

2nd
edition



A Graduate's Guide to Finding Employment

Asher Rospigliosi; Sue Greener; Tom Bourner

SUE GREENER, ASHER ROSPIGLIOSI,
TOM BOURNER

A GRADUATE'S GUIDE TO FINDING EMPLOYMENT

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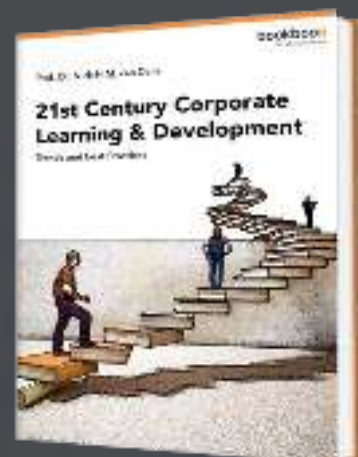
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The authors offer this book of tips to achieve two purposes. The first purpose is to support graduates who want some encouragement or practical advice on how to find employment.

The second purpose grew originally from discussions with a small group of graduates of the University of Brighton, with whom the first draft was discussed and which led to the first edition in 2011. We agreed to give all proceeds, from downloading the book, to charity.

Since 2011, we have been able to donate more than £1500 to UNICEF, a global children's charity – more details at www.unicef.org.uk. This second edition will do the same, all proceeds generated by people downloading the book (free to download) will be sent to UNICEF.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sue Greener

Dr Sue Greener currently works at the Brighton Business School, University of Brighton and as a Doctoral Supervisor at the Universities of Brighton and Liverpool (Laureate Online). Sue conducts research in the fields of online learning, Human Resource Development and Research Methodology. She is an experienced External Examiner, Chief Examiner and External Advisor in Business & Management. She has been Co-Editor of the academic journal *Interactive Learning Environments* since 2012 and is chair of the Brighton Business School Research Ethics Panel.

Sue has published for some years with Bookboon and is listed on ResearchGate and Scopus for publications. She has worked with Tom Bourner and Asher Rospigliosi on a range of projects including graduate employment.

Research interests

Personal & professional development, online resource design, blended learning, Human Resource Development, Technology Enhanced Learning, Research Methodology, Social media impact on learning communities.

Supervisory Interests

Sue's doctorate is in online learning and she continues to develop work in this area of the impact of digital learning technologies on learning design and community building in HE and organisational contexts. She currently supervises 5 PhD students at Brighton in related fields of social media and education, women and leadership, and the impact of dyslexia on learning in innovative SMEs. She has supervised two successful completions of PhD thesis, one in the field of women's learning environments in Saudi Arabian HE, the other the use of schoolteachers' acceptance and use of e-learning technologies, plus one DBA in the area of motivation and psychological contract.

In summary, the fields of supervisory interest are:

- Online and blended learning design in HE and in organisational contexts
- Social media in relation to learning and community-building
- Human Resource Development
- Problem-based learning
- Action learning
- Graduate employability

Sue is also a Lay Minister in the Anglican church, a breeder of pedigree Southdown sheep and a proud mother and grandmother.

Asher Rospigliosi

Asher is an economic sociologist with a passion for teaching the complexities of information systems in a business context. He has taught for nearly twenty years, but had a varied range of experiences before entering the Academy. He ran Comic Shops, swept streets and was a butler, before finding a place for his passion for networked information systems at the dawn of the internet age. During the 90s Asher built web sites and e-commerce publishing systems, eventually leading transnational software development projects for ZDNet.

Asher has worked with Tom and Sue on a number of projects relating to graduate employment and what it is employers value in graduates. We call our findings the New-Vocationalism. The idea is simple, that employers value that graduates have the willingness and ability to learn in employment

Asher's current research is into understanding the role of social media for job seeking graduates. He has published on graduate employability, signalling and human capital and the history of universities, action learning and New-Vocationalism in a range of journals including International Journal of Social Economics, Higher Education Review and Action Learning Research and Practice.

Away from work and research Asher is an enthusiastic cook, cocktail maker and father of three. With his wife Mitch and dog Cleo he spends much time walking the Sussex south downs, or sleeping by a fire in his tipi.

Tom Bourner

Tom is Emeritus Professor of Personal and Professional Development at the University of Brighton. Until he retired from the university he was Head of Research at the Business School and before that he headed up the Management Development Research Unit. He was also a committed and successful teacher being featured in an article in the 'Star Turn' series of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

Tom was trained as an economist and taught economics in polytechnics for 15 years. Then he became concerned about what happened to his students after they graduated, which led to an interest in graduate destinations more generally and then other outcomes of higher education (HE). At this stage his research mostly involved developing and analysing HE statistics. For example, in the 1980s he led the team that developed the transbinary database of HE outcomes of the *Council for National Academic Awards*. Increasingly, his interest turned to the educational processes that were generating these large numbers, including teaching and learning methods and then to ways of including personal and professional development within HE. Other areas of research have included part-time degree courses (during the 1980s), action learning (during the 1990s) and professional doctorates (during the early 2000s). He has published over a hundred articles in academic journals and more than a dozen books.

He has always been interested in developing innovative courses and at the University of Brighton led the development of a part-time degree course in Business Studies, a university-wide research methods course leading to a postgraduate Certificate in Research Methodology, a research degree programme for the Business Faculty leading to a postgraduate Diploma in Business Research Methods and MPhil/PhD, a Masters Degree in Change Management and Doctorate in Business Administration (BDA). His most recent programme development was the Altogether programme for developing knowledge and skills for neighbourhood renewal.

Nowadays, Tom's research interests are largely focused on university education and learning and teaching methods (pedagogical research), reflective learning in HE, graduate employability, action learning, student-community engagement and the role of the university in society. He regularly reviews books and referees submitted articles to academic journals.

Tom lives in Kemp Town in the heart of Brighton, which he loves. He is married to Jill, who recently completed a fine art degree in sculpture, and they have two wonderful daughters, Katie and Sally. Tom's other interests include staying fit and healthy, spending time with Jill, reading (especially works on 'big history', happiness, HE and human development), free-form dance, enjoying the delights of Brighton and otherwise living a simple life.

INTRODUCTION

How long it takes to find your first job as a graduate depends on many factors:

- The higher the aspiration level you set for your first graduate job the longer it is likely to take you.
- If you narrow down the graduate jobs that you will consider geographically, by sector of employment or in any other way, it is likely to increase the length of your job search.
- If you limit your search to only those graduate jobs that actually use the subject knowledge of your university degree, it is likely to lengthen the time you spend searching. At several points in this book we note the important fact that most graduate job vacancies are open to graduates of any subject.

This is not to suggest that narrowing down the jobs you will apply for is a bad thing. On the contrary, it is a mistake to set your aspirations too low; deciding you want to work for an ethically sound organisation, for example, can be a very good reason for restricting your job search. Perhaps the most important point is to find a job that will allow you to use your personal strengths to do work that is aligned with your core values. And achieving that is likely to involve you in a longer period of search than if you settle for less..

This book is not intended to be a lengthy read. When you are looking for a job, you already have enough to do. You could, of course, read it from cover to cover. However, we suspect you will prefer to dip in to a book like this; scrolling to a page that particularly interests you and start reading. Or you could use the contents list to find a chapter or group of tips, which address a particular problem.

Whichever way you use this book, remember that your job is waiting for you, and we aim to help you to find it. Whatever the state of the world economy, the degree qualification you have, or your aspirations for a career, finding the right job will take determination, courage, and good fortune. We wish you plenty of the latter in your search, and hope our collection of tips offer you some constructive food for thought.

Sue Greener, Tom Bourner and Asher Rospigliosi

1 WHILE YOU ARE STILL AT UNIVERSITY

A degree in any subject can lead in many different directions. Even if you have chosen a subject, such as accounting, which is directed at a particular vocation, you do not have to follow that particular career route. Remember that most vacancies for graduates ask for graduates of *any* subject. The people in your university careers service have the information to help you explore which direction(s) you might explore after graduation. But there are also things you can do while at uni to improve your chances of finding employment, that includes making sure your digital skills are work-ready and using any course options you might have to gain experience of work organisations. This chapter offers a range of tips which you might take up to improve your chances of employability as a graduate.

This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 1.1 University facilities
- 1.2 Using the web
- 1.3 Considering applications

1.1 UNIVERSITY FACILITIES

1. **Take up your entitlement to free careers guidance.** Your university careers service is a valuable resource, yet many students fail to use it. The staff in your university careers service will know about short-cuts and pitfalls of which you may be blissfully unaware. **This service will continue long after you have graduated – you will be able to use your university's careers service for future career changes, so start the relationship now.**
2. **Do some homework.** It pays to help the people in your university careers service to help you. If you go along to an interview with a careers counsellor in your university careers service and you say you haven't got a clue about what you want to do next, they are not really in a position to help you much. It is much better to think about some possible options and research them (from the library or the web).
3. **Ask your university's careers service** where past graduates in your subject have found jobs. This can be a good first move in helping you to begin to narrow down your options.

4. **Be open to alternatives and ready to change to your mind.** Recall again that most graduate vacancies are open to graduates of any subject. So, whatever subject your degree is in, you are not locked into any particular choice of career.
5. **Bear in mind that you are likely to change jobs and even careers during your lifetime.** So being open to change and opportunities is going to help.
6. **Recognise that the role of careers counsellors is not to recommend a particular choice of career.** They are there simply to help you explore options. You do not have to defend your career preferences, but just make sure you listen to what they have to say. Afterwards, you can decide what contribution it makes to your plans for finding graduate employment.
7. **Explore what resources are available from the offices of your university careers service.** You can do this by just looking around, but a more effective way is to ask one of your university careers counsellors about the range of resources in a careers counselling interview. It is just one of the things they will know a lot about.
8. **Find out about special events.** These might include, for example, careers fairs, open days, meetings with employers, work experience and events focused on student volunteering.
9. **Recognise that your university careers service is just the first step.** It is only one element in a job-hunting strategy. Afterwards, you will need to do your own research, but hopefully your university careers service will have given you a steer, some useful information and some helpful ideas.
10. **Computer readiness.** Now is the time to review your computer access, because internet access, basic computer and cloud-based record-keeping and word-processing are going to be important to your job search. At university you will have your own account and subscriptions to various services, as well as physical access either to plug in your own devices or to use desktops or laptops they provide. When not on campus, you can access the web at public places if you have Wi-Fi. If you have 3G, you can access it anywhere, but that is a more expensive route, depending on your contract or deal. If you have no computer at home, or no internet access at home, ask at your university careers service to use their facilities, find a job club locally, or ask everyone you know if they have an old pc or laptop which still works which you could borrow or buy. Or use your local library's internet access. Internet searching is going to be an integral part not just of your job search, but also of developing your digital profile – make sure you can regularly get online and be accessible there.

1.2 USING THE WEB

11. **Remember what the internet is good for.** Use the particular advantages of the internet to bookmark the websites you find most effective. This is what computers are great at, sorting and collecting data, and finding it again. When you are searching for a job, you will visit dozens of websites and some will stick in your mind as useful. Bookmark them so you can get back to them. If you submit your details to any, bookmark them and keep a note of the passwords you set in the process. Or, perhaps you could build a blog or webpage for yourself in which you list and link to the good sites you find.
12. **Think about option choice,** are there modules or courses you might take which will help your IT development and add to your CV? Whatever career you choose, this is going to be a vital set of skills, so try not to assume you know it all. Sign up for teaching in innovative areas: not because the content will remain the same over the next decade – it will keep on changing fast, but because the learning involved will help you adapt to changing technology. Try not to choose options on the basis of how they are assessed, or opinion on last year's teacher, look at the range of content you are studying and challenge yourself to broaden your knowledge.
13. **Your digital profile.** Consider how you will present a professional image tailored to your future job field, social media allows imaginative use of video, photos and designs to present both personal and professional images online. This does mean reviewing personal data, especially things relating to private life (photos etc.). Your profile online is likely to be searched or reviewed by any prospective employer so think what you are presenting online.
14. **Network online with care.** As mentioned previously, social networking sites such as Facebook tend to encourage personal revelations, and these are not necessarily conducive to professionalism. On the other hand, sites such as LinkedIn are focused on creating a professional network and can build rapidly. Networking can be a very efficient way of finding a job. Use this alongside other search processes to make best use of your time.
15. **Email courtesy.** One of the great things about email is the way it costs you so little time to be courteous. If a company or individual offers you a lead, or an interview, then email a thank you swiftly. Simple to do, but effective in distinguishing you from most other job-seekers.

16. **If you are active on the web, then you will get lots of spam.** Never open, click on, or reply to unsolicited emails if you do not know the sender and domain. Web tools will pick up your job searching activities, sending you commercial opportunities via email. Don't respond unless you are sure about the origin, as they are unlikely to help you and very likely to import viruses etc.
17. **Link to LinkedIn:** It is never too early to develop your profile on this channel. LinkedIn is not just a place to share stuff, it is a place to build contacts in your chosen field or fields. See if you can connect with authors, practitioners, experts in the professional area which interests you. Follow them and read what they are saying. Connect with them if you have something useful to add. There is more on this in the Social Media chapter in this book.

1.3 CONSIDERING APPLICATIONS

18. **Applying online may mean there is an all year round recruitment process,** or more likely, that online applications are accepted all year round and that there is a programme of interviews/assessment centres repeated at certain times of year. This particular arrangement will be unique to the company and should be findable on their website.
19. **Annual graduate recruitment is a seriously planned process aimed at those in their final year about to graduate,** or those who have just graduated. If you have taken a break after graduation for travel or work experience, this can be attractive to future employers, and if you want to do this but also want to secure a job, it may sometimes be possible to gain a commitment to a place for after your break. Annual schemes may start opening in October, for recruitment the following summer or autumn.
20. **Application processes for large companies take a considerable time.** Following online application, there may be psychometric or aptitude testing, telephone interviews, a face-to-face interview panel(s), and an assessment centre where groups of applicants will compete for a number of places. **Clearly, such applications can be time-consuming** since, while online tests and telephone interviews can be juggled around current study or work timetables, interviews and assessment centres may involve considerable travel and time to attend. This may be relevant if you have choices about when to start application processes and personal commitments, for example a booked family holiday.

