



JOB SEARCH HANDBOOK

ADVICE AND STRATEGIES FOR FINDING YOUR FIT

**CAREER
CENTER**



NEBRASKA
WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Securing a satisfying position takes time and may require you to utilize several strategies. Remember to set small, achievable goals with deadlines as part of your larger goal of obtaining meaningful work opportunities.

Career coaches in the Career Center can provide advice and support for the journey and also help you identify resources and connections for your specific path.

Step 1: Self-Assess *Who are you and what do you want?*

The key to job satisfaction is truly understanding who you are as an individual and allowing your values, interests, and skills to guide your career decision-making.

Taking time to identify and evaluate qualities about yourself requires intentional reflection on who you are, your natural tendencies, and reactions to former experiences. Consider the questions below to begin your reflection.

VALUES

1. What did I like most/least about experiences (part-time jobs, volunteer opportunities, student organizations) I've had?
2. What makes my life and work meaningful and purposeful?
3. Where have I found inspiration in the past?
4. Whose work do I admire? Why?
5. What do I need from a job?

INTERESTS

6. In which classes do I engage the most?
7. Which classes most interest me?
8. What are the common themes in the clubs/organizations I participate in?
9. When browsing online, talking with my friends, or selecting books to read for fun, which topics catch my attention?
10. Which types of news stories cause me to ask more questions based on my intellectual curiosity?

SKILLS

11. In which courses do I have a natural knack for understanding the material?
12. In what areas have I found success?
13. What do my friends/family members say I do well?

PERSONALITY

14. How much interaction with others do I need in my work? Am I energized by being around a lot of people, or do I prefer working in small groups, or working alone?
15. Do I prefer imagining possibilities and being inventive, or do I enjoy handling practical matters, details, and work that is measurable?
16. Do I tend to make decisions by first focusing on logical analysis and critique or do I tend to focus on values and feelings first?
17. Do I tend to follow a planned and organized structure for living my daily life, or take a more spontaneous and flexible approach?

When employers hire, they are looking for the individual who can make a unique contribution. Understanding your natural tendencies, interests, skills, and values will help guide you to satisfying work.

Based on what you know about different industries, does your reflection elevate some career fields over others? As you learn more about yourself through educational, extracurricular, personal and work experiences, you may discover new interests and skills, and your values may also change at different stages of your life.

Step 2: Research *What opportunities and employers are out there?*

Researching options involves utilizing multiple strategies. While online job postings are helpful, it is also important to consider what employers are out there, and what employers hire people with your skills, interests, and values.

Researching Employers

Make a list of potential employers. Look at websites such as Glassdoor and LinkedIn to find companies in your desired industry/field. Career Center staff, NWU alumni, professors, friends, and family may help brainstorm organizations. Seek relevant professional associations in the field, and also explore the Chamber of Commerce in your desired location. Once you find a company of interest, study their website and social media pages, and learn about positions they are hiring for.

Keep track of all the research you are doing. Use the table below as a guide, customizing as necessary.

	Organization Name	Industry	Why I'm interested	Type of position desired	Contact: Name and title	Email address	Most recent contact date	Status (ex: awaiting response, setting up informational interview...)	Next date of follow-up	Notes/next steps
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										

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December 21, 20XX

Ms. Lisa Johnson
 Human Resource Director
 Arbor Day Foundation
 211 N 12th St # 501
 Lincoln, NE 68508

Dear Ms. Johnson:

Hands caked with mud, I grinned from ear to ear staring at the new trees I helped my dad plant for our shelterbelt. With the same attitude today, I have a strong desire to help families and communities understand the positive impact they can make on our environment. Like the value of adding trees to a home, I would like to bring my passion and skills to Arbor Day Foundation in an entry-level opportunity.

