

# MILITARY **to** CIVILIAN

## Transition Guide



### Part IV

### Make the "Call Pile"

With Attention-Grabbing Resumes and Cover Letters

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Serving Those Who Serve™

# Part IV

## Make the “Call Pile” With Attention-Grabbing Resumes and Cover Letters

In this guide, learn how to create resumes, cover letters and professional portfolios that bypass the trashcan and land a spot in the interview pool.

### **Military-to-Civilian Transition Guide: A Five-Part Series**

- Part I.        Entering the Civilian Workforce: Your Journey Starts Here
- Part II.       Choose a Career You’ll Love and Never Work a Day in Your Life
- Part III.      Professional Branding That Gets You Noticed!
- Part IV.       *Make the “Call Pile” With Attention-Grabbing Resumes and Cover Letters***
- Part V.        How to Ace the Interview ... and Stand Out From the Crowd



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# Make the “Call Pile” With Attention-Grabbing Resumes and Cover Letters

## Table of Contents

- I. *Prepare to Make a Great Impression*
- II. *Modernize Your Resume*
- III. *Common Misspellings to Avoid*
- IV. *Beef Up Your Experience ... and Your Resume*
- V. *Lose the Cliches and Make More Headway With Your Cover Letter*
- VI. *Poisonous Grammatical Errors*
- VII. *Anatomy of a Civilian Resume*
- VIII. *Anatomy of a Civilian Cover Letter*
- IX. *Anatomy of a Federal Resume*
- X. *Anatomy of a Federal Cover Letter*
- XI. *Professional Portfolios for a Lasting Impression*

# Prepare to Make a Great Impression

Having a well-crafted resume is important in your transition to the civilian job market. It's how recruiters initially size you up, so put forth your best effort to make a great first impression!

With that in mind, the following suggestions will help move your resume to the top of the recruiter's call list ...

I

## ● Match qualifications with requirements

Spend time analyzing the job description and tailoring the wording of your qualifications before submitting your resume. Your resume must reflect experience that matches the job description. Visit [O\\*NET's Military Crosswalk](#) to obtain an accurate translation of military titles to civilian job titles. Simply enter your military occupation code and O\*Net provides a list of similar or equivalent job titles.

## ● Make the most of six seconds

According to a Business Insider article, recruiters spend an average of six seconds on each candidate's resume. To have your resume read and considered, here are two suggestions:

- Showcase your major accomplishments that set you apart from other candidates
- Structure your resume in an easy-to-skim format

## ● Check and double-check spelling

One of the worst things you can post on your resume is 'pays great attention to detail,' and then have several misspelled words or incorrect sentence structures littered throughout the document.

- Take a break after you've written your resume so you can avoid speed-reading when you proofread.
- *Have a friend proofread it, as well.* Reading your resume backwards word for word will help catch misspellings.
- Reading aloud will help you identify incorrect sentence structures.
- Also ... don't forget that many companies have oddly spelled names, including odd capitalization and punctuation.

## ● Use a word cloud to identify key words

Recruiters commonly narrow down potential job candidates by using resume-scanning software and applicant tracking systems. Including key words on your resume will increase the odds of it being noticed.

A "word cloud" can help you figure out which words to include. These generators produce word clouds from text that you provide. Simply copy and paste a job description into a word cloud generator and the images you create will indicate what key words you should include in your resume.

Visit [Wordle](#) or [WordSift](#) to help identify essential key words via word cloud.

## ● When in doubt, choose .doc resumes over .pdf resumes

If you save your resume as a .pdf file, it becomes a graphic/image and can become unrecognizable by *resume-scanning software*. It's not a given, but .pdf files can be rejected without the applicant's knowledge. If you submit your resume in Microsoft Word (.doc) format, there's a greater chance your resume will be successfully scanned. Just make sure the resume contains key words.

A tip on .doc resumes: Don't use special characters or graphics. There's a chance the consistency of the document will change and become unreadable by the employer.

In most cases, applicants are given the option to submit multiple documents. If this is the case, you could submit both .doc and .pdf files. After all, you can't predict the potential employer's operating system.

## ● Leverage social media

Social media and professional associations are popular and effective avenues for job seekers to network. Join professional group discussions on LinkedIn and engage in conversations with others in your field. You never know: A comment you post may impress or encourage a person with hiring authority to refer you or personally give you a call.

