

How to Get Your Very First Job

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Co-authored by [Adrian Klaphaak, CPCC](#) and **11 contributors**

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Landing your first job can seem like a big challenge, but if you are confident, professional and courteous, your demeanor and skills will stand out on their own. Knowing how to get your very first job, though, can be confusing and overwhelming. But with a few easy steps, you can be on your way to job success.

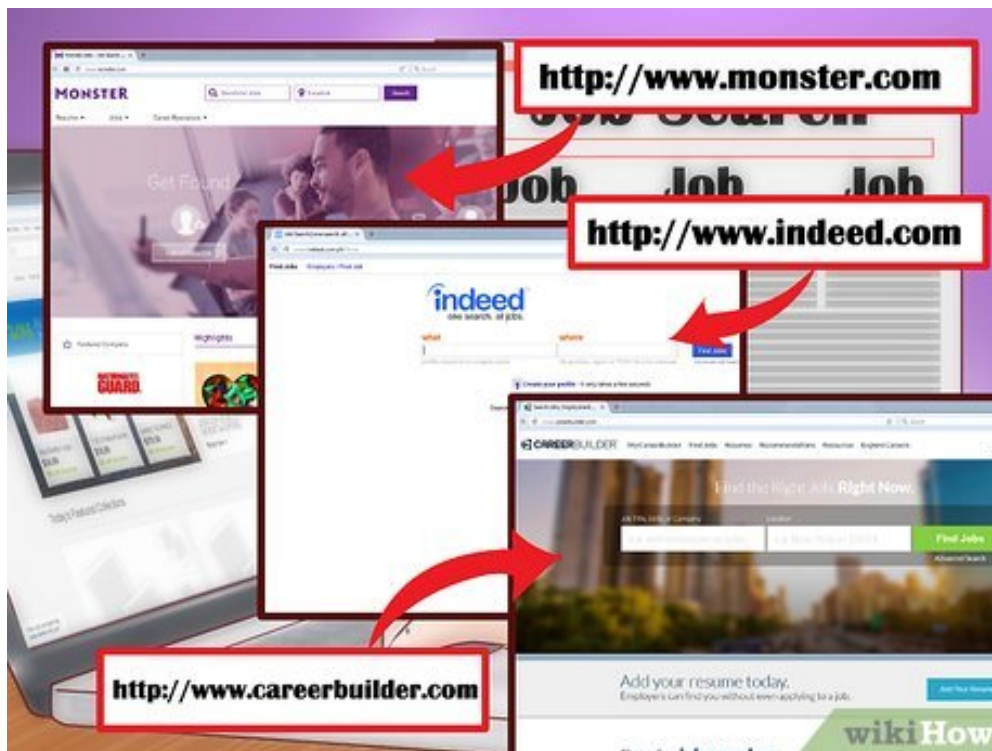
Part
1

Part 1 of 4: Finding Job Opportunities



1 **Narrow your search terms.** Before you can start combing the various resources to find a job, you will need to know what type of job you are trying to land. Since this will be your first work experience, you will want to investigate entry level positions and jobs that don't require previous experience.

- You have no work record or experience, so it is unlikely that you will end up landing a job as the C.E.O. of a Fortune 500 company. Rather, look for jobs in service and retail, entry-level data input positions, and other companies who would be willing to hire someone with no work experience.



2 Search online. There are a number of career search engines to help you find a job. The most popular job search engines are Monster, Indeed, and CareerBuilder. These sites allow you to search for jobs by job type, pay range, and location.

- Create an account on one or many job search engines, such as Indeed, Monster, CareerBuilder or HotJobs.
- Search for jobs that fit your interests, skill sets and location.
- Save these searches until you have put your resume together.



3 Check the local newspaper. Most local newspapers have “want ads” where employers publish advertisements for open positions. If you don’t have a subscription to the paper, Sunday is usually the day when newspapers post their heaviest amount of job listings.[1]



4 Look for “help wanted” signs. “Pounding the pavement” is another way to turn up job leads. Look for local help wanted signs in windows of businesses. Never be afraid to just pop in and inquire about an opening.

