

The Job Search Guide for People with a Criminal Record



Don't let your record keep you from finding and keeping a job after your release.

This guide has three sections to help you:

- Explore careers
- Learn about training and school options
- Search and apply for jobs

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Section 1: Explore Careers.

This first section will help you learn about your skills, explore career options, and begin to set career and job search goals.

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Your interests

Fact: People who like their jobs are more successful at work than people who don't like their jobs.

When your job includes things you like to do, you're more likely to enjoy it. You're more likely to keep your job. And you're more likely to earn more money.

Think about the things you like to do. These are your interests. Now think about jobs where you might get to do those things. These are your career matches. Look at the table below for ideas.

Interests and career matches

Interest	Matching types of jobs
Building things	Construction jobs, Production helper
Cooking or preparing food	Restaurant cook, Food preparation/service, Cafeteria workers
Doing detailed work	Office jobs, Stock clerk, Shipping and receiving, Data processing
Fixing cars	Automotive technicians, Body work
Helping others	Home health aide, Human services aide, Customer service
Talking with people	Retail sales, Telemarketer, Food server
Working outdoors	Landscaping, Construction, Highway / road maintenance Recycling worker, Groundskeeper



Job skills

Know what your job skills are, so you can tell employers what you can do.

What is a job skill?

Job skills are being able to do tasks like record keeping, cooking, cleaning, welding, computer programming, or teaching. You may have learned some through school, jobs, life experience and work you did while in prison. Examples are:

- Someone with construction skills can build things
- A skilled reader can understand an article, book, or instructions
- Someone with programming skills can write computer code
- Salespeople often have skills in customer service, record keeping, or ordering

Prison work assignments and training

If you've been in prison, you may have completed a work-training program or work assignment. If you did, you learned job skills that you could use in another job.

Employers want to know what you can do. Think about the skills you have that can be used on a job. Make sure to include them in your job application and your resume, or talk about them at job interviews.

Check this list for any work or training experiences you may have had while in prison, and note skills you learned from them:

What's your prison work experience?

Assembly _____

Food service _____

Furniture refinishing _____

Kitchen management _____

Machining _____

Metal fabrication _____

Painting _____

Shipping and receiving _____

Welding _____

Carpentry _____

Forklift operation _____

Hand/machine sewing _____

Laundry service _____

Mechanical design _____

Packaging machine operation _____

Print press operation _____

Warehouse operation _____

Wood working _____

Filing _____





Soft skills

What makes someone a good employee and easy to work with? The answer is often "soft" skills.

Soft skills are sometimes called people skills, or work-readiness skills. They are your personality, attitudes, and manners. They can also include how you present yourself. So the way you talk, the way you listen, the way you make eye contact, and even the way you dress are part of your soft skills.

Employers look for soft skills to decide how someone may do at a job. This is important to employers when they hire. Soft skills are often the reason employers decide whether to keep or promote workers.

When you return to work after prison, your soft skills can be even more important than your job skills.

Typical soft skills

Some soft skills can be taught in school. But most you learn in everyday life and can improve at any time. Here are some examples:

- Flexible about change
- Comfortable working with different people
- Determined
- Quick learner
- Follow instructions
- Friendly and respectful
- Solve problems
- Handle criticism well
- On time
- Patient
- Self-motivated
- Stick with the job/persistent
- Take responsibility for actions
- Accept the rules
- Team worker
- Calm

You might have these skills and not even realize they can help an employer. Or you might struggle with them. If so, it's always a good idea to practice soft skills.

One way to practice is to talk to friends, family, or a counselor. Ask for feedback on your soft skills. Look for specific things you can improve. For instance, if you have trouble making eye contact, you can practice this.



Skills checklist

Ready to make a list of your skills?

Having the right words to describe your skills will help your job search. Once you've made a list, you can use it to:

- Write your resume
- Talk about your skills in job interviews
- See how your skills match with skills used in different careers

Skills Checklist

Directions: Check any skills you have in the list below. At the end, write in any other skills you have.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to see alternatives | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accurate, quality work | <input type="checkbox"/> Honest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calm under pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Kind |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can use office software | <input type="checkbox"/> Lead groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative | <input type="checkbox"/> Learn quickly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Like responsibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dependable | <input type="checkbox"/> Neat appearance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic, enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Neat work habits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experience managing a budget | <input type="checkbox"/> Polite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experience with food service | <input type="checkbox"/> Positive attitude |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experience cleaning | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving ability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experience with tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Productive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fast worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Punctual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible | <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely get angry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fluent in more than one language | <input type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follows direction well | <input type="checkbox"/> Understand plans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> Willing to learn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good communicator | <input type="checkbox"/> Willing to work overtime |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good sense of humor | <input type="checkbox"/> Work without constant supervision |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Work well with others |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |



What is a career?

It helps to know which direction fits you before you look for a job or training.

When you work in a career that fits you, you have more confidence, feel good about work, and are more positive. This makes you more likely to get promoted or find a new job when you need to.

Job or career?

A job is work to earn a paycheck. When one job ends, you get another one like it. You may be lucky, but there's no guarantee you'll learn new skills, increase your pay, or get promoted.

A career means that your jobs, experiences, and training build up in a direction you choose. You make decisions that help you get better jobs and earn more pay.

Think of your career as moving along a path or climbing a ladder. Each step gives you greater experience. As you move along, you get more rewards from your work.

Ready to move from a job into a career? Learn about your options.