## ● Send your resume directly to a recruiter

In most cases, it won't behoove job seekers to bombard human resources personnel with job inquiries and resumes. Take a different approach by sending your resume directly to a head hunter.

[Oya's Directory of Recruiters](#) is a comprehensive online recruiter directory that allows you to browse for recruiters by industry. If you are in upper management, you can also send your resume to executive-level recruiters.

# Modernize Your Resume

Don't allow your resume to be tossed aside because the civilian employer is having a 1980s flashback. You want your resume to look clean, crisp, engaging, informative and - equally as important - modern. With this in mind, here are several things to consider as you put together an amazing, up-to-date resume ...

II

*Your resume looks ancient if:*

## **It features big paragraphs.**

On your resume, replace paragraphs with hard-hitting bullet points that highlight your experience in a more condensed fashion.

## **It uses old fonts.**

Don't use unrecognizable fonts. Using Times New Roman won't squash your chances with an employer, but it's so 2000. Try using modern, crisp, legible fonts like Arial or Helvetica to spice it up a bit.

## **It includes "References available upon request."**

It's a no brainer that your references are available upon request – you don't have to put it on your resume. Besides, in the age of social media, expect to be social screened anyway. Google yourself to preview what employers will see. Make sure your Facebook and Twitter profiles are free of pictures and comments that don't cast you in the best light.

## **It doesn't reference your LinkedIn profile.**

LinkedIn connects professionals around the world and is a wonderful networking resource for job seekers. So make the most of this tool. Treat your profile as you would a resume. And put your LinkedIn URL on your resume. You can shorten the URL by going to the Profile tab ("view your profile"). In your grey profile box, locate the area that states "Public Profile" and click the edit button. This will allow you to shorten and personalize the URL that connects to your LinkedIn profile page.

## **It doesn't use keywords.**

To survive the scanning software and applicant tracking systems recruiters often use, your resume should include keywords. Which ones you incorporate depends on the job description, but could be related to required skills, a required education level/degree or other qualifications. Tip: Avoid over-used clichés, such as hard-working, strong work ethic, etc. Tracking systems will not pick up these phrases.

## **It doesn't include an email address.**

We've reached the day and age where an email address and phone number are considerably more important than a street address on a resume. If the hiring manager is going to contact you for an in-person interview, it will likely be via email or cell phone. Companies do not use snail mail anymore to contact job seekers. The use of a street address is fine, but it's mostly to show the employer the city and state in which you presently live. Make sure your email and cell phone are listed prominently.

# Common Misspellings to Avoid

In the civilian job market, 90% of hiring authorities immediately discard resumes based on quality and appearance factors, according to the authors of *Expert Resumes for Military-to-Civilian Transitions*.

Proofread your resume, as well as cover letters and thank you notes. Have a friend read them. Always take the time to check, check and re-check. You won't regret it. And keep your eye out for the following commonly misspelled words on a resume ...

III

## + Accommodate

A common problem with this word is wondering whether there is only one C or one M. Make sure you have two of both.

## + Personnel

This word is often used by those in supervisory or managerial roles. Resume writers often incorrectly spell the word with one N and two L's.

## + Effect

Know the difference between effect and affect. It's easy to get these two words confused. Remember: Affect is a verb meaning "to influence," whereas effect is a noun meaning "resulting in or bringing about."

## + Necessary

How many C's and S's again? Remember the 1 and 2 rule - one C and two S's.

## + Experience

Resume writers will typically get the I and E mixed up with this word. Remember that all 4 E's in the word are equally spaced out by two letters other than E.

## + Familiar

Typically the second I is omitted when using this word.

## + Pioneered

This word is often incorrectly spelled with two E's and not three.

## + Business

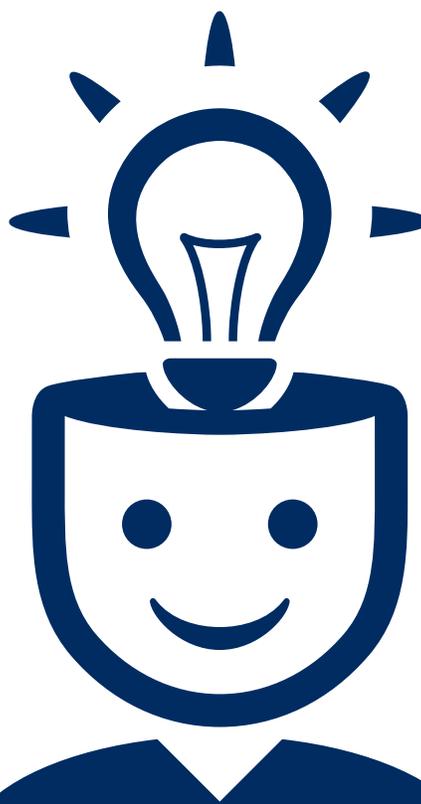
This is a very common word found on resumes. If you misspell it, chances are you might not even get a second glance - especially if you are applying for a business position. The I can mistakenly be found positioned before the S.

