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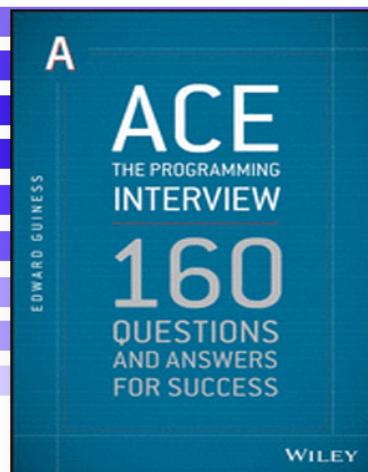
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- **Closing Your Project and the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct**

Cynthia Snyder

Chapter 1: The PMP Exam

Chapter Objectives

↵ **The PMP exam blueprint**

↵ **The exam domains**

↵ **The application process**

↵ **Taking the exam**

So you decided to take the Project Management Professional Certification Exam. That's a big step in moving forward in your profession.

The Project Management Professional (PMP) certification is developed by the Project Management Institute (PMI), which has more than 400,000 members worldwide. Its credentialing program is designed to ensure competence and professionalism in the field of project management. PMI offers several credentials, and the PMP certification is the most well known by far. In fact, the PMP is the most widely recognized project management certification in the world, and there are more than 500,000 certified PMPs around the globe.

Adding this certification to your resume is important in the growing and competitive field of project management. A PMP certification gives employers confidence that existing employees have the level of knowledge to do their jobs well. It also gives employers a yardstick with which to measure new hires. And your project stakeholders can have confidence in your proven knowledge and experience when you have a PMP credential. Bottom line: With a PMP certification, you have more opportunities in your career path.

Before spending the next 700 or so pages helping you prepare, I want to walk you through some information about the exam and the application process.

How the PMP exam is developed

To develop a valid exam, you have to start by identifying the knowledge and skills that a certified professional should be able to demonstrate. This is done by conducting a *role delineation study,* which ensures that the content on the exam is valid and actually tests skills and knowledge that a certified professional should have. Based on the information from the role delineation study, an exam blueprint is developed.

The PMP Exam Blueprint

The exam content is based on an exam blueprint that defines the domains that should be tested as well as the percentage of questions in each domain. The domains and percentages for the current exam are

Initiating the project	13%
Planning the project	24%
Executing the project	30%
Monitoring and controlling the project	25%
Closing the project	8%
Total	**100%**

Knowledge and skills

Each domain has tasks associated with it as well as the knowledge and skills needed to carry out the task successfully. For example, you might see something like this:

Task

Analyze stakeholders to identify expectations and gain support for the project.

Knowledge and skills

✦ Stakeholder identification techniques

The tasks for each domain have been translated into the exam objectives you see at the beginning of each chapter, starting in Book II. At the end of

the final chapter for each domain, a sidebar summarizes the knowledge and skills needed for that domain and provides the location where you can find information related to the knowledge and skills. Here is the minibook and chapter where you find each domain's required knowledge and skills.

Initiating	Book II, Chapter 3
Planning	Book V, Chapter 3
Executing	Book VI, Chapter 3
Monitoring and controlling	Book VIII, Chapter 4
Closing	Book IX, Chapter 1

Cross-cutting skills

In addition to knowledge and skills specific to a domain, you need cross-cutting skills. A *cross-cutting skill* is one that goes across all domains (such as active listening, problem solving tools and skills, and leadership tools and techniques). At the start of the first chapter in a domain, I identify certain cross-cutting skills that you should pay particular attention to in domain. Always keep in mind that cross-cutting skills go across all domains. I just give specific examples in certain domains so you have a concrete example of the cross-cutting skill. Specifically, you can find the cross-cutting skill examples listed in the following minibooks and chapters.

Initiating	Book II, Chapter 1
Planning	Book III, Chapter 1
Executing	Book IV, Chapter 1
Monitoring and controlling	Book VII, Chapter 1
Closing	Book IX, Chapter 1

Code of ethics and professional conduct

The PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct ("the Code") identifies four ethics standards — responsibility, respect, honesty, and fairness — and divides them into *aspirational* standards (those that we, as project managers, should strive to achieve) and *mandatory* standards (those that we must follow). Both standards use statements that describe behavior, such as, "We negotiate in good faith" or "We listen to other's points of view, seeking to understand them."

Pre-test questions

Of the 200 test questions, only 175 are scored. The other 25 questions are "pre-test" questions, which is a bit of a misnomer because they don't come before the other questions but are sprinkled in with them. Those 25 unscored questions are a trial. PMI is looking at the performance of those questions to see whether they can eventually be integrated into the exam as scored questions. That's actually a good quality control process and good news for you because you can be assured that only questions that have been through a rigorous validation process are actually on the exam.

The PMP exam does not test on the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct explicitly although the standards are integrated into the test questions; therefore, you must be familiar with the Code to do well on the exam. To help you understand how the Code can show up on exam questions, I identify where specific content from the Code could be integrated into test questions throughout the book. Additionally, the final chapter (Book IX, Chapter 2) addresses the Code specifically. By spending time with the Code, you will be familiar with the ethical context of the questions you encounter on the exam.

Exam scoring

The PMP exam has 200 questions, and you are allowed four hours to complete all 200 questions. "Pre-test" questions are not scored. Therefore you will only be scored on 175 questions. In addition to receiving a pass/fail for the exam overall you will attain one of three proficiency levels for each domain:

✦ **Proficient:** Your performance is above the average for the domain.

✦ **Moderately proficient:** Your performance is average for the domain

✦ **Below proficient:** Your performance is below the average for the domain.

The Exam Domains

The five domains on the exam have specific topics that they test. Here is a summary of the topics by domain.

Initiating the project

The initiating domain is worth 13% of the exam score. This domain comprises the initial project definition, identifying stakeholders, and getting project approval. You will see information about

✦ Evaluating project feasibility

✦ Defining high-level scope and related success criteria

✦ Analyzing stakeholders

✦ Proposing an implementation approach

✦ Completing a project charter

✦ Gaining project charter approval

Planning the project

The planning domain is worth 24% of the exam score. Topics in this domain cover all aspects of planning the project from scope, time and cost to risks, change, and holding the kick-off meeting.

✦ Gathering and documenting requirements

✦ Documenting assumptions and constraints

✦ Creating a work breakdown structure (WBS)

✦ Estimating and budgeting costs

✦ Developing a project schedule

✦ Defining project team roles and responsibilities and the organizational structure

✦ Developing a communication management plan

✦ Planning project procurements

✦ Defining how to engage and communicate with stakeholders over the life of the project

✦ Creating a change management plan

✦ Identifying risks and risk strategies

✦ Developing the project management plan

✦ Obtaining project management plan approval

✦ Conducting a project kick-off meeting

Executing the project

The executing domain is worth 30% of the exam score. These questions deal with the day-to-day management of the project after the majority of the planning is done.

✦ Managing internal and external resources and stakeholders to perform project activities

✦ Creating deliverables on time and in budget

✦ Following the quality management plan

✦ Following the change management plan

✦ Employing risk management techniques

✦ Providing leadership, motivation, and other skills to maximize team performance

Monitoring and controlling the project

Monitoring and controlling questions make up 25% of the test. The questions are about managing performance and controlling change.

✦ Measuring project performance

✦ Applying change management

✦ Controlling quality for project deliverables

✦ Conducting risk management

✦ Managing issues

✦ Communicating status

✦ Managing procurements

Closing the project

This domain makes up 8% of the questions. The questions deal with closing a phase, a procurement, or the overall project.

✦ Closing contracts

✦ Gaining final acceptance

✦ Transferring ownership and management

✦ Conducting a project review

✦ Documenting lessons learned

✦ Writing the final project report

✦ Archiving project records

✦ Measuring customer satisfaction

Applying for the Exam

The *PMP Credential Handbook* has all the information you need to apply for, pay for, and schedule the exam. It includes information on cancelling and rescheduling, the audit and appeals processes, and the continuing certification requirements. In this section, I touch on a few highlights from the handbook, but I don't cover everything. For that, you need to download and review the handbook. Go to www.pmi.org and click the Certification tab. In the Quick Links box on the right, click Project Management Professional (PMP). Using the Quick Links box again, select PMP Handbook.

To take the exam, you need to meet the following qualifications:

✦ **A four-year college degree**

   If you don't have a four-year degree, you can take the exam if you have 7,500 hours of project management experience over at least five years.

✦ **At least three years of experience managing projects**

✦ **At least 4,500 hours of experience managing projects**

✦ **35 contact hours of project management education**

PMI audits a percent of the applications submitted for the exam. If your application is selected for audit, PMI may call your employer to validate your hours, or you may have to produce evidence to validate the information on the application. If you cannot validate the information, you cannot take the exam.

The application process

You can fill out your application online at the PMI website (www.pmi.org). Enter **PMP Application** in the Search field to get where you need to go.

Filling out the entire application is time consuming. The easy stuff is the demographics and contact information. Even the education and training sections are relatively quick to fill out. But then you need to document your 4,500 hours of experience. That's right: You have to answer questions about projects you've worked on, and fill in the number of hours until you reach that 4,500-hour milestone. That can take a long time, so be prepared!

Then there is that not-so-small issue of payment. If you're a PMI member, your exam fees are currently $405 US or €340 European. If you're not a PMI member, you pay $555 US or €465 European.

TIP

To become a PMI member, just go the PMI website (`www.pmi.org`). Click the Membership tab to get all the information you need to join. The price for a one-year membership is currently $129.

After you start your application process, you have 90 days to submit the application. Then, PMI has five days to review your application for completeness. To make sure your application isn't returned to you, follow these steps:

1. **Write your name exactly as it appears on your government-issued identification that you will present when you take the examination.**

   Read more about the acceptable forms of ID in the upcoming section, "Exam day."

2. **Ensure the application includes your valid e-mail address.**

   This is PMI's primary way of communicating with you throughout the credential process.

3. **Document your attained education and provide all requested information.**

4. **Document 35 contact hours of formal project management education in the experience verification section of the application.**

REMEMBER

   You must have completed the course(s) you're using for this eligibility option before you submit your application.

5. **Affirm that you have done the following:**

   - Read and understand the policies and procedures outlined in the credential handbook.

   - Read and accept the terms and responsibilities of the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. This is included in the *PMP Credential Handbook*.

   - Read and accept the terms and responsibilities of the PMI Certificate Application/Renewal Agreement.

6. **Affirm that you provided true and accurate information on the entire application, understanding that misrepresentations or incorrect information provided to PMI can result in disciplinary action(s), including suspension or revocation of your examination eligibility or credential.**

TIP

Make sure you fill out your application early enough to leave yourself time to go through the application and acceptance process and schedule your exam. I recommend giving yourself at least six weeks prior to when you want to take the exam.

Scheduling your exam

After your application is accepted and you submit payment for the exam, you can schedule your exam. You have one year from the date your application is approved to take your exam.

PMI will send you scheduling instructions and direct you to the Prometric website (`www.prometric.com`) to schedule your exam date. Prometric is a global testing service that administers the PMP exam for PMI. You will need to go to a Prometric testing center to take the exam, but don't worry, there are hundreds of exam centers.

Scheduling your exam is a simple process. On the Prometric website, select the exam you want to take from the For Test Takers drop-down menu, select the country and state, and follow the prompts from there. The scheduling process should take less than five minutes.

WARNING! Do not misplace the unique PMI identification code you receive when PMI notifies you that your application was approved. This code will be required to register for the examination. In addition, you should print and save all examination scheduling verifications and correspondence received from Prometric for your records.

Because PMI cannot guarantee seating at the testing centers, PMI recommends that you schedule your exam six weeks prior to when you want to take the test and at least three months before your eligibility expires.

TIP If you're scheduling your exam around the time a new exam is coming out, you should give yourself at least four months prior to the exam cut-over date. Many people try to get in before the new exam comes out!

Taking the Exam

Taking the PMP exam can be stressful, to say the least. To help ease the stress a bit, here are five tips to keep in mind for the 24 hours before the exam.

✦ **Don't cram.** The night before the exam, you should know everything you need to know for the exam. Try to have a nice evening.

✦ **Get plenty of sleep.** "Have a nice evening" doesn't mean you should go out and stay up late. Your mind will be much clearer if you get a good rest.

✦ **Leave plenty of time to arrive at the exam site.** You cannot take the exam if you are late. Build in plenty of time for traffic snarls, getting lost, and so forth. Beforehand, perhaps take a practice test drive at the time of day you're scheduled to take the exam, just to see how long it takes.

✦ **Don't drink too much caffeine.** Or any kind of liquid for that matter.

✦ **Use the restroom before you start the exam.** After you start the exam, don't count on leaving the room until you finish.

Exam day

When you get to the exam site, you need to show a valid and current form of government-issued identification with your photograph and signature. The name on the ID must exactly match the name on your application. You also have to show them your unique PMI identification number. The following are acceptable forms of government-issued identification:

✦ Valid driver's license

✦ Valid military ID

✦ Valid passport

✦ Valid national ID card

The following *are not* acceptable forms of identification:

✦ Social Security cards

✦ Library cards

There are serious restrictions on what you can bring into the testing areas. You *may not* bring anything into the testing area or to the desk where you take the exam, including

✦ Purses

✦ Food and beverages

✦ Book bags

✦ Coats or sweaters

✦ Luggage

✦ Calculators

✦ Eyeglass cases

✦ Watches

✦ Pagers

✦ Cellular telephones

✦ Tape recorders

✦ Dictionaries

✦ Any other personal items

Also, you may not bring anyone into the testing area, including

✦ Children

✦ Visitors

Calculators are built into the computer-based training (CBT) exam. The testing center administrator provides scrap paper and a pencil to all credential candidates on the day of the exam.

You take the exam on a computer. When you go into the exam testing area, you have the opportunity to take a tutorial and a survey. These are optional. You have 15 minutes to do this.

Use this time to do a memory dump on your scratch paper. Write down equations, tips, the process matrix, and any other memory joggers that will help you during the exam.

During the exam, you have the opportunity to flag questions to come back to them. Make sure to first go through and answer all the questions you're sure about and relatively sure about. For those questions that you're not sure about, flag them to return to later.

Types of questions

The exam has several types of questions:

✦ **Situational:** The majority of questions are situational. In other words, you need the experience to know what they are talking about. These can be difficult. I include many of these in the test prep questions in this book, and they start something like this:

Assume you are the PM on a project to upgrade the physical security on a university campus.

Then you review a situation:

The Dean of Students wants to make sure that all campus housing can only be accessed by the student, faculty, or staff ID cards. The Security Director states that the only way to provide 100% security is to use a biometric scanner. The Finance Director doesn't care what you do as long as you reduce the current operating costs by 15%.

Finally, the question:

What document should you use to record the expectations of each of these stakeholders?

✦ **Only one possible correct answer:** Some questions appear to have two correct answers; however, the exam allows only one correct answer per question. For those questions, ask yourself, "What is the first thing I would do? What is the best thing to do?" Remember that the *PMBOK Guide* is the source for many exam questions, so think of the PMBOK-ish response.

✦ **Distracters:** *Distracters* are a technique that test questions writers use to, well, distract you. In other words, they put in extra information that you don't need to answer the question.

✦ **MSU (made stuff up):** You might see some cool words slung together and think it makes sense. If you haven't heard of it before, it probably doesn't exist: for example, "charter initiation process." There are initiating processes, and one of the outputs of the initiating processes is a charter, but there is no charter initiation process.

✦ **Calculations:** There are a fair number of calculation questions. About 8 to 10 questions will have earned value (EV) information and equations, and about 8 to 10 questions will have other types of calculations. If you know your equations, these are some of the easiest questions on the test.

✦ **Identifications:** Expect about 20 to 25 questions where you have to know a specific process name, input, tool, technique, or output.

Some tests are *adaptive*. That is, the more questions you get right, the harder the questions become. If you miss questions, the easier the questions become. However, the PMP is *not adaptive*. The questions are not adjusted based on your answers.

Exam-taking tips

These tips should help you when the going gets tough:

✦ **Keep moving.** Don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out one question. You could lose the opportunity to answer many others.

✦ **Skip to the end of a question.** If you get a lengthy question, read the end of the question first. That usually tells you the question you need to answer. The rest of the information is just background.

✦ **Go with your instincts.** Your first choice is usually correct, so don't second-guess yourself! Change your answer only if you're certain that it should be changed.

✦ **Think in broad terms.** The exam is global and across all industries. If you apply too much of what you do on a day-to-day basis, you could miss some of the questions. Think about the questions from a global cross-industry perspective.

Getting your results

When you're done with the exam, you submit your test at the computer. This is a scary moment! To make it worse, the computer will ask you whether you are sure. (And, no, the computer isn't hinting that you failed.) Select Yes, and *voilà!* You're informed whether you passed or failed. (I know you will pass!) The exam administrator will hand you a printout of your exam results, indicating your pass/fail status. The printout will also give you an analysis of your results indicating by area whether you are proficient, moderately proficient, or below proficient.

About six to eight weeks after passing the exam, you will receive a congratulations letter, a certificate, and information on how to maintain your certification.

In the unlikely event that you do not pass the exam, you may take the test up to three times during your one-year eligibility period. If you do not pass within three attempts, you need to wait for a year to reapply. There is more information on this in the *PMP Credential Handbook.*

Preparing for the Exam

In addition to the PMP certification, PMI also puts out the *Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*, or the *PMBOK Guide.* While information in the exam blueprint overlaps information in the *PMBOK Guide*, the exam blueprint identifies tasks, knowledge, and skills, and the *PMBOK Guide* identifies the *artifacts,* or the "what" of project management. Let me show you what I mean.

Earlier in this chapter, I demonstrate how the exam blueprint might address information about stakeholders:

Task

Analyze stakeholders to identify expectations and gain support for the project.

Knowledge and skills of

✦ Stakeholder identification techniques

The *PMBOK Guide* doesn't discuss knowledge and skills the same way that the exam blueprint does. The *PMBOK Guide* identifies the outputs needed to fulfill the task, such as a stakeholder register and a stakeholder management strategy.

Although the *PMBOK Guide* isn't the only source of information for the PMP exam, it is the primary source. The *PMBOK Guide* describes project management practices that, generally, are considered good for most projects. That means there is wide agreement that the outputs from the processes are appropriate and that the tools and techniques used to develop the outputs are the correct tools and techniques. It does not mean, though, that you should use every input, tool, technique, or output on your project. The *PMBOK Guide* is just a guide, not a methodology or a rulebook.

Additionally, the *PMBOK Guide* provides a common vocabulary for project management practitioners. For example, when you want to "decompose" your project into a set of deliverables, you use a "work breakdown structure" (WBS). You don't use a "scope management plan" or a "requirements traceability matrix." By having a common set of terms with an agreed-upon meaning, you can communicate better with your project stakeholders. By becoming familiar with the *PMBOK Guide* and using this book to help you study, you'll be in good shape to pass the exam.

It's time to get started. The next chapter covers some of the foundational principles you have to be familiar with to pass the exam.

Good luck!

Chapter 2: Foundations of Project Management

Chapter Objectives

✔ **Define key project management terms to provide an understanding of foundational concepts**

✔ **Compare projects, programs, and portfolios**

✔ **Introduce the competing demands that project managers have to manage to achieve a successful project**

✔ **Describe the functions of Project Management Offices (PMOs)**

✔ **Introduce enterprise environmental factors and their affect on projects**

*B*efore discussing the project management process, you need a foundation of key project management definitions and concepts. In this chapter, I discuss how projects relate to programs, portfolios, and the PMO. I also introduce the important concept of competing demands. Understanding how competing demands require you to balance time, cost, scope, quality, risk, and resources is important before looking at those topics individually in later minibooks.

Competing demands can constrain your project, but they aren't the only things that you have to keep in mind when managing a project. You need to consider your internal and external environment. In this chapter, I also discuss enterprise environmental factors (EEFs) and their effect on your project.

Quick Assessment

1 A project is unique and _____.

2 Balancing scope, schedule, cost, quality, resources, and risk is managing the _____ _____.

3 Deciding how much rigor to apply to each process is _____.

4 (True/False). A portfolio is a group of related projects, subprograms, and program activities managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually.

5 Market conditions and regulations are _____ _____ _____ that constrain how you can manage your project.

6 Successive iterations of planning where each iteration gets into more detail is _____ _____.

7 Managing one or more portfolios to meet a strategic objective is _____ _____.

8 (True/False). This following is an example of a technical advance: Your organization initiates a project to improve the efficiency in operations.

9 (True/False). In an administrative PMO, you will find a place that develops policies, procedures, templates, and forms to support project managers.

Answers

1 Temporary. Projects have a distinct beginning and end, as opposed to operations that are ongoing. *Look over the "Definition of a project" section.*

2 Competing constraints. Balancing scope, schedule, cost, quality, resources, and risk is managing competing constraints, which are also known as competing "demands." *For more on this topic, see the "Competing constraints" section.*

3 Tailoring. You will tailor the project management process and tools you use to fit the needs of your project. *Check out the "What makes a successful project manager" section.*

4 False. A *program,* not a portfolio, is a group of related projects, subprograms, and related program activities managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually. *See the "Projects, programs, and portfolios" section for more information.*

5 Enterprise environmental factors. Market conditions and regulations are enterprise environmental factors that constrain how you can manage your project. *Look over the "Understanding Environmental Constraints" section.*

6 Progressive elaboration. Progressive elaboration is a technique used to provide more detail when more information is known. *You can find more information on progressive elaboration in the "What makes a successful project manager" section.*

7 Portfolio management. A portfolio of projects is grouped so that organizations can achieve strategic objectives. The projects can be independent or interconnected. *Review the "Projects, programs, and portfolios" section for more information.*

8 False. Improving operations is a business need. Automating them would be a technological advance. *You can find out more in the "Projects and organizational strategy" section.*

9 True. The administrative PMO creates processes and documents to provide a consistent way of applying project management in the organization. *Find more in the "The Project Management Office" section.*

Grasping the Terminology

The *PMBOK Guide* and the PMP exam use terms very specifically. Therefore, you should be familiar with the definitions I call out throughout this book.

Definition of a project

Starting with the term "project," I identify important terms with the Definition icon. You should understand the specific way these terms are defined because they apply to the PMP exam. The majority of the definitions come from the Glossary in the *PMBOK Guide.*

For the exam, you need to distinguish between projects and operations:

✦ **Project:** A project is temporary and has a beginning and an end. Additionally, a project creates something unique.

✦ **Operations:** Operations are ongoing and produce identical or similar outputs.

Project. A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.

Frequently, a project is used to launch something that's eventually taken over by operations. A project that launches a new product or a new product line is temporary and unique. After the product goes into production, though, it belongs to operations.

Another aspect about a project is that it creates a unique product, service, or result. Here are some examples of each:

✦ **Product:** An artifact or a component of an artifact

• A new computer component

• A new office park

• A new factory

✦ **Service:** A function or a series of steps and actions that supports the business or a stakeholder

• Process improvement

• Supply chain management

• Online support capabilities

✦ **Result:** An outcome, information, or knowledge

• Market research

• Clinical trials

• Annual studies

The *PMBOK Guide* doesn't define *service,* but it does define *product, result,* and *deliverable.*

Product. An artifact that is produced, is quantifiable, and can be either an end item unto itself or a component item. Additional words for products are *material* and *goods.*

Result. An output from performing project management processes and activities. Results include outcomes (integrated systems, revised process, restructured organization, tests, trained personnel, and so on) and documents (policies, plans, studies, procedures, specifications, reports, and so on).

Deliverable. Any unique and verifiable product, result, or capability to perform a service that is required to be produced to complete a process, phase, or project.

Projects, programs, and portfolios

I want to talk about some close relatives of projects: programs and portfolios.

A *program* is a group of projects. It might have an aspect of ongoing operations as part of the program.

Program. A group of related projects, subprograms, and program activities managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually.

Program Management. The application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to a program to meet the program requirements and obtain benefits and control not available by managing projects individually.

Programs aren't just giant projects. Rather, they are a collection of projects that supports a common goal. Here are some examples:

✦ Building a ship or an aircraft

✦ Producing a large event, such as the Olympics

✦ Developing a new product line with multiple products and distribution channels

Program management includes managing the integration of multiple projects, the integration of projects with ongoing operations, governance throughout the program, and realizing the benefits the program was initiated to deliver.

Portfolios are more strategic than projects. They are a group of projects or programs that are grouped together to meet strategic business objectives.

Portfolio. Projects, programs, subportfolios, and operations managed as a group to achieve strategic objectives.

Portfolio Management. The centralized management of one or more portfolios to achieve strategic objectives.

An organization may have a portfolio of development projects and a portfolio of maintenance projects. Another way to group portfolios is by product line or geography.

Project management

Some additional definitions you need to be aware of are *project management* and, of course, *project manager*.

Project Management. The application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.

Project Manager (PM). The person assigned by the performing organization to lead the team that is responsible for achieving the project objectives.

Shortly, I talk about some fundamentals of what makes a successful project manager.

The three main aspects of project management are

✦ Identifying requirements

✦ Managing stakeholder expectations

✦ Managing the competing constraints (or demands)

I cover requirements and stakeholders extensively in later chapters. For now, I want to discuss the concept of competing constraints.
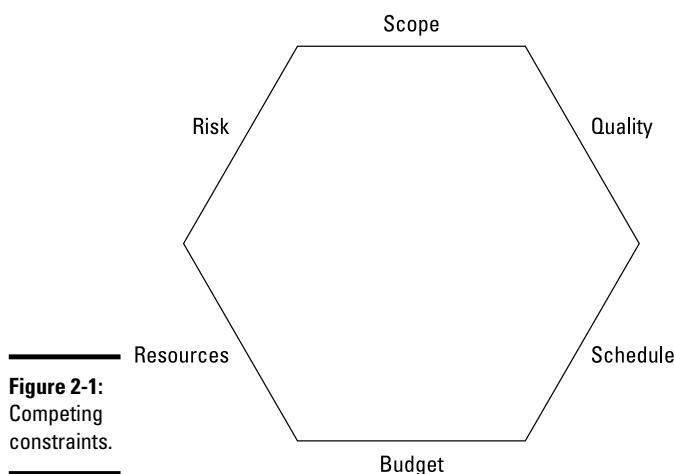
Competing constraints

For years, project management was taught around the concept of balancing scope, schedule, and cost. Then project managers started asking, "Well,

scope is fine, but what about quality? What about risk?" While you are at it, you might as well ask about resources and stakeholder satisfaction, too.