Learning about different careers and options is an important step. It will help you create a career plan that fits you. Important steps to take:

- Get information about yourself, skills, what you like
- Find accurate information about your job options and places to work
- Learn what type of education or training you need, how long it will take, and costs
- Understand limitations in career choice based on your criminal record
- Look up changes in the job market, which careers are growing or shrinking



Work restrictions

Find out about restrictions, rules, and other factors that could affect your career options.

Off-limits careers

People with certain criminal records are not allowed to work in some occupations. You may hear the term "barred occupation" to refer to these careers. Don't worry—there are still plenty of careers that are open to you. But it's important to check if you have any restrictions. That way you won't get started in a career that's not right for you.

Examples of Barred Occupations

Offense involving	Careers that may be affected
Alcohol	Working in a liquor store or as a server where alcohol is served
Firearm	Working where guns are sold, in security jobs, and some law enforcement jobs that use firearms
Money	There may be rules about working in a bank or other financial institutions
Vulnerable adult	There may be rules about working in a nursing home or group home

Job location

There may also be rules about where you can work. Depending on your record, some of these rules may apply to you:

- Some people are not allowed to work where a victim works or near certain places like a school
- Sometimes a parole officer or other agent must be allowed to visit your worksite and/or speak with a supervisor to discuss job performance and accountability
- You may need permission to leave your worksite or to visit multiple locations during the course of the day

Transportation

One important aspect of your job search is to think about how you will get to work. Can you walk or bike to work? Can you get to the job from a bus or train line? Does the bus run frequently enough to get you to work on time and home from work by your curfew?

In addition, some jobs require you to have a valid driver's license, clean driving record, and be eligible for coverage under the employer's insurance. Usually, ex-offenders under supervision are not allowed to cross state lines for work such as delivery or truck driving.

Understand the rules

The rules about barred occupations and work restrictions are complicated. It is your responsibility to understand them before you apply for jobs. Talk to your parole officer, a job counselor at an American Job Center, or someone at another employment service to help you understand how the rules apply to you.





Common first jobs

Getting and keeping your first job after release is a big step. Having a few types of jobs in mind can help.

Common first jobs after release

Here are some types of entry-level jobs in different career fields. If you have access to occupation information, you can get started by researching the average pay, basic job duties, and training needed for these types of jobs.

Career fields	Types of jobs
Restaurant & food service	Dining room helper, Short-order cook, Restaurant cook
Retail	Stock clerk, Salesperson, Sales supervisor
Warehouse operations	Warehouse worker – order filler, Cargo and freight agent
Information technology	Data & document processor, Computer support specialist
Construction	Construction helper, General construction labor, Equipment operator, Carpenter
Automotive	Tire repairer/technician, Automotive technician and mechanic, Auto body repair
Manufacturing	Production helper, Assembler, Machine operator
Customer service	Customer service representative



How to set goals

Setting goals helps you get where you want to be.

Think of a **goal** as your target. Think of **steps** as the actions that will get you to your target.

Example of job search goals are:

→ Goal: Decide what kind of career or job you want to apply for.

The steps you might take to reach this goal are:

- Research careers online or at a library
- Talk to friends, family, or others about their careers and jobs
- Talk to a counselor or take a career planning class

→ Goal: Gain new skills that can help you qualify for a job.

The steps you might take to reach this goal are:

- Research careers to learn about skills and training needed
- Research colleges and courses in your neighborhood
- Make an appointment to talk to a counselor or admissions officer at a school

→ Goal: Create a resume.

The steps you might take to reach this goal are:

- Find a book or resume guide
- Write a first draft
- Ask someone to give you feedback
- Revise your resume based on feedback

Tips to achieve your goal

Write down the steps. Write down your career goal and the steps to get there. Writing them down will help you remember the steps. It will also help keep you on track. Post your list where you will see it often.

Set deadlines. Give yourself a date to complete your goals by. Write the date when you actually finish each step.

Reward yourself. Taking steps toward goals is hard work. Think of small rewards to give yourself when you complete any step. This will help you stay motivated.

Have a goal partner. Find someone to help you stick to your plan: a friend, a job coach, or someone else. Tell them your goals and ask them to remind you of deadlines and give encouragement.



Short-term goals

A *short-term goal* is a target you want to reach soon - today, this week, this month, or within this year.

Here are examples of short-term goals:

- Take a class
- Decide which jobs to apply for
- Write my resume

Writing down some short-term goals will help you organize your time and focus on what you want to achieve. At the top write your main short-term goal. Underneath, list the steps to get you there, and when you want to complete them. Get started by reading the example below, then download the goal table here to make your own list.

Example

My short term career goal: To get an **entry-level kitchen job** in a nearby restaurant

Task	Finish by
I will practice filling out a job application and job interview skills at my local American Job Center	July 1
I will write my resume to describe my kitchen skills	July 12
I will look for Help Wanted signs in my neighborhood cafes, and look for postings in two online job banks	July 12
I will ask three people working at nearby restaurants for ideas on where to work and how to apply	July 25
I will apply for entry level kitchen work at 3-5 nearby restaurants	August 1
I will call restaurant managers 1 week after I apply to follow up and check their hiring plans	August 8
If I do not have a job offer by September 1, I will expand my job search along my bus route	September 1



Long-term goals

A long-term goal usually takes 12 months or more to achieve.

Some long-term goals are:

- Graduate from training program
- Start my own business
- Save money to buy a house
- For a longer-term career goal, think of the steps that will move you closer to reaching it. Think about:
 - What job can you get with the experience you already have?
 - Can you develop work skills on your own or as a volunteer?
 - What employers located near you would hire people in this career?
 - How long would training for your long-term goal take?
 - Could you work while you attend training? Attend school part-time?
 - What resources would help you reach your goals? Are there organizations that provide them?

