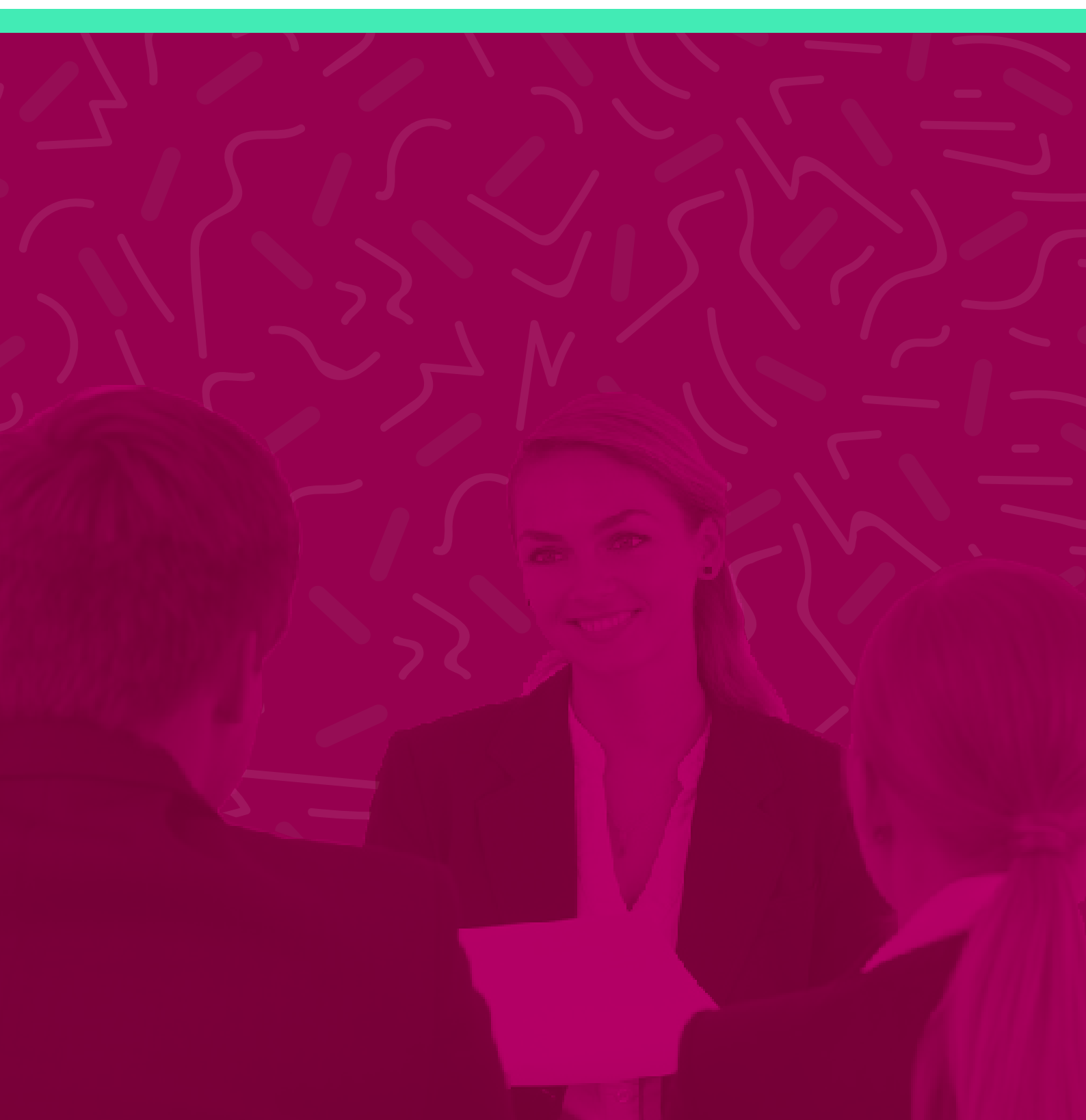


# A graduate's guide to **securing that job**



**Hiring the right staff is one of the biggest issues facing employers today, especially when it's a candidate's market.**

**To attract and secure high-calibre individuals, those who could add incredible value to your business over the years, it's important that you not only know how to differentiate yourself, but more importantly, you know where to look in order to find them.**

If you want to know the secrets to an impressive application, how to nail an interview and ultimately get a job, then read on as we're going to share our comprehensive insight. This guide will tell you exactly what you need to know to boost your job prospects and also ask our own expert recruitment consultants to answer some of your most commonly asked questions.

