

# **JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES GUIDE**



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# Preparation

## Where do I begin?

Before you can search for something, you have to know what it is you are searching for. If you have a specific opportunity in mind, that's great. If you don't, you need to identify positions, employers, and industries that may be a good fit for your major, skills, interests, and values.

Consider the following strategies:

1. **Use the *What Can I Do with This Major?* resource on our website to learn about potential career areas related to your major.** Discover common career paths for your major and advice for succeeding in those paths.
2. **Use Handshake to research employers based on their industry.** For example, if you are interested in working for a social service agency, you can search by the Nonprofit or Social Assistance industries to explore some of the employers in that area of work, learn more about them, and see their current opportunities.
3. **Reflect on your values and consider the type of employer and work environment that would be a good fit for you.** Do you value high income and a competitive environment? Are you looking for an opportunity to fight for social justice and make a difference? Maybe you can see yourself in the corporate world, or maybe you think you would fit in better in a small organization. Answering these questions can help you narrow your search and target the opportunities that fit you best.
4. **Identify skills you have developed through your experiences and education, and use those skills as keywords in your job search to identify potential job options.** Have you learned a computer programming language? Are you social media savvy? Have you developed strong leadership abilities through your involvement on campus? You have skills, and they can open the door for you as a job seeker.
5. **Consider whether your search will be local, regional, national, or abroad.** Are you interested in relocating, or are you looking for work close to home? Are you able to consider summer internships in New York or Washington, D.C.? Do you dream of living and working in another country? Answering these questions will help you focus your search in the right geographic direction.

By identifying **industries, organizations, job titles,** and **locations** for your job search, you will start to develop a job target. Your job target is what you will aim for in your search.



*Adapted from The Career Center, Florida State University*

# Preparation

## What will I need?

Preparation is key to your job or co-op/internship search. Once you know what types of opportunities you are seeking, you'll need a well-written resume and cover letter to apply, and you'll need strong interview skills to land the position.

Consider the following strategies:

1. **Use our Resume Preparation Guide** to see great resume examples and get tips for starting your own.
2. **Attend one of our resume or cover letter workshops** to learn how to create a resume that showcases your skills and abilities to an employer.
3. **Pick up our Cover Letters Guide** for an example that will show you the correct format for your letter and give you ideas for introducing yourself and your qualifications.
4. **Email your resume and cover letter to ResumeHelp@nku.edu** or make an appointment to have these documents reviewed. Your resume and cover letter should be completely error free!
5. **Review our Interviewing Techniques Guide** for a helpful overview of the interview process and a list of sample interview questions.
6. **Attend one of our interviewing workshops** to hear tips from our staff on how to succeed in a job interview.
7. **Practice your interview skills**, multiple times and in multiple ways. We offer mock, or practice, interviews by appointment, and we also offer InterviewStream, an online, webcam-based mock interview service. Practice may not make perfect, but it will certainly make you more confident in your interviews!

Finished with the above list? Consider the following advanced preparations:

1. **Create a portfolio of your work**, especially if you are seeking employment in a creative field. For those of you who are tech savvy, you may create your own website to demonstrate your talents or house work samples.
2. **Create a LinkedIn profile** to build your online professional presence and to expand your network.
3. **Start building a professional wardrobe**, with functional business casual pieces and a suit for interviews.
4. **Come in for a career advising appointment** for additional assistance.
5. **Upload your resume to Handshake** and complete your profile so employers searching the database can find you.

By preparing in advance for your job or co-op/internship search, you will be ready to impress the employer when that perfect opportunity comes along!

# Connecting to Opportunities

## How do I find co-ops/internships/jobs?

The most basic, straightforward way to find jobs is to search for open positions using a job-posting database or going directly to an employer's website. There are a wide variety of jobs databases to choose from, some general, others specific to your field or industry.

