

Employability Skills Manual

This handbook will help you become more familiar with the job-seeking process and will share some tips and insight on how to improve your chances of being hired — directly from industry professionals.



KALAMAZOO RESA

Career Connect

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Getting Started

Acknowledgements

The Kalamazoo RESA Career & Technical Education Employability Skills Manual was originally developed in close collaboration with several human resources and talent acquisition professionals from various business sectors across Southwest Michigan. Their first-hand experience provides unique insight into the hiring process and a few tips “From the Experts” on how to succeed during the experience.

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Introduction

There are many ways to get a job. The Employability Skills Manual will help you become more familiar with the job-seeking process and give you some tips and insight into ways to improve your chances of being hired.

Sound too good to be true? It's easy. Just take it one step at a time.

Where to Start

The first step in the career planning process is to gather information about yourself to make an informed decision.

Consider the following ideas:

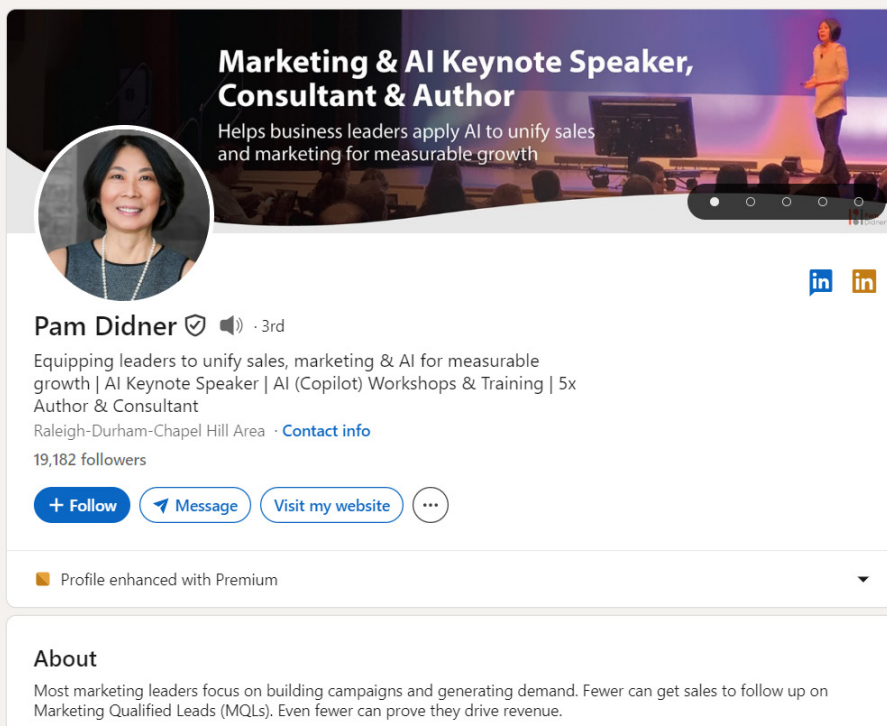
- Talk with other students. Ask them what they are learning in their class, ask about specific careers and career pathways. Does it sound like something you might enjoy?
- Speak with your instructor about why they chose their career path. Ask them how you might learn more about their career path.
- Take career exploration assessments through Xello, a college and career planning software that prepares K-12 students for success. Want to try Xello? Talk to your counselor.



Grow Your Network

LinkedIn Profile Checklist

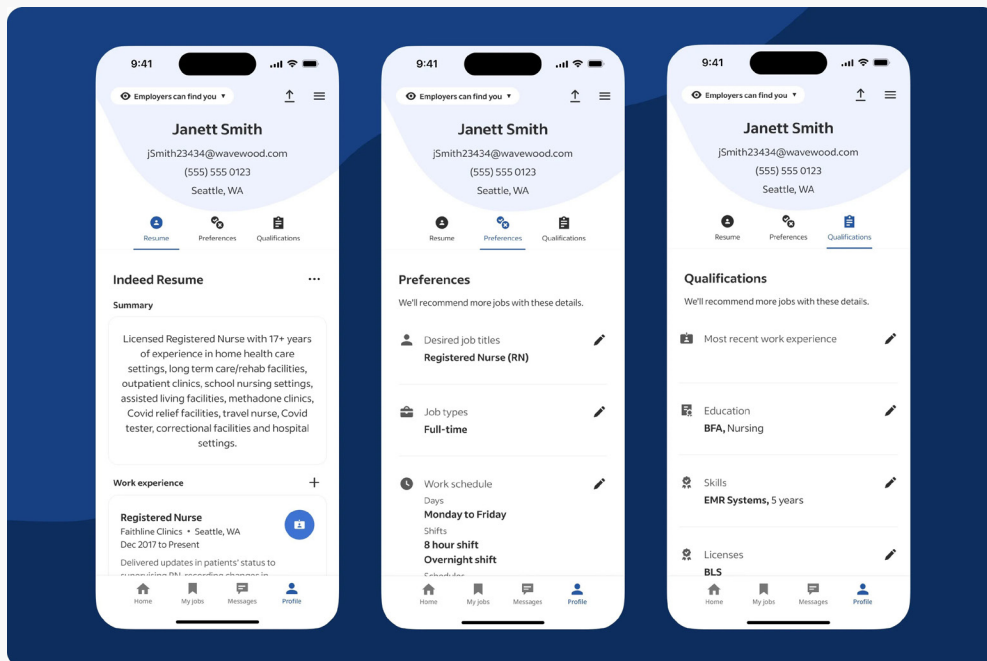
- **Photo:** Use a clear headshot with a plain background and professional attire.
- **Headline:** State what role you are training for or have.
- **Summary:** Describe what motivates you, what you're skilled at, and what's next.
- **Experience:** List the jobs you held, even if they were part-time, along with what you accomplished at each. Even include photos and videos from your work.
- **Courses:** List your CTE class to show off the skills and interests you're most excited about.
- **Skills & Expertise:** Add at least 5 key skills and then your connections can endorse you for the things you're best at.
- **Volunteer Experience & Causes:** Even if you weren't paid for a job, be sure to list it. Admission officers and employers often see volunteer experience as just as valuable as paid work.
- **Education:** Starting with high school, list all the educational experience you've had including summer programs.
- **Recommendations:** Ask managers, teachers, or classmates who've worked with you closely to write a recommendation. This gives extra credibility to your strengths and skills.



