



# AHIMA<sup>®</sup>

## CAREER PREP WORKBOOK

AHIMA<sup>®</sup>  
American Health Information  
Management Association<sup>®</sup>



## INTRODUCTION

The Career Prep Workbook is your one-stop shop for planning, preparing, and initiating your job search in the HIM industry.

In this workbook, you'll find all the tools you need to ensure you're prepared throughout your job search. Whether it's choosing the most effective words for your resume, understanding how to maximize your internship or job shadowing experience, or how to use social media in your job search, you'll find it all here.

We understand that the thought of beginning your job search post-college, or looking for a new job after years out of the industry, can be daunting. It doesn't have to be! By using AHIMA's Career Prep Workbook, you'll actually be working through some of the steps to make each of these tasks a little easier.

If you're starting from scratch, we recommend you start at the beginning and work your way through the workbook. If you require guidance on specific steps, choose the section that best fits your situation and start there.

We hope you find AHIMA's Career Prep Workbook an invaluable addition to our array of career prep tools.

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# Mapping Out Your Career: What do I want to do with my life?

*In this section you will work on developing your “personal brand” and begin planning for your HIM job search.*

- I. Questionnaire on Career Goals
- II. What’s Your Personal Brand?
- III. Spring into Action for an HIM Career
- IV. Career Map

## **i. Questionnaire on Career Goals (ACTIVITY)**

Keep in mind that the 21st century reality is that a professional career journey more resembles a career jungle gym than a straight path. These exercises will help you think through ideal situations, while allowing you to take side roads from time to time. That’s okay! When you keep your eye on your ultimate ideal job, you’ll put the pieces together and reach it eventually...until your wishes change.

### **Long-term Vision Exercise**

Set a timer for 60 seconds, then list as many answers to this question as you can in that time: What would you like to achieve, attain, and obtain in life?

Decide what is important—the “why”—about each of these answers. What do you VALUE about what you want? For example, if you have listed “travel to Spain,” perhaps you value travel, adventure, different cultures, another meaning, or a combination of things.

<b>I want...</b>	<b>Because...</b>

**What job description or title would you like to have in five years? What about ten years down the road?**

**What type of problems do you hope to solve in the future? Think big!**

**What do you want people to say about you when you're gone? What legacy do you want to leave behind?**

**Immediate Steps**

In the previous table, look for repetition or patterns in the values you have listed in the “Because...” column. Perhaps you listed some of the following:

Advancement/promotion	Growth	Physical challenge
Adventure	Family	Pleasure
Affection (love and caring)	Freedom	Power/authority
Arts	Helping others	Privacy
Being around people	Honesty	Public service
Challenging problems	Honor Independence	Purity
Change/variety	Influencing others	Quality
Close relationships	Inner harmony	Recognition
Community Competition	Integrity Intelligence	Reputation
Cooperation	Involvement	Responsibility
Country	Job tranquility	Security
Creativity	Knowledge	Self-respect
Decisiveness	Leadership Location	Serenity
Democracy	Loyalty	Sophistication
Ecological awareness	Market position	Stability
Economic security	Meaningful work	Status
Efficiency	Money	Supervising
Ethical practice	Nature	others Time
Excellence	Order	freedom Truth
Excitement	Personal	Wealth
Fame	development	Wisdom
Fast living	Personal growth	Work with others
Financial gain		Working alone

- ✓ Do your best to narrow down your list to your five core values.

**For the position or title you strive to have next, research the following:**

**What are requirements? Who is your competition? What qualifications do they have?**

**What do you need to accomplish to get to your ultimate position goal? (education, skills, experience)**

**Complete the following table to think about what you are looking for in your next job. Realize that you may not know each of these until the option is presented to you. It's still a good idea to think through the basics.**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>For example</b>	<b>Best choice</b>	<b>Neutral choice</b>	<b>Unacceptable choice</b>
<b>Geographic location</b>	Chicago			
<b>Work schedule</b>	8:30 a.m.–5 p.m. 30 min			
<b>Type of organization</b>	lunch Private hospital			
<b>Company size</b>	500 employees			
<b>Type of role/title</b>	Compliance/Risk Management			
<b>(Other criteria)</b>				
<b>(Other)</b>				

## ii. Build Your Personal Brand and Career

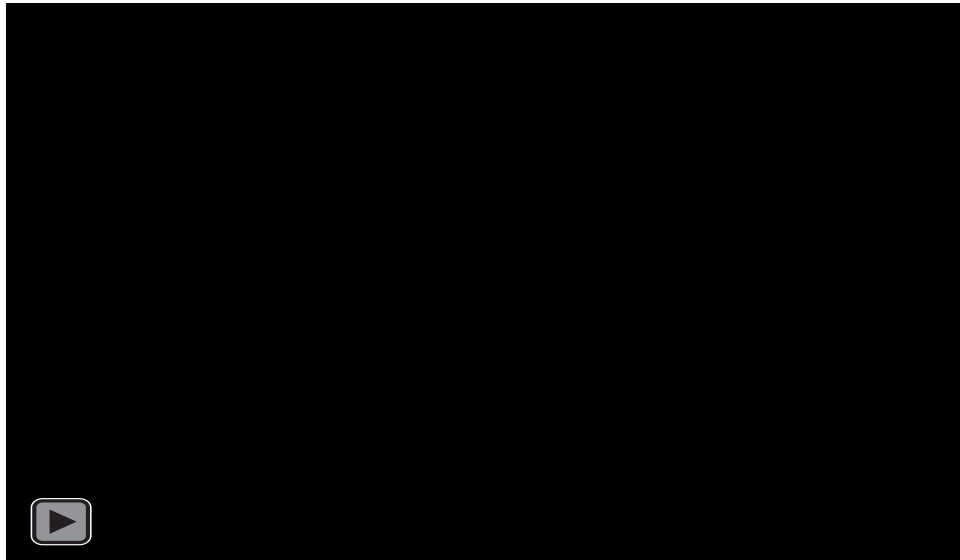
Your personal brand as a health information professional is what you communicate about yourself and how you showcase your abilities. A strong brand can help raise your profile within your organization and support your career goals.

Our AHIMA member-exclusive site, [Brand Builder](#), provides tools and tips to help you get started building yours.

### Rock your LinkedIn Profile

How you describe yourself and engage with others online is just as important as how you do it in person. Put your best foot forward with a LinkedIn profile that stands out from the crowd and reflects your personality and experience.

