

Searching for your first job is hard work, and we're here to guide you every step of the way. The resources below will help you find, apply to, interview for, and get the job that's right for you.

Choosing a career path

As graduation approaches, chances are you're starting to consider the ways you can turn your hard-earned education into a meaningful and rewarding full-time job. As you begin to plan your post-college career path, the first step is to consider which direction you'd like to take your educational credentials.

Think about what you really want to do at work. Depending on the type of educational path you've chosen, you might plan to apply your degree directly in a role that requires your specific expertise, you might have a wide range of professional options available to you, or you might choose to pivot slightly toward a field, industry or role that complements your educational background.

In any of these cases, you'll need to get specific about the job you're looking for: both to decide where to focus your search and so you can confidently answer interview questions about why you're attracted to a particular role. To learn more about the ins and outs of certain industries and jobs, talk with your favorite professors or work with the Career Center to identify opportunities to shadow professionals in your field for a day or week.

Tips

- Take stock of what you've accomplished in your academic career and internships, your personal aspirations, and what industries you'd like to pursue.
- Think about the skills you feel most confident in and those attributes that make you unique—these can be valuable selling points for potential employers. It's common for students and new grads to have limited work or internship experience. If this is true for you, consider any roles you've had in your community or school, volunteer work you've done, and other experiences where you applied your skills and interests.
- Before you begin your job search, review your social media profiles and check your privacy settings. Potential employers may look at these pages.

Researching jobs and employers

It's time to learn about the kinds of jobs that are available to people with your educational background and how the job market for different industries is evolving.

You may want to open up your search to a handful of cities or an entire country, or you might choose to search close to home or in the area near your college or university. You'll want to research how much you can expect to be paid in different jobs and locations to gain a solid understanding of your options.

At the same time, start to research companies that capture your interest. There are a lot of ways to research companies. Here are a few:

Create a target list of employers you'd like to work with.

Check the Career Center's job board Handshake to find out who is recruiting on campus, or you can learn about prominent area employers at university job fairs. Visit a company's social media pages to learn more about the day-to-day of their business.

Search for recent news articles about the company so you're up-to-date on the latest developments.

Reach out to people you know who work at the companies on your target list. In these conversations, come prepared with specific questions. For example:

- *What opportunities for students or recent graduates exist at this company?*
- *How did you find your job at this company?*
- *How would you recommend I learn more about what jobs are available here and whether I'm a good fit?*
- *What is your favorite thing about working here? What are the downsides?*
- *What advancement opportunities exist at this company?*
- *What is your relationship with your supervisor or manager like?*
- *I've seen a job that interests me, what is your referral process like? Would you be open to referring me?*

Some important etiquette to keep in mind: Never expect that a contact at a company can guarantee you a job. Put the responsibility on yourself to learn as much as you can from them and to turn the information they give you into actions. Thank them for their time. If you're meeting them in person for coffee or lunch, you should offer to pay.

Searching for jobs

It's important to keep track of jobs you're interested in and to stay organized in your search and application process. As you are applying you should keep a comprehensive list of the company, job title, date you applied, contact information, and any additional notes.

Second, set up job alerts on different job search sites as you explore. Job alerts are regular email updates about new jobs that fit the criteria you're interested in. In today's competitive job market, timing can be everything, and job alerts are a convenient way to see new job postings as soon as employers post them. You can create an unlimited number of job alerts to be sent to you either daily or weekly.

Third, use advanced search techniques to narrow in on the right job. You can search for specific companies or job titles by adding "company:" or "title:" to your search. For example, you can use filters to refine your search.

Be on the lookout for suspicious jobs

Protect your personal information, never accept money for work you have not done, and do not perform any financial transactions on behalf of a potential employer.

Writing your resume

The next step in your job search is to create or update your resume. For students and recent graduates with limited professional experience, it's important to showcase your most relevant work on your resume. One study found that the most important attributes employers consider when evaluating new graduates are internships and employment during college. List any paid or unpaid internships, other jobs you've held while in school, and volunteer activities. For each role, frame your responsibilities and accomplishments in a way that's relevant to the hiring managers you're targeting. Connect the skills you applied and expertise you gained in each role to the specific skills and expertise needed in the types of jobs you're applying for.

Writing a cover letter

Including a cover letter is a traditional part of a job application. As you go through your search, evaluate each job individually to determine if you need a cover letter.

In most cases, the purpose of a cover letter is to introduce yourself to a potential employer. You can use a cover letter to call out significant achievements or explain why you're attracted to a particular job and organization. Do not use your cover letter to reiterate what's on your resume. Instead, use it to highlight a few of your accomplishments and aspirations. Students and new graduates sometimes make the mistake of writing cover letters that are too long, too formal or too informal, or that emphasize what the student wants from the job or company. Avoid these issues by keeping your cover letter to about three or four paragraphs, researching the company so you can write with the appropriate tone, and framing your letter in terms of what you can offer the employer.

