

# Professional Communication Skills in Social Work

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## SAMPLE CHAPTER 2 Communicating About Yourself

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## CHAPTER

# 2

# Communicating About Yourself

*Section One* will assist you in exploring your “goodness of fit,” and the expectations and practice of social work. In *Section Two*, you will be exposed to various social work settings, fields, and demographics of the rural and urban areas. Recent activity and competition relating to various social work fields and education are included.

In order to launch your career, you must develop a professional and impressive resumé and cover letter that speaks “self-promotion.” *Section Three* discusses the traditional format of a resumé, brings you into the contemporary world of the e-resumé, and walks you through the development of a professional cover letter. *Section Four* will help you prepare for the interview. Both sections provide detailed information and examples to assist you in grabbing the prospective employer’s attention through the use of professional communication skills.

### Section One: Exploration

Understanding the expectations and practice of social work is the first step in the exploration process. The second step is being aware of your personal goals and values, and deciding whether the field of social work fits your career interests.

#### Expectations and Practice Exploration

***Expectations and Practice.*** To start the exploration process, let’s consider expectations and practice within the field of social work. Although social work is immensely diversified in relation to the fields of interest and the populations served, two aspects remain constant: social work expectations and practice.

According to NASW (2006), “Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends:

1. helping people obtain tangible services,
2. counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups,

*Applying what you have learned . . .***Expectations and Practice**

- 2.1. You are going to develop two lists in which to complete a compare/contrast exercise.
  - a. Make a list of your personal attributes that you feel enables you to fulfill the social work expectations and practice discussed.
  - b. Have a friend or classmate make a list of your personal attributes he/she feels will enable you to fulfill the social work expectations and practice discussed.
- 2.2. Compare your two lists. Make note of the similarities and differences. Save your lists.
- 2.3. Develop a list of your goals in social work. Consider the social work duties listed above.
  - a. Do you believe your goals match those of the social work profession? How do they differ?
- 2.4. Take time to reflect on, and develop, a list of your personal values.
- 2.5. Refer to the lists you developed in *Exercise 2.1*
  - a. Do you feel your personal attributes provide the motivation to meet and exceed the expectations and demands of social work?
- 2.6. Overall, how would you rate your social work “goodness of fit”?
 

Once you consider the social work standards and expectations, and conduct your personal exploration, you are ready to look at the social work job market.

3. helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services,
4. and participating in legislative processes working towards legislative programs that will benefit a large segment of society.” (NASW Website, 2006)

NASW (2006) also stresses that “the practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior; of social and economic, and cultural institutions; and of the interaction of all these factors.”

**Internal Exploration.** According to Towle (1954), “Social work exists because the community has had a conscience about the disadvantaged and an altruistic impulse to protect those who need help for survival” (p. 13). Social workers fulfill this duty by helping people:

1. Function the best way they can in their environment
2. Deal with their relationships
3. Solve personal and family problems
4. Face a life-threatening disease
5. Deal with and solve a social problem such as inadequate housing, unemployment, a serious illness, disability, or substance abuse
6. Assist families with serious domestic conflicts (child and/or spousal abuse)

(NASW, 2006; Towle, 1954; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006)

The first step in your internal exploration is to consider Towle's explanation for the existence of social work. Second, establishing your "**goodness of fit**" can be done by asking yourself the following questions:

1. Is my goal as a social worker consistent with the traditional mission of the profession?
2. Do my values match the values of the social work profession?
3. Am I motivated enough to meet, and exceed, the expectations and demands of the social work profession?

*(Goodness of Fit sources: D'Aprix, Dunlap, Abel, & Edwards, 2004)*

## Section Two: The Job Search

Social work is a very diverse field whose roles and services continue to expand. The key to finding a position that fits your specific area of interest is your awareness of these unlimited career opportunities in the social work field.

With the information provided in this section, you will be able to grasp the diversity of the social work arena, while gaining a focus of interest and direction toward a specific branch of the field. With focus and direction, you will feel more secure in applying for a position with an organization. Launching your professional and successful social work career in your field of interest will become viable.

### Today's Job Market

Today's job market has changed, and social work is not exempt from this change. Social workers can still be found practicing in the public sector, assisting the disadvantaged population. Recently, however, there has been a trend toward the private sector in which the social worker provides an array of services to clients from various social class populations (D'Aprix, Dunlap, Abel, & Edwards, 2004).

**Fields of Interest.** Social workers today can be found in various settings that include private practice, mental health, health, schools, community agencies, public welfare, agency administration, policy and planning, and areas that have been devastated by large-scale disasters.

The characteristics and demands of the population that social workers assist have changed and increased, and the areas of practice have expanded to meet these changes. Whether you decide to enter the public or private sector, you can expect to find a number of fields of interest available to you (see Table 2.1).

