



CAREER PASSPORT

Job hunting in your final year and beyond

This is a guide for final year students providing core job hunting information and advice all in one place.

We hope this resource will help you to keep motivated during your job search.

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Career Direction

As you read this, you might be uncertain about which career direction to go in. This section of the guide aims to help you generate some ideas to get you started, and help validate your choices if you already have an idea of the direction you'd like to head in.

The key is to create a well-rounded picture of your needs, your skills and the environment you hope to be working in. Then to consider if you and the prospective career are a good match, where you add value to your organisation and you get something of value to you in return. [Read our advice](#) on exploring options with your subject and different Industries.

Knowing yourself

The foundations of successful career planning are built on self-awareness. This involves looking at your skills and competencies and understanding your values, interests and personality to find career options that are a good fit for you.

EXERCISE 1: Career values are best summed up as factors that are important to you, whether those are specifically career related or otherwise. The more that a career option or employer meets your values the more likely it is to be a valuable choice for you. The table below lists a few of these but is by no means an exhaustive list (search for 'career values' if you want to find other lists for inspiration).

This helps you identify what you are looking for in a career path or employer and also creates a list of criteria to help you in your evaluation. Look at the list below and highlight values which resonate most strongly with you. Use the blank spaces to add your own. It will be useful to prioritise your values (perhaps start with a top 5) so that you are clear on what is the most important.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Autonomy | ☐ Have regular work hours | • Solving problems |
| • Be an expert | ☐ Help others | • Spend time with friends/ family |
| • Career progression | ☐ Leadership | • Status and recognition |
| • Challenge | ☐ Location | • Travel |
| • Competitive environment | ☐ Risk taking | • Variety of tasks |
| • Creativity | ☐ Job security | • Own your own home |
| • Work in teams or on your own | ☐ Set your own hours/have flexibility | |

In the space below write down some career options or employers that you are aware of that you think might meet your career values. Ask others for their ideas also and as you work your way through this guide, update your list.

EXERCISE 2: Your skills can fall into two categories: Specific technical ability or knowledge and soft skills usually called ‘competencies’ in the world of job hunting and recruitment. These competencies are very important to employers as they indicate your potential, especially when you don’t have specific experience in the area you are applying to. You can also use your competencies to identify careers and employers where you can make an impact. You can think of these as what you have to offer an employer.

Write down a list of your achievements including things that you are proud of, things that you have been praised for or things where you have had to overcome a challenge to achieve something. Work or personal. Then identify which competencies you used for each of your achievements. The competencies which occur most frequently are likely to represent your strengths and come more naturally to you.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analytical skills | • Planning and organising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial awareness | • Problem solving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity | • Project management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decision making | • Self-motivation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy and sensitivity | • Teamwork |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influencing | • Working under pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Initiative | • Written and oral communication |
| Leadership | |

In the space below write down some career options or employers that you are aware of that you think might meet your career values. Ask others for their ideas also and as you work your way through this guide, update your list.

Understanding your options

There are jobs which are directly related to degree disciplines, jobs where particular subjects may be useful and also a whole range of jobs open to graduates of any discipline. Before opting for a particular job role, you should have knowledge not just of the work, but the environment in which you’ll be working and the training you will need.

Further reading on this topic:

- Read more on [exploring your options](#).
- Explore different areas of work. Prospects has really useful profiles written specifically for graduates with information like salary and typical responsibilities, [take a look](#).
- Learn about assessing your career values with [the balance](#).
- Prioritise what’s important for you with [Monster](#).

Finding jobs

There are a number of approaches that you can take to find job opportunities. It is advisable to create a strategy that uses a number of different sources so that you get a more rounded view of the marketplace and increase your chances of success.

Graduate schemes

Many large companies offer graduate training schemes. They are also relatively easy to find; they are advertised online and in directories such as Prospects Directory, Target Jobs and The Times Top 100, some of which will be available to take away from Careers, First floor, Carrington Building.