## + Ensured

Ensured or insured? Make sure you use the right verb for the appropriate behavior on this one.

## + Guarantee

Typically the second A is replaced with an E. Remember, take the time to have someone else proofread your resume. Don't rely on spell check. Many common errors aren't picked up because they are actual words recognized by this handy tool.



# Beef up Your Experience ... and Your Resume

Here are four not-so-obvious ways to build your experience (and resume) and distinguish yourself in a competitive job market.

IV

## 1. Online education

Good news: It's very possible nowadays through modern technology to go back to school while still in the military. Online learning enables you to pursue your degree while keeping up with the hectic pace of your military responsibilities.

Online colleges such as Grantham University offer associate, bachelor's and master's degrees, so you can complete your degree online and boost your credentials. If you already have your associate degree, consider a bachelor's degree. If you have your bachelor's, consider the added benefits of a master's. With the competitive state of the job market, furthering your education could open up career opportunities in desirable fields.

## 2. Volunteering

Volunteer work looks great on resumes, and shows initiative and a desire to make a difference in the world. It's a bonus if you're able to volunteer in the field you are pursuing. For example, if you're interested in nursing, look into volunteering at your local hospital. For a computer science slant, offer to be the on-call IT representative for a non-profit organization nearby.

Even if it is unpaid, volunteer work is still valuable and most employers should look favorably upon such an experience.

## 3. Professional organizations

Not only are professional organizations great for networking, they often supply a steady stream of valuable industry news and information. In addition to looking good on your resume, joining a professional organization shows you have passion for your career outside of the workplace. A great way to locate professional organizations is through LinkedIn.

## 4. Internship

An internship is a great resume-enhancer if you can work it into your military schedule. Not only will you gain valuable civilian experience, but it is a great networking opportunity. An internship introduces you to experienced professionals who may be able to help you land a job after your military exit. Sometimes, internships also lead to eventual full-time work with the same organization.



# Lose the Clichés and Make More Headway with Your Cover Letter

Eliminating over-used phrases from your cover letter is the first step to catching the employer's attention. Leave out these phrases when creating an awesome cover letter ...

V

## 1. "To whom it may concern."

Be resourceful. If a name is not listed on the job posting, do your best to find one. Including a name adds a personal touch to your cover letter's salutation. It also shows you aren't afraid to do research. A simple "Dear Mr. or Ms. Smith" will suffice, in terms of phrasing.

Suggestions:

- Look up the name of the hiring manager or department manager on the organization's website.
- Call the organization, mention that you plan to submit an application and ask to whom you should address the cover letter. If the posting says "no phone calls, please," look for a name on the website. Remember to respect the employer's requests.

## 2. "I look forward to hearing from you."

Closing your cover letter with this phrase won't destroy your chances of landing an interview, but try taking a more proactive approach. Request an interview, and then say you plan to follow up to arrange the interview. As a general rule, allow a week to pass. Remember to follow up. Set a reminder in your phone or write a note to yourself to make sure you don't skip that step.

## 3. "I feel ..."

Phrases such as "I feel..." or "I believe..." do not instill much confidence with employers. Use a stronger phrase, like "I am confident...", instead.

## 4. "I'm a self-starter."

Employers are interested in how you can help their organization. Be as specific as possible in your cover letter. Instead of saying you're a self-starter, prove it. If you're a salesperson, communicate to the employer that you helped boost your current (or past) employer's sales by 20%.

## 5. "References available upon request."

Refrain from using this antiquated phrase. If the potential employer wants to contact any references, he or she will ask you for names and numbers.

Cover letters are best kept to one page (a half page typed out is okay), so clean up as many phrases with empty meaning as possible. It will greatly improve your chances of landing the job.



# Poisonous Grammatical Errors

The following is a list of common grammatical errors that could poison your resume and derail your chances of landing that important job.

