

RÉSUMÉS, INTERVIEWING, AND GETTING THE JOB

About your résumé . . .

- *Should it be one or two pages long, or perhaps even longer?*
- *Should you include nonprofessional, minimum- or near minimum-wage jobs?*
- *Should you identify a career objective?*
- *How should you incorporate your field experience? For instance, what should you call it?*
- *What headings should you use for various sections?*
- *What kind of personal data, if any, should you include?*
- *Whom should you select as your references?*
- *How many references should you include?*
- *What should a cover letter say?*
- *When should you send cover letters?*
- *Where do you find out what jobs are available to begin with?*

About the job interview . . .

- *How can you best prepare for it?*
- *How should you dress?*
- *How should you respond when a potential employer asks you what your greatest problem has been in a work environment?*
- *What kind of salary should you ask for?*
- *How can you respond when asked what kind of supervision you prefer?*
- *What can you say when an interviewer asks you to describe your primary weaknesses? What about your strengths?*
- *How might you answer when an interviewer asks you what you want to be doing in five years?*
- *What can you reply when asked how long you hope to stay with the agency?*

Introduction

The answers (or lack of definite answers) to the questions posed above are all in this chapter. You will probably put your whole heart into seeking professional social work employment just before or immediately after graduation. This chapter addresses content relevant to getting that job: the assessment of your own capabilities and interests, the investigation of potential job possibilities, résumé preparation, writing of cover letters, preparing for and participating in job interviews, and follow-up on job possibilities. Whenever you begin your job search, this material will be helpful.

This chapter will:

- Help you assess your own capabilities and interests in preparation for seeking professional employment.
- Explain how to identify and investigate professional employment possibilities.
- Propose principles for formulating your résumé.
- Respond to a range of specific questions concerning what makes the best résumé for you.
- Discuss the contents of cover letters.
- Propose suggestions for job interview preparation.
- Prepare you to answer a wide range of questions commonly asked in job interviews.
- Propose ways to follow up on job applications and interviews.
- Address briefly the appropriate manner of leaving a job.

Getting a Job

Like some aspects of social work practice, successful job finding is a combination of hard work and good luck. There are, of course, several steps you can take to enhance your credibility as a candidate. A document published by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW Program Advancement Fund, n.d.) suggests following six steps in the job-finding process. These include assessing your own capabilities and interests, investigating actual job possibilities, constructing a résumé, writing a cover letter, preparing for interviews, and following up on contacts.

Typically at graduation about 13 percent of BSW students are already employed full-time in social

work, earning a modal salary of around \$30,000 (Buchan, Hull, Mather, Pike, Ray, Rodenhiser, Rogers, and Smith [2005a]). Most of the other BSW graduates locate employment within one to three months of graduation, according to past surveys conducted by Buchan, Hull, Mather, Pike, Ray, Rodenhiser, Rogers, and Smith (2005b).

Assessing Your Capabilities and Interests

At least five areas are critical in the assessment of your own capabilities and interests (NASW Program Advancement Fund, n.d.). They include your competencies, accomplishments, job preferences, employment goals, and personal attributes (pp. 2–11). You must be able to articulate these in order to construct an effective résumé and portray yourself as competent to potential employers.

What Are Your Competencies?

Competencies are your skills and abilities. What are you good at? What skills have you mastered that would enhance your performance in a professional social work setting? Think about the social work knowledge and values you have acquired and the skills you have mastered. Highlight 16.1 identifies some competencies you might consider.

What Are Your Accomplishments?

What have you achieved professionally that makes you most proud? Try to think of at least five such accomplishments. When thinking of your achievements and choosing words to use later in a résumé, think in terms of clear, vivid, action verbs (Levitt, 2004). Highlight 16.2 suggests a range of such words. For example, have you formulated case plans? Did you supervise volunteers? Did you initiate and implement a new policy? Did you lead a support group? The possibilities are endless.

What Are Your Job Preferences?

Ideally, if you could have the perfect job, what would it be? Think in terms of four areas: (1) the types of professional activities you would most like to pur-

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.1

■ *Assessing Your Capabilities*

The following areas may reflect your professional knowledge, skills, and values:

- Assessment of individual, family, group, community, and organizational problems and functioning
- Communication
- Understanding people
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Planning
- Organizing
- Recording
- Clear thinking
- Acceptance of responsibility
- Dependability
- Pacing your efforts
- Coordination
- Case management
- Conducting meetings
- Advocacy
- Creativity
- Initiation of ideas
- Undertaking action

This is just the beginning of your capability assessment. The potential is unlimited. These are just to give you some initial ideas. After giving your capabilities serious thought, write several paragraphs summarizing and prioritizing your greatest strengths. This can help you articulate for yourself (and later for potential employers) the reasons why you are and will be a capable professional.

sue; (2) your preferred client population; (3) the problems you are interested in addressing; and (4) the type of agency setting in which you would like work. Answer for yourself the questions posed in Highlight 16.3, which illustrates examples of each category. Note that simply identifying your preferred job characteristics does not mean that you will get that exact job—or even a very similar one. However, the intent here is to help you seriously consider your own goals and career objectives. The better you know yourself, the more capable you will be of presenting yourself to potential employers and

of making decisions about what job to pursue and accept.

What Are Your Employment Goals?

What aspects of work are important to you, not including the type of social work skills you use or the population you serve? You might put this another way: What aspects of your working environment would motivate you to perform and encourage you to like your job? Highlight 16.4 lists a range of work dimensions that may be of varying importance to you.

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.2

■ *Vibrant Verbs to Capture Your Achievements*

Achieved
Administered
Analyzed
Appraised
Assembled
Assessed
Conducted
Constructed
Coordinated

Counseled
Created
Demonstrated
Designed
Developed
Directed
Employed
Established
Evaluated

Examined
Formulated
Implemented
Initiated
Led
Managed
Negotiated
Organized
Planned

Presented
Proposed
Researched
Revised
Solved
Supervised
Taught
Wrote

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.3

■ Job Preferences

1. What types of professional activities are you most interested in pursuing?

Prioritize the following:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervising staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brokering resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Running groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Fund-raising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community organizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Training staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Program evaluation | <input type="checkbox"/> Policy development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Running meetings | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General administrative activities | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supervising volunteers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing grants | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Case management | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |

2. If you had your “druthers,” what client population would you prefer to work with?

Prioritize the following:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle-aged adults |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Young adults | <input type="checkbox"/> Married couples |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elderly people | <input type="checkbox"/> Men |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Women | <input type="checkbox"/> Single parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intact families | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teenagers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minority groups (specify) _____ | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other client populations (specify) _____ | |

What Are Your Positive Personal Attributes?

Are you dedicated, hard-working, responsible, articulate, punctual, assertive, active, well-organized, or helpful? Are there other positive qualities you can describe? What are your weaknesses? When beginning a job search, it is extremely important to know yourself well. You will have to write honest, straightforward cover letters, answer pointed questions posed by potential employers, and make hard decisions about whether some job really is or is not right for you.

When considering your own strengths, keep in mind some of the skills that employers value the most: willingness to learn; good reading, writing, and computational skills; creative thinking and problem-solving ability; interpersonal and teamwork skills;

self-motivation; and leadership ability (Compton, 1995; Levitt, 2003). To the extent that you have these competencies, highlight them in your résumé and emphasize them in job interviews.

Investigating Actual Job Possibilities

Many factors beyond your control affect how difficult your job search will be. Some states prepare lists of county and state social work openings and update them periodically. Other states have no centralized registry for jobs. There, students usually search for openings in local newspapers. Some state NASW chapters advertise positions in their monthly bul-

3. What problems and issues are you interested in addressing? Prioritize the following:
- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community development | <input type="checkbox"/> Crime in communities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol and other drugs | <input type="checkbox"/> Teen pregnancy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child maltreatment | <input type="checkbox"/> School problems (e.g., truancy) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Battered women | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial resource acquisition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Probation and parole | <input type="checkbox"/> Prison |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental illness | <input type="checkbox"/> Couples conflict |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational rehabilitation | <input type="checkbox"/> Suicide prevention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developmental disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> HIV/AIDS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating disorders | <input type="checkbox"/> Homelessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |
4. In what type of agency setting would you prefer to work? Prioritize the following:
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private | <input type="checkbox"/> Close, directive supervision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervision primarily on a consultation basis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large bureaucracy | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small agency | <input type="checkbox"/> School |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County social services | <input type="checkbox"/> Community organization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Institution | <input type="checkbox"/> Prison |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group home | <input type="checkbox"/> Family planning agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary social work setting | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental-health center or counseling agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary medical setting | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary educational setting | <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (for example, for homeless people or survivors of domestic violence) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serving clients with a wide range of problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Serving clients with specialized problems |

letins or newsletters, primarily for MSW positions. In still other states, licensing or certification laws may require that graduating students pass a test before being eligible for appointment as a social worker. States' lack of uniformity makes it exceedingly difficult to give anything but general advice to you as the job seeker—except that you *will* have to seek opportunities. Even in the best of economic times you will have to work at finding a job that fits your needs.

Using Newspapers

According to an ongoing study by one of the authors, many social work graduates find jobs through newspapers and other news media. About 33 percent of graduates from BSW programs locate jobs through the news media (G. H. Hull, Personal communica-

tion, April 9, 2000). This figure is not uncommon for one simple reason: Most public and private social work openings appear in local newspapers, even if they're also listed in other job publications in the state. Thus, you would be wise to target this source first. Because many smaller communities lack a newspaper or have papers with more limited audiences, administrators often advertise in the newspapers of nearby larger cities. So, for example, a social work position in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin (a small town near Madison, the state's capital), might be advertised in the Madison newspapers. Similar arrangements abound throughout the United States.