Indeed Profile Checklist

On Indeed, your resume is your profile; however, you can add additional information to help match you better with employers and opportunities.

- **Photo:** Bright, clear photo on a plain background.
 - Forward facing
 - Good lighting
 - Smile/happy expression
- **Professional Summary:** What do you want an employer to know about your experience? This is where you highlight your experiences and key strengths.
 - Clear simple language
 - Represent skills
 - Demonstrate experience
- **Skills & Experience:** Like a resume, list out your past work experiences and responsibilities for each role.
 - Specify previous employers and employment dates
 - Detail responsibilities and environment
 - Mention qualifications



Managing Your Digital Footprint

Employers will search online for you. In most cases, there is nothing you can do to erase your digital footprint, so you must manage it so that you are positively portrayed.

Here are a few best practices for maintaining a strong and positive online presence:

- Look up your name using a search engine so you are aware of all information that is currently available.
- Consider making your personal social media profile(s) private.
- Think before you post. Never post anything you wouldn't want a boss to see. Grammar and spelling count – even online.

Where to Look for a Job

Once you have your profiles and information gathered, it's time to start looking for a job.

Here are the best places to start:

Source	How to Use It
Online Boards	Use Indeed, Ziprecruiter, and LinkedIn for high-volume listings.
In-Person	Attend career fairs or visit businesses directly to hand in applications.
Unions & Trades	Ideal for apprenticeships (3-5 years of paid training). Talk with your CTE instructor on which unions would apply to your career path.
Government	These roles often require specific civil service tests. Visit usajobs.gov (Federal) or governmentjobs.com (State of Michigan) to find open roles.
Public Agencies	Visit Michigan Works! Southwest for free career coaching, job placement, and more.
Private Agencies	Staffing firms (like Express Employment Professionals, Trillium, or WSI) can help you find "temp-to-hire" roles.

Now that you've found some potential job openings and have a general idea of what you're looking for, it's time to create or edit your materials to match the role you want.

Resumes

What is a Resume?

A resume is a concise, typically one-page document designed to highlight your skills, experience, and talents. It strategically uses keywords and action verbs to showcase your accomplishments.

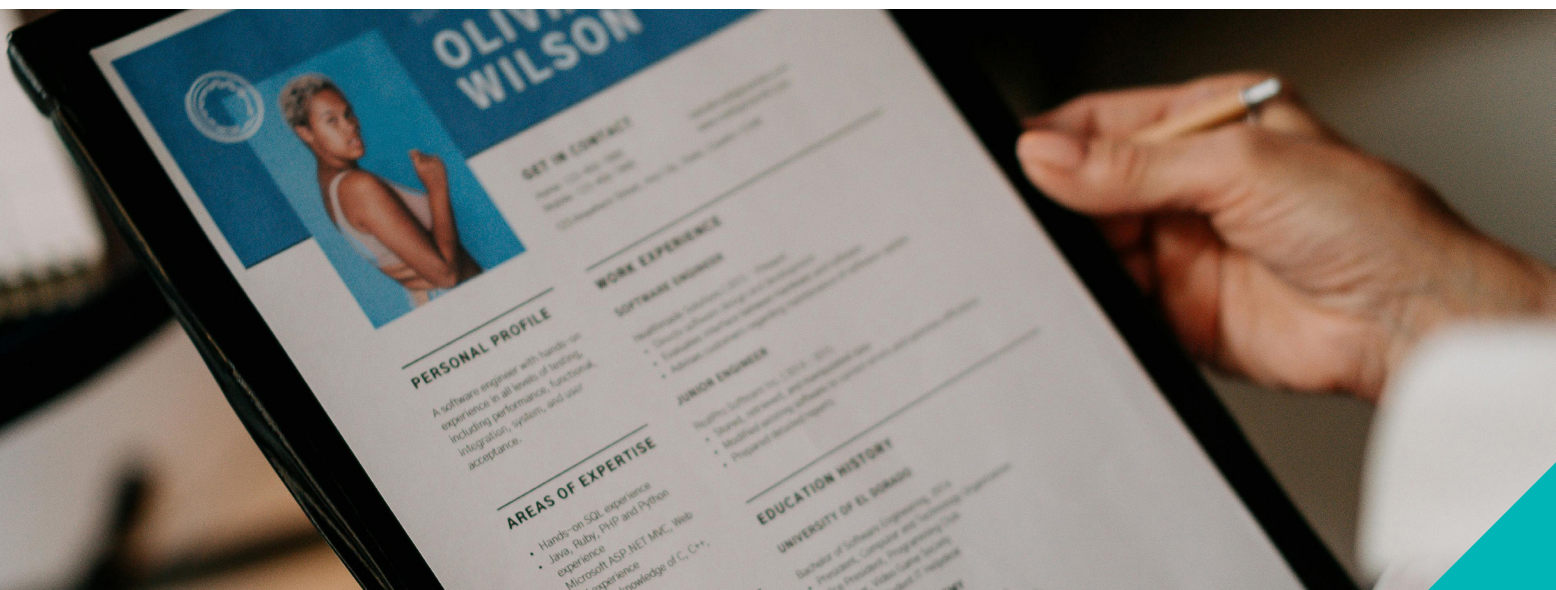
- **Relevant Experience:** Work, volunteering, and career training
- **Key Accomplishments:** A factual statement of your successes
- **Core Skills:** Both technical and professional strengths
- **Education:** Your academic background and certifications

What is the purpose of a resume?

