

Occupational Vocabulary

The following is a list of words or phrases that are commonly used at some point throughout the employment process in the U.S. Many of these terms are used within the JobTIPS website.

1. Absence - Not attending work or another commitment.
2. Accommodation – A change in the work environment or in the way things are usually done to help someone with a disability perform their job duties.
3. Advocate – A person assigned to provide support and representation to an individual with a disability. Some local and state agencies (e.g., The Autism Society, Vocational Rehabilitation) may provide advocates.
4. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) - A civil rights law to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities.
5. Applicant - The person who is applying for a job.
6. Application - A form (either in paper format or electronic format) that you have to fill out when applying for a job.
7. Apply - Requesting that you be considered for a job – you can do this by filling out an application and/or by submitting a resume/cover letter to a company.
8. Attire – The clothing that you wear to work. It is important to select the clothing that is appropriate or required for the work setting.
9. Background check- An investigation into your background, specifically looking for any criminal activities, arrests, convictions, or felonies. Many companies are permitted (by law) to conduct these investigations.
10. (Employee) Benefits – Refers to additional forms of compensation or incentives that you might receive from your employer. Benefits can include such things as vacation days, retirement savings packages, health insurance packages, sick leave, and tuition reimbursement. Each employer will offer different benefits. Some employers do not offer benefits.
11. Bereavement leave – A leave of absence due to the fact that an employee has recently lost a family member.
12. Boss - A person who is in charge of certain aspects of a company or organization. A boss often manages and oversees the work of other employees.
13. Break - A short, scheduled period of time in your work schedule when you can stop working for a few minutes.

14. Break area – Areas at work that you are allowed to take your break in. These areas might include a break room, your office, the restroom, or a lounge.
15. Bullying - Repeated negative and unwanted actions toward a victim over time by a person who intends to cause them mental or physical harm.
16. Chain of command - When there is a clear indication of who is in charge, who should be contacted if there is a problem or question, and in what order they should be contacted.
17. Commission - A percentage of a fee that an employee receives if he/she is able to get customers to buy the product(s) that he/she is selling.
18. Contractor - Someone who is self-employed and works independently. This means that you may complete work for someone but you are not their employee.
19. Constructive criticism - Verbal or written feedback (usually given by a supervisor) that directs an employee to correct a mistake or change the way they are doing something.
20. Cover letter - A letter that you write to your potential employer that expresses your interest in the job, that states why you are applying for the job, and the qualifications that you have. A cover letter is sent with a resume.
21. Co-worker – A person with whom you work (different from a supervisor or employer).
22. Criminal background check – An investigation into your background, specifically looking for any criminal activities, arrests, convictions, or felonies. Many companies are permitted (by law) to conduct these investigations.
23. Customer – A person who buys goods or services from a company or organization.
24. Customer service – A service that an employee provides to customers aimed at making sure the customer is satisfied.
25. Deadline – A specific time, day, or week by which you have to complete a task. A deadline is sometimes called a "due date."
26. Deduction – An amount of money that is taken out of your pay check to pay taxes.
27. Department – A specialized division of a company or organization.
28. Disability – As defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is a physical or mental condition that significantly limits a major life activity (for example, walking, talking, seeing, hearing, or learning) or a history of a disability (for example, cancer that is in remission).
29. Disclosure – Telling your employer or co-workers about your diagnosis/disability.

30. Discrimination – When an employer or coworker treats you unfairly *because* you have a disability. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because they have a disability.
31. Door-to-door search – When a job-seeker goes to stores/businesses and asks for applications in person.
32. Dress code - Most companies require their employees to follow a certain dress code. In some work environments, you might be required to wear a uniform or business clothing. In other work environments, you might be able to wear casual clothing.
33. Drug screening – A chemical test run on a biological specimen (typically a urine sample) to test an employee for any use of illegal drugs. Some companies can require that applicants take a drug test in order to be considered for a job.
34. Employment – An occupation or job that a person holds.
35. Equal employment opportunity – Everyone should be treated the same, or equally, during the hiring process and on the job. No one should be treated differently because of their race, gender, religion, native origin, age, or disability.
36. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) – The agency of the United States government that enforces the federal employment discrimination laws.
37. Excused absence – An absence that the supervisor has approved.
38. (Work) Experience – The amount of previous employment experience that you have.
39. Federal withholding tax – A monetary amount that is withheld from your paycheck by your employer for the federal government.
40. Fired – To be terminated from your employment position. Other commonly used slang phrases include being “let go”, “canned”, “axed”, “laid off”, and “sacked”. Often the reasons for being fired are related to employee misconduct or that the employee could not do their job properly.
41. Full time – To work approximately 40 hours per week.
42. Grievance - A complaint filed at work about a work-related circumstance.
43. Gross pay – The total amount of pay that an employee receives before any taxes are deducted from a paycheck.
44. Harassment – An offensive and unwanted action that is directed towards someone because of their disability, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, age, or sexual orientation. Harassment is illegal.
45. Hazardous – Something that is dangerous to one’s health or well-being. Some work places require an employee to work with hazardous materials or to work in hazardous conditions/environments.

