

# Applying for Jobs & Graduate Schools

Nicole Clawson



## Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you will learn

- how to write a killer resume, cover letter, and personal statement
- how rhetoric will help you land the job or a spot in graduate school



Read this chapter to make the answer to this sign "You." Photo by [Free To Use Sounds](#) on Unsplash

So you want to get a job? Or go to grad school? Or maybe get into a professional school? This chapter will give you the tools you need to create a killer application. Remember that the rhetorical situation surrounds everything—it even surrounds the pursuit of your dreams. So before you even start writing your application materials, you must assess the situation. In this chapter, you'll look at the genre of various application materials and consider how your character will be presented to your audience. You will make sure your purpose is clear and the message is compelling. But, primarily, you'll be focusing on audience. After all, how can you expect to land a job if you don't understand the group or company? How can you show an admissions committee why you're a good fit for their department *and* they're a good fit for you if you don't even know what research they conduct? How can you convince your boss to give you perks if you don't know what your boss values?

## 15.1 Professional Audience Analysis

Before you begin writing any application document you need to know to whom you are writing. Hopefully at this point you have narrowed your list of potential employers or schools. If you haven't yet—jot down a pro and con list. Compare and contrast each company/school's requirements and preferences. Dig in to their websites. See if their values align with yours and if you like the work they're doing. Once you have decided on a winner, you should perform an in-depth analysis of the company/department. The following discussion questions are rather . . . thorough . . . so get comfortable and get answering.

## Audience Analysis

1. Look at the company, program or employer's website to see how the organization describes itself.
2. Create a list of key terms from the ad and the website.
3. Briefly answer the Audience Analysis Questions. Note that you might not be able to answer all of them based on the audience.
4. Using all of this information, write a brief analysis of your audience.

### AUDIENCE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1. What is the approximate size of your audience? Are you addressing just one or two people or a sizable group?
2. Who, specifically, are you writing to? A hiring manager or department? A specific person?
3. What information do you have regarding the demographic makeup of your audience (age, gender, education level, ethnicity), and how might you use that information to develop and shape your writing?
4. What personal and professional traits do you have in common with the members of your audience?
5. What common values do you share with your audience?
6. Are there any cultural considerations that may influence how your audience responds to your writing?
7. Will your audience expect to be entertained as well as informed?
8. Will you be targeting certain members of your audience, and if so, which members? (Think name-dropping, more on that later)
9. How will you have to earn your audience's trust? How will you demonstrate your knowledge or expertise?
10. What preconceptions or biases might be held by some members of your audience?
11. What expectations will your audience have regarding your application materials?
12. What expectations will your audience have regarding the format of your application materials?
13. What key questions will your audience expect you to answer?
14. What key objections are audience members likely to raise?
15. What particular appeals should you include in your application materials to connect to the needs and interests of your audience?

After you have completed the activity you should have a pretty good picture of your audience. You will also want to spend a bit of time closely reading the position posting and/or description. See if you find similar keywords, or words that have a similar connotation, in your audience analysis and in the position posting. Make note of any you find, as they will come in handy when you are crafting your professional portfolio. Now, let's look at the resume.

## 15.2 Rules of the Resume



Resumes are essential whether on paper or online. Image via [Amtec Photos](#)

Even with LinkedIn, Facebook, and online application systems, the resume is still king. It is your chance to quickly show all of the really great accomplishments you've made and how well equipped you are for the job at hand. The trick is that you only have one page. Oh . . . and about [ten seconds to seal the deal](#).

### Conventions of the Genre

#### One Page

The first rule of the resume is that it must be only one page long. No more, no less. (There are some exceptions in certain fields that allow two pages, but these are very rare.) If you go over, you've broken the rules of the genre. If you go under, you tell your audience that you don't have much experience. This one page is golden space—use it wisely.

#### Golden Triangle

Speaking of "golden space," the "Golden Triangle" is the space which occupies the top left-hand corner of the resume and branches out to form a triangle from there. This space is where your reader is most likely to look first. That means we should put all of the most valuable information within that space. If you choose to break this rule (like putting your name on the right side of the paper), do so carefully and with thought. Your audience should be able to get the information they need quickly. Remember, a prospective employer only gives about 7-10 seconds per resume before deciding if it lives to the next stage in the application process.

## Your Golden Triangle

What information will you place in the golden triangle?

