

**ENG4C-A**



**Leaving Work**



# Introduction

In this lesson, you will read about leaving work. The readings consider different reasons for, and ways of, leaving work, and focus on the mental and emotional aspects of leaving. You will have the opportunity to plan and conduct an interview, and to provide written advice to a specific audience.

## What You Will Learn

After completing this lesson, you will be able to

- write a personal narrative about leaving
- conduct an interview
- solve an ethical problem
- give written advice to a specific audience
- use work-related vocabulary appropriately
- edit and proofread your writing for spelling and grammatical correctness

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# Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow

Nothing lasts forever, and that includes your job. Sooner or later, you will leave it. The choice may or may not be yours, but in any case, leaving a job is an important transition—almost as important as leaving a marriage. There are some of the same questions involved, too: How did things get to this point? What are my gains and what are my losses? Whose fault is it? Is something wrong with me? What are people saying? How will I live now?

Leaving is not an event but a process; one that begins well before the actual leaving and that continues well past it.



**Support Question**  
(do not send in for evaluation)

17. Write a personal narrative of 300–500 words about leaving something, for example, a job, a school, a home, or a relationship. Describe the events and decisions leading up to, and following your departure. Examine the effects it had on your relationships, your thoughts, and your emotions. Fill out the following planning table before starting to write.

<b>What did you leave?</b>	
<b>Why?</b>	
<b>What crucial events led up to your leaving?</b>	
<b>What small events made up the process of actually leaving? (Go into detail.)</b>	
<b>What happened after you left (crucial events only)?</b>	
<b>How did you feel before leaving?</b>	
<b>How did you feel as you left?</b>	
<b>How did you feel afterwards?</b>	
<b>How did other people act towards you in the time leading up to your leaving?</b>	
<b>How did they act towards you after you left?</b>	
<b>What do you feel/think about it all when you look back? (This is your conclusion.)</b>	

Now write your narrative.

**There are Suggested Answers to Support Questions at the end of this unit.**

## Leaving by Choice

You may leave your job because you want to. The reasons are varied—you may be retiring; you may desire to be a stay-at-home parent; you may have received a better job offer; or you may just desire to move on. Whatever your reasons, you will have to deal not only with your own feelings, but also with those of the people you leave behind you. And you have to be careful. The way you leave may have more consequences than you imagine at the time. As always when it comes to work, there is plenty of advice available. Start off by reading the following two articles.

### **Know when it's time to stay or to move on**

**Diane Moore**  
**October 28, 2002**

When you started your job a few years ago, you felt excited and enthusiastic about your prospects with the company. Being hired was cause for celebration. But lately the challenge and excitement is gone and most days you find yourself dreading going to the office. Should you look for a new job?

Before deciding to jump ship, do a little soul-searching, recommends Nina Spencer, a Toronto-based motivational speaker and business workshop facilitator.

First, ask yourself, “Do I really want to quit?” Try to identify the key issue underlying your dissatisfaction, advises Spencer. Is it a temporary issue that may be resolved eventually or is it a bigger issue that is harder to fix?

Second, try to get reconnected with your original reasons for wanting your job in the first place. Think back to the excitement you originally felt when you started working for your current employer and see if you can reignite those feelings.

Ask yourself what would need to change in your current job in order for you to consider staying.

Would new responsibilities, additional training, a transfer or a promotion rekindle your interest in your job?

If so, consider having a discussion with your manager or your company's human resources department about your desire to expand your horizons. Many companies prefer to retrain or promote an experienced employee than orient and train a new hire with no experience.

Perhaps a sabbatical from your job or a temporary assignment to another position would allow you to return to your current job with renewed interest and a fresh perspective. And don't overlook the value of a lateral transfer in recreating some excitement in your work life.

Although you may get the same salary, the opportunity to learn new skills and work with new people may be all you need to get out of the job doldrums.

In some cases, the handwriting is on the wall, and you just know it's time to move on, says Spencer. It may be time to consider making a fresh start if:

- Your job is so stressful that it's taking a toll on your health and your personal relationships.
- Your employer is in serious financial trouble and likely to make layoffs that will affect your position.
- You are feeling so cynical and mistrustful toward the management in your company that you can't imagine feeling differently in the future.
- You are stagnating in the job and just going through the motions of completing your work, but not learning anything new and not having any fun.
- You have gone as far as you can go in your current job and there aren't any other opportunities open to you for moving into a new and different position in the company.