After reading this guide, you should feel far more confident about the recruitment process and what you need to do to stand out in the crowd.

Here's our invaluable guide to help you secure that job.

Although many graduates know exactly what line of work they want to go in to, others may feel as though they have reached an intimidating crossroads. More still may find that they simply can't land a job in their chosen field, due to the scarcity of available vacancies. No matter which case applies to you, one of the first steps towards getting a job you love is to identify a career path.

## How would you advise a graduate who doesn't know what it is they want to do?

*We would advise them to really think about their strengths and weaknesses, and then to research what careers might suit them, taking into account their skills and qualifications. We would also suggest they ask their friends and families to tell them what they think they are like and suited to. If graduates approach us, we are VERY honest with our feedback, advising them whether they are suitable or not for our industry, and if not, why not.*

Research, you ask? Yep, but there are lots of ways to do this. Speak to recruiters, chat to people who do the job you want and assess your own skills. The government's National Careers Service is a great resource, offering advice, skills tests and real life stories to help you find your way. You may even discover that skills you've developed through hobbies and other extra-curricular activities might open doors that you had not previously considered.

This does beg the question, do academic qualifications actually play a part in determining a career path or is it all about skills?

### Does an applicant have to have a degree in a discipline that is relevant to the job?

*This all depends on what opportunities they are applying for. They're not going to get a job as an accountant without GCSE Maths, or as a brain surgeon without having studied medicine. There are, however, numerous jobs available to graduates where no specific qualifications are required; where it is much more about attitude, application and life skills, for example estate agency or recruitment. Indeed, many of these prefer candidates who have applied themselves and gained a degree in a subject.*

Brilliant! You've identified which career is best for you.

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As competition for jobs ever-increases, one of the biggest tips dispensed to graduate job hunters is to 'find a way to differentiate yourself' - something which generally alludes to gaining some work experience. It can be a great way to learn, to get a foot in the door and can look fantastic on the CV. It's also useful as it lets you try out a particular job or industry for size. We freely admit that there are occasions when providing this either free or low-paid labour can be disheartening, but it's definitely worth the bother.

## Would you think more highly of an applicant if they had work experience on their CV?

*Yes, definitely. Especially if it was relevant to the job they're applying for. In fact, any work experience on a CV looks better than none at all.*

Okay, so work experience is important, but don't worry that you'll be stuck behind a desk all day; it comes in many different shapes and forms. Volunteering, mentoring and charity work are all just as impressive as working at a FTSE 100 megalith, so don't restrict yourself. The point is that whatever the placement, whether a paid internship or a day caring for orphaned horses, it must be beneficial, enabling you to develop transferable skills and form useful connections.

Many work experience and internships opportunities are advertised, requiring you to apply as if you were going for a permanent role. In which case, it's important to present yourself professionally with a well-written CV. Alternatively, you can call your target employer to ask whether they might accommodate a placement - this shows initiative, drive and guts.

The rules around payment may seem a bit sketchy, so let us explain. Generally speaking, if you are doing 'work experience', your employer should cover your expenses at the very least, so keep hold of your bus tickets. If you have been offered an internship and will be performing a job; carrying out actual

tasks, then you are considered a 'worker' and are entitled to at least minimum wage. The Gov.uk site provides more details

An amazing CV will also help graduate job hunters elevate themselves from the pack, as we'll see next...

