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Working in the USA: Finding a Job

By Annette Vitale-Salajanu, MPA, Immigration Educator avitale@uiuc.edu

Immigrants may work in the United States legally only if they have a green card, or are authorized to do so by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. There is no such thing as a “work permit.” Rather, foreign nationals may come to the United States on non-immigrant visas which may include under certain circumstances, permission to work as incidental to their status, or under other limited conditions.

In order to begin work in the United States employees must show the employer both that they have the right to work and proof of their identity. They also must provide their social security number so that taxes can be taken out of the employees pay, as well as work credits recorded for future social security, unemployment and other benefits.

For more information on these and other immigration related topics visit the immigration section of our web site or the websites of the [USCIS](#) or the [U.S. Department of State](#)

Culture plays an important role in the way people find jobs in different countries, as well as the expectations that employers have about their employees including demeanor, punctuality, dress, and other characteristics. Laws are a part of a country's culture and the United States is no exception. We have federal, state, and local laws affecting employment and the rights of workers in this country.

It is important for employees to understand both their rights, as well as their obligations as employees.

Writing a Resume

Before beginning work in the United States, it is a good idea to prepare a resume. There is some information that you should gather before actually sitting down to write your resume. Information you should have on hand includes:

- Your full legal name and contact information
- Your school transcripts and diplomas
- List of any additional training you have had including the name of the course, dates of attendance, certificates or diplomas, and subjects learned.
- Any professional certifications or licenses held
- All awards and prizes or other forms of recognition
- List of professional memberships
- List of jobs including the name, addresses, phone, and other contact information of your current and past employer. This list should also include former supervisors and possibly one of two colleagues or customers who can verify your job performance.
- List of the most important duties you performed for each job
- List of computer skills

- List of languages spoken
- List of personal references and what each person can say about you
- List of professional references and what each person can say about you

The next step to writing a resume requires organizing the information.

Start by writing the basics for each section:

Header

- Your full legal name
- Your mailing address
- Phone numbers (home, work, and cell)
- Email address
- Website address (if any)

Credentials Summary

I recommend using a credential summary rather than stating what kind of position you are seeking. This will help the recruiter understand your qualifications, without limiting your job possibilities. It is a good idea to write this portion of the resume last.

It is also useful to think of your credentials as a “keyword” search mechanism. This is because many companies now want you to submit your resume electronically. Often, they will have a computer do a computer scan of the hundreds of resumes submitted to filter those who have the requisite experience or credentials as indicated by a keyword search of your resume. Because of this it is important in your credentials summary to use nouns, rather than action words to describe your credentials. Important key words can include words like sales, accounting, bi-lingual, help desk and customer service and job titles like receptionist, manager, project manager, computer terms or software packages such as UNIX, Microsoft Office, Microsoft Word, Powerpoint, Adobe Illustrator, or sql.

Experience:

List your experience with the most recent employer last. If you worked abroad, list the same information as for jobs held in the USA, but indicate internationally dialing instructions, and the language of use for references).

Make a list of each employer you had, the address where you worked, your job title(s), and the dates you held each position. Then, underneath, make a list of your duties and responsibilities, and some keywords describing the special skills and abilities you had to use in order to perform this job. If you had to have special training to do the job indicate that. Be sure to list your accomplishments as well.

Your resume can include both paid and relevant unpaid or volunteer experience. And don't forget that self employment can also and should also be listed on your resume.

Next, take that information and condense it or summarize it in bullet form suitable for a resume.

If you hold an advanced degree, and you are applying for a teaching or research position at an academic institution, you should use a curriculum vitae (C.V.) format, rather than a resume format. For more information about writing a C.V. [click here](#).

Education

To write this section of your resume, list the degree you obtained, the institution where it was earned, the city and state where the institution is located, the dates of attendance, your major and minor, GPA (grade point average) if 3.0 or over, and a list of some of the most relevant subjects studied. Do this for every degree earned and/or institution where you studied.

If you have several years of solid work experience, it is a good idea to list that first, with the section on your education/degrees afterwards.

Personal data

It is never appropriate to indicate too much personal information on your resume. You do not have to give your date of birth, marital status, or immigration status on your resume.

