Getting Your First Job for Dummies

Determine what kind of job you want and are suited for.

Write a compelling cover letter and résumé to land an interview.

Prepare for interviews and evaluate job offers.

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Cofounder of AfterCollege.com
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As you begin to look for your first job, start thinking of those around you who can help you in your search. You most likely have an existing support network that you didn’t know you had. Classmates, family, friends, and even some of your professors can help you become aware of opportunities and make introductions.

These individuals can also serve as good references for you. In this chapter, you learn how to approach your network and ask them to recommend you. You also gain knowledge of tools and techniques to do this more easily.

Leverage social media to let your contacts know that you’re looking for a job and get a walk-through on how to do this. This chapter fills you in on the resources typically available to you through your school and its career center. For example, most schools organize job fairs and networking events for students looking for jobs and internships. These are great opportunities to connect with prospective employers.
Enlisting Assistance from Your Network

Friends, classmates, and teachers are often cited by students as being among the most effective contacts for job searching. These individuals form part of your network, and you should definitely lean on them to find your first job. Your classmates and friends are most likely in the same boat you’re in — they’re also looking for their first job. So during the job search process, compare notes with them. Make them aware of any job leads. Share best practices you’ve learned. In return, your friends may do the same.

Identify some friends or classmates who are also looking for their first jobs and treat your journey as you would a study group. Help each other with doing research on employers, interview preparation, and figuring out what to wear.

Networking with LinkedIn

LinkedIn is as effective as the number of contacts you have. The larger your number of online connections, the louder your megaphone for letting people know about career and educational updates.

When you’ve established a LinkedIn profile (see Chapter 7), LinkedIn can help you in two simple ways:

- **Be found.** By having a profile with some basic information such as your school and major, you’re likely to be found by recruiters who are looking for entry-level candidates.

- **Tell people you’re looking.** LinkedIn allows you to update your headline to announce things to your network. This small and simple action has high impact, because it lets your LinkedIn network know you’re looking for work. And you never know — someone can stumble upon an opportunity that is relevant to you and make you aware of it. Always let your contacts know that you’re exploring opportunities.

  People on LinkedIn typically don't announce that they're looking for a job, out of fear that their current employer will find out. But in your case, because this is your first job, it’s not an issue. Take advantage and announce your search.

To announce on LinkedIn that you’re looking for a job, update your profile headline and summary. Do this by following these steps:

1. **Go to www.linkedin.com and make sure you’re logged in.**
2. **On the top menu bar, scroll to the right and click Me to bring up a menu bar.**
3. Click View Profile.

4. Click the pencil icon on the right side of your profile.

   This will bring up an edit screen (see Figure 5-1).

5. **Next to Share Profile Changes, change the switch to Yes.**

   This ensures that your contacts will be aware of the updates you’ll make.

   Update your headline and summary. For your headline, you can use something along these lines:

   **Stanford University economics student looking for internship**

   The headline should be one line; it should describe what you do and what you’re looking for.

   Keep the summary to three lines and add some specific skills. Avoid using adjectives like *enthusiastic* or phrases like *eager to learn*. These are more fluff than
real information. Keep it focused on specific skills and attributes you bring to an employer. A good example of a summary can be something like this:

- Majoring in economics at Stanford.
- Knowledgeable in Microsoft Excel and SQL, and experienced in developing financial models.
- Enjoy working with data to glean insights that help solve business problems.

Pack some specific skills and knowledge in your profile summary so when a recruiter glances at your profile, the summary and headline will catch her eye.

**Leveraging Facebook**

Use Facebook in the same way as LinkedIn to let your friends know that you’re looking for a job. You can do this easily by creating a status update and making it public, as shown in Figure 5-2.

![FIGURE 5-2: Letting your friends on Facebook know you’re looking for a job.](image)

Complete your Facebook profile by adding your school, major, and any previous internship experience you’ve had. More employers are using Facebook to look for talent, so the more information you have, the more likely you are to be found.

Here are some ways to make your update stand out:
» **Make it public.** By default, updates appear only to your friends. Make this one public so everyone sees it.

» **Add a background.** Facebook now lets you add a background to your updates. Doing this will make your update stand out.

