YOUR AI GPS CAREER TOOLKIT

AI is your GPS. You are always the driver.

Smart Tools. ***Strategic Prompts.*** ***Real Results.***



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Talent Transformation Whisperer, LLC | transformwithttw.com

For Students, First-Time Job Seekers, Career Changers, Veterans, Professionals Ready to Advance, and the Coaches Who Support Them

WELCOME TO YOUR TOOLKIT

This guide is yours to keep. Use it every time you update your resume, optimize your LinkedIn, prepare for an interview, or launch your next career move. Your future starts with the very next step you take.

I developed the content in this toolkit, drawing on more than 20 years of HR and workforce development experience. I used Claude AI (Anthropic) as a collaborative tool throughout the process, for content drafting, information structuring, visual design, and instructional sequencing, and I reviewed, verified, and refined every part of it. References are listed throughout this document and in the Career Readiness Resources section.

You never have to use AI to use this toolkit. Every strategy here, from formatting your resume to preparing for interviews and evaluating offers, works with or without AI. The prompts are there to support your thinking when they help, never as a requirement.

The GPS Principle. AI is the navigation tool. You are always the driver. AI can suggest routes, but you set the destination, make every turn, and own every outcome. The test is simple: can you defend every word in an interview? If not, AI drove and you were a passenger.

Why This Toolkit Exists

I developed this toolkit while working in higher education career services. Job searching does not keep office hours. Students, alumni, and community members often do their most focused career work at night, on weekends, between shifts, or after their children are asleep, long after a career center has closed for the day. I wanted them to have something trustworthy to turn to in those hours.

What began as a framework to guide each workshop, course build, curriculum design, and coaching conversation grew into a resource library: a place where any job seeker could learn how hiring systems work, practice with AI responsibly, and keep moving forward on their own schedule. It may have started in higher education, but I have kept refining, rewriting, and expanding it for every client I serve beyond campus. I use it in community engagement work and community workshops, with job seekers who are starting out, starting over, or moving up. It is shared here so that anyone, at any stage of their career and at any hour, can use it.

FIND YOUR STARTING POINT

Career coaches and advisors: page 87. **Students and recent graduates:** page 89. **Experienced professionals changing direction:** page 90. **Service members, veterans, and military spouses:** page 92. **Professionals seeking a promotion:** page 93. **Homeschooled teens and young adults:** page 95. **Sample resumes** for students, military to civilian transitions, and entry level community jobs start on page 39. **New to job searching?** Start with *How to Conduct a First Time Job Search*, my free guided workbook, then come back here when you are ready to go deeper.

QUICK REFERENCE: FIND WHAT YOU NEED

Flip to the page you need. Every section builds on the one before it, but you can jump in anywhere.

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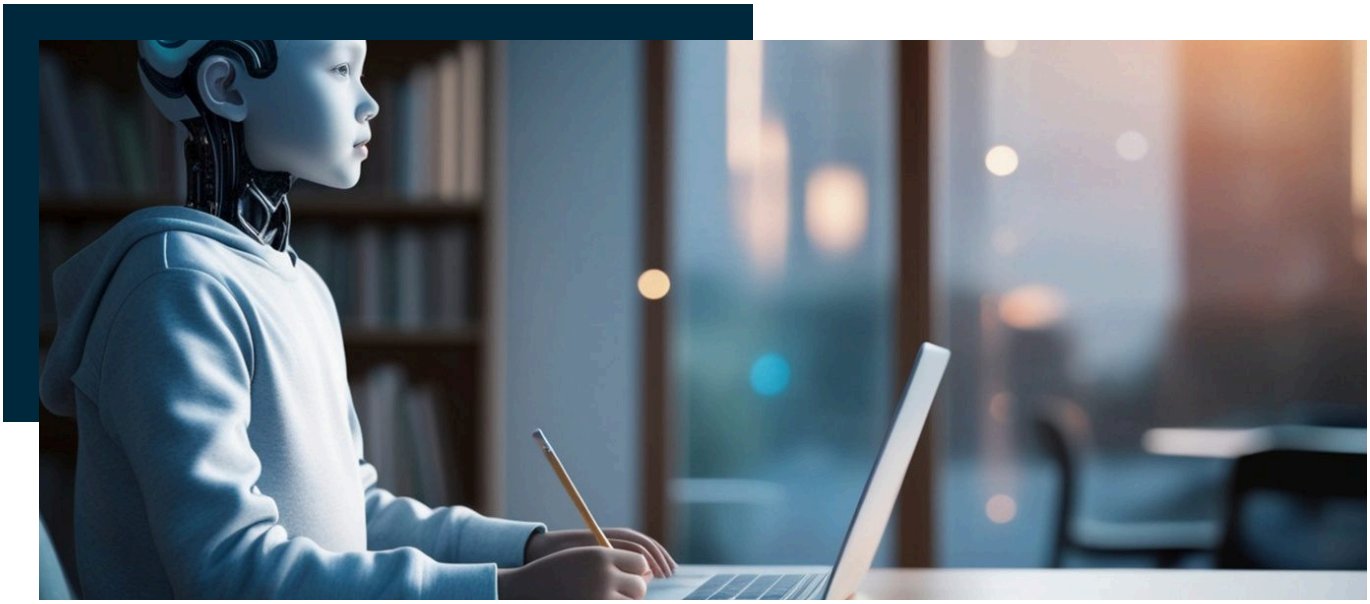
This guide is built around a simple truth: your resume, LinkedIn profile, cover letter, interview answers, job search strategy, and networking approach are not separate tasks. They are all connected. When you build one piece well, every other piece gets stronger.

Whether you are a first year student exploring career paths, a homeschooled teen looking for a first job, an adult learner returning to school, a midcareer professional changing direction, a veteran translating military service, a professional ready to advance where you already work, or a coach supporting any of them, this guide meets you where you are. Part Five includes Prompt Spotlights written for each of these starting points.

Every section includes plain language explanations of key concepts, step by step instructions, and ready to use AI prompts you can copy and paste into tools like Claude AI, ChatGPT, or Microsoft Copilot. You will also find formatting guides, real examples, and a curated resource library from leading career development organizations.

PRO TIP:

Bookmark this guide. Save it to your desktop. Come back to it before every application, every interview, and every networking conversation. Career readiness is not a one time event. It is a practice.



YOUR CAREER PORTFOLIO ROADMAP: HOW EVERYTHING CONNECTS

Career readiness is not a checklist of disconnected tasks. Your resume, LinkedIn, interview answers, cover letters, job search strategy, and networking approach all flow from the same source: knowing who you are, what you offer, and where you want to go. This roadmap shows you how every piece connects and how AI tools help you build each one.

STAGE	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
1. Personal Brand	Who are you professionally? What do you stand for?	This becomes the lens for everything you create.
2. Unique Value	What specific combination of skills and experiences makes you different?	Differentiates you from every other candidate with a similar degree.
3. Tell Me About Yourself	Your brand + value = your elevator pitch, your opening interview answer, and your LinkedIn About section.	One story, told consistently across every platform.
4. Resume	Written through the lens of your brand. Targeted to each role using keywords from the job description.	AI + Jobscan help you align to each ATS.
5. Cover Letter	Connects your unique value to a specific employer's needs, culture, and mission.	AI helps you research the company and tailor every letter.
6. CV	An expanded academic record of your education, research, publications, and presentations.	Essential for graduate students and academic roles.
7. LinkedIn Profile	Your digital brand. SEO optimized to attract recruiters who search by keyword.	Recruiters search LinkedIn like Google. Your keywords matter.
8. Job Search Strategy	Boolean operators, Google Alerts, and targeted searches find roles aligned with your goals and values.	Search for employers that fit you, not just employers with openings.
9. Interview Prep	Brand story + CAR method answers + company research = confident, authentic responses.	Gemini Notebook creates custom audio prep. AI generates practice questions.
10. Networking	Your brand tells people who you are. Your value proposition tells them why to remember you.	X-ray searches help you find the right people to connect with.

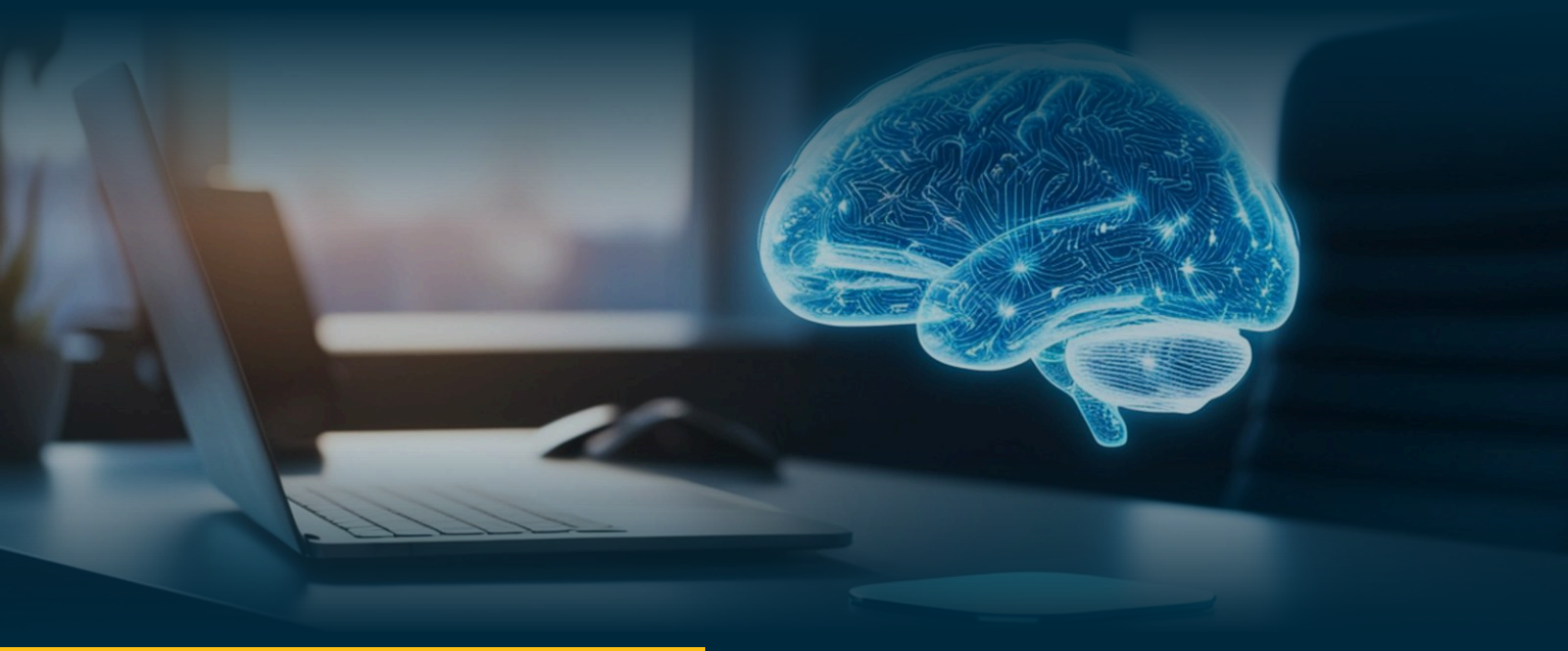
PRO TIP:

Start at Stage 1. Every tool, prompt, and strategy in this guide connects back to your personal brand. If you skip that step, everything else is generic. If you nail it, everything else becomes magnetic.

1

PART ONE

FOUNDATIONS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



WHAT IS ATS (APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEM)?

Before you open a single AI tool, you need to understand the systems that shape how employers find, filter, and evaluate candidates. These are not complicated, but they are powerful. Understanding them gives you a strategic advantage that most candidates never have.

ATS: SOFTWARE THAT SCANS AND FILTERS RESUMES BEFORE A HUMAN EVER SEES THEM

Think of ATS like a giant filing cabinet with a built in search engine. When candidates apply, the system parses each resume, pulling out details like job titles, skills, education, and work history, and stores that information in a searchable database. When a recruiter is ready to review applicants, they search that database using keywords from the job description, much like you would use Control+F to find a specific word in a document. If you have ever pressed Control+F and typed a word, you know that your computer does not delete anything. It simply highlights where that word appears so you can find it faster.

ATS works the same way, but on a massive scale. Resumes that contain the terms a recruiter searches for, such as specific job titles, technical skills, and certifications, surface in the results. Resumes that do not contain those terms are not rejected or deleted. They simply do not appear in that particular search and may sit in the database unseen. Many applicant tracking systems include a built in candidate ranking feature that scores and orders resumes based on keyword matches and other criteria before a recruiter ever opens a file. However, whether that ranking function is actively used depends on the individual recruiter, the organization's hiring practices, and how the system has been configured, which means you cannot assume every employer is relying on an automated score to make screening decisions.

Apart from knockout questions, explained below, the system does not automatically eliminate resumes. It organizes them. The real challenge is volume. Popular job postings can attract hundreds or even thousands of applications, and no recruiter can realistically review every one. That is why tailoring your resume to mirror the language in each job description matters. It ensures your qualifications are visible when a recruiter searches for them. Later in this guide, you will work through a simulated exercise designed to illustrate how an ATS with a ranking feature might respond to your resume. Because ATS ranking logic is proprietary and varies by platform, that exercise is intentionally fictitious, but it will give you a practical frame of reference for understanding how these systems can shape visibility before a human ever sees your application.

The Exception: Knockout Questions

There is one place where an ATS can screen you out automatically: knockout questions. These are screening questions on the application with preset answers, such as "Are you authorized to work in the United States?", "Do you hold a current RN license?", or "Do you have at least two years of experience?" Employers can set the system to automatically reject or flag applicants whose answers do not meet a requirement (Hu, 2024).

- Read every screening question carefully, and answer honestly. Your answers can be verified later.
- If a question is close, such as "two years of experience" when you have 22 months plus a relevant internship, choose the answer that is accurate, and use your resume and cover letter to show the full picture.
- Do not skip optional questions that ask about skills or certifications you actually have. They may be used for sorting.

THE PLAIN TEXT TEST: IS YOUR RESUME ATS FRIENDLY?

Here is a quick test you can do right now to check whether your resume will survive an ATS scan:

1. Open your resume in Microsoft Word.
2. Select all content (Control+A), then copy it (Control+C).
3. Open Notepad (Windows) or TextEdit set to plain text (Mac).
4. Paste your resume (Control+V).
5. Review: Can you read everything? Is all your text there? Is it in the right order?

If text is missing, jumbled, or out of order, your resume has formatting elements that ATS cannot read. Text boxes, tables, columns, headers and footers, graphics, and images are the most common culprits. Fix your formatting before you submit another application.



THE ATS SYSTEMS YOU WILL ENCOUNTER

In 2026, 97.4 percent of Fortune 500 companies had a detectable Applicant Tracking System, and in Jobscan's survey research, 76.4 percent of recruiters said they search and rank candidates by the skills listed in the job description (Purcell, 2026). Read these as Jobscan's own reported figures. When you apply for a job online, your resume will very likely pass through one of these systems before a human sees it. Here are the platforms you are most likely to encounter.

Purcell, K. (2026, August 20). *2026 applicant tracking system (ATS) usage report: Key shifts and strategies for job seekers*. Jobscan. https://www.jobscan.co/blog/fortune-500-use-applicant-tracking-systems/

ATS Systems by Employer Type

The system you encounter depends on the size and type of employer. Knowing which ATS a company uses can help you understand how your application will be processed.

ATS PLATFORM	WHO USES IT	YOU'LL SEE IT	EXAMPLE EMPLOYERS
Workday	The dominant ATS among the Fortune 500. Over 40% of Fortune 500 companies use Workday (Purcell, 2026).	Very High	Amazon, Walmart, Target, Eli Lilly, Deloitte, PepsiCo
Oracle Taleo	Legacy enterprise system still widely deployed in large organizations, government, and higher education. Declining but still common.	Very High	FedEx, Starbucks, many state and federal agencies, universities
SAP SuccessFactors	Large global enterprises, especially in manufacturing, healthcare, and finance. Used by 12% of the Fortune 500 (Purcell, 2026).	High	Johnson & Johnson, Siemens, Bosch, Under Armour
iCIMS	Long established platform popular across mid size to large employers in healthcare, retail, hospitality, and financial services.	Very High	Southwest Airlines, UPS, Hallmark, Enterprise, CVS
Greenhouse	The most common ATS in Jobscan's broader sample of 13,000+ companies (19%). Popular with tech companies, startups, and modern mid size employers focused on structured hiring.	High	HubSpot, Airbnb, Cloudflare, Figma, Pinterest
Lever	Popular with fast growing tech startups and mid size companies. Combines ATS with candidate relationship management.	High	Netflix, Shopify, KPMG, many Series A to C startups
SmartRecruiters	Cloud based ATS used by global enterprises. Strong in retail, hospitality, and consumer brands.	Moderate	IKEA, Visa, Equinox, Skechers, LinkedIn
ADP Recruiting	Companies already using ADP for payroll and HR often add the recruiting module. Common in mid size businesses.	Moderate	Mid size companies using ADP Workforce Now

ATS PLATFORM	WHO USES IT	YOU'LL SEE IT	EXAMPLE EMPLOYERS
Jobvite	Mid market employer ATS with strong social recruiting features. Common in healthcare, education, and nonprofit sectors.	Moderate	Logitech, Schneider Electric, Hulu
BambooHR	Small to mid size businesses (under 500 employees). Often the first ATS a growing company adopts.	Moderate	Smaller local and regional employers
JazzHR	Small businesses and startups. Budget friendly with basic applicant tracking features.	Moderate	Small businesses, local employers, early stage startups
Workable	Small to mid size employers scaling quickly. Easy to set up with broad job board distribution.	Moderate	Growing small and mid size businesses, franchise operations

Usage figures are Jobscan's own reported data. Example employers are illustrative and change often as organizations switch vendors. Confirm by checking the application URL, as described below.

HOW TO IDENTIFY WHICH ATS A COMPANY USES

When you click "Apply" on a company's careers page, look at the URL in your browser. If it redirects to a domain like myworkdayjobs.com, icims.com, lever.co, or boards.greenhouse.io, that tells you exactly which ATS is processing your application. You can also paste the job URL into Jobscan (jobscan.co), which may identify the ATS automatically. Knowing the system helps you understand how your resume will be parsed and scored.

ATS Dashboard: Riverstone Health Systems

Requisition: MKT-2026-041 | Position: Marketing Coordinator | Status: Active

Applications: 217 | Auto-screened: 217 | Advancing to review: 34 | Hold: 21 | Below review threshold: 162

#	CANDIDATE	SCORE	STATUS	HARD SKILLS	SOFT SKILLS	EDU	EXP	CERTS	RESUME FORMAT
1	**Riley Bennett**	**92%**	ADVANCE	13/14	4/4	✓	✓	2/2	.docx, 1 col, std headings
2	**Jordan M.**	**89%**	ADVANCE	12/14	4/4	✓	✓	1/2	.docx, 1 col, std headings
3	**Taylor K.**	**83%**	ADVANCE	11/14	3/4	✓	✓	2/2	.docx, 1 col, std headings
4	**Priya S.**	**78%**	ADVANCE	11/14	3/4	✓	✓	1/2	.pdf, 1 col, parseable
5	**Marcus D.**	**71%**	ADVANCE	10/14	3/4	✓	✓	0/2	.docx, 1 col, std headings
6	**Leah R.**	**67%**	HOLD	9/14	3/4	✓	✓	0/2	.docx, 1 col, std headings
7	**Sam W.**	**54%**	HOLD	7/14	2/4	✓	✓	1/2	.pdf, 2 col, text boxes
8	**Dakota F.**	**51%**	HOLD	8/14	2/4	✓	×	0/2	.docx, 1 col, std headings
9	**Mia T.**	**43%**	BELOW	5/14	2/4	✓	✓	0/2	.pdf, graphic design layout
10	**Chris L.**	**38%**	BELOW	4/14	1/4	✓	×	0/2	.pdf, infographic style
11	**Blake N.**	**31%**	BELOW	6/14	1/4	×	✓	0/2	.pdf, 2 col, icons and graphics
12	**Avery H.**	**22%**	BELOW	2/14	0/4	✓	✓	0/2	Image-based .pdf, unparseable

ADVANCE 70%+ match. Recruiter will review.

HOLD 50 to 69%. Reviewed only if pool is thin.

BELOW Under 50%. Unlikely to be reached by a recruiter.

What to Notice in This Queue

217 people applied. The ATS ranked all 217 by match score. Only the top 34 scored high enough to appear at the top of the recruiter's queue. The ATS did not reject anyone. But when a recruiter has 217 resumes and limited time, they start at the top and work down. Candidates ranked below the threshold are unlikely to be reviewed, not because they were rejected, but because the recruiter never got to them.

