



Graduate Job Success Kit

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1.0 Introduction

We know that entering the job market is increasingly competitive with over 400,000 graduates vying for the best career opportunities. The key to your success will be your preparation and planning. Of course you need a good idea what kind of career you want so a good starting point is to do an audit of your strengths and weaknesses.

Once you have identified some core skills that come naturally to you and list the skills that you don't have or could improve then it should help you clarify your capabilities. Next, either go along to your Careers Service and ask them what careers your profile matches (or register your CV with us and we can do it!).

Now you are ready to apply for jobs. Use this success kit to increase your chances of success.

2.0 CV Dos and Don'ts

It goes without saying that all recruiters will expect to see a CV. It is said that most recruiters only take fifteen seconds to make a decision on a CV; that's a very short time to make the right impression, especially in the competitive graduate market. It is essential that your CV sells you. Our consultants view up to 100 CVs a day. Here are some CV dos and don'ts that they have compiled to ensure that your CV is working for you:

Dos

- Insert a 'Career Objective' at the beginning of your CV. This is a short statement outlining what you want to do. This can be tailored to a specific opportunity, helps give your CV focus and is replacing the cover letter in modern job applications.
- Include the final year modules from your degree. Your degree is almost certainly the most relevant thing you have done. Your final year modules indicate your areas of expertise and are likely to add credence to your application. Equally, include a skills section that is relevant to your degree.
- Use spell check. We have worked with some clients that will not even consider a CV with a spelling mistake as this shows poor attention to detail. Also check the grammar and get someone else to read through your CV to look for errors and suggest corrections.

- Think about presentation, layout and format. Remember that your CV is your first impression. A poorly presented CV is like turning up to an interview in jeans and a t-shirt! Don't overcrowd your CV. White space makes your document easier for the reader. Your CV should project a professional image. Does your CV do that? Think about the font that you use. Colours should be kept to a minimum and photographs are unnecessary. Use bold typeface to emphasise key areas.
- List your most recent job/qualifications first. A prospective employer is far more interested in your degree and industrial placement than your GCSEs and your paper round!
- Include all relevant information. If you don't list your A level grades it is likely that an employer will assume they are bad. This happened to one candidate we were dealing with and when asked it turned out he had three A's! Also leave out less important personal information such as place of birth or marital status.
- If you have limited work experience highlight awards or prizes from University, sports/ society captainships, or positions of responsibility that you have had.

Don'ts

- Don't write a seven or a one page CV. Anything over two pages is excessive; one page looks like you have little to say.
- Don't write long paragraphs. Keep it short and simple and use bullet points.
- Don't use the same cover letter for every application. A cover letter should be a brief note saying why you are suitable for the specific role that you are applying for.
- Don't write two paragraphs on your Saturday job in retail (unless you are going for a retail management scheme) or your love of horse riding. You only have two pages to sell yourself. Keep things like this short and focus on other positives.
- Don't write about features, write about benefits. Instead of simply saying that you have done something, state the reason why it might benefit an employer.

3.0 CV Template

Here's a general CV layout we recommend.

YOUR NAME HERE

Home address here Term address here
Home Tel. No. here Mobile Tel. No. here
Email here (use a professional sounding one like firstname.surname@hotmail.com not a university account)
Nationality, Gender, Marital Status or Date of Birth can go here but it is not obligatory

CAREER OBJECTIVE

<This section tells the selector what type(s) of position you are looking for and should also include a bit about what you bring to the employment situation. Keep it short, focused and to the point. This is the one part of your CV that is likely to be read so make the most of it> An example Objective would be: "Looking to apply my degree knowledge on leading-edge software development projects and manage a development team within your organisation. I believe that this type of role would utilise both my technical ability and my strong communication skills."

EDUCATION

<Your Degree/Diploma/Certificate and grade (or expected)> **<dates you attended>**
<The college or University you attended goes here>

If relevant, list three or four courses from your degree/diploma/certificate here. Include any areas of specialisation or final year projects you covered too for added strength

<A Level/IB/Highers/HND subject/s or equiv. and grades> **<dates you attended>**
<The sixth form or college you got it from goes here>

You can summarise qualifications you attained before the above but no more detail is expected.