Thinking outside graduate schemes

The majority of graduates work for small or medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and these will recruit just a few graduates each year. Smaller organisations have great opportunities but don't have large recruitment budgets to publicise their roles. MyJobsOnline is a great starting point for your job search as we offer a free advertising platform for employers actively looking to recruit Reading students and graduates. Make sure you have set your account preferences to ensure you receive tailor-made job alerts and register for a graduate account once your course has finished.

Using professional bodies and professional journals

Some employers will advertise via the relevant professional body and/or journal – for example the CIPD for jobs in HR or CIM for jobs in marketing.

Using recruitment agencies

You can target recruitment agencies you have heard about or that have an office on your high street. However, they are there to find employees for their client, so any approach needs to be professional. Many recruitment agencies deal with specific career areas. You can search a directory of official agencies on The Recruitment & Employment Confederation's website: rec.uk.com.

- MyJobsOnline
- Magnet.me
- Milkround
- LinkedIn
- The Guardian
- TargetJOBS
- Indeed
- Total jobs
- Graduate Recruitment Bureau

Speculative applications

Identify companies that you might like to work for. Research them and then write or email with a CV asking for a meeting to discuss possible employment opportunities. Try and find out the name of a person to write to or phone, and follow up with a phone call two weeks after you've sent your letter and CV. Read more on [applying speculatively](#).

Using social media

Many employers use social media to advertise vacancies, so make sure you follow their pages/accounts to receive updates. A strong and relevant profile on LinkedIn can lead to employer interest and could help your applications. Make sure any online profiles are up to date and that you are aware of how any social media platform is presenting you publicly if anyone searches for your name.

Thinking creatively

Many graduates secure their job by turning a part-time job, graduate internship or summer job into something longer term. It is also quite common for some industries to take graduates into jobs that don't require a degree for example marketing assistant, arts administrator and runner (media).

Making applications

Once you have found a role of interest, it is time to apply. It takes time to do a good application, so make sure you are allocating enough time and not trying to do too many - ultimately lower quality - applications.

CV

Each employer will have their preferred method of recruitment, but an up to date CV will form the basis of many application methods. Every CV you send should be tailored to the selection criteria. If there are none visible, research further to work out which skills and experience are relevant. Never send out hundreds of identical CVs, quality over quantity wins every time.

Brief CV checklist – access the full checklist [here](#).

- High priority items at the top – contact details, personal profile, highest qualification, most recent work experience or anything else you wish to emphasise
- The headings/sub-headings are clearly emphasised and consistent
- Your CV is no longer than two sides of A4
- There are no errors in the spelling, grammar or use of punctuation
- Bullet points are included and simply styled
- You have used professional fonts e.g. Arial, Calibri and limited text formatting to bold/italics
- The key activities you have been involved in and the skills acquired can be seen at a glance

Personal profile or introduction. You can choose to include a short profile or summary paragraph below your name and contact details. You don't have to include one, and if you have a cover letter you might choose to include the content there instead. Introduce you, state your unique selling points that relate to the job and identify your career path and commitment.

Education. Your degree will often be the most recent major piece of experience, so you'll need to talk about it in a way that shows the relevant skills and experiences you've had, but not by creating a big list of everything you've done. Consider phrases like 'relevant modules included'... Also don't forget to mention any big projects, dissertations, presentations and team based learning experience if relevant.

Experience. Whether it's part-time work in retail, volunteering, summer internships, informal shadowing, employer insight days, student positions of responsibility, or full-time placement, it's all great experience. Focus on achievements and competencies rather than listing duties.

Other Skills. Put other skills that will be of interest here, such as IT skills, languages and competency level and consider a section to include achievements and positions of responsibility. Include evidence of skills such as leadership, organisation and competitiveness.

Interests. Your interests section might feel less relevant but is still important. It gives the employer a sense of your personality and can help you make a connection with your reader.

Referees. If they're requested by the recruiting organisation then include details of your referees. Otherwise 'References available on request' is suitable and common here.

Read further information on [creating a professional CV](#) and see specific examples.

Cover letter or email

The cover letter or email accompanies your CV when applying for an opportunity. It is a key marketing tool to promote you as a suitable candidate for a position on offer. It needs to be clear, concise and effective. Keep it to one side of A4 and check for errors before sending it.