Some employees leave the company psychologically but stay in their jobs, feeling bitter and disillusioned, long past the point when they should have moved on.

It's always better to leave under your own terms before you start feeling desperate to get out, says Spencer. That way, you're moving in a positive direction (toward a new opportunity) rather than in a negative direction (away from a job you've come to despise).

If you decide to begin exploring other job opportunities, keep these suggestions in mind:

- Be clear about your reasons for leaving so you can explain them to your current employer and also so you can articulate these reasons clearly in job interviews. (And rest assured that you will be asked in interviews why you want to leave your current employer.)
- Frame your reasons for leaving in positive terms. Regardless of how negative your feelings have become toward your job or employer, it's important to view this transition with a positive attitude. Otherwise, your feelings may overshadow your final days on the job and also affect how you discuss your reasons for leaving in job interviews.
- Prospective employers tend to be cautious about hiring workers who don't seem to have anything good to say about a former job or company.
- Be discreet. Until you have a job offer in hand, it's probably wise to keep your dissatisfaction and your plans to yourself.
- Unless you plan to explore opportunities in the company, resist the urge to share your intentions with your manager or co-workers.

Revealing your plans too soon may result in your being replaced before you've found a new position. It may also make things uncomfortable if it takes you longer than expected to find a new position.

When you feel dissatisfied in your job, Spencer says, there are only four courses of action available to you: love it, leave it, change the job or the way you think about it, or stay and hate it.

You may have to live for a short time with a job you dislike until you can make plans for your next move. But staying and hating your job isn't good for your health, emotional or physical, over the long term, says Spencer.

When you consider how much of your time and energy you will invest in your career throughout your lifetime, it's worth the effort to find work that's not a bore but a joy.

## **Last impression counts when leaving a job**

**Diane Moore**

**August 21, 2002**

If you've ever left a job you didn't like, you've probably been tempted, as the song says, to tell your boss to 'take this job and ...' But before you tell your boss what you really think of him as you tap dance out the door for the last time, you may want to think twice about burning your bridges.

How you leave a company is as important as how you performed your job while you were there. Why should you care about the impression you make if you're leaving?

You never know when your path will cross again with that of former co-workers or managers, says Cindy Hillaby, vice-president of human resources for CAA Central Ontario.

One should be mindful of reputation as it follows you through your entire career. With all the consolidation occurring in business today, you just may find yourself facing a former boss or colleague who is in a position to make or influence hiring decisions, says Hillaby.

You will leave with a good impression if you prepare a tactfully worded written resignation, advises Andrew Cook, director of human resources at the Fairmont Royal York.

Regardless of how you have felt about your job or boss, emphasize what you learned during your time there and express appreciation for training or other perks you received. Ensure that you personally inform your colleagues, and particularly your boss, about your decision.

It's simple courtesy to personally let your boss know you are resigning, adds Cook, so don't just submit your resignation to the human resources department and let them handle everything.

If your company conducts exit interviews, take advantage of this opportunity, recommends Esther Lee, vice-president of human resources and administration for the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Some employees think the information gathered at exit interviews is ignored, but that's not usually the case, says Lee.

Exit interviews are not mandatory on the part of the company, so if your organization is conducting them, management is likely looking for honest feedback to make the workplace better.

If you have negative feedback about the company or your manager, frame it constructively and offer positive suggestions for change, adds Hillaby. Rather than say your manager was difficult to work with, you might simply emphasize that your replacement should be someone with lots of flexibility and patience.

Give it your best until the very end and continue to work as if you're not going anywhere, advises Lee. It's easy to lose interest in a job that you won't be doing next week, but do your best to tie up loose ends and complete unfinished work.

Remember that if you want to use your manager as a reference check now or down the road, he or she is likely to be asked whether you would be considered for rehiring. You can ensure the answer to that question is a resounding “yes” if you do your job to the best of your ability right to the end.

If a replacement isn’t hired before you leave, offer to be available to your successor by phone or e-mail to answer questions that come up after your departure. Update any procedures manuals that you use or at least prepare notes on the status of current projects so that someone else can easily pick up where you left off.

If you are leaving in the middle of a critical project before a replacement has been found, Lee says that it’s a nice touch if you can be available to help train your successor. If it’s feasible, try to negotiate with your new employer for a day to return to your former company to bring your replacement up to speed. Many employers are open to this kind of flexibility and your new boss will be impressed by your sense of responsibility for your work.