Most university and college libraries have a collection of newspapers from various areas within the state or region. So do many public libraries. Locating this resource is a useful step toward collecting

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.4

■ *Employment Goals and Work Context*

What aspects of the work environment are the most important to you? Prioritize the following:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salary | <input type="checkbox"/> Vacation time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sick leave | <input type="checkbox"/> Health-care benefits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hours of work | <input type="checkbox"/> Not being “on call” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social work supervision | <input type="checkbox"/> In-service training opportunities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geographic location | <input type="checkbox"/> Clear job description |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for advancement | <input type="checkbox"/> Opportunity to function independently |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Substantial discretion in decision making | <input type="checkbox"/> Challenging environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low stress levels | <input type="checkbox"/> Good relationships with colleagues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic recording requirements | <input type="checkbox"/> Working as part of a team |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being rewarded for achievement | <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for travel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Little travel | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect from other staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for new skill development | <input type="checkbox"/> Clear rules and regulations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competent colleagues | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsive administration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good office | <input type="checkbox"/> Time flexibility |

Is there anything else that would be motivating to you? If so, specify.

information about available openings and is also an excellent source of information about jobs in other states, in case you are interested in relocating.

Once you have identified the appropriate newspapers, look carefully for job announcements under a range of categories. A given paper might have no listing under the title “social worker.” Instead, these positions might be found under such labels as counselor, group worker, case worker, probation and parole officer, youth worker, medical social worker, alcohol and other drug counselor, case manager, protective services worker, youth counselor, juvenile court intake worker, job coach, community support worker, cofacilitator, residential counselor, surveillance officer, public-health advisor, or director. Be creative when you think about the wide range of specific job titles social workers can have.

Because the titles are often of little help in revealing exactly what the job entails, you are better off reading the entire announcement before deciding whether you are interested. Because classified ads in many larger newspapers are divided into subsections (such as professional, general, and sales), it is impor-

tant to search each section carefully. One social work position might be advertised under the “Professional” heading and another under the “Health Care” section. Don’t take chances. Scrutinize each section closely.

One suggestion for responding to an ad is to delay for a few days after the ad appears. Sunday newspapers usually carry the most extensive array of job possibilities. Sending in your résumé and cover letter a few days after the employer receives the bulk of responses may make yours stand out. The employer may then be in the position of reviewing yours along with other more attractive applications. She would already have had the opportunity to review most of the applications and cut the less appropriate ones.

State Merit System Lists

Some state merit systems produce periodic lists of social work openings. You can probably find the address and telephone number of the division advertising jobs in the state capital’s phone directory. Look under the listing for governmental agencies. A phone call to this agency will quickly tell you whether such

a list is available in that particular state. You may also access such lists online. Any state lists are also likely to contain detailed job descriptions and other information about the jobs, such as whether a test is required for the position and when such a test will be given.

NASW Publications

Positions for MSW graduates are often included in the *NASW News*, published by the National Association of Social Workers. This newspaper, published almost monthly, lists positions by state. Occasionally, BSW positions are mentioned, but only rarely.

The secret to locating a good job position is to exercise patience in your job search and be as thorough as possible. Some people use only one source (for instance, newspapers) and then give up. They whine that they can't find anything. Job finding is work. Remember, you only need one position announcement to get that particular job. You can't necessarily know in advance where you'll find it.

Networking

Networking in the job-finding context involves establishing and nurturing links with other social work professionals you know. An obvious link is with that of colleagues at your field placement agency. Sometimes, if the opportunity exists and a student works out exceptionally well in an agency, the agency will hire her right after placement. Nineteen percent of BSW graduates located their positions through these contacts (G. H. Hull, Personal communication, April 9, 2000). However, don't depend on this, given that so many variables are beyond your control: The agency may simply have no openings when you need a job. Funding cuts may prevent hiring replacements for people who leave. An agency may have a policy against hiring former students. You can't do anything about any of these variables.

Nonetheless, you might keep in contact with your field placement supervisor or others whom you know in your field agency. The social work community in any particular area is usually pretty tight. People in the field are often the first to find out when an agency is hiring or about to hire. Keeping in touch with other professionals makes you privy to fresh job information.

People in your field agency are not the only primary contacts you might establish. (Primary con-

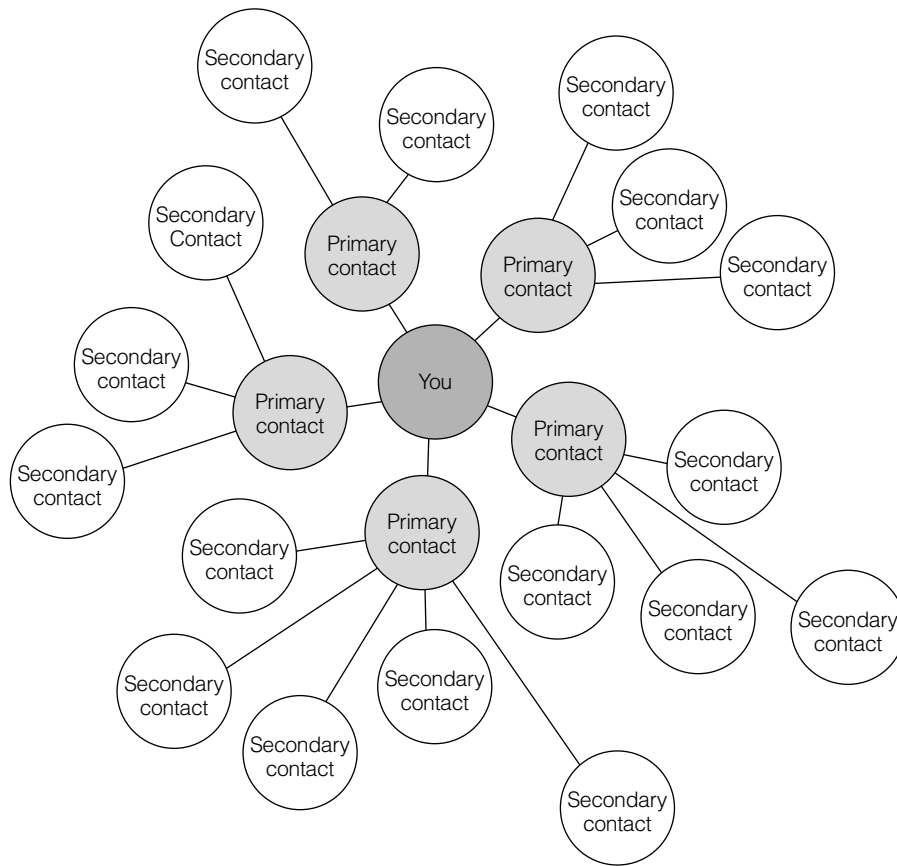
tacts are people whom you know personally.) Perhaps you've met professionals from other agencies during meetings or in-services. Maybe you've worked in the field before and can contact former colleagues. Membership in state and local NASW units can also help you form relationships with other social workers. Such membership may provide a means of linking you to the social work community's information network.

Families and friends might also serve as part of your potential job-finding network. They, hopefully, are especially interested in your welfare and might expend substantial effort to help you find a job. Friends who are social work majors may hear of jobs through the grapevine and may share their own job-search ideas and findings with you. Thirteen percent of graduates learned of their subsequent job positions through either family or friends (G. H. Hull, Personal communication, April 9, 2000).

A way to carry networking even further is to expand your primary contacts to secondary contacts. You can ask your primary contacts to refer you to other professionals you don't know personally. This can radically expand the number of contacts in your network. Every primary contact probably knows several secondary contacts for you. When contacting these secondary sources, you can cite your primary contact's referral. Any positive feelings your secondary contact has about your primary contact might "rub off" on you. Figure 16.1 illustrates how you can expand your network through primary contacts who, in turn, can provide you with secondary contacts.

When you call primary and secondary contacts and there is no specific job opening, do *not* ask the contacts directly if they have a job to offer you. This puts them on the spot. Rather, try a two-pronged technique that can be quite effective. First, give the contact a truthful compliment about his professional status. You might say, "I'm calling because I know you have many contacts among the professionals in this area and have held office in the regional NASW." You are calling this contact for a reason, to help in your job search. Therefore, it can be assumed that the person is relatively well known, skilled, and well connected—and that you can come up with a similar, accurate compliment.

The second prong of this technique is to ask your contacts for advice, suggestions, or referrals to help you in your job search. You might emphasize that you know your contacts may have no job available at their agencies. However, they might have a good

FIGURE 16.1 ■ *Primary and Secondary Networking*

suggestion. This takes the pressure off contacts to help you themselves and also flatters them, because you are consulting them for help. You might also ask your primary contacts if you can use them as references. This may make them feel that they are “on your team.”

Contacting people you haven’t spoken to for a while can bring their recollection of you out of the mists of memory and back into consciousness. If in the future they hear about a job opening via their own informal communication network, they are more likely to remember you. Thus, they may either give a potential employer your name or notify you directly about the job possibility.

Keep written track of contacts, both primary and secondary. Time can pass quickly. Briefly noting the contact’s name, number, and what was said can help you plan your networking. You don’t want to forget that you’ve already called a contact and then call her

again. Also, keep track of how frequently you use a contact. You don’t want to overdo it.

Finally, always write a brief thank-you note to contacts for their time and help. Keep it short, writing only a paragraph or two on one page. You simply want to show them that you are grateful—and that you are responsible in terms of your follow-up ability.