**Activity and Competition.** The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows that social work is one of the fastest growing careers in the United States. Social workers held approximately 562,000 jobs in 2004. According to the BLS (2006), "Employment of social workers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2014" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

**TABLE 2.1 Social Work Fields of Interest**

Addictions, Prevention, & Treatment	Dementia	Housing Assistance
Adolescent Health	Disaster Relief	Institutional Care
Adoption & Foster Care	Diversity & Equity	International Social Work
Advocacy, Consulting, & Planning	Domestic Violence	Mental Health Therapy
Alzheimer's	Eating Disorders	Military Social Work
Behavioral Health	Employment Services	Outpatient Treatment
Child Abuse and Neglect	Family Preservation Services	Parent Education
Community-Based Services	Genetics	Peace/Social Justice
Community Mental Health	Gerontology Services	Political Development
Criminal Justice	Health	Public Welfare
Crisis Intervention	HIV/AIDS	School Social Work
Chronic Pain	Hospice & Palliative Care	Veterans Services
Depression		

(Table 2.1 content sources: NASW, 2006; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006)

**Employment.** In 2004, approximately 9 out of 10 social work positions were in health care, social assistance industries, and state and local government agencies (health/human services). Although most social workers practice in cities or suburbs, the field is consistently growing in rural areas (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). Table 2.2 breaks down the employment of social workers in 2004 (most recent data).

1. **Children and Families.** Strengthening families has always been a key priority of social workers. Family lifestyles and structures are changing; thus the NASW advocates prevention and rehabilitation changes that will meet the needs of contemporary American families.
2. **School Social Work.** School social workers assess the social, behavioral, emotional, or economic problems that prevent a student from learning. Through professional judgment, the social worker refers the family and student to appropriate professional or community services. Follow-ups continue to ensure that services are provided and conditions monitored.

**TABLE 2.2 Social Work Employment**

Employment	Number of Social Workers
Child, family, & school	272,000
Mental health & substance abuse	116,000
Medical & public health	110,000
All other positions	64,000

(Table 2.2 content source: U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006)

3. **Mental Health Therapy.** Clinical social workers provide assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of various emotional problems, mental disorders, and substance abuse/chemical dependency. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported that professional social workers were the nation's largest group of mental health services providers in 1998. Social workers are recognized as one of five core mental health professions by the Federal Law and the National Institutes of Health (NASW, 2006; U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).
4. **Medical Social Work.** Social work in the medical field includes helping patients and families cope with problems that accompany illness or that inhibit recovery and rehabilitation. Problems include economic issues, disability, and lack of resources such as personal support systems after discharge to home. The social worker also provides supportive counseling to the patient and family members. Ongoing monitoring and assessing are required so that services can be modified to meet the changing needs of the patient and family.
5. **Gerontology Services.** The United States is experiencing a demographic transformation in relation to the aging population. The number of people age 65 and older is expected to reach 70 million by 2030. According to the NASW (2006), "This growing population of older adults will create an unprecedented demand for aging related programs, policies and services" (NASW Website). NASW has established an *Aging Initiative* program in order to raise awareness about geriatric social work practice, as well as to increase the number of professionally trained and credentialed social workers to serve this population.
6. **Disaster Relief.** According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2006), over 40 percent of the trained American Red Cross volunteers in 2004 were professional social workers.
7. **Elected Offices.** Over 170 social workers held national, state, and local elected offices in 2004 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

(*Social Work Employment sources:* NASW, 2006; U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006)

## Education

At the present time, 600,000 people have social work degrees, and a 30 percent increase is expected by 2010 (NASW, 2006; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).

- **Bachelor's Degree.** The most common degree held by social workers is the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work (BSW). The BSW is still sufficient for some social work positions. However, an *advanced degree is becoming* the standard requirement for many positions.
- **Advanced degree.** A Master's Degree in Social Work (MSW) is usually a requirement if your interest is practicing in health and clinical settings. Various public and private agencies may also require an advanced degree. These positions include supervisory, administrative, and staff training. In order to teach in colleges and universities, a Doctorate in Social Work (DSW or Ph.D.) is typically required.

TABLE 2.3 Social Work Education

Bachelor's Degree (BSW)	Advanced Degree (MSW, DSW, Ph.D.)
<i>Accredited programs = 442 (2004)</i>	<i>Accredited programs = 248 (2004)</i>
Prepares you for direct service casework.	Prepares you for work in your chosen field of concentration.
<p><b>Course work includes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social work values &amp; ethics</li> <li>2. Dealing with culturally diverse clientele &amp; at-risk populations</li> <li>3. Promotion of social &amp; economic justice</li> <li>4. Human behavior &amp; the social environment social welfare policy &amp; services</li> <li>5. Social work practice</li> <li>6. Social research methods</li> <li>7. Field education</li> </ol>	<p><b>Course work includes:</b></p> <p>Programs that continue to develop your skills required to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Perform clinical assessments</li> <li>2. Manage large caseloads</li> <li>3. Take on supervisory roles</li> <li>4. Expand your knowledge and use of social services necessary to meet client needs</li> </ol>
Supervised field experience = minimum of 400 hours	Supervised field instruction = minimum of 900 hours

(Table 2.3 content source: U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006)

- **Licensing.** All states and the District of Columbia require licensing, certification, or registration in order for a social worker to practice and use professional titles in the social work field. Licensing standards vary from state to state, and you should research the requirements needed in the state in which you plan to practice. The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) are resources you can use for beginning your search. See Table 2.3 for Social Work Educational Requirements.