VI

## 1. Misuse of “their/they’re/there”

**Their:** The possessive form of “they” (Distance learning students love their flexible course schedules.)

**They’re:** The contraction of “they are” (They’re both earning their degrees while serving in the military.)

**There:** A location (Please hand in your cover letter and resume over there.)

## 2. Forgetting about “it’s/its”

**It’s:** The contraction of “it is” (It’s amazing what adult learners can accomplish by taking classes online.)

**Its:** The possessive form of “it” (Sometimes, this computer has a mind of its own.)

## 3. Improperly utilizing “you’re/your”

**You’re:** The contraction of “you” and “are” (You’re going to get the job with an error-free resume.)

**Your:** The possessive form of “you” (Your job is done here.)

### Here are two more cover letter and resume blunders:

#### 1. Not being mindful of tenses

Standout resumes often contain an “experience” section that leads with strong, specific action verbs to describe past and present job duties. Remember to keep your verb tenses consistent. For instance, previous job experience should utilize verbs in the past tense, while current job experience should reference verbs in the present tense. As a guide, your current experience could mention you “manage a sales team of ten employees,” while your past experience could say you “boosted sales by 20% during time of employment.”

#### 2. Using passive voice

When job applicants write with active voice on cover letters and resumes, it adds an element of confidence to their delivery and is considerably more effective. Switch passive “being” verbs (am, is, are, was, were) to active voice whenever possible.

What sounds more enticing to a potential employer on a resume?

- A) Database systems were developed and managed to track trending.
- B) Developed and managed database systems to track trending.

Most people would probably side with B.



# Anatomy of a Civilian Resume

## VII

### Contact Information

1. Full name. You can only include your middle initial if you'd like.
2. The type of professional that you are (e.g., Human Resources Professional). This really helps the reviewer quickly know where to forward your document prior to reading your objective statement.
3. Mailing address. Recruiters often verify this information in a specialized verification tool. Therefore, make sure that you list the address where you receive your mail.
4. Daytime telephone number. Never include your desk phone at your current job, unless you are applying for a promotion within your current organization.
5. Primary email address. Do not include your employer's email; this should be a personal email address. However, the exception to this rule is again if you are applying for a promotion within your current organization. The email address that you provide should be professional (e.g., shanna.fowler@example.com).

### Objective

This should be one sentence that includes key words/action words that may show up on an Applicant Tracking System search.

Two primary parts of an objective statement are:

1. General Qualifications
  - a. Could be Experience
  - b. Could be Skills
  - c. Could be Education
2. Professional Goals and/or Aspirations
  - a. Could be as simple as attaining the job that you are applying for
  - b. Could be as complex and specific as having a goal you'd like to accomplish in the position, if hired.

*Note: You can find those key words and action words in the job description. Employers often use the company name and position title as key words for the ATS System.*

### Skills Profile

Just like the objective statement, you will want to use key words linked to the position that you are applying for. This is an ideal section for you to include computer skills and other technical skills.

The employer will likely have a skill set of their perfect candidate in mind; therefore, you can utilize the job description itself to uncover these ideal skills for their perfect candidate. By doing this, you show that you could potentially be very close, in skills, to their perfect candidate.

*Note: You should only include 6-8 skills/qualifications in this section.*

### Education

Your education should be listed in reverse chronological order, or highest attained degree to lowest attained degree. If you are currently working on a degree, you will want to list that information at the top with your "expected graduation date."

To prevent age discrimination, do not list your high school graduation date, unless the employer requests the information. Requesting high school graduation information is not uncommon for companies that handle confidential or government information.

Make sure you include the following information related to each educational milestone achieved:

1. Name of institution
2. City and state
3. Degree (example: Bachelor of Science in Business Administration)
4. Graduation date or expected graduation date (as an alternative to the date, you can just state the word "Completed" for this section.)

*Note: To prevent age discrimination, do not list your high school graduation date. If you believe that a graduation date leaves you open to ageism, you can just list the word "Completed" in place of the graduation date.*

### Professional Training

You can have a major Training heading or an Education and Professional Training heading, and then have Education as a subheading and Professional Training as another subheading. Both methods are common; it is a matter of which method best compliments your experience.

If you have a lot of training, make sure you only list the training most relevant to the position. Try to limit your training list to 3-6 training entries.