- To gain a potential employer's interest.
- To obtain an interview.
- Used by the employer as a screening tool.
- To highlight scholarships, achievements, and professional qualifications.

"The average time spent by a recruiter looking at a resume is 11 seconds!"

– Forbes



What's in a Resume?

The most commonly included sections on a resume are as follows:

1. Heading

- **Name:** Should be bold and the largest font on the page.
- **Contact Information:** Include city, state, phone number, LinkedIn or professional website links, and a professional email (e.g., jsmith@email.com). Ensure that your voicemail is set up for the phone number listed.

2. Professional Summary (Optional)

- **The "Hook":** It's a short mission statement highlighting your passion and strengths related to the job.
- **Keywords:** Use terms found in the job description to pass electronic filters.

3. Education

- **Order:** List your most recent education first.
- **Details:** Include school name, location, expected graduation date, and specialized programs.
- **Relevant Coursework:** List full course titles (no abbreviations) that relate to the job.

4. Work Experience

- **Format:** List your most recent job first.
- **Content:** Include job title, employer, location, and dates of employment. If you're currently working there, list "Present" as the end date.
- **Descriptions:** Use action verbs (e.g., "Managed," "Created") instead of "I" statements. Quantify achievements where possible (e.g., "Gained a 90% customer satisfaction rating"). Emphasize at least three responsibilities for each position listed on your resume.
- List informal work like babysitting, pet care, or lawn mowing if you haven't had a job.

5. Volunteer Experience and Community Service

- Showcase community service, including the organization name and your specific responsibilities or hours served.

6. Activities, Skills, and Awards

- **Technical Skills:** List specific proficiencies (e.g., "Proficient in Microsoft Word").
- **Involvement:** Include clubs, sports, or leadership roles.
- **Recognition:** List certificates, special awards, or honors you've earned.

FROM THE EXPERTS

Keep it Current: Your resume should be a living document. As your experience and education grow, make sure to keep your resume updated and relevant information at the top.

Resume Example

YOUR NAME

123 Street, City, MI 49001 | (269) 454-3234 | yourname@gmail.com

SKILLS SUMMARY

Versatile and multi-skilled person. Excellent mechanical aptitude and work ethic. Passionate about working in the automotive field and works on engines while not at work as an assistant mechanic.

EDUCATION

Anytown High School – Expected graduation 2022

Anytown, MI

Relevant Courses: Auto Technology and Computerized Manufacturing

Maintained B average

CERTIFICATIONS

- ASE Engine Repair (2020–2023)
- ASE Repair (2020–2023)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Assistant Mechanic

January 2020–present

Uptown Garage, Anytown, MI

- Work on all makes and models of vehicles, including domestic and imports
- Perform a variety of maintenance and repairs ranging from tune-ups to complete engine overhauls

Crew Member

Summer 2019

Simmons Detasseling, Anytown, MI

- Followed directions of Lead Foreman
- Worked on a team to detassel corn
- Invited to return for the next summer as a Lead Foreman

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

- Led a team of four students in the Breadlift fundraising event benefiting the March of Dimes (2019–2021)

ACTIVITIES

- Track (2020–present)
- Cross Country (2019–present)
- Selected for All-Conference Team (2020)

HOBBIES AND AWARDS

- Stock car racing
- Automobile customizing
- Rebuilding cars to original condition
- Awarded Southwest Michigan Hot Rod of the Year–2021

References

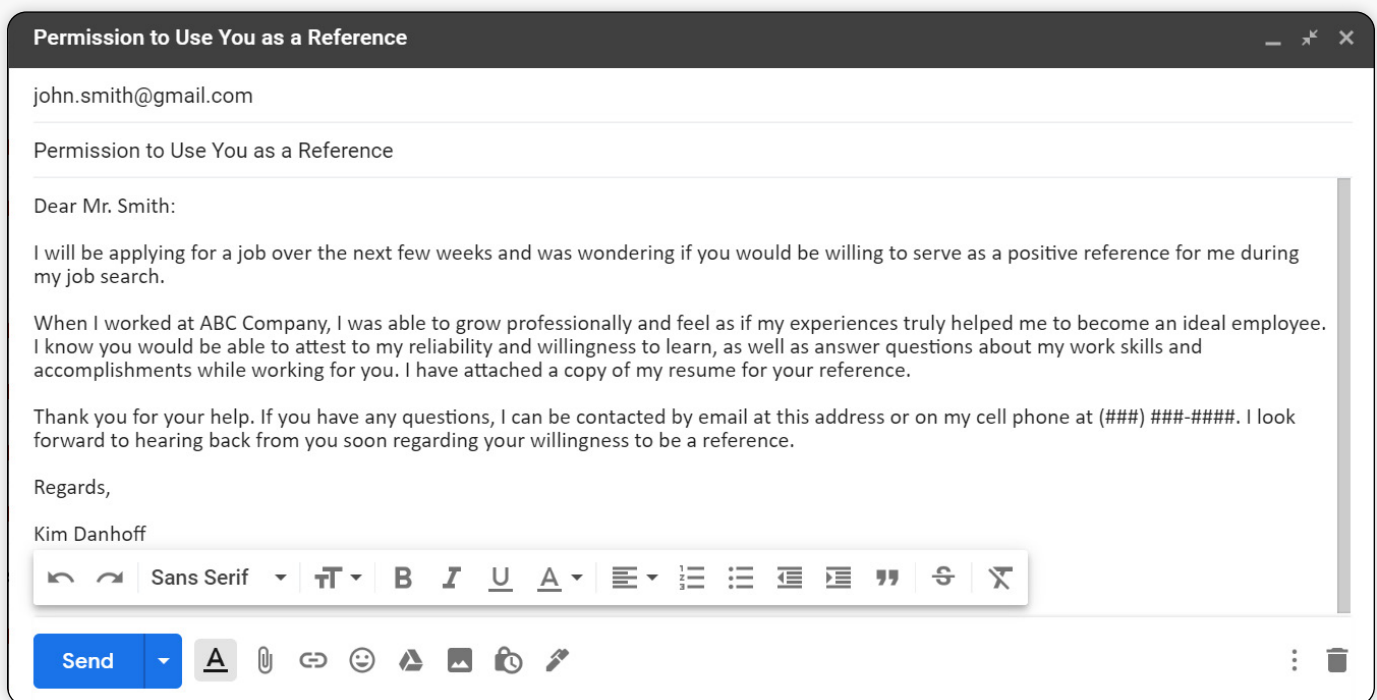
You can include references on your resume if an employer asks for them.