- It is wise to bring a resume with you when entering businesses with a help wanted sign.
- Be prepared to be asked to fill out an application on the spot. Make sure you have all the relevant addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, etc.
- Most retailers take applications year round, even when they aren’t actively hiring. So you can stop in and ask for an application or fill one out at their job kiosk.
- Always dress professionally anytime you are stopping into the business of a potential employer.



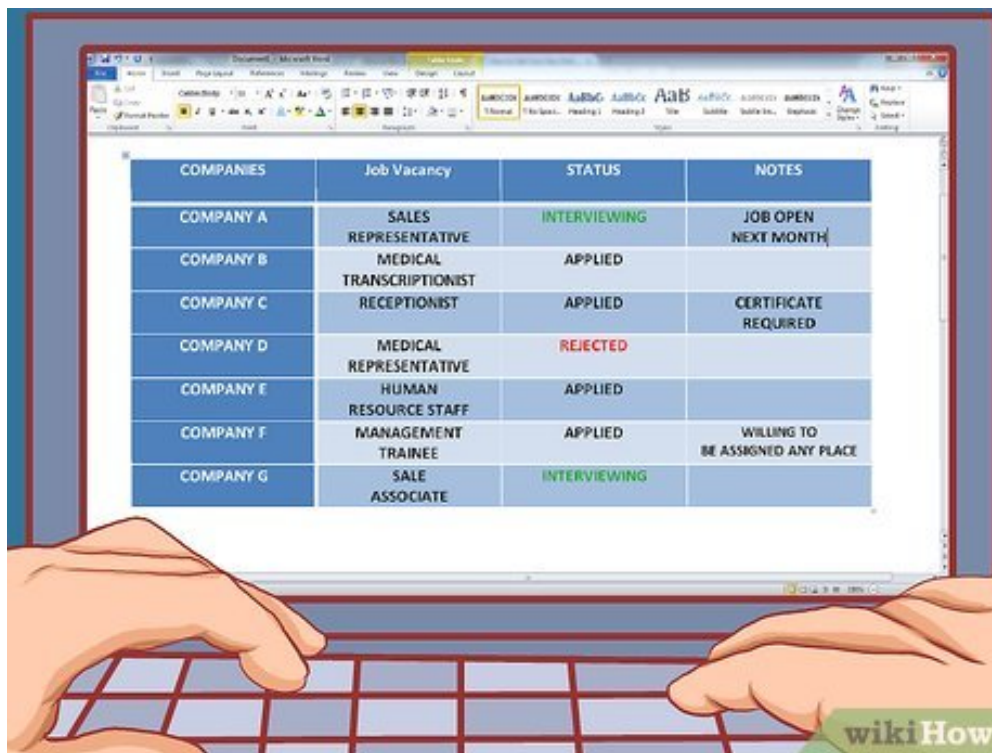
1 Create a functional resume. This step will be tricky, because you simply don't have a lot to list on your resume. However, even with your lack of experience, there are some methods to populate your resume and make it look professional by emphasizing your education and skills.

- Include all of your factual information. Because you have not had a job before, this will include your contact information, a career objective, any school information and activities, any community or volunteer activities, any computer experience or specialized skill sets you may have.
- When drafting your resume, be concise, direct and professional. When listing your experiences, whether in school or extracurricular activities, **be consistent** with how you list them. Use the same size, font, and style of characters for all similar entries on your resume. As a general rule, don't use overly ornate or fancy fonts, as they can be difficult to read.
- Have someone else or multiple people proof your resume for you.
- Name the document with your full name and the word "Resume," and save the document in an easy-to-find location.



