Northampton College



Employability skills

CV writing, job searching and interview techniques

Job searching & applications

Where do I start?

Before you begin looking for a job, think about what you're looking for e.g. a part-time job, apprenticeship or new career.

Once you know what you're aiming towards, draft your CV to portray this, making it sector specific. Search online for careers information, focusing on a few different jobs that you believe could suit you and find out more about them.

The National Careers Service website has general advice about career options, along with a Skills Health Check. This can be helpful if you are unsure of what direction you should take in your career, and give you some idea of some jobs/careers to look into:

https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/

Work experience/ volunteering

This is a good way to start gaining skills employers are looking for, such as timekeeping, teamwork and responsibility. There are lots of places to find volunteering opportunities and work experience placements:

- The Work Experience Team at the College can support you in finding the right opportunities to suit you
- Email or call employers/businesses that are relevant to you – be prepared to ask and answer questions
- Approach charities – perhaps arrange fundraisers for them in order to gain skills and work experience.

Finding the right work experience can sometimes lead to part-time and full-time jobs.

Where to look?

- Go out and look – speak to people you know, friends of your parents/carers, friends who have jobs already, ask them where they work and how they got the job
- Approach companies directly – if you are a regular customer of the same business and frequently speak to the staff, ask them if there are any opportunities available either with them or in the area (small shop owners are usually friends with other small businesses and will speak to each other)
- Look online – websites such as **www.indeed.com** and **www.notgoingtouni.co.uk** advertise roles, keep an eye on them and check regularly for new jobs
- LinkedIn and other social media platforms – create an account to research companies, recruiters, and opportunities.

Don't discount companies you see as embarrassing to work for! NO experience is BAD experience, in fact many of those more 'embarrassing' employers actually pay more for their staff and their loyalty, both financially and in terms of benefits and training.

If you are looking for an Apprenticeship, follow the same steps as above, but also search via

- **www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship**
- **www.getmyfirstjob.co.uk**

Other places to look:

- Careers fairs – the College runs a large careers fair every year for current students, speak to as many employers as you can, be confident and find out what opportunities are available
- Recruitment agencies – there are many temporary and permanent jobs available, make sure you are aware of what they have to offer
- Website searches – you can find vacancies for a wide variety of roles by looking online at popular job vacancy websites
- Job boards – these can be found in local shops, supermarkets etc.



Applications

Do:

The following is what you should aim to include on your application:

- ✔ Check grammar, punctuation and spelling – this is key to your application being accepted
- ✔ Include your contact information – make sure it's current and correct
- ✔ Keep the application positive – don't describe yourself negatively, try to sell yourself instead
- ✔ List your skills and qualities in order of relevance for the job, not in the order you think of them
- ✔ Include current studies and past studies
- ✔ Include previous and current job roles, along with the dates of the period you worked there
- ✔ Make sure your skills match the job role
- ✔ Include two references – you can use a personal character reference and a professional or educational reference, making sure to include their contact details and relationship to you
- ✔ It's okay if you're unable to include all of this, due to a lack of experience for a particular role, or perhaps because you are working towards a qualification you haven't yet achieved. Try to write your application positively and to the best of your ability.

Don't:

The following is what not to include on your application:

- ✘ Your date of birth or a photograph of you
- ✘ Your National Insurance Number
- ✘ Parent or carer's phone number – they want to speak to you not anyone else!
- ✘ Lie – don't add skills or experience that you don't have, instead try to focus on your positive aspects
- ✘ Leave gaps in education or work history
- ✘ Phrases in interests such as 'socialising with friends'.

Sometimes, the application form asks for this information so be sure to include it on those occasions, otherwise leave it out. If personal information is included unnecessarily, you could be a victim of discrimination or identity theft so, it's best to be careful.

Writing your CV

Information and advice on creating an effective curriculum vitae (CV)

What is a CV?

A CV is a summary of your skills, qualities, career, and education and is your chance to sell yourself to an employer.

When do you need a CV?

- In response to an advertised vacancy when an employer has asked for a CV to be included with your application.
- For sending speculatively to an organisation to ask about possible job vacancies.

What should be included?

There are different styles you can use to write your CV, but it should cover these points:

1. Personal details – your name, address, telephone numbers and email address.
2. Your skills and experience – these are the most important aspect of your CV. Remember to include those skills you have developed through paid and unpaid work highlighting skills that are relevant to the role.
3. Education – name of school(s) and college if appropriate, including dates and courses. Start with the most recent.
4. Qualifications – list all qualifications including subjects, grades and dates gained.
5. Employment/work experience – name of employer, dates worked, job title and main duties. Start with the most recent.
6. Additional information – this could include any additional skills or qualifications you have e.g. languages, first aid certificates or driving licence.
7. Hobbies and interests – this could be useful to give the employer a better idea of your personality and what you like to do in your spare time. Include any sports you play, clubs or teams you belong to and anything that shows skills an employer would like. Socialising with friends is not a hobby!