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS OR SKILLS

- <Typically this section would include technical or language skills but to make it relevant to the job read the skills that the job requires and put them into this section>
- <Bullet points work well here, they're easy to read>
- <Those reading your CV can pull out key information quickly>
- <Use this section to elevate your application by pointing out some of your biggest successes so far>
- <If you've recently graduated, put your degree/diploma near the top of this section, if you graduated more than two years ago you might still want to have it in this section but nearer the bottom of the section.>
- <If you've saved the company money, increased revenues, saved time, whether directly or indirectly, these are all achievements you should consider putting here or in your CV>
- <If you've won awards related to your career or jobs your applying for, consider putting them here>
- <Don't use more than 6 or 7 bullet points in this section as the bullets down the bottom have less chance of getting read, and the layout starts to look crowded>

(PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING COURSES if applicable)

<If you have taken these types of course here's where they'll be listed.>

INTERESTS

<This section just shows the reader you have a life! Use bullet points to briefly cover things you do outside of studying or work. Don't just list things. If you like swimming say you love swimming because you like to keep fit or present things differently instead of saying you like shopping you could say you have an interest in fashion and trends. Remember to mention achievements and try and relate them to the job you are applying for.>

REFERENCES

Excellent references available on request <Use this term if you have excellent references which will usually be a lecturer and a previous boss>

4.0 Covering letter template

If an employer requests a CV to apply for a position you should always include a covering letter. This is your opportunity to introduce yourself and explain your suitability.

The letter is an important method of communication. It can provide a chatty and friendly view of personal events to people, or it can be a formal document offering factual information to people you have not met. Unlike email, letters are tangible and layout is as important as content.

Letters have a standard format and this is shown in the examples below. If you are writing to a named person then it is 'Yours sincerely', if you write Dear Sir/Madam the correct ending is 'Yours faithfully'.

A good letter can cut through the competition:

- it can make the employer want to talk to you;
- it can introduce them to your personality and your commitment to them;
- it can demonstrate your written communication skills.

Example

[Recipient's name]
[Company name]
[Address]
[Address]
[Address]
[Post code]

[JOB TITLE or JOB REFERENCE NUMBER]

Dear [Recipient's name],

[Write your cover letter in the **active voice**. Keep it brief; e.g., three or four paragraphs on one page. Check your grammar and spelling, then check it again. Start by expressing your interest in the job. Employers like to know where you heard about it, so mention it.]

[Your cover letter is not the place to ask what the company can do for you, but to state what you can do for the company. The middle paragraphs are the most important, and your chance to stand out from other candidates. Summarise and highlight your skills, qualifications and major accomplishments related to the job, but don't simply reiterate your resume. Supplement it and say what it can't. **Most importantly, explain why your qualifications and the job requirements are a good match.** You don't have to say that verbatim, but say it some way, like by emphasising your qualifications that match well. Use **action verbs** such as *implemented* and *developed*.]

[Wrap it up by stating when you'll be available for work, and the best time and place the recipient can reach you. Mention that your CV is enclosed or attached, and offer to provide more information, work samples and/or references. Indicate that you'd like an interview in person or by phone. Thank the recipient for his or her time and consideration. Say that you look forward to hearing from the recipient.]

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

When the subject of a sentence performs the action of the verb, the sentence is said to be in **active** voice.

The dog bit the postman.

If the subject is being acted on, then the sentence is said to be in **passive** voice.

The postman was bitten by the dog.

The postman has become the subject of this sentence, but he isn't performing the action; the dog is the one doing the biting.

Remember to use these verbs to describe your skills and accomplishments when writing your CV and cover letters to increase the strength of your writing and make potential employers take notice!

Remember this is only a basic template – use your own experience to show originality of thought and understanding. You will have to prove your capabilities at interview.

