

## Module 8: Tools for Survival

### Topic 4 Content: Getting a Job

#### Introduction



**Getting a Job**

A Cover Letter,  
Résumé, and the  
Interview

Click **NEXT** to begin.

**whro**  
EDUCATION

#### Getting a Job – A Cover Letter, Résumé, and the Interview

Now it is time to start building the tools that will help you get your desired position in your selected career field. Click NEXT to begin.

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### Topic 4 Content: Getting a Job

#### The Cover Letter

**The Cover Letter**

Why writing →

Why you →

Request Interview →

1234 Memory Lane  
Chesapeake, VA 23325  
Today's Date

Money Matters, Inc.  
Mr. Jim Doyle, Personnel Director  
972 Volvo Pkwy.  
Chesapeake, VA 23320

Dear Mr. Doyle:

Mrs. Shelley Beeler, my Finance teacher at Indian River High School, told me of the opening in your company for a management trainee. I would like to apply for that position.

I am currently enrolled in the business program at Indian River and have taken Finance, which included interviewing techniques, résumé preparation, and composing a letter of application. In addition to this training, I have excellent communication skills. I am proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. I am independent and motivated, which enables me to get the job done properly without supervision. As the enclosed résumé indicates, I have the training and experience needed to make a real contribution to your company.

May I have the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you and the extent to which I could contribute to the success of Money Matters, Inc.? You can telephone me in the evenings at (757) 555-1234.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Enclosure

A cover letter, or letter of application, is a personal business letter that introduces you to a potential employer. It is your opportunity to describe some of your qualifications and ask for an interview.

The first paragraph of the letter should tell the employer why you are writing. For which position would you like to apply? Be specific about how you heard of the opening in the company and state that you would like to be considered for the position. The second paragraph should address why they should choose you for the position. In this paragraph you will describe the qualities that will make you successful in the position you are trying to obtain. When describing these qualities, use key words from the job listing to make it seem that you are perfect for the job. The final paragraph should conclude the letter by asking for an interview at the company's earliest convenience. Be sure to list your contact information like your phone number and email address. Be sure that your email address is professional. If necessary, you can sign up for an email account that you plan to use solely for employment purposes. If your phone has voice mail or music that plays during connection, be sure that both of these are professional as well. No employer wants to listen to anything obnoxious while they wait for you to pick up the phone or when they leave a message. Worse yet, they may not leave a message!

When preparing the letter, be sure to use good-quality paper and a high-quality printer. You can buy résumé paper and matching envelopes at many different locations, including office supply stores. It may seem silly to you to spend money on special paper and envelopes, but it shows professionalism and it also indicates the extra effort you made in order to make yourself stand out from the competition. Use standard size paper (8.5 x 11) with no discolorations, stains, or bright colors. White, ivory, or light gray are good, professional color choices. Your letter should be only one page and it should have absolutely NO errors. This means grammatical errors as well as typographical errors. It is a good idea to let a friend or trusted adult proofread your letter as well.

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#### Parts of the Cover Letter

**Parts of the Cover Letter**

- Return Address
- Letter Address
- Salutation
- Body
- Close

[Access the sample cover letter in the Resources section.](#)

1234 Memory Lane  
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Sincerely,

Your Name

Enclosure

The parts of the letter include:

- the return address
- letter address
- salutation
- body of three or four paragraphs
- complimentary close

The return address includes your street address on the first line and your city, state, and zip code on the second line. The third line should be the current date.

The letter address is the name and address to whom you are writing. It is VERY important to find out the person's name and job title to whom you are writing because you want your letter to end up in the hands of the person who does the hiring not in some pile waiting to be sent to the right person.

The salutation is the greeting of the letter. For example: Dear Mr. Smith. Do not use "To Whom It May Concern" or "Ladies and Gentlemen." Use the specific name of the individual who will be looking at the résumés and possibly doing the hiring for the position. Don't address the letter using a first name because that is too personal.