Key skills word bank

Do you have any of the following skills and attributes? If so, be sure to include them on your application or CV. If not, what can be done to learn or improve them?

- Communication
- Flexibility
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Initiative skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Working to deadlines
- Computer literacy
- Determination
- Commitment
- Teamwork
- Organisational skills
- Problem solving
- Confidence
- Time management
- Working independently
- Listening skills
- Public speaking
- Professionalism
- Resolving conflict

Finally…

- Check your spelling, grammar and punctuation
- Use an appropriate email address
- Reread the job advert and ensure everything in your application relates to it
- Ask someone to read it through and check it for you
- Check your privacy settings on your social media accounts and be careful of what you post.



Hints & tips

To get your CV noticed and read by a prospective employer, it should be:

- Clear - information should be easy to understand
- Concise - the employer hasn't got time to read lots of irrelevant information
- Well laid out - so the employer can find the relevant information easily, e.g. qualifications.

How do you achieve this?

- Use clear headings to separate information
- Use bullet points rather than long paragraphs
- Keep your CV short, 1 or 2 pages

CV writing - dos and don'ts

Do:

- ✔ Check spelling and grammar carefully
- ✔ Type your CV
- ✔ Keep a copy of your CV
- ✔ Start sentences with action words (verbs)
- ✔ Target your CV to the job you are applying for
- ✔ Use strong sentence introductions e.g. skilled in, proven abilities in, demonstrated experience in etc
- ✔ Search for examples of CVs online but make sure yours is about you and highlights your skills and experiences
- ✔ Be positive and highlight your strengths.

Don't:

- ✘ Write on the back of the pages
- ✘ Lie or exaggerate – you may be asked to explain your CV in an interview
- ✘ Assume that the reader will know anything about your previous jobs or courses
- ✘ List what you have done – instead, try to analyse the skills you have gained
- ✘ Include negative or irrelevant information
- ✘ Send your CV to an employer without a covering letter or email explaining why you are sending it to them

Example CV

Futures CV Template

Your name
Your address
Mobile number
Email address

Personal Profile

A hard working, trustworthy and enthusiastic individual, looking for a full-time position in the travel and touism industry. Able to adapt well to working in different environments, and keen to try out new challenges.

Skills and Abilities

- Excellent customer service skills
- Works well within a team
- Good time management skills with experience of working to deadlines
- Punctual and enthusiastic

Education

Dates (most recent first)
Place of study
Course and grades (if completed)

Employment History

Dates (most recent first)
Employer
Job title
Main duties listed/bullet points

Hobbies and Interests

I play a variety of sports including basketball and tennis and generally try to keep fit. At school I played in the basketball team, and I now play in a local league.

For feedback on your CV current students can email a copy to the Futures Team: futures@northamptoncollege.ac.uk



CV top tips

Your CV is your chance to make a good first impression. It should be unique to you so that you stand out, not the same as other people's.

Use the example as a guide and try to reflect your personality in your CV.

Remember an employer often decides who to interview from a number of CVs, so try to make yours as interesting and relevant to the job as possible.

CV buzzwords

Employers look for certain skills which you can mention on your CV.
Which of these describe you best?

- Willing to learn
- Hard-working
- Committed
- Creative
- Reliable
- Dedicated
- Keen
- Focused
- Resourceful
- Trustworthy
- Independent
- Organised
- Confident
- Good communicator
- Motivated
- Energetic
- Team player
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible
- Copes well under pressure
- Uses own initiative
- Able to prioritise
- Adaptable
- Good time management skills

Example cover letter

Your name
Your address
Your mobile number
Email address

The date
Contact name (if known)
Company name
Company address

Dear contact's name or Hiring Manager,

Paragraph 1 - explain why you are writing to the company.

- Provide an overview of yourself and the course you are studying.
- Give examples of your skills that make you suited to the job role.

Paragraph 2 - your own experiences from part-time work, work experience, voluntary work and other college experiences.

- Discuss skills you've developed and what you've learnt about yourself. Use these to explain why you would be suitable for this job role.
- Mention skills developed through other experiences e.g. caring for family, language skills, activities at school or college, raising money for charity, or any learning that indicates your suitability and skillset.

Paragraph 3 – a short conclusion

I believe that I have a lot to offer your organisation. I am keen to develop my professional skills and look forward to discussing my enquiry with you. I have enclosed (or attached, if sending an email) a copy of my CV for your consideration.