2 Draft a cover letter. Many jobs, even some entry-level ones, require applicants to submit a cover letter (a.k.a. letter of application, letter of introduction). These letters are designed to introduce yourself to the hiring director, explain why you want the job, explain why you would excel in the position, and detail any exceptional or notable accomplishments that would prove you are a qualified employee.^[2]

- These letters are formatted just like a regular letter. They include the name and address of the hiring director at the top, open with “Dear so and so”, and close with a salutatory note (like “Regards” or “Sincerely”).^[3]
- A good cover letter starts with a personal introduction. This section will give you an opportunity to explain who you are and will tell the employer, briefly, why you want the position.^[4]
- The body of the cover letter should give concrete examples of why you would excel in the position. Here you can state what particular skill sets you have that would translate to the open position.^[5]
- The conclusion should reiterate your interest in the position, how you could contribute to the business, and a salutatory note.^[6]
- Again, make sure this document is saved in a visible location and has been proofread multiple times.^[7]



3 Create a job table. Put the jobs you have identified into a table on Word or Excel. This will help keep your job search organized and efficient. There are a few different types of information you will want to include on your job table. [8]

- List the places you wish to apply to in the first column.
- Put the places that said they may have a job into the second column so you can follow up.
- Next, you can keep a list of places that said no.
- Next to these columns, set up a column where you can list your application status (i.e. “applied”, “rejected”, “interviewing”)
- It may also be wise to keep a notes column to include any additional information you came across during your job search.



4 Collect application materials. Applications will ask you for a lot of detailed information. As such, it is wise to seek out and compile that information before you begin filling out applications. You will need the following information:

- Personal information: name, date of birth, mailing address, phone number, email address, social security number, parents' names (if you are under 18).
- Education information: name of your school, degree acquired (if applicable), dates attended, credits completed, school address
- Most job applications ask for a bunch of information about previous employers, but these sections of the application will not apply to you.

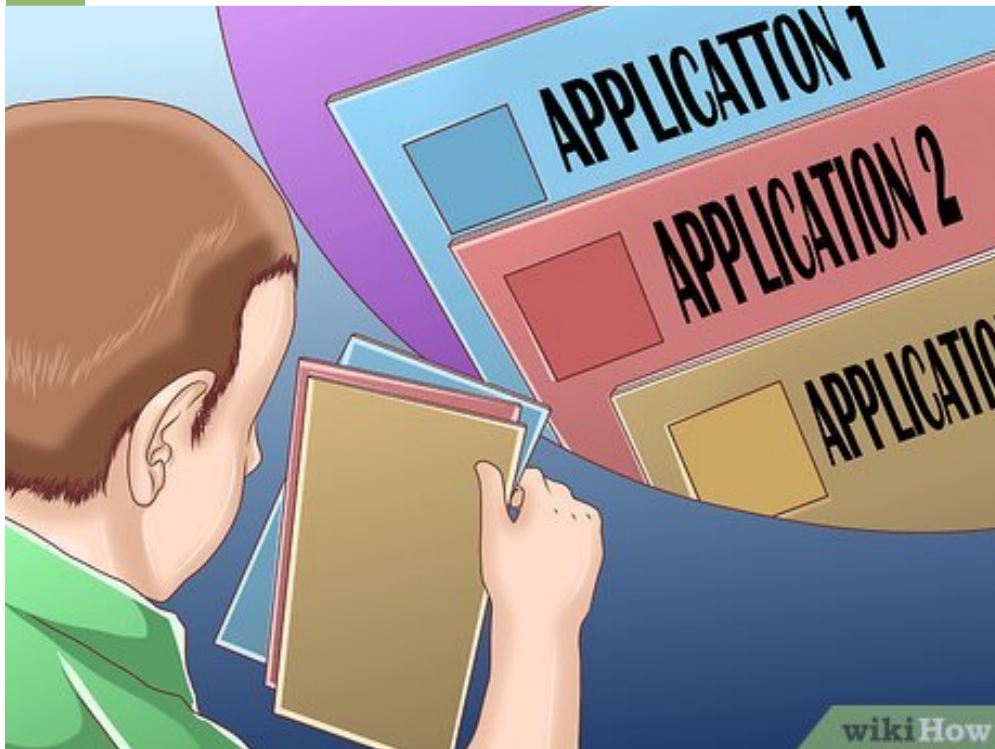


5 Acquire reference letters. Since this is your first shot at getting a job, you won't have any references from past employers. However, you can approach a teacher or close family friend, really anyone who knows you well, and ask that they write you a personal recommendation or reference letter. This will at least give your prospective employers some indication that others value your talents and abilities.