Some personal data that it is appropriate to provide includes:

Hobbies related to the job

Languages spoken

Professional Memberships including the full name of the organization, positions held if any, dates of membership (indicate current if still an active member)

Presentations, publications, or articles you may have written

Other information relevant to the job.

If English is Not Your First Language

If English is not your first language it is a good idea to have someone who has native proficiency, preferably someone with a college degree and good writing and/or editing skills proof your resume for spelling and grammar errors, as well as proper use of colloquial expressions.

Cover Letter

It is important to send your resume with a cover letter. A cover letter is a way of introducing yourself and your resume, stating what position you want, why you want it, and why you think it would be advantageous for the prospective employer to hire you. There is not, unfortunately, such a thing as a one size fits all cover letter. This makes cover letters a particular challenge for immigrants who often find writing in English a hard task.

There are certain elements that should be covered in the cover letter. These include your return address, the person to whom the letter is addressed, the name of the position for which you are applying and the job number if there is one.

The letter should state why you are well qualified for the position and should demonstrate that you understand how to do this job and how you acquired those needed skills. It should provide a glimpse into your personality and character.

One way to solve this dilemma is by writing a series of stand alone paragraphs or sentences which you can then assemble for your cover letter. This method lets you still tailor your cover letter to fit the job, while enabling you to write a cover letter to fit the job that you want. It may be necessary, though to also write some transitional sentences to make sure your cover letter flows.

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It should state what you want from the reader, such as an interview.

Finally, you should always sign your name between the closing (such as “Sincerely,” and your typed name, unless sending the letter by email---and don’t forget to indicate that your resume is enclosed!

Conducting a Job Search

There are several different ways to conduct a job search. These include:

- Responding to posted job advertisements and announcements
- Networking
- Performing a targeted job search

Posted advertisements and announcements

It is very important to read and analyze carefully job vacancy announcements to determine if you meet the minimum requirements for the position. There are a number of different sources of posted job advertisements and announcements. Some of these are on-line and let you search by location, job title, or key word.

Here is a list of some on line job vacancy advertisements:

Monster.com
Careerbuilder.com
Craigslist.com

Preparing for an Interview

Once you send out your resume, you can be called within a few hours, a few days, a few weeks, or even several months later. It is important to be ready at all times.

It is a good idea to keep certain information near the phone, or if you use a cell phone, with you at all times. This includes:

- your resume
- your schedule or calendar
- a list of the positions you applied for
- a copy of the job postings
- some sample phrases in English
- a note pad and a pen
- a list of specific examples you can give the interview about experiences, courses, or training you have had relevant to the position you are seeking

It is a good idea to research the company and the industry of that company before an interview. At a minimum, do a computer search to locate the company's web site. Find out what services or products they offer, what their history is, how they are organized, and other helpful information.

The Interview

You should be aware that you may get called for a phone interview, or you may get called to schedule a phone interview or an in person interview. Both phone and in person interviews may be with one person, or with a committee of several persons.

In person interviews usually consist of a one to two minute introduction. You may be offered something to drink or eat, but it is a good idea not to take anything stronger than water (in case it spills). Then you will be asked a series of questions by one or more interviewers usually for about 15 to 20 minutes. You should be sure to speak clearly and loud enough to be very well understood. Don't interrupt the interviewers. Listen carefully to each question. If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification or that it be repeated.

Some commonly asked questions, especially of immigrants who have accents are:

1. Do you have the right to work in the United States?
2. How long have you been in this country?
3. Is this your first job?
4. What qualifications do you have for this job?
5. Why do you want this job?
6. Why should we hire you for this job?
7. What would your former bosses (or colleagues or customers) say about you?
8. What would you do if you saw a co-worker take something from work that did not belong to them?
9. What are your strengths?
10. What are your weaknesses?
11. Do you see yourself as a team player?
12. Why did you leave your last job?
13. Would you be willing to obtain further training if it were necessary for this position?

14. What salary range do you expect?
15. Is there anything you would like to ask about this position or our organization?

