The Job Search Process

Six Stages in a Successful Search

It’s important to think of your search as a process that will take place over an extended period of time and will encompass several steps. Listed below are just some of the tactics you will likely need to take in your job search process:

Stage One: Develop a Plan of Action and Start Researching

- Develop a personal timeline (the job search is generally 3-9 months).
- Block off time on your calendar for the job search. Do at least one thing per day towards finding a job, but remember that you’ll get as much out of the search as you put into it.
- Take an assessment through CCE to determine your strengths, values, skills and interests (see page 10).
- Use Vault, Wetfeet, O*NET, industry resources, and LionSHARE through the CCE website to identify and research career fields. Talk to professors, former supervisors, family, and classmates (particularly those farther ahead in their programs) to learn more about fields that are of interest to you or uncover fields you might not have considered.
- Develop a list of jobs (including typical titles) and industries you want to target. Make a list of your top 20 organizations at which you would like to work. Use resources like Going Global, UniWorld, Indeed, and professional association websites.
- Create an Excel spreadsheet or other tracking document to record contacts you have or will meet with, positions you will apply for, and organizations you want to target.
- Create Google News alerts for your fields and companies of interest. Stay informed of current events through the news and industry-specific publications and blogs. If organizations you are interested in have newsletters, sign up for them.
- If you’re an international student and plan to work in the U.S., learn about the requirements of your visa.

Stage Two: Develop Your Professional Image

- Create a polished, targeted, and error-free resume. Have it reviewed by a counselor. Be ready to tailor your resume to specific jobs.
- Create polished, targeted, and error-free cover letters for each position you apply to. Have your cover letter reviewed by a counselor.
- Ensure that your LionSHARE profile is complete and accurate. Sign up for On-Campus Recruiting Access through the On-Campus Interviews tab (see page 83).
- Clean up your online presence. Google your name and images and keep your social media profiles appropriate (see pages 47 and 48).
- Join and be proactive in using LinkedIn and other online social sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Join LinkedIn groups such as Columbia Career Connections, Columbia Alumni Association, and IvyLife (see pages 68–72).
- Develop and practice your 30-second introduction (see our online tipsheet).
- Consider purchasing business cards (you can get them at a discount rate through Columbia Print Services).

Stage Three: Get Involved and Build Relationships

- Set up informational interviews with alumni or other contacts in your current network to learn about careers and organizations that are of interest to you (see pages 67–72).
- Actively participate in and attend panels, information sessions, and workshops offered through CCE. Attend the Fall, STEM, Spring, and Startup career fairs, as well as Media Networking Night, hosted by CCE (see pages 6 and 7).
- Join a professional association and attend their membership meetings. Many have student rates. The Center for Association Leadership offers a directory of over 21,000 professional associations (see page 69).
- Join student organizations and stay involved on campus. Many hold career related events throughout the year.
- Take on volunteer experiences to gain skills and meet new people.
Stage Four: Apply to Jobs and Internships

- Stay in touch with contacts you’ve made through networking to uncover “hidden” job opportunities that are not posted but rather will be filled through referrals.
- Create a job agent on LionSHARE to receive jobs meeting your criteria via email daily, and apply to positions (see page 82).
- Regularly check the Careers websites of your top target companies, follow their blogs and Twitter feeds, and sign up for their job newsletters.
- Pay attention to your academic department emails, find out if they offer a department-specific job board or alumni networking opportunities.
- Search the discussion pages of your LinkedIn groups for opportunities from fellow members and submit your applications/reach out to contacts.
- Apply to jobs on industry job boards (for example, MediaBistro is good for media-focused positions). You can find some to start with on the industry exploration section of our website.
- Search general aggregate job boards such as Indeed.com and Simplyhired.com and sign up to have new postings emailed to you regularly, so you can stay up to date on opportunities around the web that you might have missed otherwise.
- One to two weeks after applying to a position, follow up by email with the organization. Check your own network or LinkedIn to see if you can speak with a contact or alum who works there.

Stage Five: Interview and Follow-up

- Schedule a mock interview at CCE to build interviewing confidence. Set up a mock case interview to prepare for case-specific interviews (typical of fields like consulting), if you anticipate receiving one.
- Dress for success. Don’t forget that CCE has a Clothing Closet from which you can borrow a professional suit.
- Research and reflect before each interview. Review the interviewing section of this guide for tips for preparing for and succeeding in interviews (see pages 48–66).
- Ask your interviewers for business cards and send a thank-you note to each person with whom you interviewed (see page 46).
- Ask your interviewer or recruiter for next steps in the process and when you can expect to hear back; follow up if you don’t hear back by the time they indicated they would reach their decision.

Step Six: Evaluate and Respond to Offers, Make the Most of Your Experience

- If you receive an offer, let the employer know you are grateful, and ask when a decision is needed. Be sure that you have all the details: job description, salary, benefits, start date, etc.
- See pages 62–64 on evaluating, negotiating, and responding to offers.
- Review CCE’s salary negotiation webinar in the multimedia section of our website.
- Once you have accepted a position, let any other employers with which you were interviewing know your employment status. Inform your network of your success!
- View our webinar “How to Succeed in Business by Really Trying” for tips on making the most of your first three months on the job.
Staying Positive in Your Job Search

The job search process can sometimes feel draining. Anyone who has undergone this process has experienced myriad feelings from excitement and hope to frustration and discouragement. To maintain momentum and keep a positive outlook:

- Understand that the job search process is just that—a process. You won’t be able to create a resume, cover letter, fine-tune your interviewing skills, or land a job overnight. All stages of the process take time, dedication and research. Once you have accepted that fact, you can be a little more patient with yourself and others.
- As part of the job search process, you are continually meeting new people during interviews, networking events, and informational interviews. One of the most important aspects of these interactions is the energy that you are displaying. Are you positive and upbeat or are you irritated and anxious? Engage in activities that nourish and uplift you and take breaks. Taking time to decompress will help you to feel refreshed and stay focused. Also make sure to get enough sleep, eat, and get some exercise.
- Surround yourself with friends, colleagues, and confidantes. Think of the people in your life that are uplifting. After a day of tough interviews, a friend can be empathic and remind you that setbacks are temporary. A former colleague can help you see your next steps more clearly. Some people even enlist a “board of advisors” to turn to with questions, or start a job search group amongst friends to keep up momentum.
- Consider volunteering while you search. It will help you to feel good, put your own experiences in perspective, and even grow your network.
- Keep a journal about your experience where you can reflect on your learning and next steps in your search.

Employers and students networking at the Spring Career Fair