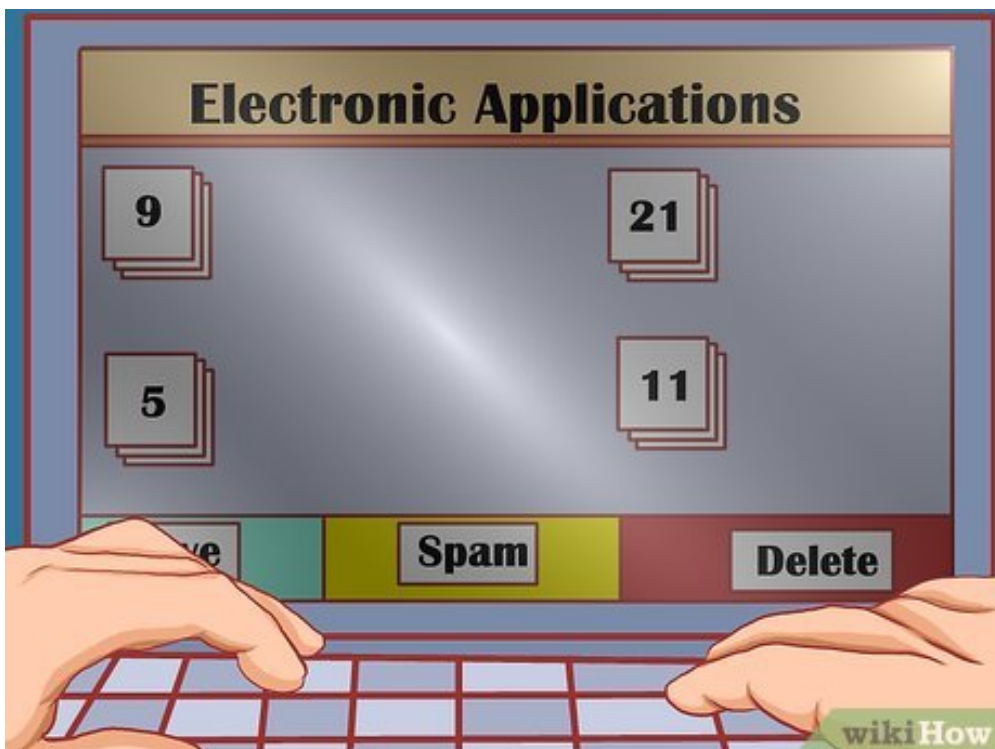
- It is usually best not to acquire reference letters from family members or people with the same last name as you.



6 Collect supplemental documents. Having no previous work experience, it would be helpful if you collected any and all documents related to volunteer work, extracurricular activities and other organizations or events you intend to highlight on your resume. Essentially, you want to be able to prove that you have done the things you claim to have done on the application.



1 Collect hard copy applications. Applications can come in varied mediums and will need to be filled out at different times. As discussed above, many employers ask applicants to fill out the application on the spot when the applicant picks it up. Many others will allow you to grab a copy of the application, fill it out at home, and return it later. Still others will ask you to go to their webpage and fill out an online application or print an application, fill it out, and submit the hard copy. Make sure you have the hard copy application for all the jobs that require it.



2 Take an inventory of electronic applications. These days, the vast majority of applications are filled out online. Make sure you refer to your job table to avoid overlooking an electronic application or to avoid submitting an electronic application multiple times.