Further pursuing conservation work, my experiences with the Nebraska Wesleyan Beekeeping Club and active involvement in the Greenhouse Project have shaped my passion for spreading environmental awareness. Using my marketing skills from my communication studies major, I promoted the byproducts of the bees' honey and beeswax to students, staff, and faculty for purchase. To increase awareness of environmental changes, the Greenhouse Project gave out succulents to the Nebraska Wesleyan community on Earth Day. Based on these experiences, I can speak and distribute information to Arbor Day Foundations' constituents.

The opportunity to support the mission of Arbor Day Foundation upon graduation in May 20XX is extremely appealing to me. I have included my resume for your review and plan to reach out to you next week about the possibility of arranging a mutually agreeable time to connect. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Adam Greenfield

Even if you don't see open positions within a company of interest, consider writing a letter of inquiry. A type of cover letter, a letter of inquiry relays your desire to work for an organization even if there is no specific position to which you are applying.

Consider this example of a "Letter of Inquiry". Notice the applicant is not applying to a specific position; rather, they are demonstrating their fit and interest in the employer. This document is often emailed to an employer's Human Resources Department along with a resume. You can also email it to an individual with whom you have a personal connection.

Researching Opportunities

Your job or internship search will likely involve researching opportunities posted online. Here's a short list of online job boards:

Handshake

Employers seeking to hire NWU students post positions on Handshake. Visit the Career Center website at career.nebrwesleyan.edu and look for the Handshake logo.



Indeed

Indeed compiles job postings from other websites, making your search more efficient. On Indeed, there is an option to apply for positions through their website. We recommend going to the organization's website and applying directly through the organization.



Google

Google's technology makes it easy to find jobs that are a good match. Similar to Indeed, Google pulls positions from a variety of sources.



Find your next job, with Google

Glassdoor

Glassdoor lists internship vacancies and jobs as well as company reviews, salaries and benefits from employees working at these companies. Additionally, interview questions that have been part of the selection process are also listed on the site.



Specific Company Websites

Some companies may only post on their own site. If you know where you want to work, go straight to the source. Also, explore industry-specific job posting sites (ex. Dice for tech jobs).

Volunteer Opportunities

- idealist.org
- volunteermatch.org

Government Jobs

The following websites can help you find job postings in various levels of government:

- City Level- governmentjobs.com/careers/lincolnne
- State Level- statejobs.nebraska.gov
- Federal Level- USAjobs.gov

Professional Associations/Organizations

Companies will often turn to their state or national professional associations to advertise positions. Hint: Google "professional association for [insert your career field]."

This can be a lot to organize. Just like you kept track of employers, keep track of the positions that you apply to. The chart below can be a helpful way to stay organized as you research and apply to opportunities.

	Status	Job Title (linked)	Company (linked)	Name of Job Contact	Email of Job Contact	Date of Application	Next Steps	Notes
1								
2								
3								
4								

Job Search Safety Tips

Scam artists post fraudulent jobs that may be difficult to spot. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Signs that a posting may be fraudulent include:

- Anyone asking for money in advance of your being hired, or offering to send you a check before being hired
- Being hired before meeting face-to-face with the employer
- Email communications from a non-company email account (e.g., Yahoo, Hotmail)
- Employers asking for Social Security or bank information
- Job postings that include several spelling and/or grammatical errors
- A high salary for a position that requires few skills
- Anonymity. If it is difficult to find an address, actual contact, company name, etc., this is cause to proceed with caution.
- The job description focuses on the amount of money to be made rather than the responsibilities of the job.

If you see a job scam, or lose money to one, report it to the Federal Trade Commission at ReportFraud.ftc.gov. You can also report it to the Nebraska Attorney General. Please contact the Career Center, too, so there will not be other victims. If you sent money to a fraudulent employer, contact your bank or credit card company immediately to close the account and dispute the charges.

Hiring and Recruiting Cycles

This diagram shows the timeframes in which companies from various fields begin to search for new employees.