Learn how to be a LinkedIn rockstar in this presentation on LinkedIn best practices from **Darryl Robinson**, social media manager at AHIMA.



Resources on Career Success through Personal Branding

***Career Distinction: Stand Out by Building Your Brand\**** William Arruda

***Stand Out*** Marcus Buckingham

***Get-Real Leadership*** Harry S. Campbell

***Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn without Blowing It*** Peggy Klaus

***Work Strong: Your Personal Career Fitness System***  
Peter Weddle

**\*Lyne Tumlinson, author of this article, is certified in the personal branding methodology described in this book.**

[Marcus Buckingham](#), who helped start the Strengths movement at Gallup, has also developed a simple-to-understand tool to help individuals realize what makes them different than others in the same job or profession.

The *Stand Out* assessment helps you increase your work performance by pinpointing your comparative advantage and showing you actions you can take to capitalize on this advantage. Buckingham examined data from those who completed StrengthsFinder 2.0 and found patterns in the results.

In *Stand Out*, the 34 strengths from StrengthsFinder are integrated into nine Roles. The assessment measures how well you match those Roles and reveals your lead Role and secondary Role. These top two Roles are the focal point of all your talents and skills and your instinctive way of making a difference in your work

As an online assessment, this process is a simple and quick method for self-understanding. A similarly easy online tool for collecting outside information about your leadership styles and skills that can be translated into your personal brand can be found at <https://www.ahima.org/brand-builder/brand-builder/>.

Developed by Harry S. Campbell, author of *Get-Real Leadership*, this tool simply asks those you request to describe you in seven words.

Keep in mind that the external perception of your Personal Brand—how others see you—is the basis of finding a job and succeeding in it. Being satisfied and fulfilled in that job comes from knowing your strengths and using them as much as possible as you work with others whose strengths are your weaknesses. The best news is, if you learn how to effectively guide your brand, you can also control your life in ways that were never before possible.

The member-exclusive site, **Brand Builder**, provides tools and tips to help you get started building your personal brand and career.

The screenshot displays the AHIMA Brand Builder website. At the top left is the AHIMA logo. The main header area features a large image of a smiling woman with glasses and the text: "Build Your Personal Brand and Career". Below this, there is a sub-section titled "Hitting the HI Basics" with a brief introductory paragraph. Further down, there are three distinct content blocks: 1) "Use the Health Information Lexicon to craft your story." with a "View Lexicon" button and a short paragraph about translating information into strategic insights. 2) "Rock your LinkedIn Profile" with a "View Article" button and a paragraph about optimizing one's LinkedIn profile. 3) A video player titled "How to Rock Your LinkedIn Profile" with a video thumbnail showing "8. Volunteering" and a list of bullet points: "Shows hiring managers your work ethic, and highlights your passions", "Valuable if you're changing careers", and "Transferable skills from volunteering also come up in search results".



**AHIMA**

**Tell Your Story**

What words form your health information (HI) story? How do you describe the profession and yourself as a HI professional?

We like to call this resource the HI Lexicon: a central vocabulary that highlights strong words that stand out and reflect the value of HI.

Using bold words like those offered in the HI Lexicon sections below communicates the powerful impact you have and the importance of the work you do.

Whether you are updating your resume, creating a LinkedIn profile, developing a presentation, or engaging in a casual hallway conversation with organizational leadership, including some of the strong words below can help to underscore your value.

**Career Tools**

As an AHIMA member, you have an array of exclusive career resources at your fingertips. We've rounded up some of them here for quick access.

- Career Guidance
- Career Assist Job Board
- Career Prep Workbook
- Career Prep Webinars
- Career Map

**Networking**

Networking helps you expand your knowledge, stay on top of the latest trends, and build valuable relationships with peers and mentors in the health information field.

Networking can be an intimidating career step to take for some. There are many ways to start building rewarding relationships with other passionate professionals. You can volunteer for a committee at work, get involved with advocacy efforts, reach out to others via LinkedIn, join the AHIMA members-only digital platform Access, or request an informational interview with a professional you admire.

- Attend an Event**  
Attending events, either virtually or in person, is a great way to expand your network. You will meet many other like-minded professionals eager to
- Connect with Your Component Association**  
Visit the Component Associations info page for information on your local organization. Component
- Look for Volunteer Openings**  
Volunteering opportunities with your local component association connects you with other health information professionals in your area, and

**Exploring Career Development in Health Information**

### iii. Spring into Action—Landing Your First Job

Even if graduation is a long way off, you need to start planning for your future health information management (HIM) career now. The tools and knowledge are available, but they can't help you if you don't use them!

Here are several tips for setting up an HIM career plan and sticking with it.

#### A. Outline a realistic career plan.

Simply saying you want to work in the healthcare industry is a vague goal. HIM is a vast and varied field, offering multiple roles to new and experienced workers. Review the job boards of the larger HIM companies and organizations, reading the job descriptions to get a better idea of what's out there. Next, perform basic Internet research on the specific duties of the positions. Note what appeals to you, and adjust your studies and strategy accordingly. Where do you want to work? Where do you see yourself at this time next year? Or for the next 5 or 10 years?

Consider the realities of the job market. Just in case things don't proceed the way you'd like them to, have an emergency plan in place. What if you can't find your HIM dream job? What fields can you work in while you continue toward your larger goal? Create a list of alternative career plans on the side.

Take advantage of your school's resources and advisors. They can offer not only guidance and help in creating your grand plan, but also provide opportunities for practice interviews and feedback on your resume and cover letter.

Refer to [AHIMA Career Map](#) and [Career Assist: Job Bank](#) to help research a realistic career plan. Remember there is no guarantee of getting a job. The more effort you put in upfront the more likely you will find a job.

#### B. Evaluate yourself, honestly.

Take stock of what you have to offer an employer and create a personal database. List your skills, strengths, previous jobs, duties, projects, achievements, and more. Arrange it all to show the way you developed and grew in your career and knowledge. Focus on results, not promises. If you've achieved a noteworthy goal, established a best practice, started a club or similar HIM-focused accomplishment, note that. Omit nothing, no matter how long ago you held a job or irrelevant a skill might seem. Use social media or even a phone call to reach out to former classmates, colleagues, and employers. They may remember something you've forgotten.

Unlike a resume, a personal database is a comprehensive, rather than a simply descriptive, account of your abilities. Use it to chart where you need improvement, or to mentally prepare to answer interview questions. It's inspirational, too! You may be starting out at the bottom, but that doesn't mean you don't have a lot to offer.