Read through the example below to get some ideas for creating your own list.

Example

→ **My long-term career goal:** To be a lead chef in nice restaurant

Task	Finish by
I will contact the American Job Center to find out about training resources and job leads for kitchen work	August 1, 2013
I will obtain entry level kitchen work at a nearby restaurant	September 1, 2013
I will apply to culinary school and apply for financial aid	December 1, 2013
I will practice at least one new recipe every week at home	Entire time I'm in school
I will enroll in culinary school part-time while I continue to work	September, 2014
I will complete my culinary arts degree to qualify as a lead chef	June 1, 2016
I will obtain a lead chef job in one of my top 5 restaurant choices	September 1, 2016

Section 2: Get Training

This second section will help you learn about different types of training and how to pay for them.

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Make your education pay

The more education you have, the easier it will be to land a good job. Also, you'll be more likely to earn more.

That doesn't mean everyone has to have a college degree. Learning skills, taking a class, or enrolling in short-term training can help your job search right away.

Before you jump into any class or training program, take the time to make sure it's really going to help you.

How do I know what skills employers are looking for?

- **Basic skills.** Employers are always looking for workers with good basic skills. Learn more by reading the page on Basic Skills Training in this workbook.
- **Computer skills.** You can often brush up on your computer skills with free classes and job search workshops. Try an American Job Center or your closest public library.
- **In-demand job skills.** Look at job listings and talk to employers in your field to learn what skills they are looking for.

How do I know a training program is worth the money?

- **School value.** Before you enroll, ask about total costs, graduation rates, loan amounts, and employment of graduates.
- **Accreditation.** When a school is accredited, it has met the formal legal requirements for an education institution. Check the school's website to make sure they have met accreditation standards.

Check First! Before you invest in any job training, read the page on Work Restrictions in the first section of this workbook to see if you may have restrictions due to your criminal record.



Pass your high school equivalency

Ready to get your high school diploma?

If you missed getting a high school diploma, you can earn a high school equivalency (HSE) now and get the full benefits of a high school diploma.

It's worth it to get your HSE. People who have a diploma or HSE earn more than people who don't. Also, many jobs and training programs require that you have one or the other.

What is a high school equivalency?

A high school equivalency or HSE is a recognized alternative to a high school diploma. There are three common exams used to determine high school equivalency:

- The General Educational Development (GED®) test
- The High School Equivalency Test (HiSET)
- The Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC)

What high school equivalency tests does my state offer?

Check with a counselor or your state's education agency to find out which tests your state offers.

How can I get ready to take the HSE test?

Many states offer study guides for the HSE tests. You can also sign up for HSE preparation classes at your local Adult Basic Education site.

How much does it cost?

Different states charge different fees to take the HSE tests. In some states they are free.



Basic skills training

Brushing up on basic skills can give you a leg up when looking for a job.

Basic skills include many types of skills. Here are some examples:

- English
- Reading and writing
- Math
- Speaking and verbal communication
- Work readiness
- Using computers and the Internet

Employers look for workers who have these skills. If you have been out of school for a long time, or just want to improve your basic skills, there are free classes available.

Check these places for free or low-cost basic skill training:

- The Goodwill Community Foundation offers free online classes in basic skills at their website, LearnFree.org.
- Look for adult basic education classes or community education classes in your area
- Contact your nearest American Job Center and ask them about local basic skills classes).



Short-term certificates

Want to improve your job skills? A short-term training program can make you job-ready.

Short-term training includes any programs that last less than two years.

Certificates

You usually earn a certificate when you complete a short-term training program. Having a certificate in your field can help you find a job, get a promotion, or earn more money.

Not sure what kind of training you're looking for?

Get started by thinking about the kind of job you want. Look at these pages in the first section (Explore Careers) of this workbook:

- Your interests: Find out what kinds of jobs match your interests.
- Career options: Learn how to explore different career ideas.
- Common first jobs: See a list of the kinds of jobs common for people with little work experience and a criminal record.

Ready to look for training?

Contact a local community college to find about short-term training programs near you. If you have Internet access visit CareerOneStop and click on Find Local Training.



Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are both full-time job and training for advancement at the same time.

When you become an apprentice, you work and earn a paycheck but you also get training. Many apprenticeships finish with a certificate or license that will allow you to work in a trade.

Apprenticeships are great opportunities to enter high-paying fields. Some of the occupations that offer apprenticeships are:

- Able seaman
- Automotive technician
- Baker
- Bricklayer
- Carpenter
- Chef
- Child care development specialist
- Computer programmer
- Construction craft laborer
- Dental assistant
- Electrician
- Elevator constructor
- Fire medic
- Horticulturist
- Lab technician
- Machinist
- Operating engineer
- Over-the-road truck driver
- Painter
- Pipefitter
- Roofer
- Sheet metal worker

Apprenticeship programs are sponsored by employers, labor unions and associations. All programs have eligibility requirements and guarantee wage increases. They last between one and six years.

There are apprenticeship programs in every state, but they can be hard to get. If you have Internet access, visit CareerOneStop and click "Apprenticeships" to learn more.





College

Ready to begin or finish a college degree?

A college degree can help you find a job, advance your career, and earn more money. Some people are nervous about attending college. But remember, your record may make you extra motivated for success.

There are two main types of college degrees:

- **Associate degrees** usually take two years of full-time college work, but some can take up to four years.
- **Bachelor's degrees** usually require four years of full-time college work, but some take longer.