General online job boards:

1. **Handshake:** A good first place for NKU students to start their search, this is the nation's largest college-to-career network ([nku.joinhandshake.com](http://nku.joinhandshake.com))
2. **Indeed.com:** A jobs database that allows you to search for job postings using a keyword and a location.
3. **LinkedIn.com:** In addition to expanding your network of professional connections, use the job search feature to search and apply for positions.
4. **Glassdoor.com:** A robust job searching site with company reviews and salary information.
5. **USAJobs.gov:** A site to search for federal government opportunities.
6. **Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce:** A list of job postings in the Northern Kentucky area. (<https://nkychamber.jobs>)
7. **Ohio Means Jobs:** A job posting site that focuses on opportunities in Ohio. (<https://jobseeker.ohiomeansjobs.monster.com/SeekerGuidepost.aspx>)

A sample of field-specific job boards:

1. **Dice.com:** For high tech jobs.
2. **Idealist.org:** For jobs in the nonprofit sector.
3. **TheArtsWave.org:** For jobs in the arts in the Cincinnati area.
4. **Accounting.com:** For accounting jobs.
5. **Bookjobs.com:** For jobs in publishing.
6. And the list goes on! For a list of additional field-specific resources, go to our Internet Resources webpage at:  
<https://inside.nku.edu/careerservices/students/searchresources/internetjobresearch.html>



**TIPS: Search frequently!** Don't assume a database isn't useful after a single search. Return frequently, at least a few times a week, to see if new opportunities have been posted.

**Find the right keyword!** Most jobs databases produce results based on the keyword you use in your search. Try lots of different words, including job titles, fields, and skills, and also try variations of your keywords. For example, if you are searching for a job in Human Resources, also try HR as a keyword and related words such as recruitment, recruiting, training, benefits, payroll, etc.

# Connecting to Opportunities

## What about networking?

Building and nurturing your professional network is another important part of the job search process. Networking can help you get to know professionals working in your field, gain information about a career field or employer, and learn about job/co-op/internship opportunities. Networking is an ongoing process—you won't create a professional network overnight, and you won't reap the benefits of having a strong network immediately. Like planting a seed, it takes planning, work, and ongoing care to see the fruits of your labor.

Networking opportunities:

1. **Career Fairs:** You have at least one opportunity each semester to meet with employers to share your interests and qualifications and to learn about what they have to offer. Many employers who attend the fairs also post jobs in Handshake, and some even come on campus to conduct interviews for their open positions! Want to make a great impression? See Appendix A in this guide for career fair strategies.
2. **Informational interviews:** Curious about what it's really like in your dream career? Ask someone who knows! Informational interviews give you a chance to get your career questions answered from someone working in the field. Plus, it's a great way to build your network! See Appendix B and C in this guide for a list of sample questions and emails.
3. **LinkedIn:** Create a profile to build your online professional presence, then connect to people you know, join groups, follow organizations of interest, see job postings, and more! Refer to our LinkedIn handout for strategies for building your profile.
4. **Professional associations:** Joining a professional association related to your career field can be a great way to learn more about your future profession, connect to people working in the field, and possibly even find job postings. Look for local or student-focused chapters of the association. For example, if you are majoring in Public Relations, the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) would be a beneficial organization. If you have the opportunity, attending a conference or event hosted by the association is another good way to expand your network!



**TIPS:** Feeling unsure about networking? Don't stress about the outcomes of your networking; instead, **focus on the relationships you are building**. You may make new friends, reconnect with former acquaintances, or possibly even develop a mentor/mentee relationship from your efforts. The best networking experiences are those in which genuine relationship building is the goal.

Keep in mind that **networking isn't one-sided**. Your network isn't only there to serve you. Look for opportunities to show genuine interest in the people in your network, and look for ways that you can return the favor.

**Learn about upcoming career events**, such as career fairs, on-campus interviews, and employer information sessions, **through Handshake**. See dates and times of events, sign up for interviews, research employers, and more!

# Applying for positions

## How many jobs/co-ops/internships should I apply for?

Job searching is not a once-and-done process. Even if you think you've found and applied for the perfect position, you should still keep searching and applying until you secure a position. Don't pin all your hopes on one position or company; instead, keep an open mind and keep working to cultivate those Plan B options.