» **Add a link to your professional profile.** If you have a LinkedIn or AfterCollege profile, add a link to it in your update.

## Going to alumni events

Alumni are an effective channel that can help you get a job. But how do you connect with them? You can do it online via LinkedIn, but you can also do it with a more personal touch like the following:

» **Alumni events:** Annual reunions tend to bring alumni back to campus. Check with your alumni association or career center about any upcoming mixers for students and alumni.

» **Alumni houses:** Some of the big universities tend to have regional alumni offices or houses around the world. If this is the case with your school, check with the local representative to see if they have any opportunities to connect with alumni.

» **Fraternity and sorority events:** Not everyone was in a fraternity or sorority in college, but if you were, then this is a network of individuals who can also help you. Don't be shy about asking for help or leads.

» **Tailgaters:** These are also a great opportunity to meet alumni. Although they're social events, you can take the opportunity to get to know people and ask them about what they do. You can mention casually that you're looking for opportunities.

Do you belong to any alumni email lists or groups? If so, send your résumé along with a detailed note asking if anyone knows of opportunities available for someone with your school and major.

## Talking to your teachers and professors

Professors and teachers are among the most influential people who can help you in your career. Professors are obviously knowledgeable in the subject matter they teach. They know their field and they also tend to know people working in their field. Because of this, they're in a good position to help you with leads and introductions.
When you think of professors, also add your teachers, teaching assistants, department head, academic advisor, or thesis advisor into this category of people who can help you.

Professors are usually busy teaching classes and doing research, and it’s not in their job description to help students find jobs. Most of the professors I’ve spoken to, though, feel a sense of responsibility to help their students. They want their students to do well when they graduate.

Here are some ways your professors can help you:

- **Identifying promising jobs:** Faculty tend to be experts in their field and industry. Because of this, they’re likely to know what jobs are out there that are relevant to you and your major. For example, your economics professor may be able to tell you about policy jobs at government agencies or analyst jobs at companies that she has worked with before.

- **Pointing you to interesting organizations:** Professors can also point you to employers that hire people with your educational background. Many professors consult for other organizations while also teaching. In my case, for example, I had professors who worked for the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and for companies like Hewlett Packard and Google. If you have the opportunity, ask a professor what kind of work she does for these organizations and ask if she knows of any relevant entry-level opportunities within these firms.

- **Making introductions:** Not many faculty do this, but in some cases, especially if you’re working on your master's degree or PhD, professors can introduce you to people in their industry with whom they've worked. If you have a good relationship with a teacher or professor, ask him to introduce you to employers in his network. Professors who advise PhD students tend to stay in touch with their students after they've graduated. And these grads tend to go back to their professors when they're looking to hire recent grads.

- **Sharing job leads:** When I was in college, my most interesting job and internship leads came from my professors and department administrators. Savvy employers know that the best way to reach students from your school and major is to contact your department. So if you get an email from a professor, teaching assistant, or department administrator about a job or an internship, take notice. These opportunities are typically very relevant and have been targeted by the employer to students with your educational profile.

- **Giving you an endorsement:** Ask early. Some professors, especially the ones who teach a large number of students, don't give recommendations because, if they do it for one student, they need to do it for everyone. Still, if you work closely with a professor and she knows you, ask her for a letter of
recommendation. You can also ask her for permission to give her name and contact information as a reference to potential employers.

Don't get discouraged if you ask a professor for help and she turns you down. Not all professors are able to help. Some are busy and have so many students that they set a policy of not giving recommendations or making introductions.

**Getting help from family and friends**

Your family and friends are most likely the people who know you the best. They have a good idea of what you're good at doing and your top qualities. They also know where you need to improve. This makes them good at judging what jobs may be relevant and interesting to you. Ask them for help in keeping an eye open for jobs that could be a good fit for you.

Here are other ways your friends can help you:

- **Getting an internship, co-op, or temporary job.** A friend, relative, or friend of the family may hesitate to get you a full-time job simply because of the connection. This is fair — nepotism is seen as a negative thing and your friend or relative may get in trouble at work. With internships or temporary jobs, especially if they're unpaid, this shouldn't be an issue.

