

Dos and Don'ts of the Job Application Process

Cover Letters and Resumes

- Number one piece of advice -- **PROOFREAD**. You would not believe the number of applications I've received that misspelled my name or had several spelling or grammar errors. When you are mass applying, it's easy to get lazy. No one wants to hire someone who can't proofread one page efficiently.
- DO -- Customize your cover letter based on your position. Avoid using a mass cover letter.
 - Tip -- Use words and phrases from the job description in your cover letter to personalize your experience to the position.
- DO -- Keep a master resume with all information you could put on a resume and then selectively choose items from that resume for different job opportunities.
- DO -- Research how to draft and address a cover letter to a legislator.
- DON'T -- Address a cover letter as "To Whom it May Concern", if you can't find the proper person "Dear Sir/Madam" or "Dear HR Director" is a good alternative.
- DO -- Put your cover letter and resume (and other applications materials) in a combined PDF. It looks more professional and eliminates squiggles under words and formatting issues.
- DO -- Label your PDF of your application materials as "lastname_position" or "lastname_resume" instead of "good cover letter", "final cover letter", "resume 2019."
- DO -- Have a career counselor, parent, or someone you trust look over your resume and cover letter and make suggestions for edits. Take those edits with an open mind and remember they are trying to help you.
- DO -- Include awards, extracurricular, and volunteer experience on your resume, especially if it's something you're passionate about. But, start to shy away from high school awards unless they are major (valedictorian, etc.).
- DO -- Be prepared to talk about anything you put on your resume.
- DO -- Keep your resume and cover letter to one page each.
- Number one piece of advice -- **PROOFREAD**. I'm listing this again because it's THAT important.

Interviewing

- DO -- Update your contacts (professors, former supervisors) about what you're applying for and if you get interviews. They may have tips or put in a good word for you if they know folks at the organizations.
- DO -- Research the company and interviewer beforehand! If you are interviewing for a legislator, DO research at least two policies or legislation they've worked on and be able to speak intelligently about those policies. Also, know his/her/their ideological alignments and priorities. When interviewing for any job, look at their website and read any op-eds or reports they've published recently. Get a feel for the work they do and how that aligns with the work you'd want to do and your values.
- DO -- Practice your answers. If you can, watch yourself in a mirror and practice out loud. You should be able to articulate why you want the job, why you want to

work for this specific company/legislator, and three skills or experiences you bring to the position.

- DO -- Arrive 10 minutes early.
- DO -- Ask questions in the interview. Come with some prepared questions in case you blank out during the interview, here are some of my go-to's.
 - What is your favorite thing about working for X?
 - What is the timeline for the next steps of the interview process?
 - What are the ideal qualities for a candidate applying to this position? (Pro-tip: Use whatever qualities they say in your thank you card to stress that you have those exact qualities and would be a great fit for the position.)
- Tip -- If you have a phone interview, get the interviewer's phone number even if they say they will call you. It's good to have especially if something goes wrong the day of the interview.
- Tip -- Dress like you're going to an in-person interview even when it's a phone interview. It will help your mindset and you won't be caught off guard if they decide to switch to a Skype interview at the last minute.
- Tip -- I asked some friends who work in politics and policy common interview questions they ask that trip up interviewees. Here's what they said:
 - How do you handle unexpected situations?
 - How do you organize your day? How does that change when something unexpected comes up?
 - How would you handle receiving multiple top priority projects from several different staff members?
 - How do you use slower periods at work to get ahead?
 - Name someone you admire on the other side of the aisle and why do you admire them?
 - What do you like to do outside of the office? -- This answer doesn't need to be perfect. If you say you like reading and they ask what you've read recently, you need to have an answer! Don't lie and don't overthink it. Have a couple of things prepared because when you're nervous you may ramble and say something you regret.

Post-Interview

- DO -- Send a thank you. For a first-round phone or Skype interview, an email thank you is appropriate. For an in-person or second/final round interview, send a written thank you. Write the thank you card and mail it the day you have the in-person interview so it will reach the interviewer quickly.
- DO -- Tell your professors, former supervisors, and mentors when you have accepted a position. They may have connections or advice, plus they are always happy to hear about your successes.
- DO -- Keep a spreadsheet of all the jobs you apply to. I keep a spreadsheet with the date, where I applied, what I sent them, and the contact information. If I haven't heard back from them in 4-6 weeks, I usually send a follow-up email detailing my continued interest in the position. This has led to me getting an interview about a quarter of the time!

Getting Coffee

- DO -- Ask professors, friends, contacts to make an introduction for you and follow-up on that introduction with a request for coffee.
- DO -- Bring a notebook and ask to take notes on any advice or contacts they are offering to connect you with.
- DO -- Be prepared to say exactly what type(s) of position(s) you're interested in. Don't just say "I'm interested in working in politics" or "I want to work for a Republican senator". Say "I want to work for a person or organization that prioritizes XYZ" and be able to explain why.
- DO -- Come prepared! Have questions ready to ask. If you can't think of any, ask your friends and family for some suggestions.
- DO -- Offer to come to their office and bring them coffee. People have busy schedules and it's important to be mindful of that.
- DO -- Ask for any contacts or connections that can help you.
- DO -- Send them a thank you after + keep them up to date if you accept a position. I've gotten coffee with people and then never heard from them again. That does nothing to expand your network. People want to hear how you're doing and like an occasional check-in. You can even send a relevant article to their work or congratulate them on something their organization did.

Great Opportunities for Political Science Students in Virginia

- Sorensen Institute College Leaders Career Conference -- <https://sorenseninstitute.org/programs>
- Governor's Fellows Program -- <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/the-administration/fellows/>

Websites for Job Searching

- U.S. Senate Employment Bulletin -- <https://www.senate.gov/employment/po/positions.htm>
- Subscribe to U.S. House Employment Bulletin -- <https://www.house.gov/employment/positions-with-members-and-committees/subscribe-to-the-house-employment-bulletin>
- www.daybook.com
- www.bradtraverse.com
- www.tommanatos.com
- www.idealists.com
- There are lots of job listservs for different groups of people (progressive jobs, conservative jobs, Black caucus, etc.). This is another good thing to ask about at coffees.

Please feel free to reach out with additional questions! I can be reached at kate.miceli13@gmail.com.