Consult Your College or University Resources

Many, perhaps most, colleges and universities have some type of career placement service. You might contact yours to see what is available for job search recommendations in your area. Note, however, that only 2.2 percent of graduates found jobs through this route (G. H. Hull, Personal communication, April 9, 2000). Your social work department at school may also have job announcements. Many agencies seek-

ing employees send announcements directly to social work programs. Check to see if there is a job board where the program posts such notices. If you are hoping to move to another state following graduation, you might ask the head of your college social work program for the name of a colleague in that state. Often a phone call to a social work educator in the state of interest can elicit the necessary information as well as other useful tips.

Using New Technology

More and more information is becoming available via the Internet. Many colleges and universities have access to programs that identify available jobs in various areas. To investigate what is available on your campus, contact either your career counseling and placement services or your computer center for online information.

An example is the Internet social work job listing provided by George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in Saint Louis which is located at: <http://gwbweb.wustl.edu/sw/jobs/joblist.asp>. This listing includes positions for social workers holding either BSW or MSW degrees and represents a national database of openings. Another online source is the Social Work Job Bank accessible at: http://jobs.socialworkjobbank.com/c/search_results.cfm?site_id=122. The *New Social Worker* journal also has an online bulletin board listing available social work positions. The URL for this resource is: <http://www.socialworker.com/career.htm>. This site also includes some useful tips for locating suitable positions including *DOs and DON'Ts for Answering Employment Advertisements*. Because online information changes rapidly, it is best to use your web browser search function to locate job listings in social work.

Preparing Your Résumé

Unfortunately, preparing your first résumé is often a fairly miserable task. You must carefully scrutinize yourself and your experience. Then you must summarize this information using a virtually “perfect” format to present yourself as positively as possible. Because most potential employers first see your résumés as you, the résumé should always put your best foot forward. What is the “perfect” format for a

résumé? No one really knows. Each individual has an opinion about what should be in a résumé, how long it should be, what color is best, and what contents must be included. Therefore, our advice to you is to ignore anyone who tells you exactly how your résumé should look. The number-one rule of résumé writing is to make independent decisions about what to include. Every piece of information you include in your résumé—indeed, every period and comma—should be there for a clearly defined reason.

The other thing to keep in mind is what you think an employer is looking for in an employee. What do you think is important in an employee? Dependability? Neatness? Good writing skills? Your résumé should reflect to the best of your ability what you think employers are looking for.

We will review a wide range of issues concerning résumés, not necessarily in any prioritized order. Each is important in its own right. The main intent is to raise questions and to give you new ideas about how to present yourself. However, the final decision regarding what belongs in your résumé rests with you alone.

Content

What should a résumé contain? Obviously, it must give your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and cell phone number, if appropriate. Your name should be prominent, but it doesn't have to be two inches high. You don't want to look arrogant. Some people prefer to label the document “Résumé” or “Vita,” others do not. It is up to you. As a student, it is often appropriate to note both your temporary and your permanent addresses. Note that sometimes a job announcement will ask you to provide a “CV” or a “curriculum vita.” For our purposes, a CV, vita, and résumé are identical. Don't let the Latin fool you.

Levitt (2004) and others suggest incorporating several dimensions of content. The first is *education and skills*. This is usually incorporated early in the résumé, before work experience. The first thing employers will want to know is whether you are qualified for the job. Otherwise why should they waste time reading any farther? In the event that you have attended various colleges or universities over your social work career, you may or may not want to list them all. The rule of thumb is to list them only if there is some specific reason, such as having earned an associate's

degree. Otherwise, the school where you got your degree, the year the degree was obtained, and the fact that it is from a CSWE accredited social work program are the crucial points. Don't include high school information unless you have some specific reason, such as having received a major honor or scholarship. It is assumed that you graduated from high school in order to be accepted at college.

The skill dimension is another area to highlight. Is there anything in particular that you want to emphasize about your skills? What makes you special? Are you fluent in Spanish? This is an advantage when competing for jobs working with Hispanic-American populations. Or do you have a specialization in health education or recreation? Such skills might be useful in working with youth. Likewise, a women's studies minor might highlight your depth of understanding of women's issues, such as sexual assault or domestic violence. Agencies addressing such areas might look on this experience very positively. Are you particularly adept at using certain computer programs? Include any aspect of your prior accomplishments that may make you stand out and look special.

A second dimension of résumé content involves *certificates or licenses*. All states now have some kind of licensing or certification for social workers. However, not all states have licensing or certification at the baccalaureate level.

If you have other certificates or licenses, you can list them at this time. If you happen to have a broad range of background experience and are a certified alcohol and other drug counselor, you will probably want to include this fact.

The next content dimensions are *work history*, *related experience*, and *volunteer experience*. These three are addressed together because there are a number of ways to include this information. Which way depends on what is best for you. It is probably appropriate to put your social work–related experience first. You may have years of such experience, or it may consist primarily of your field placements. You can use a variety of headings for this content, including “Social work experience,” “Social work–related experience,” “Job experience,” “Paid work experience,” or the like. It is appropriate to include your field experience under the first two categories that emphasize the experience aspect. After all, that's exactly what your field experience was. However, do not imply that you were paid when you were not.

If you have substantial volunteer experience, you may choose to place this under a separate “Volunteer

experience” category in order to emphasize it. Or you may feel it is better to include it in your “social work–related experience” section. This is an arbitrary distinction. Think it through and decide what is best. Make sure you can articulate your reason for the placement.

Don't necessarily exclude other work experience, even if it's waiting on tables or flipping burgers at a fast-food restaurant. The fact that you worked is significant. It illustrates that you have assumed financial responsibility. If you financed some portion of your college career yourself, you may want to indicate that. What does this tell an employer? It implies that you are motivated and responsible. However, in jobs that are not very closely related to social work, you might not want to waste time and space on details.

If you have assumed job positions of significant responsibility, you may choose to elaborate upon them a bit. For example, handling budgets, supervising workers or volunteers, or planning activities all reflect skills related to those used in social work. You want to emphasize this fact. When thinking about your various areas of experience, it is helpful to write down specific dates, job title, correct name and address (probably city and state will suffice) of the place, primary responsibilities, and special skills required. You can use this rough draft as a beginning to summarize your experience in that particular setting.

Even if you have little or no work experience, emphasize your *other accomplishments*. For example, activities such as work on a school newspaper, service on a committee, active participation or leadership in the social work club or organization, winning a writing award, and any other participation and leadership in professional organizations, clubs, activities, and events that you can think of (see Highlight 16.5). Don't forget to add any community- or church-related activities that may be applicable to social work. Be creative and give yourself credit.

The seventh content dimension involves *publications and presentations*. Do not be scared off by this. Very few people (including many college instructors) have published much, if anything. However, if you have published something, include this fact. You might have had the opportunity to put together a community resource directory as an independent study or to work on writing an improved agency policy manual as part of your field placement requirements. Any such activity counts.

Presentations are also impressive. Have you devel-

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.5

■ *Usefulness of Professional Organizations*

You might ask yourself, “Why spend \$50 to \$180, or even more, to belong to professional organizations?” The primary social work professional organization is the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Belonging to the national organization automatically entitles you to membership in your respective state’s organization and its regional offices.

There are at least four good reasons to join NASW. First, membership in a professional organization lends you credibility (Simpson & Simpson, 1992). Most, if not all, established professions have an organization to which members can belong. Such membership helps to bolster your professional identity. It associates you with other social workers. It provides visibility for social work as a profession.

A second reason is the opportunities it offers for networking. You can choose to attend regional, state, or national meetings where you can talk to other professionals. You can find out what is going on in your specific area of interest and in the field generally. You can also attend seminars relevant to your practice. You can even find out about potential job openings.

A third incentive is receipt of professional information

and material. National NASW membership entitles you to a national newsletter (published almost monthly), state newsletters (when available), and the journal *Social Work*, which has the largest circulation in the social work field. This can help you keep current on issues and techniques. You also have access to group liability and life insurance that costs significantly less than it would if purchased individually.

A fourth purpose for joining NASW concerns being a part of its national lobbying efforts (Simpson & Simpson, 1992). It exerts influence on behalf of causes and political agendas concurrent with professional social work values.

Costs for student NASW membership is currently \$45 annually and remains low for your first two years after graduation.

There are numerous other professional organizations that you may choose to join. These include national groups emphasizing working with groups, administration, child care, suicide, sex education, and any number of other special areas. They can provide a useful source of information in a specific area of interest. Many social workers join those with which they most identify. Virtually all have membership fees.

oped some minor expertise or interest and presented a training session to a class? Or were you able to put on an in-service training session at your agency? Even if you were not the only staff member participating in the presentation, you can still credit yourself for your involvement. Writing for agency newsletters is also significant. Writing is such a major part of social work practice that any evidence you can provide of competence in this area is relevant.

Other Possibilities

You may choose to include several other content areas in your résumé. Some people suggest including a clearly stated *job objective* in addition to the other information discussed above (Levitt, 2004). Evaluate the pros and cons of this tactic. If you state a specific objective (for example, “Position working with children having a developmental disability in a group home setting”), you may limit your opportunity. A potential employer with an opening that does not

exactly fit this objective may automatically eliminate you. If you state a very general objective (“Gain a professional social work position”), what good is it? Isn’t this fact assumed? In this case a potential employer may feel your interest is not specific enough to fit into her particular agency.

Later we will discuss how to tailor a cover letter to include a job objective related to a specific agency. The additional inclusion of a job objective in your résumé may then be unnecessary. Think about it. It is up to you.