  Internships and co-ops are temporary, usually lasting two to three months. Because of the short duration, employers tend to be less strict on how these hires are made. In fact, it’s often unspoken that friends tend to help other friends by giving internships to their relatives. Don't be shy about leveraging your connections or asking relatives to leverage their connections for an internship. If you do well in your internship, everyone wins. If this is not the case, it was only a two- to three-month stint.

  When leveraging a family connection or friend to get a job, reach out to the employer yourself and don’t rely on your connection to do it for you. This shows the employer that you’re proactive and you take the initiative. You'll make a good impression.

- **Employee referrals:** A simple referral, even if not an endorsement, often helps to get you through the door and to secure an interview. Larger employers often pay employees a referral fee for recommending someone who ultimately gets hired and stays with the organization for some period of time, normally three to six months.

  If you have friends who work at an employer of interest, ask them if they can submit your résumé or add a note with the recruiter that you've applied for the job. They'll be doing you a favor and they may also earn a bonus.
Obtaining Recommendations

One of the advantages of being a first-time job seeker is that employers most likely won’t ask you for references. This is because they know you haven’t had any previous employment. Nonetheless, some employers may ask you for some references.

To paraphrase a popular saying, it’s better to have the references and not need them than to need them and not have them. You’re also better off asking for references early on in your job-seeking quest to get this out of the way. This way, you’re not scrambling later on trying to get endorsements on short notice while an employer is waiting for them before it can give you an offer.

Start making a list of past employers, teachers, and classmates whom you’ll ask to serve as references or to give you endorsements.

Securing past employer recommendations

You’ve most likely had internships or a part-time job in the past, or you’ve done some volunteer work. If so, start asking some of your past employers if they can act as references. You can also ask them for recommendations ahead of time, even if you’re not sure your prospective employer will need them. It’s up to you.

Past bosses often move on to other organizations. If all your prospective employer needs is to verify past employers, give it the main number for the organization. If you or your employer needs a recommendation or reference, track down your former boss and reach out to her.

Writing someone for a recommendation

You may have a great relationship with your former boss where it’s easy for you to ask for a reference or recommendation. Either way, be polite and ask early enough. Also, be ready to thank the person for any reference or recommendation, whether or not you get the job.

Here’s a simple note you can send to your former employer, via email or via LinkedIn, asking for a good word from him:

Hello, ____.

I hope you’re doing well. I’m in the process of looking for a job and I’d like to list you as a reference. I had a great experience working with you and learned a lot. I’d like to share your name and contact information with prospective employers.
Please confirm this is okay and let me know what email or phone number I can provide as contact information.

Thank you very much, and take care,

Your Name

If you need a reference letter, definitely ask for it early in the process. They take time to write, and you want to make sure you give the person enough time to write you a good letter. Here’s an example of how you can make the request. Fill in the blanks appropriately. Make sure you provide a deadline of when you need the letter, and most important, always be courteous. Also, add details on the job you’re pursuing and a link to the job description if you have one. This will help the person craft the letter.

Hello, ____.

I hope you’re doing well! I’m in the process of looking for a job, and I’d like to ask you for a letter of recommendation. I know you’re busy, and I appreciate your help. The deadline for the letter is _______ and you can send it to _______.

The opportunity I’m considering is a _______ role with ________. My job would entail doing _________.

I’ve attached the job description to help you understand the role.

A good word from you will definitely help my prospects in securing this job. Your letter can briefly describe the work I did for you, some of my best qualities, and how you think I can do well in this role.

If you can do this, please let me know. I really appreciate it! Also, please let me know if I can do anything to make it easier for you to write the letter.

Thank you in advance and best regards,

Your Name

Be ready to provide the writer of your letter with some bullet points of items to include in the letter. This can include some of your strengths and specific contributions. You may also need to write the letter for that person.

**Approaching teachers for recommendations**

Professors typically don’t do recommendations unless they know you well enough. If you have a professor you work with or an advisor, she should be willing to write you a letter. You can also approach a faculty advisor of a student group if you belonged to one, especially if you were in a leadership position.
Here are some things to remember when asking a professor for a recommendation:

» **Ask early.** Do it prior to finals or midterms, when your professor will most likely be inundated with grading papers or exams.