- **Riley Bennett (Candidate 1)** scores 92 percent because they use an ATS friendly .docx format and standard section headings, match 13 of 14 hard skills and all 4 soft skills, and hold both preferred certifications. This is the sample resume from your toolkit in action.
- **Sam W. (Candidate 7)** has real qualifications but lands in HOLD at 54 percent. A two column PDF with text boxes prevented the ATS from reading 3 of her skills. She also used different terminology than the job description ("social media management" instead of "social media strategies"). Same skills, different words, lower score.
- **Avery H. (Candidate 12)** scores 22 percent despite potentially being qualified. An image based PDF (designed in Canva as a graphic) was almost entirely unparseable. The ATS could only extract a name and email. Every skill, every degree, every job title was invisible to the ranking system. Avery may be fully qualified, but the recruiter will never know.
- **Blake N. (Candidate 11)** matched 6 of 14 hard skills but is ranked near the bottom because the system could not identify a bachelor's degree. The education section was inside a sidebar graphic the ATS could not read. A recruiter scrolling through 217 applicants is unlikely to reach candidate 11.

THE PATTERN

Every candidate at the top of the queue has three things in common: an ATS readable format (.docx, single column, standard headings), keyword language that mirrors the job description, and skills demonstrated in context rather than just listed. Every candidate ranked at the bottom is missing at least one of those three. The ATS does not reject you. It ranks you. But a low ranking means the recruiter is unlikely to ever open your resume. Your job is to make sure your document represents your talent accurately, because the ranking is based on the document, not on you.

This is a simplified, educational simulation. Real ATS dashboards vary by vendor, and scoring logic is proprietary. In most systems, the ATS ranks and sorts candidates but does not make hiring decisions. Recruiters review candidates starting from the top of the ranked queue, which means low scoring resumes are rarely seen: not formally rejected, but effectively invisible.

Now you know what the system is looking for. The next section shows you exactly how to deliver it. Every formatting rule that follows, from paragraph spacing to section headings to file type, exists for one reason: to make sure the ATS can read your resume accurately so your qualifications reach the recruiter at the top of the queue.

ATS FRIENDLY RESUME FORMATTING BEST PRACTICES

ELEMENT	BEST PRACTICE
File Format	A .docx file is the most universally readable choice. Most modern ATS also read text based PDFs (not scanned images or graphic designs). Always follow the file type the employer requests.
Font Type	Use standard, professional fonts: Arial, Calibri, Garamond, Cambria, or Times New Roman. Avoid decorative or script fonts.
Font Size	Name: 14 to 16pt. Section headings: 12 to 14pt bold. Body text: 10.5 to 12pt. Do not go below 10pt.
Margins	0.5 to 1 inch on all sides. Narrower margins (0.5 inch) give you more space; wider margins (1 inch) look cleaner. Never go below 0.5 inch.
Spacing	Single spacing within sections. Add 6 to 10pt of space between sections. Use consistent spacing throughout.
Section Headings	Use standard labels: "Experience," "Education," "Skills," "Certifications." Creative headings confuse ATS parsers.
Layout	Single column only. No text boxes, tables, columns, graphics, or images in the body of the resume. Keep all critical content in the main text flow.
Headers and Footers	Do not place your name, contact information, or any important content in the header or footer. Some ATS parsers skip these areas, so keep critical information in the body.
Acronyms	Write the full term first, then the acronym in parentheses: "Search Engine Optimization (SEO)." This ensures ATS catches both versions.
Bullet Points	Use standard round bullets. Avoid arrows, diamonds, checkmarks, or custom symbols that may not render in ATS.



ADVANCED MICROSOFT WORD FORMATTING GUIDE FOR RESUMES

White space is your secret weapon. A resume crammed edge to edge with text signals disorganization. Strategic white space guides the reader's eye, creates visual hierarchy, and makes your strongest qualifications stand out. Here is how to master it in Microsoft Word:

Paragraph Spacing (The #1 White Space Tool)

- Go to Home > Paragraph > Line Spacing Options (or right click > Paragraph).
- Set "Line spacing" to Single or Exactly 12 to 14pt for body text.
- Set "Before" to 0pt and "After" to 3 to 6pt for bullet points.
- Set "Before" to 6 to 10pt and "After" to 3pt for section headings. This creates separation between sections without wasting full blank lines.
- Never use the Enter key to create blank lines. Always use paragraph spacing. This gives you precise control.

Tab Stops (Align Dates and Locations Professionally)

- Place your cursor on the line with your job title and company.
- Go to Home > Paragraph > Tabs (or double click the ruler).
- Set a Right tab stop at 6.5 inches (for 1 inch margins) or at your right margin.
- Press Tab, then type your date. The date will align perfectly to the right margin.
- This eliminates the messy look of spaces or multiple tabs and keeps your resume clean.

Styles for Consistency

- Use Word's built in Styles (Home > Styles) to format your headings, subheadings, and body text.
- Modify a Style: right click the style name > Modify > change font, size, and spacing.
- Once set, applying a style to any text ensures consistent formatting throughout your document.
- Styles also make global changes instant. Update the style once and every heading updates.

Section Breaks and Horizontal Lines

- To add a thin line between sections: Place your cursor, go to Home > Borders > Bottom Border. This creates a subtle separator.
- Adjust line weight and color: Format > Borders and Shading > select 0.5pt or 0.75pt in a neutral gray.
- Avoid heavy borders, double lines, or full box borders around sections.

PRO TIP:

The goal of white space is not to fill a page. It is to make the most important information easy to find in a quick first scan. In one eye tracking study by the job site Ladders, recruiters spent an average of about 7.4 seconds on an initial resume screen (Ladders, 2018, as cited in O'Donnell, 2018). Read this as Ladders' own reported figure.

WHAT IS AN ALGORITHM?

ALGORITHM: A SET OF RULES A COMPUTER FOLLOWS TO MAKE DECISIONS

Think of an algorithm as a recipe. When you search for something on Google, an algorithm decides which results to show you first. When you scroll LinkedIn, an algorithm decides which posts appear in your feed. When a recruiter searches a database for candidates, an algorithm decides whose profile shows up at the top. Algorithms are everywhere in your job search. Understanding them means you can work with them instead of against them.

In your career, algorithms affect three critical systems:

- **Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)** use algorithms to scan, filter, and rank resumes based on keyword matches.
- **LinkedIn's algorithm** decides which profiles appear in recruiter searches and which posts show up in feeds.
- **Job board algorithms** (Indeed, Handshake, Glassdoor) determine which postings you see and which candidates employers see first.

The good news:

You do not need to be a programmer to use algorithms to your advantage. You just need to understand what they are looking for and give it to them. Let's take a look at how ATS uses algorithms to parse candidate applications for a fictitious Marketing Coordinator role at Riverstone Health Systems.



Marketing Coordinator

Riverstone Health Systems • Riverton, IN • Full-Time

★ SAMPLE JOB POSTING

About the Role

Riverstone Health Systems is seeking a Marketing Coordinator to join our growing marketing team. This role supports the Director of Marketing in executing digital marketing campaigns, content creation, and brand strategy across our healthcare network. The ideal candidate is a self-starter who thrives in a fast-paced, collaborative environment and is passionate about using data-driven insights to tell compelling stories.

Key Responsibilities

- Develop and execute social media strategies across LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and X to increase patient engagement and brand awareness.
- Create, edit, and publish content including blog posts, newsletters, press releases, and email marketing campaigns using Mailchimp and HubSpot.
- Track and analyze campaign performance metrics using Google Analytics, create monthly reports, and present data-driven recommendations to cross-functional stakeholders.
- Coordinate with external vendors, agencies, and internal departments to ensure brand consistency across all marketing collateral.
- Support SEO and SEM initiatives including keyword research, on-page optimization, and paid search campaigns.
- Assist with event planning and coordination for community health fairs, open houses, and provider recruitment events.
- Use AI tools such as ChatGPT and Canva AI to support content ideation, first-draft creation, and visual asset development while maintaining brand voice and editorial standards.

Required Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree in Marketing, Communications, Public Relations, or related field.
- 1 to 3 years of experience in marketing, communications, or digital media (internships count).
- Proficiency in Adobe Creative Suite (Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator), Canva, and Microsoft Office 365.
- Experience with CMS platforms (WordPress preferred) and basic HTML/CSS.
- Strong written and verbal communication skills with attention to detail and the ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously.
- Demonstrated ability to work independently and collaborate across teams.

Preferred Qualifications

- Google Analytics Certification or HubSpot Content Marketing Certification.
- Hootsuite Social Marketing Certification or equivalent social media management credentials.
- Experience in healthcare marketing or a regulated industry.
- Familiarity with AI-powered marketing tools and a willingness to learn emerging technologies.
- APR (Accredited in Public Relations) credential is a plus.

What We're Looking For

We value team members who bring creative problem-solving, adaptability, and a growth mindset to their work. You should be comfortable with giving and receiving feedback, taking ownership of projects, and communicating proactively with cross-functional teams. We are looking for someone who can balance strategic thinking with hands-on execution.

This is a fictional job description created for educational purposes.

INSIDE THE ATS: WHAT THE ALGORITHM ACTUALLY DOES

This is a simplified version of the code that decides whether a recruiter ever sees your resume. You do not need to understand programming to understand what is happening here. Read the code, then read the explanation below it.

Step 1: The Algorithm Reads the Job Description

Before your resume is ever opened, the ATS extracts every required keyword from the job posting and builds a checklist. Here is what that looks like for the Marketing Coordinator role at Riverstone Health Systems:

```
# ATS System: Extract required keywords from job description

job_title = "Marketing Coordinator"
company   = "Riverstone Health Systems"

required_hard_skills = [
    "digital marketing", "social media strategies", "content creation",
    "email marketing", "Google Analytics", "SEO", "SEM",
    "HubSpot", "Mailchimp", "Adobe Creative Suite",
    "CMS", "HTML", "data-driven", "event planning", "AI tools"
]

required_soft_skills = [
    "collaboration", "communication", "project management", "adaptability"
]

preferred_certifications = [
    "Google Analytics Certification", "HubSpot Certification"
]

minimum_education = "bachelor&#x27;s degree"
minimum_experience_years = 1
```

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The algorithm already knows what it is looking for before it reads a single resume. If your resume does not contain these exact terms, or close variations, the system has nothing to match against. This is why mirroring the language in the job description matters.

Step 2: The Algorithm Reads Your Resume

When you upload your resume, the ATS converts it to plain text and scans it for structure. Formatting errors, unusual fonts, tables, text boxes, and graphics can break this step. Here is the parsing logic:

```
def parse_resume(uploaded_file):

    # Step 2a: Convert to plain text
    raw_text = extract_text(uploaded_file)

    # Step 2b: Check if the system can read it
    if raw_text is empty or contains unreadable characters:
        status = "PARSE ERROR: profile fields left blank"
        # The file is stored, but searches and scores cannot find your skills

    # Step 2c: Look for standard sections
    sections = identify_sections(raw_text)
    # Looks for: "Experience", "Education", "Skills", "Certifications"
    # Creative headers like "My Journey" or "What I Bring" = not recognized

    # Step 2d: Extract contact info, dates, job titles
    candidate = {
        "name":       extract_name(raw_text),
        "email":      extract_email(raw_text),
        "education":  extract_degrees(sections),
        "experience": calculate_years(sections),
        "skills":     extract_all_keywords(raw_text)
    }
    return candidate
```

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If the ATS cannot convert your resume to clean text, it is rejected before scoring even begins. This is why the plain text test from Part One of this toolkit matters. Tables, columns, text boxes, headers and footers, graphics, and unusual fonts can all cause parsing failures. Use standard section headings: Experience, Education, Skills, Certifications. The algorithm is looking for those exact words.

Step 3: The Algorithm Scores You

This is where your match rate is calculated. The algorithm compares every keyword it extracted from the job description against every keyword it found in your resume. Keywords found in your Experience section are weighted more heavily than keywords in a Skills list.

```
def score_candidate(candidate, job_requirements):
    score = 0
    max_possible = 100

    # --- HARD SKILLS (worth 50 points) ---
    for skill in required_hard_skills:
        if skill found in candidate["skills"]:
            if skill appears in Experience section:
                score += 4      # Full credit: shown in context
            else:
                score += 2      # Partial credit: listed but not demonstrated

    # --- SOFT SKILLS (worth 15 points) ---
    for skill in required_soft_skills:
        if skill found in candidate["skills"]:
            score += 3.75

    # --- EDUCATION (worth 15 points) ---
    if candidate["education"] >= minimum_education:
        score += 15

    # --- EXPERIENCE (worth 10 points) ---
    if candidate["experience"] >= minimum_experience_years:
        score += 10

    # --- CERTIFICATIONS (worth 10 bonus points) ---
    for cert in preferred_certifications:
        if cert found in candidate["skills"]:
            score += 5

    match_rate = score / max_possible * 100

    # --- THE DECISION ---
    if match_rate >= 70:
        return "ADVANCE TO RECRUITER REVIEW"   # Human sees your resume
    elif match_rate >= 50:
        return "HOLD: review if pool is thin"  # Maybe
    else:
        return "BELOW THRESHOLD"               # Unlikely to be reviewed
```

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The 70 percent cutoff in this simulation is illustrative. When an employer uses an automated ranking threshold at all, the employer sets it, and vendors do not publish a standard number. Jobscan generally recommends aiming for a match rate of about 80 percent (Baes, 2022). Every missing keyword lowers your score. Keywords mentioned in your Experience bullets are worth more than keywords in a Skills list alone, because context proves you have actually used the skill.

Step 4: Two Candidates, One Job. The Algorithm Decides.

Here is what happens when two equally qualified candidates apply for the same Marketing Coordinator position, but one has optimized their resume for ATS and the other has not:

	CANDIDATE A: OPTIMIZED	CANDIDATE B: NOT OPTIMIZED
Resume Format	.docx, single column, standard headings, Calibri 11pt, no graphics	.pdf with two column layout, text boxes, custom icons, decorative header
Parsing Result	✓ Fully parsed. All sections identified.	× Partial parse. Skills section inside text box was invisible to ATS.
Hard Skills Found	12 of 14 required skills found in Experience bullets with context	9 of 14 skills. 3 were in the text box the ATS could not read. 2 used different terminology.
Soft Skills Found	4 of 4, woven into accomplishment statements	2 of 4, listed but not demonstrated in context
Education	✓ Bachelor's in Marketing identified	✓ Bachelor's in Communications identified
Experience	✓ 2 years matched from date parsing	✓ 2 years matched from date parsing
Certifications	Google Analytics Cert found (+5 bonus)	Has the certification but listed it in footer, not parsed
Match Score	**89%**	**54%**
ATS Decision	✓ ADVANCE TO RECRUITER	× HOLD, may never be seen

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Candidate B is not less qualified. She has the same degree, the same experience, and the same certification. She loses because her resume format prevented the algorithm from reading her skills, and the keywords she used did not match the exact terminology in the job description. The algorithm does not interpret. It matches. Your job is to make matching easy.

THE BOTTOM LINE

An ATS is not evaluating whether you are good at your job. It is evaluating whether your document contains the right words in the right format. That is a different problem, and it has a different solution.

The solution is everything in this toolkit: ATS friendly formatting from Part One, exact keyword matching from your job description research, the plain text test, and the match rate target Jobscan recommends. These are not tips. They are the rules of the system your resume has to pass through.

Now you have seen the code. You know what the machine is looking for, and what your recruiter is likely searching for. Make it easy to find you.

GPS PROMPT: Run Your Own ATS Simulation

Act as an Applicant Tracking System. Here is a job description: [paste full JD]. Here is my resume: [paste full resume text]. Score my resume the way an ATS would. For each required skill, qualification, and keyword in the job description, tell me whether it appears on my resume, where it appears, and whether it is demonstrated in context or just listed. Calculate my overall match percentage. Then give me a prioritized list of the top 10 changes I should make to increase my score toward 80 percent, without adding any skill or experience I do not actually have.

This is a simplified, educational model. Real ATS systems like Taleo, Workday, iCIMS, and Greenhouse each use proprietary scoring logic with different weights and thresholds. The principles shown here (keyword matching, format parsing, and match rate thresholds) are consistent across systems even though the exact numbers vary.



WHAT IS SEO (SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION)?

SEO: THE PRACTICE OF USING STRATEGIC KEYWORDS SO YOU SHOW UP IN SEARCH RESULTS

SEO is how websites get found on Google. It is also how your LinkedIn profile gets found by recruiters. When a recruiter types "marketing intern Indianapolis" into LinkedIn's search bar, the algorithm scans profiles for those exact words. If those words appear in your headline, About section, or experience descriptions, you show up. If they do not, you are invisible, no matter how qualified you are.

LinkedIn states that it uses the profile details members choose to share, such as industry, skills, experience, and geography, to decide what content and connections are relevant to them (LinkedIn Corporate Communications Team, 2026). SEO is not about stuffing your profile with random buzzwords. It is about strategically placing the terms recruiters actually search for in the right sections of your profile.

How to Identify Your SEO Keywords Using Job Descriptions

Here is one of the most powerful strategies in this entire guide: collect 6 to 10 job descriptions for positions you actually want to apply for. Paste them into your AI tool and ask it to identify the most frequently repeated skills, qualifications, and phrases across all of them. Those recurring terms are your SEO keywords. They belong in your LinkedIn headline, About section, Skills section, and experience descriptions.

This same exercise does double duty beyond LinkedIn. The language patterns you identify become the foundation for your resume and CV, your cover letter, and your personal brand statement. When you can speak the industry's own language back to it, you signal immediately that you understand the field, not just that you want a job in it.

To see exactly what this looks like in practice, turn to the "Decode the Job Description" visual on the next page, which color codes every keyword category in a sample job posting and shows you precisely where each type belongs on your LinkedIn profile.

GPS PROMPT: Identify Your SEO Keywords from Job Descriptions

I have collected [6/8/10] job descriptions for roles I want to apply for. Here they are: [paste all job descriptions]. Analyze all of them together and identify: (1) The top 15 keywords and phrases that appear most frequently across multiple descriptions, (2) The hard skills that are mentioned most often, (3) The soft skills and competencies that repeat, (4) Any tools, software, or certifications that are commonly required. Rank them by frequency. These are the SEO keywords I should integrate into my LinkedIn profile, resume, and cover letters.

PRO TIP:

This strategy works because you are not guessing what recruiters search for. You are using real data from real job postings to reverse engineer the exact language the market values. That is how you optimize with intention.

DECODE THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Every highlighted term below is a keyword that should appear on your LinkedIn profile. These are the words recruiters search and ATS systems scan for.

- Hard Skills & Tools
- Soft Skills & Competencies
- Job Titles & Role Keywords
- Industry & Domain
- Certifications

Marketing Coordinator

Riverstone Health Systems • Riverton, IN • Full-Time

★ SAMPLE JOB POSTING

About the Role

Riverstone Health Systems is seeking a **Marketing Coordinator** to join our growing marketing team. This role supports the **Director of Marketing** in executing **digital marketing campaigns**, **content creation**, and **brand strategy** across our **healthcare network**. The ideal candidate is a **self-starter** who thrives in a fast-paced, **collaborative** environment and is passionate about using **data-driven** insights to tell compelling stories.

Key Responsibilities

- Develop and execute **social media strategies** across LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and X to increase **patient engagement** and **brand awareness**.
- Create, edit, and publish content including **blog posts**, newsletters, **press releases**, and **email marketing campaigns** using **Mailchimp** and **HubSpot**.
- Track and analyze campaign performance metrics using **Google Analytics**, create monthly reports, and present **data-driven** recommendations to **cross-functional** stakeholders.
- Coordinate with external vendors, agencies, and internal departments to ensure **brand consistency** across all marketing collateral.
- Support **SEO** and **SEM** initiatives including **keyword research**, **on-page optimization**, and **paid search campaigns**.
- Assist with **event planning** and coordination for **community health fairs**, open houses, and **provider recruitment** events.
- Use **AI tools** such as **ChatGPT** and **Canva AI** to support content ideation, first-draft creation, and visual asset development while maintaining brand voice and editorial standards.

Required Qualifications

- **Bachelor's degree** in Marketing, Communications, Public Relations, or related field.
- 1 to 3 years of experience in marketing, communications, or digital media (internships count).
- Proficiency in **Adobe Creative Suite** (**Photoshop**, **InDesign**, **Illustrator**), **Canva**, and **Microsoft Office 365**.
- Experience with **CMS platforms** (**WordPress** preferred) and basic **HTML/CSS**.
- Strong written and verbal **communication skills** with **attention to detail** and the ability to **manage multiple projects** simultaneously.
- Demonstrated ability to **work independently** and **collaborate across teams**.

Preferred Qualifications

- **Google Analytics Certification** or **HubSpot Content Marketing Certification**.
- **Hootsuite Social Marketing Certification** or equivalent social media management credentials.
- Experience in **healthcare marketing** or a **regulated industry**.
- Familiarity with **AI-powered marketing tools** and a willingness to learn emerging technologies.
- **APR (Accredited in Public Relations)** credential is a plus.

What We're Looking For

We value team members who bring **creative problem-solving**, **adaptability**, and a **growth mindset** to their work. You should be comfortable with giving and receiving feedback, **taking ownership** of projects, and communicating proactively with **cross-functional** teams. We are looking for someone who can balance **strategic thinking** with **hands-on execution**.

