

# Guide to the Job Market

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*Disclaimer: These tips are based on my professional experiences, discussions with professional contacts, and feedback from Mount Holyoke alumnae. You should consult others for advice as well and make the decisions that you feel are best for your situation.*

## Preliminary Steps to Prepare for the Job Market

### 1) LinkedIn Account

- If you have not already, create a LinkedIn profile. Make sure that it is public so that others can search for and find it. Rather than having your current position, which might be a campus job, change your headline to be: B.A. in [Major], Mount Holyoke College. Pursuing opportunities in [fields of interest].


### 2) Email Address

- If you are a current Mount Holyoke student applying for a summer internship, you should use your Mount Holyoke email. Seniors applying for jobs during the year may do so as well. As you transition out of college, however, you will need to establish a professional Gmail account of your own if you do not already have one.
- The new address should not be fun, like ILoveJorge@gmail.com, but rather contain only your name in some form. Avoid using numbers on the end like 97; readers may make assumptions about your birth-year and age. You may have to try several combinations of middle initial, middle name, first and middle initials, etc. to find one that is not already taken. For example:
  - marylyon@gmail.com
  - marymlyon@gmail.com
  - marymasonlyon@gmail.com
- Tip: Gmail ignores periods in email addresses. So mary.lyon@gmail.com, m.a.r.y.lyon@gmail.com, maryly.on@gmail.com, etc. will all go to exactly the same address. So if you are forced to use a middle initial or name that might make the address look odd, inserting a period may make it more visually appealing. For example:
  - mary.m.lyon@gmail.com
- Be sure to use this new email address on your résumé and LinkedIn profile.

### 3) Professional Photograph

- Get a professional headshot taken. You should be dressed in business attire. Be sure to use this photograph on your LinkedIn profile and for Skype in case of a video interview.

### 4) Clean Up Your Internet Persona

- Make your Facebook page completely private. Often the settings just make some parts of the profile private while other parts are still visible. To confirm, logout completely and try to find yourself so that you can see what others can see.
- Google yourself and take down any Twitter feeds, blog posts, etc. that you find that may not be putting your best foot forward.
- If you find other content about you that would like taken down that you can't take down yourself, politely contact the website/organization. Most will be accommodating and understand that you are on the job market.
- Tip: It takes Google some time to re-crawl the internet, and so sites and images that have been taken down may still show up in Google searches for a week or two weeks after. If you are in a hurry, you can fill out [this form](#)  to have content removed from searches, but it only works if the content has already been removed by the original website:

### 5) Voicemail

- Change your voicemail so that it is short, polished, and professional. For example:
  - “Hi, you have reached the voicemail of Mary Lyon, please leave a message and I will promptly return your call.”

### 6) Physical Address

- If you are a current Mount Holyoke student applying for a summer internship, you should use your Mount Holyoke address. Seniors applying for jobs during the year may do so as well. As you transition out of college, however, you will need to put your new address on your résumé.
- Tip: Be aware that many large organizations will screen job applications by geographic location, only reviewing those from the immediate vicinity. Likewise, very small organizations may not have the funds to bring someone from far away for an in-person interview, and so may exclude those applications as well. Therefore, any address in the area of the jobs to which you are applying is advantageous. Do not lie, but if there is somewhere you could stay in that city if you needed to, you may want to put down that address, as long as you could defend it if asked in an interview, for example: “I am staying at my Aunt’s house while I look for jobs in the city.”

## Preparing Job Market Materials

### 1) Cover Letter

- The Center for Career Development on campus has workshops and guides [☞](#) for how to write a cover letter.
- You will likely need two or three versions of your cover letter tailored for different types of jobs, with some letters highlighting particular skills over others. Be sure that your cover letter hits on the particular skills and experiences desired by the organization.
- Tips: Don't start the letter with "my name is" Your name should be at the top of the cover letter. Do not use the words passion, unique, and ideal. Everyone is always passionate about the issue, feels that they are unique, and asserts that they are an ideal fit for the position (that's why they are applying!). There is also no need to tell them that you are available for an interview—everyone who applies for jobs is available for an interview.