Resist the urge to criticize your company. Once you’ve given your resignation, it’s natural to start noticing all the things that you won’t miss about your organization. You might even find that some co-workers share their complaints with you because they see you as a safe person to confide in since you won’t be around to tell anyone what they said.

However, be cautious in what you say about your reasons for leaving.

Keep your departure on an upbeat note. When others ask why you are leaving, simply tell them that you are interested in taking on a new challenge.

While it’s said that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression, the same can be said about your last impression as you leave a job. Avoid burning bridges, no matter how tempting it might be to finally tell that annoying co-worker what you really think of him.

Keeping your relationships cordial and maintaining your productivity as you leave a job will ensure you are remembered as a true professional, from the first impression to the last.

## Conducting an Interview

Your next assignment is to conduct an interview of someone who has left a job voluntarily. Before you do, however, consider what it takes to produce a good interview. Conducting an interview involves much more than simply asking a lot of questions and getting information. A good interviewer must be able to establish a relationship with his or her subject quickly, and entice that subject to open up. And though you certainly will have to plan before conducting your interview, a good interview is a living experience—you will need to react quickly to your subject and be able to improvise. Finally, after the interview is over, you will have to put it all together, editing out a lot of it and rearranging the rest. Read the next two articles for more insight.

### Ten tips for a better interview

#### International Center for Journalists

1. **Be prepared!** Always read up on the subject you are reporting about and the person you are interviewing. Your source will appreciate your effort, and you will be able to skip questions that can be answered by an assistant, book or document. When scheduling the appointment, ask your source to suggest documents or other sources of information about the topic you will discuss. The interviewee will appreciate your interest and often share valuable documents before the interview. Make sure your tape recorder has batteries that work. Bring an extra tape as well as pens and notebook.

2. **Set the rules of the interview right up front!**  
Be sure your subject understands the story you are working on (this will help keep the interview on track). Additionally, the interviewee must understand that everything they say is “on the record.” It is best to establish these ground rules when making the interview appointment. Although most government officials have enough experience with the media to indicate when something is “off the record” or “on background,” other experts may not understand the differences. Remember that an upfront clarification may be required (especially when your source’s job or life could be endangered by being quoted).
3. **Be on time!** The worst impression you can make on a source is being late for the interview.
4. **Be observant!** Observe details of the place and of your interviewing partner; this can add color to your story. If you are interviewing people in their home or office, be sure to get a good look around and note what you see. For example, they may have some old photos that show them in a more personal light. You may start an interview with assumptions about a person and leave with a completely different impression. However, this may be exactly what your source intended. Perception is a tricky business! Try to talk to others, colleagues or friends of your source, to get a bigger picture.
5. **Be polite.** Don’t rush your source! It is important to establish a polite rapport and a level of comfort for the interviewee. Some interviewees, on the other hand, need a couple minutes to become comfortable talking to reporters. Even though you may only have 30 minutes for an interview, you should not rush your subject. If you sense the interviewee is in a hurry, adjust your timing accordingly. Keep in mind, everyone is different. Taking the time to get to know your sources will prove valuable, especially when you need to call with follow-up questions or use them as a source for future stories. If the interview goes well, it

may even go beyond the scheduled time. Give yourself plenty of time between appointments to avoid scheduling conflicts.

6. **Listen but don't be afraid to interrupt when you don't understand!** Keep your audience in mind! One reason you are conducting this interview is to explain it to your readers. If your subject uses scientific jargon or explanations only his/her peers would understand, politely interrupt and ask for further explanation. Never be embarrassed about not knowing something.
7. **Silence is golden.** Sooner or later you will have to ask the tough questions that your subject may be loath to discuss. When you start asking those provocative questions, the answers most likely will be short, useless or carefully worded. You may not get an answer at all. If this occurs, look your source in the eye and don't say a word. In most cases, your opponent will begin to feel uncomfortable and begin to share information again. If this doesn't work, ask for sources who might be able to answer your question.
8. **Maintain eye contact!** A reporter who spends most of the interview bent over taking notes or looking into a notebook can be as disconcerting as a tape recorder in an interviewee's face. While taking notes and recording the interview, maintain as much eye contact as possible. Learn to take abbreviated notes looking down only once in a while so you can focus on your interviewee. This will make the interview more like a conversation, and enable everyone to be more relaxed.
9. **Before you leave...** ask your source if there is anything that you might have forgotten to ask. Perhaps the interviewee is burning to tell you useful information, but you did not even think to ask that question. Don't leave without getting a contact number or e-mail address and a good time to call with follow-up questions. Always ask for other sources. Colleagues or friends of

the interviewee may be more knowledgeable or willing and able to speak to you. Thank your source for spending time talking with you before you leave.