Another suggestion sometimes made for content to be included in a résumé concerns *personal interests* and *hobbies*. We think this is a bit on the adding-useless-fluff side. However, a student once gave the rationale that such information might help a potential employer, especially one with poor interviewing skills, move on with the conversation in the interview. Another student indicated that her father had once gotten a good job mainly because he had cited on his résumé that he was a recreational pilot. The

employer, also a recreational pilot, found that he had so much in common with the student's father that he gave him the job. Of course, the father was basically qualified for the job and had relevant work experience. But probably, so did other applicants. This subjective information pushed the employer's decision-making discretion over the edge into an almost immediate hire.

Some people include additional *personal information* in their résumés. For example, they might indicate that they're married or single. If you choose to do so, make certain that you have a clear reason why. A problem with including subjective, non-work-related content is that you may strike a potential employer's negative biases. Remember how much personal discretion an employer is allowed. You neither know of nor can control an employer's personal biases.

An employer might interpret a single female applicant as not being very stable. Who knows, she might run off and get married within six months. Granted, the latter is a very unfair, inappropriate, unwarranted response. However, you have no control over such biases. Or the employer might view a married female as one who will devote most of her time and energy to her husband and family, not to her job. Perhaps she will refuse to work nights if she can't get a baby-sitter. These biases are also unfair. However, once again, whenever you include subjective information, you run the risk of striking someone's negative biases. Such biases have nothing to do with your actual ability to do the job. Legally, employers are not supposed to ask you anything personal that is not clearly work-related. (Highlight 16.9 at the end of this chapter identifies a range of illegal questions that an interviewer might ask and suggests potential responses and their consequences.)

You might choose to include your date of birth on your résumé. Positively, this provides your employer with a frame of reference regarding how you have spent your time. Negatively, it might strike an employer's age bias. Maybe you're too young. Maybe you're too old. We have seen résumés that included applicant's height and weight. Why?

Another student brought in an example of a résumé done in a folder format with the actual résumé enclosed in a matching outside folder. The paper was parchment and the type was set in gold leaf. This student said her mother hired the individual for a sales position immediately upon receipt of the

résumé. That particular résumé was exceptionally impressive.

Be aware, however, that artwork or fancy folders may "turn off" prospective employers. You never know when you might hit an employer's negative bias. Even something you feel is positively innocuous can offend or annoy a potential employer. This is not fair, but true. Once a male student placed the words, "Every man in his place can perform miracles. The primary duty is to put all energy into it," right below his name on his résumé. To some people this sounds fine, like he's an energetic kind of guy. However, others immediately focus on the masculine emphasis of "every *man* in his place." What might this convey to some people about the applicant's potential sexist bias?

Personal information that you might consider including on a résumé is "Health: excellent," if that is, indeed, the case. It implies that you are not likely to take many sick days, which is positive.

There are almost endless categories of information you may choose to include in your résumé. If you want to, for brevity's sake you can combine categories that have little or nothing to do with each other. You might have a topical heading, following information about your education, entitled "Honors and Scholarships." These two do not necessarily have anything to do with each other. However, they all relate to educational experience. It saves valuable space to group them together instead of citing them separately.

References

Some résumés include *current references*. Others do not. An advantage of inclusion is that employers have the information right in front of them. If rushed, they can make a quick call to references cited. If they know any of them, they may associate their positive feelings about them with you. However, if you anticipate your references getting dozens of annoying calls as a result, then maybe you shouldn't include them.

One advantage of not including reference information is a shorter résumé. If you choose not to include such information, you should always bring a copy of your references along to an employment interview. At the end of the résumé where references are typically cited, always include a statement such as "References available upon request." This alerts

the employer to the fact that you do have some. Always ask your references for permission to include them as such.

How many references should you include? The most typical number appears to be three. Sometimes public regulations require the inclusion of three references. However, you might include as many as five or six with the rationale that you are not “hard up” for references.

Always include a reference’s full name, degree (if appropriate), full agency address including zip code, and full telephone number including area code. You may also want to include your reference’s job title. This helps the employer know whom he or she will be contacting. Make sure all the information is accurate. You don’t want to offend either references or employers by making a mistake.

Whom should you select as your references? Well, logically, who do you think would have the most credibility from a social work employer’s point of view? Probably social work references are the most valuable. Perhaps your field instructor would write you a good one. Social work faculty are other potential references. Have you worked especially closely with any of your instructors? Have they gained a special appreciation for your abilities and skills?

Employment references are also appropriate. Good work skills such as responsibility, dependability, decision making, and the like apply to virtually all work settings, including social work ones. Professional references carry more credence than do personal ones. A good employment reference from Ms. Hardibar carries more weight than one from Auntie Hildegard or Uncle Morgan. In any case, a good reference assumes more importance than a bad one. It’s better to include a positive personal reference than even a mildly negative social work one. Likewise, a detailed reference from a less “important” person who knows you extremely well is probably more effective than a vague, saying-not-much-of-anything reference from someone very important.

A note about prior supervisors: Do not feel obligated to list all of them as references. Supervisors come and go. No employer would expect to contact each and every one. Cite only your best. In the event that you would like a reference from a certain job or agency, but you didn’t get along well with your supervisor there, this is not a problem. Simply ask another staff or colleague to write the reference for you. Once again, it is impossible for you or potential

employers to keep track of the career paths of all of your prior supervisors. Other staff who know you and your performance will suffice. The bottom line, once again, is to choose each of your references for a designated reason. What can each say about you that will make you look as good as possible to potential employers?

Some people send copies of reference letters along with their résumé and cover letter. An advantage of this is that the reference information is readily available to the potential employer. Another advantage may be that it makes you look thorough and conscientious. If you send copies of letters, make sure your reference has given you permission to do so. Also, make certain that you state in your cover letter something like: “Please feel free to contact my references for verification and further information.” You don’t want to give the impression that you’ve sent forgeries.

Length

How long should a résumé be? Some administrators prefer résumés no longer than one page. Other employers appreciate more detail. You can use your résumé to indicate to your employer how conscientious you are. You can use specific concepts to illustrate good communications skills and incorporate professional terms (even jargon, if you will) to emphasize your involvement with and commitment to the field.

It is important not to clutter a résumé with useless “fillers” that can only annoy potential employers. They are busy, too. If you choose to write a résumé longer than one page, make sure that it is organized, clear, and easy to wade through. Later, we will discuss how using capital letters and underlining or bolding can format your résumé for easy reading. You want the reader to find different types of content (for example, educational and job experience) easily and quickly.

We still haven’t answered the question of how long a résumé should be. That’s because it’s not important what we think. It is important what you think. Most résumés written by people new to the field seem to be one or two pages long. However, there are also excellent three- or four-page résumés written by students who gained substantial experience prior to returning to school for their social work degrees. You need to determine what will make you look your best.

Spacing

Allow ample space in margins and between entries. You want to provide white space so the information is clearly presented. On the one hand, your résumé should not look squished, but on the other, you should not waste any space.

Reverse Chronological Order

Always cite your educational and work experiences in reverse chronological order. Your employer wants to know what you have been doing most recently first. If you list an experience with which you are still involved, do not list a cut-off date (NASW Program Advancement Fund, n.d.). Rather, cite something like “May 1994 to present.” Locate dates so that they are easy to find. One common format is to place them along the left-hand side of the page with the respective experience immediately to the right. You should use both months and years.

Don’t Say Why You Left a Job

Never list on your résumé why you quit a job or left a place of employment. However, at a job interview be prepared to explain your reasons. Employers assume a wide range of reasons for leaving jobs. Almost everyone has left a job at one time or another for one reason or another. This is why you have references. They are supposed to explain the good things about your work performance.

Use Vibrant, Active Verbs

When discussing your job responsibilities, make them sound as exciting and relevant as possible. Try to use words like “developed,” “formulated,” “led,” “explained,” “ran,” or “counseled.” All of these words imply professional action. Highlight 16.2, which addresses the identification of your own competencies, offers additional examples of good words to use.

Use Parallel Structure

To facilitate the reader’s comprehension of the résumé, cite items in a similar manner. For example, you might state your job title and place of employ-

ment for a series of positions, each followed by a section labeled “Responsibilities” (see Figure 16.2). That portion of your résumé may read, “Responsibilities: Develop programming for youth; lead groups; counsel pregnant teens.” In this case each job description should have the same format. The word “responsibilities” should be capitalized and followed by a colon.

There is no need to use complete sentences in description of education, jobs, or duties. However, it is important to use parallel structure so that each section reads like the previous one.

Time Gaps

Some people have gaps of time when they did not work. Perhaps they were going to school. Maybe they stayed home to raise children. They may even have been involved in some treatment experience. It is difficult to incorporate such content into a résumé structure. Some people have included their time not working outside the home by stating that they were homemakers for the period of time involved. Some have described community activities participated in during this times, such as scout leadership or church involvement.

If you choose not to comment on any gaps you may have, be prepared to address them during the interview. You may also briefly explain gaps of time in your cover letter. At any rate, don’t worry about it. Many people, especially women with children, are outside the full-time work force for some period of time. If this is the case with you, it is not a problem. Stress your good points. Raising children requires time, attention, and assumption of serious responsibility. You may have learned effective child behavior management techniques. Frame your gaps, if you have them, within a positive perspective.

How Many Résumés?

A fairly common question involves whether to make one résumé or several slightly different ones. Should different résumés state different job objectives depending on the job you are applying for? Probably not. Completing a variety of résumés can become extremely confusing. Instead, you can use your cover letter to explain why you are as “perfect” as possible for the particular job.