The body of the letter should be three or four paragraphs as discussed previously. If you have a lot of qualifications, you may need two paragraphs to discuss why the company should select you for the position. Be sure to mention that you are enclosing a copy of your résumé.

The complimentary close is a courteous word or phrase that is used to end the letter. An example is Sincerely. Cordially is used frequently as well. It is best not to use Sincerely yours, Cordially yours, or Very truly yours because they are, again, too personal. After the complimentary close is your typed name. Be sure to leave room for your signature between the complimentary close and your typed name. An enclosure notation after your typed name is a way to remind yourself to

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include your résumé with the cover letter and a signal to the potential employer that your résumé is in the envelope with your letter.

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#### Your Résumé



**Your Résumé**

- Work Experience
- Education
- Abilities
- Interests
- Contact Information
- References

Your résumé describes your work experience, education, abilities, interests, and contact information for people who can attest to your work ethic and character. There is no specific format for a résumé, but there are some general guidelines for preparing your résumé. Many word processing packages have templates available for you to use when preparing your résumé. You can also find lots of information on the Internet regarding résumés. Some websites have résumé builder programs to help you create your résumé. Many of these sites also have links where you can pay someone to create your résumé. In addition most career sites let you post your résumé on their site so that employers can search them for potential employees. Be careful with these sites and make sure that your private information is protected before posting.

Although a résumé doesn't have a specific format to follow, there are several guidelines that you should follow when preparing your résumé.

Your résumé should be only one page long. Interviewers do not have the time or the desire to read your autobiography. Keep it short, simple, and relevant to the position you are trying to get. Use short phrases, not complete sentences for your information. Don't put periods at the end of the phrases because they are not complete sentences. Use your high school information. Don't go back to middle school activities or achievements.

Include all of the relevant information for the position for which you are applying. As we talked about earlier in the cover letter, use key words from the job listing to make it appear as though you are the perfect fit for that opening.

Although there is not specific format, you want to make sure your résumé is attractive, professional-looking, and easy to read. The most important information should go in the top third of the page. Information should be listed most recent first, then work backwards by date. This is called reverse chronological order. It focuses on the things you are doing now.

Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! There should be NO mistakes on your résumé. This is your chance to showcase your skills and achievements. An error on the document makes it appear as

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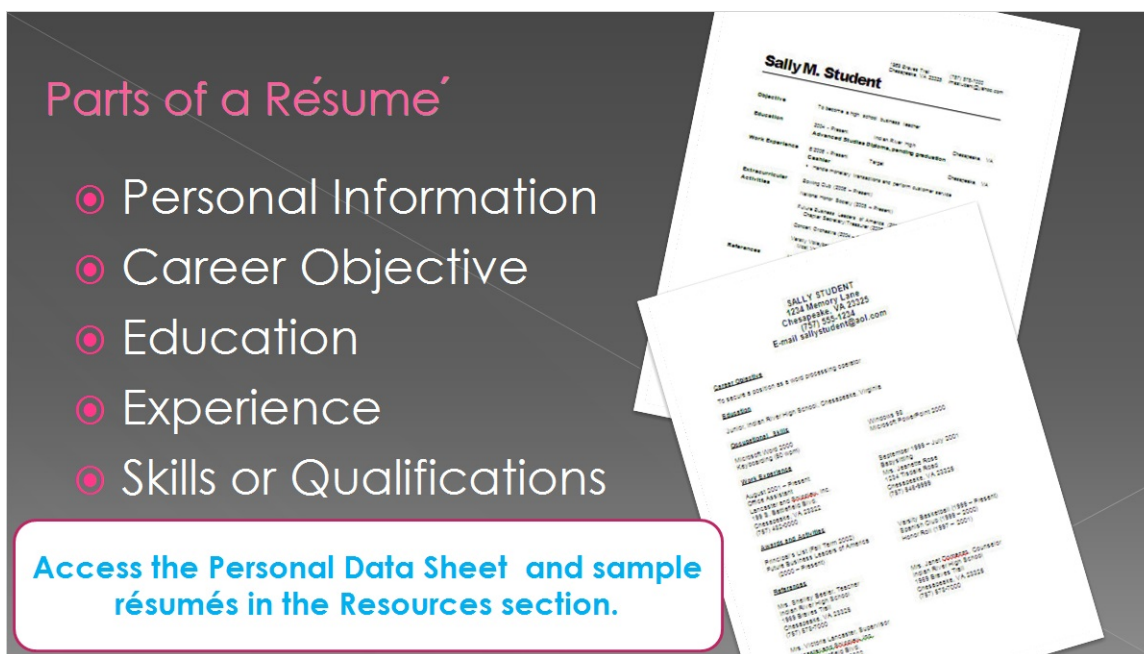
though you are sloppy or just careless. No one wants to hire someone who doesn't take the time to make sure their work is correct.