These are the 5 elements that make up a quality cover letter:

Introduction

Have you opened up your letter with a concise introduction of who you are and why you are writing?

Why they should want you?

Have you identified the key requirements for the job and demonstrated that you have evidence of using these skills and knowledge in the past? Pick 2 or 3 of the most important requirements. Avoid trying to pack too much in.

Why this job role?

Have you conveyed what it is that you would find particularly rewarding about working in that job role?

Why this organisation?

Have you conveyed what you think is attractive and rewarding about working for that organisation and in that sector?

Conclusion

Have you ended your letter in an optimistic way about what you would like to happen next such as... *'I would value the opportunity to discuss my application with you and look forward to hearing from you shortly.'*

Read further advice on [constructing a professional cover letter or email](#).

Application forms

Employers want to know certain things about anyone applying to their company and it is why they create their own application forms. All employers are different and so they will ask different questions to find out about you. The way you complete the application form, and answer their questions, will determine whether or not you go through to the next stage of the process.

Top Tips

- **Research the organisation**, the job role and other relevant information so you know exactly what the employer is looking for. Researching a company doesn't just prove to an employer you're enthusiastic about the opportunity. It also helps you pitch your application and perform better at the interview.
- **Use your research** to decide what your best examples are to answer the employer's questions. Use a range of examples including experience at university, part-time or voluntary work and extra-curricular activities.
- **Use the STAR framework** in your answers. See the interviews section for more detail on this.
- **Follow all instructions carefully**. Read the form carefully from start to finish and follow any specific instructions including word count - Don't exceed this!
- **Display motivation and enthusiasm**. You need to be asking yourself why THIS organisation and THIS role and have some convincing arguments. Employers want to employ people who want to work for them.
- **Ask someone to read over your form to check it for errors**. Look for typos, misspellings and poor grammar. These are a big turnoff which can result in all your hard work being destined for the bin.
- **Draft your answers** in a Word document before committing them to the form. Some forms don't allow you to save progress, and this also allows you to keep a copy. When it comes to the interview stage, it is essential to remember what you have told the employer!

Read further advice on [writing successful applications](#).

Speculative applications

Another tactic you can use to secure a graduate job is to apply speculatively. This is a method more commonly used when seeking placements or work experience opportunities but is becoming increasingly popular in graduate job searches.

A high proportion of jobs are never publicly advertised. Some employers never need to publicise positions as they are filled by speculative applicants and recommendations from staff. Applying speculatively can be a great way of accessing unadvertised opportunities, often referred to as the [hidden job-market](#).

In some instances, a carefully crafted speculative application can persuade an employer to recruit a graduate for the first time. Some companies don't even decide they have an opening until an impressive speculative application arrives telling them all about the relevant skills and expertise that could be brought to the organisation.

Connecting with alumni

Consider making contact with alumni working in your area of interest. Ask if they'd be willing to talk with you to help you understand the area better. This is sometimes called 'informational interviewing' and can help you gain a very valuable first-hand insight into your target career. Take the opportunity to network and make new contacts in person and online. It's a great way to broaden your interests, skills and offer of opportunities. Look out for networking events scheduled by Careers in the termly programme. Search the term's events and book your place on [MyJobsOnline](#).

Discussion starters

What are the trends in your sector/role of interest? How well your values are met by the sector and organisations within it? Which skills are most important in the roles you are interested in? How did the person you are meeting get their role? What was the recruitment process like? What is the work environment like? What are the people like?

Useful Links:

- [Commercial awareness for students](#)
- [Prospects CV and cover letter](#)
- [TargetJOBS application advice](#)
- [Milkround CV writing guide](#)
- [Milkround networking guide](#)

Further information and advice at reading.ac.uk/careers select the **COMPETE** tile.

Interviews

Interviews are used as part of the recruitment process to allow employers to assess your suitability for a role, and to give you an opportunity to **demonstrate your abilities and personality**.

What do interviewers want to know?