YOUR LINKEDIN SEO STRATEGY

The 6 to 10 Rule

Find 6 to 10 job descriptions for roles you want. Highlight every keyword that appears in at least 3 of them. Those repeated terms are the SEO keywords that belong on your LinkedIn profile: in your headline, About section, and Experience descriptions.

Where Keywords Go on LinkedIn

Headline: Job title + 2 to 3 top skills.

About: Weave keywords into your story naturally.

Experience: Mirror the language employers use.

Skills: Add all matching hard skills.

Certifications: List every one you hold.

PRO TIP

If a keyword appears in the job description but not on your LinkedIn profile, recruiters searching for that term will never find you. LinkedIn's algorithm matches profiles to searches based on keyword frequency and placement, the same way Google matches web pages to search queries. Your profile is only as discoverable as the keywords on it.

GPS PROMPT: Extract SEO Keywords from Job Descriptions

Here are [number] job descriptions for [job title] roles I am interested in: [paste all]. Analyze these descriptions and identify every keyword that appears in at least 3 of them. Organize the keywords into five categories: Hard Skills and Tools, Soft Skills and Competencies, Job Titles and Role Keywords, Industry and Domain Terms, and Certifications and Credentials. Then tell me which of these keywords are missing from my current LinkedIn profile: [paste your LinkedIn About section and headline]. Suggest specific edits to my headline, About section, and Experience bullets to incorporate the top 15 missing keywords naturally.



WHAT ARE BOOLEAN OPERATORS?

BOOLEAN OPERATORS: SPECIAL WORDS AND SYMBOLS THAT REFINE SEARCH RESULTS

Boolean operators are the search language that powers Google, LinkedIn, Indeed, and every recruiter database. Learning them turns you from a passive job browser into a strategic job hunter. Recruiters use Boolean operators every single day to search their ATS and LinkedIn Recruiter tools for candidates with specific skills. When you understand how they search, you can make sure your resume and profile contain the terms they are looking for. And when you learn to use Boolean operators yourself, you gain the ability to build laser focused job searches that surface more relevant opportunities, cut through noise, and put you in front of roles that are actually worth your time to pursue.

OPERATOR	EXAMPLE	WHAT IT DOES
AND	`finance AND internship`	Returns results containing BOTH terms
OR	`marketing OR advertising`	Returns results containing EITHER term
" "	`"project manager"`	Returns the exact phrase only
NOT / -	`engineer -software`	Excludes results with that term
( )	`(marketing OR sales) AND intern`	Groups terms for complex searches
site:	`site:linkedin.com/in "data analyst"`	Searches only within a specific website

How Recruiters Use Boolean to Find YOU

Here is what a recruiter's search might look like in their ATS or LinkedIn Recruiter tool:

- `"registered nurse" AND "ICU" AND "BSN" AND Indiana`
- `"software engineer" AND (Python OR Java) AND "entry level"`
- `"marketing" AND ("social media" OR "content strategy") AND Indianapolis`

When your resume and LinkedIn profile contain these exact terms, you appear in their results. When you use different phrasing, such as "social media strategy" instead of "social media" and "content strategy" as separate terms, you may not. This is why mirroring the language from job descriptions matters so much.

You can apply this same logic to your own search. Using Boolean operators directly in Google, LinkedIn, or Indeed lets you filter results with the same precision a recruiter uses, combining role titles, locations, skills, and keywords so the opportunities you find are targeted rather than accidental. We will go deeper on this as you develop your job search strategy later in this guide.

2

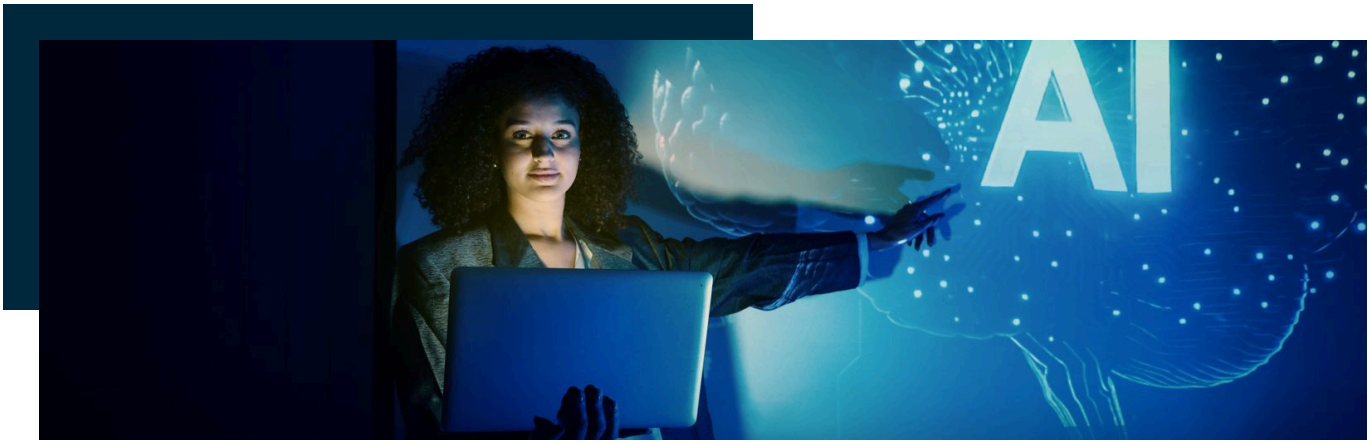
PART TWO

YOUR AI TOOLKIT



YOUR AI TOOLKIT AT A GLANCE

TOOL	WHAT IT DOES	WHY IT MATTERS
Claude AI **claude.ai**	Resume and cover letter drafting, LinkedIn optimization, STAR and CAR story brainstorming, job search roadmaps, career exploration, skill gap analysis	An all purpose career thinking partner. Excellent for long form content, nuanced strategy, and detailed feedback.
ChatGPT **chatgpt.com**	Resume bullet refinement, interview question practice, company research, brainstorming	Strong alternative for quick brainstorming and conversational practice.
Microsoft Copilot **copilot.microsoft.com**	Document editing, email drafting, research, presentations, resume formatting in Word	Often included with a school or employer Microsoft 365 account. Integrates with Word, PowerPoint, and Outlook.
Jobscan **jobscan.co**	ATS resume optimization. Compares your resume against a specific job description and shows your keyword match rate.	Jobscan's own guidance is to aim for about an 80% match rate (Baes, 2022). Free tier gives limited scans per month.
Gemini Notebook (formerly NotebookLM) **notebook.google.com**	Upload your resume + job description + company research. Generates a custom AI audio discussion to walk you through interview prep.	Hearing your qualifications discussed back to you builds confidence and reveals insights.
Google Alerts **google.com/alerts**	Automated email notifications when new content matches your search terms.	Set alerts for target companies and job titles. Opportunities come to your inbox.
O*NET OnLine **onetonline.org**	Career exploration, salary data, job outlook, skills requirements by occupation.	Research what skills employers actually want before writing your resume.
Perplexity **perplexity.ai**	AI powered search and research tool that answers questions from live web results and cites its sources.	Useful for researching companies, industries, and roles with links you can check. Free and paid versions are available. Always open the cited sources to confirm accuracy.
Canva **canva.com**	LinkedIn banners, portfolio materials, professional branding, infographics.	Create a LinkedIn banner that reflects your career goals and personal brand.



HOW TO WRITE HIGH IMPACT AI PROMPTS

The quality of what AI gives you depends entirely on the quality of what you ask. A vague prompt produces a vague result. A specific, well structured prompt produces content that is targeted, relevant, and ready to refine. Here is the framework:

The 5 Part Prompt Formula

- **ROLE:** Tell the AI who to be. "Act as a career coach specializing in entry level marketing roles."
- **CONTEXT:** Give background. "I am a junior at [your school] majoring in Communications with a minor in Business."
- **TASK:** Be specific about what you want. "Write 3 resume bullet points for my social media coordinator internship."
- **FORMAT:** Tell it how to deliver. "Use the CAR method (Challenge, Action, Result). Keep each bullet under 2 lines."
- **CONSTRAINTS:** Set boundaries. "Use language from this job description: [paste]. Do not fabricate any experience I did not have."

GPS PROMPT: Example: High Impact Prompt in Action

Act as a career coach specializing in healthcare administration. I am a senior at [your school] majoring in Health Services with a minor in Business Administration. I completed a practicum at a regional hospital where I helped streamline patient intake processes. Write 3 resume bullet points for this experience using the CAR method (Challenge, Action, Result). Include keywords from this job description: [paste JD]. Keep each bullet under 2 lines and start with a strong action verb.

Prompts That Get Weak Results vs. Strong Results

WEAK PROMPT	STRONG PROMPT
"Write me a resume."	"Rewrite my experience section using CAR method bullets that align with this job description: [paste]."
"Help with my LinkedIn."	"Optimize my LinkedIn About section for SEO using these keywords from 8 job descriptions I collected: [paste keywords]."
"Give me interview questions."	"Generate 10 behavioral interview questions a hiring manager for [role] at [company] would ask, based on this job description: [paste]."
"Write a cover letter."	"Write a cover letter connecting my practicum experience at [org] to [company]'s mission of [specific mission]. Reference their recent [initiative]. Tone: confident but humble."

PRO TIP:

Always paste the actual job description into your prompt. The more real world data you give AI, the more targeted and useful the output becomes. AI works best when it has something specific to work with.

ETHICAL AI USE: YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS THE DRIVER

AI IS YOUR GPS. YOU ARE ALWAYS THE DRIVER.

Nothing can replace your authentic voice, your lived experience, or your professional judgment. AI accelerates your process. You bring the substance.

1. **Always personalize.** Every document AI helps you create should sound like you. Read it out loud. If it does not sound like something you would actually say, rewrite it until it does. Your authenticity is your greatest competitive advantage.
2. **Never fabricate.** Do not allow AI to invent experiences, skills, degrees, or accomplishments you do not have. Use AI to articulate what is real, not to create what is not.
3. **Verify every claim.** AI can generate inaccurate information, including statistics, company details, and factual claims. Always verify before including anything in your materials.
4. **Be transparent when asked.** If an employer asks whether you used AI, be honest. Saying "I used AI as a brainstorming and editing tool while ensuring all content reflects my authentic experience" demonstrates both integrity and competence.
5. **Tailor every time.** A generic AI generated resume sent to 50 employers will perform worse than one thoughtfully tailored resume. Quality over quantity. Always.
6. **Review, revise, own it.** AI drafts. You decide. Read everything critically. Remove anything that feels inauthentic, exaggerated, or disconnected from who you are. If your name is on it, it should represent you.
7. **Protect your privacy.** Never paste sensitive personal information into any AI tool: Social Security numbers, financial data, medical information, passwords, or student ID numbers. See the privacy guide on the next page.
8. **Use AI to learn, not to bypass.** Understanding how ATS works, why keywords matter, and how Boolean operators function makes you a smarter professional. Do not just use the tools. Understand why they work.

PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY ON AI PLATFORMS

AI platforms learn from the data users provide. Here is how to protect yourself:

Claude AI

- Go to Settings > Privacy and turn off "Help improve our AI models" if you do not want your conversations used for training (Anthropic, n.d.).
- Delete conversation history regularly if you prefer not to have past prompts stored.

ChatGPT

- Go to Settings > Data Controls > toggle off "Improve the model for everyone" (OpenAI, n.d.).
- Use Temporary Chat for sensitive conversations. Temporary Chats are not used for model training and are deleted from OpenAI's systems within 30 days (OpenAI, n.d.).

Microsoft Copilot

- When you sign in to Copilot Chat with a school or work account, Microsoft states that your prompts and responses are not used to train foundation models (Microsoft, n.d.). Confirm the details with your school or employer IT office.

General Best Practices for All Platforms

- **Never share:** SSN, bank info, medical records, student ID numbers, passwords, or home addresses.
- **De identify when possible:** If sharing a scenario for advice, remove names, specific organizations, and identifying details.
- **Review terms of service:** Understand what each platform does with your data before you use it.
- **Log out** of accounts when using shared or public computers.

PRIVACY REMINDER

Anything you type into an AI tool could potentially be stored, reviewed, or used in training. Treat AI platforms the way you would treat a public conversation. Share the task, not the secrets.



3

PART THREE

BUILD YOUR CAREER PORTFOLIO



STAGE 1 TO 2: YOUR PERSONAL BRAND AND UNIQUE VALUE

Before you write a single word on your resume, LinkedIn, or cover letter, you need clarity on two things: your personal brand (who you are professionally) and your unique value proposition (what you bring that others do not). These are not just exercises. They are the foundation that makes every other career document authentic, targeted, and powerful.

GPS PROMPT: Discover Your Personal Brand

I am a [your major/program] student (or recent graduate, career changer, or alumnus) at [your school]. My strengths include [list 3 to 5 strengths]. I am passionate about [your interests/causes]. My career goal is [target role/industry]. Based on this, help me craft a 2 to 3 sentence personal brand statement that captures who I am professionally, what I value, and what I want to be known for. Make it authentic and specific to me, not generic.

GPS PROMPT: Define Your Unique Value Proposition

Here is my personal brand statement: [paste it]. Here are my experiences: [list 3 to 5 key experiences, including jobs, internships, volunteer work, class projects, leadership roles]. What combination of skills, experiences, and perspectives makes me different from other candidates in [your target field]? Help me articulate my unique value proposition in 2 to 3 sentences that I can weave into my resume, LinkedIn About section, cover letters, and interview answers.

GPS PROMPT: Build Your "Tell Me About Yourself" Answer

Here is my personal brand statement: [paste]. Here is my unique value proposition: [paste]. I am interviewing for a [job title] position at [company]. Help me craft a 60 to 90 second "Tell Me About Yourself" response that opens with who I am, highlights what I uniquely bring, and closes with why this role and company align with my career goals. Keep it conversational and confident. I want it to feel natural, not memorized.

Not sure what your transferable skills are? Start here.

Before you write your brand statement, you need to know what you bring to the table. These companion guides from two well regarded university career centers include transferable skills checklists, self assessment worksheets, and examples of how to turn everyday experiences into professional language:

1. **Princeton University Center for Career Development: Resume Guide.** Includes a Transferable Skills Table for identifying your top 10 skills and the ACE method (Action, Context, End result) for turning each skill into an accomplishment statement (Princeton University Center for Career Development, n.d.).
2. **Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences: CVs and Cover Letters.** Especially valuable for graduate students. Includes CV samples across disciplines and annotated cover letter samples with commentary (Harvard Mignone Center for Career Success, 2025).

Both guides are listed in the Career Readiness Resources section at the end of this toolkit. Complete the skills identification exercises first, then return here and use the AI prompts on the previous page to build your brand statement around what you discover.



CURRENT RESUME BEST PRACTICES

Your resume is a marketing document, not a biography. Its purpose is to prove you are a strong candidate for a specific role during a quick first scan, which one eye tracking study by the job site Ladders measured at about 7.4 seconds (O'Donnell, 2018). Every word should earn its place. Here is what works now:

Resume Structure

- **Contact Information:** Name (14 to 16pt bold), phone, professional email, LinkedIn URL, and city and state.
- **Professional Summary:** 2 to 3 sentences that communicate your brand, your target role, and your strongest qualifications. Tailor this for every application.
- **Education:** Degree, institution, expected graduation or graduation date. Include GPA if 3.0+ and relevant coursework if it supports the role.
- **Experience:** List in reverse chronological order. Use CAR method bullet points (see below). Include job title, company, location, and dates.
- **Skills:** Hard skills and technical tools relevant to your target role. Include both full terms and acronyms.
- **Optional Sections:** Certifications, Projects, Volunteer Experience, Leadership, Publications, Languages.

BEST PRACTICES FROM MY RECRUITING EXPERIENCE

These are standard practices I have learned, and that fellow recruiters recommend. They come from practice rather than research.

- **Length:** Keep your resume to one page if you have fewer than 10 years of experience. Two pages are appropriate for graduate students, career changers with extensive backgrounds, or professionals with 10+ years.
- **Location:** A full street address is no longer necessary, but include the city and state where you are applying. If you are open to remote work or open to relocating, say so.
- **Thank you notes:** Follow up with a thank you within 48 hours after a job interview.
- **Relationships:** Check in with your contacts every 2 to 3 months, so your relationships are authentic, not just transactional.

The CAR Method: Writing Powerful Resume Bullet Points with AI

CAR = CHALLENGE + ACTION + RESULT

Every strong resume bullet answers three questions: What was the challenge or situation? What action did you take? What was the measurable result? The CAR method keeps your bullets focused, impactful, and employer centered. Here is the formula: **[Strong Action Verb] + [What You Did] + [For Whom/Why] + [Measurable Outcome]**

CAR Bullet Examples

WEAK	STRONG
"Helped with social media."	"Developed and executed a 12 week social media content calendar for the university's alumni engagement office, increasing Instagram engagement by 34% and growing the follower base by 580 new followers."
"Responsible for customer service."	"Resolved an average of 45 customer inquiries per shift by identifying root causes and implementing first call solutions, achieving a 96% satisfaction rating over 6 months."
"Worked on a research project."	"Collaborated with a faculty mentor to design and conduct a mixed methods research study on workforce retention in rural healthcare, presenting findings to 120 attendees at a regional sociology conference."

GPS PROMPT: Turn Your Experience into CAR Bullets

I worked as a [job title] at [company/organization]. My responsibilities included: [describe what you did in plain language]. Use the CAR method (Challenge, Action, Result) to write 4 to 5 strong resume bullet points. Start each with a powerful action verb. Include measurable outcomes where possible. If I cannot recall exact numbers, suggest realistic placeholders I can verify and replace. Align the language with this job description: [paste target JD].

Sample Resume Layout (Text Reference)

RILEY BENNETT

Business Administration Student | Economics Minor
(555) 555-0101 | riley.bennett@email.com | Riverton, IN

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Business administration student with an economics minor and a 3.9 GPA, bringing hands-on experience in budgeting, cost analysis, and team training from nonprofit board service and customer-facing leadership roles. Built a venue cost comparison that saved a nonprofit 20% on its event budget and trained 18+ new hires across two workplaces. Seeking a summer 2028 business operations internship to apply financial analysis, process improvement, and client service skills.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Riverton State University | Riverton, IN **Expected May 2029**
Bachelor of Science | Business Administration
College of Business | AACSB Accredited

- Honors & Awards: Dean's List Fall 2026 – Present | Merit Scholarship Recipient
- GPA: 3.9/4.0

Relevant Coursework: Introduction to Business, Public Speaking, Ethics, Principles of Management

SKILLS

- **Technical:** Microsoft Office Suite (Excel, Word, PowerPoint), Financial Analysis, Budget Management
- **Analytical:** Cost-Benefit Analysis, Market Research, Strategic Planning, Data Interpretation
- **Professional:** Public Speaking, Ethical Decision-Making, Team Collaboration, Client Relations

WORK EXPERIENCE

Grocery Associate, Local Grocery Store **June 2025 – January 2028**
Riverton, IN

- Handled 50+ customer transactions per shift during peak hours by processing orders quickly and accurately, helping keep wait times low and earning repeat customers
- Trained 8+ new hires on register operations, store procedures, and customer service standards, getting them ready to work the floor independently within 2 weeks
- Took ownership of restocking and organizing 3+ product aisles per shift during busy periods, making it easier for customers to find what they needed

Server Trainer, Restaurant **May 2024 – May 2025**
Riverton, IN

- Trained 10+ new servers on a 40-item menu and service standards through hands-on coaching, helping them confidently handle their own tables within the first week
- Managed 5+ tables during high-volume dinner rushes serving 100+ guests per shift while staying organized, consistently maintaining service quality on the busiest nights

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Board Member | Local Nonprofit Organization **January 2026 – Present**
Riverton, IN

- Participated in monthly strategic planning discussions during a period of organizational growth, helping shape decisions around programming priorities and community outreach
- Researched 5+ venue options and built a cost comparison for upcoming events, helping the board select a location that saved 20% on the original budget estimate

Honors Choir | Member **2023 – 2024**
Riverton, IN

- Earned 1 of 30 spots through a competitive audition process and represented the school at 4 regional performances

Riley Bennett, Riverton State University, and all contact details are fictional and created for educational purposes.

SAMPLE RESUMES FOR DIFFERENT STARTING POINTS

Not every job seeker is a college student. The two samples that follow show how the same principles work for a service member moving into a civilian role and for someone applying for an entry level community job with a high school diploma. Both use one column, standard headings, and plain formatting, so they upload cleanly to online applications.

Sample Military to Civilian Resume (Text Reference)

JORDAN ELLIS

Operations and Logistics Supervisor
(555) 555-0144 | jordan.ellis@email.com | linkedin.com/in/jordanellis | Riverton, IN

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Operations and logistics professional with 8 years of U.S. Army service leading teams, managing inventory, and coordinating time-sensitive operations. Supervised teams of up to 12 and maintained full accountability for equipment valued at more than $2 million. Seeking an operations coordinator or logistics supervisor role in manufacturing or distribution.