References should be:

- Individuals who know your work style and work performance.
- Current or previous supervisors, teachers, counselors, coaches, or anyone who can speak about your character, skills, and work ethic.
- References should NOT be family members or friends unless you are employed by them.

Remember: Always ask permission BEFORE using someone as a reference. You can ask for permission over the phone, through email and text, or in person. However, in person is preferred or recommended.

Here's an example of one way to ask someone to be your reference:



Resume Tips and Myths

You may have heard a good resume will get you a job. The truth is, it won't land you the job, but it may get you an interview.

Here are other common myths:

- ✗ **Myth:** All you have to do to create a resume is use a template or AI.
- ✓ **Fact:** These tools are great to start with, but should not be the finished product. Hiring managers can see the effort that goes into your resume.
- ✗ **Myth:** Having a typo, a misspelling, or a grammatical error on your resume is not a big deal.
- ✓ **Fact:** Spelling and grammatical errors show a lack of attention to detail.

Here are some general tips for all resumes:

1. Always describe your experiences and skills honestly and accurately.
2. Keep the layout balanced and uncluttered. Use an easy-to-read font (like Arial or Calibri) in 11- or 12-point font size.
3. Start bullet points with strong verbs to describe your duties and achievements.
4. Keep formatting, bolding, and alignment consistent across all sections.
5. Be specific with your skills. List technical proficiencies, specialized equipment, or languages. Include software versions or model numbers where relevant.
6. Use present tense for current roles and past tense for previous ones.
7. Do not include your age, gender, ethnicity, or salary expectations in your resume.
8. Only include your GPA if it is a 3.0 or higher.
9. Spell out all words and explain acronyms (e.g., write out "Health Occupations Students of America" before using "HOSA").
10. Check for any spelling or grammar errors. A perfect, error-free resume is a direct representation of your professionalism.



Cover Letters

What is a Cover Letter?

Think of a cover letter as your personal introduction to a future employer. While your resume lists your facts, the cover letter tells your story and proves you're actually interested in the job. Employers use cover letters to see if you can write well and to figure out if you're a good fit before they even call you for an interview.

It allows you to:

- Show off your personality.
- Explain why you're the best person for the job.
- Connect your past experiences to what the company needs.

Parts of a Cover Letter

1. Heading

List your contact information (name, phone, email) and the date. Below that, list the employer's contact information (name, title, company name).

2. Greeting

Address your cover letter to a specific person or "Dear Hiring Manager,".

3. The Intro

State exactly which job you're applying for and how you heard about it. End this paragraph with one strong sentence explaining why you're a great fit.

4. Middle Section (This is the most important section)

Describe 1-3 specific projects or skills that prove you can do the work. Don't just repeat your resume; use storytelling and personal examples to give them a look at your best work. This should be one to three paragraphs.

5. The Conclusion

Wrap up your cover letter by mentioning your availability and the best way to contact you for an interview.

6. Closing Signature

End professionally with "Sincerely," or "Best Regards," followed by your full name.

Sample Cover Letter

YOUR NAME

123 Street, City, MI 49001 | (269) 454-3234 | yourname@gmail.com

Mr. Allan Moyle
Moyle Retail Solutions
305 S Main St
Anytown, MI 49002

start at the two-inch mark

RE: Application for Casual Retail Sales Assistant Position

Dear Mr. Moyle:

As a highly motivated and dedicated student with strong communication and interpersonal skills, I would like to apply for the position of Retail Sales Assistant.

During my high school years, I have been extensively involved in my school community, which has allowed me to develop strong interpersonal skills. My involvement in various events, including drama and sports, has allowed me to work closely with my peers while supporting the school community as a whole.

These experiences have allowed me to develop strong time management and organizational skills, which I see as being very important when seeking employment while continuing to study.

Personal attributes that I believe make me suitable for this position include:

- **Motivation:** Volunteer participation and school results demonstrate high motivation.
- **Customer Service:** Assisting with the sale of products at community events has allowed the development of customer service skills.
- **Communication:** Acting in drama performances and working as an MC for school events has allowed the development of communication skills.

My teachers and educators have commended me for my willingness to participate and my dedication to helping out where possible. I enjoy working with others and believe that my strong communication skills will ensure that I can meet the expectations of this role.

I believe that I have a lot to offer your organization. I am keen to develop my professional skills and look forward to discussing my application with you at an interview. My resume is enclosed for your consideration. I can be contacted at any time via cell phone or email as listed above. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

leave three blank lines,
don't forget to sign the letter.
Digital signature is fine,
but in pen is best.