(Social Work Education sources: NASW, 2006; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006)

## Demographics of Interest

Social workers assist those in need in several geographical areas, with the two extremes being rural and urban. While each community is unique, often geographic areas share common social problems such as poverty, domestic conflicts, illness, and substance abuse. The demographics for each are discussed next.

**Rural.** An objective definition of "rural" in which all academic concentrations agree does not exist. Thus, we will describe "rural" as sparsely populated country areas (less than 2,500 citizens). Rural areas also contain housing units *not* classified as urban (Henslin, 2005; Martinez-Brawley, 1980; Pugh, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). See Table 2.4 for further details on rural demographics.

TABLE 2.4 Rural Demographics

Description	Percentage of Rural Population
Poverty households	14.2%
Children in poverty	20%
Households w/inadequate food supply	11.6%
Unemployment	5.8%
Physicians' practices	9% of nation's total practices
Families w/member(s) who have a disability	30%
Young (25–39), single, not college educated	60%
Young (25–39), married, not college educated	55%
<i>*Older population</i>	<i>*25% (of U.S. population)</i>
<i>*Elderly: age 65 and over</i>	<i>*12% (of U.S. population)</i>
Population growth	0.4% (between April 2000 & July 2003)
Federal, state, local funding	\$233 billion (\$4,747 per resident)

*\* Italics indicate the percentage of the United States' total population.*

(Table 2.4 content sources: Krout & Dwyer, 1991; Mather, 2004; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006)

**Urban.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2006), an urban area consists of a densely populated, large central place with at least 50,000 citizens. Surrounding clusters with populations of at least 2,500 citizens in each cluster are also considered urban. See Table 2.5 for details pertaining to urban demographics.

TABLE 2.5 Urban Demographics

Description	Percentage of Urban Population
Poverty households	12%
Children in poverty	17%
Households w/inadequate food supply	11%
Unemployment	6%
Physicians' practices	91% of nation's total practices
Families w/member(s) who have a disability	28.5%
Young (25–39), single, not college educated	64%
Young (25–39), married, not college educated	62%
<i>*Older population</i>	<i>*75% (of U.S. population)</i>
<i>*Elderly: age 65 and over</i>	<i>*88% (of U.S. population)</i>
Population growth	1.3% (between April 2000 & July 2003)
Federal, state, local funding	\$987 billion (\$4,135 per resident)

*\* Italics indicate the percentage of the United States' total population.*

(Table 2.5 content sources: Krout & Dwyer, 1991; Mather, 2004; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006)

***Applying what you have learned . . .*****The Job Search**

- 2.7. **Refer to Table 2.1: Social Work Fields of Interest.** List the fields that you think would be of interest to you. Keep your list handy.
- 2.8. **Consider your list you developed in Exercise 2.7 Social Work Fields of Interest.** Which education degree do you feel you would need in order to obtain a social work position practicing in each one of your listed fields of interest? Keep your list.

**Rural and Urban Area Social Work Career Considerations**

- 2.9. In which area, rural or urban, do you feel you would be most comfortable and successful practicing social work? Refer to *Table 2.4 and Table 2.5*.
- 2.10. Refer to the lists you made in *Exercise 2.7 through Exercise 2.9*
- Which area, rural or urban, do you feel most needs your field of interest and would be most beneficial to the population?
  - List the reasons you feel this way.

**Section Three: Writing a Resumé and Cover Letter****Traditional Resumé**

Your goal is to have your resumé remain at the top of the potential employer's stack of social work applicants so that you are sure to receive an invitation for an interview. Positive first impressions are extremely important in obtaining employment. Your resumé provides that first impression. You must develop a resumé that is impressive and professional, while remaining brief. Before going further, let's look at some key **Do's** and **Don'ts** of preparing your resumé (see Table 2.6).

**Traditional Resumé Guidelines**

**Be Neat and Professional.** Your resumé provides your *first impression* to a potential employer. It is therefore essential that it be neat and professional in appearance. It must also be completely free of errors. You can develop a neat, professional, and error-free document by doing the following:

- Rough draft** Preparing a rough draft of any writing is strongly advised. This process is used by most professionals and scholars.
- Review and critique** Having an adviser or someone in your field review and critique your resumé is a step that is beneficial to you. Another's eye can pick out errors and appearance flaws that may exist in your document. **Avoid** depending on your computer's spell-check because it does not know the context in which you are using words!
- Additional resources** Additional resources that can assist you in developing a professional resumé include writing and career development centers.