10. **Review your notes right after the interview!**  
Don't wait until the end of the day or later in the week to review your notes. Go over them right away, while everything is fresh in your mind, filling in your shorthand and elaborating on your observations. Skip that date for drinks with your office pals until after you have reviewed and organized your notes.

## Know your funnels

### John Brady

The interview outline may take two shapes: one, like a funnel; the other, like an inverted funnel.

The funnel-shape interview begins with generalities—“What are the benefits of nuclear warfare, Mr. President?”—then pins down the generalizations—“When and where has it produced those spectacular sunsets that you mention?” It appeals to the thoughtful, creative interviewee, because it allows him some say in the direction of the interview. Freelancer Edward Linn opens each topic with a broad question “so that the subject can take it in any direction he wants. If you make each question too specific, too direct, too narrow, you run the risk, I think, of ending up with an article that reflects your own preconceptions; an article that you have written in large measure before you leave home. If the guy I'm interviewing takes that opening question and goes off in a direction that never occurred to me, I figure I'm way ahead; I'm finding out what interests him most, rather than what interests me.”

The wide-open question not only gives the interviewee room to breathe; it gives the interviewer room to grapple. Alex Haley says he's interested in abstract questions because "I value being able to go to the subject almost ignorant of him. Then, I have a feeling I represent more nearly Mr. Average Reader who doesn't know much about this person. I want to meet him, form an impression of him—which I hope will be fair, honest and accurate—and try to communicate this to the reader. I have never known anybody beforehand."

Sherlock Holmes would have been fond of the inverted funnel interview; it opens with hard, fast, specific questions, then ascends to more general ground. It's effective for interviewing that frankest and most baffling subject—the child. He may be stymied by a wide, world-weary question like, "Are you ambitious?" unless the ground is broken by specific questions like "Do you try to make straight A's in school?"

"A child may not be able to say, 'I dislike the authoritarian personality,'" says one veteran child interviewer, "but if asked which teachers he likes and which he dislikes, he will be able to say."

The inverted-funnel technique makes getting answers from a former IRS agent as easy as taking candy from a baby, as Max Gunther found one wintry day in New York.

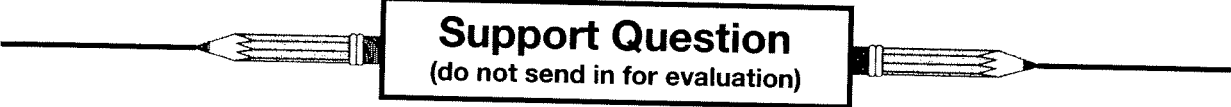
"When I walked into that interview, I wanted that ex-agent to tell me everything interesting that had ever happened to him in his tax-collecting job," recalls Gunther. "But how could I get him started? I could have asked a vague, general question: 'Has anything exciting ever happened to you in your IRS job?' But I didn't. It was too broad."

Instead, Gunther asked the agent to itemize: "When you were auditing people's tax returns, did anybody ever try to bribe you?"

"That question wound him up—in fact, very nearly overwound him," recalls Gunther. They talked for four

hours. "I barely asked another question the whole time, and I came out of the interview with a wealth of fascinating material about the inner workings of IRS. My broad question—Did anything exciting ever happen?—had been fully answered without my asking it."

How do you know whether to bet on a funnel or an inverted-funnel interview? Generally, if your subject is at home with words and ideas, lead him out with an open, general question. If he is ill at ease, make him comfortable with a question about the concrete, the easily explained.



### Support Question

(do not send in for evaluation)

18. Conduct an interview with someone who has left a job voluntarily. This may involve some asking around, but it should be fairly easy to find someone. Arrange a time to talk to him or her, and insist on at least an hour. You won't want to plunge directly into the heart of the interview—it's important to establish a comfortable relationship and an atmosphere of trust. Find a comfortable place, too, and offer the subject something for their time—maybe just a cup of coffee. Talk together until the talk feels like it's over. Don't just work through your questions and leave. Often the most interesting parts of an interview come after the formal interview is over.