Use résumé paper of standard size (8.5" x 11") in a professional color. Use a high-quality printer to print several copies.

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#### Parts of a Résumé



**Parts of a Résumé**

- Personal Information
- Career Objective
- Education
- Experience
- Skills or Qualifications

Access the Personal Data Sheet and sample résumés in the Resources section.

There are several types of résumés, but as a high school graduate, you will most likely start with the entry-level résumé. The entry-level résumé has several parts.

The first section should include your personal information like your full name—not your nickname, address, phone number with area code, and email address—make sure it is professional.

The next section is your career objective. This is just a short, specific statement telling what position you would like to obtain—your career goal. It should not be a complete sentence. It is just a statement of what career you intend to pursue. For example: To obtain a position as an architect – NOT – I want to be a successful architect. Remember, short phrases not complete sentences. Also, everyone wants to be successful so the adjective is unnecessary.

Education is the next section. You will need to list all high schools and post-high schools that you have attended, starting with the most recent then working backwards. This section may also include your major area of study, if you have one. In high school, you probably don't have a major area of study. However, if you have taken almost every business class offered at your school, that could be considered a major area of study. The education section can also include your grade point average, scholastic honors, and specific courses you have taken that apply to the job opening.

In the Experience section, you should list jobs you have had – paid and unpaid, like volunteering. Include the name and address of your employer, your job title, your duties, the length of time you worked there, and any awards you received while there. Yes, babysitting or child care counts as work experience. When people trust you to take care of their children, they are putting a lot of faith in you.

Skills or Additional Qualifications should be next. You can list any special equipment you can operate, software you know well, foreign languages you speak, and even any awards you received if you don't put them in other sections of the résumé. Special equipment means things you have had training on – not the copy machine.



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Finally, you will want to have a References section. References are people who have known you for at least a year and can provide information about your skills, character, achievements, and work ethic. They should be over eighteen and not related to you. The best references are your teachers, club or sports sponsors, school counselors, current or former employers, and adults in business. Always ask permission first. You want to make sure the person is willing and able to give you a good recommendation. You also want to give the reference a little bit of notice so he or she can be prepared when they are contacted for your information.

For practice getting ready to create your résumé. Download the Personal Data Sheet so that you can gather your information for writing your own résumé. You can also view the two sample résumés.



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#### The Interview



An interview is a meeting with a potential employer to discuss your qualifications. An interview can be conducted in a variety of ways, including face-to-face meetings, phone conversations, or online web conferences. Have you ever heard the impression, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”? Although we want a potential employer to judge us solely based on our qualifications for the position, in reality, first impressions really do count and you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Your appearance and how you conduct yourself in an interview really do make an impression. It is important that you follow some guidelines when getting ready for and participating in an interview. Here are some things that you can do to help you make a good impression on an interview:

Find out the interviewer’s name if possible. This will give you the opportunity to introduce yourself using the interviewer’s name when you arrive. This shows that you have taken the time to find out the name of your interviewer. Using a person’s name helps make them more comfortable and helps to put them at ease.

