

Has Your **Resume** Graduated from College?

> Five Strategies for Finding a Job
in Today's Economy

E. Chandlee Bryan, M.Ed.

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Introduction

Employers spend 15 seconds or less reviewing your resume before making a decision about you.

Are you worth a second look? Of course! But is your resume selling you effectively so you'll get that second look? Maybe ... and maybe not.

Over the past 10 years, E. Chandlee Bryan has helped hundreds of college students connect with internships, jobs, and employers as a certified professional resume writer, coach, former Ivy League career counselor, and recruiter. Along the way, she's learned a few secrets that may help you. For example:

The most qualified candidate isn't always the one who gets the interview.

Employers often receive hundreds of resumes for a single position. Even when you have the most relevant experience for the job, you may get passed over for an interview.

So here's a simple truth: When you present your skills and experience in a clear, concise way that aligns with your intended job target, you increase your chances of getting hired.

This e-book provides five strategies that you—as a recent college graduate—can use to refine your job search and position yourself to get noticed. Use these techniques and read the articles on [My Resume Talks](http://myresumetalks.com) (<http://myresumetalks.com>) to help ensure your resume has a strong voice that potential employers can't ignore.

The 30-Second Resume Test

*Does your resume need a makeover?
Here's a quick exercise to assess whether your resume could use
a style change:*

1. Write down your ideal job or find a job listing that interests you.
2. Write down three skills or qualifications you'll need to do the job.
3. Pull up your resume on your computer screen so you can only see the top half. (Alternative: Print out your resume, and fold it in half. Look at the information above the fold.)

What do you see?

This is how your resume appears to a potential employer. Now put yourself in a recruiter's shoes. Imagine you have seven different positions to fill, hundreds of applications, and hiring managers who wanted new employees to start six weeks ago.

Do your skills and experience stand out in a quick "eyeball review?"

Ask yourself four questions from the employer's perspective:

1. Is this an easy read?

Is your resume easy to skim?

Yes No

Are the fonts and formatting consistent?

Yes No

2. Does your experience stand out?

Is it clear how your skills and experience fit the job in an "eyeball review?"

Yes No

Is it clear why you have applied for the position?

Yes No

3. Do your skills, strengths and potential to make an impact show?

Do you demonstrate the impact of your past work—and future potential?

Yes No

Does your resume go beyond "what you did" to show "how you helped?"

Yes No

Is it easy to make the case for putting you on the interview list?

Yes No

If you answered "no" to one or more questions, it is time for a tune up. Read on to learn five critical strategies to create a winning resume.

Five Search Strategies

#1: Be Selective: Don't Look for Just "Any" Job

As you search for full-time employment, you will likely find many people who want to help you. Let them. One of the best ways to identify great opportunities in any economy is to incorporate your personal network as part of your job search strategy. But as you share your interests with others, be wary of a common pitfall: Don't tell people you are looking for "a job" or "any job."

After all, you don't want just any job, do you? For example, if you've only had your driver's license for a year and have a tough time parallel parking, an entry-level management training position with an express packaging service that requires driving large vehicles may not be the best fit for you. If a networking contact presented you with this opportunity, you may find yourself in an awkward position.

Avoiding the "Any Job" Syndrome

Trying to "appeal to all" can make you "stand out to none" and increase the time it takes to find the right opportunity. Even in a tight labor market, you can and should be selective about job types and industries that will best suit your skills. Here are four steps you can take to avoid the "any job" syndrome:

1. Identify the characteristics you are looking for in a job and in an employer.
2. Narrow your focus to specific opportunities, jobs, and industries.
3. Apply only to positions that fit your criteria.
4. Communicate your specific interests. This will make it easier for others to help you if they see or hear of opportunities that sound appropriate for you.

Concerned that setting parameters for your search will limit your opportunities? Compare the situation with another familiar aspect of college life—dating. Like dating, the job search is a process of mutual selection: Your employer picks you, and you pick your employer. You don't always get the chance to make a final decision, but it is up to you to decide whether you want to participate—and how much effort you put into the game.

