The job search process can involve numerous difficult and sometimes ambiguous situations that leave people wondering about the proper procedure. There are unwritten rules and protocol that can be crucial to a job searcher who is trying to land a job and stay out of some potentially "sticky" situations.

Remember, besides representing yourself, you are representing the University of Virginia and the other U.Va. students who are also seeking employment.

Use this handout as a guideline. If you have specific questions, please stop by UCS and make an appointment with a career counselor.

- Is it okay to embellish my resume?
- How important is the employer’s application form? Do I really need to fill it out?
- What if I can’t attend my interview?
- Should I send a thank you note?
- When should I follow up with an employer after an interview?
- When can I ask about money?
- I don’t want the job. Should I take the second interview just in case?
- How much time do I have before I accept/decline a job offer?
- I already accepted an offer. Can I back out?

Is it okay to embellish my resume?

Everything on your resume should be factual. It is likely that you will be asked to expand on elements of your resume during your interview. If you falsify something on your resume, sooner or later you’ll get caught in this falsehood. Truthfulness in an interview is extremely important. Even if you are offered a position and/or accepted it, an employer can withdraw that offer if they learn that you falsified information on your resume or application.
How important is the employer’s application form? Do I really need to fill it out?

Yes. If you do not submit the employer application, you will not likely be considered for an interview. Most employers do require candidates to complete the organization’s official application form, whether it is online or in hard copy. Complete the form carefully and neatly. Avoid making statements on the application like "see attached resume." Don’t leave spaces blank. If a question does not apply, write "not applicable" on the line. Your application may remain in your personnel file for years and could affect career progress decisions.

What if I can’t attend my interview?

Contact the employer as soon as you realize you won’t be able to attend. Disclose only as much information as you feel comfortable sharing. Try to reschedule if possible. If you are unable to reschedule, follow up with the employer with a brief note of apology.

Cancelling your interview because you feel unprepared or a better opportunity has come up, is not appropriate. Interview spaces are at a premium. A wasted interview space may deny your fellow student the opportunity to secure a job.

Should I send a thank-you note?

Yes! Thank-you notes are a must in the job search process. Letters should be sent within 2-3 days and no longer than a week after the interview. However, send the letter even if you lose track of time. A late thank-you note is better than no note at all. If you have decided that you are no longer interested in a particular position, it is wise to send a thank-you note. You never know when you will need to contact that employer in the future. It is better to leave your options open.

Thank-you letters may be handwritten, typed, or e-mailed; it’s a personal preference. Thank-you notes should always be written to the person with whom you had the interview. Even if you were asked to address the interviewer by their first name during the interview, play it safe and use their title and last name in the letter. Many times during the second or even an initial interview, you may meet with more than one person during the course of the day. If you are interested in pursuing opportunities with the company, write each person a thank you note. Don’t use a form letter; try to individualize each letter to make the most favorable impression.

When should I follow up with an employer after an interview?

If the employer has not given you a specific time frame for getting back to you regarding the position, two weeks is an appropriate time to wait before calling the employer. If a specific time has been communicated, wait until that time has passed before you try to contact the employer. This may be hard to do as the anxiety grows, but it is to your advantage to wait and give the employer the amount of time he specified. Very often their screening process may take a bit longer than they predict.
When can I ask about money?

The employer should first mention the topic of salary. You will be in the strongest position as a candidate if you can put off discussion about salary as long as possible. Salary discussions usually do not occur in the first meeting. The employer may not want to discuss salary with an interviewee until a clear assessment of the candidate has been made. Several meetings may take place before salary is mentioned.

Do your homework before the topic comes up - resources at UCS can provide you with average salaries by major and type of position. If you want to investigate salary negotiation tactics further, consult the resources in UCS library. A verbal offer need not be accepted on the spot. Ask for time to think it over and ask for a formal offer letter.

I don’t want the job. Should I take the second interview just in case?

If you are asked back for a second interview, and you know that you’re definitely not interested in the employer, let the employer know. This enables the employer to extend an invitation to another qualified candidate who may be thrilled at the opportunity to have a second interview.

How much time do I have before I accept/decline a job offer?

Great! You have an offer. However, you’re not really sure whether you want to take it or not or fear something better could come along. What should you do? The first step is to acknowledge the receipt of the offer, thanking the employer for his/her interest and showing an understanding of the terms stated. The communication does not mean that you are going to accept the offer. It simply means that you have received the offer and are giving it your consideration. Remember though, an employer has a right to withdraw an offer any time prior to acceptance. It is appropriate to ask the employer how much additional time you might have to consider your options. However, the employer is not obligated to grant you this time. This is a difficult decision. However, remember that you will need to stick by your decision once you have made it.

I already accepted an offer. Can I back out?

Once you accept the offer, you make an ethical contract with the employer. You are ethically obligated to stop looking for employment elsewhere and reject all future offers. When an employer extends an offer to you, he/she invests a great deal of time, effort, and resources. The employer also makes the decision not to offer the job to other well-qualified candidates. If you accept and then rescind an offer, the employer must begin the search again, spending time and money, and may find that all the other qualified students they were interested in have already accepted jobs elsewhere. As soon as you make a decision to accept an offer, you should immediately notify all other employers who are waiting to hear from you. This enables them to extend an offer to another qualified candidate. If you find yourself in a quandary, stop by UCS and consult with one of the counselors. The decision you make will be final, so make sure that you will be able to stand by it.