In essence, you're balancing competing constraints or demands. In reality, your project will have its own unique constraints. Consider safety as a constraint upon a construction site, or regulatory constraints for a new drug. Therefore, part of your job as a project manager is to first identify the competing constraints and then manage your project to balance them appropriately. The *PMBOK Guide* explicitly lists the following six constraints, as shown in Figure 2-1:

✦ Scope

✦ Quality

✦ Schedule

✦ Budget

✦ Resources

✦ Risk

Figure 2-1:
Competing constraints.

When any constraint changes, it affects one or more additional constraints. For example, a team losing a key resource will probably affect quality, schedule, and risk. If budget is reduced, that should affect scope and/or quality; if it doesn't, then the risk increases. A shortened schedule usually affects scope, quality, budget, and/or risk.

What makes a successful project manager

It isn't enough to know what's in the *PMBOK Guide*, or pass the PMP exam, to be a successful project manager. You also need subject matter knowledge, the appropriate personality, and good performance. Beyond that, you need to master progressive elaboration and the fine art of tailoring.

✦ **Knowledge:** Think about it: Without the requisite subject matter knowledge, how would you know whether an estimate a team member gives you is reasonable or out in left field? You have to know something about the type of project you're managing. How else can you expect people to respect you and your expertise?

✦ **Personality:** Another key aspect in project success comprises your personal traits. Your attitude, personality, and leadership ability are key aspects in your success. It might not seem fair that personality plays a role, but really, this job is not for everyone. Someone who is withdrawn or hypercritical won't do well in this job.

✦ **Performance:** You can know everything about project management and your industry and technical area, and you can be well liked and respected, but if you can't deliver or perform, you won't be successful.

Don't be surprised if you run into a question that indicates that the project manager has to be knowledgeable about the technical and professional aspects of the project.

Progressive elaboration and tailoring

One of the key techniques that project managers use to ensure success is *progressive elaboration*. There is no way you can know everything about a project when it's first handed over to you. The planning process helps you learn more about the scope and requirements of the project. This in turn helps you develop more detailed and refined cost and time estimates as well as build more accurate schedules and budgets.

Progressive Elaboration. The iterative process of increasing the level of detail in a project management plan as greater amounts of information and more accurate estimates become available.

All areas of your project are progressively elaborated from assumptions to risks and requirements to resources.

Another critical aspect in being successful is what I call "tailoring." You have to figure out how formally you will apply the various project management processes. You might do a very robust and thorough job of gathering and documenting requirements. However, you might not spend as much time in the procurement processes if you have a long-standing strategic relationship

with a vendor who is familiar with your organization. Your ability to tailor the degree of rigor you bring to the project is one way you can make your job easier.

Although there are no exam objectives that tie directly to the information in this chapter, you still need to know all the concepts. The concepts and definitions in this chapter are integrated into exam questions. For example, a question may present a scenario that requires a risk response. Information in the question may indicate the priorities between the competing demands that you need to understand to answer the question correctly. Therefore, even though you aren't expected to name the competing demands, you need to understand the concept to be successful on the exam. The same applies to the definitions of project, programs, portfolios, progressive elaboration, and so forth.

Projects and organizational strategy

I mention earlier that projects are initiated to meet strategic objectives. The *PMBOK Guide* lists these strategic reasons for initiating a project:

✦ **Market demand:** This includes new products and updating existing products.

✦ **Business need:** This can include projects to make operations more efficient and thereby increase net profits.

✦ **Social need:** Projects that improve the quality of life, such as improving literacy, drinking water, or reducing disease.

✦ **Environmental consideration:** This includes projects such as environmental remediation, improving air or water quality, or projects that reduce waste and environmental impact.

✦ **Customer request:** A customer request can occur via a bid process, or an existing customer can approach you and ask you to perform work.

✦ **Technological advance:** Anything that helps automate operations or helps your company do things better, faster, or less expensively.

✦ **Legal requirements:** When a new law or regulation is passed, you need to understand the implications and make sure your organization can comply.

The word "objective" is frequently misunderstood.

Objective. Something toward which work is to be directed, a strategic position to be attained, or a purpose to be achieved; a result to be obtained, a product to be produced, or a service to be performed.

Did you notice that the definition has three of the key words from the definition of project? It talks about a product, service, or result. We undertake projects to achieve objectives. Objectives are enumerated in the project charter, which I talk about in Book II. When you initiate a project, you usually have scope and quality objectives: in other words, what you want to accomplish. And, generally, there are some expectations for schedule and budget objectives as well. These objectives guide the project manager in making decisions and trade-offs throughout the project.

The Project Management Office

A Project Management Office (PMO) is common these days. PMOs can have all different functions, depending upon the needs of the organization.

Project Management Office (PMO). An organizational structure that standardizes the project-related governance processes and facilitates the sharing of resources, methodologies, tools, and techniques.

The responsibilities of a PMO can range from providing project management support functions to actually being responsible for the direct management of a project.

Here are the three basic types of PMOs:

✦ **Supportive:** A supportive PMO develops policies, procedures, templates, forms, and reports for project management in the organization. The supportive PMO also serves as a project repository for project management resources. It has a low degree of control.

✦ **Controlling:** A controlling PMO also provides develops policies, procedures, templates, forms, and reports for project management in the organization; however, they require compliance with the project management methodology, the usage of the forms, policies, templates, and so forth. This type of PMO has a moderate level of control.

✦ **Directive:** Some large projects have a PMO set up to manage a specific project. The degree of control is high.

Of course, PMOs can provide multiple functions, or a little bit of each, but those in the preceding list are the general descriptions of the most common services that PMOs provide. You may also see a PMO that is a home for project managers. In this type of PMO, all project managers (PMs) report to the director or head of the PMO. The head of the PMO assigns PMs to projects, monitors progress, and serves as the functional manager for project management. This PMO also serves as a communication hub and allocates resources across multiple projects.

Understanding Environmental Constraints

All projects are constrained by the environment in which they are performed. If you think about it, your company culture has a lot to do with how you manage your project. If you've managed projects in only one company, you might not see this as clearly as if you had worked with several different companies. Think about where you work. Do you have lots of policies, procedures, forms, rules, and so forth that guide how you manage projects? Or do you work somewhere that has very little formal structure, and you use your personal influence and ingenuity to get things done? Do PMs have a lot of position power or very little?

A company's culture includes

✦ Shared vision, values, and beliefs

✦ Policies and procedures

✦ Authority relationships, leadership, and hierarchy

✦ Work ethic, code of conduct, and work hours

✦ Risk tolerance

✦ Reward and motivation systems

Enterprise environmental factors

DEFINITION

Enterprise Environmental Factors. Conditions, not under the immediate control of the team, that influence, constrain, or direct the project, program, or portfolio.

The company culture, as described earlier, is an example of an enterprise environmental factor (EEF). EEFs can be the result of any or all the enterprises involved in the project; and in addition to company culture, include

✦ Standards, codes, and regulations

✦ The organizations infrastructure, such as IT systems, supply chains, and organizational structure

✦ Marketplace conditions, including the availability of material and technical skills

✦ Stakeholder risk tolerances and the ability to work with uncertainty

✦ Extreme geography and weather

Generally, EEFs are considered to be a constraint. They might be almost transparent, but you need to keep them in mind while you plan and execute

your project. You will see EEFs as an input to many of the project management processes throughout this book.

When you see EEFs as an input to a process, take some time to think about the various things in both the internal and external environment that could influence how you perform the process. This will get your brain used to thinking about how EEFs affect projects rather than being a bunch of words strung together.

The following responsibility standard from the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct relates to EEFs:

> We inform ourselves and uphold the policies, rules, regulations and laws that govern our work, professional and volunteer activities.

Project governance

The organization's governance structure can also be considered a constraining factor. Project governance follows the organization's governance structure, but it is focused on the project life cycle. Governance is a framework for conducting the project and includes

✦ Guidelines for aligning organizational and project governance

✦ Project life cycle and phase reviews

✦ Decision-making processes

✦ Issue resolution procedures

✦ Change management procedures

✦ Project organizational chart and the relationship among the team, the organization, and external stakeholders

Key Terms

These terms are foundational to understanding the rest of the information in this book. Make sure you understand them well enough to be able to explain them to a novice project manager.

✦ Project

✦ Product

✦ Result

✦ Deliverable

✦ Project manager

✦ Project management

✦ Progressive elaboration

✦ Program

✦ Program management

✦ Portfolio

✦ Portfolio management

✦ Objective

✦ Project Management Office (PMO)

✦ Enterprise environmental factor (EEF)

Chapter Summary

The main points in this chapter are defining projects, project management, competing demands, PMOs, and enterprise environmental factors (EEFs). You will see these concepts repeated throughout this study guide, so make sure you are comfortable with them.

✦ A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. Projects produce deliverables to project requirements.

✦ Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.

✦ To manage projects successfully, you need to identify and balance the competing constraints. You will also need to practice progressive elaboration and tailor the various project management processes to meet the needs of your specific project.

✦ Programs manage a group of projects, subprograms, and program activities in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually.

✦ Portfolios are projects, programs, subportfolios, and operations managed as a group to achieve strategic objectives.

✦ Projects are initiated to meet the organization's strategic objectives. An objective is a position to be attained or a purpose to be achieved.

✦ A Project Management Office (PMO) can have various structures and provide various roles to support project management in the organization.

✦ An organization's culture, infrastructure, organizational structure, IT systems can constrain (or enhance) the way a project is managed. These are enterprise environmental factors (EEFs). Other EEFs include regulations, market conditions, and available skill sets.

Prep Test

1 **Performing routine maintenance for a company campus is an example of**

   A ○ Project management

   B ○ Operational management

   C ○ Functional management

   D ○ Program management

2 **Which of the following is not one of the PMI-identified competing constraints?**

   A ○ Market conditions

   B ○ Quality

   C ○ Schedule

   D ○ Resources

3 **Your project sponsor wants to know why the schedule you gave her has milestones listed with only the first 90 days worth of work defined in detail. You explain to her that you can provide a more detailed schedule as the project progresses, when you can have a greater understanding of what is involved. You tell her that this concept — common in project management — is**

   A ○ Planning

   B ○ Life cycle planning

   C ○ Progressive elaboration

   D ○ Progressive estimating

4 **You are tasked with completely updating your organization's communication infrastructure. You decide to break this into several components: one each for telephones, IT, and radio communication. Each will have its own manager. This is an example of**

   A ○ A project

   B ○ A portfolio

   C ○ A program

   D ○ Operations

5 **The centralized management of one or more portfolios — including identifying, prioritizing, authorizing, managing, and controlling projects, programs, and other related work to achieve strategic business objectives — is**

   A ○ Program management

   B ○ Portfolio management

   C ○ Strategic management

   D ○ Forecasting

6 **Your company won a contract to update the security system for the local court-house. This project is an example of**

A ○ A market demand

B ○ A business need

C ○ A customer request

D ○ A legal requirement

7 **Your company works with a number of chemical compounds. Your project is to update the handling and disposal of all chemicals to ensure that everyone is handling them correctly. You are doing this because of**

A ○ A market demand

B ○ A business need

C ○ A customer request

D ○ A legal requirement

8 **A PMO that develops policies and procedures and ensures compliance with the project management processes is what kind of PMO?**

A ○ Administrative

B ○ Supportive

C ○ Project specific

D ○ Bureaucratic

9 **You work for a commercial roofing contractor. You are asked to do a job in Barrow, Alaska. Which EEF do you need to pay closest attention to?**

A ○ Company culture

B ○ Infrastructure

C ○ Weather

D ○ Availability of resources

10 **The custom homebuilder you work for has a contract to build a 10,000–square foot home. The customer wants marble from Florence, Italy. To work with the tile, you need extremely skilled craftsmen with special tools. This EEF is an example of**

A ○ Company culture

B ○ Infrastructure

C ○ Weather

D ○ Availability of resources

Answers

1 **B**. Operational management. Routine maintenance is an example of operations. *Review "Definition of a project."*

2 **A**. Market conditions. Market conditions might be an enterprise environmental factor, but they're not one of the competing constraints. *Look over "Competing constraints."*

3 **C**. Progressive elaboration. Progressive elaboration is continuing to provide more detail as more is known about the project. *Check out "Progressive elaboration and tailoring."*

4 **C**. A program. This is a program. Each component is a project. *Look at "Projects, programs, and portfolios."*

5 **B**. Portfolio management. This is the definition of portfolio management. *See "Projects, programs, and portfolios."*

6 **C**. A customer request. The fact that you won this from a bid on a contract defines it as a customer request. *Go to "Projects and organizational strategy."*

7 **D**. A legal requirement. Ensuring the correct handling and disposal of chemicals is a regulatory requirement. *Look over "Projects and organizational strategy."*

8 **A**. Administrative. Setting policies and procedures and ensuring compliance is the role of an administrative PMO. *Check out "The Project Management Office."*

9 **C**. Weather. In Alaska, weather is always an EEF! *Review "Understanding Environmental Constraints."*

10 **D**. Availability of resources. The material and the labor to work with it are constraints associated with the availability of resources. *Go back to "Understanding Environmental Constraints."*

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It's a tough exam. This friendly, plain-English guide boosts your chance of success!

If you've committed to gaining PMP certification, you know it's challenging. This guide can be your best study buddy! Clearly organized into minibooks, each of which explores a specific theme or topic, this book helps you organize your studies and assures that you are covering every aspect of the exam. As your knowledge grows, so will your confidence!

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- *The control factor* — *see how to control costs, scheduling, communications, and more while you're monitoring progress*

- *Be a pro* — *review the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*

Cynthia Snyder is a professional project management instructor and consultant. She was project manager for *PMBOK Guide, 4th Edition*, and serves on the PMI Standards Member Advisory Group. She received the Distinguished Contribution Award from PMI in 2009.

Open the book and find:

- How the application process works

- What a charter is and why you need one

- Steps for constructing a project management plan

- Advice on estimating costs, duration, and staffing needs

- How to manage change as the project progresses

- Ways to maintain control of the project

- The process of closing a project

- Plenty of test-taking tips

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John Mongan, Eric Giguere, Noah Kindler

1

Before the Search

Before starting your job search, you need to prepare yourself. You shouldn't apply for jobs without knowing what kind of job you want. Just being a good coder isn't enough; you must understand what the market wants and how you can improve and package your own skills to make sure that the company with the job you want will want you.

KNOW YOURSELF

Stereotypes to the contrary, all programmers are *not* alike. Knowing what kind of programmer you are is crucial to finding the right kind of job. Although you can probably do many different kinds of programming tasks, you probably don't find them all equally engaging. Doing something you don't enjoy is fine on a short-term basis, but you need to be interested in and excited by what you're doing for it to sustain you over the long term. The best programmers are passionate about their work, and you can't truly be passionate about something that's only moderately interesting to you.

If you're not sure what you like or dislike, ask yourself some questions:

➤ **Are you a systems programmer or an application developer?** Systems programmers work on the code that keeps computer systems running: frameworks, tools, compilers, drivers, servers, and so on. Other programmers are their primary audience, so little interaction occurs with non-programmers — and usually the job involves little or no user interface work. Application developers, on the other hand, work on the pieces that those non-programmers use to do their own work, and often more interaction occurs with non-technical people. Many programmers find interacting with non-technical people about technical topics to be frustrating; on the other hand, you may enjoy creating applications that are seen and used by an audience that extends beyond other programmers.

➤ **Do you like coding user interfaces?** User interface design — also referred to as *user experience (UX)* or *human computer interaction (HCI)* — is a role that draws on a diverse set of skills, including programming, graphic design, and psychology. This

work is high profile because the user interface is the most visible part of any application. User interface design is particularly important in mobile application development, where the restrictions of the device require even greater creativity and innovation. If you have the necessary skills and enjoy this work, you're in elite company: Many programmers find it finicky, hard to do well, and easy to criticize, especially when you take internationalization and accessibility issues into account.

➤ **Are you a good debugger?** If you think finding problems in your own code is difficult, imagine what it's like to fix problems with someone else's code. It requires strong analytical and problem-solving skills. Finding and fixing bugs can be extremely rewarding in its own right. You need to know if you'd be happy doing primarily maintenance work. (Of course, you should always expect to maintain your own code — all programmers need debugging skills.) In many cases, particularly in older companies, maintenance programming jobs involve working primarily with older technologies now considered outdated or no longer in fashion. Developing your experience and skills with older technologies may narrow the range of jobs that you're suited for, but because expertise in older technologies is hard to find, you may be highly sought after by the smaller number of companies dependent on older programs.

➤ **Do you like testing?** Testing — also referred to as *quality assurance* or QA for short — requires a combination of meticulous attention to detail to ensure that tests cover every conceivable use of a program and outside-the-box creativity to find bugs in the program by generating combinations of inputs that the program's developers never considered. Skilled testers are hard to find, and good programming skills are required to write tools and automated test cases.

➤ **Are you an architect or a coder?** Every coding job includes some kind of design aspect, but certain jobs lean more one way than the other. If you enjoy designing, particularly designing the large-scale structure of big projects, a position as a software architect might be more appealing than a coding-focused job. Although you need a good understanding of how to code to be an effective architect, architecture positions can involve a lot of meetings and interpersonal interactions and little or no coding. Unless you have formal training in software architecture, the usual route to becoming an architect is to code first and to then display an aptitude for designing and fitting together different pieces of a project.

The preceding questions deal with different kinds of programming, but you should also consider non-programming responsibilities that might interest you and the work environment that you prefer:

➤ **Does management interest you?** Some coders have a long-term goal to become a manager, but others shiver at the very thought. If management is your goal, you need to develop leadership skills and demonstrate that you can manage the human parts of the software development equation as well as the technical pieces. If management is *not* your goal, look for companies with good *technical* career paths, so you're not forced to manage people to be promoted. (You still need leadership skills to get promoted no matter which career path you choose, but leadership skills are separate from people management skills.)

➤ **Do you want to work for a big company?** There are advantages and disadvantages to working at big companies. For example, a large company may offer more job stability (although layoffs during downturns are common) and some kind of career path. It may also have a name brand that non-techies recognize. On the other hand, you may feel stifled by the bureaucracy, rigidity, and intracompany rivalry often found in bigger companies.

➤ **Do you want to work for a small company?** The pay may be less, but getting in on the ground floor at a new company can create opportunities for future advancement (and possibly substantial remuneration) as the company grows and succeeds. Also, the work environment at small companies is often more informal than at larger organizations. The downside, of course, is that most new ventures fail, and you may be out of a job within a year or two, most likely without the kind of severance package you might expect from a large company.

➤ **Do you want to work on open source projects?** The vast majority of programming jobs have historically involved proprietary, closed-source projects, which some programmers don't like. A shift has occurred in some companies in favor of more open software development, which provides opportunities for people to work on open-source projects and still be paid for that participation. If it's important to you that your work project is open source, it's best to seek out companies already involved in open source. Trying to champion open source in traditional software companies is often a frustrating and fruitless undertaking.

➤ **Do you want long-term or short-term projects?** Some programmers crave change, spending a few months at most on each project. If you like short-term projects and don't mind traveling, a gig with a consulting company might make more sense than a more conventional corporate job.

Realize that there are no universal answers to these questions, and no right or wrong way to answer them. The more truthful you are in answering them, the more likely you'll find the kind of programming job you truly enjoy.

KNOW THE MARKET

Knowing what you'd like to do is great, but don't box yourself in too narrowly. You also need to understand the current job market and how it constrains your search for the "ideal" job, especially during an economic downturn like the one that burst the Internet bubble of the late '90s or the global real estate and banking meltdown of the late 2000s.

Basic Market Information

A number of sources of information exist about what's hot and what's not in the developer job market, including the following:

➤ **Social networks** — The tremendous growth of social networks, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google+, have transformed social networks into virtual recruiting grounds for all types and sizes of organizations. LinkedIn is particularly important. The other social networks can provide an indirect "pulse" of the market and also valuable leads for new and even unannounced job postings.

➤ **Online job sites** — Visit two kinds of job sites as part of your research. Job listing sites such as Dice (which specializes in technology-related career listings) and Monster (a general job listing site) enable you to see what kinds of jobs are currently in demand. Review sites such as Glassdoor and CareerBliss discuss working conditions, salaries, bonuses, perks, and other information useful for finding the right kind of company for you.

➤ **Bookstores** — Even though more and more programmer documentation is available online, professionally published books are still important, whether printed or downloadable. The number of books published on any given topic is a good indication of the level of interest the programming community has in that topic. Look especially for niche topics that are suddenly going mainstream, but beware that in most companies, mainstream use of technologies lags the interest levels represented in books by a few years.

➤ **Professional development courses** — Colleges and universities try to keep abreast of what companies want and create professional development courses around those needs.

If you're not in college or university, find out what languages and technologies the local institutions and your alma mater require of their computer science students; although academic needs don't always coincide with what employers want, educational institutions try to graduate students with practical skills that employers can use.

What About Outsourcing?

Outsourcing and *offshoring* — contracting tasks to other companies or foreign divisions or companies — is an important part of the technical employment landscape. Outsourcing of ancillary business activities such as payroll administration and property maintenance has been around for decades. More recently, this has expanded to programming, driven by the advent of inexpensive computers, cheap long distance communication provided by the Internet, and the recognition of technically educated workforces in low-wage developing countries. There was a flurry of outsourcing, particularly offshoring, in the mid-2000s. This has become less topical in the past several years because most companies that intend to outsource have already outsourced whatever they can. In addition, the costs of offshoring have risen as wages rise in the developing world, particularly in India and China. This coupled with recognition of the hidden costs of coordination with workforces from different cultures on very different schedules have led some companies to insource roles they previously outsourced. Nevertheless, outsourcing and offshoring remain a possibility for expanding companies that think they may cut costs, as well as established companies wondering if they're paying too much by keeping their work local.

If outsourcing (and offshoring in particular) is something that worries you, consider taking steps to avoid landing a job that might be outsourced at some point in the future. The following are some suggestions:

➤ **Work for software development firms** — A software firm's *raison d'être* is the intellectual property it develops. Although medium and large firms may open development centers in other parts of the world, the smart ones are unlikely to move their entire operations to other countries or entrust their future to outside firms. That said, some companies outsource all or substantial parts of a project to other countries for cost or other reasons, so it pays to research a company's behaviors and policies.

➤ **Work for an outsourcer** — Oddly enough, many outsourcing firms hire personnel in countries such as the United States.

➤ **Move up the programmer food chain** — Design-oriented jobs are less likely to be outsourced. Coders are relatively cheap and plentiful, but good designers are much harder to find. (This assumes that your company recognizes that good design skills are separate from good coding skills.) Another way to make yourself more difficult to replace is to acquire *domain specific knowledge*: expertise related to the programs you write but outside of the field of programming. For example, if you develop financial software, it's much more difficult to outsource your job if it involves the application of accounting skills in addition to programming than if you're purely a coder.

➤ **Take a management job** — Management can be a refuge from outsourcing, so a management-oriented career path is one option to consider.

Of all these options, moving up the food chain is usually the best approach. The more non-programming knowledge your job requires, or the more interaction with customers, the less likely you are to be outsourced. There's no *guarantee* you'll never be outsourced, of course, or that you'll always keep your job. Your company may shutter or downsize the project you're working on at any point, after all, and put you back on the street. This is why developing reusable and marketable skills throughout your career is extremely important.

DEVELOP MARKETABLE SKILLS

In the appendix we discuss your résumé as a *marketing tool* to get you job interviews. The easiest thing to sell is something that people want, so it's important that you have *marketable skills* to offer a prospective employer.

To stand out from the crowd both on paper and in the interviews you need to develop skills and accomplishments, especially if you're entering the job market for the first time. The following are some approaches you can take:

➤ **Upgrade your credentials** — Companies such as Google are well known for favoring job applicants with graduate degrees. Getting a master's or doctorate degree is one way to upgrade your credentials. You can upgrade your credentials in other ways, such as taking university or professional development courses or participating in programming contests.

➤ **Get certified** — Certification is a contentious issue in the software development profession, but some jobs either prefer or require candidates to be certified in specific technologies, especially IT jobs. Consider surveying job listings to see whether certifications are required for the jobs that interest you before you invest time and money in certifications.

➤ **Work on a side project** — A great way to expand your skill set is to work on a project not directly related to your primary work or study focus. Starting or joining an open-source development project is one way to go. Or if you work at a company, see if it will let you spend time on an ancillary project.

➤ **Do well in school** — Although grades aren't everything, they are one measure that companies use to rank new graduates with little job experience. The better your grades, especially in computer science and mathematics courses, the more you can impress a potential employer.

➤ **Keep learning** — The end of formal education doesn't mean you should stop learning, especially when so much information about programming is available from a wide variety of sources. Whether it's books or blogs, there's always a way to keep current, no matter what type of programming you do. It's also a great way to expand your horizons and discover other areas of interest. This kind of learning doesn't show up on your résumé, but it's something you can highlight in your technical interviews.

➤ **Be an intern** — New graduates who manage to secure employment during their non-school terms — especially those that participate in cooperative education programs — have a huge advantage over their peers who haven't yet ventured into the real world. Software development in the field is often different from software development in an academic setting, and potential employers are cognizant of this.

The key is to *keep learning*, no matter the stage of your career. You can't develop marketable skills overnight; they take some effort and initiative on your part but can have long-lasting effects on your career.

GET THINGS DONE

Companies look for software developers who *get things done*. You may look great on paper in terms of skills and education, but credentials and knowledge don't make products or services that a company can sell. It's your ability to *accomplish something* that truly sets you apart from the other candidates.

Getting an advanced degree such as a Ph.D., becoming a trusted contributor to a widely used open source project, or carrying a product through from start to launch are all big accomplishments. But small accomplishments can be just as important, such as adding a feature to a product, making a measurable improvement to the product's performance, starting and completing a side project, or creating a useful application for a class project. These all show that you can get things done.

Recruiters and hiring committees like to see that you have multiple accomplishments — a pattern of getting things done. This is especially true for more senior and experienced developers. You need to show those accomplishments on your résumé and your online profile. Whether your accomplishments are big or small, always be ready to talk intelligently and confidently about each one. This is incredibly important! Make sure you can clearly and succinctly describe the underlying problem and how your project solved it, even to a non-technical person. Displaying a passion for programming is always positive; clearly communicating how your passion produces products and services that other people can use makes you really stand out from the other candidates.

MANAGE YOUR ONLINE PROFILE

Your online profile — everything public about you online — is just as important as your résumé. Recruiters use online profiles to find desirable candidates. Screeners use them to weed out undesirable applicants. Interviewers use them to prepare in-depth interview questions when résumés lack details.

An online profile consists of any or all these things:

➤ **LinkedIn profile** — LinkedIn is a social network for tracking professional connections. It's free to join, and you can create a detailed profile about yourself, including your jobs and your education — essentially an online résumé. Colleagues and customers can publicly endorse you or your work, which can be quite valuable.