Some golden rules

Never put anything in your letter that cannot be backed by your CV or application form. There are some conventions about letters of application. Generally letters sent with a CV or application form should:

- Be addressed to a named person;
- state why you are writing, what you are applying for and what you are currently doing;
- Flag up the most important/relevant thing you want the employer to know about you;
- Refer the reader to your CV or application form;
- Show that you know something about the company;
- Make a connection between your skills and abilities and company needs or wants;
- Identify the career you are seeking;
- Be reasonably brief.

Remember if the covering letter is poor, the employer may not bother to read your CV or application form.

5.0 Interview tips

An interview can be a pretty scary prospect but with a bit of thought you can make things a lot easier for yourself.

The purpose of interviews is for the employer to gain a deeper understanding of a candidate's skills and capabilities as well as personality and general attitude. The interviewers will be looking to weed out unsuitable candidates at an early stage by trying to determine if the candidate is a suitable fit for the company and the role in question. In this section you can also find out about:

Preparation

An interview is not something you can just wander into and 'wow' them with your personality. Well-prepped candidates are more confident and provide more thorough answers. If you know how to give complete answers, you worry less and are able to ask better questions. All of this improves the odds that you will be assessed fairly, especially if the focus of the interview is on detailed discussions about your major accomplishments.

Do prepare thoroughly by:

- Researching the company and role - look at the web site, read brochures/company literature, check the job specification and become familiar with it and the skills required. Check to see if the company or competitors have been in the press recently.
- Look at your CV/application form the night before to try to spot obvious questions e.g. Why did you take that year out? Why did you get a poor grade in maths?
- Check travel arrangements - book tickets in advance, telephone to confirm both interview, and travel arrangements 24 hours in advance.
- Check to see if there will be any tests - revise relevant skills before the day.
- Don't rehearse your answers word for word – it will sound very false. You need to have the information ready but still sound natural.

On the day

- Arrive on time - try to be at the interview location ten minutes before the interview. If you arrive half an hour early walk around the block and try to relax. Contact the employer if any problems arise. If you have a problem attending the interview contact the employer immediately e.g. traffic.
- Positive body language - warm handshake, maintain eye contact, do not fidget, sit up straight, do not cross arms in defensive manner, try holding hands gently in your lap, convey enthusiasm and interest.
- Do dress appropriately. If in doubt err on the side of smartness rather than being too casually dressed.
- Do try to smile and look happy to be there and be enthusiastic. Nerves often make both these difficult.
- Do be prepared to talk and 'tell the story'. Yes/No answers won't give the interviewers enough information to go on.

BUT

- Don't talk too much – look to your interviewer for clues as to whether you are rambling eg. Breaking off eye contact, shuffling papers, trying to get a word in edgeways.
- Don't mention salary. It is advisable to keep away from details about the remuneration package.
- Do be nice to everyone you meet on the day. Receptionists and people who show you round can be asked for their opinions too.

At the interview

Ask the "universal question"

Discussions about major accomplishments should dominate the interview session. Since most interviewers don't usually do this naturally, you can take the initiative. Ask this question if you feel the interview is going nowhere:

"From what I understand from the recruiter and my research, this job involves (for example) launching new products and setting up a national advertising programme. If this is correct, could you explain it more thoroughly? After that I'd like to give you some examples of projects I've worked on that are comparable."

Something like this will allow you to then describe some important related projects you have worked on.

Showing enthusiasm and energy at an interview is probably the most important factor

In this economic climate when there are perhaps less jobs and more graduates looking, it is possible that although looking good on paper they are not offered the role just because they don't convey enthusiasm, excitement or a sense of urgency that a company is looking for. Make sure you leave an interview conveying a strong desire, energy and enthusiasm to work for that company. You should leave having the interviewer thinking you want the job, even if you don't. It is important to remember that a negative or apathetic attitude has a way of sticking in people's mind...and so does a positive one.

Selling your strengths and strengthening your weaknesses

No matter how suitably qualified or confident a person is, an interview is a stressful situation. It is filled with questions that can catch you off guard, especially an inexperienced new graduate with little or no prior interview experience. Make sure you know your own strengths and weaknesses. A good idea is to write down four or five strengths and one or two weaknesses. Include a short, one-paragraph example of some accomplishment you have achieved using each strength. With the weaknesses, write up a specific situation where you have turned that weakness into a strength, or have overcome the weakness.