TABLE 2.6 Key DO'S and DON'TS of Developing a Professional Resumé

Do's	Don'ts
Be neat and use a professional format. <b>Must be completely free of errors!</b>	<b>Hurry!</b> This results in a sloppy/nonprofessional appearance.
Be brief when developing your resumé. Provide clear and specific information. Use powerful language!	<b>Lengthy!</b> May end up at the bottom of the stack, or worse. Generalizations and self-congratulation should be avoided.
Contact information, employment objective, education, employment history with dates, and skills are a must.	Salary on your resumé shortchanges you when it comes to negotiation time.
One telephone number is sufficient. Make sure it is a number you check often and can have a calm and professional conversation on. Be sure to return the call in a timely fashion.	<b>Don't write your resumé for your needs!</b> Providing your cell phone number is not a good idea. You can't have a dignified and professional conversation while sitting in traffic.
Be generous with margins. You should have a one-inch margin on all sides. Remember <b>symmetry</b> so that your resumé has a balanced appearance. Have adequate white space.	Cluttered, packed arrangement of information should be avoided. Paragraph structure and full sentences should be avoided.

(Table 2.6 content sources: Barthel & Goldrick-Jones, 2005; Beale, 2004; Hultberg, 2002; Hunter College Reading/Writing Center, 1999; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

**Be Brief, Precise, and Confident.** When developing your resumé, it is important that the document be brief. Because the potential employer is going to spend about 10 seconds scanning over your resumé the first time, it is important to choose your words wisely. Be confident in your abilities, and provide clear and specific information. The following suggestions will help you accomplish this clarity.

- 1. Active verbs** Use active verbs when describing your skills, talents, abilities, and achievements. Examples of these verbs include:
  - lead, organize, participate, train, supervise, coordinate, direct, research
- 2. Adjectives and nouns** Use adjectives and nouns that describe you in a positive and accurate manner. Examples include:
  - bilingual, capable, creative, diversified, motivated, experienced, flexible
- 3. Powerful language** Be confident in your attributes and use powerful, honest wording. Avoid generalizations and self-congratulation!
- 4. Review and critique** Do remember to have an adviser or someone in your field review and critique your resumé.

**Resumé Contents.** Employers prefer a one-page resumé. Two-page (maximum) resúmes are acceptable/preferred if you have a strong history of employment, leadership, and education, and have included your references.

Every resumé requires the following:

1. **Contact information** Your first/last name, current and/or permanent mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address should be centered at the top of the page, with your name in bold print. **Avoid** using your cell phone number, “cutesy” e-mail address, and personal hobbies or interests that are not relevant to the position.
2. **Employment objective** The employment objective on your resumé is going to be slightly different for every job for which you apply. Make sure you tailor it to match the specific job for which you are sending it.
3. **Education** Your most recent education obtained should be listed first. Use the official name of each school you attended, along with the address that includes city and state. Be sure to use complete dates attended (start and completion), along with any honors earned. Listing relevant courses and an earned 3.0 grade point average and above are always impressive.
4. **Employment history** List your most recent employment first. Be sure to include company name, job title, date of employment, and a brief description of duties and accomplishments. **Never** list salaries on your resumé because this may be offensive and immediately sets the market value on your skills!
5. **Skills** Focus on what you know how to do in this section. Remember, use verbs because skills are *performable actions*.
6. **References** Three to five individuals who can support your skills and abilities may be listed in the reference section. Name, title, place of employment, and telephone should be listed for every individual reference. Be sure to ask permission to use them as a reference! **Avoid** personal references such as a boyfriend or a parent. References are optional.
7. **Additional sections** You can add additional sections to your resumé. Examples include honors, awards, and languages spoken.
8. **Review and critique** Having your resumé reviewed and critiqued by an adviser or someone in your field is an important step you should not skip.

**Margins, Symmetry, and Space.** Your resumé format will look impressive and professional if you follow these guidelines:

1. **Margins** Use a one-inch margin on all sides of your resumé.
2. **Symmetry** Make sure your resumé has a balanced appearance.
3. **Space** Leave adequate white space so that your resumé does not appear cluttered. Avoid a cluttered, packed arrangement. Do not use paragraph structure and full sentences.
4. **Font** The most appropriate typeface to use is *Times New Roman*, size 11 or 12 point.
5. **Review and critique** Again, take the beneficial step and have an adviser or someone in your field review and critique your resumé.

(Traditional Resumé Guidelines sources: Barthel & Goldrick-Jones, 2005; Beale, 2004; Hultberg, 2002; Hunter College Reading/Writing Center, 1999; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

TABLE 2.7 Key DO'S and DON'TS of Developing a Professional E-Resumé

Do's	Don'ts
Be neat and use a professional format. <b>Must be completely free of errors!</b>	<b>Hurry!</b> This results in a sloppy/nonprofessional appearance.
Be brief when developing your e-resumé. Provide clear and specific information. Use powerful language!	<b>Lengthy!</b> May end up at the bottom of the stack, or worse. Generalizations and self-congratulation should be avoided.
Contact information, employment objective, education, employment history with dates, and skills are a must.	Salary on your e-resumé shortchanges you when it comes to negotiation time.
You should have a one-and-a-half inch margin on all sides.	<b>Don't write your e-resumé for your needs!</b>
Use capital letters for section headlines. Align all text of the e-resumé to the left margin.	Don't Clutter, information. Don't use paragraph structure and full sentences.
Use asterisks or dashes to highlight specific features of your e-resumé.	No characters should touch one another. *This also includes slashes used.
Font size should be 12–14 points (10 min. & 14 max.).	Don't use columns.
<b>Keywords:</b> It is important to use as many keywords as possible. Examples: subtitles, job titles, skills, accomplishments, education.	Don't use decorative fonts, borders, bullets, etc. **For Scanning and Printing Purposes:
	Don't use paper with speckles. Do not fold your resumé.