Your Name

General Tips for a Cover Letter

1. Write your own cover letter. There are many samples available to use as guides for ideas, but the final product should be your own work.
2. Check to see if the application requires a cover letter. If it doesn't, you do not need to submit one.
3. Use the same header, font, and format that you used in your resume.
4. Avoid spelling and grammatical errors. Triple check for common errors such as misspelled words, incorrect punctuation, and not capitalizing proper nouns (names of businesses, schools, classes, etc.) Always ask for at least two other people to proofread your cover letter before sending it.
5. If you have a personal connection within the organization, mention it; this may help you stand out from the rest of the applicants.
6. Target each version of your cover letter to a specific position, and strategically align your skills and qualifications to the position.
7. Intentionally use key words and phrases from the job posting. Use detailed examples to support your claims. For example, if you claim that you are organized, give an example of how you have used that skill.
8. Save a copy of your cover letter for future use and follow-up purposes.



The Job Application

What is a Job Application and Why Do Employers Use It?

Most employers will ask interested applicants to complete a job application, which is either in paper format or online.

A job application is a legal document that asks for factual information. It allows employers to collect information and the applicant's signature, verifying that everything on the application is true. The application may also give the employer permission for reference, background, criminal history, and financial history checks. Most applications also ask the applicant whether they can contact current or former employers. Lying on an application is grounds for termination and rescinding of an offer.

Asking for a Job Application

Many companies have job applications on site that you can ask for in person.

When asking for an application:

- Dress neatly and professionally.
- Ask for the hiring manager or person in charge.
- Keep your request simple and confident.
- "Hi, my name is John Smith. I'm very interested in working here. May I please have a job application?"
- Many companies require online applications — ask how to apply if needed.
- Go alone and avoid busy hours.
- Bring a pen and any necessary information with you.



Information You Will Need to Complete Any Job Application

Personal Information

Name, complete address (house number, street name, city, state, and zip code), email address, and home and cell phone numbers.

Education and Qualifications

Schools attended including complete addresses (high schools, colleges, and trade schools), certifications, skills, and qualifications tailored directly to the position.

Employment History

Name of employer, address, phone, email address, supervisor's full name, job title and your responsibilities, dates of employment (month and year), starting salary and ending salary, and reason for leaving.

References

Three professional references that the company may contact. Include first and last name, job title, relationship to you, company, address, phone number, email address, and how long they've known you.

Position Applied for and Availability

List the position(s) you are interested in applying for at the company, days and hours you are available, as well as the date you are available to begin working.

Online Application Process

Many organizations have transitioned to online application systems, some of which require you to use an on-site computer. Plan to register a username and password to access the application if this is your first time applying through the system. Be sure to save this information in case you need to log in later to revise something, check the status of your application, or apply for a different position. You may also need to complete additional follow-up tasks after submitting your application, including personality and skills assessments or other tasks. Be sure to regularly check the email attached to the application.

You may be asked to submit your resume along with the application, or in place of it altogether. Plan to have your resume created, so you are prepared to upload it.

FROM THE EXPERTS

Take your time: Set aside time for this! Plan for sufficient time to complete a job application. It may take longer than you would expect.

Application Examples

Written application example:

- ▶ <https://eforms.com/employee/application>
- ▶ [Try filling out this online practice job application.](#)

EMPLOYMENT / JOB APPLICATION

PERSONAL INFORMATION

FULL NAME: _____ DATE: _____
First Middle Last

ADDRESS: _____
Street Address Apartment
City State Zip Code

E-MAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN): _____

DATE AVAILABLE: _____ DESIRED PAY: \$ _____ ☐ HOUR ☐ SALARY

POSITION APPLIED FOR: _____

EMPLOYMENT DESIRED: ☐ FULL-TIME ☐ PART-TIME ☐ SEASONAL

EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY

ARE YOU LEGALLY ELIGIBLE TO WORK IN THE U.S.? ☐ YES ☐ NO

HAVE YOU EVER WORKED FOR THIS EMPLOYER? ☐ YES ☐ NO

*IF YES, WRITE THE START AND END DATES: _____

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED OF A FELONY? ☐ YES ☐ NO

*IF YES, PLEASE EXPLAIN: _____

EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL: _____ CITY / STATE: _____

FROM: _____ TO: _____

GRADUATE? ☐ YES ☐ NO DIPLOMA: _____

COLLEGE: _____ CITY / STATE: _____

FROM: _____ TO: _____

GRADUATE? ☐ YES ☐ NO DEGREE: _____

OTHER: _____ CITY / STATE: _____

Tips for Completing Paper and Online Applications

1. Read Everything First

- Follow all directions and read the whole application carefully before you start filling in information.
- Fill in every blank. If a question doesn't apply to you, write N/A (Not Applicable). Do not write 'see resume'.

2. Be Prepared and Accurate

- Have your information ready. Keep a list of the information you need and always list your most recent job first.
- Complete the application on your own or with help, if needed. If it is a paper form, print neatly using black or blue ink.

3. Be Smart with Your Answers

- If the application asks for your Desired Salary, don't write a specific dollar amount. Instead, write "Negotiable" or "Open".
- Show off your skills and mention your good attitude, reliability, or teamwork, even if you don't have a lot of work experience.

4. Triple Check Your Work

- Spelling errors can cost you the job. Use spelling tools or search online if you are not sure how to spell a word.
- Be 100% honest and do not lie. Employers check your facts, and lying will get you disqualified.
- Review everything once you have completed the application. Don't forget to click submit online!

