

10 Tips for Entering the Workplace

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CONGRATULATIONS, GRADUATES! Your college degree tells employers that you can set and complete goals, solve problems, meet deadlines, and finish what you start. You are ready to apply your knowledge in the workplace and cash in on all of those years of school. Your goal is now to find and land one of the best available positions. You are competing not only with other new graduates, but with job seekers who have professional experience on top of their education.

Here are 10 tips to help you enter the workplace successfully:

1. **“Try on a new pair of glasses,”** as motivational expert Zig Ziglar advises. View yourself from the employer’s perspective. At first glance, do you look like a reasonable person who would be good to work with 40+ hours a week? Notice how professionals in your field dress for work, then dress one step above that to interview. Present yourself professionally, even if you’re only stopping by to pick up an application. Dress conservatively to focus the employer’s attention on eye contact, not your clothing, accessories, hairstyle, or makeup. Fashions continue to change, but women still need to wear hose for interviews. Also, face jewelry and visible tattoos make an impression, but not a good one when you’re seeking work! Your attitude is equally important. Choose a positive attitude every morning, and hit the “reset” button as many times as you need to during the day to recapture a positive outlook about yourself, employment opportunities, and your future.
2. **Evaluate your skills & accomplishments.** Employers want to know the skills you have to offer, and especially those skills that can transfer easily into their company. Transferable skills gained from school include time management, the ability to work well with a wide variety of people, problem solving, navigating change, computer knowledge, teamwork, and leadership skills, to name a few. Accomplishments are best expressed in terms of numbers, percentages, and dollar amounts. How many students were in the study group you led? What did your group achieve compared with other groups? What percentage of improvement in productivity did you achieve over what period of time? How much money did you help your group raise for charity? Were you able to complete a project under budget? If so, by how much money or what percentage? List all of your skills and accomplishments that can convince employers you have what it takes to help them achieve their goals. You can then plug these elements into your applications and resume.
3. **Establish a plan of action.** You may know exactly the type of career you want, or you might be open to any number of possibilities. Either way, it’s important to make some progress every day toward your main goal of winning a job offer. Set short-term goals that are specific, controllable, and measurable to build success into each day of your job search. List five or six tasks you plan to accomplish in a day, such as, “Work one hour on my resume,” “Call ten people to ask them to serve as personal references for me,” “Attend a

professional or civic association meeting to network”, or “Spend two hours in a consignment store looking for an interview outfit.” Check each goal off your list as you accomplish it. At the end of the day, pat yourself on the back, be grateful for what you accomplished, plan your next day, and then relax.

4. **Your papers are due!** Your resume is a critical element in your job search. Even with little or no paid work experience, you can show your skills and accomplishments in a variety of resume formats. A recent engineering graduate organized his resume by stating both short- and long-term goals in his “Career Objective”. He then included an “Education/Achievements” section, where he mentioned his scholarships and relevant courses completed. His main section of “Skills/Abilities” included subsections of “Design,” “Research”, “Technical”, and “Personal Attributes”, which highlighted the skill sets he had gained in school. If you are open to different career possibilities, you might customize a resume for each career path. You might have one resume geared toward corporate sales, another toward marketing, and another toward sales management. Keep your resume(s) in a computer file so you can easily customize and e-mail to potential employers. Attach a personalized cover letter to each resume you submit. In the cover letter you can explain your interest in the specific position and company, tell the employer that you are a new graduate seeking an entry-level position with potential for growth, and express an interest in visiting with the employer about career possibilities. Also prepare a list of personal references and gather letters of recommendation from professors, supervisors in paid or volunteer work, and other contacts from the business community. If you have samples of your work, compile a portfolio to take to interviews. You might also develop an online portfolio on your own Web site, presenting your resume and samples of your work. Spell-check AND proofread everything you send to employers.
5. **Locate job leads.** Job search engines such as www.workintexas.com, <http://lubbockworks.com>, www.americasjobbank.com, www.careerbuilder.com, www.monster.com, and www.indeed.com are excellent places to start. Check newspaper classified ads daily and list yourself with WorkSource Career Center, private personnel agencies, and professional headhunters. Make a Top Ten list of employers you would most like to work for, then research those employers and try to set up informational interviews with them to discuss career opportunities. Network by attending professional and civic organizations, attending business functions, and contacting all of your friends and family members. Let them know what type of work you are seeking, and ask for information, advice, and referrals. Project a positive attitude with everyone you see.
6. **Knowledge is still power.** Research potential employers to find out which are the best fit for your skills and career path. Learn as much as you can about each company’s products, services, size, history, future plans, financial standing, mission statement, and philosophy. Familiarize yourself with the company’s Web site, request an annual report if available, and use library directories to learn more. Show your Top Ten employer list to all of your personal references and other networking contacts, asking if they know anyone who works for those companies or if they have any information about them.

7. **Test time: Applications.** Applications are like employment tests. If your application doesn't make it through the first cut, you fail the test and don't get an interview. The employers' number one complaint about applications they receive is that job seekers don't read and follow directions. (We were supposed to learn that in kindergarten, right?) Approach each application as though it's your first assignment from that employer. The quality of your application represents the quality of the work they can expect from you. When you ask for an application, ask for a printed job description as well, so you know which skills to emphasize. Take it home, if allowed, and practice on a copy first. Proofread to be sure your application is legible, complete, correct, and relevant to the job you're applying for. Attach your resume and a cover letter, and submit it on time. When applying online, print out the job description so you can address the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for that particular job. Include your resume and cover letter as attachments when possible. Again, proofread your work!
8. **Interviewing.** Prepare for your interview by focusing on the job description of the position for which you're applying. Review your strengths as they relate to the job. Compose accomplishment statements that demonstrate your competencies such as problem solving, teamwork, creativity, and initiative. Use the "SAR" (Situation, Action, Result) formula to prepare these statements. An employer may ask for an example of your leadership skills. Briefly describe a particular Situation you encountered, the Action you took to solve that problem using your leadership skills, and the positive Result. Preparing these accomplishment statements before interviews will increase your confidence, make a very positive impression on employers, and increase your chances of being hired. Also prepare for more common interview questions which you can easily find on Web sites such as www.jobsearch.about.com. WorkSource Career Center has videotapes, books, and seminars to help you prepare.
9. **Follow Up for Success.** Send a brief thank-you letter, note, or e-mail after every interview. If you are interviewed by a panel of people, send a note to each one. Thank-you notes can be either handwritten or produced on your computer. You can use your resume paper, tailored note cards, or the Internet. Send your note within 24 hours if possible. Thank the employer for the interview, express your interest in working with them, and provide your contact information.
10. **Starting the job.** Attitude is paramount to your success every day, and your attitude is always your choice. Be grateful for the opportunity the employer has given you to build your skills. Focus on helping the employer achieve company goals to create your own success. Align yourself with employees who are happy and successful. Use your managers and other business contacts as mentors. Be careful about e-mail and Internet use. These are often monitored by employers, so don't create any blogs or forward e-mails you wouldn't want your employer to see. Remember, they own the computer and they are paying for your time. Keep a folder with examples of your work, and maintain a list of all training you complete. Update your resume and professional portfolio as you go along. Remember that you are in charge of your career and your own success. Enjoy your new responsibility and keep learning. Good luck in your career!