### **C. Diversify and gain experience to build up your resume.**

Check your school's internship and volunteer postings for HIM and related workplaces. Through volunteering, you can pick up skills, raise your profile, build mentor/student relationships, and stick in employers' minds as a potential future hire. Most importantly, it's a chance to see if the work and environment are a good fit for you.

Remember to ask if you can follow an HIM professional through his or her work day. It's not hands-on experience, but it will give you a chance to see the inner workings of the profession you've chosen. Other ways to gain experience is to:

- ✓ Join your local CSA
- ✓ Join AHIMA Volunteer Groups
- ✓ Look for summer jobs/contract jobs in Health Information service departments, ie scanning notes, record culling and data reconciliation
- ✓ Look into volunteer community programs overseas or locally to donate time to help the less fortunate. There are many third world countries that have no medical record systems so any sort of help is needed. Plus, it looks fantastic on your resume.

### **D. Network.**

As you'll learn, there's a difference between school and work. The biggest benefit of pursuing an HIM degree, however, is the amount of cross-over between the two worlds. Your professors and teachers should be your first points of contact within the industry. They can provide advice and put you in touch with the right people or offer advice on the best networking events to attend. Cultivate relationships with them, and discover who else you should be speaking to within their circles. Don't forget about your PPE contacts as well.

Follow up with any promising leads by e-mail, incorporating a thank-you and polite inquiry about available positions. AHIMA offers a [mentor match program](#) where you can be matched with HIM professionals already in the workforce. Another great networking resource is AHIMA's Annual Convention. It is a great way to meet many of our thousands of members, vendors, and guest speakers. You can attend Student Academy, career fairs or just simply learn more about where HIM is heading in the future.

### **E. Join.**

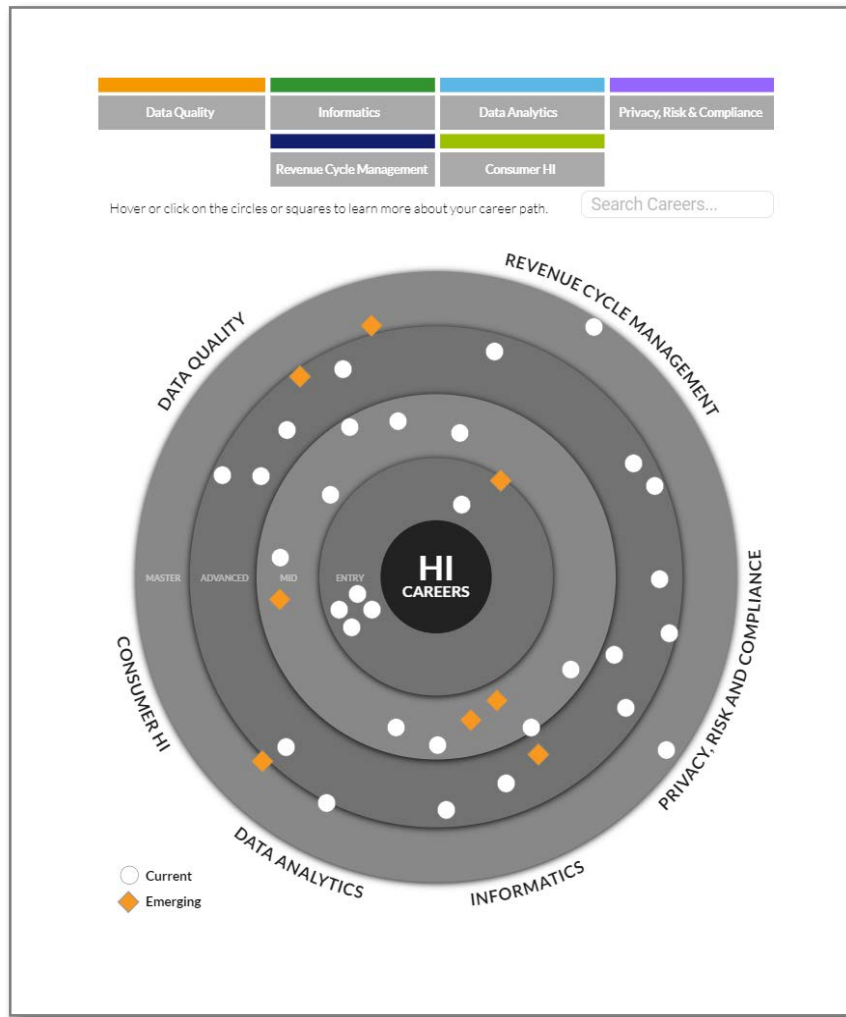
If your school has a student HIM club, join it. If it doesn't, start one up and reach out to outside companies and organizations through requests for tours, job shadowing opportunities, volunteer work, guest speakers, and more. You'll build contacts for the future, and interactions with outside firms mark you as a potential leader in the field.

Other professional associations, particularly local ones, can also give you a leg up. Such groups don't necessarily need to be affiliated with HIM. Organizations servicing information technology, administration, management, computer science, and other professionals all support your future career!

iv. [Career Map](#)

The [HIM Career Map](#) is an innovative tool designed to show the wide scope of the HIM landscape in a more tangible and interactive way. There are 71 jobs on the map (64 current roles and 7 emerging job roles), each complete with a description and details on skills, responsibilities, salary ranges, and the education and work experience required.

Whether you are an established HIM professional, a recent graduate, or a student just getting started, your career is important to you. You may wonder what the next step in your HIM career should be, or may want help learning how you can get your foot in the door at an entry level job. You can investigate the possibilities and explore your future using the [Career Map](#). Make sure to visit the career map today and start mapping out your career.



## Preparing for the Perfect Job: Purpose: How Do I Stand Apart from the Competition?

*In this section, you will learn how to prepare to apply for jobs through internships, learn tips to create an eye-catching resume and cover letter, plus how social media can affect your job search.*

- I. Making an Internship Translate to Employers
- II. Bridging the Gap from Student to Employee
- III. AHIMA Virtual Lab (VLab)
- IV. AHIMA Mentorship
- V. Creating a Resume
- VI. Five Tips for Critiquing Your Own Resume
- VII. Action Words to Use in Your Resume
- VIII. Creating an Effective Cover Letter
- IX. Want a Job? Do it Right Socially!

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### **i. Making Your Internships Translate to Employers**

*Adapted from CAREEREALISM. To access the original article, visit: <http://www.careerealism.com/how-internships-translate-employers>*

Internships are an excellent way to get your career started. An internship can be a major stepping stone to working with a company you admire, or to gain experience in a field that's relevant to your dream job. They are typically the first step in making connections and networking with other professionals. Not all internship experiences are the same. Even though you have been hired to work for the company, it is your responsibility to make your experience meaningful and valuable.

