

# From classroom to conference room

Must-have tips for  
graduates entering  
the workforce



## Finding the right job

Job hunting can be a difficult, frustrating, and scary time, and you will probably face it while you are still in school and dealing with exams and completing assignments, reports, problem sets, and research.

**Resume:** A good starting point for finding the right job is a well-written resume. It is important to have someone review and critique your resume for content and grammar—whether that is a parent, professor, or someone in your school’s recruiting office, it helps to get a second opinion.

**Internship:** Know the type of position you are seeking. If you are not certain, consider an internship. Internships are a great way to test the waters and gain valuable experience. Many students pursue internships during their junior and senior years.

**Connections:** Take advantage of the connections you have made at your school. Talk with alumni, faculty, people from your professional organizations, or staff in your school’s recruiting offices and let them know that you are actively looking for opportunities. This ensures that you are top of mind when they hear of anything.



*“During my senior year, I took an environmental engineering course as a technical elective and became very interested in the environmental field. It was my last semester and there wasn’t time to take additional environmental coursework. I saw a flyer for an environmental internship on the door to one of the lecture halls and decided to pursue it to find out if it was the direction that I wanted to take for my career. While interning, I learned a lot technically, but I also discovered what kind of job I ultimately wanted and what type of organization I wanted to work for.”*

—Kristen Cole, 3-year CH2M HILL employee



**Career Fairs:** Attend every career fair you can. If you are able to get a list of companies attending the fair in advance, review the list and do some research.

- Determine which booths you absolutely want to visit and which you would like to visit if you have time.

Doing your research ahead of time will also make it easier to strike up a conversation with perspective employers at the booths—it also shows them that you are prepared and interested. Make sure you bring plenty of copies of your resume.

- After the fair is over, follow up with the contacts you have made. If they recommend applying through their Web site, do so. More and more companies are using Web-based tools for their hiring process. By law, applicants seeking employment with firms that support government contracts, like CH2M HILL, must apply for a “specific job” to be considered. When you apply through the Web site, include a note in your cover letter, or in a comments field if there is one, that you visited their booth at the career fair and spoke with [person’s name]. If you get business cards from perspective employers at the booths, follow up with them directly if you can.

**Resources:** Corporate Web sites or other job-hunting sites are invaluable resources. The recruiting offices of some schools have their own job search Web sites and other tools available to students only. While it is possible to get hired by applying to a posting on a company’s Web site without a personal connection, if you have a connection, use it.

## Making the most of your interview

Once you line up an interview, research the company ahead of time. This shows that you are truly interested in the company and prepared for the interview. A good interviewer will ask you questions about the company, especially why you are interested in working for them. Because your interview is with a potential employer, this is your first chance to show your initiative—a trait many employers look for in potential employees.



### Before the interview:

- Be on time for your appointment. It’s better to get there early and wait in your car than it is to arrive even one minute late.

- Be friendly and courteous to everyone you encounter, including the receptionist. First impressions are important, and they begin the second you walk in the door.
- Be sure you make eye contact, smile, and shake hands with people as you meet or are introduced to them. A good, firm handshake is important—it shows you are confident.

**During the interview:** The best way to succeed in an interview is to be prepared—and honest.

- If you are asked if you have experience in a particular subject area, or with a certain software program, do not lie or embellish your expertise; it will only come back to haunt you down the road. Simply respond by saying you are not familiar with it, or have not been trained on it, and that you are a quick learner and interested and eager to learn.
- Be as specific as possible when answering questions. Provide examples to substantiate your responses. These can be from your experiences from school project teams or other jobs or internships. For example, if you are asked: “How do you handle conflict at work or within a team?” respond directly to the question and think of an example. Describe the situation, the task that needed to be completed, the action you took, and the outcome.
- Web sites like [jobinterviewquestions.com](http://jobinterviewquestions.com) have sample interview questions. Go to them, review the questions, and think of how you would answer them if asked.
- Never be afraid to ask questions during the interview. It’s a good time to get additional information on how the company functions and any other details you may be interested in learning about the position you are hoping to obtain.
- Hold off on asking questions about benefits, salary, vacation, or anything along those lines until you have been offered the position. Employers want to know what you can do for them; how you can contribute to the firm’s success. Asking questions about benefits and salary at this stage demonstrates that you are only interested in what they can do for you. Some employers may volunteer this information or ask you directly what salary range you are seeking; it is a good idea to have a range in mind.
- Stay positive and confident during the interview, and keep your energy up. Some interviews can take a half day or longer.