21. **Small and medium sized employers are likely to recruit “as and when”** they need staff, and this may be frequently, throughout the year. Recruitment may be triggered by staff leaving, or the creation of new teams or roles. So don't necessarily wait until summer to search.
22. **Apply speculatively.** If a large employer's recruitment scheme dates have just passed, but you really want to work there, then apply regardless. You will need to be particularly persuasive, approaching the company with a targeted CV and covering letter, which sets out why you may be of value to them, and how you would like your information to be matched to particular types of vacancies or parts of the business. Many progressive companies like to maintain talent pools, which saves them time if they suddenly need a number of new staff. By being in such talent pools you may receive updates of company news and job opportunities; you may also be able to fulfil the early application process, so that upcoming jobs can be applied for swiftly.
23. **Never give up on the search, even if you feel you have found the right job.** Stay alert to potential job opportunities, which you could pass on to others, or which may come in useful for yourself. Network, and ask your friends and family to keep their eyes open for possible job opportunities – it is easy to pass them on quickly through email or instant messaging.
24. **Recognise that all work experience is not equal.** If you do a sandwich degree with a year's relevant work experience integrated into your degree course, it will undoubtedly enhance your career prospects. If, at the other end of the spectrum, your work experience is a short period of part-time work stacking shelves in a supermarket that, in itself, is unlikely to have much positive impact on your career prospects. In general, the sort of work experience that is most valuable to a new graduate is, (1) long-term rather than short-term, (2) full-time rather than part-time, (3) integrated into a course of study, and, probably most important, (4) the source of significant learning.
25. **Consider doing Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO).** This is a particularly attractive option if you're not sure if you want to travel overseas for a year, broaden your work experience, or get a job straight away. With VSO you can do all three at the same time. By spending a substantial period of time in one place overseas, you will not experience 'tourism myopia', i.e. developing a superficial view of where you go overseas; you will reach a deeper understanding of the people and their problems in the place you are based. There are various alternatives to Voluntary Service Overseas, it would be worth searching for opportunities with charitable organisations abroad.

26. **Do some other voluntary work.** Ask local societies, charities, clubs and other voluntary organisations if you can help out in ways that will enhance your work experience. You don't need to offer specialist qualifications or skills, but if you can that will be a bonus. For example, if you are completing a degree in information technology or computing, then you could offer to help set up or improve their web-site. If you have completed a degree in accounting, you could help with their finances, etc. Many universities and colleges organise links with local charities or voluntary organisations and offer direct contacts and voluntary service options. You may even find your voluntary work could be accredited as part of your degree.
27. **Ask professional associations and societies for sources of work experience.** Work experience is not always easy to find. Professional organisations can be a good source, and they often have useful links with professional bodies abroad.
28. **Remember that it is down to you to make the most of your work experience.** Work experience is an informal way of developing your employability, so usually there are no clear objectives or targets about what you will learn. You therefore need to take responsibility for obtaining maximum value from it.

DON'T EAT YELLOW SNOW

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2 SOCIAL MEDIA

This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 2.1 The importance of social media
- 2.2 Some tips for social media use
- 2.3 Getting started with LinkedIn

2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

For many of us social media is a place where we share content with friends. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn are all places where you may have words, pictures, videos and links you have shared (or maybe just been tagged in). Social media is also important as it can help to develop the networks of people, interests and organisations with which you are connected. Networks are one of the most important ways to find work. Your network of friends, family and others may be a way that you can hear about job opportunities or let others know you are work seeking. Social media extend your network, as they allow users to look at friends of friends, and maybe follow or connect with people we do not know directly.

Some employers may look at your publicly visible social media content and network, as a way of getting a sense of who you are. Social media presents a valuable opportunity to showcase the real you, a chance to show your interests, maybe some expertise or what you are passionate about. This might be something you do not think to put on your CV, but can show an employer important parts of your life. Pictures of travel, cultural and sporting pursuits or even just a good social life can all inform an employer. This also means there are risks of showing aspects of your life that you may not want your employer to see. It is important to review what can be seen, and what it says about you as a potential employee.

1. **Take a look through your shared content** and think about what it says about you. It may be that there is nothing you would not want to have an employer see, but it is worth thinking critically about how the content looks in the context of a job interview.
2. **Review your privacy settings.** Choose what you want seen. Facebook has privacy controls for each item on your timeline. Twitter and Instagram will let you set your account to private, so only those you approve can see your content.

3. **Use an 'incognito' or 'private' tab or browser to search for yourself on Google.** Your browser and phone offer search results based on your behaviour. To see what a potential employer would find, you need your browser to be anonymous. If your name is unusual, you may be surprised. Otherwise search for your email address, your name plus your town, school, college or university.
4. **Search Facebook for your email address.** Log out first, and you will see your profile pictures and cover photo. You may also find content you have been tagged in, that you did not post. You are still able to modify the privacy on these, even if they are not your pictures (once you log back in).
5. **Don't delete everything.** Employers may expect some content on social media, it is something many people participate in, and some employers may be puzzled if you leave no trace.
6. **Consider your social media as a showcase.** At the very least a nice Facebook profile picture and a LinkedIn profile that matches your CV will allow employers to see who you are.
7. **Find some pictures of you that show your professional face.** Your LinkedIn profile picture should probably show you looking professional. Your Facebook profile picture and cover picture should also be reviewed – what do they say about you as a possible employee?

For more tips on how to develop your LinkedIn page and use LinkedIn see the sections Getting started with LinkedIn and Power working with LinkedIn **For more tips on using social media to develop your network**, look for jobs and let others know you are seeking work see the section: Some tips for social media use

2.2 SOME TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

In the section on 'The Importance of Social Media' there are tips on how to make your social media presence safe, so a potential employer who searches for you is not likely to see something that puts them off. But social media and online social networking provide lots of ways to seek work and can be a way a job may find you. Granovetter's famous book 'Getting a Job' highlighted that 70% of all jobs come through networks. This statistic has remained remarkably consistent over nearly 50 years. The only real difference is that many of those networks have moved online. So your social media connections, and connections of connections may be some of the most useful places to seek work, and perhaps to have work seek you.

Social media networks may extend beyond people we know personally, and may give you access to specialised communities or groups who share an interest. If you are a participant in these communities, they may be a place where work opportunities arise, and it may be interesting and rewarding work, if it relates to some aspect of your life you are passionate about. Social media may be a way to identify types of work you would like. So it is worth taking some time to both consider what you like and look at on social media and to add to your social media use, things that relate to your work aspirations.

8. **Audit your network for useful connections.** You could look for people you know who are working in companies, sectors or locations where you would like to work. Let them know you are job seeking, and ask them to keep you in mind.
9. **Audit the network of those in your network who are working in companies, sectors or locations where you would like to work.** Maybe these 'friends of a friend' are mentioning openings or opportunities. Maybe you could message them directly, though you need to take care not to be too presumptuous or pushy with people you do not know. On Twitter and Instagram you could follow them, on LinkedIn you might ask to connect.
10. **Search for social media users that are active in areas you are interested in.** Are there Instagram or Twitter users that speak to the world you want to work in? Follow their accounts and like posts that you like.
11. **Be yourself on social media.** There is no point following accounts and liking content just in the hope it will lead to a job. Social media use reflects your identity and it is not useful to fake an interest.
12. **Join the conversation.** If there are topics you are interested in, social media gives you a chance to show your interest. When you find communities or groups discussing something you know and care about, you have an opportunity to demonstrate your engagement. Express yourself clearly, but be careful to treat others with respect; if your interest leads to a job opportunity, it may be those you spoke to online who are interviewing you.
13. **Follow up offline.** If you are engaged in online communities, where there is the possibility of a job, try to connect offline. Often a phone call, or a face to face meeting can make an online possibility become a reality.

14. **Research hot topics of interest in the area you want to work in.** Discussions and debates on Twitter and LinkedIn are very effective ways to learn about the issues of current interest to those who participate. You don't always need to join the conversation, but you might want to take note. In interviews or job applications, knowing what the industry or sector is debating will help to demonstrate your genuine interest and engagement.
15. **Celebrate your online brand.** Your social media presence can say a lot about you. Who you follow, what you like and what you say. The intersection of the varied networks of your interests are a reflection of your uniqueness, and are an important asset. Consider registering a web site to build an online portfolio, or link your different social media accounts, to show the range of your interests, networks and engagement.
16. **Develop your online brand across different social media platforms.** Look at the headline and profile LinkedIn, the 'about you' area of Facebook and your Twitter self-description. Are they up to date? Are they consistent and linked together? Do they tell others what you would want to say about you, your interests and your capabilities and that you are job seeking?

For more tips on how to develop your LinkedIn page and use LinkedIn see the sections Getting started with LinkedIn and Power working with LinkedIn

2.3 GETTING STARTED WITH LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is probably the most important social media site for developing and displaying your capabilities, experience and interests online. It provides a dynamic place for your online CV, your professional network and a work-focused social media platform where you can share, comment and like content related to the work you are interested in. Recruiters can use LinkedIn to find potential candidates. Job seekers can use LinkedIn to connect with firms and communities they want to be part of.

Most powerfully, LinkedIn allows users to maintain and grow a network of connections that may help in the linking of the right candidate with the right job. Networks are very important in job seeking with research consistently finding that most people in work found their job through their network. So actively networking on LinkedIn with a current and relevant profile may be some of the most helpful steps to finding the right job.

17. **Upload a recent and professional photo of yourself.** The profile picture is important – first impressions count a lot in making connections. Choose an image that shows your face and looks ready for professional work. It is easier to grow your network and your network will be more useful if people recognise you.
18. **Have a headline that says something.** Your name, your photo and your headline (text under your photo) are all that show on LinkedIn searches so these are what tells others who you are and what you offer. Make sure the headline is useful. It is a chance to say you are seeking work, what work you want, what experience you have but all in 120 characters (less than a tweet). It is a chance to sum yourself up in a short sentence. Here are three more tips to help you say something useful in your headline.
19. **Say you are job seeking in your headline.** There is a lot to fit into a small space, but signalling clearly that you want a job is important. Many users of LinkedIn are in the job they want and are maintaining their profile, you want to stand out as ready for work: now. Work a short phrase like “looking for” “seeking” or “ready for” into your short headline. You only have 120 characters.
20. **Use your headline to say what you offer.** You have experiences and interests that are unique to you. Try to find a short phrase that captures some of what you offer and to whom. Even if you have not had much employed work you can draw on your degree and relevant life experiences, but avoid exaggeration (see the next tip). Here are some examples.
- | Arts graduate with babysitting experience...
 - | Adventurous cook with BSc Chemistry...
 - | Extensively travelled Engineering grad...
21. **Avoid meaningless exaggeration in your headline.** While it is important to try and stand out, authenticity and honesty are very important. Use terms to describe yourself that are genuine and do not sound like boasting. Here are some terms you should try not to use (there are many more like them):
- | Outstanding
 - | Hard-working
 - | Dedicated
 - | Motivated

22. **Keep your profile up-to-date.** While job seeking try to be active on a regular basis, maybe aiming to visit LinkedIn several times a week. Sharing or commenting on news or content that shows in your feed, or even just liking items will show you are active and increase your visibility.
23. **Explore the network of those you are linked to,** especially those who are working in companies, sectors or locations where you would like to work. It is part of how LinkedIn works that you can show your interest and ask to connect to second degree connections (friends of a friend).
24. **Personalise your connection request.** The default LinkedIn connection request shows no consideration or interest in the person you want to connect with. If you add just a few words, it will make a significant difference to how the request is perceived, and this is a chance to tell them that you are seeking work. Maybe include a one-line summary of what you offer. Your request will appear in their email inbox and might be the only time that they will see what you want to tell them about yourself.

3 ABOUT YOU

The three big questions when searching for a job are (1) what have you got to offer? (2) what do you want from a job? (3) how can you use what you have to offer to secure a job that offers what you want from a job? Clearly it is necessary to answer the first two questions before you can answer the third question. The first two questions are fundamentally about knowing yourself. Question 1 ('what have you got to offer?') involves taking stock of your talents, strengths, skills, aptitudes and other positive attributes. Question 2 ('what do you want from a job?') involves exploring your needs, preferences and values and prioritising them in the context of potential employment.

This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 3.1 Finding your strengths, talents and positive qualities
- 3.2 Reviewing your skills so far?
- 3.3 Identifying your relevant experience
- 3.4 Clarifying what you want from a graduate job
- 3.5 Trying to see things from the perspective of a graduate employer
- 3.6 Getting active

3.1 FINDING YOUR STRENGTHS, TALENTS AND POSITIVE QUALITIES

The more talents, skills, qualifications and experience you can offer an employer, the more successful you are likely to be in the graduate job market. This section focuses on your talents and other positive qualities. Most people are not fully aware of their talents and strengths, yet these are key assets. Here are ten tips to help you to identify the range of your talents and strengths:

1. **Start by asking yourself 'what do I like doing?'** This can be a good starting place because most of us like doing the things we are good at, and we tend to get better at the things we like doing. So looking at things you like doing can give you clues about what you are good at. What skills, aptitudes or strengths do you use when you're doing what you're good at? If your aim is to find employment, then the question, 'what do I like doing?' is a sensible place to start.

2. **Feedback.** Ask other people who know you well, particularly your family and friends. Rather than just make a general request that can easily drift into a rudderless conversation, it is best to be specific about what you want with a question, such as 'I'm trying to develop my CV and I'd be grateful if you could help me by giving me feedback on 3 strengths or positive qualities that you see in me.
3. **Identify your weaknesses.** When you've listed your weaknesses then look for the strength behind each one. For example, 'stubbornness' suggests that you may also have 'determination and tenacity'. 'Impetuous' indicates that you can also be 'proactive', and so on. Each weakness offers a clue to one of your strengths and in the right context, each weakness can become a strength.
4. **Look at your achievements.** Identify your achievements and then explore each one for the talents and strengths on which the accomplishment depended. You can use questions such as, What talents/strengths do I have that made that possible? What talents/ strengths contributed to that level of outcome? What strengths or positive qualities made me want to accomplish that? We are not talking about earth-shattering achievements here, like climbing Mount Everest. We are simply looking for any time in your life when you did something which made you feel good about yourself and gave you a sense of accomplishment. Note that the point of reference is yourself, not other people. It doesn't matter whether or not it impressed other people, only whether it pleased you.
5. **Reverse chronological scan.** Divide your life into segments of 4 equal parts and then, (1) identify your main activities in each of those years, starting with the most recent years, then (2) identify any achievements associated with those activities, then (3) explore which of your strengths or positive qualities contributed to making those achievements possible for you.
6. **Variation on chronological scan:** you could use 'places you have lived' instead of time-periods if that makes most sense to you.
7. **Focus your search.** Partition your experience into particular domains to structure your search for your strengths, talents and positive qualities. It can be much easier to identify these if you can narrow the search down to specific areas. For example, you could look for strengths, talents and positive qualities in the domains of 'people', 'information/ideas' and 'things'. Then you can ask, (1) which of strengths talents and positive qualities are mostly to do with *people*? (2) which are mostly to do with ideas or *information*? (3) which are mostly to do with *things*?

8. Here are some more ways of **partitioning your experience** into different domains to focus your search:
 1. Work, leisure and learning
 2. Body, intellect and spirit
 3. Doing, being and having
 4. Self and others (What are my strengths in dealing with myself? What are my strengths in dealing with others or dealing with the outside world more generally?)

9. **On-line questionnaires.** There are some useful on-line questionnaires designed to help you identify your strengths. Here are couple of examples of on-line questionnaires that you can Google: (1) Strengthfinder 2.0, and (2) VIA signature strengths questionnaire.