Employment Testing and Screening

Many companies use quick tests during the application process to see if you are a good fit for the job before they hire you. **There are three main types of tests:**

Personality Tests

Personality assessments have no right or wrong answers. They provide the employer with a look into your interests and personality traits, allowing them to see how you work with others and align with their companies' core values. Common examples of these tests include the Gallup StrengthsFinder, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and DiSC Personality Profile.

Skills Tests

These tests prove that you can do the job right now. Examples of skills tests include basic math, operating equipment and machinery, inputting data, designing an ad layout, writing a letter, blueprint reading, etc.

Aptitude Tests

Aptitude tests allow employers to see if you have the ability to learn the job once you are trained. They are generally written or oral, and are designed to determine reasoning, mathematical, writing, or verbal skills.



FROM THE EXPERTS

Practice beforehand using online aptitude tests like **LinkedIn Learning** or **[practiceaptitudetests.com](https://www.practiceaptitudetests.com)**

Your Rights and Rules

By law, employment tests must be fair. The test must relate to the job, everyone applying must take the exact same test, and your scores are private.

Employers may also perform other tests, which they will always ask for your approval.

Background Checks

Employers may look into your past and run a background check. They will usually check your school/work history and criminal record. They must get your permission first.

Drug Screens

Many jobs require a drug test before hiring you to keep the workplace safe. The most common method is urine sampling. A positive result indicates recent drug use and many companies have a zero tolerance for drug use.

FROM THE EXPERTS

Be Honest: If you take prescription medicine, know what it is and expect it to show up on your test.



Employment Testing and Screening

Make sure you follow up within a couple of days after submitting an application. This will help you set yourself apart and show your enthusiasm for the organization and position. You can follow up by sending an email or a phone call.

Interviews

The interview will be the deciding factor as to whether or not you get the job. First impressions are formed within the first ten seconds, so be prepared to impress.

Types of Interviews

There are three main types of interviews: in-person, virtual, and over the phone. Everything in this section can apply to any type of interview. Here are more specific things you need to know:

1. Phone Interviews

These kinds of interviews are typically the first step in the interview process. Ahead of your phone interview, make sure you:

- Clear the room of distractions.
- Put your phone on Do Not Disturb mode.
- Have your resume up for reference.
- Have a pen and paper available to take notes.

**It is becoming common for AI callers to conduct the first phone interview.*



2. Virtual Interviews

This type of interview has become the new normal in the hiring process. Ahead of a virtual interview, make sure you:

- Test the platform and download the application on your device.
- Be aware of your background, make sure your space is quiet, and your Internet connection is strong.
- Switch your screen view so you can see everyone in the interview.



3. In-Person Interviews

- Can be conducted one-on-one or in a group setting.
- This could happen at any time in the interview process.



Do Your Homework

Before the interview, look up the company online. Look at their website and social media, learn about the products and services they offer, the company values and mission, the latest news, and any other information you can find. Mention anything you found interesting in the interview!

Read reviews from current and former employees on websites like Glassdoor or Indeed. This helps you get a brief look into the company culture to see if it would be a good fit for you.

Research the interviewer on LinkedIn and read over the job description to make sure you mention your skills that align with what they are looking for.

FROM THE EXPERTS

Be Prepared: Do your research and explore a professional's LinkedIn profile. Don't forget to keep your profile up-to-date as well.

What to Bring (and Leave Behind)

Bring these in a neat folder:

- Extra copies of your resume and reference page.
- Portfolio or work samples.
- A notepad and pen to take notes and write down your questions. You can prepare questions ahead of time!

Leave these behind:

- Your phone: Turn it completely off and leave it in your bag or car. Do not look at it in the building.
- Food or Drinks: Do not bring any outside food, including snacks or chewing gum. Most organizations will ask if you want something to drink, but it is okay to bring a water bottle in.



What to Wear

First impressions happen in the first 10 seconds, so it's important to look professional.

Here are a couple of examples of typical interview outfits:

RECOMMENDED

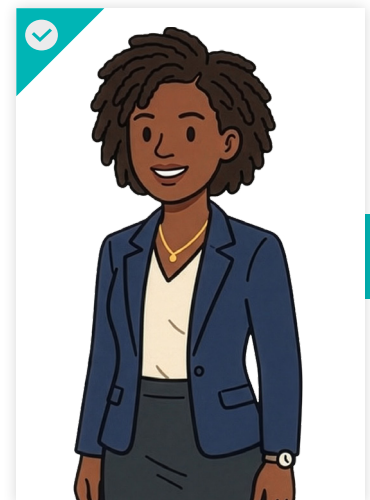
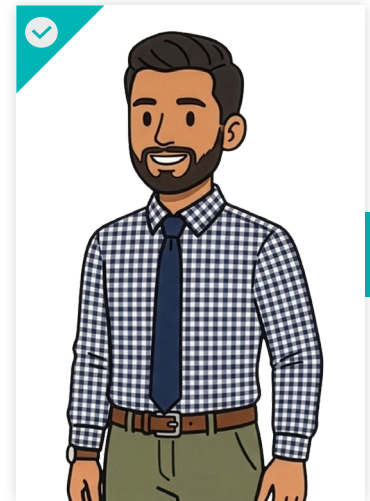
- ✓ Polo or button-up shirt (tucked in)
- ✓ Slacks, chinos, or nice khakis
- ✓ Belt and clean shoes (dress shoes or nice loafers)
- ✓ Neat grooming (hair and facial hair tidy)

AVOID

- ✗ Graphic t-shirts, hoodies, crop tops, or athletic wear
- ✗ Shorts, ripped jeans, sagging pants, leggings (unless under a dress), or casual joggers
- ✗ Ball caps or beanies
- ✗ Slides, flip-flops, or dirty sneakers
- ✗ Excessive perfume, loud jewelry, or distracting nails

Remember, it's not just about clothes.