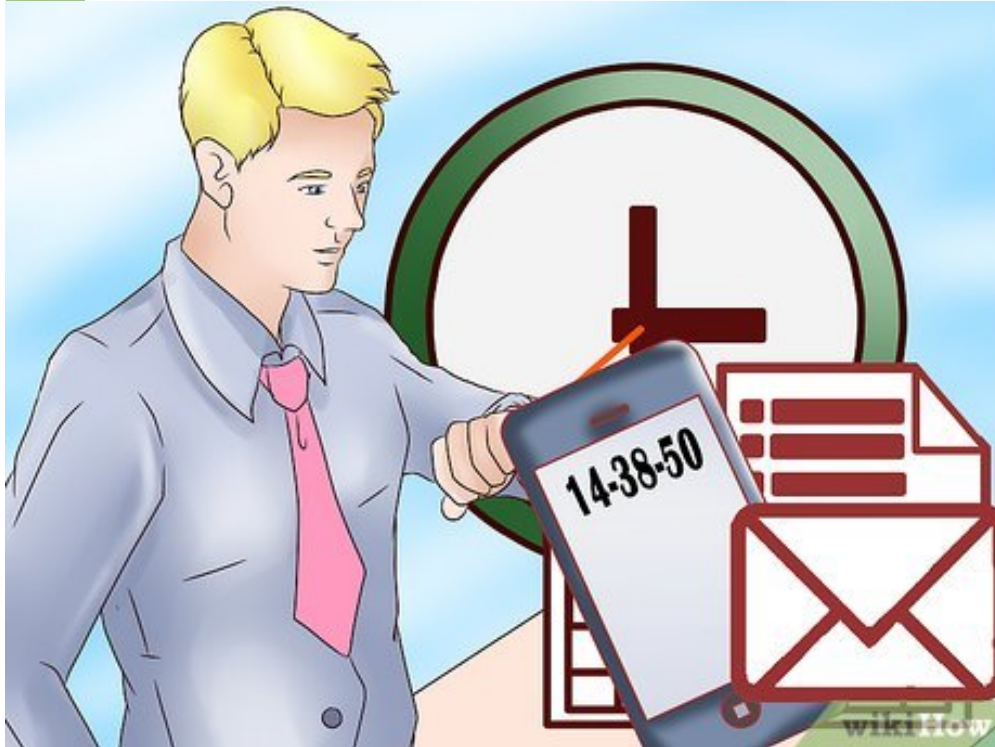
3 Revisit job search engines. Return to your saved jobs in the search engines, and begin applying for the jobs. Be thorough and careful when filling these applications out. Typos and minor errors may reflect poorly on you as a job candidate.

- Fill out all necessary information.
- Upload or copy and paste your resume and cover letter as required.
- Finish all additional application steps.
- Follow any application steps listed on the job posting. Generally this will be to mail or email your resume and cover letter.



4 Complete hard copy applications. Again, it important you are accurate and careful when filling these applications out. Nothing is more embarrassing than submitting an application with information scratched out and rewritten outside the margins. The application will look sloppy and submitting it that way makes you look careless.

- Make sure that you include any supplemental or additional information along with the hard copy applications. If necessary, attach your resume and cover letter to the application.
- Also, it would be wise to make photocopies of all the applications you complete for your own records. If you are lucky enough to follow the application up with a job interview, you will want to be able to review what you said in your application.



- 1 Wait for the call.** If a prospective employer liked your resume and/or application, you will be called for an interview. Schedule this at a mutually agreeable time.



- 2 Practice.** Practice your interview skills with a parent, a friend or a teacher. Ask them to pretend to be the interviewer, and have them help you get your nerves under control as well as compile comprehensive answers to simple and complex interview questions.^[9]



3 Be punctual. Nothing says “I don’t really care about this job” like showing up to an interview late. If necessary, scout the interview location in advance to ensure you have ample time to get there when the interview comes.^[10]

- You should always be 10 to 15 minutes early for an interview, just in case they need you to fill out some paperwork.^[11]



4 Be confident. You will likely be a little nervous for your first job interview. That is natural. But you have to overcome the nerves. Try reminding yourself before each interview that, no matter what happens, this is the first of many interviews. If you don’t get the job, you will move on and look for something else. ^[12]