### 2) Résumé

- The Center for Career Development on campus has workshops and guides [☞](#) for how to write a résumé.
- If you have more experiences than fit on one page, that is fine; but some organizations will specifically request a one-page résumé, so you will need to maintain two versions.

### 3) References Sheet

- A separate references page should contain the full names, titles, affiliations, phone numbers, and email addresses for at least three references. Be sure that you have talked with everyone you put down to get their permission and alert them that you are on the job market and that they may be contacted for a reference.

### 4) Combining Files and Styles

- If you are applying through an automated system that has different places to upload files or the instructions specifically say to send the materials as separate files, then you should do so. If not, you should combine the cover letter, résumé, and reference page, in that order, into one PDF file that you can submit. And always use PDFs for your files, not Word or other documents.
- Tip: There are many templates in Word that can easily add some attractive headers and colors to make your files stand out (though be careful not to go overboard). You should use the same template across all three documents. Also, you do not need to use the same color for every job application. Be strategic. If you were applying to a job at Mount Holyoke, you might use blue. **A great example from a former student is attached.**

## 5) Writing Samples

- Many jobs postings will request a writing sample with the initial application materials or you may be asked to supply one at a later interview stage. The requests vary. You should thus have both one-page and five-page writing samples available. You may also want a slightly longer research paper that you could submit for research and writing intensive jobs, particularly at later stages of the interview process if requested.
- Include brief details on the writing sample either in the final paragraph of your résumé or at the top of the writing sample itself. For example:
  - “The following is five-page excerpt from the introductory chapter of my senior honors thesis.”
  - “The attached writing sample is policy brief on the conflict in Eastern Congo written for a class at Mount Holyoke College.”

## **Applying for Jobs**

### 1) Locating Jobs

- There are specialized job boards that cater to particular fields. [Idealist](#), for example, lists jobs related, broadly, to human rights. You will also find it useful to check the employment pages on the websites of major organizations working in your area of interest.
- Be sure to keep a spreadsheet with each position, its submission process (email or online system), requested files, and due dates. Combine PDFs accordingly to create the requested files for each application.
- Tip: Submit application materials as soon as you see a position for which you want to apply. Even where a deadline is listed, realize that most employers review applications as they come in and may even fill the position well before that date.

### 2) Addressing Cover Letters and Emails (if you are not submitting via a system)

- If there are no instructions for who to submit the application materials to, then you can simply address your email and cover letter: “To Whom It May Concern.”
- If you are instructed to send the application materials to a specific person, then you want to address your email and cover letter to them. If they have an important position, use their short position title. If they don’t have a clear title, then it is up to you if you want to use the more formal Mr. or Ms. and their last name or their first and last names. For example:
  - Dear Professor Reiter
  - Dear Mr. Reiter
  - Dear Andrew Reiter

### 3) Phone Etiquette

- Answer all calls from unknown numbers and always identify yourself. For example:
  - “Hello, this is Mary Lyon”
- Tip: There are many apps out there for your phone that tap into sizeable telephone directories. They won’t be able to detect personal cell phones, but if someone calls you about a job interview from an office phone, the name of the business is likely to show on your screen. This can give you a valuable few seconds to take a breath and prepare accordingly before answering.

### 4) Follow the News

- Locate news sources and specialized blogs that track developments in your fields of interest. Ensure that you can be conversant on events and issues during a job interview.

## **Preparing for an Interview**

### 1) Know the Process

- Be prepared for a variety of formats. In early rounds, some larger organizations use programs where you record video answers and even complete written tasks in response to questions and instructions, without ever interacting with a person. Phone call and video conference (Skype, Zoom, and other programs) interviews are the most common for initial screening of applicants. At more advanced stages, you will be asked to come to the organization itself to interview, likely with multiple people.
- For all formats, be certain to find out who you will be interviewing with. This can be very important for an in-person interview where you might be meeting four to five different people across an hour or more.
- Always ask: “Is there anything I should prepare ahead of time?”

### 2) Research

- Spend considerable time researching the organization’s website. What is its mission? What is it working on currently? Why do you want the job?
- Also research the person(s) you will be speaking with. What is their position? What projects do they appear to be working on? Are they part of a larger unit at the organization?