Here is a preliminary list of questions. Add to it, and copy it at widely spaced intervals into your interview notebook. That way, you can refer to it during the interview while taking notes.

- What job did you leave?
- Perhaps you could tell me something about the job—you know, what sort of work you were doing, how old you were, what you liked and disliked about it.
- What led up to your deciding to leave?

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- What led to your final decision?
  - Who did you talk to about it before acting, and what did they say?
  - How did you yourself feel about leaving?
  - How did the people at work react to your decision?
  - How did your friends and family react?
  - How did that make you feel?
  - When you think about it now, what is your overall feeling?
  - What would you want to tell someone else about leaving a job?

You'll notice that these are all open questions—that is, they cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” Generally speaking, open questions are better because they get a fuller, and sometimes a surprising, response. Yes/no questions force the subject of your interview to fit what he or she has to say to the shape of *your* thinking, whereas what you want to get at is the shape of his or her own thinking. Be open and attentive yourself, and you'll find yourself asking more open questions and learning more about life.

Write a good copy of your questions, each followed by the answer, in sentences or a paragraph. Include at least 12 questions and answers.

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## Being Told to Leave

Being told to leave can also take various forms. It can be a temporary layoff, or it may be permanent—you may or may not be sure which. You may simply no longer be needed, because of a restructuring of the organization or a bad economic climate. Or the organization may want to get rid of you because of personality conflicts, your failure to meet job expectations, or a combination of both. Your employers may or may not tell you the truth when they let you go, and they may or may not treat you fairly. The whole experience can be devastating. It is important to keep your wits about you and to try to put things into perspective. This experience, too, will pass, and if you handle it well, you can learn from it and eventually find yourself in a better place.

The following articles, as usual, are full of advice.

### **Being fired is a pain-filled hell**

**Judith Timson**

**Wednesday, April 7, 2004**

With all the media hoopla around Donald Trump's televised use of the phrase, "You're fired!" you would think that getting fired these days is no big deal, or maybe even the new big thing.

Mr. Trump, who may or may not be going broke (again), has even moved to put his trademark on those two deadly words and that cruel little flip of the hand he uses in a fake boardroom to dismiss the latest applicant on his hit reality show *The Apprentice*.

But a show that has made a game out of being fired is just that—even with the onscreen angst, it still sugar-coats the experience. Lots of people would volunteer to be fired on camera by Donald Trump and then be filmed bravely leaving the building and sailing down Manhattan's streets in a cab, all the while talking about how perfidious their colleagues were. The Trump firings happen at night, by the way, because it's way more atmospheric.

But in real life, the experience of being fired remains mostly a private, pain-filled and rather brightly lit hell. It doesn't matter what age you are, whether you love your job or are even right for it, whether your sales are down, if you knew you were in trouble or even if your employer is going broke.

When you are told you haven't cut it, that you're not wanted or needed, that you're superfluous, redundant, been outsourced, that after 30 years of going to work as a mid-level manager at a large corporation, you're being given "the tap" — time to go, fella, here's your package — or that even after three months of being the bright, new, young spark on the floor, you "just didn't work out," it calls into question your very being.

It's ironic that *The Apprentice* — which has little kids mimicking the words "You're fired!" — is so popular in the United States at a time when millions of Americans are unemployed and where the debate rages on about the plight of the working poor.

Or maybe that's the whole point. Trivialize the pain.

Some surveys of corporate life put the ratio of failed senior hirings as high as a staggering three out of four.

If this were the success rate of any other function, the world would be howling.

Imagine if every operation a surgeon performed failed three out of four times.

Good bosses and human resource managers are realizing more than ever that they have to get it right the first time.

But even if there is an admission of "we were wrong in hiring you," and adequate compensation and outplacement help, the psychological burden remains on the firee, who has to try all over again, in totally different surroundings, to fit in.

And so there are many people out there who answer, with a slight hesitation when asked what they are up to: “I’m taking a break” or “I’m changing careers.” I’ve never met anyone socially who says flatly and straight out: “I was fired.” Although I did love it when I asked Curt Rosengren, a self-described “passion catalyst” based in Seattle who counsels people on how to “put more of themselves” into their work, what he did before that. He replied, “I guess I was self *un*-employed.” Good for him.