The training entries should mirror your Education entries in certain ways and should include the following sections:

1. Training Title
2. Completion Date

If you earned a certificate, put the name of the certificate in place of the training title and adjust the "Professional Training" subheading to the following: "Professional Training and Certificates."

*Note: Include professionally related training and certifications that was obtained within the past 10 years. There are exceptions to the 10-year rule depending on the type of training and certification; therefore, use your best judgment.*

### Experience

This is traditionally where one would list professional work experience relevant to the position. This is the section where you demonstrate that you know your field well by highlighting previous positions that have prepared you for the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying.

Three acceptable ways to list this information are:

#### 1. Employment/Work History

Under this heading, the reviewer is going to expect to see every position that you have held and been paid for. The order should be reverse chronological order.

#### 2. Professional Experience:

If you use this heading, the reviewer is going to expect to see every position that

you've held that is relevant to the position for which you are applying. Relevancy is usually determined by similar duties and how long ago the position was held. Generally speaking, the positions listed in this section should only go back five to seven years (no more than 10 years). The order should be reverse chronological order.

If you have military and civilian professional experience, you can have two subheadings under your "Professional Experience" heading: Related Civilian Experience and Related Military Experience. The first subhead should be the one with the most recent professional experience.

### 3. Experience:

This is the broadest of all of the acceptable headers. Within this header, you can list your professional experience, and experience gained through other avenues, such as: military experience, contracting experience, professional work experience, internships, volunteer experience, course work, course projects, etc.

Because this section is so broad, if you include experience attained by avenues other than professional experience, you will want to "signpost" these to make it easier for the reviewer to understand where you gained the experience. All entries should be listed in reverse chronological order.

*Note: If you include course projects in this section, include a copy of the final project in your portfolio.*

### Achievements

Detail specific milestones you have achieved that can be quantitatively measured (e.g., Increased revenue by 35% by instituting an electronic communication process).

There are two ways to highlight your achievements:

1. Have a specific section just under your Skills Profile. The potential problem with this method is that it could leave the recruiter/hiring manager guessing where the achievement occurred, which can likely land your resume in the "round file."
2. Have a subheading for achievements/accomplishments under each employment heading within your experience section. This method shows the recruiter/hiring manager where the achievements occurred, and that you consistently go above and beyond your assigned duties.

*Note: If you use this method, use the Table Tool in word processing to create two columns: one on the left for Accomplishments and a second one on the right for duties. (Accomplishments should be on the left because we read from left to right, and the reviewer will notice your accomplishments prior to your job duties.)*

### Membership, Affiliations and Certifications

This section should reflect your connection and participation within your profession. It also serves to communicate your efforts to improve yourself professionally through professional certifications.

Because employers want employees who are "connected," many will review your professional social networking profile to see what groups you belong to, how active you are in those groups, and what you state you are doing.

Often, especially if you have certifications, this section will be with education or professional training. The Professional Training subheading is renamed "Professional Certifications," which is an acceptable alternative. The presentation varies by how this section best showcases your unique skills and experience in context to the reviewer's hiring needs.



## Applicant's Information

Name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip

Date

## Employer's Information

Hiring Manager  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip

Dear Hiring Manager (use this only if you don't know the hiring manager's name),

Introductory Paragraph (Introduce yourself and your interest to be employed by the prospective employer. State the position that you are applying for here.)

Body (Briefly review your unique skills and experience, and how these skills and experiences make you the ideal candidate for the position and employer.)

Closing (Thank the employer for taking the time to review your cover letter and resume. Provide a follow-up date here, as well.)

Sincerely,

Applicant's Name  
Job/Position Title

Attachments (1)  
Resume (2 Pages)

### Personal Information

- Full given name
- Mailing addresses (where you get your mail, as this will likely be verified via the Applicant Tracking System)
- Telephone number (evening and daytime phone number- do not list your employer's phone number)
- Email address (primary personal email address, unless you are a current government employee)
- Social Security Number
- Country of citizenship (majority of federal and state government jobs require U.S. citizenship)
- Whether or not you qualify for the veteran's preference program
- If applicable: Reinstatement to a federal position eligibility
- If applicable: Highest federal pay grade position held

### Job Posting Information

- USAJOBS ID
- Job title
- Position pay grade (GS Scale)

### Education

List the highest degree you have attained or are working on. Then list your next highest attained degree. Normally, it is not advisable to list your high school graduation date; however, the federal government requires this information on a federal resume.