FIGURE 16.2 ■ *Examples of Résumés*

Sample Résumé A

LYNN GWEENY

<p><i>Permanent Address</i> 1950 Rock Knoll Elvisville, Wisconsin 55894 Telephone: (747) 247-7526</p>	<p><i>Temporary Address</i> 515 Skid Road, Apt. #235 Happyville, Wisconsin 23584 Telephone: (313) 786-6357 LGweeney@coldmail.com</p>
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EDUCATION:
 May 2004 Bachelor of Social Work (Accredited Program)
 Improveyourself University, Happyville, Wisconsin

HONORS:
 Spring 2004 Dean's List

SOCIAL WORK AND RELATED EXPERIENCE:

January 2004 to Present	<p><u>Social Work Intern</u></p> Responsibilities: Counsel individuals and groups; assess resource needs; serve as liaison between community residents and resources; record case histories and progress notes.	<p><u>Justincase County Mental-Health Center</u> Porta Bella, Wisconsin</p>
June 2003 to December 2003	<p><u>Co-Coordinator</u> (Volunteer)</p> Responsibilities: Planned programming; ran support groups; assisted students in information retrieval; planned and administered budget.	<p><u>University Women's Center</u> Improveyourself University Happyville, Wisconsin</p>

EMPLOYMENT:

May 2003 to September 2003	<p><u>Waitress</u></p> Responsibilities: Entered data using Word, Wordperfect, and Excel; assisted in document preparation; filed; typed.	<p><u>HeeHaw Truck Stop</u> Countrywestern, Wisconsin</p>
May 2002 to September 2002	<p><u>Computer Assistant</u></p> Responsibilities: Entered data using Word, Wordperfect, and Excel; assisted in document preparation; filed; typed.	<p><u>Stellar Aeronautics</u> Havemercy, Wisconsin</p>

REFERENCES FURNISHED UPON REQUEST

Discussion of Résumés A and B

Résumés A and B reflect the same person's experiences. Note that Lynn Gweeny is a recent graduate with little experience. The intent of these documents is to illustrate that you can choose various ways of formatting your résumé. Résumé A includes both permanent and temporary addresses. Résumé B includes the permanent address only. The information on each résumé is provided under different headings. Résumé A begins with education and honors. Résumé B begins with objective and qualifications. Both honors and objective are optional items to include on a résumé. Depending on how you want to portray yourself, you may choose to include both, only one, or neither.

Work, social work, and volunteer experience are treated differently on each résumé. Résumé A clusters social work and volunteer experience together and employment separately. Résumé B, on the other hand, groups both social work and other work experience together. Volunteer experience is cited separately, thereby emphasizing it.

(continued)

FIGURE 16.2 ■ (continued)

Sample Résumé B

LYNN GWEENY
 1950 Rock Knoll
 Elvisville, WI 55894
 Telephone: (747) 247-7526
 LGweeny@coldmail.com

OBJECTIVE: Social work position counseling children and families.

QUALIFICATIONS: Bachelor of Social Work, Improveyourself University, Happyville, WI, 5/95.

EXPERIENCE: *Social Work Intern*, Justincase County Mental Health Center, Porta Bella, WI, 1/04 to present.

- Counseled individuals and groups;
- Assessed resource needs;
- Acted as liaison between community residents and resources;
- Recorded case histories and progress notes.

Waitress, HeeHaw Truck Stop, Countrywestern, WI, 5/03 to 9/03.

- Served food and communicated with customers.

Computer Assistant, Stellar Aeronautics, Havemercy, WI, 5/02 to 9/02.

- Entered data using Word, Wordperfect, and Excel;
- Assisted in document preparation;
- Typed and filed.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE: *Co-Coordinator*, University Women’s Center, Improveyourself University, Happyville, WI, 6/03 to 12/03.

- Planned programming;
- Ran support groups;
- Assisted students in information retrieval;
- Planned and administered budget.

REFERENCES:

Frank Bizarre, Ph.D. Associate Professor Social Work Program Improveyourself University Happyville, WI 54908 (747) 298-4333	Sheila Weber, MSW Supervisor Justincase County Mental Health Center Porta Bella, WI 52765 (747) 256-9860
Myrtle Bureaucrat Computer Analyst Stellar Aeronautics Havemercy, WI 57362 (747) 243-7987	

Résumé A indicates that references will be furnished upon request. Résumé B provides the references.

Both résumés attempt to demonstrate a balanced appearance. Both are, obviously, single-paged résumés. Résumé A uses a “responsibilities” format for describing work experiences. Résumé B uses a series of bullets below job titles and locations. You can choose any way you feel is best to format your résumé. The important thing is to be consistent throughout. In other words, don’t combine both the “responsibilities” and the bullet formats in the same résumé. That would be confusing and look disorganized.

Pay careful attention to detail. Even the way dates are illustrated differs between the two résumés. Résumé A spells the months and years out in full. They are listed consistently at the left-hand side of the page. Résumé B, on the other hand, abbreviates the dates to numbers (for example 5/03 for May 2003) and cites them consistently following the places of employment or receipt of degree.

FIGURE 16.2 ■ (continued)

Sample Résumé C

RÉSUMÉ

Name: **Notfarg Lluh** Telephone: Home: (714) 388-0506
 Office: (714) 638-2545
 Cell: (714) 168-9002

Address: 2732 N. Inferiora
 Autumnfield, NE 70856
 Notfarglluh@LOA.com

Formal Education:

Bachelor of Science, Social Work
 University of Nebraska, June, 1994

Master of Social Work
 Florida State University, May, 1995

Professional Experience:

December 2003 to present	<p><i>Social Work Supervisor I</i>, Cowotinam County Department of Social Service, Cowotinam, Nebraska.</p> <p>Responsible for supervision and direction of Foster Care Unit, Delinquency Rehabilitation Unit, Group Home Project, and Day Care licensing.</p>
May 2001 to December 2003	<p><i>Social Worker IV (Foster Home Coordinator)</i>, Cowotinam County Department of Social Service, Cowotinam County, Nebraska.</p> <p>Responsible for home finding, study and licensing.</p>
July 1999 to May 2001	<p><i>Group Home Director</i>, MGM Group Homes, Inc., Lazybeach, Florida.</p> <p>Responsible for staff supervision and scheduling, treatment plan- ning, case management, budgeting, and serving as community liaison.</p>

Discussion of Résumé C

Sample Résumé C reflects the background of a person obviously more experienced than the individual writing Résumés A and B. Notfarg Lluh has both a BSW and MSW. This résumé provides another example of how formats may differ. He includes more dimensions of content including grants, seminars attended, miscellaneous service, and professional memberships. He also includes five references, most of whom are from the agency where he is currently employed. Apparently, he decided that it was more important to have a longer résumé that provided greater detail. He could not include all the facts he wanted to if he tried to limit the format to a single page.

(continued)

FIGURE 16.2 ■ (continued)

Notfarg Lluh	
Page 2	
June 1995 to June 1999	<i>Social Worker I</i> , Children’s and Adolescent Units Southwestern State Hospital, Buffalo Chip, Nebraska. Responsible for providing direct social work service, both individual and group, for two units.
Grants	
1999	Independently wrote and presented successful Nebraska Institute of Mental Health grant proposal to establish and fund a group home for delinquent boys.
Seminars Attended (Recent):	
2003	Human Services Management Institute: Needs Assessment: Supervision Seminar; NASW National Conference
2001	The Dynamics of Childhood Sexuality; Adolescent Diagnostic and Treatment Issues; Total Quality Service; NASW National Conference
2000	Family Therapy in the 21st century; Quality through Accountability; Alcoholism and Adolescence
1999	Gangs in America; NASW National Conference
1998	Just Say No to Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll; NASW National Conference
Miscellaneous Community Service:	Member, Cowotnam City Council (elected), 2003 to present Member, Cowotnam Landmarks Commission, 2002 to present Member, Board of Directors, Comehome Refuge House, 2004 to present
Memberships in Professional Organizations:	National Association of Social Workers Academy of Certified Social Workers Delinquency Prevention Council of America

Note that his résumé indicates Notfarg received a promotion from Social Worker IV to Social Work Supervisor I. He emphasizes this difference even though both positions are in the same agency. Being promoted to a position with greater responsibility reflects the agency’s respect for Notfarg’s competence.

FIGURE 16.2 ■ (continued)

Notfarg Lluh
Page 3

References:

<p>Mary Poppins, MSW Director Cowotinam County Department of Social Service Cowotinam, Nebraska 43789 (714) 638-8990</p>	<p>Gene Yuss, MSW Unit Supervisor Foster Home Placement Cowotinam County Department of Social Service Cowotinam, Nebraska 42789 (714) 638-4982</p>
<p>Kari Meeback, MSW Social Work Supervisor I Cowotinam County Department of Social Service Cowotinam, Nebraska 43789 (714) 638-1135</p>	<p>Minnie Series, Ph.D. Executive Director MGM Group Homes, Inc. Lazybeach, Florida 34879 (908) 353-5713</p>

Harry Kari
Social Worker
Cowotinam County
Department of Social Service
Cowotinam, Nebraska 43789
(714) 638-2321

Another divergent feature from the other two résumés is the fact that Notfarg labels the résumé right at the top. Also note that at the tops of later pages he indicates both his name and the résumé page number. An employer who misplaces pages can easily replace the pages where they belong.

Paper and Printing

In the past, conscientious résumé writers would take their résumés to a professional to have the résumés formatted. This is no longer necessary. Computers and laser printers do excellent jobs. Additionally, formatting your own résumé allows you to make ongoing changes and keep the résumé current. The danger of having others design and prepare your résumé is that they will probably not understand social work jargon and values. Social work résumés can vary significantly from other business résumés. The moral here is to be wary of strong suggestions from your business major friends (such as “A résumé *must* be one page long.”).