## White Space

If you have a bit of extra white space on your resume (usually due to a lack of relevant work experience) you should focus on your school experience. List the accomplishments you have achieved during your time at university: Teacher Assistantships, Projects, Lab Work, Courses Completed, Scholarships, Club Memberships, etc.

## Narrative

Your job is to create a story for your audience. Make sure you are answering who you are and why you are a great fit for this position within both the resume and cover letter or statement of intent. Every paragraph in your cover letter and every bullet point in your resume should be there for a reason. Take a look at your past and current experience and match it up to what the company is looking for.

## What to Include and in What Order

Remember that your goal is to tell a story about why you are a great candidate for this particular job or internship. And . . . we only have one page in bullet-point format to share that story. That means that we should only include the most relevant and current information for that specific job. Generally speaking, that excludes your high school days. Based off of your audience analysis, give the information that matters most to your audience. Are they more concerned about your educational experience? Or your work experience? Put the one they care about most at the top. Make sure your bullets are in reverse chronological order. Your audience is interested in the really cool stuff that you are doing now, not what you did when you were 14.

## Religious Volunteer Experiences

Many students ask if they should include their religious volunteer or mission experience and the very clear answer is "it depends." Like everything else in your resume, your experience must be there to tell a story and link directly to the current job for which you are applying. BYU Career Services has an excellent [handout](#) which helps job and grad school candidates work church service into "transferable skills."

## Interests

Some companies pay close attention to the interest section. You are not required to include this section, or a section like it, but it is a great way to fill in some of the golden space if you may not have extensive work experience. Spend a bit of time researching those you'll work with. If you find out they like the outdoors and you are a kayaking enthusiast—write that down. It will show that you are a good fit not only in the office, but socially as well. However, make sure that you are genuine in your responses. Don't write that Shakespeare is your favorite author (because you think it makes you sound smart) when all you remember is watching Leonardo DiCaprio play Romeo during movie day in your sophomore English



class. You may find yourself in a very uncomfortable position when your interviewer asks which of the Bard's sonnets is your favorite.



Bullet points help readers speed through your resume. Photo by [Dean Page](#) on Pixabay

Photo by [Dean Page](#) on Pixabay

## 15.3 Bulleted Sections

Once you have nailed down which experiences you want to highlight, based on your audience analysis, you need to look at how you will organize that information into bulleted sections. Within every section, each bullet point is a phrase—not a complete sentence. And each phrase begins with a verb. If you find that you are using the same verb in many of your bullets, you may want to google “Action Verbs” or head to BYU’s Career Services website to see their [Action Verbs handout](#).

Look at each of your bullet points. Do they begin with a verb-first phrase? After you have revised your verb-first phrases you need to look closely at the information you are providing your readers. You should move from task-oriented phrases to phrases which provide *quantifiable data*, indicate the *motivation* behind the task, and show the *impact on others*.

Move from

- Tested operating systems

to

- Tested 5 operating systems daily

and ending up with something like this

- Tested 5 operating systems daily to minimize errors for customers

### Bullet Points

Now you do it. Revise each of your bullet points to include quantifiable data, motivation, and impact.

## Best=Longer?

Right now you might be thinking “how can I create the ‘best’ bullet points and stay within the one-page limit?” The best way to do so is to head back to your audience analysis. Make sure that each section has a purpose and links to your narrative. Adapt the sections to highlight the information your audience wants to know. Get comfortable with the delete button and get rid of irrelevant bullet points (we really don’t need to know the stuff you did in high school). Only include and highlight the most current and impressive and relevant bullet points.