### Are there other ways for grads to differentiate themselves from the rest?

*Yes! Anyone who has looked into and studied any required or relevant qualifications to further a career within a chosen sector will stand out, along with any work experience gained in that field during and after education.*

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Here's something you should know about submitting a CV: most recruiters and hiring managers will spend an average 6.25 seconds reviewing a CV before deciding whether or not to progress an individual. That means you have just 6.25 seconds to grab the recruiter's attention and show you are worthy of consideration.

## Can you give me any examples of a really bad CV that you've received?

*Off the top of our heads, here are some of the most common no-nos:*

- *Bad spelling and/or grammar throughout.*
- *CVs with no dates next to jobs, or no company names of who they have worked for.*
- *CVs with the text in numerous different fonts and colours.*
- *CVs with tables, boxes, pictures in them.*
- *CVs not saved in Word or PDF format, but in Notepad, as a .jpeg or a mobile screen shot.*
- *No CV, but just a screen shot of their LinkedIn page, becoming more and more common, and regarded as a little lazy.*

Some people may think that traditional CVs are outdated, favouring other 'clever' methods, but unless you are applying for a role where an over-the-top, tongue-in-cheek approach would be welcomed, stick to a plain old CV.

The first step is to use a good CV template; you want all of your information to be displayed in a clear and easy to read format. It's easy to find templates online, or ask a friend if you can borrow theirs. A decent template should ensure your CV at least looks the part and will serve as a reminder for the details you should include. Now for the content.

If there's one point we want to bang on about, it is this: keep your CV relevant. That means tailoring it for the specific role for which you are applying, not sending out the same document in a blanket approach - recruiters can tell. Instead, study the advert and job description to identify the key requirements and emphasise where you have experience of them. Use succinct bullet points so that recruiters can see quickly where your skills and experience match, don't be afraid to leave irrelevant information out, too (though that doesn't mean fib!).

### When reading a CV, what three things indicate that the applicant is worth pursuing?

*One: A focus on the industry the candidate is looking to get into, be that in their profile on their CV, in their cover letter, or in any relevant work experience.*

*Two: Grammar, spelling and layout / presentation of the CV are all of outstanding quality - sadly a rarity these days!*

*Three: Someone who has not job-hopped.*

Accompanying your CV should be some kind of cover letter, email or note. Often omitted, this is actually more important than the CV as it's the first thing that recruiters will read about you. This is your chance to convey a genuine interest for the role and the company, and to inject a little personality into your application. It also allows you to include more information that might not be relevant (see, told you we'd bang on about that) for your CV.



## Why are cover letters important?

*They are very often the first thing a recruiter or employer will look at, so no matter how good the CV is, if the cover letter is not up to scratch the CV may not even get read. They gain people's attention, and it is an opportunity for candidates to sell themselves more than in a CV.*

*Don't forget to check your CV and cover letter - maybe ask someone else to have a look, such as a recruitment consultant - for spelling and grammatical errors. A recruiter may also be able to give you some other pointers, based on their years of reviewing CVs.*

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## Do you use social media to find out more information about a client?

*Yes, all the time!*

Social media has become a hugely valuable tool for graduate job hunters, offering so many opportunities for them to get noticed by people that matter, network and be exposed to more job vacancies. A great social media presence may even elicit calls from recruiters. Suffice to say, using social media effectively can significantly enhance your job prospects.

If you don't already have one, create an account on professional social networking site, LinkedIn. Don't make this a carbon copy of your CV though, add all sorts of details and update it with any new skills or experience you acquire. The great thing about LinkedIn is that you can join groups and participate in forums that are appropriate for your industry. You can make connections, 'follow' valuable employers and also be found via the search function.

Twitter too has its uses. Follow influential people and comment on posts; don't forget to follow recruiters and companies' dedicated job accounts so that you are the first to hear about vacancies. Essentially, social media can provide some great ways to search for roles and to raise your profile among communities in your chosen industry. Make sure that if you have any personal profiles - like Facebook, for example - that your non-professional activities are locked down to 'private'; the last thing you need is for a potential employer to spot those dodgy photos of you at the graduation ball. If you're worried about this, check out our [blog](#) on social media naivety.