➤ **Other social network profiles** — Other social networks such as Facebook or Google+, depending on your privacy settings.

➤ **Personal website** — This is a potential source of more in-depth information about you.

➤ **Articles and blog posts** — If you write about programming-related topics, this is a good way for recruiters to assess your experience.

➤ **Comments and forum posts** — These provide another way to gain some insight into your programming skills and your general attitude toward technology and technology companies.

The impression employers get from your online profile can affect your chances of being hired. If your résumé lists extensive experience with C# but they find a forum posting you made only 6 months ago asking how to open a file in C#, they'll probably conclude that you're exaggerating your experience level, putting your whole résumé into doubt. Or if they see disturbing or inflammatory material that they think you've authored, they may decide to pass you over for an interview, no matter how well your résumé reads or how long ago you wrote those things. No one's proud of everything they ever did in high school or college, but those who have grown up in the post-Internet era see things follow them that they'd rather forget about, something the older generations rarely had to contend with.

At some point before you apply for a job, take a good look at your online profile. Put yourself in a company's shoes to see how much information — good or bad — they can find about you, or link to you. If your online profile is possibly going to prevent you from being hired, take some steps to sanitize your profile. If possible, remove questionable material from the web and from the search engines.

Spend some time developing the positive aspects of your profile. This is particularly important if there's unfavorable material about you on the web that you're unable to remove. You may want to read a little about search engine optimization (SEO) and apply some of these techniques to get the positive aspects of your profile to appear before older, less favorable items in search results. If you don't have a LinkedIn profile, create one, and make it as detailed as possible; if you already have one, make sure it's up to date. Consider creating a profile on Stack Overflow or a similar Q&A site, and spend some time answering questions relating to your areas of expertise.

> **WARNING** *One caveat about updating your LinkedIn profile: By default, all your contacts are notified of your updates. Many people have learned to interpret these notifications as de facto announcements that someone is looking for a new job. That might help you get the word out, but if your contacts include people at your current company and you don't want them to know you're looking for a new job, disable these notifications before you make your updates.*

Develop an online profile that doesn't throw any red flags in front of the screeners and shows you in the best possible light. Finding a good job is hard enough — why make it harder?

SUMMARY

What you do *before* a formal job search is critical to finding the right kind of job. With that in mind, you should consider the following things:

- ➤ Know your likes and dislikes as a programmer and a prospective employee.
- ➤ Understand the market to find and apply for the best jobs.
- ➤ Develop the marketable skills that employers look for and that can enhance your career.
- ➤ Manage your public profile to show you in the best possible light and make sure there are no surprises to turn off potential employers.

Once you've worked through all these points, you're ready to begin your job search.

2

The Job Application Process

Interviewing and recruiting procedures are similar at most tech companies, so the more pre-
pared you are for what you will encounter, the more successful you will be. This chapter
familiarizes you with the entire job-search process, from contacting companies to starting
your new job, so you won't need to write off your first few application attempts as learning
experiences. Hiring procedures at technical companies are often substantially different from
those followed by more traditional firms, so you may find this information useful even if
you've spent some time in the working world.

FINDING AND CONTACTING COMPANIES

The first step to getting a job is to find and make contact with companies you're interested in
working for. Although referrals are the best way to land a job, you can also work with head-
hunters or contact a company directly.

Finding Companies

You can better target your search if you know which companies you're most interested in working
for. Big companies are easy to find — you can probably name a dozen national and international
tech companies off the top of your head. You can identify candidate medium-sized (as well as
large) companies through articles in trade and local business press. Many magazines and news-
papers regularly compile lists of successful companies and rankings of the best places to work.
(Take these rankings with a grain of salt: There's often a lot of variation in quality of work life
across large companies.) Most companies of this size also advertise at least some of their job
openings on online job boards; these postings can help you identify companies to investigate
even if the specific job posted isn't right for you.

Small companies, especially early-stage startups, can be much more challenging to find. Often
these companies are too small, too new, or too secretive to get much press. They may lack the
resources to advertise their openings beyond their own website, which you can't find unless

you know the name of the company. One good way to find these companies is asking friends and acquaintances if they know of startups that are hiring. Another technique is to use online social networks. You can use some sites, such as LinkedIn, to search for people by profession within a region. Most people on these sites list the name of their company, so you can build a list of companies in a particular region by going through the results of this search. This can be laborious, but part of the payoff is that if you can't find these companies any other way, neither can anyone else, so you're likely to be competing with fewer applicants.

Getting Referrals

Referrals are the best way to find a job. Tell all your friends about what kind of job you're looking for. Even if they don't work for the kinds of companies that might hire you, they may know people who do. Coming from "Susan's friend" or "Bill's neighbor," your résumé is sure to receive more careful consideration than the hundreds (or thousands) of anonymous résumés that come flooding in from online postings, job fairs, and other recruitment activities. Be sure to use your social networks, both real and virtual, to identify potential job opportunities.

Don't feel you're imposing on your friends and acquaintances. Companies often reward employees with big bonuses — as much as several thousand dollars — for successful referrals of talented software engineers. Your friends have a financial incentive to submit as many résumés as possible! (This is why referral bonuses are paid only *after* the referred person has been hired and has started working for the company.)

After you have a contact at a company, it's up to you to make the most of it. Your approach depends on how well you know the contact.

If the contact is not a close friend, e-mail the person to arrange a time to speak. When you speak to the person, ask about the company and the work environment. Then ask about any existing job openings. The person might not know of any — many employees know only about job openings in their immediate workgroup — but if you know jobs are available, point the person to the job listings. Explain why you'd be a good match for one of those openings. Then ask the person to submit your résumé. Before you end your conversation, always thank people for their time.

If the contacts are close friends, you can be more casual and just ask about job openings and if they'd refer you.

The best referrals are from people who have worked with you before. A current employee who vouches for your skills and accomplishments is the strongest type of referral. That's why you need to keep track of former co-workers — you might want to work with them again one day.

Working with Headhunters

Particularly when labor markets are tight, some firms use outside recruiters known as *headhunters* to help them find candidates. In addition, you may find it useful to seek out a headhunter and provide her with your information.

If you list yourself with a headhunter, she can assist you with your job search and call you when she learns of an opening that matches your skill set. It may take a while, so don't be discouraged.

Some headhunters are more helpful than others, so ask around to see if anyone you know has recommendations. If you can't locate a headhunter this way, you can search the web for headhunters, recruiters, or staffing services. You can check out a prospective headhunter by asking for references, but be aware that headhunters deal with so many people that even those who frequently do a poor job probably have 5 or 10 satisfied clients who serve as references.

When you work with headhunters, you must understand their motivation: headhunters are paid only when an applicant they've referred is hired. It is therefore in a headhunter's interest to put as many people as possible into as many jobs as possible as quickly as possible. A headhunter has no financial incentive to find you the best possible job — or to find a company the best possible applicant, for that matter. If you recognize that a headhunter is in business for the purpose of making a living and not for the purpose of helping you, you are less likely to be surprised or disappointed by your experiences. This is not to suggest that headhunters are bad people or that as a rule they take advantage of applicants or companies. Headhunters can be helpful and useful, but you must not expect them to look out for your interests above their own.

When you get a potential lead from a headhunter, she will usually send you a job description and a vague description of the type of company but not the name of the company. This is to make sure that if you apply for the job, you do it through the headhunter so that she gets her commission. It's unethical to independently apply for a job that comes to you through a headhunter, but sometimes you might like to have more information about the job or company before you proceed. For example, you may determine that it's a job you've already applied for, or at a location that would involve too long of a commute. The job description that the headhunter sends you is often copied verbatim from the company's website so by pasting it into your favorite search engine you can often find the original job listing.

Some companies don't work with headhunters in any capacity, so don't limit yourself by conducting your entire job search through a headhunter. As a corollary of this, avoid working with any headhunter who insists on being your exclusive representative. Finally, be aware that "headhunter" is a widely used term by people outside of this profession, but considered pejorative by most of the people who do this work, so it's best not to use the word "headhunter" when you speak to one of them.

Contacting the Company Directly

You can also try contacting companies directly. The Internet is the best medium for this approach. Most companies' web pages have instructions for submitting résumés. If the website lists specific openings, read through them and submit your résumé specifically for the openings that interest you. If you don't have a contact within the company, it's best to look for specific job openings: In many companies, résumés targeted at a specific job opportunity are forwarded directly to the hiring manager, whereas those that don't mention a specific opening languish in the human resources database. A tech-oriented job site is a good place to start your search if you don't have a specific company already in mind.

If a site doesn't provide any directions for submitting your résumé, look for an e-mail address to which you can send it. Send your résumé as both plain text in the body of the e-mail (so the recipient can read it without having to do any work) and, unless there are instructions to the contrary, as an attached file so that the recipient can print a copy. A PDF file is ideal; otherwise, attach a Microsoft Word file. Do not send a file in any other format unless specifically requested. Be sure to convert the

file so that it can be read by older versions of Word, and scan it with an antivirus program (you can easily do this by mailing the resume to yourself as an attachment) to be absolutely certain that your résumé isn't carrying any macro viruses.

Approaching a company directly like this is a bit of a long shot, especially when the résumé is sent to a generic human resources e-mail address. Many companies use automated screening software to filter incoming résumés, so if your résumé lacks the right buzzwords, a human probably won't even see it. Consult the appendix for tips to get your résumé past automated screeners. With a good résumé in hand it takes so little time and effort to apply that you have nothing to lose.

Job Fairs

Job fairs are an easy way to learn about and make contact with a lot of companies without much effort. Your chances of success with any one particular company at a job fair are low because each company sees so many applicants. However, given the number of companies at a job fair, your over-all odds may still be favorable. If you collect business cards at the job fair and follow up with people afterward, you can separate yourself from the rest of the job fair crowd.

In addition, if they are available to you, college career centers, alumni organizations, and professional associations can also be helpful in finding jobs.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

If someone is sufficiently impressed by your résumé to want to talk to you, the next step is one or more screening interviews, usually followed by an on-site interview. Here, we prepare you for the stages of the interview process and help you dress for success.

Screening Interviews

Screening interviews are usually conducted by phone and last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. You should take the interview in a quiet room with no distractions and keep pen and paper handy to take notes. Screening interviews may also take place on the spot at a job fair or on campus as part of a college recruiting process.

The initial screening interview is with a company recruiter or human resources representative. The recruiter wants to make sure that you're interested in doing the job the company is hiring for, that you have the skills needed for the position, and that you're willing to accept any logistical require-ments of the position, such as relocation or travel.

If you make it past the recruiter, there's normally a second screening interview in which a technical person asks you a few knowledge-based questions. These questions are designed to eliminate appli-cants who have inflated their résumés or are weak in skills that are key to the position. During the technical interview you may be asked to write some code using some kind of cloud-based document-sharing tool such as Google Docs. This gives the interviewer a firsthand look at your coding skills.

You should treat the phone interview as seriously as an on-site interview. It *is* an interview.

If the feedback from the technical interviewer is positive, the recruiter will get back to you, usually within a week, to schedule an on-site interview at the company's office.

On-Site Interviews

Your performance in *on-site interviews* is the biggest factor in determining whether you get an offer. These interviews consist mostly of a variety of technical questions: problems requiring you to implement a simple program or function; questions that test your knowledge of computers, languages, and programming; and sometimes even mathematics and logic puzzles. The majority of this book focuses on helping you answer these questions to succeed in your interviews.

Your on-site interviews usually last either a half day or a full day and typically consist of three to six interviews of 30 to 60 minutes each. Arrive early and well rested at the company's office, and take a restroom break if at all possible before any of the interviewing starts. Turn off any phones or pagers you carry. Under no circumstances should you interrupt your interview to read or answer a text, page, or call. You'll likely be greeted by either the recruiter you've been dealing with or the hiring manager. You may get an informal tour before the actual interviewing starts, which is a good way to see what the working conditions are like at that location.

Your interviewers may be the members of the team you'll work with if you are hired, or they may be engineers chosen at random from other groups within the company. Most companies have a rule that any interviewer can block an applicant from being hired, so all your interviews are important. Sometimes you may interview with two separate teams on the same day. Usually each group you interview with makes a separate decision about giving you an offer.

The company usually takes you out for lunch midway through your interview day. A free lunch at a nice restaurant or even at the company cafeteria is certainly enjoyable, but don't let your guard down completely. If you make a negative impression at lunch, you may lose your offer. Be polite, and avoid alcohol and messy foods. These general guidelines apply to all company outings, including evening recruiting activities. Moderate drinking is acceptable during evening outings, but show restraint. Getting drunk isn't likely to improve your chances to get an offer.

At the end of the day, you may meet with the boss; if he or she spends a lot of time trying to sell you on working for the company, it's a pretty strong indication that you've done well in your interviews and an offer will follow.

Dress

Job applicants traditionally wear suits to interviews. Most tech companies, though, are business casual — or even just casual. The running joke at some of these companies is that the only people who wear suits are job candidates and salespeople.

This is one area in which it's critical to do some research. It's probably not to your advantage to wear a suit if nobody else at the company is wearing them, not even the salespeople. On the other hand, if you wear jeans and a T-shirt, interviewers may feel you're not showing sufficient respect or seriousness, even though they may be wearing jeans. Ask around to see what's appropriate for the company. Expectations for dress vary by location and nature of business. For example, programmers working

for a bank or brokerage may be expected to wear suits. You should aim to dress as well as or slightly more formally than you would be expected to dress for the job you're interviewing for.

In general, though, a suit or even a jacket and tie is overkill for most technical job interviews. A standard technical interviewing outfit for men consists of non-denim cotton pants, a collared shirt, and loafers (no sneakers or sandals). Women can dress similarly to men. No matter what your sex, go light on the perfume or cologne.

A RECRUITER'S ROLE

Your interviews and offer are usually coordinated by a company recruiter or human resources representative. The recruiter is responsible for the scheduling and logistical aspects of your interview, including reimbursing you for travel or lodging expenses. Recruiters aren't usually involved in the hiring decision but may pass on information about you to those who are. They are also usually the ones who call you back about your offer and handle compensation negotiations.

Recruiters are usually good at what they do. The vast majority of recruiters are honorable people deserving of your respect and courtesy. Nevertheless, don't let their friendliness fool you into thinking that their job is to help you; their job is to get you to sign with their company as quickly as possible for as little money as possible. As with headhunters, you need to understand the position recruiters are in so that you understand how they behave:

➤ **Recruiters may focus on a job's benefits or perks to draw attention away from negative aspects of a job offer.** They generally tell you to come to them with any questions about your offer. This is fine for benefit and salary questions, but ill-advised when you have questions about the job. The recruiter usually doesn't know much about the job you're being hired to do. When you ask a specific question about the job, the recruiter has little incentive to do the work to find the answer, especially if that answer might cause you to turn down the offer. Instead, recruiters are likely to give you a vague response along the lines of what they think you want to hear. When you want straight answers to your questions, it's best to go directly to the people you'll be working for. You can also try going directly to your potential manager if you feel the recruiter is being unreasonable with you. This is a somewhat risky strategy — it certainly won't win you the recruiters' love — but often the hiring manager has the authority to overrule decisions or restrictions that a recruiter makes. Hiring managers are often more willing to be flexible than recruiters. You're just another applicant to recruiters, but to the hiring manager, you're the person she chose to work with.

➤ **After the decision is made to give you an offer, the recruiter's job is to do everything necessary to get you to accept the offer at the lowest possible salary.** A recruiter's pay is often tied to how many candidates he signs. To maneuver you, a recruiter sometimes might try to play career counselor or advisor by asking you about each of your offers and leading you through a supposedly objective analysis to determine which is the best offer. Not surprisingly, this exercise always leads to the conclusion that the offer from the recruiter's company is clearly the best choice.

➤ **Some recruiters are territorial enough about their candidates that they won't give you your prospective team's contact information.** To protect against this possibility, collect business cards from your interviewers during your interviews, particularly from your prospective managers. Then you'll have the necessary information without having to go through the recruiter.

OFFERS AND NEGOTIATION

When you get an offer, you've made it through the hardest part: You now have a job, if you want it. However, the game isn't over yet. You're looking for a job because you need to make money; how you play the end game largely determines how much you get.

When your recruiter or hiring manager makes you an offer, she may also tell you how much the company plans to pay you. Perhaps a more common practice, though, is for the recruiter or hiring manager to tell you that the company would like to hire you and ask you how much you want to make. Answering this question is covered in detail in Chapter 17.

After you've been given a specific offer that includes details about salary, signing bonus, and stock options, you need to decide whether you're satisfied with it. This shouldn't be a snap decision — never accept an offer on the spot. Always spend at least a day thinking about important decisions such as this; it's surprising how much can change in a day.

Dealing with Recruiter Pressures

Recruiters often employ a variety of high-pressure tactics to get you to accept offers quickly. They may tell you that you must accept the offer within a few days if you want the job, or they may offer you an exploding signing bonus: a signing bonus that decreases by a fixed amount each day. Don't let this bullying rush your decision. If the company wants you (and it probably does if it made you an offer), these limits and terms are negotiable, even when a recruiter claims they aren't. You may have to go over the recruiter's head and talk to your hiring manager if the recruiter refuses to be flexible. If these conditions are non-negotiable, you probably don't want to work for a rigid company full of bullies anyway.

Negotiating Your Salary

If, after careful consideration, the offer meets or exceeds your expectations, you're all set. On the other hand, if you're not completely happy with your offer, you should try to negotiate. All too often, applicants assume that offers are non-negotiable and reject offers without negotiation or accept offers they're not pleased with. Almost every offer is negotiable to some extent.

You should never reject an offer for monetary reasons without trying to negotiate. When you negotiate an offer that you would otherwise reject, you hold the ultimate high card. You're ready to walk, so you have nothing to lose.

Even when an offer is in the range you were expecting, it's often worthwhile to negotiate. As long as you are respectful and truthful in your negotiations and your requests are reasonable, you'll almost

never lose an offer just because you tried to negotiate it. In the worst case, the company refuses to change the offer, and you're no worse off than before you tried to negotiate.

If you decide to negotiate your compensation package, here's how you do it:

➤ **Figure out exactly what you want.** You may want a signing bonus, better pay, or more stock options.

➤ **Arrange a phone call with the appropriate negotiator, usually the recruiter.** Your negotiator is usually the same person who gave you the terms of your offer. Don't call the negotiator blind because you may catch him at an inconvenient time.

➤ **Explain your case.** Say you appreciate receiving the offer and explain why you're not completely happy with it. For example, you could say, "I'm pleased to have received the offer, but I'm having a hard time accepting it because it's not competitive with my other offers." Or you could say, "Thank you again for the offer, but I'm having trouble accepting it because I know from discussions with my peers and from talking with other companies that this offer is below market rates." If the negotiator asks you to go into greater detail about which other companies have offered you more money and how much, or where your peers work, you're under no obligation to do so. You can easily say, "I keep all my offers confidential, including yours, and feel that it's unprofessional to give out that sort of information."

➤ **Thank the negotiator for his time and help and say that you' re looking forward to hearing from him again.** Negotiators rarely change an offer on the spot. The company's negotiator may ask you what you had in mind or, conversely, tell you that the offer is non-negotiable. Claiming that the offer is non-negotiable is often merely a hardball negotiation tactic, so in either case you should respond by politely and respectfully spelling out exactly what you expect in an offer and giving the negotiator a chance to consider what you've said.

Many people find negotiation uncomfortable, especially when dealing with professional recruiters who do it every day. It's not uncommon for someone to accept an offer as close enough just to avoid having to negotiate. If you feel this way about negotiation, try looking at it this way: You rarely have anything to lose, and even modest success in negotiation can be rewarding. If it takes you a 30-minute phone call to get your offer increased by $3,000, you've made $6,000 per hour. Even lawyers aren't paid that much.

Remember that the best time to get more money is *before* you accept the job. When you're an employee, the company holds all the power.

Accepting and Rejecting Offers

At some point, your negotiations will be complete, and you will be ready to accept an offer. After you inform a company you're accepting its offer, be sure to keep in touch to coordinate start dates and paperwork. The company may do a background check on you at this point to verify your identity and your credentials.

Be professional about declining your other offers. Contacts are important, especially in the computer business where people change jobs frequently. You've no doubt built contacts at all the companies that made you offers. It's foolish to squander your contacts at other companies by failing to inform

them of your decision. If you had a recruiter at the company, you should e-mail her with your decision. (Don't expect her to be overjoyed, however.) You should also personally call the hiring managers who made you an offer to thank them and let them know what you decided. For example, you can say, "I want to thank you again for extending me the offer. I was impressed with your company, but I've decided it's not the best choice for me right now. Thank you again, and I appreciate your confidence in me." Besides simply being classy, this approach can often get a response such as, "I was pleased to meet you, and I'm sorry that you won't be joining us. If things don't work out at that company, give me a call, and maybe we can work something out. Best of luck."

This gives you a great place to start the next time you look for work.

SUMMARY

You can find prospective jobs in various ways, but networking through friends and acquaintances is usually the best method. If that's not possible, find and contact companies directly. You may also engage the services of a headhunter; be aware that the headhunter's motivations aren't always aligned with yours.

The interviews are the most important part of the job application process. There are one or two screening interviews, usually by phone, to ensure that you're applying for the right job and that you are actually qualified. After the screening interviews, there are usually a series of on-site technical interviews that ultimately determine whether a job offer comes your way. Be sure to dress appropriately for the interviews, and turn off any electronic gadgets you might have with you.

During the interview process you'll frequently interact with one of the company's recruiters, especially if a job offer is made. Be sure to understand the recruiter's role during this process.

When an offer is made, don't accept it immediately. Give yourself time to consider it. Look over the offer, and try to negotiate a better deal because most offers aren't fixed in stone, no matter what the recruiter says. After accepting a job offer, be sure to contact anyone else who has made you an offer to thank them for their interest in you.

CONTENTS

Get the job you want by gaining the interview skills you need

Landing a great programming job isn't a matter of luck; it's a matter of being prepared for the unique challenges of the technical job search. Programming interviews require a different set of skills than day-to-day programming, so even expert programmers often struggle if they don't know what to expect. This thoroughly revised and expanded third edition teaches you the skills you need to apply your programming expertise to the types of problems most frequently encountered in interviews at top tech companies today. Step-by-step solutions to an extensive set of sample interview questions simulate the interview experience to hone the skills you've learned. After you've worked through this book, you'll approach your interviews with confidence, knowing you can solve any problem that stands between you and the job you really want.

Programming Interviews Exposed:

- Leads you through the job search process, including the most effective techniques for employing LinkedIn and other social networks

- Teaches you the techniques you need to solve any interview problem

- Illustrates the full thought process of application of these techniques to real interview problems with step-by-step solutions

- Solves each problem with code in C, C++, C# or Java, with emphasis on object-oriented solutions

- Includes new chapters on sorting and design patterns and new questions on 64-bit computing and secure programming practices

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A

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160
QUESTIONS
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FOR SUCCESS

EDWARD GUINESS

Hiring Programmers: The Inside Story

When I was a young boy, making new friends seemed easy. I had grown up with the surreal humor of Monty Python and my usual approach to a potential new friend would be something like *"I am a knight who says Ekki-Ekki-Ekki-PTANG!"* I thought it was hilarious. I made a few great friends (one is still a friend 30 years later), but I also had a lot of misses. Actually, mostly I had misses, nearly all the time. Sometimes my approach would generate open hostility. I couldn't understand it.

What my young self didn't realize was that enthusiasm for the absurd was not a universal constant. Not all kids my age had seen Monty Python, and even if they had, not everyone loved and appreciated it like I did. I was seeing the world through my own Python-shaped glasses, and I did not appreciate the diversity of other childhood experiences. Not everyone was on the same wavelength.

As naïve as this might seem, many hiring managers make the same basic mistake when interviewing. Perhaps they suppose that because they have a lot of hard-won experience in a certain area then *of course* everyone with experience in that area will see things the same way. Further, they might assume that their thought process will be similar. At the interview the hiring manager might abruptly open the conversation with the equivalent of my Python-inspired icebreaker:

> *"Nice to meet you; now, could you please describe a situation where it would be inappropriate to normalize a set of database tables into Boyce-Codd normal form."*

It might be that you love Monty Python and, for you, meeting an interviewer who quotes from Python might seem like a dream come true. If that is the case, then I wish you all the best; just be careful how you respond when the interviewer asks you to "*Please, walk this way.*"

For the rest of us, establishing a level of communication that is easy and familiar will take some preparation and effort.

It might have occurred to you that I'm hinting at the concept of rapport. *Rapport* is an excellent word; it describes feelings of harmony, of sympathy, and of being on the same wavelength. I hesitate to use this word only because it has been somewhat hijacked in recent times and now comes loaded with connotations of insincerity, like the fake grin of a novice salesman.

But for an interview to be really effective, to have the ideal degree of communication, and to put yourself on common ground with the interviewer, you really do need to work on establishing a rapport.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to start building rapport is to try to see things from the interviewer's perspective. If you understand the motivations of the interviewer, establishing a common ground and adapting your responses appropriately becomes much easier. You can quickly home in on what the interviewer is looking for, in both a positive and negative sense.

In this chapter, I will take a thorough look at the process of finding a programming job including:

- What motivates a hiring manager, and how to tailor your approach appropriately
- How to prepare a CV that will get you to an interview
- How to use job sites
- Understanding recruitment agencies; how they work and how to work effectively with them
- How to find jobs without a recruitment agency (it can be done!)

Let's start by taking a look at some of the most common reasons why a company might want to hire a programmer.

Reasons They Recruit

Without exception, a company hiring a programmer will have a reason for hiring. If you know what that reason is and understand the motivation for it, then you can optimize your approach accordingly.

Planned expansion

A common scenario—one that will become increasingly common as the major world economies resume growing—is for companies to make medium- to long-term plans for expansion that require them to take on more programmers in accordance with their plans for business growth.

The interviewer's motivation and approach

Because the role is part of longer term plans, the interviewer is unlikely to feel a great sense of urgency. Well-prepared interviewers will have a job profile, perhaps also a person profile, and be comparing candidates to these. With time on their side, they are less likely to compromise their pre-determined requirements, and although they might not realistically expect to perfectly match every aspect, they will probably be less open to considering candidates who deviate by any significant degree.

Your approach

Your approach should be to highlight areas where your skill and experience matches well with the advertised job profile. That is the easy part.

What about skills that aren't a good fit? For example, suppose you apply for the role of a .NET programmer and during the interview it becomes apparent that the interviewer has an expectation that the ideal candidate will have experience of a certain component library, which happens to be one you've not used. In areas where your background is not such a good fit, you have three basic options.