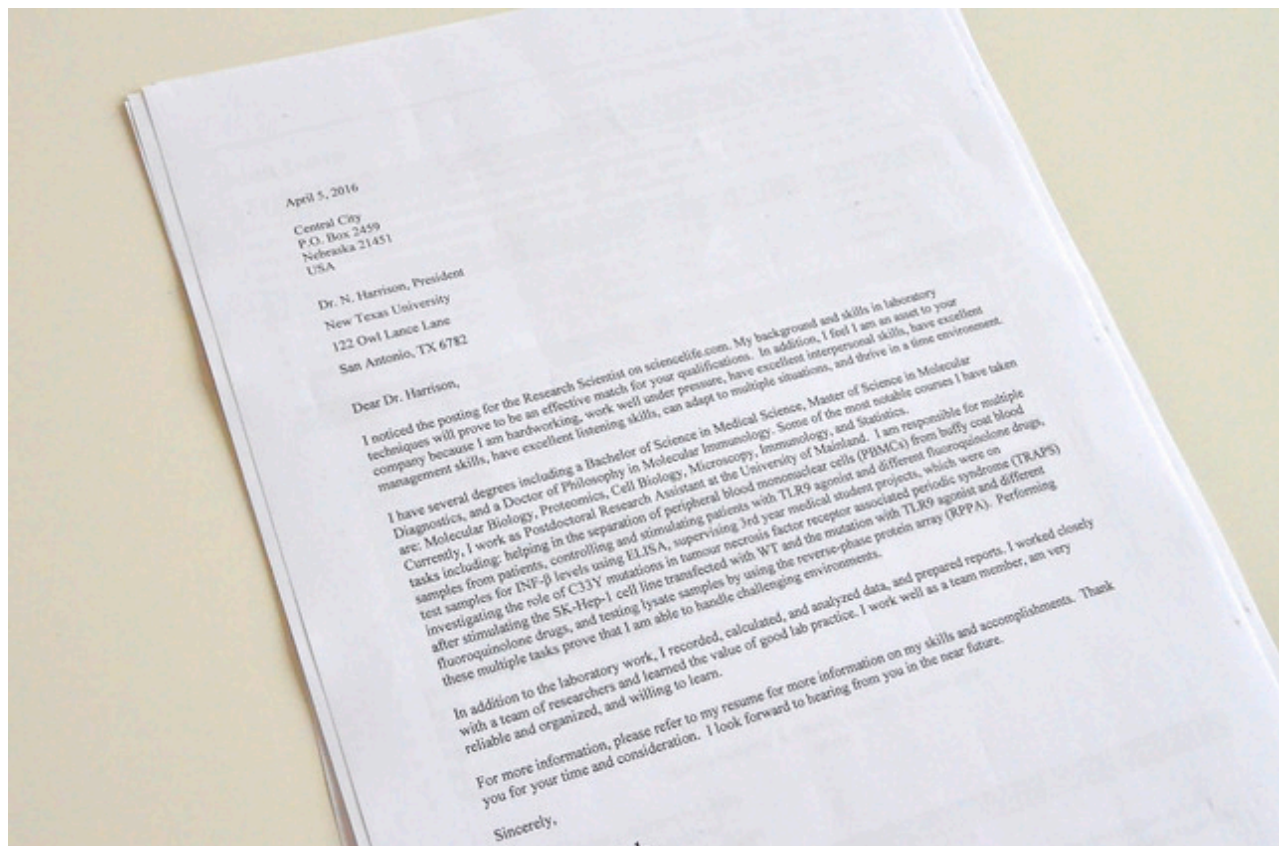
## 15.4 The Master

It is good practice to keep a “master” resume as you progress through your career. A master resume contains all of the awesome things you have done. Each time you complete a new task or project in your current job, you will head over to this master resume and either add more bullet points under your current job or create a new bulleted section. Your master resume will be multiple pages long. If you are faithful to this process, you will have an up-to-date working document that is always ready to use for a job application process.

### How to Use It

After you have completed the audience analysis for your prospective job, you will head to your master resume. Copy and paste (or adapt) only the information that is pertinent for this new job into your new resume. Basically, you are plagiarizing yourself. Which is the only cool way to plagiarize.

## 15.5 Cover Letters



Cover letters allow you to highlight your best points. Photo by [Resume Writing Lab](#)

The cover letter is a weird thing. The very name implies that it comes first in the application process. However, it sometimes only comes into play after your resume has made the cut. And many jobs don't ask for a cover letter anymore or ask for an email instead. That being said, your cover letter is the place where you can emphasize or highlight certain aspects of your resume or explain some of the holes your resume might have. It should introduce, justify, and explain your resume. And, if you are one of the lucky ones who do not have to submit a cover letter, still write one. Use it as a place to practice your PAR story for your interview—PAR stands for problem, action, result. Try to frame your experience in cover letters and interviews by showing a problem you encountered, an action you took, and the results of that action.

### Conventions of the Genre

The cover letter looks and smells like a traditional formal letter. It must have a heading, opening salutation, body paragraphs, and a closing salutation. It should be one page long with lots of white space.