(Table 2.7 content sources: Barthel & Jones, 2005; Beale, 2004; Hultberg, 2002; Hunter College Reading/Writing Center, 1999; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

## E-resumé

The electronic resumé has advantages over the traditional resumé in that it is fast, convenient, and user-friendly. It is also cheaper than paper. When preparing your e-resumé, you should follow several important steps so that it is not lost in cyberspace.

First we will look at the key **Do's** and **Don'ts** of preparing and sending your e-resumé (see Table 2.7).

## E-Resumé Guidelines

**Be Neat and Professional.** The e-resumé provides your *first impression* to a potential employer. It is extremely important that it be neat and formatted in a professional manner. It must also be completely free of errors. You can develop a neat, professional, and error-free e-resumé by doing the following:

1. **Rough draft** Preparing a rough draft of any writing is strongly recommended. This process is used by most professionals and scholars.

2. **Review and critique** Having an adviser or someone in your field review and critique your e-resumé is beneficial to you. Another's eye can pick out errors and appearance flaws that may exist in your document. **Avoid** depending on your computer's spell-check because it does not know the context in which you are using words!
3. **Additional resources** Additional resources that can assist you in developing a professional e-resumé include writing and career development centers.

**Be Brief, Precise, and Confident.** When developing your e-resumé, it is important that it be brief. Because the potential employer is going to spend about 10 seconds scanning over your e-resumé the first time, it is important to choose your words wisely. Be confident in your abilities, and provide clear and specific information. The following suggestions will help you accomplish this clarity:

1. **Active verbs** Use active verbs when describing your skills, talents, abilities, and achievements. Examples include:
  - lead, organize, participate, train, supervise, coordinate, direct, research
2. **Adjectives and nouns** Use adjectives and nouns that describe you in a positive and accurate manner. Examples include:
  - bilingual, capable, creative, diversified, motivated, experienced, flexible
3. **Powerful language** Be confident in your attributes and use powerful, honest wording. **Avoid** generalizations and self-congratulation!
4. **Review and critique** Do not forget to have your resumé reviewed and critiqued by an adviser or someone in your field.

**E-resumé Contents.** Employers prefer a one-page e-resumé. Two-page (maximum) e-resumés are acceptable/preferred if you have a strong history of employment, leadership, and education, and have included your references. Prepare your e-resumé in *Word format* to avoid type distortion when potential employers print it out.

The following are a must on every e-resumé:

1. **Contact information** Your first/last name and e-mail address should be the only information in this section. The potential employer may *not* be the only one with access to your e-resumé! This information should be at the left margin at the top of the page. **Avoid** using a “cutesy” e-mail address.
2. **Employment objective** The employment objective on your e-resumé is going to be slightly different for every job for which you apply. Make sure you tailor it to match the job you are seeking.
3. **Education** Your most recent education obtained should be listed first. Use the official name of the schools attended, along with the address that includes city and state. Be sure to use complete dates attended (start and completion), along with any honors earned. Listing relevant courses and an earned 3.0 grade point average and above is always impressive.
4. **Employment history** List your most recent employment first. Be sure to include company name, job title, date of employment, and a brief description of duties and accomplishments. **Never** list salaries on your resumé!

5. **Skills** In this section focus on what you know how to do. Remember, use verbs because skills are *performable actions*.
6. **Keywords** E-resumés are scanned using a keyword technique. It is important that you use as many keywords related to the position you are seeking. Examples of keywords include subtitles, job titles, skills, accomplishments, and education.
7. **References** Three to five individuals who can support your skills and abilities should be listed in the reference section. Name, title, and place of employment should be listed for every individual reference. Be sure to ask permission to use them as a reference! **Avoid** personal references such as boyfriend or parent. References are optional.
8. **Additional sections** You can add additional sections to your e-resumé. Examples include honors, awards, and languages spoken.
9. **Review and critique** Remember, having an adviser or someone in your field review and critique your e-resumé is a step that is beneficial to you. Do not skip this step prior to submitting your e-resumé to a potential employer.