Play it down

Your first option is to downplay the perceived gap in skills—including the option of substituting other experience as being of equivalent value. If you decide to play it down, you might say:

> *"It's been my experience that it never takes long to learn the basics of a new component library, since, as programmers, we face an endless supply of new components and frameworks both open source and from the major vendors."*

You might also comment that learning is part of the job:

> *"One thing I really like about programming is the experience of learning new technologies and platforms. It's part of the ongoing attraction of the job."*

The biggest risk in taking this approach is that you might appear evasive, so be wary of overdoing it. After all, it is unlikely the interviewer chose the requirement at random, and if you push too hard at downplaying the requirement you might inadvertently maneuver yourself into an argument. Be sure to avoid that.

Take it on the chin

Your second option is to take it on the chin, so to speak. Take ownership of the "development opportunity" and perhaps talk briefly about how you have acquired other, similar skills or experiences.

If you decide to take it on the chin, simply agree with the interviewer's observation and at the same time show your enthusiasm for learning something new:

"I don't have experience of that particular technology but I would really enjoy learning it."

If the interviewer persists, you might feel it appropriate to ask how other developers in the team might learn new skills:

"Could you describe how the developers in your team generally learn new skills?"

Each example of learning given by the interviewer is an opportunity to show how, as a part of the team, you would benefit from the same approach and so acquire the necessary skill.

Understand the requirement

Your third option is to explore the interviewer's motivation, to gently probe the motives underpinning the requirement.

Exploring the underpinning motivation of the requirement gives you the best chance of looking good, but to take this approach you must have established a reasonable rapport; otherwise, you risk appearing argumentative. The basic idea is that you explore the requirement looking to show that you understand and can meaningfully address the underlying requirement despite lacking a specific skill or certain experience.

For instance, you might lack experience of a particular IoC container, let's say Microsoft Unity. You might ask the reason for using that particular implementation of IoC:

"I know there are a few good reasons for using an inversion of control pattern; could you describe how the Microsoft Unity framework helps with the kind of work you do here?"

If the answer is to encourage loose-coupling of components, then this gives you an opening to talk about your understanding of dependency injection principles. If the answer is to encourage the writing of code that is structured in a way that better supports unit testing, then you can talk about your experience

of refactoring legacy code to add unit tests, or you could talk about your understanding of dependency injection without using an IoC container.

If the interviewer asks a pointed question, or simply makes a challenging statement regarding the relevance of your experience in a certain area, your response should be respectful but equally forthright. Often the case is that an interviewer with a blunt approach is looking for a similarly direct approach in the interviewee.

> Challenge: *"I don't see any experience of Microsoft Unity in your CV. We use that, so your experience doesn't match our job spec."*
>
> Response: *"Is that a deal-breaker?"*

The principle at work here is *mirroring* the behavior of the interviewer (refer to the section on establishing rapport in Chapter 3 for a discussion of this powerful technique).

Whatever approach you take, keep in mind that you should not dwell on any particular mismatch. In particular, keep your comments brief and to the point. The more you talk about it, the more prominence it will have in the interviewer's memory of the interview when they reflect afterward. There's not much you can do if the interviewer appears to be stuck on an apparent mismatch—just keep your comments brief and resist the temptation to ramble on the topic.

Specific projects

When a company spots an opportunity in the market, it might scramble to put together a development team focused on delivering a solution to capitalize on the opportunity. There could be pressure to be first to market, or perhaps the commercial opportunity is constrained to a limited window of time.

The interviewer's motivation and approach

The interviewer wants to know that you can work under some pressure, and that you are someone who finishes what you start. Sometimes that pressure to hire can relax the strictness with which the interviewer will match your experience against the details of the job specification, although of course you can't assume that will be the case.

Your approach

Be aware that although you need to demonstrate how your skills and experience are a good match for the job as advertised, the interviewer also probably has the needs of a specific project in mind. The company might have adopted the job specification to suit the project, but more often than not interviewers reuse a standard job description and look for the "extras" at the interview.

Your enthusiasm and ability to adapt might count for more than usual. Showing an ability to quickly grasp key aspects of the project gives you an advantage over applicants who stick to the published job specification.

Many consulting and service-oriented companies routinely put new software development teams together to respond to customer demand, so the chances are higher that this type of company will recruit with a specific project in mind. If you aren't sure of a company's motivation for hiring, there's absolutely no harm in asking directly:

"Could I ask why you are recruiting? Is it for a specific project?"

Replacing someone

A third common reason for hiring a programmer is simply to replace someone who is leaving or who has left the company.

The interviewer's motivation and approach

The interviewer will have similar motivation as in the planned expansion scenario. They will probably be under some time pressure, but not as much as if they were recruiting for a specific project.

An interesting aspect of this situation is that they will probably have experience of a previous person filling this role, for better or for worse, and will therefore have a list (written or not) of things they want to ensure the next person will and won't bring to the role. For example, perhaps the previous person was a stickler for detail, and this might, therefore, be high on the list of personal characteristics the interviewer wants to confirm in you.

Your approach

Obviously, unless you're very lucky, you're unlikely to gather insight into what the interviewer liked and disliked about the person you hope to replace prior to the interview. What you can do at the interview is ask about unique challenges of the role, things for which you might to need to be on guard, and so on:

"Could you tell me a bit about the challenges of this role that might make it different from the usual programming job?"

Experienced interviewers are unlikely to volunteer much information about the previous person, but they might give you clues along the lines of how certain attributes are important; for instance, "the ability to get along with the team." If you ask the right kind of question, you might get vital clues about the things you need to highlight with regard to your experience and ability:

"Can I ask whether there have been issues about how the team has been working together that make this ability particularly important?"

Talking to Managers

It is a story often told. A capable and bright programmer impresses everyone and is promoted to team leader or manager. The newly promoted manager takes on the responsibility of hiring new programmers and uses his awesome interpersonal skills to hire more bright programmers.

The problem is that this is almost never how it happens. Many otherwise excellent programmers simply don't have awesome interpersonal skills, and sometimes these are the people who will be running the interview and interviewing you.

Is that a good thing, or is it bad? It depends. It could mean you suffer a terrible interview experience—in which case, count yourself lucky you won't be working for a poor communicator—or it could be a huge advantage. Think of it like this: In every human relationship, having things in common helps, and the more you have in common the easier breaking the ice and enjoying a conversation will be.

Now, as one programmer talking to another programmer (even if the manager isn't currently working as a programmer) what might you have in common? The answer is "lots." Have you ever spent hours or days tracking down a difficult bug? Sure you have—and almost certainly the manager has, too. What do you like about a particular programming language? The manager might feel the same. Do you regularly visit a website for programmers? The manager might, too. Do you have a favorite XKCD cartoon? Do you visit `http://thedailywtf .com`? What is your favorite programming book? Have you ever used the word "nullable" in conversation with a non-techie? What annoys you about the IDE you use? There are lots of topics you can discuss together.

Tech talk—don't hold back

It might become apparent during the interview that the interviewer is not as technical as you might have assumed. He might have a background in project management or product marketing, for example. How should you react? Don't make the mistake of thinking you need to "dumb it down" for the interview. The problem with "dumbing it down" is that you put yourself at a disadvantage when the interviewer compares your responses to another candidate. He might not understand everything you say, but his impression of your response will be colored by the language you use, and if you talk purely in metaphors (for example) then you risk giving the impression that you don't actually know

the subject as well as the other candidate who talks about specific language or framework features using their proper names.

If a non-technical interviewer asks you a technical question then he expects a technical answer. The case might be that he has a "cheat sheet" of his own, a list of questions and answers, for example.

Don't hold back—answer the question fully and as you would if talking to a technical interviewer. If the non-technical interviewer wants you to explain something in non-technical terms, then you could use a metaphor (see the next section "Using metaphors"). As a rule, keep your answers grounded in reality using real names and proper terms for things.

Using metaphors

Sometimes a non-technical interviewer wants to assess how well you can explain a technical subject to someone who is non-technical. In this case, a metaphor is your best bet.

For example, suppose you are asked to explain the concept of an IP address in non-technical terms. Here is the definition from Wikipedia:

> **An Internet Protocol address (IP address) is a numerical label assigned to each device (e.g., computer, printer) participating in a computer network that uses the Internet Protocol for communication.**

The first metaphor that might occur to you is that an IP address is much like a mailing address. A mailing address is used to deliver mail, and an IP address is used to deliver packets of information, so the metaphor seems to work. On the other hand, mailing addresses vary widely in format and local conventions, whereas an IP address conforms to a strict set of rules that are consistently and globally applied. Perhaps a better metaphor would be latitude and longitude?

While metaphors might conveniently help a non-technical person relate to an aspect of a technical subject, they are almost by definition an imperfect representation. They have limits, and you should never cling to an imperfect metaphor after reaching those limits. For example, if you use latitude and longitude as a metaphor for an IP address, presumably you don't mean to imply that IP addresses are assigned purely due to the physical location of the computer or device.

Preparing Your CV

A good CV (also known as a resumé) gets you past the filters of recruitment agencies and human resource (HR) departments. A good CV will mean your application is not rejected out of hand, and it could give you an opportunity to

talk to someone about the job role. A CV by itself is never going to win you the job. In other words, no hiring manager ever decides to hire someone purely on the strength of her CV alone.

Include relevant keywords but keep them in context

Knowing that, in most cases, non-technical agents will filter your CV has one very important implication—you need to be sure to include keywords that are relevant to the job and in particular to the job advertisement. The technical hiring manager might well understand that working on the ECMAScript specification means you have excellent knowledge of JavaScript, but the typical recruiter will not see the connection unless you spell it out and include the keyword "JavaScript" in your CV. Of course, you also want to avoid the appearance of insincerely stuffing your CV full of keywords, so ensure that any list of keywords is presented in proper context.

Write as well as you can

Poor writing puts you at a severe disadvantage. What you write must be clear and concise. You must proofread (or have a friend proofread) and ruthlessly rewrite or delete anything that isn't clear or relevant.

When I am unsure how to write something, I find that pretending to tell it to a friend is helpful. If you have no friends, tell it to your hand, and then write down the words you used. It doesn't matter what they are at first because the next step is to revise those words into shape. Showing a bit of personality is good, but don't ramble. Also keep in mind that what might seem funny to you while writing your CV might not necessarily look so clever to everyone who reads it. A much better strategy is to let your personality show at the interview after you've established a rapport. If in doubt, always err on the side of plain and simple writing.

Some managers don't care so much about spelling and grammar, but others (like me) care a great deal. I think my distaste stems from years of reviewing poor code that is often full of spelling errors. Using the spelling checker in your word processor or browser doesn't take a lot of extra effort. Don't ignore the red squiggly lines!

Most people find that writing well takes a bit of effort and discipline, so be realistic and allow yourself plenty of time to write and revise.

Justify your claims of experience

If you claim to have experience in an area, or if you claim knowledge of a particular technology, the hiring manager needs to understand how you acquired it. If your CV doesn't show how you got "five years of experience of ASP.NET"

then you risk appearing insincere. If you claim to have the experience then the hiring manager will to want to see where you got it. If I don't see it, I won't necessarily assume you're lying, but you will be at a disadvantage when I have another CV that clearly shows where the experience was obtained.

If you claim to be good at anything, it should be reflected in the details of your employment or education history. You need to be explicit. Also be aware that job titles today are almost meaningless. Being an "analyst" could mean just about anything and doesn't necessarily imply analysis skill of any kind. A "web developer" could mean someone with programming skills or someone with Photoshop skills. A "programmer" should mean someone who produces code, but I've seen it used for jobs where the work amounted to configuring systems via drop-down lists. You need to describe the technology, and how you used it.

Ignore anyone who tells you "strictly one or two pages"

Ignore all the advice about keeping a CV short. That's for people with short attention spans and for recruiters who in many cases don't care for details. If you have lots of experience it should be reflected in your CV. As a hiring manager I want to see it, and more importantly you should be proud of it, not ashamed.

This is not an excuse to ramble—the advice about being clear and concise still applies, and you still need to make effective use of keywords and summaries.

Emphasize skills that match the job advertisement

There's nothing wrong with emphasizing certain skills to match a job advertisement. As a candidate, it took me a long time to appreciate that emphasizing different skills depending on the job in question is perfectly fine. I used to think it was deceptive, but I don't think that any more. See it from the hiring manager's point of view—if a CV clearly calls out skills that match the job description then that CV will appeal more than some other CV that contains the same skills but buries them among other, less-relevant skills.

In other words, highlighting relevant skills helps everyone.

If you have experience in a variety of areas, consider writing more than one CV, each one emphasizing different areas. You might write one that targets database-centric roles, and another that emphasizes your business analysis skills. Having these prepared and ready to send means you can respond quickly to job advertisements without the need to revise your CV before applying.

Don't leave unexplained gaps between jobs

Don't leave gaps in your CV, especially big ones. It risks making you appear shifty or evasive. If you were volunteering in Africa, that's great. If you took time off to retrain, or to pursue a start-up idea, or to raise a child, that's all good. The only thing you have to prove is that you can do the job. Yes, in some cases,

a gap in your experience might mean you have to accept a lesser salary, but a savvy employer will see that as an opportunity rather than a problem, and savvy employers also know that life experience counts for something.

"Reading, music, and cinema"

My estimate, based on reading many hundreds of CVs, is that 80 percent of CVs contain a "personal interests" section, and that 80 percent of these sections contain the exact same list of things; reading, music, and cinema.

You really don't need this section in a CV, especially if it contains the same interests listed by everyone else. If you do happen to be a Tiddlywinks world champion, maybe that is something to show off, but in general, rather than trying to show how well-rounded and interesting you are in this odd little corner of your CV, try to let that show through in the rest of your CV, through your experience, and at the in-person interview.

On the other hand, if you have (for instance) used your programming skills to support a non-profit organization, perhaps a charity, then you should mention it. I know a person who worked with inner-city kids at one point, and as a hiring manager I would definitely be interested to read that. Anything you've done that demonstrates enthusiasm, altruism, or any other noble quality is worth including. Just avoid being boring because you felt compelled to include this section—better to leave it out.

Use a logical layout

In general, the layout of your CV should be easy to scan and arranged logically. A key goal of any CV is to make it easy for someone to check boxes off when comparing your experience and skills against a job specification. I recommend starting your CV with a well-written summary that includes an overview of your key skills and significant experiences. The next section should be your job history shown in reverse chronological order, followed by a section for projects including any voluntary or unpaid work experience, and the final section should be education and training.

Every page of your CV should contain your contact information—your name, e-mail, and phone number, for example, within the header and footer areas. Contact information does not need to be a dominant feature but you do need to ensure that employers or recruiters have no trouble finding your contact details when they want to contact you.

Graduate CVs

With a relatively small amount of work experience, you will need to show off your abilities by listing projects, at or out of school, and the role you played in each. If you led a project, played a key role, solved a difficult problem, or designed

a complicated component, then be sure to highlight that as an accomplishment. Testimony from someone who assessed your work or benefited from it in some way adds authenticity.

CVs containing more experience

Experience is wonderful, and there is no substitute. However, a lot of experience can be interpreted in a number of ways and not all the ways are flattering. Twenty years with a single employer might give the impression, right or wrong, that you have never been challenged professionally. No doubt within those twenty years you overcame many tough challenges, so you should ensure that these are made visible in your experience. You should include subheadings for:

- Major projects where you had significant responsibility
- Different roles or major responsibilities
- Organizational changes that required you to adapt

CVs of those returning to work

If you've taken time off to raise children, travel, or study, then you've absolutely nothing to hide or to cover up. Be honest in your CV about why you have not been working. A single sentence is probably enough. Also, be honest with yourself about areas in which you might be somewhat out of date.

If you've been out of work due to redundancy—perhaps a down-sizing due to poor economic conditions—or if you were outright fired then, please, be honest in your CV. You don't need to use the word "fired" (if you were), but you don't want to hide your circumstances or pretend it was according to some plan. Hiring managers are hyper-vigilant for this kind of deception, and (trust me on this point) if a manager feels you are being deceptive in any way, you will have zero chance of landing the job.

Redundancies happen, and now and then people are fired. A simple and honest summary of the situation is by far the best strategy.

If you were fired, you may find some doors are closed. I can't pretend otherwise. The most practical advice I can give is to omit your "firing" from your CV, and be prepared with a good answer when asked why you left that job. A good answer is something like:

"I was fired following a disagreement with my team leader. We fell out after I took an initiative she disagreed with. It was difficult, but I feel I learned a lot from the experience."

You may have strong feelings about a firing and that is, of course, quite natural. What you mustn't do, even if the interviewer encourages it, is to complain about your past employer. Let the facts speak for themselves, and allow the interviewer to come to their own conclusion.

Think of it this way: If you are composed, dignified, and reasonable at an interview, the interviewer will be more inclined to believe your side of the story. If you are emotional and allow yourself to vent, the interviewer may be more inclined to sympathize with your past employer.

It is difficult, but be sure to consider how you will answer this question, before the time comes (as it surely will).

Avoiding common CV blunders

It is a sad truth that many hours of good work can be undone by a moment of carelessness. The first impression a hiring manager will have of you is based on your CV. Not only that, but your CV will sit alongside a stack of other CVs. Most hiring managers sift this stack into a smaller "short list" stack, and to do, that they must somehow discriminate. All other things being equal, the small mistakes in your CV could result in rejection. Let's go over some of these "small" things so you are sure to avoid them.

Poor spelling or grammar

Poor spelling or grammar can ruin an otherwise good CV. It happens so often that it is almost a cliché. Be sure to proofread your CV, or better, have an eagle-eyed friend check it for you. If English isn't your first language then you really should have a native English speaker review your CV, even if it means paying for it.

Vague or nonspecific accomplishments

When describing accomplishments, you need to keep two things in mind: Be specific, and describe the accomplishment in terms that most people can understand. For example, if you discovered and fixed a performance issue in a framework component, someone unfamiliar with that component (but otherwise technically informed) will find it more impressive if you describe the impact of your performance tweak rather than the mechanics of the tweak itself. Describing a "200 percent performance improvement" is much better than describing how you implemented a custom sort method. You will have plenty of opportunity to show off your technical skills in more detail at the interview.

Unclear or cluttered Layout

Of all the mistakes, fixing a cluttered layout is the easiest to detect and to fix. Simply hold up the page—without trying to read it—and let your eyes focus on whatever leaps out of the page. If nothing leaps out, it's too cluttered—or too empty! If the wrong things leap out then the CV isn't arranged well enough.

Don't be afraid to add whitespace around things you want to highlight, and whatever you do, don't use a tiny font hoping to cram in more information.

Unprofessional e-mail address

No matter how hilarious your friends think it is, "jojo_2hot4u@hotmail.com" is never going to be appropriate on a CV. Think how this address looks to someone who's never met you and is trying to form an opinion based purely on the presentation in your CV.

Domains are cheap to register and easy to maintain, and unless you have a very common name then *yourfirstname@yourlastname.com* or a variation like *@yourname.info* will probably be available.

If you don't want to spend any money then at least consider signing up for a more "professional" e-mail from one of the many free providers such as Google or Yahoo!.

Using Job Sites

All online job sites function similarly. You can upload your CV and thereby make it searchable by employers (or more likely, by recruiters), browse and search for jobs, subscribe to receive e-mailed notifications of new jobs, and apply for jobs.

For the job seeker, these sites are always 100 percent free to use. They all have a huge following of recruiters and employers. From a purely statistical point of view, you have a better chance of making contact with a potential employer than if you go it alone.

Some of the search tools on these sites make them truly useful. For example, you can limit your search to a very specific location, salary, or job title.

The sheer volume of users on job sites means that your CV is less likely to be noticed. You join a very large crowd of job seekers, and it is harder to differentiate your CV from the many thousands of others. It can be disheartening to send your CV and hear nothing back.

Unfortunately, it doesn't take much time reading through job advertisements to realize that almost all the jobs posted on these sites are posted by recruiting agencies. This means you're almost never going to be dealing directly with an employer. This can sometimes (though rarely) work in your favor should the agency take a special interest in your application, but, for the most part, these agencies represent another layer of obstacles between you and the interviewer.

Also, it doesn't take too much imagination to see how these job boards might potentially be abused by unscrupulous agencies who post fake job adverts in order to gather CVs from applicants, CVs which are then redacted and forwarded to prospective clients as the agents tout for business. This may not be common but it would be naïve to think it never happens.

Be on your guard, and don't invest too much mental or emotional energy in the "perfect" job after submitting your application. If you don't hear back soon after submitting an application for which you are obviously suited, the job may never have existed in the first place.

Comparison of major job boards

All job sites operate similarly and have the same pros and cons, so how you choose which site to use is a question of personal preference. It might be helpful to see which sites post the most jobs for programmers, in which case refer to the numbers in Tables 1-1 and 1-2. The search query used to obtain these numbers was "programmer OR software developer" and the search was limited to "posted within the past seven days." The query was run in June 2012.

Table 1-1: Job Listings on Major U.S. Sites

SITE	NUMBER OF JOBS LISTED
CareerBuilder.com	1,950
Monster.com	1,000+
Jobserve.com	718
ComputerJobs.com	685
Dice.com	152

Table 1-2: Job Listings on Major UK Sites

SITE	NUMBER OF JOBS LISTED
CWJobs.co.uk	3,018
Reed.co.uk	2,439
Jobserve.co.uk	930
Monster.co.uk	531

Recruitment Agencies

All recruitment agencies work on behalf of employers to find and match job seekers to vacancies. While all agents will initially appear very interested in your career prospects, the extent to which they are committed to finding you a job is limited by how likely they think it is that they can "sell" you to an employer. If they don't have a live vacancy that matches your profile, you might never hear from them after the initial contact.

Almost all agencies work on a contingency basis, which means they charge their clients (the employers) a percentage of the salary they will pay to the person they hire following an introduction. If the agency doesn't place someone with that employer then it gets nothing. The fees of recruiting agencies vary a lot, but are usually somewhere between 10 and 30 percent of the new hire's first-year salary. This might seem like a lot of money for very little work, but the uncertain nature of this work—and the fact that many employers are willing to pay these fees—appears sufficient justification for the recruiters to continue charging what they charge.

Job seekers are not normally asked to pay any fees to recruitment agencies so you should treat any such request with great suspicion.

In exchange for the promise of this contingent fee, the agency might advertise the job vacancy on a number of online job sites and will probably also search its database of candidates looking for a match between candidate skills and the skills listed in the job description provided by the employer. Most recruiters will also put the word out via their network of contacts, hoping to attract suitable candidates they can then introduce to their client.

Interestingly, almost all recruiting agents involved with sourcing and placing software developers have no significant first-hand (and sometimes not even second-hand) experience with software development. When working with employers and programmers, their role is purely sales and (social) networking. Inevitably some of the more experienced agents will pick up a basic vocabulary of technical and programming terms that enable them to communicate a bit less awkwardly, but as a programmer you might occasionally find yourself explaining the most elementary programming terms to a recruitment agent. What you need to remember is that although agents might lack technical comprehension, whatever you say to them will (hopefully) be replayed to a potential employer. To minimize the chance of Chinese whispers, avoiding the temptation to relate your experience in great detail is usually the best strategy. Save that information for when you talk directly with the employer. Good agents will ensure that the most relevant aspects of your experience are relayed to the potential employer. They will also be aware of their own limited technical knowledge when communicating with employers, and, for the most part, they will (and should) refer technical questions to you. If you ever find that an agent has "made stuff up" about your experience (and incredibly some do) then you should distance yourself from that agent as soon as possible. He or she won't be helping you find the right employer and might even damage your reputation.

Some agencies want to interview you prior to making an introduction to any employer. This is an interesting and sometimes amusing affair, where the agent, who knows next to nothing about the technologies in your CV, asks you questions about your experience with those technologies. Pragmatic agents will recognize their own limitations and restrict themselves to asking generic interview questions such as those related to your motivation, your aspirations,

your attendance, and sickness-absence record, and so on. One important thing to remember is that apart from a routine confirmation of your background and experience, the agent also wants to gain a clear impression of your "personality," which he or she can then relate to the potential employer. This is one way agencies and agents "add value," though the actual value added from this subjective assessment is perhaps questionable.

Working effectively with a recruiter

Remember that recruiters are paid by employers, and so their motivation to help you can vary depending on the prospects currently on their books. Investing too much emotional energy with any individual agent or agency, regardless of how exciting the job on offer might be, is generally not advisable. Certainly never be tempted to rely exclusively on a single recruiting agency, regardless of how effective it might appear.

Also remember that agents act as middlemen, and that whatever you say might be replayed to a potential employer. Although you need to convince the agent that your credentials and experience are genuine and relevant, being somewhat guarded in disclosing anything that isn't clearly advantageous to your application also makes sense. You can't avoid obvious questions, such as gaps in employment, but avoid volunteering unflattering or "complicated" information that might be misrepresented to the employer.

When waiting for news from an agent, don't waste your time and energy fretting if she doesn't return your calls. Be assured that an agent will waste no time in contacting you when she has news—she doesn't get paid unless she places you. Remember, too, the agent is at the mercy of the employer and is therefore just as likely as you to be anxious when waiting for news. Keeping in touch with the agency doesn't hurt—perhaps do a weekly "check in" call to ensure the agency has you in mind and is aware of your continued enthusiasm—but avoid pestering agents. It doesn't help.

Searching for Jobs Yourself

An alternative to relying on recruitment agencies is to find and contact employers yourself. This task isn't as hard as you might think. After all, most employers want to spread the news of a job vacancy as widely as they can, and many have an area on their website dedicated to advertising current vacancies. Very large employers might have an arrangement with a number of preferred supplier agencies or have a dedicated team in their Human Resources department that handles all incoming employment queries, but—and I cannot stress this enough—most hiring managers still welcome direct approaches from suitable candidates, provided, of course, that the contact is respectful and personalized.

If you make contact with a hiring manager who then refers you to the HR department, don't be disheartened. The manager is very probably obliged due to corporate rules of "efficiency and uniformity" to send you through to HR. Unless you feel that the contact was unwelcome then nothing prevents you from remaining in touch with the hiring manager as your application progresses through the necessary HR channels. Remember that the corporate "rules" don't apply to you unless and until you're an employee. Always remain respectful and forthright in all your communication, and don't be put off by the bureaucracy.

A word of caution—don't be tempted to send a generic letter or e-mail. To the potential employer this approach puts you in the same category as the bothersome agencies that send out unsolicited and unwelcome junk mail about "exciting opportunities" or "hot candidates." Always personalize your message as much as you can, including addressing the letter or e-mail to the hiring manager rather than "To whom it may concern," and mention specific and genuine reasons why you are interested in joining the company. If you are stuck for ideas then ask yourself these questions: Does the company produce a product you've used? Is it working in an area with potential that excites you? Have you heard something interesting about the company from friends or in the news?