Learn more about a school by contacting the admissions department to ask some of the questions below:

- Does the school offer a part-time schedule for working adults?
- Do they offer open admissions, which means anyone with a high school diploma or GED can attend?
- Can you take one class to get used to being in a classroom with tests and homework to complete?
- Are there special resources for adult learners?
- What kinds of financial aid are available?



Certifications

A certification can help you get a new job, or earn more at a current job.

What's a certification?

You can earn a certification for a certain type of work by taking a test to prove you have the needed skills and knowledge. Certifications are often offered by national organizations that specialize in particular fields or technologies. Sometimes, those same groups offer training to prepare for certifications. Other times, you can find training at a local community college.

Why would I want a certification?

Some people earn a certification in order to get started in a career. Other people earn specialty certifications to help them advance in their careers.

Earning a certification can give you a big leg up in the job market. It's a key item that hiring employers look for on resumes. Some employers may require workers to have certain certifications. This can be true especially in health care or financial fields.

How do I find out about certifications in my field?

If you have Internet access, visit CareerOneStop and click on "Certification Finder."



Licenses

Some jobs require that you have a license to hold the job.

Rules for licenses are set by the state, and they are different in each state. Examples of fields that often require licenses are:

- Health care jobs, such as dental assistants and emergency medical technicians (EMT)
- Jobs in the trades, such as plumbers and building contractors
- Jobs that provide personal care such as barbers and cosmetologists

It can be hard to qualify for a license when you have a criminal record. But in many cases, it is possible. The best plan is to learn about license requirements before you begin a training program or invest time or energy into starting a career.

Contact your state licensing agency to learn about licenses in your state. If you have Internet access, you can visit CareerOneStop and click on Find Licenses to see licenses required in any state.



Financial aid

What are your financial aid choices?

Financial aid is money that helps you pay for school or training. Most students get money from one or more types of financial aid. This is used to pay for your tuition (school fees), books, or other costs.

- **Grants** are awards you don't have to pay back. Grants mostly come from the government, such as the Federal Pell Grant.
- **A loan** is money that you do have to pay back. Different types of loans have different rules.
- **Scholarships** can come from a school, community group, business, or the government. You may have heard of sports scholarships, but you don't have to have a specific talent to qualify for a scholarship. Many are based on location, race, ethnicity, life experience, or other characteristics.
- **Work-study** is on-campus employment offered through the school. It helps you earn money to pay for your education.

The first step to getting federal financial aid is to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA helps determine if you can get financial aid. It also determines how much aid you are eligible to receive. Complete the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1. You can find the FAFSA online.

 **Aid and your conviction**

Can you still get financial aid even if you have a conviction on your record?

The short answer is: yes. Many people with felony convictions can receive financial aid, but they don't apply. The best way to find out what aid you qualify for is by completing the FAFSA. You'll find a link in the Resources box below.

Two types of convictions can affect eligibility: drug convictions and sex offenses.

Drug convictions

If you had a drug conviction, the FAFSA Drug Conviction Worksheet will help you determine your eligibility. Find the link in the Resources box below. If you are not eligible:

You might still qualify for financial aid from another source such as scholarships, or funds from the school. Make an appointment with the school financial aid office to find out about aid they may offer, or to search for scholarships that fit your situation.

You may regain your eligibility if you complete an acceptable drug rehabilitation program

Sex offenses

If you have a sex offense on your record, you will not be eligible for a Pell Grant. You should still complete your FAFSA application because you could be eligible for other financial aid from your state or private sources.



Special aid for veterans

If you're a veteran, you can get money to help pay for training and college. Learn about veterans' benefits and forms of financial aid.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill

If you are a veteran with an honorable discharge who provided military service for at least 90 days after September 10, 2001, you are eligible to receive education benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Post-9/11 GI Bill. Financial aid awards depend on how long you served in the military.

Grants and loans

The federal government is the largest source of financial aid. It provides both grants (money you don't need to repay) and loans (money you will need to repay). Federal loans have much better repayment deals than private bank loans. To apply for federal aid, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Work-study programs

The FAFSA is also used to apply for the federal work-study program, where students work at their college to help pay college costs. The VA also offers a special work-study program for veterans.

Scholarships

You may be eligible for scholarships based on your military service or other circumstances. Scholarships provide money you don't need to repay. If you have Internet access, check out these resources:

- Visit CareerOneStop.org and select Scholarship Search to find funds especially for vets and disabled vets.
- Go to the website of your military branch to see what scholarships are available.
- Visit VetSuccess.gov to find scholarship and guidance resources by state.
- Contact your school's veterans-affairs office or financial aid office for scholarships for veterans.

Fee waivers

Some colleges don't require veterans to pay certain fees after applying for a fee waiver. Check with a financial aid officer to find out your college's policy.

Section 3: Find a Job

This third and last section will help you plan your job search.

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Job search checklist

Use this checklist to get started on your job search.

Job searching can be a full-time job. A great way to get started is to learn how to set goals. Below is a list of other tips to follow.

- **Find a job search center with computer access.** Locate your nearest American Job Center, which offers free computer use for searching for jobs or writing your resume, free job search workshops, and job clubs. Many public libraries also offer computer access and job search resources.

- **Make a daily schedule and have a reliable way to keep track of time.** Get a watch, cell phone, or other way to keep on time. Practice being on time to appointments, interviews, and other meetings. It also helps to set a daily schedule for yourself. Include enough time for sleeping, meals, chores and other obligations, and job search activities. Read the page about Short-term goals in the first section of this workbook for examples of job search activities to add to your schedule.

- **Have clothes for interviews and work.** It's best to have at least one set of "interview-ready" clothes. If you need help, ask about any local organizations that help people get clothes, shoes, and more.