SKILLS

- **Operations and Logistics:** Inventory Management, Supply Chain Coordination, Receiving and Shipping, Scheduling, Equipment Accountability, Safety Procedures
- **Leadership:** Team Supervision, Training and Onboarding, Performance Coaching, Conflict Resolution
- **Technical:** Microsoft Office (Excel, Word, Outlook, Teams), Inventory Tracking Systems, Data Entry and Reporting

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Logistics Supervisor (Supply Sergeant), U.S. Army **June 2019 – May 2025**
[Installation], [State]

- Supervised a team of 12 receiving, storing, and issuing equipment and supplies for a 150-person organization, maintaining 100% accountability across 4 annual inspections
- Managed inventory valued at more than $2 million in an automated tracking system, cutting order processing time by 20% by reorganizing storage and reorder procedures
- Trained 15+ new team members on inventory procedures, safety standards, and reporting, preparing them to work independently within 30 days
- Coordinated delivery schedules with 6 departments during high-volume periods, keeping operations on schedule

Equipment Operator and Driver (Motor Transport Operator), U.S. Army **August 2017 – May 2019**
[Installation], [State]

- Operated and maintained heavy vehicles over 40,000 miles with zero safety incidents, completing daily inspections and maintenance logs
- Planned routes and loads for transport missions, delivering supplies on time to multiple locations

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Associate of Applied Science | Supply Chain Management **Expected May 2029**
Riverton Community College | Riverton, IN

- Leadership Development Course (Army Basic Leader Course) | 2019
- Security Clearance: Secret (inactive)

Jordan Ellis, Riverton Community College, and all contact details are fictional and created for educational purposes. Civilian job titles come first, with the military title in parentheses, so recruiters and applicant tracking systems recognize the work.

Sample Entry Level Community Job Resume (Text Reference)

TAYLOR MORGAN

(555) 555-0177 | taylor.morgan@email.com | Riverton, IN

SUMMARY

Friendly and dependable customer service worker with 3 years of experience in fast-paced settings. Comfortable greeting visitors, answering phones, scheduling, and handling payments accurately. Seeking a front desk receptionist role to help visitors feel welcome and keep the front office running smoothly.

SKILLS

- Customer Service and Greeting Visitors
- Phone and Email Communication
- Appointment Scheduling and Check-In
- Cash and Card Payments
- Data Entry and Microsoft Word, Excel, and Outlook

WORK EXPERIENCE

Cashier, Neighborhood Pharmacy **March 2024 – Present**
Riverton, IN

- Greet and help 80+ customers per shift, answering questions and directing them to the right staff member
- Answer and transfer phone calls to the pharmacy team, taking clear messages when staff are busy
- Process cash and card payments and balance the cash drawer at the end of every shift

Crew Member, Quick Service Restaurant **August 2022 – February 2024**
Riverton, IN

- Took orders at the front counter and drive-through during busy meal rushes, keeping orders accurate and lines moving
- Trained 4 new crew members on the register and customer service standards

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Welcome Table Volunteer, Community Food Pantry **June 2023 – Present**
Riverton, IN

- Check in 40+ families each week, enter visit information into a spreadsheet, and help guests feel comfortable while they wait

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATIONS

High School Diploma, Riverton High School **May 2022**

- CPR and First Aid Certification, American Red Cross | Valid through June 2029

Taylor Morgan and all contact details are fictional and created for educational purposes.

Built for online applications.

This resume uses one column, standard headings, and no tables, text boxes, or graphics, so it uploads cleanly to Indeed and other one click apply systems. Save it as a Word document or PDF, whichever the posting requests, and save a plain text (.txt) copy to check that every line reads correctly. Whatever your background, a clean, targeted resume translates your relevant and transferable experience, including work, volunteer roles, certifications, education, and specialized training, into the language of the role you want.

COVER LETTER TEMPLATE AND STRATEGY

A strong cover letter does three things: it connects your unique value to the employer's specific needs, it demonstrates that you have researched the company, and it shows personality and enthusiasm that a resume alone cannot convey. Here is the structure:

Cover Letter Structure (3 to 4 Paragraphs)

Paragraph 1 (The Hook)

State the role you are applying for, how you found it, and one compelling reason you are excited about this specific company. Name something specific: a recent initiative, a company value, or a news story.

Paragraph 2 (Your Value)

Connect 2 to 3 of your strongest qualifications directly to the requirements in the job description. Use specific examples. This is where your CAR stories come to life in narrative form.

Paragraph 3 (The Bridge)

Explain why this company and this role align with your career goals and values. Show that you are not just looking for any job. You are looking for this job.

Paragraph 4 (The Close)

Express enthusiasm, restate your interest, and include a professional call to action. "I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experience in [X] can contribute to [company]'s goals."

GPS PROMPT: Generate a Targeted Cover Letter

Write a professional cover letter for a [job title] position at [company]. Here is the job description: [paste]. Here is my resume: [paste]. Here is my personal brand statement: [paste]. Research this company and reference one specific initiative, value, or recent news item. Connect my strongest qualifications directly to their needs. Tone: confident, genuine, and enthusiastic. Keep it to 3 to 4 paragraphs. Do not use generic filler phrases like "I am writing to express my interest."

RILEY BENNETT

Business Administration Student | Economics Minor
(555) 555-0101 | riley.bennett@email.com | Riverton, IN

February 25, 2028

[Hiring Manager Name]
[Company Name]
[Company Address]
[City, State ZIP]

Dear [Hiring Manager Name],

I am excited to apply for the [Position Title] internship at [Company Name] for summer 2028. As a junior pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an Economics minor at Riverton State University, I have built a strong foundation in financial analysis, strategic planning, and team leadership. I am eager to bring that foundation to your team and continue growing in a hands-on professional environment.

My work experience has given me practical skills that translate well to banking, finance, and business operations. As a Grocery Associate, I processed 50+ customer transactions per shift with accuracy and speed, trained 8+ new hires on store procedures, and took ownership of inventory management across multiple aisles. Before that, I worked as a Server Trainer where I coached 10+ new team members on service standards and managed high-volume shifts serving 100+ guests per night. These roles taught me how to stay organized under pressure, communicate clearly with different types of people, and take initiative when something needs to get done.

Outside of work, I serve as a Board Member for a local nonprofit organization where I contribute to strategic planning discussions and have conducted cost analysis research that helped the organization save 20% on event venue costs. This experience has strengthened my ability to think critically about budgets, weigh options, and present recommendations to a group. I have also maintained a 3.9 GPA and earned a spot on the Dean's List every semester since Fall 2024, which reflects my commitment to balancing multiple responsibilities at a high level.

I would welcome the chance to learn more about [Company Name] and discuss how my background in business, finance, and leadership could contribute to your team. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Riley Bennett

CURRICULUM VITAE (CV) GUIDE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

A CV is different from a resume. While a resume is a concise, targeted marketing document (typically 1 to 2 pages), a CV is a comprehensive record of your academic and professional history. CVs are used for academic positions, research roles, graduate school applications, fellowships, and certain government or international roles. There is no page limit for a CV.

CV Sections (in order)

1. Contact Information
2. Education (list degrees in reverse chronological order, include dissertation or thesis titles)
3. Research Experience and Interests
4. Publications and Presentations
5. Teaching Experience
6. Grants and Fellowships
7. Professional Experience
8. Certifications and Licenses
9. Professional Memberships and Affiliations
10. Honors and Awards
11. Service and Volunteer Work
12. Skills and Languages

GPS PROMPT: Build Your CV from Your Resume

Here is my current resume: [paste]. I need to expand this into a full academic CV for [purpose: graduate school application, academic job, fellowship]. Add sections for Research Experience, Publications, Presentations, Teaching, Professional Memberships, and Honors. Help me format it in standard academic CV style. Ask me follow up questions about any section where you need more information from me.



RILEY BENNETT

Adjunct Instructor, Department of Business Administration
College of Business, Riverton State University
100 University Avenue, Riverton, IN 00000
Phone: (555) 555-0101 | Email: riley.bennett@riverton.example.edu
Mobile: (555) 555-0102 | riley.bennett@email.com

EDUCATION

MBA | Midwest Regional University | [City, State] **May 2019**
Master of Business Administration (MBA) | Strategic Management
Thesis: "Scaling Organizational Efficiency in Midwestern Mid-Market Firms: A Case Study of Regional Manufacturing"
Advisor: Dr. Lillian Mosher

B.S. | Riverton State University | Riverton, IN **May 2017**
Bachelor of Science, Business Administration
College of Business | AACSB Accredited
Minor: Economics

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Strategic management in regional economies; ethical decision-making in business; cost-benefit analysis in nonprofit governance; workforce development and talent pipeline strategy in AACSB-accredited business education; experiential learning pedagogy for undergraduate business students

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Riverton State University, College of Business | Riverton, IN
Adjunct Instructor, Department of Business Administration | August 2022 – Present

- Designed and delivered BUS 101: Introduction to Business for sections of 35+ undergraduate students per semester, incorporating case-based learning and local industry guest speakers
- Developed BUS 265: Principles of Management course materials emphasizing ethical leadership, strategic planning, and team dynamics aligned with AACSB learning assurance standards
- Created and facilitated experiential learning assignments connecting students with regional organizations including Riverton Packaging Group, First Riverton Bank, and the Riverton Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Mentored 40+ students per academic year through individualized office hours focused on career readiness and professional development
- Achieved average student evaluation scores of 4.7/5.0 across six semesters of instruction

Riverton State University, College of Business | Riverton, IN
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Principles of Management | August 2021 – May 2022

- Led weekly discussion sections of 25 students for undergraduate management course under Dr. Robert Kellam
- Graded case study analyses, facilitated peer review exercises, and supported exam development
- Assisted in piloting a new team-based learning module on ethical decision-making frameworks

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

First Riverton Bank | Riverton, IN
Branch Operations Analyst | June 2019 – July 2022

- Analyzed branch-level financial performance data across 12 regional locations, producing quarterly cost-benefit reports that informed resource allocation decisions
- Collaborated with senior leadership on strategic planning initiatives to improve customer retention by 15% over two fiscal years
- Trained and onboarded 20+ new branch associates on compliance procedures, financial products, and service standards
- Led a cross-functional team of 6 in implementing a streamlined customer transaction process, reducing average wait times by 22%

Riverton Packaging Group | Riverton, IN
Business Operations Intern | May 2018 – August 2018

- Conducted market research and competitive analysis for the Consumer Packaging division, contributing findings to a regional product strategy presentation
- Assisted in budget management and cost tracking for a $2.5M packaging line upgrade project
- Compiled data for quarterly operational reviews using Excel-based financial modeling and data visualization

Midland Holdings, Inc. | Riverton, IN
Administrative Support Associate | June 2016 – May 2017

- Supported the finance team with accounts receivable processing, vendor coordination, and internal audit preparation
- Organized and maintained digital and physical filing systems serving 4 departments with 50+ employees
- Drafted internal communications and coordinated scheduling for monthly management meetings

PUBLICATIONS AND SCHOLARLY WORK

- Bennett, R. (2024). Bridging the classroom and the community: Experiential learning approaches for undergraduate business administration students in regional economies. *[Journal Name], 12*(2), 45–58.
- Bennett, R. (2023). *Ethical frameworks for early-career professionals: Integrating virtue ethics into introductory business curriculum* [Paper presentation]. [State] Academy of the Social Sciences Annual Conference, [City, State].
- Bennett, R., & Kellam, R. (2022). Nonprofit board governance and financial decision-making: Lessons from small-city organizations. *[Journal Name], 97*(3), 22–29.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- Bennett, R. (2024, April). *Teaching business ethics through place-based case studies: A regional model* [Paper presentation]. [National Business Education Conference], [City, State].
- Bennett, R. (2023, October). *Developing workforce-ready graduates: Partnerships between AACSB programs and regional industry* [Paper presentation]. [Regional Academy of Management Annual Meeting], [City, State].
- Bennett, R. (2023, March). *Cost-benefit analysis as pedagogy: Embedding real-world financial thinking in the undergraduate classroom* [Poster presentation]. Faculty Scholarship Symposium, Riverton State University, Riverton, IN.

SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

Board Member, Riverton Community Arts Alliance | January 2020 – Present

- Participated in monthly strategic planning discussions during a period of organizational growth, helping shape decisions around programming priorities and community outreach
- Researched 5+ venue options and built a cost comparison for upcoming events, helping the board select a location that saved 20% on the original budget estimate

Faculty Advisor, Student Business Association | August 2022 – Present

- Guided 30+ student members in professional development workshops, networking events, and community service projects
- Coordinated with the campus career center and the local SHRM chapter to host on-campus employer panels

Volunteer, United Way of Riverton County | September 2018 – Present

- Facilitated financial literacy workshops for young professionals in partnership with local banks
- Served on the annual campaign planning committee, assisting in budget forecasting and donor communications

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Academy of Management, Member | 2021 – Present
- Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Affiliate | 2022 – Present
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Member | 2019 – Present
- Local SHRM Chapter, Member | 2019 – Present

SKILLS

- **Technical:** Microsoft Office Suite (advanced Excel including pivot tables, VLOOKUP, and financial modeling), Blackboard/Canvas LMS, Tableau, SPSS, QuickBooks
- **Pedagogical:** Case-based instruction, team-based learning, experiential learning design, rubric development, AACSB learning assurance assessment
- **Professional:** Public speaking, strategic planning, financial analysis, budget management, client relations, ethical decision-making

REFERENCES

- Dr. Robert Kellam | Associate Professor of Management, College of Business, Riverton State University | (555) 555-0202 | rkellam@riverton.example.edu
- Dr. Priya Vasquez | Dean of Academic Affairs, College of Business, Riverton State University | (555) 555-0303 | pvasquez@riverton.example.edu
- Margaret Thornton | Senior Vice President, Branch Operations, First Riverton Bank | (555) 555-0404 | mthornton@firstriverton.example.com

On every page after the first, a CV carries your last name and the page number, in the header or footer, so pages stay together if they are separated. This sample CV is entirely fictional. Names, institutions, employers, publications, and contact details are invented for educational purposes; bracketed fields show where real details would go.

LINKEDIN PROFILE OPTIMIZATION AND ALGORITHM BEST PRACTICES

Your LinkedIn profile is not an online resume. It is a searchable, living digital brand that works for you 24 hours a day. In 2026, LinkedIn changed how its feed decides what to show. Understanding the change is the difference between being discoverable and being overlooked.

What Changed: LinkedIn's 2026 Feed Update

In March 2026, LinkedIn announced that it was upgrading its feed ranking with large language models (LLMs) and new "generative recommender" models. According to LinkedIn, these systems "better understand what a post is actually about and how your professional interests evolve" (LinkedIn Corporate Communications Team, 2026). Here is what LinkedIn and independent reporting say changed, and what it means for you:

- **Meaning matters more than exact keywords.** LLM based retrieval connects posts and members by topic, even when the exact words differ (Hutchinson, 2026; David, 2026). Clear, specific writing about your field now carries more weight than tactics such as stacking hashtags.
- **Your profile is the algorithm's evidence file.** LinkedIn says ranking draws on the profile details you choose to share, including industry, skills, experience, and geography, along with your engagement patterns over time (LinkedIn Corporate Communications Team, 2026). Reporting on LinkedIn's engineering work describes profile details, skills, work history, and education being converted to text the model reads (David, 2026). A vague or outdated profile gives the system less to work with.
- **Engagement bait is being reduced.** LinkedIn is reducing low substance posts, "comment to agree" prompts, videos that do not match their text, and recycled thought leadership that adds little (LinkedIn Corporate Communications Team, 2026; Hutchinson, 2026).
- **Fake engagement is being targeted.** LinkedIn is acting against comment automation, engagement pods, and unauthorized third party tools (LinkedIn Corporate Communications Team, 2026). Genuine conversation is the only engagement worth investing in.
- **Interests evolve, and new members get help.** The system relies less on old engagement history and adapts as your interests change. LinkedIn is also testing an Interest Picker for new members who do not yet have a complete profile or engagement history (LinkedIn Corporate Communications Team, 2026; Hutchinson, 2026). This matters for first time job seekers building a profile from scratch.
- **It is not a reach cap.** LinkedIn states that the update "isn't about limiting reach or discouraging participation" (LinkedIn Corporate Communications Team, 2026).

Coaching guidance, not a published LinkedIn rule:

Because the system learns your professional interests over time, posting and commenting thoughtfully on two or three core topics in your field helps it understand what you are about. Treat this as a recommended practice that follows from LinkedIn's stated approach, not as a formula LinkedIn has published.

THE 6 TO 10 JOB DESCRIPTION STRATEGY FOR LINKEDIN SEO

This is the strategy that changes everything. Instead of guessing what keywords to use on your LinkedIn profile, you are going to reverse engineer them from the job market itself.

1. **Step 1:** Find 6 to 10 job descriptions for roles you genuinely want to apply for. Save them in a document.
2. **Step 2:** Paste all of them into Claude AI, ChatGPT, or Copilot.
3. **Step 3:** Use the SEO Keywords prompt from earlier in this guide to identify the most frequently repeated terms.
4. **Step 4:** Integrate those keywords naturally into your LinkedIn Headline, About section, Experience descriptions, and Skills section.
5. **Step 5:** Revisit this process every semester or whenever your career goals shift.

GPS PROMPT: LinkedIn Profile Full Optimization

Here are the top SEO keywords I identified from 8 job descriptions in my target field: [paste your keyword list]. My personal brand statement is: [paste]. I am a [major/background] at [your school] targeting [type of role] in [industry/location]. Using these keywords, write: (1) Five LinkedIn headline options under 220 characters, with the most important keywords in the first half, (2) A complete About section under 2,600 characters that is SEO optimized, conversational, and includes a call to action, (3) Suggestions for my Skills section (top 10 skills to add). Optimize for recruiter search, not just reading.

Important note on the About section:

LinkedIn allows up to 2,600 characters, but only the opening lines are visible before the reader clicks "See more," and even fewer on mobile. Make sure the opening lines function as a strong hook that earns the click, not just a polished introduction buried at the end.

GPS PROMPT: Optimize LinkedIn Experience Section

Here is my resume entry for [job/internship title] at [company]: [paste]. Rewrite this for my LinkedIn Experience section. Make it more conversational than a resume. Include relevant SEO keywords for [target role]. Expand on the impact of my work. Include 3 to 5 bullet points. Write in a tone that reflects my personal brand: [paste brand statement].

LINKEDIN PROFILE SEO OPTIMIZATION CHECKLIST

Maximize your visibility in recruiter and LinkedIn searches

Professional Headshot

- [ ] High resolution photo (400x400 px minimum), face fills about 60% of frame
- [ ] Clean background, professional attire, natural smile with eye contact
- [ ] Even lighting with no harsh shadows; photo taken within last 1 to 2 years

Banner Image

- [ ] Custom banner uploaded (1584 x 396 px), no default gray
- [ ] Reflects professional brand; includes tagline or value proposition
- [ ] Key text and images not hidden behind headshot; previewed on mobile + desktop

Headline (Up to 220 Characters)

- [ ] Replaced default title with keyword rich custom headline
- [ ] Leads with target job title, followed by 2 to 3 industry keywords (use | or •)
- [ ] Includes a unique differentiator; avoids buzzwords (guru, ninja, rockstar)

About Section (2,600 Characters)

- [ ] Strong hook in the first 2 to 3 lines (only the opening lines show before "See more")
- [ ] Written in first person; 8 to 12 target keywords woven in naturally
- [ ] 3 to 5 accomplishments with quantifiable results (numbers, percentages, dollars)
- [ ] Ends with keyword block of core competencies + call to action

Work Experience

- [ ] Each role linked to official company LinkedIn page (for logo + search boost)
- [ ] 3 to 5 keyword rich bullets per role starting with action verbs
- [ ] Measurable outcomes included; language mirrors target job postings
- [ ] Relevant media attached (presentations, reports, portfolio links)

Education

- [ ] All degrees listed with correct school LinkedIn pages linked
- [ ] Certifications prominently displayed (SHRM-CP, CPRW, PMP, etc.)
- [ ] Relevant honors, activities, and continuing education included

Volunteer Experience

- [ ] All volunteer roles added with keyword rich descriptions
- [ ] Impact quantified; transferable skills connected to professional brand

Skills (LinkedIn Allows Up to 100)

- [ ] Relevant skills added, prioritizing exact terms from target job descriptions; top skills featured in your About section
- [ ] Exact phrases from job descriptions used as skills
- [ ] Endorsements requested from colleagues who have seen your work

Mining Job Descriptions with AI for SEO Keywords

- [ ] 5 to 10 target job postings collected (LinkedIn, Indeed, Handshake, company sites)
- [ ] AI prompt: "Extract the top 20 repeated keywords from these descriptions"
- [ ] AI prompt: "Categorize keywords into Hard Skills, Soft Skills, Tools, Industry Terms"
- [ ] AI prompt: "Compare my LinkedIn profile to these keywords and identify gaps"
- [ ] AI prompt: "Rewrite my headline/About section embedding top keywords naturally"
- [ ] Master keyword list created and refreshed quarterly
- [ ] All AI outputs verified and personalized with authentic voice

4

PART FOUR

LAUNCH YOUR SEARCH



START WITH A STRATEGY, NOT A SEARCH BAR

Before you type a single keyword, the most effective job seekers answer a question most never ask: who, specifically, do I want to work for? That shift from searching broadly to targeting deliberately is the core premise of Steve Dalton's research backed framework, *The 2 Hour Job Search* (Dalton, 2020). Dalton argues that the majority of job search energy is wasted on low probability applications submitted to organizations the applicant knows little about and has no connection to. The antidote is a focused, prioritized target list built before any applications go out.