If you accept a full-time job offer after only a few interviews, it's the equivalent of making a long-term commitment after only a few dates. You've just agreed to spend 40 or more hours a week with people you don't know very well. The stakes are high—so be strategic about how you play.

In a tight market, the search for employment is a dance between possibility and open opportunity. Let other people know your skills, strengths and search criteria and showcase what you offer. Be open to opportunities you may not have considered before. But remember that you'll be more successful in the long run if you've taken the time to choose a compatible partner. Don't be afraid to be clear about what you want.

#2: Know What Employers Want Before You Apply

If this is your first time searching for a full-time job, you need to know that one of the worst ways to go about it is by applying for a position before you've done your homework.

If you don't know what employers need, you may miss the mark. Sometimes employers are looking for a skill or experience that isn't obvious.

Here is one example: Many years ago, I spent an hour with a regional director of the American Institute of Architects. I asked him one of my favorite questions: "What do firms in your field look for most when hiring entry-level employees?"

When I asked the question, I thought I knew the answer. I had previously spoken with employers who were recruiting architects. I knew aspiring architects. One of my friends was the associate dean of an architecture school. Several of these individuals had shared with me a common difference between the architecture you learn in school and actually working in the field, that being that not all schools teach the software applications used by architects in drafting and drawing. According to my sources, not knowing the software tools was a common weakness of aspiring architects.

Yet this was not the answer I received when I posed my question.

"Project management. Budgeting. Accounting. These are the most important skills an entry-level hire can have," he told me. "Students think that architecture is all about creating building plans and drafting. But architectural firms have to be able to run a business in order to survive, and we need junior employees who have an aptitude for business."

Take a lesson from the architects: Even if you have skills or experience that fit the job, don't assume you meet all of the hiring criteria. Organizations may have other inside needs that aren't listed in the job description. In addition, you'll find that many

employers are looking for “soft skills” like teamwork and collaboration in addition to relevant skills and experience. This is why it is important to highlight extracurricular activities in your resume.

When hiring, employers evaluate candidate skills and experiences against the core competencies they need for employee success. You will be evaluated based on their needs—not your interests.

Summary

To create your own blueprint for success, find out what employers need. Reframing your skills and experience from the employer’s perspective will strengthen your resume and job search materials in the short term—and your job prospects as you move forward.

#3: Go Offline to Determine Employer Needs

Social networking is growing exponentially, and is radically transforming the landscape for job seekers. Through social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, you have vast opportunities to create and strengthen connections with friends, colleagues, and digital communities in your area of interest.

Know the Risks of Online Networking

But social networks have also resulted in a new challenge for job seekers: Chances are strong that your digital footprint, or online presence, will be seen by more people than your resume. Given this new trend, it's not just your resume that speaks volumes about you—it is also your web presence.

A 2006 survey conducted by ExecuNet found that 77 out of 100 executive recruiters reported conducting background Internet research on candidates; 35% said they had ceased considering a candidate based on what they found online. What does this mean? Many employers may weigh your online presence in the hiring process—whether you invite them to or not.

So your task is to ensure that when potential employers mine the Internet for information about you, what they find is a professional image and a focused message about your interests. How do you do that? It may mean going "offline" to gather the information you need to move forward in a digital world. A great way to start is by expanding your personal network.

Use Your Offline Networking Skills

After spending time on a campus that you've gotten to know well, the concept of connecting with relative strangers may feel awkward. It is normal to feel this way; the networking process can feel unnatural and formal—especially if you have been advised that it is something you "must" do. That said, it's important to recognize that you are already a natural networker.

As a college student, you are networking all the time. When you ask for directions or ask about the homework for a class, you are networking. When you tell an acquaintance where to find the best parties, you are networking. When you post information on Facebook and share it with your community of friends, you are engaging in viral networking.

You may not think of these actions as networking, but the [dictionary](#) on MSN Encarta suggests they are:

net-work·ing [[nét wùrking](#)]

(Noun): practice of gathering of contacts: the process or practice of building up or maintaining informal relationships, especially with people whose friendship could bring advantages such as job or business opportunities.