- **Make a plan for transportation to interviews and work.** Can you walk or bike to a job? If you take a bus or subway, check the routes to help decide where to look for work. Have a plan to tell employers how you will be able to arrive to work promptly.

Now you're ready to gather your personal records, write a resume, get personal references, and fill out job applications. Read the next pages to get started.



Prepare your resume

Resumes are an important tool to get job interviews. They make it easy for employers to see your skills at one glance.

A resume describes your abilities and experiences. They can be simple, but for people with criminal records, resumes are extra valuable. They give you a chance to choose which past experiences you want to highlight. That means you can put the focus on what you can offer instead of your record.

Resumes are not a list of everything you have done. Highlight just the parts of your experience that make you a good candidate for a job. See below for what to include on your resume.

Section	Information to include
Contact information	Place this at the top of your resume and include your full name, home address, phone number and an email address. If you don't have a permanent address, use a location where you can receive mail, or a rented post office box.
Career Objective or Summary	Write the career you want to be hired for, such as "Retail Salesperson." Or write 2-3 sentences to highlight skills or accomplishments that show why you are a good fit for the
Work Experience	A list of past jobs you've held. Include employer/company name, city and state, your job title, dates you held the job, major responsibilities, accomplishments, promotions, and
Education	List education and training you have done. Include school or program name, city and state, dates attended, and any diplomas, degrees or certifications you have earned.
Volunteering and Activities	List volunteer or community work you have done. Also include other activities that can show your responsibility,
Military Experience	List dates of military service, rank obtained and branch. Write in any special training or skills you gained.

Other things to think about when writing your resume:

- **Be truthful.** State your skills and abilities accurately.
- **Target your audience.** Highlight skills and activities related to a specific career.
- **Be brief.** Limit your resume to one or two pages. Use few words so it is easy and quick to read.
- **Be professional.** Print your resume on high-quality paper using a quality printer.
- **Be accurate.** Proofread your resume for errors. Ask at least one other good speller to do the same.
- **Include all related experiences.** Include positive information that's unique and related to the job. Example: If the job description indicates that speaking Spanish is preferred and you speak Spanish, include that.



References

References are people who will speak positively on your behalf about your skills, abilities, work history and motivation. When you apply for jobs, you will usually be asked for references.

What they say can make a big difference. People you could ask include: previous work supervisor, co-worker or client, a teacher, mentor, religious or spiritual advisor, volunteer coordinator, or others.

Usually family and close friends do not serve as references. Past employers are the most influential. Remember to send them a thank you note when you know they have given you a recommendation.

How can you prepare a reference for the call?

- Contact a possible reference before you give their name to a potential employer. Don't surprise them!
- Get permission to give out his or her name and phone number or email address.
- Find out if the reference would prefer to be contacted at work or home.
- Find out the best times to reach her or him.

Discuss your job search goals and the specific employers who may be calling. You might ask if you can forward this information in an email so they have it for their own reference.

An employer may also ask for your reference's occupation, how long you've known each other, and the nature of your relationship.

What other documents might help?

You can also provide copies of letters of recommendation from former employers. Copies of written performance evaluations may also be helpful. Bring them with you to an interview if you have them.



Job applications

Filling out a job application correctly can help you land the job

Job applications provide information to employers about applicants' work history, and help them decide who would be qualified for the job. When you fill one out, it's your chance to tell employers that you have the skills they need. Make sure this first impression is positive.

States have different laws about declaring your criminal record on job applications. It is important to be honest, while also giving only the necessary information. Some applications ask only about felonies, and not misdemeanors. Others ask only about convictions in the past seven years.

Also, employers may need to know what is on your record, but don't need the whole story. Keep your responses to-the-point for a better chance of getting an interview. Then you can explain any details necessary face-to-face.

Applying in person

When going to fill out an application in person, keep these points in mind:

- Be polite and respectful to everyone you meet — from the time you enter the parking lot to the time you meet with the potential employer.
- Assume that you are being observed while filling out the application. Employers want to see if you will represent their company well.
- Dress as if you were going for an interview.
- Learn some facts about the company before you go to apply. Then you can impress them if you are asked to interview on the spot.

Job application tips

Read each question completely and only give the information that is requested.

Bring a record of your past jobs and schooling, or keep a copy of an old job application filled out with the information you need. Be ready with employer and school names, addresses, dates, job titles, responsibilities, and contact information for your references. If you're applying online, you may have a limited time to complete the online application, so it will help to have this information handy

Complete the application neatly and completely. Follow directions, and sign "release of information forms." Not signing these forms could be a red flag to employers.



Criminal record expungement

You may be able to help your job search by having your record expunged

Expunging means sealing your record. It does NOT mean your conviction is gone. It does mean that most people can't see it.

Can I get my record expunged?

Each state has its own rules about expunging records. They look at many factors including:

- How serious your crime was. It is unlikely you can ever expunge a serious crime involving violence or a sex offense
- How old you were when you were convicted
- How long it's been since your arrest
- Whether you completed the terms of your sentence, probation, or diversion program
- Whether you have more than one offense on your record

How do I get started?

You have to apply to have your record expunged. Find out how this works in your state by asking your parole officer or by locating a free or low-cost legal clinic in your community.



Who hires ex-offenders?

It would be great to get a list of companies that hire people with criminal records. Unfortunately, that list doesn't exist.

The truth is that some companies hire many people with a record. They look for people who have the skills and abilities to do the work, even if they have a criminal record. Others may be afraid that people who have criminal records won't be good workers. In those cases, it's up to you to show them that's not true.