Write up your two most significant accomplishments

To improve your verbal pitches, prepare more detailed write-ups for your two most significant accomplishments. Each of these should be two to three paragraphs in length, no more than half a page each. One should be an individual accomplishment, and the other a team accomplishment. Make sure you include examples of your strengths in both write-ups. Most candidates get a little nervous in the opening stages of an interview, which can result in temporary forgetfulness. The write-ups will allow for better recall of this important information in these times. They'll also be the basis of the examples in the SAFW response.

Example questions

These will obviously vary from interview to interview, but there are always some basic underlying questions which you should be able to answer once you have done your preparation, such as:

- 1. What are your strengths and weaknesses?**
Be positive and give strengths that relate to the role and if necessary weaknesses that are not crucial and/or under control.
- 2. Where do you see yourself in five years time?**
Interviewers will be trying to find out if you are ambitious and have set yourself goals as well as if you are committed to the company and the industry to which you are applying.
- 3. Why do you want this job?**
Try to mention aspects of the role and company that appeal and strengths and experiences that you can bring to the role. Put across your enthusiasm.
- 4. Why do you want to work for this company?**
This is an opportunity to put across some of the information that you have researched prior to the interview. Sometimes interviewers will ask problem solving questions such as 'How many tennis balls are there in the world' or 'Can you give me 10 uses for a housebrick?' or 'You are the manager of a shopping centre which is just about to have a huge opening event and the Health and Safety Executive ring up and tell you your ceiling tiles are a severe fire hazard – what do you do?' These can be very stressful to the interviewee and you have to do your best and be prepared to think out loud and show how you tackle a problem where you don't have a lot to go on.

They don't want you to sit silently for 3 minutes then give an answer – it's a practical approach to problem solving they are after. Keeping cool under pressure, a logical approach to problem solving and an ability to think laterally are all attributes they could be looking for. Don't worry about whether you give the 'right' answer or not – there very often isn't one. Most people will feel that they have done badly in these answers – just put it behind you once the question is finished and concentrate on the rest of the interview, otherwise you may not do well in the remainder of the interview. Fortunately these types of questions are not used by many employers.
- 5. What qualities can you bring to the role?**
STAR – Try to give examples of applicable activities, experiences and mention what you gained from them and how they will help you fulfill the job description.
- 6. What do you think you will do in this job?**
Make sure that you have read the job description and you are familiar with it.

7. **Tell me when you have worked in a team, took the initiative, had to persuade others, organised something, achieved a goal.**
For all these questions it is important to give examples that put yourself forward as a positive participant and not a spectator. Try to choose examples from different areas of life, not just university or sport. Think how you could relate the examples to the job.
8. **What other jobs have been applying for?**
It is important not to mention jobs in other areas of industry as this might imply that you are not specifically interested in this kind of position.
9. **Why do you think you are suitable? (i.e. what skill have you which are relevant?)**
What evidence can you provide that you have organisational/teamworking/ leadership /persuasive etc skills? (from your course, vacation jobs, hobbies and interests, positions of responsibility etc)
10. **What kind of person are you?**
Not often asked direct, but comes in the form of – what are your weaknesses?, what would your friends say about you? Careful with this one – only give one weakness at a time and make sure it's not one which is crucial to the job you're applying for. Also be prepared for the next question which is 'What have you done about it?')

Answers!

Learn the "optimum answer". Answers should be about two minutes long. Much more than three minutes and candidates can be perceived as boring or unable to get to the point. Less than a minute and they're branded as dull and lacking interest. It has been suggested that candidates use the acronym SAFW to form their answers:

- S: make an opening **Statement**
- A: **Amplify** that statement
- F: provide a **Few** examples
- W: **Wrap** it up

The examples part is the most important. This is the demonstrated proof behind the opening statement. Interviewers will use these examples to form their judgements about candidate competency. Most candidates talk in generalities. This is not as convincing as a specific example. The answer will be more meaningful if the candidate shows how one or two of their strengths, like creativity and perseverance, were required to achieve the results described in the example.