Again, the job search bears similarity to dating: It is a mutually selective process which generally gets easier with practice. As you start your job search, it may be easier to start out talking to someone you feel comfortable with and have known for a while rather than an "elusive crush" who may not know you exist. Either way, your chances of success increase when you know more about the interests and needs of potential suitors.

Make the Most of College Connections and Friends

If you are shy—or uncertain about how to articulate your skills and interests—start with people who may be easy for you to approach and at the same time willing to help you in your search. Here are a few suggested leads.

In addition to their work with you, most professors and staff members at colleges and universities maintain active ties with alumni and individuals in their respective fields. If you would like to work in a field related to your major or other coursework, consider asking faculty members for leads in your area of interest.

Your friends may also be a strong source of leads. I know of more than one person who has landed a job through Facebook status updates alone.

Alumni can also be a valuable source of leads. When you think about it, you share many common interests with individuals who went to your school, whether you know them or not, including:

- Campus rituals, faculty lectures and school traditions
- Allegiance to sports teams
- A sense of loyalty to the college community

Many schools offer formal alumni networks, maintain databases of individuals who volunteered to meet with one another for informational interviews, and may also host local receptions in metropolitan areas. Take advantage of these connections; you may find a volunteer mentor. You may also find people who are willing to make introductions for you.

Track Trends in Your Field of Interest

Individuals currently working in your field or holding jobs of interest to you are a natural source of leads and information for your job search. But you need to be prepared.

Take a lesson from established leaders in your field and stay on top of trends and networking opportunities through professional associations. These organizations generally offer member services that include job listings, continuing education, and forums for discussing industry trends.

Many professional associations have full-time staff members at the regional and national level; these individuals—as well as association members—are a natural source of networking leads, especially since many active associations have local networking

chapters. If you attend a local meeting, you may stand out in the crowd and find volunteers willing to help you make connections.

Professional associations can help you find a mentor or a highly visible leader in your field. They can often provide "word of mouth" job leads and access to emerging trends inside organizations and your field-at-large. If you attend regular meetings, monitor current events, and attend conferences, you will develop a strong network and potentially establish yourself as a leader in your field.

Summary

Professors, alumni, friends, and professional groups are all great resources that can help you build and expand your network, forge new friendships, and have fun while learning what employers need from you.

#4: Frame Your Resume to Fit the Position

The conventional rule for business success in retail is three words: location, location, location. Visibility in a target market can be a critical element for business success.

Likewise, the essential rule for preparing your resume is also three words: position, position, position. To successfully promote yourself as a top candidate for a job you must:

- Know the **position** you're applying for.
- Understand how your skills fit the **position**.
- **Position** your skills to meet the needs of your potential employer and the job function.

Making Your Resume Meet the Need

Once you know what employers need, you're ready to write and refine your resume. Start with a strong summary statement or objective at the top of your resume designed to engage the interest of a potential employer. These two articles by Monster resume expert Kim Isaacs explain how to do this:

- [Generate Interest with a High-Impact Summary Statement](#)
- [What's Your Objective?](#)

Your summary statement or objective is the thesis of your resume. It frames your experience for employers and highlights your suitability for a particular position.

While a great opener can command attention and help you get noticed, you have to follow it up with supporting evidence to build your case. You need to build on your summary and demonstrate the impact you can make.

How to Present Your Experience

But what if your past and/or employment track record isn't letter perfect? What if life, calculus, and a "major path explored but not taken" have thrown you off track?

Relax. There are strategies you can use to highlight your best or most relevant experiences. Here are techniques which may work for you:

1. **Don't be afraid to deviate from a traditional resume format to highlight your experience.**

A majority of entry-level resumes present experience in "reverse chronological order" (most recent experiences first). But you can deviate from this structure.

If you are within the first three years of finishing college, you will generally begin with an "Education" section immediately following your "Summary" or "Objective" section. However, you don't have to present all of your experience in chronological order.

You can highlight your primary skills or experience first. Use this approach if:

A "selected" or "relevant" experience section demonstrates your suitability for a position, though the actual experience doesn't align neatly with your overall timeline.