One of the best ways to find a potential employer is through your own personal network of friends and contacts. Perhaps you're lucky and have naturally built up a large social network over the years, or perhaps (more likely) as a programmer you don't have a particularly large social network. Many of us know intellectually that having a large network can be a tremendous asset, especially when looking for a new job, but how many of us (and I sheepishly include myself in this number) have failed to invest time and energy into establishing and maintaining this kind of network?

If you don't have a significant network of contacts because you are—and let's call a spade a spade—an introvert, then don't despair. This next section is especially for you. I only wish I had followed this advice myself from an earlier age.

Networking for introverts

The problem with most of the advice you may have read about networking is that it was written *by extroverts for extroverts*. If, like many programmers, you are not particularly extroverted by nature, most of this advice is wasted on you. What's even worse is you might feel guilty or stressed about not being able to follow what is presented as "simple and easy" advice for networking.

Don't feel guilty. Instead, play to your strengths as an introvert.

Introverts are often quite thoughtful, preferring to spend time thinking about a topic rather than talking about it. This trait can be a major advantage when "preparing to network." If you want to make contact with someone, set

yourself a goal of making a list of thoughtful questions to ask that person when the opportunity arises. Most people love talking about themselves and sharing their opinions. This is not a cynical view; it's just basic human psychology—the sharing of personal experience is fundamental to any human relationship. Thoughtful, open-ended questions asked at the right time break the ice and set the relationship off to an excellent start.

Introverts are often more comfortable talking to individuals rather than to groups of people. It also happens that communicating one-on-one is much more effective in terms of exchanging ideas and building relationships. Look for situations where you can engage a new contact one-on-one, even if that interaction happens in a public place. Perhaps ironically, the open and public space of Twitter is a good environment for an introvert to make contact. The 140-character limit works well for those who prefer thoughtful and concise exchanges over wordy and extended conversations, and after you're followed by a Twitter user you can send him direct (and private) messages. You'll learn more about using Twitter and other social networking tools later in this chapter.

Many introverts find the job of building a network somewhat daunting. It needn't be. The trick is to think of it as a game with a well-defined goal—to make new contacts and build meaningful relationships with them. The hardest part for introverts is that the "rules of engagement" are vague. *"Exactly how,"* an introvert might wonder, *"do I go about building a network*?" If you're introverted, these vagaries are annoying and off-putting—*"What on earth should I do next*?" If you're extroverted these vagaries are exciting—*"I can do whatever I wish*!" (Though if you're extroverted you've probably skipped this section or are reading it out of curiosity.) For introverts, here's a cheat sheet for how to build a network:

- Make a list of potential contacts.
- Sort the list into order, from "most desirable and probable" to "least desirable and improbable."
- Starting at the top, think about what kind of questions the contact might find interesting, and write down a short list of questions.
- In a suitable environment, ask those questions of up to five potential contacts (more than five might be difficult to do, depending on your personal capacity and energy).
- Engage with those who respond.
- Keep adding to your list so you always have five potential new contacts.
- Repeat!

Finally, if you find that networking drains your energy, be sure to protect your energy reserves by pacing yourself. Take time out to reflect and process

information gathered from social exchanges, and in this way prepare yourself for the next opportunity to build and maintain your network. It's a marathon, not a sprint.

Finding potential employers

Potential employers are out there. Unfortunately, many of them are unthinkingly patronizing recruitment agencies, or perhaps (more fairly) they exclusively use agencies because they don't know of any better way.

Consider the problem of finding candidates from the hiring manager's perspective—wouldn't it be nice if a suitable candidate contacted the company directly? Wouldn't it save the company a lot of money and time? Too right, it would! With that in mind, here are some of the channels you can use to unearth these potential employers:

- Your personal network of contacts, including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn
- Regional business directories
- Chambers of commerce job fairs
- Job sites, limiting your search to jobs that have been "posted by employer"
- Web search for "careers" + "*employer name*"
- Professional journals

Searching for a job is no time to be bashful. Add a note to your online profiles that you're available; you never know who might see it.

Approaching potential employers

Approaching a potential employer "cold" is probably the hardest aspect for many job seekers, and I won't pretend otherwise. If you can, having someone (other than a fee-seeking agency) introduce you is much better. If you use LinkedIn, check to see whether anyone in your network can help, and of course, ask around and make use of your other social networks. You've probably heard of the idea that everyone is on average six steps away, by way of introduction, from any other person.

If you don't have a connection then you'll need to contact the hiring manager without an introduction. Don't panic; this isn't necessarily a problem. The first thing to do is to find out as much as you can about the company, the department, and the people who influence and make hiring decisions. I say "as much as you can," but I don't mean you should spend an unlimited amount of time researching a company. Set yourself a reasonable limit, perhaps a few hours

at most, by which time you will have all the useful information you need plus some insight into how the company is structured and who makes the decisions.

Obviously, you need to look at the company website where, quite often, you will find most of the information you need. At the very least you will find a contact telephone number. Call it. Don't pretend to be anything other than a job seeker, and ask the person who answers the phone whether he or she can help you. You only need a few bits of information, and if you are up-front and honest most people are happy to help. It doesn't hurt that many receptionists have been in your position (job seeking) and therefore have some sympathy for job seekers. Be warned, though: The first hint of deception or evasiveness will cut your conversation short. Having had the benefit of sitting near receptionists, I've heard this happen over and over. Companies receive endless cold calls from sales people and recruiting agencies, and most receptionists have developed finely tuned senses to detect these types of calls. A naïve sales person will call asking to speak to the software development manager about "a business opportunity" and, inevitably, he achieves nothing but having his details taken on a Post-It note that is soon discarded. Don't let that happen to you!

I do not recommend that your very first contact should be via e-mail. Think of what happens to the unsolicited e-mails that land in your own inbox. You need to call up and talk to someone. The aim of the first call is very simple: You want to get the name and contact details of the person who makes hiring decisions in whichever department hires programmers. Ideally you will also find out a bit about the structure of the company and whether or not it is hiring, but at minimum you must obtain the name and e-mail address of the hiring manager. If the first-contact conversation goes well, you might ask the person you talk to if he or she will pass on a message to the hiring manager that you're a software developer, you're available, and that you're hoping to have a chat. Don't fret about the possibility of the message being lost or ignored. That might happen, but more than likely this message will serve as a kind of introduction in lieu of one from a common connection in your social network.

Being persistent

One thing that is drilled into trainee sales people is that persistence can pay off. This is a double-edged sword, for although it is true that persistence can pay off it can also taint your reputation and result in you being labeled as a pest. A fine line exists between persistence and pestering but, at its most basic, persistence is the idea that you should not give up at the first hurdle.

This can mean that you need to make more than one phone call to get the information you desire. It can mean that you need to send follow-up e-mails rather than assuming the worst. It might mean that your e-mail was accidentally

filtered into a "junk mail" folder and you need to send a personally addressed letter, which is something I recommend in any case. Ultimately, you must be the judge of when your efforts have crossed the line, but remember that if you have consistently been polite, respectful, and direct in all your communication then there is no good reason why anyone would consider you a pest.

Timing

Many large companies are constantly in the news for various reasons. If you have an ambition to join one of these companies, you should keep a lookout for any news that suggests expansion plans are afoot. For instance, many publicly traded service companies announce whenever they win major new contracts or business. Submitting (or resubmitting) your application after learning of news like this might provoke a favorable response, when otherwise the answer would have been "no current vacancies."

Also, most companies make plans for expansion that coincide with their financial year. If you find out when this financial year starts—and this information is readily available for all publicly listed companies—then you might stand an improved chance if you submit an application just as the hiring process kicks off.

Emerging Alternatives

If you've spent much time online then almost certainly you have heard of or are active on one or more social networking sites. Here's a quick overview of some of the more popular sites, and how suited they are (or can be) to finding your next job as a programmer.

Using Twitter

Twitter is a social networking service where users can post and exchange messages. These messages are known as "tweets" and they are limited to 140 characters. Twitter claims to have more than 140 million active users who collectively post 340 million tweets daily.

When you're looking around for potential employers, don't forget that the reason most people join and use Twitter is to exchange funny tweets, interesting thoughts, and useful information. A steady stream of similar-sounding tweets won't gain you many followers, and neither will tweets that are impersonal and stuffy. To be interesting, you also need to be a little bit vulnerable, sharing your ideas even if they won't necessarily be universally popular. This is not to suggest you should continually air your unpopular opinions (should you have

any), but rather that you should not be afraid to—always respectfully—say what you think. A monotonous repetition of dull links to your website won't gain you many followers.

If you are new to Twitter, spend the first few days reading the tweets of others, noting what kind of tweets are popular and retweeted, and also noting what kind of tweets are less popular or ignored.

You can pay to gain followers, but I don't advise you do this. The followers you gain won't be at all interested in you, and they won't be interesting to follow. You can also pay for software that automates the "following" and "unfollowing" process in order to gain a large number of followers. You might find this helpful, perhaps as a minor ego boost, but again I don't recommend you do this. You can distinguish these robotic accounts from real users because they will inexplicably follow you one day, and if you don't reciprocate they will unfollow you in short order. Real relationships in Twitter, just like in life, are not something you want a robot attending to, at least not if you want real, potentially helpful connections with real, potentially helpful people.

In summary,

Do:

- Engage with others, including retweeting tweets you find interesting or relevant.

- Update your profile to include mention of your availability.

- Include a link in your profile to your CV (or better, your website where your CV can be found along with other interesting material you've written or compiled).

Don't:

- Post unprofessional or offensive tweets (this includes not retweeting the potentially offensive tweets of others).

- Limit your tweets to just advertising yourself and your job search. Tweet about what you find interesting or amusing.

- Follow obvious spammers or "follow back" robots. Yes, this increases your number of followers but at the same time it taints your account by association.

Using Facebook

Facebook is probably the best known and most widely used of all social networks. You might have seen the film *The Social Network*, and the chances are you have a Facebook account no matter where in the world you happen to live.

The popularity and the ubiquity of Facebook is a double-edged sword; a potential employer might have a presence on Facebook, which can give you some insight into their company and culture. On the other hand, consider the sobering thought that every potentially embarrassing thing you've ever posted on Facebook is at risk of being discovered by that employer. You should also be aware that the U.S. Federal Trade Commission recently came to an agreement with Facebook over their accusation that Facebook "deceived consumers by telling them they could keep their information on Facebook private, and then repeatedly allowed it to be shared and made public." You could assume that this agreement between Facebook and the FTC will lead to better privacy controls at Facebook, or you could take a more cynical view that Facebook is unlikely to care for your privacy unless it is forced to by external regulation.

There is another privacy aspect to Facebook, although perhaps it has been exaggerated in the popular media. It has been reported that employers and academic institutions have begun asking for access to the accounts of Facebook users, or to become Facebook "friends" with potential employees or students. Whether this is right or wrong or even legal is largely irrelevant; the implications for many job seekers faced with this kind of request is unpleasant. At the very least, this gives many people a reason to hesitate before freely posting social updates.

Ultimately, Facebook is great for purely social networking, but not so great for the job seeker.

Using LinkedIn

If you had to choose exactly one networking site for the purpose of finding a programming job, you are well-advised to choose LinkedIn. More than any other networking site, LinkedIn clearly targets professionals; that is, those in paid employment and employers. LinkedIn's mission statement makes it clear beyond any doubt that this is the site for connecting with other professionals.

> **The mission of LinkedIn is to connect the world's professionals to enable them to be more productive and successful.**

Using LinkedIn is mostly self-evident. You connect with people you know, join groups that interest you, keep your employment history up to date, and post occasional updates. You can also interact with other LinkedIn users by sending "InMail," which is handy if you don't have any other contact details for that person.

LinkedIn also provides a convenient way to showcase recommendations from your colleagues and business associates. You can display (or hide) these recommendations in your profile.

For a monthly fee LinkedIn also offers a number of extra features for job seekers, including:

- Five "InMails," which allow you to contact anyone on LinkedIn (normally you are limited to contacting just your immediate network).

- Information about who has viewed your profile (normally you can see just limited information).

- Your profile displays a "job seeker" badge, though this is optional.

- When you apply for a job via LinkedIn, your profile appears as a "featured applicant" at the top of the list as viewed by the job poster.

- Recruiters (in fact, anyone on LinkedIn) can send you messages via "OpenLink," which appears as an icon displayed in your profile. This is an optional feature.

Writing a blog

Writing a blog is incredibly effective as a way to connect you with potential employers. If you write well, and have interesting or amusing things to say, you can reach a very large audience who will return to your blog or sign up for your RSS feed. Over time, you can develop a group of loyal readers, and the value of that loyalty for the job seeker is huge.

That's the good news.

The reality is that many blogs are started with the best of intentions, and then fall silent after an initial burst of enthusiasm. Why is this so? It's because writing takes time, accumulating readers takes time, and building up a significant following can take months or even years.

If you regularly post on Twitter or any social network then blogging might be the option for you, in the sense that every interesting thing you might post to a social network can instead be posted to your blog. If not, then you have to ask yourself whether you have the capacity to sustain a blog. The content has to come from somewhere, and if your heart isn't in it, then it will probably show in your writing—and consequently you won't gain many readers.

Getting started blogging is easy, and many free services are available to get started with. I don't recommend these. Hosting your blog on your own domain and with a paid hosting provider lends credibility to your blog but perhaps more important, gives you ultimate control over your blog and your content. In contrast, anything you post on a "free" site is subject to terms that detract from a professional image. For example, some free sites adorn your blog with unrelated advertising. Similarly, if you post your content on one of the well-known social networks, you probably don't have much control over that content, and depending on the terms and conditions you agreed to when signing up (you

do remember those, right?) then the possibility exists that you might not even own the content you've created.

If you decide to set up a blog, here's what I recommend:

- Choose a topic for your blog that is relevant to your career interest. Programmers are lucky—we have an enormous number of very interesting topics to talk and write about. Resist the temptation to blog about random unrelated things—a focused blog is more likely to attract loyal readers.

- Pay for hosting and buy a suitable domain name.

- Set yourself a reasonable schedule for writing, one that is regular and to which you can realistically commit over the long term.

- Try to build up a buffer of blog posts for those inevitable times when for whatever reason (for example, holiday or sickness), you can't write new material.

- Use blogging software. If you don't know which blogging software to use then I recommend WordPress as a good starting point.

- Enable comments on your blog posts. Yes, this attracts spammers, but the benefit of engaging with your readers far outweighs the hassle of filtering spam comments. People love being heard, so don't ignore them when they leave comments.

Careers at Stack Overflow

At some point, most programmers find themselves searching the Web for answers to a difficult or obscure problem. Many of these programmers find the answer on Stack Overflow, a relatively new site that has become a mecca for programmers and a truly valuable resource. Most programmers reading this will know of Stack Overflow and will have visited it many times.

What isn't quite as well-known is that the good people at Stack Overflow have branched out from their initial programming Q&A site and now also run a site for employers and job seekers at `http://careers.stackoverflow.com/`.

The operation of this site is similar to most job sites: You can submit your details to allow employers and recruiters to find your profile, and employers and recruiters can search for profiles using keyword and location. The unique aspect of `http:// careers.stackoverflow.com` lies in its connection with Stack Overflow. If you have contributed answers to Stack Overflow then your "top answers" display in your profile along with how you rate in various subjects. Your Stack Overflow reputation will also be on display.

Whether your involvement with Stack Overflow is seen as a significantly positive aspect of your application depends on the attitude of the potential employer. Tech-savvy employers might be impressed, and some might even browse your contributions (including your questions!) to gain insight into your

style of communication and to see how well you can express yourself. On the other hand, the possibility exists that some employers won't see your involvement with Stack Overflow in quite the same light. For example, they might understandably have concerns about the time you might spend on this site versus actually working for them. If you have a particularly high reputation, this might be an issue you must prepare to address during a phone or in-person interview. If your involvement with Stack Overflow was during a period of unemployment, the time you've spent on Stack Overflow probably won't be an issue, but otherwise you should consider how you can credibly respond to the question when it is asked.

Skills matter: "Find Your Ninja"

An interesting alternative to the usual approach to matching employers with programmers is the Find Your Ninja project run by the training company Skills Matter, London.

The basic idea is that employers who want to hire a programmer pay a fee to attend, and pitch their company and project to an audience of programmers. Programmers attend the event for free.

This event sounds similar to a traditional job fair, but an important difference exists. Because the audience consists mostly of experienced programmers who have heard about the event while attending training at Skills Matter, the presentations (that is, the "pitches") are more technical than usual. Rather than emphasizing general benefits, employers focus more on the technology and programming environment in addition to the usual information about the company. Employer presentations are usually given by technical leads within the company rather than by recruiting representatives.

Fundamentally, the Find Your Ninja project and other similar events are based on the assumption that the audience is filled with highly motivated and competent programmers. If you see yourself in that category and you live in or live close to London, then perhaps this kind of event is for you.

If you don't live near London then contact technical/programmer training companies near where you live, or near where you want to work, to see if they run similar events.

Contents

IT'S YOUR DREAM JOB. YOU'RE QUALIFIED.
HERE'S HOW TO SEAL THE DEAL

There's more to acing a job interview than correct answers. This down-to-earth guide, written by a programmer who has been on both sides of the desk, covers it all. Learn what your resumé should include, what to expect from the interviewer, how to answer tough questions, why spelling matters, what to wear, and even ways to gain confidence. From preparing a phone interview cheat sheet to code-writing best practices, language quirks, and testing, this complete reference empowers you to ace that interview and land the job.

- Understand how the hiring manager sees the interview process
- Learn what to research before the interview
- Be prepared for social and behavioral questions
- Get tips on communicating effectively and establishing rapport
- Master the most common problems interviewers present
- Conquer quirks and idioms of JavaScript, C#, Java, Perl, Ruby, and T-SQL
- Study the open-ended questions that test a programmer's experience

Edward Guiness is a software developer who has been both interviewer and interviewee over his long career. He has been programming since before the birth of Windows 1.0. In 2012, Edward founded SocialCoder (socialcoder.org), a volunteering organization for programmers, designers, and other technical people.

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Back Cover

Now completely updated for online and on-paper job search — the only guide to new-style letters that get you in the door

Go beyond the classic cover letter! Whether you're a new or experienced job hunter, this guide offers you fresh ideas for crafting a wide variety of engaging cover letters and innovative career marketing documents. You'll see how to stand out in today's fierce job market with savvier, higher-impact messages that cut through the competition.

- *Realize the clout of your cover letter* — discover the surprising role your document plays in a successful job search
- *Build your marketing arsenal* — from e-mail cover notes and resume combo letters, to online profiles and professional branding statements
- *Write your way to a job with great success lines* — see how your letter should look and read, include the right targeted content, grab the reader's attention (and hold it), and keep the door open with a take-charge close
- *Apply the latest letter tactics* — get strategies for replying to ads, prospecting, networking for job leads, and writing thank-you letters that clinch the job
- *Choose from more than 125 outstanding samples from top career professionals* — including a mix of new-style, traditional, creative, friendly, hard-hitting, and clever letters

Joyce Lain Kennedy is a nationally syndicated careers columnist appearing in newspapers and on Web sites across the country. The author of seven career management books, she has more than 30 years of experience in the career field.

Open the book and find:

- The nuts and bolts of 21st-century job search letter-writing
- Explanations of all types of leading-edge documents and materials
- 125+ new samples from professional cover letter/resume writers
- Attention-grabbing openers and action closers
- The latest online networking trends
- Tips for identifying your marketable skills
- A handy glossary of problem words

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Contents at a Glance

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Introduction

● ●

*W*elcome to the newly retooled *Cover Letters For Dummies,* 3rd Edition. Compared to its last incarnation a decade ago, this revision is a different creature. Times change. Communications change. Job-clinching techniques change.

Even if you're an experienced job hunter, you'll find in this book a wealth of fresh ideas about how to robustly present yourself online or on paper. And you'll be surprised by the uncommonly wide scope of content that extends far beyond classic cover letters. In a nutshell, you haven't read this book before.

As career management expert and writer Don Orlando commented upon seeing the updated manuscript — "It definitely is not the umpteenth edition of *Miss Penelope Swain's Letter Writing Guide for Young Ladies and Gentlemen."*

No, it isn't. In the digital era, cover letters that deliver are vigorous and vivacious, assertive in asking for that all-important interview. What's more, the new-style cover letters partner with a strike-up-the-band parade of creative, hard-hitting career management documents that are anything but sleepy letters of transmittal.

Letters that have no higher ambition than merely to serve as wraps for resumes won't move your hopes and dreams where you want to go in today's fast-changing job market, one that seems to evolve with every sunrise.

In the spirit of providing something for everyone, both new-style and traditional letters are represented in the book's 126 documents. This forward-leaning edition is a milestone for cover letter books. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

About This Book

The book you are about to read also marks a milestone in the 13 editions of *For Dummies* books that I've written: It's the first one crafted with a wide collaboration by professional writers in the career management industry. The 57 professionals whose work appears here are among the very best in the business. Their names appear beneath their work and in the appendix.

I'm a big believer in the Community of Intelligence, the school of "everyone's better than anyone," and so I'm immensely proud that this work features top cover letter writers whose samples show you how to know a great letter when you see one or write one.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate this book, I've established the following conventions:

- ✔ *Italic* is used for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that are defined.
- ✔ `Monofont` is used for Web addresses.
- ✔ Sidebars, which are shaded boxes of text, consist of information that's interesting and, while not necessarily critical to your understanding of the topic, add to your learning rewards in the book.

Further, in the sample documents throughout the book, I substitute a reminder to add the relevant dates in your document with the word *date* or *dates* enclosed in editorial brackets — [dates] — instead of actual years to keep your attention focused on key career marketing concepts. Similarly, I sometimes substitute such terms as *inside address* and *salutation* to conserve page space for the heart of the message.

Also in the interest of space, I left out handwritten signatures in the letters, but including a handwritten signature on paper or a cursive signature online is an important and highly recommended practice.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume you picked up this book for at least one of the following reasons:

- ✔ You've never written a cover letter — or any type of career management document — and you'd like to see how the pros do it. You're thinking: "If they can do it, why not me? How hard can it be to string sentences together and sound smart?"
- ✔ You have written a cover letter, but it must not have lit up the sky (or else your resume was a goose) because you're still waiting to hear back — four months later.

✔ You're happily employed but worried about the economy. If you're forced to pack up and leave on short notice, you want to be ready. You discovered that your resume is a teardown, and so you're rebuilding it from the ground up but have the nagging feeling that your cover letter is a few tactics short of a strategy. You ask yourself: What is an action close? Why is a postscript a killer sales tactic? When should I be as subtle as an infomercial?

✔ You're ready to move up in rank, and you've heard buzz about some new-style letters you can write to network for leads, or to follow up after an interview to make sure an employer comes back to you with an offer. And you heard that *gasp!* some audacious soul actually wrote a letter asking for a promotion.

✔ You've aware of blazing-fast, technology-based changes in the way people and jobs hook up, and how they post their profiles on social networking Web sites. You want to be sure your career marketing messages are working with you — not against you — in the newest technology sense. You don't want the world to pass you by.

How This Book Is Organized

Being tapped for an interview or series of interviews — and being hired after that — depends on more than merely being qualified for the position you seek. Many talented people have figured that out and are improving their odds with robust cover letters and other career marketing documents. The following five parts give you an arsenal of written ammunition you can use to your advantage.

Part 1: Cover Letters and So Much More!

This part reviews the role cover letters play in a successful job search and introduces a dramatic and rich variety of other career marketing documents that may be unfamiliar to you. You also discover or refresh your memory about the impact of online social networking in communicating career-charging messages. More adventures: Almost a dozen uncommon documents, including six samples, help you make the margin of difference in a highly competitive contest for a great job.

Part II: Creating Compelling Communications

These four chapters help you jump through the writing hoops to come up with Stand Out work. This part shows how your cover letters should look and read, with suggestions on image, content, and language. You get ideas on writing great opening lines and closes that keep your hands on the wheel. You also find tips on identifying and selling your marketable skills.

Part III: Job Letters: Sample the Best

Here's the proof in the power-pudding: A collection of 86 samples — written by the best of America's and Canada's professional career management document writers — show you how to apply the strategies I describe in this book. You see job ad replies and letters for prospecting, networking, and following up after interviews. I bet you'll never look at job letters the same way again.

Part IV: Online Messages: Sample the Best

This part contains 34 more outstanding samples. These messages show you how to impress with branding statements, online profiles, and online cover notes.

Part V: The Part of Tens

In these short chapters, I give you quick bits about job letters. I offer guidance on avoiding unnecessary mistakes and tips on how to score at the top of the class when you're writing online profiles.

Appendix

Here you find a directory of the professional writers whose work appears in this book. Following the directory, I explain what the initials after their names mean, as well as recognize the five professional cover letter and resume writers' organizations whose members contributed to this work.

Icons Used in This Book

For Dummies signature icons are the little round pictures you see in the margins of the book. I use them to laser-guide your attention to key bits of information. Here's a list of the icons you find in this book and what they mean.

This icon directs your full attention to compelling messages that make you stand out from the crowd.

Advice and information that can spark a difference in the outcome of your career message are flagged with this icon.

Some points in these pages are so useful that I hope you keep them in mind as you read. I make a big deal out of these ideas with this icon.

No move or technique achieves the job letter-interview connection every single time. This icon reminds you to think through an issue and try to make the best choice for your situation.

Watch out for deep waters filled with things that bite. This icon signals there could be trouble ahead if you don't make a good decision.

Where to Go from Here

Every author wishes you would start at the beginning and savor every word in lock step until you reach the end of the book. In real life, where you start depends upon your current needs:
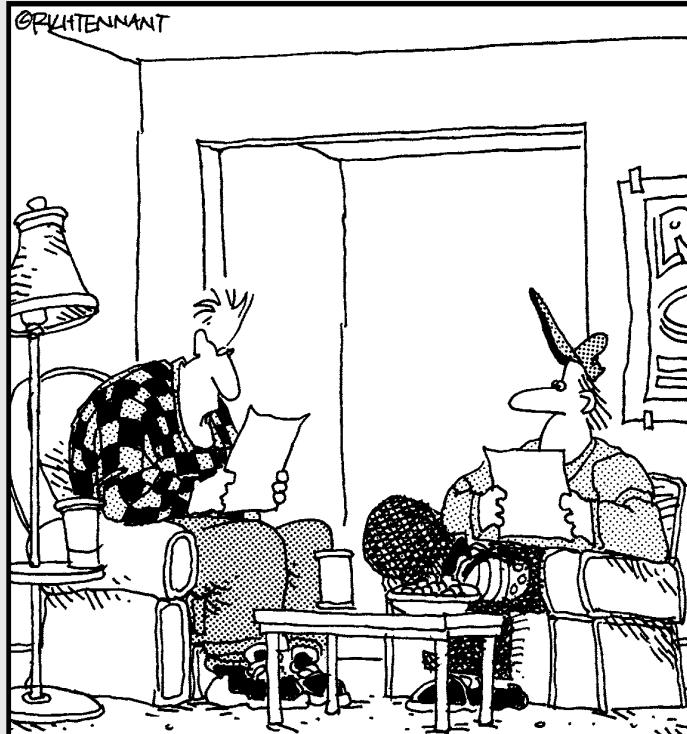
- ✔ When you've just spotted an advertised job opening you want, immediately read Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8.