How can you ensure a successful experience? Communication! By setting goals and defining how you see your experience with their company, you can rest assured the internship will help you in your future endeavors.

Listed below are tips to help make your internship satisfying and relevant:

- ✓ Schedule a meeting with your supervisor: This should be one of the first things you do upon starting your internship. This meeting serves to set a structure and plan for your time there, and lets you see what you'll be working on at their company.
- ✓ Offer up suggestions on projects you can "own": Having ownership through the start and finish of a project is not only rewarding, but it also provides concrete evidence of your abilities. The experience is valuable, and the more you are able to take on and complete successfully, the more you'll have to add to your resume and discuss with future employers.
- ✓ Determine project outcomes: Once your projects have been defined, work with your supervisor to determine what the outcomes should look like. This will ensure you have measurable targets.
- ✓ Develop new skills: Ask your supervisor if you can attend meetings, rotate into other roles, or shadow others to observe other experiences. See if you can set meetings with other employees to see how they work to develop new skills or continue to develop their education.
- ✓ Network: Use this internship to build a professional network. Connect via LinkedIn, if you have an up-to-date profile. Use your time at the company to connect to key industry people or thought leaders. These can become your biggest advocates!
- ✓ End with an exit interview: On your last day with the company, schedule a performance review meeting to discuss how they think you performed, as well as what you learned, what you accomplished, and if you met your goals.
- ✓ Remember that not all internships can accommodate these kinds of requests. They are going out of their way to help you gain a valuable experience, so take what you can get from the opportunity placed in front of you.

## ii. [Bridging the Gap from Student to Employee](#)

Transitioning from college to the work force in the HIM field can be a difficult process. This article explores ideas that can help you bridge that gap.

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## iii. **AHIMA VLab®**

If you graduated from an academic program which used AHIMA Virtual Lab (VLab) in their HIM courses, be sure to highlight your technical skills using the various software applications. Since you already know how to use the applications, you require less on-the-job training and can help your potential new employer get further, faster. This can be a critical differentiator—setting you apart from your competition.

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## iv. **AHIMA Mentorship**

Do you need help landing your first job or advancing your career? Mentors can help you answer tough questions about your career path or get perspective on the industry. They can help you navigate your career, or even help you network. It's important to choose a mentor whose expertise and attitude fit with you and your goals.

Take advantage of the AHIMA mentor match program—once you enroll as a mentee, you can begin searching through our database of experienced mentors who can answer your questions, provide insight, and offer guidance about advancing your career in HIM.

[Enroll today!](#)

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## v. **Creating a Resume Webinar (ACTIVITY)**

[Resumes for Results—Get that Interview](#)

This webinar, facilitated by Lyne Tumilson, CAE, discusses how to create an eye-catching resume that will really sell your skills and help land you an interview. Please enter password: 504125 when prompted.

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## vi. **Five Tips for Critiquing Your Own Resume**

After you have soaked up the information in the “Resumes for Results—Get that Interview!” webinar and its related handout, you will have a good start on acquiring the best information. Here are five tips to challenge your thinking and ensure you stand out on your application:

1. You might not actually need a resume.

Some might argue that a resume is a relic of the past; a non-technological way to represent what you offer a potential employer. With social media as the latest/greatest source of information for all things, including hiring and recruitment, why not simply load a magnificent summary into your LinkedIn profile and let it go at that?

The reality is, you need both. When you submit a winning, easy-to-read resume AND also post the pertinent information about your skills, your passions and your experience, you have a higher chance of being found and of standing out among old-style (boring!) resumes that feature nebulous tasks that are irrelevant to the potential position.

2. You have less than eight seconds to convince your reader to put your resume in the pile to consider instead of the pile to toss. What will it take to make the cut?  
How much on a piece of paper (in a large stack of similar paper) would be read in eight seconds? Make sure to format your resume so the most important, relevant, and outstanding information catches the eye first. Include keywords, especially for a large organization utilizing an automated Applicant Tracking System (ATS). The next two tips include key points to highlight. That vital eight seconds certainly presents a good argument for customizing your resume and highlights for every application.
3. Think carefully: Who/what do they want for this position?  
Do your homework! Research can be done on the organization’s website, on LinkedIn, from networking connections (best source!), and connecting the dots with those inside your profession.  
Keep in mind, most hiring managers will not hire who they need (nor do they want to be told who or what they’re lacking), but who or what they “want.” Many will be looking as much for a fit with their organizational culture as for the required experience. So part of your successful homework will be to have a clue of how that culture will impact you and your best work.
4. Think carefully: Who/what are you offering the hiring manager?  
Most of us have more than one facet to offer a potential employer. Which of your strengths fit what they want for this position?  
This is where your personal brand plays well. When you frame your stories from the basis of your strengths—those things that you’re skilled at AND that motivate you—and how you are viewed from the outside in (your reputation), you can share an unedited version of yourself that quickly and authentically creates trust and respect with a hiring manager.
5. Who will you enlist to help you develop the best application possible?  
Take time to find the right person; someone who is detail-oriented and knows you well, to carefully read your resume and keep it from being tossed in the recycle bin based on:
  - Typos—misspellings, punctuation, or syntax foibles. If this someone is a stickler about grammar and often complains about mistakes as they read the newspaper or Facebook, they’re perfect for this task!
  - Old-style descriptions of experience as tasks you did instead of positive results for your unit and the organization. Even worse is including what you were “responsible for” or “required” to do—both of which imply you were forced AND do not mean you accomplished the tasks!
  - Jargon that won’t be understood outside the realm of health information management. Presumably, your hiring manager will understand the lingo, but your application often passes through Human Resources first. Don’t make assumptions!

In summary, to be sure you are able to submit the best possible resume, as well as adapt it for social media profiles, avoid a last minute throw-together adventure. Just as you’ve taken years to develop your professional knowledge and experience, also take the time to develop your potential communication on your results of thoughtful research and relationship-building.