» **Consider teaching assistants.** If your professor is unable to write a letter, ask the teaching assistant. A professor is more prestigious, but a teaching assistant’s recommendation is better than no recommendation at all.

» **Write your own letter.** In some cases, you may be asked to write the letter yourself, for the professor, and then hand it to him so he can add the finishing touches. If you get asked to write your own letter, don’t be bummed. It’s normal and it just means the individual is busy, but he wants to help you.

### Crafting your own recommendation letter

If you’re asked to write your own letter, here’s a sample letter you can customize and use:

```
To whom it may concern,

It is with pleasure that I recommend YOUR NAME HERE for ___________ role at ________.

As I understand, the opportunity entails doing __________________

__________________________________________________________________________.

YOUR NAME HERE is an ideal candidate for this position. While he/she was a student in my _____ class/group, he/she showed great aptitude in ___________ and performed well, obtaining one of the top scores in the class. The work involved working in a group, and YOUR NAME HERE was able to work well and collaboratively as part of a team. His/her fellow team members often went to YOUR NAME HERE for assistance and relied on him/her for feedback.

YOUR NAME HERE showed mastery of the subject matter and was always willing to help others.

I believe YOUR NAME HERE’s work style, ability to master difficult concepts, and willingness to help others provide him/her with the skills necessary to succeed in any endeavor he/she sets his/her mind to. I would, therefore, appreciate any consideration you can give YOUR NAME HERE for this position.

Sincerely,
```
When writing your own letter, provide the document to the person recommending you in a file format where she can easily make edits (such as Microsoft Word).

Be sure to include the following components in the letter:

- **Role and responsibilities**: Include the job that you’re applying to and details about what the job entails.
- **Organization**: Include the organization that you’re applying to.
- **Accomplishments**: Include any of your specific accomplishments or results you achieved that the recommender can point to in his letter.
- **Skill sets**: Include any skills that are relevant to the job you’re applying to that the recommender will also be willing to write about.

**Requesting endorsements via LinkedIn**

LinkedIn makes it easy for you to ask for recommendations. When someone recommends you, her endorsement appears as part of your profile. Recruiters who look at your profile will usually look to see if you have any recommendations. Not having them doesn’t hurt you, but having them definitely adds to the appeal of your profile and makes you stand out.

To get recommended on LinkedIn, follow these steps:

1. **Go to www.linkedin.com**.
2. **In the upper-left search bar of the screen, enter the name of the person whom you would like to ask for a recommendation**.
3. **Click the three dots toward the top of the person’s profile and select Request a Recommendation from the drop-down menu**.
4. **Select the relationship you have with the recommender and the role you had, as shown in Figure 5-3**.

On the next screen, you’ll be able to enter a message for the person. Make sure you personalize this message and include detail about yourself, your interactions with the person, and any specific aspects that you would like the recommender to mention.

When you receive a recommendation on LinkedIn, you can decide if you want to accept it. You can also keep it private for now and make it public at a later point.
Asking for recommendations via AfterCollege

You can also ask for recommendation on AfterCollege, similar to how you can on LinkedIn. With AfterCollege, though, the recommender doesn’t have to be a member and you can ask anyone, as long as you have the person’s email address.

Recommendations will appear in your AfterCollege profile, which you can make public and share with employers. You can add a link to your public profile on your résumé or send the link to employers directly.

To ask for a recommendation on AfterCollege, do the following:

1. Go to www.aftercollege.com and log into your account.
2. On the upper-right menu bar, click My Profile and select View/Edit My Profile.
3. **Scroll all the way to the bottom to the Recommendations section and click Edit.**

   The pop-up window shown in Figure 5-4 appears, with all the recommendations you've received, if any.

   ![Figure 5-4: Asking for a recommendation on AfterCollege.](image)

4. **Click Add New Recommendation.**

5. **Enter the name and email of the person you would like to endorse you.**

   You'll see a message template you can use to make your request, as shown in Figure 5-5. You can customize this message as you see fit.

   ![TIP](image)

   Add some context to your request, including any specifics that you would like the recommender to mention, such as class projects, skill sets, or knowledge you possess, or a specific accomplishment.