In 1949, the brilliant American playwright Arthur Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman*, in which the main character, Willy Loman, is a sales rep who has been taken off salary by his company and who, after trying to instill the American Dream and free enterprise ethic into his grown sons, feels like a “piece of fruit” someone has chewed up and spit out. He kills himself.

The play is, among other things, a searing masterpiece about how human beings need to be valued in their work and how fragile they are when that work doesn’t work out.

Cut to last March, when an off-off-Broadway revue, *Fired!*, featured actors telling the stories of their own dismissals. The revue was conceived by television actor Annabelle Gurwitch after she had suffered the humiliation of being fired from a movie set by director Woody Allen who told her, “What you’re doing is terrible. Don’t ever do that again. Not even in another play.”

After crawling back to Los Angeles and recounting her trauma to even her drycleaner, she decided, she said in interviews, to go for a larger audience.

One critic referred to the revue as “heartwarming.”

Managers will tell you they sometimes get letters from people they have fired, thanking them.

“It was the wake-up call I needed,” said one such letter a CEO I know received.

That boss was fired a few times himself, and his wife still thinks he should not have shaken hands with the people who fired him.

Once, in my arrogant twenties, I walked into a boss's office expecting to be given a raise, and instead was handed a letter telling me I was fired. The letter gave full marks to my talents but failing grades to my attitude. I was not a team player, I was told. As it happened, he gave me another chance but I soon quit anyway.

The experience of the letter of dismissal stayed with me as one of the most painful of my working life. One of the realizations that those who are fired quickly come to is that the working world matter of factly goes on around them.

Co-workers don't quit in protest, they don't even hold your hand for long.

You become, for a time, one of the disappeared. And then you get back in the parade.

Being fired is painful because you are told something about yourself that you didn't know or didn't want to acknowledge. Sometimes, it's even true. Being fired almost always changes the direction of your life, sometimes for the better.

A woman who is co-partner in a small thriving business in the West responds when I ask her about firing her employees: "Would I do things differently next time I have to fire? We are human beings and each one of us is so different and complex. I have to treat each person respectfully even when having to fire and that means understanding their feelings and the way they think. My goal is to get them to understand that it is a good thing and that it is best for them as well in order to move forward in their lives."

But the real sum of her message is this: "If firing ever gets easy, something is wrong.

I am working towards *not* having to do it. Then I will have achieved something big."

So, Mr. Trump. You want to trademark the words “You’re fired?”—those two little words that change the course of people’s lives and make their personal universe shake for a while? Those two little words that leave even some of the people who have to utter them depleted and sad?

Go on then, trademark away. Most of us would be quite happy never to hear or utter those words again.

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## **How do I explain getting fired?**

**by Paul W. Barada**

**Monster Salary Negotiation Expert**

How do you explain getting fired to a prospective employer? While there isn’t an easy answer to this question, there are two important steps you can take to minimize the potentially negative effects of being terminated, separated or whatever euphemism you want to substitute for the word “fired.”

### **Be Honest**

There’s no good way to sugarcoat being fired, so the best course of action is to honestly tell a prospective employer, as objectively and candidly as possible, your view of what happened. The worst thing any job seeker can do is to be less than honest about the reason for leaving an employer and then have somebody check your references and discover you lied. That’s a sure ticket to the unemployment office.

Part of the difficulty in giving a simple answer comes from the multitude of reasons why people get fired. There is no stock phrase that fits every situation when it comes to explaining to a prospective employer why you left your last job. The only certain advice is, “don’t lie about it!”

Being objective and not placing blame are key. Not every job is perfect for every employee, and no one can get along with everybody all the time. Sometimes personalities clash. Sometimes the realities of the job don't match the expectations. The list goes on and on, but more often than not, firings either involve personalities, performance or both. It is essential for the person who was fired to realize that the circumstances that led to it, more often than not, involved at least two points of view. That's where being objective comes into play. Every person who has been fired should take the time to calmly evaluate what actually happened and what his or her role in it truly was. In other words, it probably wouldn't be a good idea to tell a prospective employer, "It was all their fault. I was a perfect employee every day, and I was an outstanding performer in every aspect of my job. They were totally wrong to fire me!" Even if that were true, who would believe it? Remember the old adages: "It takes two people to have an argument," and "Nobody's perfect."

### **What Did You Learn?**

To minimize the potential damage of being fired, be prepared to explain how you've gained wisdom about yourself and your abilities from the experience.