Dalton's LAMP method provides the structure. LAMP is an acronym for List, Alumni, Motivation, and Posting. You begin by generating a list of roughly 40 employer targets in your field and geographic range. Then you assess each organization across three dimensions: whether you have any alumni or personal connections there (Alumni), how genuinely motivated you are to work there (Motivation), and whether an active posting currently exists (Posting). The result is a prioritized employer list that tells you not just where jobs exist, but where you have the highest probability of a warm introduction, a successful interview, and a meaningful career fit.

L · List

About 40 target employers in your field and geographic range.

A · Alumni

Alumni or personal connections inside each organization.

M · Motivation + P · Posting

How much you want to work there, and whether a posting is live now.

This framework reframes your entire job search. You are not scanning job boards hoping something looks good. You are building intelligence on a focused set of target organizations, activating your network strategically, and entering conversations as a prepared and intentional candidate rather than an anonymous applicant.

The tools that follow, including Boolean search, Google X-ray, Google Alerts, and AI research strategies, all work in service of this method. Use them to build and refine your LAMP list, gather intelligence on your target organizations, and identify the people already inside those organizations who can open a door.

Reference

Dalton, S. (2020). *The 2-hour job search: Using technology to get the right job faster* (2nd ed.). Ten Speed Press.

JOB SEARCH STRATEGY: WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER

A strategic job search is not about applying to everything. It is about finding the roles that align with your skills, values, and career goals, and then presenting yourself as the strongest possible candidate for those specific opportunities.

Using Google as a Job Search Engine

Most job seekers limit their search to LinkedIn and Indeed. Those platforms are useful, but they represent the most crowded lane in the job market. Google, used strategically, opens a different lane entirely, one most applicants never think to use. Three tools make it powerful: Boolean operators, X-ray search, and Google Alerts. Together, they transform Google from a general search engine into a precision job search system.

Boolean Operators: The Foundation

Boolean operators are the syntax that makes targeted Google searching possible in a search bar. Rather than typing a vague phrase and scrolling through irrelevant results, Boolean strings tell Google exactly what you are looking for and what to exclude. The core operators every job seeker needs are:

- **AND** requires both terms to appear: `"project management" AND "entry level"`
- **OR** expands results to include either term: `("nonprofit" OR "NGO") AND "program coordinator"`
- **Quotation marks** lock in exact phrases: `"bachelor of science in sport management"`
- **The minus sign or NOT** excludes unwanted terms: `"marketing manager" AND Indianapolis NOT senior`

A complete Boolean job search string might look like this:

- `("event coordinator" OR "event manager") AND ("sport management" OR "athletics") AND Indiana AND ("entry level" OR "new grad")`
- `("human resources" OR "HR generalist") AND "entry level" AND (Indianapolis OR "Central Indiana")`



Type a Boolean string directly into Google, then open the Jobs results.

Think of Boolean operators as instructions you give a search engine. AND tells it you need both terms. OR tells it either one will do. NOT tells it to leave something out entirely. Quotation marks mean you want that exact phrase, word for word. Parentheses keep grouped terms together so your search logic does not fall apart. A wildcard, represented by an asterisk, fills in for any word ending, so a search like `market*` can return marketing, marketer, and marketplace all at once.

Recruiters and talent acquisition professionals use these same operators daily to source candidates across LinkedIn, job boards, and company databases, which means learning this syntax puts you on equal footing with the people looking to hire you. The reference table below outlines core Boolean operators and their functions. Boolean search allows you to create more precise and targeted search queries to find the best fit role and company faster.

Boolean Operators Quick Reference

OPERATOR	FUNCTION	EXAMPLE
AND	Narrows results: both terms must appear	`project management AND healthcare`
OR	Broadens results: either term may appear	`recruiter OR "talent acquisition"`
NOT	Excludes a term from results	`marketing NOT "social media"`
" " (Quotes)	Searches for an exact phrase	`"human resources business partner"`
( ) (Parentheses)	Groups terms to control search logic	`(HR OR "human resources") AND compliance`
*** (Wildcard)**	Captures word variations from a root	`manag*` finds manager, managing, management

Using AI to Build Your Boolean Strings

Constructing effective Boolean strings from scratch takes practice. One of the most practical applications of AI in your job search is using it as a Boolean string generator before you ever open Google. Rather than guessing at the right terminology, you can prompt an AI tool to do the linguistic heavy lifting. Try prompts like these in Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, Claude, or a similar tool:

GPS PROMPT: Generate Boolean Search Strings

"I am a recent graduate with a degree in health services administration looking for entry level roles in hospital operations or healthcare management in [your state]. Write me three Boolean search strings I can use in Google to find job postings."

"I want to find nonprofit organizations in the [your city] area that work in youth development or workforce readiness. Write a Google Boolean string I can use to surface their careers pages."

The AI output gives you a starting string. Your job is to refine it based on what the actual search returns. Treat it as a first draft, not a final answer. Over two or three iterations, you will develop a search string that surfaces roles precisely aligned to your goals.

Boolean Logic Works Beyond Google

The same Boolean logic that powers Google searches works directly within most major job platforms. LinkedIn, Indeed, FlexJobs, ZipRecruiter, Idealist, and USAJobs all support Boolean operators in their search bars, with some variation in syntax. On LinkedIn, for example, you can type `("HR coordinator" OR "talent acquisition") AND "entry level"` directly into the job search field and filter results from there. On Indeed, quotation marks and AND/OR operators function the same way as in Google. Learning this syntax once gives you a precision tool that works across every platform in your search ecosystem.

Google X-Ray Search: Going Deeper

X-ray search takes Boolean logic one step further by using the `site:` operator to search within a specific website or domain. This surfaces job postings, career pages, and opportunities that standard job boards do not easily surface (Workology, n.d.). Small and mid size employers frequently post positions only on their own websites. Nonprofits, government agencies, and trade associations often maintain separate career pages that never cross post to LinkedIn or Indeed. X-ray search finds them.

Examples:

- `site:indeed.com "human resources generalist" AND "entry level" AND Indianapolis`
- `site:usajobs.gov "workforce development" AND "bachelor's degree"`
- `site:[companyname].com "careers" AND "entry level" AND "supply chain"`
- `"now hiring" AND "social media manager" AND (remote OR "work from home") AND "bachelor's degree"`



An X-ray search limits results to a single site, here Indeed job listings.

One important limitation to know: since 2024, LinkedIn has restricted search engine access to profile data, meaning Google X-ray searches of LinkedIn now return limited results and no longer surface key fields including Headline, About, and Experience (PCRecruiter, 2024). LinkedIn has not given an official reason. When asked, LinkedIn replied that "Google is a tool for finding websites/pages and answers to questions," and sourcing professionals have speculated it reflects a push toward the platform's own paid tools, including LinkedIn Recruiter and Sales Navigator. For job seekers, this means you should not rely on Google to surface LinkedIn profiles or job postings the way you once could. LinkedIn's internal search remains useful for what it is, but Google is no longer a reliable back channel into the platform.

Where X-ray search remains fully effective is everywhere else. Company career portals, nonprofit and association websites, university job boards, government employment portals, and industry specific hiring pages are all indexed by Google and respond well to `site:` searches. These are also frequently the sources that list positions before or instead of posting them to major job boards, which is precisely why this technique gives you an edge. The job seeker who searches `site:usajobs.gov` or `site:[targetcompany].com` with a well built Boolean string is finding opportunities that the LinkedIn and Indeed only job seeker never sees.

BUILDING YOUR TARGET LIST: AI RESEARCH, ALUMNI DATA, AND SALARY INTELLIGENCE

Once you have a sense of the industries and roles you are targeting, the next step is building the employer list at the center of your LAMP framework. This is where AI tools, alumni outcome data, and labor market salary tools work together.

Using AI to Identify Target Employers

AI is an efficient brainstorming partner for generating an initial employer list when you are not sure where to start. Use prompts like:

GPS PROMPT: Brainstorm Target Employers

"I have a degree in kinesiology and want to work in corporate wellness or community health programming in the Midwest. Give me 20 types of organizations and specific employer examples I should research."

"What industries commonly hire graduates with a background in communications and nonprofit management? List specific types of employers in [your state] and regionally."

AI output here is a starting point for research, not a verified hiring list. Use it to surface employer categories and organization names you had not considered, then verify each one through the tools below.

Alumni Outcome Platforms: Where Graduates Like You Work

Many colleges and universities give students and alumni access to alumni outcome platforms, such as Steppingblocks, that draw on graduate outcome data to show where alumni have gone, what roles they hold, and what they earn. If your school offers one, it is one of the most underutilized research tools available to you. If it does not, LinkedIn's alumni search for your school offers a similar starting point.

Use an alumni outcome platform to:

- **Search by major or field** to see which employers have historically hired graduates from your program in roles aligned with yours. This surfaces organizations already familiar with your school and its programs.
- **Identify specific alumni working at your target organizations,** which directly supports the Alumni column of your LAMP list and gives you warm connection points for informational interviews.
- **Review salary ranges and career path data** based on real outcomes from people who started where you are. This informs both your expectations and your negotiation preparation.

Ask your campus career center whether you have access and how to log in.

Salary Research: O*NET and Beyond

Salary expectations grounded in data give you credibility in every conversation, from informational interviews to formal negotiations. O*NET OnLine (onetonline.org), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides detailed wage ranges, skill requirements, and job outlook data organized by occupation code. Search your target role title, review the national and state level wage data, and note the skills and competencies listed. These become the keywords you build into your resume, cover letter, and LinkedIn profile.

Cross reference O*NET data with alumni salary outcomes for a more localized and field specific picture. Where the two sources align, you have a reliable market rate. Where they diverge, note the context and ask about it directly in informational interviews.

GOOGLE ALERTS: PASSIVE INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Boolean search requires you to go looking. Google Alerts brings opportunities to you. A Google Alert is a free notification tool that monitors the web for new content matching your keywords and delivers results directly to your inbox on a schedule you set. For job seekers, this means you can track new postings, company hiring announcements, and industry news without logging into a single job board.

To set up a job search alert, go to google.com/alerts and build a keyword string using the same Boolean logic you would use in a search. Useful alert strings include:

- `"sport management" AND "hiring" AND Indiana`
- `"HR coordinator" AND "entry level" AND [your city]`
- `"marketing" AND ("now hiring" OR "we're hiring") AND remote`
- `[Target company name] AND ("careers" OR "job opening" OR "we're hiring")`

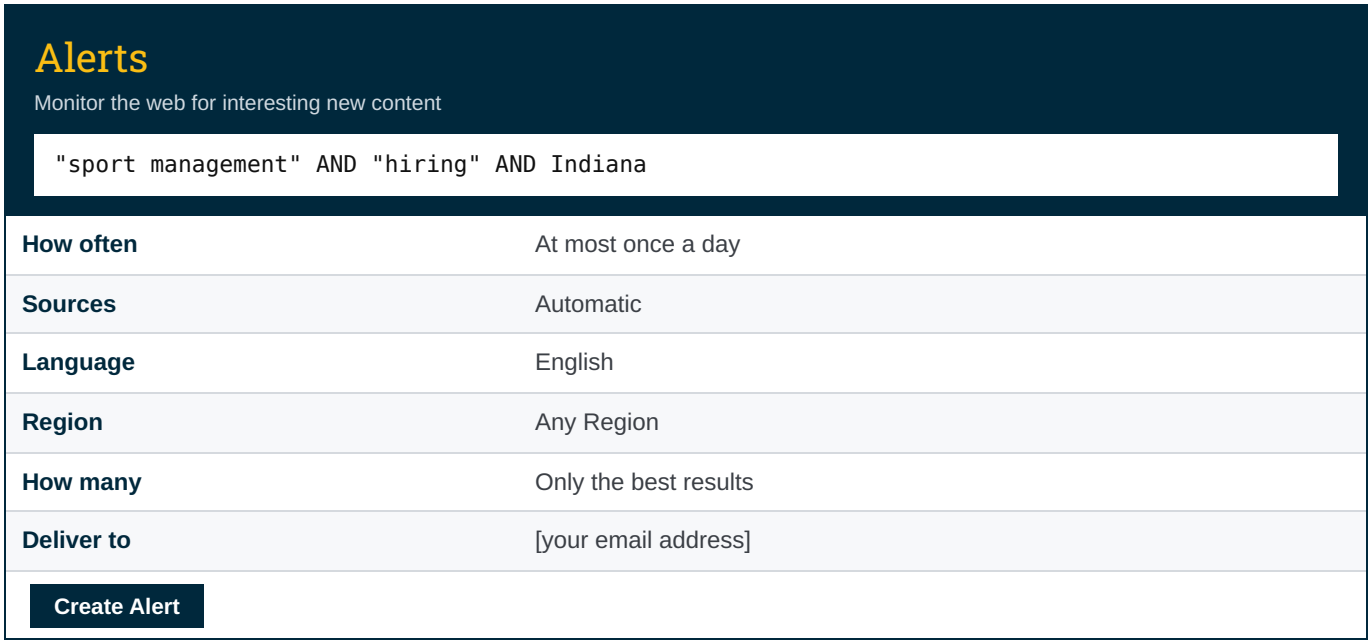


Illustration of the Google Alerts setup screen with a Boolean string in place.

Set alerts to deliver daily or weekly depending on how active your search is. Over time, your alerts become an intelligence feed that tells you which companies are growing, which are hiring repeatedly in your target field, and which roles surface most consistently, all of which informs where to direct your networking energy.

WHY THIS COMBINATION WORKS

In LinkedIn research released in January 2026, two thirds of recruiters (66%) said it had become harder to find qualified talent over the past year (LinkedIn, 2026). Read this as LinkedIn's own reported figure. Industry estimates suggest referrals make up only about 7% of applicants but 30 to 50% of hires, which makes them far more effective than cold applications alone (Flynn, 2026). Boolean search, X-ray search, and Google Alerts do not replace networking. They tell you exactly where to network, which companies are hiring, and what language those employers are using, before most applicants even know a role exists.

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FROM INTELLIGENCE TO ACTION: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS AND INTENTIONAL APPLICATIONS

Building a target list and gathering employer intelligence only creates value when it leads to human connection. Research without outreach is just preparation that never gets used. The final step of a strategic job search is activating your network around the specific organizations on your LAMP list.

Start by identifying who you already know, or who you are one connection away from, at each of your target employers. Your school's alumni outcome platform or alumni network is your first resource for this. LinkedIn is your second. Search your target organization by name, filter by your university or geographic network, and look for alumni, former classmates, faculty connections, or second degree contacts who currently work there or have in the past.

When you find a relevant connection, the goal is not to ask for a job. It is to request a 20 to 30 minute informational interview, a conversation in which you learn about their experience, their organization, and the field from someone living it. Informational interviews build relationships before a posting exists, give you insider language and context that sharpens your application materials, and position you as a thoughtful and prepared candidate when a role does open. They also move you from anonymous applicant to known quantity in the mind of someone who may influence hiring decisions.

Putting AI to Work: Informational Interview Support

GPS PROMPT: Drafting Your Outreach Message

"I am a senior majoring in health services administration. I found [Name] through my school's alumni network and see they work in hospital operations at [regional health system]. Write a short, professional LinkedIn message requesting a 20 minute informational interview. I want to sound prepared and genuine, not like I am asking for a job."

GPS PROMPT: Preparing Your Questions

"I have an informational interview with an operations coordinator at a regional hospital system. I have read their recent press release about expanding outpatient services. Help me write five thoughtful questions that show I have done my homework and am genuinely curious about the field, not just fishing for job leads."

GPS PROMPT: Synthesizing What You Learn

"I have had informational interviews with three people working in nonprofit workforce development. Here are my notes from each conversation. What themes are emerging about the skills they value, the challenges in the field, and how they describe a strong candidate?"

In each case, you are directing the AI with specific context you already hold. The output only becomes useful because you bring the knowledge of who you talked to, what you read, and what you observed. That is the distinction between AI as a shortcut and AI as a thought partner.

The full sequence, from AI assisted brainstorming and Boolean search to alumni research to network activated informational interviews, is not a set of separate activities. It is a single integrated strategy. Every tool in this section is designed to get you to the same place: a focused list of target organizations, a warm connection inside each of them, and the preparation to make every conversation count.

AI POWERED JOB TRACKER

Staying organized is one of the biggest challenges in a job search. When you are managing multiple target companies, outreach messages, follow ups, and application deadlines at once, details fall through the cracks fast. A job tracker keeps your search visible, intentional, and moving forward.

Rather than building one from scratch, use AI to create a customized spreadsheet tailored to your specific search strategy. A well maintained tracker also becomes a record of your effort and momentum, which matters when a search feels stalled. You will be able to see at a glance where you have applied, who you have spoken with, what follow up is overdue, and which companies on your LAMP list still need attention.

Once AI generates the structure, make it yours. Add columns that reflect your search, remove what does not apply, and commit to updating it at least twice a week. A tracker you never open is just a file. A tracker you maintain consistently becomes one of the most powerful tools in your search.

GPS PROMPT: Create a Custom Job Search Tracker

Create a comprehensive job search tracking spreadsheet for me with the following columns: Company Name, Job Title, Date Applied, Application Link, Resume Version Used, Cover Letter Version, Contact Person, Follow Up Date, Follow Up Status, Interview Date, Interview Type (phone/video/in person), Notes, Status (Applied/Phone Screen/Interview/Offer/Rejected). Also add a second tab called "Networking Contacts" with columns for: Name, Title, Company, How We Connected, Date of Last Contact, Next Step, Notes. Format instructions so I can recreate this in Excel or Google Sheets.

Job Application Tracker

Total Applications: 0 **Interviews: 0** **Offers: 0**

COMPANY	JOB TITLE	LOCATION	DATE APPLIED	SOURCE	STATUS	FOLLOW-UP DATE	CONTACT	SALARY RANGE	NOTES

A sample tracker layout you can recreate in Excel or Google Sheets.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM JOB SCAMS

Job scams target people at exactly the moment they are working hardest to find opportunity. Scammers post fake listings, pose as recruiters on LinkedIn and by text, and increasingly use polished, AI written messages that look legitimate. Knowing the warning signs protects your money, your identity, and your energy.

Red Flags to Watch For

- **You are asked to pay to get the job.** A legitimate employer will never ask you to pay to be hired (Federal Trade Commission, 2024).
- **The pay sounds too good for too little work.** Promises of high pay for a few hours of easy work are a warning sign (Federal Trade Commission, 2024).
- **You are asked to pay by gift card, cryptocurrency, a payment app, or wire transfer.** These methods work like cash and are very hard to recover (Federal Trade Commission, 2024).
- **You receive a check and are asked to send part of it back.** The check is likely fake, and you will owe the bank the full amount (Federal Trade Commission, 2024).
- **An offer arrives without a real interview,** or the entire "interview" happens by text or chat.
- **You are asked for your Social Security number, bank details, or a copy of your ID before a written offer.**
- **The recruiter uses a personal email address** or a domain that does not match the company's official website.

How to Verify an Opportunity

1. Find the job on the employer's official careers page, reached by typing the company's web address yourself, not by clicking a link in a message.
2. Search the company name with words like "scam" or "review" (Federal Trade Commission, 2024).
3. Look up the recruiter on LinkedIn and confirm they work for the company. Contact the company directly through its main website if you are unsure.
4. Talk the offer through with someone you trust before you share personal information or money (Federal Trade Commission, 2024).

GPS PROMPT: Check a Suspicious Job Message

Here is a job message or posting I received, with my personal information removed: [paste]. List any warning signs of a job scam you notice, explain why each one matters, and tell me how I can independently verify whether this employer and opportunity are real. Do not tell me it is safe; help me check it myself.

If you think you were scammed:

Contact the company you used to send money right away and ask about reversing the payment. Report the scam to the Federal Trade Commission at ReportFraud.ftc.gov (Federal Trade Commission, 2024). Being targeted is not a reflection of your judgment. Scammers are skilled, and reporting helps protect the next person.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION: BE READY FOR ANYTHING

Interview confidence comes from preparation, not from personality. When you know your stories, have researched the company, and have practiced answering questions out loud, you walk into every interview ready to be your best self.