- **Why do you want the job?** Often asked earlier on in an interview, this is a very important element to be prepared for. Questions could include 'Why did you apply for this job?', 'How does this fit in with your long-term career plan?' and 'What do you know about our organisation?'
- **Can you do the job?** The employer needs to find out more about your skills and experience. This might include questions like 'Tell us a time when...?' or 'what would you do if...?' This is often based around the competencies of the job and asking you for related evidence.
- **Will you fit in?** You will need to be ready to answer questions about yourself, how you work within a team and what you see as your strengths and weaknesses. Questions may include: 'Tell us about a time when you made a significant contribution to a team that you were part of?' and 'What are your main strengths and weaknesses?'

Types of interview

- **Screening/telephone interviews** are often used to decide which candidates to invite to a face-to-face interview, they explore how well your skills and experience relate to those required by the job. The interview is typically focused on the competencies that the recruiter is looking for, so make sure you have your answers to these ready.
- **Video interviews** are increasingly being used by employers at the screening stage. These tend to take the form of either a live interview or a website where you record answers to pre-set questions.
- **Face-to-face/one-to-one interviews** the format often involves the employer explaining a little about the job, asking you some questions and giving you time at the end to ask any questions you may have. It is likely that a significant portion of the discussion will be based on getting evidence of your competencies.
- **Panel interviews** are conducted by a group of interviewers and you are usually told in advance who will be on the panel and what their roles are. Direct your answer at the person who asks you the question but make sure to make eye contact with the other panel members.
- **Portfolio-based interviews** are sometimes used if your interview is for a creative role such as graphic design, animation, creative writing, or journalism. Depending on the nature of your skill, this may be required in a paper-version, online, or a DVD so check what format the company requires and be ready to talk through your portfolio in detail.

Preparation

Preparation includes working out what you are going to wear, how you are going to get there, answers to potential questions and questions you are going to ask the employer. A bit like exams, interviews can creep up on you, the more preparation you do the more confident you will be on the day. Role playing an interview with someone else is great for feedback and advice. We provide mock-interview sessions where you are able to undertake a practice run of a real-life interview. View and book your slot via MJO.

Questions

It's difficult to guess the questions you may face at interview, but developing a bank of well evidenced examples of your achievements and experience can be used for a multitude of questions.

Some typical interview questions include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would your friends describe you?
- Why should we employ you?
- Tell me about a time you were part of a team, what was your role, what would you do differently next time?
- Describe a challenge you have faced, what was it, how did you cope?
- Can you give an example of a time when you persuaded someone around to your point of view?
- What attracted you to this organisation/post?
- What do you think the challenges will be in this post?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- Describe your understanding of what we do?
- Who do you think our main competitors are?
- What challenges do you think we will be facing in the next five years?

Read further advice on [preparing for interview](#).

Structuring answers with



If you are asked competency-based questions, you can use the STAR framework to compose your answers. Use specific examples and beware of generalisations, which will not be detailed enough to provide enough evidence.

- **SITUATION:** Briefly explain the situation you were in so the example makes sense to the employer.
- **TASK:** What were you required to do/what was your role?
- **ACTION:** What specific actions did you take? *70% of answers should be in the 'Action' phase of the answer.*
- **RESULT:** What was the final result of your actions? Is this quantifiable in anyway?
- **REFLECTION:** *Some questions require reflection at the end and this is also useful if you are asked about a time when things did not go so well. What would you do differently or what did you learn about yourself?*

A simple example of STAR to demonstrate good teamwork':

- **SITUATION:** As a member of the Geography Society I was part of the team organising a fundraising ball.
- **TASK:** I was in charge of publicity for ticket sales.
- **ACTION:** I designed posters and put them up on all floors of the Geography department. I also liaised with the social media contact for the society and promoted the event on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. I wrote an email inviting all Geography students and staff to the ball with instructions on how to purchase tickets.
- **RESULT:** We sold 450 of the 500 tickets and raised £1000 in profit for the new Geography minibus.

The most common competencies are: leadership, communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative, planning and organisation, persuading and influencing and commercial awareness.

EXERCISE 4: As preparation, have a go at putting a response together on paper. This will also be good practice for application forms. You can use the following questions or ones that you have found elsewhere. Try looking at your examples from exercise 2 if you are finding it difficult to come up with examples.