- ✔ When you want to do most of your searching online, hit your bull's eye with Chapters 1, 2, 13, 14, and 16.

- ✔ When you're at the starting gate and have a couple of weeks to learn your way around career management documents, grant the author's wishes and read this book cover to cover. As I said in *Job Interviews For Dummies,* 3rd Edition, practice recommended strategies, tactics, and techniques. "After you master the information in these pages, you own a special kind of insurance policy that pays off for as long as you want to work."

Part I

Cover Letters and So Much More!

The 5th Wave   By Rich Tennant

"The magazine didn't hire me, but they are paying me $50 to print my cover letter on their joke page."

In this part . . .

Are your cover letters puny pages that do nothing but sit atop your resume or are they bringing full-force strength to a well-crafted marketing message? In this part, you find out how a cover letter can bring the right kind of attention your way. And there isn't just one way to go about it, so this part runs down the many kinds of messages that fit the cover letter bill, including the all-important online communiqué.

Chapter 1

News Flash: Cover Letters Are Grown Up and Have Kids

*O*nce upon a job-hunting time long ago, the term *cover letters* brought to mind drab documents like this one:

> *Dear Sir/Madam,*
>
> *Please accept this letter and resume for the Payroll Manager position as referenced in the Louisiana Times, Nov. 5. My work history and educational background make me an outstanding candidate. I am available for an interview at your earliest convenience. Thank you.*

That style of transmittal letter has become a museum piece.

In this century's brave new world of hypercompetitive job searches, cover letters have not only been reinvented, they've spawned a family of *career management documents* like these:

- ✔ Intrigue-inducing e-mail cover notes
- ✔ Deal-closing thank-you letters
- ✔ Interest-reviving follow-up messages
- ✔ Star-power bios and branding statements
- ✔ Image-brightening reference blurbs
- ✔ Qualifications-matching candidate checklists

✔ Humanizing audio and video bites in profiles

✔ Eye-popping accomplishment sheets

And there's much more in the new cover letter family. All together, today's family of career management documents — which I also call *job letters* — delivers a spectacular array of self-marketing tools for people who want to be seen, noticed, and hired for the best jobs. That's you, isn't it?

A New Age of Self-Promotion Is Here!

Looking for and landing the job you want is always a challenge, especially in uncertain times. But — lucky you — in one important way, your timing hits the jackpot!

You're in the right century at the right time with the right tools to better manage your career than any generation before.

By seizing the opportunity to capitalize on 21st-century opportunities, you can

✔ Change to creative and high-impact letters that bring interviews

✔ Switch to gutsy but polite letters that generate hires

✔ Shift to persuasive and content-rich letters that position you to win career rewards that matter to you

You live in nothing less than a *revolutionary age for career self-promotion.* How did you get so lucky? This empowering new age is upon us for two main reasons:

✔ **Society's changing expectations in message style.** In this era of mass-marketing and media overload, people are so accustomed to vivid, sparkling advertising and creative, clever marketing in every corner of their lives that they no longer pay much attention to feeble, uninteresting messages from job seekers who merely go through the motions. The family of new-style letters is hard to ignore in an atmosphere where HDTV gets attention, but black-and-white TV is ho-hum.

The new-style letters vary in approach from elegant to elementary, but their missions are the same — picking up the cue from contemporary advertising and marketing, all the best ones are *sales letters*.

✔ **Emergence of a technology-rich environment.** In previous centuries, cover letters were joined at the hip with the post office. In this century, the Internet's vast and powerful e-mail and social networking services supply unprecedentedly wide vistas to carry new-style messages.

For clarity, I pause to emphasize that despite the loosening of collars in the new wave of job letters, conservatively styled cover letters aren't dead. They continue to be preferred in certain buttoned-down industries, such as banking, medicine, and government service. Why? Because they're persuasively and expertly written to satisfy the tastes of executives in those industries. (See for yourself the conservatively styled cover letters that appear in Parts 3 and 4.)

As creativity and technology turn new pages in recruiting circles, the cover letter has morphed into an extended family of hard-hitting messages that influence how the working world sees you and treats you.

Cover Letters Are Alive and Sell

Considering our digital world in which millions of people send their resumes off to online boarding schools without cover letter guardians, you may ask whether the cover letter model (new- or old-style) continues to lead the parade of written job docs. More bluntly, are cover letters still valuable?

The answer is a resounding *yes!* These resume sidekicks pack far too much firepower to be left on the sideline, according to two 2008 surveys:

✔ You leave interviews on the table when you skip cover letters: so concluded a survey I developed with talent selection expert Alise Cortez, PhD. Three-fifths (60 percent) of a cross-section of 83 American employers, human resource specialists, and recruiters sampled say they read cover letters always, often, or sometimes. Two-fifths (40 percent) read resumes rarely or never. Dr. Cortez is a founding partner of ImprovedExperience. com, a third-party research firm headquartered in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, that specializes in surveys for the human resource industry.

✔ Big company managers overwhelmingly prefer their resumes with cover letters. A poll of 150 executives in major U.S. companies reveals that a whopping 86 percent rate cover letters as valuable, with only 14 percent calling cover letters not valuable. Moreover, 80 percent of polled executives say cover letters accompany resumes they receive electronically. The poll was developed by OfficeTeam, a leading staffing company headquartered in Menlo Park, California.

In summing up widely held opinion among people in the employment business, OfficeTeam executive director Dave Willmer explains why your resume should never leave home without a cover letter at its side:

Submitting a resume without a cover letter is like not shaking hands when meeting someone for the first time. Those who aren't including cover letters with their resumes are missing an opportunity to make a good first impression and set themselves apart from other job applicants.

Will your cover letter save the day?

When a rookie recruiter, who hasn't yet been taught the finer points of analyzing data-packed resumes, doesn't know what to make of yours but doesn't want the boss to know that he or she doesn't know, your resume's new address can be the reject pile.

A cover letter treatment is the recommended therapy to save your resume from certain candidate death merely because a rookie can't measure its value. Why? Letters are easier to analyze than resumes. The rookie reads the letter and immediately knows what you bring to the table. Wanting to look like a savvy judge of talent, the rookie recruiter is now likely to pass your package of letter and resume up the line to a senior recruiter who does know how to evaluate resumes and who can extend interview invitations.

The takeaway: Attaching a cover letter that zings with your qualifications for the job can keep your resume (and job hopes) alive.

A Stand Out cover letter does much more than keep your resume warm during its long trip to a hiring manager. Cover letters done right can step up and accomplish a number of important getting-you-noticed purposes, which the following sections outline.

Looking good at first light

Use a cover letter to immediately position yourself as a most valuable person. First impressions are very hard to change. And your cover letter often is an employer's first inkling that you're on the planet and for hire. You can use your cover letter to show yourself to be alert and attentive by editing out all the typo goofs for which your high school English teacher would have given you a big fat F.

Targeting the employer's needs

The resume focuses on you and the past. The cover letter focuses on the employer and the future. Tell the hiring professional what you can do to benefit the organization in the future.

Failure to understand this simple principle is a critical mistake, advises career grand master John Lucht, CEO of RiteSite.com, a respected Web site for professionals seeking jobs at six figures and up. Lucht explains:

Lots of people figure that the cover letter is about them and what they want. Wrong! It should be about what the employer wants that they provide. Dump the 'I'm looking for' — both the attitude and the words. Instead say, 'Do you need?' And make the 'need' one that you — as your attached resume clearly spells out — are the ideal person to fill.

Showcasing your attractive personality

Your cover letter is a chance to bring more personality to your application than a resume can carry. It suggests, even subliminally, whether you're open to new ideas, results driven, energetic, a people person, cheerful, agreeable, and cooperative, to name but a few premium employer-pleasing qualities.

Most chief executives say that employee turnover is one of their biggest headaches. Personality is a key ingredient (along with knowledge and skill) in being a good fit for a job, which is why some employers give personality tests to candidates. Your cover letter offers early clues to your personality fit for the job.

Closing gaps in your work record

Your cover letter is the ideal vehicle to explain — on your terms — any disruption in your work history. The basic strategy explains the gap as a positive achievement: You studied further, gained business-related transferrable skills while raising children, served in the military, undertook volunteer activities, moved to a new location for a good reason, or resolved a non-recurring health problem.

BEWARE

When your resume has time holes in it and you don't explain how you productively filled the time and kept your skills current, yoking your past and your future is very difficult. In that case, entry-level offers are the most likely outcome. (Followed closely by no offers.)

Highlighting your skills and accomplishments

Your cover letter is the perfect place to emphasize the high-interest factors that whet a hiring authority's interest in knowing more.

This is your chance to connect the dots for hiring authorities and recruiters, counsels Lynne Sarikas, director of the MBA career center at Northeastern University's College of Business Administration:

> Most likely you have not done this exact job in this exact industry before and don't assume they will figure out how your experience is transferable. Show them how you meet their specific needs and the unique value you bring to the table.

By the way, don't sabotage this purpose by merely repeating your resume using different words and mixing them up a bit. That's a time waster, and you don't want to be thought of as one of those.

Demonstrating your communication skills

Every survey of employers' most-wanted skills seems to include the ability to communicate well. By a strange coincidence, almost every professional-level job seeker claims the ability to communicate well — without offering proof.

An impeccable and robust cover letter provides that proof. It's your chance to show that you have the chops to communicate clearly, that you're downright articulate.

Taking the wheel

An action close on a Stand Out cover letter tells the recipient that you'll proactively call to set up an interview. It establishes that you have initiative and aren't one to sit around and wait for interview manna to fall in your lap.

Of course, an action close isn't always possible in a digital exchange when you don't know to whom you're applying. Or when you don't know who's in charge of a task force selection committee. In situations where you can't take the interview initiative, maintain your image of a "person of action" by encouraging the hiring authority to quickly contact you.

Meet the Letters Family

Like all the best families, the job letter clan has its share of first and second cousins and an occasional odd uncle. The following sections show you how the relatives line up.

Job ad reply letter

The head of the letters family is the category of cover letters written in reaction to a published job opening in print or online. Responding to published job openings is the most common job search letter activity. Pay the job ad reply letter the courtesy of customizing it to point out how you match the requirements of the position it addresses.

You find everything you want to know about writing job ad reply letters in Chapter 8.

Prospecting letter

Sent selectively to a relatively small number of potential employers with whom you have some sort of connection (same industry, personal meeting, affinity group), these self-marketing, direct-mail messages are similar to broadcast letters and may overlap with networking letters. Call them prospecting, broadcast, or networking letters: Whatever you call them, you need them. I dissect and illustrate prospecting letters in Chapter 9.

Broadcast letter

A type of self-marketing direct mail, the biggest differences between broadcast and prospecting letters are scale and relationships. You send broadcast letters to big numbers of potential employers with whom the sender has virtually no connection. In fact, job seekers often use commercial mailing lists to develop their broadcast letter address book. True believers in the pay-off for broadcast letters insist that their secret to success is the distribution by postal mail or online of large numbers of enticing letters ("a numbers game"), with persistent follow-up by phone or e-mail. Find out more in Chapter 9.

Networking letter

Most networking letters ask for job leads, not for job interviews. They're addressed to human networks, requesting that members respond by phone, e-mail or Twitter. (Twitter is a Web site and service that lets users send short text messages from their cell phones to a group of individuals.) Networking letters typically reach out to those with whom you have some kind of affinity — fellow alumni, members of your church, civic organization, or buddy group, and so on. Additionally, you may send a networking letter for other reasons — to a hiring authority with whom you've recently met, for example; in such situations, you *do* ask for a job interview. Find networking letters in Chapter 10.

Resume letter

An odd uncle in the letters family, this direct postal or online mail document doesn't contain a separate resume per se. (However, you may attach a separate accomplishment sheet.) A storytelling approach weaves the facts of your work history into a narrative describing your objective. A resume letter is a good choice when your fundamental qualifications are sound but you need to gloss over gaps or other problems. When interestingly written, the letter pulls in readers because everyone likes a good story well told. A resume letter can be categorized as a subset of a broadcast or prospecting letter. Find samples in Chapter 11.

Job fair cover letter

Deciding in advance which companies you want to target at a job fair enables you to write attention-getting cover letters to leave with your resume at the land booth or send online to a virtual job fair. View a job fair sample letter in Chapter 9.

Try a twist by pairing a cover letter with an accomplishment sheet instead of a resume; see Chapter 11.

The vast majority of fair visitors don't make the extra research effort and instead just hand over generic documents, which gives you a huge opportunity to Stand Out from the crowd.

Thank-you letter

Think of a letter written ostensibly to thank a hiring authority for an interview as what it really should be: another turn at bat to drive home your winning run, not merely an extension of your mother's etiquette lessons to show your good manners. Focus on facts and comments that advance your candidacy for selection. Chapter 12 contains chapter and verse on thank-you letters and includes great samples, as well.

Follow-up letter

Also an after-interview communication, a follow-up letter is designed to spur decision action or even serve as a comeback effort to revive your candidacy after a period of thundering silence from the employer. Chapter 12 hosts super follow-up letters.

Professional branding statement

How will prospective employers, clients, and customers perceive you professionally — as Sam Slacker or Sam Superstar? As Betty Boob or Betty Best? That's what personal branding is all about — your image and your reputation. What you deliver for the money, you expect to be paid. Chapter 13 is home base for crafting professional branding statements based on accomplishments and specializations that make you memorable in the job chase or on the consulting scene.

You can use a professional branding statement in letters, online profiles, accomplishment sheets, resumes, interviews, blog biographies, and elevator speeches. Even if you never get around to weaving a branding statement into a document, the mere act of writing one is a great way to concentrate your mind on what you're selling.

Online profile

Growing more popular by the minute, this second cousin in the job letters family ranges from short and sweet (executive bio, described in Chapter 13) to a Yao-Ming-tall Web portfolio stuffed with links — photos, blogs, vlogs (video blogs), lists of publications, certifications, licenses, audio or video sound bites, and more. You name it, online profiles have it! Chapter 13 is your destination for online profiles.

How important are the quality of your online profile and other mentions of concern about you on social networking sites? *Very!* To cite a single but typical late 2008 survey of 3,169 hiring managers by online job site CareerBuilder.com, 22 percent screened potential staff members by using social networking profiles. This figure was up from 11 percent just two years earlier. An additional 9 percent said they plan to start using online profiles. In sum, almost a third of recruiting and staffing professionals are using or plan to use social networking sites to check up on potential hires.

About a third of hiring managers said that they had dismissed a candidate after what they discovered on social networking sites. Biggest offenses: information posted about drinking or using drugs, provocative subjects, or inappropriate photographs. More turnoffs: poor communication skills, lying about qualifications, candidates using discriminatory remarks related to race, gender or religion, and an unprofessional screen name.

The good news is that the survey found that 24 percent of hiring managers said that they found content on social network pages helped seal their decisions to hire candidates.

E-mail cover note

Cover notes, which you find aplenty in Chapter 14, are kid brothers and sisters to cover letters. They're short and to the point. Typically, you send them in text in the body of an e-mail to introduce your attached resume, which usually is presented as an MS Word or PDF document.

Pulling Out the Stops with Special Marketing Messages

One of America's iconic comedians, the late George Burns, told audiences how he defined happiness. "Happiness," Burns said, "is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city."

That quip works as a metaphor for an elite branch of career management documents. The documents in this group, described in Chapter 3, may as well be in another city because they come out only for special occasions, which are:

- ✔ When the job you want is master of the universe and you're thinking "fat chance that will happen"
- ✔ When the job is exactly what you hope to find, and you can't bear the thought of it slipping through your hands
- ✔ When the job is madly desired by so many competitors that you need to do something really special that makes you Stand Out

Special marketing messages generally are extra, load-bearing documents you take along to interviews, leaving them behind to remind decision-makers of your worthiness. Turn to Chapter 3 to find out what I'm talking about.

Sing, Cover Letter, Sing

Call upon your inner muse before desperately resorting to sending out a skimpy, generic cover letter that brings you neither glory nor notice. Pledge to write cover letters that employers actually read; inspire intrigue by creatively using the right words and sending the right facts. Although Part II contains this book's mother lode of writing advice, here's a digest of tips to paste on your copyholder.

Customize and use names

Is your job search stalling after you submit a cover letter and resume package but before you're offered an interview? If that's your experience, why keep repeating failure?

Realize that, like the dearly departed all-purpose resume, the era of the generic cover letter is gone. Switch to a best practice of customizing each cover letter you send — not only in content, but addressed to the specific hiring manager instead of the threadbare approach of "Dear Employer " or "Dear Sir/Madam."

When you can't discover the hiring manager's name (by calling the company or through research), you're stuck with using a generalized introduction that's better than nothing but not as effective as "Dear Ms. Carmel," or "Dear Mr. Alvarez."

Speak the right language

Consider the recipient of your information. If the organization is conservative and traditional, keep the presentation of your information conservative and traditional. By contrast, when the targeted organization is creative and entrepreneurial, the addition of a splash of gifted words or a flourish in design tempts the doorkeeper to let you in.

I explain in Chapter 6 that the opening of your letter has to hook the reader, selling him or her on your abilities. One of many devices employed to hook readers is the use of a quotation. But here's the danger: Don't risk being perceived as a poet without a point by leading off with a nice but unrelated quotation that goes nowhere. Connect inspirational quotations with your strengths, or skip the quotation.

You can take more chances in approach and language when you really know your audience. To illustrate that principal, career coach Don Orlando in Montgomery, Alabama, passed along a high-risk real letter he wrote some years ago for a client who wanted to become chief of staff to a U.S. senator. She used her network to gain understanding of the senator's personality and preferred standard operating procedures. Discovering that he was known for giving curt answers, had a short fuse, and preferred take-charge staffers, here's the letter Orlando wrote for her:

Your job search for a chief of staff is over. Please tell your secretary to expect my call at 10:30 EDT, Monday, 28 July, to arrange an interview. I will need twelve minutes of your time on the day that is best for you.

During that short meeting, if I cannot convince you that I can arm you with bulletproof information that moves your agendas forward among all your constituencies, I will leave your office at once.

But if I can, I will start work the following Monday.

She was hired.

State the reason you're writing

Always tell the reader why you're writing, but be tactical about it. To reply to an advertised job, name the position title and where you saw the ad, but don't squander valuable real estate doing so in the opening paragraph. Instead, accomplish the same thing by positioning that information in the upper right-hand corner in the subject line "regarding" space. Other ways to handle the reason you're writing are presented in samples throughout this work.

Explain why you're a top candidate

Your basic message should be: "Here are examples of work I've done and accomplishments I've achieved that match what you're looking for." Because you research the company online, you're able to show why your skills and competencies are right for the job and can benefit the company. You explain any gaps in a positive way.

Accomplishments are job-offer magnets. Employers hire for results, not responsibilities. And they like numbers — percentages, dollar amounts, or other key measures wherever possible to quantify achievements and accomplishments.

Tell them why you admire them

You needn't gush with insincere praise when explaining why you'd like to work for a company, but intelligent compliments are a staple of effective cover letters. You won't be believable unless you get a line on the company before writing your letter. Why bother? Because your appreciation of the workplace where he or she toils makes the hiring manager feel important.

Declare what's next

In closing your letter, reprise your enthusiasm, confirm your desire for an interview, and state what the next step will be. Preferably, you use an action close, telling the recipient that you will follow up and when that will happen. In some instances, you will have to wait for them to contact you. Find out all about the action close in Chapter 6.

Read and reread

Go beyond using your computer's spell checker tool to review your job letters for typos and grammatical errors. Ask a friend or mentor to look over your letters as a backstop. Your words are going out into the hiring world as your only representative. If they don't go out in first-rate order, you never get to show off your stuff in person. Chapters 4 and 5 give you writing tips that enable you to write with the skills of a grammar snoot without actually having to be one.

Be a savvy submitter

When you plan to send your application package of cover letter and resume online, bear in mind the advice I received from Susan P. Joyce, editor and Webmaster of Job-Hunt.Org.

Spam filters have been called into service seemingly everywhere because spam messages now comprise an estimated 78 percent of all e-mail received. That means that up to 10 percent of your messages won't make it through to the intended recipient. Susan Joyce explains how to up your odds:

- ✔ **Be very careful with the message subject.** Be precise and concise, while avoiding the "unsafe" words below. When you're responding to a specific posting, the job title is the safest, clearest, and most helpful subject for the recipient.

  Stay away from words like *free, testing, money, urgent, payment,* and *investing.* Look at the spam messages you get and avoid their terminology and methods. Find synonyms or use a completely different approach to the subject.

  Avoid using all caps and punctuation, particularly exclamation points and dollar signs.

- ✔ **Watch the words you use in the body of your message.** Spam filters check the bodies of messages as well the subjects, so similar problems apply.

✔ **Know that you are usually safest using unformatted text, rather than rich text or HTML.** If you do use formatted text, be wary of using colored text and backgrounds, and avoid including fancy technology (Flash or other animation) unless the technology is related to a job requirement.

✔ **For a really important message, you can add a line that requests confirmation of receipt.** When confirmation doesn't come through, you can follow up. This can be a good excuse to call.

A Different Kind of Cover Letter Book

As this first chapter explains, career management docs are becoming important success drivers in a digital era. Cover letters now head up an entire family of new-style job letters, online profiles, and amazing self-marketing creations you can't afford to ignore. Visit the family reunion in the following pages, illustrated by 126 great new samples from professional cover letter writers.

Keeping everything straight

When you send resumes and cover letters in an MS Word document, send them to yourself first to be sure that they survive their electronic journey formatted the way they left home. You may find that some portions of the text slip and slide around, winding up in the strangest places. Here's an easy solution: Send each Word doc as a PDF (portable document format) attachment. PDFs arrive looking identical to the way you send them. You can quickly convert any document into a PDF for free at `www.pdf95.com`.

4th Edition

Job Interviews

FOR DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- **Survive web-based screening knock-outs**

- **Master the essentials of popular video interviewing**

- **Manage your social media presence to make a great impression**

Joyce Lain Kennedy
Nationally syndicated careers columnist

Contents at a Glance

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Introduction

*1*f you'd rather fight off an alien invasion than be grilled in an interview, take heart — you've come to the right guidebook. With the help of dozens of interviewing authorities, I make your interviewing challenge easy, successful, and even fun (steal a peek at the last chapter).

I share with you lots of new things in this fourth edition of *Job Interviews For Dummies,* ranging from the cosmic shift sparked by the rise of social media that changes what privacy means, to increasingly popular video interviewing that changes how communication occurs.

What hasn't changed is the fundamental role in the employment process played by job interviews — those crucial meetings that seal the deal on who gets hired and who gets left on the outside looking in.

REMEMBER *Job interviews are a slice of performance art.* They're staged theatrical sketches rather than X-rays of life histories. That's why theater and drama are the themes of this book, and I hope you have some enjoyable moments with the show-biz motif.

So on with the show! With the help of this guidebook, you, too, can be a ShowStopper.

What Exactly Is a ShowStopper in Job Interviewing?

In the drama of job interviewing, a ShowStopper performance is one that wins so much enthusiastic, prolonged applause that the show is temporarily interrupted until the audience quiets down.

A ShowStopper meeting causes the interviewer to mentally shout, "Bravo! More!" Your stunning impact quickly translates to a preliminary decision in your favor. If follow-up interviews, testing, and reference checking support that reaction, a job offer is on its way to you. The employer may continue to see other candidates to round out the interview process, but in reality, no one else stands a chance of landing the job after you figuratively stop the show.

Job Interviews For Dummies is packed with the essentials of performing ShowStopper interviews:

✔ Strategies and techniques

✔ Sample dialogue and research tips

✔ The best answers to make-or-break questions

About This Book

A guidebook of contemporary interview arts, *Job Interviews For Dummies* contains the distilled wisdom of hundreds of leading interview experts whose brains I've been privileged to pick for many years. By absorbing the guidance and tips I pass on in this guide, you can interview your way into a job by out-preparing and outperforming the other candidates.

Conventions Used in This Book

To assist your navigation of this guidebook, I've established the following conventions:

✔ I use *italic* for emphasis and to highlight either new words or terms I define.

✔ Web addresses appear in a special font to distinguish them from the regular type in the paragraph.

✔ Sidebars, which are shaded boxes of text, consist of information that's interesting but not necessarily critical to your understanding of the topic.

Terms Used in This Book

Is there another word for *synonym?* Would a fly without wings be called a *walk?* How is it possible to have a civil war? These one-liners from comedian George Carlin (www.georgecarlin.com) hint at the importance of words.

I use the following terminology in this guide to label specific roles and organizations:

✔ A *candidate* or *job seeker* is a person applying for a job. (Another once-common label, *applicant,* is used less today because of a federal regulation that defines an applicant as one to be counted in discrimination monitoring. But *applicant* means the same thing.)

✔ An *interviewer* is someone interviewing a candidate for a job. An *interviewee* is a candidate being interviewed for a job.

✔ A *human resources* (or *HR*) *specialist, HR manager,* or *screener* is an employer sentry who is conducting a screening (preliminary) interview.

A *hiring manager, hiring authority, decision maker, decision-making manager,* or *department manager* is a management representative who is conducting a selection interview and who has the authority to actually hire a person for a specific position. (Read about the differences in screening and selection interviews in Chapters 2 and 5.)

✔ A *company, employer,* or *organization* is the entity you hope to work for, whether private and profit-making, or private and nonprofit. *Agency* implies employment in the government (public) sector.

✔ A *recruiter* (also called a *headhunter*) is an intermediary between the employer and you. *Internal recruiters* work inside the company, either as regular employees of the human resources department or as contract employees. *Third-party recruiters* or *independent recruiters* are external recruiters, some of whom are employed as retained recruiters on an ongoing basis, while most are employed on a transaction basis as contingency recruiters and are paid only when a candidate they submit is hired.

✔ A *career coach* (also called a *career consultant)* helps job seekers gain workplace opportunities. (A *career counselor* and a career coach represent two different professions, although their work sometimes overlaps.)