10. **Use checklists of talents/strengths.** You can find partial lists of talents/strengths in books and web-sites on job-finding, career-management and career-life planning. They are only partial because they naturally focus on attributes that convey advantage in finding employment, and also because a full list of all possible strengths and positive qualities is arguably unlimited!

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3.2 REVIEWING YOUR SKILLS SO FAR

11. **Ask people close to you what work they could see you doing.** Many of us don't like to accept advice from those close to us. However, they often do have a point of view about us which is valuable. It would be interesting to ask a number of your friends and family what work they could see you doing and then compare their responses. Treat this as a proper project: write down their responses and then bring to bear your academic skills on this 'data', analyse it, and see what themes and ideas it suggests.
12. **What gets you in the 'zone'?** If you have a hobby, interest, passion, consider this as a source of information for your job search. What activities does this involve that you enjoy, or find stimulating? This can help to identify what you are looking for in a job.
13. **What have you learned from university about your relationship with time?** You learned certain skills and ways of getting by at uni. Do you work best at certain times of day? Do you need to make lists to keep track? Are you a last minute person? Have you learned to leave assignments until the last minute, because "I always work better under pressure"? Perhaps 'last minute' is too late to respond to tentative opportunities, or preparation for interviews. Now you are in job search mode it is time to review those skills. What don't you like about the way you use time? Might doing stuff as soon as it comes to your attention serve you better now?
14. **You and money.** Some graduates have had to learn the hard way how to budget and do just enough paid work to meet the bills. And you probably still have a significant debt to carry forward. This is now a common burden for graduates. However, there will be expenses around job searching which cannot be ignored. Some interviews are offered with very little notice, and that can be expensive on train fares or bus fares. Some companies will pay travel to interviewees, but this is not the norm. So plan now how you are going to find the money to get around the country to interview. Get interview clothes by asking for these as birthday gifts, or find smart clothing from charity shops. Start thinking not just about how to eke out money until you get a job, but how to fund starting work until the first month's pay arrives. Maybe a new financial strategy?
15. **What, where, how?** This is a method attributed to John Crystal, which is intended to help you understand where to start your job search, by getting to know your own skills and needs better.

“What” means identifying your transferable skills – that sounds jargon-ish, but it means look seriously at what you enjoy doing and list the skills involved. For example, if you enjoy cooking – think about a time you last enjoyed cooking and work out what skills it entailed. It could have included planning (menus, new recipes, suiting individual tastes), last minute coping strategies (when you didn’t plan or decided to use anything you found in a cupboard), entertaining, presenting (table layout, food presentation, colour co-ordination, serving) and so on. The idea is to think back to events in your life where you have enjoyed using any kind of skill and developing lists or maps or pictures of them. As the lists grow, you will have a clearer idea of what you enjoy doing and how these skills might transfer to work. The key here is not to list skills just because you are good at them, but to focus on the ones you enjoy (you are going to be spending a lot of your life at work!).

“Where” means the environment in which you thrive best. This may be the geographical location in which to look for work, or a simple city/town/rural choice. You might also think about the kind of workspace you enjoy most – lots of people or by yourself – open offices, big spaces, small spaces, outside etc. You might consider whether you want lots of variety of environment – work involving travel or regular changes of venue (e.g. consultancy, selling, researching), or whether you are happier in a regular place.

“How” means how you put into practice your chosen “what”s and “where”s. This involves research to find the kinds of job title, profession, career, employers that might offer this kind of work. Once you have decided on the type of work/job and employers, then you need to work on how to find the people in these organisations who can employ you – real names. Then make contact.

16. **Self-promotion.** While at uni it is possible you may have valued fitting in with the crowd, being one of the group. This is a useful skill in some social situations and new situations, but one you may need to unlearn for selection processes. What matters now is to stand out from the crowd – make sure you are memorable without being dismissed as too extreme. Apply some thought to this – who are you in relation to the crowd of people wanting a job – what makes you special and how can you stand out in group discussions, presentations etc at assessment centres?

3.3 IDENTIFYING YOUR RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

This can be far more demanding, yet more rewarding, than it appears. Whilst you may find the first list of relevant experiences comes easily, as it will be largely descriptive, the rich reward will come if you can re-describe your experiences in terms of the skills they reveal.

17. **What opportunities have I grasped at college?** For example, did you participate in sports or cultural societies at university? Did you take on job training in your work experience?
18. **What opportunities have I missed?** More importantly, consider what you have learned from this.
19. **Describe your achievements differently.** For example, use terms such as work experience, group projects, techniques, technologies, skills, individual learning, clubs and societies, rather than job titles and course names. This will make it easier to show actions rather than descriptions
20. **Quantify, quantify, quantify.** From the mundane, such as your attendance record, to any positive feedback you received from your employer.
21. **Use verbs, not adjectives.** When showing what you have to offer, try to give brief examples that show what you actively 'did', rather than what you passively 'were'. For example, instead of saying you were secretary of a particular university society you could say what you actually did in that role.
22. **When describing a group achievement, clearly identify what you personally contributed.** Be specific. What did you do? Did it succeed? How do you know it succeeded? Can you identify other benefits from the group activity? Did you resolve a conflict? Did you draw out a weaker colleague?
23. **Don't be afraid to include travelling achievements.** Some of the most important life lessons are learned in a foreign context. Was it a good investment of time and money? What elements or aspects of it might you be able to use in a job context?
24. **Don't forget voluntary work or community involvement.** This could include ways that you have helped your family or friends. What did you need to learn? What was difficult about it? What did you get praised for?
25. **Ask yourself what have I done outside of study and work this week, this month, this term, this year or indeed while at university?**

26. **What do I read?** Be careful how you approach this one! Does it pinpoint strengths relevant to this potential vacancy? Only put “reading” as a hobby if you are prepared to discuss specific books and genres with your interviewer.

3.4 CLARIFYING WHAT YOU WANT FROM A GRADUATE JOB

27. **You will find it much easier to succeed in your new job if you like it.** People who are successful in their work often spend every waking moment working because they really enjoy it, and often continue to work past retirement, even though they could easily afford to retire. So finding a job that is enjoyable and fulfilling may be more important than finding a job that pays well.
28. **Identify what you want from your graduate job, in terms of your own values.** We don't all want the same thing from a job. That which one graduate regards as 'stimulating', another sees as 'stressful'. That which is a 'challenge' to one graduate is a 'problem' to another. One graduate wants to be fully engaged by the job, and another wants to be able to switch off when they leave work at 5 pm. Have a look at the following list and identify the 4 aspects that are most important to you – and then rank those 4 aspects:
- a. Stimulation
 - b. Money
 - c. Congenial social environment
 - d. Self-respect
 - e. Respect from others
 - f. An opportunity to be creative
 - g. An opportunity to make a positive difference
 - h. An opportunity to use your skills
 - i. A chance to learn and develop
 - j. Challenge
 - k. Hands-on experience
 - l. Status
 - m. A career
 - n. Security
 - o. Opportunity for promotion/advancement
 - p. Variety
 - q. The opportunity to become a member of a team

3.5 TRY TO SEE THINGS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GRADUATE EMPLOYER

If you can understand graduate employment from the perspective of an employer of graduates, you will increase the likelihood of securing a graduate job. If you can really appreciate what graduate employers are looking for from graduate employees, it will help you to present yourself as effectively as possible in the market for graduate employment. For example, in a systematic study of what graduate employers look for in graduate recruits, employers were asked to assess the importance they attached to each of a list of 62 graduate attributes, and 'critical ability' ranked 32 on the list behind such items as dependability, co-operation, drive, self-management, flexibility, initiative, time management, self-confidence, persistence, planning ability, and ability with information technology.

29. **Realise that although the ability to write for an academic audience is a skill that is vital to those going on to become professional academics, most graduate employers do not particularly value the ability to write in an academic way.** In fact, some see this as something to be 'unlearned', as new graduate employees acquire different communication skills, such as writing business reports, executive summaries, and other forms of organisational communication, which require rather different abilities. This may be disappointing to you as you probably spent some time learning how to structure an academic paper and reference your sources correctly.
30. **Recognise that most graduate employers place relatively little value on some of the other skills and attitudes that a good university education seeks to develop,** i.e. a questioning attitude, disinterested enquiry and intellectual curiosity (i.e. a desire to learn for its own sake). The belief that these skills and attitudes are prioritised by graduate employers has not been supported by studies of what employers look for in graduate recruits. In fact, if anything, they seem to prefer attitudes towards the other end of the 'disinterested observer' spectrum, such as commitment and proactivity.
31. Try to answer this question: **'if it's not the knowledge, skills and attitudes that graduates bring with them by virtue of their university education, then what is it that most graduate employers value in graduate employees enough to pay them a 'graduate premium'?** Our answer to this question is that most graduate employers believe that, on balance, *graduates are more able and more willing to learn than non-graduates*. In other words, they are prepared to pay graduates a graduate premium because they think that, in general, graduates are better at learning new things than non-graduates. Graduates have become specialists in learning and employers with graduate job vacancies are prepared

to pay extra for that. This suggests that a graduate job should be defined as one that will require the incumbent to do a significant amount of learning while they are employed in that job.

32. **Understand why graduate employers expect that, on balance, graduate recruits will be better at learning than non-graduates.** The short answer is that they have proved their ability and willingness to learn by successfully completing a degree. Because they have had to demonstrate an aptitude for learning to be accepted onto a university degree course, i.e. they have had to satisfy entry requirements that test their ability and willingness to learn at school, and they have spent the whole of their undergraduate years, at least three years of full-time study (or full-time equivalent), in which they are required to do little else than learn. They are specialists in the practice of learning. An undergraduate degree can be viewed as an apprenticeship in learning. Graduate employers are looking for graduates who are prepared to learn. Note that the term, 'prepared to learn', can be unpacked into, 'able and willing to learn'. Ability to learn and willingness to learn go together. People who are good at learning tend to be more willing to learn, because the cost (mostly in terms of time and effort) of learning is lower for them, and because people tend to enjoy doing that at which they excel. You will enhance your prospects of finding graduate employment if you can convince graduate employers that you are good at learning, and are keen to learn more.
33. **Look at yourself through their eyes.** What would you do with a graduate fresh out of university if you had a business to run? Would you trust them immediately with a critical project? Or, would you want them to prove themselves willing and committed first? Newly graduated employees often have to offer some evidence of commitment before they become accepted and trusted. If that means doing something you think is menial, do it with humility. Consider every task you are given as a test of commitment and ability; throw yourself into it and prove you will do what it takes to earn trust and confidence in you.
34. **It is not just the boss you need to impress.** Give some thought to your new colleagues, how would they feel about you? Will they see you as competition? Arrogant and lacking experience? Full of theories and short on common sense? These are misconceptions and prejudices that some employees have about graduates in their first job. It is not hard to impress, provided you show yourself open to learning from them. Value their experience and use it to learn your way into the organisation – because that is what you, as a graduate, are good at, learning.

35. **You will not be the only one new around here.** When we first join a new group of any kind, we tend to assume that everyone else knows their way around and we are the only new person in town. This sometimes makes us feel inadequate, focussing on our own lack of knowledge. Remember that in most workplaces, some people will be quite new like you – look for them and see if you can make friends, help each other by passing on what you learn about how business is conducted in this workplace.

3.6 GETTING ACTIVE

Sometimes we need a little help from our friends. Getting active in the pursuit of employment does not have to mean endlessly editing your CV, there are other and possibly more valuable ways you can connect with people.

36. **Make full use of your alumni organisation.** You may have been to one university or more, but anywhere you have studied will consider themselves responsible, to a greater or lesser extent, to maintain contact with you and to support your professional development and job search activities. Alumni associations have a vested interest in staying in touch with you because, at some point, you could be valuable to them, for fund-raising, publicity, or for supporting and mentoring other new graduates. So don't dismiss or neglect this opportunity to stay in touch. Your university careers service will continue to support you if you make use of it. It's a simple way to obtain internet access, check current graduate job listings, gain advice, and network with others at events.
37. **Get together with friends.** On your own, there are only so many ideas you can have and work on at a time. There is creativity in numbers. Some of your friends will already have jobs – stay in touch, they may hear of other openings which might suit you. Avoid job envy; they may have obtained theirs by luck, personal contacts or family friends, systematic planning, or simply being less aspirational about what they wanted to do and where they wanted to do it. It is too easy to lose touch with others who could be helpful to you, just because you do not feel you have achieved so well. Your chosen career is far more important than short-term job competition. Your friends might be the way to find that special job; their recommendation at work may be useful, and they may also be able to give a more honest picture from the inside of an organisation.

38. **You could start a group or club** to meet and work on job searches together. This not only helps to keep you positive, but also allows you to learn from others' experiences, actions, chance ideas, or helpful advice. If you need help with how to get most value from a job search club or group there is a process called 'Action Learning' you could use. It has some well-established principles, such as regular meetings to reflect on, discuss, challenge and commit to actions, giving equal time to everyone at meetings, using questioning to help people reframe and revisit ideas and attitudes, These principles can be adopted and adapted for group meetings, provided you are all committed to supporting each other.

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4 SEARCH FOR EMPLOYMENT

This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 4.1 Getting out there
- 4.2 What kind of organisation do I want to work for?
- 4.3 Choosing how to search for a job
- 4.4 Power tips for working with LinkedIn
- 4.5 Documenting your experience
- 4.6 Job ads
- 4.7 Applying for vacancies online

4.1 GETTING OUT THERE

With all the technology we have at our fingertips today, it may be tempting to sit at home and click for a job. It is rarely that simple. In any case, staying within four walls for a significant length of time can be depressing and unhealthy. It's better to take a more active approach.

1. **Make looking for work into a job.** This is a popular tip for those who have lost a job, but it can also be applied for those seeking their first graduate job. The practical effect is that most jobs have regular working hours and a change of venue – both of which can be achieved by adopting a local library, internet cafe, or simply a different room at home which becomes your “workplace”. Treating job search as your full-time employment means that that, on the one hand, you spend enough time engaged in job search and, on the other hand, you don't become so obsessed with it that it dominates all your waking hours. Identifying a workplace and work times can support a disciplined approach to job search.
2. **Find a local library or use your local university library.** It is often possible to gain temporary membership of a local university library. If this is not possible, your local library may be good. What is the point here? To discover resources and gain access to resources you may not have realised were available.
3. **Don't give up the sports or other activities you enjoy.** For job searching, you need to stay fit and healthy both physically and mentally - and variety of activity is important for mental health too.

4.2 WHAT KIND OF ORGANISATION DO I WANT TO WORK FOR?

Some organisations regularly hire graduates fresh from university careers fairs and from annual application rounds. However, at the time it can be difficult to weigh up one organisation against another, and work out what you want to be involved in. Remember that organisations are professional bodies which specialise in self-promotion and they are competing for your attention. Even if you are looking for a job some time after graduating, the range is huge and complex. These tips compartmentalise types of organisations to help you decide what is right for you.