### 3) Prepare Questions

- You are interviewing them too so be prepared to ask them questions. You want to know if this is a place where you want to work. Interviewers will almost always end an interview by asking whether you have any questions for them; it is important that you have some. Always prepare more questions than you will have time to ask because some are likely to be answered already during the interview. Here are some example questions:
  - What's it like to work here? What's it like to be part of this team?
  - How long have you worked together?
  - You've told me about the necessary skills to be successful in this position, but what type of personality are you looking for?
  - If you chose to hire me, what advice would you give me about joining your team/organization? What would I need to know in the first week?
  - What's the timeline for your decision-making process, and when is the anticipated start date?
    - Tip: If they don't tell you, always try to ask this question at the very end. You want to know when you might expect an invitation for another round of interviews or a job offer.
- For larger organizations, you may also want to ask:
  - Will there be opportunities to gain additional skills and take on more responsibilities within the organization?
  - Do you have any formal or informal mentoring opportunities for early career professionals?

### 4) What to Bring

- For all types of interviews, have a professional notepad and pen. It can be helpful to write down thoughts about your answer as interviewers are asking questions. You can also take a second after a question to outline your answer before replying.
- For in-person interviews, also bring extra, printed copies (in color, stapled) of your résumé and writing samples just in case anyone needs one.

## **At the Interview**

### 1) Timing

- For in-person interviews arrive five minutes early (but not 15!). For phone and video conference interviews, be ready to answer your phone or be logged on ten minutes prior to the scheduled start time.

## 2) Introductions

- For in-person and video interviews, appearance is important. Wear proper business attire and bring your smile.
  - Tip: Dress professionally for phone interviews too. Studies show that doing so makes you take it more seriously and improves your performance.
- For in-person interviews, shake hands firmly, smile, look them in the eyes, and repeat their names.

## 3) The Actual Interview

- Maintain positive body language. Be calm and confident, sit up straight, and lean in.
- Watch any verbal tics: don't say "like," "you know," or "stuff," and don't end your sentences with ?'s.
- Answer questions to the best of your ability. Be thorough. Don't be afraid to think. If you need time, say: "That's a good question. Let me think about that for a second."
- Tip: Most interviewers have a set of questions they are asking each interviewee. It is important that you try to get through most or all of those questions during your interview. Sometimes they will tell you how many they have for you at the beginning, and so you can then pace yourself and make sure your answers are not too long. Before your first answer you can also say "please let me know if my answers are too long. I want to be thorough but I also know you probably have a set of questions you are asking all applicants and I want to make sure we get through all of them in our allotted time."
- Ask your own questions at the end (see preparation tips above).

## 4) References

- After an in-person interview they will often tell you that they plan to contact the references of candidates before they make a decision. You should then reach out to your references to alert them that they will likely be contacted. Tell them a bit about the position and why you are interested in it.

## **After the Interview**

### 1) Thank You

- Wait until the next day and send a short, polite email to the person(s) who interviewed you. For example:
  - Dear [Name], Thank you for taking the time to talk with me yesterday about the [title] position. This sounds like a wonderful opportunity and a great fit for me. I look forward to hearing from you! Best wishes, [Your Name]

### 2) Salary Considerations

- Research the cost of living in the area where the job is and plan your budget for how much you would need to live on. Try to find out what the typical salary is for this type of position—at this specific organization if you can, but also the market overall. [Glassdoor](#) is a good resource for salary information. Determine a salary range that you would need to take the position.

## **Getting a Job Offer**

### 1) Initial Reaction

- Be excited that you got the offer and tell them that that is great news—but don't act surprised like you can't believe they picked you!

### 2) Acceptance Process

- Job offers will almost always be by phone, but beyond that the process varies considerably. Sometimes you will be asked to give a verbal acceptance on the phone. Other times you will be given details on the job on the phone and asked to verbally accept within a defined period of time (example: call or write back by tomorrow at 5:00). In other scenarios, you will be told that details on the offer will be emailed to you and that you need to respond via email or phone to accept the offer after reviewing the files. Be prepared for all types.
  - Tip: If you are pressured to accept an offer on the phone and don't feel comfortable doing so right away, you may be able to buy yourself a bit of time with some creativity. For example:
    - “Actually, I am just heading into a meeting now, would it be okay if I call you back in a couple of hours?”
    - “I am just about to sit down for lunch right now, would it be okay if I call you back later this afternoon?”