✔ A *hiring professional* is any of the aforementioned professionals who is engaged internally or externally in the employment process.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume you picked up this book for one of the following reasons:

✔ You've never been through a competitive interview and you're freaking out. You need a couple thousand friendly pointers from someone who's interviewed many of the marquee minds in the job interview business and lived to write about it.

✔ You've been through a competitive interview and assume the company sank like Atlantis because you never heard a peep from those folks again. Or maybe you could have done better and actually heard back if you'd have known more about what you were doing in this interview thing.

✔ The most important interview of your career is coming up. You realize that now is the hour to dramatically improve your interviewing success. You need help, and you're willing to learn and work for success.

✔ You've been through a slew of job interviews over the course of your career and have a hunch that some important things have changed (you just don't know what exactly). You want to catch up with the help of a trusted resource.

✔ You want to be in the interviewing know and are sure that the authors of *For Dummies* books will give you the goods. You rely on *For Dummies* books to get the facts you need to succeed without jumping through verbal hoops until your eyes pop out of your head.

I further assume that you're someone who likes reliable, comprehensive information that gets to the point without rocking you to sleep. And I assume even further that you like your expertise with a smile now and then.

How This Book Is Organized

Before he was famous, superstar George Clooney auditioned for a television stereo commercial with a six-pack of beer tucked under his arm; he had researched the type of actor the advertiser wanted for the role, one whose attitude revealed the casual poise of a couch potato. He got the gig.

Later, Clooney explained the contribution of performance in both theatrical auditioning and job interviewing. He noted that the actor who lands the job isn't always the most talented, but the one who makes the best impression: "You get the job when you walk in the door. Because in a weird way, we're not selling acting. What we're selling is confidence."

Appearance. Performance skills. Confidence. All are winning — and learnable — traits in job interviews as well as theatrical auditions. This guidebook shows you these traits and much, much more in the following five useful categories.

Part I: And the Interview Winner Is . . . You!

This part opens with an overview of what's happening right now in job interviewing circles, beginning with the theme of this guidebook: *Interviews are theater.* A spotlight on new topics is next, including the growing impact of screening interviews, the spread of video interviewing, and interesting interview variations in a global marketplace. The conclusion is a review of 18 formats you may encounter, from behavior-based interviews to mealtime interviews.

Part II: Backstage Researching and Rehearsing

In this part, I show you how to explore the backstage preparation that drives interview success. You learn how to research employers, understand personality tests, negotiate salary, dress like a star, overcome stage fright, look smart with questions you ask, and say all the right things to hold the door open to gracefully check back with the interviewer for progress reports on filling the job.

Part III: Actors' Studio: Casting Your Character

Are you a new graduate who's getting ready for your debut career interview and concerned about coming across as a clueless beginner? An experienced person who feels miscast and wants desperately to change careers? A job-search veteran whose presentation persona may need a touch-up? I show you how to tailor your interviews for job offers, whether you're a rookie, career refugee, or prime-timer.

Part IV: Lights, Camera, Talk! Answering Questions

How do you deal with the heart and soul of the interview, the questions? Turn to this part to find out. Here you immediately discover how to deliver a ShowStopper's response to each major question employers are almost certain to ask. I present the answers in a crisp style that puts you far ahead of your competitors.

Part V: The Part of Tens

Be ready to bag quick, surefire tips that help you put a five-star shine on your performance. You'll also learn how to avoid falling through trapdoors with the wrong answers to trick questions. As you leave the stage triumphantly, take a few minutes to smile as you read an irreverent group of statements that superstars of history may have made on a job interview, if they'd had one.

Icons Used in This Book

For Dummies signature icons are the little round pictures you see in the margins of the book. I use them to focus a searchlight on key bits of information. Here's a list of the icons you find in this book:

This icon flags news you can use that you won't want to forget.

Bravo! This icon heralds star-quality lines and moves that prompt job offers.

A bad review for a poor performance. This icon signals situations in which you may find trouble if you don't make a good decision.

Advice and information that can put you on award-winning pathways in your interview follow this icon. It lets you in on interviewing best practices.

Where to Go from Here

On the stress scale of life, job interviewing ranks with making a speech before 500 people when you can't remember your name or why you're standing in a spotlight at a podium. The spot where you start in this guidebook book depends on your present needs:

✔ When you have a job interview tomorrow, quickly read Chapter 1 for an overview, followed by Chapters 23 and 24 for an instant infusion of key know-how. Additionally, go to the company's website to glean as much basic information as you can. Don't forget to read the company's press releases.

✔ When you have a few days before you're scheduled for an interview, read Chapter 1 and then flip through the Table of Contents to the chapters dealing with your most pressing concerns. Pay attention to Chapter 12, which reveals how to stack the deck in your favor during the closing minutes of your interview.

✔ When you have plenty of time, read the book from cover to cover. Practice recommended strategies and techniques. After you master the information in these pages, you'll have a special kind of insurance policy that pays big dividends for as long as you want to work.

Part I

And the Interview Winner is … You!

The 5th Wave   By Rich Tennant

"Other than that, what would you say are your special skills and competencies?"

In this part . . .

Interviews are theater, and in this part, I start off by showing you how that's true and what it means for your role in an interview — giving you the rundown on interviews from rehearsal to curtain call.

This part also gives you the details about where interviewing stands now — the scenarios you might encounter (screening interviews, video interviewing, opportunities abroad) and the styles of interviews that stand between you and your new job.

Chapter 1

Job Interviews Are Show Biz. Seriously!

• •

In This Chapter

▶ Why job interviewing is Drama 101

▶ Spotting what's new in interviewing

▶ Auditioning your best self in an interview

▶ Applying seven concepts to make you a star

▶ Putting into practice more ideas that win Oscars

• •

A resume or profile functions as bait to snag a job interview. The interview is the decisive event when a hiring authority decides whether you'll be offered the job.

Because the job interview is the single most important part of getting a job — and you may not have interviewed in awhile — any number of unfortunate scenarios may be sneaking into your subconscious, including fears of these confidence-disturbers:

✔ Stumbling and mumbling your way through the ordeal

✔ Being glued to a hot seat as they sweat the answers out of you

✔ Forgetting your interviewer's name (or the last place you worked)

Exhale. You've come to the right book. Take the suggestions within these pages to heart, and you'll head into every interview feeling confident, calm, and well prepared. What more can you ask?

Interviewing As Theater

When you're engaged in a selection interview, your entire future may rest on how successful you are in presenting yourself to a stranger across a desk in 15, 30, or 60 minutes. Making life-altering decisions during this micro slice of time isn't real life — it's show biz.

Like reality shows on TV, interviews are based on reality but, in fact, are staged. And as in reality shows, only one survivor beats the competition to win the prize.

The most successful interviews for you require solid preparation to learn your lines, showing your future bosses that you're smart and quick on the uptake, as well as able to communicate and not likely to jump the tracks.

At each meeting, your goal is to deliver a flawless performance that rolls off your tongue and gets the employer applauding — and remembering — you. Perfect candidate, you!

But what about all the people who tell you, "Just be yourself and you'll do fine in your interview"? That advice doesn't always work for you in the theater of job interviewing.

Why "be yourself" can be poor advice

A scene in the movie *Children of a Lesser God* features a speech teacher (William Hurt) and a deaf janitor (Marlee Matlin) duking it out in a jolting battle of wits.

In a climactic verbal battle, the janitor signs to the speech teacher, "Let me be me," to which the speech teacher replies, "Well, who the hell are you?" There is no answer.

The troubled janitor isn't the only one who has trouble with that question. The bromide "Be yourself" is very difficult to articulate with consistency. Be yourself? Which self? Who is the real you? Our roles change at various times.

Your role: Job seeker

Jerry is a father, an engineer, a marathon runner, a public speaker, a law student at night, and a writer of professional papers. Jennifer is a loving daughter, the best salesperson in her company, a pilot, a tennis player, a football fan, and a history buff.

But at this time in their lives, Jerry and Jennifer — like you — are playing the role of a job seeker. Similarly, the stranger across an interviewing desk is playing the role of interviewer.

Getting real about the job seeker role

Playing the role most appropriate to you at a given time, and playing it effectively enough to get you the job you deserve, isn't turning your back on authenticity. To do less than play the role of a hard-charging job seeker courts unemployment — or underemployment.

Why "be natural" can be poor advice

First-cousin advice to urging you to "be yourself" in a job interview is the "be natural" admonition. On the whole, isn't natural better than artificial? Not always.

Is combed hair natural? Shaved legs? Trimmed beard? Polished shoes? How about covering a cough in public? Or not scratching where you itch?

Being natural in a job interview is fine as long as you don't use your desire to be natural and authentic as an excuse to display your warts or blurt out negative characteristics.

Never treat a job interview as a confessional in which you're obligated to disclose imperfections, indiscretions, or personal beliefs that don't relate to your future job performance.

Job interviews are time-centric. Every minute counts in the getting-to-know-you game. And to really know someone in a brief encounter of 15, 30, or 60 minutes is simply impossible. Instead of real life, each participant in an interview sees what the other participant(s) wants seen. If you doubt that, think back: How long did you need to really get to know your roommate, spouse, or significant other?

If you insist on being natural, an employer may pass you over because of your unkempt beard or unshined shoes, or because you don't feel like smiling that day.

The things you've done to date — your identification of your skills, your resume and profile, your cover letter, your networking, your social media efforts — all are wasted if you fail to deliver a job interview that produces a job offer.

Because job interviewing is show biz, make the most of your critical brief encounters by learning the acting skills of storytelling, using body language, establishing rapport, and more in this modern interview guide.

New Faces, New Factors in Interviewing

Are you having trouble staking out your future because you can't close the sale during job interviews? This mangled proverb states the right idea:

If at first you don't succeed . . . get new batteries.

Recharge yourself with knowledge of the new technology and trends that are affecting job interviews. Here are highlights of the contemporary job interview space.

Curtain going up on tech trends

Classic interviewing skills continue to be essential to job search success, but more technology firepower is needed in a world growing increasingly complex, interconnected, and competitive.

The new tech trends revolutionize all components of the job search, including the all-important job interview. Here are examples of technological newcomers and how they change interviewing practices:

✔ **Lighting up screens:** Both live and recorded video job interviews are coming of age, requiring that you acquire additional skills and techniques to make the cut. Chapter 3 is a primer on how you can outflank your competition by presenting like a pro in video interviews.

✔ **One and done:** Automated and recorded phone screening services permit employers to ask up to a dozen canned screening questions and allow candidates up to two minutes to answer each question. Informed interviewees anticipate the questions and must hit their marks the first time because there are no do-overs on recorded answers. Read about this technology in Chapter 2.

✔ **The real deal?** Credibility issues are surfacing for multitalented job seekers (or those with a checkered work background) who, by posting various resumes and profiles online, come across as different people with different skill sets. This development can be a knock-out punch for you in a tight job market where employers have plenty of candidates on offer. Sidestep the emerging problem of identity contradictions in interviews by following the advice offered in Chapter 16.

✔ **Deep web woes:** Employers can hire a service to dig deep beyond the usual suspects (Facebook and Twitter) to check out your online history. The service rakes through closed databases in the deep web, leaving virtually no secrets unrevealed. If the deep web reveals negative information, you may get a chance to defend yourself in an interview — or you may never know why you struck out. See Chapter 16 for more information on this 21st-century sleuthing tool.

Expect new kinds of interviewers

If the last time you trod the boards of job interviewing you went one to one with a single interviewer, usually a white man or woman, get ready for a different set of questioners, like these possibilities:

- ✔ A veteran team of six managers — individually or collectively
- ✔ A hiring manager (especially in technical and retail fields) who is two decades younger than you
- ✔ Someone of another color or heritage

Turn to Chapter 5 for a broader picture of group interviews, and to Chapter 15 for a good tip on interviews with younger bosses.

Showcase your ability to start fast

Because you can't count on being on the job more than a few years — or, in contract assignments, a few months — the hiring spotlight lasers in on competencies and skills you can use from Day One. The question is, *What can you do for our company immediately?*

You can come across as ready to blast off if you do enough research on the company's goals (increase revenues, reduce costs, acquire new market share, land larger accounts, create a technical breakthrough), think about how you can help the company reach those goals, and remain ready to speak the insider jargon of the industry.

If the job you're applying for isn't at the professional or managerial level, research the nature of the company's business, assume that it wants to make or save money, and stock up on a few good buzzwords used in the industry.

Scope out more ways to show your launch speed in Chapter 6.

Overcome job-hopping objection

The current employer-driven job market makes it easy for companies to buy into the "job-hopper objection" and, as a matter of policy, turn away unemployed candidates and people who've held three jobs in five years. Unfortunately, many of these automatic rejects have been trapped in a cycle of frequent layoff's, part-time work, temp assignments, seasonal employment, contract jobs, freelance gigs, and company shutdowns.

Some companies refuse to hire so-called job hoppers, claiming that they'll quit before employers can get a return on their training investment — or that, if the unemployed candidates were any good, they'd be on someone's payroll.

What's a sincere, hard-working person to do? Try this quartette of basic rebuttals:

- ✔ **Say varied experience beats repeated experience.** Explain how your dynamic work history makes you a far more vibrant and resourceful contributor than if you'd been stationary for four years.

- ✔ **Briefly explain departures.** Give a reasonable, short, even-toned account of why you left each job. (It wasn't your fault.)

- ✔ **Review your accomplishments.** You can't change the amount of time you were on certain jobs, but you can divert the focus to your accomplishments and contributions. Employers are impressed by candidates who are good at what they do, even if they had only a short period of time in the role.

- ✔ **Confirm interest in stable employment.** Forget the "loyalty" chatter. Make a point of your intense interest in a stable opportunity where you can apply all your considerable know-how for the employer's benefit.

Chapter 19 offers more suggestions on how to maximize the value of your experience.

Cut out the loyalty oath

Answers to certain questions are pretty much the same year after year, but watch out for one humdinger requiring a new response: Why do you want to work here? The old "I'm looking for a home and I'll be loyal to you forever" statements don't play as well as they once did.

Many employers now solicit contract employees — no muss, no fuss in getting them out the door when a project's finished or when a decision is made to outsource the work.

Rather than pledge eternal fidelity, talk about your desire to do the work. Talk about how you are driven to funnel substantial amounts of productivity into the job quickly. Talk about wanting to use your superior technology skills. Talk about your interest in work that excites you, work that matters.

But fidelity? Pass on that as a theme song; it won't make the charts today.

Stock up on what you *should* say instead of talking about loyalty in Chapters 16, 17, 18, and 19.

Learn new lines for small-business jobs

Have you grown up professionally in a large-company environment? If so, carefully consider the answers you give when applying to small companies. Such a move can happen sooner than you think if you're forced into an involuntary change of employment. Prime-timers in countless droves are discovering that the small company sector is where the action is for them.

TIP

Emphasize different aspects of your work personality than the ones you emphasize when interviewing for a big company. Interviewers at big companies and small companies have different agendas.

Among the reasons owners of small ventures reject former big-company people are these stereotypical perceptions: People who come out of Big Corporate America often are thought to be

- ✔ Unaware of the needs of small business
- ✔ Too extravagant in their expectations of resources and compensation
- ✔ Too spoiled to produce double the work product their former jobs required
- ✔ Unwilling to wear more than one job hat at a time
- ✔ Deadwood, or they wouldn't have been cut loose from the big company

Chapters 15, 17, and 18 can help you with this issue.

Get ready for the global job interview

For professional jobs, the basic format of interviews globally is Western style, accomplishment oriented, but cultural interviewing differences among nations still matter. Newcomers to the United States may be surprised to learn, for example, that they aren't expected to dress in pinstriped suits to interview for a technology job, nor are they encouraged to speak extensively of family and other personal issues.

Americans who hope to work overseas for the first time may be surprised at such local customs as those of China, where interviewees are expected to nod, showing that they're listening and understanding the Chinese speaker who is communicating in English, or of certain European countries, where a female candidate may be asked directly, "Are you pregnant?"

Chapter 4 tackles the emerging body of buzz about international interviewing.

Polish your storytelling skills

Behavior-based interviewing is said to predict future performance based on past performance in similar situations. The behavioral interviewing style isn't new, but it seems to be more popular than ever.

Advocates of the behavioral style claim that it is 55 percent predictive of future on-the-job behavior, compared to traditional interviewing, at only 10 percent predictive. The reasoning is, "If you acted a certain way once, you'll act that way again." Solid proof of this claim is hard to come by. But for you as a job seeker, it doesn't matter the least bit whether the claim is true or false. The behavioral style is such a big deal with employers today that you need to know how to use the style to your advantage.

It works like this: Interviewers ask candidates to tell them a story of a time when they reacted to a certain situation. *How did you handle an angry customer? Describe an example of a significant achievement in your last job.* The more success stories you can drag in from your past, the more likely the interviewers using this approach will highly rate your chances of achieving equivalent success in the future.

Read more about behavior-based interviewing in Chapter 5.

Focus on fitting in

"We chose another candidate who is a better job fit" is another familiar reason that seems to be heard today more often than before when explaining to a disappointed job seeker why someone else got the job.

In the workplace, "fit" essentially refers to how an individual fits into a company's culture. Company culture is expressed in the values and behaviors of the group, which forms a kind of "tribe" or, to use an analogy from high school, an "in crowd."

The culture typically flows from company or department chieftains: If the boss wears long sleeves, you wear long sleeves; if the boss shows a sense of humor, you show a sense of humor; if the boss works until 6 o'clock, you work until 6 o'clock.

When you're given the not-the-best-fit-for-the-job rejection, the reason is

✔ A convenient short and legally safe answer

✔ A cover story

✔ A belief that the hiring decision makers perceive you won't fit in well with the "tribe"

When the reason really is the fit issue, decision makers may think that you can do the job but that you won't do it the way they want — and, furthermore, they just don't feel at ease with you.

Instead of losing sleep over a fit-based turn-down, move on. Do better preinterview research (see Chapter 6). At least you won't waste time on companies well known for being a fortress of round holes when you're a square peg.

Seven Concepts to Make You a Star

You've heard it said over and over that you have only one chance to make a first impression. It's especially true for job interviewing, so make that first impression pay off. Read these seven super tips to make the hiring gods choose you at job interviews.

Go all out in planning ahead

Preparation makes all the difference in whether you get the best offers as you face intense scrutiny, field probing questions, and reassure employers who are afraid of making hiring mistakes. You must show that you're tuned in to the company's needs, that you have the skills to get up to speed quickly, and that you're a hand-in-glove fit with the company.

Fortunately, never in history has so much information about companies and industries been so easily accessible, both in print and online. Chapter 6 gives tons of tips on researching your audience.

Distinguish screening from selection interviews

As hiring action is increasingly concentrated in smaller companies, the separation between screening and selection interviews fades: The same person may do both types. But traditionally, here's how the types, which I cover in Chapter 5, differ.

Screening interviews

In large organizations, interviewing is usually a two-stage process. A screening specialist eliminates all candidates except the best qualified. The screening interview is usually conducted by telephone or video interviews instead of face-to-face in the same room. Survivors are passed to a manager (or panel of managers) who selects the winning candidate.

Screeners are experienced interviewers who look for reasons to screen you out based on your qualifications. Screeners can reject, but they cannot hire. They won't pass you on to hiring managers if your experience and education don't meet the specifications of the job.

When you're being interviewed by a screener, be pleasant and neutral. Volunteer no strong opinions. Raise no topics, except to reinforce your qualifications. Answer no questions that aren't asked — don't look for trouble.

But do remember to smile a lot.

Selection interviews

By the time you're passed on to a hiring authority who makes the selection, you're assumed to be qualified or you wouldn't have made it that far along the channels of employment. You're in a pool of "approved" candidates chosen for the selection interview.

At a selection interview, move from neutral into high gear if the person doing the interview will be your boss or colleague. No more bland behavior — turn up the wattage on your personality power. This is the best time to find out whether you'll hit it off with the boss or colleagues, or fit into the company culture.

Verify early what they want and show how you deliver

Almost as soon as you're seated in a selection interview, ask the interviewer to describe the scope of the position and the qualifications of the ideal person for it.

Although you've already done this research when you're going for ShowStopper status, use this question to confirm your research. If you're wrong, you must know immediately that you need to shift direction.

(*Insider's note:* This super tip was shared with me by several career management hall-of-famers, including the late Bernard Haldane.)

How can you adapt the tell-me-what-you-want tip when you're dealing with multiple interviewers? That's easy: Direct your question to the senior panel member and wait for an answer. Then gaze around the group and ask, "Does anyone have something to add to the ideal person description?"

Confirming your research (or gaining this information on the spot) is the key to the entire interview. You now know for sure the factors upon which the hiring decision is made and how to target your answers.

Connect all your qualifications with a job's requirements

If a quick glance at your notes reminds you that the interviewer missed a requirement or two listed in the job posting when describing the position's scope and the ideal person for it, help the interviewer by tactfully bringing up the missing criteria yourself. Keep it simple:

I see from my notes that your posting asked for three years of experience. I have that and two years more, each with a record of solid performance in . . ..

You want to demonstrate that you take this job possibility seriously, an attitude that the employer will applaud. Winning job offers by targeting your interview performance to a company's requirements is a logical follow-up to the resume targeting strategy that I explain in my book *Resumes For Dummies,* 6th Edition (John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

Memorize short-form sales statements about yourself

Almost certainly, you will be asked to respond to some version of the "tell me about yourself" question (see Chapter 16). You're not helping your hiring chances if you respond with a question that a 13-year-old might ask: "What do you want to know?" That naive approach makes you sound unprepared.

Instead, commit to memory a short-form sales statement (two minutes max, and preferably less than one minute) that describes your education, experience, and skills, and matches your strengths to the jobs you seek.

Some people call such a statement a "commercial," while others prefer the terms "elevator speech" or "profile summary." Whatever you call it, after briefly reciting the facts of your background, make your statement sizzle by adding a couple personality sentences about such traits as your curiosity, commitment, and drive to succeed.

The "personal branding brief" is another version of the short-form sales statement. Used chiefly by professionals, managers, and executives, it's incorporated into all self-marketing opportunities, including job interviewing.

In personal branding, you become known for something — Jon Stewart for political satire and Serena Williams for tennis, for example. You don't have to be famous to pursue personal branding, but you do have to be consistent in your efforts to develop your brand.

Your goal is to perfect a *branding brief* that tells your "story" — one that rolls off your tongue — in about 20 to 30 seconds, or in 100 words or less:

> *After I graduated from San Diego State University, I worked in the insurance industry until I took a break to start a family. That accomplished, I went back for refresher education. Now, thoroughly updated, I'm looking for a new connection in either the insurance or financial fields.*

Learn much more about the pursuit of personal branding from renowned personal branding expert Dan Schawbel (`www.danschawbel.com`), who literally wrote the book (the best-selling book) on the topic, *Me 2.0: 4 Steps to Building Your Future* (Kaplan Publishing).

The difference between a commercial and a branding brief is length and content. A commercial is longer and includes more details than a cut-to-the-chase branding brief.

Win two thumbs up from the hiring manager, and you're in!

Likeability is a huge factor in choosing and keeping employees, as I note later in this chapter. Given a choice of technically qualified applicants, employers almost always choose the one they like best. For your purposes, remember this:

> *We like people who are like us.*

How do you encourage the interviewer to think, "You and me against the problem" rather than "You against me"?

Beyond exchanging pleasantries, establishing mutual interests, connecting with eye contact, and other well-known bonding techniques, watch for special opportunities:

✔ Suppose your interviewer looks harried, with ringing telephones and people rushing about interrupting your talk. Flash a sympathetic smile and commiserate: *It looks like you're having one of those days.* The subtext of your comment is, *I understand your frustrations. I've been in a similar place. You and I are alike.*

✔ Or suppose you're showing a work sample. Ask if you can come around to the interviewer's side of the desk to discuss your sample. You are looking at it "together."

Forget about age, color, gender, or ethnic background. Do whatever you reasonably can to make the hiring manager believe the two of you are cut from similar cloth.

To rewrite the famous 20th-century Broadway wit and playwright Damon Runyon:

> *The part goes not always to those we like, nor the hiring to our twins, but that's the way to bet.*

Try not to talk money until you know they want you

When the salary question comes up at the beginning of an interview, say that money isn't your most important consideration — nor should it be at this point.

Admittedly, stalling salary talk until a better time is much more difficult today than it was a decade ago. But you should be holding out for the market value of the new job, not settling for an inadequate figure of your present or previous employment.

Only when you know the scope of the position and its market value — and that the company wants to hire you — are the stars in alignment to bargain in your best interest.

Read Chapter 8 for in-depth guidance on salary negotiation.

Take Home an Oscar from Any Interview

Rookie? Prime-timer? Clerk? Chief executive officer? No matter. You can do exceptionally well by following certain performance routines that succeed in any interview scene. Some of these suggestions are basic and familiar, but most people who haven't been on the interview tour for awhile can use the reminders.

Play the likeability card

When you're up against a rigid requirement that you absolutely can't meet and that you're pretty sure is going to mean curtains for you in the interview, try this last-ditch compensatory response:

Let's say that you were to make me an offer and I accept. What can I do when I start to further compensate for my lack of [requirement] as I work hard to relieve your immediate workload?

Essentially, you're counting on your likeability. You're asking the employer to revert to the philosophy of hiring for attitude and training for skill. You're using the likeability qualification to plug your requirement gap.

As legendary recruiting guru Paul Hawkinson observes: "Likeability is a factor that can turn the tide in your direction. Although skill level and applicable experience trump at the beginning of the interview process, I've seen dozens of less-than-qualified people hired because the employer *liked* them better than the perfect candidate with the personality of a doorknob.''

Everyone likes to work with agreeable, sunny people. People rarely hire someone they don't like.

Soak up moves that make interviewers see you as an agreeable and calm person in Chapter 10.

Style your body language

Interviewers observe everything about you: not only your dress and interview answers, but your body language, facial expressions, posture, carriage, and gestures. If you're a rookie, think dignity. If you're a prime-timer, think energy. In between? Watch political candidates on TV for hints of what looks good and what doesn't.

Confirm that your body language is sending the "Hire me!" message with tips in Chapter 10. Chapter 9's up-to-date data on dress and appearance add even more nonverbal firepower to your candidacy.

Be a treat: Act upbeat

Steer clear of negative words (such as *hate, don't ever want, absolutely not,* and *refuse*). And avoid such risky topics as the knock-down, drag-out fights you had with that bonehead you used to work for — never knock the old boss. Your prospective new boss may empathize with your old boss and decide to never be your boss at all.

Chapters 7 and 14 throw more light on avoiding a maze of negativity and looking as though you're a serial complainer who will never be satisfied.