4. **Do you want to choose a global private sector organisation such as Diageo or Toyota?** These have job opportunities in many countries of the world, potentially high salaries, the potential for career development in-house, and a product range you can get to know beforehand. You will, initially, and perhaps for some considerable time, be a small part of a very large organisation and are more likely to benefit from standardised and consistent approaches to managing people, and graduate recruitment schemes offering you structured development. They also offer a range of career specialisms once you are established with them. Because of their business models in a turbulent world, they can also be ruthless about performance, and you will probably need to commit a big part of your life to working there. Furthermore, large employers are more likely to want staff to be mobile, so personal commitments to family or a local community may be difficult to keep.
5. **What about a small or medium-sized private sector organisation (with up to 250 employees)?** This is less stable potentially than a large one, though nothing is guaranteed whatever size of company you work for. A smaller organisation may see you as less dispensable, more important to their business and give you a wider range of opportunities to work in different parts of the business in a shorter time. Equally, they may have definite plans for you which keep you in one function within the organisation. Get to know as much as you can about them from public domain information, and preferably try to talk to someone who works there.
6. **Public sector organisations can be huge, such as the NHS, or much smaller and focussed on a particular service or kind of user, such as local authorities, schools and colleges.** They deliver goods or services by or for the government, and exist to serve the public interest. They will usually have well supported entry schemes, and offer good training and development opportunities. They are unlikely to be a job for life, though their pension provision might be good compared to some private sector employers. Additionally, don't expect a safe

and unchanging job. Change is endemic in the public sector, particularly as government policies dictate changed values and priorities, as well as services offered, and staff to deliver them.

7. **Small private sector businesses – with perhaps one or two principals in the business (usually owners) can be attractive**, as they will be paying you for your graduate skills and will see you as providing essential input to the business. However, structured development schemes are less likely, so you may have to work hard to get further training and/or development, or pay for it yourself. There may be a sense of freedom in a smaller business, but family-owned businesses can also be stifling, especially if you don't see eye-to-eye with the family members.
8. **Third sector organisations** may include large national and international charities such as Red Cross or Oxfam, but they also provide opportunities to make a difference in a small local voluntary organisation, which works for specific beneficiaries and has an active impact on them. Not-for-profit organisations will need similar managerial and functional expertise, but are usually be in a position to pay as much as the private sector. Experience in this sector will usually be important for entry, so volunteering in a relevant field can help you gain employment.
9. **Do you want to work in a local organisation?** This will cut down the choice drastically, unless you live in a major urban centre, but may help with living costs and travel costs if you are at home or living with friends.
10. Though **your initial ambition** may be to work locally and live at home to absorb costs, it may prove easier to investigate public transport links to nearby cities and towns, which are likely to have wider job opportunities. It is too easy to get downcast when a thorough trawl for local jobs draws a blank. Follow the train line or bus routes to see how far you could go for work and still live at home, and how much you would need to earn to outweigh the commuting. Bear in mind that most people don't enjoy commuting and research has found that it is something they don't get used to over time.

4.3 CHOOSING HOW TO SEARCH FOR A JOB

Dick Bolles suggests there are just 16 ways to find a job: emailing your CVs, answering job ads, using government services (e.g. JobCentre Plus), searching employment agencies, asking anyone you know who might know of a vacancy, using former teachers, schools, colleges and universities, scanning the web sites of organisations you want to work for, searching company listings to find local and interesting companies, joining or forming a job club, doing a thorough self-audit of skills you have, and which you enjoy using, visiting places where employers find workers (career fairs etc.), applying for Civil Service entrance, studying professional journals in a field that interests you, using a temp agency in the hope of being permanently recruited, volunteering and using the internet.

This last suggestion shows the classic list was written in an era when the internet was less embedded in all aspects of how we live, and we have sections elsewhere in this book on social media, and LinkedIn in particular, to address 'using the internet'. In this section we will focus on how to search, as well as the consequences of there being so many choices.

11. **Do not try all these methods at once!** There is some evidence to show that you maximise your chances of finding employment if you use more than one, but no more than four, of the above methods. Choose what appeals to you, rather than doing all of them half-heartedly.
12. **Use active not passive methods.** It is very tempting to do the simple passive things first – such as write a CV (see the section on 'tailoring your CV for a specific job') and upload it to an online jobsite and expect things to happen, or buy a paper and hope there are suitable jobs in it. Research shows that doing more active things pays off better than these activities. The methods of job searching, which have the highest chance of finding you a job are: a) doing a thorough self-audit and finding out what you really enjoy doing (see our chapter 'About You') and where you can do so through serious focused job research, b) working together in a group with others looking for work (job club, action learning set or informal group of friends) but helping each other out with leads, ideas and encouragement, and c) actively identifying, emailing or calling or, preferably, visiting employers in your chosen area, whether or not they are advertising jobs.
13. **Manage your working hours.** If the ideal full-time job is not showing itself quickly, or if you have a range of interests and do not want to put all your eggs into one basket, consider a flexible working contract. Options include part-time, zero hours contract/retainer, project work, consultancy, tele-work, or job-share. Alternatively, look for the kind of work, which occupies part of

the week, and leaves some space and time for another part-time job or leisure activity. An example is someone who is passionate about textile design, but to develop a portfolio she works from 7am to 12 noon as a barista in a coffee shop and devotes her afternoons to her creative work. Flexible contracts are not the traditional way to begin a graduate job, but increasingly, qualified graduates are building portfolios of work, which allow them more freedom to organise their time. Consider working from home, or incorporating different part-time work elsewhere. This does not make life easy, and you must be particularly careful with zero hours contracts or other insecure employment, but it might be the tailor-made solution to meet your individual needs.

14. **Use keywords related to your enjoyable skills for focused job searches.** Search becomes most accurate when precise keywords are used. Our chapter 'About You' suggests doing a thorough self-audit and finding out what you really enjoy doing and where you might find somewhere to use these enjoyable skills, through serious focused job research. Build lists of keywords, these may be clustered into factors about you, the sector, the nature of the work and about your location. These can be combined in different ways to give a number of searches to save and use against job listing sites and recruitment agencies (and maybe directly in Google). They may produce quite different results. Those that work well can be saved as searches to produce email alerts (see next tip)
15. **Save effective search phrases as alerts.** Most job listing sites, recruitment agencies and search engines will allow you to save a search term, and receive an email alert. Recombining the phrases and search terms (from the previous tip) will increase the likelihood that you will hear about a range of job openings.

4.4 POWER TIPS FOR WORKING WITH LINKEDIN

The section of this book 'Getting Started with LinkedIn' in the chapter on social media has a set of tips for making your LinkedIn profile and network work for you. Once you are actively networking on LinkedIn with a current and relevant profile, here are some tips to boost how often you show up in the news feed of your connections. Like other social media platforms, LinkedIn uses algorithms to put items and people in the feeds of users. The algorithms are designed to encourage users to visit LinkedIn frequently and keep them on the site once they are logged in. Here are some ways you can use those features to increase the visibility of your profile and make people in your network more likely to think of you when a job opening comes up. Remember that for many years research has shown that most people find their jobs through their networks.

16. **Share online content you have made or worked on.** Links are a way of building your online portfolio, and showing what you have done, but also each time you post on LinkedIn, your post will show up in some of the feeds of your connections. You could link to online materials you made while you were a student (did you create a blog, wiki or other online coursework?). Were there reports or updates related to projects you were involved in from part time work, placement projects or charitable volunteering? LinkedIn makes it very easy to post a link, and you only need to write a few words to explain what your involvement was.
17. **Publish links with a comment to content online you think is interesting.** Even if you do not have any of your own content online, share what you are reading or viewing. So long as it is related to areas you want others to know you find interesting, LinkedIn as a social media platform, is an effective way to show your interests. You could share guides and tips you find about job hunting, as a way to show your network that you are looking for work. Why not share a link to this book? Maybe other graduates would be glad to find it. More seriously, you can show you are keeping up with news and guides to the industry or organisations you are interested in working with. A link with a one line comment on why you thought it useful or interesting will help to keep your profile visible and will serve as a summary of your interests.
18. **Comment on other users posts, or share them with your own network.** Commenting on an interesting post is a way to show you are out there, that you are reading relevant content and that you have an opinion. Finding one useful idea to add, or an anecdote or a link to an example can expand a post and make a useful contribution. And if your comment shows some interesting thought, this may increase the likelihood of you being considered by others in your LinkedIn network.
19. **Personalise Your LinkedIn Profile URL.** By default your LinkedIn Profile URL will be initials, numbers and some of your name, but you may be able to choose one that is more memorable. Then add it to the signature of your emails, and put it on your CV.
20. **Add a background image.** As well as the professional photograph of yourself, LinkedIn gives a space at the top of your page for an image. This is a chance to show a bit more about yourself – it is a cliché that a picture speaks a thousand words, but is it true that an image can convey a lot of information very rapidly. So the background image offers a chance of personal branding, showing key

achievements or showcasing a creative or distinctive aspect of yourself. There are many free online tools to build one just the right size and format, search for “LinkedIn Background Photo Generator”

21. **Join LinkedIn groups.** There are groups related to where you studied, your field of study and sector(s) in which you want to work. There may also be groups related to your location or your interests where you can build your network. If you are practising some of the tips above, on publishing and commenting, your contributions will be seen by more people, the more relevant groups you are in.
22. **Connect with people you do not know.** LinkedIn makes connecting easy, and the more connections you have, the more likely that someone will have news of a job that may suit you. If you see 2nd degree connections saying or sharing interesting things, or if they work in a sector or organisation you are interested in, ask if you can connect. Don't forget to use the tip on personalising your connection request (see Getting Started with LinkedIn) and tell them why you want to connect.

4.5 DOCUMENTING YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE

Certain prospective employees have been known to exaggerate (or even falsify) their experience to secure the job they want. As a result, employers increasingly expect evidence to support claims of experience. Work experience, and skills based on work experience that can be documented are more valuable than experience and skills that are difficult to prove. There are a variety of places you could keep and show evidence of your work experience including LinkedIn, your own web site, Instagram or even a file. Besides providing evidence of relevant experience this record can help you find useful examples for your CV and indicates a methodical and organised approach to work.

23. **Make a written record of all past jobs.** You should include as much as possible, such as: (1) name and address of employer, (2) description of main duties, (3) main responsibilities, (4) reason for leaving, (5) the name and address of someone who can vouch for your experience. In addition record examples of tasks or projects that went well, photos and commendations are all valuable. If you can get these on a public site like LinkedIn or your social media – so much the better.
24. **Keep any certificates you accumulate safe.** Even if these are things like first aid courses, or internal training courses, they all count. They are evidence of your work experience, enthusiasm and willingness to learn.

25. **Ask your employer or supervisor for an 'open' testimonial.** An open testimonial is a reference that is headed 'To whom it may concern'. This is always worth having, because employers are sometimes hard to find later. The person who supervised you may move on, forget about your employment, or may simply be difficult to contact. The most valuable places for these testimonials are on public spaces such as LinkedIn or your social media, but an email or print letter are also useful. Take a photo of the letter if it is printed.
26. **Keep any commendations or thank you letters or emails from past clients.** If these were sent to the organisation rather than to you, do not be afraid to ask for a copy.
27. **Maintain contact with your supervisor and other close employees,** who are in a position to give you a 'closed' reference, i.e. a reference that you do not see. These carry more weight than open references with potential employees. As soon as possible after leaving, send a 'thank you' email to your supervisor to help to ensure you are remembered, and a few Christmas cards for a couple of years after you leave is a pleasant way of staying in contact.
28. **Hold on to any evidence of particular achievements.** This could include documents of achievements such as 'employee of the month', or a bonus for exceptional performance.
29. **Keep induction manuals and training handbooks.** These can provide evidence of what you have covered, and can also serve as an aide-memoire to you.
30. **Record details and evidence of any project to which you contributed.** As for it to be mentioned on LinkedIn or other social media.

4.6 JOB ADS

Whether you are looking at LinkedIn, company web sites, Twitter or agency sites, it is easy to be discouraged after you have read the first hundred! Try to find ways to keep the activity of reviewing job ads fresh for you.

31. **Take lots of breaks when you are reading through job ads.** After a while, they will all look the same and all feel inappropriate. Frequent breaks may help you pick out the possibles with more clarity. Make notes of any interesting organisations you might like to work for, even if the advertised job isn't suitable for you. You can always visit their website or talk to them about other potential vacancies.

32. **Look for the key facts which constrain your choice of job.** Looking through endless job ads can be very time-consuming and repetitive. Make sure you know the things about a job, which will make you reject the ad – look for these first. This is your basic filtering process. For example, there may be a location you want to avoid, or a type of job which you have tried and really disliked, or perhaps there are specific anti-social hours which are simply too inconvenient. While you do need to keep your options open as much as possible, make a list of these limiting factors, and make sure you review the ads for these first, to save you time.,
33. **Look for the gaps.** What is it that the employer or agent is NOT saying in the ad? Do they not mention hours of work, or training etc.? The gaps may be significant for your choice.
34. **Study job ads rather than scanning them.** Put your academic skills into action by writing a comparative study of jobs ads in your chosen field. What do they have in common? What distinguishes them? Which media carry similar types of job in your field? Usually, when looking for a job, we scan adverts very quickly, and reject them. Delve deeper into the industry that interests you, considering each position.
35. **Where else can you find job ads?** We have mentioned LinkedIn, company web sites, Twitter and agency sites, but you can find jobs through many other routes, especially your own networks. Try asking your friends in employment, family friends and across your online social networks (see the sections in this book on LinkedIn and social media). Be alert for any channel of communication with potential to deliver a job ad.

4.7 APPLYING FOR VACANCIES ADVERTISED ONLINE

Most jobs are listed online in several locations. Typically the details will be listed on the organisations web site, but unless there is a particular place you want to work, job portals or job listing sites are the most realistic route to discovering openings

Job advertisements in newspapers are an easy way of identifying vacancies. They usually give information on the pay and the nature of jobs, which facilitates job comparison... On the other hand, vacancies advertised in the press usually attract large numbers of applicants, possibly thousands. In other words, using job adverts is an easy way to look for jobs, but it will attract many other graduates, so prepare yourself for some serious competition.