For example, let's say you are applying for a job as a paralegal. You are a History major and worked at a law firm three summers ago. In a traditional resume format, this experience might get buried. In a hybrid format, you could develop a summary which emphasizes any legal courses you've taken, and then list your law firm position in a "Related Experience" section. This way, you start by making a connection for your reader—rather than hoping that she will make the connection in her 15-second scan.

You can also use this approach to highlight specific technical skills or leadership abilities.

If you wish to be known for your skills or expertise in a particular area, consider starting your resume with a “Core Competencies” or “Technical Competencies” section that lists your skills and knowledge areas. The “competency-based” header works especially well if you are applying for positions that require knowledge of a specialized application or field—or if you already have industry-specific certifications.

2. If you are known for your leadership skills more than your academic record or related internship experience, you can also begin with a leadership section.

If you choose to lead with leadership, proceed with caution. Be sure to list at least one organization that you do not chair. As much as employers value leadership, they also value team players. Show that you can lead and that you can contribute from the sidelines when appropriate. In a work environment with tight deadlines and fiscal constraints, leadership and following directions are equally important.

Do you have a significant gap in your resume? Do you feel that you are missing internship experience, technical skills, or a significant leadership experience? If your major aligns with your intended job target, start there and show the impact of your work.

A big myth of resume writing is that “coursework doesn't count.” You can list your courses as part of your resume. If you do this, you simply need to make sure you back up the information. You can list a group project you completed for your degree requirements, but be honest about how you gained the experience—include the name of the course and nature of what you did. Demonstrate the outcome. How was your work used?

Be clear about what you did, and how you used technology to accomplish your goals. For example, if you created financial models using Microsoft Office Excel® and presented the final presentation in Microsoft Office PowerPoint®, you can say this. Including this information demonstrates that you are familiar with commonly used applications, and that you can provide similar assistance to your future employer.

3. If you're a fifth year senior, you don't have to make it obvious that you've taken longer to finish school.

The convention for U.S. resumes is to list month and year of graduation. You don't have to specify date of enrollment for any programs that resulted in a degree.

Unless you are asked for specific dates of enrollment via job application instructions, you only need to list the month and year of graduation on your resume for any degree-bearing programs.

LIST University of Texas – Austin, Austin, TX May 2009
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

NOT University of Texas – Austin, Austin, TX 2004 – 2009
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

This is how John "Bluto" Bartarsky of "Animal House" could explain his seventh year of college on his resume. (According to the film, his future career included a seat in the U.S. Senate.)

Note: This rule doesn't apply to any schools you attended from which you did not receive a degree. If you are a transfer student, enrolled in courses at another institution or participated in a study abroad program, you need to list those dates separately and include start and end dates of study.

Examples:

Study Abroad

Reid Hall, Paris, France

Spring 2009

Participant in study abroad program hosted by Columbia University.

All coursework completed in French.

Transfer Student

University of California – Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 2006-2007
Completed coursework in Economics and Political Science. Dean's List.

4. Make sure to use your GPA to your advantage.

Employers consider multiple factors when evaluating candidates for full-time jobs; academic performance is virtually always on the short list of factors for review. The question of how to list GPA can be challenging—especially if you do your best work outside of the classroom.

If you don't list GPA, your application may not be seriously considered—or you may hear the question: Where is it?

Listing GPA is often a discretionary decision. What matters most is to know and follow your school's guidelines for calculating and presenting GPA and "rounding up" numbers. If your academic record is not perfect, school officials may be able to help you decide when and how to list GPA for the job search process. (A common rule of thumb is to list GPA if your average is 3.0 or a higher on a 4.0 scale—the scale most commonly used in the U.S.)

The cumulative GPA on your resume should match the cumulative GPA on your transcript. Be exact. Many schools don't allow "rounding up" and most employers will ask for a copy of your transcript.

Follow your school's resume writing guidelines for calculating GPA and be transparent in your math to ensure full consideration by employers. Misrepresentation of your GPA can have serious consequences—including rescinded offers of employment and disciplinary action at your school.

You may be able to "reframe your GPA" by selectively listing coursework in your major or from a certain time period (i.e. Fall 2008 – Present). If you do this, you must be transparent in your calculation.