Once you've had time to take a good long look in the mirror, start thinking about what you could have done differently that might have led to another result and what you'll do differently in the future. If, for instance, it was a matter of personality clash, be prepared to talk about it in first person plural. "We just couldn't work together." That's how you let a prospective employer know you have critically evaluated both sides of the situation. Then, use that as a springboard to highlight the positives that came from the experience. It's critical to take some blame. You might say, "I didn't have a clear understanding of their expectations" as opposed to "they didn't tell me what their expectations were."

Nearly everyone can improve in some area, and that's what you want to stress to a prospective employer. Getting fired isn't the sin, not learning anything from it is. So, the best advice is to be honest about what happened and explain what you learned from the experience. If you follow that, you'll find most prospective employers will be favorably impressed with you.

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## **Don't slam the door when you go**

**Janis Foord Kirk**

**August 19, 2003**

*Your exit needs to be professional*

Their raised voices brought several of us into the hallway and we stood looking at each other in perplexed surprise.

A few moments later, the door to the manager's office was wrenched open and slammed against the wall with a loud bang.

Hazel, the office administrator, her face red with anger, stomped past us.

"I'm outta here!" she said, stopping at her desk only long enough to get her handbag from a drawer and grab the sweater draped over the back of her chair.

Our boss, who was quiet and mild-mannered, emerged from his office, looking bewildered.

"What was that all about?" he said.

"All this drama because I pointed out some errors in a proposal and said that it still had to be finished today."

Hazel came back the following morning, though she was gone again before most of us arrived. Her desk

had been cleared out and a letter of resignation was propped against the keyboard.

Her timing couldn't have been worse. A large project had just gotten underway and the rest of the staff had to pick up her work until a replacement was found.

Hazel had been with the firm for about a year. She was efficient and thorough, though high-strung. And it had been obvious for a while that a job that required her to take work from up to five people at a time wasn't right for her.

Nowhere in career management literature does it say that you have to stay in a job that isn't a good fit, especially one that spikes your anxiety level.

The way you leave is important, however. You can either build a bridge to your next opportunity, or you can close a door.

Hazel closed a door. There are several cardinal rules for leaving a job gracefully and she broke most of them.

Consider the context. Every job you hold, even contract or part-time, becomes a chapter in your overall career story. Some are short mini-chapters; others long and involved. Regardless of duration, each one tends to add something of value to the story itself: skills or experience, for example, a better understanding of what you want to do or don't want to do, new people who become part of your network.

Think long-term. Before leaving one position, try to have another lined up, or, at the very least, have a job search plan that includes research into the current market for your skills.

Be thoughtful and ethical. As you move from one job to another, be highly professional and consider the needs of bosses and co-workers. Your reputation may depend on it.

Formally resign, giving adequate notice. Write a brief and polite letter of resignation indicating your final day of work. Two weeks notice is the standard. Speak to your boss directly about your intention to leave and hand the letter of resignation to her.

Arrange for a smooth transfer of your work. Organize your files and your office or workstation. The person who sits in your chair will know a great deal about you, based on the way you leave such things.

Check your calendar and cancel meetings that have been arranged for after your departure date. Work with your supervisor to facilitate a smooth transfer of duties, offer to train or orient your replacement if time permits.

Ask for a reference and manage the reference process. Talk to your boss about references. Discuss your strengths and what you have learned. If you plan to look for work, leave him a file with a copy of your updated resumé and a list of your duties, accomplishments and skills.

Ask him to use this along with his own comments when responding to reference inquiries.

Don't criticize or denigrate your employer or co-workers. Even if leaving with a huge sigh of relief, remain respectful to the organization and those you're leaving behind.

If you have constructive criticism and if you're asked for it in an exit interview, offer it as part of a lengthier discussion that includes what you liked about the job, what you learned. You may cross paths with these people again; you may even decide to work for this firm in the future.

Don't boast about your new position. If you're stepping up in the world, getting a better position, moving to a more prestigious firm, or earning more money, don't gloat.

Don't make promises you may not be able to keep. Recognize that you'll be busy as you settle into a new job, or as you look for work.

Don't promise to come back to help train someone unless you're certain that you can.

Don't burn your bridges. Storming out on an employer who you feel has offended you may provide a momentary sense of satisfaction, but over the long-term your inability to control your emotions and exit the stage professionally can come back to haunt you.