   ![TIP](image)

   Use AfterCollege to ask classmates or team members to endorse you. LinkedIn is the most widely used service, but AfterCollege comes in handy when asking for recommendations from those who don't have a LinkedIn profile.
Your university career center should be one of your first stops as you prepare to look for a job. Career centers are online, allowing you to access them from anywhere, and to easily schedule interviews and sign up for events and workshops.

Good university career centers connect you with alumni and with others outside the organization who can help you find your path. They'll recommend services you can use, whether they're part of the school or not, and they won't pigeonhole you into using only their services. The ecosystem of resources and sites available to you is huge, and effective career centers know this. They do their research and recommend best-of-breed tools for you instead of trying to do everything themselves.

Career centers also organize job fairs and on-campus interviews, which students find effective.

Colleges and universities may have one main career center, a career center for each department or school, or both. Make sure you sign up for every career center you’re eligible to use.
Attending career fairs

Among all the services offered by career centers, students rate job and career fairs as the most effective. Career fairs give you an opportunity to meet with a large number of employers in one place, usually walking distance from your classes or dorm room. It doesn’t get more convenient than this.

If you’re just starting to look for work, make it a point to take an hour or two out of your day to attend an on-campus job fair. These events are usually publicized in the school newspaper or on your career center’s website.

Here are some things to remember when attending career fairs:

» **Do research.** Look at the list of employers attending the career fair and research the ones that interest you by going to their websites.

» **Show interest.** Sometimes, career centers may have a way for you to express interest in employers prior to the fair. Take advantage of this. The employer may even reach out to you prior to the career fair.

» **Bring copies of you résumé.** That way, you can drop them off at tables with employers that interest you. You can apply to jobs later, but it doesn't hurt to bring your résumé if you have one.

» **Take notes.** Take notes after you talk to an employer. You'll want to write down deadlines of when you need to sign up for campus interviews, where to go online to apply for specific positions, and anything else noteworthy that can help you apply later on.

» **Go early.** Some of the top-brand employers like Google and Tesla will have long lines of students waiting to talk to the recruiters. If you want to avoid waiting in line, go during lunch when all the other students are eating or early while the employers are setting up for the fair.

» **Connect on LinkedIn.** Connect with recruiters you meet at the fair via LinkedIn if you find out their names.

» **Learn about new organizations.** Don't limit yourself to organizations you've heard about. Stop by the booths of employers you haven't heard of. You never know! One of them may have your dream job waiting for you.

» **Don't worry about being perfect.** If you tend to get nervous at interviews or at these types of events, don't worry. It's likely the recruiter won't remember you and you'll most likely interview with a different person once you apply.

» **Ask about the dress code beforehand.** In general, you don't need to dress formally when you attend job fairs. Most schools allow students to come wearing whatever they wear to class, even if that means jeans or shorts.
Career fairs are generally seen as an opportunity for students to do research and for employers to market themselves to students. Employers should be the ones on the spot, not students. That said, some schools do turn away students at the door if they aren’t dressed “appropriately.” To be safe, make sure to ask about the dress code and follow those guidelines.

Take advantage of career fairs to learn about new organizations. Go with a group of friends and divide the companies you talk to in order to save time. Then compare notes and share your findings.

Signing up for on-campus interviews

On-campus interviews are usually held shortly after career fairs are held. This is when employers interested in hiring students from your school send representatives to campus. The benefit of these interviews is that they happen on campus and in one convenient location.

Don’t delay checking into on-campus interview dates because they vary by industry. For example, the big accounting and consulting firms tend to be on campus very early, as soon as school starts in the fall. On the other hand, government agencies, nonprofits, and firms in other sectors tend to interview later in the school year.

The downside is that not every employer can come to campus. It usually tends to be local employers or large employers that can afford to come to campus.

Sign up for interviews when you’re ready. These interviews are the real deal, and you should do your research and prepare before you do an interview.

Read Chapters 10 and 11 to get more familiar with the interview process and how to prepare.

Practicing with mock interviews

Mock interviews allow you to practice before you do real interviews. Most career centers organize mock interviews by enlisting employers to volunteer to interview on campus and give feedback to students. For employers, it’s a chance to build their brand on campus and to identify potential candidates of interest. For you, it’s a chance to practice and make a good early impression with prospective employers.