- Try to anticipate questions - prepare answers to likely questions
- Give positive answers - if you have a weakness steer away from it and/or counteract it with a positive attribute
- STAR - when given a question try to give the Situation where you encountered the activity, an example of the Activity and a positive Result of doing the activity
- Prepare relevant questions - ask positive questions about the company and job e.g. training issues, career progression, the people that you would be working with, how the role would interrelate to the rest of the business

At the end

Ask for the job! At the end of the interview, tell the interviewer that you are interested in the job, and would like to know what the next steps are. If the next steps seem evasive or unclear, ask if your accomplishments seem relevant to the performance requirements of the job. Understanding a potential gap here allows you to fill it in with an example of a related accomplishment.

Thank the interviewer for his/her time at the end and perhaps follow up with an email or letter expressing your enthusiasm for the role. You can view an interview follow up letter template on the next page.

Interview follow up letter template

[Recipient's name]

[Company name]

[Address]

[Address]

[Address]

[Post code]

[Date today]

[JOB TITLE or JOB REFERENCE NUMBER]

Dear [Recipient's name],

Thank you for scheduling my interview for the [job title] position.

I am pleased with the benefits [company name] offers and impressed with its [products, success, industry standing, etc.]. I'd greatly appreciate the chance to contribute to its future success.

Judging by our discussion [today], I believe that my qualifications are an excellent fit, particularly my [specific education, experience, skills, etc.]. The position is exactly what I'm looking for, and I'm confident that I can be a significant contributor to the success of [company or department name].

[INCLUDE here if you forgot to mention something important, this is your second chance but don't say you forgot!]

I hope to hear from you soon to discuss my future with [company name]. If you have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me on [telephone number or email].

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

Remember this is only a basic template – use your own experience to show originality of thought and understanding. Also think about the interview soon afterwards and make a note of things which went well and not so well to help you in future interviews. Some employers may even be prepared to give helpful feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

6.0 Practice online tests

Many recruiters today are more commonly using tests as part of their graduate selection procedures. These tests are designed to measure and assess many different criteria. They come in many forms and are dependent on the type of skills a certain position demands. The most commonly used tests are:

Aptitude and ability tests

These assess your overall or 'general' intelligence, or particular types of intelligence, such as your logical reasoning or thinking performance. Many tests are designed to measure a particular ability or disparate skill e.g. verbal, numerical, diagrammatic, spatial, abstract reasoning, data interpretation. Aptitude tests identify your potential to learn to do a new task rather than the abilities you already have - something that is important to many employers.

In practice, the tests used most by employers are verbal and numerical. They are administered under exam conditions and are strictly timed. A typical test might allow 30 minutes for 30 or more questions.

Aptitude tests are sometimes used prior to a first interview - at this stage there is often a "pass mark" or cut off score, which you have to achieve to continue your application. For example 'Data Connection', 'Cyberscience', companies where key skills are important.

Personality tests

These aim to assess your personal qualities by your responses to a number of questions or statements. They focus on a variety of personality factors such as : how you relate to other people, your work style, your ability to deal with your own and others' emotions, your motivations and determination and your general outlook.

Unlike aptitude tests, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and questionnaires are usually untimed. The selectors will not be looking for a rigid "typical" personality profile, although certain characteristics will be more or less appropriate for that particular job. The best way to approach all of these questionnaires is to answer them as straightforwardly as you can. Guessing what the employer is looking for is difficult and could well be counter-productive - after all, you do not want to be given a job which really does not suit you.

Some test examples:

Barclays Capital encourage applicants to try sample tests to familiarise themselves with the format of the tests as well as with the types of questions you may be asked. They use SHL practice tests, which are available online and consist of verbal/numerical and diagrammatic reasoning questions, and personality questions. Follow this link:

<http://www.shldirect.com/>

7.0 Taking away the mystery of Assessment Centres

Pioneered in the UK by the armed forces, assessment centres are now used by a number of organisations to select graduates. They are very often re-labeled 'development centres' and used for internal selection purposes to identify fast-trackers and people with potential for promotion. For most candidates it's a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Assessment centre exercises

Assessment centres are usually designed to include exercises which will measure you against the aspects of the job. For all of the exercises make sure you understand the chairperson's instructions or the written brief. If you don't, ask. Not listening and not reading instructions thoroughly are the two biggest causes of frustration in candidates. The following are common exercises.