**Margins, Space, and Characters.** Your e-resumé format will look impressive and professional if you follow these guidelines:

1. **Margins** Use a one-and-a-half inch margin on all sides of your e-resumé.
2. **Left-justified** Make sure all your information on the e-resumé begins to the left. Do not indent.
3. **Space** Leave adequate white space so that your e-resumé does not appear cluttered. There should be a space between each character, including slashes. **Avoid** a cluttered, packed arrangement. Do not use paragraph structure and full sentences.
4. **Capital letters** Use ALL CAPITAL LETTERS for section headlines. Asterisks or dashes are used to highlight specific features of your e-resumé. Font size should be 12–14 points (10 min. & 14 max.).
5. **Review and critique** Again, having an adviser or someone in your field review and critique your e-resumé is a step that is beneficial to you.

**Sending Your E-resumé.** There are a few steps you should take prior to sending your e-resumé to the potential employer. This will ensure that he or she not only receives it, but can read and print out your e-resumé in a professional format. They include:

1. **E-mail your e-resumé** to friends and/or colleagues so they may look over and critique it. This also ensures that your e-resumé sends properly and is received in a professional format.
2. **If possible, call the Human Resources Department** and get the name of the person responsible for the recruiting process. This will ensure that your e-resumé is not overlooked and/or lost among the many e-mails received.
3. **Send your e-resumé** as either a *Word attachment* or in the body of your e-mail. Before sending contact the Human Resources Department and find out what format it prefers.

(*E-Resumé Guidelines*: Barthel & Goldrick-Jones, 2005; Beale, 2004; Hultberg, 2002; Hunter College Reading/Writing Center, 1999; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

## Resumé Styles

You can use either of two styles when formatting your resumé; reverse chronological and functional.

**Reverse Chronological Format.** The reverse chronological format is the most popular resumé style used and is usually an employer's preference. Using this format, you list your most recent experiences first, and you proceed backwards through time. This is a good format to use if your most recent job and training closely fit with the position you are seeking. When developing your reverse chronological resumé, remember to do the following:

1. **If you start with the reverse chronological format**, all sections of your resumé should be in this style.
2. **Check your dates** to make sure the most current date is first and that remaining dates proceed backwards from there.
3. **Review and critique.** Have an adviser or someone in your field review and critique your resumé.

**Functional or Skills-based Format.** The functional or skills-based format reflects what you can do rather than where and when you did it. It is the best style to use *only* if:

1. You lack relevant work experience.
2. You are changing careers.
3. You have no time gaps in your employment and education history.
  - *FYI: This format is not always popular with employers!*

**\*\*Never Include in Your Resumé or E-Resumé\*\***

1. Personal information such as height, weight, age, date of birth, marital status, gender, race, health, personal photo, and social security number
2. Reasons for leaving previous job (s) and salary history
3. Falsified information

*(Resumé Styles sources: Barthel & Goldrick-Jones, 2005; Beale, 2004; Hultberg, 2002; Hunter College Reading/Writing Center, 1999; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)*

## Cover Letter Guidelines

The second important document that is part of getting you an interview with a potential employee is your cover letter. The cover letter, like your resumé, needs to be done in a professional and error-free manner. To prepare a cover letter that will accent your resumé and highlight your professionalism, the following information should be present:

1. Your address, personal telephone number (not cell phone number), and e-mail address. It should be typed in this exact order, and located at the top, left-hand corner (do not indent). Double-space.

2. Full date (month, day, year) should be next (left-hand side). Double-space.
3. The contact name and title, and full business address (left-hand side). Double-space.
4. Write: Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms./Dr./Professor/etc. then the last name (left-hand side). Double-space. (Do not use: Sir, Madam, or To Whom it May Concern.)
5. The body of your cover letter should be typed in standard English format. Use full and complete sentences, with correct paragraph structure. Use professional, block-style format. Do not indent!

**First Paragraph.** The first paragraph is your first chance to “grab the attention” of the potential employer. It should include:

1. Telling the reader who you are and the reason for writing
2. Informing the reader what position you are applying for
3. Stating why you believe the organization needs your services

**Second Paragraph.** Your second paragraph should include:

1. The reason (s) you would like to work for the organization
2. A few qualifications and experiences you can bring to the organization

**Third Paragraph.** Your third, and final, paragraph must contain:

1. A request for an interview and how you can be reached
2. A thanks to the reader for his or her time and consideration

**Closure.** Close your letter with “Sincerely.” Leave at least four spaces, then:

1. Type your name.
2. Sign your name in the space between the closing statement and your typed name.
3. Send the original to the potential employer—never send a photocopy!

*(Cover Letter Guidelines sources: Hultberg, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005; Purdue University, 2005)*

### ***Applying what you have learned . . .***

#### **Preparing a Resumé and Cover Letter**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.11. Prepare a traditional resumé using the reverse chronological format.</li> <li>2.12. Prepare a cover letter that accompanies your traditional resumé.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.13. a. Prepare an e-resumé using the reverse chronological format.</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">b. E-mail your e-resumé to a classmate and/or instructor for feedback.</li> </ol> |
|--|--|

## Section Four: The Interview

This section will guide you through the process of preparing for an interview. Professional etiquette surrounding appearance, arrival time, greeting, demeanor, and departing the interview are discussed. Captions reinforcing the proper protocol are displayed in the section. You will benefit from conducting a practice interview following the techniques and guidelines that are highlighted.

