

A Guide to

STUDY SKILLS

and **CAREERS** in

CRIMINAL

JUSTICE

and

PUBLIC

SECURITY



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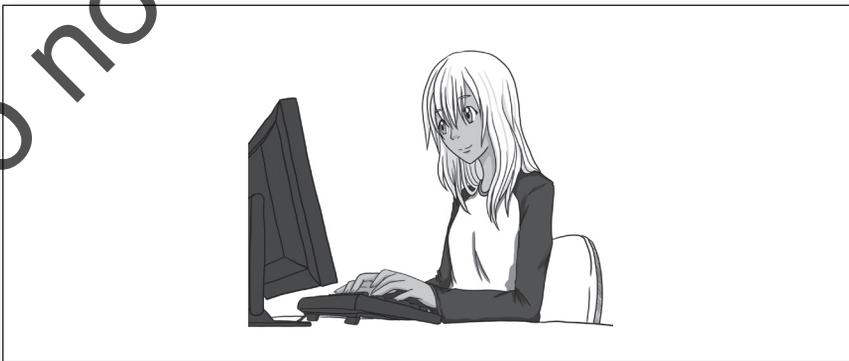
Communicating Effectively and Applying for Jobs

Highlights of This Chapter

- Communicating With Professors
- Communicating With Professionals
- Creating Cover Letters and Résumés

The age of technology has made possible many wonderful things. Today, we can go online to socialize, do research, find recipes, apply for jobs, shop for just about anything, and even find love using any of the many matchmaking services. We can send quick messages via text rather than having to make long (possibly expensive) telephone calls. Many use the Internet to work from home, to further their education, and to earn college degrees. So, is there a negative repercussion to the ever-increasing use of technology in our personal and professional lives?

Unfortunately, the answer is yes. For one thing, technology allows us to cut corners in our communications, and the result can often be



First Impressions Are Important

disastrous and sometimes offensive. The purpose of this chapter is to provide simple, understandable guidelines on communication that you can implement with the individuals who are important to your career: professors and potential employers.

Communicating With Your Professors _____

Let's start off with an exercise. Assume a student has sent the following e-mail to a professor. What problems do you find with this form of correspondence?

Hi Mr. Thomas! I have relly enjoyed ur class this semester ☺. How are ur kids? They sure are cute lol! I have a question about our final project. Do i need to prepare a visual aid?

Thx! Jan

There are many things wrong with this e-mail, but let's go over some rules and guidelines for successful communication before we revisit what changes need to be made.

Who Is Your Professor?

Most of us prefer to be addressed properly by those around us. For instance, if you are a woman, being called "Mr. Smith" would be offensive. In addition, dependent upon cultural expectations, some of us prefer to have children address us formally with a "Ms." or "Mr." in front of our first or last names. Similarly, when addressing a faculty member at your university or college, it is important to recognize she deserves respect for her accomplishments in her chosen career field.

The majority of faculty members at universities have a doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) or doctor of education (Ed.D.) degree. Such educational accomplishments confer upon them the title of "Doctor," which can be abbreviated as "Dr." No, these kinds of doctors cannot operate on you or prescribe medicines, but, just like medical doctors, they worked extremely hard and went to school for many years to become experts in their field. So, for such people it is appropriate to begin an e-mail with the following salutation:

Dear Dr. Hester:

Conversely, some faculty members have earned a master's degree (e.g., an M.S.) in their fields but have not earned the title of "Dr." However, rather

than using the title “Mr.” or “Mrs.,” addressing these faculty members in the following way is appropriate:

Dear Professor Huling:

or

Dear Instructor Mullen:

You may be thinking, how in the world do I know what title to use? There are a number of ways to find out. First, look on the professor’s webpage or biography on the university’s website. Second, if there are sample syllabi online for that professor, check them out. Or third, ask the professor or another faculty member in the department who would know the proper title. If you still can’t find the answer, err on the side of caution and start e-mails with the *Dear Professor* salutation.

Who Are You?

When writing an e-mail to your professor, it is important to keep in mind that you are not his only student. Your professor may have dozens, or even hundreds, of students in the current semester. In addition, he may have multiple sections of the same class, so do not assume he will immediately know who you are and where to find your information. So, it is helpful to give him a heads-up on your identity when you begin your e-mail. Consider the following opening:

Hello, my name is Susan Turner from your Intro to Criminal Justice class at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday/Thursday.