	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
Investment Banking, Finance, Consulting	■	■	■	■								
Technology	■	■	■	■	■							
Education, Nonprofit, Government				■	■	■	■	■				
Advertising, Marketing, Media, PR							■	■	■	■	■	■

Start early when searching for a job in business, accounting, banking, finance, and technology. Many firms hold information sessions, interviews, and other events during the first half of fall semester. In fact, the majority of positions in these areas that start in June will be filled before winter break.

Hiring cycles for other employers typically begin later in the academic year. Employers in these fields post positions during winter, spring, or even summer. Many companies only fill positions that have recently been vacated. For government agencies, recruiting cycles vary by agency, so research application deadlines throughout the year.

The “Hidden” Job Market

While students tend to start looking at their options through online postings, employers tend to hire primarily through networking. It is more effective and cost-efficient for a company to look internally or hire from their employees’ connections and those who have already expressed an interest in the organization, rather than open the position to the public. Approximately 80% of jobs are obtained through networking. Because of this, it’s important to make personal connections with people in organizations of interest.

Step 3: Build and Use your Network

Contact family members, friends, parents' friends, advisors, professors, peers, alumni from your school, acquaintances from activities you are involved in... everyone! Let them know your skills and the type of position/organization you are seeking. Ask if they know of a specific position, organization, or someone connected in the industry that you are interested in. Request for them to keep you in mind if they hear of any positions or prospects and offer to send them a copy of your résumé.

Informational interviews or job shadowing can be a great way to establish contacts and learn where and how people obtain positions. Nebraska Wesleyan's [Career Assistance Network](#) consists of NWU alumni who have agreed to share information and advice on careers, employers, and job searching. See the "Information Interviewing" handout in the Career Center, which includes examples of emails to send to organizations and contacts.



Career Assistance Network



Also, consider joining a young professionals organization in your target city. These groups offer the chance to gain knowledge of the business community, find a mentor, show off your leadership skills, learn about opportunities such as conferences and other business events, and find job prospects.

Attend career fairs and other networking events. You won't want to miss NWU's Backpack to Briefcase reception early in the Spring semester. Additionally, UNL has the largest career fairs in the state, which are open to the public. These occur every fall and spring.

Maintain Your Network

Whether you chatted at a hiring fair, met through a family friend, or had coffee after being introduced by a professor, maintain contact! Send a follow-up email asking additional questions about a topic they touched on. Share an article you enjoyed about their industry. You can even set up a lunch or coffee simply to touch base. The impact of staying in touch with contacts will be worth it; if you need a recommendation or advice, people will be much more willing to help you out, and they are likely to start to reach out to you when they hear of job openings.







Networking on LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional social media platform where you can connect with colleagues/classmates/professionals in industries you are interested in, and where you can follow companies or organizations. It is currently the world's largest professional network, with more than 1 billion members in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide.



For comprehensive information, check out the Career Center handouts ["Top Tips for Building Your LinkedIn Profile"](#) and ["Top Tips for Leveraging LinkedIn."](#)

Step 4: Develop Your Personal Brand

 Resume	A document (typically one-page in length) that illustrates your education, experiences, and skills. Your resume should relate to the specific position and/or industry for which you are applying.	 Cover Letter	Often sent to introduce yourself as an applicant, the cover letter demonstrates your potential fit within the organization and fit in the position. This is your opportunity to explain how your skills match the organization's needs.
 CV	The CV is often the preferred professional document of choice in international cultures. While similar to a resume, the CV is used to keep track of all relevant research, presentations, and experiences.	 Professional Reputation	If you are just starting your working career, you may have a very limited professional reputation. Keep in mind that others will learn about your work ethic and skills via word of mouth from your network.
 LinkedIn	LinkedIn is one of the first places employers search to see your connections, skills, education, and interests in a professional social media platform. The site allows you to connect, network, and summarize your passions.	 Online	TikTok, X, Instagram, and other personal social media accounts should be kept professional, as many employers search these profiles when making hiring decisions. Consider adjusting your privacy settings on these platforms during your job search.