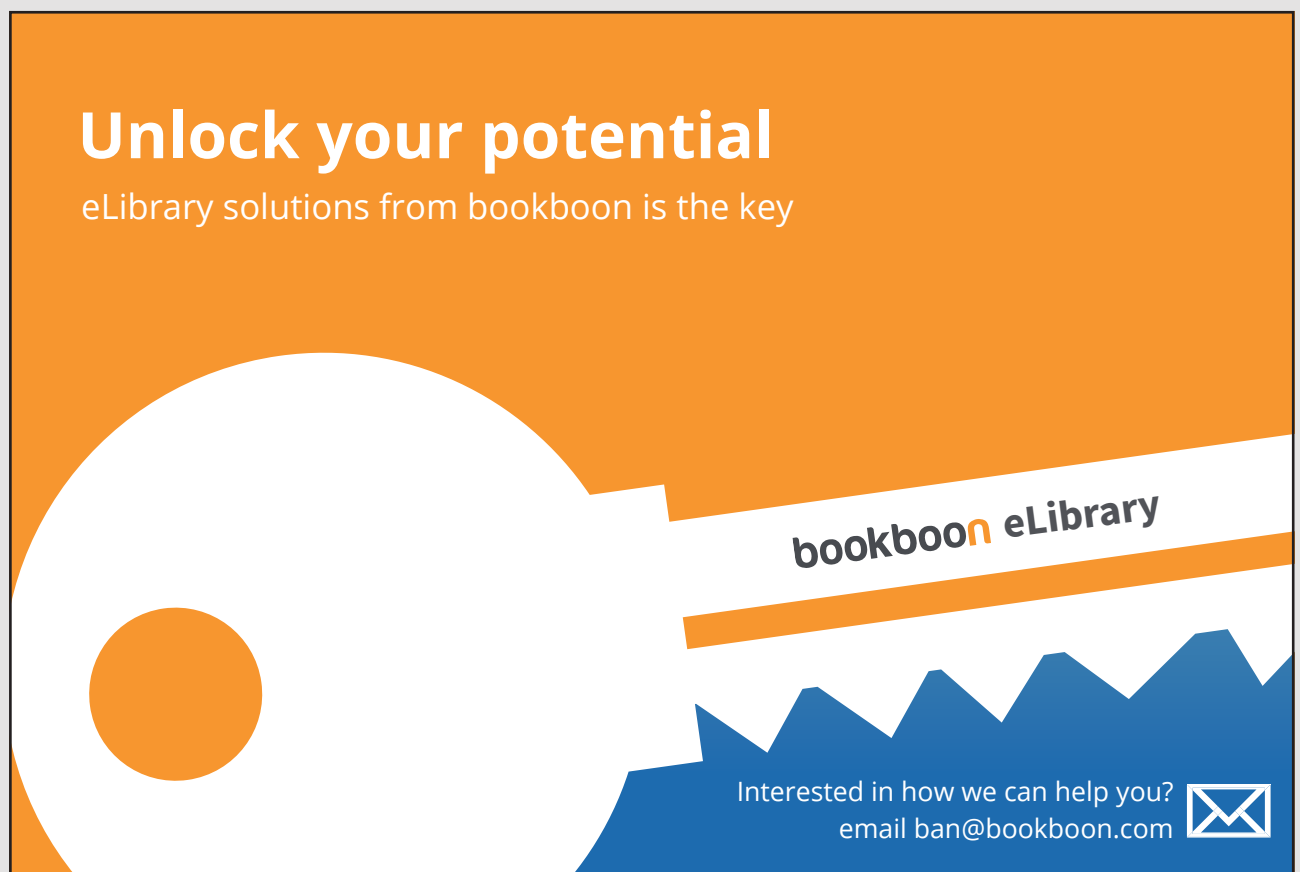
36. **Do not depend on a single site as your only source of vacancies; not all job vacancies are advertised on all sites.** Many employers never advertise vacancies. Some estimates put the proportion of job vacancies advertised as low as 10 percent.
37. **Search for a range of portals and job sites.** Online resources change frequently so do not rely on a quick website list but search using a variety of search terms and search engines (for more see the section on choosing how to search for a job).
38. **Find specialist job sites for sectors you are interested in.** There are many sites that specialise in specific sectors such as education, technology and healthcare. These sites are likely to get listings that may not reach the biggest job sites, or may be hard to discover among the many new listings adding to the biggest sites.
39. **Consider looking at specialist job sites for sectors you are not interested in.** You may not think you want to work in education, but a listing for a social media ambassador at a university might be just the opening to working in digital marketing you have been hoping for.
40. **Sign up for alerts.** Once you have found sites that look promising, subscribe – using your selected search term (sometimes known as filters) to alert you by email when new vacancies that meet your criteria arise.
41. **National web sites may be the most relevant for graduate job vacancies, but don't rule out regional sites.** The widest selection of managerial, professional and skilled jobs will be the national jobs sites. However, they tend to carry vacancies for jobs predominantly in the capital, and larger cities. Regional sites may be good for more focused job searches, especially for vacancies in companies, with a strong presence in your preferred region.

5 APPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the most usual documents required in job applications, that is the application form and CVs. There is also a section on Recruitment Agencies. Requirements will differ among organisations and agencies but there is one sure thing and that is sending out a 'standard' CV to multiple jobs and agencies is unlikely to get you far. Each time you use a CV, make sure you re-read each time you use a CV and tailor it whenever you can to make it relevant to the job and organisation for which you apply.


This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 5.1 Completing an application form
- 5.2 CV presentation
- 5.3 CV content
- 5.4 Honing your CV
- 5.5 Making the most of your CV
- 5.6 Tailoring your CV for a specific job
- 5.7 Evaluating your CV
- 5.8 Recruitment agencies and job boards



Unlock your potential
eLibrary solutions from bookboon is the key

bookboon eLibrary

Interested in how we can help you?
email ban@bookboon.com 

The advertisement features a large white key graphic on an orange background. The key's shaft is a white banner with the 'bookboon eLibrary' logo. The key's head is a white circle with an orange circle inside. Below the key is a blue jagged mountain range graphic. The contact information is located in the bottom right corner of the banner.

5.1 COMPLETING AN APPLICATION FORM

While you will require a CV for most job applications, you will usually find that a specific job requires you to complete an application form. This has both benefits and drawbacks. The form provides you with an explicit structure, and this helps to ensure that you cover what the recruiter has identified as important. The form may also indicate the weight that the recruiter attaches to the different areas, by how much space is available to answer the various sections. A drawback of this structure and weighting is that it requires you to discuss each aspect the recruiter has identified, and may not allow you space to show off other skills. The process of completing an application form has much in common with [tailoring your CV](#) for a specific job.

1. **If it is an online form**, save it to your computer, or at least prepare your text using a word processor. It is all too easy to spend time filling out an online form, to then lose everything if the browser crashes, or moves you to another page.
2. **Use a word processor to help with spelling errors, but make sure you always proof read** the document, too. A spell checker will not help if you have used the wrong word or phrase in the wrong context. You may copy parts of your CV into an application form, but make sure you answer the question without mindlessly copying and pasting. Always read the instructions and the question carefully.
3. **Use the job specification.** Download any available details about the job. This may include separate documents that relate to the job description, person specification, and possibly a departmental or organisation description.
4. **Identify the key requirements.** As you go through the job description and person specification, use a highlighter to identify exact words and phrases used to describe the job requirements, and potential employee.
5. **Use their words to describe yourself.** Find the phrases they use to describe what they want, and apply these, truthfully, to your own context.
6. **Never say anything you do not mean** or cannot justify. However, do not be shy of selling yourself either; this is your chance to tell them exactly why you should do the job.
7. **Do not be afraid to spell out information explicitly.** Interviewers do not always have time to draw connections, so do this for them to maximise your chances of success.

8. **Complete every section in an application form.** Little attention will be paid to application forms with incomplete sections. Application forms are used to ensure the required information is provided. If it isn't, they are usually discarded instantly.

5.2 CV PRESENTATION

Your CV should be as reader-friendly as you can make it. Your aim should be to put the reader your potential employer, in a good mood. As well as being reader-friendly, your CV needs to look professional. If an employer is swamped with applications for a good job, then the interviews are likely to go to those who produce the most professional-looking CVs.

9. **Head the page 'CURRICULUM VITAE'.** This is especially important if it is accompanied by several other documents (covering letter, application form, testimonial etc) as it helps the reader find essential information quickly.
10. **Use A4 paper.** A4 paper is the standard size of paper used in organizations; it is the easiest to handle and file. However you may want to use a good quality paper, rather than photocopier quality, to demonstrate the care and attention put into your CV.
11. **Word-process your CV.** You may be tempted to hand-write it, as this is can be more personal. However, a hand-written CV is also more difficult to read.
12. **Try to provide all the information on one side of one sheet of paper or at most both sides of one A4 sheet.** Longer CVs take longer to read. If you want to produce a longer CV, then produce a one-page executive summary as well, so that when the person-who-has-the-power-to-give-you-an-interview reads it, they can decide whether or not they want to plough through the longer version.
13. **Use black ink.** Colour for headlines or key summary can be useful if you can make multiple copies but it may be copied by the organisation into black and white. Black produces the best photocopies.
14. **List any vocational qualifications separately from your academic qualifications.** This may include qualifications, such as a first aid certificate, driving licence. Keeping academic and non-academic qualifications separate makes the CV easier to follow.

15. **If you present the information on your CV in chronological order or reverse-chronological order, be consistent with all the information on your CV.** In other words, never use chronological order for one section and reverse-chronological order for another. Such inconsistency violates the principle of reader-friendliness.

5.3 CV CONTENT

A CV (curriculum vitae) is a concise statement of your personal details, education, experience and achievements. It is sometimes termed a resume or a bio (short for biography). As a prospective employee, it is your 'shop window'. Its purpose is to provide a prospective employer with an executive summary of your background and suitability for the job in question. It should do so in a way that can be absorbed by a potential employer as quickly and easily as possible. Here is a check-list of the main items on a CV:

16. **Personal details and contact information** This should include: (1) full name (first name, followed by any middle names and then your surname), (2) full postal address (you may include a university address and a parental address, so you can be contacted at all times), (3) telephone numbers with different day and evening numbers, including mobile as well as any relevant landlines (4) email address.
17. **Educational details and qualifications** This part should include schools and colleges attended, subjects studied, and qualifications and grades obtained with dates.
18. **Experience** (including part-time and vacation work) Include the name and address of employers, job titles, and brief details of your main responsibilities.
19. **Achievements** Focus on any achievements that provide evidence of your capacity and willingness to learn in varying circumstances. This may include backpacking abroad, working on your college newspaper etc.
20. **Interests** These help to differentiate you as an individual. Again, focus on those interests that emphasise your capacity and keenness to learn in different situations.
21. **CVs are laid out in a 'formulaic' way to make the information as quick and easy as possible for the reader to absorb.** This is important because for any job there may be hundreds of applicants each submitting a CV. The formulaic aspect of CVs means that readers generally know where the information they

are looking for will be found. In general, a CV opens with personal details and contact information, a key skills summary, followed by educational history and qualifications, experience including work history, achievements, and finally, interests. You can distinguish yourself by deviating from this formula, but only at the cost of reader-friendliness. If you do decide to deviate significantly from this pattern, make sure the benefits outweigh that cost.

5.4 HONING YOUR CV

The easiest way to produce a good CV is to do it in two stages: (1) produce a rough first draft, (2) make improvements to it. Here are some suggestions as to how to improve it:

22. **Ask a friend or family member to read your CV and give you feedback.** Ask them for the 3 positive points about it, and 3 ideas for possible improvements. Then, amend your CV in the light of this feedback.
23. **Check for redundant information.** Information that was relevant for the last job you applied for may be irrelevant for this one, or at least need adapting.
24. **Remove acronyms unless you are *certain* the reader will know what they refer to.** If in any doubt, replace them with their full versions or define them the first time you use them by putting the full version in brackets after the abbreviation.
25. **If you are a mature graduate, delete or minimise any old information, such as previous clients or job detail.** Retain it only if it is very relevant to the particular job for which you are applying.
26. **Triple check your CV.** Human input, preferably from someone who can be objective, surpasses that of computer spell checkers.
27. **You need to have at least have two versions of your CV,** a print version, and an online version. You may also find it helpful to have a plain text version without formatting, which may make it easier to insert sections into an online form if needed.
28. **Your online CV can include links** to work you have done, social media etc. You may also wish to link to an online portfolio of your studies and work.

29. **When you email a CV to a potential employer**, make sure you put a useful and explicit subject line to the message, such as “*CV for [your name] applying for job [job title here]*”.
30. **The eight second CV.** It is true that most employers will give your CV very brief attention, particularly if you have sent it in relation to a job advertisement, as it will be part of a pile of CVs. The employer’s main job (or that of their HR department) will first of all be to discard as many CVs as possible. Thus, there must be nothing on your CV which causes them to notice adversely and discard. Such negative triggers may be a gap in education or work experience, which is unexplained, a lack of a qualification specifically requested in the job ad., a poorly presented, crumpled CV, or one with grammar or spelling mistakes.

5.5 MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR CV

Your CV provides a prospective employer with at-a-glance information about you as a prospective employee. The main objective of a CV is to get you an interview. CVs are often used by employers to filter out people *not* to interview. A good CV will not get you a graduate job but a poor CV will probably prevent you getting one.

31. **Make sure you keep your CV up-to-date.** You will normally need to edit your CV for every job application.
32. **To a greater or lesser extent your prospective employer will project the qualities of your CV onto to you.** The employer will not have met you when they get your CV and so will look for clues about you from the CV. If your CV is unprofessional and sloppy, that is how you will come across to the employer. Instead, you want your CV to be evidence that you can work professionally and to a high standard.
33. **Make sure you give your full contact details.** Sometimes interviews are called at short notice and are, therefore, given to people who can be contacted immediately.
34. **Avoid gaps in your educational or work record. If there are any (e.g. when you were travelling or unemployed) include them and indicate what you were doing.** Gaps create suspicion, and there is a danger that a prospective employer will infer that you are hiding something and think the worst.

35. **Keeping CV copies on file.** This isn't the only time in your life when you will need to keep updating your CV, it will happen again. So take a little care to title your CV files clearly. You might want to save the CV file not only to show the date at which you updated it, but also the company or sector for which you amended it. Then if, in the future, you need to remember how you tailored it for a specific type of job, you can easily find the right version.

5.6 TAILORING YOUR CV FOR A SPECIFIC JOB

While it is important to have a generic CV ready to submit where requested, there are times when a CV will need to be tailored or customised for a specific job. The likelihood of this increases if the job is asking for special skills, but even for a general position, a CV that relates closely to the job, is more likely to tick the right boxes with the employer. What do we mean by tick the right boxes? Well, if you put yourself in the place of the recruiter for a moment, you will see that as they read through the submitted CVs, they will have a list of criteria that allow them to decide who to call for interview. In tailoring your CV, you are attempting to make this easy for them, by making it evident in what ways you meet their criteria.

36. **Arrange items in your CV in the same order as the employer has chosen if this is different from your normal CV.** Make it easy for the recruiter, as they go through your CV, to see how you meet their criteria.
37. **Highlight the most important matches in your covering letter.** Take the items that they have asked for, and put them in the covering letter using their words.
38. **Online CVs and automatic filtering.** At the end of your CV, include a list of relevant keywords – this is picked up by various types of software on job sites and by employer's application sifting software. Make sure the keywords directly relate to the particular job in question, and change them regularly.