By providing this kind of introduction, he can find your information quickly in order to better address your question (especially if you are asking about grades).

Why Are You E-Mailing?

It is great to have a friendly relationship with your professor, but realistically your professor is likely to have many students, so e-mail correspondence should be brief and to the point. In other words, keep the chit chat out of the e-mail and save it for office hours or after class. First, place a short blurb on the subject line of the e-mail correspondence (e.g. *Final Exam* or *Project Requirements*) so your professor knows why you are e-mailing and your correspondence can be separated from less important ones. Second, after your salutation and introduction, state the purpose of your e-mail in full, concise sentences:



What Are You Saying?

I am writing to inquire about our final project. Do we need to prepare a visual aid in addition to the paper?

If at all possible, your professor should be able to read your entire e-mail in one screen length.

There are a few other things to consider when writing your e-mail. *Refrain from texting language, cute symbols, and abbreviations.* Texting styles are spilling over into other forms of communications, such as e-mail, but it is important to remember that e-mail is NOT texting. It falls more into the realm of professional communication, so be sure you spell out all words in your e-mail and avoid smiley faces and abbreviations for words and phrases (e.g., lol, ttyl, brb). This kind of “language” may be fine for your friends but not for your professors. In addition, *proofread your e-mail.* Make sure all words are spelled correctly and that your e-mail makes sense. Nothing is more embarrassing than simple mistakes that could have been avoided. Such mistakes show that you did not care enough about what you are saying (or about whom you are writing to) to check your e-mail before sending it.

Lastly, *do not get an attitude.* You may be upset about your grade, treatment by a professor or fellow student, or any number of issues. However, assuming an attitude or getting confrontational with a professor is never appropriate and will almost doom your communications from the start. If your professor gets an attitude with you, take the high road! If your professor gets out of hand in communicating with you, you can always bring in another party, like the chair of the department or dean of the college, and you will always look better if you have maintained a professional style.

Keep in mind that there are some subjects that are not appropriate to discuss using e-mail. If you want to discuss a personal issue that will require some time to resolve, e-mail your professor and request an appointment. In addition, if you want to speak with the professor about your grade or a serious issue regarding the class, a face-to-face meeting is more appropriate than conversing over e-mail.

Signing Off in Style

Now that you have crafted the perfect e-mail, it is important to end the e-mail on a positive and appropriate note. Once you have written the body of the e-mail, it is nice to show your appreciation for the professor's time. You can do this in a few different ways, depending upon the content. For instance, if you are asking to meet with the professor, provide several days and times that are convenient for you. A statement such as "I would like to meet with you on Thursday at 2:00 p.m." insinuates that you feel as if the professor has no obligations other than to meet with you. Conversely, giving several days and times allows you and your professor to decide on a time that works for both of you. Another scenario involves requesting a professor to review a draft of a paper. It is appropriate to end the e-mail with "Thank you in advance for your time."

Lastly, sign the e-mail with a polite ending, such as "Sincerely," followed by your name and identifying information. This identifying information should be university-related (not social security or credit card numbers), such as a student identification number or class information. By signing off in that manner, you are reminding your professor of your identity:

Sincerely,

Jonathan Young

Eagle ID: 4893848985

The Final Product

Remember the atrocious e-mail that began this chapter? Once we have applied all our dos and don'ts, this is what the revised product should look like.

Dear Dr. Thomas:

Hello, my name is Jan Smith from your Intro to Criminal Justice class at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday/Thursday. I am writing to inquire about our final project. Do we need to prepare a visual aid in addition to the paper?

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Jan Smith

Banner ID: 67941679

Can you see how a professor would respond better to this type of communication?

As you continue through your academic career, there will come a time when you will have to communicate with professionals in the field. Many undergraduates in criminal justice/criminology are required to do internships, and eventually you will likely be seeking employment in a criminal justice–related agency. When communicating with other professionals, most of the rules of communicating with professors that we have just discussed still apply. The next section addresses appropriate communication with those individuals.

Point to Remember

It is important to remember that professors are people too! They have personal and professional lives and have experienced a lot of the things you are currently experiencing as a student. You may be surprised how sympathetic they can be to struggles you are having, but do not take advantage of that humanistic quality. Lying to a professor or making up an excuse can ruin your reputation if you are discovered. Honesty is always the best policy—professors will respect you for it much more than making up a lie.