So, what can you do to increase your chances of getting hired? Here are a few tips:

Contact a community organization. There are hundreds of local service providers across the country who specialize in helping ex-offenders find work.

- Different local service providers offer different services. Some place workers in jobs with local employers. Others offer training and resources to help with your job search.
- Find a service provider near you by selecting your state in the State Resources box at the bottom of this page.

Use multiple ways to connect with employers. Try several of the following:

- Talk with family, friends, counselors and others about the kind of work you'd like, and ask for job leads.
- Contact employers in person, by phone and online to ask about job openings in your field.
- Apply to jobs you find in online job banks.
- Attend job fairs and introduce yourself to different employers.
- Visit employers in your community to apply for jobs.

Tell employers about the benefits of hiring a worker with a criminal record. Two items to mention:

- The Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which gives tax discounts to employers who hire low-income ex-offenders.
- The Federal Bonding Program, which is insurance for employers concerned about theft or dishonesty by an employee. Employers can call 1 (877) US2-JOBS to get more information.



Networking

What is networking?

Networking is simply talking to people – in person, by phone, using email or letters. It's communicating what you are looking for, to a broad group of people. Use networking to find work or other resources you need, like housing.

When you network, let people know about the type of work you're looking for. And you can describe some of the reasons why you'd make a good worker. Networking is not the same as asking for a job. It's more about getting the word out that you are looking for a job.

Who's in your network?

Your network is everyone you know who can help with your career goals. It includes friends and family, teachers, past employers, people you've volunteered for, and workers who've helped you. It also includes the people your own friends and family know.

Although your networking contacts are probably not hiring managers themselves, they may know someone who is. Many jobs are filled without ever being advertised, and instead are just filled by networking. So be sure to connect with a lot of people to let them know what you are looking for.

Get started: Make a list of contacts

List people who might be able to help you answer your job search questions. Start talking with them. These contacts might include:

- Friends, family, and neighbors
- Members of your community groups
- Former classmates, teachers, and professors
- Acquaintances and business contacts, including former managers, supervisors, and coworkers
- Referrals from other contacts

Once you have a list of contacts, make a plan to get in touch with some people on your list every day. When you ask for their help, you could also ask how you could be helpful to them. You are also part of their network.



Learn about job banks

Job banks are websites where you can search and apply for job openings online. They are sometimes called job boards.

What you can do on a job bank

Most job banks will give you a general introduction on how to use their site. Here are the common tasks you can do at most job banks:

- **Search and apply for job openings.** There are thousands of online job banks. Most work in the same basic way. Employers pay to post job openings. Job seekers search the openings for free. You can usually register to learn more and apply for jobs. This should also be free of charge.
- **Post your resume.** Sometimes you can post your resume without applying for a specific job. Then employers can see your resume and match you to an open position. Follow the instructions on each job bank site to post your resume.
- **Get a feel for the jobs and the pay.** Job banks can be a good research tool. You can learn what skills employers are looking for. You can also learn what kind of pay to expect for different jobs in your area.

What to avoid

You should not have to pay to search through job openings on a job bank. You should also be able to post your resume for free. However, you may have to register with a user name and password in order to use all the features of a job bank. It's helpful to write down the web address, user name and password for all the job banks you use so you can easily get access and track openings.

Sometimes, job postings on online job banks are scams. They try to get you to pay up front or perform illegal activities. Beware of job postings that ask you for an "up-front" investment of money. Also be wary of offers that seem too good to be true. For instance, you can't really earn thousands of dollars for depositing checks from foreign countries. And it may be illegal to ship items from your home.

Never give personal information. A legitimate company won't ask you for certain personal details online. Never give your social security or national ID number online. Also never give a credit card number, bank account information, or similar details on job search sites.



Visit a job fair

Job fairs are events to connect job seekers with employers that might have job openings now or in the future.

You don't always apply for jobs at job fairs. You usually learn about open positions and requirements. These events are held by many different organizations. They may be held by one company. They may be held by a group of similar companies. For instance, several hotel chains may hold a hotel industry job fair. You might even find a job fair that is just for ex-offenders. (Try searching for "ex-offender job fair" at Google.com).

All job fairs are different from each other. It's important to have the right expectations for what you can and cannot do at a job fair.

Expect to:

- Make connections that could lead to a job interview or application
- Give copies of your resume to potential employers
- Practice introducing yourself to potential employers and answering questions

Do not expect to:

- Have on-the-spot interviews (but be prepared, just in case!)
- Be given a job offer



Temporary agencies

Employment agencies can be a good path to a job.

These businesses match your skills with jobs that employers want to fill fast. The employers pay the employment agency for hiring workers, so there is no cost to you. Employment agencies are also called staffing, recruiting, or temp agencies. Read below to see how they work for different types of positions they fill.

Short-term or temporary-to-permanent positions

Staffing services match workers with short-term or temporary positions. They often hire for office and administrative work, light industrial or manufacturing, and customer service positions. The benefits of using a staffing service and doing temporary work include:

- You gain work experience, develop skills, and increase contacts for future jobs.
- Some agencies offer training you might need on the job, such as office software.
- You earn money while continuing to look for work.
- It's easier to get a job when you have a job.
- You may be able to obtain special scheduling or work conditions you need.
- You can check out an employer or occupation before committing.

A temporary assignment can last a few hours, days, weeks, or several months. Sometimes employers offer permanent positions to temp workers. When workers complete a job, the agency looks for another assignment for them. Temporary employees generally do not receive paid vacation, sick leave, or holidays. Most agencies do not offer health insurance, but some make it available after you have worked for a set period of time.

Tips for working with employment agencies

Before you work with an employment agency, find out what services you can expect and what will be expected of you. Make sure you ask whether it will cost you anything.