Yours sincerely (or faithfully if the name is not known)

Your name

A cover letter or email tells an employer why you're the right person for the job, and shows your interest in the opportunity.

Interview skills

In your interview, you have the chance to sell yourself to an employer and find out if the company and role is right for you. If you are well prepared for an interview, you maximise your chances of being offered the job.

Top tips

Research the company by looking at their website and asking yourself the following questions:

- What do they do?
- What's their main business?
- What are their values?
- How long have they been established?

If they ask you what you know about the company or organisation, it would be very impressive if you have taken time to find out about them.

Keep a copy of your application

Before the interview, read through your application or CV and use this to prepare answers to questions you could be asked.

Some of the most popular interview questions include:

- Why do you want the job?
- What are your skills and abilities?
- What experiences have you had that could be relevant for this position?

Appropriate dress

First impressions count - by dressing smartly and ensuring you are clean and presentable, you show that you are mature and ready for the responsibility of the role.

You shouldn't wear jeans, trainers or excessive makeup and jewellery. Be sure to avoid strong scents such as body odour, smoke and overpowering perfume or aftershave.

Punctuality

Punctuality is important. If you aim to arrive at least 10 minutes early, you give yourself the best chance to keep your nerves in check and your potential employer can see that you are reliable.

Be ready for the worst-case scenario by:

- Knowing where the interview will take place
- Planning your journey beforehand
- Taking the interview letter (and a phone on silent) in case you are delayed and you need to phone the company

Body language

During the interview, it's important to sit up straight (being careful not to slouch or fold your arms), smile and maintain eye contact with your interviewer(s).

Make sure to shake the interviewer's hand confidently at the start of the interview and again when you leave, thanking them for taking the time to see you and considering you for the role.

Handling nerves

While nerves are perfectly natural and to be expected, it's key to get them under control. You could be judged from the minute you enter the building, so be polite and professional to all staff you encounter.

Some people find that taking some deep breaths before the interview or having a glass of water can help.



What do interviewers want to know?

1. Can you do the job?

2. Do you want the job?

3. Will you fit in?

Be professional, enthusiastic, and confident in your abilities – the company has already seen your potential through your application form or CV and is looking for reasons to hire you!

Be positive and friendly throughout the interview. If you don't understand a question, you can ask the interviewer to clarify or repeat it – that way you can answer it to the best of your ability.

Difficult questions are often designed to see how you react to pressure and if you can think on your feet, so it would be impressive to prove that you are calm in stressful or unknown situations.

Questions you may be asked

General questions

- Why did you apply for this job?
- What interests you about this role?
- What do you know about this company?
- What do you think you have to offer this company?

Career questions

- What would your previous/current employer say about you?
- Tell me about your career aspirations.
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- What are you looking for from your career?

Questions which assess your skills

- Why should we hire you?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses? (think of weaknesses as areas to develop)
- Do you like working as part of a team/ working alone?
- Name a time where you have successfully been part of a team.
- What do you consider to be your best achievement to date.

Questions for you to ask the interviewer

- Are there any opportunities to gain extra qualifications/experience?
- Where do you see me/the company in the future?
- Is there anything you would like me to explain further?
- Do you have any doubts about whether I'm suited to this role? (This gives you one last chance to impress by addressing any issues they might have.)

Questions you should not ask the interviewer

Whilst it is important to ask the interviewer questions such as those above, there are also questions you shouldn't ask:

- What will my salary be?
- What holiday will I get?
- How long will I have for a lunch break?
- I have to get two buses to get here, would it be ok to start a bit later?

These questions aim to find out what you can get out the company, when you should instead be focussing your attention on impressing your possible employer.

Even if you want or need to know the answers to these questions, this can be discussed if the job is offered to you and not in the interview stage.

Tips for answering questions

- Listen carefully to the questions asked
- Give clear and concise answers, trying not to ramble
- Use examples to support what you say
- Be confident and sell yourself
- Don't lie – be as honest as you can, but focus on positive points
- Don't criticise former employers
- Take a moment to pause and think if needed
- Ask to come back to the question if you're struggling
- If asked about something you can't do yet, prove that it's a skill you're prepared to learn.

At the end of the interview, you could ask when you can expect to hear from them, or perhaps make a note of any relevant names and contact information if you wish to make a follow up call or send an email.

Try not to feel downhearted if this particular role isn't offered to you. If you can, get some feedback from the company and use this as learning experience. You would be very lucky to gain the role on your first try so don't panic if it takes a few interviews before being successful!



Current students can email the Futures Team for help and support

futures@northamptoncollege.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can visit the **Futures Team** based in **E1.01 at Booth Lane**, or pop into **Student Services at Lower Mounts or Daventry** to make an appointment with an advisor.

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