- Relevant data about the employer (e.g., city or county population, services provided, number of employees, size of budget)
- Information about your area and scope of responsibility (e.g., reporting structure, services provided, number of employees supervised, and size of budget for which you are/were responsible), including specific examples
- Accomplishments, including specific examples (this is where you have the opportunity to tailor your résumé to the position for which you are applying).

Again, information on current and past work experience should be complete without being burdensome. If you have had short tenure in a position, you may choose to include a brief explanation for leaving it.

Professional activities   List professional activities that demonstrate the nature of your administrative leadership skills and your involvement, activity, and leadership in the profession in general. Include membership in related professional organizations and any articles and publications that you have authored. Unless you have very few years of experience, don't list every speech you've given, every conference you've attended, every course you've taught, or every certificate you've received. Again, it's important to be selective. List the most important activities, the nature of the activity, the offices held, and/or the honors received. In summary, this section should suggest that you have a commitment to the profession. If space permits, a simple listing of significant memberships can be helpful and impressive.

Military service   If you held a military commission or a professional assignment, you may wish to include it in the professional experience section of the résumé, and you can list significant service assignments, activities, and awards. If you did not serve in any capacity that is significant in terms of professional development, you should include only your service dates.

References   Unless specifically required in the application process, do not list references within your résumé. You may say "References available upon request." It's a fairly standard practice for employers to obtain a signed release from the applicant prior to contacting references. This release designates specific individuals named by the applicant who may be contacted.

If you choose to include references along with your résumé, prepare a separate page with their names and contact information. As mentioned earlier, depending on state laws, application materials may become public documents open to inspection by local media who are not bashful about contacting current employers or references. Consider the potential negative consequences of submitting references in advance of an interview offer or an offer of employment.

For further information on references, see the section titled "Selecting your Professional References."

No personal information and photographs   There is no value in including personal data in the body of the résumé. It detracts from your message, and it places the résumé reviewer in the awkward position of having access to information that he or she otherwise is legally prevented from requesting. Photographs are not necessary and not recommended.

Attachments   As a rule, the only attachments that should be included with your résumé are those specifically requested by the prospective employer. Unnecessary attachments may have a negative effect on your consideration for the position. If you use attachments, keep them to a minimum and be sure they are relevant, recent, and of specific interest. Do not attach letters of reference or recommendation, college transcripts, or certificates, but if you're a recent graduate, be prepared for a prospective employer to ask you to arrange for a transcript to be sent.

Keeping your résumé current   Experienced professionals know that it's a good idea to keep a résumé current. Although you may not be actively seeking new employment opportunities, keep a list of special projects and assignments, successes, and accomplishments so that you'll be prepared to update your résumé if and when it becomes necessary.

Your cover letter

The cover letter tells the reader who you are, indicates your interest in the position, and briefly shows how your professional accomplishments, interests, and skills match the needs of the position. The cover letter is nearly as important as the résumé; in many cases, the reviewer will not even read a résumé unless it is accompanied by a cover letter.

A good cover letter will impress the reader not only with your skills and experience, but also with your understanding of the organization and the position, thereby improving your chances of "winning" this first round of the competition. Your goal at this point

is to have your résumé considered carefully and to be invited for an interview. Again, you need to make yourself stand out from the crowd and show why you're a top candidate. For this reason, your cover letter should be an original work.

How do I prepare the cover letter?

Like the résumé, your cover letter should be neat and businesslike, give a good first impression, and be tailored to the specific position for which you're applying and to the community where it's offered. It should direct the reader's attention to the particular skills and accomplishments that make you a strong candidate for the job. See Appendix C for a sample cover letter.

To customize your letter, draw on the information you gathered about the community in the "homework" phase described earlier.

Address the cover letter to the appropriate person by name, not just by title. If the job advertisement doesn't give the name, call the listing organization and try to obtain it. The letter should be simple, clear, and no more than one and one-half pages long. Use frequent paragraph breaks for easy reading. Because of the length limitation, you will have to put considerable thought into writing and editing it. In the first sentence, you should attempt to attract the attention of the reader by noting the single accomplishment that best illustrates what you have achieved professionally. In the following sentences, list five or six other significant accomplishments that are most relevant to the community to which you are applying. The reader should want to read your résumé. Indicate your enthusiasm for the position and "ask for the job"!

As noted earlier, many employers now request electronic applications, with the cover letter and résumé attached to an e-mail message. However, if the letter and résumé are sent by "snail mail," print the cover letter on plain white or ivory paper or on personal (not business) stationery. Be sure to mark the envelope "Confidential."

Are my résumé and cover letter ready to send?

Be aware that you will draft and edit your résumé and cover letter numerous times before you end up with a good product. Take no pride in authorship. Have a professional associate or a career adviser give your final draft a critical review. If that person says it looks fine, give it to someone else who can be more critical and who can read it from the viewpoint of a prospective employer.

It goes without saying that your résumé and cover letter must be correct in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. A misplaced word or poor grammar in your application materials is a quick route to the "reject" stack; in fact, typographical and grammatical errors are the most common reasons for rejection of an applicant's qualifications.

Selecting your professional references

No matter how you decide to handle professional references at the initial phase of your job search, select your references with thought and care. They should include individuals who are

- distinguished in your organization, your community, and/or professional circles
- knowledgeable about your professional accomplishments and work style
- knowledgeable about your personal character
- knowledgeable about your career objectives and why you have applied for the position
- willing and available to give a reference and articulate in doing so
- willing and able to maintain confidentiality.

Whom should I ask to serve as a reference?

Ideally, your references should be individuals who can comment on your skills, your effectiveness in dealing with people, your personal qualities, and, if you're an experienced manager, your community standing, your professional reputation, and your financial management abilities. More specifically, you want your references to be professionals with high integrity who are advocates of your strengths and abilities while providing candid and honest feedback. It's not likely that every reference will be able to meet all of these criteria, but in combination they should be able to.

Take care not to provide references with whom you have not communicated in recent years. In addition, do not provide personal references (relatives, neighbors, clergy, etc.) unless specifically asked to do so. And don't be tempted to "name drop."

Be sure to ask individuals' permission to list them as references. If you don't, they'll be caught unaware when contacted. Be sure to explain to your references your desire for the job, your future interests, and any new accomplishments of which they may not be aware. Provide them with a copy of your résumé to