You probably should purchase some good quality paper. This will help to make your résumé stand out among the scores of papers on an employer’s desk. Select a color you feel comfortable with. Our favorite is buff. It’s neutral enough to avoid being offensive, yet different enough to stand out amid white. Light blue, ivory, or light gray are other possibilities.

Be wary of excessively bright colors. If possible, print your cover letter on the same paper as your résumé. Matching envelopes are also impressive. If you have more than one sheet for your résumé, do not staple them together (Levitt, 2004). Never staple your cover letter to your résumé.

Do Not Make Mistakes

Do not make mistakes. This cannot be emphasized enough. If your résumé has a spelling error (when the résumé is supposed to be the ultimate reflection of your ability and near-perfection), what does that tell an employer about your writing ability and competence? Proofread your résumé very carefully, then ask others to read it and share their opinions. Remember, résumés with obvious errors may be discarded immediately.

Becoming Outdated

A résumé can easily, and most often does, become outdated the day after you complete it. This is to be expected. Inevitably, you will win some award, attend an exciting in-service training session, or assume some new work responsibility that you feel you must include in the résumé. You might choose to put the date of your résumé at the top. This will

help orient you and your potential employer to when it was written and what time has elapsed since it was written.

Application Cover Letter

Always send a cover letter with your application. The cover letter tailors you and your experience to fit the particular job you’re applying for and also emphasizes your greatest strengths.

NASW (NASW Program Advancement Fund, n.d.) makes a number of suggestions for writing good cover letters. First, *write only one page*. A cover letter’s purpose is to grasp your potential employer’s attention. It should be short and to the point. Second, *each cover letter should be individualized for a particular job* at a specific agency. Another purpose of a cover letter is to individualize and personalize your more generic résumé.

Third, *try to establish “a picture frame” effect* (p. 22). The letter should look good. Type should be centered with wide margins. Fourth, *use straightforward, understandable language* in fairly simple, direct sentences. Make certain what you say is grammatically sound. Fifth, *let your letter reflect your individual personality*. This is tricky. On the one hand, the letter should clearly be yours and only yours. On the other, be careful to “avoid being too aggressive, overbearing, cute, or humorous” (p. 22). It probably is better to err on the conservative side to avoid offending the reader.

Sixth, make sure you *sign the letter above your printed name*. Leave adequate space for your signature. Seventh, it is best to *address a letter to a specific individual*, perhaps the supervisor or department head doing the hiring, or the personnel director, if there is one. You can often call and find this out. Such personalization indicates that you expended the time and effort to find out to whom the letter should be sent or, at least, read the ad accurately. It is best to use the title preferred by the individual such as Ms., Mrs., Dr., Pastor. If you cannot find this information, you can address the letter “Dear Sir” or “Madam” followed by a colon.

Eighth, *get feedback from other people about your cover letter*. Is it worded as concisely as possible? Does it get your points across clearly? Ninth, *never send a cover letter out without keeping a copy*. In the event the employer calls you and refers to the letter,

which might well be the case, you need to know exactly what you said. You do not want to look like an idiot.

Contents

NASW (NASW Program Advancement Fund, n.d.) recommends using four paragraphs in your cover letter. The first should explain why you are sending the letter in the first place. Are you responding to an ad in the Sunday *Benjamin Key*? Or were you referred by a colleague at another agency? Specify what job you're interested in. Make it clear how you found out about the job. For example, you might write something like: "In response to the advertisement for a Social Worker published in the October 20, 2004, *Jacksonville Journal*, I would like to submit my application for your consideration." (Please note that these phrases are simply examples for you to think about. These are not necessarily the best ways to present yourself and get your points across. Their intent is to stimulate your ideas about how to say what you want.) Or you might state: "Dr. Bill Ding, Director of County Social Services, has indicated to me that you have a social worker position available in your agency. My strong interest in this position has prompted me to apply."

The second paragraph should explain why you're perfect or almost perfect for the job. Briefly and succinctly, what interests, accomplishments, and qualities do you have that qualify you for this particular job? For instance, you might say "My undergraduate social work degree, volunteer experience, and strong interest in working with youth contribute to my qualifications for the position. Additionally, my elective coursework has focused in that area which is, by far, my preferred area of employment."

The third paragraph should refer to the fact that a résumé is enclosed. If you are also sending an application form or copies of reference letters, mention that they are enclosed. You might say something like: "Please refer to the enclosed résumé for further details. It identifies some of the specific skills I have mastered during my field and volunteer experiences. They include planning and running small groups, providing basic counseling to enhance clients' decision-making ability, making treatment recommendations, writing grants, and using a wide range of recording formats for accountability." For the sake of brevity, you may choose to combine the

second and third paragraphs into one. (This is our personal preference.)

The last paragraph should re-emphasize your interest in the position. Additionally, thank the reader for her or his time, consideration, or attention. There is a range of opinion regarding what else should be said in this final paragraph. Some suggest expressing avid enthusiasm by indicating that you would like to have an interview or would appreciate it if the employer would call you. You might indicate when you will be in town and available for an interview. On the other hand, a potential employer might view this as being pushy. Decide what sounds right to you, and say it.

For example, your closing paragraph may resemble the following: "Thank you so much for your time and attention. I would welcome the opportunity to interview with you. I eagerly look forward to hearing from you."

Another closing might be: "I would like very much to discuss with you how my skills could contribute to your agency and your clients. The skills you require seem to match my professional strengths and personal qualities. I would be happy to schedule an interview with you at your convenience. Thank you for your consideration."

Formatting the Letter

Your letter of application and résumé are the first contacts an agency administrator will have with you. Make them pay off. Cover letters should always be typed, preferably on the same quality and color of paper used for the résumé. The letter should not exceed one page in length.

Using block style for your letter is often easiest. Cover Letter 1 in Highlight 16.6 reflects this style. You position the date at least one inch down from the top of the paper (more if the letter is short). After the date, leave at least five spaces before the name, title, name of agency, and agency address. All sentences can begin at the left margin with no indenting required. Single-space, and leave a blank line between paragraphs.

Always include your full address in the letter. You want the employer to be able to reach you quickly and easily. You might also want to include your telephone number and e-mail address, as Cover Letter 1 illustrates, even though it is already included in your résumé. You can use any of a number of closing

HIGHLIGHT 16.6
Cover Letter 1

May 28, 2004

Russ T. Hinge
 Social Services Director
 Kneebend County Social Services
 Kneebend, NY 98576

Dear Mr. Hinge:

I am responding to the advertisement for Case Manager published in the *Kneebend News* on May 17, 2004.

As my enclosed résumé reflects, I am well qualified for the position. I received my social work degree from an accredited program and have applied for state licensure, which should be forthcoming. My field practicum at a child welfare agency has provided me with experience in case management. My work experience includes serving as care counselor for adult clients who have a mental illness in a group home setting. My volunteer experiences include visiting elderly adults living in health-care settings. These experiences have provided me with a well-rounded exposure to a variety of social service settings that, I believe, have prepared me well for the case management position.

Thank you very much for your attention. I hope to be hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ernest Endeavor
 4995 Truthful Avenue
 Wholesome, Massachusetts 48069

Telephone: (401) 859-4833
 E-mail: Ernestend@ma.net

salutations. These include “Sincerely,” “Very sincerely,” “Truly yours,” or “Very truly yours.” It seems that people select the one they like the best and then use it pretty consistently thereafter.

Highlight 16.7 is Cover Letter 2, which contains several differences from Cover Letter 1. One variation is placement of the letter’s date, the applicant’s address, the closing salutation, and signature. All of these are indented to the right. They should align themselves approximately with the right-hand margin.

Another difference between Cover Letters 1 and 2 is that the latter incorporates four instead of three paragraphs. Cover Letter 2’s second paragraph elaborates upon some personal qualities, whereas the third paragraph focuses on information included in the résumé. Cover Letter 1 combines information about assets and the résumé into only one paragraph and includes less content about personal characteristics.

The “(C94 *Penguin Press*)” in Cover Letter 2’s first sentence is the ad’s reference number. Newspapers

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.7

■ Cover Letter 2

84 Hot Street, Apartment #1
Boiling, New Mexico 48300
January 13, 2005

The Penguin Press
Box 8888
Frigid, Alaska 68349

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is in response to the advertisement published in your January 1 edition for the position of Social Work Counselor (C94 *Penguin Press*).

My primary interest and career goal is to work with people who have developmental disabilities. I am hardworking and committed to enhancing people's well-being. I am open to constructive criticism and consistently strive to improve my skills. My intent is to become the best social worker I can be.

My résumé is enclosed. It reflects my accomplishments, which include a field internship at a sheltered workshop; volunteer experience with the Special Olympics; and a concentration of coursework related to developmental disability. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you if my credentials match those of the person you seek.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Burr Bank

Enclosure

usually use some kind of reference code so that they know to which blind ad an applicant is referring. A blind ad is one where the employer does not provide the agency's name and contact information, perhaps because the employer prefers to review applications anonymously first and select the best qualified candidates. Otherwise, if applicants know whom to contact about the job, they may inundate the employer with phone calls and letters.

Cover Letter 2 contains the word "Enclosure" at the bottom left. This refers to the enclosed résumé. You can also use the terms "Encl." or "Enclosure: Résumé" to reflect this. However, because you have already stated in the letter's body that the résumé is

enclosed, this is not absolutely necessary. Nonetheless, many people include it.