Communicating With Professionals: E-Mail

Let's start off with an exercise. Assume your friend will be graduating next month with a degree in criminal justice and is currently applying for jobs. What problems do you find with her correspondence, shown below?

Angela:

My résumé is enclosed for the corrections officer position. I am excited to get an interview and talk about my skills.

Thanks,
John Hudson

There are many things that are wrong with this e-mail, but let's go over some general rules and guidelines to good communication before we revisit what changes need to be made.

Who Are You E-Mailing?

Composing e-mails to professionals can be tricky, especially when you do not know the person. The discussion in the previous section with regard to addressing someone properly also applies here. It is appropriate to address a professional with her designated title rather than first name. Even if you happen to know the person on a personal level, now is the time for a professional approach. For instance, if you are applying for a job in law enforcement and the applications are to be directed to Sergeant Michael Williams, your salutation should be: *Dear Sergeant Williams*. In other words, if there is a title associated with the person (e.g., Corporal, Dr., or Senator), use that designation. Otherwise, use of Mr. or Ms. is appropriate in the salutation heading.

Who Are You?

When writing an e-mail to a professional, it is important to keep in mind that you are likely not to be the only one who will communicate with this person today. Whether you are applying for a job or simply requesting information about a particular organization, you need to identify yourself. Consider the following opening:

Hello, my name is Marian Davis and I am an undergraduate student of Criminal Justice at Smith University.

or

Hello, my name is Thomas Anderson and I recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Criminology from Hudson College.

With this kind of an opening, you have introduced yourself in a friendly and professional way.

Why Are You E-Mailing?

As mentioned earlier, now is not the time for chit chat. Instead, you need to get right to the point and make yourself stand out. After your introduction, you should state the purpose of your e-mail, being as specific as possible. For example, if you are applying for a job, indicate the job title and where you heard about the position:

The purpose of this e-mail is to apply for the position of police officer at the Avon Police Department in Avon, NC, as advertised in the Outer Banks Gazette. I have attached my official cover letter and résumé for your review and consideration.

The cover letter (discussed later in this chapter) should contain a more thorough outline of your qualifications. If you are requesting information or an appointment, consider the following language:

The purpose of this e-mail is to request a telephone conference with you regarding the Justice Reinvestment Act. I am interested in doing my thesis on this piece of legislation and would like to discuss the impact it has had on our state's corrections system.

Lastly, the rules discussed earlier also apply to e-mails with professionals. *Refrain from texting language, cute symbols, and abbreviations, and proofread your e-mail.* Make sure all words are spelled correctly and your e-mail makes sense.

Signing Off in Style

Now that you have crafted the perfect e-mail, it is important to end the e-mail on a positive and appropriate note. Once you have written the body of the e-mail, it is nice to show your appreciation for the professional's time and consideration. You can end the e-mail with "Thank you in advance for your time, and I look forward to speaking with you soon." Lastly, sign the e-mail with a polite ending, such as "Sincerely," followed by your name and your credentials if applicable. And don't forget to proofread before hitting "send."

The Final Product

Remember the atrocious e-mail from earlier in this chapter? Once we have applied all our dos and don'ts, this is what the revised product should resemble:

Dear Sergeant Williams:

Hello, my name is Thomas Anderson and I recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in criminology from Hudson College. The purpose of this e-mail is to apply for the position of corrections officer at North Kern State Prison as advertised in the California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation newsletter *Rehabilitation Today*. I have attached my official cover letter and my résumé for your review and consideration.

Sincerely,
John Hudson

Depending upon the situation, the e-mail we just created may be sufficient for your needs. However, if you are applying for a job or an internship, you will be required to write a cover letter and prepare a résumé for potential employers to review and consider. The next section discusses appropriate techniques to create these documents.



Go Out and Get a Job!

Applying for Jobs and Internships

Creating a Cover Letter

The cover letter can propel you into instant consideration for a job or internship, or it can immediately send you into the trash pile. This quick change of course can occur not necessarily because you aren't qualified but because your letter isn't very well written or because you have so many typos in the first paragraph that an employer assumes you can't communicate well. Writing a cover letter can be an easy task, but it is important to include the necessary contents and follow the rules for appropriate content. A cover letter should introduce you to the employer and describe how you would be an excellent fit in the organization. It should show how you are qualified to assume the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying. In addition, it should demonstrate your knowledge of the organization, as well as your ability to communicate well and coherently.

Let's go over each section step by step, starting by viewing a sample cover letter. This cover letter (Figure 5.1) is written by a recent criminal justice graduate applying for a victim advocate's position.