- **Heading:** Your heading should match the heading found on your resume. Make sure to include your address, telephone number, and email address. You can include your LinkedIn information. We also need the date and the address of person to whom you are writing.
- **Opening Salutation:** Please avoid using "To Whom It May Concern." It is outdated and shows that you didn't care enough to seek out the person your letter is going to. Use Google and see if you can figure out your point of contact. If that fails, give the company a call. "Hi! My name is Bob Lob and I'm applying for the student intern position in the pediatric research department. I'd like to personalize my cover letter. Could you tell me who's responsible for potential interns?" Not only does it provide you with the information you need, but it could also get your name circulating. If all of the above fails, you can broaden your field a bit and address the role or the department (e.g., "Dear Hiring Manager," or "Dear Applications Department")
- **First paragraph:** How did you find out about the job? What connects you to the company? "Name drop" in this paragraph. Do you have any mentors that work there? Did a current employee suggest the job to you? What position are you applying for?

### First Paragraph Activity

Answer the above questions in paragraph form.

- **Second and third paragraphs:** Why are you interested in their company? How will you add value to the company? What is unique about you? Highlight the awesome items that are in your resume. Mention education and experience. You can mention why the company is good for you, but focus mostly on how you are good for the company. Show them how much you want to work for them. If you need to explain why you may have sub-par grades or experience, this is the place to do so. Make sure that you own your flaws, but use them to show your character. If something made your grades fall a bit short, show what you learned from the experience.

### Second and Third Paragraph Activity

Answer the above questions in paragraph form. Make sure you are keeping your audience in mind. Also, it wouldn't hurt to use the PAR method (problem, action, result).

## 15.6 The Interview

Thanks to all your hard work on your resume and cover letter your foot is in the metaphorical door, but your rhetorical work is far from done. Now we need to prepare for the interview.

## Prepare

Interviewers like to ask behavioral questions to figure out how you react to challenges. Be prepared to convince them of your skills by using the keywords you found during your audience analysis to prepare personal stories that show problems you faced, actions you took, and changes you effected. Not only will this exercise help with your interview, but it will help with crafting your cover letter or statement of intent. Each of the stories we share should be brief, engaging, and job related. Make a table of PAR stories (problem, action, result) like the one below, with column heading for key words, problem, action, and result.

KEY WORDS	PROBLEM	ACTION	RESULT
Leadership	My team had been working on a project for weeks, but we weren't having success. No one was stepping up to take responsibility for our deliverables. The due date was fast approaching.	I created a schedule that would ensure completion by the due date, then talked to each person on the team to get their commitment. I put in double shifts to help a new team member get up to speed.	The team and we completed the project on time and the professional work and model.
Analytical	Our client delivered a 40-page document of required changes that made my team feel overwhelmed and discouraged.	I stayed late and created a spreadsheet showing which person could best make the changes requested and how we could accomplish them quickly.	My boss next morning assigned the changes to the team and they were completed on time.

Type caption for image (optional)

Just like you'll be adding experiences to your Master Resume, make sure to add to your PAR table throughout your career when you conquer a tough challenge. You'll be instantly ready to prep for your next interview, cover letter, or statement of intent. Look over this [sample PAR table](#). Read some of the example stories to get ideas.

## Practice

After you've done your research, grab a smart person and practice, practice, practice. Hand them a copy of your resume and something to eat. Get them to ask you behavioral questions so that you can **practice answering smoothly and confidently** with PAR stories.

You may feel uncomfortable asking someone to practice an interview with you, but practicing your PAR stories at least three times will give you a level of confidence that sets you apart from your competition. **Ask for candid feedback.** Be open and appreciative. Video record yourself to see if your mannerisms, posture, and voice all support the image you are trying to portray.

## Interview Formats

Interviews are conducted in various formats (in-person, video call, recorded video, phone), depending on an organization's resources, the job level, an location.

### In-person Interview

Face-to-face interviews are still the gold standard. Lots of information (most of it non-verbal) flows back and forth in this sort of interview. When you're offered a seat, take out a pen and paper to take notes. Taking notes helps you look alert and capable. it also helps you remember points you'd like to bring up.

Your interviewer will probably start with an "ice-breaker" question. Be prepared for the classic **"Tell me about yourself."** Give a brief personal pitch that you've practiced so many times you don't even need to think about it. Connect your background and strengths to your target job.

Once you get talking, remember to breathe. Your interviewer wants you to succeed. Help them or her discover that you're the perfect candidate; that will make their job much easier.

