

Your Job Search

Your job search is a process which begins during your studies, when you start thinking about life after you've completed your studies. It is an ongoing process, from your first job you accept entering the job market, throughout the various positions you might hold in the future with different companies. Start your job search on a solid foundation by understanding how the process works and work your way successfully through each step towards your ultimate goal – your new job. Finding a job and finding the right job are two very different things. If you want to be successful in your job search, you should focus on finding the right job. An important key to accomplishing this goal will be to spend the necessary time in preparing yourself properly for your job search.

Step 1 – Self-assessment (Who am I? What do I have to offer?)

The first step in your job search is self-assessment. In order to market yourself properly, you need to take time discovering yourself. The better you know yourself, the better you will be able to make a match between what you are looking for in a job, and what an employer is looking for in you. Successful job-seekers will take time to identify their specific skills, talents, abilities, interests, values, needs and goals. Take personal inventory of the following:

- **Education:** Think about your favourite subjects, best subjects and academic achievements. What have you learned from your academic, paid and volunteer experiences?
- **Abilities:** These could be interpersonal, artistic, creative or organisational. List the jobs, tasks or activities that you have most enjoyed. List things that you truly disliked about the work you have done. What are your work-related skills? Which skills do you enjoy using? Which skills are your strongest? Knowing who you are and what you have to offer will increase your job search success, since you will be able to clearly communicate in which way your skills, strengths, and abilities match up with the job description and requirements.
- **Interests and hobbies:** These would include recreational activities and involvement in the community. What interests you? Consider the type of organisation you prefer: small, medium or large, flexible or tightly structured? Think about work conditions – do you mind travelling? Are long hours okay? How much time do you need for non-work activities?

- **Goals:** These include what you want to accomplish, the type of lifestyle you want to have or your ideal future. Consider your life as well as your work goals. What kind of position are you seeking? Where do you want to live? If you had no constraints, what would you like to be doing five years from now? What would help you to get there? Define your career goals. If you are not clear about what you want, you may wind up with a job you don't want.

You must know yourself to the extent that you can look a prospective employer in the eye and tell him/her what professional and personal skills and characteristics you have that qualify you for the position you are applying for. Self-awareness helps you to conduct a more focused job search and seek out the best-fitting job opportunities. This step is the foundation of your job search.

Step 2 – Identify employers

After self-assessment, you should be able to research and explore career options that match your skills, interests, values and personality. Having a clear idea of who you are, what you can do, what you want to do, and in what environment you want to do it, will enable you to develop your career objective. You need a plan of action for your job search. You also need to identify employers and know specific information about each employer. How will you develop a list of potential employers and how will you contact them? Try the following methods to gather information:

- Online assistance – visit the websites of the organisations that interest you, as well as online recruitment agencies, career-related sites, job-listing sites, employer directories and CV databases.
- Have a look at career books to see the sort of jobs available.
- Read the annual reports of different organisations that interest you.
- Speak to as many people as you can to find out what they do or have done in the job areas that interest you.
- Visit all career-related events, like information sessions, workshops and career fairs, to learn about the types of positions available in your field.
- If the company is very small, call and ask them to send you some information.
- Networking is an important part of your career development – make contacts, create alliances, build a support group and befriend people with similar career interests. Questions to ask people that are working in your field of interest might include: 'What do you like or dislike about

working in this field?' 'Could you describe an "average" day in your profession?' 'Do you have any recommendations for someone interested in this field?'

- Check the NWU Career Centre Events and Calendar frequently – use the Career Centre's resources and advisors.

Looking for a job proactively is not easy. It requires commitment and lots of discipline, but those who continue to try will eventually reap the benefits. The key to successful career choice is in knowing yourself and what you want from your career, knowing what is available in the market place and being able to market yourself accordingly.

Step 3 – Market yourself

The crucial element to securing a job is preparation. In today's competitive job market, you are judged from the outset. In order to get an interview, make sure that your CV and cover letter is going to be noticed. Your **curriculum vitae** and **cover letter** are the two most basic marketing tools for your job search. It is, therefore, essential to develop an effective CV and well-targeted cover letter. Getting the **interview** is the ultimate goal of your marketing tools.