The first section of a cover letter is the *heading*, which includes the sender's address, the date, and the address of recipient. Cover letters should be written single-spaced in a 12-point font that is not unusual. Appropriate fonts include Times New Roman, Arial, and Courier New.

Figure 5-1 Cover Letter Example

126 Firewood Lane
Dover, Delaware 19901

April 23, 2017

Kent County Courthouse
Attn: Mallory Johnson
414 Federal Street
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Ms. Johnson:

My name is Kathy Goring and it is with pleasure that I apply for the position of victim advocate coordinator for Kent County, as advertised in the *Dover Gazette*. Based on my academic training, as well as my experience in the field, I am highly qualified for the position and would be an asset to victims involved in the criminal justice system in Kent County.

In May 2016, I graduated from the University of Delaware with a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in criminal justice with a social work minor. During my studies at the University of Delaware, I took courses that would greatly assist me in performing responsibilities associated with the position, including Victimology, Court Services and Applications, and Management of Grief. These courses made me knowledgeable of the three facets of the criminal justice system, especially the responsibilities relating to crime victims and their families: finding resources, representation in court, and providing emotional support. My verbal and written communication skills are quite good, earning me high grades in all my writing and communication courses. In addition, my internship at the Kent County Courthouse in the district attorney's office allowed me to learn court operations in the county, as well as network with the court stakeholders, both of which give me insight into the responsibilities of the currently available position.

Thank you in advance for considering me for this position, and I look forward to speaking with you. I have enclosed my résumé for your review. Should you have any questions or would like to schedule an interview, please contact me at kgoring@hotmail.com or 123-456-7890.

Sincerely,

Kathy R. Goring
Enclosure

Your address should include only your address, not your name. A blank line goes between the address and the date you are sending the letter, and another blank line goes between the date and recipient's address. Your cover letter should always be sent to a specific person or department, and that information will likely be indicated in the job opening announcement. If it is not indicated, addressing the letter to Human Resources or Hiring Committee is a good option.

The second section of a cover letter is the *introduction*. Provide a blank line between the recipient's address and then begin with a salutation (Dear Ms. Johnson:). After another blank line is inserted, begin by discussing who you are and why you are writing. It is appropriate to note where you heard about the job, whether it be from a person, online advertisement, or career fair. Next, provide a brief discussion of the contents of your letter (a summary) and what the reader can expect to hear about more in detail in the upcoming paragraph.

The second paragraph of the letter is the *persuasion or argument section*. This is where you sell yourself as a candidate. Discuss your educational and vocational qualifications. Explain how your qualifications demonstrate that you are an ideal candidate for the position (noted in the advertisement) and the mission of the organization. It will impress the hiring committee if you demonstrate that you have done research about the organization and that you are knowledgeable about their goals and operations. In this section, you do not have to discuss every aspect of your résumé, but you should provide an overview of how your experiences and qualifications make you the perfect candidate for the job. If you have no employment experience in the field, it is a good idea to discuss internship and volunteer experience.

Finally, your *closing paragraph* should reiterate your appreciation for their considering your application, as well as provide your contact information in the event they want to interview you. It is important to provide contact information you actually use! For instance, give the e-mail address you regularly check and be sure the e-mail address is professional. An e-mail address such as `steelersrule@hotmail.com` or `chucksgirlfriend@yahoo.com` is NOT appropriate. Instead, use your academic e-mail address or create a basic e-mail address similar to the one in the example e-mail presented earlier in this chapter. Many e-mail services are free, so take advantage!

After you close, there are a few very important things to do. First, proofread! Read and reread the draft for spelling and grammatical errors. Ideally, walk away from the letter for a day or so before you proofread. That way, you will have a fresh set of eyes to find items that could be better written or to uncover mistakes. Second, your closing signature should be "Sincerely," followed by three blank lines and then your name. Once you print the letter, you will sign your name between the two. Then, if enclosing a résumé and/or other requested documentation, put the word "Enclosure" directly under your name.

Designing Your Résumé

You are now one step closer to securing that position! The next step is to create a résumé. There are multiple types of résumés, but, as a new graduate with little to no experience in the criminal justice field, it is most likely that you will be creating an entry-level résumé. Your résumé should be a brief summary of your experiences, academic history, and other important skills and qualities. Entry-level résumés should be relatively short—generally one or two pages. This way the employer can quickly determine if you are qualified for the job. Figure 5.2 is an example of an entry-level résumé.