**vii. Action Words to Use in Your Resume**

Achieved	Calculated	Extracted	Honored as	Negotiated	Resolved	Suggested
Approved	Computed	Engineered	Identified	Observed	Reviewed	Taught
Accepted	Contained	Enabled	Illustrated	Obtained	Revised	Transferred
Accumulated	Coached	Encouraged	Imagined	Operated	Revitalized	Translated
Acted	Competent	Explained	Improvised	Organized	Restructured	Tested
Advised	Communicated	Eliminated	Improved	Originated	Reconciled	Treated
Allocated	Conceptualized	Established	Initiated	Oversaw	Repaired	Tolerated
Appraised	Created	Educated	Innovated	Participated	Replaced	Trouble-shot
Appointed	Counseled	Expedited	Inspired	Performed	Reported	Tutored
Assessed	Classified	Elected	Instructed	Piloted	Remodeled	Terminated
Assisted	Catalogued	Employed	Interpreted	Perfected	Reduced	Trained
Acquired	Compiled	Endured	Integrated	Persuaded	Reversed	Tabulated
Alleviated	Composed	Enforced	Interviewed	Planned	Recorded	Understood
Anticipated	Charted	Enlarged	Invented	Predicted	Retrieved	Utilized
Applied	Constructed	Entertained	Investigated	Prepared	Reinforced	United
Amended	Completed	Estimated	Increased	Presented	Represented	Updated
Arranged	Dealt with	Exhibited	Influenced	Prevented	Recipient of	Upgraded
Authored	Decided	Experimented	Inspected	Problem-solved	Scheduled	Verified
Assembled	Defined	Expressed	Informed	Processed	Selected	Validated
Assigned	Delegated	Evaluated	Introduced	Produced	Serviced	Wrote
Attained	Delivered	Experienced	Implemented	Promoted	Shared	
Addressed	Demonstrated	Enlarged	Instrumental	Proposed	Specified	
Advised	Designated	Effected	in Installed	Protected	Spoke	
Adapted	Designed	Expertise	Judged	Published	Supervised	
Audited	Determined	Familiar with	Justified	Pinpointed	Solved	
Acted/	Developed	Focused	Knowledge of	Prioritized	Supported	
Functioned	Devised	Formulated	Launched	Projected	Synthesized	
Bargained	Directed	Fabricated	Lectured	Purchases	Studied	
Briefed	Dispensed	Facilitated	Learned	Provided	Strengthened	
Budgeted	Displayed	Fashioned	Listened	technical	Streamlined	
Built	Distributed	Founded	Located Made	Proficient	Summarized	
Balanced	Documented	Familiarized	Maintained	Questioned	Surveyed	
Chaired	Dramatized	Finalized	Managed	Raised	Systematized	
Changed	Drafted	Fund-raised	Mapped	Reasoned	Structured	
Controlled	Diagnosed	Gathered		Recommended	Saved	
Consolidated	Decreased	Generated	Marketed	Recruited	Shaped	
Coordinated	Dispatched	Guided	Measured	Referred	Successful in	
Corresponded	Evaluated	Handled	Mediated	Regulated	Subcontracted	
Clarified	Executed	Headed	Monitored	Rehabilitated	Successful in	
Collected	Expanded	Helped	Motivated	Reorganized	Specialized in	
Conducted	Edited	Hired	Moderated	Researched	Sorted	
Critiqued	Examined	Hypothesized	Modified		Simplified	

Adapted from a list provided by the Community Employment Services, Ontario (<http://www.cesoxford.ca>)

### viii. Creating an Effective Cover Letter

A cover letter can sometimes be even more important than the resume. It will actually “sell” the reader on the idea of reading your resume so they will want to contact you for an interview. A cover letter should always accompany a resume and should always be individualized to the employer you are sending it to for review.

#### An effective cover letter:

- Is tailored to a specific position in a specific organization (matches your qualifications with the requirements of the job).
- Shows why the employer should read your resume.
- Demonstrates your knowledge of the hiring organization and the job.
- States how you heard about the opening, whether through a person, job listing, ad, etc.
- Is straightforward, businesslike, and positive.
- Is typed neatly, error-free, and on good quality paper.
- Is usually no more than one page.
- Is addressed to a specific person. Avoid using “Dear Sir” or “To Whom It May Concern.” If you are unsure to whom it is addressed, use “Dear Hiring Manager,” “Dear Manager,” “Dear Human Resources Manager,” or “Dear Recruiter.”

Cover letters can be used to inquire about job openings or apply for known vacancies. They should always be specifically tailored to respond to a particular company and/or job vacancy. This means you will need to create a different cover letter for each job you seek. To personalize your letters, research information about the business, and obtain the name of the person to whom you are writing.

Cover letters should usually consist of three paragraphs, as outlined below.

**The Opening**—State the position you are applying for and how you learned about the job.

**The Body**—Highlight your main qualifications, the skills and experiences that relate to the job (refer to, but don’t repeat your resume).

**The Closing**—Request an interview and suggest a time for your follow-up call or contact.





## SAMPLE 1

2100 E. Elm St.  
Hickory, NC 28602  
April 1, 2023

Ms. Barbara Moore  
Human Resources Director  
Metropolitan Hospital  
Winston-Salem, NC

Dear Ms. Moore:

Please consider this letter of application and resume for the position of clinical laboratory assistant you advertised in Sunday's Triad Times.

I am graduating from Catawba Valley Community College on June 6, 2014, and will be available for full-time employment immediately. As my resume indicates, I have completed my Associate Degree in Health Information Technology and have hospital experience. I feel that my education, experience, and skills qualify me for the position you advertised.

I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications and the position, and would like to call soon for an appointment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Jean R. Henry*

Jean R. Henry

Enclosure

## SAMPLE 2

532 City of Oaks Ave.  
Raleigh, NC 27602  
July 14, 2023

Mr. Ben Stewart  
Regional Manager, First In Food, Inc.  
222 Peabody Industrial Park  
Raleigh, NC 26702

Dear Mr. Stewart:

I was excited to learn that your company plans to open 10 new restaurants in this area by the end of next year. Your restaurants have always been a favorite of mine. A mutual acquaintance, Mary Walters, told me you are interested in hiring managers with proven organizational abilities, a willingness to learn, and a high level of commitment to the company's goals. I have these qualifications and have enclosed my resume for your review.

With two years' experience working in restaurant management and a recent Associate Degree in Business Administration, I have obtained the skills and knowledge required to succeed at First In Food, Inc. In my previous position, I led our team in winning "Restaurant of the Year" for two consecutive years. We also maintained the lowest employee turnover rate and increased sales by 25 percent.

I look forward to meeting you, learning more about your expansion in this area, and discussing my qualifications with you at your earliest convenience. I can be reached at 555-3456.

