in interviews. Many of the principles are the same, but in an employment interview, the subject is *you*. Just as in an exam, the first step in preparation is to know your material.

Learn about the organization. In almost every interview situation, you'll be asked, "What can you do for this company?" Practice your answer. Research press releases, stories in the *Wall Street Journal*, annual reports, blogs, Web sites, the news, and so on. Know the company's philosophies, goals, plans, new products, targeted customers, new executives, and major directional changes.

Use your network. Do you know anyone who works for or has worked for this company or organization? Call or have lunch with him or her before your interview to learn more. Your competition likely won't have done their homework as well as you have. Your prospective employer will notice.

Review the job description. Be prepared to explain how your background qualifies you for the job. Did you find the job posting online? Be sure to have printed a copy, and bring it with you to the interview. Some companies take weeks to start calling people in for interviews, and by then the job description may have been removed from the site where you saw it.

Review your résumé. Think of examples that describe or illustrate your accomplishments. You will be asked about items on your résumé, and you need to be able to support them and go into more detail.

Use your study guide. Employment interviews, especially screening interviews, do not

stray far from a standard list of questions. Find a quiet one to two hours to review the interview study guide provided here, prepare your answers, and actually practice them. Your answers should be short but complete.

Interview Study Guide

The following questions SuccessHawk, "Interview Questions to Anticipate," <http://www.successhawk.com/Interviewing/Interview-Questions-to-Anticipate> (accessed July 13, 2010). are typical in many employment interviews. If you prepare answers for them ahead of time, you will not be caught off guard during an interview.

- **Tell me about yourself.** Remember that one-minute elevator introduction you worked on for networking? Here's your starting place.
- **What can you offer us? Why should we hire you?** Make a list of your qualifications for the job. Include years of experience, education, special training, technical skills, inside knowledge of a product or market, and so on. Are you a customer of this product or service?

Use your list of transferable skills like communication, leadership, organization, attention to detail, and work ethic. Review the list objectively. Which items are most valuable to the employer? Use this information to write a brief "sales pitch" that describes your qualifications for the job. Structure the information in a logical fashion and then practice saying it aloud until your delivery is smooth, natural, and confident.

- **What are your strengths?** Provide context and scope when answering this question. By elaborating on your strengths, it's easier for the employer to see where and how you excel.

Think about your noteworthy and unusual achievements or experiences. What did you do to accomplish them? What kind of preparation did they require? Why are they unique?

Think about performance reviews you have received in a job. Have you won awards or received positive feedback from others in the organization or from a happy customer? What were the reasons for the positive attention?

If you are a student or recent graduate with limited professional experience, think about your papers, reports, projects, or group assignments. Think about the assignment and what you did to complete it. The same strengths that helped you academically will also help you succeed professionally.

- **What are your weaknesses?** Remember that employers are human and appreciate honesty. It's OK to acknowledge your weaknesses and explain steps you've taken to address them. It's also fair to point out how you've turned a weakness into a strength.
- **Where do you see yourself three to five years from now?** Think about your personal goals and answer as genuinely as possible. This is a good opportunity to ask the interviewer about the opportunities available to a person who succeeds in this job.
- **What attracted you to our company?** Draw from your research and personal knowledge of the company to answer this question. Keep in mind that this interview is about what you can do for them, so answering that you're attracted to the free snacks in the break room won't score any points.

- **Tell me about a time you were under pressure to meet a deadline and what you did.** When did you find pressure at school or work because something was due? Describe the problem, the actions you took, and the outcome. Choose examples in which you received positive feedback.
- **What will former employers say about you?** Be honest. Think about the positive things they will say about you.
- **What salary are you expecting?** This is a land-mine question and one you'll almost certainly face. Typically a company has budgeted a certain salary range for a position and will do their best to stay within it. A general rule for salary discussions is that he or she who says the first number loses. Ask what the salary range is and where the interviewer sees you fitting into that range.

You owe it to yourself to find out before the interview what the salary range is for a comparable position in the geographical region. You can learn this through your network or an online salary search.

- **What questions do you have for me?** Before the interview, think of questions you would like answered about the company, the job, or the industry. Having good questions will tell the interviewer a lot about your listening skills and your degree of preparation. If you can, tie your questions back to something the interviewer said earlier. Remember, an interview is not just the company checking you out, it's also you checking out the company.