Direct applying process:

1. **Follow instructions.** This may seem obvious, but it is crucial that you follow whatever job application instructions are provided by the employer. This may include emailing your resume and cover letter to a provided email address, completing an online application, or some combination of the two. The employer may ask for other supporting documents, such as samples of your work, letters of recommendation, salary requirements, etc. Your goal is to complete the application process completely, thoroughly, and without error.
2. **Make organization a priority.** It can be easy to lose track of how many pending applications you have and with which employers you have applied. Save job posting information, which may be removed by the employer during the hiring process, for future reference. Make a chart or spreadsheet of the positions you have applied for, when you applied, when the job posting closes, etc. Then keep track of rejections you've received, interviews you've had, etc. Also, save all versions of your resume and cover letters that you've used, with the employer and job title in the name of the document, so that you can easily find and update these documents as needed. Staying organized during your search will give you perspective and make a complex process seem a little less daunting.
3. **Follow up.** It is perfectly acceptable to follow up with an employer after submitting your application materials. If there was a contact person listed for the job, you can reach out to that person with application questions and to confirm that your materials were received. Pay attention to the date that the posting closes, then follow up after that time to inquire about your status as an applicant.
4. **Be patient.** The job search process can be frustrating and lengthy. There may be times when you get no response from your application. There may be times when you've given up on getting a response to a job, only to then be contacted to interview. Bottom line: develop a thick skin and lots of patience. A typical timeline for an applicant from applying to beginning a job is 2-4 months. New graduates may need as much as 6 months to land their first professional position. You will hear "no" before you hear "yes." Remember, persistence pays off.
5. **Be proactive.** There are many jobs databases that allow you to post your resume so that employers can find you. Handshake has this feature, and it's a good feature. But don't just sit back and wait for an opportunity to fall into your lap—go in search of what you want! Be aware of the job search process, learn how to advocate for yourself as an applicant, and seek out connections and information that can help you in your search.

# Applying for positions

## What if I can't find positions?

Learning how to find and apply for positions in your particular field will be an important part of your job-search process. If you are searching through a variety of means and cannot find posted positions, or you aren't finding enough of them, you may need to use an indirect method of finding opportunities.

Indirect job-searching methods:

1. **Identify employers who may be interested in hiring you and inquire about opportunities.** Even if an employer doesn't have a position posted currently, that doesn't necessarily mean an opportunity isn't available. Send your resume along with a prospecting letter (see our Cover Letter guide for an example) to employers of interest. This may not result in a job immediately, but it might give you additional information or strategies for applying with that employer.
2. **Network.** Don't keep your job search a secret! Let people in your life know you are looking and the types of positions you are seeking. Your network may be able to help you connect to opportunities. Talk to faculty members and classmates in your major to get ideas and leads. Meeting people who work in the career or at the employer you are targeting can help you better understand the hiring process in your particular field of interest and can help you learn about opportunities before they are posted.
3. **Volunteer.** Even if you aren't getting paid, volunteer experience can be an excellent way to get a foot in the door with an organization, meet new people, gain information, and demonstrate your commitment to working in that particular field. Also, it can be a great addition to your resume!
4. **Take an entry-level job as a gateway to other opportunities.** Gaining experience in your field, even if it isn't exactly what you hope to do long-term, can be valuable. Furthermore, some hiring is done internally, so already being an employee can give you more information about upcoming opportunities and an advantage over external candidates. This situation can lead to the "right place at the right time" phenomenon, and you're likely to meet professionals in your field of interest and expand your network.



**TIPS: Customize your job search correspondence.** Use Handshake to see if a contact person has been listed for that employer, then address your cover or prospecting letter to that person. This will show that you've gone the extra mile to find the appropriate contact person.

**Looking for a person who works for your dream company?** Try finding someone using LinkedIn. You can search for an employer, then see all of the employees there who have a LinkedIn account. You can even sort those employees by the school they attended, so you can find people working at that company who attended NKU. Connecting to alumni of your university is a good strategy for networking since it gives you a source of common ground. To access these features of LinkedIn, you will need to have a complete profile and some established connections.