Use Job Descriptions to Predict Interview Questions

Every job description is a roadmap to the questions you will be asked. The required qualifications and responsibilities tell you exactly what the interviewer wants to hear about.

GPS PROMPT: Generate Interview Questions from a Job Description

Here is a job description for a [job title] at [company]: [paste full JD]. Generate 12 behavioral interview questions this hiring manager is likely to ask based on the required competencies and responsibilities listed. For each question, identify which competency it is testing. Then, using my resume [paste], suggest which of my experiences would make the strongest CAR response for each question.

GPS PROMPT: Build a CAR Interview Story

Help me build a CAR interview story. The question is: "Tell me about a time you [specific competency]." Here is the situation I want to use: [describe briefly]. Walk me through structuring this as: Challenge (1 to 2 sentences describing the situation), Action (3 to 4 sentences with specific details about what I did), Result (1 to 2 sentences with a measurable outcome if possible). Make it conversational enough to say out loud in an interview.

Gemini Notebook (Formerly NotebookLM): Your Personal Interview Coach

1. Go to notebook.google.com and create a new notebook.
2. Upload three sources: your resume (PDF), the job description (paste as text), and 2 to 3 pages of company research.
3. Click "Audio Overview" to generate a custom AI podcast.
4. Listen to AI hosts discuss your qualifications, anticipate questions, and analyze your fit.
5. Take notes on insights you had not considered.

PRO TIP:

Google renamed NotebookLM to Gemini Notebook in July 2026, and it remains a standalone research tool (Woodward, 2026). Gemini Notebook is especially powerful for auditory learners. Hearing your story discussed back to you builds confidence and helps you internalize talking points without memorizing a script.

More Ways to Prepare in Gemini Notebook

Gemini Notebook creates content grounded only in the sources you provide, so what you upload shapes everything it gives back (Google for Education, n.d.). Upload only what you are comfortable sharing, and remove personal details such as your address or phone number first.

FEATURE	WHAT IT DOES	HOW TO USE IT FOR INTERVIEW PREP
Audio Overview	A podcast style audio summary where two AI hosts discuss your sources	Listen on a walk or commute to hear how your experience connects to the role.
Video Overview	An explainer video that pulls in images, diagrams, and quotes from your documents	Watch your experience and the job's requirements laid out side by side, then plan your strongest examples.
Mind Map	A branching diagram of the main topics in your sources and how they connect	See which skills in the job description your stories cover, and where you have gaps to prepare for.
Flashcards and quizzes	Practice cards and quizzes based only on the sources you upload	Drill company facts, role requirements, and your own talking points before the interview.

GPS PROMPT: Ask Your Notebook

Using only my uploaded sources, identify the three experiences from my resume that best match the requirements in this job description, and explain the connection for each. Then list the requirements my sources do not show evidence for, and suggest one question I should prepare to answer about each gap. Cite the source for every point.

You are still the driver.

Gemini Notebook can surface connections, but you decide which stories to tell and how. Check every point against your own experience, and practice your answers out loud in your own words.



Free AI Mock Interview Resources

Practicing out loud is the single best way to reduce interview anxiety and sharpen your responses. These tools let you practice anytime, anywhere, with real time AI feedback:

PLATFORM	FEATURES	COST
Huru AI **huru.ai**	Video mock interviews with AI feedback on content, delivery, and body language. STAR method coaching. Chrome extension.	Free trial available. Premium plans with full feedback.
Interviews.chat	Text and voice mock interviews. Behavioral, technical, and case study practice. Feedback with model answers.	Free tier available.
SmallTalk2Me **smalltalk2.me**	Feedback on grammar, fluency, confidence, and answer quality. Great for multilingual and English language learners.	Free basic access.
Big Interview **biginterview.com**	Video practice with AI feedback. Curriculum based learning modules. Often available free through university career centers.	Check with your campus career center for access.
ChatGPT / Claude AI	Ask AI to role play as an interviewer for a specific company and role. Practice answering and get feedback in real time.	Free tiers available on both platforms.

PRO TIP:

The best interview prep combines AI practice with human feedback. Use AI tools for repetition and refinement, then schedule a mock interview with your campus career center or a career coach for personalized coaching.



KNOW YOUR INTERVIEW FORMAT

Different Formats, Same Goal: Show Them Who You Are

Not every interview happens in a conference room. In 2026, you are just as likely to interview on your phone, over Zoom, in front of an AI camera, or in a formal panel setting. Each format has its own rules, and the candidates who understand those rules have an immediate advantage.

FORMAT	WHAT TO EXPECT	HOW TO PREPARE
Phone Screen	Usually 15 to 30 minutes with a recruiter or HR representative. Focused on basic qualifications, salary expectations, availability, and initial fit. You cannot rely on body language or visual cues.	Stand up while you talk. It adds energy to your voice. Keep your resume, the job description, and notes in front of you. Smile while you speak. It changes your tone even when they cannot see you. Have a quiet space with good reception ready.
Video (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet)	Can range from 30 minutes to a full panel interview. Interviewers can see your face, background, and body language. Technical issues are common and not held against you if handled professionally.	Camera at eye level. Look at the camera, not the screen, when speaking. Test your audio, video, and internet 24 hours before. Use a clean, well lit background. Natural light from a window in front of you is ideal. Close all other tabs and silence notifications. Dress fully. You may need to stand up unexpectedly.
In Person	Typically 30 to 60 minutes. May include a tour, panel, or sequential interviews. Full visual impression matters: your arrival, greeting, posture, and eye contact. You may meet people not on the original schedule.	Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early. Know the building, parking, and entrance. Bring 3 to 5 printed copies of your resume on quality paper. Have a professional bag or portfolio. No phone visible. Make eye contact with everyone in the room, not just the person asking questions. Thank the receptionist and anyone who walks you to the interview room.

FORMAT	WHAT TO EXPECT	HOW TO PREPARE
AI Conducted (HireVue, Paradox, Spark Hire)	One way recorded video: you answer pre set questions on camera with no live interviewer. Typically 3 to 6 questions. You get 30 seconds to prep and up to 3 minutes per response. Depending on the platform and employer settings, AI may score what you say and how you structure it. Used by many large employers.	Practice recording yourself answering questions on camera before the real thing. Treat it with the same professionalism as a live interview. Dress appropriately. Speak to the camera as if it were a person. Maintain natural eye contact with the lens. Structure every answer using STAR (see below). AI systems are designed to evaluate structured responses. See the full AI interview preparation section later in this guide.

PRO TIP

Regardless of format, three things stay the same: research the company thoroughly, prepare stories using the STAR method, and practice answering out loud. The format changes the setting. Your preparation stays constant.

THE FIVE TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Know What They Are Really Asking

Every interview question falls into one of five categories. When you can identify the type, you know exactly what the interviewer wants to hear. This is not about memorizing answers. It is about recognizing patterns so you can respond with confidence.

QUESTION TYPE	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE	WHAT THEY ARE TESTING
Behavioral	"Tell me about a time you…"	Past behavior as a predictor of future performance. They want real stories, not hypotheticals. Use STAR.
Situational	"What would you do if…"	Your judgment, problem solving process, and decision making under ambiguity. Walk through your thinking step by step.
Technical	"Explain how you would…" or "Walk me through…"	Your knowledge and skills in action. Be specific about tools, methods, and processes you have actually used.
Competency Based	"Give me an example of your leadership…"	Specific skills mapped to the job description. Review the required qualifications and prepare one story for each.
Conversational	"Tell me about yourself" or "Why this role?"	Communication skills, self awareness, and genuine interest. Keep answers concise and relevant to the role.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Most interviews use a mix of all five types. Behavioral and situational questions are the most common in 2026 because employers have shifted to skills based hiring, where they evaluate what you can do rather than where you went to school. When you hear a question, take one second to identify the type before you start talking. That moment of recognition changes everything.



THE STAR METHOD: YOUR ANSWER FRAMEWORK

Turn Every Experience Into a Compelling Interview Story

The STAR method is the most widely recommended framework for answering behavioral and situational interview questions, and it is the structure AI interview systems like HireVue are specifically designed to evaluate. STAR gives your answers a clear beginning, middle, and end, which is exactly what interviewers are listening for.

If you have been using the CAR method (Challenge, Action, Result) from earlier in this toolkit to build your resume bullets, STAR works the same way with one addition: it separates the Situation from the Task so the interviewer clearly understands both the context and your specific role.

S	**Situation** **10% of your answer**	Set the scene. Where were you? What was happening? Give just enough context for the interviewer to understand the challenge. One to two sentences.
T	**Task** **10% of your answer**	What was your specific responsibility? What were you asked or expected to do? This clarifies your role in the story. One sentence.
A	**Action** **60 to 70% of your answer**	What did you actually do? Be specific. This is the heart of your answer and where you spend most of your time. Describe your steps, decisions, and leadership.
R	**Result** **10 to 20% of your answer**	What happened because of your actions? Quantify whenever possible: numbers, percentages, timeframes, feedback. End with what you learned or how it shaped your approach.

STAR in Action

Question: "Tell me about a time you had to manage a tight deadline."

STEP	WHAT YOU SAY
S	"During my internship at a marketing agency, a client moved their product launch up by two weeks without warning."
T	"I was responsible for the social media campaign and all supporting graphics."
A	"I immediately reprioritized my task list, set up a shared project tracker so the team could see progress in real time, broke the deliverables into daily milestones, and coordinated with the design team to batch produce graphics. I also flagged two deliverables that were unrealistic for the new timeline and proposed alternatives to the client."
R	"We launched on the revised date with all core deliverables completed. The campaign reached 40,000 impressions in the first week, exceeding the original target by 15 percent. My manager cited the experience in my performance review as an example of proactive leadership."

STAR VS. CAR: WHEN TO USE WHICH

Use CAR (Challenge, Action, Result) for resume bullets and LinkedIn where space is limited. Use STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) in interviews where you are speaking out loud and need to walk the listener through the full story. They are the same framework at different levels of detail.

GPS PROMPT: Build a STAR Interview Story

Help me build a STAR interview story. The question is: "Tell me about a time you [specific competency]." Here is the situation I want to use: [describe briefly]. Walk me through the Situation, Task, Action, and Result structure. Make sure the Action section is the longest and most detailed. Include at least one quantifiable result. Then help me practice saying it out loud in under two minutes.

YOUR QUESTIONS MATTER: INTERVIEW THE INTERVIEWER

This Is Not a Formality. It Is Your Chance to Evaluate Them.

When the interviewer says, "Do you have any questions for me?" that is not the end of the interview. It is the beginning of your evaluation of them. This is where you demonstrate genuine interest, strategic thinking, and the kind of curiosity that separates you from every other candidate who says, "No, I think you covered everything."

Never say you have no questions. Always prepare at least five so you can adapt based on what was covered in the conversation.

Strong Questions to Ask

CATEGORY	QUESTION
Role Clarity	"What does success look like in this role in the first 90 days?"
Team and Culture	"Can you tell me about the team I would be working with and how they collaborate?"
Growth	"What opportunities for professional development does the organization offer?"
Manager Style	"How would you describe your management style and how you give feedback?"
Company Direction	"What are the biggest priorities for the department this year?"
Day to Day	"What does a typical week look like for someone in this position?"
AI and Tools	"What tools and technology does the team use day to day, and how is AI being integrated into workflows?"
Next Steps	"What are the next steps in your hiring process, and is there anything else I can provide?"

RED FLAG AWARENESS

Your questions are also how you spot warning signs. If the interviewer cannot describe the team, avoids questions about management style, or seems surprised by your questions about professional development, that tells you something important. A good employer expects and respects thoughtful questions.

GPS PROMPT: Generate Targeted Questions for Your Interviewer

I am interviewing for a [job title] position at [company name]. Here is the job description: [paste]. Based on this role and company, generate 8 thoughtful questions I could ask the interviewer that demonstrate my research, strategic thinking, and genuine interest in the position. Avoid generic questions. Focus on questions that would help me evaluate whether this role and team are the right fit for me.

USING AI TO BE IMPACTFUL AND MEMORABLE

AI Is Your Prep Partner, Not Your Replacement

AI does not replace your preparation. It accelerates it. The candidates who stand out in 2026 are not the ones who memorize perfect answers. They are the ones who walk in with deeper research, sharper stories, and a level of preparation that most candidates do not have time for without AI. Here is how to use AI strategically at every stage of interview preparation.

Before the Interview

STRATEGY	HOW AI HELPS
Predict the questions	Paste the job description into Claude or ChatGPT and ask it to generate 12 behavioral questions based on the required competencies. Then prepare a STAR story for each.
Research the company deeply	Ask AI to summarize the company's recent news, earnings, strategic priorities, and competitors. Go beyond the About page, and verify what it tells you.
Practice out loud	Use AI as a mock interviewer. Ask it to role play the hiring manager and give you real time feedback on your STAR structure, specificity, and length.
Sharpen your stories	Paste a rough draft of your STAR answer and ask AI to help you tighten it, add quantifiable results, and cut unnecessary detail.
Prepare your questions	Ask AI to generate interviewer questions based on the job description, company news, and industry trends.
Build confidence with Gemini Notebook	Upload your resume, the job description, and company research to Gemini Notebook. Generate an Audio Overview to hear AI hosts discuss your fit and anticipate questions.

During and After the Interview

AI cannot help you during a live interview, and you should never use AI tools while actively interviewing. But the preparation AI helped you do before the interview is what makes you memorable in the room.

After the interview, AI becomes useful again. Use it to draft your thank you email (see the next section), debrief on questions you found difficult, and refine your stories for the next round.

GPS PROMPT: Full Mock Interview with Feedback

Act as the hiring manager for a [job title] role at [company name]. Here is the job description: [paste]. Conduct a realistic 30 minute interview with me. Ask one question at a time. Mix behavioral, situational, and conversational questions. After each of my answers, give me specific feedback: Was my STAR structure clear? Did I provide enough detail in the Action step? Did I quantify my Result? Was my answer under two minutes? At the end, give me an overall score and tell me the one thing that would most improve my interview performance.

WHAT EMPLOYERS ARE ACTUALLY ASKING ABOUT AI IN 2026

The Questions Most Candidates Do Not See Coming

Here is something most candidates do not expect: employers are already testing your AI literacy, even when the job description does not mention AI. In 2026, a growing number of employers evaluate AI capabilities during interviews, but most do it indirectly through standard behavioral and situational questions.

These are the questions showing up across industries right now, along with frameworks for answering each one. Practice these out loud before every interview.

1. "How do you use AI in your work or academic life?"

Why they ask: This is now a baseline question. Every industry, every role, every level. They are not testing technical knowledge. They are checking whether you embrace useful technology or resist change.

Your framework: Name 2 to 3 specific tools. Describe one concrete use case. Explain what you still do yourself. Show selectivity, not dependency.

Try starting with: *"I use AI tools regularly, but I am selective about when they actually help versus when they add unnecessary steps. For example, I use Claude AI to…"*

2. "Walk me through how you would approach this task. What tools or resources would you use?"

Why they ask: This sounds like a standard workflow question, but they are listening for whether AI is part of your process. Candidates who never mention AI seem behind. Candidates who mention only AI seem dependent.

Your framework: Describe your process step by step. Integrate AI naturally as one tool among several. Emphasize your judgment as the final filter.

Try starting with: *"My first step would be to… Once I have that foundation, I would use an AI tool like [name] to… Then I would review and refine the output to make sure it…"*

3. "Tell me about a time AI gave you a result that was not accurate. How did you handle it?"

Why they ask: They want to know if you blindly trust AI output or if you verify, question, and correct. This is the question that separates strategic AI users from careless ones.

Your framework: Use STAR. Describe the situation, what went wrong, how you caught the error, and what you did to fix it. Emphasize your critical thinking.

Try starting with: *"I was using AI to help draft… and I noticed the output included… I verified by… and corrected it before…"*

4. "How do you decide when to use AI and when not to?"

Why they ask: This is the sophistication test. They want to see that you understand AI's limitations, not just its capabilities. Knowing when not to use AI is as valuable as knowing when to use it.

Your framework: Give a clear principle. Provide one example of each: a time AI was the right tool and a time it was not. Show that your judgment, not the tool, drives the decision.

Try starting with: *"I use AI when I need to process large amounts of information quickly or generate a first draft I can refine. I do not use it when…"*

5. "How do you make sure your work stays authentic when using AI tools?"

Why they ask: Employers are concerned about AI-generated content that sounds generic. They want to hear that you use AI as a starting point, not a finished product, and that your voice and judgment remain central.

Your framework: Explain your review process. Describe how you personalize AI output. Emphasize that AI drafts but you decide.

Try starting with: *"Everything AI helps me create goes through my own editing process. I read it out loud, ask whether it sounds like something I would actually say, and rewrite anything that feels…"*

6. "If you had access to any AI tool for this role, how would you use it to add value in your first 90 days?"

Why they ask: This is a forward-looking question that tests whether you can think strategically about AI in a work context. They want vision, not just competence.

Your framework: Connect AI to a specific business need in the role. Show that you would learn the company's existing tools first. Propose one concrete, realistic application.

Try starting with: *"In the first few weeks, I would focus on understanding the team's current workflows and tools. Once I had that context, I would look for opportunities where AI could…"*

7. "What is your understanding of ethical AI use in a professional setting?"

Why they ask: With a growing share of organizations now using AI to conduct initial interviews and AI-generated resumes becoming increasingly common, employers need to know you use AI responsibly.

Your framework: Cover three principles: transparency (disclose when asked), verification (never submit unverified AI output), and privacy (never input confidential data). Connect to your personal practice.

Try starting with: *"I believe ethical AI use comes down to three things: being honest about how I use it, always verifying what it produces, and protecting sensitive information. In practice, that means I…"*

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE QUESTION

In 2026, many interviewers do not ask about AI directly. They listen for it in your answers to standard questions like "How would you handle a large project with a tight deadline?" or "Describe how you stay organized." If AI is part of your real workflow, let it show up naturally in these answers. You do not need to force it. But if you never mention AI in any answer, interviewers may wonder whether you are keeping up with how work actually gets done today.

PREPARING FOR 100% AI INTERVIEWS

When There Is No Human on the Other Side

A growing number of organizations now use AI platforms like HireVue, Paradox, and Spark Hire to conduct initial interviews with candidates. These platforms record your responses, and depending on the vendor and the employer's settings, AI may evaluate what you say and how you structure it. HireVue, for example, removed facial analysis from its assessments and has said language carries the most predictive value (Staffing Industry Analysts, 2021). There is no human watching in real time, and many large employers use these platforms at scale.

This is a different experience than interviewing with a person. It requires different preparation.

How AI Interviews Typically Work

You receive a link by email. You log in, test your camera and microphone, and the interview begins. A question appears on screen (text or pre recorded video). You get approximately 30 seconds to think, then up to 3 minutes to record your answer. Most AI interviews include 3 to 6 questions. The whole process takes 20 to 30 minutes.

You typically get one attempt per question, though some platforms allow a single redo. There is no live interviewer to read, no rapport to build, and no follow up questions. Your answer either communicates your value or it does not.

What AI Measures

WHAT AI MEASURES	WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU
Language and keywords	Use terminology from the job description naturally. Do not keyword stuff. AI evaluates context, not just word count.
Response structure	STAR formatted answers score higher than unstructured responses. AI systems are designed to recognize this pattern.
Communication clarity	Speak in complete sentences. Avoid filler words (um, like, you know). Pace yourself. Pausing briefly before answering signals confidence.
Pacing and delivery	Some platforms or human reviewers may consider delivery. Speak at a conversational pace and vary your tone naturally, as if you were talking to a person across a table.
Relevance and specificity	Generic answers are flagged. Include specific examples, numbers, and details that connect directly to the question asked.

Your AI Interview Preparation Checklist

- [ ] Record yourself answering 5 practice questions on your phone or laptop before the real interview.
- [ ] Watch your recordings and check for filler words, eye contact with the camera (not the screen), and pacing.
- [ ] Test your technology: camera, microphone, internet speed, and lighting at least 24 hours in advance.
- [ ] Set up your space: clean background, camera at eye level, light source in front of you (not behind).
- [ ] Dress professionally from head to toe. Treat it exactly like an in person interview.
- [ ] Prepare 5 STAR stories that cover different competencies from the job description.
- [ ] Practice your 30 second prep time. When the question appears, take a breath, identify the question type, choose your story, and begin.
- [ ] Speak to the camera lens, not the screen. This creates the appearance of natural eye contact.
- [ ] Keep answers between 90 seconds and 2 minutes. Concise, structured answers outperform long, rambling ones.
- [ ] Close all other applications. Silence your phone. Eliminate every possible distraction.

IMPORTANT: AI INTERVIEWS ARE NOT LESS SERIOUS

Because there is no human on the other side, some candidates treat AI interviews casually. This is a mistake. These recordings are reviewed by hiring managers after the AI flags top candidates. Your performance in a 20 minute AI interview can determine whether you advance to the next round at companies you want to work for. Prepare for it the same way you would prepare for a face to face conversation with the CEO.