5 Prepare a message and stick to it. There are certain points you are going to need to get across during the interview. Figure out what these points are and clearly get them across during the interview^[13]

- Some effective messages for first time workers to get across are:
- The strength of your work ethic, as evidenced by your grades or performance in school.
- If you are a younger job candidate, point to your enthusiasm and energy for the the job.
- Identify and emphasize any skills that relate to the position. For example, if you are interviewing for a cashier position, you can highlight your math abilities. If the job requires physical strength, point to your career as a high school athlete.
- As a first time worker, it may be wise to stress your eagerness and ability to learn new skills or talents that can be acquired from the job.



6 Nail your interview. Since you have no work experience, your interview is really all a hiring director has to try to get an impression of you as an employee and as a human being. With this in mind, you will want to do the following things to leave the hiring director with the best impression possible.^[14]

- Dress appropriately for the interview. You don't need a three piece suit to interview at McDonald's, but you shouldn't dress in pajamas either. As a general rule, try to emulate the dress of the people already employed at the business.^[15]
- Be courteous and be honest about your skills and interests. Outright lies will get you nowhere. Even if the interviewer is somehow fooled by your deceit, your inexperience and lack of skills when come to light as soon as you start working and you will soon be interviewing for another job.^[16]
- Ask questions, when appropriate, and be engaged in the conversation. Interviewers hate it when a candidate does not engage beyond answering questions they are asked. It is wise to come up with a list of questions you may have before the interview so that you can better engage with the interviewers.^[17] Some questions you could ask are: What sort of culture has the company built for its employees? How does the company intend to grow? What are some drawbacks, in the interviewer's opinion, of the position? What skills and abilities should the ideal candidate have? What are some of the problems facing the staff and how can you, the candidate, help fix those problems?^[18]
- Close the interview with a verbal thank you and a firm handshake.^[19]



7 Follow up. If you feel the interview went well, wait a week or so and check back in with the business or hiring director. You don't want to pester them, but you do want to remind them that you interviewed. Try sending a follow-up thank you card directly to the person who interviewed you.



Expert Q&A

Question

What do you do if you don't have a job reference?



Adrian Klaphaak, CPCC
Career Coach
Expert Answer

Even if you're applying for your first job, you can still find people who will be a reference for you. You might ask your teacher, a volunteer coordinator, a coach, group members who worked with you on a project, or a leader from your community, like someone in a church group. If you've ever done odd jobs or babysitting, that can be a great reference as well. Once you find someone, give them some context about the job you're applying for and what the employer is looking for so they'll know what to highlight when they're talking about you.

Helpful Not Helpful

Question

How do I get promoted at work?



Community Answer

Work hard and be respectful to your boss and co-workers. Always ask if anyone needs help and volunteer for the assignments no one else wants to do. Be on time and don't call in sick unless you're truly sick. If you've been at your current job for a while, talk to your boss and make sure they know you're interested in advancing.

Helpful Not Helpful



Tips

- Make sure to leave the interview with a business card from your interviewer. This will aid in sending your thank you card later because you will have the correct spelling of his or her name as well as all of the correct address information.
- Note that you will want to tailor your resume career objective and your cover letter to each job for which you apply.



Warnings

- In this day and age, employers can run an online search through sites like Google or Yahoo to try to find your online presence. Searches like this can typically turn up your social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) pages, so make sure that they have been scrubbed of any inappropriate content prior to your application process.

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About This Article



Co-authored by:
Adrian Klaphaak, CPCC
Career Coach

This article was co-authored by **Adrian Klaphaak, CPCC**. Adrian Klaphaak is a career coach and founder of A Path That Fits, a mindfulness-based boutique career and life coaching company in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is also is an accredited Co-Active Professional Coach (CPCC). Klaphaak has used his training with the Coaches Training Institute, Hakomi Somatic Psychology and Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS) to help thousands of people build successful careers and live more purposeful lives. This article has been viewed 27,157 times.

★★★★★
3 votes - 100%

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