**After the interview:** In the days following your interview, be sure to follow up with the individuals you met with by sending a thank you note. Make sure you reiterate your interest in the position and the company.

# Limitless Opportunities

## Starting your new job

Once you receive a job offer, there are a few things that you might want to consider before starting life as a professional:

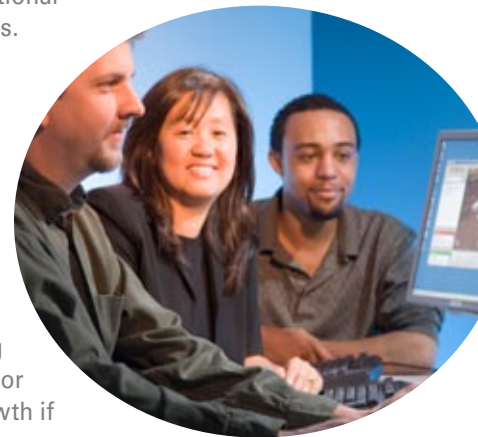
- Before you start your new job, take some time off if possible. See if you can carve out some time to decompress between finishing school and starting the job.
- Try to get yourself adjusted to your new daily schedule ahead of time. This can be one of the hardest adjustments to make as most college students tend to be night owls who then have to adjust to standard 8 to 5 schedules.
- Make sure you have appropriate work attire to get you through to your first paycheck. You probably obtained a good gauge of the company's dress code during your interview, but if not, do not be afraid to ask. When in doubt, it is better to overdress than to underdress.
- Take a practice trip to work, at the time you would normally travel to work, especially if you are in a new town. Travel times may vary due to accidents and rush hour traffic. It is never good to show up late on your first day.



- Show initiative. If you finish an assigned project, find other projects to work on or ask for additional work—don't wait for work to come to you. Not all parts of your work may be exciting and interesting all of the time, so be patient, willing to learn, and maintain an enthusiastic outlook.
- Be aware of your coworkers' communication styles. It is often more effective to leave your cubicle or office, walk down the hall, and talk to your colleagues face-to-face than it is to send an email or instant message.
- Always stick to deadlines as they are assigned. If there is any flexibility, the project manager or supervisor will let you know. However, if something comes up and you are not going to be able to meet the deadline, let your project manager know as soon as possible.
- Stay organized, particularly as you start to take on more work and responsibilities. A useful tool is to create a daily "to do" list. Every morning define the most important task for the day—the one that absolutely has to get done that day—then add the rest of your tasks (both big and small, short and long term) to prioritize the other actions that need to get done. This is a good way to inventory your tasks and to ensure that things don't fall through the cracks.

**Once you have your feet wet, it is time to seek additional opportunities to ensure your success:**

- Find a mentor, someone with whom you can meet to discuss your future within the organization and career issues. Some organizations have established formal mentoring programs to help facilitate these relationships. If your organization does not, identify one of your colleagues and approach them. Set up regular meetings to have career checks with them.
- Take advantage of educational and training opportunities. Keeping up with current trends in your field is essential. Get advice from your supervisor and mentor on what might be the most valuable opportunities. Many companies offer tuition-reimbursement programs—but be willing to donate your own time or money for your own growth if you have to.
- Take the time to get involved, whether it is community outreach, college relations, office fundraisers, or team softball leagues. Being involved is fun, and a great way to get to know people in your office.



## Being a great employee

**Once you start your new job, keep office etiquette in mind:**

- Be polite and friendly to everyone you encounter. This will help you integrate into your new work community and ensure you make positive connections within the organization.
- Dress professionally and appropriately. One standard rule to follow is to dress to the level of your superior, but observe your colleagues as well. For example, if others around you are not wearing sweatshirts, don't wear a sweatshirt—even on casual days.
- Always knock before you enter someone's office.
- Answer your telephone politely, even if the call is internal. Always identify yourself when you answer the phone.
- If you are in a cubicle, be aware of your volume and your conversations. Be a considerate cube mate for those around you; you will want the same from them.
- Work time is work time. Most companies have their own policies on this. Save the personal stuff for your lunch hour or after work, unless there is a critical emergency.

**As you start working on projects and assignments, it is important to:**

- Ask questions. If you are assigned a task and are not sure how it should be completed, ask. Your colleagues will be happy and willing to help you. They were once new employees and understand your position and the learning curve you face.

Overall, maintain a positive attitude and an open mind—and be flexible. Starting a new job is a major life change and it takes time to integrate into a new organization.



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## Developing People through Challenging Projects