- Name of institution
- Field of study/major/degree (example: Business Administration)
- Your cumulative GPA at the institution
- The degree you earned and graduation date
- If you did not graduate, only list the number of credit hours earned while attending the institution and dates you attended the institution (MM/YYYY-MM/YYYY).

### Military Experience

Due to the Veteran's Preference Program, military experience should be listed first and separate from any civilian or other federal professional experience.

- Official job title with military specialization code
- Military branch
- Rank and enlistment status (E-#)
- City, State
- Dates stationed, and be as specific as possible (mm/yyyy)
- Number of hours worked per week
- Annual salary
- Base name
- Supervisor's name
- Supervisor's contact information (active phone number)
- Job duties (not the job description)

Choose several key words from the job posting and relate your job duties to those key words.

- Significant accomplishments
- Whether the hiring manager can contact this supervisor

### Non-Military Experience

Because you want to separate any military experience from federal and civilian experience, the federal and civilian professional experience should come after the military experience in a separate section. The information being presented in this section is similar to the information presented in the Military Experience section.

- Designated job title the employer would recognize on a verification call
  - If this is a federal position, include the series and GS pay grade with the job title.
- Employer's name
- City, state
- Dates employed and be as specific as possible (mm/yyyy)
- Number of hours worked per week
- Annual salary
- Supervisor's name and contact information (active phone number)
- Job duties (not a description)

Just like with the military experience, pick several key words from the job posting and tie everything that you say in your job duties back to those key words.

- Significant accomplishments
- Whether or not the hiring manager can contact this employer/supervisor

### Other Qualifications

This section is closely related to your Skills Profile, Certifications and Licensure, Formal Training, and Awards and Recognition sections within a civilian resume. Just like a civilian resume, it is best to "sign-post" these various sections. Examples of subheadings for this major section include:

- Skills Profile
- Language Skills



# The Anatomy of a Federal Cover Letter

X

Job Posting ID

Position Title

Applicant's Information

Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip

Date

Employer's Information

Hiring Manager

Position Title

Agency

Street Address

City, State, Zip

Dear Hiring Manager (use this only if you don't know the hiring manager's name),

Introductory Paragraph (Introduce yourself and your interest to be employed by the prospective employer. State the position that you are applying for here.)

Body (Briefly review your unique skills and experience, and how these qualifications make you the ideal candidate for the position and employer.)

Closing (Thank the employer for taking the time to review your cover letter and resume. Provide a follow-up date here, as well.)

Sincerely,

Applicant's Name

Job/Position Title

Attachments (1)

Resume (3 Pages)

# Professional Portfolios for a Lasting Impression

Now comes the easy part of your civilian job search. While simple to compile, the portfolio is very important, primarily because it is a lost art. A well-thought-out portfolio proves to the employer that you can actually do the tasks you touted in your resume. It is a sampling of your best, most unique work.

XI

There is no right way or wrong way to create a portfolio. What matters most is that it is professional in appearance and shows the great quality of work that you are capable of producing. And because you have already created a resume and a cover letter, you're already a step ahead, with items that belong within the portfolio.

A sampling of pieces that could be included in your portfolio includes the following:

- Resume
- Cover letter
- Cover page
- Professional philosophy statement
- Letters of recommendation
- Samples of your work (this could be projects completed within your course work)
- Honors and awards
- Copy of college transcripts
- Photocopy of actual diplomas
- Professional licenses and certifications
- Professional development activities/certificates of completion
- Any research that you completed
- Any publications you helped create
- Any reports you authored that may be helpful (this is especially helpful in the technical fields)
- Listing/proof of volunteer work (letters of appreciation from the organization work very well for this, as do photos)
- Letters of appreciation from employers, customers, even co-workers
- Professional references
- Personal references

The most common way to organize a portfolio is to put the information in a professional binder and separate the information for quick review by the potential employer. Just like your resume, the portfolio is geared toward one career field/job type. There are no templates, because it is a reflection of you and your work. So make sure your portfolio clearly reflects why you are a superior candidate.



# Now What?

So now that you have given this guide an in-depth read, are you ready to put your transition plan in motion? Earning your degree is one of the first steps.

Visit Grantham's website at [www.grantham.edu](http://www.grantham.edu) or call us at (855) 271-7808, and we will be happy to share information on our accredited online degree programs or tuition assistance possibilities.

**We look forward to hearing from you!**



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