Make No Errors

Proofread the letter carefully. An employer will likely throw out any letter with typing, spelling, or grammatical errors. If you make mistakes in your letter now, what can an employer expect later when you are on the job? Then you will be carrying a full case-load and trying to get such documents as court reports, social histories, and referral letters acceptably completed on time.

The Job Interview

Sooner or later one of your applications will result in an invitation for a job interview. This is often a bit scary, even for the person who has successfully completed a 450-hour field placement or has additional social work experience.

Find Out about the Agency

To prepare for the interview, it is often helpful to learn something about the community and the agency. Sometimes, your social work faculty can provide this information. At other times you will need to consult the telephone book and online sources and look up information about the city. Or you can consult government documents listing such information as population, ethnic diversity, and type of government. Try to find out what you can about the agency. What kind of clientele does it serve? What specific services does it provide?

Prepare Questions to Ask

Knowing some specific information about an agency can form a foundation for asking more thoughtful and impressive questions during an interview. Always think of questions you can ask and prepare a list. Remember that the interview process is a two-way street. The employer is finding out whether you are right for the agency, but you are also finding out whether the agency is right for you.

Questions could include duties/responsibilities of the position, the date the agency would like the new employee to start, what other agencies you might have contact with on the job, and characteristics of the client population.

Prepare for Potential Questions

Anticipate questions that might be asked and rehearse your responses. Highlight 16.8 illustrates some typical questions you can expect that an employer might ask. Many of the questions posed in Highlight 16.8 are tough, really tough. That's why it's important for you to give them serious consideration ahead of time. You should sound strong and definitive and yet frame answers that sound as positive as possible. Let's consider potential answers. For example, how might you respond when asked what your major

weaknesses are? Replying that you have none is probably not the truth. What about sharing a weakness that can also be viewed in a positive light? You might say something like, "I tend to take my job too seriously" or, "I have some trouble letting go of cases I really care about." Both imply weaknesses in the context of a strong willingness to work and do an effective job.

Another question asks how long you think you will remain with the agency. How can you answer this honestly, yet positively? You might say something like, "That's a tough question because it's hard to see into the future. I would like to remain with your agency as long as I feel the work is challenging and I am doing a good job."

A related question can be posed to applicants who have a BSW about whether and, subsequently, when they plan to return to graduate school for their MSW. You might reply, "I would be committed to working here in this position for several years. Yes, at some point I would like to go back to school. However, I want to get firmly established in the field first. Additionally, there's always the possibility of going back part-time."

Other questions involve prior problems in supervision or being let go from some job position. Never lie. You will destroy your credibility forever. The social work community is a relatively small one. Word spreads. However, you can couch what you say in as positive a light as possible. For example, you might respond, "I had difficulties with one supervisor. I was young and inexperienced. At that point in my career, I needed more structured supervision than I do now. I didn't feel he could provide the help I needed."

Another response concerning a prior difficulty with a supervisor might concern that supervisor's lack of appropriate commitment to professional ethics, which subsequently placed you in a precarious position. Or perhaps you feel you were not given sufficient credit for the work you did. Generally, it is best not to criticize former supervisors or employers severely. Rather, try to be honest, objective, and as specific as possible. Explain your side of the story in enough objective detail to make your perspective clear to the interviewer. Avoid negative emotional outbursts that make you sound resentful or whining. The most effective approach is to evaluate the supervisor's side of the story also. What factors influenced her to operate as she did? In this way, you can show an interviewer that you are not only capable of ana-

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.8

■ *Common Interview Questions*

1. We would like to get to know you a little better. Could you tell us about yourself?
2. What made you choose social work as a major? Who influenced you the most in choosing social work and in continuing in the major?
3. What interests you about this agency and position?
4. What are your major strengths? What are your major weaknesses?
5. With what type of clients would you like to work?
6. Are there any clients with whom you may have difficulty working?
7. What makes you the best candidate for this position?
8. What is your definition of a "family system"?
9. What kind of information would you collect on a new case?
10. What can you bring to this agency?
11. What are your long-term goals?
12. How will you work under pressure?
13. How do you deal with criticism?
14. What experiences have you had that might help you in our agency?
15. With what type of supervisor do you work best?
16. What do you do to unwind?
17. What motivates you the most?
18. What do you tend to have the most difficulty with on the job?
19. What salary range are you looking for?
20. What type of work environment makes you feel the most at ease?
21. Are you planning to stay in social work?
22. (To BSWS) Are you planning to go to graduate school?
23. Have you ever done a job ineffectively?
24. Are you willing to work overtime?
25. Do you mind being on call?
26. How long do you think you would remain with this agency?
27. What type of decisions are most difficult for you?
28. What do you expect to be doing five years from now?
29. What do you know about our agency?
30. What personal characteristics do you think are important in social work?
31. Do you feel you did as well in college as you could have? Why or why not?
32. Have you ever had trouble getting along with people, such as other students or faculty?
33. How would you define the word "cooperation"?
34. What type of work interests you the most?
35. Do you think employers should consider grades important? Why or why not?
36. What have you done that demonstrates initiative?
37. Describe your time-management skills.
38. How do you prioritize your workload?
39. What frustrates you the most?
40. In what ways has or hasn't a prior supervisor of yours assisted in your skill development?
41. How do you react to being evaluated?
42. Why should you be hired for this position instead of other candidates?
43. What do you think you could do positively for this agency?
44. What has been your worst difficulty with a prior supervisor? Explain.
45. Explain why you quit or were let go from prior jobs.

lyzing such an agency situation, but have also learned from your experience and will probably handle a similar one better the next time. Although less frequently than previously, you may also encounter questions that are illegal under current law. Highlight 16.9 discusses this situation in more depth.

An exceptionally difficult issue to confront during the interview is salary. If possible, research ahead of time what similar positions in that geographical location pay. Have some figures established in your mind. It is perfectly appropriate to address salary

during the interview. Usually, if the interviewer does not bring it up, you should do so toward the end of the interview. If you bring it up too early, the interviewer may get the impression that money is all you're concerned about. If the interviewer indicates that the amount you expect is totally beyond reason, then perhaps this is not the job position for you. On the other hand, you may be willing to give up some salary for what you consider a super job. One other suggestion is to negotiate nonsalary benefits. How about two weeks of vacation the first year instead of

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.9

■ *What If They Ask Illegal Questions?*

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of race, gender, age, national origin, religion, or pregnancy. Additionally, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 bars discrimination in pay because of gender.

To concur with these rights, a range of questions potentially asked by employers are illegal. They are considered too personal and are inappropriate for use in hiring decisions. Forbidden areas include questions about marital status, pregnancy, religion, skin color and its relationship to race, religion or religious participation, criminal records, credit history, ancestry, personal characteristics such as weight, organizational memberships, children, and whom you live with (Berk, 1990). What if the interviewer asks them anyway? You have the right to file a claim against the agency through the Federal Equal Opportunity Employment Commission or your state's Department of Human Rights. You can even file a civil suit if you want to. However, what do you think your chances are of that agency hiring you if it labels you a troublemaker?

What if an interviewer says, "I see you're wearing an engagement ring. Does that mean you'll be relocating with your fiancé if he gets a job elsewhere?" What are your options? Remember, legally you have the right to refuse to answer such a question. You might say any of the following:

"Excuse me—that question is illegal and I refuse to answer it."

"I'm happy to answer your questions, but I don't see that my personal life has anything to do with my potential job performance."

"I can understand that you would be concerned about whether getting married might affect my staying with the job. Believe me, my work and career are very important to both me and my fiancé. If I get this job, I am committed to staying with it."

How do you think an interviewer would respond to each statement? You have the right to make any of them. It is up to you. If you feel the question is so gross or rude that it is inexcusable, you really might want to tell the interviewer so. However, it is likely that if you offend the interviewer he will blackball you for the job. On the other hand, would you want to work for him or an agency that he works for? Note that the third response varies from the first two. This response answers the interviewer's question, even though it is illegal. The response first empathizes with the interviewer's perspective ("I can understand that you would be concerned") and then emphasizes the job's importance, implying that the job supersedes the personal variable in question (namely, moving after getting married because of a spouse's job elsewhere).

one? Or is it possible to negotiate a raise after your six-month probationary period?

Note that it may be possible when offered a job to negotiate vacation. Often, you must work for some period (such as a year) before you can take any vacation time at all. You might consider negotiating for a week or two the first year without pay. A year without any vacation is pretty rough.

Participating in the Interview

Show up ahead of time for the interview. Allow yourself extra time for emergencies or for a quick rest stop. If you show up late, what does that tell an employer about your punctuality and planning ability? Spend the waiting time looking through any available brochures or other material placed in the lobby or waiting room.

"What should I wear to an interview?" is a common question. It's generally best to dress in a relatively conservative fashion, which may mean that it's probably better to overdress than to underdress. However, this still takes careful thought. What type of position are you interviewing for? If it's in a hospital, you'd best dress quite formally. Hospital social workers tend to enhance their credibility by dressing more formally because medical settings are inherently very professional and formal. However, if you are interviewing for a counseling position in group home for adolescents with behavior problems, how much should you dress up? What if a lot of the job will involve recreational activities with the kids?

Two situations come to mind. Once an employer called for a reference for Carlene, a student. We were happy to provide a positive reference. However, one of the employer's questions struck us as strange. She

asked, “Does Carlene always dress up so much?” We tried to think back. Yes, she always looked nice and often wore matching scarves, earrings, and other accessories. We didn’t recall her ever coming to class in jeans. She always curled her long dark hair and wore attractive makeup. We tried to empathize with the employer and what she meant by this comment. We responded to the employer that we felt this student took pride in her appearance, but always appropriately.

