

Finding your first job: a step-by-step guide for grads

 By Jackie Carroll

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The university year has drawn to a close and, if you're a new graduate, you're likely in the process of trying to find your first job. This, without a doubt, is a daunting task. Breaking into the labour market can be extraordinarily difficult if you don't know where to begin or how to navigate the professional world. Fortunately, there are a few critical steps you can follow to find a job and prepare yourself for the workplace.



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Step 1: Identify job opportunities

This may seem an obvious first step, but what matters here is *how* you identify opportunities that interest you. While the internet may seem to be the most important, or even the only, tool available, many companies choose not to list their jobs online at all. Instead, they bypass recruitment websites and LinkedIn in favour of referral channels and word of mouth.

As a result, looking for work goes hand-in-hand with harnessing the power of your networks. Your friends, family members, lecturers and mentors are all valuable resources. You might also consider approaching companies that interest you directly, and asking about available positions or internship opportunities. Or you could attend talks and conferences related to your field. You never know who you might meet, or what insight you might learn that could prove useful in an interview.

Step 2: Craft your CV

Without much professional experience to your name, you may feel quite discouraged at the thought of crafting your first graduate CV. But remember that your potential employer knows that your experience at this point is likely to be primarily academic, and that you should still take the opportunity to promote your knowledge, skills and talents in an interesting way.

Take the time to plot out the structure of your CV, and be creative in how you communicate relevant information in each section. Be professional, but don't be afraid to share some of the interests and passions that will help you stand out.

Step 3: Build a professional image

Before applying for jobs or circulating your CV, do a full audit of all of your online profiles, including your social media platforms. While it can be valuable for employers to see that you're tweeting interesting insights about your field, it can also be detrimental for them to see private photographs of you on Facebook. Be selective about what you make public. While you're at it, take the time to update your LinkedIn profile and connect with as many people as you can.

Of course, you've got to ensure you project professionalism in person too. Make sure you appear clean and neat and that your hair and nails are well groomed. And make a warm and positive impression when you meet someone – a confident handshake, a smile and eye contact go a long way.

Step 4: Nail your interview

The most important aspect of any interview is the research you do beforehand. Investigate the company thoroughly. Demonstrating your knowledge about the work they do, who they do it for, their culture and values, and how your personality and skills would be a good fit can be the very thing that gets you the job.

It's also important to dress appropriately and to pay close attention to your body language. Is the company corporate and formal? Young and vibrant? Look and act accordingly and, if you're unsure, always err on the side of smart and professional. Listen attentively, answer honestly, and acknowledge your weaknesses while leveraging your strengths. And remember that an interview works both ways – you should ask questions too. The more you can turn the interview into a conversation, the more of a rapport you'll develop with the hiring manager.

This is just the beginning

Of course, finding a job isn't the destination – it's just the start of an entirely new adventure. By following the steps above, you'll not only work towards finding your first job, but also equip yourself with valuable skills you can use in the workplace.

Entering this next phase of your life can feel very unsettling – there's so much to learn and so much to discover. But it's also a very exciting time. Remember that you know what hard work is; it's hard work that got you here in the first place. All you need to do now is make your strong and positive work ethic clear to others. Persevere, take initiative, and infuse everything you do with a good dose of self-belief. You've got this.

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Jackie Carroll is the CEO and co-founder of Media Works, South Africa's leading provider of adult education and training for over 21 years.

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