# Job Search Checklist

- Let Career Services or another trusted source review your resume and cover letter.
- Upload your resume to Handshake and complete your profile.
- Identify jobs and industries of interest.
- Identify specific employers who hire for the work you want to do.
- Identify and contact at least three people to serve as references.
- Practice interviewing with friends/family or with InterviewStream and consider a mock interview with Career Services.
- Prepare a portfolio or samples of your work.
- Develop a quick introduction of yourself for career fairs and networking events.
- Add career fairs and other important events to your calendar.
- Send thank you letters/emails following interviews.
- Periodically evaluate your progress and change your job search methods if needed.



**TIPS: Evaluate and reflect on your job search progress periodically.** If you aren't getting any response from employers, perhaps you need to adjust your resume format or content. If you get interviews but don't get an offer, perhaps you could benefit from a mock interview to practice your interview skills.

**Consider an offer carefully before saying “yes.”** When you apply for multiple positions at the same time, it's very possible that you will be considering multiple offers at once. It is acceptable to ask an employer for a day or two to think about an offer. If you have an offer on the table, but you are waiting to hear back from another employer, it is acceptable to contact that employer and let them know you have a pending offer and to see if you are still being considered for their position. Bottom line: once you've accepted a position, you should keep your promise. Even if an even better position comes along shortly thereafter, the ethical choice is to keep the position you accepted.

See Appendix D for a guide to evaluating job offers.

# Appendix A: Career Fair Strategies

1. **Create/polish your resume.** Email your resume to ResumeHelp@nku.edu for feedback or schedule an appointment to discuss your resume. If you are new to resume writing, attend one of our resume workshops and review our Resume Preparation Guide.
2. **Practice your introduction.** When you approach an employer at a career fair, you need to be ready to shake hands, smile, and introduce yourself. This can be an intimidating process for the unprepared. To feel more confident, prepare a quick “elevator speech” prior to the fair that touches on the following points: who you are, what you have to offer, why you are interested in that industry/employer, and what makes you a good fit. End your introduction with a question for the employer, allowing them the opportunity to speak about their organization and opportunities.
3. **Dress to impress.** Don’t break out the ball gowns and tuxedos, but do think about your business professional wardrobe. A well-fitting suit in a classic color is always appropriate. Dress pants or skirt, along with a dressy blouse or button-down shirt and tie is a classic combo. Closed-toe dress shoes (high heels not required!) finish your look. At a minimum, you should wear business casual attire, such as khaki pants, polo shirt, sweater, etc. Even though denim may be common throughout some workplaces, we would discourage you from wearing jeans to a career fair. Never wear shorts, tennis shoes, caps, or athletic wear. Avoid excessive cologne or perfume, and keep accessories to a minimum.
4. **Do your homework.** Researching attending employers before the fair not only helps you feel more prepared, but it can also help you make a great impression. View the list of employers attending the fair on the Career Services website or in Handshake. These lists include a brief overview of the employer, the majors they are interested in recruiting, and the opportunities they currently have available. Take your research a step further by exploring employer websites and social media accounts to get an even better feel for the organization, what they do, their mission, their vibe, etc.
5. **Come to the fair with a game plan.** In addition to having an awesome resume and a professional outfit, you need to enter the fair with a strategy. You won’t have time to speak to every employer, nor do you need to. Identify your top five employers, the ones you feel most excited about, and visit those first. If there is time remaining, visit other employers that seem interesting to you or those who mentioned an interest in your major.
6. **Be open to opportunities.** You may enter the fair with a dream job in mind, or you may have your heart set on working for one particular employer. Don’t let that hold you back from unexpected opportunities! Keep an open mind and see what develops.
7. **Take a break if you need one.** You are always welcome to step out of the crowd and gather your thoughts, make notes, or just take a break. Networking is hard work!
8. **Follow up with good leads.** Gather contact information from the recruiters who engaged positively with you. Sending a quick thank-you email following the career fair is good manners and a good idea!