5.7 EVALUATING YOUR CV

If you were going to assess your CV, what mark would you give it out of 100? In order to assess it, you need some criteria against which to evaluate it. This section provides you with such criteria.

39. **Complete.** Does it have any missing sections? Have you missed out anything significant from any of the sections?
40. The person-who-has-the-power-to-give-you-an-interview will probably have very many CVs to scan, and **the ones that are hardest or slowest to read are most likely to be discarded.**
41. **Looks professional.** If your CV looks professional then you are likely to come across as a professional person, which is an important criterion. Spelling errors, for example, indicate that you have not taken the trouble to proof-read it properly.
42. **Reader-friendly.** For example, if it contains any obscure abbreviations then you should mark it down on this criterion.
43. **Fit for purpose.** Its purpose is to provide a prospective employee with an executive summary of your background, your suitability for the job and as someone they would gain from employing. How well does your CV achieve this purpose?

5.8 RECRUITMENT AGENCIES AND JOB BOARDS

This is the place to which graduates often turn when immediate prospects are looking less hopeful. A recruitment agency has all the right connections to employers, and may prove a useful route in to the job you want. Job boards or recruitment websites which ask for your data may be useful as some can be trawled by agencies or large employers, but simply signing up on many does not guarantee any success.

44. **Don't sign on with too many agencies or sites.** For a start, it will be difficult to be available at all the times different agencies may call you for interviews or to visit companies – this way you end up letting them down and they are unlikely to work hard for you again.
45. **Agencies often specialise in particular sectors, functions or industries** so be choosy about what interests you. Use www.rec.uk.com run by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation to identify specialist agencies.
46. **Treat the agency as if it were a prospective employer.** It is not a service run entirely for your benefit, the agency has a professional interest in maintaining excellent working relationships with employers. If you fail to turn up to arranged

appointments “because it’s only an agency”, they will in turn be less committed to finding you work.

47. **Some agencies and sites provide additional services** – sometimes paid for – to help you with industry jargon and specialist requirements, or simply to support you with interview practice or CV building.
48. **Build a relationship with your recruitment consultant, promote your skills and knowledge, and share your goals honestly with them.** It will be important they know you as well as possible when they are matching you with possible jobs.
49. **Most agencies run websites or job boards online.** As with the houses promoted by estate agents, the same vacancy may appear on several job boards. Registering with too many of these boards can make it difficult to remain organised, and you may end up applying for the same job more than once. Use your academic judgement to review the range and relevance of vacancies advertised before registering.
50. **Revise your CV regularly** as each temporary or permanent job or experience may alter the balance and attractiveness of your CV.
51. **Use the experience of job interviews and feedback on your CV** to improve it, and ensure the best version is promoted to all agencies and job boards.
52. **Don’t expect lots of leads from agencies.** They represent vast numbers of people and there may be many others in the queue who are just as qualified as you are. Work at the relationship and be persistent but professional (not desperate) in your regular communications with agencies. Recruitment agencies are only one part of your strategy to find your dream job.

6 INTERVIEWS

Going in to a job interview without good preparation shows poor professionalism. Graduates are expected to prepare and to have worked out what they want from the experience. That involves plenty of research and making sure you appear alert and intelligent. Nerves are fine, everyone expects that, but don't let them make you behave badly (learning back in the chair, treating the interview panel without respect, not listening to questions, not giving eye contact for example).

Think about what interviews are for: they want to find out if you have the skills and competences needed in the job, the motivation and enthusiasm to work there, and whether you will blend in with the work environment, the organisation culture and the teams.

This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 6.1 Preparations before the day
- 6.2 How should you look?
- 6.3 Preparing for the interview process
- 6.4 Questions to ask the interviewers
- 6.5 In the interview

6.1 PREPARATIONS BEFORE THE DAY

1. **Provide evidence of success in a hobby or activity that demands learning**, e.g. playing a leading role in amateur dramatics at your university, playing chess for your university team, or learning the saxophone. These all indicate an aptitude for learning, and are therefore contenders for inclusion in your CV.
2. **Provide evidence of challenging situations.** For example, if you have undertaken student volunteering or work experience that requires learning, this looks valuable on your CV.
3. **Produce a CV with a wide range of other experience and accomplishments.** This also indicates you are willing to put yourself in different situations that require learning. That is why the fact that you back-packed across South America, or have been the sports editor of your student newspaper, is important information to a potential employer.

4. **Show your problem-solving ability.** Graduate employers are looking not just for whether you were a school team leader, or have done a great dissertation – lots of students will claim this. If you can talk about situations which were really difficult for you, and how you rose to the challenge and got through them, that can set you apart from the crowd. Every job that is worth having will involve you facing difficult situations, so don't hide the ones you have already faced, but explain in positive terms how you tackled them and surmounted them.
5. **Reflect on your learning methods and strengths; maximise this on your CV.** For example, add detail to the following general ideas “I enjoy learning to use new apps”, “I enjoy new experiences and new challenges”, or “The part of my degree I enjoyed most was the final year dissertation, when I was able to plan and manage a project from start to finish.”
6. **Consider your talents and strengths;** illustrate these using evidence. Always try to include brief examples to support the claims you make.
7. **Research any potential employer, the organisation and the job.** This is especially important before interview. Revealing at interview that you are ignorant of the organisation or the job, signals that you have not been able or willing to find out, which, in turn, signals you are not keen to learn, whatever your need to learn to succeed in the job.
8. **Can you think of any other ways to signal that you are willing and able to learn?** If you can, it will raise your chances of finding graduate employment.

6.2 HOW SHOULD YOU LOOK?

Here are tips about what to wear, how to prepare, kinds of questions you might face, body language and good interview behaviour.

9. **The more important appearance/dress is in doing the job for which you are being interviewed, the more important it is likely to be in the interview.** For example, interviewers for a job that involves meeting potential clients or customers are likely to be very concerned about how you present yourself at the interview. Additionally, remember that the job for which you are being interviewed may not involve meeting potential clients, but it may lead on to such a job. Moreover, if you are a success in the job for which you have applied, you are likely to be considered for promotion to a more senior position. The

interviewers will be aware that this is the normal progression. Interviewers generally have a longer term perspective than just how you will perform in the particular job for which you have applied; they are also likely to be interested in your potential for more senior positions in the longer term. This will help the employer to visualise you in that capacity.

10. **Ask yourself what first impression your appearance and dress convey.** First impressions are important, and it has been said that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. If a job (now or in the near future) involves engaging directly with customers or clients, ask yourself the question, 'what impression would my appearance/dress make on a customer or client?' If you fail to ask this question of yourself, it is certainly one that will be of importance to the interviewer(s).
11. **Dressing in the same way as your peers is a way of being accepted. We all know this is true in social situations.** If you want to be one of the in-group, then it is usually necessary to look like one of the in-group. An interview can be viewed as a ritual through which you are seeking entry to a particular in-group; you want to enter into an organisation, and into a particular group of employees. If you are successfully employed, maintain this throughout your contract period.
12. **Avoid looking untidy or over-casual for an interview.** The reason for this is that interviewers are looking for clues about how you will work. If you look untidy or disorganised, this is a clue that you are an untidy or disorganised person who will be untidy and disorganised in your work. If you are over-casual at the interview, this is a clue that you may be over-casual in your work and, in particular, with clients or the person to whom you report. Interviewers are looking for these sorts of clues; it is precisely what interviews are for. In other words, interviewers are likely to project your appearance onto the way you will work.
13. **Ask yourself if your appearance and dress reflect where you have been in your life, or where you want to go, i.e. your history or your future.** Just because you have had a particular appearance in the past does not mean you have to stay that way. It may have been appropriate for the contexts and situations in which you have been in, which are different from the contexts and situations towards which you are now moving. Your appearance/dress may have been appropriate for your circumstances as a student, and now you can ask whether it is time to let that go and move on.

14. **If you are really not sure what constitutes appropriate dress for a particular interview, adopt the 'safety first' policy and dress in the 'standard interview uniform'.** Here is the 'standard interview uniform' for male graduate interviewees: dark suit (grey or dark blue with faint stripes) with conservatively striped white shirt (no pullover), and black shoes which are well polished. A grey or blue sports jacket with grey trousers is an acceptable alternative to the suit. The 'standard interview uniform' for a female graduate is rather less standard: a suit with matching jacket and skirt, or a blouse with a collar and a skirt below or on the knee, with a conventional jacket and black, sensible shoes. **In case this seems unbearable and just too conservative, have a look at the corporate website – look for images of anyone at work in the kind of job you want.** If you are in any doubt, the safety first rule is to err in favour of conventionality, rather than looking trendy or fashionable.
15. Be aware that there are also times to disregard the interview uniform completely and look precisely the way that most pleases you. When is this the right policy? In all the following situations:
- when you do not need the job,
 - you want to test the veracity of employer statements that 'we don't mind how you dress',
 - when you care more about how you dress and how you look than whether you get the job,
 - when the employer is looking for people who think 'outside the box' and you want to project an unconventional image,
 - when you want to find employment with an employer who does not place importance on how you dress/look,
 - when you want to convey a particular impression, and the way you dress and other aspects of your appearance will contribute to that impression.

The bottom line is that your appearance and dress will have an impact on the likelihood of your success at an interview, so give it some thought. It may only be a negative effect, i.e. the right dress/appearance is very unlikely to get you the job, but the wrong dress/appearance can prevent you from securing it.

6.3 PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

16. **Don't set foot in a company without a good knowledge of what they do.** Failing to research the basics shows lack of graduate-ness.

17. **Look around the company website**, and see if you can get access to the annual financial statements or specific information in the public domain.
18. **Research, with subtlety, members of the interview panel** if you are provided with their names in advance.
19. **Make sure you don't stand out too much when you arrive.**
20. **As far as possible, travel the interview route the day before** – so you can be sure of arriving in good time. You don't want to arrive sweating, panting or desperate to find a toilet.
21. **Allow time in your journey for delays**, security procedures at the company and finding your way to the interview room.
22. **Questions you might prepare for** include:
 - a. Why do you want this job/to work for this company?
 - b. Why should we appoint you?
 - c. How have you prepared for this interview?
 - d. Are you applying for other jobs, and if we offer you the job today, are you ready to accept it today?
 - e. Tell me about yourself
 - f. What are your greatest weaknesses? What are your greatest strengths?
 - g. What are your salary expectations?
 - h. What do you expect, or hope, to be doing in five years time?

6.4 QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWERS

Consider the question, “what do you want from this job?” – your answer may make a difference. These same considerations may also furnish you when an interviewer asks, “do you have any questions?”.

23. **Pay** – what is the minimum acceptable? There may be a trade-off between less now, for more later (including experience, training and promotion), or more pay now, with fewer opportunities to develop a career later.
24. **Is there a structured and transparent promotion scheme?** Do pay increases relate directly to staff appraisal or professional development?

25. **Does pay relate directly to performance?** Do you want it to? This is very likely to depend on the kind of work you will be doing.
26. **What are the learning opportunities?** Does the job offer learning? Does doing the job allow you to gain formal qualifications (such as professional diplomas or chartered status)? Does the job require you to take formal study (perhaps in your own time)? Does the job pay for private courses?
27. **What are the promotion opportunities?** Does evidence of experience in the job open opportunities for advancement?
28. **Does the company have Investors in People (IIP) or another quality standard?** In the company information, does it see *its people* as important?
29. **What facilities does the company offer?** Canteen, library, sports facilities, parking, or transport links.
30. **What about the social environment?** Are there opportunities to meet people you may have something in common with? You may be spending a large proportion of your time in your new job, so how will it compare with university as a place to make friends? Will you be working alone or working in a team? How much contact can you expect with the public.
31. **What is the company's reputation, amongst its customers within the industry, its suppliers, its neighbours and community, and the broader public?** Is this a company where management muck in, or is there very clear demarcation between the different parts of the company? Is there a formal company dress code, or are there practical requirements for dress? Do you like what this implies and tells you about the job, and the company?

6.5 IN THE INTERVIEW

32. **Attend to all the interviewers.** It is normal to have more than one interviewer and you may face a panel of several. It is a common mistake to focus just on the one interviewer who smiles at you, or the one you think might be most important. Attend to them all equally and make sure your gaze includes them all when you give answers, but focus on the questioner when listening.

33. **Most interviews will simply be one part of an application process.** If they are the final part, don't relax yet! This could be make or break time depending on your test/group/problem-solving performance. Stay focussed throughout, use positive body language, such as tending to lean forward rather than back in the chair to show attention.
34. **Consider the interviewers.** Not every interviewer is fully experienced in this process. That can mean that some will be even more anxious than you. And that anxiety can show in aggression or a peremptory tone. Don't let their tone influence yours, keep your cool and don't contradict or argue (unless you feel very strongly, or think you are being tested in some way).
35. **Listen.** Don't feel you have to lead the interview or talk too much. Listen for clues as to what they want, listen to the words used, try to use the same ones in your answer.
36. **When you don't know the answer.** Take a little time to think, maybe ask for the question to be repeated, and if you don't know the answer, say so, but try to explain how you might find that answer. For example, if you are given a what-if scenario and you have no idea how to deal with it, consider suggesting the kind of people you might ask for advice or the first steps you could take.
37. **How do you end the interview?** Try not to fade out. Have they answered all your questions? Have you enough information to decide for yourself whether you want this job? Once you understand the interview is over, stand and offer a handshake to all, with a positive smile, thanking them for their time. Make sure you know what the next steps are before you leave.

7 STAYING MOTIVATED

This part looks at managing yourself during the process of searching for graduate employment, especially if it is taking longer than you expected. It's about staying positive and resilient, particularly if it is proving more difficult than you expected to find a graduate job.

This chapter addresses the following issues:

7.1 Staying positive

7.2 Resilience when job-searching: staying positive when you get knocked back

7.1 STAYING POSITIVE

Looking for a job is not something we do once and for all. It is highly unlikely these days, that the first job after graduation will be your only job or your only organisation. This might make you feel low, if you are not enjoying the experience of searching for graduate employment. But there is a positive side to this – every time you take job searching seriously, you learn and develop your job-searching skills.

Also, you learn more about yourself, you collect additional information about your own skills, you get better at producing a good CV and better at applications and interviews, you learn more about the kinds of jobs out there and you grow in your views, aspirations, and ideas. Job changing and searching can broaden the mind, moving from a study-context, which gives specific horizons, to a wider menu of possibilities. You are likely to change career as well as job several times in your working life. So that huge – 'shall I or shan't I' decision about this job offer or that one, is not the be-all and end-all of your life. It's just the next stage of learning.

1. **Job search is not a science, it is an art.** Certain graduates seem just to walk into the right job; they seem to have a knack of being in the right place at the right time. That can be pretty dispiriting for those new graduates who seem to be the reverse – only hearing about great jobs after they are filled, endlessly receiving rejection letters, or lacking invitations to interview. We can be systematic about searching, without being scientific in the sense of proving which is the best set of techniques and how to use them. Treat the process of job searching as an art, something creative which you can keep improving, something unique to you, which will be your own way of getting a job. There is no shortage of advice out there (and in this book!) if you need support, but your way of looking for a job is something only you can create, and only you will reap the reward.