For short-term contract work, ask about the pay rate, benefits, and length of assignments. Also, let them know the hours and days you're able to work, whether you can work overtime, and your transportation and salary needs. Some additional tips:

- **Be professional.** Treat agencies as you would a potential employer. In the case of temp agencies, they will be your employer.
- **Be available.** Most agencies expect you to be available when they offer you work. If you turn down more than a few jobs, they may not consider you for work in the future.
- **Expand your job search.** Do not use agencies as your only job search method.
- **Check your benefits.** Short-term wages may reduce benefits such as unemployment insurance. But it may also extend the length of time that you can receive benefits. Before accepting or rejecting work, check with the agency where you receive your benefits.



Interview tips

Interviews are a chance for an employer to learn more about you. They are also your chance to learn about the company.

Take time to prepare for your interview: what you'll say and how you'll act. Plan what you will wear and how you will get to the interview. These activities will help you be confident during each interview. Your confidence will make a good impression.

In advance

Practice answering the common interview questions on the next page. Then, make a list of questions you would like to ask during the interview. Pick questions about the job and the company that will show your interest. Look at the company's website and write up questions to learn more about what you read. Avoid asking about pay and benefits. If you are offered a job, that is the time to discuss them.

The day of the interview

- Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early. You might need to fill out paperwork before the interview.
- Go by yourself. If a friend or relative drives you, have them wait in the car or pick you up later.
- Dress in a manner appropriate to the job. Good personal grooming makes a positive impression.
- Turn off your cell phone.
- Bring your sense of humor and smile.

What to bring to an interview

- Extra copies of your resume, your references. If you need them for your work, bring a portfolio with work samples. Carry them in a folder or case.
- Papers you need to complete your application, including copies of work licenses, your driving record (if required), and your social security or immigration cards.
- A pen and notebook to write down information.
- Questions for you to ask during the interview.

During the interview

- Display confidence. Shake hands firmly, but only if a hand is offered to you first. Maintain eye contact. Be friendly.
- Let the interviewer start the dialogue.
- Listen carefully. It is OK to take time to think before you answer.
- Accept questions openly, even the hard ones.
- Give honest, direct answers.
- If you don't understand a question, ask for it to be repeated or clarified. You don't have to rush, but you don't want to appear indecisive.



Common interview questions

Before an interview, take the time to practice answering these questions

Common interview questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in working for this company?
- Why have you chosen this particular field?
- In a job, what interests you most/least?
- What is your major weakness?
- Give an example of how you solved a problem in the past.
- What are your strengths?
- How do others describe you?
- What do you consider your best accomplishment in your last job?
- Where do you see yourself in three years?
- Think about a time you failed in your life, and tell me why you think it happened.
- Give an example where you showed leadership and initiative.
- Give an example of when you were able to contribute to a team project.
- What have you done to develop or change in the last few years?

Illegal questions

- What is or was your spouse's name or line of work?
- Have you ever filed a Workers' Compensation claim or been injured on the job?
- Do you have any physical conditions that would prevent you from performing the job?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- What is your hair/eye color?
- What is your height/weight?
- Have you ever been hospitalized?
- If so, for what condition?
- Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist?
- If so, for what condition?
- How many days were you absent from work because of illness last year?
- Are you taking any prescribed drugs?
- Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?



How do I talk about my conviction?

Employers use background checks to confirm qualifications. It's better to be honest up front and possibly lose some opportunities than to lose someone's trust after you are hired.

Here are a few tips to increase your chance of getting hired:

- **Be honest.** Never lie to an interviewer or put false information on your resume or application. This will disqualify you when the employer does a background check or checks your references.
- **Keep it simple.** Answer questions directly. Address any concerns the employer has, then steer the interview back to your skills and the positive traits you bring to the job.
- **Make a good first and last impression.** Avoid talking about negative issues at the very beginning or the end of an interview. If possible, try to address your criminal history in the middle of the interview. End with a summary of your qualifications and interest in the job.
- **Emphasize the positive.** If asked to give information about your past (convictions, incarceration, drug and/or alcohol abuse), avoid telling "your side of the story." Even if you were wrongly convicted, you will leave a negative impression. Keep focused on what you have to offer the employer, not your personal story.
- **Focus on your current activities and future plans.** Emphasize the education and job training, community work, and other activities you have done since your release. Talk about your career goals, how you chose them, and how the job you are applying for fits them.
- **Be ready to talk about benefits available to employers who hire people with a record.** You can bring up the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which gives tax discounts to employers who hire low-income ex-offenders. You can print a brochure about this program to bring to interviews by clicking the WOTC Brochure link below. Also talk about the Federal Bonding Program which is insurance for employers concerned about theft or dishonesty by an employee. Tell employers they can call 1 (877) US2-JOBS to get more information.

It's also a good idea to pay attention to body language. Sometimes your body language can give off the wrong signals. People may think negatively about you because of it. When you practice how to answer interview questions, pay attention to your posture and eye contact. Some tips:

- **Have good eye contact, without staring.** Not looking a person in the eye when talking can be seen as a sign that you are lying or hiding something.
- **Stand and sit tall.** Slouching or sitting casually can look like you are not taking the interview seriously. Sit up straight, but relaxed. This lets the employer know that you are interested.
- **Smile.** A genuine smile shows that you are a friendly person and someone the interviewer would want working at the company.
- **Shake hands firmly.** Shake hands only after the interviewer extends his or her hand first. If you are not able to shake hands because of health or cultural reasons, politely tell the interviewer, "I don't shake hands with people, but I am very pleased to meet you."
- **Show interest through your facial expression.** Many people look serious when they are nervous. An employer can mistake that as being bored or dull. As the interviewer is talking, nod your head and smile when appropriate.