# Appendix B: Informational Interview Sample Questions

- How did you get into this field?
- Which majors are most successful in securing employment in this field?
- How would you describe a typical day/week on the job?
- What are the most satisfying aspects of your job?
- What frustrations or drawbacks do you experience in this position?
- How would you describe the work environment (work pressure, deadlines, routines, new activities, etc.)?
- How often do you travel and for how long?
- How does your career affect your lifestyle (the amount of work required, your material needs, and time for leisure, travel, outside interests, and family)?
- What are the latest developments and primary issues in this field today?
- How do you see the jobs in the field changing over the next five to ten years?
- What educational degrees, licenses, or other credentials are required for entry and advancement in your kind of work? Are there any that are preferred or helpful, although not required?
- What are the trade/professional groups to which you belong and which do you find most beneficial to your work? Do any of them assist college students interested in internships or entry-level positions in your field?
- Which other career areas do you see as being related to your work?
- What personal characteristics, personality traits, values, interests, etc., do you believe are necessary or helpful for success and satisfaction in this occupation (or organization)?
- How do people usually learn about job openings in your field?
- What do you wish you had known about this career field before you entered it? What about this employer? How is the organization structured? What kinds of entry-level jobs are available within organizations like this?
- Do you have a formal training program? Could you please describe it to me? What percentage of training occurs in the classroom? On the job?
- What are the typical career paths within your organization?
- Is there anyone else you would recommend I speak with? Are there any books, periodicals, or websites that you would recommend?
- What advice would you give to a young person entering your field?

# Appendix C: Informational Interview Introduction and Thank-you Email

## Introduction Email

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am currently a sophomore at Northern Kentucky University and am seeking information about a variety of occupational fields that interest me. A career advisor at NKU's Career Services recommended that I conduct some informational interviews to learn more about employment opportunities in these fields.

More than other disciplines, the field of marketing appeals to me because it seems to be an occupation at the forefront of our society. I have been researching various positions and tasks involved in this occupation and now would like to talk with someone who is actually working in this field.

Ms. Smith, getting firsthand information from accomplished people such as you would help me make a wise and knowledgeable decision about my career choice. I would certainly appreciate any information and insights you could provide.

I look forward to the possibility of a brief meeting with you over the phone or in person to discuss career options in marketing. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Victor E. Viking

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## Thank-you Email

Dear Ms. Smith,

I would like to thank you once again for the information you provided on Thursday. Your insights on the field of marketing were extremely helpful in clarifying my career goals.

As you suggested, I made an appointment with Mark Lowry at Marketing, Inc., to discuss his career in marketing research. I appreciate this referral and am sure it will be very beneficial. Also, thank you for recommending *Sales and Marketing Management* magazine to me. I'm looking forward to reading it.

Again, thank you for your information and time.

Sincerely,

Victor E. Viking

# Appendix D: Evaluating Job Offers

## RATING YOUR JOB OFFERS

**Directions:** Rate each job factor listed below by circling one of the scores (1 = Poor, 2 = Average, 3 = Good, 4 = Excellent). At the bottom of the grid, subtotal your scores in each column and add your subtotals for the total score.

Job Factor	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Use of Your Skills	4	3	2	1
Responsibility Level	4	3	2	1
On-the-Job Training	4	3	2	1
Coworkers	4	3	2	1
Supervisors	4	3	2	1
Working Conditions	4	3	2	1
Evaluation/Feedback on Your Work	4	3	2	1
Commuting Distance	4	3	2	1
Advancement Possibilities	4	3	2	1
Reputation of Organization	4	3	2	1
Location of Job	4	3	2	1
Subtotals	+	+	+	
TOTAL				

### Scoring\*

- 44 – 41 Excellent Job Offer (the kind most people dream of)
- 40 – 34 Good Job Offer (better than most people can hope for)
- 33 – 28 Average Job Offer (most job offers fall here)
- 27 – 20 Poor Job Offer (accept only if nothing else comes along)
- 19 – 0 Dismal Job Offer (forget it)

\*Some job factors are more important (or have higher priority) than others. For some people, for instance, the “Use of Your Skills” may be more important than “Location of Job.” In this rating sheet each job factor was weighted equally. When evaluating your score you may also want to weigh these factors in terms of their importance to you.

(Appendix D excerpted from For Your Action by W. Wallace, C. Wagner, & N. Siska)