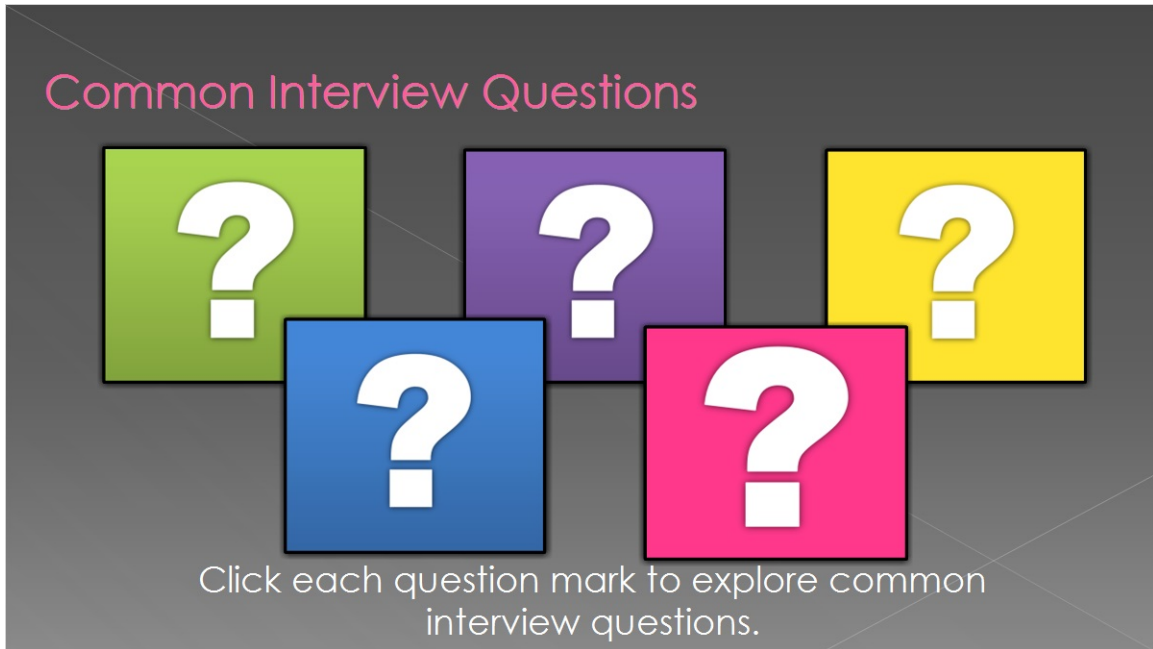
Review your résumé so that it will be fresh in your mind.

Get your clothing ready the night before. If you find out in the morning that your shirt needs to be ironed, you will add a lot of stress to your morning, which will probably be very evident during the interview. What to wear will be discussed a little later.

Be prepared to answer commonly asked interview questions. These are usually open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer. You should practice your answers ahead of time for these questions. Think of it like this: suppose your math teacher told you all of the questions for the exam ahead of time. Wouldn’t you work out the problems prior to the exam and have all of your answers ready to go on test day? If you wanted to get a good grade, you would. This is called being prepared. You really need to spend some time preparing GOOD answers to these questions.

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**Common Interview Questions**



Click each question mark to explore common interview questions.


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#### Question 1

**Common Interview Questions**

What kinds of activities do you participate in outside of school?



If you are not involved in clubs or sports at school, get involved in something. This shows that you are a well-rounded person who gets along with others. Volunteer experience and work experience are good things to talk about here as well.

 Click arrow to explore more possible questions.

What kinds of activities do you participate in outside of school?


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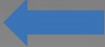
**Question 2**

**Common Interview Questions**

Where do you see yourself in five years?



The answer should be very specific. Lack of goals for the future can keep you from getting a position.

 Click arrow to explore more possible questions.

Where do you see yourself in five years?


The answer should be very specific. Lack of goals for the future can keep you from getting a position.

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**Question 3**

**Common Interview Questions**

Why should we hire you?



This is where you get to sell yourself and your qualifications. Focus on what you can do for the company – not what they can do for you. Be confident with your answer.