Here are some things you can do to maximize your mock interviews:
Pick a lesser-known employer. These are practice interviews and employers realize that you’re still preparing. Still, if you’re worried about making a first impression, start practicing with employers where you’re not worried about making the best impression.

Learn from feedback. Mock interviews are valuable because of the feedback you receive. Write it down or memorize it. But make sure you take any advice you’re given and use it to improve your interviewing skills.

Take it easy but take it seriously. Again, these are practice interviews so don’t stress about them. But if you have time, do your research on the interviewer and his organization. You’ll need to do research for the real interviews, so you might as well get used to doing this now, even for practice interviews.

Get the interviewer’s contact information. Even if these are practice interviews, you may end up interviewing with the person for real at some point. Take her contact information and send her a thank-you message afterward.

Utilizing other resources on campus

Visit your career center and ask about the resources it has. For example, some career centers offer workshops on writing your résumé and cover letter. You may even be able to get a one-on-one session with a counselor to go over your résumé and to get ideas of things you can do to prepare for your job search.

Some career centers take walk-ins, while others require that you make a reservation to come in. Either way, do this early in the academic year to give yourself plenty of time to prepare and to avoid the last-minute crowds of fellow students.

Visit your career center’s website to find out how you can sign up to receive updates on upcoming events and workshops and follow it on social media.

Deciding to Use Headhunters and Staffing Firms

The topic of using staffing firms and headhunters to help you find a job is a controversial one. To clarify, I’m referring to recruiters who help place you at an organization. I’m not referring to recruiters hired by employers to help them find talent — those folks are hired by the employer and you should view them as being
an extension of the employer. I’m talking about people who earn fees on the placements they make. This is where I would exercise caution.

Some people say to use every resource at your disposal to find a job, and in turn, to use a third-party recruiter if it makes it easier for you to find work. I would argue that no one is better qualified to help you find a job you like than you are.

Recruiters are experts in the job placement business. But, at the risk of sounding cheesy, you’re the expert in yourself, and this is more important. When you arm yourself with some of the tactics and best practices to find a job, you don’t need to hire a staffing firm.

If you do consider working with a staffing firm or headhunter, consider the following:

- **Who pays?** Do you need to pay a fee or part of your salary to the recruiter if she places you in a job? You shouldn't have to. Even if the employer pays the fee, make sure the recruiter is looking out for your best interests and not placing you at an organization that is paying her the highest finder’s fee.

- **Whose interest do they represent?** Will you get placed at the employer that is the best fit for you, or will you get placed in one of a handful of employers with which the staffing firm works? Make sure you know this beforehand.

- **Is there time pressure?** Can you take your time in deciding where to work or do you have to make a decision within a certain time frame?

- **What impression will you make?** Some employers don’t mind whether you apply via a third-party recruiter or if you apply directly. Others may. Some employers will state on their sites that they don't take applications from third-party recruiters.

These are some of the questions you should ask before enlisting the help of a third-party recruiter to help you find a job.
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Roberto Angulo is co-founder and CEO of AfterCollege, the largest career network for college students and recent graduates. He came up with the idea for AfterCollege while studying economics at Stanford University. Not knowing what to do with his degree, he set out to start a service that helped students figure out what to do based on their field of study. Today, AfterCollege is used by millions of students and grads annually and counts more than 18,000 professors and academic contacts as subscribers who receive targeted job content for their students.

Roberto is also the CEO of Recruitology, a leading recruitment platform that helps small and medium employers hire the right candidates at the right time. The platform gives employers access to best-of-breed job sites and includes intelligent job distribution, an applicant tracking system, and analytics.

He collaborated with President Obama’s administration on various initiatives, including the launch of Summer Jobs+, which created summer opportunities for youth ages 16 to 24. He also co-founded US2020.org, an initiative to engage STEM professionals as mentors to students from kindergarten through graduate school.

Roberto enjoys traveling, running, and developing new product and partnership ideas for AfterCollege and Recruitology.
Dedication

To the entire team at AfterCollege. Without you, this work would not have been possible. To my wife, Ana Bertran who’s been my biggest fan and supporter. She encouraged me to write this book. And to Sophie and Lucas, who think it’s really cool that their dad wrote a book.
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