Employment checks

You may go through more than one kind of screening as you interview for jobs. It's good to know all the types of checks that employers might do before and after you are hired.

Most employers do some type of background check or pre-screening on all job candidates.

Employers want to know as much as possible about a person before making a job offer. This helps employers know that they are hiring a person who has the right skills and qualifications for the job. They also want someone who will represent their company well.

Employers cannot do most of these checks without your permission. Often you are asked to sign a document allowing the company to do a specific check. This can happen when you fill out a job application or submit a resume, or it can happen during the interview process.

There are several types of pre-screenings or checks an employer can do. It's common to do more than one type of check on a candidate. Some checks or screenings are done after you are hired.

Employment history checks

Your past employment is verified in several ways. The most common way is to use databases updated directly from company payroll records. This information uses your Social Security number to find your past jobs.

The hiring manager might contact a past employer personally to verify employment. They usually talk to the human resources representative at your past employer.

In most cases, a past employer is allowed only to reveal the dates of your employment with that company, job titles you held, and if you are eligible for rehiring. Any other details, including your job performance or reasons for leaving the job, are not discussed.

References

If you list a former supervisor or coworker as a personal reference, that person can talk about your job performance in detail. Your personal reference can say if you were a good worker, got along with people, describe your best skills, and other things.

Be sure to give your references a copy of your resume so they know the dates you worked, your exact job title, and other details about your past jobs.

Social networking and internet searches

The number of employers that check social networking profiles is growing rapidly. Social networking sites include Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Many employers say they will not hire someone who has posted inappropriate content or photos on these sites.

Employers also use search engines, such as Google or Bing, to check for questionable information on job candidates. Make sure you know what information employers can find when they type in your name.

Not all of the information found on the Internet is used to disqualify a candidate. In fact, it's a good idea to use social networking sites to help you create a good reputation and build your network.

Drug testing

An employer may require a drug test during the hiring process and after you're hired. They are used to determine if someone has recently consumed alcohol, prescription medication, or illegal drugs.

According to the National Clearinghouse for Drug & Alcohol Information, employers can use several types of drug tests:

- **Pre-employment tests.** An employer can decide to not make a job offer based on the results of a drug test given before hiring a person unless the finding is a prescribed medication — then they can not discriminate.
- **Reasonable suspicion and for-cause tests.** When an employee shows signs of not being fit for duty or has a documented pattern of unsafe work behavior, the employer can issue a drug test.
- **Random tests.** Employers might issue drug tests to all employees at unscheduled times. This discourages employees from using illegal drugs at any time.
- **Post-accident tests.** An employer may test employees who are involved in an accident or unsafe practice incident to find out if alcohol or other drug use was a factor.

Each employer has its own policies regarding drug testing. You will know if a drug test is part of the hiring process. After hire, the company will give you a copy of their employee drug policies.

Credit checks

Checking a candidate's credit report is more common than in the past. However, an employer should have a sound business reason for this. If the credit information is directly related to a job, it's OK to check. Otherwise, using credit as part of the hiring process might be discriminatory.

Employers should let you know about their policies and procedures related to credit checks. The use of credit information should be both relevant and fair. Job seekers and human resource staff should refer to the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FERC) and state regulations.

Pre-employment screenings

Other common pre-employment screenings include:

- **General knowledge.** This measures an applicant's basic knowledge of what is required to perform the job. An example is to solve math problems. If required, it is done usually at the beginning of the application process.
- **Aptitude screening.** This measures an applicant's skills and ability to learn new skills. It can be a written test or a hands-on test or demonstrating a task related to the job.



- Psychological screening. This measures an applicant's ability to handle the situations and environments that might be encountered on the job. An example is to ask how you would handle a difficult customer or a fast deadline.

It might make you nervous to know that an employer gives these screenings and checks, but think of these checks as a good thing.

Some of these screenings take a lot of time and cost the employer money. They are only given to people who are seriously being considered for hire. So, if you are asked to go through one or more of these checks, that might mean you are close to getting hired.



After you land a job

Getting a job takes effort. Make the most of your hard work by following through to keep it.

Here are some basic tips to being successful at work:

- **Stick to your schedule.** Go to work and be on time every day you are scheduled. Try for perfect attendance.
- **Follow the rules.** Follow company policies about safety, dress code, break times, and other guidelines.
- **Make it a priority to get along with co-workers and supervisors.** If you have a problem, seek out a positive solution through your supervisor or Human Resources department.
- **Dress appropriately.** Ask your supervisor what's appropriate. Also, notice what successful co-workers are wearing.
- **Learn all you can from the job, co-workers and leaders.** Show an interest in improving your job skills and take training if it's available.
- **Act professionally.** This means:
 - Don't make personal phone calls or send personal e-mails during work time.
 - Don't use company equipment, such as the copier or computers, for your own tasks.
 - Don't use curse words or slang, or speak too casually to customers or your boss.
 - Never use alcohol or illegal drugs at work.
 - Don't sleep on the job or go to work exhausted and unable to do your best.

Outside of work hours, you can do a few simple things to keep your career on track.

- **Maintain positive habits and sobriety.** Seek out contacts and support groups in the community that will help you practice a healthy lifestyle.
- **Pay attention to the money you earn and spend.** Ask someone for help with a budget if you haven't been successful managing your money in the past.
- **Think about career goals.**
- **Find ways to increase your skills.**
- **Meet positive people to add to your network of contacts.**