Sometimes employers may ask you to answer a specific question in a cover letter. If you come across a job description or application like this, make sure you follow the writing prompt closely. Employers include a prompt like this to assess your attention to detail and written communication skills.

Applying to jobs

Before you apply to any job, give your resume a final review. At this stage, you want to make sure it's the best representation of you and doesn't contain any typos or misspellings. In addition to visiting the Career Center, you may want to ask a friend, family member, or university writing center to review it for you.

Submitting your application

Once you've filled in an application, submit it. It is highly unlikely that you will be able to edit your job application once it has been submitted, so be sure that you've completed it to your satisfaction before taking that final step.

Even though the job market for new graduates has improved, it can still take several months to land your first full-time job after graduation. An important part of properly positioning yourself to get a job is casting a wide net. On average, new graduates apply to 23 jobs before they get hired. Job search is hard work, and consistently applying is a part of that effort. It's helpful to set goals for yourself—how many jobs do you want to apply to each day or week? As you meet your application goals, think of a way to reward yourself.

Waiting for a response

An inevitable part of any job search is waiting for employers to get back to you. Some employers may send you an email confirming that they received your application and will be in touch if they want to move forward. Others may not get back to you at all.

How long should you wait to hear back before moving on? There is no standard answer to this question. The amount of time it takes to review a job application varies for each job and company. It is appropriate to follow up after two weeks, or ten business days; however, don't expect that every company will have a response for you. Some companies (e.g. state, federal) may take several weeks or months.

While you're waiting to hear back, it's important to continue your job search. Keep researching new opportunities and applying to jobs. Set up job alerts and follow your dream employer's company page to get updates when new jobs are posted. And don't forget the power of face-to-face interactions: Take a classmate, professor, or family member to coffee and ask them about their career path. You might be surprised by what you learn and how it inspires you. Stay active in your academic community to make new connections.

Interviewing

As a student or recent graduate, you'll probably be competing with other entry-level candidates for the same roles, many of whom will have limited professional work experience like you. This means it's crucial to make an impact in your interviews by conducting yourself with the utmost professionalism and showcasing the traits, expertise and values that make you unique. The interview and hiring process is handled differently at different companies. Sometimes you may not have direct contact with anyone before your interview. If that's the case, you'll have to prepare on your own. You can research common interview questions in your industry and practice your answers.

If you are communicating with a recruiter before your interview, you can ask them questions that will help you prepare. Here are some examples of questions to ask:

What is the dress code like in your office?

- You want to look your best at an interview and knowing what the environment is like at this company will give you some ideas of what to wear. Most likely, you will dress in professional attire for an interview.

In addition to my resume, is there anything else I should bring to the interview?

- For some jobs, employers might want to see examples of relevant academic projects or your portfolio. The answer to this question will help you determine what to bring.

How many people will I be interviewing with, and what are their names and titles?

- Sometimes it will be just one person or you might talk to several people, one at a time. Other interviews might be conducted by a panel. Knowing their positions will help you prepare well since the questions a supervisor would have for you could differ from those a peer might have.

Why is the position open?

- This question will give you insight into the reason they need to fill this job and how soon. It will also tell you about the history of the position and the company's culture. For example, if the job has been vacated by someone who was promoted, that could indicate they like to promote from within. If the job is newly created, that might mean you'll be helping to define the job more clearly once hired.

In a recent survey of 1,000 hiring managers, they were asked to list the most important attributes of top performers at their company. The top five attributes they named were problem-solving, drive, self-direction, strategic thinking, and initiative. As you prepare for your interviews, think of examples from your academic history, internships and work experience that embody these attributes and be ready with relevant anecdotes to share. Pairing your experience with what managers care about the most is a great way to make an impression.

Entry-level salaries are often less negotiable than those for more experienced hires, but there's no harm in trying to negotiate your first salary, and doing so can have compounding effects that resonate throughout your career. Go into interview discussions with confidence by arming yourself with the latest salary data for your industry, role, and location.

Starting a new job

You've made it through the search and landed your first job, congratulations!

What to expect on your first day will vary from company to company. For many entry-level employees, the first day will involve an employee orientation and training sessions. At this stage, you should have a line of communication open with your new employer and should ask any questions you have about the job.

For many people, keeping an eye on new job opportunities is a part of continuous career development, even once you've found a new job.

Adapted from indeed.com- "The New Graduate's Guide to Career Search"