### 3) Salary Negotiations

- Never say the first salary number; it is their responsibility to provide the proposed salary. If they do try to get you to say what salary you desire first, always ask: “what is the standard salary at your organization for this position?”
- Be prepared for what salary you would accept (see the research section above). If the salary offer is amenable to you then feel free to accept it—you don’t need to negotiate. If it comes in a bit lower than you would like, however, don’t be afraid to say so. For example:
  - “I’m really excited about the offer, but the salary is about 5% lower than I was hoping for.”
    - This could lead to them indicating that they are willing to negotiate. They may say that they will talk to others in the organization, likely Human Resources, and get back to you.
    - They may, however, tell you that this is the standard salary or even above the standards salary for this position. At that point, you will have to decide if the offer is high enough for you to accept.
- Tip: Always try to have salary negotiations via phone rather than email. If they send you an offer via email and the salary is not as high as you would like, email them back and ask to schedule a time to talk about the offer and then bring the salary issues up then, on the phone. Avoid negotiations via email where wording can be imprecise and tone can be lost.

### 4) Other Benefits

- Remember that there are many other benefits that come with jobs besides salaries. Good health care and dental plans, for example, can save you considerable money. Paid vacation days are also very important. If an organization says that it provides 15 paid vacation days throughout the year, then that is equivalent to 5-6% of your salary. You should thus be willing to accept a slightly lower salary if the benefits are good. If the person you are talking to does not know much about the benefits, don’t be afraid to ask:
  - “Is there someone in human resources that I could talk to about the details of the benefits package?”
- Organizations don’t typically provide this for new employees, but after a certain time of employment many provide retirement plans (often referred to as a 401k or 403b). You may be required to or can voluntarily place a certain percentage of your check each month (e.g. 2.5%) into an account managed by a third-party financial organization. But the employer also contributes, and that is free money that is then managed professionally and will grow considerably over the decades until you retire. If you think you will be at this organization long-term, this should also factor into your considerations. Employer contributions can range from as little as 2% to as high as 10%. The higher the employer contribution percentage, the better.

## 5) Start Date

- If they haven't already told you, ask them what their desired start date is. You should already have in mind when you could begin. If they need someone right away and you can start right away, be sure to tell them that. If you are negotiating on salary, your availability and willingness to start immediately may help you.
- Don't be afraid to raise any potential conflicts you have. Perhaps you have a trip already scheduled that you don't want to cancel, you will need a week to move to the city, or you have a current job and would need to give them two weeks' notice to quit. Generally, organizations realize that these situations exist and will be willing to work with you.

## 6) Thanking References

- After you have accepted an offer for a new job, be sure to email your references and tell them the good news and thank them for serving as a reference.

## 7) Resigning from a Current Job

- If you are currently employed, the process of resigning can be difficult. Always do it in person, though they might ask you to follow up in writing or provide an official resignation letter. Be prepared: they might be happy for you, or very surprised, or even upset.
- Let them know when your last day will be and ask them how you can help make this intervening time the most productive and helpful, and if there are any projects that you should get done before you leave. Or tell them you would like to set up a time to talk about those two points. Be sure to tell them how much you enjoyed the opportunity and the job that you are leaving, and add something personal about their supervision or mentorship.
  - Tip: Unless they offer, don't ask them whether they are willing to serve as a reference for you for future job applications in your career. Given the sensitivity of the moment, it makes sense to hold off. But if you think you would like them to be a reference in the future, be sure to stay in touch with them periodically as your career progresses and then ask them when you are on the job market again.
- If you would like to stay at your current job and think that there could be a retention opportunity, you should tell your boss about the offer when you get it but before you accept. Say something like: "I'd like to stay here but they're offering me a salary of X." If you do receive and accept a retention offer, be sure to have a follow-up conversation with your boss expressing your commitment to the organization.
  - Note: You can usually only do this once at an organization. Repeatedly using outside offers to try to get a higher salary is frowned upon and you are not likely to be successful beyond the first attempt.