GPS PROMPT: Prepare for an AI Conducted Interview

I have an AI conducted video interview (HireVue or similar platform) for a [job title] position at [company name]. Here is the job description: [paste]. Generate 6 practice questions that are likely to appear on this type of platform, focusing on behavioral and situational questions. For each question, help me draft a STAR formatted answer that is between 90 seconds and 2 minutes when spoken aloud. Then give me feedback on whether each answer uses specific examples, includes quantifiable results, and avoids filler language.

REQUESTING ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE HIRING PROCESS

You Deserve a Fair Chance to Show What You Can Do

If you have a disability, including a disability that is not visible, such as a learning disability, ADHD, autism, anxiety, or a chronic health condition, you may be entitled to reasonable accommodations during the hiring process. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects job applicants as well as employees (Job Accommodation Network, n.d.-a).

What Accommodations Can Look Like

- Extra time for a timed assessment or a recorded AI interview
- An alternative to a one way video interview, such as a live interview or written responses
- Questions provided in writing, or a sign language interpreter or captioning
- An accessible online application, or a different format for a skills test
- A quiet space, breaks, or a schedule adjustment for an in person interview

What You Should Know

- **You choose whether and when to disclose.** The ADA does not require you to request an accommodation at a particular time. Some people ask during the application process; others wait until after an offer (Job Accommodation Network, n.d.-a).
- **There is no official form.** You can ask in plain language, as long as you make clear the request relates to a medical condition (Job Accommodation Network, n.d.-a). A short written request helps you keep a record.
- **Employers generally may not ask disability related questions before making a job offer,** though they may ask whether you can perform the essential functions of the job (Job Accommodation Network, n.d.-b).
- **AI and recorded interviews are included.** If a timed or automated format would not let you show your abilities fairly, you can ask the employer for an alternative.

GPS PROMPT: Draft an Accommodation Request

Help me write a short, professional email to [recruiter or HR contact] at [company] requesting an accommodation for the [type of assessment or interview] in my application for [role]. I would like to request [specific accommodation]. Keep it brief, confident, and focused on what will help me participate fully. Do not include any medical details beyond what I write here: [optional detail I choose to share].

Know where to get help:

The Job Accommodation Network (askjan.org) offers free, confidential guidance on accommodations for job seekers and employers. None of the information in this toolkit is legal advice. Laws vary by state and by situation, so consult an employment attorney to clarify and confirm how they apply to you. If you believe you were treated unfairly, you can also contact the EEOC.

POST INTERVIEW THANK YOU EMAILS

Close the Loop, Leave the Impression

The interview does not end when you walk out of the room or close the Zoom window. What you do in the next 48 hours can be the deciding factor between you and another equally qualified candidate. A thoughtful, personalized thank you email signals professionalism, reinforces your fit, and keeps you top of mind during the hiring decision. This is not a formality. It is a strategy.

Why Thank You Emails Matter

Hiring managers notice who follows up and who does not. A well crafted thank you email accomplishes four things:

- It demonstrates professionalism and follow through.
- It reinforces a specific moment from the conversation that connected you to the role.
- It gives you an opportunity to address anything you wish you had said differently.
- It keeps your name in the interviewer's inbox during the decision making window.

Thank You Email Best Practices

- **Send within 48 hours.** Sooner is better, especially for competitive roles.
- **Personalize for each interviewer.** If you interviewed with multiple people, send an individual email to each person, not a copy paste.
- **Reference something specific.** Generic messages like "Thank you for your time, I enjoyed learning about the role" are forgettable. Mention a project they described, a value they emphasized, or a challenge they shared that excited you.
- **Keep it concise.** Three to four short paragraphs is the target. This is not a second cover letter.
- **Proofread carefully.** A typo in a thank you email can undo the strong impression you made in person.
- **Use a professional subject line.** "Thank You: [Your Name], [Position Title] Interview" is clean and searchable.

Thank You Email Structure

Paragraph 1: Gratitude and Specificity

Thank the interviewer by name. Reference something specific from the conversation that resonated with you or deepened your interest in the role.

Paragraph 2: Reinforce Your Fit

Connect one of your qualifications or experiences directly to something discussed in the interview. This is your chance to reinforce the strongest moment of your conversation or to briefly address something you wish you had expanded on.

Paragraph 3: Forward Looking Close

Restate your enthusiasm for the role and the organization. Express your interest in next steps. Keep the tone confident but not presumptuous.

Sample Thank You Email

Subject: Thank You: Riley Bennett, Marketing Coordinator Interview

Dear Ms. Hernandez,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today about the Marketing Coordinator position. I especially enjoyed our conversation about the team's upcoming brand refresh initiative and the emphasis your department places on data-driven storytelling.

Our discussion reinforced my confidence that my experience developing content strategies and analyzing engagement metrics during my internship with the alumni engagement office aligns well with the goals you described for this role. I was also glad for the chance to share how I approach balancing creative work with measurable outcomes, which clearly matters to your team.

I am genuinely excited about the opportunity to contribute to your department and to grow alongside a team that values both innovation and precision. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can provide any additional information. I look forward to hearing about next steps.

Warm regards,
Riley Bennett
(555) 555-0101 | riley.bennett@email.com | linkedin.com/in/[your-profile]

What If You Forgot to Mention Something Important?

The thank you email is your recovery tool. If you blanked on a question, undersold an experience, or forgot to mention a relevant qualification, you can address it naturally in Paragraph 2. Frame it as a continuation of the conversation, not a correction.

Example: "After reflecting on our conversation about team leadership, I also wanted to share that I led a cross functional project last semester that required coordinating across three student organizations, which gave me additional experience managing competing priorities and deadlines."

What If You Interviewed with a Panel?

Send an individual email to each panelist. Each message should reference something specific that person said or asked. This shows attentiveness and respect for everyone's role in the process. If you did not catch someone's name or email, it is appropriate to ask your main point of contact or the recruiter for that information.

AI GPS PROMPTS FOR THANK YOU EMAILS

Copy and paste these prompts into Claude AI, ChatGPT, or Microsoft Copilot. Replace the bracketed text with your own details.

GPS PROMPT: Generate a Draft Based on Your Interview Notes

"Act as a career coach specializing in post interview communication. I just completed an interview for [job title] at [company name]. The interviewer was [name and title]. During the interview, we discussed [list 2 to 3 specific topics, projects, or moments from the conversation]. I want to reinforce my fit for this role based on my experience in [relevant skill or experience]. Write a professional thank you email that is warm, specific, and concise. Keep it to 3 short paragraphs. Do not use generic language. Do not fabricate anything I did not mention."

GPS PROMPT: Tailor a Thank You for a Panel Interview

"I interviewed with a panel of [number] people for the [job title] role at [company name]. Here are the names and what each person focused on during the interview: [list each panelist and what they discussed or asked about]. Write a separate thank you email for each panelist. Each email should reference something specific that person said or asked. Keep each email to 3 short paragraphs. Make each one feel personal, not templated."

GPS PROMPT: Recover from a Missed Question or Weak Answer

"During my interview for [job title] at [company name], I was asked about [topic or question] and I feel my answer did not fully capture my experience. Here is what I wish I had said: [describe the experience or point you wanted to make]. Write a thank you email that naturally incorporates this point in the second paragraph without making it sound like a correction. Keep the tone positive and forward looking."

GPS PROMPT: Adapt Your Thank You for a Virtual Interview

"I just completed a virtual interview via [Zoom/Teams/phone] for [job title] at [company name]. The interviewer was [name]. We discussed [key topics]. Write a thank you email that acknowledges the virtual format naturally and reinforces my enthusiasm and fit for this role. Keep it concise and professional."

GPS PROMPT: Follow Up After No Response

"I sent a thank you email after my interview for [job title] at [company name] on [date]. It has been [number] business days and I have not heard back. Write a brief, professional follow up email that reiterates my interest without sounding desperate or impatient. Keep it to 2 short paragraphs."

ETHICAL REMINDER

AI can help you structure and polish your thank you email, but the specific details must come from you. Only you were in that interview. Only you heard what the interviewer said. Never let AI fabricate conversation details, interviewer quotes, or project names you did not actually discuss. Write your notes immediately after every interview so you have accurate material to work from.

EVALUATING AND NEGOTIATING A JOB OFFER

An Offer Is the Start of a Conversation, Not the End of One

Receiving an offer is exciting, and it is also a decision point. Taking a short time to evaluate it carefully, and asking respectful questions, is professional and expected. You do not have to accept on the spot.

Evaluate the Whole Offer

ELEMENT	QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF
Base pay	How does it compare with wage data for this role and location on O*NET OnLine and the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook, and with pay ranges posted for similar roles?
Benefits	What do health insurance, retirement contributions, and paid time off actually cost or provide?
Schedule and flexibility	Are the hours, shifts, and remote or hybrid options workable for your life?
Growth	Is there training, mentoring, tuition support, or a clear path to the next level?
Commute and location	What will the commute cost in time and money each week?
Values and culture	Does what you learned in interviews fit your values and needs?

How to Negotiate Respectfully

1. **Get the offer in writing** and ask when they need your decision. A day or two to consider is a reasonable request.
2. **Do your research first.** Use wage data for the role and location, and note whether the employer posted a pay range. As of August 2026, 16 states plus Washington, D.C. have pay transparency laws, and some, including California and Colorado, require a pay range in job postings (Othmer & Trulock, 2026). Rules vary by state, and none of this is legal advice. Where a range is not posted, you can still ask for it. AI can state pay figures incorrectly, so never use it as a salary source.
3. **Lead with enthusiasm.** Make clear you want the role before you ask for anything.
4. **Ask, do not demand.** Name a specific, researched number or request and explain the value you bring.
5. **Consider more than salary.** If base pay is fixed, ask about start date, schedule flexibility, professional development, or a review timeline.
6. **Get any changes in writing** before you accept.

GPS PROMPT: Prepare for an Offer Conversation

I received an offer for [role] at [company] in [location]. The offer includes [salary, benefits, schedule, other details]. I researched these pay figures: [paste the ranges I found and their sources]. Help me (1) list questions I should ask to fully understand the offer, (2) identify which parts may be negotiable, and (3) draft a short, warm script for asking about [specific request]. Do not invent salary data; use only the figures I provided.

NETWORKING AND FINDING MENTORS

Networking is not about collecting business cards or sending mass LinkedIn requests. It is about building genuine professional relationships with people who can support your growth and whose growth you can support in return. The most important skill in networking is curiosity. Ask good questions. Listen. Follow up.

How to Network Strategically

- **Start with who you already know:** professors, supervisors, family friends, classmates, alumni.
- **Expand intentionally:** use X-ray searches and alumni tools to find professionals in your target companies and roles.
- **Attend events:** career fairs, professional association meetings (like SHRM and its local chapters), alumni events, and industry webinars.
- **Follow up within 48 hours** of meeting someone. Reference something specific from your conversation.
- **Maintain your network:** check in every 2 to 3 months, a standard practice recruiters recommend, so relationships stay authentic rather than transactional. Share articles. Congratulate people on milestones. Be visible.

GPS PROMPT: Write a LinkedIn Connection Request

I want to connect with [person's name/title] at [company]. I found them through [career fair, X-ray search, alumni network, class speaker]. Write a personalized LinkedIn connection request under 200 characters (LinkedIn's limit for invitation notes) that mentions something specific about their background and explains why I am reaching out. Tone: genuine, respectful, and professional.

Finding a Mentor

Many colleges, professional associations, and employers run mentoring programs that connect you with alumni and professionals who can offer resume feedback, career advice, and industry insight on a one time or ongoing basis.

- **Ask your campus career center or alumni office** whether your school offers an alumni mentoring platform, and how to join.
- **Check your professional association.** Many, including SHRM chapters, offer student and early career mentoring.
- **Use alumni outcome data** to browse potential mentors by industry, major, location, or employer.
- **Schedule informational conversations,** ask for advice, and build a relationship over time.
- **Mentorship is a two way street.** Come prepared with questions, follow up with gratitude, and share your progress.

GPS PROMPT: Prepare for a Mentor Meeting

I am meeting with a mentor who works as a [their role] at [their company]. I am a [your major/year] student interested in [career goal]. Help me prepare: (1) 5 thoughtful questions to ask that go beyond "How did you get your job?" (2) A 30 second introduction of who I am and what I am exploring, (3) A follow up email template I can send within 24 hours after our conversation.

HOW TO SHOWCASE YOUR AI SKILLS

AI literacy is now a workforce competency. Employers across every industry want to know that you can use these tools strategically and ethically. Here is how to talk about your AI skills on your resume, in interviews, on LinkedIn, and in cover letters.

On Your Resume (Skills Section)

AI and Career Technology: Claude AI, ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini Notebook (formerly NotebookLM), Jobscan (ATS Optimization), Boolean Search Operators, Google Alerts, SEO Strategy, Canva

On Your Resume (Bullet Points)

- **Example:** "Leveraged AI powered tools including Jobscan and Claude AI to optimize resume targeting, achieving 85%+ ATS keyword match rates across 12 applications."
- **Example:** "Utilized Boolean search operators and Google X-ray searches to identify 15+ industry professionals, expanding professional network by 40%."

In an Interview

SAMPLE ANSWER: "HOW DO YOU USE AI?"

"I use AI like a GPS, not a replacement for my own thinking. For example, I use Claude AI to help brainstorm ideas, refine my writing, and analyze job descriptions for keywords. But I always review, personalize, and fact check everything. I see AI as a tool that accelerates my process while I bring the critical thinking, creativity, and authenticity that AI cannot replicate. Nothing replaces the human voice."

On LinkedIn (About Section)

Example: "I combine strategic career planning with AI powered tools to approach every opportunity with intention and precision. From ATS optimized resumes to data driven networking, I believe in using every resource available to find the right fit, not just any fit."

In a Cover Letter

Example: "My approach to [relevant task] reflects the same data driven mindset I bring to everything I do. I regularly leverage AI powered tools to analyze information, identify patterns, and optimize outcomes, skills I am eager to apply to [specific aspect of the role]."

5

PART FIVE

PROMPT SPOTLIGHTS FOR EVERY CAREER PATH



PROMPT SPOTLIGHTS FOR EVERY CAREER PATH

Career readiness does not belong to one stage of life. The same principles in this toolkit, knowing your story, speaking the language of the role, and defending every word, apply whether you are choosing a first job, changing direction at midcareer, translating military service, or growing where you already are.

These spotlights give you ready to adapt prompts for six different starting points. Read the one that fits you, and then read the others too. A coach supporting clients at any level will find ideas in every spotlight, and a job seeker often recognizes part of their own story in more than one.

IF YOU ARE...	START WITH THIS SPOTLIGHT
A career coach, advisor, or educator supporting others	Spotlight 1: The Career Coach
An undergraduate or recent graduate	Spotlight 2: The Undergraduate
A midcareer professional changing direction or returning to the workforce	Spotlight 3: The Midcareer Professional
A service member or veteran moving into a civilian career	Spotlight 4: Military to Civilian
Looking to grow or be promoted where you already work	Spotlight 5: Advancing in Your Current Organization
A homeschooled student looking for a first job	Spotlight 6: The Homeschooled First Time Job Seeker

THREE RULES THAT APPLY TO EVERY PROMPT IN THIS SECTION

1. You supply the facts. Every prompt asks AI to work only with what you give it. AI organizes, questions, and drafts; it does not invent your experience.

2. Share the task, not the secrets. Remove names, ID numbers, addresses, and anything confidential before you paste. Coaches: de identify every client detail.

3. Defend every word. If you could not explain a sentence out loud in an interview, it does not belong in your materials yet.

PROMPT SPOTLIGHT

The Career Coach

1

For career coaches, advisors, educators, HR partners, and mentors who support people at any stage, from first job to final promotion.

AI can compress the preparation side of coaching, the handouts, practice questions, and plans, so more of your time goes to the human conversation. These prompts help you build resources for the person in front of you without handing their story to a machine.

GPS PROMPT: Build a Custom Session Plan

I am a career coach preparing a [30/45/60]-minute session for a client who is [career stage, e.g., a first time job seeker, a midcareer career changer, a transitioning veteran]. Their goal is [goal]. Their main concern is [concern, de identified]. Draft a session plan with an opening question that builds trust, three focused activities, one reflection question, and a clear next step the client chooses. Use strengths based, trauma informed language with no urgency pressure.

GPS PROMPT: Create a Practice Interview Set for Any Level

Create 10 interview practice questions for a [job title] role at the [entry/mid/senior] level, based on this job description: [paste]. Mix behavioral, situational, and role specific questions. For each, add a one line coaching note on what a strong answer demonstrates. Do not write sample answers; my client will develop their own.

GPS PROMPT: Turn a Client's Experience into Coaching Questions

Here is a de identified summary of a client's background: [paste, with no names, employers, or identifying details]. Generate 12 open ended questions I can ask to help them surface transferable skills and accomplishments they may be underselling. Include questions that honor caregiving, military service, volunteer work, and other experience that does not appear on a traditional resume.

GPS PROMPT: Build a Reusable Handout

Create a one page handout for [audience: e.g., adult learners returning to work, veterans, high school students] on [topic: e.g., how to research employers, how to prepare for a phone screen]. Use plain language at an accessible reading level, short sections, and a three item action checklist. Avoid jargon and deficit focused framing. Add a line reminding readers to verify any facts and salary figures with current sources.

GPS PROMPT: Design a Job Search Plan Template

Create a four week job search plan template a client can complete themselves. Include weekly goals for target employer research, networking outreach, applications, and interview practice, with space for the client to set their own targets. Build in one rest and reflection checkpoint each week.

GPS PROMPT: Pressure Test Your Own Materials

Here is a resource I created for clients: [paste]. Review it the way a skeptical reader at [career stage] would. Where is it unclear, too generic, or unintentionally discouraging? Where might it assume a background or resource the reader may not have? Suggest specific revisions, but do not rewrite the whole document.

Coaching note:

Never paste a client's name, contact details, employer, health information, or other identifying details into an AI tool, even to save time. Write from a de identified summary, follow your organization's AI and privacy policies, and disclose AI assistance in the resources you share, the same way this toolkit does.

PROMPT SPOTLIGHT

The Undergraduate

2

For students and recent graduates connecting coursework, campus life, and early work experience to a first professional role.

You have more relevant experience than you think. Class projects, part time jobs, student organizations, caregiving, and volunteering all build skills employers hire for. These prompts help you see it and say it.

GPS PROMPT: Connect Your Major to Real Careers

I am majoring in [major] with interests in [interests]. List 10 career paths people with this major commonly pursue, including some I might not expect. For each, give the typical entry level job title I could search for. Then remind me to verify outlook and salary information on O*NET OnLine rather than relying on your estimate.

GPS PROMPT: Translate Campus and Part Time Experience

Here are my experiences: [list classes, projects, part time jobs, organizations, volunteer roles]. For each, identify two transferable skills an employer in [target field] would value, and draft one CAR style resume bullet using only the facts I provided. Do not invent any experience, skill, credential, or number I have not given you. Ask me questions when you need more information.

GPS PROMPT: Find and Prepare for Internships

I am a [year] student looking for a [season] internship in [field] near [location or remote]. Suggest five types of organizations to target, three Boolean search strings I can use on job boards, and five questions I should be ready to answer in an internship interview.

GPS PROMPT: Prepare for a Career Fair

I am attending a career fair with these employers: [list]. Help me write a 30 second introduction based on my brand statement [paste], and suggest one specific, researched question for each employer. Remind me to verify company facts on each employer's own website.

GPS PROMPT: Weigh Graduate School vs. Work

I am deciding between applying to graduate school in [program] and starting work as a [role]. Ask me eight questions that help me think through cost, timing, career goals, and what each path requires. Do not make the decision for me.

Coaching note:

Students often discount work that "doesn't count," such as food service, retail, or family responsibilities. Ask what they handled on the busiest day, who they trained, and what problems they solved. Those answers become the strongest bullets on the page.

PROMPT SPOTLIGHT

The Midcareer Professional

3

For experienced professionals pivoting fields, returning to the workforce, updating their search approach, or rebuilding after a layoff.

You bring depth, judgment, and a track record. The task now is translating that depth into the language of where you are going next, and modernizing how you search. These prompts help you lead with relevance rather than length.

GPS PROMPT: Build an Accomplishment Inventory

I have [number] years of experience in [field]. Interview me one question at a time to build an inventory of my top 10 accomplishments. For each, ask about the challenge, my specific actions, and the measurable result. Wait for my answer before asking the next question. Do not invent any experience, skill, credential, or number I have not given you. Ask me questions when you need more information.

GPS PROMPT: Write Your Pivot Story

I am moving from [current field/role] to [target field/role]. Here are my core strengths and accomplishments: [paste]. Help me draft a 60 second answer to "Why are you making this change?" that connects my past to my target role, sounds forward looking, and does not apologize for the transition.

GPS PROMPT: Modernize a Long Resume

Here is my current resume: [paste]. I am targeting [role] and here is a job description: [paste]. Identify which experience is most relevant to this role, what could be condensed or removed, and which keywords from the description are missing. Suggest a two page structure. Do not change my dates, titles, or employers.