Prepare a strong, polished résumé and cover letter. Every document should be tailored and customized to the employer and position. Brainstorm what the organization is looking for (use the job description, if you have one) and write down what they might consider your most significant experiences and accomplishments based on their needs. Then, consider how you might highlight those in your application. Grab a [Resumes, References, and Cover Letters](#) handbook from the Career Center for guidance, and have a Career Center staff member critique your documents prior to sending them.

Step 5: Apply and Interview

Read this section for a quick overview, but be sure to check out our [Preparing for the Interview](#) handbook for more in-depth information regarding the application and interview process.

MOST COMMON JOB APPLICATION AND INTERVIEW BLUNDERS TO AVOID:

- **Mass applying to open positions.**
Quality over quantity is key. If you are applying to every position you come across, chances are you are not evaluating your true fit and taking the time to customize your application.
- **Not following job application instructions.**
Fill in all fields and include all required attachments. Do not send unsolicited information such as your salary requirements or academic transcripts.
- **Making spelling and grammatical errors.**
Your marketing documents and correspondence must be your absolute best work. There is no margin for errors.
- **Focusing only on responsibilities instead of highlighting accomplishments.**
Everyone who has had a job had responsibilities. Let the employer know how well you accomplished them.
- **Displaying an unfavorable online presence.**
Employees represent the company they work for even outside of work. Expect to be Googled.
- **Missing a phone or web interview because of a time zone difference.**
Some companies outsource screening interviews, or they may have employees who work remotely. Be aware of possible time zone differences.
- **Not knowing anything about the company/services/products when interviewing.**
This is a clear indication to the employer that you are not vested in working for the organization.
- **Forgetting to send a thank you note after the interview.**
In a competitive applicant pool, final selection can be based on who demonstrated appreciation.

Disabilities Disclosure in the Job Search

Decisions regarding if, when, and how to disclose disability-related information during your job search are highly individual and depend on multiple factors. Connect with a Career Coach to talk through challenges/concerns.

When making decisions about disclosure, some basic questions to consider might include the following:

- Will the employer find information about your disability by researching you online?
- Will you need reasonable accommodations to participate in the interview?
- Will reasonable accommodations be needed to perform the essential functions of the job?
- How and when will you disclose? In person or via email? Before or after the job offer?

The **Job Accommodation Network** (askjan.org) offers excellent resources, in particular their Disclosure Information, found here: <https://askjan.org/topics/disability-disclosure.cfm>.



Research **ADA and Workplace Accommodation Information:**
<https://www.eeoc.gov/employees-job-applicants>



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

abilityJOBS offers a large nationwide job site and resume database of job seekers with disabilities.



LimeConnect focuses on attracting, preparing, and connecting high-achieving professionals and university students for scholarships, leadership programs, internships and full-time careers.



Job Search Considerations for International Students

International students may be eligible to work in the U.S. short-term by using Curricular Practical Training (CPT), commonly for internships, or Optional Practical Training (OPT), commonly for full-time jobs. Employer-based visa sponsorship such as the H-1B visa is required if you want to work long-term in the U.S. after graduation.

Finding employers that may hire international students

Handshake: You can find employers in Handshake sponsoring work authorization for international students by using the "US work authorization not required" or "Open to candidates with OPT/CPT" job search filters.

Myvisajobs.com: This site provides information on H-1B Visa sponsorship trends by employers, industry, job title and occupations in its [top 200 sponsors](#) report.

H-1B Employer Data Hub: This site offers a database of employers petitioning for H-1B employees. It allows you to search for H-1B sponsors by employer name or location.

Keep Good Records

Remember those lists you made earlier to research employers and opportunities? Keep updating these lists by tracking where you applied, who you talked to, and what documents were sent. This helps you stay organized and ensure you've sent in a complete application with all required materials. Keep your references updated about your job search process!

