

How to Get a Job After College

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College is a time of enormous personal growth and development, but it doesn't last forever. If you're preparing to graduate, chances are you're looking for a job. It can be difficult to land that first post-college job, but with help from friends, family, classmates, and your college career center, you will be able to get closer to your dream job.

Part
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Part 1 of 6: Getting Experience Before it's Time to Apply



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1 Volunteer. If you know the field that you want to enter, volunteer with an organization, company, or group that does the kind of work you want to do. Volunteering does not just have to be for non-profit groups, though this is common. Many businesses would be willing to have you volunteer if they know that it is part of your projected career. This will be a way for you to get a sense of the field you hope to enter while at the same time getting some experience. Lack of experience is going to be a major obstacle to getting work, and volunteering is one way to overcome it. Most schools have a community service or volunteer coordinator or office – talk to someone there about opportunities in your area.^[1]



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2 Pursue an internship. Internships are another great way for you to get experience in a field without the challenge of trying to find a full-time job. Some internships are during the [summer](#), while others are during the school year and have to be juggled with your course schedule. Think carefully and early about what you might want to do. Some internships are very competitive and will require an application. Others might be easier to get but will require you to set them up and figure out if you will get college credit.^[2]



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3 Get a part-time job if you don't have one. Many college students already work, but if you don't, think about the kinds of jobs you might be able to get. Apply for something in your field, but realize that the competition might be too much to get your top job. Even if the job you get is not in the field you want, having an employment history to put on your resume can be very helpful. It shows that you were a responsible worker and were able to hold down a job and go to school at the same time. Having an employer able to write you a letter of recommendation can also be helpful when you are looking for a full-time position.^[3]

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1 Decide what job you want. Some people graduate with a very specific degree based on the job they hope to have -- computer programming, nursing, winemaking -- while others get a liberal arts degree that's not geared toward a specific job, like history, sociology, or English. If you have a job-focused degree, chances are you've already met many people in your field and are somewhat aware of job prospects. If you have a liberal arts degree, you have to do more work to figure out what jobs you might be qualified for.



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2 **Talk to an advisor at your school's career center.** No matter what degree you have, the people at the career center can tell you about what previous students have done. You can get an idea of the kinds of jobs and experiences students like you have had. Ask the people at the career center to put you in touch with people in the field you hope to enter for more advice.^[4]



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3 Conduct informational interviews. Even though you think you might know what kind of job you want, it's important to talk to someone actually working in the field. Connect with alumni from your college or university and ask friends and family for suggestions of people they might know in the field you hope to enter. Write up the questions you'd like to ask beforehand. When you conduct the interview, be professional: dress formally, take notes during the interview, and be sure to follow up and thank the person, either with a thank-you note or email. Be sure to take a copy of your resume (we will talk about this more in the next step). Some examples of questions for the informational interview might be:

- What is your typical day like?
- How did you come to work at this job?
- What do you wish you had known in my position?
- Do you have any suggestions for my job search?[5]



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4 Network. It's not what you know, or even how well you know it. It's who you know. Most jobs that you stand a chance for will be referred by friends, schoolmates, and relatives. The more people you know, the better chance you have that they will remember you when they hear of a job in your field.^[6]

Part 3 of 6: Getting Your Materials Together



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1 Create a resume. If you haven't had many (or any) previous jobs, think about how your experiences (internships, leadership roles in college activities) can transfer to the position you'd like to have. For any college graduate, you should think about the kinds of soft skills at which you excel -- communication, both written and oral, leadership, organization, teamwork, etc. It will be important to highlight these on your resume. These are also skills that can help in getting a job. Check out some [templates](#) for specific suggestions on how to format your resume.

- Highlight the skills you have from volunteer opportunities, internships, and any part-time jobs you have had.
- Mention any specific field-related knowledge you have – certificates, relevant computer programs, formats or styles of work, or languages.
- Ask former supervisors or employers for letters of recommendation – they will be able to tell possible employers about your work ethic, teamwork, and interest in the field.



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2 Get feedback on your resume. After you've written it, ask someone at the career center to look it over for you. They will probably have good suggestions about how you can improve it. Keep in mind that it will get easier the more resumes you write -- it's a specific format that you just have to learn.^[7]



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3 Write a cover letter. It's good to start with a general letter that you can then change depending upon the position to which you're applying. Try looking at some [templates](#) to get an idea of the style and wording of typical letters. Your cover letter is a way for you to present yourself and your experiences in a different way than your resume -- don't just reiterate the information you have included on your resume. Explain why your studies have prepared you for the job in this particular field. Again, ask at the career center for help in formulating a good letter and feedback after you've written it.