← Click arrow to explore more possible questions.

Why should we hire you?

This is where you get to sell yourself and your qualifications. Focus on what you can do for the company – not what they can do for you. Be confident with your answer.


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#### Question 4

**Common Interview Questions**

**Tell me about yourself.**



Although this is not a question, it is information that is typically requested at the beginning of an interview. Be sure to keep this answer professional and talk about things you like to do that relate to the position, if possible.

 Click arrow to explore more possible questions.

Tell me about yourself.

Although this is not a question, it is information that is typically requested at the beginning of an interview. Be sure to keep this answer professional and talk about things you like to do that relate to the position, if possible.


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#### Question 5

Common Interview Questions

What are your strengths and weaknesses?



It is easier to list your strengths. However, do not say that you do not have any weaknesses because that is not true. Everyone has weaknesses. Instead, think of a weakness that you are working to improve. Turn your weakness into a positive statement about yourself.

 Click arrow to explore more possible questions.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

It is easier to list your strengths. However, do not say that you do not have any weaknesses because that is not true. Everyone has weaknesses. Instead, think of a weakness that you are working to improve. Turn your weakness into a positive statement about yourself.



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#### Question Practice



There are many more questions than the five you just reviewed. Take some time to do an Internet search for commonly asked interview questions. How many are there? Prepare your answers to one of the questions discussed in the last slide and one question that you find that was not one of the five common interview questions previously reviewed.

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#### The Interview Continued...



Another way to prepare for an interview is to research the company to which you have applied. Many times you will be asked why you want to work for that company. How can you answer that question if you don't know anything about the company? What do they make or sell? Where are its branches located? How rapidly has it grown? What are its prospects for the future? How did they get started? What is the company's mission or goals? These are things you should know before you go in for an interview. Not only will you seem interested and well-prepared, you will be able to get an idea of whether or not that company is one for which you would like to work.

Find the location of your interview ahead of time. Make a "dry run" a few days prior to the interview to scout out parking, traffic, and exact location.

Think of questions to ask the interviewer. More than likely, at some point in the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. Say YES! Do not ask about salary, vacation, or benefits until you have been offered the position. So what should you ask? You might ask questions like...What is the company's promotion policy? When and how will I hear about your decision? What would a typical workday in this position be like? How will I be trained or introduced to the position? How does this position contribute to the company's overall success? How will I receive feedback on my performance? What are the department's goals for the year? These questions are all forward- looking and make you seem interested in the success of the company, not just your own success.

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#### A Good Impression...



Making a good first impression is vital to getting hired. Here are some things you can do to help you make that good impression:

Be sure to get there ten to fifteen minutes early. **NEVER** be late! Remember you are on the interviewer's schedule. You need to respect their time. Being late or too early can keep you from getting the job.

Dress appropriately. You should dress conservatively and professionally. Be neat and clean. Gentlemen should wear a suit and tie. The tie can have a small design but should not be overwhelming. Wear dress shoes, dress socks and a collared shirt. Men should wear little to no jewelry – a wristwatch and class ring or wedding ring is all. Ladies should also wear a suit. Pantyhose should be worn with a skirt. Again, minimal jewelry – one pair of earrings, no bigger than a quarter, a watch, and one ring per hand. Be conservative with makeup and nail polish. Do not use perfume or cologne. You never know when your interviewer will be allergic or turned-off by your chosen scent. Absolutely no tattoos, or body or facial jewelry should be visible. No denim, miniskirts, low-cut blouses, casual shoes (flip flops, athletic shoes, or sandals), excessive skin or visible undergarments should be worn to an interview.

Go alone. You don't want to appear dependent on another person.

Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and a smile. Introduce yourself and use the interviewer's name.

Be prepared. Be sure to have several copies of your résumé, any reference letters you have, and school transcripts. Be sure everything is neat, up-to-date, and accurate. Take a pad of paper and a couple of pens with you. You can also take your company research with you. This is a good thing to review in the lobby while you wait your turn for the interview. Take all information you may need in order to fill out an employment application.