Make it easy for employers to duplicate your math by listing the number of courses you've completed—and make sure employers can identify what courses you are counting on your transcript. (Frequently, department codes are easy to identify and count on a resume.)

If your "GPA by Major" includes coursework outside of your major department, mention the course by name:

Example:

University of Maryland, College Park, MD May 2010
Candidate for Bachelor of Science in Chemistry
Major GPA: 3.5/4.0 (10 courses, including pre-requisite in Math 220)

If you present GPA by date, list the number of courses you've completed and received grades for during a specific time period.

Example:

Ohio State, Columbus, OH May 2009
Bachelor of Arts in English. Cumulative GPA: 3.3/4.0.
GPA Fall 2008 – Present: 3.85/4.0 (15 courses)

#5: Collaborate to Get a Job

Once you've updated your resume, make sure someone else takes a look at it *before* you send it to a potential employer.

Even if you were editor of your school newspaper, don't try to be the final proofreader of your own work. Spell check doesn't pick up certain words. For example, it doesn't miss the "l" in public. A handful of job seekers do, and it doesn't help them with applications for public relations opportunities.

As a job candidate, one of the most difficult things to do is to see yourself as others view you. Your colleagues, friends, family and professors can identify personal strengths and attributes that may elude you when you describe yourself.

Share your resume draft to get a second and a third opinion. Give equal consideration to praise and constructive suggestions, and incorporate the feedback you receive into your final document. It will help you clarify your content with your reader in mind. Speaking of your end reader, here's a final tip:

Employers receive a lot of material; make it easy for them to find you. Name your documents so that anyone can find and identify them—include your name and intended position title.

Example: Brian_Cox_Actor_Entourage

Need additional sources? Check out this article on [How to Land a High Profile Resume Critique](#) from Monster Career Coach Peter Vogt.

Final Word

A final note: What about keywords, format, and grammar? Aren't those essential tips for your resume, too?

Absolutely. Keywords, strong formatting, and clear grammar are essential elements of any resume and the backbone of a successful job application. But, in a tight market, you need to go beyond the basics and frame your experience from the employer's mindset. A good resume summarizes past accomplishments and work history; a great resume stands apart by demonstrating your future potential. The five strategies in this e-book are designed to help take your resume to the next level. If you need help with fundamentals, check out the resources below:

[Declutter Your Resume in Five Steps](#)

[Refresh Your Retro Resume in Six Steps](#)

[Put Your Education To Work](#)

[Keyword Challenge:
Find the Right Ones for Your Resume](#)

About the Author



E. Chandlee Bryan, M.Ed., is a certified professional resume writer, coach and former Ivy League career counselor. Prior to starting her own business, she worked briefly as a recruiter and spent over eight years connecting Ivy League students with job opportunities. She is the former Director of Career Services of the Engineering School at Dartmouth College and worked for many years at the University of Pennsylvania. She returned to Penn as a guest facilitator for Manhattan-based programs following the economic downturn in September 2008.

Bryan is a voracious reader of career trends, regularly interviews employers about their pet peeves, and rarely tires of hearing job search stories or learning about work environments and employment culture.

In the course of connecting students and employers at several institutions, Bryan has had a front row seat to observe job search techniques that do and don't work. In 2008 she started her own business, Best Fit Forward, and began writing to share what she'd learned. She also signed on as facilitator and organizer for a MeetUp.com group of job seekers in New York City, a role which has exposed her to a diverse community of individuals—from new graduates to industry veterans in fashion, Wall Street, media, and entertainment.

Exercise: Explore Your Potential

Not sure where to apply? Here's a quick exercise designed to help you explore potential new areas of interest.