GPS PROMPT: Map Transferable Skills to a New Field

Compare my skills and experience [paste] with these three job descriptions in [new field] [paste]. Create a table showing which requirements I already meet, which I partially meet, and which are gaps. For each gap, suggest a realistic way to build or demonstrate the skill, such as a short course, a project, or volunteer work.

GPS PROMPT: Reconnect with Your Network

I want to reconnect with former colleagues I have not contacted in a few years to learn about opportunities in [field]. Draft three short, warm message templates: one for a former manager, one for a peer, and one for someone I mentored. Each should ask for a brief conversation, not a job.

GPS PROMPT: Prepare for a Salary Conversation

I am interviewing for a [role] in [location]. Help me prepare for a salary conversation by listing the questions I should research, the factors beyond base pay to consider, and three ways to respond if I am asked for my expectations first. Remind me to verify salary ranges with current sources such as O*NET OnLine and posted pay ranges.

Coaching note:

Midcareer clients sometimes carry the weight of a layoff, a long caregiving gap, or a feeling of starting over. Name the experience they are bringing before you name the gaps. A gap in employment is a chapter in a career story, not a deficit to hide.

PROMPT SPOTLIGHT

Military to Civilian

4

For service members, veterans, and military spouses translating service into a civilian career.

Military experience builds leadership, accountability, logistics, training, and performance under pressure. The challenge is translation: civilian hiring managers may not recognize ranks, acronyms, or job codes. These prompts help you translate without losing what makes your service meaningful.

GPS PROMPT: Translate Your Military Role

My military occupation was [branch and job title or code, e.g., "Army 92Y Unit Supply Specialist"]. My main duties were [describe in plain language], and I led [number] people and was responsible for [equipment, budget, or programs]. Translate these duties, including my leadership and scope, into civilian language for roles in [target field]. Then suggest civilian job titles I should search for, and remind me to confirm matches using the O*NET OnLine Military Crosswalk. Do not invent any experience, skill, credential, or number I have not given you. Ask me questions when you need more information.

GPS PROMPT: De Jargon Your Resume

Here is a section of my resume: [paste, removing unit names, locations, and any sensitive details]. Rewrite each bullet so a civilian hiring manager in [industry] would understand it. Replace military acronyms and ranks with plain language equivalents, keep my scope and results, and flag any term you are unsure how to translate so I can decide.

GPS PROMPT: Prepare for "Tell Me About Yourself"

Help me build a 60 to 90 second "Tell me about yourself" answer that briefly explains my service, highlights three strengths that transfer to [target role], and explains why I am drawn to this field. Keep it conversational, not scripted.

GPS PROMPT: Explore Transition Programs

I am [time] from separating from the [branch]. Make a checklist of transition questions to ask my installation's transition office about programs such as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and DoD SkillBridge, and about credentialing that could transfer to [field]. Remind me to confirm eligibility and deadlines with official sources.

Privacy, security, and coaching note:

Never paste classified information, operational details, unit locations, or documents such as a DD-214 (which contains personal identifiers) into an AI tool. Describe duties in general terms and add specifics yourself.

Coaching note: Many transitioning service members are used to team first language. Invite them to practice saying "I" when describing their own actions, while honoring the team context. It is a shift in culture, not a lack of confidence.

PROMPT SPOTLIGHT

Advancing in Your Current Organization

5

For professionals seeking a promotion, a stretch assignment, an internal move, or more visibility where they already work.

Growing where you are takes a different strategy than an external search. Your audience already knows you, so the work is making your impact visible, aligning it with what the organization needs next, and asking clearly for what you want.

GPS PROMPT: Build an Impact Log

Help me create a simple monthly impact log I can keep throughout the year. Include columns for the project, my specific contribution, the result or metric, who benefited, and the skills I used. Then suggest three reflection questions to answer at the end of each month.

GPS PROMPT: Make the Case for a Promotion

I want to be considered for [target role or level]. Here are my accomplishments from the past [time period]: [paste from my impact log]. Here is the description or expectations for the target role: [paste]. Help me organize a one page case that connects my results to the expectations of the new role, and identify any expectation I have not yet demonstrated. Do not invent any experience, skill, credential, or number I have not given you. Ask me questions when you need more information.

GPS PROMPT: Prepare for a Career Conversation with Your Manager

I am meeting with my manager to discuss my growth. Help me prepare: an opening that frames the conversation positively, three specific contributions to mention, two development goals, and two questions to ask about what success at the next level looks like. Keep the tone collaborative, not demanding.

GPS PROMPT: Create an Individual Development Plan

My goal is to move toward [target role] within [timeframe]. Based on these skill gaps [list], draft an individual development plan with learning goals, on the job stretch opportunities, potential mentors or sponsors to seek out (described by role, not name), and checkpoints. Keep it realistic for someone working full time.

GPS PROMPT: Apply for an Internal Role

I am applying for an internal position as [role]. Draft a short note to the hiring manager expressing interest, connecting my current work to the role's priorities, and requesting a conversation. Then list five interview questions I should expect from someone who already knows my work.

GPS PROMPT: Map Your Stakeholders

Help me map the stakeholders who influence my growth in my organization, described by role only. For each role, suggest what they care about most and one way I could add value to their priorities over the next quarter.

Workplace note:

Do not paste confidential company data, financials, performance reviews of others, or proprietary documents into a personal AI account. Check your employer's AI policy, and use an approved workplace tool when your prompt involves internal information.

PROMPT SPOTLIGHT

The Homeschooled First-Time Job Seeker

6

For homeschooled teens and young adults preparing for a first job, and the parents, mentors, and coaches who support them.

Homeschooled students often build real responsibility early: running projects independently, teaching younger siblings, helping in a family business, leading in co-ops, 4-H, faith communities, or volunteer groups. Employers value initiative and reliability, and these prompts help you show both, even without a traditional school transcript or a school career center.

GPS PROMPT: Discover Your Experience

I am a homeschooled student looking for my first job. Ask me 10 questions, one at a time, to help me identify experience that counts, such as projects I managed on my own, co-op or group activities, volunteering, caring for family members, helping in a family business, sports, music, or community involvement. Wait for each answer before asking the next. Do not invent any experience, skill, credential, or number I have not given you. Ask me questions when you need more information.

GPS PROMPT: Build a First Resume Without Traditional Job History

Using only the experiences I shared [paste], help me draft a one page first resume with sections for Education (homeschool), Skills, Experience (including volunteer and project work), and Activities. Show me how to list homeschool education clearly and professionally. Use my real details only.

GPS PROMPT: Find First Jobs That Fit

I am [age range] and live near [city or region]. I am interested in [interests] and available [schedule]. Suggest 10 types of entry level jobs or volunteer roles that could fit, and five places to look for openings locally. Remind me to check my state's rules for working minors, including any permits or hour limits, with an official source.

GPS PROMPT: Practice Your First Interview

Act as a friendly manager interviewing me for a [job, e.g., library page, grocery associate, camp counselor] position. Ask me five common first job interview questions, one at a time. After each answer, tell me one thing I did well and one thing to strengthen. Keep the tone encouraging.

GPS PROMPT: Explain Homeschooling with Confidence

An interviewer may ask about my homeschool education. Help me prepare a short, positive answer that explains how I learned, what I am proud of, and how it prepared me to be reliable and self directed at work. Keep it honest and in my own voice.

GPS PROMPT: Write a Reference Request

I would like to ask [describe the person by role, e.g., my co-op teacher, a volunteer coordinator, a family friend I worked for] to be a reference for my first job. Draft a short, polite message asking permission and offering to share my resume and the job description.

Privacy note for younger job seekers:

Never put your full name, home address, birth date, phone number, or photos into an AI tool. Work through these prompts with a parent, guardian, or trusted mentor, and add your personal details yourself when your resume is final.

Coaching note:

Homeschooled students may not have access to a school career center, so point them to community resources such as the public library and local American Job Centers, which you can find through CareerOneStop (careeronestop.org). Treat the parent as a partner, and keep the student's own voice at the center.

CAREER READINESS RESOURCES

These are curated resources from leading career development organizations, top university career centers, and trusted industry platforms. Bookmark these and return to them throughout your career journey.

Companion Guides from Leading University Career Centers

These guides offer in depth formatting examples, sample resumes, CVs, cover letters, action verb lists, and transferable skills worksheets. Use them alongside this AI GPS Career Toolkit for a complete career readiness foundation.

Princeton University Center for Career Development: Resume Guide

Includes the ACE method (Action + Context + End Result) for writing accomplishment statements, a Transferable Skills Table, an action verbs list organized by category, a Helpful Headings reference, and links to resume templates and samples.

Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin GSAS: CVs and Cover Letters

Includes CV guidance for graduate students, CV samples across disciplines (including art history, political science, neuroscience, and neurobiology), annotated cover letter samples with commentary, a postdoctoral inquiry email example, and an action verbs list organized by category.

These are the formatting and sample foundations. Your AI GPS Career Toolkit is the strategy layer that shows you how to optimize those documents for ATS, SEO, LinkedIn, and the 2026 job market using AI powered tools.

Your Campus Career Center

If you are a student or alumnus, your campus career center is one of the most valuable and underused resources available to you. Most offer:

- Career coaching appointments, in person or virtual
- Resume reviews, mock interviews, and job search strategy sessions
- Alumni mentoring programs and alumni outcome data
- Career fairs, employer information sessions, and on campus recruiting events

Professional Organizations and Industry Resources

- **SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management):** shrm.org. Career resources, certifications, and workforce readiness tools.
- **NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers):** naceweb.org. Career readiness competencies, salary data, and benchmarks.
- **Jobscan:** jobscan.co. ATS resume optimization scanner with a free tier.
- **Indeed Career Guide:** indeed.com/career-advice. Resume templates, interview tips, salary research, and job search strategies.
- **LinkedIn Learning:** linkedin.com/learning. Free with many library cards. Courses on career development, AI tools, and professional skills.
- **Microsoft Copilot Guides:** copilot.microsoft.com. Tutorials for using AI within Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Excel.
- **O*NET OnLine:** onetonline.org. Career exploration, skills profiles, and labor market data by occupation.
- **Gemini Notebook (formerly NotebookLM):** notebook.google.com. AI powered research and interview prep tool.

Top University Career Center Resources (Open Access)

- **Harvard Mignone Center for Career Success:** careerservices.fas.harvard.edu. Resume and cover letter guides, industry specific resources.
- **Stanford Career Education:** beam.stanford.edu. Career planning worksheets, networking guides, industry overviews.
- **MIT Career Advising and Professional Development:** capd.mit.edu. Resume and CV guides, STEM specific career planning.
- **Yale Office of Career Strategy:** ocs.yale.edu. Resumes, CVs, cover letters, and career exploration resources.
- **University of Michigan Career Center:** careercenter.umich.edu. Comprehensive career guides, job search strategies, and interview preparation.
- **Columbia Center for Career Education:** careereducation.columbia.edu. Industry guides, networking strategy, and professional development resources.

AI Tools Quick Links

TOOL	LINK
Claude AI	claude.ai
ChatGPT	chatgpt.com
Microsoft Copilot	copilot.microsoft.com
Gemini Notebook (formerly NotebookLM)	notebook.google.com
Jobscan	jobscan.co
Canva	canva.com
Google Alerts	google.com/alerts
Huru AI (Mock Interviews)	huru.ai
Interviews.chat	interviews.chat



YOUR NEXT STEPS: CAREER READINESS CHECKLIST

Use this checklist anytime you sit down to work on your search, day or night, to keep building momentum. Check off each item as you complete it. Every step moves you closer to career readiness.

Foundation

- [ ] Define or refine your personal brand statement
- [ ] Identify your unique value proposition
- [ ] Craft your "Tell Me About Yourself" response

Resume and Cover Letter

- [ ] Run the plain text test on your resume
- [ ] Format your resume using ATS best practices
- [ ] Write CAR method bullet points for every experience
- [ ] Use Jobscan to check your keyword match rate (Jobscan recommends about 80%)
- [ ] Draft a targeted cover letter for your top choice employer

LinkedIn

- [ ] Collect 6 to 10 job descriptions and identify your SEO keywords
- [ ] Optimize your LinkedIn headline with target keywords
- [ ] Rewrite your About section for SEO and authenticity
- [ ] Update your Experience section with keyword rich descriptions
- [ ] Add AI tools to your Skills section

Job Search

- [ ] Set up 3 to 5 Google Alerts for target jobs and companies
- [ ] Practice one Boolean search on Google or LinkedIn
- [ ] Try one Google X-ray search to find a networking contact
- [ ] Create your job search tracker spreadsheet
- [ ] Review the ATS systems list and identify which ATS your target employers use
- [ ] Verify every opportunity using the job scam red flags

Interview and Networking

- [ ] Generate interview questions from a target job description
- [ ] Build 3 to 5 CAR stories for common behavioral questions
- [ ] Upload your materials to Gemini Notebook (formerly NotebookLM) for audio, video, mind map, or flashcard interview prep
- [ ] Complete one AI mock interview (Huru, Interviews.chat, or SmallTalk2Me)
- [ ] Send one personalized LinkedIn connection request
- [ ] Send a personalized thank you email within 24 hours of every interview
- [ ] Draft thank you emails using the AI GPS prompts and personalize before sending
- [ ] Explore an alumni or professional mentoring program
- [ ] Practice answering 3 of the 7 AI interview questions out loud
- [ ] Complete the AI interview preparation checklist before any HireVue or recorded interview

AI Skills

- [ ] Practice writing high impact prompts using the 5 Part Formula
- [ ] Add AI tools to your resume Skills section
- [ ] Practice answering "How do you use AI?" out loud
- [ ] Review and adjust privacy settings on your AI platforms

YOU ARE AI CAREER READY.

Here Is What That Means in 2026.

THE 2026 REALITY

The job market you are entering is not the one previous generations navigated.

45%	of employers rated the job market for the Class of 2026 as "fair," the most common rating (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2025).
~80%	of people surveyed across 13 global markets said they feel unprepared to find a job in 2026, according to LinkedIn's own survey (LinkedIn, 2026).
45%	of U.S. employees have used AI at work at least a few times a year, yet only 10% use it daily (Kemp, 2025).

You are no longer in that majority.

If you have worked through this guide, you now have skills that most candidates, including experienced professionals, have not developed. You can:

- Reverse engineer job descriptions to identify the exact keywords algorithms and recruiters search for
- Build ATS optimized resumes that survive the technology filter and land in human hands
- Craft AI prompts that produce targeted, strategic career documents while keeping your authentic voice
- Optimize a LinkedIn profile so recruiters find you before you find them
- Use Boolean operators, Google X-ray searches, and data driven networking to uncover hidden opportunities
- Prepare for interviews with AI generated questions, audio coaching, and the CAR and STAR methods
- Write thank you emails that reinforce your fit and keep you top of mind
- Talk about your AI skills with confidence, honesty, and the ethical framework employers respect

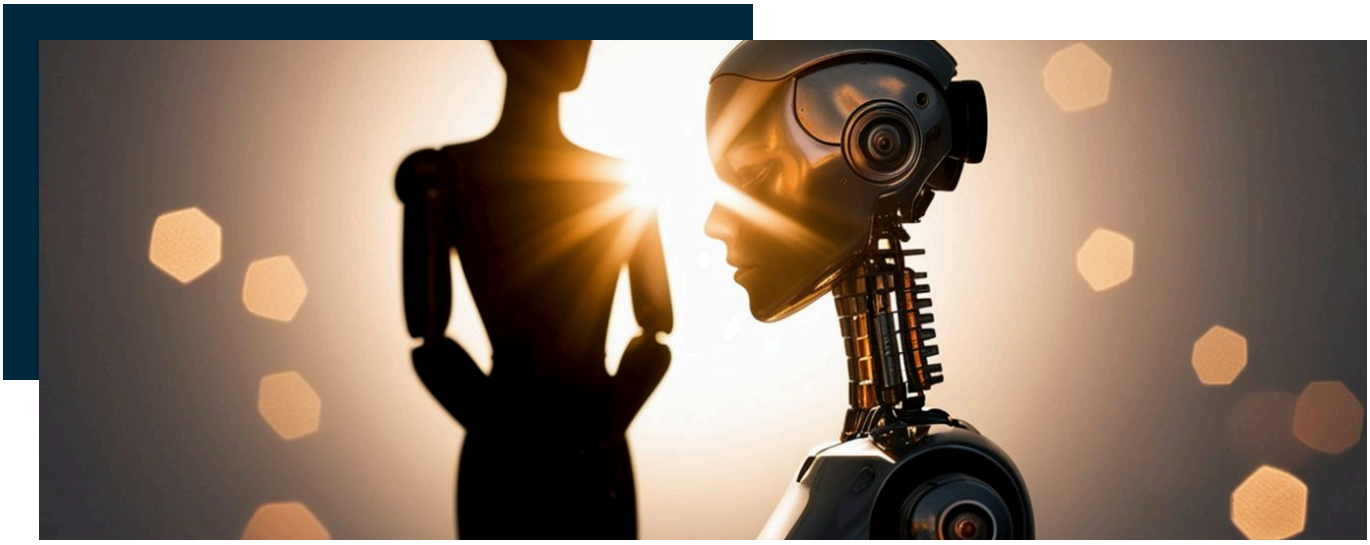
In a job market that increasingly rewards skills over credentials, **you can name yours.**

In a workforce where AI literacy is becoming a baseline expectation, **you have it.**

In a hiring landscape where 70% of employers responding to NACE's Job Outlook 2026 survey report using skills-based hiring, **you can demonstrate what you know how to do.**

Sources: Kemp (2025); LinkedIn (2026); National Association of Colleges and Employers (2025, 2026). Full citations appear in the References section.

These are not just job search techniques.
These are workforce readiness competencies.
And they belong to you.



READY TO TAKE THIS FURTHER?

This toolkit gave you the knowledge. Practice is what makes it yours.

A Seven Week Practice Plan

Choose one real target job posting and use it as your anchor for all seven weeks. Each week builds on the one before it, so by the end you have a complete, polished career portfolio you can use immediately.

WEEK	FOCUS	TOOLKIT SECTIONS TO USE
Week 1	Define your professional brand statement and unique value	Personal Brand and Unique Value
Week 2	Explore career paths and salary data with AI and O*NET	AI Toolkit, Salary Research
Week 3	Build an ATS ready resume and validate it with Jobscan	ATS, Formatting, CAR Method
Week 4	Optimize your LinkedIn profile for SEO and recruiter visibility	SEO, LinkedIn Checklist
Week 5	Create a strategic networking plan and target list	LAMP, Boolean, X-ray, Alerts
Week 6	Prepare for interviews, including AI conducted formats	STAR, AI Interview Questions
Week 7	Review everything through an ethical AI lens and assemble your portfolio	Ethical AI Use, Checklist

IF THIS TOOLKIT IS THE PLAYBOOK, PRACTICE IS THE FIELD.

You do not have to do this alone. Your campus career center, a trusted mentor, or a career coach can walk alongside you through each week, give you honest feedback, and help you see strengths you might overlook.



AI did not do this for you. You did.

AI was your GPS. You were the driver.

Every decision, every revision, every word that made it onto your resume and your LinkedIn profile came through your judgment.

That is something no algorithm can replace.

Keep this guide. Come back to it before every application, every interview, and every career move. And when you land the role you have been working toward, know that it was not luck. It was preparation, strategy, and you.

KEEP GOING: THE FULL SERIES

Every guide in this series is free at transformwithttw.com. They share one governing question, could you defend every word of this in an interview?, and one principle behind it: AI navigates, and you drive.

For career advisors, educators, and coaches

AI Ethics Quiz. A ten question quiz that builds a shared foundation in five ethical principles for AI use.

Critical Evaluation Framework. Five lenses for judging what AI produces before it reaches a student or employer.

Can You Defend Every Word? A Constraint Design Guide. How to design courses, assignments, and agents that keep the thinking with the student.

Organize, Don't Replace. Three ways to build AI tools that help students organize their own thinking, never write for them.

For job seekers

How to Conduct a First Time Job Search. A guided, fillable workbook for anyone starting their first search.

Your AI GPS Career Toolkit. *(you are here)* The full guide to hiring systems, application materials, and AI, for every career stage.

GO DEEPER WITH THE TEXTBOOK

These guides are free and stand on their own. When you want the full framework behind them, I brought it together in my textbook, *Can You Defend Every Word? Ethical AI for Career Advisors Who Coach, Teach, and Build* (Talent Transformation Whisperer, LLC, 2026). If you coach or advise job seekers, Chapters 2 and 3 map the tools job seekers use and the authenticity gap they face.

Available now on Amazon. Search the title or ISBN 9798140001568.

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AI-Assisted Content Disclaimer:

This document was developed with AI assistance and has been reviewed, verified, and approved by Megan O'Connor, SHRM-CP, CPRW, as the human expert of record. Final content reflects the author's professional judgment and subject matter expertise.