### Preparation

You have a scheduled interview with a potential employer because your resumé and cover letter were presented in a professional manner. Researching the organization and practicing your responses to various interview questions are two ways to prepare yourself for the interview. This preparation will also help you maintain professionalism when meeting with the prospective employer.

**Research the Organization.** You may be asking yourself, “Why do I need to research the organization? They will inform me of their goals, missions, and expectations during my interview.” Yes, the *interviewer* will probably fill you in on the organization. However, you will have a better understanding of what the interviewer is talking about and can ask specific questions if you have done your homework.

There are several ways to research the organization. Your first step should be the organization itself. Brochures, newsletters, and annual reports can be requested from the organization. The Internet and library are also valuable tools to use for finding information about your prospective employer (Brantley & Miller, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005).

Another important reason to research the organization before you have your interview is to enable you to respond to the interviewer’s questions in an educated and professional manner. The interviewer may also be impressed to find that you took the initiative to become familiar with the organization. Keep in mind that the less time the interviewer spends explaining the organization means more time *selling yourself* (Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005).

**Questions and Responses.** Most interviewers are interested in knowing three things about you.

1. **Your education:** what you know
2. **Your transferable skills:** your experiences that will be beneficial to them
3. **Team fit:** what type of employee will you be

You will appear more professional and be less anxious during the interview if you prepare your responses to these three items. In order to prepare yourself, you can ask yourself the following questions:

1. How do I want to express myself?
2. What are my key strengths?

3. What personal skills will best meet the job requirements?
4. What experiences have I had will be beneficial to the organization?
5. It is very important to remember that the interviewer may implement various job-related scenarios into his or her questions. An example is, “What would you do if a client asked you to behave unethically?” You need to prepare responses to meet this challenge!

(*Questions and Responses sources:* Brantley & Miller, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

### Nonverbal Communication

Your nonverbal communication is a critical element in the interview process. The interviewer will be listening to your responses while taking note of your body language. It is crucial that you become familiar with the Do’s and Don’ts of nonverbal communication because of the impact they will have on your interview (Brantley & Miller, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005; McDonald, 2004; Murray, 2005).

**Body Language.** In order to be regarded as a competent professional, it is important that you display proper body language during your interview with a potential employer (Murray, 2005). You can maintain professionalism by following the guidelines presented in Table 2.8.

**TABLE 2.8 Key DO’S and DON’TS of Professional Body Language**

Do’s	Don’ts
Appear confident.	Enter the room “sluggish.”
Have a firm handshake = self-confidence & professionalism.	Have a weak handshake = may signify a weak personality.
Maintain eye contact.	Stare.
Smile when appropriate, express approval by nodding and keeping friendly eye contact.	Frown or make tense facial expressions.
Sit upright, yet be relaxed.	Cross your legs = presents awkward posture.
Keep your arms open & to the side, or loosely folded in your lap.	Cross your arms = says “defensive.”
Remain in your own space.	Move into the interviewer’s “comfort zone” by leaning forward in your chair.
Have a “natural response” nod when agreeing.	Nod persistently.
Use gestures to emphasize important points.	Overuse hand motions = distracting.
Stay calm and focus your energy on the conversation.	Fidget or tap your fingers or feet = indicates you are anxious to end the interview.

(*Table 2.8 content sources:* Brantley & Miller, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005; McDonald, 2004; Murray, 2005)

## Appearance

At this point, you may be asking yourself, “What do I wear to my interview?” It is important that all your clothing and accessories make a good impression on the interviewer (see Table 2.9). Always wear professional business attire because it is better to be *overdressed* than *underdressed*!

You can do a number of things to guarantee a professional appearance:

1. Make sure your breath is fresh and your teeth are clean. Avoid chewing gum or candy during the interview.
2. Make sure your hair is clean, recently cut, and neatly brushed. If your hair is long, you should pull it back so it remains away from your face.
3. Use deodorant or antiperspirant only.
4. Do not use perfume or cologne. The office staff and interviewer may have allergies.
5. Be clean-shaven. Facial hair may be acceptable if it is neatly trimmed.
6. Avoid open-toed shoes and tank tops.
7. Bring a pen, paper, and extra copies of your resumé.
8. Carry a clean portfolio or briefcase. Do not carry a backpack.