Your curriculum vitae

Your first impression should hit the mark. You will not get a second chance at making a great first impression. The idea of a CV is to get your foot in the door and be granted an interview. Your CV should reflect your occupational and educational highlights, as well as important personal information, key skills and qualifications. It is your own personal advertisement where you illustrate your skills relevant to the type of work you are seeking. Use your CV as a marketing tool to sell yourself to a prospective employer. Consider the following tips when compiling your CV:

- A potential employer will spend only 30 to 60 seconds reading your CV.
- Be prepared to tailor your CV to a specific position – the more closely you can match the requirements, the more likely you are to get an interview.
- You are competing with every other CV in the stack; make sure that you stand out in a positive way.
- Do not assume that you know the best way to present yourself – find resources on résumé writing and learn from the experts.
- What interesting facts might set you apart from the crowd?
- Do not misrepresent any aspect of your background.
- Keep your CV concise and to the point.

- The paper quality and presentation of your CV is vital when selling yourself.
- Check for spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors.
- Avoid graphics, colours and long sentences – less text is easier to read.

Your cover letter

A great cover letter can differentiate your CV from the others on an employer's desk. Make sure that yours stands out. The cover letter is your opportunity to personalise your CV – it conveys your personality and your enthusiasm. The cover letter:

- explains why you are submitting the CV. The first paragraph should inform the reader of the reason why you are writing, name the position you are applying for, and say where you have seen the advertisement or heard of the position;
- introduces you to the employer; and
- serves as a vehicle to sell yourself to the employer. Here you have the opportunity to draw attention to your skills and experience.

The focus of the cover letter should be on that which you can do for the organisation. It should highlight the key features and strong points of your CV, connecting them to the company you are targeting. The cover letter should leave no doubt that you know what is wanted, and that you can provide it.

Cover letter guidelines

- Keep the letter concise – a single page is sufficient.
- Target the cover letter at a specific job – don't be tempted to send out a formatted example that is used for different applications.
- State the date, your name and address at the top of the letter.
- Always try to address the letter to a specific person by name and title.
- Clearly refer to the job title and the advertisement.
- State your interest in the job and mention your skills, education, special training and work experience that qualify you for the job.
- Thank the person for taking the time to read your letter.
- Check the letter for content, grammar, typographical errors, bad punctuation and spelling.
- Use the same paper stock for the cover letter and CV.

Always send a cover letter with your CV and application forms.

Your interview

Being granted an interview is the goal of your marketing tools (i.e. your CV and cover letter). It is easy to be so intent on getting an interview that you neglect to prepare appropriately for the interview. Regardless of the skills, qualifications and experience you have, your personality and personal presentation will still count when your prospective employer sizes you up. Your objectives for the interview is:

- to convince the employer that you have the qualifications, background, skills and abilities required for the position; and
- to evaluate whether the company and position represent a good match with your career aspirations.

How you can develop the skills that are required to 'ace' the interview and approach it with confidence:

- Research the organisation – go to the employer's website and learn as much as possible about them.
- Study books or web resources on interviewing.
- Prepare – get a list of common interview questions and develop good answers to them.
- Perform mock interviews to get some practice.
- Be able to verbalise your career goals – develop a 60-second statement about yourself and practise a short sales pitch.

Imagine yourself as the employer: Would you hire yourself? Work on your appearance, attitude, professionalism, passion, enthusiasm – in other words, your product. You will then be ready to market yourself.

Step 4 – Apply for the job and make a decision

As a job seeker, you should be aware of the different hiring methods of employers and advertising agencies. How do you become aware of job vacancies?

- Advertisements in newspapers, journals, newsletters and trade magazines.
- Advertisements of employment agencies in newspapers.
- Names of employment agencies in phone directories.
- Internet resources – search online job sites and company websites to be aware of vacancies.
- Targeted mailing – try to find out who is in charge of the area you are interested in and send your cover letter and CV to that person.

- Direct contact – visit the company in person; research your option and ask for a specific person to whom you can present yourself.
- Professional associations – join them while you are still a student. They often have websites which include resources and events.
- Networking – a lot of vacancies remain hidden in the job market, because not all jobs are advertised. For this reason, networking remains the number one job search strategy.
- Recruiting on campus – services at the Career Centre, such as online recruiting (CareerZone), career fairs and employer presentations.

Decision making

'You've got the job!' You've been hoping to hear these words. You still need to decide if this is the job that you want. You have to evaluate the offer to see if it matches your interest:

- Compare the job with your career objectives.
- Look out for warning signs – negative interviewers, complaining employees, work environment.
- Compare the benefits with your needs that were identified in the first step of your job search.

To find a job is hard work, takes time and may be frustrating. It is important to let as many employers as possible know who you are, what you can do, and why you want to work at their organisation. To be rejected sometimes will be a normal part of your job searching. Do not allow rejections to discourage you – learn from each and improve your skills for the next application. The staff of the Career Centre is available to assist you with each step of your job search, but you are the one who has to get out there and make things happen – no one can do it for you.