46. Holiday – Taking a vacation from work.
47. Hours – The schedule and times for which you work. For example, you could work full time Monday to Friday, from 9am-5pm.
48. Human Resources Department – A department in a workplace that is devoted to personnel selection, employee relations, training, benefits, and monitoring and maintenance of work policies and procedures.
49. I-9 Form – An employment eligibility form that every employee must fill out. This form documents that someone is legally authorized to work in the U.S.
50. Initiative - A quality that demonstrates that you have the motivation and drive to accomplish something without being told what to do.
51. (Job) Interests - Interests, hobbies, or other activities that may help you determine what type of job you would be interested in.
52. Interview – Typically, a face-to-face meeting between the person applying for a job and a company representative. During this meeting, the company representative asks the interviewee questions about their educational and work experiences, their personality, their strengths and weaknesses, and their skills.
53. Interviewee – The person who is applying and interviewing for the job.
54. Interviewer – A company representative who interviews a job applicant.
55. Job description – A description of a certain job or occupation.
56. Job coach – Someone who is responsible for providing training and advocacy for an employee in their work environment.
57. Job fair - An organized event where potential employers are looking to fill positions.
58. Lay off / laid off – To be terminated from your employment position. This term differs slightly from being “fired” because it implies that the circumstances for being laid off were out of your control. For example, the organization went out of business or closed down, or they could not afford to keep the same amount of employees on the payroll.
59. Leave of absence – An extended absence (longer than a vacation) from work due to specific circumstances, such as a medical leave or bereavement leave.
60. Medical insurance – A benefits package provided and paid for by an employer that will allow an employee to seek medical care and treatment with minimal or no financial cost to themselves.

61. Medical leave – An extended absence from work due to medical-related circumstances (e.g., having surgery).
62. Memo – A short, formal note to employees regarding work policies, procedures, or activities.
63. Merchandise – Items that are sold by a company. Merchandise can refer to items for sale in a store, items that have been manufactured at your workplace, or items that are to be shipped from your workplace.
64. Negative feedback – When a supervisor points out a mistake you have made or when they ask you to change how you are doing a certain task.
65. Negotiation – The process of coming to a decision regarding salary or pay rate. A negotiation typically takes place between an employer and the person they would like to hire as an employee.
66. Net pay – The overall bi-weekly or monthly amount of pay that an employee receives after taxes or other deductions.
67. Networking – The process of making connections or contacts with people who may be hiring employees.
68. Occupation – Employment or job that a person has.
69. Offer (job offer) – An employer offers you a position in their company or organization.
70. On time – Arriving or leaving somewhere at the appropriate time. It can also mean completing assigned work in the appropriate length of time given.
71. Over-qualified – A person who has more experience or education than a company or organization is looking for from an applicant/employee.
72. Overtime – Working more hours than your allotted/scheduled hours.
73. Part time – Working less than full time hours, approximately 20 hours per week or less.
74. Pay period – The specific dates in which an employee gets paid. Typically pay periods range from 2-week periods to 1-month periods.
75. Pay schedule – A dated calendar schedule that outlines when an employee will receive their pay.
76. Paycheck - The amount of money you receive for working that is given in the form of a check.
77. Pay stub – A printed record of the amount of money you receive for working, typically every 2 weeks, or once a month.

78. Payroll – The amount of money in your bi-weekly or monthly salary that includes your wages, tax deductions and withholdings, and, any bonuses you may have received.
79. Personal leave – A leave of absence due to personal circumstances. These circumstances can include bereavement reasons, physical illness, or mental health reasons.
80. Policy – Outlined and pre-determined rules to follow at a workplace. Typically, these rules are also mentioned with procedures.
81. Positive feedback – When a supervisor or co-worker gives you praise or compliments.
82. Pre-Employment Screening Tests - Online or paper tests that some companies require applicants to complete during the application process.
83. Procedures – A set of outlined pre-determined actions to follow at a workplace. Typically, these rules are also mentioned with policies.
84. Promotion – A promotion can refer to an increase in your pay rate or salary, added responsibilities in your job duties, and/or a change in your job title.
85. Punctuality – Refers to being ‘on time’; arriving or leaving at the time expected by your employer.
86. Qualifications – The skills, experience, and education that are needed for a particular job.
87. Qualified – When an applicant has the necessary skills, experience, and education for a particular job.
88. Raise – An increase in your pay rate or salary.
89. Reasonable accommodations - According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, an accommodation is reasonable if the employer can provide it without significant difficulty or expense.
90. References - People that your potential employer may contact in order to find out more information about you and if you would be a good fit for the job. References provide a recommendation for you.
91. Resign – To inform your employer that you would no longer plan to work for them (also called quitting).
92. Resignation letter – A professional and polite letter informing your employer that you would no longer like to work for them. A resignation letter typically includes the last date that you will be working.
93. Responsibilities – Your job responsibilities include such things as: Completing all tasks as expected, completing work on time, completing work accurately, dressing appropriately for work, following a supervisor’s instructions and feedback, and being a “team player” if you work closely with other employees.