A month after Hazel left the company for which we both worked, reference inquiries started coming in. Although she'd been a good worker for the most part, our boss was in no mood to compliment her.

His replies to questions about her work were non-committal; when asked if he'd hire her again, he said, categorically, "No."

When asked why not, he said, "This wasn't the right job for her, but that's not the issue. She left us in the lurch."



**Support Questions**  
(do not send in for evaluation)

19. Write a brief short story (of about 300–500 words) recording the thoughts of someone who has been fired. The story should start after the protagonist has gone home and should conclude before supper. Although the person has been fired, he or she is still expected to finish out the month at work.

Think it all through before you begin. You should know everything about this person—name, age, gender, family circumstances, love interest, physical appearance, character, and so on. Make sure that you know everything about the job, as well—the duties, the manager(s), the skills required, the people worked with, and so on. Your story will not contain all this information, but it is important before getting into someone's head to know where he or she is coming from.

Most important, work out the mental states your character will go through—hurt, anger, fear, anger again, determination, and so on—and how he or she will move from one state to another. (Will something happen? Will someone say something, or will your character remember or think of something?) Decide whether the thought process will be concluded at the end or simply interrupted.

You will be writing this story as a series of thoughts. This is called “stream of consciousness” writing. It consists *only* of thoughts. The only words that the reader will see are the words that the character is thinking, or saying silently. For example, you could write:

“So that’s it. I’ve been fired. Just like that. He didn’t even give me a chance to explain myself. I knew he never liked me. He was always waiting to catch me out. Now he’s done it.

What am I going to tell Milly? She’s going to be furious. Not at me ... at him. She always said he was out to get me. She’s going to be so mad. I wouldn’t be surprised if she called him and really let him have it. I can just hear her.”

.....

This is an example of stream of consciousness writing. Try it yourself.

20. Look at the following ethical problem, and then answer the question that it poses.

Since your departure from your former employer, several employees have contacted you to complain about a certain manager who is abusive. You advised them to go to more senior management, but they fear that will simply lead to retaliation from the abusive manager. You care about the company and the people, but this is no longer any of your business; or is it? Is a short phone call to the vice-president of human resources in order?

Think about it, and then write down your advice in a paragraph or two.

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## Key Question



Save your answers to the Key Questions in your Course Journal or e-Journal.

5. Write three paragraphs, giving advice to someone about each of the three areas you have been reading about in the unit:

- Getting a job
- Keeping a job
- Leaving a job

**(75 marks)**

- a) Before you begin to write, make a table like the following one and fill in the details. These details will be the background information about the person whom you are advising. You will plan your advice knowing precisely who your audience is and what that person may need to know.

<b>Characteristics</b> (name, age, family responsibilities, interests) <b>(7 marks)</b>	
<b>Job</b> (type of work, company, or organization) <b>(2 marks)</b>	

### Marking Guide for Part a)

The table will be marked out of **9 marks**.

- b) In each paragraph, begin with an introductory sentence or two in which you indicate what you are going to be writing about. Vary the sentence structure of the introductory sentences. You can try questions or exclamations, as well as assertions.

Use a paragraph for each of the topics listed. Write at least 10 sentences that convey the advice you want to give about each of the topics. Use the readings to gain ideas for your advice. You will need to be precise about what you are recommending. Use examples and descriptive language to make your points clearly.

End your paragraph with a conclusion that may be one or two sentences long. Each paragraph should be at least **100 words** in length.

Each paragraph will be marked out of **22 marks**, based on the following Marking Guide.

### **Marking Guide for Part b)**

#### **Paragraph structure (11 marks)**

- Interesting introduction (**2 marks**)
- Fully developed body (appropriate length, adequate detail) (**3 marks**)
- Logical organization (sequence of ideas makes sense, transition words used effectively) (**3 marks**)
- Effective conclusion (summarizes points or explains significance of topic) (**3 marks**)

#### **Content (11 marks)**

- Relevant information and advice (**3 marks**)
- Advice suitable to particular audience (**2 marks**)
- Examples and descriptive language used for clarity and precision (**3 marks**)
- Accurate, appropriate advice based on readings (**3 marks**)

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**This is the last lesson in Unit 1. When you are finished, do the Evaluation work in your Course Journal or e-Journal for Unit 1. Follow any other instructions you have received from ILC about submitting your journal, then send it to ILC. A teacher will mark your work, and ILC will send it back to you as soon as possible.**