## Video Call or Remote Interviews

Video call interviews are becoming much more common. They're an inexpensive way for companies to quickly assess the capabilities, suitability, and fit of candidates. In addition to the tips above, follow these steps to improve your video interview performance.

### Set up

- Become familiar with the technology so you won't be flustered if it fails. Try out at least two services so you can switch if necessary.
- Compose a backdrop. Make sure your interviewer sees you in a clean, simple environment.
- Orient the light toward your face or to your side, (not above or behind you.) Strong overhead light can make you look spooky. Natural light is the most flattering, so try to sit facing a window.
- Make sure the camera is at eye level or slightly above. Place your laptop on a stack of books so that your interviewer isn't looking up your nose.
- Double check the interview time and time zone.

### On the day

- Choose a solid-colored shirt and make sure it's pressed. Wrinkles show up more on camera. If you need to wear a white shirt, wear a suit jacket over it. If you want a few pointers on how to dress, read [this article](#) by Monster.
- Maintain a fairly constant distance from the webcam.
- Don't drum your fingers or use the keyboard to type notes during your call. Sensitive microphones will magnify every sound.
- Look at the camera, not the screen. Don't try to stare at it constantly, but do look directly into it when you want to emphasize a point or convey sincerity.
- Smile! Exude energy, confidence, and optimism.

## Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are a little nerve-wracking because of limited feedback from your interviewer. You can't see a reassuring nod or smile to tell if you are on the right track. In addition to securing a quiet spot and double-checking your interview time, these two simple tricks will make a big difference in helping you come across as calm, confident, and upbeat.

1. Remain standing and walk around
2. Smile (even if no one's in the room)

Even if people can't see you, you will sound better if you're smiling, moving, and well-dressed than if you're slouched on the couch in your pajamas. Also, moving helps you shed stress.

## Interview Day

You've done your preparation and the big day is finally here. Don't worry. You'll rock this. Having confidence will improve your performance, so do what you can to feel invincible. Read through your PAR stories to remind yourself how awesome you are, press your shirt (details make a difference), and leave an extra half hour for traffic.

## 15.7 The Aesthetics of the Application

Some jobs will only ask for your resume; others will ask for a cover letter or a written statement in addition to your resume. If your potential place of employment asks for multiple documents, you must make sure they present a unified front. Basically, both the content and visual elements should tell the same story.

Just like you dress the part for an event, you need to dress up your application materials. If you are trying to impress a date, you probably aren't going to wear your grandpa's Hawaiian shirt with your sister's pleather pants. Just a guess. Most likely, and probably without even thinking, you'll be cultivating an image of yourself. Maybe you want to exude "Hey, I like the outdoors and I smell like pine trees," so you wear brown boots and a plaid shirt. Maybe you want your vibe to be "I'm a cultured person who enjoys the finer things in life," so you wear dark jeans, a crisp white oxford, and a blazer. If the date is to a concert, you know you'll wear jeans and a t-shirt . . . unless it is a philharmonic concert. Then, to borrow words from Justin Timberlake, "I be on my suit and tie." You are considering the genre (what type of date is it), the audience (your date), and your character (how you want the world, or your date, to perceive you).

This is what you need to do with your application materials. You want those documents to say that you are smart, with-it, bright, mature, and detail oriented. And all parts should look like they belong together (remember the Hawaiian shirt and pleather pants?). The easiest way to do this is through colors and fonts. Make sure that you have the same font on your cover letter as you do on your resume. Yes, chances are that they won't look at those two documents at the same time, but what if they do? You don't want them to wonder why your resume has a Hawaiian vibe while your cover letter looks like it's from a bad Britney Spears' music video. That's bad news.

### Comparison

Open your two documents (resume and cover letter) side by side on your screen. Do they jive? do they look like they go together? If now, fix them. Make them cohesive. Just like you dress the part, you need to dress up your application materials.

As a reminder, always keep your audience in mind. What are they expecting your application materials to look like?

**Check out the standards in your field.** Generally speaking, the same rules apply for all fields; however, they might look slightly different. For example, imagine what application materials would look like for someone going into graphic design. Now think about someone going out for a CPA job. BYU Career Services has collated [sample student resumes](#) from many different fields. Use them as a resource. You can also use other legit online sources to find appropriate examples.