Sincerely,

*Mitch Stevens*

Mitch Stevens

Enclosure

**After submitting your cover letter and resume, be sure to follow up and schedule an appointment.**

**ix. Want a Job? Do It Right Socially! (ACTIVITY)**

If you're trying to get a high-level volunteer position, entry-level job, change industries, or get a networking contact from fellow industry professionals, present your best self online, just as you would in an interview or networking opportunity. Use these questions to check for best practices in your usage of this potentially very positive or very dangerous tool for making an impression. Answers can be found on the last page of this document.

1. When sending a professional e-mail message, which of the following are good practices:

Always include a subject line.

Give recipients a heads-up if the message contains quick-read information.

Never use all caps.

All of the above.

1. In an on line group discussion, take advantage of the opportunity to show your personal brand and expertise by correcting others' mistakes and calling them out when they are off base on a topic.

True                  False

3. Your online brand includes all of the information on the Internet with your name on it. To ensure consistency and to control your personal brand online, you should:

a. Do nothing. You don't need to worry about what's on Facebook or Twitter because you can set your privacy settings so no one outside your friends can see it. Focus on LinkedIn and other more "professional" social media site to put your brand out there.

b. Google yourself and verify that, at a minimum, all first page results are relevant to you and present you in a way that matches your professional goals.

c. Add posts frequently to discussions in a variety of social media sites for broader name recognition online.

4. Social media and the Internet in general are a fairly informal media for communication, so writing informally (i.e., like you speak) is the best way to approach posts.

True                  False

5. It is considered bad etiquette to request a LinkedIn connection with someone you don't know, even if that person can help you in your career.

True                  False

## **Finding the Perfect Job: How do I find the job of my dreams? How do I sell myself in an interview?**

*In this section, you'll learn how to effectively search for jobs and be given tips to succeed in both phone and in-person interviews.*

- i. Finding the Right Job
- ii. Tips to Ace Your Phone Interview
- iii. Personal Interviews
- iv. Using the S.T.A.R. Method to Answer Interview Questions
- v. Top 10 Interview Question Examples

### **i. Finding the Right Job**

When starting out in the HIM industry, you may find the positions you're qualified for might not be the ones you pictured yourself in after graduation. The best way to gain perspective is to view these jobs as important career stepping stones. Keeping this in mind, you should be able to find an entry level job that serves as a great opportunity to build your experience.

Keep these tips in mind while searching for your first job:

1. Take your time—Take time to personalize your cover letter and resume. It's hard to be an impressive candidate when you use a standard template or a copy letter copied from a job site. If you can show awareness of a job's requirements and how your skills match, you'll stand out.
2. Dedicate yourself to a certain number of applications—Don't apply for every job you come across. Focus on the specific positions, roles, job sites that are of great interest to you, and review the job descriptions. Instead of applying for many random positions and receiving very random results, by focusing your efforts you'll hear from the sort of entry-level positions that may lead to a bigger future in HIM.
3. Pace yourself—Set a goal for how many applications or resumes you will fill or send out each day. Start with a lower amount, such as two to three, and then add a few more as you get more comfortable with the process. If you can't find positions you'd like to apply for, then focus on new ways to get your name and brand out there. Set up informational interviews with people who have jobs that interest you. Write a new introduction on LinkedIn. Participate in volunteering or networking activities to get closer to someone in the field or the position you are interested in.
4. Check out HIM-specific job boards—Using these specific resources will help you weed through a ton of postings that may not be what you're looking for in a job. CareerBuilder and Monster are great when looking for advice and tips, but if you choose an HIM job board, you can work on compiling a list of employers you're interested in, with the thought that you'll check back on a weekly basis to see if any new positions have been added.
5. Don't forget local job boards—If you're looking in a specific region, contact your Component State Association (CSA). They may be able to help you find organizations where AHIMA members are working in your area. You can then add these to your list of employers to follow up with during your search. You can also try networking with area HIM professionals for their recommendations on finding job postings in the area.
6. Utilize AHIMA resources such as the Career Assist Job Bank, AHIMA Virtual Career Fair and Career Fair at Convention. AHIMA offers their Virtual Career Fair twice a year where you can virtually connect with employers who have opportunities available.

**ACTIVITY**

*Create a list of your top 20 sites to look for jobs. Go through this list below for each:*

Employer

Education and skills required

Skills I have to prepare me for these jobs

How to apply what I know to these jobs

Reasons these jobs stand out to me

Ways these jobs will prepare me for my future/goals

If you run into jobs that you would like to have in the future or are very interested in but not qualified for yet, outline your game plan to reach that position goal:

What's the position title?

How can I attain the skills I need to prepare for this position?

Are there any outside skills I can acquire to increase my marketability for this job and place me ahead of competitors? Do I

have contacts at this site that I can work with to learn more about what the organization values in new employees?

## ii. Tips to Ace Your Phone Interview

The phone interview is a way for employers to identify and screen candidates and narrow the pool of applicants invited for in-person interviews. This is an extremely important step to prepare for throughout your job search, as you could receive a call at any time asking if you have a few minutes to discuss the opportunity. It's important to make a great impression that leads to an in-person interview!

### Preparing for the interview:

1. Keep your resume in clear view, so it's easy to reference. Also be sure to have a pen and paper nearby to take notes.
2. Develop a short list of accomplishments you can review on the call.
3. Make sure you have privacy during the call. You do not want to worry about background noise, such as the TV or pets. If something distracting happens during the call, then be honest about it. The interviewer is human, too, and will appreciate your honesty.
4. If you're using your cell phone, make sure you're in an area with good service to avoid a dropped call or static.
5. Web access can be a plus. Having the company's website open can help you if you need to look up anything while interviewing. You do not want to sound distracted, though, or have the interviewer hear you typing.

### During the phone interview, it's best to:

1. Avoid smoking, chewing gum, drinking, or eating. Have a glass of water nearby, in case you need to fight dry mouth.
2. Smile! It's possible to sense a smile through the phone. You will project a more positive image, and your tone of voice will sound more excited and energetic.
3. Be sure to speak slowly and clearly.
4. Use the person's title when speaking with them. Only call them by their first name if they ask you to do so.
5. Don't interrupt the interviewer.
6. It's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts after you've been asked a question. You will be less likely to say as many "ums," "uhs," and "okays" this way.
7. Be sure to thank the interviewer, and remember the goal is to set up an in-person interview. Ask them if it's possible to meet face-to-face.
8. Follow up on the interview with a thank-you note about an hour or two after the interview. This reiterates your interest in the job, and shows you appreciate their time.