Follow-Up

The importance of following-up after interviews cannot be stressed enough. Many employers consider these follow-up letters to gauge your interest in their organization. After an interview, send a thank you note expressing your appreciation for their time. Individualize the note, stating your interest in specific aspects of the company or role.

Approximately five to ten days after the prospective employer has received your note, you may want to call to once again convey your interest in the organization. This call verifies your sincere interest in the company but also serves to keep your name fresh in the employer's mind. If you feel you left a good impression on the interviewer but were not offered the job, ask them to keep you in mind for future openings. It also can't hurt to inquire whether they have any feedback that may help as you move forward with your job search.

Step 6: Evaluate Job Offers

Job Offers – After the Interview

If an employer has not gotten back to you within the time frame discussed, it is appropriate to contact them to follow up on your status. If a time frame was not mentioned, wait two weeks after the interview to follow up. Keep in mind that employers may be busy. Limit the frequency of follow-up contacts to avoid annoying the employer.

Receiving an Offer

An offer of employment is often delivered over the phone by your primary point of contact. Be sure to thank them for the offer and clarify when you need to provide a decision. Do not instantly accept the offer. Even if you are confident about the opportunity, take appropriate time to think through all aspects of the opportunity.

Example: *“Thank you for the offer. I am excited about this role and the opportunity to work for your company. Of course, this is a very important decision for me and I will need some time to think it over. May I get back to you with my decision by Friday?”*

In addition to a verbal offer, request a written document outlining the employment offer and associated benefits.

DO NOT ACCEPT AN OFFER AND CONTINUE THE JOB SEARCH. ONCE YOU ACCEPT AN OFFER, YOUR JOB SEARCH ENDS IMMEDIATELY. If you would like to continue interviewing with other companies or complete the interview process with another company, ask for a deadline extension.

Evaluating the Offer

It's not unusual for new questions to emerge as you evaluate an opportunity. Now is the time to ask the potential employer about these issues — and to do some checking on your own. You can get in touch with the recruiting contact, an alumnus that works for the organization, career services staff, or a current employee to provide you with the information that you need to make the best decision for you.

A candidate rarely gets everything they want in a job offer. Consider which factors are most important to you and which ones you would be willing to give up in order to get what you want most.

- Salary and benefits
- Job/industry stability (turnover and layoffs)
- Physical work environment
- Geographic location/possibility of relocation
- Personally rewarding work, impact on society
- Opportunities to travel
- Level of responsibility/autonomy
- Size of the organization
- Non-profit vs. profit/public vs. private
- Nature of supervision
- Fit with co-workers
- Telecommuting/flex-time
- Opportunity for advancement
- Work hours
- Ability to use skills and be challenged
- Training and development

Consider utilizing tools to help you when making financial decisions:

- **Budgeting:** Figure out your expenses and how much you need to earn based on your standard of living. Multiple budgeting apps are available. Research and choose the best one for you.
- **Cost of living calculators:** Working in San Diego, California, a salary of \$80,000 may initially seem attractive, but that same salary is equivalent to \$52,731 in Lincoln, Nebraska. To compare cities, try bankrate.com or NerdWallet.com.
- **Salary estimators:** Is the salary competitive? Know if you're being over- or under-compensated:
 - https://www.jobsearchintelligence.com/etc/job_seeker_salary_calculators.php
 - Some Nebraska-specific Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics information is available by searching online for “[NEworks OEWS](#)”

Understanding Benefits and Total Compensation

Total compensation includes base salary plus the value of the benefits package. Benefits must be carefully weighed, as they can increase compensation by up to one-third of the salary. These factors should be considered:

- Insurance premiums and coverage (medical, prescription, dental, vision, life, etc.). What is the co-pay?
- Paid time off (PTO): vacation, sick/disability leave, family leave (maternity, paternity, or family leave). How are these allocated? When can you begin to use them? Do you accrue this immediately, or is there a waiting period? Does your PTO roll over from year to year? When does your PTO allocation increase?
- Retirement plans. Does the company match? Are you eligible immediately? Is a contribution mandatory?
- Stock options and profit-sharing.
- Bonuses: signing, holiday, productivity. How are they allocated (seniority, sales, level of position, etc.)?
- Relocation expenses. Flat fee or reimbursement? If you lose your job, will you be required to pay it back?
- Tuition reimbursement. Will they reimburse for advanced degrees or licensures?
- Do they have a student loan payback plan?
- Flex-time or telecommuting. Is there flexibility to work from home? Do you need to be employed for a specific amount of time to be eligible? Can you work four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days? Will weekend or evening work be available/required?
- If the position requires travel or requires you to make purchases on behalf of the company, will you pay for these expenses upfront and receive reimbursement later?
- What does professional development look like? Will the company pay membership fees in professional organizations?
- Does the company offer on-site childcare?
- Will you be provided a company car? If you use your personal car for work-related travel, will the company pay mileage? What does parking look like (free, paid – by who)?

Negotiating the Offer

WARNING: Proceed with caution when negotiating because you are affecting your relationship with your future employer. Are there issues you want to negotiate that would make the offer more attractive? Perhaps there are issues about the offer that are flexible, such as start date or location. If you have concerns about a particular aspect of the offer, ask whether it can be negotiated. For entry-level positions, many employers have a set salary range and may not have the flexibility to negotiate. To negotiate, consider these tips:

- The best time to negotiate is after an offer is made. Avoid salary discussions during an interview.
- Don't negotiate just for the sake of it. A company will offer what they perceive to be a fair compensation package based on your experience, education, and skills. If you feel that it is inconsistent with market data, share your researched facts.
- Always maintain professionalism in the negotiation process. This reaffirms the skills that you have to offer.
- Don't negotiate TOO hard. Aggressive negotiation tactics may lead to a rescinded offer.
- Reiterate your excitement about the offer. Be gracious before elaborating on your concerns.
- Research typical salaries for the nature of the work and the geographic area before asking for more money.
- Current economic factors such as availability of candidates will influence your worth to an employer.
- Be able to articulate your strengths so there is no question what value you can offer to an organization. This value can come from experience, specialized knowledge or certifications/licenses.
- Understand that your negotiation requests may be denied. An employer may not be able to fulfill your request. Decide which of your requests are "deal breakers" and which are only on your "wish list."
- If your negotiation requests are accepted, you are expected to accept the job with no further negotiation.

Handling Multiple Offers

Weigh all of the factors. Create a pros and cons list, outlining comparative aspects of each opportunity. Analyze the list according to what is most important to you. Reflect on your interests, skills, and values and consider which position or organization might be most consistent with these.

Turning Down an Offer

Be tactful and timely when declining an employment offer. It is important not to “burn bridges.” Indicate any aspects of the recruiting process or organization that you enjoyed or appreciated. Be sure to call your main point of contact at the organization to decline verbally, but also decline in writing. Use this example as a guide:

Thank you for offering me the position of Business Assistant with XYZ Company. Your organization’s reputation for exemplary customer service was reflected in the courtesy and professionalism provided to me throughout the interview process.

However, after careful consideration, I have decided to accept another position that aligns more closely with my skills and interests at this point in my career.

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview and learn more about your organization. I enjoyed meeting you and the other members of the sales team.

Coping with Rejection

If you get the dreaded rejection email, it’s okay to feel disappointed. Give yourself time to grieve and then move on. Analyze the process and what you could do differently in the future. Review your résumé and reflect on the interview. Consider your presentation, including preparation, interview attire, body language, nervous habits, and answers to the questions. Remember, even highly qualified people experience rejection and disappointment during the job search process. Keep working towards your goal every day.

Consider reapplying. In some industries, it is common to apply several times before your application is successful. A one-time rejection is not always a permanent rejection. Ask companies and organizations “What is your reapplication time frame or protocol?”

Need Help with Next Steps?
Career Coaches are available to help at any point! Schedule an appointment on Handshake.