## Have you ever rejected a candidate on the basis of something you've seen on their social media profiles?

*Yes, as there is often conflicting information on CVs and social media. For example, jobs missing off one that are on the other, or dates that don't match up.*

*Other examples we've witnessed recently that have put us off include:*

- *Someone applying for a job with us saying they hate the industry but don't know what else to do.*
- *A candidate in June telling his friends on Facebook that he was off to do a Ski Season in November.*
- *Someone actually admitted on FB that he had been sacked because he had told his boss where to get off!*

That's because - as you probably know - recruiters and employers make use of social media for hiring purposes, too. Usually, it's to find out extra information about an applicant, to discover something that warrants that person's progression to the next round of the recruitment process. However, it can also be used to screen applicants, so your profiles should be professional, up to date and interesting if they are going to help you find that job.

We're going to be honest here, the job hunting process is a long, arduous and sometimes disheartening journey. In the interests of managing your expectations, we can't emphasise enough how important it is for you to be patient, have some resilience and develop a thick skin. The truth of the matter is that, unless you apply via an agency, you may not have your applications so much as acknowledged. There will be times when you are dangling, not knowing whether you've been short-listed or rejected. It's tough; not all employers have the resources to cope with hundreds of applications.

It's not nice, especially if you feel you've poured your heart and soul into an application or that you have the correct qualifications. You are fully entitled to contact the employer for feedback and the information shared can be really useful in helping you create a stronger application in the future.

Yes, you'll get knocked down, but don't let this temporary disappointment ruin your job hunt. Persevere, get back on that horse and try again.

## What's your top tip for surviving the job hunting process?

*Be persistent, resilient and be prepared to embrace constructive criticism and treat it as a positive learning experience.*

That's the advantage of using an agency over applying to a company direct - a recruitment consultant will get in touch with you to discuss your application and whether they feel you are right for the role. Vitally, they will be honest with you but could know of a more suitable vacancy. You won't be left in the dark, at least.

Argh! Few of us like interviews; they rank among life's most unpleasant and nerve-wracking experiences. However, if you want that job, then interview-phobia is something you need to overcome. The key, it'll come as no surprise, is preparation.

Most interviews are what's known as 'competency-based' - where you'll be asked questions relating to the key requirements of the job. Examples of competencies include customer service, communication skills, time management and the like. Typical questions start with: "Can you tell me a time when you have..."

The great thing about this style of interviewing over a more informal approach is that you can readily Google competency-based interview questions from which you can prepare answers. You should be able to discern the competencies from the job description and/or advertisement, but if you're unsure, ask your recruitment consultant.

Just knowing that you've prepared, have researched the company and can answer simple questions like: 'what are your skills and weaknesses?' should inject you with some confidence. It's worth knowing that you can take notes into an interview, though it's polite to ask as a courtesy. You may not even refer to them, but the reassurance that a note book provides can help diminish your nerves. Should your mind go blank, then you can consult your research.

Naturally, it's key that you look the part. A smart suit never fails to impress and conveys a sense of maturity and professionalism. Have your interview outfit ready the night before so that you can be cool and calm on the day, rather than frantically ironing a shirt. Though this may seem a contentious subject, it's also advisable that you hide any visible tattoos and remove piercings.

On the day, ensure that you have double-checked the time and venue so you're not late. Work out any public transport routes ahead and factor in some contingency time in case of delays. Take the interviewer's phone number and name with you, in case something should go wrong and cause you to be late.