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## iii. Personal Interviews

Face-to-face interviews are where decisions are made! It may seem obvious, but dress professionally and come prepared. Bring several copies of your resume, a writing utensil, a notebook, references, questions, breath mints, a comb, and anything that will make you feel comfortable and prepared.

During the employment interview, the interviewer meets with the candidate to evaluate their skills, capabilities, and level of experience. When sitting in the hot seat, keep in mind that while there are no standard responses, your replies should be clear and relevant.

To answer questions appropriately, remember these guidelines:

- Listen carefully. If you feel the question is unclear, ask politely for clarification.
- Pause before answering to consider all facts that may substantiate your response.
- Always offer positive information.
- Get directly to the point. Ask if the listener would like to you to go into more detail before you do.
- Discuss only the facts needed to respond to the question.
- Do not open yourself to areas of questioning that could prove difficult to you.
- Be truthful, but do not offer unsolicited information.
- Focus and re-focus attention on your successes.

#### **iv. Using the S.T.A.R Method**

There is no doubt that job interviews are stressful. Across the board, from healthcare management to information systems management professionals, there typically is a common thread of interview questions asked by prospective employers. You only get one chance to “wow” the hiring manager, so why not practice your way to interview perfection? This article demystifies common interview questions and helps prepare you for interviewing success through advice from career service experts and using helpful interviewing strategies including the S.T.A.R. (Situation, Task, Action, and Result ) method.

##### **“Tell me about yourself.”**

Although this question sounds simple enough, many interviewees struggle with this question because they are not sure the type or amount of information to share. Essentially, the answer to this question should be your “elevator” speech and should last between 30 seconds and two minutes. Remember, although the hiring manager is asking about you, they are inquiring only about your professional history—not personal milestones. They do not want to know where you are from, if you have a family, your marital status, or what you like to do in your free time. They essentially want to know about your educational and career successes and professional goals. Examples are education, internships, volunteer work, and professional association memberships.

A great suggestion is to write out your “elevator” speech well before your interview and practice, practice, practice! That way, you will know exactly what you are going to say and will not feel like you’re rambling on about yourself with no direction.

##### **“What do you know about the company?”**

Essentially, the hiring manager wants to know if you have done your homework about the organization. Do you honestly want to work for this specific company, or are you just out applying to every job you see? By doing your research beforehand, you will also be able to ask specific questions about the organization. For example, if there is a change in senior leadership, you will be able to note that when speaking with the hiring manager and ask the follow-up question on how or if that will impact the way in which the company operates. It is imperative to do your research on the organization before going into an interview to demonstrate your commitment to be hired.

##### **“What are your salary expectations?”**

The dreaded money questions! It is taboo for an interviewee to ask how much the position pays, but the interviewee will undoubtedly be asked about the prospective employee’s salary expectations. To be prepared to answer this question, it is very important to do your research. You may want to check a variety of sources such as [salary.com](http://salary.com), [indeed.com](http://indeed.com), and [bls.gov](http://bls.gov) to be able to come up with an appropriate salary range. You do not necessarily have to answer with a specific dollar amount, but at least be prepared to share a range that you are comfortable being paid.

##### **“Walk me through your resume.”**

This question sheds a lot of light on the frequency and reason you change jobs. This question elicits a great answer to how you handle change and stressful situations. If you move for minor reasons, the company may think you have a difficult time handling change and stress.

Make sure you explain each job you’ve held and why you left. A common mistake for interviewees is to read through the entire resume word for word. The person you are interviewing with can read, and they want you to give them a little more “color” about your professional history.

### “Why should I hire you?”

This is your opportunity to sell yourself! Talk about your talent, skills and knowledge, and highlight your strengths. As the company, they want to hear that both parties are on the same page. The company is looking to hear from you, and why you truly feel you are the most qualified candidate. Your response should align with your previous answers.

### “How would a reference describe you/your work ethic?”

The company wants to know what type of working relationship you had with your previous boss and coworkers. This question can also call out individuals who are not team players or comfortable handling difficult situations. However, when answering this question correctly, it can showcase your strengths. Remember, when the company checks your references, you want to make sure the answer provided is consistent with what your references provide.

### “Tell me about a time when...”

It can be said that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior; therefore, more and more employers are using behavioral-based questions to learn about past situations interviewees have encountered, how you handled those situations, and the outcomes. Questions like, “Tell me about a time you demonstrated communication skills,” or “Tell me about a time you solved a difficult problem that could have had a big impact,” are two examples of behavior-based questions that are frequently used. These queries can easily be the most difficult to answer during your interview if you don’t know how to properly approach them and haven’t done your homework before the interview.

In order to cover everything the interviewer wants, answer behavioral-based questions using the S.T.A.R. method: Situation, Task, Action, and Result. First, give the interviewer the background information (Situation). Then, explain the Task you were given to complete, and then discuss the Action(s) you took to tackle the undertaking. Finally, describe the end product of the Result.

Here is an example of a behavioral-based question and an answer using the S.T.A.R. technique:

Question: Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership skills.

Answer:

- S** During my last quarter of school, I completed an internship at Memorial Hospital in the Health Information Management Department. I was the first and only intern the department ever had, and they decided they wanted to continue with an official internship program.
- T** In order to successfully launch this program, my supervisor asked me to create and administer a training curriculum for the new, incoming interns.
- A** To complete this task, first, I outlined all the procedures the new interns would need to learn about such as HIPAA standards, how to operate the 10-line phone system, and how to use the health record index and storage system. Next, I created a three-day training agenda covering these topics. Finally, I facilitated it to train four new interns.
- R** The training was a huge success. On a survey completed after the training, all four interns rated the program a 10 out of 10 in the areas of usefulness and creativity. In addition, each intern rated my communication and leadership styles as “Excellent.”

Some of you may be thinking, how could I possibly cover all these areas when put on the spot during an interview? The answer is preparation. You know the position and field you are seeking, so think about the key skills and qualifications the employer is looking for in an employee. Pay attention to the job description. If the qualifications list “strong oral communications skills,” then you can probably guess the interviewer will ask you about your oral communication skills during the interview. Therefore, doing your research beforehand will allow you to anticipate the questions hiring managers may ask. If you can anticipate the questions then you can prepare answers based on situations in your work, school, or volunteer experiences that can speak to those skills.



**(ACTIVITY)**

Create a list of great experiences that you want to share, or could pull from, during an interview. Explain each of those using the S.T.A.R. Method.