Next, you will be expected to ask some questions. This is a way for you to highlight some of your strengths which may not have come out in the interview, as well as to show your knowledge of the company. This shows your interest in working for that employer. This should take between 5 and 10 minutes. Some good questions are:

Could you describe a typical day for a person holding this position?

What do you see in the future for this industry?

Then, the interviewer will conclude the interview. You may want to ask about what happens next by asking “*Will you be getting in contact with me or should I contact you in a week or two?*” Make sure you smile, ask for the interviewer's business card, and thank the interviewer for his or her time.

Its not really over

The interview is not really over when you say good bye. How you react after the interview will also show the interviewer what kind of person you are. Always send a thank you note following up on the interview. If you were asked to submit receipts for reimbursement, make sure you do so promptly, and in a well organized fashion to demonstrate your personal time management and organizational skills.

If you live in a household where English is not the only language spoken, or where some people who live with you don't speak English at all, it is important to think about how prospective employers will be able to get in touch with you. One option is to get an answering machine that lets people at home screen calls for those from friends and loved ones, while allowing prospective employers to leave a message for you that you can return at a later date.

Some helpful hints

It is important when going to an interview that you plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early. Be respectful and courteous to the receptionist. How you treat her/him may be passed on to the big boss!

Bring several extra copies of your resume and job application if any, with you as well as a note pad and pen, a copy of the position announcement, proof of your identity and right to work in the United States. It is also a good idea to bring a list of questions and a copy of your cover letter.

Although it may be considered rude to make direct eye contact in your culture, in the United States making direct eye contact is considered a sign of honesty and being forthright, which are considered good things. It is also important to shake hands with a firm handshake at the beginning and end of the interview, even if the interviewer is a member of the opposite gender.

It is also important to show respect to the interviewer by dressing in business attire. You also show respect by using a formal salutation when addressing the interviewer such as Mr. _____, Ms. _____, or Dr. _____. Your body language also says a lot about you so use good posture and do not touch anything on the desk of the interviewer.

Keep a smile on your face and you will probably have a smile in your voice. Use your voice to project a sense of confidence, warmth, and competency.

Working in the United States

It is important if you are offered a job in the United States that you find out what time you are expected to start and stop working each day, whether you can bring your lunch, how to dress, who you report to, and your specific duties and responsibilities.

It is also important to understand that culture plays a role in work expectations. For example, Americans tend to be very independent and more self-reliant, so although it is acceptable to ask questions, you should not expect your employer to repeat him or herself or to demonstrate repeatedly how to do your job. Instead you should take notes so you can remember the important details about how to perform your job responsibilities.

Following schedules and being on time is very important to Americans. People here can get fired from their jobs if they are late to work more than a few minutes or times. Additionally, people here will be upset when they think someone has “wasted” their time.

It is also important to come to work on time and to be ready to start working then. It is also important that you not take off for non-emergency situations, except for pre-approved vacation or personal days. Since Americans feel people should be self-sufficient, they do not think it is acceptable for someone to call in just to help a family member who needs translation services, help moving, or similar assistance.

To an American, your brother (or sister, aunt, cousin) is a specific family relationship. Further, your “brother” can only be your brother if you share at least one parent. So if an extended family member dies, your employer will only let you have the day off if the person who died is in your immediate family - grandparents, parents, siblings, or your spouse or children.

It is important to remember that Americans expect people to be very open and direct when they speak. When talking, especially to your boss, it is important to speak honestly and directly, even when giving unpleasant news. But do not argue with your boss unless it is a matter of safety. Americans also like people to be very precise and exact when they relay information. Some immigrants from your country will only tell you what they believe you want to hear, or they talk around the issues in a circle or indirect fashion. They may not volunteer information. At work, your boss may get angry if he finds out you did not share important information with him. Consequently, if you have a question or a concern, you must tell him/her. S/he will never realize you have a problem if you are

not straight with him/her about it. Speaking of bosses, don't forget that your boss could be a women!

Finally, American have a lot of rules and we tend to write them down. It is important to study and follow these rules consistently at work. Many of them are in place for your own safety and protection.

I hope this information is helpful to you. I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how we can improve this web site. You can contact me at avitale@uiuc.edu