(*Appearance sources*: Brantley & Miller, 2002; Hultberg, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

**TABLE 2.9 Professional Appearance and Clothing Attire**

MEN	WOMEN
Make sure fingernails are clean, trimmed, and buffed.	Use light nail polish colors. Avoid unusual colors and acrylic nails.
Use hair gel/mouse in moderation.	Use make-up in moderation.
Be sure to remove your piercings.	Go easy on the jewelry. Remove your piercings (“simple” earrings are fine).
Make sure you do not have things in your pockets that “jingle” (keys, change, etc.).	Invest in a basic, tailored suit with a knee-length skirt. Avoid anything above the knees. A pants suit is a good choice also. Both should be in plain colors (black, blue, gray).
Invest in a dark-colored suit (gray, black, blue). Coordinate your suit with a solid-colored dress shirt (white, beige, gray, or blue). Avoid polo shirts!	Wear skin-toned hosiery and polished shoes with a maximum heel of 2 inches.
Choose a tie that is “interesting” and in good taste. Polish your shoes.	Avoid tight-fitting clothing and clothing that is revealing.
Don’t forget: Your clothing should be clean, pressed, and in good repair.	Don’t forget: Your clothing should be clean, pressed, and in good repair.

(*Table 2.9 content sources*: Brantley & Miller, 2002; Hultberg, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

## The Appointment

Preparing and sending your professional resumé and cover letter, researching the organization, and shopping for the right professional attire have prepared you for your interview appointment. You now need to know how to “survive” the interview itself. The information in Table 2.10 is going to help you do this.

## Follow-Up of the Interview Process

A “*Thank You*” note should be sent to the interviewer within 24 hours after your interview. Between ten days and two weeks after your interview, you should call the interviewer to

### *Applying what you have learned . . .*

#### Interview Questions and Responses

- 2.14. Develop a list of your key strengths, personal skills, and experiences.
- 2.15. You have a scheduled interview. How do you think you will answer the interviewer’s following questions? Refer to the list you developed in Question 1.
  - a. The social work position requires you to travel to various rural areas and assist younger residents with household management. What classes and experiences have you had that you feel will enable you to properly assist the younger families?
  - b. Our organization employs 15 social workers. Numerous families in the areas we cover require various types of intervention and prevention. How do you feel about collaborating with a coworker who may have special skills and experience to deal with a specific family situation?
  - c. How would you handle the following client situation?
    1. You are visiting a single mom with two children who have been victims of domestic violence. The husband is out on bail and decides to visit his family while you are there. Your client lets him in the house. He is angry that you are there and the verbal abuse begins.

#### The Interview

It is time to put everything you have just learned into practice. The exercise should be spread out between at least two class time meetings (per instructor). You will be utilizing all the chapter’s exercise materials you completed.

- 2.16. Pick a classmate with whom to do a “mock” interview. Both you and your partner will have an opportunity to take on the role of interviewer and interviewee.
- 2.17. Both of you *together* need to refer to your social work fields of interest lists you developed. Decide what type of social work position and area (urban or rural) each of you wants to interview for. Share this information with your partner.
- 2.18. You and your partner must then “individually” create questions and answers. Do not share your questions and answers with your partner.
  - a. **Interviewer:** Create questions that match the field and area your partner is interested in.
  - b. **Interviewee:** Develop a plan based on what you believe your partner’s questions will be during the interview. The job opening is based on your field and area of interest.
  - c. Switch roles.

TABLE 2.10 Proper Interview Protocol

Proper Protocol	Improper Protocol
<b>Arrival Time Frame:</b> Be on time or 5–10 minutes early <i>maximum!</i>	Do not be late or show up 30 minutes early. Have respect and remember, the interviewer is busy.
<b>Proper Greeting:</b> Smile and firm hand shake	A weak handshake.
<b>Demeanor:</b> Be in good spirits, confident, and positive	Leave your “cranky” mood and negative attitude at home.
<b>Proper Exit:</b> Let the interviewer end the interview. Use your manners and say “Thank you!”	It is not your role to end the interview. Forgetting your manners.
<b>Follow-up:</b> Send a “Thank you” note and say “Thank you!”	Forgetting to recognize the valuable time the interviewer spent with you.

(Table 2.10 content sources: Brantley & Miller, 2002; Hultberg, 2002; Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005)

find out the status of the position and your application. Be helpful if they ask for more information from you (Mansfield University Office of Career Development, 2005).

### Summary

The first step in your exploration process brings about an understanding of social work expectations and practice. With this understanding, you can proceed to the second step, during which you become aware of your personal goals and values, and decide which field of social work fits your interests best. Exploring social work diversity and becoming familiar with the demographics of rural and urban populations help you gain a focus on a specific branch of practice that interests you. With this focus, you can also develop a successful educational plan that will lead to obtaining a position with an organization of your choice.

Self-promotion is the key to launching your career in social work. Initially, you do this through your resumé and cover letter. Both documents provide your *first impression* to a potential employer. It is extremely important that both your resumé and your cover letter be prepared in a professional format and be free of errors. As stressed throughout the section, you should complete a rough draft and have it reviewed and critiqued prior to submitting it to a potential employer. This will ensure that both your resumé and cover letter emphasize your professionalism, and that you stay at the top of the employer’s interview call list.

Finally, preparation and familiarity with the organization you wish to join will equip you with impressive conversation pieces during the interview. *Don’t forget:* your professional appearance, proper etiquette during the interview, and a follow-up *thank you note* are critical to your success in obtaining the position you are seeking.

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