- Work on explaining your lack of experience – let employers know about the steps you've taken while still in school to get a feel for the field through volunteering or internships.
- Let potential employers know about relevant coursework you might have taken, from learning how to code to becoming certified in medical translation.



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1 Start looking for jobs. Enlist friends, family, and classmates to help. Let them know the kind of job you're looking for so they can tell you when they see a position that might fit you. Start searching the job classifieds online. Craigslist, monster.com, indeed.com, and other regional sites (depending on where you live) are going to have a wide cross-section of jobs to which you could apply. If you are interested in particular companies, check their websites (usually the Human Resources section) to see if they have openings.[8]



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2 Read the advertisements carefully. If you don't have the qualifications they are looking for, don't apply. It's a waste of your time and their time. Most jobs now have so many applicants, anyone who is not completely what they are looking for will be disqualified.



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3 Apply to all the jobs in your field for which you are qualified. Make sure your letter properly reflects the job to which you are applying. You might get lucky and get your dream job right after you graduate from college, but most of us aren't so fortunate. Job searches often take a great deal of time and many applications before you find something. Applying to everything in your field for which you are qualified (even if you aren't sure it is a job you want) can help you gain valuable interviewing experience, even if you don't end up getting the job.

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1 Agree to any interview you're given. Even if you don't think you want the job, going to the interview can be revealing. You might find it's a job you do want. And if you discover that it's not a job you want, you have learned more about a job in your field and how different people conduct interviews. If it's a job you're not sure you want, it's also less pressure and can be good practice for those job interviews that you really want.



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2 Practice your interview. Enlist a family member, friend, or classmate to do a mock interview with you. Think beforehand about what kinds of questions you think they might ask. Write out some possible answers so that you feel prepared. Practice multiple times so that you feel calm and ready (even if you know you'll be nervous during the interview itself). Think of any questions you might want to ask your interviewers. Some practice questions for you to answer might be:^[9]

- Why did you decide to apply to this job?
- What qualities make you a good fit for this job?
- What do you consider your strengths as a worker? What are your weaknesses?
- What are your career goals?



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3 Go to your interview. Be prepared. Take a written copy of the questions you want to ask. Have copies of your resume to pass out to the interviewers. Make sure you know where you are going, and leave early.

- Dress as if you already have the job -- it's better to be too formal than too casual. [\[10\]](#)
- Get your clothing ready the day before and try them on to make sure they are clean and pressed.
- Have a backup outfit if you spill something on it before you leave or the weather suddenly changes and your clothing is no longer appropriate for the interview.



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4 Do your best at the interview. Use your nervous energy to help you. Hopefully you will be early to the appointment, and you can walk around beforehand, breathe deeply, and visualize the interview going well. During the interview, try not to start talking before you have really thought about your answer. Take a deep breath before answering each question to give yourself time to answer.^[11]

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1 Discuss the specifics. After you get a job offer, it's important to be clear about what your job will entail -- what the people hiring you expect, salary, and benefits. Think carefully about whether you want to accept the job. Do you have lingering questions about your duties? Ask them now rather than after you've accepted. Are you unsure about the commute? Do it at rush hour and think about whether you could take it every day for years.[12]



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2 Accept the position. Congratulations! You've successfully landed a post-college job. Hopefully it's in your field and you're excited to begin. If it's not your dream job (and it's probably not) think about how long you will want to stay in the job, and what skills you hope to take away from this position. Get as much as you can out of the job you have.



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3 Keep networking. Even though you're not looking for a job, you probably will be in the future. You also might want to explore what your options at your current job will be -- whether you will be able to move up or if that's unlikely -- and networking will help. Meet with co-workers and people outside your job but in your field for coffee or lunch. You also might want to think about staying in touch with your college's career center -- they will still help you as an alumnus, and might want you to help future job seekers in your field.^[13]



Expert Q&A

Question

How can I get a good job after college?



Adrian Klaphaak, CPCC

Career Coach

Expert Answer

Look for job openings that make you feel energized. Trust your gut instinct and intuition when you're looking at job listings. If you're not excited about a job, it probably won't be a good fit.

Helpful ☐ Not Helpful ☐

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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 20,870 times.

★★★★★
2 votes - 100%

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