## 15.8 Graduate School Applications



This could be you if you get into graduate school. A killer application will help you get there. Photo by [Frits de Jong](#) from Pixabay

So you are one of those who want to slave through a few more years in academia? Before you start dreaming about the hallowed halls of academia, you need to get your application materials in order. In addition to submitting your resume or CV and transcript, you'll most likely be asked to provide a personal statement about why you want to attend the school's particular grad program. You also need to be thinking about who you'll ask to write your letters of recommendation.

### Curriculum Vitae

As opposed to a traditional one-page resume, a curriculum vitae, or CV, is an academic document that showcases your entire academic and professional career and can be multiple pages long. You should include professional contact information and relevant details of your educational training, coursework, professional training, special accomplishments, and skills while focusing on those most relevant to academia—teaching, researching, publishing, and presenting. If you're applying to medical school or a professional school, you should emphasize your specific medical, dental, law, PT, etc. experience and training as well.

### Format

Your format can include large headings and a generous amount of white space. Create relevant sections with headings that keep this information clear and accessible, and highlight the most important items (from the school's perspective). Your CV should generally be single spaced, 10-12 pt font.



## Style

Your style should be fairly formal. Although you do not need to use complete sentences, your style should be clear, concise, and precise. Keep your formatting and wording consistent and parallel.

## Examples

Check out [this site](#) for examples of CVs including tips for writing them.

## Personal Statement

Although sometimes daunting to write, a personal statement (aka statement of intent or letter of intent) gives you the space to tell your specific audience why you should be admitted. You get to tell what talent, skills, and perspective you bring to the incoming class in an interesting and engaging way. Sometime you'll receive a bit of a prompt, other programs will just ask you to write a "Personal Statement" or "Statement of Intent" or "Letter of Intent."

### Personal Statement Questions

Respond to the following: (Yes, there are a lot of questions, but these will help you create a really fantastic and specific statement)

- What is your purpose in graduate study?
- What is the area of study in which you wish to specialize? (Use the language of the field)
- What is your intended future use of your grad study?
- What is your unique preparation and fitness for study in the field?
- Do you have any problems or inconsistencies in your records/scores?
- Do you have any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere in your application?
- What did you learn from the problems or inconsistencies or special conditions?
- How have those experiences made you into the person you are today?
- These should be made into positive statements about your abilities and future.
- Why do you want to attend their university? Be specific.

## Conventions of the Genre

- Be conservative with your design and writing style
- If no page requirement is listed—stick to 2 pages max, singled-spaced.
- 12 point in a conservative font like Garamond, Calibri, or Times New Roman

Your essay must emotionally engage the reader and directly link to the narrative you created with your resume or CV. It should show a unique point of view and reinforce all of the rest of your application materials. It should unfold the story of what have you done in your life up to this point that uniquely positions you to be a top candidate for this particular program.

## Format

- No opening or closing salutation
- Your essay should begin
- ATTN: Graduate Selection Committee (unless you are posting your work in a text box)

The beginning of your essay should have a hook. You can grab the reader's attention with a spellbinding anecdote, counter-intuitive statement, or shocking one-liner.

The essay should be written in the first person as it creates an intimacy between the writer and the reader. We want our work to be emotionally appealing.

1. Begin with personal details outlining the "WHY": the why of your academic and career plans
  - Tell how you first became interested in the subject you plan to study
  - Provide anecdotes from childhood, early academic life, travel, service, or other experience
2. Present some recent experience and accomplishments in the field
  - Course work you've excelled in
  - Awards you've received
  - Aspects of the field that inspire you
  - Clubs you've participated in
  - Conferences you've presented at
  - Papers you've published
3. Goals for the Future

You should explain why attending THEIR university matters to the achievement of your goals. Notice the difference between the following

- "I want to attend X University because I want to study women's health"
- "As you can see, from the time I was 16, I've dedicated myself to researching the impact of the environment on women's health in third world countries. My time spent studying under Dr. MacKenzie has taught me the value of working alongside someone who not only excels in academia but also gets their boots dirty, so to speak. X University's reputation for providing onsite training and fieldwork, in addition to preparing its students to hold their own in the academic setting is unparalleled. I would be honored to be among those students. I would also love the opportunity to study with Professor Ludlow, given her groundbreaking research on microplastics and women's health in India. Her article found in..."