2. **It isn't just luck.** Sometimes it does feel as if luck plays a big part in finding and successfully gaining the job you really want. And it is true that luck does play a part – both bad luck and good luck. But by being systematic, positive and determined about the process, you will minimise the uncontrollable element of luck involved. If you simply post your CV on a few job sites and sit back – luck will play a big part and mostly against you – the statistics suggest that success with this approach is slim. If you work actively to understand your particular strengths and talents, set out to make a good impression, are systematic and professional about paperwork and to stay determined to pursue your own thoughtfully identified goals then you need to rely less on luck. And you will at least be in the right place to profit by it.

3. **What is the worst-case scenario?** If finding a graduate job is taking much longer than you thought, it is easy to become despondent and begin to believe it just isn't possible to find the right one. If all that is driving you right now is hanging on to get a graduate job, that doesn't leave much room for self-respect. How about building a 'horror floor'? This involves being as objective as you can about your situation to identify the worst possible outcome in as unbiased way as you can. By clarifying the real worst possible outcome it's possible to find the base level from which to build without succumbing to unreasonable and bottomless despair. If you don't get a job for the next year, what would actually happen? Would you spend the whole time looking at the post-box and inboxes? Probably not. If you can face the worst and work out how to live with it then you can make life happen for you, with or without the job.

4. **Remember that 'fortune favours the prepared mind'.** If you decide to become an expert on graduate employment and graduate employability this increases the likelihood of securing the right graduate job for you. How can you become an expert on graduate employment and employability? You can use the skills of knowledge acquisition that you've developed on your degree course. Remember also that 'knowledge is power' so you can gain knowledge of graduate employment and employability by using the same methods you used on your degree course, including finding and reading books on the subject, using your skills of on-line search, listening to people who are more knowledgeable about this subject than yourself. If you do this then there will come a time when your friends may actually consult *you* about finding their next job. The fact that you are reading this book is a huge step in this direction. You can view this as an investment in yourself. Since you are likely to change jobs and organisations, if not careers, many times before you retire, it is an investment that will pay dividends many times over.

7.2 RESILIENCE WHEN JOB-SEARCHING: STAYING POSITIVE WHEN YOU GET KNOCKED BACK

You've been applying for lots of jobs and you've just received another rejection email. Bouncing back and resuming the process of job search with renewed determination can be really hard in this situation.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity, including setbacks like rejection by graduate employers. There is plenty of scope for setbacks in the process of seeking your first graduate job. When you make it to the short-list for the ideal job that you really want, it can feel like a kick in the teeth if you don't get the job. It can be a blow when you don't get invited for an interview for a job for which you believe you are well-suited. And it can be dispiriting if you don't even get responses to your enquiries about jobs that interest you. Setbacks in the job-searching process usually means rejections. And rejections can be demoralising, discouraging and demotivating.

With high numbers of applicants for graduate jobs, the experience of seeking employment can be very challenging for the new graduate. Rejections are an inevitable part of protracted job search. They can undermine self-confidence and self-belief. Getting rejection emails or failing interviews can produce feelings of disappointment, frustration and even hopelessness. It's hard not to take rejections personally and it can make you want to give up. How can you pick yourself up? Here are some ideas:

5. **Put your setback in the context of a bigger picture.** It's easy to become disheartened by a set-back if you focus on it to the exclusion of all else. You may have failed to get a job you wanted, but this is likely to seem less significant if you can place it in the broader context of your life as a whole. You may have a loving family, good friends and have a good education. So, if you broaden your perspective to include these larger aspects of your life you're likely to feel stronger. Extending your time perspective is also likely to help. This setback has happened to you now, but in the context of your whole life, including both your past life and your future life, it is likely to be much less significant. You can probably remember other setbacks from earlier times in your life that seemed a disaster at the time but with the perspective of hindsight they now seem like molehills rather than mountains.
6. **Develop a support community and use the support it provides.** We all need support at difficult times. Think about who is in your own support system. Your family and friends are likely to be at the heart of it. So make sure you stay in touch with your friends at this time. Colleagues and acquaintances can also be a great source of support when setbacks occur. If you don't have family or friends

available because you're in an unfamiliar city for any other reason you could build a support system by forming a job club. The term 'job club', also called a 'job search club', means a small group of job seekers who meet regularly to assist each other with job hunting. As a member of a job club, you both give and receive job search support, information and share job opportunities and lessons you learn from job hunting. The members of a job club could also share CVs and cover letters, recommend job leads, conduct mock interviews and offer general encouragement and ideas about job search. A job club will give you a group of people with whom you can share frustrations, successes, information, contacts etc. You can find lots of ideas about setting up a job club by simply googling 'how to start up a job club'.

7. **Remember that you are not alone.** Rejections are an inevitable part of protracted job-search. And everyone hates being rejected. It can help to remember that all the other graduates who are still seeking their first graduate job are in the same boat as you.
8. **Avoid isolation.** The new science of positive psychology emphasizes the importance of connecting with others in developing and sustaining a positive frame of mind. So when you've completed your job-seeking activities for the day get out into the world. Do the sort of things that will enable you to meet other people such as meeting up with friends or enrolling in a class in a subject that interests you or could develop you further.
9. **In the face of setbacks remind yourself of your strengths, your skills and your achievements to date.** The psychological impact of continuing rejections during job-searching can generate self-doubt which can impair your capacity to bounce back. So this is a time to bolster your self-belief and self-confidence so that you can view problems as challenges. You are more likely to feel resilient if you feel strong and resourceful. This implies that the clearer you are about your strengths, talents and positive qualities the more resilient you'll be.
10. **Stay healthy and fit.** You will be better able to meet the challenges of protracted job search if you maintain a good healthy diet and take regular exercise, even if its only getting out for a regular walk to the nearest park. A real danger from receiving rejections from your efforts to find a graduate job is that you become demoralised, which will be bad for your frame of mind and your job prospects. There are, alas, no great secrets to staying healthy and fit; the answer is a good diet and exercise.

11. **Don't become sleep-deprived.** Lack of sleep makes people less resilient. So do what you can to get enough sleep each night. And if you get a chance to take a nap in the day then take it. One reason that power-naps are powerful is that they replenish our reserves of resilience.
12. **Take a break.** Resilience is a finite and depletable resource. When you are at the end of your tether you are likely to be low on resilience. That's why we all need periods of rest and recuperation. That's one reason why a good night's sleep can be so valuable when we've been wrestling with a problem. It aids recovery of our resilience. It doesn't have to be a long break; it might be short and simple such as going to the cinema.
13. **Seek to live a balanced life.** It is important not to allow the set-backs especially the rejections, to generate lethargy and turn you into a couch potato. But it is equally important not to flip to the other extreme and allow your life to become obsessively job-focused. Becoming a couch-potato could make you depressed but becoming obsessive about job-searching could drive you crazy. All work and no play, depletes resilience and the capacity to cope with rejections and other setbacks. So take time out to do things that refresh your perspective and recharge your batteries.
14. **Celebrate the small wins along the way.** Set small goals each day that you can achieve. Then even though you haven't yet landed the job you want, you'll be making steps each day in that direction. It will give you a sense of progress towards that goal. Focusing on these wins will provide you with the rewards to keep you going.
15. **Generate things to look forward to.** An extended period of job-hunting can be disheartening and this will have a negative effect on recovery from bad news. One way of managing this is to make a list at the start of the day of things to look forward to, like going for a walk in a nearby park at lunchtime or visiting a friend in the evening or a forthcoming music festival. Having something to look forward to can help keep your spirits up when news on the job front is discouraging.
16. **Acknowledge the disappointment that rejections and other setbacks bring.** Disappointment is an unwanted emotion and suppressing, fighting or denying unwanted emotions is rarely an effective way of managing them. When it comes to unwanted emotions there is much truth in the saying 'What you resist, persists.' It's usually better to acknowledge the disappointment and sit with it

for a while. (in fact, if you sit with it long enough, it can eventually actually become boring). Then ask what lessons can be learned from the experience that culminated in the disappointment. After that, you are more likely to be able to move on again and refocus on the hunt for the job you want.

17. **Look for the learning in each of the set-backs.** Remember that you are a graduate and you are therefore a specialist in learning. From a graduate employer's viewpoint, the main factor that differentiates graduates as a group from non-graduates as a group, is that, on average, they are better at learning and more willing to learn. Now is your chance to develop that capacity further by learning how to reframe a negative outcome into a learning opportunity. Any failure is feedback that, in some way, you're off-target. This can be demoralising if you take it personally, leading you to see *yourself* as a failure, but if you raise your awareness above this and look more closely, each failure can give you information on *how* you've missed the target. Every failure contains some useful knowledge if only you can find it. And knowledge is power. From that perspective, every set-back has the potential to make you more knowledgeable and more powerful. That awareness can motivate and enhance resilience. Here is a powerful way of distilling some knowledge from a setback in the process of job-searching. First, think back over the whole experience leading up to the negative result of not getting a job you wanted, starting with how you first heard about the job. Then think of the 3 things you did in the process that you are most satisfied with. Next, think of 3 things that you could have done differently. In this way you can use this experience as an opportunity to give yourself feedback on what you did well and what you could do better. By doing this, you can use each application as an opportunity to reflect and learn.
18. **Recognise that employers value resilience in their employees.** If you can use the experience of job search to develop your resilience then you get a double payoff: it will benefit you in terms of job search and it will benefit you in terms of making yourself more attractive to employers. Employers value grit, determination and perseverance in employees and these qualities are all associated with resilience.
19. **Think through how you've handled set-backs in the past.** Many graduate employers are keen to employ people who are resilient as it enables their employees to cope with change, unforeseen obstacles and similar problems. So

they sometimes ask questions in interviews intended to help them assess your resilience. Here are a few sample questions:

- Tell me about something major that you've failed at and how you dealt with it.
- How do you deal with set-backs? Give me some examples of some set-backs in your life.
- Tell me about some time when you had to deal with some crisis.
- Tell me about something in your life that didn't work out as well as hoped and what you learned from it.

By thinking through your answers to these possible interview questions, you'll learn more about yourself and, in particular, how you handle setbacks.

20. **Recall times in the past when you've coped well with adversity and challenging situations.** For example, you could recall how tough it was starting at a new school when you were young. This will help you develop a sense of your mastery over challenging situations. It will help you develop the belief that "I'm the sort of person who can cope with adversity and challenging situations."
21. **Meditate.** Meditation has become increasingly popular and many claims are being made for its benefits, particularly by those who are selling meditation courses and meditation apps. Not all of these claims bear close inspection. But one claim that survives scientific scrutiny is that mindfulness meditation supports the development of resilience (see Goleman and Davidson, 2017¹). You can learn how to meditate from books, from courses or using apps.
22. **Develop self-talk that will support resilience.** Listen to yourself; what do you say when you get another rejection? Is it hard and unforgiving, like "Shit! I must be useless" or is it more gentle and forgiving, like "Bummer! Oh well, everyone has their off-days." Beating yourself up with self-talk that is hard and negative *may* motivate you to do better in the short-run but is more likely to sap your resilience in the longer run. Some people find the following phrases usefully to include in their self-talk when tackling the negative emotions that follow from a setback in their lives:

'This too shall pass.'

'What doesn't break me makes me stronger.'

'This is just one to chalk up to experience.'

23. **Don't fight on too many fronts at the same time.** Finding your first graduate job is likely to constitute a major change in your life. If you are trying to make a major change in one part of your life then make sure other parts are as stable as possible. In other words, when you are struggling to find your first graduate job might not the best time to move from where you are living, break up with a partner and start training for a running a marathon. Each major change is likely to be accompanied by its own unpredictable problems.
24. **Recognise that it may be them rather than you.** Just as graduate applicants vary so do employers. Some graduate employers would give the graduate job to candidate X and others would give it to candidate Y. So sometimes a graduate doesn't get the job simply because, on this occasion, they have encountered the wrong graduate employer.
25. **Learn about dealing with rejection from the experts.** The experts in dealing with rejection are salespeople. Salespeople are taught that accepting rejections is part of the job: "If you can expect to make a sale about once every ten presentations then it helps to make sense of the nine 'No's as the pathway to the one 'Yes'." In other words, If you're going to get a sales on average one time in ten then the more rejections you get the more sales you'll make. In sales, this is known as seeing rejection as a 'numbers game'. Similarly, if you think that, on average, new graduates will get rejected for 30 jobs before they get accepted by the one they will eventually take up then you can view each rejection as one step closer to the successful application that will get you the job you want.
26. **If you really want to enhance your resilience greatly then find out more about it.** You could, for example, read a book on the subject with the result of recent research on resilience, such as Southwick and Charney (2018)².

8 YOU'RE IN YOUR FIRST JOB, WHAT NOW?

You made it. Your first job as a graduate. Is this the end of the process? No, this is a beginning, not just of this job but of your career. And that career may be a succession of jobs in one sector, or many different sectors. There is a whole range of jobs which have not yet been invented, which will become available to you in the future, provided you keep on learning.

This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 8.1 First or last job?
- 8.2 Your first days in a new job
- 8.3 Getting a higher qualification

8.1 FIRST OR LAST JOB?

Your first job as a graduate is very unlikely to be your last job. Many graduates move on quite quickly from their first job as a graduate, and most have several jobs in their first seven years after graduation.

1. **Think of your first graduate job as work experience.** If you are looking for a first job as a graduate, look for a position where you can broaden your horizons and learn new skills.
2. **Treat your experience of looking for your first graduate job as *practice*** to help you learn about the graduate labour market, and the job-searching process itself. This will probably take some of the stress out of looking for your job as a graduate, because it will feel more like a rehearsal than the real thing. It will also shift the focus from graduate employment per se to learning about graduate employment and give you permission to experiment and make mistakes. It is perfectly normal, of course, to make mistakes when we are learning something new.
3. **Asking in an interview about opportunities for training and development** informs a prospective employer that you are keen to learn in the job for which you have applied. Most employers are much more interested in what you will learn in their employment than what you've learned on your degree course. Moreover, training and further education can be expensive, so it is a considerable perk of any job and should never be wasted.

4. **Expect to change jobs.** The phenomenon of lifetime employment is rapidly disappearing. Even jobs that seem secure now could disappear within a few years. The safest job is the one that enables you to gain skills, qualifications, and experience that can be applied in many different sectors of the economy.
5. **Consider taking a lesser job as a stepping-stone to the job that you really want.** A part-time, temporary or contract post can be a halfway house on the journey to reaching full-time graduate employment. It is usually easier to obtain a permanent job in your preferred field of work from a position of partial employment or employment in less targeted work, than from a position of being unemployed.

8.2 YOUR FIRST DAYS IN A NEW JOB

The person to whom you report in your new job is probably the person who will have most influence on your next steps in employment. They will be recommending you for promotion, or not, or they will be writing a reference for you for your next step into a new organisation.