Start your interview on the right foot

Here are four tips to help you make a good impression right off the bat:

- ✔ Find out in advance what to wear (see Chapter 9) and where the interview site is located. Make a trial run, if necessary.
- ✔ Be on time, be nice to the receptionist, read a business magazine while you're waiting, and — surprise, surprise — don't smoke, chew gum, or otherwise look as though you lack couth.
- ✔ Develop a couple icebreaker sound bites, such as comments about a nice office, attractive color scheme, or interesting pictures.
- ✔ Don't sit until you're asked or until the interviewer sits. Don't offer to shake hands until the interviewer does.

During the interview, frequently use the interviewer's name (but never use a first name unless you're old friends). And remember to make a lot of eye contact by looking at the bridge of an interviewer's nose. (Divert your gaze occasionally, or you're perceived as more creepy than honest.)

Track down more suggestions for making yourself a memorable candidate in Chapter 11.

Remember that you have a speaking part

Communication skills are among the most desired qualities employers say they want. Answer questions clearly and completely. Be sure to observe all social skills of conversation — no interrupting, no profanity. Just as you shouldn't limit yourself to one- or two-word answers, neither should you try to cover your nervousness with surround-sound endless talking. Aim for a happy medium.

Take in Chapter 16 for a savvy start on how to talk about yourself.

Revisit the dramatic pause

In face-to-face live interviews, allowing a few moments of silence to pass, perhaps pausing to look at the ceiling or glance out an open window — taking time to think — can make you look wise and measured in your response. Pauses can raise the ante by reflecting disappointment in a salary offer. Pauses can suggest that you're reluctant to travel 50 percent of the time but that you're a team player and will consider the requirement.

Surviving a snippy interviewer

Short of taking out a restraining order, what should you do when an interviewer's manner is offensive?

That depends on who's doing the talking. When the interviewer is the person who would be your boss, be certain that you're not misunderstanding intent. If conversation really is disrespectful, bail out unless you want to spend most of your waking hours dealing with a difficult person. Show class. Just say, "Thank you for your time. I don't think this job is a good fit for me." (*Payback:* It may leave the interviewer regretful that you're the good one who got away.)

But when the interviewer is doing preliminary screening, give the employer the benefit of the doubt by assuming that the interviewer doesn't represent the entire company and will be working five floors below you in a subbasement. Here are a few coping techniques:

✔ Smile and make a light remark: "Oh, do you think so? That bears watching."

✔ Respond with a two-second nonanswer, and then quickly ask a question: "That's an interesting observation. It reminds me to ask you, what role would the person in this position play in the new company product launch?"

✔ Pretend the rude remark is a dropped call that you didn't hear, pause, and talk about your accomplishments or skills.

✔ When an interviewer keeps interrupting or contradicting you, look puzzled and ask for clarification. "Perhaps I'm not following you correctly. Can you please restate the question or explain what you mean by — *?*"

When all else fails, remember the words of English writer Joanne Kathleen Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books: "Yet, sadly, accidental rudeness occurs alarmingly often. Best to say nothing at all, my dear man."

A pause is effective body language and works great in live, face-to-face interviews. But today's interviewer may call on a telephone or use online video interviewing, and dead air time can make you appear dull-witted rather than contemplative.

Moral: Exercise judgment in using the reflective pause as a communications tool. (When you just don't know the answer immediately, that's another story; stall by asking for clarification.)

Rely on Chapter 3 for details on video body language and Chapter 8 for salary negotiation.

Agree to take pre-employment tests

No one likes those annoying pre-employment tests. Job seekers keep hoping they'll drop off the face of the earth, but they're with us still. When you want the job, you're going to have to suck it up and test when asked. No test, no job.

Race to Chapter 7 for survival clues when you hope to be the last one standing after test time.

Flesh out your story beyond a college degree

Education is a fulcrum for movement throughout your career, but relying on it alone to pull you through a competitive job search is a mistake. The mistake grows larger with too many mentions of an illustrious alma mater, assuming that the school's marquee power is a hall pass to move forward.

For example, a couple mentions of Harvard in an interview are plenty; interviewers get it the first time. They wonder whether the Harvard background is the singular "accomplishment" a candidate offers.

Instead, spell out your accomplishments with true examples — what you learned and what you can do with your degree that benefit the employer.

In marketing a three-dimensional you, think of your education as one dimension, your experience as a second dimension, and your accomplishment record as a third dimension. All are important.

Wait. Back up. If the interviewer is also a Harvard grad, three mentions is perfectly okay. And if three is good, maybe four or five is better.

Chapter 5 is headquarters for storytelling tips; Chapters 16–20 show you how to fill in the blanks for your campus experience and beyond.

Bring a pen and notebook with you

Making a note here and there is advisable, as long as you don't attempt to record a transcript. To illustrate, you need to jot down reminders to get back to the interviewer when you can't answer a question from memory.

Brownie point: Writing down what someone says is flattering to the speaker.

Winning candidates are memorable

Comparing TV reality talent show winners to job interview candidates, Phoenix career coach Joe Turner (`www.jobchange secrets.com`) says it's the total package that counts. "You don't have to be the best singer or dancer — just the *most remembered* decent performer. Same for the job interview. You don't always have to be the best candidate with the top skills. You do have to find a way to be the *most remembered* hirable candidate."

Fighting back on interview exploitation

You can lose your intellectual property through abuse of the job interview.

In the so-called *performance interview* for professional and managerial jobs, candidates are required to prove themselves with projects that demonstrate on-the-job skills, problem-solving capabilities, and communications abilities.

The employer asks for a proposal of how you would handle a company project or requests that you design a process the company can use. You're told to be ready to "defend your ideas" at the interview.

Unfortunately, sometimes the free-sample demand is incredibly time-consuming (say, 80 hours) and costly ($200 and up in materials and research). You do your best, but suppose you don't get the job. In an example of shoddy ethics, your work samples may be given to the victorious candidate, who then steals your viable creative ideas. In the following sections, I give you a few examples from stung readers of my newspaper and web column.

Portfolio scam

When applying to an advertising agency for a copywriting job, the owner asked me to leave my portfolio for review. He kept the portfolio and called on all the clients whose work was shown in the portfolio! Since then, I always respond to requests to leave or send my portfolio with this statement: "I need to be there to clarify the work shown. I will be glad to bring it, and we can discuss my work at your convenience."

State government rip-off

When I applied for a significant and highly symbolic job with my state government, I was informed I had been selected but had to go through the formality of an interview with a key aide to the governor. As requested, I took materials and a plan for approaching the job's goals to the confirmation interview. A long, official silence followed before a form letter arrived stating that a less qualified professional, to whom I was a mentor, had won the position. The victor showed me the state's plan of action: mine.

Consulting caper

My husband, an expert in human resources, spent two long days interviewing in a small town with the owner of a family company and his son. He gave them an unbelievable amount of advice and information to help their meager HR program, process management, and integrated product development. All we got out of that was reimbursement for a 200-mile car trip, a bad motel, and meals. That was our first realization of how small businesses, in particular, get almost-free consulting work.

Training trickery

I was a candidate for a city's new training division chief. I had to spend several hours in the city's computer labs designing programs and leaving them on CDs. I knew that, with my education and experience, I had done well.

A long-term firefighter with zero training experience got the job with the city and used my materials for new employees!

Protecting Yourself

How do you avoid abuse without taking yourself out of the running for a job you want when you're not sure about the real interview agenda? Here are two ideas:

✔ You can copyright your plan and place a valid copyright notice ©, along with the publication date and your name, on its cover as an indication of your underlying claim to ownership. For free information, contact the Copyright Office online at `www.copyright.gov`, or by mail at Registrar of Copyrights, Copyright Office, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20559.

For easier reading, see an excellent guide, *The Copyright Handbook: What Every Writer Needs to Know, 11th Edition*, by Stephen Fishman (Nolo Press; `www.nolo.com`).

✔ You can bluff, hoping to create a theft deterrent by slapping a copyright notice and "Confidential — Property of (Your Name)" on your plan's cover.

When you're desperate or really, really, really want the job but don't have the time, inclination, or money to respond in full measure, offer something like this:

I'm glad that you see I have the brains and talent to bring value to your company. I'm happy, too, that you have the confidence in my work to ask me to handle such a potentially important solution to your marketing challenge. With my background, I'm sure I can do an outstanding job on this assignment. But you do realize, I hope, that such an important project would require 80 to 100 hours of intensely focused work. I'd enjoy doing it, but, quite frankly, I have several other job interviews scheduled that I really can't shift around. Do you think a sample of substantially smaller scope would serve as well for your purposes?

With a statement like this, you

✔ Remind the interviewer that you're a top candidate

✔ Promise superior results

✔ Bring a reality check to a sensitive interviewer about what's being asked of you

✔ Let the interviewer know others are interested in you

✔ Propose to do much less work until a job offer crosses your palm

You can, of course, flatly refuse to part with advance goodies. In a seller's market, you'll probably be considered anyway. But in a buyer's market, the likelihood is that you'll be passed over when you decline to turn in a hefty free sample.

Keep your ears up and your eyes open

Don't just sell, sell, sell. Take time to listen. When you're constantly busy thinking of what you're going to say next, you miss vital points and openings. So work on your listening skills. When you don't understand an interviewer's question, ask for clarification.

Observe the interviewer's moves. Watch for three key signs: high interest (leaning forward), boredom (yawning or displaying a glazed look), or a devout wish to end the interview (stacking papers or standing up). After assessing where you stand with the interviewer, take the appropriate action:

✔ High interest suggests you're stopping the show and should continue.

✔ The remedy for boredom is to stop and ask, *Would you rather hear more about (whatever you've been talking about) or my skills in the ABC area?*

✔ When the interviewer is ready to end the meeting, first ask whether the interviewer has any reservations about your fit for the job; if so, attempt to erase them.

> Then go into your interview closing mode (see Chapter 12). Gain a sense of timing and keep the door open for follow-up contact by asking three questions: *What is the next step in the hiring process? When do you expect to make a decision? May I feel free to call if I have further questions?*

Building Lifetime Confidence

This first chapter serves as an overview for the entire book. The pages that follow are wide and deep, with details that can help you gain a lifetime of confidence in your ability to sail through the drama of interviews and secure the best job offers.

Back Cover

Get your career in gear and write a winning resume to land that job interview

Is your job search stalling out after you submit a resume but before you're offered an interview? Whether you're entering the job market for the first time, looking for a new job after a layoff, or changing careers, *Resumes For Dummies* shows you the ropes and rules for a new era in recruiting and job searching, and gives you expert tips on writing a resume that shines.

- *Resumes 101* — uncover the resume basics that'll wow 'em every time, and find out how to get yours into the right hands to land that job interview

- *Put your best self forward* — discover how to write a resume that highlights your good points and downplays the not-so-good ones, like work-history gaps or job-hopping

- *Make your resume shine online* — get the latest innovations in Internet-based tools and mobile services on the recruiting scene — social media, smartphones, job-search apps, and e-readers

- *Customize yourself* — find out how to quickly (and effectively) customize a resume for a specific job target

- *Enjoy a sample* — take a gander at dozens of sample resumes for every consideration — perfect for modeling your own winning resume

Joyce Lain Kennedy is the nationally syndicated career columnist of Careers Now, which appears twice weekly in newspapers and on Web sites across the U.S. She is the author of award-winning books, including *Job Interviews For Dummies* and *Cover Letters For Dummies*.

Business/Careers

Open the book and find:

- **The parts of a resume (and how to best format and design it)**
- **Ways to hook the reader with a summary or objective**
- **How to make education, experience, skills, and competencies work for you**
- **An innovative system for writing targeted resumes**
- **What you should research about a job before writing a resume**
- **Tips for recent graduates**
- **How to handle changing careers, transitioning as a military veteran, or grabbing a job as a Baby Boomer**

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Spine

Resumes For Dummies®

Kennedy

6th Edition

Front Cover

Making Everything Easier!™

6th Edition

Resumes

FOR DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- **Skyrocket interviews with the new instant customizing method**
- **Use right resume forms with different digital docks**
- **Control privacy and reputation issues in online social job search**
- **Avoid resume-killer mistakes you never knew about**

Joyce Lain Kennedy
Nationally syndicated careers columnist and author of Job Interviews For Dummies and Cover Letters For Dummies

Part I: Visiting the World of Resumes, Today and Tomorrow ....

Chapter 1: Digital Age Changes Job Chase.................

Chapter 2: Finding Your Next Job in the Wide World of Social Media ....

Chapter 7: Chart a Cool Course to the Right Jobs ....

Part III: Resume Basics That Wow 'Em Every Time

Chapter 12: Passages: Resumes for Your Life's Changing Phases . . . .

Chapter 13: Successful Solutions to Resume Problems . . .

Part IV: Bringing It All Together: Sample Resumes

Part V: The Part of Tens ....

ous editions. Yikes! Putting that edition together was a fronc co[...]
this 6th edition, which contains about 75 percent new text.

My intense study of what's happening on the current recruitment [...]
a job-search process being reset. In fact, I think of what's happeni[...]
thumb pushing a big reset button as I report to you the mind-blow[...]
of fresh digital ideas raining down on us — from social networkin[...]
resume-capable mobile devices.

Much of what worked before for resume-writing job seekers still [...]
handsomely. Eternal verities, you might say. But what you found[...]
edition about moving along in job life is no longer enough. That'[...]
absolutely must have this edition right now.

Ready? Push the big reset button . . . *go!* Update your resume, ca[...]
wave of new stuff, and find the job you need and want.

About This Book

Resumes For Dummies, 6th Edition, is a playbook showing you h[...]
powerful and targeted resumes, and how to use them with impor[...]
ideas and strategies in your search for a good job. The first seve[...]
spotlight the latest resume technology and innovations; the rem[...]
book covers timeless resume success factors, as well as samples[...]
resumes.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate this book, I've established the following co[...]

- ✒ *Italic* is used for emphasis and to highlight new words or te[...]
  defined.
- ✒ `Monofont` is used for Web addresses.

Watch out also for the numbering system I use in the sample res[ ]
Chapters 14 to 17. I put cross-matching numbers there to guide y[ ]
important aspects of each resume, but you don't want to stick nu[ ]
yours.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume you picked up this book for one of the following reason[ ]

- ✔ You've never written a resume and want an experienced, fri[ ] on your shoulder.
- ✔ You have written a resume — it got you where you are toda[ ] want to do better next time.
- ✔ You like where you are today but want more from life than [ ] where you're planted. To move to the next level, your exper[ ] you that it's time for a resume makeover.
- ✔ You need a new resume for that great job you heard about bu[ ] too many competitors will submit virtually the same cookie-[ ] ment pirated from somewhere. To stop looking like a human [ ] machine, you want to understand resume writing from the gr[ ]
- ✔ You've heard about sweeping technology-based changes in [ ] people and jobs find each other. A realist, you know that te[ ] can't be uninvented. You want to be sure your resume is in [ ] the latest updates.

I further assume that you are someone who likes information tha[ ]
chase, sometimes with a smile.

Part I: Visiting the World of Resume Today and Tomorrow

This part features the latest innovations in Internet-based tools and on the recruiting scene: social media, smart phones, tablets, and can also refresh your memory of earlier and still popular resume technology, as well as discover how to protect or correct your o tion and privacy.

Part II: Customizing Resumes: Your Faces in Many Places

Customized resumes directly aimed at a specific target are smar generic resumes in all but a few situations. Fortunately, you can quickly with new "Custom Lite" techniques explained here. You the first technical guide to presenting your resume correctly for devices. You get the memo on how to steer clear of resume blac rundown of make-or-break resume content rounds out this part.

Part III: Resume Basics That Wow ' Every Time

Format, words, and design — all these factors impact the quality resume. Read special tips for new graduates, over-50 job seekers sitioning military members. Consider answers to specific resume such as work-history gaps or job-hopping. Discover here how be light your good points while downplaying the not-so-good ones. do it all with grace, clarity, and readable style.

resume makeovers.

Part V: The Part of Tens

In these short chapters, discover quick bits of highly useful infor
yet more resume topics. I offer guidance on proving your resume
choosing professional resume help, and, finally, using a resume
won't take half a day to complete.

Icons Used in This Book

For Dummies signature icons are the little round pictures you se
gins of the book. I use them to laser-guide your attention to key
mation. Here's a list of the icons you find in this book and what t

This icon directs your attention to techniques that cause readers
praise and respect on your resume and then move it to the "you

Some points in these pages are so useful that I hope you keep the
you read. I make a big deal out of these ideas with this icon.

Advice and information that can spark a difference in the outcom
resume-led job search are flagged with this icon.

Watch out for deep waters filled with things that bite. This icon s
may be trouble ahead if you don't make a good decision.

But this book breaks new ground in resume creation and distrib
get ahead and stay ahead, start by reading Chapters 1 through 7
of tweeting and texting, they help you say hello to new ideas tha
reach for your time investment.

P.S. Have you ever forgotten to push "send" on an e-mail and the
why your computer wasn't working? Me, too. The good news is t
not be a techie to make sense out of the innovations described h
if by some wild, outside, totally unlikely chance, I didn't explain
clearly enough and you don't get it, grab the nearest teenager an
clarification. That's what I do.

and Tomorrow

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennan

ON YOUR RESUME IT SAYS YOUR LAST WRITING ASSIGNMENT REALLY BROUGHT CUSTOMERS THROUGH THE DOOR.

PUSH PUSH

In this part . . .

Changes aplenty make the current Web climate different from that of just a couple years ago, and this part gets you up to date, especially on using the Internet and social media to help — not hurt — your job-seeking cause. I also show you how to sift through the myriad online job boards and how to get your resume into the hands that can get you the interview.

▶ Growing your career with truly terrific resumes

▶ Blending human know-how with new technology

▶ Staying on the leading edge in job search

. . . .

*A*re resumes outdated? Every few years an employment exp
announces a "new discovery" — that resumes are old hat a
essary. The expert advises job seekers to forgo resumes and talk
into an interview. This advice rarely works in real life. Very few p
eloquent enough to carry the entire weight of an employment ma
sentation without a resume.

A newer resume attack turns not on oratorical talent but on tech
one scenario, recruiting professionals encourage employers who
weary of hiking over mountains of resumes to do away with ther
resumes with rigid application forms on the Web — complete wi
questions and tests — to decide who gets offered a job interview

Another recent scenario — also technology dependent — reflect
that social networking online profiles are pinch hitting for resum
marketing documents. As I point out in Chapter 2, online profiles
lent to generic resumes. Handle them with kid gloves for a very i
reason: All-purpose online profiles are likely to be ignored for th
ity of available jobs.

Resumes Are Here to Stay

At some point in a hunt for better employment, everyone needs
career marketing communications. That is, everyone needs a res
something very much like a resume — that tells the employer wh

✔ You're an excellent match for a specific job.

✔ The value you bring matters.

Keeping Up with Resume Times

The ongoing need for terrific resumes doesn't mean the job chas[...] time. Far from it. In this digital age — when one-third of women i[...] age range check Facebook when they first wake up, even before [...] the bathroom or brush their teeth — every job seeker needs to e[...] entire fresh package of tools and strategies for getting a new job[...] age contains new and traditional components:

- ✔ Digital tools that are rapidly altering the nature of how jobs [...] and filled in America and across the globe.

- ✔ Timeless know-how and savvy developed by the best emplo[...] over decades.

REMEMBER

New technological ideas standing on the shoulders of historically [...] smarts are a winning combination. Technology changes in a deca[...] nature doesn't.

Reset your concept of what you must know about resumes in the [...] Writing great resumes is no longer enough. You must know how [...] those resumes to people who can hire you, or at least can move [...] the process.

This book combines the details of how to create marvelous resu[...] also puts a microscope on various technological delivery option[...] tal age. This chapter previews what's ahead in this comprehensi[...] resumes, and how to use resumes and other career marketing c[...] tions you need to reach your goal in the great job chase.

The targeted resume rules

Job seekers, brace yourselves: Trolling the job market is getting [...] and requires considerably more effort than the last time you bai[...] resume hook — even a short five years ago. The *generic resume* [...] of the list of job search tools on the way out. (Read all about it in[...]

BEWARE

You probably have an all-purpose resume lying around in a desk
where. What legions of job seekers everywhere like about the all-
resume is that it casts a wide net to snag the attention of many er
and it saves time for those of us who are too busy getting throug
keep writing different resumes for different jobs. I appreciate that
one-size-fits-all work of art is obsolete, and it's getting lost in mor
recruiting sinkholes.

The generic resume has been replaced by the *targeted resume* (w
to in this book as OnTarget), a customized resume tailor-made fo
employment opportunity.

ONTARGET

An OnTarget resume is a valuable marketing tool to convince the
work will benefit a specific employer and that you should make th
didates invited in for a closer look. An OnTarget resume

- ✔ Addresses a given opportunity, showing clearly how your q
  are a close match to a job's requirements.

- ✔ Uses powerful words to persuade and clean design to attra

- ✔ Plays up strengths and downplays any factor that undermin
  for an interview.

Unfit resumes are zapped

The word got out, slowly at first. And then — *whoosh!* — millions
ers found out how easy it is to instantly put an online resume in
employers across the country as well as across town.

Post and pray became the job seeker's mantra as everyone figure
manipulate online resumes and click them into the online world
fast-shuffling dealers lay down cards at casino tables.

everything but the kitchen sink.

And what about the job seekers who sent all those generic, unst~
resumes? They were left to wonder in disappointment why they
a peep from the recipient employer.

The answer's in the numbers: A job advertised online by a major
creates a feeding frenzy of many thousands of resumes. Employ~
bases are hammered with such mismatches as sales clerks and s~
ers applying for jobs as scientists and senior managers, and vice~

Tried-and-true techniques remain

A resume that doesn't show off the great goods you're selling isn~
much. Show off your assets in effective style by making sure that
the suggestions in this book. I show you how to

- ✔ Choose the resume format that fits your goals and situation~
  where in a resume isn't a one-size-fits-all consideration. An ~
  Whether you lead with your education or the qualifications
  for the job depends on which job you want. Chapter 9 tells ~
  formatting your resume and provides templates for popular
  designs.

- ✔ Get your points across in powerful language. Make your str~
  ger by describing them in vibrant language that stands tall.
  examples in Chapter 10.

- ✔ Use design techniques effectively. Big chunks of text cause
  (and boredom). Present your information in a way that enab~
  instead of inhibiting them. Chapter 11 shows you how.

- ✔ Overcome hurdles. Getting attention from potential employ~
  in certain situations. If you're just getting out of school, for
  you have to overcome some less-than-ideal perceptions. Ch~
  gives you suggestions for easing your transition into a new ~
  Chapter 13 helps you manage any bits of your background t~
  off employers.

TIP

Send your resume off to job market battle by leading with strengt
your most impressive career accomplishments and honors at the
one, not tucked in as afterthoughts on page two. This simple stra
ages employers to read the whole thing.

Technologies Facilitate Job Search

After the Internet caught job-search fire in the mid-1990s — inst
ing resumes to and fro — little new technology changed the pict
social Web groundswell burst upon us in the mid-2000s. Now job
have the tools to

- Use social networks to dramatically enlarge personal netwo
- Tap their networks to identify jobs and for recommendation
- Go directly to hiring authorities
- Market accomplishments in professional profiles
- Pinpoint employment targets with position-mapping

REMEMBER

Continue to apply for jobs with a customized resume and cover l
as you've done so far. Classic job searching methods continue to
they're not enough in an economy where jobs have gone missing.

state of the industry and suggests how you can "go social."

I expect a never-ending stream of new technical bells and whistl[...]
social. Location awareness is one example of what's new. When [...]
launched its Places feature in late 2010, social media expert Cha[...]
explained: "Until now, Facebook knew who you were, what you a[...]
when you did it. Now they add an even richer dimension — whe[...]
that completes the picture." Facebook added Places to its posts, [...]
phone app, and a mobile site.

How can a location-aware feature facilitate a job chase? Suppose[...]
ing for a retail or restaurant job in a given locale. The activity st[...]
location feature indicates which restaurants and retail stores are[...]
popular — and, thus, good prospects for employment.

For breaking news about social networking, become acquainted [...]
lowing two Web sites:

- **Mashable** (www.mashable.com) is a top guide to social me[...]
  hub for those looking to make sense of the online ream.

- **Altimeter Group** (www.altimetergroup.com) focuses on[...]
  social, including the new field of social commerce. Be sure t[...]
  Group's admirable disclosure policy.

Chapter 5 discusses ways to keep your online reputation in good[...]
the job search.

Mobile's on the move

Smart phones came on fast. Tablet computers are picking up ste[...]
communication is what's new and it's already happening. Even w[...]
not rooted to a desktop computer, you can send and receive e-m[...]
online, and download apps. Chapter 3 examines the latest in mol[...]
chasing.

perplexing question in Chapter 6 as she steps you through an eye-
"Custom Lite" resume process.

Resumes find digital docks

Here's a digital definition of frustration: Craft a perfect resume th
and markets like a jewel only to discover that your intended digi
platform — job board, Web site, recruiting firm, smart phone, an
won't accept anything but plain text. There is a solution, and Jim
book's technical editor, neatly packed the answers into chart for
Lemke Guide in Chapter 7.

Bios gain new importance

The short professional bio (see the Sarah Tobin bio in Chapter 2
tioned for immense popularity, thanks to social media. The shor
when you want to apply for a job, network, post on a guest blog,
tells people quickly who you are, what you do, and why they sh

Plan on writing a bio in three lengths — a micro bio, a short bio,
bio. A micro bio is a sentence you can use on your Twitter profile
ters). A short bio is a paragraph (about 100 words). A long bio ca
page.

"YourName.com" becomes vital

More people are living their lives on the Internet, and episodes
jacking are rising. Realization is mushrooming that controlling th
online rights to your own name makes sense, even if you're not
owner.

noticed that A-list candidates are typically younger than you and have recently done the very job the employer is trying to fill?

On the other hand, when you're a rookie, does it seem as though those on the A-list are typically older than you and have recently done the very job the employer is trying to fill?

The definition of frustration is when you are treated like an ant at a picnic because you're not perceived as an A- or B-list candidate.

Unfortunately, your exclusion rate from inter-view offers may be high when the employer uses online recruiting tools.

An answer to your dilemma. Get personal.

call daily: "Who else should I b

✔ Follow up on job ads, but crushing competition by figur the hiring manager is and o decision-maker directly. Yo write a resume letter (see Chap person, but do not mention the approach is that you've been companies where your excelle tions may be a good fit. Even if coincidence" causes the hiri to send your resume to the HR now it arrives from an importa and is likely be examined.

✔ Remember that the vast maj are found in small businesses. yet using modern job-search t value your person-to-person a

You can protect your identity in its purest Web form by buying your name — YourName.com. You can also purchase a URL (We for your resume — YourNameresume.com. See chapters 2 and 5 owning your own name has gained red-alert status in a digital ag name!