4. Conclusion
  - Summarize what you've already written
  - Perhaps touch back on the hook from your intro
  - Express interest in *their* program
  - Thank them for their consideration

A quick note about educational or work foibles from [Vana C. Koutsomitis](#) (it's corny, but true):

*"Maya Angelou famously said, 'We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.' This is true of your professional evolution. You might feel like you are not where you want to be—or not where you thought you'd be by now—but your journey will evolve. There is nothing wrong with revealing the bumps along the way, as long as you can articulate where you want to go. The most important exercise . . . is defining your values, goals, and mission and working consistently in that direction."*

## Mentors

Many students cruise through university without taking advantage of all that the university has to offer. No, I'm not talking about renting out the cinema room on the fourth floor. I'm talking about the potential to find a mentor in one or two of your professors. Take advantage of this opportunity. Seek out a professor with whom you have a connection. And, frankly, if you are in a class of 350 students, it's going to be hard to make a connection during class time. Office hours provide a great opportunity to get to know your professors, and they'll be happy to answer any questions you have.

So, just like in an interview, come prepared! Ask them how they got to be where they are. Ask them about their experiences in grad school. Ask them how they knew they were on the right career path. Ask them about their specific field. Ask. Ask. Ask. Listen and take notes. Be engaged and courteous. Tell them what your current plans are and ask for advice. Ask if they know of anyone in the field that might be willing to talk with you or let you shadow them. Then, a day or so later, shoot them an email thanking them for their time. Be specific on why their interview was helpful to you. You also can do this type of interview in the workplace with people who have the job you want someday. It can be a great way to make connections and find out what it takes to reach your goals.

This is only one way of finding and creating a mentor. Sometime it happens organically. Sometimes you have to go out and make it happen. Mentors can encourage and guide us. They can connect us with others that can further our career and enrich our lives. Go the extra mile and make these connections.

## Letters of Recommendation

Most grad programs will ask for multiple letters of recommendation. That means that you have the opportunity to show different aspects of your personality and work ethic. Your boss, your mentor, and your professors have all had different experiences and interactions with you. Give careful thought to which qualities you want highlighted in your letters, and consider which of your contacts will best be able to showcase those qualities. Your professor and your boss will have different experiences with you and will be able to highlight various qualities you possess. Don't procrastinate this decision; you want to give your recommenders several weeks' notice.

When you approach your letter-writers, make sure to ask if they can write a strong recommendation—you want to know now if they have any hesitation and why. If everything still seems golden, go ahead and provide them with your due dates, application materials (resume or CV, personal statement), and a list of your attributes, accomplishments, and experiences. You can even tell them what the other letter writers will talk about. Don't hesitate to remind them of the looming deadline if they haven't submitted their letter yet.

Be sure to drop by with a small token of appreciation (chocolate, office plant, etc.) and thank them for their work. They are taking time out of their busy schedule to provide a free service for you.

## 15.9 Personal Branding



You need a presence online so potential employers can find you. Photo by [FirmBee](#) on Pixabay

### Online Presence

Just like you were concerned about your narrative in your application materials, you need to worry about what story is found in your online presence. It's important to make sure that what you've been putting out to the world is what you want your potential employers to see. It is also important to ensure that what you are putting out there is authentic and uniform across all platforms. Not only do you want the narrative in your resume and cover letter to match, you want to it match across Facebook and Instagram and Twitter. Revisit the narrative you created in the Interview section and create a 2-3 sentence-long description of yourself. You can use this for your "elevator pitch" when you meet someone, in interviews, or your tagline on social media.

# Personal Branding with Social Media

Build your brand online and network with professionals in your field using social media that reflects your career or professional goals. The tips below, from the National Association of Colleges and Employers, provide you with tangible steps to building your brand online.

## Facebook

- Use a professional-looking picture; you can use the same picture on all of your social media pages
- Add the following to the "about" section: internship, job and other educational experience, a short bio, and links to other professional social media
- Follow organizations you're interested in to discover intern and full-time job opportunities, company announcements and potential organizational contacts

## LinkedIn

- Use a professional profile photo
- Customize your headline with keywords and phrases related to your desired industry or profession
- Submit requests to connect with professionals you've worked with or met through networking channels and personalize your request by offering some information on why you would like to connect
- Don't just connect and leave it at that; build relationships with your network to cultivate stronger professional ties

## Twitter

- Use a professional profile photo and your cover photo can indicate your interests
- Choose a Twitter handle that will be recognizable as you
- Tell your story in your bio, include university, class year, major, and keywords describing your career interests
- Add a link to your LinkedIn profile, your personal website, blog, and/or online portfolio

Image by [Washington & Lee University](#).

