

Job Market To-Do List

This guide outlines advice on how to prepare for the transition of leaving GVSU during your senior year and entering the professional world. The guide is intended to help increase the chances that you are ready for employment when you graduate.

October

By the end of this month, you should:

- Update your résumé. Let this be a master résumé that includes *everything* you believe might be useful for relaying your abilities to a wide range of employers. Then when you apply for specific positions, you can cut the master version and use what you need in a version that best targets the specific job and posting.
- Draft a general cover letter that can be used as a starting point for creating individualized cover letters for specific jobs/organizations. At this point, this document should help you think about how you will sell yourself; you'll need to contextualize it much more for specific types of jobs (e.g. technical writer vs. copy editor) and the specific company to which you are applying.
- Begin developing at least two professional writing samples that you can share with prospective employers.
- Consider meeting with a GVSU Writing Consultant if you need help with developing any of the three previously mentioned documents.
- Contact professors and/or previous employers that you wish to use as references (preferably three).
- Begin looking seriously for an internship if you have not completed one and need to do so in the Winter term. A good internship can help build your résumé, and sometimes an internship can lead to a full time job. So don't wait; work hard to find the one that is right for you.
- Schedule a meeting with your Writing Major advisor if you have not done so yet this semester. She/he can offer advice about the job market. But more importantly, you need to make certain you are on track to graduate at the end of the Winter term.

October 13, 2:00 to 6:00 p.m. -- Attend GVSU Careerfest 2010

Even if you have not updated your résumé and are not prepared to seek a job, you should plan on attending the GVSU Careerfest to see what kind of jobs are available and to gain experience networking with recruiters.

November/December

Early on (probably during November), you will want to:

- Become familiar with the GVSU Career Services website and the services they have to offer.
- Schedule a meeting with a GVSU Career Services advisor in your major.
- Explore other resources available for finding job opportunities, both within the state of Michigan and for a nation-wide job search.
- Get feedback on your résumé by sharing drafts with an advisor at GVSU's Career Services Office; friends who are on the job market (you can trade off giving feedback); or professionals in the field that you know.

Before you return from the semester break, you will want to develop a strategy for the types of jobs you will pursue during the Winter semester.

- Use the resources you discovered during November to recognize the types of jobs that are available that you might be qualified for. At this point, be willing to cast a wider net in terms of the types of jobs you might take as preliminary research. In other words, with this preliminary research, get a feel for what is available much as you might explore a wide range of topics for writing a paper.
- Be realistic during your research. If the job ad says that the employer is looking for five years of experience as a requirement, they generally mean it; be sure to focus on entry-level jobs unless your employment history contains multiple years of full-time experience in your field.
- After your preliminary research, develop a strategy for what type of jobs you will pursue during the Winter semester by considering what's available. Based on your preliminary research, you may have found that you need to expand your scope to (a) a wider range of jobs or (b) a wider geographical area than you might have originally hoped prior to this semester.

January/February

January/February should be your big push to

- Find positions you want to apply for.
- Conduct research on the companies you are applying to.
- Develop contextualized versions of your résumé and cover letter to send out. Be sure to have a 2nd pair of eyes proofread any documents before you submit them.
- Begin sending your materials.
- Become knowledgeable about interviewing skills and etiquette.
- Buy appropriate interview clothes.

Be aware that being competitive on the job market means not just having skills, but working hard to compete for jobs available by doing research and creating good application materials. Remember, looking for a job is a job in itself!

At this stage, consider collaborating with fellow students on copyediting and proofreading the materials you are preparing to send to employers. As an individual applying for a job involving writing, you will be judged more strongly by the quality of the writing in your application materials than will people in many other disciplines. Demonstrate your skills in your application materials.

How much time do I need to spend on researching companies and creating contextualized job application materials?

It depends on how much time you have and how badly you want the position. In allocating your time, you might have a general résumé and cover letter that fits particular job types so that you can put your application materials in the pool for many positions, and then you might do research on each company and individually contextualize your application materials for a few jobs that you want to focus your attention. You can always meet with a GVSU Writing Center consultant if you need assistance with thinking about how to contextualize your application materials for specific job contexts.

Additional Steps during the Winter Term

- Continue to look at the Career Services website and other useful job lead resources in case new positions become available.
- Attend the Winter GVSU Careerfest.
- Wait a couple of weeks, and then follow up your application with a telephone call to verify that your application materials were received, to see if the employer needs additional materials, and/or to learn the next step in the process. The goal of this phone call is to make contact with a human being, indicate your continued interest, and make a favorable impression. DO NOT ask for an interview unless you are applying for a position where you are expected to be aggressive (such as in sales). You don't want to be remembered as the 5th person that week who bugged them about an interview; they'll contact you when they are ready.
- *Within 24 hours*, be sure to follow up any interview with a thoughtful thank you letter. Sometimes when employers are torn between you and another interviewee, the thank you letter can swing the balance in your favor. Moreover, it's a way to express your continued interest in the company. It's not unheard of for a favorable job candidate to get turned down for one position, but then get offered a new interview for another one.