Tell me about a time you were part of a team, what was your role, and what would you do differently next time?

Describe a situation in which you have had a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you approach it?

Assessment centres

Some employers will use assessment centres as part of their recruitment process as they allow them to observe applicants tackling a variety of tasks in different settings with the pressure of a time limit. Their hope is that this will act as an approximation for how you might react in the real workplace.

You may be asked to conduct a variety of activities specifically designed to assess your suitability for the role. These might consist of the following:

Psychometric tests are taken to help the employer assess your abilities or personality. They can include: verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning, situational judgement, critical thinking and work simulations allowing employers to match candidates with their requirements. Understanding the tests and making as many practice attempts as possible offer your best route to a successful outcome.

Presentations should be well-structured, relevant to the given topic and can be delivered within the time limit.

Group presentations are designed to see how individuals work in teams and how they communicate effectively. Remember that it is not a competitive exercise.

E-tray and in-tray exercises are designed to test your ability to absorb and process complex information quickly and effectively. You will be given information, instructions and a deadline.

Group discussions/exercises can be on topics that do not require research, but some exercises may need technical understanding. Employers are looking at your interpersonal skills, so try not to dominate the group or be too quiet. Even if you can't come up with great ideas, you can still demonstrate your team and communication skills by reminding people of the task, the time constraints and by drawing in quieter members.

Role plays usually involve an assessor acting as your client in a simulation and the aim of these is to test your negotiation skills. You may be given a briefing before the exercise starts, so use this time to think about other skills the role play is calling for.

Read more on [performing well at assessment centres](#).

What to know in your first days at work

Congratulations, you got the job. Here are a few top tips for those early days from students:

- It's OK not to know everything. So, don't be afraid to ask questions as this will help you do the best work you possibly can.
- Talk to everyone! Getting to know people across an organisation can give you useful contacts to help you do your job. This can also have the added benefit of increasing your visibility and exposure to opportunities.
- Say 'yes' to opportunities, even if they scare you, as these can broaden your horizons, test your skills and show what you are capable of.

Useful Links:

- 5 steps to a successful video interview from [Prospects](#)
- The Graduate Jobs [ultimate guide to video Interviews](#)
- How to answer the 'tell me about yourself' question from [the balance](#)
- [7 ways to succeed](#) in a video or telephone interview from the Guardian
- Performance tips for [Skype and video interviews](#)
- New Job? Read the Guardian's advice on [signing your contract](#)

When things don't go to plan

Looking for a job is a competitive process, so there will be let downs along the way. Here are a few things to consider that might help take some of the frustration out of the process:

- Firstly, remember that employers get very many applications. It can come down to factors and situations outside your control. So, **try not to take rejections personally.**
- **Treat any setback as a learning experience.** Ask yourself what you can learn from it to make future applications better.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for feedback** after an unsuccessful interview. Sometimes, you can get great pointers. However, employers are very busy and may not always get back to you.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Remind yourself of your achievements and why you are a great candidate!
- **Keep in touch with friends** and fellow job hunters. It helps to have support from those around you and people to discuss strategy with.
- Be persistent and take whatever opportunities present themselves in the meantime e.g. volunteering.
Building your skills will increase your value in future applications/interviews.

Exercise 5: NEXT STEPS – working towards your first post-university role involves small actions, taken regularly. Write down here the next small actions you are going to take with regards to your graduate job search:

	NEXT STEPS	I will have done this by
1	<i>Book a careers advice appointment via MJO to make sure I get feedback on my next steps.</i> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
2	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
3	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

WHAT NEXT?

We are available to discuss any aspect of the career planning, job search and selection process. Use our online resources and receive 1:1 guidance for up to 18 months after you graduate – whatever stage you are at.

Careers are here to work with you towards your first job after university, and beyond. If you have not yet secured a post-university job please book a careers advice appointment today. **Please bring along this booklet and we can discuss your answers** to the exercises, help you fill in the gaps, and jointly define your next steps! Book your appointment now ↓



VISIT

reading.ac.uk/careers/myjobsonline

SELECT

Appointments, then **book** a convenient time

[Career support for graduates](#)