94. Resume - A document that you give to a potential employer when you apply to a job. It lists your past work experiences and training so that a potential employer can quickly see your skills and experiences. It is a summary of your skills and strengths to show that you are a good candidate for the job.
95. Retirement – Stopping work on a permanent basis after you have been working for a long period of time. Retirement can be dependent on age, or a combination of age and the amount of years an employee has worked for a certain company.
96. Safety – In the context of workplace health and safety, ensuring that an employee follows proper safety protocols at work.
97. Salary – The overall (yearly) pay that an employee receives.
98. Satisfaction – To be happy with what you have accomplished.
99. Schedule – A pre-determined amount of hours, days, or shifts that you work. Schedules can sometimes vary by week, every 2 weeks, or even every month.
100. Self-employed – Someone who owns their own business.
101. Severance package – A pay and benefits package that an employee receives when they are asked to leave. Typically a severance package is only given to an employee if they are leaving because of lay-offs, or if they are retiring.
102. Sexual harassment – When one employee makes unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical displays of a sexual nature to another employee. Sexual harassment is illegal.
103. Shift – The amount of hours that an employee will work per day. Shifts can be a certain amount of hours (e.g., 4 hour shifts), or classified by time of day (e.g., the first shift may refer to an 8am-4pm work schedule).
104. Sick days – Work days that given to an employee to use specifically for when they are sick and unable to come in to work due to illness. These days are usually paid, meaning that an employee can call in sick for a day and still get paid for that day's work.
105. Signature – The name (or shorthand name) that someone signs on cover letters, thank you letters, job applications, and employment forms.
106. Small talk - A short conversation where the purpose is to be friendly and to show interest in the other person. Small talk is a normal and expected thing that happens in almost every work environment.

107. Social Security Card – A card that is issued by the U.S. government that contains a person's full legal name and their nine-digit Social Security Number. Most employers require that an applicant present this card during the application process.
108. Social Security Number (SSN) – A nine-digit number assigned to all U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and temporary working residents (Example: 123-45-6789). In most cases, you need this number when you fill out job applications and employment forms.
109. Social Security tax – A monetary amount deducted from your wages by your employer for the federal government. This tax is collected and accumulated to be distributed to those over 65 (retired) or those who are disabled and unable to work.
110. State income tax – A monetary amount deducted from your wages by your employer for the state government.
111. Supervisor – A person who is in charge of certain aspects of a company or organization. A supervisor often manages and oversees the work of other employees.
112. Taxes – Several monetary amounts that are deducted from your wages by your employer for the federal and state governments.
113. Thank you letter – A brief letter that the applicant sends after a job interview. This letter is written to the interviewer.
114. Time-management – The process of managing your time so you can complete your work in a timely manner. Strategies for time-management include monthly and weekly calendars, daily schedules, visual organizational systems, etc.
115. Transportation – A method of traveling to and from work. Modes of transportation can include bus, car, train, or bicycle.
116. Under-qualified – When an applicant does not have the necessary skills, experience, and/or education for a particular job.
117. Undue hardship – According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, if a workplace accommodation causes the company significant financial strain or if it causes a disruption in the operation of the business, then the accommodation would result in undue hardship. A company is not required to provide an accommodation that results in undue hardship.
118. Unemployment compensation – A monthly amount of money that someone receives for being unemployed. These payments are typically given to someone who has registered with the government as being currently unemployed and actively looking for work.
119. Unexcused absence – An absence that the supervisor has not approved.

120. Union – A labor union is an organized group of workers whose main directive is to maintain the best interests of their workers (as employees). For example, unions can negotiate wages, labor contracts, and better working conditions on behalf of the workers in their union.
121. Vacation – A specific amount of time taken away from work by an employee.
122. Vocational Rehabilitation Services – Offered in every state in the United States. Vocational Rehabilitation services include counseling, training, education, transportation, job placement, assistive technology and other support services. These services are provided to people with disabilities to assist them with living independently, and with finding and keeping a job.
123. W2 – A yearly form from the employer that outlines an employee's payroll, including tax deductions.
124. W4 – A form completed by an employee (that is given to the employer) that outlines the employee's financial situation. The purpose of this form is to help the employer calculate the correct amount of tax deductions.
125. Wages – The pay rate or salary that an employee earns.