Appear poised and self-confident. Everyone is nervous on an interview. That is natural, but the more prepared you are, the more you will be able to be yourself and let your best qualities shine

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through! Sit up straight with your hands in your lap and your knees together and your feet crossed at the ankles. Maintain good eye contact. Do not chew gum, smoke, or display other nervous habits like bouncing your foot or tapping a pen. Smile occasionally. Let the interviewer lead the interview and don't ramble during the quiet times between questions.

Be respectful and courteous. Use your manners. Even if you are asked to wait, be polite. Remember, an interview is not about you, it is about what the company needs and wants. They have plenty of other people to choose from. Remain standing until the interviewer asks you to be seated. This shows respect for their office space. Put your belongings on the floor beside your chair. Do not invade the interviewer's space by putting anything, including your arms, on the interviewer's desk. Turn your cell phone OFF, not vibrate. This shows that you have respect for their time and that nothing is more important than that interview.

Think before you answer a question. Answer briefly but completely using complete sentences and correct grammar. Be HONEST! Lying on an interview will not get you hired and can get you fired if you do get the position. Speak slowly and clearly, avoiding slang and informal speech (like yeah instead of yes).

Emphasize your strong points. Sell yourself—be enthusiastic. Talk about school, your grades, attendance, skills, work experience, activities, and goals positively. Negative comments reflect poorly on YOU. Never talk bad about a previous employer. This make you look bad, not the former employer.

Be enthusiastic and interested in the company and the position for which you are applying.

When the interview is over, thank the interviewer for his or her time. Be sure to leave copies of your résumé, reference letters, and any other information that is relevant to the position. Leave with a smile, another firm handshake, and a positive comment about how you will be looking forward to hearing from them again soon.

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#### The Follow-Up

**The Follow-Up**

Your Street Address  
Your City, VA ZIP  
Current Date

Your Interviewer's Full Name  
Company Name  
Company Street Address  
Company City, State ZIP

Dear (Interviewer's Title and Last Name)

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you for the management trainee position with your firm. I was impressed with the opportunities that exist within your company. I am certain that the work would be challenging and interesting. I am very interested in this position and hope you feel, as I do, that my training and skills would be useful to your firm. The growth potential of the company and the many opportunities to make a contribution at Money Matters, Inc. certainly appeal to me.

Please call me if you need additional information. I look forward to hearing from you soon regarding your decision. I can be reached at (757) 578-7000 in the evenings.

Sincerely,

Sally Student

**Access the sample follow-up letter in the Resources section.**

Following up after the interview is another important step to getting hired, and many people don't do it. This is an excellent way for you to remind the interviewer of your interest in the position and of your interview. After the interview is over, within twenty-four to forty-eight hours, you should send a thank-you or follow-up letter. This is a tool to remind the interviewer of you and to thank him or her for their time. You should use the same format as the cover letter. Be sure to address the interviewer by name. If you were interviewed by more than one person, write a brief letter to each interviewer.

The key to the follow-up letter is to be short and to the point. The first paragraph should remind the interviewer of your interview. The second paragraph re-emphasizes your interest in the position and your desire to work for the company. You should also list a couple of your key qualifications as discussed in the interview. The final paragraph should express your eagerness to hear when a decision is reached. Include your contact information again so the interviewer doesn't have to look it up. Make sure your letter is error-free. This may be your last chance to represent yourself. Check out the sample letter.

It is okay to call the company after a few days to see if a decision has been reached. Do NOT call every day! Interviewing and hiring can be a long process for a company. Be patient.

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#### Final Tidbits



Remember, each interview is a learning experience. If you don't get the position, it may be because someone else was just a little more qualified than you were. It is important to review your performance after an interview and try to figure out where you can improve. No matter how much you prepare, you will more than likely be asked a question that you weren't prepared for! That's okay. Do the best you can and remember to prepare for that question next time.