- Start with good personal hygiene. Be clean and use minimal cologne or perfume.
- Well-groomed hairstyle. So as not to be a distraction to yourself, hair should be out of your eyes.
- Make sure your fingernails are clean and trimmed.
- Brush your teeth beforehand to make sure you have fresh breath.
- Avoid distracting jewelry that is flashy or loud when moving around.



FROM THE EXPERTS

Practice Makes Perfect: Practice your interview in a mirror, on camera, or with a friend or family member, and find areas for improvement.

The Do's and Don'ts of Interviewing

DO:

- ✓ Research pay and benefits beforehand.
- ✓ Arrive 10-15 minutes early. Enter the building 5 minutes before your interview. You can also make a practice drive to the organization where you will be interviewed, so you know exactly what to expect.
- ✓ Consider the position's roles and responsibilities and know what your dealbreakers are (overtime, weekend, travel, etc.) .
- ✓ Listen carefully to the interviewer and express your interest in the job.
- ✓ Smile, sit up straight, and make eye contact.
- ✓ Give detailed answers instead of just "yes" or "no".

DON'T:

- ✗ Ask about pay or vacations in the first interview.
- ✗ Overuse slang and filler words like "um," "uh," or "like".
- ✗ Overshare about your life or trash-talk past employers, teachers, or coworkers.
- ✗ Bring friends or parents into the building with you.
- ✗ Exaggerate. Be honest about your experience and accomplishments.
- ✗ Leave a question unanswered.

Typical Interview Questions

Many interviewers ask standard questions during an interview. Some of these questions are listed below with suggestions on how to best answer. Remember, you should answer honestly and tie in your skills.

Tell me a little about yourself

Talk about your school and work experiences, as well as your accomplishments. Keep it professional.

Tell me about the work you've been doing

Talk about your duties and responsibilities. Share your educational accomplishments.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- Describe the strengths which directly correlate with the position for which you are interviewing. Use class experience, team projects, or other examples for when the strengths were used.
- Describe one weakness that you want to improve on. For example, a weakness could be time management, and you are using a planner or alarms to help improve. Never say a weakness without also including what you are doing to improve.

Why do you want to work for this company/want this job?

Use the research from before and draw on company values and the job itself, and apply the skills you have to explain why you want this role.

What have you learned from your previous work experience?

Use an example from a previous job, class project, or volunteer opportunity. Your answer does not have to be job skill-related; it could be related to your Skills for Success, like collaboration.

More interview example questions can be found here:

[http://careermobilityoffice.cs.ny.gov/cmo/documents/Sample Interview Questions.pdf](http://careermobilityoffice.cs.ny.gov/cmo/documents/Sample%20Interview%20Questions.pdf)

How to Answer Tough Questions

Employers want to know how you handle real situations. Using the STAR approach is the best way to showcase your experience using a quick story.

Here is an example answering the question, “How do you handle conflict?”

S **Situation:** Define the context and the problem you overcame using Who, What, When, Where, Why.
Example: “I handle conflict with grace. In a school group project, two members were not doing their work.”

T **Task:** Identify the key objective. What were you trying to accomplish?
Example: “We needed to finish the project by a specific date to get a passing grade.”

A **Action:** What did you do to complete the task while emphasizing your skills?
Example: “I talked with the group members privately, broke the work into smaller steps, and we finished the project together.”

R **Result:** Summarize the outcome. Use data or numbers if you can.
Example: “We turned the project in on time and got an A. My classmates told me they appreciated how I handled the situation and it made them feel more included.”

Oddball Questions

Don’t be surprised if an interviewer asks you something like, “What animal would you be?” These questions are asked to see how you think on your feet and your creativity. Always tie your answer back to a strength. You could answer the above question by saying, “An owl, because I’m a quick learner and a good listener.”

Know Your Rights

By law, interviewers should only ask about the job. They cannot ask about your age, religion, race, citizenship, or if you plan to have kids.

An example of an illegal interview question would be: "How old are your children?"

You may choose to answer the question, but you have the right to also refuse to answer it. If you are asked an illegal question, it is recommended to address the reason they are asking.

For example, you can respond to the above question, saying: "I assume you are concerned about my attendance. In my last job, I missed less work than any other member of the staff."

Here is a full list of illegal interview questions from Yale University:

ocs.yale.edu/channels/illegal-interview-questions

Always Have Questions

At the end of the interview, they will ask if you have any questions. Always have one to two questions ready and make sure you don't ask a question that has already been answered previously.

Here are examples of questions you could ask:

- Tell me what you like about this job.
- What skills are required to be successful in this role?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?

Follow Up

Make sure you send a short, polite thank-you email or note after your interview on the same day.

In your thank you, include:

- Thanking them or the group for their time.
- Mention something specific you talked about, so they remember you.
- Highlight your relevant skills and desire for the position.
- If pay and benefits are not discussed, you can follow up later during the thank-you note.
- Proofread it carefully for spelling errors.

First Days on the Job

Guide To Your First Week At Work

You got the job! Now it's time to show them they made the right choice.

- **Prepare the Night Before:** Lay out your clothes and get a good night's sleep. If your job requires safety gear, make sure you have it ready.
- **Show Up Early:** Never arrive late, and don't ask to leave early.
- **Be a Sponge:** Soak in all of the information that you'll need to succeed in your new role. Take notes during your training so you don't forget how to do tasks. Read the Employee Handbook.
- **Ask Questions:** It's always better to ask than to guess and make a mistake.
- **Hide Your Phone:** Put your phone on silent and keep it completely out of sight while you are working.

Forms, Forms, and More Forms

Before you can actually start working, you have to fill out some important tax and legal forms. If you are under 18, you will need to get a Work Permit from your high school's main office before your first day!

