



Ask Jack

CareerLine Q & A

by Jack Wilson

ACM's career consultant, Jack Wilson, answers questions from students about their forthcoming careers in computing and information technology.

Q: I have great technical skills but am not a great writer. I know I should have a cover letter when I send out my resume. What should be included in this letter?

A: Effective cover letters have three parts:

1. *An opening.* Your intro should contain some kind of a "hook" or statement that will get the reader's attention and make them want to continue reading. Perhaps include a statement about your most compelling strength or skill, or state the reason why the reader should be interested in you. What differentiates you among all applicants?
2. *A Statement of Purpose.* State the kind of a position you are focused on and where you can be most valuable. Include a bulleted list that highlights around three or four of your other key skills and strengths.
3. *A Conclusion.* Close the letter with a statement of what you want to happen: an interview, a phone call, and whether you intend to follow up the letter personally. And of course, include a polite closing that thanks the reader for their consideration and mention that you are looking forward to learning more about the opportunity.

Remember to make your letter clear, crisp, concise, and convincing.

Q: I was recently introduced to a recruiter who offered to "sell me" to several different companies. Is it a good idea for me to accept his assistance?

A: I would be a little suspicious of any offer to shop you around to many different employers, especially if the recruiter asks you to work with him exclusively. There is no limit to the number of recruiters with whom you can work, and I would not tie myself exclusively to any one of them. Also, you should reach an understanding with the recruiter that they will not send your resume to a company without your prior knowledge and consent. This agreement is necessary to ensure that the recruiter's actions will not interfere with any inroads you may already have made with a particular company.

Q: I am expecting to receive my first offer for full-time employment in the next few days. Is it customary to accept the first offer a company makes, or can I negotiate for a better offer?

A: Unless the company has forewarned you that they are making their final offer, you can negotiate for a better offer. If you are fully satisfied with the offer, you can certainly accept it. On the other hand, if you think you have a higher market value or need more than what is being offered, you may say so. Ask the hiring manager whether there is any flexibility in the terms of your offer. I would recommend keeping a dignified and professional tone by using questions during the negotiation. Phrase your questions such as, "Would you be willing to consider....?", or "Do you have any flexibility on?", or "Could we talk about....?"

Q: I am considering working as an independent consultant when I get my Masters degree. Do you have any suggestions for starting my own business?

A: The first thing I suggest is to never start a consulting business without having at least one client. I also recommend that you visit the school's business library and pick out a few recently published books on the subject of consulting. One title that I particularly suggest is, *On Your Own*, by C. D. Peterson (John Wiley & Sons, Inc). Based on my own personal experiences, I also recommend that you make it a priority to hire for periodic consultation both an accountant and an attorney who have small business experience.