In-tray exercises

You are given the 'in-tray' of a senior manager and have one hour to 'get through it' – otherwise you'll miss your plane! You'll be asked to write on each item what you would do with it, or write a reply to letters.

Sales or negotiation role-play

You are asked to sell a product or negotiate a deal, even if you haven't applied for a sales job, persuasion skills are important in many jobs.

Business simulation

This may be paper-based or computer-based. You are split into small groups and over a series of rounds, compete with other groups to develop, manufacture, market and distribute products. Great fun!

Group discussion (interactive skills)

You are given a problem to solve as a group. Common problems are simulations where your group have been stranded at sea, in the desert or on the moon.

Psychometrics

These can be personality evaluations, which attempt to see how well you match against their idea of an ideal candidate, or ability tests, which measure your skills at things like numerical or verbal reasoning.

Presentation

To assess your self-confidence, ability to communicate and ability to handle a mini-project, some organisations may ask you to make a short presentation either to a group of managers or, for very senior positions, to the board of directors. The subject can vary: debating the pros and cons of subjects like E-commerce, or you may be asked to present a mini-marketing plan for one of the company's products. They may even leave the

choice of subject to you. Choose a business-related subject that you know something about. The time you are given to prepare can vary from 30 minutes to many days.

If you are asked to give a presentation do take it seriously – management time is very valuable and if the company has gathered an audience to listen to you, then you can be sure that they will be taking it seriously.

Inside information

Get as much sleep as you can beforehand. It's highly likely that, just as you're starting to relax, you'll be handed a mammoth task with a tight deadline to see how you respond under pressure.

Keep your eyes and ears open and observe the performance of the other candidates. You may be asked to rate their performance. Be prepared to give a factual and analytical summary of their contribution and don't be afraid to be complimentary of other candidates.

If you've been invited to join everyone for dinner the night before the assessment centre, don't be lulled into a false sense of security, by thinking the assessors are off-duty. They will probably be assessing your social competence over dinner, in the bar, over breakfast ...

Even if you haven't been asked to prepare a presentation, brush up on your skills. There is a good chance that you'll be asked to prepare one at short notice: Pre-select two topics: 'an improvement you've made at work' and an 'interesting angle on your hobby'.

If you're invited to attend an assessment centre in a hotel, a few casual questions to the manager or receptionist may give you a good idea of what's in store. If the assessors have spent the early part of the day setting up a network of computers in syndicate rooms, then it sounds as if you're going to be involved in a computer-based business simulation. Great fun!

Try to think through the qualities the assessors will be looking for: leadership, interpersonal skills, ability to handle stress, verbal communication, written communication, flexibility, negotiation skills, problem-solving, business skills, commercial acumen, decision-taking, initiative and creativity. Clearly the weightings will change depending on the job, but commercial acumen, interpersonal skills and flexibility must be high on everyone's list.

Don't try to suppress other candidates in an attempt to make the assessors notice only you. You will come across as overbearing and insensitive.

Make the most of the opportunity

An assessment centre is a tremendous opportunity for you to show what you can do. Prepare yourself well and enjoy it. In summary, be positive, be prepared to play the game and project an image of your real self.

SUCCESS STEP 1

Register your CV with GRB. Our experts will identify your strengths and match your CV with the best graduate career opportunities available

SUCCESS STEP 2

Apply for jobs. Receive one-to-one job application guidance and execute graduate job success kit

JOB OFFER

A job offer in a career that plays to your strengths and increases your chance for rapid progression

Finally

We hope this has been useful to you. Everyone at the GRB is delighted that we have been able help you prepare for the job market. If you would like to hear about jobs with fast growing firms and blue chips that are not advertised elsewhere **and** get one-to-one expert advice all for free contact any member of our team on **01273-325775** or by email to **info@grb.uk.com**