Trick Questions in Interviews

These happen to the best of interviewees. The only wrong answer to an impossible question is "I don't know." Hiring managers are looking for employees who think through tough challenges. They want to know if you keep your cool under pressure, if you can think on your feet, whether you BS or maintain your credibility, and how you respond to the unfamiliar. So show them: think aloud.

Talk about what you know about the problem; work out the process in front of them. You are being judged not only on your ability to solve problems but also on your intelligence and potential. There is no potential in "I don't know."

Prepare yourself physically. Like a final exam, an interview can cause anxiety, and too much anxiety can result in a poor interview. Make sure you eat well and get a good night's sleep before the interview. Hunger, use of energy drinks, and lack of sleep all contribute to interview anxiety.

Dress to impress. Research indicates many job applicants have unsuccessful interviews because they didn't dress professionally. If you're not sure, ask the person who schedules you for an interview what the dress code is. A suit or jacket, dress slacks, dress shirt, and a tie are usually fine for men. A suit or blouse and a skirt or slacks are fine for women. The rule of thumb is to dress one notch above that group's normal attire. If in doubt, a suit is never inappropriate for men or women. Remember, you're going to a job interview, not a casual event.

Punctuality counts. Confirm the date and time of the interview a day or two before. Make sure you know how to get there and how long it takes. Arrive at least ten to fifteen minutes before your interview. You may be asked to complete an application or other form when you arrive. If not, it's a good time to do some relaxation exercises.

Tips for Success during the Interview

Now is the time to demonstrate your listening, thinking, and communication skills. Avoid unexpected distractions, and turn off your cell phone before you even enter the building. Know whom you will be interviewing with and what his or her role is in the company; if possible, get something in writing from the interview coordinator so you can get the names spelled correctly (for follow-up purposes). Once you are face-to-face with the interviewer, do the following:

- Relax, take a deep breath, and smile. You should be genuinely pleased to be there, as you were selected from a pool of many other candidates.
- Be yourself. That's whom you want them to hire, not someone you're trying to act like.
- Keep your tone conversational but not too informal. Avoid slang and expletives.
- Make eye contact but don't stare.
- When answering questions, keep your answers focused on your skills and knowledge.
- Avoid one-word answers, but be succinct and direct; don't ramble.
- Be truthful. Any statements discovered to be untrue are grounds for not hiring you.
- If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- If you don't have the exact fact an interviewer is asking for, offer to find out and get back to them.
- At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer and tell him or her you enjoyed your conversation. If the interviewer hasn't already told you, it is appropriate to ask about the next steps.

After the Interview

Be sure to send a thank-you note to each person you interviewed with. It is also courteous to send a short note of thanks to the person who coordinated your schedule with the company, even if he or she didn't interview you. This person is often asked for his or her impressions of you. Keep your notes short but personal; refer to a comment or question from the interview that you found significant. An e-mail is usually acceptable, especially if the employer required you to submit an electronic application or résumé. Be sure to send it within twenty-four hours.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Successful interviewing depends on careful preparation.
- Most interview questions can be anticipated and prepared for.
- An interview is as important for you to evaluate the company and its working environment as it is for the company to evaluate your skills and "fit."

CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Practice, even with phone interviews, will make you more comfortable in any interview situation. Set up and complete three informational interviews about a field or industry you are interested in. Write about what you learned about yourself and your approach to interviews.
2. Practice, even with mock interviews, will make you more comfortable in any interview situation. Invite a friend to conduct a mock employment interview with you for a job you select from an Internet posting. Then switch roles. Write about

12.9 Chapter Activities

CHAPTER REVIEW

1. Explain the difference between a job and a career.

2. List three ways in which the employment environment is changing. What does this mean to you?

3. What is your life's mission?

4. What is your Holland occupational type? What kinds of occupations should you explore based on your results?

5. List two work-related skills and five transferable skills you have.

6. What are some ways you can gain experience and explore career options before you get your degree?

7. What are some of the factors you should consider when choosing a major or field of study?

8. Why is networking so important?

9. List four or five qualities of successful networking.

10. Many people are shy about networking. How would you recommend they overcome this?

11. What is the primary purpose of a résumé?

12. What should the body of a résumé focus on?

13. What is the purpose of a cover letter?

14. What are the three types of interviews and what are their objectives?

15. List three things you should do to prepare for an interview.

MAKE AN ACTION LIST

Two things I will do to further	Actions	How I will know I accomplished each action
--	----------------	---

my career exploration in...		
The next two weeks	1.	
	2.	
The next two months	1.	
	2.	
The next two years	1.	
	2.	

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