**“Why did you leave your previous position?”**

Employers ask this question to avoid a mis-hire. Asking this question allows interviewers to learn about your desires or intentions with the new position. You must be prepared to answer this question with brevity. If you start rambling on as you answer, it may seem like you’re hiding something.

Think about what excites you about the position you are interviewing for currently. Here are two more things to remember when preparing for this question, along with some examples of “bad” and “better” answers:

**1. Don’t bad mouth your previous employer or boss.**

Bad: “My supervisor never gave me a chance to spread my wings. He was a micro-manager and had me doing the same projects over and over. I’m looking for a position where I can have some independence and be trusted.”

Better: “In my previous position, I did not create and implement multiple projects both independently and as a team. With this new position, it appears as though I will be able to experiment with variety and creativity.”

**2. Don’t lie...be honest...(just not brutally honest).**

Bad: “I was fired because my supervisor thought I didn’t have the entrepreneurial spirit required for the position. I didn’t make enough cold calls, and I had a hard time closing deals with clients because I wasn’t sold on the product myself.”

Better: “It was decided that I was not the best fit for the organization. I was having difficulty making my sales goals each quarter, and they really needed someone who was passionate about sales. That is why this new position is exciting, because it focuses on customer relationships and satisfaction rather than on selling and transactions.”

**i. Top 10 Interview Question Examples**

1. Tell me what you consider to be your greatest strengths/weaknesses?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. Why do you want this job?
4. Have you ever had difficulty with a [customer/client/supervisor/colleague]? How did you resolve the conflict?
5. What qualities or attributes do you feel will most contribute to your career successes?
6. Why did you apply for this position/with this company?
7. What do you consider your greatest accomplishments?
8. Describe a situation where your results were not up to your professor/supervisor’s expectations. What happened? What action did you take to remedy the situation?
9. Give me an example of a time you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
10. Do you have any questions for me?

## **Accepting the Perfect Job: I Landed My Dream Job—Now What?**

*Learn what to do when starting with a new company, and how to make your job work for you.*

- i. The Dos and Don'ts of Starting a New Job
- ii. 50 Ways to Enhance Your Career

### **i. Dos and Don'ts of Starting a New Job**

Adapted from: HR Ringleader: The Dos and Don'ts of Starting a New Job and Al Casey's Rules for Success

When starting a new job, you want the transition to be easy and positive. Here are some suggestions to make that possible:

- ✓ Dress appropriately: Find out if there is an office dress code and stick to it. Jeans might not fly at your new job. It's important to look professional in your dress and mannerisms.
- ✓ Be yourself and be friendly: It's important to show your coworkers who you are personally and professionally. Be genuine and sincere, and use the first few months to work on building relationships. If you are active in social media, be sure that your online persona is one that you want your employer to see.
- ✓ Let others see you: When you start, get an organization chart of your company or department and walk around introducing yourself to people.
- ✓ Listen and learn: Don't try to show off your knowledge. Be open to learning from your new colleagues.
- ✓ Don't stress: You're new, and there is a room for error when learning a new job or skill or system. It takes time to get up to speed.
- ✓ Journal: Write down important things that you learn about the company and culture. These pieces of information maybe be of value later!
- ✓ Listen, Observe, Learn: Once you've been able to observe your new company for a few months, you can really start to assess the current situation. Things that you have done with your old company or in your old job may not work in your new company/position. Don't assume that your way is the right way, or that you have all the answers. There is plenty you can learn.
- ✓ Ask questions: Find out who you need to get to know. Make appointments to meet important people in your first couple months. Find out how you are going to be working with these people, and if there are things you can do help these people in their jobs.
- ✓ Do what you say you will do: If you take something on, make sure you are able to complete it to the best of your ability. If you can't, let it be known.
- ✓ Don't get buried: Make sure you have time for a personal life.
- ✓ Don't try and do everything yourself: Delegating is a great skill to learn and know. Taking on too much will just cause you more stress and a quicker burnout. Relying on teammates and showing that you can be relied on is important to being a team player.
- ✓ Ask for help: And show your appreciation when you get it.

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### **ii. [50 Ways to Enhance Your Career](#)**

The *Journal of AHIMA* compiled a list of tips for success from volunteers and staff to use on the job, or as part of a career plan. Also, read about the career turning points from AHIMA members.

## Changing Careers and Moving Forward: *How Do I Start Over in HIM?*

*In this section, we discuss changing careers and the importance of continuing education.*

- i. Your Job Search: Getting Ready for the Ride
- ii. Climbing Higher: Bridging the Gap to Advanced Degrees in HIM
- iii. Continuing Education: Resources for Getting Started and Moving Forward
- iv. Professional Development: How to Get Started, How to Keep Growing

### **i.** [Your Job Search: Getting Ready for the Ride](#)

It is estimated that 17% of Americans changed jobs last year—and HIM professionals are no exception to this statistic. If you are hoping to make a job change soon, it's time to get a plan in place.

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### **ii.** [Climbing Higher: Bridging the Gap to Advanced Degrees in HIM](#) Bridging the Gap **(ACTIVITY)**

1. Based on the article above, which of these is NOT a factor for students choosing a college?

- Job placement rates
- Opportunities the college provides for internships
- Frequency of career fairs
- Quality of career placement services

1. Which of these are examples of career explorations that the article mentioned?

- Job shadowing
- Practica/professional practice
- Internships

All of the above

1. Based on the above reading, fill in the blank: “Some school programs require an applicant to conduct a/an \_\_\_\_\_ with a practitioner prior to accepting the student into the program.”

- Information interview
- Survey
- Experiment

All of the above

1. Based on the above reading, fill in the blank: “Without questions, maintaining the \_\_\_\_\_ of health information presents a challenge to this initiative.”

- Integrity
- Privacy
- Safety
- Quality

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**iii.** [Continuing Education: Resources for Getting Started and Moving Forward](#)

HIM is a growing field so it is vital that you participate in ongoing continuing education and professional development. There are many opportunities offered by AHIMA such as the annual convention, specialty meetings and webinars to maintain your AHIMA credentials.

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**iv.** [Professional Development: How to Get Started, How to Keep Growing](#)

Professional development is a must for HIM professionals who want to keep on top of changes in the healthcare industry. Multiple venues provide these opportunities for those looking to advance their careers.

**Answer Page**

**Want a Job? Do It Right Socially! Quiz**

D, False, B, False, True

**Climbing Higher: Bridging the Gap to Advanced Degrees  
in HIM Quiz** C, D, A, B