



Tips for Finding Work in a Challenging Employment Market

Times are tough

The economic climate fluctuates and there are cyclic patterns of higher unemployment levels. The good news is that graduates tend to fare better than most and that your investment in your education is a positive step to take in terms of your future career.

Research

Find out what is happening in the industries which are most relevant to your studies and your career goals. Talk to people in similar roles, read industry journals, attend industry events and monitor the most relevant job websites on a daily basis. Be clear about what you're looking for and where you would like it to take you. Research a range of options so that you can plan for contingencies and avoid disappointment

Adjust your expectations

If necessary, you may find you need to be flexible and possibly lower your expectations. Be prepared to take on roles that will help you to gain experience while you make contacts and work toward your goals.

- Apply for permanent positions as well as part-time, casual positions and contract roles
- Review your time frame for finding work and be realistic (it may take 3 - 12 months); consider volunteering for the not-for-profit sector or ask to work shadow someone in your field to build your skills base while you seek employment
- Consider a less ideal job in your preferred industry or organisation. Any job (even junior ones) with your sector may prove fruitful in the long term, don't expect to start in your dream position
- Expand your search to consider other locations e.g. outside the central business district, non-metropolitan or even interstate or overseas
- Consider a deferred start date if offered this option
- Give 100% in every role you take, show your enthusiasm to learn and collect great references

Who do you know? Work your networks

Step 1

- Make a list of people in your immediate and less immediate circle of contacts – parents, siblings, partner, wider family circle, their colleagues, your friends, people in your sporting/hobby groups, your current and previous work colleagues, your neighbours, your academic links (lecturers/tutors), friends of friends. Aim to come up with at least 30 people in your network
- Examine common interests. Where do these people work? What roles are they in? Is there any similarity to the role/industry you want to get into? Who may be able to provide useful information, ideas or further contacts?

Step 2

- Expand your networks by joining professional associations as a student member and attend industry functions and networking occasions, read journals and take advantage of mentoring programs, worksite visits and conferences
- Explore university programs you can join e.g. faculty-based club and society activities (industry nights, employer presentations) or other programs (LUCY mentoring, Young Achievement Australia, alumni)

Step 3

- Let this wide community of people know that you are looking for work so they can keep you in mind for opportunities that arise, send your resume to the most relevant contacts

Step 4

- Arrange to meet or speak with relevant contacts – conduct an 'information interview' with them. Remember that it is less threatening to ask people for advice and guidance at this stage rather than ask for a job – they may not be able to offer a job opportunity to you right now but would still like to help you with useful information and tips

Give a positive impression

Are you confident about the wide variety of skills and experiences you can offer an employer? Can you talk with some credibility about where you developed these skills? Focus on the skills and experiences most relevant to the employer you are targeting – learn to tailor what you have to offer to specific markets and people. Stand out from the crowd of other applicants. Be able to explain where you can add value to their business.

Update your resume

Make sure your resume expresses clearly who you are and what you have to offer a potential employer.

- Target to the job and organisation
- Give your format a fresh and contemporary look
- Fix any spelling and grammar problems
- Articulate your relevant skills and experience
- Review the message and impression your resume gives to the reader
- Have your resume checked by people working in the industry you wish to join
- Attend a Resume Rescue workshop with the Careers Centre for a final check

Remind yourself that sending out a general resume and cover letter to a wide variety of employers across industries is generally an unsuccessful approach – avoid this strategy.

Present yourself effectively

- Are you genuinely passionate and interested in specific job vacancies that arise? How do you communicate this? Demonstrate your enthusiasm with extra reading, certifications, a broad knowledge base and capacity to present ideas
- Do you look and sound as professional as you can e.g. high standard of personal grooming, appropriate dress code for the role, professional-sounding voicemail message and email address?
- Gather relevant and useful information into a portfolio – transcripts, certificates, examples of work relevant to the vacancy, references, skills list
- Consider your non-verbal signals such as your smile, eye contact, handshake and posture and if necessary get help in improving your body language messages
- Have you prepared answers to common interview questions and then practised your responses?
- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise program - be attractive to prospective employers

Other Ideas

- Find out if there other places where vacancies in your field are listed beyond the common job boards such as seek.com e.g. faculty notice boards, specialist recruitment agencies or industry specific job boards
- Approach small to medium organisations, not just the larger and better known graduate recruiters
- Be well organised and persistent – follow up applications when you don't receive a response, ask employers for feedback when notified of being unsuccessful
- Be resourceful about your career plans and consider areas that might be more successful in a challenging economic market e.g. other industries, alternate roles, listen to what the market needs and possibly consider starting your own business
- Many people utilise an employment downturn by undertaking further study in an Honours or Masters degree or even a PhD before heading into the workforce. Graduate Certificates, Graduate Diplomas and TAFE qualifications can also be a strategic way to realign your skills base and provide additional options for job exploration
- Have you always wanted to travel, do an international exchange or volunteer program? This could be a great time to follow your dreams and, with a bit of planning, you can develop a whole range of skills and experiences valuable to an employer, even while backpacking!
- Don't allow negative talk to get you down or stop you from submitting applications. Even when times are tough, graduate employers are still keen to meet extraordinary candidates - research what they require and be able to demonstrate how you can contribute toward their goals.

Suggested further reading

Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) provide news and media releases and have articles addressing graduate recruitment in times of economic downturn
www.graduatecareers.com.au

The Autumn 2009 GO For It! E-zine, published through Graduate Opportunities, features a transcript from GCA's 2009 Virtual Careers Fair (VCF), in which an online chat session was held for students on the topic of job search strategies in times of economic downturn. Click on 'subscribe to updates'
www.graduateopportunities.com