The Cafeteria Approach to Identifying Potential Positions

1. Pick a function.

Think about your skills and abilities. Select three items in the following list of transferable skills that you enjoy and find easy:

- Analyzing and Synthesizing Data
- Brainstorming
- Coaching/Motivation
- Communications
- Consulting
- Event Management
- Financial Analysis
- Fundraising
- Interviewing
- Goal Setting
- Group Dynamics/Negotiations
- Group Presentations
- Handling Details
- Leading and Delegating
- Making Decisions
- Managing Conflict
- Management
- Marketing
- Needs Assessments
- Persuading
- Policy Making
- Problem Solving
- Project Management
- Public Speaking
- Public Relations
- Reporting
- Sales
- Taking Direction
- Team Work
- Writing

Can't decide?

Ask a friend, advisor or mentor for their observations on what you do best.

2. Pick an industry.

Pick at least two industry sectors in which you can apply your skills.

- COMMUNICATIONS
 - From Advertising and Public Relations to Writing and Marketing
- EDUCATION
 - Schools, Colleges and Universities
- GREEN ENERGY / NATURAL RESOURCES
 - Chemical, Environmental Engineering
- FINANCIAL SERVICES
 - Accounting, Banking, Corporate Real Estate, Venture Capital
- HEALTHCARE
 - Includes Hospitals, HMOs, Healthcare facilities
- GOVERNMENT
 - Local, State and Federal Government
- MANUFACTURING
 - From Aerospace and Apparel to Pharmaceutical and Consumer Products
- NON-PROFIT
 - From Arts and Professional Associations to Advocacy and Social Services
- SERVICES
 - From Consulting and Law Firms to Travel and Personal Care
- TECHNOLOGY
 - Software, Hardware, High Tech
- TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Action Steps:

1. Write down your list of three skills.
2. Write down your list of two industries.
3. Combine them and explore job opportunities.

Example #1:

Skills: Handling Details, Communications, Writing
Industries: Government, Manufacturing

Sample Positions:

Government: Legislative Staff Assistant for an elected official
Manufacturing: Entry-Level Technical Writer

Example #2:

Skills: Analyzing and Synthesizing Data, Negotiations,
Project Management
Industries: Services (Entertainment), Advocacy

Sample Positions:

Entertainment: Licensing Assistant for a film crew
Advocacy: Research Assistant to a Grant Manager

What are your potential leads?

Skills:

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

Industries:

1: _____

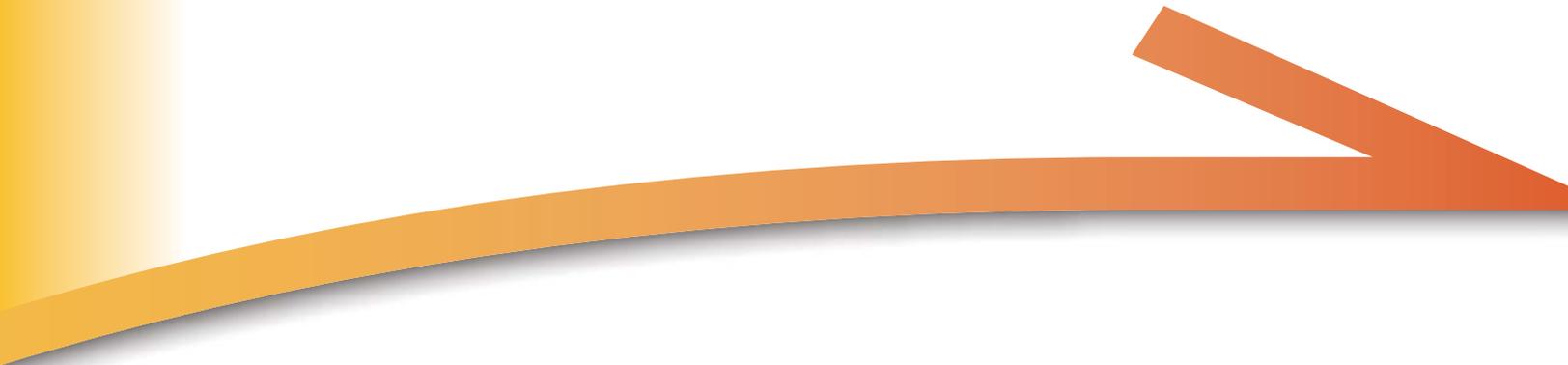
2: _____

Potential Jobs:

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____



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