The three big forms that everyone has to fill out are: the I-9, W-4, and MI-W4. Learn more about these forms, how they work, and how to fill them out at the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) website: www.irs.gov/individuals/tax-withholding-estimator

Probation Period

The first 30 to 90 days of a new job are typically a probationary period. This time allows you and your employer to ensure the job is a good fit.

You will learn a great deal of new information during these first few months. To put your best foot forward, be prepared to take detailed notes during any training, meetings, or one-on-ones, and always ask questions if anything is unclear.

Skills for Success

Skills for Success (S4S) are the top 5 professional skills that employers look for in the real world. They're transferable, meaning once you learn them in school or life, you can use them at any job to stay competitive.



Communication

Sharing your ideas clearly using written, visual, or speaking skills. It means listening, asking questions to understand, and adjusting your message for your audience.



Collaboration

Working well on a team with people from different backgrounds. It means valuing other perspectives, helping your group complete complex tasks, and handling disagreements respectfully.



Personal Management

Keeping yourself organized, safe, and healthy. This means setting goals, meeting deadlines, showing up prepared, following safety protocols, and putting your phone away.



Critical Thinking

Asking smart questions to make sense of information. It means analyzing data and considering how your choices impact a project, the community, or the environment.



Problem Solving

Using your creativity, school knowledge, and technical skills to find solutions. It means spotting a problem, understanding its limits, testing a solution, and learning from your mistakes.

FROM THE EXPERTS

Make sure to use these Skills for Success on your resume and talk about them during interviews with examples.

Employment Evaluations and Performance Reviews

Many companies have evaluations or performance reviews annually that can directly influence pay increases and promotions.

Typically, during these evaluations, you'll meet with a supervisor and talk about your work during the past year. Ahead of the evaluation, it's a good idea to:

Compile a list of accomplishments since your last review of:

1. Trainings Completed
 - Certificates earned
 - Large projects completed
 - Anything else you are proud of
2. Goals You Plan to Set

During the evaluation, make sure you are honest, take responsibility when necessary, accept constructive criticism gracefully, and emphasize your strengths. This is also a good time to ask about career development opportunities and let your employer know about any additional training you'd like to receive.

Steps for Advancement

If you want to earn a promotion or raise, focus on these key habits:

- **Be Reliable and Safe:** Always do your best work, follow safety rules, and show up on time.
- **Have a Great Attitude:** Show enthusiasm, even during unpleasant tasks. Dress for the job you want and practice great hygiene.
- **Be a Team Player:** Get along with everyone, keep your temper in check, and cooperate with your coworkers to get things done faster.
- **Take Initiative:** Don't wait to be told what to do. Be willing to take on extra tasks and ask for feedback to improve.
- **Learn and Grow:** Keep building your Skills for Success, accept constructive criticism gracefully, and look for extra training opportunities.

Worried About Your Job Status?

If you are nervous about your future at the company or feel like you might get let go, don't just quit.

Use communication to turn things around:

- Ask your supervisor for a private chat.
- Ask them how to improve your performance.
- Ask for help. If you don't understand a task, ask for clarification. Getting help can save your job!

Leaving Your Job

Employment Resignation

When you decide to leave a job, how you exit matters. Your connections matter, and you never want to “burn bridges”, because you might need them for a job reference later.

Follow these steps to resign professionally:

- **Tell Your Boss First:** Request a quick, private face-to-face meeting. Your supervisor should hear the news from you.
- **Keep It Positive:** Keep your reasons for resigning positive. For example, say: “I’ve been offered a position with more responsibility,” or “I’m leaving for an opportunity that aligns more with my schedule.”
- **Give Two Weeks Notice:** The standard rule is to tell your boss two weeks before your actual last day. This timeline varies by industry. Keep working hard and showing up during those final two weeks.
- **Write a Resignation Letter:** After your private meeting with your boss, make sure you email or provide a written resignation letter that same day. It should state the position you are leaving, your exact last day, a brief reason why, and a quick “thank you” for the opportunity.
- **Ask for a Reference:** Depending on your relationship, you can ask your manager if they would be willing to act as a positive job reference for you in the future.



Sample Letter of Resignation:

Dear [Employer],

It is with regret that I inform you I will be leaving my position as [Job Title] with [Company]. My last day will be [Date].

Working for [Company] has been a very rewarding experience, and I have learned a lot. Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Exit Interviews

Some organizations require an exit interview from employees leaving the company. During this meeting, it is acceptable to give constructive criticism. Be open and honest while answering questions.

What if You are Fired or Let Go?

Getting fired is tough, but the key is how you bounce back and grow from the experience.

Here is how to handle a termination:

- **Keep Your Cool:** It is a stressful moment, but do not argue, blame others, make excuses, or say things you will regret. Take a deep breath and stay polite.
- **Get Specific Feedback:** Ask your boss for the exact reasons you are being let go. If they say, "It wasn't a good fit," politely ask what specific skills or behaviors you need to improve for your next job.
- **Own It and Remember Your Worth:** Use this as a lesson on what not to do next time and know that getting let go does not mean you are a bad worker or a bad person.
- **Bounce Back:** Update your resume with your new experience, practice your interviewing skills, and start looking for your next job.

Notice of Non-Discrimination

It is the policy of Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency that no discriminatory practices based on gender/sex, sexual orientation, race, religion, height, weight, color, age, national origin, disability or any other status covered by federal, state or local law be allowed during any program, activity, service or in employment. The following positions at Kalamazoo RESA have been designated to handle inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy: Assistant Superintendent Meredith Lewis and Assistant Superintendent Mindy Miller. Contact information: (269) 250-9200, 1819 E. Milham Ave, Portage, MI 49002.

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