6. **Try to understand what is important to them.** A straightforward way to do this is to ask them. Then you can look for ways to assist.
7. **Try to bring solutions rather than problems.** Your boss will already have plenty of problems and probably enough people to bring more. You will get noticed if you seem to be looking for, or providing, solutions.
8. **The biggest mistake you can make is to never make a mistake.** It has been well said that the person who never made a mistake, never made anything. The new graduate in a new job can view a mistake as a disaster - but the worst mistake you can make is to be so risk-averse that there is no possibility that you will ever make a mistake. It probably won't feel like it at the time but mistakes are a resource – they are a valuable source of learning from which you can learn. So try to distil all the learning you can from each mistake you make.
9. **Take responsibility for outcomes.** Don't hide from responsibility behind the fact that you are the newest or youngest employee where you work. The sooner you learn to take personal responsibility, the quicker you will become a respected member of your work-group.

10. **Find yourself a mentor.** If this is a job in which you intend to stay long enough to seek advancement, then seek a mentor in your organisation or your industry. Seek advice from someone who has succeeded, so they can help you to succeed. Check whether your organisation has a mentoring scheme. Some professional bodies offer mentoring schemes so it is well worth checking that out too. Otherwise, use informal ways to find a mentor. People are more likely to be willing to act as a mentor than you think, because most people like having someone to look up to them. It is flattering to be asked to be a mentor; it is pleasant having someone listen attentively to your words, and it is pleasant to be able to share lessons from your own experience.
11. **Recognise the importance of interpersonal relations.** Most students study, complete assignments and are assessed on the basis of *individual* work during school, college and university. Most work within employing organisations is done in a group or departmental setting. Indeed, the essence of organisation is to combine the contributions of individuals to realise joint outcomes. Hence, learning to get on with work colleagues is essential.
12. **Recognise the importance of teamwork.** An employing organisation is a way of combining the work of individuals working together. Your contribution to the organisation will be assessed by your contribution to your group at work. Sometimes working with other people in your team is not easy and then a fruitful attitude is to see working with the other people in your group as the problem for you to solve.
13. **Network within your own organisation.** Access to interesting work as well as promotions depends on who you know as well as what you know. Make contacts within your current organisation.
14. **Develop your network** Your current employing organisation is unlikely to be the last organisation that employs you. Most jobs are obtained by personal contacts and networks (in the USA it is about 65%). Places you can network include alumnus groups, on-line groups, professional bodies, and trade associations.
15. **Build goodwill.** People will be much happier to help you if they see you as someone who will help them. If you help other people in your organisation, you will develop a network of people who are likely to think of how they can help you when the opportunity arises.

16. **Staying in touch.** Networking is not just about making contacts; it is also about building relationships with these contacts. Think about ways for keeping in touch with your contacts.
17. **Avoid burning your bridges with anyone.** It can be a small world, so keep your enemies to the minimum.
18. **Develop yourself.** In the best of worlds, your employing organisation will recognise your worth and realise the importance of developing your potential. If not, you need to do the job yourself. A good place to start is to work out a development plan for yourself, even if it is very provisional and subject to amendment in the light of emerging circumstances.
19. **It is never too soon to begin thinking about where your present job will lead you.** What are the options for your next move? Which options look most promising?
20. **Look for as many learning opportunities as possible.** What training or development is needed to arrive at where you want to go next? Are there courses on offer which could build your CV in the direction you want to go? How can you make the most of informal learning, particularly about the particular sector in which you are now working?
21. **Look for a niche to make your own.** If you have an area of specialisation within an organisation or an industry this can be a valuable source of comparative advantage. It is even better if you can find an area of specialisation that is likely to be in more demand in the future.

8.3 GETTING A HIGHER QUALIFICATION

You may decide to do a higher degree. This is one way of signalling to employers that you are good at learning, and if you graduate at a time of rising and/or high unemployment it can be an attractive option as it postpones your entry into the labour market until what might be a more propitious moment. It also opens up a range of jobs in institutions for further and higher education.

22. Consider doing a Master's degree in the area of your undergraduate degree.

This is the natural option if you are aiming at subsequent employment in an institution of further or higher education. It will increase the range of jobs to include subject-dependent vacancies, and update your knowledge of the most recent developments in your subject area.

23. Alternatively, consider studying a higher degree in an area different from your undergraduate degree such as an MBA. This will not only signal your versatility in learning, but will also widen the range of your employment options. Whereas some Masters degree courses require an undergraduate degree in the same subject (such as Maths, Physics or French), others recruit students from graduates from a wide range of subjects (such as MBA or Social Work).

24. Consider studying for a Master's degree while you are working. There are an increasing number of Master's degrees available on a part-time basis, which increases the attractiveness of this option. Try to persuade your employer to support you in so doing. *Alternatively, consider finding part-time employment while you complete a part-time Master's degree.* Sometimes it is easier to find employment for two days per week, than a full-time post. This allows you time to study on a part-time basis. In this way you can gain work experience, while you are acquiring a higher level qualification.

9 MISCELLANEOUS TIPS AND OTHER IDEAS

We have chunked the ideas in this book into the main different parts of the process of finding graduate employment. Inevitably there are some ideas that did not fit easily into those parts. Rather than force-fitting them into some section or other in this book or omitting them altogether, we have added this last part to the book as a home for those ideas which did not fit elsewhere.

This chapter addresses the following issues:

- 9.1 What if the assessment process is not just an interview?
- 9.2 Work experience: how some charitable organisations can help.
- 9.3 Miscellaneous tips

9.1 WHAT IF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS IS NOT JUST AN INTERVIEW?

1. **Many larger firms select applicants through an assessment centre** which can include a range of activities: prepared and unprepared presentations, tests and questionnaires of various kinds, group discussions, practical tasks in a group together with more than one interview. The assessment centre can last half a day or up to three days. You will be with other applicants during this process. There may be several people observing what is happening and scoring your participation - as long as you are aware of this, it won't be a shock. This is generally a fairer way to select people, since several selectors will gather and discuss their scores after the assessment centre, looking at you in relation to the person specification for the job.
2. **Carefully read the invitation to an assessment centre.** It should give you some detail on what will happen, where and how long it will take. Be sure you note whether you are asked to prepare something (a case study or a presentation) in advance. All the other tips in here about researching the company, checking the competences required in the job and how the ad was worded, these all apply; the more background you can learn beforehand the better.
3. **If you have to prepare a presentation:** make sure you have found out who or at least how many there are in the audience as it may also include other applicants.

This may be just a selection panel. Check what equipment is available at the centre, and if you are using PowerPoint or similar, make sure you take both a portable flash drive with a copy and also a print copy, just in case their internet connection goes down and you cannot access the cloud. Aim for one slide per two minutes of presentation, make them simple, clear and arresting - often an image can be better than a list of bullet points. Always practise the presentation, aiming to remember the extra detail which is not on the slides rather than using too many notes. And if you use notes, use cards, not A4 paper which can be distracting to the audience. Time yourself to make sure you are not going to overrun your allowed time.

4. **Even small businesses are likely to use one or more tests at the selection stage.** Your career service at university may already have encouraged you to sit some of the more common psychometric tests, which look for individual differences in personality, aptitude and ability. Good employers will tell you in advance if you have to take such tests, how long they will take and if you need to prepare in any way. These tests are not about how 'correct' you are, they are ways in which employers try to build a profile of applicants. Don't try to second guess them, because they are designed to check consistency, and will be used with other selection methods to make sure you are not just a good test-taker! You should be able to get feedback on how you did in such tests.
5. **Psychometric tests.** These may be sent as links for you to complete online, or you may have to take them in the centre. They may include numerical reasoning and verbal reasoning - you may have done similar tests before in your full-time education. Also, so-called 'in-tray' exercises - where you have a group of papers of the type you might have to deal with in the job and have to make notes on what action to take. There are also situational judgement tests which offer a specific work-based problem and ask for your proposed judgement and action you might suggest.
6. **Practical or professional tests.** These will relate directly to the role for which you apply - perhaps manipulating a spreadsheet or other data, perhaps working in real time in the work environment while being observed. All such tests, and psychometric ones, are used alongside interviews and other tasks to build a detailed picture of how you might be expected to perform against the competences and aptitudes required in the role, or career for which you are selected.

9.2 WORK EXPERIENCE: HOW SOME CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS CAN HELP

When people are considering possible sources of career help, charitable organisations do not usually spring to mind. However, a number of charitable and voluntary organisations are involved in career advice and development. Some have a particular focus, such as ethnic or women's groups, whilst some are concerned with the wider community. These services are not more used because this aspect of their work is not widely known. However, the quality of their help is usually of a high standard. On-line search is probably the best way of finding out about this.

7. **Consult your local library.** Your local library should have a copy of at least one directory of charitable and voluntary organisations (such as the Voluntary Agencies Directory) in its 'reference' section. If you have difficulties finding what you want, ask one of the librarians and remember that different librarians specialise in different areas, so don't be surprised if you are passed on to the librarian who can help you most. Ask if there is a librarian who has responsibility for training and development, employment, or careers advice. Ask also if there is a librarian whose responsibilities cover areas like charities, third sector organisations and voluntary organisations.
8. **Visit the nearest branch of your national employment service.** This is worth doing though you may have to be determined to find help here.
9. **Use the web to track down these services.** Try adding key terms such as 'career help', 'career development', and 'finding employment' to terms such as 'charity', 'voluntary organisation', 'foundation' and 'charitable organisation'.
10. **Focussed charities.** There are, for example, charities that assist women from ethnic minorities and also ones that focus on students from particular backgrounds.
11. **Make enquiries through your local authority.** Your local authority will have careers specialists who may be able to help you find the charitable organisations you are looking for.

9.3 MISCELLANEOUS TIPS

12. **Recognise that your social skills are also business skills.** You may regard skills, such as the ability to get on easily with people and be persuasive or be a good host, as particular social skills. Nevertheless, they are also important skills within organisations, as very few jobs involve working alone. In the context of employment, they are termed 'soft skills' or 'people skills', and can be a very attractive asset to employers

13. **Never ignore basic skills.** You may think that with your higher level university degree qualification you have moved above the basics such as spelling, coherent writing, grammar, simple numeracy etc. Such hubris will not serve you well when you are seeking employment. These basic skills remain of importance to most employers. Many employers take the view that if you fail to get the basics correct, like spelling on your CV, then your degree cannot really be worth much.

14. **Ask someone to proof-read** your CV, accompanying letter, completed application form and any other documentation you send to a prospective employer. It is difficult to proof-read our own work as we know what we *meant* to write, so that is what we tend to read. Other people read without our preconceptions so they find it easier to spot our errors.

15. **Ever considered becoming a non-executive director?** This may sound rather grand, but graduates of any age have a lot to offer in an unpaid capacity to small charities or private sector businesses, in terms of either business or technical expertise. Many job-related skills learned at university are vital on a Board of Directors. New start-ups, small voluntary sector organisations, or social enterprises need help and clear thinking skills, for which they cannot afford to pay. In return, you gain employment awareness, and a very fast insight into some of the problems facing organisations today.

10 A FINAL THOUGHT: MYTHS ABOUT GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

What do you need to know about finding a job as a graduate? This short final section sets out some of the myths about the process, many of which are rather negative and dispiriting. Don't allow yourself to be depressed by myths. There are many opportunities out there and your investment in gaining a degree will pay off, through the experiences you have had, the learning you have done, the friends you have made, the skills you have acquired and probably it will pay off financially too.

1. "*A graduate job is any job that is done by a graduate.*" Picking fruit, flipping hamburgers, or working in a call centre do not offer enough scope for the expression of graduate qualities. Many graduates get jobs after leaving university which do not make use of their learning. They may do this by choice, but before long are more likely to be in a job which does make use of their education.
2. "*To be a graduate is to be a member of a small educational elite.*" This may have been true fifty years ago, when fewer than 5% of school-leavers went to university. The picture now is that 47% of school-leavers go to university; a marked difference.
3. "*Most graduates find employment with large employers, with well-established graduate recruitment programmes.*" These are the kinds of employers who still dominate the graduate careers directories, which are distributed free from university careers centres. They include the Civil Service, the NHS, and the Armed forces, together with the major institutions of the financial, manufacturing and retailing sectors. In fact, these large employers of graduates now employ a small minority, less than one fifth, of the graduates universities produce each year. Graduate recruitment schemes are growing and they cover all industrial sectors and sizes of company. SMEs (employing fewer than 250) are the main source of graduate employment.
4. "*For most graduates, finding a graduate job in the current market is hopeless.*" Even if you graduate in an economic recession, most graduates eventually find jobs; after one year more than half of graduates are in sustained employment. By ten years after graduation, the figure rises to 70%, with many more employed overseas or self-employed.

5. *“You will have to do an unpaid internship to get a graduate job.”* Unpaid internships are still offered but this is not the norm and in many cases is not even legal. Most of the best graduate employers offer paid work experience programmes, and the median starting salary for graduates has not decreased (around £30,000 among leading graduate employers in UK).
6. *“You have to go to a ‘Russell Group’ university to get a good graduate job.”* Most universities have strong relationships with employers, local connections can help, but above all it is the work you put in that matters more than the name of your university.
7. *“All UK graduate jobs are in London.”* It’s true that in Westminster, more than 70% of the workforce have a degree; but then London contains a quarter of the country’s business and the headquarters of more than 60% of the FTSE100 businesses. In fact, most graduates start their career outside Greater London. 58% of graduates start work in the region in which they took their degree, and 69% of graduates started work in the region where they had grown up.
8. *“Most employers place greatest value on the most up-to-date knowledge of an academic subject.”* Most graduate job vacancies are open to graduates of any subject area. Knowledge acquired during your degree is important as a foundation of your learning, but the more current detail is likely to change quickly - knowledge will always need updating, using the skills you learned at university. Most graduate employers are more interested in what the graduates they employ will learn in their employment, than the subject knowledge they acquired at university. That is the reason that most graduate job vacancies are open to graduates in any subject.
9. *“If you have not studied for a ‘vocational degree’, you are more likely to remain an unemployed graduate indefinitely.”* Again, this is contradicted by the fact that most graduate job vacancies are open to graduates of all subjects.
10. *“Most employers value critical thinking above all other graduate attributes.”* Well this one is more likely to be true. Problem-solving, teamwork, great communication skills top the employer requirements, but critical thinking skills learned at university will be a big advantage in the internet age where information needs evaluation, not just blind acceptance.
11. *“When you find a graduate job, you will be making a transition from the learning stage of your life to the working stage of your life.”* Whether you like it or not, you will continue to learn throughout your working life. Our best tip? Stay open to every opportunity to learn.

ENDNOTES

¹ Goleman, D., & Davidson, R. (2017). *The science of meditation*, London: Penguin.

² Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2018). *Resilience: The science of mastering life's greatest challenges*. Cambridge University Press.