Note how the first bullet point asks for a professional photo. It's because it's important. But it doesn't mean that you have to break the bank. Ask your roommate or a friend to take a picture of you in natural light. Wear professional clothes; pick a neutral background. Then upload that picture to each site. Just don't use a selfie or crop a vacation pic.

## Your Personal Brand

Your Personal Brand Review what Washington & Lee University has said about personal branding (above). Go through your Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter and make necessary changes. Write a quick paragraph detailing some of the changes you made.

## LinkedIn

Look over your LinkedIn profile and make sure that it reflects best practices in your target industry. Different industries—and even different functions within industries—have different standards and expectations. Modify your headline and summary to point toward the job you want. Make sure your profile is “search optimized” by including key skills and phrases in your descriptions of accomplishments at former positions. If you have done a thorough job of the audience analysis earlier in this chapter, you'll be set to hit the ground running. If you are new to LinkedIn, do a little genre research. Find people who have the job you want and let their LinkedIn profiles inspire you content, formatting, etc. If possible, connect with these people and seek their advice. Join groups in your industry and begin engaging with the members. You could even interview one of these people to find out more.



## ResearchGate

Check out [this Science article](#) about the role the social networks ResearchGate or Academia.net can play in your online presence. It gives great information about how to connect to others in academia and filter out information and research you don't want.

### 15.10 Commencement



Don't forget to enjoy the moment. Photo by [Baim Hanif](#) on Unsplash

Thinking about life after college can be one of two things: absolutely thrilling or absolutely mind numbing. There are so many choices and options. If you've known you were going to be a dentist since the time you were three, good for you. Go after your tooth (ful)filling dreams. If you are still trying to decide what to do with your life (and you graduate this semester), good for you. Keep waiting tables until you decide. Life is long and it often twists and turns in unexpected and beautiful ways. Although this chapter isn't about helping you decide what path to take but how to put your best foot forward once you begin down that road, it's helpful to take a minute to think of where you've been, where you'd like to be, and enjoy where you are in this moment.

Once you're ready to take the first step toward life after undergrad, know that you have the tools to create really stellar application materials. Start small, start early, and start with the basics. **Make sure you know your audience** well. Get ready to write and revise and revise and revise and . . . you got it—revise! You'll want to get everything as near to perfection as you can. Make plans to ask trusted people (mentors, professors, people in the field, etc.) to make sure that you are presenting your **character** the way you want and that your **message** is persuasive. Get comfortable with helpful criticism. Begin looking at your online presence through the eyes of a potential employer or grad school mentor. Ask yourself if you need to revisit some of the content you've posted online. If the answer is "yes," then take the time now to spruce up your image.

Take your time with your application materials and put the effort in. You've got what it takes to do what you love!



With a good application, you, too, can end up doing what you love! Photo by [Riz Mooney](#) on Unsplash

## References

How to create a professional online presence authentically. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://goop.com/work/how-to-create-a-professional-online-presence-authentically/>

Peterson, Thad. (n.d.) How to dress for an interview. Retrieved from <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/appropriate-interview-dress>

Kintisch, E. (2014). Is ResearchGate Facebook for scientists? Retrieved from <https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2014/08/researchgate-facebook-science>

Work: Get the job. (n.d.). In L. Thomas (Ed.), Management communication. Retrieved from <http://mcom320.net/>

<https://pixabay.com/photos/ammunition-9mm-hollow-point-3949620/>

<https://pixabay.com/photos/wedding-cufflinks-black-and-white-636021/>

<https://pixabay.com/photos/office-business-accountant-620822/>

<https://pixabay.com/photos/tu-delft-university-library-1723434/>

## Previous Citation(s)

Clawson, N. (2019). Professional Portfolio. In C. C. Charles, *Writing in the Social Sciences*. EdTech Books.  
Retrieved from [https://edtechbooks.org/writing/professional\\_portfolio](https://edtechbooks.org/writing/professional_portfolio)



**Nicole Clawson**

Nicole Clawson is an adjunct faculty member at Brigham Young University. When she isn't in her garden, she is busy knitting a new sweater while (re)watching Downton Abbey.

This content is provided to you freely by EdTech Books.

Access it online or download it at [https://edtechbooks.org/advancedwriting/professional\\_portfolio](https://edtechbooks.org/advancedwriting/professional_portfolio).