Figure 5.2 provides a guide to anyone preparing to enter the job market. Each heading is clearly marked and organized in understandable fashion. Keep in mind the résumé is in a good, readable 12-point font. In addition, all the information is on one page. Each résumé you send out may need to be altered in various sections depending upon the job requirements. For example, if you apply for both a law enforcement position and a clerk of courts position, you may want to highlight different coursework.

At the top of the résumé is the applicant's name and contact information, which is also provided in the cover letter. The first section, Education, should include the institution you are currently attending or have graduated from. You should also include your graduation date (or expected graduation date if you have not yet finished). List your degree and any relatable minor and/or major coursework to the position for which you are applying. This may need to be customized for each application and should be limited to three or four classes. Lastly, only include your grade point average and status if it is notable. For example, a grade point average over 3.0 is worth noting and if you graduated cum laude (or higher) or with special honors, that should be noted as well.

The next section, Work Experience, can be tailored depending on your qualifications. If you have any work experience that is relatable or similar to the job, place it under *Related Experience*. If you do not, that is nothing to worry about! You can demonstrate you are still qualified and dependable by listing any work experience you have, as well as volunteer experience. Employers are looking for well-rounded candidates, not necessarily the person with the most years of experience. Under this section, include the name and location of your employment and your dates of employment. List your official title(s) and your responsibilities as an employee. Note that when you list the responsibilities, keep the first words of the lines in the same tense. In the example in Figure 5.2, the responsibilities in the internship section (under *Related Experience*) are described in the past tense because the applicant no longer works there. However, she is still an employee of Trudy's Jewelry (under *Other Experience*), so her verbs relating to that position are in present tense.

Volunteer experience is another section that can be added to an entry-level résumé, especially if an applicant does not have much employment experience. It is not unusual for full-time students to focus on studies and

Figure 5-2 Entry-Level Résumé

KATHY GORING

126 Firewood Lane, Dover, DE 19901
123-456-7890
kgoring@hotmail.com

EDUCATION

University of Delaware Graduated May 2016
Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice
Minor: Social Work
Cumulative GPA: 3.86
Related Coursework: Court Services and Applications, Management of Grief, Victimology

WORK EXPERIENCE

Related Experience

Kent County District Attorney's Office, Kent County, DE Jan–May 2016
Intern
Responsibilities:

- Prepared evidence for court hearings and trial
- Assisted district attorney with correspondence to witnesses and defense attorneys
- Assisted in depositions

Other Experience

Trudy's Jewelry, Dover, DE April 2014–present
Assistant Manager
Responsibilities:

- Train new employees
- Manage payroll
- Prepare orders for stock

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

YMCA Kent County March 2013–2014
Holly Hills Baptist Youth Group Leader January 2015–present

COMPUTER SKILLS

Microsoft Office, SPSS, STATA

REFERENCES

Available upon request

not work during their undergraduate careers. However, many students volunteer for professional organizations, participate in community service, and are active members of extracurricular groups. It is important to list these activities and memberships because it indicates the ability to be a well-rounded and involved member of the community while simultaneously pursuing an academic career.

Another important section can be noted as Skills. If you are applying for a job that requires computer skills, it is important to note your proficiency with programs or Web design. Or, if the job requires proficiency in a foreign language or firearm experience, list that as well. Lastly, under the References section, note that your references are available upon request. This saves space for more valuable information.

Other examples of résumés include chronological résumés, which are used by seasoned applicants. For instance, if you have been a police officer for 10 years at two different locations, you would list that information before noting your recent education. However, most new graduates do not have that kind of experience and will need to place emphasis on other areas. Remember, you have to create a résumé that shows why you would be a great employee! Do not fill it with unrelated fluff.

Should I Include It?

If you are unsure about the usefulness of including certain information on your résumé, ask your professor. Volunteer experience or certain skills may be completely relevant for certain types of job applications but wasted space on others. In addition, you may not need or want to include your high school graduation information. If you graduated with high honors, it may be important to include. However, if you have graduated from college, an employer can assume you also have your high school diploma or GED, so it is unnecessary to include it on a résumé. There comes a point in your educational and professional career when high school experiences are irrelevant.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain a time that you felt you communicated with a professor or professional in an inappropriate way. What were the repercussions?
2. Think about your ideal career. What can you start doing now to help your chances of getting that job?