## What's your best interview tip?

*Here are a few:*

- *Don't ever be late, even one minute, and if for whatever reason (though there shouldn't be one) you are late, apologise profusely and then apologise again.*
- *Turn your mobile phone off. Do not even leave it on vibrate as the interviewer will hear it.*
- *Wear a conservative business suit, male or female.*
- *If you smoke, don't be tempted to have a puff before you go in, however nervous you are, as it will be smelt and it will almost certainly jeopardise your chances.*

It is usual practice for interviewees to ask questions at the end of the interview, thus it's key to have several ready. These might refer to team structure, training opportunities or something more specific to the role. The one question you should never broach, though, is the money one. It's tricky, especially when you do not know the salary and benefits on offer, but our consultants strongly advised against asking, saying that it was "a big turn off for employers".

How, then, can you negotiate your compensation package?

No doubt about it, initiating conversations regarding your salary and other perks is not easy. It's one of those subjects that we don't like to raise, yet all want an answer on.

When a job offer is made, the salary will be disclosed. Hopefully it'll be an amount around which you expected, but if it's not - and if it falls below what was advertised in the job advert - then it's perfectly reasonable for you to question. Ask the hiring manager why it's been offered at a lower rate - it might be their policy to increase the salary once a probation period has passed; this is normal practice but it should be made clear at the job offer stage.

## How can a graduate ask for a higher salary without seeming greedy?

*This all depends upon the circumstances. If the employer is offering less than originally advertised, there is no harm in asking why. If the candidate is applying for a sales role e.g. estate agency or recruitment, then the employer will almost be reassured if you are prepared to negotiate. It is, after all, what the candidate is being employed to do!*

Other benefits may accrue over time, such as a right to working flexi-time or additional holiday and this should also be detailed to you at the offer stage. All of this information should be written in your Terms and Conditions of Employment - aka your contract - which you should read before signing. If there's anything that you are unsure or unhappy about, then don't sign the contract until you have a satisfactory answer.

This process is far easier if you have applied for the role through an employment agency, as the offer will be made to you by your recruitment consultant and you can ask them to negotiate a salary package that's more in line with your expectations - provided you are asking for a realistic amount. The consultant effectively acts as the middleman so you don't have to have any difficult conversations with your prospective employer.

## Have you any tips for making that first day go smoothly?

*Don't be late, be polite, well mannered, friendly but not over familiar. Listen to what is going on and do what you are told without questioning. Don't take or make any personal calls or texts.*

It's your first day; you're understandably nervous, but excited. How can you be sure everything will go smoothly? Much of this is reliant on the employer's on boarding processes, but in most cases, you should expect a practical day. It's likely you'll have a lot of forms to sign, policies to read and training to begin. However, you'll also get to meet your new work mates, have a thorough tour of the building and possibly start on an induction course which will tell you all about the company.

Before you set off in the morning, check through your paperwork again, as you may be asked to bring certain documents in. These might include your signed contract (if you haven't already sent it back), a form of photo identification and perhaps your exam certificates. If you have a P45 from your last place of employment, bring that in too. If not, don't worry, your manager or payroll specialist will supply you with an alternative form.

Although you may be apprehensive, so long as you remain polite and attentive, you can't go wrong and will make a great first impression. There will be a lot to take in, admittedly, but take notes where necessary and try to stay focussed. Don't forget to turn your mobile phone off and don't reach for it until your lunch break.

Your contract will probably state a probation period - in which your skills and behaviours will be closely scrutinised. Don't be alarmed, this is usual and it also gives you a chance to decide



whether this really is the job / employer for you. If either party decides that things aren't working, they can give a shorter notice period before employment is terminated. Probation varies in duration depending on your employer, possibly ranging from one month up to a year. Whilst working within this period, you may find that you are not eligible for sick pay, though this may be subject to your manager's discretion depending on your circumstances.

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This seems like a lot of information, we know, but to recap, you need to:

- Identify what career is right for you.
- Get some work experience.
- Create an amazing CV and cover letter.
- Use social media to your advantage.
- Be patient and resilient.
- Prepare well for your interviews.
- Remain calm when negotiating benefits.
- Know what to expect on your first day.

Bear all of these points in mind and you should significantly boost your chances of getting that job. Remember, you are brilliant - who wouldn't want to employ you?

**Good luck!**



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