



How new graduates can improve their chances of finding employment.

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Finding your first job as a recent school leaver or graduate is daunting. It is particularly challenging in an environment where jobs are scarce and employers want to hire employees with work experience. It takes time to train up a new employee without work experience in the basics of the working world. If you have never worked before you may not be familiar and comfortable with various aspects in the workplace. For example, working hours, leave, dealing with customers, dealing with other employees in the company, managing and writing emails, general MS office programmes, meeting etiquette, business dress, travelling for business, and a whole host of other tasks that you learn on the job. The general view, fair or unfair, of prospective employers is that they have to invest a lot in a new employee. Not just learning how to do the job they are hired for, but in general how to navigate the business world and working life.

There is also some research done over the past few years, locally and internationally, which shows that employers prefer to hire someone who can hit the ground running. Following many rounds of retrenchments, most companies are lean, and their staff are stretched. Many don't have time to spend teaching new recruits the basics of the workplace.

Now if you are a recent school leaver or tertiary education graduate, before you throw your hands up in despair and think this is just more bad news, armed with this information you can do something about it to increase your chances of finding employment. Below are some suggestions.

1. Look for employment. If you don't look you are unlikely to find something. Look for job adverts – the internet and LinkedIn are still good places to use and most entry-level jobs are posted on the internet. Even if the advert says some job experience is required don't let that put you off. Most people who apply for jobs don't meet all the criteria listed. Obviously don't apply for a job that requires 10 years work experience, but if minimal work experience is required give it a shot.
2. Your connections and word of mouth are also good ways to find a job so use them.
3. Research the company advertising for candidates. Sometimes you cannot do this as you don't know the name of the company, however if you do, then read up about them as you can use that information to show on your CV and in interviews how you would be a good fit for the company. Employers know that cultural fit and values are important. Try out the products and services of the company. See who works in the company. Understand what the company does and where it is going in the future. Employers prefer to hire people who really want to work at their company, not people who want any old job.

4. Do an internet search on yourself. In this day employers tend to check out employees on the internet. Google your name and see what comes up. You want to view what shows on your social media pages. So be careful what you post or use the privacy options if you don't want everyone to see all your posts.
5. Your CV needs to be great. So, spend time on it and make sure you create a CV that is as good as possible. Most of the points below relate to putting together a great CV and answering questions that could be put to you in an interview situation.
6. Because employers usually want work experience put down all your experience that is related to work you have done. Include all part-time work. Include all vacation work. Include ways you have made money, which could include the lemonade stand or raising money for the SPCA. Include all volunteering.
7. Consider work you have done which could be similar to work you will do in a company. Maybe you organised a party or Christmas dinner for people. To do this you would have used skills such as planning and organising, budgeting, coordinating suppliers, communication, amongst others. These are skills wanted in the workplace.
8. Once you have considered all the work you have done, list the skills you developed doing the work. The soft skills that employers tend to want are: communication skills, presentation skills, empathy, flexibility, conflict management, negotiation, persuasion, relationship-building skills, resilience, leadership, and motivating others. Other general skills that employers like include: problem-solving skills, analytical thinking, decision making, creative thinking, teamwork, ability to work under pressure, attention to detail and accuracy, fast learner, perseverance, reliability, result-oriented, and time management. If you have done work that required you to use any of these skills then point it out in your CV.
9. Prospective employers like project management skills because a lot of work is project-based even if it is not formally designated as a project. If you have done any projects at all, be it at school, tertiary studies, part-time work, then put down a summary of how you did the project.
10. When you talk about your skills don't name the skill and leave it at that. Recruiters ignore CV's that say something like, "I am a hardworking candidate with good communication skills. I excel in problem-solving". Anyone can say that. You need to demonstrate how you used your skills. If you are good at communication then show how you are good at it. For instance on your CV you could show this as: Communication skills: In a class project we were stuck because our group could not come to an agreement on the method to follow. I led a session where everyone had a chance to discuss the various options and led the group to agree on the method going forward. This applies to everything you put on your CV. The hiring manager wants to see that you are good at it. If you are hardworking then you need to describe a time that shows you worked extra hours when needed.
11. Include your qualifications. As a recent school leaver your qualifications and your marks are likely to count for more than if you have lots of years working experience. If you have any distinctions in subjects or awards then put them down. You want to stand out from the other candidates and with little work experience, your marks are one way of doing so.
12. Where you can please put down some achievements. To say your role was to do..... means nothing. The recruiter has no idea if you did your role, if you could not do your role, if you could do parts of your role, or if you were outstanding in your role. You want to write down what you actually did and achieved. And if you can use numbers then so much the better. For instance. Corrected and updated 5000 client records. Posted 90 posts on social media for a restaurant. Increased patrons by 10%. Negotiated a new pet food distributor for the animal shelter saving 15% on costs. Launched 3 new products in two months.

13. Your front page must sell you and if you are a recent graduate or school-leaver one page is enough for your CV. Tailor it to the job you are applying for.
14. When a recruiter or hiring manager gets your CV they scan the front page for about 7 seconds. If there is nothing that catches their eye then they will put your CV aside and move onto the next one. You don't want to write an essay. You want headings where you showcase your strengths. You want them to look at your CV and think wow, I want to find out more about this person. You want bullet points. Use some colour but unless you are applying for a job in a particularly creative field such as advertising don't overdo the colour.

If you are looking for your first job, then you need resilience. It is not easy, but people do get jobs. So, make sure you give yourself the best possible chance of getting employment by following the above advice. If you can get work, any work, then take it even if it is for a short time. You need to persevere even when you get tired of trying to find work. Persistence does pay off in the end. And when you get into a job, make sure you make the most of it by learning skills and getting experience that will increase your marketability in the workplace.