The point here is that Carlene apparently struck one of this employer’s bias points. It appeared that this employer thought the student was inappropriately dressed. We surmised that the employer perceived informality as being more appropriate for that particular work setting.

On another occasion, we interviewed a candidate for an MSW position. The candidate appeared in an obviously expensive, tailored three-piece gray suit. The position was one of therapist for adolescents with serious behavioral problems in a day treatment center. The job involved “getting one’s hands dirty,” so to speak, and jumping in to join a lot of adolescent activity. We looked at this candidate with his perfectly clipped beard and his perfectly matching gray socks. (Have you ever tried to match two different grays?) We thought that he would never fit into our informal, active agency environment. He later got a job as a hospital social worker, where such attire was very appropriate. In essence, there is no perfect answer regarding what to wear. Dressing a little conservatively means you are probably less likely to strike someone’s negative biases. Men can wear suits, or possibly sports jackets.

There still appears to be pressure for women to wear skirts instead of slacks. The term “conservative” might imply dark or dull colorless suits and boring hairstyles. If you’re female, it’s up to you. Do you think plain is more positive? Should women try to look as much like men as possible? In this context? Think of a powerful female figure you admire and what she has worn in public situations. Have you seen her wear a dark gray three-piece suit with her hair austere pulled back in a bun? Pay attention to the colors of clothes and variety of hair styles she wears. Consider what is important to you, what you think a potential employer might expect, and what attire will make you feel the most competent and comfortable.

During the interview, you may wish to ask about any agency dress code (this may also defuse bias about what you wear to the interview). Some agen-

cies rely on the good judgment of their staff and others set written policies. An example of such a dress code is seen in Highlight 16.10.

When first meeting the interviewer, shake hands. Use a firm grip, but not a knuckle-crusher. Wait until you are asked to be seated.

Use the micro skills you have acquired during the interview. Be warm, empathic, and genuine. Maintain good, appropriate eye contact. Respond straightforwardly and as succinctly as possible. Make certain you give adequate answers and explanations, but don’t take forever to do so. If you don’t understand a question or if you think you haven’t given the information the interviewer desires, ask for clarification.

Many agencies give prospective employees situation questions describing a case and ask the applicant to indicate what she or he would do in such a situation. These questions may be designed to test the applicant’s values, knowledge base, or skills. In addition, some agencies will interview the applicant in front of a group of supervisors rather than in a one-on-one setting. This might be designed to test performance in stressful situations.

Expect the unexpected. In one interview the applicant was asked to describe the type of clients with whom he least liked to work. He replied that he did not like working with involuntary clients (those forced to come to see the social worker). A few minutes later he asked what the specific duties were of the position in question. “Juvenile probation agent” was the answer. He smiled sheepishly and said, “That’s the type of client I just said I didn’t like to work with, isn’t it? Well, I’m flexible.” His sense of humor in a difficult spot saved the interview. He was offered the position and became a highly respected social worker with juvenile offenders.

Highlight 16.11 contains a list of interview answers to avoid at all costs. None of them will enhance your job prospects.

It is appropriate to ask an interviewer approximately when candidates will be notified about hiring decisions. It is also completely appropriate to ask questions about the agency and the position. You want to present yourself as a person who can communicate well in a dialogue instead of only responding dully and methodically to the interviewer’s questions.

During the interview itself, let the interviewer know how motivated you are. A common reason given for not hiring someone is that he or she just didn’t look all that excited about or interested in the job.

■ HIGHLIGHT 16.10

■ *An Agency Dress Code*

Culbertson Community Mental Health Center, Inc.

Policy and Procedures

Title: Dress Code Policy

- Policy:** The dress code policy is designed to inform employees of the appropriate dress to portray a professional image.
- Purpose:** It is our goal to be extremely professional, friendly, and service-oriented. Our appearance and personal conduct influence the impressions that customers, visitors, and other staff members develop about our organization.
- Procedure:** Good judgment is expected in how we look. The guidelines listed will ensure that the employees of CCMHC portray a professional image.

Unacceptable Dress

1. Casual attire: Please note the only exception to this is the day that is designated for dress down. (Please see “Acceptable Dress for Casual Day” below.)
2. Spandex clothing or leggings
3. Tank tops, tee shirts, golf shirts, midriff blouses, or halter tops
4. Sweat suits
5. Opened-toed shoes or sandals, thongs
6. Sundresses without a jacket
7. Tennis shoes
8. More than two pairs of earrings per ear lobe; earrings larger than 2 inches in diameter or longer than the jaw line.
9. Shorts or split skirts that are above the knee

Acceptable Dress for Casual Day

1. Jeans without rips, holes, tears, and/or tatters
2. Golf shirts
3. Tennis shoes
4. Conservative casual wear

The unacceptable dress list is a general policy for the agency. Residential facility staff, by virtue of the programs and activities engaged in, may dress in a more relaxed fashion, but should use good judgment. Questions about dress should be addressed to their supervisor or Human Resources. **Please note: Residential staff, for their safety, should avoid wearing dangling earrings, ties, and long necklaces.**

Good hygiene and grooming is also expected. Staff are expected to use good judgment in the application of makeup, perfumes, and colognes. A noncompliance with the dress code by **any employee** will result in the employee being sent home to change their dress to comply with the code. The time away is not compensated.

Bringing extra copies of your résumé to an interview makes you look prepared. If you're asked a specific question about some of your experience, both you and the interviewer can refer to the résumé's content.

At the interview's conclusion, remember to thank the interviewer for his or her time and interest. You might add that it was a pleasure to meet him or her and that you look forward to hearing about the decision.

HIGHLIGHT 16.11

Answers You Should Never Give

On a lighter note, while discussing this chapter's content, a group of students came up with the following answers one should *never* give during a job interview:

- I smoke too much.
- I never get my paperwork in.
- I really hate dealing with people.
- I only went into social work because my parents made me.
- I'm in social work for the money.
- I start things but I never finish them.
- I really don't have any weaknesses.
- I have a cocaine addiction.

Note

The authors thank the Social Work Practice III, Section 2 students at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, spring semester, 1995, for providing these suggestions.

Follow-Up

Write a brief thank-you letter following your interview. This will probably make you stand out as an exceptionally conscientious job candidate. For example, a candidate for a BSW case manager position was interviewed. She had a year of substantial social work experience and was articulate and bright. However, she didn't seem all that excited about the job prospect. The interviewer remained ambivalent regarding whether or not to hire her. Suddenly, the agency received a mass of client referrals. State licensing requirements mandated that a social worker be hired immediately to meet client/social worker ratios. Ironically, the interviewer received a brief thank-you letter from that candidate the same day. He had neither the time nor the interest in doing more interviewing. He called her that day and asked if she could start the next. She, of course, responded that she had to give her current employer adequate notice but she accepted the offer.

As it turned out, she was an excellent worker. She was a dynamic, conscientious, ethical, hard-working person with a great sense of humor. As the inter-

viewer later found out, the reason she presented such a sluggish initial impression was that she had strep throat during the interview and could hardly talk.

A question interviewees commonly ask is whether to call the interviewer or agency within a week or two of the interview if they haven't yet heard whether or not they got the job. It seems only right that you find out whether you have been hired or not, especially if the interviewer doesn't get back to you by the time he says he will. You might wait a few days or a week. You can then call and indicate that you would appreciate information regarding whether or not you were hired. You might add that you are in the midst of interviewing and deciding which job you will take. If the agency indicates no decision has yet been made, it is up to you whether you feel comfortable calling again after another week or two passes. Do not call the agency every day.

In the event that you are not hired, you can ask the interviewer for feedback about your performance during the interview. However, do not be surprised if you receive only blank answers such as "the other candidate has more experience."

Postscript

Getting your first position is enormously gratifying. It reinforces your sense of self-worth, though you may be nervous about starting your first "real" social work job. The suggestions discussed above are intended to increase your chances of getting that opportunity to be nervous.

Leaving a Job

Despite your best efforts, your first job is always a gamble. Both you and the employer are hoping that the fit will be good among you, the agency, coworkers, and clients. Often it is, and your first job experience provides a solid basis upon which to build your career. Sometimes it is not. To quote John Lennon (1999) "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Sometimes you discover that the population you are working with is not as enjoyable as you imagined. Maybe the agency's ethical standards do not reflect your own. Perhaps you discover that you can't achieve the goals you set for yourself without changing positions. Of course, even

if the job has been great, other opportunities may come along. In any case, you must consider a few things before leaping headlong into your next adventure.

First, leaving a position in a professional manner merits a brief note here. When applying for a new position, you do not have to inform your current employer. Often, telling the employer creates a negative impression. She might think, “What’s the matter? Doesn’t he like working here? Doesn’t he like me? What doesn’t he like about me and my agency?” If you don’t get another job right away, you’ll have to live with hard feelings for quite a while.

Second, it is appropriate and ethical to conduct a job search with correspondence and telephone communication directed to your home instead of to your work address. This prevents colleagues and administrative staff from knowing about your plans to leave the agency.

Finally, once you accept a new position, notify your current employer immediately. This allows her to begin looking for your replacement as soon as possible. It is also appropriate to provide your employer with some formal written notice of when you will be leaving. Some agencies specify the amount of time

they prefer to have. Others leave it to your discretion. It might be two weeks or a month. But they do expect you to provide notice. Any notice less than two weeks can leave an agency “high and dry” for adequate service provision to your clients. If you do not give notice, you can potentially harm clients, and you can also damage your reputation in the professional community. Such action might be considered rude, selfish, or inconsiderate. It is amazing what a small world the social work community is.

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